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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 USC 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 editor is 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 one of a subseries of volumes of the *Foreign Relations* series that document the most important issues in the foreign policy of Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford. The subseries presents a comprehensive documentary record of major foreign policy decisions and actions of both Presidents. This specific volume documents U.S. policy toward the war in Vietnam from January 20 to October 7, 1972.

The Easter Offensive, and its ramifications, represents the most significant event in Indochina for U.S. policy in this period, and documentary coverage of the event dominates the volume, concentrating mainly on what happened in North and South Vietnam, policy formulation and decision making in Washington, and the negotiations in Paris. Only a very small number of documents relate to events and policy in Laos and Cambodia, and then only as they relate to events and policy in Vietnam.

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

Documents in this volume examine the link between force and diplomacy in U.S. national security policy toward the Vietnam war. In the period the volume covers, force drove diplomacy. Only by recognizing this can the process by which America's Vietnam war policy was formulated and implemented be fully understood. Controlling the process was a small circle of men, led by President Richard M. Nixon, and which included the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger; the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, Major General Alexander M. Haig; and a few National Security Council officials trusted by Kissinger. The themes and subthemes that provided the focus of the research and the principles of selection for this volume are as follows.

When Nixon became President in 1969, a war-weary and increasingly disillusioned U.S. Government began to question its long involvement in the Vietnam war and, consequently, its objective of creating a stable, independent, non-Communist South Vietnam. Upon taking office, Nixon declared he would continue the U.S. commitment to secure "peace with honor" but would do so differently than his predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson. That is, while preparing the South Vietnamese to take over the fighting and gradually turning the ground war over to them (a policy Nixon called Vietnamization), he would also withdraw U.S. troops and continue providing military advice and support to South Vietnam. A negotiated settlement was also a critical objective of Nixon's. In his view, to simply leave South Vietnam, as many critics demanded, would destroy American credibility around the world. He therefore authorized Kissinger to initiate secret negotiations with North Vietnam in Paris to find a way out of the war as well as to safeguard South Vietnam's independence.

By early 1972, Nixon's approach had not succeeded. To be sure, he had withdrawn most American ground forces from the South and turned over the fighting to the South Vietnamese. However, military and diplomatic stalemate persisted. A powerful anti-war movement in the United States placed additional pressure on him to disengage. As a result, America's broad purpose gave way during 1972 to narrow ob-

jectives: extricating the United States from the war without seeming to abandon South Vietnam; freeing American prisoners of war captive in North Vietnam, mostly airmen whose aircraft had been shot down while conducting missions over the North; and supplying South Vietnam the wherewithal to maintain a strong military establishment.

Meanwhile, believing that time was on their side, North Vietnam's leaders refused to negotiate seriously. Indeed, on March 30, 1972, they attempted to bypass negotiations altogether with a full-scale invasion of the South. Called the Easter Offensive by the United States, the invasion initially almost overwhelmed the South. By late spring, however, Nixon's decision to mine North Vietnam's harbors and the massive application of American air power against infrastructure targets in the North and operational ones in the South, plus the tenacious defense of South Vietnam by its own armed forces, had blunted the offensive.

As a result, the North Vietnamese began to signal that they were ready to negotiate. After increasingly amiable sessions in Paris in July, August, and September, they seemed on the cusp of making what Kissinger considered breakthrough concessions. That is, they were prepared to agree to a cease-fire and a settlement that separated military and political issues. What this meant was that they no longer linked readiness to negotiate an American withdrawal with a demand that the Americans support the removal from office of their chief ally, Nguyen Van Thieu, President of the Republic of Vietnam, and to dismantle Thieu's government. Additionally, the nature of South Vietnam's political future would be determined by the Vietnamese parties themselves.

The reason for this change was that the Communists had become convinced by American air power, especially the B–52 bombing against Hanoi and the port city of Haiphong, that they could not win if the United States remained in the war. Thus the Hanoi leadership consciously decided to make concessions along the above lines to persuade the Americans to depart. At the same time, the North Vietnamese would not agree to withdraw their troops in the South. They would serve as the basis for future Communist military activity against South Vietnam.

President Thieu believed America's continued presence and commitment were critical to his country's survival and for these reasons argued against a settlement. Despite strong signs that Thieu might act to disrupt such a settlement, Kissinger looked forward to the next round of negotiations, beginning in Paris on October 8, believing that the talks would produce an agreement that the United States could live with and one that he was confident he could sell to the South Vietnamese.

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 and the chief technical 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 editor 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 original 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 the 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 this and other volumes, describe key events, and provide summaries of and citations to public statements that supplement and elucidate the printed documents. Information derived from mem-

oirs 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 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 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 USC 2111 note), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has custody of the Nixon Presidential 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 formally to 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 3 documents and make minor excisions of less than a paragraph in 20 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 record presented in this

volume provides an accurate and comprehensive account of the U.S. policy toward Vietnam.

Acknowledgments

The editor wishes to acknowledge the assistance of officials at the Nixon Presidential Materials Project of the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland (Archives II). He also wishes to acknowledge the Richard Nixon Estate for allowing access to the Nixon Presidential recordings and the Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace for facilitating that access. Thanks are due to members of the History Staff of the Center for the Study of Intelligence in the Central Intelligence Agency, who helped to arrange access to the files of that agency, and to James Van Hook, the former Joint CIA–State Historian, who was an able guide through a murky finding aid. John Haynes of the Library of Congress was responsible for expediting access to the Kissinger Papers. The editor was able to use the Kissinger Papers, including the transcripts of telephone conversations, with the kind permission of Dr. Henry A. Kissinger. The editor would like to also thank Sandy Meagher, for her valuable assistance in expediting the use of Department of Defense files, and Michael Johnson, of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for making research in the Moorer Diary, while it was still at the Pentagon, convenient and productive under difficult circumstances. Finally, the editor wishes to express his appreciation to Craig Daigle, Richard Moss, and Edmond Pechaty for their work in transforming the often technically imperfect Nixon tape recordings into useful transcripts. They toiled long, hard, and well to produce readable transcripts that substantially enhance the value of this volume.

John M. Carland collected the documents, made the selections, and annotated the documents, under the supervision of Edward C. Keefer, General Editor of the series, and Erin Mahan, Chief of the Asia, General, and Africa Division. Chris Tudda coordinated the declassification review, under the supervision of Susan C. Weetman, Chief of the Declassification and Publishing Division. Keri Lewis and Aaron W. Marrs did the copy and technical editing. Do Mi Stauber prepared the index.

Bureau of Public Affairs
June 2010

Ambassador Edward Brynn
Acting Historian

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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 agencies, departments, and other entities of the U.S. Government engaged in foreign policy formulation, execution, or support cooperate with the Department of State Historian 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 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). Many of the Department's decentralized office files covering the 1969–1976 period, which the National Archives deems worthy of permanent retention, have also 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, including tape recordings of conversations with key U.S. and foreign officials. Presidential papers maintained and preserved at the Presidential libraries and the Nixon Presidential Materials Project at Archives II 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. The Nixon Presidential Materials 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. In the future, Nixon's papers will be transferred to their permanent home at the Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California.

Sources for Foreign Relations, *1969–1976, Volume VIII*

In preparing this volume, the editor 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 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's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David. A final negotiations file of note is one in the NSC Files, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, that contains records of private channel talks between Henry Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. 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, especially the State Department 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 MemCons, the President's Daily Briefing Files, and the Unfiled Materials.

Of equal importance in the NSC Files of the Nixon Presidential Materials 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 H-Files contain the minutes of NSC 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 prepara-

tion for the meetings. Also of value in the 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.

Presidential tape recordings of Nixon's telephone conversations and of his meetings with senior advisers—also part of the Presidential Materials collection—add greatly to our ability to document the Vietnam policy process and its implementation. In the transcript of conversations we see crucial predecisional discussions between and among principals to the policy process, and on occasion even capture the moment of decision itself. Because Vietnam represented so complicated and difficult a problem, or problems, for the President and his inner circle, the tape transcripts provide additional richness in the sources. These frank conversations add much to our understanding of the players, their actions, and the consequences of action.

The most useful collections in the White House Special Files are the President's Personal Files. The Nixon Presidential Diary in the White House Central Files is an essential tool for researchers.

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 contain 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, the Department of Defense, and to a lesser extent the Central Intelligence Agency, strong bureaucratic players in past *Foreign Relations* Vietnam volumes, play 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 and some Lot Files, are valuable for describing what was happening in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, or at the Paris talks. There are almost no Department of State files that trace policy decisions, since the Secretary of State and his Department were excluded from key policy decision making on Vietnam. Still, some of the Central Files most useful for developments in the field are POL 27 VIET, POL 27 VIET S, and POL 27 LAOS.

The Central Intelligence Agency's records are valuable for intelligence on Vietnam and the war in Southeast Asia, but 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. Carver's files are especially valuable since he was, from 1966 to 1973, the CIA Director's Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs and involved in all Agency activities—tactical, operational, and strategic—related to the war there.

The Department of Defense and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird were key players in the implementation of Vietnam policy, especially regarding Vietnamization and the Easter Offensive. Because Laird had a semi-independent base in Congress, where he was a member of the House of Representatives for years before coming to the Department of Defense, his actions often supported limits on the President's Vietnam policy rather than enabling it. While Laird's key memoranda are almost always found in the Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, it is sometimes illuminating to trace the evolution of a Defense position through documents originating within the Department of Defense.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and its Chairman, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, played an important role in executing U.S. military policy in Vietnam during 1972. Therefore, Moorer's office records, particularly message traffic to and from the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and to and from the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command, as well as Vietnam papers generated within the JCS, are particularly useful to the researcher. Even more valuable for understanding how he assisted in the implementation of White House policy in the run-up to, during, and in the wake of the Easter Offensive are his diary entries and attached telephone conversation transcripts. Regarding the latter, his conversations with senior military officers and senior civilians at the Department of Defense, including Secretary of Defense Laird, and with senior White House Officials, including President Nixon, Henry A. Kissinger, and Alexander M. Haig, are always instructive.

H.R. Haldeman's diary is on occasion extraordinarily useful because his entries set the scene for White House decision making, provide insight into the decision-making process and the decisions made, characterize the President's state of mind vis-à-vis the process, and describe the actions and interactions of the major White House players on Vietnam policy issues.

The following list identifies the particular files and collections used in the preparation of this volume. 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

POL 27 VIET S
POL 27–2 VIET S
POL 27–10 VIET
POL 27–14 VIET
POL 27 LAOS

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

Records of Thomas H. Moorer

- Miscellaneous Material on Vietnam
- Correspondence to and from the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
- Correspondence to and from the Commander in Chief, Pacific
- Diary, July 2, 1970–July 1, 1974

Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland

National Security Council Files

- Vietnam Subject Files
- Vietnam Country Files
- Paris Talks/Meetings
- Backchannel
- President's Trips
  - Dobrynin-Kissinger, 1972
- Country Files, Far East
  - Cambodia
  - Indochina
  - Laos
- For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam
- Alexander M. Haig Chronological File
- Alexander M. Haig Special File
- Jon Howe, Vietnam Chronology Files
- Jon Howe, Vietnam Subject Files
- Henry A. Kissinger Office Files
  - Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, Vietnam Negotiations, General
- Unfiled Material

National Security Council, Institutional Files (H-Files)
Meeting Files, National Security Council Meetings, 5/8/72
Meeting Files, Senior Review Group Meetings, Vietnam Assessment, 1/24/72
Meeting Files, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, Vietnam Minutes of Meetings, Washington Special Actions Group Minutes (Originals)
Policy Papers (1969–1974), National Security Decision Memoranda

National Security Council, Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts
Chronological File

White House Special File, President's Personal Files, May 8, 1972

White House Tapes

Central Intelligence Agency

Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence
Jobs 79–T00862A, 80–B01673R, and 80–T0179R

Executive Registry Files
Job 80–R01284A

National Intelligence Council Files
Job 80–R01720R

Library of Congress, Washington, DC

Papers of Henry A. Kissinger
Chronological File
Chronological File, Vietnam
Top Secret
Chronological File
Geopolitical File, Vietnam
National Security Council, Washington Special Actions Group
National Security Council, Meetings

National Security Council

Subject Files, Vietnam, 17 Jan 72–2 Oct 73

Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland

FRC 330, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense
74–0142
Top Secret files from the Immediate Office of the Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, 1969–1972
75–0155
Top Secret subject decimal files from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
77–0094/95
Secret and Top Secret subject decimal files from the Official Records of the Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the Special Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense, 1972

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Abbreviations and Terms

A–1 Skyraider, a propeller-driven attack aircraft that carried out close air support for U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and South Vietnamese Air Force
A–4 Skyhawk, a lightweight, single engine jet attack aircraft used by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps
AAA, anti-aircraft artillery
AC–130 Spectre, heavily armed U.S. aircraft that provided close air support, air interdiction, and force protection
ACFT, aircraft
Ad referendum, subject to reference
AGC, automatic gain control
AID, Agency for International Development
Amb, Ambassador
APC, armored personnel carrier
ARC LIGHT, code name for U.S. B–52 bombing missions in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia
ARG, amphibious ready group
ARM, anti-radar missile
ARVN, Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam
ASW, anti-submarine warfare
Avenue Kléber, shorthand for the public plenary talks held at the International Conference Center on Avenue Kléber
Azimuth, method used by the military to indicate direction during tactical operations; based on the 360 degree circle

B–3 Front, North Vietnamese designation for its Central Highlands command
B–5 Front, North Vietnamese designation for its northern South Vietnam command
B–25, a versatile WWII medium bomber (in one configuration a gunship), retired by the U.S. Air Force in 1960
Bach Mai, an old French airfield immediately south of Hanoi which contained a military base and the command and control headquarters of the North Vietnamese Air Defense Command
BARREL ROLL, U.S. air campaign in Laos to support Royal Lao Government forces in operations against the Communist Pathet Lao near Long Tieng and the Plain of Jars
BDA, bomb damage assessment
Binh Tram, military way station on the Ho Chi Minh Trail

C–130, *see* AC–130
CAS, controlled American source
CBS, Columbia Broadcasting System
CBU, cluster bomb unit, small explosive device, also called a bomblet, placed inside a canister with other CBUs; when canister is dropped from an aircraft it opens before reaching the ground; the bomblets can be configured to explode on contact with the ground, when stepped on, or after a certain amount of time has passed, and to carry a variety of payloads
Chaff, radar confusion reflectors, consisting of thin, narrow, metallic strips of various lengths and frequency responses, which are used to reflect echoes for confusion purposes and to cause enemy radar guided missiles to lock on to it instead of the real aircraft
ChiCom, Chinese Communist(s)

CI, counter-insurgency
CIA, Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command
CINCPACFLT, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet
CINCSAC, Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Air Command
CJCS, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
CL, classified
CNO, Chief of Naval Operations
CNR, Committee of National Reconciliation
Comint, communications intelligence
COMMANDO HUNT, a series of airpower campaigns in Laos, begun in November 1968, to interdict the flow of material on the Ho Chi Minh Trail from North to South Vietnam
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
CP50, subordinate section of the North Vietnamese Politburo that analyzed issues relevant to the Paris Peace Talks, assisted the Politburo in monitoring and directing the talks
CPDC, Central Pacification and Development Council
CRS, Congressional Research Service
CVA, aircraft carrier

DCI, Director of Central Intelligence
DD, destroyer
DDO, Deputy Director for Operations, Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff
DEFCON, defense readiness condition
DepSecDef, Deputy Secretary of Defense
DIA, Defense Intelligence Agency
Dikes, Red River Delta, an intricate, centuries-old system of dikes that controlled irrigation in the low-lying areas of the Red River Delta of North Vietnam and protected those who lived and worked there
Dixie Station, South China Sea location of the U.S. aircraft carrier group that provided close air support to land operations in the South
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
DOS, Department of State
DPRG, Defense Program Review Group, National Security Council
DRV, Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
DTG, date time group

EA, Executive Assistant, Joint Chiefs of Staff
EAP, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State
EO, electro optical
EOB, Executive Office Building
Exdis, exclusive distribution

F–4 Phantom, an all-weather jet fighter-bomber used by the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy in Vietnam
FAC, forward air controller
FANK, *Forces Armées Nationales Khmères* (Khmer Republic Armed Forces [Cambodia])

Fan song radar, target acquisition and guidance system for surface to air missiles
FARK, *Forces Armées Royales Khmères* (Royal Khmer Armed Forces [Cambodia])
FBIS, Foreign Broadcast Information Service
Flash, precedence indicator for an extremely urgent message which requires instant action by the addressee regardless of the time of day or night
FRAME GLORY, a naval gunfire support raid on radar installations on the island of Hon Mat, North Vietnam, near Vinh, conducted by the USS *Berkeley* on May 8, 1972
FREEDOM PORCH, U.S. Air Force B–52 Stratofortress strikes on the Haiphong petroleum products storage area, April 16, 1972
FREEDOM TRAIN, Operation, April 1972 air campaign against North Vietnam carried out by U.S. Navy and Air Force
FSB, fire support base

GAC, George A. Carver
GCI, ground control intercept
GKR, Government of Khmer Republic (Cambodia)
GNR, Government of National Reconciliation
GRUNK, *Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchea* (Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea), Communist group nominally headed by Norodom Sihanok and affliliated with North Vietnam
GVN, Government of Vietnam (South Vietnam)

HAK, Henry A. Kissinger
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, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
INR/DDC, Deputy Director for Coordination, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
INR/IL, Office of Information Liaison, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
INR/REA, Office of Research and Analysis for East Asia and Pacific, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
IRON HAND, U.S. Air Force operations against North Vietnam to suppress or destroy surface to air missiles

JCS, Joint Chiefs of Staff
JDN, John D. Negroponte
JGS, Joint General Staff, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
JHH, John Herbert Holdridge
JPRC, Joint Personnel Recovery Center, established at Military Assistance Command to locate and rescue U.S. personnel evading attempts to capture them or already taken prisoner
ISA, Office of International Security Affairs, Department of Defense

KC–135, jet aircraft specifically designed for aerial refueling
KHR, Khmer Republic (Cambodia)
KIA, killed in action
Kontum, a province in South Vietnam's Central Highlands opposite Laos

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

LANTFLT, Atlantic Fleet
Lao Dong, *Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam* (Vietnamese Workers' Party), Communist Party of North Vietnam
LDX, long distance xerography
LINEBACKER I, code name for U.S. air interdiction campaign against North Vietnam, May 10–October 23, 1972
LOC, line of communication
LORAN, long-range navigation system for air and marine travel
LOU, limited official use
LPF, Lao Patriotic Front, political arm of the Pathet Lao
LTG, lieutenant general

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; sometimes called MACSOG
MAP, Military Assistance Program
MASF, military assistance service-funded
MAT, Mobile Advisory Team
MEDTC, Military Equipment Delivery Team, Cambodia
Meo, *see* Hmong
MG, major general
MiG–21, fighter aircraft provided by Soviet Union to North Vietnam
mm, millimeter
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
MRTTH, Military Region Tri Thien Hue, Communist military command in northern South Vietnamese provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien
mtg, meeting
Muong, *see* Hmong

NCO, non-commissioned officer
NGFS, naval gunfire support
NIC, Naval Intelligence Command; National Intelligence Council, Central Intelligence Agency
NIE, National Intelligence Estimate
NLF, National Liberation Front
nm, nautical mile
NMCC, National Military Command Center
Nodis, no distribution
Noforn, no dissemination to foreign nationals
NSA, National Security Agency
NSAM, National Security Action Memorandum
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

OASD/ISA, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
ONE, Office of National Estimates
OP, observation post
OPREP, operational report
OPREP–4, report of a completed operation or phase of an operation, as well as the operation's or phase's results or estimated results; purpose is to get information quickly into the chain of command
OSD, Office of the Secretary of Defense
OSS, Office of Strategic Services, American intelligence gathering and covert operations organization during World War II

PAC, Pacific Command
PACFLT, Pacific Fleet
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
PF, *see* RF/PF
Phoenix Program, (Phuong Hoang) South Vietnamese program to destroy VC shadow government (infrastructure) in villages and replace it with a pro-GVN administration
PMDL, Provisional Military Demarcation Line, term used in the Geneva Agreements to describe the line between the northern and southern zones, later called the DMZ
PNS, Pacific News Service
POCKET MONEY, Operation, plan to mine major North Vietnamese ports
POL, petroleum, oil, lubricants
POW, prisoner of war
PPOG, Psychological Pressure Operations Group
PR, public relations
PRC, People's Republic of (Communist) China
PRG, Provisional Revolutionary Government, political wing of the South Vietnamese Communist movement, replaced the NLF, but terms often used interchangeably
PROUD DEEP ALPHA, Operation, a five-day campaign, December 26–30, 1971, in which U.S. aircraft flew 1,025 sorties against targets north of the DMZ but south of the 20th parallel
PSYOPS, psychological operations

RCT, Regimental Combat Team
RDVN, *République démocratique du Viêt Nam* (Democratic Republic of Vietnam), North Vietnam
Reccy, reconnaissance or reconnoiter
Reftel, reference telegram
RFE, Radio Free Europe
RF/PF, Regional Forces/Popular Forces, South Vietnamese provincial and district security (militia) forces, respectively
RG, Record Group
RP, route package, target areas for airstrikes against North Vietnam, numbered 1 through 6, south to north, from the DMZ to a buffer zone near the Chinese border
RLG, Royal Lao Government
RN, Richard Nixon
ROE, rules of engagement
RTG, Royal Thai Government

RVN, Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
RVNAF, Republic of (South) Vietnam Armed Forces

S/S, Executive Secretariat, Department of State
S/SG, Secretary of State's Special Group on Southeast Asia
SA–2, missile
SAC, Strategic Air Command
SAM, surface-to-air missile
Sappers, North Vietnamese/Viet Cong demolition commandos
SAVA, Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency
SDO, Special Development Office, Defense Intelligence Agency
SEA, Southeast Asia
SecDef, Secretary of Defense
SecState, Secretary of State
Sensor string, a set of electronic devices, usually 2 to 5 in number, inserted in enemy territory to monitor from remote location re-supply and reinforcement activity
Septel, separate telegram
SGU, Special Guerrilla Unit
Sidewinder, a short-range, heat-seeking, air-to-air missile used by U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy fighter aircraft
SIOP, Single Integrated Operational Plan, the U.S. contingency plan for nuclear war
SNIE, Special National Intelligence Estimate
Sortie, one attack by a single military aircraft
Sparrow, a medium-range, air-to-air missile used by U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps fighter aircraft
SRG, Senior Review Group
STD, Strategic Technical Directorate, South Vietnam's covert operations agency
STDAE, Strategic Technical Directorate Advisory Element, also called Advisory Team 158, American military advisors to the STD
STEEL TIGER, U.S. air operations over the northern portion of the Laotian panhandle designed to interdict the flow of men and materiel down the Ho Chi Minh Trail
STOL, short takeoff and landing
Subj, subject
SVN, South Vietnam

Tacair, tactical air support
Takhli, U.S. Air Force Base in Thailand
TAKSIN contingency planning, arrangements for a joint Thai/U.S. forward deployment in Laos to pre-empt NVA access to the Mekong River
Talos, a long-range anti-aircraft missile used by the Navy in Vietnam
TCC, Troop Contributing Countries
TDY, temporary duty
Telcon, telephone conversation
TOW, tube launched, optically tracked, wire guided (anti-tank) missile
TS, Top Secret

UH, utility helicopter
UPI, United Press International
USA, United States Army
USAF, United States Air Force
USG, United States Government
USIA, United States Information Agency
USN, United States Navy
USSR, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

U Tapao, Royal Thai Air Force Base from which USAF B–52s carried out missions over Vietnam

VC, Viet Cong
VF, vertical flight
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 First Indochina War
VNAF, (South) Vietnamese Air Force
VOA, Voice of America
VSSG, Vietnam Special Studies Group

Walleye, also EO (electro optical) Walleye, television guided bomb
WBLC, water borne logistic craft
WH, White House
WSAG, Washington Special Actions Group

Yankee Station, South China Sea location of U.S. aircraft carrier or carriers from which the Navy conducted air operations against North Vietnam

Z, Zulu time (Greenwich Mean Time)

Persons

Abrams, Creighton W., General, USA, Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam until June 28, 1972; Chief of Staff, USA, from October 12
Askew, Laurin B., Office of the Vietnam Working Group, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State

Batitsky, Pavel, Marshal, chief of Soviet air defense forces
Bennett, Donald V., Lieutenant General, USA, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency
Berger, Samuel D., Deputy U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam until March 1972
Binh, Nguyen Thi, *see* Nguyen Thi Binh
Bo, Mai Van, *see* Mai Van Bo
Brennan, Peter J., labor leader (President of New York City Building and Construction Trades Council and New York Building and Construction Trades Council) and Nixon supporter
Brezhnev, Leonid, General Secretary, Communist Party of the Soviet Union
Bunker, Ellsworth, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam
Butterfield, Alexander P., Deputy Assistant to the President
Buzhardt, J. Fred, General Counsel, Department of Defense

Carver, George A., Jr., Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs to the Director for Central Intelligence
Chou En-lai (Zhou Enlai), Premier, People's Republic of China
Clarey, Bernard A. "Chick," Admiral, USN, Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, Pacific Command
Clay, Lucius D., General, USAF, Commander, Air Force, Pacific Command
Colby, William E., Executive Director–Comptroller, Central Intelligence Agency
Colson, Charles, Special Assistant to the President
Connally, John B., Jr., Secretary of the Treasury until June 12, 1972
Cooper, Damon W., Admiral, USN, Commander, (Carrier) Task Force 77
Christison, William, analyst, Central Intelligence Agency

Dang Van Quang, Lieutenant General, ARVN, Military Assistant to President Thieu
DePuy, William E., Lieutenant General, USA, Assistant Vice Chief of the Army; from 1966 until 1967 commanded the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam
Dobrynin, Anatoly F., Soviet Ambassador to the United States
Don, Tran Van, *see* Tran Van Don
Dong, Pham Van, *see* Pham Van Dong
Doolin, Dennis J., Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Duong Van Minh (Big Minh), South Vietnamese General and political activist
Dzu, Ngo, *see* Ngo Dzu

Eliot, Theodore L., Jr., Executive Secretary of the Department of State
Emerson, David F., Rear Admiral, USN, Deputy Director of Planning, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations

Ford, Gerald R., Republican Representative from Michigan

Freeman, Mason B., Rear Admiral, Acting Director, Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff, from April 8 until June 11, 1972
Fulbright, J. William, Democratic Senator from Arkansas; Chairman, Foreign Relations Committee

Garment, Leonard, Special Assistant to the President
Giap, Vo Nguyen, *see* Vo Nguyen Giap
Godley, G. McMurtrie, U.S. Ambassador to Laos
Gromyko, Andrei A., Soviet Foreign Minister
Guay, Georges R., Colonel, USAF, Air Attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Paris, conduit for U.S. messages to North Vietnamese in Paris, also handled logistical arrangements for Kissinger and his party during negotiating trips to Paris

Haig, Alexander M., Jr., Brigadier General, USA, promoted to Major General, March 1, 1972, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Haldeman, H.R., Assistant to the President and White House Chief of Staff
Helms, Richard M., Director of Central Intelligence
Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Vietnamese Communist Party and President of the DRV until his death in 1969
Hoang Duc Nha, President Thieu's press assistant, nephew, and confidant
Hoang Xuan Lam, General, ARVN, Commander (MR–1) until May 3, 1972
Holdridge, John H., member, National Security Council staff
Hollingsworth, James F., Major General, USA, Commander, Third Regional Assistance Command in MR–3
Horgan, John P., Deputy Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency, and Chairman, Psychological Pressure Operations Group
Howe, Jonathan, Lieutenant Commander, USN, member, National Security Council staff
Hubbard, Henry, White House correspondent, *Newsweek*

Johnson, Gerald W., Lieutenant General, USAF, Commander, 8th Air Force
Johnson, U. Alexis, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

Karhos, Frederick E., Major General, USA, Director, Vietnam Task Force, International Security Affairs, Department of Defense
Kennedy, Richard T., Colonel, USA, member, National Security Council planning staff
Kissinger, Henry A., Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Knowles, Harold F., Brigadier General, USAF, Deputy Director for Operations (J–3), Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff
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
Kraft, Joseph, columnist, Field Newspapers Syndicate
Kraslow, David, Washington Bureau Chief, *Los Angeles Times*
Ky, Nguyen Cao, *see* Nguyen Cao Ky

Laird, Melvin R., Secretary of Defense
Lam, Hoang Xuan, *see* Hoang Xuan Lam
Lam, Pham Dang, *see* Pham Dang Lam
Lam, Tran Van, *see* Tran Van Lam
Latimer, Thomas, member, National Security Council staff
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

Lon Nol, Prime Minister of the Khmer Republic (Cambodia) and Minister of National Defense
Lord, Winston, member, National Security Council staff

Mack, William P., Vice Admiral, USN, Commander, 7th Fleet
Manor, LeRoy J., Brigadier General, USAF, Deputy Director for Operations/Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Mansfield, Michael, Democratic Senator from Montana; Senate Majority Leader
McCain, John S., Jr., Admiral, USN, Commander in Chief, Pacific, until September 1, 1972
McCloskey, Robert J., Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Press Relations
McGovern, George S., Democratic Senator from South Dakota
McKee, Kinnaird R., Rear Admiral, USN, Director, Executive Panel, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations
McNickle, Marvin L., Lieutenant General, USAF, Acting Commander, 7th Air Force, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, from April 4, 1972
Meyer, John C., General, USAF, Commander, Strategic Air Command from May 1, 1972
Miller, Robert H., Deputy Executive Secretary of the Department of State
Minh, Duong Van, *see* Duong Van Minh
Minh, Nguyen Van, *see* Nguyen Van Minh
Mitchell, John N., Attorney General until March 1, 1972, afterwards head of the committee to re-elect President Nixon
Moorer, Thomas H., Admiral, USN, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Murphy, Daniel J., Rear Admiral, USN, Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense

Negroponte, John D., member, National Security Council staff
Nelson, William E., Chief, Far East Division, Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency
Ngo Dzu, Lieutenant General, ARVN, Commander (MR–2) until May 10, 1972
Ngo Quang Truong, Lieutenant General, ARVN, Commander (MR–4) until May 3, 1972; Commander (MR–1) thereafter
Nguyen Cao Ky, Major General, VNAF, Vice President, Republic of Vietnam
Nguyen Co Thach, North Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister
Nguyen Duy Trinh, North Vietnamese Foreign Minister
Nguyen Thi Binh, (also known as Madame Binh) Foreign Minister, PRG, and the PRG's representative to the Avenue Kléber talks
Nguyen Van Minh, Lieutenant General, ARVN, Commander (MR–3)
Nguyen Van Thieu, President of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
Nguyen Van Toan, Lieutenant General, ARVN, Commander (MR–2) from May 10, 1972
Nha, Hoang Duc, *see* Hoang Duc Nha
Nixon, Richard M., President of the United States
Nutter, G. Warren, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Pham Dang Lam, Ambassador, Head of Republic of Vietnam Delegation to Paris Peace Talks
Pham Van Dong, North Vietnamese Prime Minister
Polgar, Thomas, Special Assistant to the Ambassador in Saigon; Central Intelligence Agency Chief of Station in Saigon
Porter, William J., Chief, U.S. Delegation to Paris Peace Talks
Pringle, Donald B., Captain, USN, Executive Assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations
Pursley, Robert E., Brigadier General, USAF, Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense; promoted to Major General on February 1 and Lieutenant General on November 19

Quang, Dang Van, *see* Dang Van Quang

Rectanus, Earl F. "Rex," Rear Admiral, USN, Director, Naval Intelligence Division
Robertson, Horace B., Rear Admiral, USN, Deputy Judge Advocate General, Navy Department
Rogers, William P., Secretary of State
Rosson, William B., General, USA, Commander, Pacific Command
Rush, Kenneth, Deputy Secretary of Defense from February 23, 1972

Scali, John, Special Consultant to the President (for public affairs)
Scott, Hugh, Republican Senator from Pennsylvania; Senate Minority Leader
Searles, DeWitt R., Major General, USAF, Deputy Commander 7/13th Air Force
Seignious, George M., Lieutenant General, USA, Director, Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff, from June 12, 1972
Shakespeare, Frank, Director, U.S. Information Agency
Souvanna Phouma, Prince, Premier of Laos
Stearman, William L., member, Operations Staff, East Asia, National Security Council
Stennis, John C., Democratic Senator from Mississippi; Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
Stuart, Richard K., Deputy Director for Coordination, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
Sullivan, William H., Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Chairman, Interdepartmental Group on Vietnam
Swank, Emory C., U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia
Symington, W. Stuart, Democratic Senator from Missouri

Thach, Nguyen Co, *see* Nguyen Co Thach
Thieu, Nguyen Van, *see* Nguyen Van Thieu
Tho, Le Duc, *see* Le Duc Tho
Thuy, Xuan, *see* Xuan Thuy
Toan, Nguyen Van, *see* Nguyen Van Toan
Tran Van Don, prominent South Vietnamese political and military figure
Tran Van Lam, South Vietnamese Foreign Minister
Trinh, Nguyen Duy, *see* Nguyen Duy Trinh
Truong, Ngo Quang, *see* Ngo Quang Truong

Vang Pao, General, Royal Lao Armed Forces, Commander of Military Region Two, head of the Meo (Hmong) guerrilla forces
Vasey, Lloyd "Joe," Rear Admiral, USN, Director, Strategic Plans and Policy, U.S. Pacific Command, until July 20, 1972
Vogt, John W., Lieutenant General, USAF, until April 7, 1972, General from April 8; Director, Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff until April 7; Commander, 7th Air Force, and Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, from April 10
Vo Nguyen Giap, General, People's Army of Vietnam, North Vietnamese Defense Minister

Walters, Vernon A., Lieutenant General, USA, Defense Attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Paris until March 1972; Deputy Director of Central Intelligence from May 2
Weiss, Cora, anti-war activist, wife of Peter Weiss
Weiss, Peter, anti-war activist, radical lawyer, husband of Cora Weiss
Weyand, Frederick C., General, USA, Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, until June 28, 1972; Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, from June 29
Whitehouse, Charles W., Deputy U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam from March 1972

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

Zais, Melvin, Lieutenant General, USA, Director for Operations (J–3), Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Zumwalt, Elmo R., Jr., "Bud," Admiral, USN, Chief of Naval Operations

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

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

The type of clandestine activities enumerated under the new directive included: "propaganda; economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberation groups, and support of indigenous anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world. Such operations shall not include armed conflict by recognized military forces, espionage, counterespionage, 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 Department of State 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 the NSC, the PSB, and the departmental representatives originally delegated to advise the OPC, no group or officer outside of the DCI and

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[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 6, 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 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 when weekly meetings began to be held. Neither the CIA nor the Special Group adopted fixed criteria for

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[5] William M. Leary, editor, *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents* (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.

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 resisting subversive insurgency and other forms of indirect aggression in friendly countries. In early 1966, in NSAM No. 341, President John-

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[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.

son 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 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.

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[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.

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 operations. The OAG was required to hold formal meetings to develop

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[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.

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, January–October 1972

Before the Easter Offensive, January 20–March 29, 1972

1. Message From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Abrams) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Saigon, January 20, 1972, 0945Z.

76221. Exclusive for Adm McCain. Deliver during waking hours. References: A. COMUSMACV 041237Z Jan 72. B. COMUSMACV 070812Z Jan 72. C. COMUSMACV 170425Z Jan 72.[2]

1. (TS) The purpose of this message is to describe in the clearest possible manner the impending enemy offensive against RVN; the impact of ongoing operations on the Commando Hunt interdiction campaign and the additional authorities that will be needed for the conduct of an effective defense in the coming period.

2. (TS) As pointed out in my assessment of the enemy situation submitted in Ref A and B, along with additional intelligence in para 3

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 330–75–0014, OSD Files, International Security Affairs, Vietnam Task Force, Box 3, File of Meetings, Senior Review Group. Top Secret; Immediate; Exclusive; Specat. Repeated to Moorer. Bunker and Berger in Saigon reviewed the message line by line with Abrams. (Sorley, *A Better War,* pp. 315–316) During a special briefing in Saigon on the cable and the requested authorities, the following exchange occurred between Abrams and Bunker. Abrams: "As messages go, this is probably the most unequivocal message we've ever sent." Bunker: "I think it's time to be unequivocal because there's so much at stake." Abrams: "I'm in hopes that this will get all the way, or the essence of this will get all the way, to him [the president]. I don't see how they can afford not to." Bunker: "I can send in—I can flag it to see that he does." (Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles,* p. 756; "the president" is bracketed in the original.) As it turned out, Bunker had no need to flag the message. When the message arrived, Moorer sent it to Laird and recommended that, "because of the importance of General Abrams' assessment," the message should be forwarded to the White House. (CM–1468–72, attached to Moorer Diary, January 20; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

[2] COMUSMACV message 1237Z, January 4, and COMUSMACV message 0812Z, January 7, were not found. In COMUSMACV message 0425Z, January 17, Abrams gave his reasons why the enemy would initiate major military action in South Vietnam in a few months. (Ibid., Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 62, COMUSMACV General Service Messages, January 15–31, 1972)

below, the enemy is preparing and positioning his forces for a major offensive. It is apparent that the high level decisions and planning for such an effort have already been made by the enemy. Although we cannot be sure at this time of his precise plan of attack it is apparent that he is going to attempt to face us with the most difficult situations of which he is capable.[3] There is no doubt that this is to be a major campaign. We estimate that the main effort will be against the B3 front in RVN MR 2 and northern RVN MR 1, but this will be accompanied by a general increase in enemy activity in other areas of RVN. The enemy will use MiG's, SAM's and AAA to complicate our operations. We expect his recently intensified MiG activity to continue and to be directed against our air operations. He is expected to position SAM's and AAA just north of the DMZ and has already moved these weapons into the Laotian panhandle to counter our operations in these areas. These measures will accompany intensive armor and artillery supported ground operations against which we must be able to concentrate U.S. and VNAF air power regardless of the hostile air environment. The enemy will undoubtedly continue operations in Laos or Cambodia against sensitive targets for the purpose of diverting U.S. air power to areas of secondary strategic importance. Difficult strategic decisions will be required on our part to prevent the fragmentation of our air effort. We foresee a hard battle involving sophisticated weaponry and as much ground combat power as the enemy can generate.

3. (S) Since the dispatch of our intelligence assessments of Southeast Asia in References A and B, the enemy has continued to provide clear and positive evidence of his intentions during the next six months.

A. In NVN on 18 December 1971, General Giap, in an official address to high level civilian and military authorities, emphasized that all young men must fight. The theme of Giap's address stressed "we must fight with determination to win." *The official party organ Nhan Dan, has announced that all youths must go into military service to defend the homeland regardless of past exemptions.* Additionally, Hanoi daily news-

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[3] Eight days earlier, on January 12, Le Duc Tho in Hanoi had cabled Pham Hung, head of COSVN. In the cable he reminded Pham: "Both we and the enemy are preparing for a ferocious confrontation against one another during the upcoming spring and summer." Then he added: "Since we have now made our policy decisions and are now beginning to make our deployments to carry them out, it is ever more vital that you maintain a firm tight grasp on the situation [in the South], both the enemy situation and our own situation." On how to implement the attack plans, Le emphasized, "You must not simply devote all your attention to the activities of our main force units; you must also devote attention to the plan to attack the pacification program and to the plan for political and military struggle in the cities." (Cable No. 77, Le Duc Tho to Pham Hung, January 12, in *Collected Party Documents,* vol. 33, 1972, p. 2)

papers have published photographs of soldiers in combat uniforms and equipment with the caption "Following in the footsteps of their fathers, units on the way to fight in the South."

B. The southward movement, or preparation for movement, of major tactical units continues. The headquarters of the 320th Division and its three regiments continue their movement toward the VC B–3 front, with the Division headquarters most recently located southeast of Sarvane. The headquarters and one subordinate regiment of the 308th Division have moved over 100 miles south and intelligence indicates that major organic elements of this division are making preparations for deployment. The 304th Division and two of its regiments have relocated significantly south with divisional reconnaisance units reported to be operating west of Khe Sanh. Additonal intelligence reveals that the Division headquarters and regimental elements of the 324B Division are also preparing for deployment. These indicators show a *willingness by Hanoi to commit four of the five reserve divisions held in NVN,* a commitment which has previously occurred only during Tet 1968 and during Lam Son 719 in March and April 1971. The 271st Independent Regiment, heretofore utilized as a coastal defense and border defense unit in NVN is also moving south. In addition, 122 MM guns and other artillery are enroute to the B–3 front. Intelligence also reveals *a very high level of infiltration of personnel and units from NVN into the RVN and Cambodia far in excess of that for a like period last year.* Of particular significance is the large number of organized units moving through the infiltration system. The enemy has also extended and improved his air defense capability to the south. Two SA–2 missile firings have occurred from positions in the vicinity of Tchepone, and one from a site 25 nautical miles further south in the panhandle. There has been an increase in the sighting of SAM associated equipment (missiles, launchers, radars, and fire control vans) in the vicinity of the entry gates and along the LOCs in the Laos panhandle. Additionally, intercept of Fan Song radar signals in the vicinity of Vinh Ling just north of the eastern edge of the DMZ indicated a SAM capability in extreme southern NVN. Recently the enemy has increased his conventional anti-aircraft capability in the Laos panhandle to 52 battalions vice 44 held there in the latter part of 1971. Sensor string activations during the past several weeks indicate *the enemy is accelerating his logistical campaign in the Lao panhandle.* During December 1971, the weekly average of sensor string activations was approximately 3,100. The weekly average for the first two weeks in January 1972 jumped to 5,400, and the third week in January will substantially exceed that average. These most recent developments, General Giap's statements, unit moves, increased infiltration, build up of SAM and anti-aircraft threat and the continuing increase in truck activity in Laos all indicate the enemy's intention to make *an all-out effort.* We believe the enemy will be prepared to mount

main force warfare in the B–3 front, northern MR1 and to a lesser extent in MR5 by late January or early February.

4. (TS) The enemy build up has been hurt by the Commando Hunt VII interdiction campaign, but the campaign has been degraded by the diversion of air effort to other missions.

A. Last year our strike sorties in the interdiction campaign in Steel Tiger increased from 6625 in November to 9510 in January. During the same period this year strike sorties have declined in the area from 4967 in Nov 71 to an estimated 4710 sorties in Jan 72. The *weight of effort in the interdiction campaign has been affected by the execution of Proud Deep Alpha in Dec 71,* the increased strike sorties flown in the Barrel Roll, and the increased air defense sorties required for MiG cap and escort. Although the Barrel Roll area was also active during the 1970/1971 interdiction campaign, the percentage of the total strike and air defense effort devoted to the Barrel Roll area this year has been significantly greater than for the same months last year. For example, in Nov 70, Dec 70, and Jan 71 the percentage of effort devoted to strike and air defense in the Barrel Roll was 11 percent, 9 percent, and 10 percent respectively, as compared with percentages of 17 percent, 17 percent and 32 percent this year.

B. The Arc Light support for the interdiction campaign also reflects the increased emphasis on support for the Barrel Roll. During Nov and Dec 1970, less than one percent of the 1000 monthly sorties went into the Barrel Roll. This compares to 1 and 13 percent respectively during Nov and Dec 71. There were only 96 Arc Light sorties flown in the Barrel Roll during all of 1970, this compares to 114 sorties flown there during Dec 71 alone. During the first 15 days of Jan 1972, 29 percent of all Arc Light strikes went to support the Barrel Roll area. If this rate were continued, *nearly 300 of the 1000 available sorties monthly would be flown outside the critical interdiction area.* This further reduces the overall interdiction campaign at a time when the total Tacair strike sorties available is significantly less than during the previous campaign.

5. (TS) As noted above the forthcoming battle will probably include MiG and SAM activity in close proximity to the North Vietnam border in the vicinity of the DMZ. Effective protection of our forces will require new operating authorities which must be in hand from the outset of the battle. I therefore request that the following standby authorities be approved now for use as needed throughout the battle. These authorities will be invoked as appropriate when the battle for northern RVN begins.

A. Authority: *Fighter aircraft may strike enemy MIG aircraft on the ground at Dong Hoi, Vinh and Quan Lang.*

Rationale: MiGs based at these fields pose an unacceptable risk to U.S. and Allied aircraft operating in the DMZ area. MiGs operating

from Dong Hoi, the southernmost of the three fields, are only four minutes from northern RVN, even with extensive air defense/MIG cap augmentation, it cannot be assumed that detection and acquisition of NVN aircraft can be achieved in time to prevent MiG attacks against friendly forces. The enemy has demonstrated the ability to use terrain masking and radio silence procedures to deploy undetected into airfields south of 19 degrees north and to launch from these airfields for attack on friendly forces in Laos. In some cases, after-the-fact collateral information has provided the only basis for determination of MIG activity. Tacair strikes near the border, Arc Light, gunships, ABCCC, tankers, and relay aircraft are particularly vulnerable to NVN fighter/interceptor attack. Once MiG's are positioned at Dong Hoi, Vinh or Quan Lang they must be considered to have entered the battle and must be attacked.

B. Authority: *Fighter aircraft, including Iron Hand may strike active GCI radars in NVN below 20 degrees north.*

Rationale: For several years NVN has had the resources and ability to integrate the GCI/fighter combination with AAA and SAMs, and thereby establish a highly effective air defense system. During a MiG engagement, GCI radars perform the same function for the MiG as do guidance radars for SAMs. Each time the MiGs have been active, the NVN radar/GCI system begins to radiate just as is the case in preparation for firing surface-to-air missiles. With operative GCI radar the MiG pilots are provided with positive radar control and warning which places them in a *vastly superior* potion to complete their mission. It is apparent that the aggressive MiG activity is closely associated with the activation of his GCI radars and that the enemy is training intensively toward the end of disrupting operations in Laos and destroying a B–52 or other U.S. aircraft. In addition to the use of GCI radars to control and vector attacking fighters, *the enemy is using GCI radars as an integral part of the SA–2 missile fire control system.* The SA–2 missiles are aimed and launched using early warning or GCI radar derived azimuth and range information. At a pre-determined time, the Fansong radar is turned on for very short periods to provide terminal guidance information. This tactic effectively negates the protection afforded by our radar homing and warning equipment since there is little time to evade the missile. Whether paired with missiles or MiGs, the EW/GCI radars are being utilized like any other fire control radar; therefore, the authority to strike EW/GCI radars controlling fighter and missile attacks on U.S. and Allied aircraft is necessary to effectively counter the NVN air offense capability in southern Laos and northern RVN.

C. Authority: *Fighter aircraft, including Iron Hand, may strike any occupied SAM site and associated equipment in NVN that is located within 19 nautical miles (SAM range) of the PMDL and within 19 nautical miles of the*

North Vietnam-Laotian border as far north as 19 nautical miles above Mugia Pass.

Rationale: Immediate protective reaction strikes against SAM/AAA and associated equipment as presently authorized leave to the enemy the initiative to contest this critical air space. The principal result to be achieved by the implementation of this proposal is to maintain control of that minimum essential air space required for the conduct of Arc Light and tacair operations in the critical infiltration passes and the anticipated battle zone in northern RVN. We must not allow enemy interference with our use of air power which may be the decisive element in the battle.

D. Authority: *Fighter aircraft may strike enemy logistic support facilities below 18 degrees north.*

Rationale: The enemy logistics facilities below 18 degrees north will provide direct support to the offensive against RVN. These facilities will be essential to the enemy to sustain his offensive and are considered an integral part of the campaign. *Elimination of these facilities will have a direct bearing upon the duration of the battle.*

E. Authority: *Sensors may be implanted throughout the DMZ. This authority will be executed to the extent required to provide the intelligence deemed necessary for safety of forces.*

Rationale: Current authorities permit implanting sensors within the DMZ, south of the PMDL. Expansion of this authority to include the entire DMZ will greatly enhance the ability to monitor resupply and infiltration activity, and permit U.S. and Allied forces south of the DMZ to conduct timely counteractions.

F. Authority: *Fixed and rotary wing aircraft may be employed for logistic support, trooplift and medevac in support of RVNAF limited cross-border operations in Laos or the KHR when requirements exceed VNAF capabilities. Rotary wing gunships may be employed when necessary to provide security of these operations.*

Rationale: The RVNAF are being encouraged to conduct raids against known or suspected enemy base areas along and near the RVN/Laos and KHR borders. *Without the assurance of U.S. backup support, the RVNAF are reluctant to engage in such operations,* thereby permitting the enemy to establish and maintain supply and base areas from which to launch offensive operations. This authority will allow us to assist RVNAF during such operations, to insure timely support in emergency situations, and to exploit lucrative targets when discovered.

6. (TS) The seriousness of the developing situation and the need for prior preparation demand the most urgent consideration. The stakes in this battle will be great. If it is skillfully fought by RVN, supported by all available U.S. air, the outcome will be a major defeat for the enemy, leaving him in a weakened condition and gaining decisive time

for the consolidation of the Vietnamization effort. When the time comes, *it is imperative that the available U.S. air power be focused specifically against the threat to RVN realizing it will mean reduced support for Laos and Cambodia.* As it is we are running out of time in which to apply the full weight of air power against the build up. The additional authorities requested in para 5 above are urgently needed, the rate of enemy build-up and our uncertainty as to the exact timing of his offensive pose a most dangerous situation in which the field commander must be accorded maximum flexibility and authority to deal with what will probably be a very rapidly developing enemy threat of major proportions. *I view the probable main battle zone as that area north and south of the DMZ in which we can expect to find the main enemy maneuver and combat support forces capable of directly influencing the course of the battle within SVN.* I must have the necessary authority to deal with those forces from the outset.

There will not be time for reassessment of the need for additional authorities as in the past. For this reason, I am requesting the removal of those current constraints in our operating authorities which would deny necessary application of force and freedom of action within the battle zone. In the final analysis, when this is all over, *specific targets hit in the southern part of North Vietnam will not be a major issue.* The issue will be whether Vietnamization has been a success or a failure.

7. Ambassador Bunker has seen this message and concurs.

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2. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, January 20, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to General Abrams's message and to military actions in Vietnam.]

Kissinger: One massive problem we have is in Vietnam. We had a message from Abrams today.[2] They are putting in every reserve unit they have. Everything. They're stripping North Vietnam.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 652–17. 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, 6:08–6:36 p.m.

[2] Document 1.

Nixon: The North Vietnamese are?

Kissinger: Yeah, they're stripping it bare and—

Nixon: What can we do?

Kissinger: Well, he wants to bomb the southern part of North Vietnam, where they have their logistic buildup. So we've got to look at it tomorrow. I want to talk to Dobrynin and tell him, "Look, if this offensive"—of course, they want to put it to us.

Nixon: Well, I think they want to put it to us. My view is that we may have to risk the Chinese thing, Henry. I—

Kissinger: It's my view, too, Mr. President—

Nixon: I just don't believe you can let them knock the shit out of South—I mean China—so if the Chinese—the Chinese aren't going to cancel the trip.[3]

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: They're not going to cancel the trip because—

Kissinger: I don't think we should go quite as far north but we should, as we did in the last attacks, I think we should let him do something. I think if—

Nixon: Well, Henry, you—you remember I—

Kissinger: Particularly after your peace speech.[4] I don't think you should do it—

Nixon: I wouldn't do it now. I mean, wait 'til the—after the peace speech.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I think you're right.

Kissinger: I'd wait until they've—

Nixon: Do you think they'd respond with—to our speech—with an increased buildup?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I think so, too.

Kissinger: That's my understanding.

Nixon: We could just simply—what does Abrams—? Does Abrams have a plan? Or—

Kissinger: Well, he has targets. And I think they probably are going to make an all-out—and then they're going to settle. If they don't

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[3] Nixon was referring to his State visit to Beijing, which was to take place in late February.

[4] Nixon was scheduled to deliver a major speech on the Vietnam peace negotiations on Tuesday, January 25.

tip it then, they're going to settle. They're going to settle either way, because if they win, of course, they're going to have it, and if they don't make it then they're going to—

Nixon: When you speak in terms of the win, what are they doing? What do you envision?

Kissinger: Well, what they could wind up doing is have a massive attack in II Corps, and come across the DMZ, and across the—and go all out in I Corps. Now, we ought to be able to handle it with massive air. But, if they go across the DMZ, of course, they'd be violating the understandings totally—[5]

Nixon: Yes.

[Omitted here is material printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 38.]

Nixon: You think that what they're really doing is, as you said, what Abrams says, is a massive buildup, huh?

Kissinger: Their biggest buildup, sir, in four years. Every reserve division they've got. Literally, they've stripped it. If we could land one division up North we could drive to Hanoi.

Nixon: And where are they all? He says they're—

Kissinger: Well they're in—coming down—

Nixon: How'd they get in there so fast?

Kissinger: Well, they're not all—well, some are on the trail and some are just north of the DMZ. And they've built a road across the DMZ, which they don't need for infiltration—

Nixon: Well, what the hell? Why aren't we hitting the road?

Kissinger: Mr. President, this has been one of the worst—

Nixon: What in the name of God are we doing about the road now?

Kissinger: Well, we are—oh yeah, we are bombing it. But it's—it's one of the worst disgraces, that here the great U.S. Air Force can't keep

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[5] On October 29, 1968, in a meeting with his national security advisers, President Johnson summarized the understandings:

"—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 cities.

"—The Soviet Union, which has played a part in this negotiation, knows these circumstances intimately. Their understanding has been reaffirmed at the highest level in the last few days.

"—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.*" See *Foreign Relations,* 1964–1968, volume VII, Vietnam, September 1968–January 1969, Document 140.

a road from being built. They still haven't finished it completely, so I don't think they'll start the DMZ attack yet. Our judgment is, or the intelligence judgment is, that they'll start their attacks in Vietnam in February, and in the Second Corps area, and in March in the First Corps area. I think they'll have knocked it off by May 1st.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to General Abrams's message or military actions in Vietnam.]

Nixon: Incidentally, what are the South Vietnamese doing in terms of preparing to meet the offensive? Are they—

Kissinger: Well, he changed a commander of the second—of two of the divisions in II Corps.

Nixon: Has he?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: And has he—the commander has changed, but are—

Kissinger: And we've put—

Nixon: They must be pretty good now, the South Vietnamese—?

Kissinger: Well, in I Corps they're pretty good but that's where they may run into a lot of tanks. This may be a replay of the—

Nixon: We have tanks there now, remember? We've been delivering tanks to that place—

Kissinger: Yeah. No, no. They've got—that should be a gory battle but, you know, it would be a lot of publicity in this country.

Nixon: Look, if it doesn't involve Americans, it's all right. There is—they have publicity on it anyway—

[Omitted here is material printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 38.]

Nixon: I don't know what we can do. We don't have any cards there, Henry, nothing but the damned Air Force, but we'll use it. We've got to use the Air Force—

Kissinger: Mr. President, I think the demonstration of impotence, of getting run out of Vietnam physically—

Nixon: What's that? I couldn't hear you.

Kissinger: I mean—

Nixon: It's a demonstration of what?

Kissinger: Of being run out physically. It would be too great.

Nixon: Oh, we can't do anything.

Kissinger: Because I think they will be—after this shot—I think they—

Nixon: They've got to settle.

Kissinger: Yeah. That's it.

Nixon: Don't you think so?

Kissinger: They've got to settle this summer. One way or the other, I think, in making your planning, you can pretty well assume, one way or the other it's gonna be done—

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to General Abrams's message or military actions in Vietnam.]

Nixon: I wish we could do something tough in Vietnam. I don't—well, goddamnit, that Air Force plus the South Vietnamese should be able to do it. I don't think the North Vietnamese are that strong. I can't believe—

Kissinger: What we ought to do—

Nixon: —in Laos, in Cambodia they could be that strong.

Kissinger: What we ought to do is get a series of one or two-day strikes. I don't think we can do five days at a clip, but we can—

Nixon: No, I—we can't. As I told you before, I really think that the last two days of the last mission—it wasn't fatal, but it didn't help us. I don't think it was worth [unclear] just continuing. It looked like we just didn't hit 'em. But hit 'em for a couple of days and then stop. As you noticed that, we stopped the bombing. They quit talking about it after three days—

Kissinger: Yeah. Yeah. In two days, we can do one week. And then two weeks later, another day. They've just got to, and then—

Nixon: Why do you think that the fact—the reason I asked you about the other one, Henry, I think the fact that we did that five day—

Kissinger: Oh, that was very strong—

Nixon: —gave them some pause.

Kissinger: Oh yeah.

Nixon: Don't you think it would worry them a little? They needed [unclear]—

Kissinger: Yeah, but I think we may have to hit them early in February. I don't think it's—

Nixon: Well, that means next week maybe, though.

Kissinger: No, the week after your proposal.

Nixon: Oh, you want to wait that long?

Kissinger: Oh, maybe at the end of the week. I'd like to give your proposal a little more ride. I think they're going to—

Nixon: Yeah, I think we should let it ride the weekend, if we can.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: How about that—?

Kissinger: And then if they hit us, then maybe we hit them for five days. You know, if they respond to your proposal with an all-out offensive.

Nixon: That's right. But we can—in your briefing you could hit that. I don't want to say it. I don't want to threaten in my speech—

Kissinger: No—

Nixon: Or, do you think I should?

Kissinger: No, you should not.

Nixon: I don't think I should be threatening at all in the speech.

Kissinger: No, no, no.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to General Abrams's message or military actions in Vietnam.]

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3. Memorandum From Philip A. Odeen and John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, January 22, 1972.

SUBJECT

Abrams' Vietnam Assessment

This memo reviews critically General Abrams' recent message assessing the North Vietnamese threat and requesting a series of air operating authorities against targets in North Vietnam. (Abrams' message is at Tab A.[2] Our analytical summary of his threat assessment is at Tab B.[3]) Specifically we:

—Assess the intelligence and air material operations cited by Abrams;

—Review the air operating authorities he requested, pointing to problems and raising questions as well as suggesting optional authorities you might wish to consider;

—Suggest a series of possible military actions the U.S. might take to deter or cope with a major North Vietnam offensive.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–062, Senior Review Group Meetings, SRG Meeting Vietnam Assessment 1/24/72. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action.

[2] Printed as Document 1.

[3] Tab B, an analysis of Abrams's assessment by Odeen and Negroponte, undated, is attached. The NSC staffers concluded: "In our view, an all-out effort envisioned by Abrams is no more than a possibility; on balance, it is probable that enemy efforts will fall short of the maximum efforts."

Intelligence Assessment

To support his request for additional authorities, General Abrams has provided an intelligence assessment which concludes that a truly major enemy offensive is imminent. He believes that the main enemy efforts will occur in the central highlands of MR II and in northern MR I. A detailed report on General Abrams' assessment along with our comments is at Tab B.

We do not share General Abrams' judgment that such an offensive is probable; in particular, we question the likelihood of a major enemy push in northern MR I. In any event, General Abrams' requests can be considered apart from his assessment. Two of his requests relate specifically to a northern MR I offensive, three of the requests relate to the enemy's increased SAM–AAA–MIG capabilities, and the final request relates to U.S. support for pre-emptive ARVN incursions in Laos and Cambodia.

The specific requests and our comments and suggestions follow.

Air Sortie Levels—1970 and 1971

Abrams points out that enemy initiatives in North Laos and increased hostile air activity this year have forced him to divert air from the Panhandle area where the supply and manpower infiltration is occurring.

There is no question of the accuracy of this statement, but it is mitigated by several considerations:

—The logistic flow through Laos started later this year, thus there was less need for strikes in South Laos.

—Most of the aircraft diverted from South Laos missions have been F–4s. These aircraft are relatively ineffective in the interdiction role—the AC–130s do the bulk of the truck killing.

Air Operating Authorities

After assessing the NVN build-up and the serious threat to our aircraft posed by MIGs and SAMs, Abrams requests a series of new air authorities. These authorities would be used "*as appropriate*" when the "battle for Northern RVN begins." The requested authorities are:

—(1) To strike aircraft on three fields in North Vietnam situated at 19° and southwards.

—(2) To strike active ground control intercept (GCI) radars below 20° used to direct enemy MIGs.

—(3) To strike any occupied SAM sites within 19 miles of the DMZ and the NVN/Laos border as far north as 19 miles above Mu Gia pass (about 18°).

—(4) To strike any enemy logistics facilities below 18° (i.e., the southern-most 60 miles of NVN where the major passes are located).

—(5) To plant sensors in the northern half of the DMZ.

—(6) To use our aircraft and helicopters to support RVNAF cross border operations into Laos or Cambodia.

Abrams wants these authorities now, stating the situation is developing rapidly and time does not permit him to delay his request until the threat is fully developed.

Each authority is discussed in more detail below.

Attacks on NVN Aircraft on Southern Bases. Abrams states that MIGs based at the three southern-most airbases pose an unacceptable risk to our aircraft operating in the DMZ area. As you will note, he is concerned about MIG operations against SVN and the DMZ areas, not Laos. Yet, to date the MIGs have not attacked or harassed our air operation in the DMZ/Northern SVN areas, only Laos.

This authority would let MACV strike any of the three airfields any time MIGs are based on them. This would essentially permit MACV to strike the airbases constantly, until NVN withdrew the aircraft farther north. Once the MIGs are pulled back (probably to bases above the 19th parallel), the immediate threat to the DMZ would be eased. Since the distances are so small, aircraft from fields north of Vinh could still go after our aircraft over the DMZ. However, our likelihood of detecting them would increase.

This authority would reduce significantly the threat to our aircraft operating over Laos. Most of the attacks on our aircraft over the Trail area as well as the simple incursions into Laotian airspace have been by MIGs based at Bai Thuong or the bases near Hanoi.

If the requested authority seems inappropriate given development thus far, there are a number of lesser options.

—Authorize a single strike, against all of the occupied bases or any one of the three bases.
—Authorize a retaliatory strike each time a MIG attacks one of our aircraft or intrudes on SVN or Laotian airspace.
—Give Abrams standby authority to hit the three bases once we have firm evidence an aircraft from one of them has intruded over SVN/DMZ airspace or attacked or harassed a friendly aircraft operating over the DMZ or SVN.

Authority to Strike GCI Radars South of 20°. Abrams points to the key role played by ground control intercept (GCI) radars and requests authority to strike any active GCI radars below 20°.

The GCI radars are key to the effectiveness of the MIGs operating over NVN/Laos and also play an important role in SAM operations. The GCI radars detect and track our aircraft and this information is passed on to the SAM units as well as to MIG bases. MIGs normally operate under control of the GCI radars which direct them to our aircraft. Since the MIGs have poor radar, without the GCI they are blind except during optimum weather. Thus, knocking out the GCI radars would almost eliminate the MIG threat and reduce the effectiveness of the SAMs.

There are, however, problems associated with striking the GCI radars:

—Our anti-radar missiles (e.g., Shrike) are not effective since the enemy knows when we launch them and, by shutting off his radars, can avoid being hit.

—The radars are a small target. We have not been effective in hitting them in the past using conventional bombs except by using a number of aircraft.

—Radars are easy to repair and in most cases are operational within 48 hours of being hit.

—Since NVN has overlapping GCI coverage, even if one or two radars are out, the air defense can still operate. Also, since they can be repaired quickly, the Air Force must continue taking precautions (e.g., providing air defense and radar suppression aircraft to protect our B–52s) so hitting the sites does not reduce the diversions of fighter aircraft to the air defense mission.

Despite these problems, some added authority might be considered:

—Authority could be granted to strike GCI radars controlling MIG aircraft attacking or harassing our aircraft.

—Authority could be granted for retaliatory strikes against GCI radars that control MIGs against our aircraft.

Attacks on SAMs near the Border. Abrams requests authority to hit any occupied SAM site within 19 miles of the DMZ/Laotian border as far north as 18°. At present, he can only strike these SAM sites if they are preparing to engage our aircraft.

Efforts to strike SAM sites except when they are operating have not been very successful in the past. The SAMs are quite mobile and move frequently. Thus, finding the sites before they turn on their radars is tough. Once they turn on the radar, normally we can hit them if an aircraft is in the area. The authority Abrams requests would, in essence, be to fly armed recce along the border area, searching for SAM sites. Or possibly, it would entail more photo recce, with aircraft dispatched to strike sites that are found in the photos.

Since MACV already has authority to strike SAMs that track aircraft with their radars, there is no clear alternative authority to the new one requested.

Strike Against Logistics Targets Below 18°. Abrams states these facilities would provide direct support for operations in the DMZ, northern SVN area.

Essentially, Abrams wants authority to renew bombing in the area about 60 miles north of the DMZ. This is the broadest of the six authorities requested and the domestic political implications are obvious.

This area also includes the three major passes into Laos, thus it would also be useful in slowing the flow of supplies into the Laotian trail. To be effective, such a campaign would have to be extended for

weeks or months. Short raids hurt NVN, but can be offset in a matter of days. Over the next two months, the effectiveness of such an air effort would be limited by weather. The monsoon begins to lift in March, but until then rain and clouds will be the rule.

Some alternative authorities that might be considered include:

—Providing the requested authority only after NVN intentions to mount major offensive operations in the DMZ northern MR I area are clear.

—Approving a short, one to three-day raid along the line of the December bombing (it might be wise to wait until the weather improves).

—Approving a raid against a particular target, if an especially lucrative target south of 18° can be found.

Plant Sensors in the DMZ. Abrams wants authority to place sensors in the northern half of the DMZ. At present, he is limited to the southern half.

This seems like a small but logical action. It should provide better intelligence on enemy activities. We foresee no problems with granting it.

Support RVNAF Operations in Laos and Cambodia. To encourage and make more effective RVNAF cross-border operations, Abrams wants authority to provide fixed wing and helicopter support. This would include troop lift, medical evacuation and resupply.

This appears to be a useful step. There are no legal problems as long as the President is willing to determine these measures necessary to our withdrawing forces from SVN.

Recommendations on Six Additional Operating Authorities Requested by General Abrams on Standby Basis.

—(1) Air strikes against the MIG bases at Vinh, Dong Hoi, and Quang Lang, all south of the 20th parallel: Selective strikes should be considered.

—(2) Air strikes against North Vietnamese GCI radar sites south of the 20th parallel: Selective strikes should be considered.

—(3) Air strikes against SAM sites in the DRV within 19 miles of the DMZ and the DRV–Laotian border to a point 19 miles north of the Mu Gia Pass: Defer until threat further materializes but consider for approval at such time.

—(4) Air strikes against logistics targets in the DRV south of the 18th parallel: Most controversial authority requested. Defer.

—(5) Employment of sensors in the northern half of the DMZ: Should approve immediately.

—(6) U.S. Tactical air and helilift support as necessary for limited ARVN operations across the Lao and Cambodian borders. Should approve.

Other Military Actions. While the threat Abrams is concerned over has not yet developed, especially the threat to MR I, it could develop

over the next two to three months. Attention should be given now to military actions we might take at this time or later to cope with the threat, if it materializes.

Some possible actions are discussed below.

B–52s. The 1,000 sorties per month are currently all flown out of U Tapao in Thailand. During Lam Son 719, the sortie rate was increased to 1,200. This could be done again this year.

Higher sortie levels might be possible if two actions were taken, adding more B–52s to the Thai base or flying sorties out of Guam.

—There are serious limits on space as U Tapao is also the KC–135 tanker base, but a few more aircraft could be based there. It might be possible to increase the sortie rate by another 100 per month (3 to 4 per day) from Thailand.

—B–52 sorties were flown from Guam from 1965 to 1969. The distances are long and the costs high but by basing two B–52 squadrons there, another 300 sorties per month should be feasible.

Tac Air. Our tactical air could be augmented in two ways, deploying more aircraft to Thailand or increasing our carrier force in the Tonkin Gulf.

It should be possible to add up to three squadrons at our bases in Thailand. These aircraft could fly about 1,500 sorties a month. The manpower problem and costs that this would entail are unclear, but DOD could provide an assessment fairly quickly.

We presently have three carriers in the Western Pacific, two of them normally operate in the Tonkin Gulf. All three could be sent to the Gulf and one more carrier could probably deploy from the West Coast to SEA. Also, the carriers can surge their operating levels for limited periods (e.g., up to 30 days) so the amount of carrier based air support could be increased sharply. The greater carrier presence might also exert some political pressure on NVN. Using the carrier would also be easier than to deploy more aircraft into Thailand, as country clearance will be unnecessary.

Other Actions. Other military actions could be taken to increase pressure on NVN and possibly provide a standby capability should a major offensive take place.

—A Marine amphibious force could deploy to the area off the coast of SVN. We normally have two battalions afloat in the Western Pacific—both could be sent to Vietnam, and a third battalion could be deployed from Okinawa in a matter of a few weeks.

—The Naval forces in the area could be strengthened and operate closer to the NVN coast.

—One to three day strikes against truck parks situated north of Hanoi might be considered. (Two are just north, one is very close to the PRC border.)

4. Minutes of a Senior Review Group Meeting[1]

Washington, January 24, 1972, 4:25–5:30 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Assessment

PARTICIPATION

Chairman: Henry A. Kissinger

State: Amb. U. Alexis Johnson

Defense: Mr. G. Warren Nutter

JCS: Admiral Thomas H. Moorer

CIA: Mr. Richard Helms

NSC Staff:
Mr. Richard T. Kennedy
Mr. Philip Odeen

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

—Requested authorities for air and helo support for ARVN cross border operations and for employment of sensors in the northern half of the DMZ are unobjectionable and should be provided.

—Air strikes against the GCI radar, while not objected to, should be considered in connection with a package of strikes against logistics, airbase, and SAM targets.

—Alternatives for attacking SAM sites, GCI radars, MIGs on the ground, and logistics targets would be developed by JCS together with packages of attacks designed to hit a variety of targets within a given time period.

—JCS would consider ways to increase Tac Air availability in SEA including additional Carrier forces and increase in aircraft stationed in Thailand.

—General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker would be urged to take steps to get ARVN combat unit strength up from its present level.

Dr. Kissinger: Have you all seen General Abrams' summary of the situation and request for authorities?[2]

Ambassador Johnson: No, I have not seen it.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 158, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Jan–Feb 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room. All brackets are in the original.

[2] See Document 1.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Admiral Moorer) Would you summarize it briefly?

Admiral Moorer: (Gave a copy of the telegram to Ambassador Johnson and then summarized it briefly, noting that General Abrams had requested a series of additional authorities.) This is, of course, General Abrams' personal assessment. He puts all of the information and factors together and notes that a major enemy effort is impending.

Dr. Kissinger: (To Mr. Helms) Do you agree with Abrams' assessment?

Mr. Helms: Yes, essentially. We just received a new report today from our station chief. It says they are picking up indications that the enemy intends a countrywide general offensive as opposed to earlier comments about high points. This is a much starchier statement of their intentions than the enemy was giving in December. It seems that they intend to come on stronger than they had stated earlier.

Dr. Kissinger: Does this mean that they had always intended this or that they have changed their intended course since last December?

Mr. Helms: The report does not specifically state, but it is clear that they are talking in a much stronger tone now. They seem more confident.

Dr. Kissinger: What has happened to bring this change?

Admiral Moorer: They decided that they could make a much stronger push than they had earlier planned and that it would be to their advantage to do so over the next month or so.

Dr. Kissinger: But why do they see that differently now?

Admiral Moorer: I think it's primarily a political view timed with the trip to Peking.[3]

Mr. Helms: I agree.

Dr. Kissinger: Well, either they have more resources than we had thought or they will use the resources they have more intensively to conduct a major campaign. They usually do this before they reopen negotiations.

Mr. Helms: They are putting a lot of chips onto the table. There are a lot of troops in Laos and in Cambodia. They are going to orchestrate this thing. I believe they want to give you a good reception when you go to Peking.

Admiral Moorer: I agree.

Mr. Helms: I think it will come in early February.

Admiral Moorer: I would guess around the 10th; we had a flurry in the DMZ area over the weekend. They fired 200 mortar rounds. The Koreans also had quite a fight.

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[3] Nixon's trip to China was scheduled for February 21.

Dr. Kissinger: Do we think the ARVN can hold?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. The North Vietnamese probably could temporarily infiltrate into the Pleiku and Kontum areas. But General Minh has planned movement of his forces to reinforce against this very sort of attack. He also is going to hold all his forces on duty during Tet, rather than let them go home as they usually do. We don't know how successful that will be. Most of them may just leave anyway. He also has plans for additional patrols and spoiling actions to cut the possibility of infiltration. He believes that the NVA will peak their effort before the Peking trip.

Ambassador Johnson: I think they want to make a heavy attack on the ARVN and then determine their future tactics based upon what happens. I don't think that they would necessarily come to the table in Paris.

Dr. Kissinger: But they might come to the table in Paris if they had humiliated the ARVN in their major attacks. If they had not been able to make much headway, they could elect to go to protracted war again. In either event it wouldn't make much difference what happened at Long Tieng.

Mr. Helms: I would like to comment further about the report that I mentioned earlier and read a part of it. (Mr. Helms read a paragraph of the cable which noted that the past three years had not been good for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. Pacification had been successful in separating the enemy from the people. Thus it was believed that the enemy might feel that they would have to show to the people that they could reassert some control, otherwise the people would believe that the Government had finally been able to assert its own control and they would make it even more difficult than for the NVA and the VC.)

Dr. Kissinger: Well, the President wants to do the maximum we can to support the ARVN. We should take a look at the authorities which General Abrams has requested, expressing our views. Then the President can take a look at the requests and our views of them. There are six authorities that were requested. They are not all related.

1. Airstrikes against the MIG bases at Vinh, Dong Hoi, and Quang Lang, all south of the 20th parallel.
2. Airstrikes against North Vietnamese GCI radar sites south of the 20th parallel.
3. Airstrikes against SAM sites in the DRV within 19 miles of the DMZ and the DRV–Laotian border to a point 19 miles north of the Mu Gia Pass.
4. Airstrikes against logistics targets in the DRV south of the 18th parallel.
5. Employment of sensors in the northern half of the DMZ.
6. U.S. air and helilift support as necessary for limited ARVN operations across the Lao and Cambodian borders.

Admiral Moorer: You are correct, they are not all related. There actually are two groups. The first three pertain to the air threat and the last three to the expected enemy offensive.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's look at the question of sensors in the northern half of the DMZ first. Does anyone have any problem with this proposal?

Mr. Nutter: This would be above the imaginary median line. We already have them in the lower half below the line.

Ambassador Johnson: Would we put them in by air?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. The idea is to be able to pick up the lateral activity that we can't now pinpoint.

Dr. Kissinger: Why don't they just pick those things up?

Admiral Moorer: They are well camouflaged. Even if they find them we simply put in others. The reason we want to do this is to pick up the truck movements that move through the northern half of the zone and simply go around the end.

Ambassador Johnson: I see no problem with this proposal.

Mr. Nutter: I discussed this earlier with Secretary Laird and he sees no problem with it.

Mr. Helms: I think we should do it. There should be no problem.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's consider No. 6—Tactical Air and Helilift Support. I thought the authority existed for this.

Admiral Moorer: The authority exists only for Base Areas 701 and 702 of Laos and the cross border operation areas in Cambodia.[4] This would extend the authorities in Laos.

Mr. Nutter: A related question is the use of riot control agents in those areas where the helicopters might go. Our request is still pending. We don't have the authority to use the RCAs now in the areas although the ARVN does have.

Admiral Moorer: General Vien's instructions call for small cross border operations all along the line. Only if ARVN resources were not adequate would they call upon US support.

Dr. Kissinger: How much support—how many helicopters—are we talking about?

Admiral Moorer: These are small operations. I would think 20–30 helicopters per operation.

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[4] Both Base Areas were in the Highlands principally on the Cambodian, not the Laotian, side of the border with South Vietnam: 701 was in Cambodia opposite Pleiku Province while 702 was mostly in Cambodia across from southern Kontum Province though its northern tip may have been in Laos.

Dr. Kissinger: How large would the forces be?

Admiral Moorer: They would be small. Perhaps company sized special forces units.

Mr. Nutter: These would be very small operations, but the ARVN may have its own resources tied up in other operations and need our help. The biggest benefit would be psychological—knowing that we would be willing to help if needed. Also the gunships support would be very helpful to them.

Ambassador Johnson: What is the current authority?

Mr. Nutter: The current authority allows us to give this kind of support in the Toan Thang operational area and Base Areas 701 and 702. This request would expand the authority to all of Cambodia and Laos.

Ambassador Johnson: Our rules now do not allow anyone on the ground in Laos. Is that correct? Are we still doing any of the MACSOG operations?

Mr. Nutter: That is right. Our current authority does not allow any ground operations in Laos. There are some MACSOG operations in South Vietnam but they are very small.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't see what the difference is. If we allow this kind of support in some areas, why don't we in the others?

Admiral Moorer: The last authority we had to operate this way in Laos terminated in May last year when the Lam Son operation there was over.

Mr. Nutter: These would be very small-scale operations, but the question would be the political reaction in this country.

Dr. Kissinger: I can't see the ARVN doing any large operations. If it doesn't cause any political problem in the areas where we are now authorized to support them, I don't see why it would make any difference if we extend the authority. I am sure that most people don't know that these are different areas or that the authorities are now limited.

Admiral Moorer: I think the important point is that if the authorities are granted and the ARVN knows that we would be prepared to support them they would undertake some operations. Otherwise they would not.

[All agreed that this authority should be granted.]

Dr. Kissinger: Let's turn to the bombing of logistic targets south of the 18th parallel.

Ambassador Johnson: Where does this extend?

Dr. Kissinger: It is about 60 miles north of the DMZ. Isn't that correct?

Admiral Moorer: Yes (referring to a map and some photos). There are a number of truck parks and five transshipment points.

Ambassador Johnson: As I understand it, the rationale would be to inhibit the movement of supplies which could support an attack.

Admiral Moorer: Yes, the authority to attack these targets would be in connection with the land battle. I discussed this with Secretary Laird. He would visualize perhaps a two-day or 48-hour authority. He would give only a specific period and say you can attack them during that period and then look at the situation again.

Dr. Kissinger: The President does not want to give blanket authorities. He wants a series of 1, 2 and 3-day plans which he could consider and decide upon. How soon do we need to make a decision on this?

Admiral Moorer: Well, we could wait until the major action develops.

Dr. Kissinger: Since we know that the attack on the B–3 front is coming, we could wait until that attack occurred and then authorize attacks on the logistics targets as a response to that attack. Is that correct?

Ambassador Johnson: Well, theoretically, that's true, but at that point we obviously couldn't affect that part of the battle with those attacks.

Admiral Moorer: But the 320th Division is already down there so it is really almost too late to have any major effect on the B–3 front battle. We might be able to restrict some supplies headed for the 320th.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you think the Division is there without supplies for the attack? Up to now we have seen no evidence that major supply movement to support the Division has occurred.

Mr. Helms: I don't believe that. I believe the supplies are already there and may have been there all the time. Besides, I think that they may be carrying a good deal of it with them. They have never "spooked us" or tried deception with communications, so I think the Division is there.

Dr. Kissinger: It is my recollection that they have never tried deception of this kind on us and never did on the French either.

Admiral Moorer: That's right.

Mr. Helms: That is correct.

Admiral Moorer: We have to remember that there are very few days of good weather in February in which targets like this could be struck. Our records show that during February we can expect only three days in which we could have six hours with a 10,000 foot ceiling and only six days in which we would have three hours with a 10,000 foot ceiling.

Dr. Kissinger: (To Admiral Moorer) Would you please get some plans over for 1, 2 and 3-day attacks? The President will then consider possible authorities in the light of those plans. If the authority is granted, we will notify only the people in this room. For the B–3 battle, there is no urgent need for this authority. Clearly we could not give an authority which would result in attacks occurring while we were in Peking. It could be phrased in a way which would give the authority to conduct the strikes against these targets for a limited period, whenever the weather was suitable up to a specific date.

Admiral Moorer: I will get the plans over to you this week.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's now turn to the question of air strikes on SAM sites. Couldn't we just do this by running armed recce along the DMZ and when we activate their radars, attack them?

Admiral Moorer: We are looking into that possibility and others. We could have one set of authorities now, for example, and a different one later when the battle is joined.

Dr. Kissinger: But couldn't you step up the amount of armed recce as a way to get at this problem?

Mr. Nutter: General Abrams wants the authority requested in order to save air assets. Increasing armed recce would run counter to this. He would simply give them the authority to attack whenever they are identified.

Ambassador Johnson: But he wants to bomb then. That also will require air assets.

Admiral Moorer: They can fire now whenever a SAM radar is locked on.

Dr. Kissinger: But I still don't understand why we don't step up the armed recce and fire whenever the radar is activated.

Admiral Moorer: There are two ways to attack the SAMs. You can fire a missile when you have been fired on or you can make an out-and-out attack on the site.

Dr. Kissinger: If we're trying to avoid an unrestricted authority to attack, we need to find an authority which makes operational sense and increases the threat to the SAM sites.

Mr. Nutter: They can't fire now unless the radar is locked on. We could authorize them to fire whenever fired on.

Admiral Moorer: Abrams wants to have the authority to attack the sites with bombs whenever a site is identified.

Dr. Kissinger: But I think we should try to avoid a situation which would result in daily stories of attacks. There would seem to be three possibilities. We could (1) increase the amount of armed recce and provoke the SAM or radar reaction and then attack, (2) attack the sites with bombs whenever they fire, or (3) attack the sites whenever we

find them. The third possibility has the disadvantage of generating what will be daily news stories of attacks. Couldn't we marry the second and third possibilities giving them a one-time authority to hit sites that have been found. Our experience has been that you get the same amount of heat domestically for a four plane attack as you do for 400. (To Admiral Moorer) Could you please give us a proposal?

Admiral Moorer: I will get this for you.

Dr. Kissinger: How about the GCI radar sites.

Admiral Moorer: This is straightforward. We want to fire on these radars when they lock in our aircraft. We want the same authority as we have to attack SAM radars.

Dr. Kissinger: Where are they located?

Admiral Moorer: There are five of them south of the 20th parallel. They are shown on the map here (map attached[5]).

Ambassador Johnson: Are these sites in populated areas?

Admiral Moorer: No, but we would have to restrict the direction of the attack to avoid the missile going north toward Hanoi.

Dr. Kissinger: We would attack these and the authority would be used only when the radars were painting our aircraft?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, we would start only by firing missiles when the radars picked up our planes.

Ambassador Johnson: Do they usually fire up the radar when the aircraft is in the area and they have a MIG tracking?

Admiral Moorer: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: General Abrams also wants to attack the airfields where the MIGs are based.

Ambassador Johnson: Won't you be able to hit them when you hit the SAMs?

Admiral Moorer: No. We could handle this with photo recce. We could increase our photo flights and attack the MIGs when they shoot at our aircraft taking pictures.

Ambassador Johnson: At present if they see a MIG on the ground, can't they hit it?

Admiral Moorer: No. Unless the MIG takes offensive action, current authorities do not permit attack. We can only hit them if they show hostile intent.

Ambassador Johnson: I can see a case for destroying the MIGs on the ground as distinct from a general strike on the airfields.

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[5] Attached but not printed.

Mr. Helms: From a public relations point of view, what difference does it make?

Dr. Kissinger: The problem again is one of stories appearing in the press of attacks every day. If we could state this authority in a way which wraps these strikes into a package of a 2-day strike, for example, if would be good.

Admiral Moorer: The objective is to suppress MIG attacks in Laos.

Mr. Nutter: One way would be to let other aircraft follow in and attack an aircraft after one of our aircraft is attacked. They can't do that now.

Dr. Kissinger: Could we get a statement by Wednesday morning of the alternative kinds of authorities which might get at this problem? Then we can meet again Wednesday[6] to discuss this.

Admiral Moorer: I will do that.

Dr. Kissinger: There is one other problem that I would like to raise. General Abrams says he is short of aircraft. Could we put another Carrier out there?

Admiral Moorer: He didn't exactly say that. He said that the number of sorties is going to be tight because he is diverting aircraft to other missions. Did you mean four rather than three Carriers?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, I was speaking of four Carriers. Abrams cites Laos requirements as limiting available sorties.

Admiral Moorer: If we keep two Carriers on line all the time, there would be a significant increase. Actually our rate has been 1.6 Carriers on line. Abrams has not been flying up to the 10,000 sortie level yet. We can increase greatly within it. We could raise the Navy sortie rate, for example, from 3,300 to 4,200 per month by keeping two Carriers on line. With three Carriers on line we could get to 6,300 Navy sorties. I will look at the possibility of having four Carriers out there during February and March.

Dr. Kissinger: If the other side is surging its effort, they'll peak for a couple of months and then they will have to lower their level of activity. We should not continue business as usual. We should be in a position to put in the maximum effort through April. Can we put in more Tac Air in Thailand?

Admiral Moorer: We have a plan to augment in Thailand by bringing aircraft from Clark Field in the Philippines. An increase, for example, of 15 aircraft would provide 450 sorties more per month. We also have the capacity to put more planes at Da Nang but we are trying to get out of there.

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[6] January 26.

Dr. Kissinger: We all are trying to save getting run out all over South Vietnam.

Admiral Moorer: But there are two pressures that we have to live with—the political necessities and the military feasibility. We want to be sure that we do what's possible.

Dr. Kissinger: The President wants to be sure that we have the assets to do what is necessary.[7] He wants a judgment as to what is needed. If more is needed, he wants to be told how to get it. He will be the judge of political feasibility. He is prepared to do more over the next three months. We need some proposals this week.

Admiral Moorer: I will have some for you.

Dr. Kissinger: I spoke to Secretary Laird who told me that he had worked out with Admiral Moorer a way to avoid the rapid drawdown of helicopters that we discussed at our last meeting and to keep more helicopters out there as we draw down to 69,000.[8]

Admiral Moorer: Yes, we have a plan that will keep about 670 helicopters with the 69,000 man force. We shall recall, however, that there will be a further drawdown starting in June and that will mean cutting into the helicopter force again.

Dr. Kissinger: But we need to keep up that capability now. If we can get through until June, we will have passed the point of maximum danger of attack and will be getting on toward the rainy season.

Mr. Nutter: I would just add that we are concerned about what the ARVN is not doing. They are not keeping their forces up in strength. The strength of most of their combat battalions is down to 50%. We have been trying to push them to keep them up to 90% but despite all our efforts, it seems to continue downward. We have urged Bunker to press Thieu on this matter.

Admiral Moorer: I based my earlier statements on a message from Bunker.[9] It said that December showed the first upturn for several months in recruiting and draftees. Part of the problem, of course, is the fact that the ARVN has been expanding but they have not been keeping their units up to strength as they should.

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[7] In a telephone conversation at 10:30 a.m. on January 21, the President asked Kissinger to tell him what was needed most in South Vietnam. Helicopters, Kissinger replied. The Pentagon was pulling them out according to its withdrawal schedule while they were "desperately" needed in South Vietnam at least until May. Nixon ordered Kissinger to arrange to get more helicopters for South Vietnam. "Do it today," he told him. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 12, Chronological File)

[8] On January 21, Kissinger called Laird, who then directed Moorer to find more helicopters. The Admiral did so by taking them from non-combat units. Laird informed Kissinger on the telephone of his success on January 22 at 12:20 p.m. (Ibid.)

[9] Not further identified.

Dr. Kissinger: Can't we ask Abrams and Bunker to look into this and take it up with Thieu and give us some explanation and recommendation as to how we can get on top of this problem?

Mr. Nutter: We have done that over and over again but nothing seems to happen.

[The meeting ended at 5:30 p.m.]

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5. Editorial Note

In a televised address on January 25, 1972, President Richard M. Nixon revealed the secret talks with North Vietnam in Paris and unveiled his latest peace proposal. He informed viewers that his Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry A. Kissinger had, since August 1969, engaged in secret talks to end the Vietnam war, traveling to Paris twelve times on these missions. Kissinger had met seven times with North Vietnamese Politburo Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy, head of the Communist Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks, and five times with Xuan Thuy alone. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, pages 100–105)

The secret talks ran parallel to the public ones, called the plenary sessions, which also took place in Paris. In the plenaries—held intermittently from mid-1968 and more regularly from early 1969 when Nixon became President—United States and South Vietnamese representatives faced the North Vietnamese and members of the Viet Cong's political arm, the Provisional Revolutionary Government. Scheduled for Thursday of each week, the plenaries tended to be meetings where the two sides read statements to one another and on occasion one side or the other canceled a meeting because of the other's conduct of the war or the negotiations. For a report on the first plenary session, which set the pattern for most that followed, see *Foreign Relations,* 1964–1968, volume VI, Vietnam, January–August 1968, Document 230; see also Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War,* pages 241–243.

In both the secret and the plenary venues, the President observed in his January 25 address, progress had been disappointing. "The American people," said Nixon, "deserve an accounting of why it has been disappointing. Tonight I intend to give you that accounting, and in so doing, I am going to try to break the deadlock in the negotiations." The President declared that the necessity for secrecy had prevented his responding to accusations by domestic and international critics about the lack of progress in the negotiations. At first, because these meetings were secret, Nixon hoped that the two sides could be

more flexible in offering new approaches and discussing them "free from the pressure of public debates." The President reviewed the record of the secret negotiations, noting specific moments between May and November 1971 when the United States had made accommodations to its adversary's demands without receiving similar accommodations or indeed anything in return from the other side. He also noted the frustrations brought on by North Vietnamese public charges that he had ignored or refused to respond to their proposals when the United States had already answered in the secret channel. He further noted that the only perceptible reaction to the most recent proposal of October 1971 had been an increased infiltration of troops from North to South Vietnam since that time, and a parallel increase of combat activity by Communist forces in Laos and Cambodia.

In the televised talk, Nixon presented a new negotiating proposal to Hanoi (Document 8) based on a plan the United States put forward in October 1971. Despite the Communists' failure to respond to this proposal, Nixon believed that it would "prove beyond doubt which side has made every effort to make these negotiations succeed. It will show unmistakably that Hanoi—not Washington or Saigon—has made the war go on." Substantively, Nixon believed that his plan contained all that was needed for a comprehensive agreement, including a cease-fire in place, withdrawal of U.S. troops, release of prisoners of war, an internationally supervised election in South Vietnam, and a commitment to implement these within six months of an agreement in Paris. Additionally, the United States would fund a major reconstruction program to help the region recover from decades of war. South Vietnam's special contribution to the new proposal was that President Nguyen Van Thieu and Vice President Tran Van Huong would resign a month before the new election while the Chairman of the South Vietnamese Senate would form a caretaker government.

President Nixon directed Ambassador William J. Porter, head of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks, to present the plan publicly to the other side in the next plenary session on January 27. The United States was willing to work within the framework provided by the new plan but was open to at least two other approaches. In the first, the two sides would negotiate the easier to resolve military questions immediately, and began implementing the solutions to these questions while negotiations on the other issues continued. In the second, they would agree at the outset to settle the military issues and then leave the more difficult political issues to the Vietnamese, North and South, to resolve after the Americans had left. President Nixon was certain he had presented a negotiating proposal that could produce a lasting peace.

Toward the end of the speech, he did indicate a point beyond which he would not go. "The only thing this plan does not do," he said, "is to

join our enemy to overthrow our ally, which the United States of America will never do. If the enemy wants peace, it will have to recognize the important difference between settlement and surrender." However, Nixon continued: "If the enemy's answer to our peace offer is to step up their military attacks, I shall fully meet my responsibility as Commander in Chief of our Armed Forces to protect our remaining troops."

The day after the speech, January 26, Kissinger held a news briefing to explain the President's peace proposal. Excerpts are printed in *The New York Times*, January 27, 1972, page 14.

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6. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Governor of New York (Rockefeller) and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

January 25, 1972, 10:23 p.m.

R: I understand that they gave away the secrets of your talks.

K: No; that there were secret meetings.

R: That's what I mean. Why is this being done?

K: They are launching a big offensive in February.

R: Military or political?

K: Military.

R: I will be damned. After you have offered them everything.

K: I tried to call you before the speech.

R: I was at a testimonial dinner for Vic [omission in the original]. Pete Brennan gave it you see. People were there from all over the country so I couldn't listen to the President.

K: We had to do it. The other side wouldn't negotiate.

R: What will be the result?

K: Dobrynin already called babbling like an idiot. He's afraid we are going to hit them.[2]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 13, Chronological File, January 25–31, 1972. No classification marking. Rockefeller was in New York; Kissinger was in Washington.

[2] A tape recording of Kissinger's telephone conversation with Dobrynin after the President's speech is ibid., White House Tapes, White House Telephone, Conversation 19–65. Kissinger had called on Dobrynin on the evening of January 21. According to his memorandum of conversation, Kissinger's central point about Vietnam was: "If a Communist offensive occurred, I emphasized that we would take the strongest possible

R: He is not so dumb.

K: We have to do something dramatic.

R: Do you think they will change?

K: They will scream. But if we have to hit them, this gives us a better posture to hit them.

R: Have we got the strength?

K: We have got the strength but it is the courage we are lacking.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

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action, which in turn would have effects on our relationship." Dobrynin replied: "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." The memorandum of conversation is printed in full in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 39.

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7. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between David Kraslow, Washington Bureau Chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, January 26, 1972, 3:15 p.m.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

[DK:] Doesn't Hanoi appear to be behaving as if it has the upper hand and can therefore hang tough.

HK: My own judgment—and this is absolutely unattributable—there is a high probability that they will negotiate and on something like this proposal. It would be uncharacteristic for them to leave a proposal like this on the table. They never have when they wanted to close the book on something. I think they will shoot their wad.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 13, Chronological File, January 25–31, 1972. No classification marking. All blank underscores are omissions in the original.

DK: Militarily?

HK: Yes, and if it fails, but in a position of demonstrated—maybe exaggerated strength . . . They may figure they may negotiate later this year.

DK: But first they want to shoot their wad.

HK: In '68 when Tet hit, you ask people who talked with me, I said this means a negotiation. In '67 they didn't wipe the table off with that either.

DK: They may want to get their _____ out of the way as a prelude to negotiation.

HK: That's right. What they may be doing . . . it would be very odd for them not to turn a proposal down. It has never happened. Now they may.

DK: They have.

HK: It would not have been turned down had we not surfaced it. In every secret contact I have had with them they always made a formal turndown, except in October of 1967 and then they settled on what I proposed a year later in effect.

DK: You think they felt they would win militarily?

HK: Or make clear . . . In this case this is even more important for them. If it comes to a political contest, they have to prove that they are a major political force in the country. If they do it in a position where they haven't done anything in three years . . . If they don't want to negotiate, it's much better for them to have a series of high points this year and then next year either have a Democrat in office who will get out, or have us back but with such a reduced chance to be able to do what they are doing now.

DK: . . . to topple Thieu and second, failing that, to demonstrate force.

HK: To make clear they seem the stronger of the two parties if not decisively.

DK: When do you anticipate this whallop?

HK: February or March.

DK: As big as Tet?

HK: Not as big . . .

DK: What will we do?

HK: Bomb the sons of bitches back into the stone age.

DK: Seriously.

HK: There will be setbacks. The question is how calm and wise our people are going to be. I think there's a better than even chance to get the thing settled this year.

DK: But first we have got to go through the agony.

HK: But we have put it in the open to see if we can avoid the agony or at least have people understand it isn't caused by the determination of a military victory.

DK: . . . if the whallop comes, it would entail a serious stepup in bombing on our part?

HK: It depends on where it is.

DK: But it's possible?

HK: I don't want to speculate on that. You followed these negotiations and when all the smoke has cleared any fair minded person has to say we have gone practically to the limit of what is possible.

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8. Joint United States and Republic of Vietnam Proposal[1]

Washington, January 27, 1972.

Republic of Vietnam and United States Proposal for a Negotiated Settlement of the Indochina Conflict

1. There will be a total withdrawal from South Vietnam of all U.S. forces and other foreign forces allied with the Government of South Vietnam within six months of an agreement.

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 the agreement is signed. The release will begin on the same day as the troop withdrawals and will be completed when they are completed.

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 an agreement. This election will be

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 107, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam Negotiations, Paris Negotiations, January 25, 1972–January 1973. No classification marking. This proposal was submitted at the plenary session of the Paris Peace Talks. The text of the proposal was released on January 25, the day of President Nixon's speech (see Document 5). It is also printed in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972,* pp. 105–106.

organized and run by an independent body representing all political forces in South Vietnam which will assume its responsibilities on the date of the 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.

One month before the Presidential election takes place, the incumbent President and Vice President of South Vietnam will resign. The Chairman of the Senate, as caretaker head of the government, 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 consistent with the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Accords.
—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.[2] There will be no foreign intervention in the Indochinese countries and the Indochinese peoples will be left to settle their own affairs by themselves.

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 agreement is signed. As part of the ceasefire, there will

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[2] The Geneva Accords were a collection of agreements rather than a single document. See *Foreign Relations,* 1952–1954, volume XVI, The Geneva Conference, pp. 1505–1539. For the text of the "Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos" and the accompanying "Protocol," signed on July 23, 1962, see Department of State *Bulletin,* August 13, 1962, pp. 259–263.

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, the withdrawal of outside forces from Indochina, and the implementation of the principle that all armed forces of the countries of Indochina must remain within their national frontiers.

8. There will be an international guarantee for the fundamental national rights of the Indochinese peoples, the status 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.[3]

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[3] In backchannel message 33 from Saigon, January 25, Bunker sent Kissinger the text of South Vietnam's communiqué on the United States–South Vietnam proposal. Although identical to this text, it added material that made clear South Vietnam's support for the proposal, its hope that the other side would respond quickly, and an appeal to the rest of the world to support the proposal "so that peace and stability can be promptly restored in this area of the world." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 872, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Washington-Saigon Consultations on President's January 25, 1972 Speech)

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9. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, January 28, 1972.

PARTICIPANTS

Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy F. Dobrynin
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 9 [Part 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the White House Map Room. This memorandum of conversation was sent under a February 8 covering memorandum from Kissinger to the President summarizing the meeting. A notation on the February 8 memorandum indicates the President saw it. Printed in full in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 41.

Vietnam

We then turned to Vietnam. Dobrynin said that at first he had thought our action (the President's address of January 25)[2] precipitate, but if we were really convinced that there would be an offensive, he could see the sense in it. He wanted to assure me again that the Soviet Union had no interest in seeing the war continue; on the contrary, the Soviet Union had every incentive to see the war end, because methods that could be used prior to the Peking Summit might also be applied prior to the Moscow Summit.

I said there was another reason why the Soviet Union had an interest in seeing the war end. Many of the things we were talking about presupposed a President who had authority enough to implement them after this election, and it could not be in the Soviet interest to undermine Presidential authority. Finally, there would be the major problem that if an offensive took place we were determined to make a sharp response. We would simply not hold still for an American humiliation. Dobrynin said that this point had been made abundantly clear.

Dobrynin then asked whether I had any ideas for ending the war. Was the offer of a military arrangement still open? I said it was, as long as it involved elements of a ceasefire. Dobrynine asked whether the ceasefire was an absolute requirement. I said a standstill of military operations was a requirement. The formality in which it was expressed could be perhaps the subject of negotiation. Dobrynin said that this was an interesting point. I stressed that I was thinking out loud and that it represented no commitment.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

We parted cordially.

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[2] See Document 5.

10. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, January 29, 1972.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Authorities

Secretary Laird has sent me his views on General Abrams' assessment of the situation in Vietnam. He also advises that he has granted certain broadened air operating authorities requested by General Abrams. (Tab B)[2]

As to the situation, in brief, *Abrams believes the North Vietnamese are preparing for major offensive action in the northern half of South Vietnam,* particularly in the highlands of Military Region II and Military Region I.[3] The North Vietnamese have substantial forces available and if they employ their 320th Division, which has been brought down to Southern Laos, they can develop a 1-1/2 to 1 force advantage in the area. The North Vietnamese also have significantly increased the threat to our air operations. They have moved additional SAM battalions and antiaircraft artillery into the southern part of North Vietnam and Laos and their MIGs are increasingly willing to challenge our aircraft.

The Senior Review Group principals discussed General Abrams' assessment and his requests for additional air operating authorities to meet these threats at a special meeting on January 24, 1972.[4] Secretary Laird's memo to me advises that he has:

—Authorized emplacement of sensor by air throughout the DMZ (we previously had confined them to the southern half of the DMZ).

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 84, National Security Council, Meetings, January 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. A note at the top of the first page by Butterfield reads: "Mr. President, Henry believes that you should at least read this memo prior to the NSC mtg at 3 pm." A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. On January 27, Odeen and Kennedy sent a draft of this memorandum to Kissinger urging that he send it to the President. (Ibid.)

[2] Tab B is a January 26 memorandum from Laird to Kissinger informing Kissinger that he had approved some of the authorities requested by Abrams to counter the coming offensive.

[3] Moorer concurred. In JCS message 2002 to McCain, January 26 (information copy sent to Abrams), Moorer observed: "All concerned realize that if and when major attacks develop in the northern sectors of South Vietnam, it will be recognized as a major test of Vietnamization and everything possible must be done to insure the successful outcome of the ensuing campaign." (National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, January 1972)

[4] See Document 4.

—Authorized fixed and rotary wing aircraft, logistic troop lift and medevac support for South Vietnamese cross border operations along the Laotian and Cambodian border.

—Advised General Abrams to consider hostile any MIGs which are airborne from Dong Hoi, Vinh and Quan Lang during the expected enemy ground offensive; they may be engaged when encountered below the 18th parallel.

—Authorized a more vigorous protective reaction posture (reflected in recent strikes against the Quan Lang and Dong Hoi airfields in defense of unarmed reconnaissance aircraft observing those fields).

—Authorized employment of anti-radiation missiles against the ground control intercept (GCI) radar sites outside of the Hanoi–Haiphone area when MIGs are airborne and demonstrate hostile intent. (Tactics will assure that any missiles fired will not impact in the Hanoi–Haiphong area or the PRC.)

All of these authorities were requested by General Abrams. It was the consensus of the Senior Review Group that the authorities for the sensor coverage of the DMZ and the aircraft lift support for the cross border operations should be granted immediately.[5] As for the broadened authorities to attack airborne MIGs and GCI radar sites, the SRG expressed no objection but withheld judgment pending a more specific definition of the authority and the manner in which it would be implemented. It was felt that the objectives sought with these authorities might be achieved in the context of a larger strike conducted simultaneously on a number of potentially lucrative targets. Secretary Laird's memorandum has described these authorities concretely.

The SRG believed that attacks on the airfields themselves should be considered in the context of broader plans which should be developed for execution of larger scale strikes directed at logistics targets and SAM facilities over limited time periods. Secretary Laird has not granted authority to attack logistics targets or broadened authority to attack SAM sites but has requested that plans be developed to do so. The SRG's reasoning for considering including the airfield attacks within such plans was to limit the number of daily reports of attacks, thereby lessening the likelihood of a growing public relations problem of "renewed bombing of the North." I am persuaded that protective reaction attacks on the airfields in the context of reconnaissance of those fields is a logical extension of our protective reaction posture and will not generate excessive public comment.

Accordingly, *I recommend* you approve the authorities which Secretary Laird has given General Abrams.[6] In granting these authorities without your prior approval, however, Secretary Laird has set a dan-

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[5] Nixon placed a check in the margin next to this sentence.

[6] Nixon placed a check in the margin next to this sentence.

gerous precedent. In the critical period ahead we will need to consider carefully the timing and character of our operating authorities, taking into account operational need as well as likely domestic and international reaction. *I further recommend* therefore that you advise Secretary Laird that all modifications or extensions of existing authorities and granting of new authorities in the future must be approved by you.[7]

A memorandum to Secretary Laird, giving your approval for the authorities he has already granted but directing that in the future all authorities must be approved by you is at Tab A.[8]

I recommend you sign the memorandum to Secretary Laird.

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[7] Nixon placed a check in the margin next to this sentence.

[8] Not printed. Tab A is the memorandum to Laird, which the President signed on February 1.

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11. Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 1, 1972.

SUBJECT

Secretary Laird Suggests Some Contingencies for Laos

Secretary Laird has sent you a memorandum informing you that he plans to undertake some "precautionary actions" in view of the current situation in Laos (Tab B).[2]

He declares that current North Vietnamese efforts may be intended to force the RLG to call for a halt in U.S. and ARVN activity in Laos or, failing that, to bring about a change of government in Laos. Hence, he concludes that the following actions be taken now:

—Careful development of the theme in public affairs channels that the interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail relates to an area not under RLG control and therefore not dependent upon RLG approval.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 550, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 9, Jan–Sep 1972. Top Secret. Sent for action. Haig initialed for Holdridge.

[2] Attached but not printed; dated January 29.

—New contingency studies to replace the unacceptable Taksin planning (a controversial contingency plan involving the use of U.S. and Thai ground forces should Laos fall to the Communists).

—Development of plans to support a legitimate Lao government should the present one be overthrown by Hanoi.

—Updating our negotiating scenario for a military standstill in north Laos.

Mr. Laird concludes that DOD will initiate "its portion" of these actions and he asks for your support and participation as needed.

Comment. Mr. Laird does not define "DOD's portion" of these various actions. Presumably the military contingency plan to replace Taksin would be undertaken by DOD, while the other measures would at least involve coordination with State.

Of immediate concern is the possibility that Mr. Laird may begin to take the line publicly that our air interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail can and will be carried out independently of any RLG decision. In our view, this would not serve any useful purpose; it would only arouse a controversy and undercut Souvanna at a time when he is under considerable pressure.

We have drafted a memorandum from you to Mr. Laird which requests that he not take this line and which further suggests that he coordinate the contingency studies with appropriate departments (Tab A).[3] Col. Kennedy concurs.

Recommendation

That you forward the memorandum at Tab A to Secretary Laird.

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[3] Attached but not printed; dated and sent on February 8.

12. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

The Situation in Vietnam

The NSC will meet on Vietnam at 10:00 a.m., Wednesday, February 2, 1972. The primary object is to discuss the current situation, ongoing actions to meet the threat and ensure that whatever further steps are needed are in fact implemented.

The Enemy Threat

We face a rapidly increasing enemy threat to South Vietnam. Specifically, the enemy has:

—Infiltrated 20% more men than at this time last year. Infiltration this year will be the greatest since Tet 1968, although well below that level.

—Moved in at least three NVA divisions to threaten the northern region of South Vietnam. For example, the 320th NVA division is now in Laos, positioned to launch an attack on the highlands of MR 2.

—Accelerated the movement of supplies into Laos and started preparing for battle in South Vietnam. While the overall flow of supplies into Vietnam is still below last year's level, it is rapidly rising and will be sufficient to support offensive activities.

Based on these preparations, the intelligence community is convinced that the enemy will launch significant offensive operations in northern South Vietnam combined with increased activity in other areas.[2] It seems likely that the attacks will start on or about February 15 and could continue for one to two months. The enemy clearly intends to make a major effort timed to precede and coincide with your trip to Peking. His purpose is to weaken your position in talks there if he can and to rekindle domestic opposition in the U.S.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–032, National Security Council Meetings, NSC Meeting Vietnam 2/2/72. Top Secret; Sensitive. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. On February 1, Haig transmitted a nearly identical memorandum to Mitchell to assist him in his preparation for the February 2 NSC meeting; ibid., Alexander M. Haig Special File, Box 1001, Haig (General Files), 1972.

[2] An unattributed CIA analyst commented on Abrams's message: "By and large, General Abrams' assessment appears to be an accurate rendition of the Communist threat, although we might quibble with some aspects of it." (Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–B01630R)

In addition, the enemy has continued to press in North Laos and maintains a considerable offensive capability in Cambodia. Vietnam will almost certainly be the focus of his effort, but the enemy will probably try to tie us down by attacks elsewhere.

The Situation in South Vietnam

While the enemy threat deserves serious concern, we and the GVN are in a position of relative strength in South Vietnam. For example:

—Allied combat forces outnumber the NVA/VC three to one throughout South Vietnam. In northern South Vietnam, our relative advantage is less, but still significant.

—GVN control over the countryside continues to improve but at a slower rate than last year, particularly in the northern regions. Nationwide, the GVN now controls over 70% of the rural population.

Moreover, our position has been improved by measures taken recently in anticipation of a Communist offensive. In particular:

—The formation of new RVNAF units in MRs 1 and 2 and preparations to move reserves northward have significantly increased our capability to blunt an offensive. While isolated defeats cannot be avoided, we should have sufficient forces to deal with the problem.

—The long overdue improvement of GVN leadership. Until very recently, little had been done to provide better leadership of the combat units directly in the path of the expected attack. Last week, Thieu replaced three division commanders and 10 province chiefs in a major reshuffling that promises to improve the situation.

The capability of U.S. forces, especially air units, to support our allies has been increased, within the limits of our planned withdrawals. DOD has revised the redeployment plans to leave more helicopters in SVN. Steps are being taken to increase the readiness of our forces in SEA, strengthen our air units in Thailand and move another attack carrier into the Tonkin Gulf. In addition:

—Broadened air authority has been granted General Abrams to handle the threat to our air operations and respond to the buildup in northern South Vietnam. The new authorities are spelled out at Tab B.[3]

—Plans have been prepared for one to three-day bombing campaigns to counter enemy threats near the DMZ. Plans to strike enemy air defenses and airfields in southern North Vietnam are also available.

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[3] Attached but not printed is an undated list of the air authorities granted. A notation on the list indicates the President saw it. Laird granted the authorities to Abrams. See footnote 2, Document 10.

Given our basic strength and these improvements, the consensus is that the allies can handle the major NVA offensive against South Vietnam without a major setback. The enemy's capability to launch sizeable attacks, perhaps even seizing a province capital, is not doubted but this will not win the war for them.

In fact, based on existing estimates of the situation, the aftermath of any new major offensive could indeed leave the enemy even worse off than he is now, depending on the effectiveness of the RVNAF response. RVNAF has the means, and the crucial variable now is whether or not they have the will. The real test will be in the battle.

The Meeting

While our position is strong, we must prudently anticipate a major enemy effort to discredit Vietnamization and undermine Thieu and the GVN and thereby weaken our position both at home and vis-à-vis Peking. To minimize the chance Hanoi will be successful, we must press the GVN to further strengthen its forces and ensure that our remaining forces provide maximum assistance to the South Vietnamese.

The timing of some actions we might take such as increased air attacks in North Vietnam is crucial. We can't delay too long in responding to major attacks or buildups if our actions are to have maximum effect. But we must not undertake major actions such as air strikes close to or during your Peking visit.

Your Talking Points at Tab A[4] stress that, while we are basically in a strong position, we must act to solve remaining problems.

Director Helms is prepared to follow your opening remarks with a threat briefing. Admiral Moorer is ready to outline the friendly military situation and the actions to strengthen our position.

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[4] Attached but not printed is an undated copy of the talking points. A notation on the document indicates the President saw it.

13. National Security Council Meeting[1]

Washington, February 2, 1972.

Nixon: We have this meeting for purposes of one subject, which we have discussed individually with several of you here, but never in an official group. I've talked with Bill, Mel, John, and others numbers of times. I have also [unclear] I thought it would be well to pull all together at this time to see where we stand and what we can do in terms of responding to the enemy's actions over the next three months, three months or four, at least through the dry season. The intelligence community has a, I was going to say, not a divergence, but there's a shading of views on this, as there always is, as to what to expect. But they all agree that the enemy wants [unclear] in this period, so I think we would start with the intelligence analysis of how we're going to [unclear],[2] then we'll go to Admiral Moorer for his briefing on ARVN capabilities, our capabilities, enemy capabilities, what we see from the standpoint of the services. And then we'll go to what we want to do.

[Omitted here are Helms's briefing and subsequent discussion, and the initial portion of Moorer's briefing on the situation in Laos and Cambodia.]

Nixon: Could I ask one question there? Perhaps Ambassador Bunker could comment upon it. I indicated a couple months ago that Thieu might consider the possibility, rather than just, you know, just a nitpicking kind of operation, of some major action in the Cambodian

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Cabinet Room, Conversation 89–1. 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, 10:05 a.m.–12:16 p.m. Kissinger noted in a 9:05 a.m., February 2, telephone conversation with Secretary of the Treasury John B. Connally that Nixon had changed the date of the meeting from January 29 to February 2 so that Connally could attend. (Ibid., Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 13, Chronological File, February 1–4, 1972) No other written record of this meeting has been found. In his memoirs, Kissinger noted, "I cannot find a record of the meeting." (*White House Years,* p. 1100)

According to the President's Daily Diary, the following attended the meeting: Nixon, Vice President Agnew, Rogers, Laird, Connally, Mitchell, Helms, Moorer, Bunker, Kissinger, Haig, Director of the Office of Emergency Planning Lincoln, and White House Press Secretary Ziegler. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

[2] A copy of Helms's briefing is in the Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 79–T00862A. In the briefing, Helms concluded that recent intelligence pointed to two findings: "First, the Vietnamese Communist Party's Politburo in Hanoi is still striving to establish political control over South Vietnam, plus some form of hegemony over the rest of Indochina. It is not yet willing to countenance any settlement of the struggle that does not virtually guarantee this result. Secondly, Hanoi believes its objectives can best be furthered by a sharp rise in military and political activity throughout Indochina—that is, a multi-faceted offensive which all available evidence indicates is on the verge of being launched."

area in order to divert the enemy's attention. When you see the fact that the South Vietnamese ground forces are, in terms of numbers, three times as strong as the North Vietnamese, and you see the fact that the South Vietnamese have air support and a navy, and the North Vietnamese have neither, it would seem that they might consider the possibility of blunting the enemy's offensive by some action on their own. Is that—as I understand, the South Vietnamese have rejected that idea due to the fact that they want to be in place for the expected enemy attacks. Is that—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: Do you think that's the case—?

Bunker: Yes, I think that's true, but they were, as you know, in Cambodia.

Nixon: Yes.

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: What I was referring to, of course, now, here we sit and we see three divisions there, we see this, that, and the other thing. Everybody's worried, well, what are the North Vietnamese going to do? Well, here are the North Vietnamese have ⅓ of the forces, with a long supply trail, with no air force, no navy; and here's the South Vietnamese. I'm just trying to put it in terms of—is that accurate at the moment?

Agnew: To follow on that, because the same thing was going through my mind, except that between modifications, is it feasible or possible to consider an initiative on the part of the South Vietnamese, possibly on a reserve unit of the North Vietnamese in North Vietnam, instead of in Cambodia? Mainly looking at the propaganda effect of a South Vietnamese initiative in response to all this, where they actually go into North Vietnam, where there's a large concentration of reserve troops or matériel, and maybe another parachute operation will stop them. Just knock the hell out of them eventually. Give the papers something to write about.

Nixon: Have they considered those kind of actions, commando raids, anything of that kind—?

Bunker: Well, yes, they've considered that. I think that's one thing that Thieu thought that they might be able to do is small raids. But not anything on a large scale like Lam Son, for example, last year. They won't take—their view is, I think, and I think we agree with them, is that the defense against this sort of thing is better on their territory than it is trying to move into, into Laos, which is very difficult territory to fight in.

Laird: Well, their military people, though—isn't it true, fair to say, Ellsworth—are more apt to be willing to do some of these things presently. Now, the President [Thieu], when I discussed this matter

with him, this was very firm and as frankly as I could.[3] You remember—

Bunker: Yes, yeah.

Laird: —on this operation, and also on raids to the North, and went into these things in some detail with him. He is a little reluctant. He was reluctant in Lam Son. He didn't personally put the, the hold on Lam Son when [unclear] up there would have done a—would have gone a little further, and Tom might be well to comment on that, because he really feels that his primary responsibility is not to Cambodia. He'll help Cambodia if he thinks it helps him.

Bunker: Well, I think that's true, and I think he's not willing to risk the destruction of his own forces. That's the main thing, and this is the—this is why he didn't go further in Lam Son.

Nixon: Given Napoleon's biography—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: —during Napoleon's earlier years, the way which to avoid the destruction of your own forces is not to sit in place and get your ass beat off. The way to avoid it is to go in with inferior forces and knock hell out of the opposition. We've seen that. In fact, I just, without getting into the strategy, but I—it seems to me that the long range of communications, no air force, no navy, and here they all say sit there and say: "Gee whiz, we're going to have an offensive." Well, I wonder. I can understand that, but I understand that you can't do anything that he will not approve. I mean, he's been, he's been fine, and he stands up brilliantly in this political thing and the rest. And I'm not suggesting that our people are [unclear]. We aren't engaged in his activities on the ground, but—and I know Mel didn't raise this because we discussed it before.

Laird: You told me to and I had that.

Nixon: The thing that I'm concerned about is that—well, it's probably too late. They're just not going to do it. Isn't that right? They're going to wait and take the blow, is that correct?

Moorer: In this particular [unclear]—

Nixon: As regards the enemy, the enemy's going to take the play and they'll just play the defense.

[Omitted here is a continuation of Moorer's briefing that deals with the North Vietnamese order of battle and infiltration to the South, their

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[3] Laird was probably referring to his November 3–6 trip to Saigon where he met with Thieu and his senior advisors, Bunker, and Abrams. ("Laird Concludes Visit to Vietnam: He Indicates U.S. Is Ready to Step Up Troop Pullout," *The New York Times,* November 7, 1971, p. 11)

logistics network, and their anti-aircraft system, and with the South Vietnamese order of battle and their intelligence on the North Vietnamese for the offensive.]

Moorer: At the same time, we have moved out on several precautionary actions. The first three I'm going to talk to separately. Additional air authorities have been granted. We have developed plans for a certain amount of air capabilities. We have carefully reviewed our helicopter assets. We have planned for increased CV and naval gun fire support, we have allocated all the CV using munitions that we have. These are the small anti-personnel type weapons, Mr. President, that have been very effective recently.[4] We've sent over—we've made certain that all we have in inventory is available for this operation. We have developed a plan for strikes against the LOCs in North Vietnam. I mentioned the airlift augmentation. And General Abrams has talked about the security of our forces. He has formed 28 teams. He sent them to examine the defense plans and the alertness of every U.S. unit in South Vietnam. He reports to me that the oral reporting received so far is good, that they are—that all our people are aware of the threat and they are not going to be surprised. And in addition to that, we've developed plans to increase P–3 offshore patrols in the event that the sea infiltration is kept up during this crisis.

Now, I'd like to talk about these first three: the air authorities, the plan to develop the surge of air elements, and the availability of the [unclear]. First, the air authorities, I've listed here with the red dots. This is what General Abrams requested. Next to it, the black square shows the authority he's been granted so far.[5] Now, the first thing he asked for air support for the Vietnam forces that might be in pursuit across—to conduct cross-border operations. This has been given to him. Across the Lao and Cambodian borders he can't use U.S. air assets to support the South Vietnamese if they conduct operations across the border. Secondly, he asked for authority to release the sensors North of the DMZL. Heretofore, we had only been supplying the operating sensors south of the DMZL. This will give us a readout on the activity along the northern part of the DMZ, both lateral and vertical activity, and will, I think, provide more warning and permit a better counteraction can be taken.

Next, he asked for authority to strike the GCI radars in North Vietnam that are directing the fighters, the MIG fighters. He was given the authority to fire the anti-radar missiles, mainly the Shrike and the

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[4] In Navy terminology, CV meant aircraft carrier, CV munitions were what the aircraft on the ships carried, i.e. bombs, one kind being CBUs, or cluster bomb units, the "small anti-personnel type weapons" mentioned above.

[5] Moorer used charts as visual aids to his briefing.

Standard ARM, against these GCI sites when they locked on or when there was MIG activity and the GCI site was operating. In addition to that, so far, he was not given authority to attack these radars whenever one was located, but rather we have directed CINCPAC to prepare contingency plans for this purpose. So, if it's directed from here, he can in fact do that.

Nixon: How many? What are we talking about there in terms of numbers of strikes?

Moorer: No, there were five radars, sir. Of course, we were given five of these large [unclear] type radars. I have them on this other chart—

Nixon: It's all right. I don't need it. I'll explain to you something: what I'm trying to get at is the magnitude of the authority he's requested. He wants authority to go in and hit the five radar sites, and—?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: —we have said only, basically, hit them only if it is really protective reactions? That's in effect what he asks?

Moorer: No, that isn't what we said there. That's a little different, Mr. President. You have noticed that whenever they're using—directing MIGs up in that particular area, he wouldn't hit them.

Nixon: Look, I understand. But that—but the—

Moorer: They're already in there.

Nixon: Yeah. The authority he wants is to what, to hit—?

Moorer: Once he locates one, he wants to go get it, when the weather permits, regardless of MIG activity. In other words, he does not want to wait for protective reaction situations.

Nixon: How many would it be? What does it require? How many strikes and where to do that?

Moorer: Well, he wants, he asked for authority for those south of 20 degrees—

Nixon: Those?

Moorer: Five, sir. There are five sites, I believe.

Nixon: Okay, I got it.

Laird: Well, we asked him to develop a plan, Mr. President, how many strikes it would take to do it and we haven't got that plan back yet.

Nixon: Yes, well [unclear].

Kissinger: And also, as I understand it, there are three different states that one could talk about that one. One is that if the radar locks on the airplane that then they can fire a strike against that radar, which—

Nixon: Sure—

Kissinger: The second is that while the radar is locked they can also use other explosives that are not focused on the radar, that do not depend on being—on homing in on the radar. Third, is what he's asked for, namely to attack it outside the engagement, but even while the engagement's going on, he does not now have authority to use anything other than homing beacons.

Moorer: That's right.

Kissinger: Isn't that correct?

Moorer: Yeah.

Kissinger: So, then he would—

Nixon: But he would like authority, he has asked for authority, to strike regardless, regardless of engagement.

Moorer: When he finds it. [unclear] You have to understand, Mr. President, that one strike might not necessarily, although he may demolish [unclear] they would bring it—they would put it back in action a week later, so what he was really asking for was the authority to—

Nixon: To keep it up?

Moorer: —any time he found one, to go knock it out—

Nixon: Yeah. Okay. I was just wondering.

Moorer: Now, the same thing he—was requested with respect to the SAM sites. As you know, he already had authority to fire the antiradar missiles against the SAM sites, and we have been doing this with increasing regularity as the SAM activity increases. He would advise that once the ground offensive starts, that this authority would be considered on a case-by-case basis. And we would go ahead and prepare contingency plans for the one-time strikes against SAM sites. I should point out that we have authority today to strike those four sites in Laos, and we have struck the four sites, parts of them. What they do is they—these are mobile, and they move them around all the time. And consequently, you may know where one is today, and it may not be there tomorrow.

Nixon: Do I understand, that what we have, in effect, said to them that after the enemy launches its massive attack, that he then, on a case-by-case basis, has got to get authority to take out [unclear]?

Moorer: Yes, sir, that's what we're talking about.

Laird: Well, what we've asked him—

Nixon: Change that.

Laird: —we've asked him, Mr. President, to come in with a plan to do it now. And that plan is to be submitted. [unclear]—

Nixon: Well, I just—I'm just trying—I know that there's been some disagreement as to what should be done and so forth.

Laird: I don't think there's any disagreement.

Nixon: Well, [unclear] what I meant is that I just want to be sure that there's a clear understanding here as to the two different phases: what do we do now, what do we do when it starts. Now, without, of course, giving commanders in the field the right to start a nuclear war, once their major offensive has begun the situation totally changes, in my opinion. We're not going to go through this crap of saying, well, we have to approve every goddamned thing. It's not going to be done that way and I want to—

Laird: I don't think there's any question.

Nixon: No, there is. That's exactly what we've been talking about in both places. If they start an offensive, we're not going to go through this nonsense of saying that we'll wait until a SAM shoots and then we'll knock it out. That's what the real argument's about?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Okay.

Moorer: Well, we will have plans to strike these sites and these radars subject to the authority.

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: Also, he requested permission to strike those airfields that I showed you, that—

Nixon: Now, here the argument is also, though, the question—what has been granted here? The authority, that's to be done on a case-by-case basis, right?

Moorer: We have told him to increase his airfield reconnaissance and to make certain these reconnaissance aircraft are heavily supported with bombing aircraft, and if these aircraft are fired upon, which they always are, he was to then attack the airfield, and so we have been doing a series of operations of this type, sir.

Nixon: You've got all the intelligence ready, you know how to hit 'em, and so forth and so on?

Moorer: Yes, sir. Now, we have not attacked the Haiphong airfield, which is the one right up on the edge of the 20-degree parallel, but we've attacked Dong Hoi, Binh, and Quan Lang. [unclear] And, incidentally, they're very effective. Usually what happens is they have one reconnaissance plane, two fighters protecting against MIGs, and eight attack planes. And when the reconnaissance plane goes over the airfield, and as machine AA fires, they target their weapons on the—openly on the AA or on the support facilities at the airfield. But here again, Mr. President, I'd emphasize that this has be done continually in order to make certain that the airfield is not restored to operation.

Nixon: Go ahead.

Moorer: Well, he's also been told that, again, that once the battle is joined, so to speak, that any aircraft south of 18, as Secretary Laird

just said, is hostile and they can be attacked at any time in A–1. I should add to this that we have stationed two tail cruisers, with an awful big pulse radar in the vicinity of Binh, and they also have authority to fire at these MIGs that are indicating hostile intent. And we are interpreting hostile intent very broadly.

Laird: I guess we've had one firing hit.

Moorer: We had one, one firing so far. Right.

Laird: A hit, but they're standing off. They're ready to fight.

Nixon: Right.

Connally: Mr. President, may I ask if the later discussion will bring out the objections to granting these authorities that he's asked for?

Nixon: Let's be particular and we'll see at the next one. The last one is against—go-ahead—logistics.

Moorer: Yes, sir. He asked for authority to strike stockpiles and transshipment points, and conduct all reconnaissance against trucks moving down the LOCs leading into Laos, mainly through the, primarily through the Ban Karai and the Mu Gia passes. I have a chart here. We have—

Nixon: The point here is, the point here at issue, is that this authority to hit such logistic places in North Vietnam?

Moorer: Yes, sir. South of 18 degrees. Again—give him the first chart, Mel. Yeah, that's all right.

Nixon: How close is 20 degrees to Hanoi?

Moorer: Well, it is—20 degrees, sir, is right here, and it's—that's about—

Nixon: Yeah?

Moorer: —60 miles, one more degree.

Nixon: 18 is—?

Moorer: A little over 75 miles, let's say.

Nixon: I don't understand this. What's that? [unclear]

Moorer: [unclear]—

Nixon: Now this logistics business, tell us what that's all about.

Moorer: Yes, sir. [unclear] Here, we—I drew up a concept of the plan, have sent it out to the field to get them to flesh it out in terms of the exact numbers of sorties, the exact—some of them—they'll take it apart and so on, and we have the candidate plan available, sir, which would authorize General Abrams to make these attacks on these logistics activities taking place, feeding into Laos.

Nixon: What's the weather situation at this point? Will it be—?

Moorer: Well, during the month of February, sir, of course, is about—in January–February, as we found out last year, is the worst

part of the year in the panhandles. Actually, there are six days out of February that have 10,000 feet altitude for a period of three hours, and there are three days that have a period of six hours wherein you have 10,000 feet. So, this is one of the reasons that General Abrams has asked to go when he has the opportunity so that—

Nixon: Whenever there's a window?

Moorer: Whenever there's a window is what we talked about. Yes, sir.

Rogers: Tom, these are all based on what General Abrams requested. How about the Joint Chiefs? Are there things that we should be doing now that aren't included here? Because it seems to me that because of the importance of this new offensive we ought to take every possible action. I don't think we have anything to lose. The American people don't understand all this stuff. [unclear] The only thing it seems to be, the only question we have, is what can we do that will be effective?

Mitchell: Well, that kind of brings up the point that the one airfield with the seven MIGs is above the 18th parallel, and the other airfield with the one MIG is the one that below which he has the authority.

Laird: Mr. President, I'd just like to make a comment about what we can do. Because I think that's the important question as to what we can do as far as the offensive is concerned. The offensive, I think, if it takes place, will be in the B–3 Front. I think that that's indicated by all of the activities that that's where the attack will be made. Now, we've got to concentrate on limiting that attack, it seems to me, and do everything we possibly can with all the airpower we have, because this inasmuch it gives the South Vietnamese a much greater advantage than any kind of artillery or anything else the other side can have. The activities in the North will not have anything to do with B–3 activities because every bit of logistic support, if the activities that are going to take place in the next three weeks have already gone through these passes and is already in place. Anything that needs to come down to support that operation now won't be available until March or April. So everything that for this attack that we're concerned about is in place and has been, including the people that are involved, as far as the B–3 Front is concerned.

Now, as far as an attack may be in March or April, I think these logistic strikes should be authorized, and I hope that the contingency plan, as finally approved, gives the latitude to General Abrams to go three or four times for letting him pick the particular day that he goes, based upon the weather conditions that exist. I think it's better to give him either 24 or 48 hours two or three times that he can make the choice, because that's the most effective way to limit a possible offensive in the March–April period, because those would be the supplies that would be used in March and April, not the February offensive. In

that way, we can live with it as far as the country is concerned. I think it's understandable in a short period that if we go for five, six, seven, or eight days in a row, there is a certain amount of political pressure that people get over a long period of time. And I am sure that General Abrams would be more effective with the use of his assets if he has the authority himself to go 24 or 48 hours in the North in these areas to hit logistics. Now, I don't want to mislead anybody at this table. That is not going to have an effect upon the B–3 Front offensive if it comes. It will have an effect upon a possible future offensive that might come in April–May period, but it takes at least that long. Now that's not true of Military Region 1, but it is true of Military Region 2 and in the highlands area. That stuff is already in place.

Moorer: I suppose, Mel, you have—

Laird: Yeah—?

Moorer: —you have a built-in restraint in terms of the weather. [unclear]—

Laird: Well it is—the weather is going to be lousy all month, so that this idea that we're going to have great weather out there—it's going to be lousy weather.

Nixon: In February?

Laird: Yeah, the weather—the weather in December, January, and February is lousy, and it probably will be lousy into March.

Moorer: Yes, sir. The point I'm making is you're not going to have a seven day good weather period.

Laird: No.

Moorer: So, we don't have to worry whether you make it seven days or not—

Nixon: What is the situation—let me come back to that DMZ, the possibility of their moving en masse across there, at the sanctuary they have where the line is drawn? The authority—has he asked for authority to hit above that line now to knock those roads out? [unclear]

Moorer: That would be part of this logistics plan.

Nixon: That's—that'd be fine.

Moorer: Yes, sir—

Nixon: That's fine. He's not asked for that authority yet?

Moorer: Yes, sir. He has authority for [unclear]—

Laird: One pass area there goes through the upper part of the DMZ, and that he has asked for.

Moorer: And the road runs right parallel to the DMZ—

Nixon: How many—that's one road. How many roads are being built? You said several roads are being built across the DMZ? That they'll come, they thought, potentially might come down those roads.

Laird: There are two roads, two roads being built; one major road and the start of another—

Nixon: We bombed part of it, but not the other part now? Is that correct?

Laird: Well, the road is not in use now, but we are—it goes in to South Vietnam—and we are, presently, are bombing it.

Moorer: We bomb all of it south of the DMZL.

Nixon: I understand.

Moorer: Yep.

Laird: But it has not been used and there hasn't been much to hit there. They just reconstructed it.

Nixon: He wants the authority to be sure. Well—

Laird: He wants the authority to use that target area if there is a logistic buildup there. He won't go up and just hit it if there isn't a logistic buildup—

Nixon: [unclear]

Laird: But if there is a logistic buildup there, and he has a good weather window, and there are supplies there, he'd like to hit it.

Rogers: Mr. President, can I ask a question to Tom? It seems to me that in view of the fact that we've only got two weeks before the President leaves for Peking, and I don't—I think the American people feel the President's gone so far now to try to work out an equal settlement that they'll support it, [unclear]. It seems to me that if this offensive takes place while the President is in Peking, and even if it's reasonably successful from their standpoint, when we all try to second guess the plan, then we should, the President should, seriously consider giving the military any authority that it wants—within reason, of course, not nuclear authority, but anything else. Because short of that, it seems to me we will—that this is, this is the key play. It could well be that this could be the turning point of the whole battle for South Vietnam. [unclear] So, I would—what I was wondering about, in addition to what General Abrams is asking for, are there other things that the military thinks the President should consider and authorities that they should have to prevent this offensive or to deal with it successfully? In other words, is everything being done that can be done? Or are there other things that we should be thinking about, too—?

Agnew: I'd like to expand on that if I might. Listen, what you said really anticipated what I was going to say to some extent and that is this: that it seems that all of the military preparations and the carefully defined limits of what can be done prior to any strike are pretty well—have pretty well been anticipated and explored. Where—the point I'm worried about is what happens to us after this strike? And I'm not talking about, necessarily, actions that are of grave military importance. I'm

talking about the psychology of the war and the fact that the North Vietnamese have now responded to, not only to the President's peace initiatives, but to his three times or four times repeated warning that any escalation of the war on their part that jeopardizes the success of our troops there will be responded to immediately in a very affirmative way. So, now it seems to me that military considerations aside, we have to look at the psychology of what's going to take place in the United States the minute that they launch these attacks. That there's going to be cries of the failure of Vietnamization, and we should have been out by now, and that it's all lost, and the only thing that'll overcome that, as I see it, is something that should be very carefully planned now that represents a punch action by the United States with the South Vietnamese in an area that we've never gone. And then, let them call it a widening of the war, but some place where we can go in there and hit 'em in the gut real hard. Maybe, I don't know whether you could think about doing something to Haiphong Harbor or anything else? I mean, maybe that's an unmentionable subject, but the point is that they've been warned three or four times not to do this. They're going to do it anyhow. They're going to do it for political reasons more than military reasons, because they think they can drive us out through the pressure of public opinion. And it seems to me that it's time when they do it, the President having issued these warnings on four occasions, not to make 'em idle, but to move in there and hit 'em a good one in the gut somewhere where they've never been touched before.

Connally: Mr. President, may I add one thought to what the Vice President said? I think both from the standpoint a public voter sees it and actions over there that a good part of it ought to precede your departure from the United States. We ought to be preparing our own propaganda offensive now, that you're going to China didn't precipitate all this, 'cause this is the posture which our enemies here are going to play it, "If you hadn't gone to China, they wouldn't have launched this offensive." This, the propaganda offensive that ought to be launched here at home now, is that this is another Tet. Westmoreland's the only man that I know of that's really made a point of it. Look, we ought to be saying it tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day, long before people are conscious that you're leaving on whatever day it is in February. And so that when you do react, you're reacting to an offensive on their part that parallels what they did in the Tet offensive in '68. It ought to be tied back in [unclear], so they're prepared and they're going to do it and so forth. Otherwise, I think the American press, our enemies in the press, are going to, frankly, lay it to your door and just say, "Well, if you hadn't, prior to this Peking trip, this wouldn't have happened."

Laird: Mr. President, can I add something to that? I want to make a point here that I think is overlooked, and that is that I am confident

that this will be a success as far as the South Vietnamese are concerned, and I am confident that our program will hold. Now, they're going to lose the battle or two, but they're doing nothing differently than they did last year or the year before. The numbers are the—about the same. Now, they're going into a different area. They're going into the B–3 Front and they will conduct a battle there, but let's not forget that we have done certain things for the last three years to build up the South Vietnamese, to build up their capabilities. And I don't believe that we're going to be in a position where the South Vietnamese are going to get such a bad, bloody nose that it's going to be any kind of a defeat, interpreted in that way here in the United States.

Agnew: But, no, if it looks like a failure—

Laird: It doesn't help—

Agnew: —it doesn't make a damn bit of difference how successful it is—

Laird: It's very important, this one, but as far as the B–3 Front battle is concerned, we've got all the authorities we need for the B–3 Front battle. I'm concerned about the next battle, maybe on down the road in two or three months after you get back. We've got everything in place to handle the B–3. When I got back in November, I made the report to the President that, in that report, I anticipated the B–3 Front as the battle site, and at that time I went to the Joint Chiefs and asked them to prepare the plans to defend on the B–3 Front. And we've been planning for this since November. Now, we—everything that we have on the B–3 Front is in place right now. You can't do a hell of a lot more on the B–3 Front. We've got a surge capability on our '52s, we have a surge capability on our tactical air, we have a surge capability as far as our naval air is concerned. And if the President's—while the President is in China that could be the major area of concern. Now, as far as the next offensive is concerned, that's a different problem, and that's why I believe that some standby authorities given to General Abrams in the area of logistics support, knocking out these particular areas. I would limit those authorities to him to go for a 24–48 hour period, but three or four times that he can do it, because then you can start the attack and you can announce when it is over. He should choose the times when there are logistic buildups up there so we can actually hit something, and you do have to have good weather. I think that is needed and necessary. That isn't going to help the problem while you're in China, necessarily, Mr. President. I think that should be understood around the table. Because the—that battle is pretty well-drawn, and if it comes—

Nixon: [clears throat] Well, you have a week then. That's only a week that we're there, so the point is that—

Laird: But I just don't want people to get too panicky about the period of time that you're gone in China because those particular sup-

plies and the combat personnel—I think Dick would have to agree with that—that they're in place on that front—

Connally: Look, Mel, I can't understand, if all the supplies are in place, all the personnel are in place, we obviously know that, we have to know where they are—

Laird: And we're hitting 'em—

Connally: —are we hitting 'em now?

Laird: All right. [unclear] what we're doing there with the B–52s and with the Tacair right now. We've got the best all-source intelligence operation going on in the B–3 Front that we've ever had in the whole history of this war. And I think it would be well to explain to you exactly what we're doing as far as hitting in there right now to—you've got some—

Moorer: Here, take these—

Rogers: While they're getting the charts out, though, Mel, your comment doesn't—is not inconsistent [with] what John said—

Connally: No. Not at all—

Rogers: We can make this, if we do what John suggested, and I think we should, then if doesn't come off or is not successful we can say, "Well, hell, we anticipated it and we guarded against it and that's why it was unsuccessful."

Laird: But I don't want anyone around this table to think that by hitting those places [unclear exchange] something to do with that fact, because it will not.

Rogers: Everybody [unclear]—

Laird: And the problem that you have here is, you know, there are a lot of people who seem kind of panicky around here each time that you roll for four or five days. I happen to know. I sit down and I, I, I love to take the heat for this stuff; it doesn't bother me a bit. I've always said, Mr. President, publicly and all over, that I would recommend—that never committed you—but I would recommend that we blast hell out of them if they come across the DMZ.

Nixon: Oh, well, we've said that, too. The point that I make is that you have that period when we're back from China, the 28th of the month or something like, that's plenty of time to get that March and April buildup. Don't you think?

Laird: Oh, yes, sir.

Moorer: If I may make a point, sir? They're always hard sell. The problem of hitting these fleeting targets is nothing more than weather. And so, it won't be a matter of General Abrams discovering a supply build-up or something of this kind. Anytime during the next three months there will be targets, and if he has the visibility—if Tacair has the visibility, so they can strike these trucks, these moving trucks, these

temporary stockpiles, and so on—they will find productive targets any time that the weather was suitable.

Connally: And they have authority to strike?

Moorer: And they have authority. Yes, sir. If they have the authorities.

Connally: I'm asking, do they have the authority to strike—?

Nixon: They have it. They have it outside of North Vietnam. The authority we're arguing a bit, we're discussing now, is the authority to go into North Vietnam—

Laird: The authority—

Moorer: That's correct, sir—

Laird: The authority we are discussing is an authority which would grant him, below the 18th or maybe up to the 20th in those pass areas, to go after any logistic buildups. We've gone after them before.

Nixon: In the period, for example, in the five-day period after Christmas, between Christmas and New Year's. That was originally authorized as a, basically, a two-day operation. Weather was lousy, so they took it for two days and we extended it finally—well actually, it was four days in turn, it was in total, but we extended it for two more days.[6] The—what we're really talking about here is rather than having the—rather than having these authorities in which you hit four days at a time, which each day escalates the news story, is to have the authority. If we give the authority, it might be extended over, say, what as I understand it, is they want the authorities over a 30–day period to hit for 24 hours, whenever the weather is good. In other words crack 'em, crack 'em, crack 'em.

Laird: And that's what I'd like—

Moorer: That would be more effective, sir—

Nixon: That's a different—rather than—rather than attempting on ad hoc basis, to say, "Well, now you can go for five days." Well, those five days may be the lousiest damn weather there is, so you wouldn't want to do it. And also the difficulty is that, again, when it's continued over a period of time, unless there is enormous provocation, you see, that's more of a problem. On the other hand, if you follow your intelligence reports, we're having correct protective reaction strikes every damn day right now, so you're hitting things. Incidentally, and I understand, and I just want to be sure, that that's being interpreted very, very broadly.

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[6] The President was referring to Operation Proud Deep Alpha, conducted December 26–30, 1971. During the operation U.S. aircraft flew 1,025 sorties against targets north of the DMZ but south of the 20th parallel.

Laird: I don't know if they can, because they can't interpret it any—I've gone out and talked to Tom. Haven't we given them the broadest interpretation—?

Nixon: You see, the thing is they, they—there was a story here in *The New York Times* to the effect, first, that after the period after Christmas that we ordered these strikes for no military reason,[7] which was not true, because as you remember, Mel, you came over, and some of the Joint Chiefs said, "We've got to hit 'em now." Right?

Laird: Right.

Nixon: And because you were anticipating the B–3 buildup, right?

Laird: Right.

Nixon: Right. And that's what we were trying to hit. And the second point was that it was extended beyond the time that it was useful, for no good reason. Well, the reason it was extended was because you said the weather was bad, right?

Moorer: Yes, sir. [unclear]—

Nixon: The story was totally inaccurate.

Moorer: Those strikes were effective—

Nixon: It shows you the problems you've got. Huh?

Moorer: Those strikes were effective. We—

Nixon: Well, of course they were—

Moorer: We made the equivalent of 750 truckloads of supplies were destroyed—

Nixon: That's very—

Moorer: —and—

Nixon: That's very worthwhile—

[*25 seconds not declassified*]

Nixon: When people ask, "What should we do to bear out the indication of a practical use of a five-day strike?" We got through to 'em pretty tough and all of our intercepts indicate that. They've arranged to hit 'em. We should put in some more, too. You have to see to it some more—

Moorer: Yes, sir. I'll tell you, sir, what we have laid on an effort here, not only against trucks coming down, but also against the infiltration by foot and bicycle, et cetera, that have been taking place, the

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[7] Nixon may be referring to the editorial entitled "Buying Time for What," which stated: "But there is no reason to believe that the renewed bombing can prevent, or even long deter an all-out assault from the North." (*The New York Times,* January 5, 1972, p. 36) At the same time, practically all of the almost 100 stories in *The New York Times* between December 25, 1971, and February 1, 1972, that report or editorialize on bombing North Vietnam did so within the context of the military intentions and impact of the air attacks.

several thousand that I indicated. And the B–52s near the An Khe area, in the base areas that they are going to use, would use against the highlands, have been laid on quite heavily using these CBUs, which I mentioned to you is equivalent—I think that one B–52 strike would be about 130 hand grenades—130,000 hand grenades going off at one time. And we do have indications, I believe, that everything's effective against the forces that are moving into the B–3 Front. So we've—we've been, been working on those all right. I think an answer to add to the Vice President's question, the authorities that General Abrams has requested would give him the latitude, certainly south of 18, to do something that we haven't done before. Of course, they think it would require some action north of the 20th.

Nixon: How many—how many B–52s do we have at the present time operating in this area—?

Moorer: 47, sir.

Nixon: 47? How many—how many do we have in the world?

Moorer: 450.

Nixon: How far away—?

Moorer: They aren't all equipped. Some of them are renewed, silent.

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: Well, I know that they're silent [unclear] anyway. What is the situation with regard to the—where the rest of those are? How far away are some of them? How many of them in Europe and other places?

Moorer: Well, sir, the aircraft like this are currently operating in Laos—in Thailand.

Nixon: [unclear] No, what I mean, is if we wanted to supplement the forces.

Laird: We have additional in [unclear] now.

Moorer: And, additionally, it would be the bombing and [unclear].

Laird: Right now, we're not flying as many B–52 sorties as we could. Now, General Abrams has the authority to surge now. He has chosen not to surge at this particular time. But he can surge now, and he could surge from three to thirty days.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. To a certain extent, Mel, to a certain extent, though, I just want to be sure I understand where the real danger it. Is it the SIOP? Not now? The other danger is here—

Laird: You go there—

Nixon: We already have 40 regiments against 400, and I want to see something on that. I know you're looking into it, but [unclear]. Because you talk about saturation up there, you have to hit everything

that moves out there. You might, you might, you might get another four or five hundred. When we really come down to it, I think we have to make sure that the South Vietnamese are taking some casualties, but their casualties are down this year as compared to last also. But, when you really come down to it, when you look at the North Vietnamese—I know we can't agree on them, but they're at least—when you look at the North Vietnamese casualties, their numbers are probably exaggerated, but a great, great number of those are due to our military—our air operations this spring.

Rogers: Tom, what if we operated our B–52 strikes from Thailand? Would that be helpful in deterring this offensive?

Moorer: Well, that would certainly broaden the capabilities, particularly if we have problems here with—up in Long Tieng. The problem is it would push a couple of people to put in Thailand, for one thing. But we'd have to increase the numbers, [unclear]. And, in addition, we have been—

Nixon: Put it in temporary duty?

[unclear exchange]

Moorer: And we could run the number of sorties up. We could do 1,200 a month now for one month, and then when the month runs out then he's—he can go back to his previous [unclear]—

Rogers: What I was thinking about is getting—getting a signal to the enemy: we're getting ready, if you start something we will, we will really move massively.

Laird: We can move, Bill—and I looked at this—we can move '52s off of Guam into Thailand to carry on the surge now, and he can't surge now, but we're not at that point yet. But we have the capability to take some of those aircraft and retrofit them in Guam. You see, we have to retrofit the aircraft and change them from nuclear weapons into this type of bombing, which can be done. But we have aircraft in Guam now that could be used at this particular moment.

Nixon: What about your carrier aircraft, Admiral? How many—I mean, could you bring some down from the Sea of Japan to supplement them? I mean, how many carriers do you have now operating with Tacair?

Moorer: Three, sir. Let me run through this, if I may. Currently, as this chart indicates, we have available more operating—5,000 South Vietnamese sorties a month. The U.S. Air Force is programmed for 6,700 and the Navy for 3,300. That gives us a total of 15,000 Tacair sorties and 1,000 B–52s, 33 a day. Now, in-country we have the capability to assume we take certain actions for 60 to 90 days to stay, by increasing the numbers this much, up to 17,540, and surging the B–52s to 1,200. Now, this 540 is the result of a plan I made, which would move

aircraft from Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines down to Thailand. It would give us 18 additional—

Nixon: Are they A–1s? A–1s?

Moorer: No, sir. They're F–4s. F–4s—

Nixon: Oh, F–4s, that's okay. Right. Right. You mean the small planes?

Moorer: Yes, sir. Now, for 30 days where you would make an all-out effort, but of course subsequent to those 30 days you'd have to drop down considerably—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: Now, we have the capability of about this many with the three carriers that are there. Now, I've issued instructions for none of those carriers to go north of Hong Kong.

Nixon: Where are those? You've got three carriers there in the area now.[8] How many are other carriers do you have? How many are over in Hawaii and others [unclear]? Could you get three more carriers out there, for example? I'm just thinking.

Moorer: Yes, sir. Well, we've got the next one we've had on standby is the *Kitty Hawk*. And she could—and we're giving her 10 days to get out. She could move out and be out there in—by the end of the month, sir.

Nixon: We're into this month. The end of which month?

Moorer: The end of this month, sir. Yes.

Nixon: The *Kitty Hawk*? Where's the *Kitty Hawk* now?

Moorer: The *Kitty Hawk* is stationed on the West Coast.

Nixon: That'd give you four?

Moorer: That would give us four, and that would—

Nixon: What about the one that's up there around Korea?

Moorer: No, sir, we have all three of them down south.

Laird: All three, yes—

Moorer: Three of them on—

Nixon: So, if you had—you could—you couldn't do—I'm just trying to—

Moorer: Yes, sir. We could send one more. We could send one more carrier, and—

Nixon: And have this, particularly the *Kitty Hawk*. I'd like to see a, see a contingency on that one.

Laird: Yes, sir.

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[8] The USS *Constellation,* the USS *Coral Sea,* and the USS *Hancock*.

Moorer: Yes, sir. And then of course the next step would be, if we needed more tactical air, would be to take the F–4s from either Okinawa or South Korea and move them down. And, so those are the alternatives we have. But we have right now, subject to making this call to deployment from the Philippines, a surge capability of 21,500 for 30 days. At that point, we would put all three carriers in the Tonkin Gulf and run them up to 5,300. The *Kitty Hawk* will add another 1,600 sorties to this number.

Laird: We probably wouldn't ever use that many sorties, Mr. President, but we do have the capability. I think it's—

Nixon: You'd have to get a real break on the weather.

Laird: We could double.

Nixon: Or—let me put it this way: when we think in terms of 24-hour strikes, you get just as much heat for 50 as you do for 5,000, if it's for 24 hours. If you expand it to five days, then the heat is enormous. In other words, the point that I would like, what I think we need a contingency plan after all, because I—remember we once talked about this before, the contingency plan, I remember, Henry, we talked about earlier—I said: "Be ready that when there's a window you can give them a hell of a sock. Then get in, get out, and then say it's over." Remember, we talked about this? Mel, you've got to have it there ready to give 'em the hell of a sock, rather than just dribbling it out, you know, and running over and dropping it on the combat troops, if the weather's bad. That happens, too.

Laird: We can do that—

Nixon: More Air Medals are made that way.

Laird: We can do that, Mr. President. [unclear] And I just—I don't think we'll ever go as many sorties even on a good day as we can find on a surge basis. But we can do it. The B–52s are the ones that are limited as far as their surge to 30 days. The others can surge up to 60 to 90 days.

Moorer: Incidentally, [unclear]—

Nixon: The '52s can move from what, from 42?

Laird: Well, we can go up to about 40 sorties a day.

Nixon: Right now, the number of '52s?

Kissinger: Unless you increase the total number of planes there, you cannot reach the point that the President is making for 24 to 48 hours.

Laird: We can with three carriers there. We've never had three carriers there before—

Kissinger: The way you get the surge capability is to increase the daily average and then that gives you a higher total at the end of the month. But if you want to put everything into one day or two

days you need more airplanes there, because there's no way you can [unclear]—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: The possibility of a one-day mission. If we think about the real problems of this war, public relations-wise and the rest, I suppose many books will be written about it in the future, I hope that perhaps maybe—maybe it will come out all right. But, if you look at the problems we must remember that—and I don't think it's a criticism of people who have to take care of all of the decisions, but it was the gradual escalation, day after day, failing to use maximum force at a maximum point in time, that gradual escalation takes away all the strength that we had. It didn't have the effect. It—it had, like water dropping on a rock, it destroyed the American support for the damn war. Now, as far as the American people were concerned, if we do something and do it not gradually—to them the theory of gradualism in war has always been wrong, totally wrong. It's this tit for tat crap. The only—the only thing to do if the other guy gives you a, you know, a slap on the wrist, is you kick him in the groin. That's, that's one theory. You know, that's what we've got to do here—

Agnew: Mr. President, Henry, you're talking now—you were talking about flexibility, but you're limiting your flexibility [unclear]. But the point I was trying to make before is that the flexibility that is really going to be valuable is the flexibility—

Nixon: That's a plus—

Agnew: —[unclear] something new that's going to shock these people.

Nixon: Well we have a few places [unclear] and yet they were surprised. But I know exactly what you mean there. We—we wanted—

Moorer: Incidentally, it's the first time we've been up to 20 degrees since the November '68 stand-down—

[Omitted here is discussion of inhibiting the flow of supplies to the Communist forces in South Vietnam, South Vietnamese morale, and President Thieu's appointment of new division commanders to improve ARVN performance.]

Nixon: The point that you should make, of course, that everyone should make out there, is that putting it in its coldest terms: South Vietnam should get demoralized if they concluded that the peacenik portions in this country led to not just an American withdrawal, but led to withdrawal of our aid programs—

Bunker: Oh, yes.

Nixon: —military and economic, in the future, which is their real objective.

Bunker: Yes.

Rogers: Yeah.

Nixon: Now, the revelation of our peace initiative has bought a little time in that respect. The Congress, I mean the jackasses who are ready to go off on another one of their kicks, not just a withdrawal date, but to cut aid, cut sorties, and cut everything else. I think if the point could be strongly made, that public support at the moment, which is reflected in Congressional support, support which is in turn reflected in the appropriations, is more solid than it has been for a long time—

Bunker: Yeah. Yes.

Nixon: And therefore they can have confidence that they're going to continue to have economic and military aid so that they will be able to fight the enemy. That's the key point—

Bunker: Yes. Yes.

Nixon: —if they take the long view.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: Then, of course, you have the short problem, the short view problem. That's what you're addressing [unclear]. There you say they think they're ready for it.

Bunker: Yes, sir.

Nixon: They're not frightened to death of them, huh?

Bunker: No.

Nixon: I don't think they would feel ready if, as I say, if I had an air force and a navy, and short communication lines up against an enemy with a long communication line, no air force, and no navy. Good God, if they aren't building morale now, what can? They never, they can't make it alone, can they, if they cannot at this time? Do you agree Admiral?

Moorer: Yes, sir. I think this is a critical test of leadership—

Nixon: Good. It's pretty good, pretty good odds on their side.

Laird: They've gone from 2—a little under, about 200 attack aircraft to over 1,000 that they're operating, in a period of 24 months.

Nixon: Who? The South Vietnamese?

Laird: The South Vietnamese.

Nixon: On their own? On their own. That's right—

Laird: No, I—I, I just feel that, Mr. President, that we have accomplished something here in giving these people this capability, and I don't want them to get into a panic situation. I want to do everything we can to protect them, but I don't want to give the impression, as far as this country is concerned, particularly in view of the—I've got to testify before the Congress. Maybe everything is all right, but I'll tell you it's not going to be easy to get that economic aid through for Vietnam.

Nixon: Sure.

Laird: It's a tough damn problem right now. We're $300 million light right at the present time. Maybe others think that the atmosphere has changed and that we can get these—this money through easily, but it hasn't changed as far as the damn gut questions in those committees. Look at this last action of the Senate, just this last week. Those people are in there and sometimes I think our people aren't being tough enough on this thing, but by God, they'd gut us. On the—they really gave us a gut shot this week on economic aid on Vietnamization. We've got to get that money back somehow, and it's not easy.

Nixon: That's right.

Laird: It's going to be a tough, hard, rough fight, and they're trying to take everything out of my budget and put it over in the AID administration, now, up there on the Hill; the Fulbrights, the Mansfields, and the rest of them. I'll tell you, if it gets out of this Defense budget, the Vietnamization program is down the drain in '73 and '74, because the only thing that keeps us going is that it's in the Defense budget, not over there in the AID budget. That's the only thing that keeps it going. You know that, don't you?

Rogers: Yeah, for sure. Yeah. We all agree. You bet.

[Omitted here is discussion of strengthening and enlarging the South Vietnamese Air Force and the augmentation of U.S. air and naval forces in the theater.]

Nixon: The thing we have to bear in mind is that, the point that was made earlier, that if this offensive is one that was as far as the North Vietnamese is concerned, it isn't about China and it isn't about Russia. It's about South Vietnam.

Moorer: Absolutely.

Nixon: It was going to come, it was inevitable, and they're going to try to get on top. From the standpoint of the offensive, it will have—if it's a failure—it will have a massive effect on them. It will have a massive effect on them because they will have failed not against the United States, although we will, of course, have helped a great deal in the air, but they will have failed against the ARVN, for whom they claim to have great contempt. Under these circumstances then, they then have to look at their hole card. And, so, as we see this offensive, the one that will come in February, or at least that's anticipated, then the one that will come later in March and in April, we must realize that this—must know the North Vietnamese will come if they feel, after we're out, they can make it. And, if they fail they're going to have to look very, very closely to what their options are. If they succeed, [unclear]—

The other point that should be made is this: That we don't want to do anything that is stupid. We don't want to do anything that unnecessarily exacerbates our public in this country, the ugly youth. We must

realize that as support for what we're doing—or, shall we put it, as the level of criticism of what we do escalates, it encourages the enemy. And therefore we don't want that to happen, to the extent that we can mitigate it. On the other hand, we must also realize that in terms of a—of getting ourselves into a position where we can react very strongly to enemy offensive action, we have not been in a better position to do so for a long time. The American people will understand for two reasons: one, because American ground forces are not involved, and therefore we won't have all that on television; and, second, because of the peace proposal having been made, and having been rather generally supported, and having been reacted to by a step-up in the military. So under these circumstances, we're now in a position for a period of time which could pass. It might pass in 60 days, it might pass in 30 days. It will last for a period of time where the action we've taken, we can take, or the level of activity, is in the air. That's what we're talking about.

Moorer: Right, sir.

Nixon: It would be much greater than it otherwise would be. Now, we'll look—do you want to look at the contingency plan in terms—because it is well to give enormous discretion, because there may be a day or a time when something very sensitive may be discussed on the diplomatic front. It might be, for example, one of the reasons you don't give them just a blank [unclear] in this thing is that who knows? Maybe not too good a chance, but it could be. But who knows whether or not, perhaps, there can be some nibble in the negotiating. If there is—I'm just using that as an example—you have to be in a position to know whether you want to do it at that time or at another time. That's what we have to do; we can't go flat-footed. On the other hand, when we see other contingency plans, let's see not only what the North, but the South Vietnamese we've got, who have been trained, but they're still somewhat ignorant in terms of modern warfare is concerned, what they have asked for, what General Abrams asked for, but also what the CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs, and the rest have come up with as to what we can do to that we are not doing. That's why I want to see the *Kitty Hawk*, we want to see more B–52s, we want to see A–1s, anything that you think.

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: Just a minute. Maybe, maybe, maybe we won't do any of them, but maybe we'll do all of them. And, also, in terms of the targeting thing, we've gone over this before. I think we've got two or three plans I know on that issue. I think we've got a pretty good range of targets, including the ones you mentioned, but we'll take another look at the targets, too. Because [unclear] those—if the level of enemy activity is such, and the timing is right, and the weather is dry, we can do quite a bit.

Moorer: Yes, sir, and the most—

Nixon: And we thoroughly intend to do so. The main thing we all have to understand here, is that the greatest miscalculation the North Vietnamese make is that we will pay, on our part, an exorbitant price because of the political situation in the United States. That's not true. Because there's one determination I've made: we're not going to lose out there. I determined that long ago. We wouldn't have gone into Cambodia; we wouldn't have gone into Laos, if we had not made that determination.[9] If politics is what was motivating what we were doing, I would have declared, immediately after I took office in January of 1969, that the whole damn thing was the fault of Johnson and Kennedy, it was the "Democrats' War," and we're ending it like Eisenhower ended Korea, and we're getting the hell out, and let it go down the tube. We didn't do that. We didn't do it, because politically, whatever, it would have been wrong for the country, wrong for the world, and so forth and so on, but having come this long way and come to this point, the United States is not going to lose. And that means we will do what is necessary. But we can't do it in terms of pusillanimous planning and options that are inadequate. So, we want to see what you have. [unclear]

Agnew: Don't just write it for the record.

Nixon: No, I know we're going to write all of this stuff out. We'll ask for all this, you know, turn down this story that appeared in *The New York Times*.[10] [unclear] I don't think anybody else sitting in this chair would have ordered Cambodia or Laos. If we hadn't had Cambodia or Laos or our casualties would be a hundred a week today rather than—

Helms: At least.

Nixon: —five. So my point is, even with the election facing us, even with the diplomatic initiatives we have, we, we have to win it. We have to be sure we don't lose here for reasons that affect China. They affect Russia. They affect the Mideast. They affect Europe. That's what this is all about. Now, having said all that, we—we don't want to be dumb about it; that's really what it gets down to, because we have a very delicate public opinion situation in this country. And the—at the moment, it's a little quieter, but they'll stir up again.

Rogers: Mr. President, I'd like, on that score, also, I think if you could impress on President Thieu—he probably knows it, but, as Tom

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[9] Nixon was referring first to the Cambodian incursion and the American-South Vietnamese sweep into Cambodia that began on April 29 and ended on June 30 and then to Lam Son 719.

[10] It is unclear to which story in *The New York Times* the President was referring.

says, this is a critical test. And even if it looks, after this is over with, that we had to come to his rescue, it's going to cause us trouble getting him additional economic and military aid for him. If he comes out of this looking as if Vietnamization is working, if he is successful, that's going to help us in our future.

Laird: That's going to help us a lot.

Rogers: It's damned important for him to fully understand that—

Bunker: He understands that. There's no question—

Nixon: He's got to win this on his own.

Bunker: That's right—

Nixon: That's right. And, incidentally, as far as our own activities are concerned, do everything. But, fire every goddamn PRO officer in the Defense Department. Don't talk about it, just do it. You know? Let them in there, but don't say we had so many sorties and all this thing. Let the ARVN—if the ARVN pulls this off, let them have the credit. It's very important that they get the credit. Not our B–52s, not our A–1s, not directly. Let's do it, but let's be sure that the ARVN in this instance gets the credit. We'll get the blame if it fails, but we want them to get the credit. That, also, is very important in terms of your getting the dough for [unclear].

Laird: Yes.

Moorer: At the same time I think we ought to be prepared for Ron Ziegler and the others to—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —straighten out the record, because—

Nixon: Oh, I know—

Moorer: —I can already see the press is going to try to frame this, you know, pose this as a North Vietnamese victory, no matter how it comes out.

Nixon: I know.

Rogers: Yeah.

Nixon: Yes. Every, every, every yard of ground that is lost, every hamlet that is captured, every provincial town that may fall will be—that's part of it. That's true. And you have the situation, the rather ironic situation—you think of World War I and World War II, and even Korea—remember the Inchon landing—whenever our side won, good God, it was front page and everybody was cheering. It was great. Now, whenever our side wins it's with the corset ads, and whenever—any time the enemy does anything good, big, "Wow that's great." [unclear] We, we have that situation, you know. We all know. You're absolutely right about that. But that's all right. Let me say, the important thing in the long run, though, is to win. The important thing—I'm not going

to—the propaganda will hurt for a while and, sure, there'll be—what Mel has described as spectaculars and the rest, and we don't want to be Pollyannaish about it. Say, "Yeah. This is a hell of a battle. Many battles have been lost." And just to leave it in the proper context, the—all of you students of military history, I mentioned it before here, remember March 21st, the period of World War I was the greatest [unclear]. Let's talk about it. It was supposed to be an enormous defeat. General Joffre was disgraced as a result of it and retired, and, yet, historically, when you look at the fact that in the week, in the two weeks of that battle, they lost 400,000 and the Germans lost 400,000. It was the first time they lost so many to the other side. The Germans lost the war because of that battle, because he put everything he had in there and it didn't break.[11] And so—and so the most important thing here is to remember the headlines may be bad but we will have lost—to hell. How many times have we lost Cambodia? Good God, I mean, if you look at CBS over the past year—I was looking at it—there have been at least 30 broadcasts that said Phnom Penh's going to fall. It hasn't fallen. Maybe it will, but the point is we, we've got to face the propaganda. But, we're talking about just being sure that we're doing everything we can to see that the ARVN comes through.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Nixon's concluding statement.]

[11] Despite inaccuracies in his statement, the President was apparently making reference to General Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, and to the Battle of the Somme (July 1–November 18, 1916). Because of the huge casualties suffered in the battle (420,000 British—almost 60,000 on the first day; 200,000 French; and as many as 600,000 German), Haig received heavy criticism then and later. Others, most notably U.S. Army General John J. Pershing, argued that the battle considerably weakened the German army and contributed substantially to its surrender in 1918. Haig was promoted from general to field marshal in 1917 and after the war became commander-in-chief of the home forces. In 1919 he was raised to the peerage as Earl Haig.

14. Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, February 3, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of U.S.-Indian relations, Senator Muskie's speech about Vietnam, and South Vietnamese morale.]

Nixon: One thing we're hitting on, I think you should know, the—this—don't say this to anybody—

Bunker: No.

Nixon: —beyond this meeting.

Bunker: No.

Nixon: But, we've ordered the extra carrier in.

Bunker: Oh, good.

Nixon: In our briefing. We've ordered more B–52s in.

Bunker: No, I was going to—

Nixon: We've ordered A–1—A–1s, and everything. Now, incidentally, I just want to—I think you've got to put it toughly. Well, I'll see Moorer today. I would just double the number of '52s if necessary, whatever is necessary, so there's one hell of a show. We've got 400. I know a lot of them have to be refitted, or whatever we have to do, but get them the hell over there, right now. Let's have an awesome show of strength. Now, between now and the time we return from China, we cannot hit the North.

Bunker: No—

Nixon: Nor will I. On the other hand, we can dump everything we've got on the South.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: And I think that—that it seemed to me [unclear] when Moorer came in, from a military standpoint, if they hit in there, our [MR–] 3 area, or whatever it's called, that this saturation bombing over there is bound to kill a hell of a lot of people.

Kissinger: Well, Mr. President, a lot of this argument about targets is phoney, because when they know they have X number of sorties, they gear the targets to the sorties. When they have more planes, they'll find—they'll waste a few bombs. If they—

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 665–3. 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, 10:53–11:33 a.m.

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: There's got to be somewhere in a definable area they're going to attack.

Bunker: Yes. Sure.

Nixon: You mean, in other words, having them be—I'd like to see—

Kissinger: If you have more B–52s—

Nixon: I'd like to see Moorer and Abrams concentrate on just bombing. [unclear] If they're going to have a battle in a certain area, and they know where the North Vietnamese are, saturate it. Just saturate it. Remember that personnel bomb? Don't you think so?

Kissinger: I think so.

Nixon: Instead of screwing around trying to hit a milk truck one time, or, oh, a buffalo the next time, or—you know, some of this bombing is silly. Utterly silly.

Bunker: Yes, sir. Yes. And the—this B–52 bombing, you know, affects the enemy morale tremendously.

Nixon: Yeah, that's what I understand.

Bunker: Yeah, oh yes. And also, Mr. President, as I said yesterday, they've done a increasingly good job on this interdiction.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: The trucks they get in, the input—the throughput, it's a small proportion of the input. They've done a fine job on this. This—on this question of bombing with more B–52s, the bombing of these SAM sites becomes important. And one thing that both General Abrams and I—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Bunker: [unclear]—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Bunker: —we could get authority to bomb these SAM sites. Now, the authority is for—to bomb them when they fire at aircraft—

Nixon: I saw that.

Bunker: —when the radar's locked on. But, the problem is that's, that's late to start attacking them.

Nixon: Right.

Bunker: And the other problem is weather. You've got to see them. Now, you'll sometimes only get an hour a day—

Nixon: Well, my point is, Henry, I think protection and reaction should include the right of the—and Abrams is not going to do something, do something utterly stupid—the right to hit the SAM sites.

Bunker: Clearly—

Nixon: Nothing—protective–reaction should include preventive-reaction.

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: I think the way to handle it, Mr. President—I haven't had a chance to talk to Ellsworth, yet—is that, one, is to give them a blanket authority. That has the disadvantage—

Nixon: It'll get out.

Bunker: Definitely.

Kissinger: —of getting out and also—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —of—it's doing that, something when we are in China. The other is, right now they can only hit when the radar is locked on—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and that's very restrictive because that means that the plane which is in trouble also has to fire. The third possibility is to say that Abrams can hit any SAM site that has locked on, even if it is no longer locked on. In other words, if a—and—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: Would that broaden it up—?

Kissinger: —and use high explosives, too. Right now they can use only Shrikes.

Bunker: It—this is one thing we would like to do.

[unclear exchange]

Bunker: Here are these locations of the SAM sites here.[2]

Nixon: Have all of these fired at some time on our planes?

Bunker: No. Now, but they've—but we've located it.

Nixon: Yeah?

Bunker: That mean is their range. So, the B–52s have got to keep out of this.

Nixon: Yeah, I see.

Bunker: And what, what Abrams would like to have is authority to bomb these SAM sites within the 19 nautical miles of the border.

Nixon: Hmm.

Bunker: You see? [unclear]

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: Could he knock it off while we're in China? And not to hit [unclear]—

Bunker: Oh, yes. Yes.

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[2] Bunker was apparently pointing to a map.

Nixon: Could he do it now, though?

Bunker: He could do it now, and he can stop.

Nixon: I don't think they should be doing it while we're in China.

Bunker: No, no.

Nixon: The only thing in China, it should only be protective reaction—

Kissinger: But couldn't—?

Nixon: —in the technical sense, but right now, counteractions are to be stopped—

Kissinger: But couldn't we stage it, as long as we in this room agree, and on the grounds that they have fired, rather than—

Nixon: I want him to say—no. No. What he [unclear]—

Kissinger: Or that they have—

Nixon: He is to say, we—he is to call all of these things "protective reaction."

Kissinger: Right.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: Just call it "protective reaction."

Bunker: That's what it is, really.

Nixon: Tell that to him, because preventive reaction—

Bunker: [unclear]—

Nixon: I am simply saying that we expand the definition of protective reaction to mean preventive reaction, where a SAM site is concerned. And I think that, but let's be sure that anything that is done there it's best to call an ordinary protective reaction. Who the hell's going to say that they didn't fire?

Kissinger: No, but could they stop from blabbing it at every bloody briefing?

Bunker: Yes, absolutely—

Nixon: Yeah. Why do we have to put—? You tell him I don't want it put out any more.

Bunker: Right.

Nixon: Tell him—I want you to tell Abrams when you get back, he is to tell the military not to put out extensive briefings with regard to our military activities from now 'til we get back from China. Do it, but don't say it.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: Goddamnit, he can do that.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: Because, goddamnit, these PRO officers blab.

[unclear exchange]

Bunker: Yeah, sure, and, you see, Mr. President, there are about—the enemy has about 168 SAM sites. They've got some in southern Laos, three in southern Laos, now. Now, they've got about 28 of them manned, but they can move these anywhere within six hours from one site to another, and that's what they do.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Bunker: [unclear]—

Nixon: Henry, we need—

Bunker: The B–52s are very vulnerable.

Nixon: If we lose a '52, I'll never forgive myself for not knocking those sites out. [unclear]

Kissinger: I have no problem with it.

Nixon: All right. Your problem is you don't want it done while we're in China? Is that it?

Kissinger: I don't want it done—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —from the 17th, from the time you leave—

Nixon: Yeah.

Bunker: Yup, until you get back.

Kissinger: —until you get back.

Nixon: All right, between now and the 17th—

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: —you work out the authority.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: He can hit SAM sites, period. Okay?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: But he is not to build it up publicly for the duration [unclear]. And, if it does get out, to the extent it does, he says it's a protective reaction strike.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: He is to describe it as protective reaction, and he doesn't have to spell out that they've struck. After all, it is a SAM site, a protective reaction strike against a SAM site. As you know, when we were hitting the [Mu] Gia Pass and the rest, we'd call that protective reaction—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —and then bomb the hell out of a lot of other stuff.

Bunker: Sure.

Nixon: Okay?

Bunker: Sure.

Nixon: So what we want is protective reaction. Fair enough?

Kissinger: Fair enough.

Nixon: So he's got about two weeks—about ten days, now—

Bunker: Yes.

Nixon: —to [unclear]. From the 17th until the first of March, he's dead—

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: —as far as North Vietnam is concerned. But then tell him to get those damn bombers and start hitting something in South Vietnam, and hit it good. Yeah?

Bunker: Yeah, sure. In the B–3 Front, and, of course, in Laos, too.

Nixon: Yeah. In the B–3 Front, and Laos, and don't forget Cambodia. There's something to hit there—

Bunker: Yeah. Yeah.

Nixon: Knock the bejeezus out of it.

Bunker: Yeah. Right.

Nixon: Now, the other thing, Henry, that we have to remember when we talk to Moorer about the DMZ: we are not going to hit across the DMZ until after we get back from China.

Kissinger: Oh—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —no.

Nixon: That's a silly thing to have—

Kissinger: No, I think—

Nixon: —we bomb the road [unclear]—

Kissinger: I have no problem with hitting on the northern side of the DMZ.

Nixon: Will you—

Kissinger: I mean—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —short of the border.

Nixon: That's what I meant. I think we should cover the whole DMZ. Now, would you make that in our—in the talk with Moorer this afternoon?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: And, at least, let's blunt that offensive a bit. You know? They've said, "Well, we can hit the road, but [unclear]." It's a lot—I agree they can fix the road up quickly, but it's more difficult if you hit it all the time.

Kissinger: Well, yeah. It's—that's—

Nixon: Also, if the enemy knows you're only going to hit south of that dividing line, they can all be in a perfect sanctuary north of it. So hit it.

Kissinger: I don't think—I don't know what Ellsworth believes—that they will attack in I Corps before the middle of March.

Bunker: I think, I think that's about it, yes. Maybe the first of March on. The weather gets better then.

Nixon: Well, we're going to be back—

Bunker: Sometime in March. No, I think that's—oh, sure. Yeah. Sure. Well, that'll be fine, I think. It's great.

Nixon: We will see that the authorities are adequate. I can assure you that the authorities will be adequate. We will see that more planes are put in there, and carriers. Goddamm it, they should have asked for more planes and carriers. Henry, I don't understand the military.

Kissinger: Mr. President, if you hadn't been at the briefing yesterday, that thing was sort of fixed to lead you to the opposite conclusion, but—

Nixon: Oh, I know that we were doing everything we could.

Bunker: Now, I thought it was great. I got tremendously encouraged from—when you moved in on it, I must say.

Nixon: Well, they have to do it. Now we—but I'm just concerned that we haven't—well, the one carrier, it's got to be on its way now, you know. [unclear]

Kissinger: It will be there before the end of the month.

Nixon: Okay.

Bunker: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Which is about as fast as they can get it there—

Nixon: Full speed.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Because they go out there and get ready, then boy. And those little Naval pilots can hit better than the Air Force pilots, too, you know. They really know how to target—

Bunker: They're good. Yes.

Nixon: They're fantastic.

Kissinger: And they discover targets once you—once they've got the plane. That's the question of priorities.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: Explain that again.

Kissinger: Right now, they'll always tell you they're hitting every target they get. But, they also know that they have certain limitations.

Nixon: Oh, I see.

Kissinger: So—

Nixon: So, if they've got more planes, they'll find more targets?

Kissinger: That's my guess—

Bunker: Yeah.

Kissinger: —what do you think?

Bunker: Yeah, that's for sure.

Kissinger: And for the next three months, we are better off wasting bombs—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —than we—

Nixon: Well, I would very much like to have in the B–3 Front—if that's what it's called—I'd really like to have some saturation bombing now. I mean, just take—take it off of everything else, and for a couple of nights, just bomb the bejeezus out of where they'd invade. There are two or three divisions there.

Bunker: Yeah.

Nixon: They've pinned them. We ought to be able to just frighten the hell out of them—

[Omitted here is discussion of the use of B–52s in Laos to defend Long Tieng, the effect of B–52 bombing on enemy morale, improvements in South Vietnamese combat effectiveness, the achievement of the Lam Son operation of 1971, and a residual U.S. force in South Vietnam.]

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15. National Security Decision Memorandum 149[1]

Washington, February 4, 1972.

TO

The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT

Additional Authorities for Southeast Asia

As a result of the February 2, 1972 meeting of the National Security Council[2] during which options designed to establish maximum readiness in Southeast Asia during the period February–June 1972 were considered, the President has directed that the Secretary of Defense undertake the following actions:

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–230, National Security Council Decision Memoranda, NSDM 149. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

[2] See Document 13.

1. Add, as soon as possible, one additional carrier to the three currently available for operations in Southeast Asia.
2. Deploy additional B–52s to permit a sustained sortie rate of about 1500 per month.
3. Deploy additional fighter bomber squadrons to Southeast Asian bases. These deployments will be maintained in Southeast Asia until the enemy offensive terminates. You are authorized to exceed the current Thai manpower ceiling during this temporary deployment period.
4. Remove all existing sortie restrictions for both B–52 and tactical air missions during the current dry season in South Vietnam.[3]

The President has again reviewed the operating authorities requested by General Abrams, and those which you authorized on January 26, 1972.[4] He wishes to give the field commander freedom of action in dealing with the growing surface-to-air missile threat, and therefore has decided that you should authorize fighter aircraft, including Iron Hand, to strike any occupied SAM site and associated equipment in North Vietnam that is located within 19 nautical miles of the PMDL, and within 19 nautical miles of the North Vietnam/Laotian border as far north as 19 nautical miles above the Mugia Pass. This authority should become effective as soon as the enemy offensive commences but not prior to March 1, 1972 and only after final clearance with the President. Further, to insure that the enemy is not permitted to build up his logistical or military posture in the DMZ north of the PMDL, you should authorize air strikes into the northern portion of the DMZ whenever the field commander determines that the enemy is using the area in preparation for attack in the south.

The President has asked that you provide him with an updated report of the specific actions taken or underway in response to this decision memorandum. In addition, the President requests that you provide him with a detailed report on authorities which have already been given to General Abrams and which should be subsequently considered for his approval. Finally, the President requests that you provide for his review outline plans for the conduct of air operations against North Vietnam as discussed during the February 2 meeting of the National Security Council.

Henry A. Kissinger

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[3] In message 3927 to McCain and Abrams, February 5, Moorer informed them of the detailed directives he had issued to carry out NSDM 149. In addition, Moorer wrote the following: "I assure you that your requirements, evaluations and recommendations are being brought to the attention of our commander-in-chief who is giving Southeast Asia much personal attention despite his many activities elsewhere." (National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, January 1972)

[4] See Document 10 and footnote 2 thereto.

16. Editorial Note

On April 15, 1969, after a North Korean aircraft shot down a USAF EC–121 reconnaissance aircraft over the Sea of Japan, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird unilaterally suspended the flights and then failed to inform the White House. According to the memoirs of the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig:

"The White House learned about Laird's unfathomable action only by breaking down, with great difficulty, a Pentagon stone wall composed of delays, excuses, and obfuscation. Finally, we learned the truth. Nixon ordered the immediate resumption of the flights, but three weeks elapsed before the EC–121s were flying again. A vivid and probably ineradicable impression of presidential indecision and vacillation had been planted in the minds of our adversaries." (Haig, *Inner Circles,* page 208)

Rather than bringing Laird in and, as Haig put it, "reading him the riot act," President Richard M. Nixon instead told his Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger, to see Laird. The President said: "I don't want to see Laird. *You* talk to him. Tell him there'll be no more of this." Haig believed that Laird took from this incident the following lesson: "Laird was a worldly man, and he knew who had won this round and who had lost, and he knew that he did not have to listen to mere messengers." (Ibid., page 209)

Secretary Laird's quasi-independent power base, rooted in his years of service in the House of Representatives, combined with Nixon's non-confrontational style of leadership (according to Kissinger, the President "was almost physically unable to confront people who disagreed with him; and he shunned persuading or inspiring his subordinates"; *White House Years,* page 482), made it necessary for the President's senior advisers on national security issues to find ways to work around the Secretary. Perhaps anticipating such an approach, Laird established a bureaucratic defense against it as early as September 12, 1969. On that day, he sent a memorandum on "Processing White House Requests" to all senior officials in the Department of Defense. It reads as follows:

"From time to time requests bearing the ostensible imprimatur of the President will be transmitted from the White House to officials in the Department of Defense. No execution of such orders will be initiated until a check has been made with the Secretary of Defense or the Deputy Secretary of Defense. I would be pleased if you take those steps necessary to insure that such a procedure is followed." (Memorandum from Laird to Secretaries of the Military Departments, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Director of Defense Research and Engineering, Assistant Secretaries of Defense, and Directors of Defense Agencies, Sep-

tember 12, 1969, attached to Moorer Diary, April 3, 1972; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

Although the memorandum, and later amendments to it, made things difficult for Kissinger and Haig, they were able to work around Laird on most Vietnam issues. In large measure, this was because of the attitude and approach of Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

On February 1, 1972, in a telephone conversation, Moorer related to Haig the substance of an exchange he had had with Kissinger on January 24:

"I told him about my conversation with HAK on our channel of communications and that Laird has issued a directive and said nothing would go out of the Pentagon to the White House without going through him or Rush or Pursley. I said I am caught in the middle, the President does not like it, he is going to have to talk to Laird. This is an identical directive to the one he gave to Wheeler just before I relieved him and Wheeler told me it was going to be a problem. I told him that I talked to HAK and my first loyalty is to the President and the orders he gives me are obeyed immediately. Laird just has to have a directive. I told HAK that we could have a conversation between you (Haig) and I every day on the secure telephone. I said I will not let anything fall through the crack. Ehrlichman and Mitchell both told me that the President wanted the channel kept open. I understand the feelings over there but the feelings are the problems over here are pretty tight also. The long-term implications are disastrous for the President and the military. No doubt that the President is going to have to talk to Laird about it.

"I said that any order from the President, of course, will be obeyed from me regardless of Laird. Laird keeps saying things like 'no wonder I get scooped all the time, the White House knows more than I do.' I think though that between us we can use our heads and work out something until this storm passes." (Moorer Diary, February 1, 6:29 p.m.; ibid.)

At a late afternoon White House meeting on February 3, attended by the President, Kissinger, Assistant to the President H.R. Haldeman, Moorer, and Deputy Assistant to the President Alexander Butterfield, Admiral Moorer received permission to communicate directly with the White House when necessary, especially on Vietnam war related issues. Moorer drafted the following memorandum for the record the next day, February 4:

"1. The President called me in to discuss the communications channel between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the White House and emphasized that this frank exchange between the Commander-in-Chief and the military forces must be in operation at all times.

"2. He emphasized that we must provide the resources to MACV in order to get over the difficult period facing us at this time. He said that he recognized that there were influences in the OSD that wanted to go in the other direction, but he was the Commander-in-Chief—he had been elected whereas the others were not and, consequently, he was going to take actions as necessary.

"3. He repeated what he said in the NSC meeting [February 2], namely, he did not intend to lose in South Vietnam.

"4. At the conclusion of our discussion he asked me to submit proposals for ensuring that we did have adequate military capability and went on to say that he would like to see me *frequently* in order to be kept up-to-date." (Memorandum for the record, CJCS M–8–72, February 4, attached to Moorer Diary, February 4; ibid.)

Henceforth, Moorer and the White House frequently used this confidential channel of communications, apparently without Laird's knowledge.

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17. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 5, 1972, 11:30 a.m.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

RN: Let me ask you one thing. This will be rejected by Haig and the military because it is inconsistent with the traditional way of things. And you may reject on the ground that Bunker, etc. rules it out. The use of air power. When you study war—any war—the military are horribly conventional. They are basically interested in seeing that everything is timed and can't be responsible for anything that goes wrong. My main point is this on the use of air power. What we are doing at the present time is extremely routine—we send out a number of planes and a number of [omission is in the original], so we routinely hit them

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 13, Chronological File, February 5–10, 1972. No classification marking.

and do it better than ever because of lasers and better intelligence, but on the other hand there might be something to be said for a standdown. I am speaking about the period before we return from China and then have a day or two, weather permitting to concentrate in a massive way everything we have got in say the B–3 area.

HAK: I think it is a good idea.

RN: My view is the Patton concept—his whole thing was concentration in a certain area. We are not talking about that kind of thing here. Step up the number of sorties and the number of [omission is in the original]. For 48 hours we will hit everything in the B–3 area; everything that might cripple the North Vietnamese and hurt their morale.

HAK: I agree.

RN: This was the Churchillian strategy. When I look at the various battles—Hoffman disobeyed orders. We are not in a position to do it on the ground with Americans. And the South Vietnamese don't have the guts.

HAK: They don't have the resources. Laird hasn't presented this to you adequately. We haven't given them any Phantoms or helo's(?).

RN: This standdown has its points psychologically—they will think they have to defend every place. Drop 3,000 tons in 24 hours on the B–3 area. We want to get a division, not just a battalion.

HAK: But the papers will report a standdown.

RN: Can you get Haig thinking on this?

HAK: Haig is a very creative thinker. We will just tell the damn military to have their own schedule. This is no problem.

RN: Abrams doesn't think creatively.

HAK: No he is a shell.

RN: Give him this responsibility to see that carriers are moving and the 52's are moving. I don't want any bullshit.

HAK: Haig has already asked for a detailed report from Moorer. Any orders you give in this office will be followed.

RN: The idea cannot be compromised. You know what destroyed the Schlieffen plan[2]—moving two armies from the west to the east—they would have won the war in 1914(?). I want the Air Force and Navy to follow this without compromise. I want them to hit everything in the

[2] The German General Staff's pre-1914 plan to deal with a two-front war against France and Russia. It required a lighting quick assault on France through Belgium to take the French Army out of the war and then the wholesale, rapid deployment of the German Army to the Eastern front to attack and defeat the Russian Army.

B–3 area or northern part of the DMZ.[3] It was H.A. Wells who wrote the military are by nature conventional—Napoleon wasn't conventional.

HAK: Most great leaders were not conventional. I think it has great merit and I will start on it immediately.

RN: Knock the hell out of them. One of the problems before was that they never concentrated on anything.

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[3] Kissinger transmitted the President's order to Haig who, only 30 minutes later, passed it on to Moorer, noting that: "The President said this may not sit well with the military minds but he wants a massive concentrated air effort in the B–3 Front for 48-hours continuous in the immediate future (the best time we consider productive), with every aircraft we can get on it without dissipating some other priority operation." (Moorer Diary, February 5, midnight; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman) At 3:29 p.m. Admiral Moorer issued the order to conduct such a strike. (Message 3920 from Moorer to McCain, February 5; ibid., Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, February 1972) The actual attack took place on February 12–13. (Message 65797 from Abrams to Moorer and McCain, March 6, attached to Moorer Diary, March 6; ibid.)

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18. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, February 8, 1972.

SUBJECT

Secretary Laird's Daily Report on Southeast Asia Situation

Attached is the first of Secretary Laird's daily reports on the situation in Southeast Asia which have been instituted to keep you abreast of actions related to stepped-up enemy activity.[2] The report confirms the following:

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1330, Unfiled Material [2 of 8]. Top Secret; Sensitive. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. The President wrote the following comment on the memorandum: "K—Is there *anything* Abrams has asked for I have *not* approved?"

[2] Attached is Laird's February 7 report. A notation on the report indicates the President saw it. In a meeting with his senior staff the previous day, Moorer discussed the form he wanted the daily report to take and the purpose he hoped it would serve: "I want us to expand the information in it and not send just what Abe [General Abrams] sends to us, fill in the historical facts and show the cumulative results to keep the President from panicking." (Moorer Diary, February 7; ibid., RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

—Delineations of numbers, types and general location of air sorties which were conducted on February 6. The report indicates a total of 292 air sorties were executed; 210 tac air, 33 B–52, 20 gunship and 29 non-attack sorties.

Secretary Laird reports the following actions with respect to operating authorities which you have approved:

(1) Sensors have been placed by air north of the PMDL to pick up enemy movements.

(2) Authority has been granted to use fixed and rotary wing aircraft, logistic troop lift and medevac for ARVN operations against suspected enemy base areas along the border with Laos and Cambodia.

(3) Authority has been granted to employ anti-radar missiles against GCI sites in North Vietnam when MIG's are airborne and indicate hostile intent.

(4) Authority has been granted for tactical air strikes in the northern part of the DMZ whenever General Abrams determines the enemy is using the area in preparation for an attack southward. Long-range artillery and rocket sites north of the DMZ and in range of friendly forces may also be attacked within this authority.

(5) Sortie restrictions have been lifted for all air activity.

(6) Once the campaign begins, General Abrams has been authorized to engage MIG aircraft airborne from the three North Vietnamese airfields south of 18°.

(7) General Abrams' air assets have been augmented by an F–4 squadron from Clark Air Force Base with 12 aircraft going to Thailand and six to Danang.

(8) B–52 sortie rates have been raised to 1200 a month, and an additional directive has been issued which would deploy more B–52's to raise his capability to 1500 sorties per month.

(9) A fourth carrier has been ordered to proceed to Southeast Asia. (The fact of this movement will soon become public.)

(10) General Abrams will conduct a sustained all-out, forty-eight hour air effort against enemy targets in the B–3 Front commencing at 6:00 p.m. Washington time on February 9. All air assets in the theater will be concentrated on this effort with the exception of minimum essential support missions around Long Tieng and absolutely essential diversions for other unforeseen critical developments. The third aircraft carrier has been moved to Yankee Station to support this all-out effort which will commence Wednesday evening our time, weather permitting.

(11) Thai manpower ceilings have been temporarily removed and the Military Aircraft Command has been alerted to augment General Abrams' airlift capability should the requirement develop.

General Abrams reports that all South Vietnamese and American units are on a high state of alert and that II Corps elements are in the best posture possible to meet the expected enemy attack. At my suggestion, Secretary Laird is briefing Secretary Rogers daily on the situation so that he is fully abreast of the authorities which have been given and the situation as it evolves. These briefings will be limited to the Secretary and selected principal assistants to insure that only essential personnel in the Department are cut in on the situation.

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19. Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, February 9, 1972.

Nixon: Al, I wanted to ask you, how about that, the B–3 strike. Is it going to get off? Or do we hear yet, or what—?

Haig: Yes, sir. As of now, it's on schedule and the weather is favorable, and that would be the only thing that would—

Nixon: Stop it. Right.

Haig: —cause it to be postponed.

Nixon: And that'd be starting tonight then, or—

Haig: Yes, sir—

Nixon: Or today?

Haig: At 6 o'clock our time.[2]

Nixon: Good. Good. Good. And you're convinced now that they're gonna carry that out and do—and, at least, do their—

Haig: They're delighted with it—

Nixon: —do their best to concentrate, will they?

Haig: Yes. They want to do it because they want to first exercise the system completely to a max surge.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, White House Telephone, Conversation 20–84. 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, 11–11:24 a.m.

[2] The airstrike did not take place until February 12–13. In a page 1 story, *The New York Times* on Monday, February 14, reported: "One of the heaviest American bombing campaigns of the war was concentrated over the weekend on base areas and infiltration trails west of the Central Highlands city of Kontum."

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig; And to enhance their responsiveness.

Nixon: Are they—?

Haig: They're in total agreement with it; they just think it's great—

Nixon: Have they—Al, have they been, do you think they have really now looked around to see if they've got any targets in the damn area?

Haig: Yes, sir, they do—

Nixon: I mean—

Haig: They have fixes—

Nixon: —being there must be if—there must be with all the infiltration. And if they're expecting a thing, aren't there—there must be troops, that's what I mean. I realize those are secondary targets, but goddammit if you hit enough of 'em they're not.

Haig: No, sir. I think they've got some good targets. General—I talked to Admiral Moorer last evening. He said they're very pleased. They have communications fixes on regimental and division headquarters, and they're just gonna just pour it in there for 48 hours.

Nixon: Yeah. What is the advantage of doing 48? You know, if you hit them, you mean that they will then try to—wouldn't they, wouldn't they move out? I'm just—I'm just figuring, trying to figure out how does it work.

Haig: Well, what they hope to do, sir, is to put this concentrated load in at max effort.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Haig: They are going to have to, to recycle a little bit—

Nixon: Sure—

Haig: And if they wanted to get a read from the communications—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Haig: —it'll give them a sharp new communications [unclear]—

Nixon: Yeah, the intelligence. I see—

Haig: That's right. And then they can do it again. And then, you know, I think General Abrams—

Nixon: Yeah?

Haig: —wants to do this.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, that's good—

Haig: I think it's going to be a very effective psychological—if not even, if they miss, it's going to be psychologically damn impressive.

Nixon: Because why? Because—?

Haig: Well, the enemy has not seen—they've been deceived, because as we've drawn down we have held down our sortie levels.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Haig: Laird's done that for economic reasons, but—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —Abrams has actually gone along with it.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: So, I think they have the impression that perhaps we're a lot weaker than we are. And when they get hit with this kind of a massive firepower demonstration, they're gonna know—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —at the outset what price they're going to have to pay.

Nixon: When they start. I get it.

Haig: And they have picked up already that there's a third carrier in the Tonkin Gulf, and a fourth on the way.

Nixon: Hmm.

Haig: Now, this is—this is a hell of a [laughs]—

Nixon: The North Vietnamese know this?

Haig: Yes, sir. I'm sure they do—

Nixon: That's good.

Haig: The press has picked it up.

Nixon: The press has? Good.

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: That's good. That's good. That's more of that psychological bull.

Haig: That's right—

[Omitted here is discussion of enemy infiltration into Laos and operations of the South Vietnamese Navy along the coast.]

Nixon: Well, we'll just hope for the best. Just hope that weather holds up, because, you now, just one time if the weather holds up and everything goes right, that Air Force and the Navy is likely to knock the bejeezus out of something, aren't they?

Haig: I think they are, sir. I—I think this is a damn good thing to do. It's something they should have come in with themselves.

Nixon: Yeah, it's a concentrated smack. Well, I don't know whether they should or not, but we haven't done a dish yet and let's try something that we haven't done. That's all. Now, there must be, you know, other, other things. I hope they—I hope Moorer begins to think of a few.

Haig: Well, if this pays off, sir, I think it's the kind of thing that we can do—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —as soon as a threat develops.

Nixon: Yeah, in other areas.
Haig: That's right, and—
Nixon: And just—
Haig: —just pour it in.
Nixon: Just mass it and hit it for a couple of days.
Haig: That's right, sir.
Nixon: Okay, Al. Thank you.
Haig: Fine, sir.
Nixon: Thank you. Thank you.
Haig: Bye.

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20. Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 11, 1972.

SUBJECT

Paris Negotiating Tactics

On February 7, State sent Ambassador Porter a telegram (Tab B)[2] instructing him to focus on the separability issue in order to get the other side to state specifically whether in their latest formulation point one (military) could be discussed and implemented separately from point two (political).[3] The telegram suggested that Porter concentrate on military issues and let the GVN spokesman take the lead in addressing political issues.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 191, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, January–June 1972. Secret; Sensitive. Sent through Haig. Sent for action. Haig and Kissinger initialed the memorandum.

[2] Attached but not printed at Tab B is telegram 21826 to USDel Paris, February 8.

[3] Reference is to a proposal made by the North Vietnamese in the plenary talks on February 2. The first point required that the United States establish a definite date to withdraw from South Vietnam and to end its air war in both North and South Vietnam, on which date prisoners of war would also be released; the second demanded the resignation of President Thieu and a wholesale change of policy by the South Vietnamese Government. The Communist negotiators characterized the Two Point proposal as a concession because it did not demand, as had all previous proposals, the overthrow of the entire South Vietnamese Government. (Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*, p. 209)

The telegram was intended to initiate a systematic probing of the other side's new "two point" proposal—as opposed to attacking it at this time. This approach is consistent with that outlined in our February 5 memo to you.[4]

At the February 10 meeting, Ambassador Porter disregarded these instructions.[5] He did not press the other side on the separability issue and, in fact, raised such political issues as elections and self determination. Apparently, Porter was convinced that a formulation in the PRG opening statement inseparably linked the two points; therefore, there was no point in pressing this issue. The PRG formulation in question does not seem to us to be that categorical on the separability issue, and we believe a probing of their positions in the Paris forum is still in order. We do not believe we should leave ourselves exposed to charges that we have failed to explore even the slightest ambiguity in the other side's position at Kleber.

Ambassador Porter has been most skillful in exposing and denouncing the flaws in the other side's arguments and proposals. We feel, however, that we should presently engage in a dispassionate probing exercise. This probing may well determine that the latest Communist elaboration is the most unreasonable one to date—then we can return to the attack.

Ambassador Porter might believe that White House approval of his excellent performance to date gives him a mandate to ignore the kind of State guidance sent to him last Monday with our concurrence.

It would, therefore, be useful for you to tell him that you personally concur in State's latest instructions. A back-channel to this effect has been prepared for your review and approval.

Recommendation

That you send the telegram at Tab A to Ambassador Porter.[6]

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[4] In this memorandum, Holdridge recommended to Kissinger three approaches that Porter should follow at the February 10 meeting. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1330, Unfiled Material [2 of 8]) Haig initialed the memorandum and Kissinger wrote on it: "See me." Despite a handwritten "OBE" on the first page of the memorandum, its recommendations were included in Porter's instructions in message 21826, February 8.

[5] Porter's presentation is in message 2595 from USDel Paris, February 10. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–14 VIET)

[6] Although Kissinger did not initial either the approve or disapprove option, he wrote on the first page of the memorandum: "I am not disposed to do this." Tab A is attached but not printed. There is no indication that the message was sent.

21. Message From the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State[1]

Vientiane, February 11, 1972, 1115Z.

1181. No distribution outside Department. For the Secretary from Ambassador. Bangkok eyes only for the Ambassador.

1. Your message 024222 and the joint White House/State/Defense/CIA message 231429 have just arrived.[2] If I interpret these messages correctly, they are based on the assumption that the current deployment of Lao forces in MR II, especially the turning movement that has been launched from Pa Dong, represents an unacceptable risk to the Lao and Thai forces involved and could lead to a severe military setback in Laos at the time of the President's Peking visit. I earnestly believe that this assumption is unwarranted and that, on the contrary, a withdrawal from Long Tieng of the kind recommended by Washington agencies would play directly into the enemy's hands. This belief is shared by all members of my country team who have been directly involved in current troop movements for the defense of Lao Government positions in MR II and MR V.

2. There is little doubt in our minds that the North Vietnamese would like nothing better than to turn Long Tieng into another Dien Bien Phu. Their foremost objective is certainly the destruction of Lao and Thai fighting forces in Northern Laos. A second objective of equal importance psychologically if not militarily is the capture of Long Tieng itself. This is indicated by the fact that Communist propaganda media have prematurely and most uncharacteristically announced the fall of Long Tieng and the defeat of RLG forces in the area.

3. In these circumstances I believe our most practical and prudent strategy is to deploy friendly troops in the way best calculated to deny the enemy both of his goals. In the opinion of my colleagues and myself this is eminently possible. We have sufficient forces in MR II to create a stabilized military situation of the kind Washington and this Mission desire. Friendly forces have been fighting well. We have abundant evidence from intelligence sources that the enemy's timetable has been disrupted and that his forces have been hurt. With the exception of the indispensible operation to reestablish friendly positions on Skyline, Lao and Thai losses have not repeat not been unusually high. Furthermore, troop morale is good. The recently launched Pa Dong and Muong Kassy

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 550, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 9. Secret; Immediate; Nodis. Repeated Immediate to Bangkok.

[2] Neither found.

operations were conceived and initiated entirely by the Lao and Thai commanders. No cajoling or arm twisting was required on our part. On the contrary, we have left the Lao and Thai in no doubt that their military objectives would have to be achieved on foot and that additional U.S. air support of any sort was out of the question. With full knowledge of these facts Sisouk, Generals Vang Pao, Dhep and Kouprasith have made their decisions.

4. As of the moment friendly forces have the initiative along Route 13 and may be able to reoccupy Muong Kassy in the next few days. This action should not only bolster FAR morale but will calm jangled political nerves in Vientiane. We do not think the enemy is present in the Muong Kassy area in any strength and believe therefore that Kouprasith's operation can succeed. It is too early to assess the Pa Dong operation at this time. After a slow start it has been moving well. The enemy has not yet resisted but we believe has redeployed troops from the Long Tieng/Sam Thong complex to avoid their being flanked. This in itself is a modestly encouraging sign. The NVA are beginning to react to friendly initiatives, rather than the other way around, and the pressure against Long Tieng may be relieved at least temporarily.

5. If at this time with both the Muong Kassy and Pa Dong operations underway and moving as well as could be expected we attempt to turn the Lao and Thai around I fear we will have the worst of both worlds. Orderly withdrawal from positions north of Long Tieng will be difficult if not impossible. The Lao and Thai leadership will be confused and discouraged. They may leap to the unjustified conclusion that we have decided to give up the defense of Northern Laos as part of some larger politico/military strategy of which they are not aware. Misunderstanding and confusion of this kind can be quickly exploited by the enemy and Long Tieng would be likely to fall by its own weight. In these conditions I do not see how a credible defense line could be established south of Long Tieng and a sauve qui peut mentality would be almost inevitable.

6. Such a military withdrawal, taken against the wishes of the Lao and Thai military leadership on the ground, would, I imagine, produce profound repercussions in Bangkok as well as Vientiane. The Thai volunteers program in Northern Laos would disintegrate. Souvanna's position would be further weakened and his critics both of the right and left immeasurably strengthened. All of this would occur at the very moment when US influence was at its lowest ebb and our power to maintain the political equilibrium in Vientiane proportionately reduced.

7. For these reasons I believe that Washington's instructions would plunge us into the very abyss they are designed to avoid: a dramatic military setback and political disequilibrium in Laos at the time of the President's visit to Peking.

8. These are my frank thoughts on the instructions I have received. I cannot do otherwise than to express them to you directly. All of us here are deeply conscious of the risks inherent in the present situation. The military tactics we support are those I believe most likely to avoid politico/military reverses like those anticipated in my instructions. I therefore most respectfully request that they be reconsidered in the light of the position I have outlined above.

9. Needless to say I will faithfully carry out to the best of my ability whatever instructions you give me. Washington agencies should however be aware that we do not repeat not have case officers with the Pa Dong units which are operating under complete radio silence. The practical difficulties involved in pulling them back, should the Lao and Thai be willing to do so, will obviously pose enormous other problems.

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22. Joint Message From the White House, Department of State, Department of Defense, and Central Intelligence Agency to the Embassies in Thailand and Laos[1]

Washington, undated.

1. We have carefully reviewed your 51667[2] and 1181[3] in State channels. By separate message in State channels you will be receiving what constitutes our guidance in response to your two most recent messages.[4]

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, 385, Laos. Top Secret; Sensitive. Repeated to CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, Deputy COMUSMACV, and Commanders 1st and 7/13 AF. The text printed here is the copy approved for transmission. Drafted at a meeting of the Ad Hoc Group on Laos on February 12, the joint message reflected a State, NSC, CIA consensus to which Defense acquiesced. The Defense Department's representative, Dennis Doolin, wrote to Rear Admiral Daniel J. Murphy, Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense: "I argued as forcefully as I could that Godley should be *ordered* to thin out the forces at Long Tieng and stop the Pha Dong operation." However, representatives from the Department of State, the CIA, and the NSC, convinced by Godley, decided that they could not direct the operation from Washington (see Document 21).

[2] Not found.

[3] Document 21.

[4] Attached but not printed is the approved draft of the message dated February 12. In it the Ad Hoc Group told Godley that "Your arguments in favor of your strategy, including continuation of Padong operation, are forceful and we will abide with your judgment on present dispositions." Nonetheless, the view from Washington was that the Group had to be more concerned about the maintenance of integrity of forces at Long Tieng than retention of any particular position, including Long Tieng itself. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, 385, Laos)

2. We believe, however, it would be useful to review in somewhat greater detail the background which underlies our thinking on North Laos strategy and provide some specific observations on the tactical situation. These observations are based on concerns dating back to late last year when the current North Laos situation was the subject of a high-level interagency review in the aftermath of the PDJ losses. These same concerns have been reinforced by the personal observations of General Stilwell[5] who recently returned from a southeast Asian trip. His observations have had a persuasive impact here and are provided not with a view to giving you detailed tactical guidance but to ensure the fullest and frankest dialogue between us.[6] The stakes are too high to allow for any misunderstandings between us and we must do everything we can to both reach a meeting of the minds on the objective situation and identify with the greatest possible precision those areas where our judgment may diverge.

3. *General Stilwell's Views:*

Following are the essential points of General Stilwell's observations as conveyed to senior Washington officials concerned with situation:

(a) The defense of the Long Tieng/Sam Thong area now includes practically all reserves in Laos leaving no reactive capability to enemy initiatives elsewhere.

(b) The Long Tieng/Sam Thong area has acted as a magnet for the bulk of Thai volunteers although the focus of the program was originally intended elsewhere.

(c) Logistical support for defenses are provided almost entirely by vulnerable Air America.

(d) Although principal importance of area is as Meo base, the Meo represent only 25% of the defenders.

(e) Vang Pao has neither the capability nor the means to exercise command/control over heterogeneous forces.

(f) The primary requirement for defense, a good fire support plan backed by the target acquistion means and communications to put it into effect, is lacking. Primary dependence is on air delivered ordnance.

(g) Although terrain to the southwest is conducive to defense, no preparations for defense in depth have yet been made. Thus the en-

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[5] Lieutenant General Richard G. Stilwell was the U.S. Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations.

[6] Stilwell had already briefed the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, arguing that if the Lao/Thai units remained at Long Tieng they would suffer a military disaster at the hands of the Communists. He recommended thinning out the Lao and Thai force there rather than reinforcing it. His briefing notes formed the basis for this message. (Briefing for the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff (Executive Session, 24 January 1972); National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 991, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Chron, January 22–31, 1972)

emy can turn position or interdict air corridors. The forces in Long Tieng will then be in jeopardy and abandonment of equipment and exfiltration by foot without capability to delay may well occur.

(h) Long Tieng has no special military importance and the Meo dependents, once housed there, are now well to the south, in the vicinity of Ban Xon. The terrain to the south is rugged and heavily cross compartmentalized. The enemy can be confronted on every hill, every defile; and the more he advances, the greater will be his misery, operationally and logistically. Moreover, he will outdistance his artillery.

(i) Thus, it would be wise to thin out Long Tieng and reposition some units rearward rather than reinforce it. In this manner, there would be greater assurance of protecting the integrity of the force; free some of the units drawn from elsewhere in Laos; ease the enormously difficult air logistic burden; and better prepare for the contingency that MACV may be inhibited in providing Tacair/Arc Light support if these assets are simultaneously required elsewhere.

4. We wish to again affirm that we are not and have not been advocating withdrawal from Long Tieng. We make this reiteration because you used the term withdrawal repeatedly in your reference messages and we believe this is an area where there has been some misunderstanding between the field and Washington. Our point is that some further forces can be removed from the immediate Long Tieng defense positions and deployed to the south now to establish defense positions in depth. We share your concern that once engaged by heavy enemy attacks it will be extremely difficult to organize orderly fighting retrograde movements unless there are manned defensive positions waiting to receive the retreating troops.

5. Another area where there is misunderstanding and perhaps disagreement is the degree of likelihood that Long Tieng can be held in face of strong enemy attack. Believe Washington consensus is less sanguine on this possibility than is that of field.

6. If we understand your position correctly you believe the most effective way of preserving the integrity of friendly forces is to stand and fight within current dispositions. You also believe that the very disintegration we all wish to avoid will occur by the very fact of withdrawing some units for a defense in depth, even in the absence of concerted enemy pressure.

7. We believe there is less chance of destroying integrity of friendly forces by a reduction of defending troops in Long Tieng and redeployment to defense in depth positions than there is in maintaining the present defensive strength at Long Tieng. If the enemy is successful in taking Long Tieng as presently defended he will have achieved both his objectives; i.e., taking Long Tieng and shattering the integrity of friendly forces. If on the other hand fewer forces are committed at Long

Tieng proper, and a defense in depth with supporting artillery bases is formed, Long Tieng can still be vigorously defended, and if lost, will not also result in a destruction of friendly forces.

8. Obviously the crunch judgement boils down to how best avoid unnecessary personnel losses [while] delaying and making matters as costly as possible for the enemy. We are not in position to give you detailed tactical instructions from this distance but believe fullest possible clarification of situation and issues is essential. Whatever course you, the Lao and the Thai choose to adopt, we wish you to keep most prominently in mind the problem of how to best preserve the integrity of friendly forces should Long Tieng come under heavy attack.[7]

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[7] Godley replied in backchannel message 51810 on February 16. In his summary he stated: "On 16 January I would have required one to three odds to bet we would hold Long Tieng through the President's return from Peking. Today I offer three to one we will be in Long Tieng when the President returns to Washington and two to one that we will be there when the rain starts falling." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 550, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 9)

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23. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, February 14, 1972.

SUBJECT

Situation in North Laos

As you know, we have had a series of meetings and exchange of cables on the situation in North Laos.[2] Essentially, the problem boils down to:

—The Washington agencies are nervous because the Lao and the Thai have not prepared and occupied defensive fall-back positions in the event of an all-out assault on Long Tieng. This concern has been conveyed to Godley although everyone has agreed we must refrain from giving him detailed tactical instruction.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 550, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 9. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. At the top of the memorandum, Haig wrote: "Agree—Let's watch."

[2] See Documents 21 and 22.

—As of the latest reading, Godley feels that the Lao and Thai forces are well dug in defensively at Long Tieng, and if the NVA attack it will be a good fight and not a rout and that the very act of repositioning forces now to defensive fall-back positions would have a more debilitating effect on the Lao/Thai forces than whatever outcome of the strategy which is now being pursued.

All this discussion is very nice. But the real problem, if I understand it correctly, is that when the crunch comes the Lao/Thai forces will be almost completely reliant on air. This fact puts MACV and DOD in an excellent position to pull the plug on North Laos. I don't want to sound cynical, but there is an aspect of self-fulfilling prophesy here. DOD and the Army have been the most critical of our half-baked effort in Laos; they have been predicting its doom for a long time and now are in a commanding position to allocate our resources in a way which might conceivably make or break that prophesy.

There has already been a drop in tactical air and arc light sorties in North Laos, primarily to make available assets against the B–3 front build up. And yet, the densest concentration of NVA forces in all of Indochina *now preparing to do battle* is south and west of PDJ.

The reason Godley and Unger repeatedly relayed to us Lao and Thai requests for an assured level of air sorties is obviously to give a political shove to an otherwise weak position. They are not in the military chain of command and have no control over those resources. If the Lao and the Thai have a fixation about Long Tieng, I think Laird and the military have an equal or greater fixation about Vietnam, where after all the Vietnamization program has in fact virtually eliminated the risk of a major set back this dry season. This is simply not true in Laos where we have not had a parallel program of beefing up local forces, and our air is all the more critical.

With three carriers off the Gulf of Tonkin, another on the way, and a fresh squadron of F–4s assigned to the Indochina area, it is inconceivable to me that we could not dedicate a bit more to North Laos than we are at the moment. This is not something that I would propose accomplishing formally but perhaps you, in discussions with colleagues over in the DOD, might be able to help in an informal way.

24. National Security Decision Memorandum 152[1]

Washington, February 14, 1972.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT

Herbicides in Vietnam and NSDM 141

The President has reviewed the Secretary of Defense's appeal, as set forth in his memorandum of December 3, 1971, for reconsideration of certain decisions in NSDM 141 regarding the Vietnamization of herbicide capabilities.[2] The President has also reviewed the views of the Secretary of State as contained in his memorandum of February 4, 1972.[3]

The President has decided that the U.S. will not make an open-ended commitment to supply additional stocks of herbicides to the GVN, but will encourage the GVN to establish alternate, commercial supply channels for herbicides fitting their requirements. However, in the event that additional stocks are required by the GVN prior to the establishment of an alternate supply channel, authority is hereby granted to resupply such herbicides. Such GVN requirements will be determined in conjunction with COMUSMACV and American Embassy Saigon under the guidelines of base and installation perimeter operations and limited operations for important lines of communica-

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, 370.64, Viet. Secret. A copy was sent to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A notation on the document reads: "Sec Def has seen." In a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Laird at 3:05 p.m., February 2, Laird said: "Another thing you can help me on over there. Herbicides. I can't give authority to SVN—." Kissinger then asked: "Have you sent a memo?" Laird replied: "It's been over 5 months," which prompted Kissinger to say: "I will move it this week." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 13, Chronological File, February 11–29, 1972)

[2] In his memorandum Laird argued against the prohibition in NSDM 141, dated November 26, 1971, on resupplying certain herbicides to the South Vietnamese when their current supply was exhausted. The herbicides were used to inhibit the growth of vegetation around firebases and other military installations. (Ibid., NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–229, National Security Decision Memoranda, NSDM 141) NSDM 141 is printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume VII, Vietnam, July 1970–January 1972, Document 279.

[3] Next to this date, written in an unknown hand, is the word "secret." In his memorandum Rogers argued that: "Because of the political liabilities of our association with this program, we believe that the GVN should move as rapidly as possible to begin direct procurement of stocks through commercial channels should it wish to continue to employ them for base perimeter defense." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–231, National Security Decision Memoranda, NSDM 152 [1 of 3])

tion only. As the GVN establishes an alternate, commercial supply channel, the U.S. will establish its own system for the supply of herbicides used by the U.S. under the guidelines prescribed by NSDM 141.

When advising the GVN to establish an alternate, commercial supply channel, the U.S. will also inform them that it is prepared to provide that in-country equipment as clarified below. Given a requirement from the GVN, authority is hereby granted COMUSMACV and American Embassy Saigon to provide the helicopter spray systems presently possessed by U.S. forces in South Vietnam necessary to ensure a GVN capability for base and installation perimeter operations with the understanding that they be used for such operations only. (Given a requirement from the GVN, NSDM 141 already grants authority to provide the ground spray equipment presently possessed by U.S. forces in South Vietnam.)

There should be no stimulation of the GVN to acquire or develop herbicide capabilities other than mentioned herein.

The President has directed that instructions to the field, consistent with the directives in this memorandum, be prepared immediately for White House approval.[4]

Henry A. Kissinger

[4] A marginal note in an unknown hand at the end of this paragraph reads: "Henry isn't sure we can read."

25. Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency[1]

YS–323 Washington, February 14, 1972.

SUBJECT

Meeting of President Thieu with the ROK Minister of Defense

1. On 11 February 1972 President Nguyen Van Thieu met with Republic of Korea (ROK) Minister of Defense Yu Chae-Hung to discuss Korean troop withdrawals from South Vietnam (SVN). Thieu began the meeting by apologizing for not being able to meet with Yu earlier and explained that he had just spent the previous two days visiting the troops in Military Region (MR) 1 and MR 2.

[Omitted here is material that Negroponte indicated was less important.]

10. Speaking then about the peace negotiations in Paris, Thieu explained that his position was very clear: he had said that he would do anything for the peace of Vietnam, but it had to be a peace which preserved the independence, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of SVN and which included an international guarantee for a lasting peace. Thieu considered the fact that he would resign one month before a new election as the "last step" he could take in the settlement of the war, and he could do that only after there were international guarantees for peace in SVN. His resignation in these circumstances would be his personal sacrifice for the peace of the nation. However, he would never accept a coalition government or the dissolution of the SVN legal institutions or the abolition of the Constitution or abolition of Article Four of the Constitution. Thieu said that it seemed to him that some people did not understand what President Nixon and he had agreed on. Thieu further explained that never would he let the USG interfere with the internal political affairs of the SVN and that he would never interfere in the internal political affairs of the U.S. He would never permit the U.S. to deal on behalf of Vietnam on internal political affairs. President Nixon had assured Thieu that he would never make any agreements related to SVN in either Peking or Moscow without his consent, and Nixon understood Thieu's position very clearly. Nixon had told Thieu that if the question of Vietnam arose in Peking, he would very clearly define the position of

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 158, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Jan–Feb 1972. Secret; Sensitive. In an attached covering memorandum transmitting a copy of the memorandum to Kissinger, Negroponte wrote: "Director Helms has sent you a report of conversation between Thieu and the ROK Defense Minister [*less than 1 line not declassified*]. The entire report is worth reading, with pages 15 through 23 [the section printed here] particularly noteworthy." Kissinger initialed Negroponte's memorandum.

the U.S. and Vietnam to Mao Tse-tung. Nixon would say that, as for negotiations, Hanoi had to talk to Saigon. Thieu emphasized that Nixon was going to Peking "very well acquainted with my thinking, my position, and there was no confusion whatsoever."

11. Thieu felt that the "situation" was now more complex than before. That is, the Soviet Union was now worried that Nixon and the PRC might make an agreement which would result in the PRC's pressuring Hanoi to cease the war. Thieu noted that it was possible that China might promise to help the U.S. by refusing aid to North Vietnam (NVN) and agreeing to "bother" Soviet activity in NVN in some way. Then there might be some kind of reaction from the USSR, such as pushing Hanoi into stepping up the war this year to pressure Nixon into dealing with Moscow, not Peking, in regard to Vietnam. Now that the Soviets had supported India and Bangladesh, they would like to make a deal with Phnom Penh and Laos, in order to increase their influence in Southeast Asia. So, the problem no longer was between China and the U.S.; rather, it was between the U.S. and the USSR. The Soviets continued to support NVN, which meant that the U.S. had to deal with them. Therefore, Thieu thought it would be very difficult to reach any solution until Nixon went to Moscow and had an exchange of ideas with the Soviets. Thieu viewed President Nixon's trips to Peking and Moscow as a "mobile summit" to arrange their positions and their zones of influence, as had been done at Yalta after World War II. Therefore, after Nixon's trips, there might be some insights into the future.

12. Thieu pointed out that if Hanoi mounted an offensive in SVN during Nixon's trip to Peking, it would not be because Peking told it to, but because Moscow told it to. The USSR would support NVN in order to suppress Chinese influence there. Thus, while Nixon's trip to Peking might not help the SVN situation, his trip to Moscow could. Thieu noted that Moscow and Washington had many other problems besides Vietnam, e.g., in the Middle East and Europe. Thieu thought that Moscow must be very angry because Washington was dealing so much with Peking; it might be afraid the U.S. would give economic aid to China to the detriment of the USSR. Peking might block the roads from the USSR to Hanoi or interfere with the railroads; the USSR would then have only the Port of Haiphong to get supplies into NVN. However, the Soviets might still be able to get into Hanoi by a road through India and Bangladesh. Thieu noted that there was a strong pro-Soviet faction in Hanoi and that since the USSR gave so much aid to NVN and was working to strengthen its influence there, it was just possible that in time the pro-China faction in Hanoi might fade completely into the background.

13. Returning to the subject of Korean troop withdrawals, Thieu said that in talking with the Americans, he could not use words like "pressure" but that he could tell President Nixon very frankly that both

Korea and SVN had problems and that if Korea could not continue to support SVN, it was because it felt that it did not have enough support to deal with its own problems, that is, with the North Koreans. SVN and Korea would like to support each other but to do so they needed help from the U.S. Thieu said that he understood that President Pak never wanted to create any difficulties for him, but he also understood that the ROK had both political and military problems. Thieu told Yu that even if the U.S. left 100,000 soldiers in SVN, it would not help, because the spirit of the U.S. soldiers was completely different than it had been two years ago. Thus, Thieu thought it was much better to help President Nixon by allowing the withdrawal of ground troops in exchange for full air support.

14. Thieu concluded the meeting by asking Yu to convey his best regards to President Pak.

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26. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 15, 1972.

SUBJECT

Future Prospects for the Vietnam Negotiations

After over three years of Paris Talks, Hanoi's fundamental objectives have remained unchanged.

—The U.S. must get out of the war.
—The U.S. must render South Vietnam incapable of resisting a Communist takeover.

There is, moreover, scarcely any likelihood that the Communists will even modify these goals prior to 1973.

One fundamental obstacle to negotiations is Hanoi's probable determination to wait out the results of the U.S. presidential election. The Communists no doubt calculate that their position will, in any case, be improved by the election—no matter who wins. They probably believe that President Nixon will make concessions during the campaign which

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1331, NSC Unfiled Material, 1972 [8 of 8]. Secret. Sent for information. Lord initialed for Negroponte.

he will have difficulty in retracting if he wins. On the other hand, they probably also believe that the odds are at least even that Senator Muskie will win and will be willing to meet their basic demands. The Senator's recent public statements on Vietnam only serve to reinforce the latter belief.

It is axiomatic that the Communists will make no basic concessions until they are absolutely convinced that this is the only way to get concessions from us. For the reasons mentioned above, there is little chance that this point will be reached prior to 1973.

In order to retain maximum bargaining leverage until 1973, it is essential for us to reach a line which we can firmly hold through the election and into 1973.

This places us in an obvious dilemma. We do not want to appear to be inflexible, rigid and unreasonable. On the other hand, signs of flexibility and eagerness to reach accommodation on our part only meet with increased demands from the Communist side. The last "two point" proposal contains what are probably the most far reaching Communist demands to date, if one assumes that the two points are inseparable.[2] Their sweeping political demands are of themselves probably an acknowledgment of their political weakness on the ground and the greater need than ever for our help in toppling the GVN.

Proposed Strategy

Ideally, we should unswervingly adhere to our "eight point" proposal[3] until the other side offers real concessions. On the other hand, it would be simpler for us to focus wholely on the military issue of withdrawal, cease-fire, POW's, and logistical support and leave the political issues to the Vietnamese parties.

Prospects for Separability

There were indications last October that the Communists might have been thinking of expanding point one (withdrawal, POW's, etc.) of the "seven points" to where it could separately have given them the game.[4] On October 24, Foreign Minister Trinh expanded point one to include stopping U.S. air and naval activities in Vietnam and stopping

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[2] See footnote 3, Document 20.

[3] Document 8.

[4] The Seven Point proposal was made by Nguyen Thi Binh, head of the PRG delegation, on July 1, 1971. The first point required that the United States and its non-South Vietnamese allies withdraw their military forces from South Vietnam during a specified period while prisoners of war would be released simultaneously. See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume VII, Vietnam, July 1970–January 1972, Document 226. For a discussion of the proposal from the Communist point of view, see *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger Negotiations in Paris,* pp. 176–177; for the American view, see Kissinger, *The White House Years,* p. 1024.

U.S. military aid to the GVN; however, when a new "two point" elaboration was presented in Paris on December 2, point one made no mention of military aid, whereas point two called upon the U.S. to cease its support of and commitments to the Thieu government. Subsequently, the other side became more explicit in linking the military (one) and political (two) points.

Point one of the July 1, 1971 "seven points" could easily have been defined in such a way as to assure the downfall of the Thieu government—especially the demands to stop "the war of aggression" and Vietnamization. Point two was somewhat vague on Thieu's fate and required us to "cease backing the bellicose group" headed by Thieu. Point two also implied that Thieu could be ousted in the coming October election.

As late as August 20, the Communists were publicly urging their followers to vote in the upcoming lower house elections—an unprecedented departure from the Communist boycotts of all previous elections. It is possible that Hanoi felt we might use the presidential election to oust Thieu and thereby end our involvement in the war. Xuan Thuy certainly intimated this in his CBS interview when he said that last year, prior to the October SVN elections, the U.S. had an opportunity to settle the war with honor.

If the Communists did indeed harbor such illusions, Minh's[5] withdrawal from the elections and our refusal to prevent the election from being held anyway probably dashed such illusions and argued against separating points one and two. Senator McGovern's public statement that Xuan Thuy has (on September 11) indicated such separability was effectively—if indirectly—repudiated by Communist spokesmen in Paris. If Hanoi had seriously contemplated separating the military issues from the political ones, it was clearly moving away from this position in September. Nevertheless, as Trinh's October 24 remarks indicate, the Politburo might have been debating the separability issue. Trinh's formulation was repeated by the DRV Paris press spokesman on November 14 and again on November 16 in the DRV–GRUNK (Sihanouk government) communiqué.[6] In fact, the communiqué used the broader formulation "stop aiding" (the Thieu administration).

In the two point elaboration contained in Pham Van Dong's November 20 first day speech in Peking, point one no longer called for an end to military aid. This was evidently subsumed under a new point

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[5] Duong Van Minh, known as "Big Minh."

[6] Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchea (Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea), 1970–1975, was a rebel organization in Cambodia controlled by Cambodian Communists. It was affiliated with the North Vietnamese and nominally headed by the deposed Cambodian ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanok.

two formulation calling upon the U.S. to "withdraw support from, and relinquish all its commitments to" the Thieu regime. This new formulation was also in the DRV–PRC communiqué of November 26.[7] It was essentially this new two point elaboration which was tabled in Paris on December 2 and which remained operative until it was replaced by the latest "two points" on February 2 (tabled in Paris on February 3).

In the meantime, the Communist side had become quite explicit in linking points one and two. For example, during the January 13 Paris session, both Communist spokesmen made it quite clear that our agreement to both points was a sine qua non for a POW release.

The Communists have remained vague on the separability of the latest (February 2) "two points." Initially they said the "two big problems will make it easy to resolve the other problems with a view to ending the war." Most recently (February 12) they said these two "main points" were closely related." It seems likely that when pressed, the other side will eventually make it clear that the points are inseparable.

There might be those in Hanoi who argue that U.S. acceptance of a point one which ends all U.S. participation in the war and cuts off aid to the GVN would in itself ultimately ensure victory and is more likely to be accepted by the U.S.

Opposing this would be the view that Thieu is neither popular in the U.S. nor in South Vietnam, and therefore, there is much to be gained by showing Thieu to be the principal obstacle to reaching a settlement; moreover, withdrawing U.S. support and aid might not automatically bring down Thieu, and the war could go until the GVN exhausted its stockpiles of war matériel. Thus, ideally, Thieu and his apparatus should be eliminated to ensure early success. If this proves to be infeasible, one could fall back to negotiations on purely military matters (point one).

Our October 11 proposal could have been interpreted in Hanoi as a signal that we were not wedded to Thieu.[8] The recent controversy over U.S. "flexibility" concerning Thieu's resignation would reinforce such an estimate.

On the other hand, it is difficult to see how the Communists could believe anyone would accept the new point two demand for the dis-

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[7] This communiqué, releasted on November 26, 1971, at the end of Premier Pham Van Dong's visit to Beijing, demanded that the United States stop fighting in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos and cease aiding the non-Communist regimes in those countries. ("Hanoi Joins With Peking in Hard Line," *The New York Times,* November 27, 1971, p. 3)

[8] The proposal was presented to the North Vietnamese on October 11, 1971, as the basis for a meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, which did not take place. Similar to the proposal Nixon made public on January 25, it had President Thieu resigning a month before an internationally supervised Presidential election. See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume VII, Vietnam, June 1970–January 1972, Document 269.

mantling of the GVN military police and administrative apparatus (the "machine of oppression and constraint"). This unprecedentedly sweeping demand almost seems designed to rule out negotiations on a political settlement and was no doubt intended as a strong counter to our eight point proposal. There is, however, some chance that point two will be somewhat softened. Instead of demanding that Thieu resign "immediately" and the GVN apparatus be disbanded "at once," a more deliberate timetable for these steps could be proposed. This would appear to be more reasonable without, however, really changing anything.

In any case, it would, in our view, be an error for our side to evince any serious interest in the outrageous demands of point two; moreover, we should, from now on, make it clear to the other side that the U.S. will no longer discuss political issues either in plenary or private sessions because we are leaving these matters entirely up to the GVN. This would strengthen our negotiating position by making it clear that there will be no opportunity to drive a wedge between the GVN and us; furthermore, if we hold to this tack, it seems likely that the other side will eventually begin discussing the military issues with us separate from the political Gordian knot. Whether this happens before our elections is open to question.

If and when such purely military discussions begin, the other side will probably demand as a ransom for our POW's:

—Total withdrawal (as already defined).
—Cessation of all U.S. air and naval activities in Vietnam—and possibly in all of Indochina.
—Cessation of all aid to the GVN.

Our most logical response would be along the following lines:

—Withdrawal for POW releases.
—Cessation of air and naval activities for a cease-fire.
—Limitation of aid to the GVN for a monitored cessation of similar outside aid to North Vietnam. (We think ultimately Hanoi will cease its insistence on a curb in aid either because it proves unnegotiable or as a trade-off for our dropping the cease-fire.)

We believe the real crunch issue, if talks on military issues ever materialize, will be that they define cessation of our air activities as part of our withdrawal while we consider this an issue for discussion as terms of a cease-fire.

If the Communists become convinced that we can hold this position for a long time, they will finally begin making the kind of concessions which could lead to serious negotiations. For reasons given earlier in this memo, we believe we are not likely to reach this point before 1973.

27. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 16, 1972.

SUBJECT

Ambassador Porter Recommends that After Peking Visit We Consider Suspending Paris Talks Unless DRV Permits Access to our POW's By Neutral Body and Agrees to Exchange of Sick and Wounded

Background

Ambassador Porter has sent you a message [*less than 1 line not declassified*] recommending that after the Peking visit[2] you consider sending a private message to the North Vietnamese to the effect that unless they permit access to prisoners by a neutral body and agree to an exchange of sick and wounded prisoners we will suspend the Paris Talks until further notice (Tab B).[3]

Ambassador Porter notes that he has already dealt with Xuan Thuy's statement that access cannot be granted to our POW's in Vietnam because it might trigger a U.S. commando raid. In a recent plenary session Porter pointed out that it would be a simple matter to bring the prisoners to a neutral medical body in Hanoi for inspection without revealing the locations of detention camps.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Porter's Proposal

Advantages:

1. This course of action might actually have an impact on the DRV's approach to the handling of our POW's, if indeed they are sensitive about the prospect of losing the Paris Plenary forum.

2. The GVN would welcome this step as an indication of firmness in our position, particularly in the aftermath of all the fuss about "flexibility."

3. We would in effect be temporarily closing down a forum which is widely considered to be sterile. It is also a forum which many judge

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1135, Jon Howe, Trip Files, John Negroponte Negotiations File, 1972–1973. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for action.

[2] On February 21, Nixon was scheduled to embark on a state visit to the People's Republic of China, the first ever by an American President. The Vietnam war was to be a major topic of discussion.

[3] Attached but not printed is backchannel message 570 from Paris, February 14.

as offering a better propaganda platform to the DRV than to the allied side.

4. It would demonstrate in yet another concrete way that we really care about our men held captive in North Vietnam.

Disadvantages:

1. The suspension suggested might not have the desired effect of gaining access to our POW's and the exchange of sick and wounded.

2. This course might generate unnecessary criticism from those who would prefer to blame us rather than the DRV for lack of progress in Paris.

3. We would disrupt a channel which has been useful in minor ways (e.g. exchanging messages about POW packages, orchestrating our public stance with our private initiatives, and maintaining the talks as a symbol of our willingness to negotiate seriously with the other side whenever it is prepared to do so).

4. As a general proposition, we would simply be making more of a fuss about the Paris Talks than most people think it is worth.

Our Views

We think Ambassador Porter's recommendation has some merit and, of course, is very much in keeping with his innovative style.

The key judgment would seem to boil down to weighing the advantage of showing our real concern for our POW's versus the disadvantage of the adverse publicity we might get for in effect taking the initiative in suspending the talks.

We believe this is really a toss-up judgment which only you and the President can decide. We have, however, prepared a draft reply to Porter on the assumption that you will decide *against* the proposal, pointing out that this is an idea that we may wish to hold in reserve but we do not wish to rock the Paris boat quite so much at this time.

Recommendation

That you approve the message to Porter at Tab A.[4]

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[4] Negroponte's draft for Kissinger's signature at Tab A states: "We think your idea has merit although the President may wish to hold it in reserve for a while." The backchannel message sent to Porter on February 16 concludes: "After we return from Peking we will consider your suggestion in 570 about suspending talks. There of course should be no movement in that direction in the interim." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 107, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam Negotiations, Paris Negotiations, January 25, 1972–January 1973)

28. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, February 16, 1972.

SUBJECT

Efforts in Southeast Asia

On a recent report of actions being taken to thwart the anticipated enemy offensive in South Vietnam, you asked if all of General Abrams' requests for additional authorities had been met.[2] With the exception of authority to strike certain areas of North Vietnam freely, General Abrams' requests are being met. Authority to strike SAM sites in an area within 19 miles of the border in southern North Vietnam will be submitted for your final clearance after March 1, 1972 if an enemy offensive develops. In addition, various plans for other air strikes against North Vietnam have been prepared, but have not yet been authorized. I believe that our preparations are sufficient and that there is no need to grant broader authorities at this time.[3]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1330, NSC Unfiled Material, 1972 [3 of 8]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] See Document 18 and footnote 1 thereto.

[3] The President wrote the following comment on the memorandum: "K and Haig (in our absence): Be *sure* if an offensive develops Abrams et al will *not* have a case for failing to do enough to protect our interests—due to our being in China. The heaviest possible strikes in S.V. Nam, Laos, and Cambodia should be undertaken if an offensive begins and if it will be helpful to blunt it. RN."

29. National Security Decision Memorandum 154[1]

Washington, February 17, 1972.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Vietnam Economic Policy

The President has considered the VSSG Working Group study on economic support for Vietnam prepared in response to the memorandum of January 3, 1972.[2] He has selected option two as the basis of our support for 1972 and beyond. This option provides 1972 support of $680 million and requires $385 million of FY 72 supporting assistance funds.

This support will be provided so as to encourage the GVN to increase domestic taxes, improve government efficiency, adjust its exchange rate, and take other actions to reduce the required level of support in future years. Economic development should be encouraged to the maximum extent possible. Expansion of exports should have the highest priority in GVN economic planning and U.S. assistance.

In implementing this plan:

—AID should retain flexibility on the composition of its FY 73 project program pending a review of CORDS requirements;

—the Department of Defense should prepare a study of all Vietnam related items in its FY 73 budget to identify the sources of funds for meeting this requirement. This study should be presented by April 15, 1972.

—the Department of Agriculture in meeting the target of at least $125 million in PL–480 may finance ocean freight; such financing will not be considered a precedent for similar action in other countries.

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.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–231, National Security Decision Memoranda, NSDM 154. Confidential. Copies were sent to the Secretary of the Treasury and Director of Central Intelligence.

[2] Not found.

The VSSG Working Group should monitor economic developments in Vietnam and ensure that the elements of flexibility in the study are retained while adequate economic support is provided on a timely basis. The VSSG Working Group should report actions taken and progress on implementing the support plan to the Senior Review Group by April 15, 1972.

These decisions should be promptly communicated to the highest level of the GVN to permit early planning of its 1972 economic program in consultation with the U.S. Mission.

Henry A. Kissinger

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30. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 29, 1972.

SUBJECT

The Enemy's Dry Season Campaign

The Saigon Station Chief has sent us his appraisal of the enemy's winter–spring campaign (Tab A)[2] which is summarized below.

The current level of enemy activity is still far below what we believe the VC/NVA are capable of mounting. ARVN spoiling attacks and U.S. airstrikes may be partly responsible for slowing down the enemy timetable. In any case, his plans are flexible (unlike 1968). His offensive is proceeding in a deliberate and cautious manner and will probably unfold in stages, moving from small to larger attacks as he probes for exploitable opportunities. He will keep his options open and will try to avoid the disaster he suffered in 1968.

The enemy probably wants to strike what is primarily a psychological blow. His main targets are pacification and Vietnamization. He

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 158, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Jan–Feb 1972. Secret. Sent for information. Lord initialed for Negroponte. Kissinger initialed the memorandum.

[2] Attached but not printed; dated February 24.

hopes that spectacular military action in Vietnam between now and the U.S. elections will bring new pressure to bear on the Administration to end the U.S. role in the war once and for all.

The next weeks should bring a noisy mix of ground attacks on lightly defended outposts and resettlement villages, terrorist activity, attacks by fire against urban areas and sapper strikes or rocket attacks on GVN and U.S. installations. Heavy action could also begin in MR–I with little warning, probably coordinated with attacks in the B–3 Front. Major actions could, however, be spaced over a longer period to ensure maximum political impact by demonstrating that the war could drag on forever.

The ARVN will pass the tests just ahead and by the end of the dry season will be in a position to move forward once again, but not so decisively as to preclude enemy efforts to create disruptions intended to influence the U.S. election in November.

Comment: The Station Chief's appraisal closely parallels one we prepared for John Holdridge on the eve of the Peking trip (Tab B).[3] We indicated that there would probably be no large offensive during the Peking trip, and we also speculated that the enemy has been less secretive about offensive plans because extreme secrecy caused him problems in 1968.

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[3] Attached but not printed is a February 16 memorandum from Steadman to Holdridge.

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31. Editorial Note

President Richard M. Nixon's February 21–28, 1972, trip to the People's Republic of China (PRC) was the first to Mainland China by a United States President. While there, the President discussed Vietnam on several occasions with Premier of the State Council, Zhou Enlai. The United States was withdrawing from Vietnam, the President told Zhou, and had pulled out almost 500,000 troops since he had become President. However, the United States would not complete the withdrawal except on negotiated terms, the essential conditions being that American prisoners of war had to be returned and the American ally, the South Vietnamese Government, had to survive the negotiating process. On the latter point, Nixon told Zhou, "we cannot remove the government of South Vietnam and in effect turn over the government to the

North Vietnamese." (*Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 196)

Premier Zhou made carefully calibrated responses to Nixon's statements. While noting that the PRC supported the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong cause, and would continue to provide aid to them, he nonetheless concluded: "there is one thing we scrupulously abide by, [and] that is our respect for their sovereignty and independence." Moreover, he continued, the Chinese had no intention to and no right to negotiate for the North Vietnamese. (See ibid., Document 204) On this point, Nixon admitted that to get the negotiations back on track the United States would welcome any assistance the Chinese might provide. At the very least, he hoped that they would not discourage the North Vietnamese from negotiating. To this, the Chinese agreed. (Ibid., Documents 196 and 199) More positively, Premier Zhou confirmed that if the war in Indochina persisted, the PRC, while still sending aid to Hanoi, would not become militarily involved as long as the United States did not attack China. (Ibid., Document 196) Since the United States obviously had no such intention, Kissinger seemed justified in concluding that Zhou had told him in a roundabout way that China would not send troops to Vietnam. (Kissinger, *White House Years,* page 1062)

In their official histories of the Vietnam war, the North Vietnamese indicated that they largely accepted the Chinese position. Hanoi believed that a great power such as China had to play a full role in the international community. Resuming relations with the United States would create favorable conditions for the PRC to enter the United Nations and to normalize relations with other countries. (*Le Duc Tho–Kissinger Negotiations in Paris,* page 210) More pragmatically, as long as the Chinese continued to send food, military equipment, construction materials, weapons, and machinery to North Vietnam, the great power diplomacy of the United States and the People's Republic of China seemed not to matter greatly. Even so, North Vietnamese leaders reassured Chinese (and Soviet) leaders that while pursuing their policy of protracted war against the Americans and the South Vietnamese they intended to fight only in Indochina. They would not allow the war to expand further and threaten world peace. (Nguyen Dinh Bin, ed., *Vietnamese Diplomacy, 1945–2000,* page 234)

32. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, March 2, 1972, 2:31 p.m.

TELECON/IN—from SecDef—Subject: POW Plan

SecDef thought it was impossible for this plan to be carried out.[2] He thinks CIA is the only one that has contacts in the area. I said I realize that; however, my point is we are still in the planning stages and trying to get some help from CIA and they are passing judgement on the thing before we have even decided to present it to you. Laird said, don't you think it is a pretty tough memo from CIA though?[3] I said yes, but you saw the message this morning about our last five boys that were captured. My only point is that while we are in the planning stage we are just going ahead of time by letting CIA influence a decision now. SecDef said it was not addressed to him, he had a copy of it and he just wanted Bennett[4] to read it and digest it from an intelligence stand point.

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

[2] Laird was referring to a plan, called Project Diamond, to rescue U.S. prisoners incarcerated in Ha Lo Prison in Hanoi.

[3] In his February 17 memorandum to Rear Admiral Donald B. Whitmire, Assistant Deputy Director for Intelligence, Defense Intelligence Agency, who had requested intelligence assistance on Project Diamond from the CIA, Carver wrote: "It is certainly true that seemingly impossible escapes from prison have been successfully made, particularly by resourceful and determined men in wartime. The odds against Project Diamond's success, however, are astronomical." (Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–R01720R, Box 7, GAC [George A. Carver] Chronology, February 1972)

[4] Lieutenant General Donald V. Bennett, USA, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency.

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

Washington, March 8, 1972.

SUBJECT

Cover and Deception Options

After reviewing the options suggested by the Chairman for deception operations against North Vietnam, I find that the probable outcome from executing any of these options would not warrant the effort involved. A deception operation which hinges on large-scale US participation in a landing in North Vietnam does not seem to be credible in the current international environment. RVNAF resources are heavily committed in the current dry season so that it would be inadvisable to divert a sizable RVNAF force from its present mission to a deception operation.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff concludes that the probable results of any of these operations are too slight to warrant the risks and expenditure involved.

The enclosed plans are provided for your information.[2]

Melvin R. Laird

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 5, Chronological File, Mar.–Aug. 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive.

[2] Attached but not printed.

34. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon[1]

Washington, March 8, 1972.

SUBJECT

Actions Relative to the North Vietnamese Dry Season Offensive

The situation in Southeast Asia has reflected for the past few weeks and continues to reflect a North Vietnamese capability to launch an offensive against friendly forces in South Vietnam. Enemy forces in the western portion of Military Region (MR) 1, in the Central Highlands, and in Cambodia along the Republic of Vietnam border, have been concentrated and are capable of launching major attacks. In addition, there has been a buildup of North Vietnamese air defenses in the North Vietnamese panhandle and in Laos.

In January 1972,[2] and later in response to the direction you outlined in NSDM 149,[3] a range of measures were taken to blunt the expected enemy offensive. These are summarized as follows:

—Employment of Talos antiaircraft missiles from ships in the Gulf of Tonkin against MIGs in NVN up to 20°N.

—Employment of antiradar missiles, both air and ship launched, against primary GCI radar control sites outside the Hanoi–Haiphong area when MIGs are airborne and indicate hostile intent.

—A fourth carrier to support Southeast Asia operations arrived on 3 March.

—Eight B–52s were deployed to Thailand on 7 February and 29 B–52s to Guam on 11 February, providing a 1500 sortie per month capability.

—Eighteen additional F–4s were deployed to bases in South Vietnam and Thailand on 8 February. Five additional F–105 aircraft equipped to launch antiradiation missiles were deployed to Thailand. Plans to move three additional squadrons of F–4s from Korea to Southeast Asia have been prepared.

—Authority for higher sortie rates for B–52s and Tacair was passed to field commanders.

—Authority was granted to strike 130mm guns in the northern DMZ area during the period 16–17 February.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–062, Senior Review Group Meetings, SRG Meeting Vietnam Assessment 1/24/72. Top Secret; Sensitive. See Nixon's marginal comment in footnote 1, Document 18.

[2] See footnote 2, Document 10.

[3] Document 15.

The measures outlined above and the firm RVNAF posture have disrupted the enemy's offensive plans to an indefinite but considerable degree. To repeat, however, the North Vietnamese retain a major offensive capability in South Vietnam. Their accelerated air defense efforts likewise constitute a continuing threat to our attack aircraft over South Vietnam, Laos, and to our unarmed reconnaissance aircraft over North Vietnam.

In NSDM 149 you indicated the desire to give our field commanders additional freedom of action in dealing with the surface-to-air (SAM) threat. You specified that as soon as the enemy offensive commences, but not prior to March 1, I should authorize—after receiving your final clearance—tactical aircraft strikes against occupied SAM sites and associated equipment in a North Vietnamese area encompassing:

—19 nautical miles north of the PMDL,
—19 nautical miles of the NVN/Laotian border,
—as far north as 19 nautical miles above the Mu Gia Pass.

While the enemy has not been able to launch the predicted major offensive moves in South Vietnam, General Abrams believes the enemy has been trying to get such an effort underway. In a technical sense, he considers the enemy offensive to have commenced. Considering the overall SAM threat, General Abrams, CINCPAC, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, believe exercise of the NSDM 149-indicated authority to be prudent now. SAM installations are mobile and therefore constitute transient targets. Limited duration strikes can, at best, achieve limited benefits. Extensive strikes over an indefinite period involve, in my judgment, even higher risks and costs. I therefore concur in our military commanders' judgment that selective and limited duration strikes should be authorized now against occupied SAM sites in the lower NVN panhandle.

I should add that standing authorities to deal with the air defense threat from NVN include authority for:

—Friendly aircraft and SAMs to engage enemy aircraft over NVN, which by their intentions indicate hostile intent against U.S. or allied aircraft operating outside the borders of NVN.
—Fighter aircraft, including Iron Hand, to strike any SAM/AAA site in NVN below 20°N which fires at or is activated against U.S. or allied aircraft. In conjunction with the impending offensive, additional authorities were granted to permit engagement of MIGs airborne below 18°N and strikes against active GCI radar sites when MIGs are airborne and indicate hostile intent. The latter authority has been exercised on several occasions.

In summary, I believe our extensive air operations are taking a substantial, though indefinite, enemy toll. Our air efforts have probably contributed to the disruption of Hanoi's offensive timetable. The North

Vietnamese air defense capability and tactics constitute a major and growing threat to our air operations. I recommend we continue to exercise the air operating authorities now in existence. I further recommend you authorize up to three (3) twenty-four hour strikes against occupied SAM sites in the L-shaped geographic area of the NVN panhandle outlined in NSDM 149. The twenty-four hour strikes could be taken in continuous sequence, or as separate periods. In any case, the authority would be exercised prior to May 1.

Melvin R. Laird

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35. Message From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Abrams) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Saigon, March 8, 1972, 1155Z.

69866. Deliver upon receipt. Subject: COMUSMACV personal appraisal of the enemy/friendly situation (C).

1. (TS) In view of the growing intelligence picture, I am today submitting my personal appraisal of the overall situation as it now stands and the requirements necessary to effectively meet this situation. There are five distinctly identifiable and interrelated threats which must be considered and countered. The five threats are the enemy forces in the northwestern portion of MR1 and near the DMZ which for ease of reference will be called the DMZ area; the enemy forces in the Pleiku/Kontum area which will be referred to hereafter as the B–3 Front, the enemy forces in the Chup/Mimot/Snoul area of Cambodia opposite MR3 which will be referred to as COSVN, the enemy forces in the PDJ/Long Tieng area which will be referred to as the Long Tieng area, and the enemy logistics offensive moving down the Laotian panhandle which will be referred to as the logistics offensive. I will first summarize the intelligence pertaining to each of the five threats, discuss their interrelationship, present my concept for the employment of US

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 62, COMUSMACV General Service Messages, March 1972. Top Secret; Flash; Specat; Exclusive.

air power against the threat, and finally present the authorities needed to counter the threat.

2. (S) DMZ and Northern MR1. The enemy continues to make a deliberate effort to improve his capability in the DMZ area and northern MR1. All indications suggest that the 324B NVA Division is en route to traditional areas of operation in MR1. Major elements of the 304th NVA Division are already located in Laos west of Khe Sanh and destined for commitment to western Quang Tri Province. The enemy continues to improve his air defense capability in the DMZ area. Dong Hoi airfield is now operational, and Khe Phat air strip should be operational by 15 April. SAM battalions have recently deployed to the Tchepone/Muong Phine area while sites in the vicinity of Bat Lake and the DMZ have been occupied. Two SAM support facilities have been constructed approximately 7½ NM north of the central DMZ to support these sites. On 6 March pilot reports indicate two missiles were fired from within the DMZ against allied aircraft over northern MR1. At least 8 × 130mm guns and 5 × 122mm guns have been confirmed north of the DMZ indicating their anticipated use against northern MR1 in the near future. Since 25 January 2757 rounds of 130mm ammunition have been shipped to the DMZ area. There is an increasing flow of enemy truck traffic into western Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces. During February total input to MR1 more than doubled the detections for January. The enemy continues to expend considerable effort to upgrade his route structure throughout western MR1. AAA defenses are also being upgraded significantly, and MiG activity in the southern part of North Vietnam and the Laos panhandle has recently increased markedly.

3. (S) B–3 Front. Force structure augmentation, concentration of main-force units, and increased rear service and support activities point to enemy intentions to mount large-scale operations. The 320th NVA Division, the 141st Regiment, 2nd NVA Division, and the 83rd NVA Engineer Regiment recently arrived in the B–3 Front area. Movement of 122 millimeter field guns and howitzers and 160 millimeter mortars to the front has also been observed. T54/55 tanks have been sighted south of Chavane in the Laotian panhandle. Troop infiltration destined for the B–3 Front now approximates 32,000 or 19,500 more than the total B–3 Front infiltration for 1968, the highest previously recorded year. Infiltration, including main-force units, has doubled the number of regiments in the area. Rear service activities within the front have increased, old roads and trails have been upgraded and new roads and bunkers are under construction. Enemy main-force units can launch attacks within the B–3 Front with little warning.

4. (S) COSVN. Since mid-February, major relocations of VC/NVA units have markedly increased the enemy threat to the Tay Ninh area of MR–3. The movement of a second regiment of the 9th VC Division, the 95C NVA Regiment, from west of the Mekong River to an area east

of Mimot raised to eight the number of infantry regiments operating in this area. The Division's 272D VC Regiment continues to be located in the Chup plantation. In addition, the 165th and the 209th NVA Regiments, 7th NVA Division moved from the Chup–Dambe area to positions west of Mimot. It is also possible that the 7th Division's 141st NVA Regiment has relocated from the Chup–Dambe area toward the east. The relocation of the 6th VC Regiment, 5th VC Division from the Snuol area further augmented the force concentration in the vicinity of Mimot. The 5th Division's 174th NVA Regiment remains north of Mimot. Additionally the 271st NVA Independent Regiment is now located in northern Base Area 354. There are now at least six enemy regiments located within 20 kilometers of the RVN/Cambodia border.

5. (S) Long Tieng Area. It appears that the enemy forces, which earlier had reacted to Vang Pao's operation southeast of the Plaine des Jarres, are once again being positioned for attacks in the Long Tieng area. On 4 and 5 March, the headquarters, 141st and 165th Regiments, 312th NVA Division, were located within six kilometers of Sam Thong, and on 5 March the 148th Regiment of the 316th NVA Division was located approximately 16 kilometers northeast of Long Tieng, thus approximating their positions prior to the friendly operation. Enemy reconnaissance and tactical activity around Sam Thong have increased over the past several days. Elements of the 335th Regiment continue to operate in the Skyline Ridge area. Additionally, the construction of a road from the Plaine toward Long Tieng and the movement of supplies and emplacement of AAA weapons along the road have continued unabated. Finally, while the 174th Regiment, 316th NVA Division, has not been detected returning to the Long Tieng area, the decrease in the friendly ground threat to the enemy lines of communication makes redeployment of this unit to join in an attack on Long Tieng a distinct possibility.

6. (S) Logistics Offensive. During the past week the general directorate of rear service element in the Lao panhandle initiated a general logistics offensive. It is designed to move more supplies and materiel to enemy units in RVN, southern Laos and Cambodia. This offensive began on 1 March and reportedly will continue, at least in some areas, until July. This plan emphasizes greater efforts by engineer units to repair roads and fords; an increase in the number of round trips performed by vehicles drivers; prepositioning of rations along roads for drivers; and increased alertness by AAA units in Base Area 604. The current offensive appears to be a phase of heightened activity on the part of Binh Trams of at least three transportation groups and very likely is underway throughout the entire enemy logistics system.

7. (TS) Interrelationship of the Five Threats. Early in the enemy buildup, we had expected that the enemy offensive against the B–3

Front would precede action against the DMZ area. This has not materialized and it now appears that the enemy is capable of concurrent offensive action in all five threat areas. The most salient interrelationship among concurrent offensives in the five threat areas would be the sudden demand for air power needed to support each. In fact, the competing demands for air power already exist as we attempt to counter the enemy preparations in each threat area. Two other interrelationships are pertinent, offensive action by COSVN forces could create a threat to MR3 that would complicate the JGS decision to move airborne and marine reserve forces to MR1 or MR2. This emphasizes the need for preemptive actions against COSVN forces. We are applying air power against these forces, and as mentioned in my assessment of 6 March, III Corps plans to initiate an offensive against them on 9 March.[2] Finally, since virtually everything the enemy does has an associated goal of influencing public opinion, the execution of concurrent attacks in four separate geographical areas would portray an impression of omnipotence that could be beneficial to his purposes.

8. (TS) My basic concept for countering the enemy buildup is to continue concentration of US Tacair primarily against the enemy logistic offensive and the B–52's primarily against targets in the DMZ, B–3 Front, COSVN and Long Tieng areas and their related support bases. VNAF will continue to operate primarily against in-country Tacair targets supplemented by US Tacair when lucrative targets are developed either as a result of B–52 strikes or preemptive ground [operations. After the enemy offensive begins, however, the South Vietnamese will have] to be encouraged to shift their air resources to the high threat areas. This concept of air power employment does not exclude the employment of B–52's against lucrative targets that may develop in conjunction with the logistics offensive but the threat situations in the DMZ, B–3 Front, COSVN and Long Tieng receive the main weight of the B–52 effort. When the enemy offensive begins, the distribution of air power will have to be judged in the light of all elements of the situation. The situation in the DMZ area requires special discussion and is covered in the following paragraph.

9. (TS) The intelligence situation in the DMZ has been discussed in para 2 above. It is important to understand what the enemy has put together in southern Quang Binh, the DMZ and western Quang Tri. It is a system integrating MiG's, SAM's, heavy anti-aircraft artillery, long range artillery, tanks and other ground forces. The enemy has put

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[2] Message 65797 from Abrams to Moorer and McCain, March 6, attached to Moorer Diary, March 6; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman.

into position a SAM umbrella that extends as much as 16 NM into northern MR1 and to an even greater depth into the Laotian panhandle. In the [Mu Gia] pass areas, he has perhaps the best integrated, most closely coordinated MiG/SAM operating environment that has yet been developed and actively exercised under combat conditions. He has driven our highly vulnerable gunships out of the [Mu Gia] pass areas and northern MR1. He has made operation of fighter aircraft extremely difficult in these areas. He has kept the B–52 out of these areas although CINCSAC has stated his willingness to fly into the SAM rings when the targets justify the risk. He has developed a sustaining logistics base beneath this air defense umbrella. He has positioned long range artillery just north of DMZ in range of friendly positions. Tank and infantry units have been positioned in the area. If he initiates his offensive at the outset of a protracted period of bad weather, we risk serious losses in northern MR1. Our response to this critical situation must deal with all of the major elements of the integrated system described above. We must have authority to hit the MiG's GCI, SAM sites, long range artillery, tanks and logistics facilities. We must have clear weather to operate effectively against his system. I urgently request approval of authority to strike the enemy system above the DMZ (formal statement of authority needed is in following paragraph). A one-time strike authority is temporarily useful but is of only limited value due to the enemy recuperative capability. Furthermore, the weather conditions change so rapidly as to make one-time authority difficult to exploit. What is needed is standing authority to strike the SAM's artillery, GCI, tanks, anti-aircraft artillery and logistics as described in para 10 below, as a minimum I need the standby authority to strike this system of targets as quickly as weather will permit after the enemy begins to fire his artillery against friendly forces. The existing authority to return fire is too restrictive to be fully effective and does not adequately accommodate the fact that what we are up against is an entire system of integrated power rather than a single-weapon problem.[3]

[3] In the March 9 memorandum CM–1625–72, Moorer wrote to Laird: "I fully agree that authority is needed now to strike the integrated enemy threat north of the DMZ. Because of the vagaries of the weather pattern for this area, one-time strikes make it difficult achieving their full potential. The enemy's recuperative capability under conditions of short duration operations also limits us to very near term, temporary results." (Attached to Moorer Diary, March 9; ibid.)

10. (TS) Specific authorities needed at this time are as follows:

A. Authority to conduct Tacair strikes and naval gunfire attacks against SAM sites, MiG's, GCI sites, AAA, long range artillery, tanks and logistics facilities in North Vietnam located below 18 degrees north. This statement of authorities needed is different from the previous request because we now know more about the highly integrated system facing us and, based upon previous attempts to attack parts of the system, realize that it must be attacked as an entity. Naval gunfire can provide needed firepower against SAM sites and logistical targets located near the coast.

B. Authority to employ area denial munitions in the northern portion of the DMZ.[4]

11. (TS) One final point concerns the Long Tieng area. Thus far the enemy has not resumed his all out offensive against Long Tieng. The recent operation by Vang Pao was successful in drawing forces away from Long Tieng and was a commendable initiative.[5] I am aware that plans are underway for an even more ambitious diversionary operation.[6] While it is difficult to judge from here the full merits and problems of the new plan, I must caution against initiating any new operation at this time that is dependent upon US air power for success or prevention of disaster. We are hard pressed even at this time to provide the necessary air power against the five threats and a sixth situation would be unsupportable.

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[4] Bunker sent Abrams's message to Kissinger on March 9, commenting that "General Abrams' message is comprehensive and cogent and I recommend that you read it in its entirety. I fully support his request for these additional authorities, in view of the massive enemy buildup in all of the threat areas mentioned." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 992, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Chron, March 7–15, 1972) Laird forwarded the recommendation to the White House on March 10. See footnote 4, Document 44.

[5] Operation Strength I, carried out southeast of Long Tieng during February, aimed to divert North Vietnamese troops from the area.

[6] Refers to Strength II, which was about to begin. Similar to Strength I in objectives, its operational area would be northeast of Long Tieng.

36. Memorandum From Richard T. Kennedy and John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, March 10, 1972.

SUBJECT

Request for Approval to Conduct a Multi-Battalion Diversionary Operation North and East of the Plain of Jars

Director Helms has sent a memorandum (at Tab A) to you, Under Secretary Irwin, Deputy Secretary Rush, and Admiral Moorer asking for early approval of a new diversionary maneuver by Vang Pao's forces.[2] The operation would seek to utilize our advantage in mobility by helilifting sizable elements of Vang Pao's forces east and north of the PDJ in order to divert the enemy from Long Tieng. The plan is summarized on the map at Tab A–1.[3]

Current indications are that it is merely a matter of time until the North Vietnamese attack Long Tieng in overwhelming force. The NVA forces which countered Vang Pao's earlier diversion southeast of the PDJ have returned westward toward Long Tieng.

The question, then, is whether Long Tieng (and ultimately the Mekong Basin and the RLG) is better defended by using the approximately 5,000 irregulars to strengthen Long Tieng's immediate defenses or by the proposed maneuver. If retained at Long Tieng, they could add strength to the defenses and serve as a reserve. But there is general agreement that Long Tieng itself probably cannot be held if the NVA put all the force they have available into the effort to take it. The real defense will have to be one in depth using the excellent terrain to the south to delay and extract a heavy price for further enemy advances. This is essentially the strategy we have visualized since the start of the dry season, and Godley has moved to be in a position to implement it.[4] Moreover, there is the danger that in static defense the Meo might be destroyed as an effective force, even if they and the Thai SGUs succeeded in holding Long Tieng.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 21, Chronological File, March 1972. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for action. Sent through Howe. Haig initialed the memorandum.

[2] Tab A is attached but not printed. In it, Helms mentioned Operation Strength II, noting that it would be difficult to provide adequate air support.

[3] Attached but not printed.

[4] See Document 21 and footnote 4, Document 22.

Alternatively, the proposed operation seeks to defend the base indirectly by threatening the enemy's lines of communications. That the North Vietnamese are sensitive to such attacks was shown by their rapid reaction to Vang Pao's earlier initiative south and east of the PDJ. The earlier effort successfully substituted mobility—where we have a definite advantage—for manpower and ordnance; casualties were light and ordnance expenditures conservative. The new proposal would continue to use Vang Pao's forces in the mobile role in which they are most effective, retain the initiative, dissipate some of the enemy's energies and supplies in response, and probably cause him to expose more targets to air attack than otherwise.

There is the risk that the enemy may attack a weakened Long Tieng while this 5,000 man force is maneuvering behind his lines and we will face the difficult task of extricating them. But the chances are at least even that this diversionary effort will take some pressure off of Long Tieng and may even thin out the NVA forces there to an extent which would diminish the likelihood of a successful assault against the defenses. We believe that this chance argues for going along with the plan.

The U.S. Commander 7/13 AF[5] assesses the risk to the 5–9 CH–53 helicopters which would be flying to support the operation as moderate to high from possible enemy reaction in planned landing zones and possible AA fire along some of the proposed flight paths. Flak suppression sorties will be used to lessen the risk.

All elements of the American Mission concur in the plan, and Ambassador Godley urges early approval so that the helilift can get underway no later than March 10. Director Helms suggests telephonic concurrence and no WSAG meeting unless we see serious problems with the plan. Admiral Moorer favors the plan. State favors the plan and recommends approval. (Sullivan wants to use approval to force the issue of whether we go for an increase in the ceiling. The added cost of about $95 thousand clearly will have no effect on the ceiling and we consider this a red-herring.) Secretary Laird has withheld judgment pending further JCS assessment of possible U.S. helo losses, overall level of U.S. support required for the operation, and plans for extricating the force if it gets into trouble (This assessment is to be provided to Mr. Laird today.).

We believe the likely gains outweigh the costs and risks. The previous operation of this type accomplished the purpose at little cost to

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[5] The mission of the 7th/13th Air Force, headquartered at Udorn Air Force Base, Thailand, was to provide logistical and air support to United States allies fighting Communist forces in Laos.

the attacking force and this one has as good a chance to succeed as the earlier one. Accordingly, we believe we should agree with Godley.

Recommendation

That you concur in the operation and authorize us to inform Director Helms.

Approve[6]

Disapprove, schedule WSAG meeting

Other

[6] Haig initialed this option for Kissinger.

37. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, March 10, 1972.

SUBJECT

Operations Against North Vietnam

1. You will recall that in response to your request in early 1970 we began a program of action operations against North Vietnam. Since 22 February 1970, twenty-two of these operations have been run. We have reviewed the results of these operations, their cost in money and personnel, the prospects for future operations and the political risks. Our conclusion, frankly, is that the results of this program are of questionable value balanced against the effort required and the risks inevitably involved. We recommend that this program be phased down and at the same time we develop a program in the covert action and disinformation field against North Vietnam. This latter program we believe has the potential for causing North Vietnam much more real difficulty than minor paramilitary harassment.

2. Since 22 February 1970, twenty-two operations were attempted by CIA teams conducting attacks by fire against targets within North

[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, DCI Files, Job 80–R01284A, Box 6, 1 January–31 May 1972. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

Vietnam. (See Attachment A.)[2] Ten operations failed; twelve operations were successful in that the team fired toward the target and returned to the base safely. Of these twelve, three were rocket attacks against Dien Bien Phu, six were against North Vietnamese Army (NVA) supply depots, two were rocket attacks against truck parks and one ruptured an NVA POL pipeline. No damage assessment was possible on any of these operations.

3. As far as we know the results of these operations have been minimal in military terms and it is doubtful they have had any psychological impact on Hanoi. To date we have spent over $3 million on these operations, diverted to them a considerable part of the operational effort of the Vientiane Station, and have lost twenty-nine team members in action, most of whom have been captured. These are all Lao nationals.

4. One of our principal problems has been that most of our operations have, perforce, been conducted in the immediate vicinity of the North Vietnamese border. We have developed some limited capability for deeper penetration by helicopters [*less than 1 line not declassified*]. Deeper penetration operations, however, require good low-level photography in order to pick out helicopter landing zones and develop operational plans. The JCS has been most cooperative in attempting to provide us with the necessary photography. There has been an enormous increase of North Vietnamese antiaircraft and air defense capability in the most likely target areas. As a result of this, the JCS has been unable to provide us with the kind of low-level photography that is essential to mount an effective sabotage mission. They have been forced, because of the MIG threat, to fulfill our request for photography by the use of drone and SR–71 platforms. This kind of photography does not provide the necessary resolution for operational use. We therefore face the prospect that if we attempt to go on with this program we will have to employ U.S. reconnaissance planes and pilots in low-level photographic flights in an extremely hostile environment. To proceed would also involve risking [*less than 1 line not declassified*] helicopters and crews in missions which are unlikely to have any serious military or psychological effect on the North Vietnamese, but which would appear to run major political risks in the context of Congressional and public opinion.

5. In the light of the above, I feel we should phase out the present program and turn our efforts to the development of a structured program of deception and disinformation targeted at North Vietnam which will, I believe, cause North Vietnam considerably more trouble at much less risk to the U.S. interest. We will be able to use the

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[2] Attachment A is an undated list of 22 operations including target, weapon, data, and results; not printed.

penetration capability developed to date to place small intelligence teams on special missions inside North Vietnam against high priority intelligence targets.

6. I believe that at the present time North Vietnam would be particularly susceptible to a carefully orchestrated deception program worked out in close cooperation with your office. You will recall that we attempted such deception programs in the past on a limited basis in connection with both the Cambodian incursion and the Lamson 719 operation. We believe we have the channels through which we could convincingly move such deception material to the North Vietnamese, though to be effective the themes employed should be worked out in close cooperation with your office to ensure their consonance with Presidential policy and the negotiating situation between the U.S., North Vietnam, the People's Republic of China and the USSR. We have put at Attachment B a series of suggestions illustrating the kinds of themes that could be used. These are only presented as examples and the actual scenario in each case would have to be worked out with your office. We propose that you assign one member of your staff to work with us on an ad hoc basis to develop appropriate scenarios.

7. I recommend therefore:

a. That we phase out of paramilitary action operations against North Vietnam.

b. Agreement in principle to develop a series of deception and disinformation operations against North Vietnam designed to compound the problems of North Vietnam's leaders and simultaneously increase the attractiveness, in their eyes, of a negotiated settlement of the Vietnam war and a termination of their military effort in South Vietnam.

Richard Helms[3]

Attachment B

PROPOSED LEGENDS

1. The U.S. and Communist China are negotiating a secret protocol or agreement under which the U.S., in return for cessation of Chinese military assistance to the DRV and renewal of the Open Door policy in Sino-American relations, will guarantee (a) the territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China and (b) removal of residual elements of the U.S. 7th Fleet from the Taiwan Straits. (This line, if believed in Hanoi, should expedite serious negotiations since it would point to the beginning of the end of military assistance either from or through China.)

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[3] Printed from a copy that bears Helms's typed signature with an indication that he signed the original.

2. President Nixon is considering offering a deal to the USSR whereby in return for significantly reduced Soviet aid to the DRV, including elimination of all military aid, the U.S. will agree to a European security conference and agreements facilitating the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Europe. (This line could have high impact on Hanoi, since the USSR currently provides 80 percent of DRV's foreign assistance.)

3. A faction inside the DRV Politburo is planning a coup motivated by the belief that increased emphasis should be placed on rebuilding the DRV economy as opposed to the primacy of the war policy. This coup will be supported by Peking, which is acting on behalf of the U.S. in return for significant support to Chinese industrial development. (This line could be reinforced by reopening the Hoang Minh Chinh affair of 1967 and offering some plausible evidence to support the idea that Hoang and his cohorts were, in fact, Chinese—or Soviet—agents of influence. The result could be increased suspicion and repression within the leadership structure with a concomitant diminution in drive and efficiency.)

4. An upper-middle level Soviet official, in a recent briefing of Japanese Communist Party officials, confided that it was not in the Soviet Union's interest for Hanoi to be too successful or for the Americans to suffer an ignominious defeat. It would be much better for the big powers involved to have Hanoi bloody its head indefinitely in combat with a reasonably strong GVN. This would keep North Vietnam from suffering delusions of grandeur about who calls the shots on communist movements elsewhere in Southeast Asia, especially in Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia. The Japanese should therefore make clear to their business interests that large-scale investment in North Vietnam would not be financially prudent for the foreseeable future. Safer and more significant returns could be achieved through economic development and investment in Siberia. (The objective here would be to reinforce whatever views the Hanoi leadership may have that the USSR is prepared to play big-power politics and sell the DRV down the river when the Soviets' own national interests are at stake.)

5. During President Nixon's visit to Peking, Chinese officials applauded the American decision to provide a multi-billion dollar postwar aid program to South and North Vietnam. They urged the Americans, however, to place careful restrictions on this aid. They said that aid should either be in the form of hard goods or light industrial plants and that the U.S. should be cautious that aid not be given in such a form as to enable Hanoi to use it to acquire hegemony over the other Indochina states of Laos and Cambodia. (This line would reinforce to Hanoi's leadership the prospect of an emerging conflict of interest between China and North Vietnam in Indochina, with consequent worry that future Chinese aid might be less generous.)

38. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, March 11, 1972.

Looking ahead on Vietnam we must take several political factors into consideration as we draw near to the Democratic Convention in early July.

I would not be surprised if the Democrats might lie low a bit on Vietnam insofar as troop withdrawals are concerned with the idea that they would like to have a pretty large residual force in Vietnam at the time of the Convention so that they could make an issue of the fact that after three years we still have not ended the American involvement. In other words, we should not take any particular comfort in the fact that Vietnam at the moment is not an issue. It is not an issue only because they are not making it an issue and may not even want to do so on a massive scale at this point. We can be sure, however, that once their Convention meets with the anti-war crowd constituting a majority of the delegates they will have a platform plank and an acceptance speech on the part of their candidate which will take us on hard on this issue unless we have defused substantially by that time.

I do not want to do anything in the April announcement[2] that will in any way reduce the chances for some success on the negotiating front in the meeting you have in Paris at that time.[3] As you know, I have very little confidence in what such a meeting may accomplish and I do not believe that they are going to negotiate until after the election. But in any event, we have to play the negotiating string out but we must not let that string hang us in the fall by failing to do what we can to present the very best possible case for our position on the assumption that no negotiated settlement will have been reached.

As far as the troop announcement in April is concerned, whether it is for one month or two months or three months is irrelevant. What is vital, however, is that a final announcement of some kind must be made before the Democratic Convention in July. Either in April or in June when we return from Moscow our announcement must be one which indicates that all American combat forces have left, that the resid-

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1971. Eyes Only.

[2] On April 26, Nixon announced that an additional 20,000 United States troops would be withdrawn during May–June, reducing the number to about 49,000 by July 1. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, p. 552)

[3] Reference is to a meeting between Kissinger and the North Vietnamese tentatively scheduled to take place in late April.

ual force will be retained there until we get our POWs, that the residual force will be a solely volunteer force, and whatever else we can develop along those lines.

What I am emphasizing is that for over three years and through 12 fruitless meetings in Paris we have pursued the negotiating front. I think we must continue to do so throughout May and June for reasons that we are both aware. But before the Democratic Convention we must make a final announcement of some type or we will be in very serious trouble.

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39. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

March 11, 1972, 11:10 a.m.

P: Hello, how are you? What is the situation with regard to that Vietnam thing? You say Moorer believes no extensive strikes are necessary?

K: No. Moorer would like to make extensive strikes, but I think it would be a mistake. If they are going to attack they have moved supplies into position now. We don't have to attack North Vietnam to knock out supplies for whatever offensive they do next week.

P: I am not talking about North Vietnam. I am talking about attacks in South Vietnam.

K: In South Vietnam they are going full blast.

P: Are we trying to concentrate in B–3 area, or just dazzling around as usual?

K: I will have to check.

P: I understand they can't hit everything but if they will just hit something instead of just sporadically.

K: They are doing 50% more now than before the NSC meeting.[2] I will give Moorer a call.

P: Pound him in terms of hitting the South—that is where supplies and personnel are. Get in there and do something about it.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 13, Chronological File, March 11–17, 1972. No classification marking. Nixon was at Camp David; Kissinger was in Washington.

[2] See Document 13.

K: If they find military things in the DMZ north of the line that is technically North Vietnam but it is a violation of the DMZ.

P: Yes. I think the North Vietnamese strikes can come. I don't think they are going to do a lot of good but if they come have them come after the offensive breaks.

K: I think so, because then we can put it on the basis that they tricked us. We made every effort to talk to them. We told them there would be no escalation and nevertheless they hit us.

P: How do you go about that?

K: We would have to decide whether we want them to blow the channel again but we could gear that to the intensity of the attacks. But we could just hit them. We told the Chinese and the Russians we would do it.

P: That's right. The point of hitting them we have to weigh in terms of what good it does. As far as psychological good, I don't know at this point.

K: I think not hitting them would be psychologically weak.

P: In that case we do it, but if we do it we have got to make it worthwhile. Since they sent those MIGs up we should take out 2 or 3 airfields.

K: They would like to take out MIGs and SAMs.

P: Certainly we ought to be able to do something in the general area.

K: I think it is further south.

P: The airfield?

K: Yes, I think in the Dong Hoi area about 30 miles north of the DMZ.

P: When we do hit it I think we should let [*tell*] the Chinese particularly, and the Russians—it doesn't matter, the Chinese immediately when it is done. They call off their dogs, otherwise they take the consequences.

K: We should do it not more than 3 days or a 2-day package and let it sit for a while.

P: It doesn't make any difference whether 2 or 5, two is enough psychologically. I think we have got to get that across to the Air Force people—the psychological effect would be just hitting the North. But it is not going on for several days. They must remember that. They don't have the weather problem, do they? Or do they always have the weather problem?

K: We haven't had a month they didn't have the weather problem. From the middle of the month it should be improving in the North and getting worse in South Vietnam. That is why I think if they do attack it will be over by May 1.

P: Sure. The thing I was going to say—Thompson's evaluation—did it take into account this attack? He believes the attack can be contained?[3]

K: He wants an attack. He thinks it will be badly defeated.

P: He told me it would be contained. He even goes further with you.

K: He thinks it will be badly defeated. The South Vietnamese fight well according to him. After that the North Vietnamese will be finished until well into 1974 and after that we won't even need much airpower. I know his predictions usually sound wild but they are almost always right.

P: We know. He never missed a thing. Haldeman was just telling me Humphrey said yesterday he would withdraw all Americans ten days after he was elected.[4]

K: Sickening. That is not the issue. The issue is will he overthrow Thieu and cut off economic aid.

[Omitted here is discussion of China, including the logistics of the upcoming trip to China by Senators Michael J. Mansfield and Hugh D. Scott.]

P: They [Mansfield and Scott] did not discuss Vietnam with us. If he [Mansfield] says what will you do with Vietnam it must be that—and Sihanouk.

K: Only he [Mansfield] will see Sihanouk, and I can't control Sihanouk.

P: I think it is important for them to understand that under our system only I can talk about Vietnam and they must give them nothing on Vietnam. Mansfield is likely to come back and say the President

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[3] Kissinger forwarded Sir Robert Thompson's trip report to Nixon three days later with the following comment: "If the coming offensive is defeated with heavy losses to the enemy, as Sir Robert expects, he believes North Vietnam will be thwarted in its purpose and the threat of its marauding army will be indefinitely containable with only limited American aid and assistance in accordance with the Guam Doctrine. Protracted war will have been defeated by stable war which is more peaceful and prosperous for the people of Indochina than a losing peace." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 21, Chronological File, 1–27 Mar. 1972) Beginning in 1969, Thompson, a British counterinsurgency expert, traveled to Vietnam as a White House consultant and then reported to Nixon and Kissinger. The trip report referred to was the result of a February visit to Vietnam by Thompson. The Guam Doctrine, better known as the Nixon Doctrine, came into being on July 25, 1969 when the President announced that henceforth the policy of the United States in conflicts would be as follows: "we would furnish only the material and the military and economic assistance to those nations willing to accept the responsibility of supplying the manpower to defend themselves." To this Nixon made only one exception: if a nuclear power attacked ann American ally or friend, the United States would "respond with nuclear weapons." (*RN*, p. 395)

[4] Former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey was a contender for the Democratic nomination for President.

was unable to get anything done but I got an arrangement with the Chinese where if we will do this and that the Chinese will release . . .

K: That's not possible.

P: You can't trust Mansfield. Mansfield, as a Democrat, is likely to come back and say he was able to negotiate with the Chinese better than we were.

K: I will make the Chinese understand that we will take it very ill if they get involved . . .

P: . . . in any substantive discussions on Vietnam—right?

K: Right.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

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40. Memorandum From the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency (Carver), to Director of Central Intelligence Helms[1]

Washington, March 13, 1972.

SUBJECT

13 March Session with Secretary Laird

1. My 13 March 1972 session with Secretary Laird was relatively brief and even more banteringly informal than usual. General Pursley was the only other person present (i.e., Deputy Secretary Rush was not there). As the mess steward was serving coffee, Laird—in high good humor—regaled me with an account of his just completed DOD staff meeting. Apparently, he had forcefully enunciated his position on NATO force reductions, a position considerably at variance with that of the service chiefs. Contentedly puffing a cigar, he observed that once he had made his remarks the room was filled with the noise of pens scratching under the table in an exercise that Pursley described as "real-time redrafting." This anecdote is here relayed because I consider it relevant to some of the developments noted below.

2. Most of the meeting's substantive discussion revolved around Laos and, particularly, Vang Pao's projected new offensive operation,

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[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–R01720R, Box 7, GAC [George A. Carver] Chronology, March 1972. Top Secret. Copies were sent to Colby, Karamessines, and Nelson.

Strength II.[2] Laird said he hoped no one thought he was being obstructive over the weekend but he had had a problem. On 8 March, Abrams sent in a flash message to Admirals Moorer and McCain in the Specat channel (copy attached)[3] outlining five major threats with which MACV was currecently faced: the DMZ area, the B–3 Front, the lower trail net in Laos, and Long Tieng/PDJ. In the final paragraph of that 8 March message, Abrams explicitly addressed himself to Vang Pao's proposed offensive describing Vang Pao's initiative as commendable but cautioning against undertaking a sixth requirement for U.S. air support on top of the five MACV already faced in Indochina.

3. Laird explained that he had not been able to endorse Vang Pao's plan until he had satisfied himself with respect to Abrams' problems.[4] He also expressed irritation at the fact that the White House, in various telephone conversations on Saturday morning (11 March), had claimed that Vang Pao's operation was endorsed by the JCS. This was simply not true, or at least that was not what the Chiefs had told him. He also said—reflecting overt amusement that imperfectly masked private annoyance—that Godley's message to the White House, the Secretary of State and the Director might have included him as an addressee since his resources were the ones being called on.[5] In any event, if he was ever faced with a conflict between backing Abrams and backing Godley he would never hesitate for a moment to support General Abrams. In amplifying these remarks, Laird had Pursley secure a copy of Abrams' 8 March message which Laird then passed to me for my information. I thanked him but noted lightly that it would have been very useful if we had had this text three days ago. He grinned but did not respond.

4. There are several things at work here. The Specat message in question is clearly the one Tom Polgar saw in Saigon and flagged to our attention by cable, though it was never released to us until Laird handed it to me on the 13th. The point about the Chiefs also merits amplification. When Bill Nelson talked to General Knowles on, I believe, Friday (10 March) Knowles did indeed say that the Chiefs endorsed Vang Pao's plan. What almost certainly happened was that Moorer and/or his colleagues reversed field smartly when they sensed Laird's personal reluctance.

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[2] Elements of Vang Pao's Hmong force were infiltrating northeast of the Plain of Jars to attack and divert North Vietnamese troops from the area around Long Tieng, but the North Vietnamese refused to engage and Strength II failed.

[3] Printed as Document 35.

[4] Haig approved the operation, in Kissinger's name, before Laird himself decided to support it; see Document 36.

[5] Laird was presumably referring to message 1181 from Vientiane, Document 21.

5. Laird now claims to be a supporter of the Vang Pao operation though he cautions that there may not be air assets available to bail Vang Pao's troops out of difficulty if difficulties arise simultaneously with the outbreak of serious hostilities on other major Indochina fronts. Laird also asked that I make sure that any information or reporting on Vang Pao's operation be promptly passed to General Pursley for him.

6. The above conversation prompted Laird into a general discourse on the situation in Laos and his budgetary problems, particularly those deriving from the 350 million dollar Symington ceiling.[6] According to Laird, Defense had already programmed 390 million dollars for Laos operations through 30 June on matters that came within the ambit of Symington's restrictions. Something, hence, would have to give. Clearly reflecting traffic in military channels which I have not seen, Laird grumbled a bit about "fresh lettuce" and other foodstuffs that are apparently now being airlifted to Vang Pao's troops at a cost Laird professes to find excessive. He did say that starting "this week" he might be forced to institute some "rationing" of deliveries in order to curtail the expenditure rate in an effort to stay within shooting distance of the Symington ceiling. I mentioned that, as he knew, there had been a lengthy discussion of this whole problem at the 10 March LIG meeting at the White House, chaired by General Haig and attended on our behalf by [*name not declassified*].[7] It was my understanding that serious consideration was being given to seeking relief from some of the strictures the ceiling imposed. (I did not remind Laird that a considerable part of our problem derives from the inaccurate Defense Department figures on which the $350 million limitation was originally based.) Laird said he knew of the discussions in question, but even if the Administration did go back to Congress, he still felt that Laos expenditures had to be reduced.

7. The remainder of the session was devoted to a brief discussion of Cambodian politics and a review of current enemy troop movements in South Vietnam.

George A. Carver, Jr.[8]

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[6] Reference is to an effort in Congress led by Senator Symington to restrict United States activities in Laos by limiting the amount of money that could be spent. He and his anti-war colleagues had imposed a similar restriction on United States activities in Cambodia.

[7] The Legislative Interdepartmental Group coordinated congressional liaison activities on foreign affairs and defense matters for the White House, NSC, CIA, Department of State, Department of Defense, and Department of Justice.

[8] Carver initialed "GAC" above his typed signature.

41. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense's Military Assistant (Pursley) to the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency (Carver)[1]

Washington, March 14, 1972.

SUBJECT

Study Parameters for Net Assessment of DRV/RVNAF Forces

Secretary Laird's requested comparative analysis and net assessment of the DRV armed forces and the RVNAF hopefully could cover the following parameters:

- troop levels (quantity and quality)
- equipment
- training
- leadership
- morale.

In addition, the Secretary would like an assessment of the overall capability of each force to

- defend its own territory, and
- project its military power across national boundaries.

The Secretary would appreciate the net assessment to be based upon:

- The status as of 1 January 1972, and separately,
- The projected status as of 1 January 1973.

You may assume that the projected military assistance to the DRV will be at those levels of the recent past. The projected assistance to the RVNAF can likewise be assumed to be at levels which, in essence, are projected from the trends of the recent past. You may treat US air and naval support parametrically; but it would be reasonable to assume declining levels of direct US military support.

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[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–R01720R, Box 7, GAC [George A. Carver] Chronology, March 1972. Secret; Sensitive. Carver sent Pursley's memorandum to members of the CIA Ad Hoc Indochina Group, informally called "the brethren," to obtain their views on the scope of the study as defined by Pursley. In his March 15 transmittal memorandum, Carver wrote: "My intent is to see if we can arrive at a consensus view on what we are prepared to undertake, a view I would then present to the Director for his approval and subsequently communicate to Secretary Laird." (Ibid.)

In addition to the net assessments outlined above, Secretary Laird is interested, as you know, in the quantitative and qualitative arms limitations imposed on the DRV by Moscow and Peking. In particular, he would appreciate your judgments on:

- What accounts for the current levels of USSR/PRC military aid, which, by reports we have seen, are lower than levels provided in the late 1960s?
- What operating limitations, if any, do the lower military aid levels put on the DRV?
- What accounts for the qualitative arms limitations, if any, imposed by Moscow and/or Peking (e.g., why haven't the Soviets provided SA–3s etc.)?
- What operating limitations have qualitative limitations put on the DRV forces?
- What would be the impact on the military situation in SEA if Moscow and/or Peking were to increase substantially the quantitative, and/or qualitative military assistance levels? to decrease, say cut in half, the military assistance levels?[2]

Robert E. Pursley[3]
Major General, USAF

[2] The brethren met on March 16 and Carver reported to Helms the next day. While directing his staff to move ahead on the analysis and assessment Pursley had requested, Carver told Helms that three issues needed clarification: (1) the wisdom and feasibility of the CIA undertaking a project typically carried out by the military; (2) the anger of the military once the CIA's involvement became clear (as it would since Carver's staff would have to obtain information from the military); and (3) the military's understandable desire that the project's result should reach Laird as a joint, coordinated paper. On this point, Carver noted: "This, however, is precisely what Laird has explicitly told me he does not want, expressing his thoughts forcefully in statements interlarded with impolitic and very unflattering aspersions on the services in general and DIA in particular." (Memorandum from Carver to Helms, March 17; ibid.)

[3] Pursley signed "Bob" above his typed signature.

42. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon[1]

Washington, March 14, 1972.

SUBJECT

Request for Operating Authorities to Counter the North Vietnamese Threat

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has forwarded a request for additional authorities to assist in countering the enemy threat in Southeast Asia. He has requested permission to conduct air and naval gunfire attacks against North Vietnam south of 18°N latitude until 1 May 1972. I have earlier provided the Chairman's request, as well as General Abrams' message initiating the request.[2] In this memorandum I shall provide my judgments on the proposed action. Recognizing the difficulties and pressures under which our field commanders and units are operating, I conclude nonetheless that, on balance, it would not be wise now to accede to the request. I prefer the course of (a) continuing the extensive operating authorities now in existence and (b) authorizing the three twenty-four (24) hour strikes requested earlier against occupied SAM sites in the limited L-shaped area closest to the DMZ and Laotian border passes.

Situation in SEA

The Chairman's assessment of the current enemy dispositions is consistent with other available intelligence. The NVA have concentrated their forces so that they are capable of launching multiregimental assaults simultaneously in northern Military Region (MR) 1, the Central Highlands, western MR 3, and at Long Tieng in northern Laos. It is entirely possible that the NVA may be able to achieve a short-term victory on one or more of these potential battlefields. On the other hand, I do not foresee, on the basis of information now available, the North Vietnamese being able to overwhelm friendly forces to the extent that the progress of Vietnamization is reversed.

The enemy has apparently strengthened his air defense capability in southern North Vietnam with a buildup of MIGs, Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs), and Anti-aircraft Artillery (AAA). This air defense provides protection for his long-range artillery, tanks, and ground forces

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0095, 385.1, Viet. Top Secret; Sensitive.

[2] See Document 35 and footnote 3 thereto.

located adjacent to the DMZ, and is a threat to friendly air forces operating in northern MR 1 of South Vietnam and the Laotian panhandle. Our losses to NVA air defenses over recent weeks and months have been light, especially in relation to the large numbers of sorties flown. In January 1972 the US lost two aircraft to hostile causes while flying nearly 19,000 sorties of all types (attack, recce, etc.). The resulting loss rate to hostile causes was less than one-fourth that experienced by US forces in the CY 1966–68 period and was less than half that experienced in CY 1971. In the last full year of operations, CY 1971, we flew nearly 260,000 sorties of all types in Southeast Asia, losing 72 aircraft to hostile causes. It is clear the enemy poses a threat to our air operations. It is equally clear we are able to continue effective air operations. The existence of the growing NVA air defenses does require the occasional diversion of US air missions from primary targets. The NVA air defenses also require the assignment of escort aircraft dedicated to suppression of the defenses. The authorities and measures now in effect for US forces dilute partially the weight of effort we might otherwise put against NVA non-air defense targets. That dilution is not, in my judgment, of major proportions. We have dropped in excess of 150,000 tons of air ordnance on key targets in Southeast Asia since 1 January. The freedom to execute these air operations has in no small part, I believe, accounted for Hanoi's inability to date to generate the expected major offensive operations.

Implications of the Chairman's Request for Expanded Authorities

The Chairman's 9 March memorandum emphasized that short one-time strikes, as we have used since November 1968, do not permit using our full potential to counter the enemy. The Chairman does not contend, however, there is no military value in the limited duration, limited area strikes.

The thrust of the Chairman's request for additional authorities is to reopen the bombing campaign, which was terminated by the 1968 bombing halt, against North Vietnam. A prolonged and widespread resumption of air attacks against NVN south of 18°N has serious implications for the eventual shape of events in Southeast Asia. Such bombing would terminate our adherence to the November 1968 Understandings. I agree that enemy provocation to terminate recognition of the Understandings is great. It is true, however, that Hanoi has abided by the Understandings in a relative sense. In particular, the NVA forces—for whatever reasons—have used the DMZ and shelled populated areas less since November 1968 than before that date. The Understandings have served as a constraint which, if lifted, would have significant negative impacts for the Republic of Vietnam. I do not agree that we should abandon lightly the hope they hold for restraint on the war and the precedent they offer for future negotiations.

A second matter which should be weighed in your consideration of the new authority is that there has been no flagrant provocation for renewed air attacks. He has not moved major forces directly across the DMZ. The military activity in Southeast Asia is still low. Resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam now would heighten the controversy over the war. The resultant widely publicized escalation, as contrasted with the unpublicized enemy provocation, could result in criticism for enlarging the scope of the war.

I am not convinced, moreover, that the reported enemy preparations for an offensive would be thwarted by extending our air strikes to the 18th parallel or by placing munitions in the northern half of the DMZ. The majority of threatening forces are now concentrated in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. I have described to you in earlier memoranda the measures we have taken to delay the expected enemy offensive. I have expressed the belief that our extensive air operations are inflicting a substantial, though indefinite, toll on the enemy. We should continue to direct our effort to attacking these concentrations. Should the enemy launch a major attack through the DMZ, or offer a clear provocation by massive support of an attack from immediately north of the DMZ, we could then reassess the Chairman's request.

Summary

I do not believe that executing the measures which the Chairman has recommended is warranted now. Of the measures proposed, standing authorities permit engagement of enemy aircraft airborne below 18°N; strikes against active GCI sites when enemy aircraft are airborne and indicate hostile intent; and engagement of AAA and long-range artillery when fired upon friendly forces. I have separately recommended that you authorize limited-duration strikes against occupied SAM sites in North Vietnam within 19NM of the PMDL and the NVN/Laotian border as far north as 19NM above Mu Gia Pass.[4] Current measures fulfill your responsibilities to protect the lives of our servicemen. The additional authority requested for three 24-hour strikes against SAM sites would help to alleviate a specific part of the enemy threat; but that authority is not, in my judgment, critical to the outcome of the so-called dry-season activity.

I recommend we stay with existing authorities, with the exception that you allow me to authorize at a relatively early date the twenty-four (24) hour anti-SAM missions requested earlier.

Melvin R. Laird

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[4] See Document 34.

43. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, March 14, 1972.

Nixon: At a certain point, we must make a dramatic announcement that—which in effect will say, like something like: "Well, we've got to keep our people there until we get our prisoners," or something like that—

Kissinger: I couldn't agree more—

Nixon: Now, as a matter of fact, let me be quite candid, [unclear] at this point, having stuck with Thieu as long as we have, if they can't make it, then it's a bad bargain, and we just can't stick around on the ground. It's going to affect ourselves all over the world. You know what I mean? I think they can make it. That's my view, but if we stick around—I'm not speaking about getting out now, but I'm speaking about saying we'll stay another five years with air power and all the rest, it just doesn't go. It won't wash. It won't wash as a, as a use of American strength.

Kissinger: No, but I think that five years is ridiculous. But—

Nixon: That's what [unclear]—

Kissinger: —I think at this stage, though, we have to balance—well, first of all, in my judgment, I think the April announcement ought to be a nothing announcement.[2]

Nixon: I agree. Just say nothing. We may not even make one.

Kissinger: Or just a few thousand, and just do it—

Nixon: Well, obviously, we'll then just say the withdrawals will continue, we'll have another announcement in May, if everything—

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: The withdrawal has—

Kissinger: Or June.

Nixon: —already begun. Don't even give a number. Just say, "Withdrawals will be continuing. We'll have another announcement [unclear]."

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 685–2. 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, 9:03–9:51 a.m.

[2] Kissinger was referring to the next announcement of U.S. troop withdrawals from South Vietnam. See foonote 2, Document 38.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: I won't say anything this time.

Kissinger: Because we are—I think that should be a nothing one. By the middle of June, off the Moscow trip, or even later than June, depending on how you need it.

Nixon: It isn't a question of whether we need it. It's a question—it has to be then, do you see? You know how the political conventions work. Two weeks before the Democratic Convention begins, they start hearings on the platform.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: It is there they will make the issue on Vietnam. Now the issue isn't worth a damn, but they can make it worth a damn. You know what I mean? They'll say, "All the rushing in there, well, now we still have 50,000 in Vietnam, and we're still bombing," et cetera, et cetera. And they'll be running over each other to say, "After four years Nixon has still got us in Vietnam and hasn't ended the war." We mustn't give them that issue. We've got to defuse it to the point where it's a nothing issue politically, but you see? And that's a very different thing from being a nothing issue with [unclear] you talked to the other day. See?

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: I urge you to think, I have no illusions about what they'll do with it.

Kissinger: Yeah, but I think—I think this—my own view is, well, first of all we get an all-volunteer army, we can set a figure which can be almost arbitrary—35,000, 30,000—of a residual force. I think we ought to announce going to that in the middle of June rather than now.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: And say we'll have reached that by the middle of July or something like that. Or the first of August and have it all volunteer. It doesn't make a hell of a lot of difference whether it's 40 or 30,000 at that point.

Nixon: I saw something in the news summary where, obviously, we thought they would exploit us for it, it said our real problem now is: how we are going to defend the remaining Americans? Now, that's bullshit. Look here, we can't defend them now as you well know. Okay, if they get hit with less than 100,000 there, we don't have any combat forces to defend people there.

Kissinger: So—

Nixon: 10,000.

Kissinger: So, that is—

Nixon: Right?

Kissinger: So that can be done. Also, we can then see—I share your judgment, almost certainly the negotiations aren't going to bring any, aren't going to bring anything. But there's just a slight chance—

Nixon: [unclear] If this happens soon it could get worse.

Kissinger: Absolutely. If they don't produce anything then the only thing we have to balance is not to let the thing unravel before November because then—

Nixon: Let—then South Vietnam unravels.

Kissinger: That's right. Then—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: Then we'd really be vulnerable. That, I think, would make us more vulnerable than a small, residual force of volunteers.

Nixon: I agree.

Kissinger: Who the hell can—

Nixon: You understand, nothing is to be done at the cost of unraveling. On the other hand, we mustn't—we mustn't go overboard in terms of every time Thieu sneezes then we get a cold. And we've got to talk the talk tough—

Kissinger: Well, but Thieu has been pretty good.

Nixon: I know. But we must have—he must have—

Kissinger: But if we can't get—

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: Mr. President, I think that would—

Nixon: He'd expect too much.

Kissinger: Also it will—it will draw attention to Vietnam. I'd rather take a trip out there.

Nixon: The best way to do that is to just [unclear]—

Kissinger: Have Haig go out there.

Nixon: Huh? Yeah.

Kissinger: I think that's better. If I go there—

Nixon: [unclear] I know. Haig can go.

Kissinger: It will make—

Nixon: You see what I'm getting at here? Thieu has got to stand firm on any kind of an announcement we make, having in mind the fact: don't give the Democrats an issue.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Don't give the anti-war people an issue, Henry. That's all we're saying.

Kissinger: I couldn't agree more. But if we can, I think you'll—

Nixon: And we might get—we might get a negotiation out of it—

Kissinger: Right—

Nixon: —[unclear]—

Kissinger: We'll come out—if things break right, we'll come out of Moscow in a very strong position. It isn't just—

Nixon: It's not Moscow, as you know. The underlying goal is not whether we're right on Moscow or China, that helps us a great deal, but in terms of a political issue, Henry, it's like a—well, [unclear] it's like the ITT thing, nothing to the damn thing at all. ITT stock went down 12 points, and it's never recovered as a result of the trust settlement we imposed upon them. But they're making it an issue. Now, that's what this is. See, in the campaign they'll be made issues, not real issues. So we must not look at the merits. We must look to the politics of it.

[Omitted here is discussion on the importance of Nixon's trip to the People's Republic of China and the forthcoming U.S.-Soviet summit.]

Nixon: What we have got from a public standpoint, and Thieu has got to understand it, we've got to let it appear that we've got to keep a reserve force there because of POWs.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: That's the only justification of it. Say, "These volunteers are staying there because of their buddies in the North." People will support that. You noticed even that—even McGovern[3] had to come to that the other day. Even Humphrey has had to come to that. But if they say, "We are keeping a reserve force there for the purpose of surviv—of assuring the survival of the Thieu government," that is a very risky thing. That is the real reason. You and I know that—

Kissinger: But I don't exclude, Mr. President, that in June or July, we could just offer this total withdrawal for the POWs and get it hammered out—

Nixon: We could do that. And I didn't put that in there, because I don't want to—I do not want to do anything that will push the government down the tube. If we could do that, knowing that that's a straight POW [deal] for that, I would do it. But you've always said, and I agreed—

Kissinger: Yeah, but that was a year ago. We've got—

Nixon: You have always said, though, however, and I agree, that once we offer that they'll say, "Yes, we will do that provided you stop

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[3] Senator George S. McGovern (D–SD) was running against Humphrey for the Democratic nomination for President.

the bombing." And that we can't do. But on the other hand, if in June, Henry, that would solve—I don't care, it could be 50,000. You could leave 50,000 there if you could say in June, "We're now down to this force. We will retain this force until—and as soon as we get the POWs we will remove the force." Period.

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: We could say that.

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: That would be enough. I wouldn't need a thing more.

Kissinger: Well, let me take it—

Nixon: Volunteers in order—in order to get the POWs. Now, let me say, though, I'd only get—the other side of that, that I mentioned at length [unclear] which I—I've thought this out very carefully—it depends what we say. You remember we only have to live with that for three months. For three months we let that be the position, and Thieu's governing. Then in November, win or lose, we'll bomb the hell out of the bastards. Now, that's exactly the way I feel about it. There's not going to be anymore screwing around.

Kissinger: Well, you see, we've gone since then another year. I, frankly, would like an offensive to take place now, Mr. President for—

Nixon: That's what [Sir Robert] Thompson wants, I know—

Kissinger: Because if we had the offensive now and we didn't lose, we would be—we would know they couldn't do one in October. My nightmare is that they are husbanding all this stuff, and even though October isn't a good year—a good month, that they'll take it on in October.

Nixon: Yes.

Kissinger: Although, it's a hell of a gamble for them to take, because if they don't tip you over in October, then they've had it.

Nixon: And if it works.

Kissinger: You see, they're just—

Nixon: You understand, they'd take it either way, because if they think that as a result of losing the election, if we should lose the election because of their offensive, that I am just going to roll over and play dead, they're crazy. I'm still President until January. And I'll do what I—to hell with the goddamned [unclear]—

Kissinger: You also—

Nixon: [unclear] right in the butt.

Kissinger: The price they'll pay if you don't, if they wait this late, is that they'll pay if your image as a leader will be, in foreign policy, will be so cemented that they may be putting themselves away in an isolated position.

Nixon: Yeah, maybe. Do you think that they're even rational, though, Henry?

Kissinger: Yeah—

Nixon: That's our problem. You have always thought they were. I never did—

Kissinger: I think they're rational [unclear]—

Nixon: I think they're no different from the Koreans. I thought the Koreans were crazy, but I think these people [unclear]—

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: No, but, Mr. President, in fact they've been right so far; they haven't lost by being so tough.

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: It's a miracle that we have held on, given our domestic opposition—

Nixon: Yes.

Kissinger: I mean, if you had said on—

Nixon: And we're down to—what are the casualties this week?

Kissinger: Two.

Nixon: Hmm. Again, two.

Kissinger: We have lost—

Nixon: Do you think one day—isn't there one week when there's going to be none?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: Goddamnit, there could be one—one week, can't they? Well—

Kissinger: Mr. President, we have had fewer casualties all this year than in any week last year—than any week in the first six months of last year, and less than one percent of the casualties we had when we came in.

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: 60–70 percent of all the casualties in your administration were incurred in the first year, 48 percent in the first six months. In other words, I think we should go on the offensive. We should say these people—every quarter, every area in the world, when we came in was in turmoil. We quieted them all down. If you had said that you could pull 520,000 troops out of Vietnam, which is what you have done—

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: —and not lead to collapse, I think it would have been considered unbelievable.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

44. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, March 18, 1972.

SUBJECT

Request for Operating Authorities to Counter the North Vietnamese Threat

On March 8, 1972, the Secretary of Defense sent you a memorandum advising that General Abrams, CINCPAC, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff had asked for additional operating authorities to counter the increasing North Vietnamese air defense threat (Tab C).[2] Specifically, they wanted authority to attack any occupied SAM sites and associated equipment in the area of the south North Vietnamese panhandle which had previously been conveyed by NSDM 149[3] subject to your final approval. Secretary Laird alternatively proposed that authority be given for three 24-hour strikes against such sites on the ground that more extensive strikes over an indefinite period entailed high risks and costs.

General Abrams subsequently reiterated his request and, in addition, asked for authority for naval gunfire attacks against SAM targets in North Vietnam south of 18 degrees, citing the serious buildup of enemy air defense capabilities. General Abrams also requested authority to employ area denial munitions in the northern portion of the DMZ. Admiral McCain and Admiral Moorer support General Abrams' request. (Tab D)[4]

By memorandum dated March 14, 1972, Secretary Laird has again reviewed these requests (Tab B).[5] He has again concluded that it would be unwise to accede to the requests. He proposes instead that the extensive existing authorities which you have approved be continued and that three 24-hour strikes against occupied SAM sites in the limited L-shaped area closest to the DMZ and the Laotian border passes be approved as he had earlier recommended.

—Mr. Laird believes that the authorities requested by the military commanders would, in effect, reinstitute a major bombing campaign with attendant high political cost unjustified at this time by either the nature of the threat or the likely result. He argues that the effect could be

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 97, Vietnam Subject Files, Air Activity in Southeast Asia, Vol. IV, Sep–Dec 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for action. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Printed as Document 34.

[3] Document 15.

[4] Attached but not printed; dated March 10. For General Abrams's request, see Document 35.

[5] Printed as Document 42.

the removal of the last vestiges of constraint arising from bombing understandings of November 1968. Because the enemy has not yet moved major forces directly across the DMZ and the level of the military activity continues low despite the enemy's buildup, he believes that the authorities requested, if exercised, would be widely publicized as a major escalation with resulting criticism for enlarging the scope of the war.

—Moreover, Mr. Laird argues that our air campaign thus far has helped to delay the expected enemy offensive and that broadening the authorities at this time, as requested by the military commanders, would not further thwart the enemy's preparations.

Secretary Laird believes, therefore, that we should not grant these additional authorities now but be prepared to reassess the request should the enemy launch a major attack through the DMZ or offer a clear provocation by massive support of an attack from immediately north of the DMZ.

I agree with Secretary Laird's appraisal. I do not believe that you should at this time grant either the requested authorities for unlimited air attacks or for naval gunfire attacks on SAM sites north of the DMZ. I also recommend against granting the authority which Mr. Laird has proposed for three 24-hour attacks at this time. The costs and risks outweigh the advantages which might be gained by such strikes in the current circumstances.

I recommend, however, that you grant the authority for aerial emplacement of area denial munitions in the northern portions of the DMZ. The risks of this course are low and their emplacement now could seriously delay any enemy attack through the DMZ should he choose to mount one.

At Tab A is a memorandum for Secretary Laird which reaffirms the existing air authorities which you have already approved, denies the requests at this time for the additional air and naval gunfire authorities, and authorizes the mining of the northern portion of the DMZ.[6] It also informs Secretary Laird that should an enemy offensive begin the requests for additional authorities will be reassessed.

Recommendation

That you sign the memorandum to Secretary Laird at Tab A.[7]

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[6] Attached but not printed; dated March 18.

[7] The memorandum was signed by Nixon and sent to Laird on March 18. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0095, 385.1, Viet) A note on the Department of Defense copy reads: "Sec Def has seen." On March 22, Laird informed Moorer of the President's decision (National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 28, Vietnam, March 1972) and on March 24, Moorer informed McCain and Abrams in message JCS 6432. (Ibid.)

45. Editorial Note

On March 3, 1972, President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry A. Kissinger approved a plan devised by Ambassador William J. Porter for the public plenary sessions of the Paris Peace Talks. It required that the United States refuse to meet with the Communists on March 9, then agree to meet on March 16 and 23, but suspend future talks on the latter date. (Memorandum from John D. Negroponte to Kissinger, March 3; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1135, Jon Howe, Trip Files, John Negroponte Negotiations File, 1972–1973)

In the meetings on March 16 and 23, Porter urged the Communists to engage in meaningful negotiations and discussions on the prisoner of war issue. At the end of the March 23 meeting he suspended the talks, saying that the other side refused to engage in genuine negotiations and refused to take seriously the prisoner of war issue. Regarding the latter, Porter said: "It would be a mockery of our concern for them were we to sit in this room with you and listen to more of your blackmail and distortions to the effect that the prisoner of war issue is an 'imaginary problem.'" (Message 5594 from USDel Paris, March 23; ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–14 VIET)

President Richard M. Nixon, at his press conference the next day, emphasized that Porter had acted in accordance with his orders, saying: "There has been about a 3½-year filibuster at the peace talks on the part of the North Vietnamese. They have refused to negotiate seriously. They have used the talks for the purpose of propaganda while we have been trying to seek peace. Whenever the enemy is ready to negotiate seriously, we are ready to negotiate. And I would emphasize we are ready to negotiate in public channels or in private channels."

For the moment, however, the President said, "we are not going to continue to allow them to use this forum for the purpose of bully-ragging the United States in a propaganda forum rather than in seriously negotiating peace." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972,* page 488)

When the United States had proposed on February 14 that Kissinger meet in private with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy, North Vietnamese officials in Paris accepted the invitation, indicating any time after March 15 would be acceptable. (Message from Walters to Haig, February 14; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 862, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Memos, January–August 1972) The United States suggested March 20 and the North Vietnamese on February 29 agreed to that date. However, on March 7, claiming that the United States had bombed North Vietnam in violation of its promise not to, and also had refused to meet on March 2, the Communist side can-

celled the meeting. (Message from Guay to Haig, March 7; ibid., Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972)

Categorically rejecting the Communist accusations, the United States nonetheless accepted the cancellation and counter-proposed April 24. (Message from Kissinger to Guay, March 11; ibid., Box 867, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, HAK II, May 2–October 7, 1972 [5 of 5]) The North Vietnamese agreed but only on condition that the public talks be restarted. "If the United States wishes to show its serious attitude," proclaimed the diplomatic note handed to the Americans, "they should attend the customary [i.e., public] sessions of the Paris Conference. The RDVN wishes to inform the American side that if the work of the Paris Conference is resumed as is customary, Special Counselor Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy will agree to a private meeting with Dr. Henry Kissinger on 24 April at 1100 hours at the usual place." (North Vietnamese diplomatic note, undated, attached to memorandum for the record, prepared by Guay, March 28; ibid., Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [5 of 5])

North Vietnam valued the public talks and wanted them to continue. On April 17, Special Counselor Le Duc Tho in Hanoi cabled Minister Xuan Thuy in Paris: "We should maintain the Paris conference as a propaganda forum for our benefit and for direct settlement with the US later. The maintenance of the Paris forum is not because of our weakness but because we need it to combine with the battlefield in the struggle with the US." (*Le Duc Tho–Kissinger Negotiations in Paris,* page 214) The public talks did resume on April 27; see Document 102.

46. Backchannel Message From the Head of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks (Porter) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Paris, March 29, 1972, 1244Z.

666. 1. You might wish to consider desirability of informing other side that if they begin any major military activity while we are considering their demands to resume the Paris talks such activity would be considered an unacceptable reply to our desire to put the talks on a business-like basis.[2] You could add that another major military campaign might make it difficult to maintain the US Delegation in Paris.

2. Such notification would add to strains that may exist inside Politburo and might have effect of holding mil activity yet awhile even though they have apparently prepared their ground. It would provide further understanding, if they need it, of the firmness of our position; and it would be possibly useful reference in future as part of our efforts to reduce level of military activity in VN. Finally, I do not discern from here any important disadvantage such notification might bring to us.

3. See you soon. Best regards.

Porter

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 419, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages 1972, Paris, Watson and Porter. Secret; Eyes Only.

[2] On March 29, the Politburo in Hanoi sent a message to all major political and military commands in the South, which, among other things, made the following point: "On the diplomatic front, the enemy is slyly preparing public opinion so that when we launch our powerful attacks he can issue public statements placing the blame on us and using this as an excuse to launch intensified attacks against North Vietnam." (Politburo Cable No. 182/B to COSVN and the COSVN Military Party Committee, Military Region 5 Party Committee, and Tri Thien Region Party Committee, March 29; *Collected Party Documents*, Volume 33, 1972, p. 225)

The Easter Offensive, March 30–May 7, 1972

47. Editorial Note

On the morning of March 30, 1972, President Richard M. Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger, were discussing the latter's forthcoming trip to New York to meet with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and a proposed trip to China by Senators Michael J. Mansfield and Hugh D. Scott. In the midst of their discussion, one of Kissinger's aides entered and handed him a note. Kissinger then said to the President: "It looks as if they are attacking in Vietnam." The conversation continued:

Nixon: "The battle has begun?"

Kissinger: "Yeah, right at the DMZ. And the sons-of-bitches again, I made them check whether the—of course, the weather is too bad for us to bomb."

Nixon: "Hmm."

Kissinger: "We must have the world's worst air force."

Nixon: "What's the situation? They—is this the—this is an attack on a broad front?"

Kissinger: "It looks that way. It's—they have attacked eight fire support bases, which is usually the way these things start. And—"

Nixon: "How—?"

Kissinger: "And they are attacking within range of the SAMs in North—"

Nixon: "How are they doing?"

Kissinger: "It says they're doing fairly well, but, you know, the first six hours of an attack, you know, who can tell?"

Nixon: "How's the ARVN doing? It's done fairly well?"

Kissinger: "Yeah. That's what they say. It says they're reacting well, but—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "—but you can't really believe them. I think if this is a real attack, we should hit the SAMs in North Vietnam—"

Nixon: "Sure."

Kissinger: "—that are protecting—and we told them we were going to do it."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "And—"

Nixon: "Well, I don't see why we don't do it right now. Is it—it's weather?"

Kissinger: "Well, let's wait until the end of the day to see whether it's a real attack or just a blip."

A few minutes further into the exchange, the two began to discuss in more detail a possible immediate response:

Nixon: "Well, now, let me ask—what the hell is the situation here?"

Kissinger: "Well, I, Mr. President, before I—"

Nixon: "Should we start bombing right now? I mean, [unclear]—"

Kissinger: "I think it is infinitely better for us that the attack is coming now. My nightmare—"

Nixon: "I understand that."

Kissinger: "My nightmare was—"

Nixon: "September—"

Kissinger: "—that they'd do it in September and October."

Nixon: "That's right."

Kissinger: "If—we'll either win or lose. And I don't think we'll lose because, as I watched them in Laos, for example, there's no reason why they haven't been able to take Long Tieng yet."

Nixon: "They haven't done that—?"

Kissinger: "And—except the fact that they're a lot weaker than they used to be. And if we—they'll use up their supplies this way and we know when this is over there isn't going to be anything the rest of the year. I think it's a hell of a lot better—"

Nixon: "I agree. Oh, I'm not concerned about the attack, but I am concerned about the counterattack. By God, you've got the Air Force there. Now, get them off their ass and get them up there and hit everything that moves—"

Kissinger: "Well, I think if this attack continues 24 hours, then we should hit them by Sunday or Monday [April 2 or 3]—"

Nixon: "I want you to call Moorer and tell him that I want a plan ready, and they are to meet and agree—"

Kissinger: "I think a 48-hour attack."

Nixon: "48-hour attack? Great."

Kissinger: "And that—"

Nixon: "Fine, but, but don't scatter it around. Hit—hit in ways that are going to affect this thing."

Kissinger: "That's right. Well, just north of the DMZ is the place to do it—"

Nixon: "Is that where it is?"

Kissinger: "Yeah."

Nixon: "Like within—like the B–3 strike there? [Nixon had ordered a massive airstrike in the Highlands (the B–3 Front) in early February; see Document 17 and footnote 3 thereto.] Is that what you think?—"

Kissinger: "Yes, sir. And that would get rid of the—we could take out the SAMs there, plus the supplies. And then they can go in with gunships against this attack."

Nixon: "Is that right?"

Kissinger: "Yeah." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 697–2)

In the wake of this conversation, Brigadier General Alexander Haig, the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, called Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to find out what was happening. Haig's call compelled Moorer to make a series of calls of his own and to hold conferences with his senior JCS subordinates throughout the day. Moorer recorded in his diary on March 30, the substance of the calls and meetings.

Regarding Haig's call at 9:57 a.m., Moorer wrote: "He asked if there was any additional activity indicated in South Vietnam. I briefed him on what I knew, that there was not much new, a MIG crossed into South Vietnam (the first time), tried to get back to Vinh and could not make it, was fogged in and finally bailed out. We had a MIG engagement over Mu Gia Pass and our F–4s claim they shot down one MIG. They are building two fields in the southern part of North Vietnam. They have sent down more aircraft, there are 12 planes south of 20 degrees now.

"Haig indicated they had a report about 8 ARVN FSB under ground attacks. That they may be an indication that the NVN are moving South. I told him I would check on it right away, I knew there was some firings but not ground attacks. I told him about the [C–]130 being shot down and although this was not the first time they have been fired upon, it is the first time they have been hit by SAMs.

"The President told HAK he may want to hit them hard up North. We need to go after the SAMs and their supply points. We have a request to strike SAM sites and we will watch it closely." (Moorer Diary, March 30; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

In a series of telephone calls that worked up the chain of command in the J–3 (Operations) section of JCS, Moorer spoke with the Assistant Deputy Director for Operations, Colonel Jack N. Butts; the Deputy Director for Operations, Brigadier General Harold F. Knowles; and the Director for Operations, Lieutenant General Melvin Zais. Of the first call, made at 10:01 a.m. to Butts, Moorer wrote: "I asked if he had any word of major ground attacks along the DMZ. He said yes, they had an item that the enemy launched coordinated attacks. I asked why I was not told. He said they sent it in to the [JCS] briefers to brief, and at the same time they LDX'd it to the White House." (Ibid.)

Next, Moorer contacted Knowles at 10:06 a.m.: "I asked about the attacks on the Fire Support Bases and said I found out about it from a call from the White House.

"The DDO passed it to DIA and the J–3 Briefer and expected that it was to be briefed. Somehow it was not. I said it is very embarrassing; do not send anything to the White House unless SecDef, me and General Vogt know about it. They think we do not know what is going on. I asked them to call MACV and check on the activity." (Ibid.)

At 10:11 a.m., he called Zais: "I asked Zais if he knew about the enemy launching the coordinated attacks against 8 FSB's south of the DMZ. He said attacks by fire he was aware of. No, I said these were ground attacks. The SVN had withdrawn from defensive positions in three places. Zais had not seen it either. I said the DDO sent it to the White House and did not send it to me and now they are running in circles over there. I told Zais to be sure that if it was important enough for the White House that I should get it."

At 10:18 a.m. on a secure line, Moorer spoke to Haig and brought him up to date on the latest message from General Abrams in Saigon: "He refers to the three FSB's being attacked by ground probes. 8 were attacked by fire. He may have to divert Arc Light over to the area on a case by case basis. Abe does not think the situation is critical, however, it is developing with increased pressure." (Ibid.)

At 3:33 p.m., Moorer and Haig talked for the third time that day when the latter called with White House directives: "Haig understands they are going to hit the Highlands tonight. HAK wants a 48-hour plan over to the White House tonight, at least a conceptual plan. He is asking SecDef for this plan. Haig says he sent the question over 4 hours ago. I said I have not seen the request yet but we can respond quickly when we get it. HAK asked where the four carriers were. I said three can get there but one is pretty far away. The President is building up a head of steam to hit the NVN up North." (Ibid.)

Moorer then met with senior subordinates at 3:40 p.m. to pass on the orders and discuss what should be done: "I described to them what the situation was and told them to prepare the authority request for our strikes in the North. I said dust off a 48-hour plan and give me some options for South of 19, South of 18, and South of 20, primarily against SAM sites, logistic targets, and military targets with airfields included. I told them to draw up the plan and have it available with the execute messages so I could talk to SecDef about it." (Ibid.)

At 6:38 p.m., Moorer had a last conversation with Haig: "I told Al I had the watch set up and should be able to handle anything. I asked if he had in mind a general strike against supplies and missile sites. He said that was the general idea but it must be made clear to HAK

that if the battle is underway the air may need to support the battle and not be striking up North. We will have instant replay in our Situation Room with the information we get from MACV, CINCPAC, Godley, CIA, and NSA." (Ibid.)

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48. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 1, 1972.

SUBJECT

Bombing and the Talks

A couple of aspects of your conversation with Porter yesterday set me to rethinking about the relationship between bombing the DRV, continued talks public or private, and the timing of their meeting requests:

—Porter seems to feel what they want as a quid pro quo for private talks is a resumption of plenaries. On the face of things this is true but evades the issue of *why* they want resumed plenaries. Porter believes, and I think incorrectly, that it is because they want their propaganda forum back. I think it is because they have some new public formulation to advance. (My own hobby-horse is that they will this time separate points one and two so we can then get down to haggling over the meaning of "withdrawal".)

—The timing of their original request for a private meeting in February closely followed the PRG 2 point elaboration of February 3 which more than any previous formulation lends itself to our trying to separate the two points. They may have hoped to have an offensive off the ground by that time which, if moderately successful, would then have provided them a rationale for splitting off the military issues and saying to themselves that the political issues will work out once we get the Americans out militarily (including air from Thailand and the Gulf of Tonkin which will be the obvious sticking point). The offensive was delayed; but it is now clearly gaining momentum.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 5, Chronological File, April 1972. Top Secret; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. Kissinger initialed the memorandum.

—My reading is that at this point they are eager to talk to us and place higher priority on the symbolic value of steadily recurring plenaries (as a cover for Tho's presence in Paris) than they are in whatever military measures we take in the interim. The one part of Porter's scenario which disturbs me is that at the April 13 plenary he would not agree outright to a plenary on the 20th but pose for discussion at the next session some topic such as the situation in the DMZ. If they balked, he would say that they could also propose a topic and the matter could be worked out by liaison officers in the following days. *This involves a risk of no plenary on the 20th and possible cancellation of your meeting by the other side.* I think you should consider the merits of simply scheduling plenaries for the 13th, 20th and 27th *without conditions.* If your private session goes badly then we can cancel the meeting on the 27th.

—*On the military side, the resumption of plenaries is going to look like we are returning under military pressure in any event.* By assaulting through the DMZ and now making full use of their new logistics system there which runs all the way to Khe Sanh, they could hardly be surprised if we retaliate—in fact they probably expect it and I don't think it would affect their willingness to meet with us. We met for 6 months under those conditions in 1968 and they have only occasionally walked out of the talks because of our protective reaction strikes and for only one meeting at a time.

—Another factor is the Chinese. Their denunciations of our air strikes over the DRV have been perfunctory and pro forma. But they have vigorously denounced our suspension of the meetings, as have other bloc countries. On balance therefore I believe we can and, in fact, should make heavy retaliatory strikes against what is now the most blatant violation of the understandings reached in 1968.[2] As long as we agree to reschedule plenaries, I don't think such actions would jeopardize the whatever prospects there may be for progress at private sessions. After all, they have now been conditioned to the fact that we will do what is militarily necessary until a settlement is reached and that it is not our habit to restrain ourselves simply for agreement to talk—particularly during a rather critical three week period. If we uncork a few good ones at the DRV it might even make them more anxious to tell us whatever it is they have to say as soon as possible, particularly if one accepts the hypothesis that whatever new formulation they advance will have as a principal design the curbing of U.S. air power.

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[2] See footnote 5, Document 2.

49. Editorial Note

On April 1, 1972, the Commander in Chief, Pacific, Admiral John S. McCain, sent a message to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer. In it he wrote:

"For the past two and one half months, General Abrams and I have consistently requested the authority to conduct those operations deemed necessary to preclude generation of the critical enemy threat which was predicted and now has developed. Many of the requests either have been denied, or approved with seriously limiting provisions. The effect of the current constraints on the field commander are clearly evidenced by the serious battlefield situation now existing in northern RVN MR–1.

"Reevaluation of Washington policies with respect to the freedom of action allowed our tactical commander on the battlefield is imperative. He has the overall mission of taking those actions necessary to help ensure success of the Vietnamization program. Forces are available which are capable of far more effective employment in support of that mission. The missing element is the authority to use those forces as required by the enemy threat, operations and the changing situation. This means the authority to take the right act at the right place at the right time."

McCain's analysis led him to this conclusion: "Failure to provide recommended authorities will place at unacceptable risk the achievement of United States' objectives in Vietnam and invite physical and eventual political occupation of a portion of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese force of arms." Therefore: "In view of the extraordinary implications of the current situation in MR–1 and MR–2 to our total national investment in Southeast Asia, I request the foregoing views be brought to the attention of highest authority." (Message from McCain to Moorer, April 1, attached to Moorer Diary, April 1; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

On the following day, at 10:30 a.m., President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry A. Kissinger called Moorer:

"HAK: I talked to SecDef but wanted to repeat to you what the authorities are because we will be looking for you to be sure they are carried out and if you are told anything different you will check with us and wouldn't accept any different orders unless you get them confirmed by us. During the battle Abrams has authority to hit north of the 25 miles north of the DMZ, and he needs no additional authority for that.

"Ans [Moorer]: International of the battle. ["International" is likely a transcriber's mistake.]

"HAK: Keep that area cleaned out. Second, we want 48 hours strike on top of that with maximum effort south of 19° route packages and

SAM and other things since he has authority for SAM concentrate more on logistics. The other thing, we are suggesting, that since we are going to take the same heat for one plane as for 400 when it finally does get going that he shouldn't do it until we can really do something.

"Ans: We will go in this 25 mile belt as soon as they are in position and we will go on the other one when conditions are right.

"HAK: As soon as possible you say that's right I agree with you on this, we sent someone one SAM sites attacked and it'll make tremendous headlines in *The New York Times.*

"Ans: I know what you are saying if they say that in fact it was a massive raid that's what it should be." (Moorer Diary, April 2; ibid.)

Almost two hours later, at 12:15 p.m., Kissinger called Moorer again:

"HAK: I am just checking and want to be . . .

"Ans: We got the order out all right on the 25 mile zone and that was sent out okay but limited to 1 May but we can correct that later. That is what they wanted.

"HAK: What about the 48-hour one?

"Ans: Haven't put that one out yet he [Laird] wants to talk to me about it I have got the message written his argument . . .

"HAK: I don't give a darn about his argument. The President is the Commander Chief. I have never heard of a SecDef countermanding an order of the President.

"Ans: I haven't either. I put out my strongest argument with Field Marshal Pursley and I wanted to give then the authority we required for the weather and the resources available would provide optimum results and message is written all you got to do is initial it and that message has not gone out. Laird, he [sent] Pursley down to talk to me.

"HAK: He's got an Execute Order.

"Ans: Exactly, it's always the case. He hasn't initialed it but if you want me to I'll go ahead and send it, although I don't think I should be put in that position. I will do anything the President orders me to do, anything. I don't know why they are argumentative. But he says they can't do it any way and said let's talk about it in the morning. I have written the message precisely like you passed on the President's instructions and one of them is done and the other not done because of . . ." (Ibid.)

In a 12:48 p.m. telephone call to Deputy Secretary of Defense Kenneth Rush, Moorer described the precarious tactical situation of the South Vietnamese in Quang Tri Province near the DMZ and how Laird had signed off on the first order but not the second one:

"Laird has agreed to the 25 mile zone but he wants to talk to me Monday about the other thing and so I am kind of caught in the mid-

dle again having one instruction from HAK and other set from SecDef. HAK says he would call SecDef and call me at 1500 this afternoon and straighten it out, unless that [*they*?] get that settled we're in a mess.

"Ans [Rush]: Mel will see the light.

"CJCS: These are the specific instructions in light of what we talked about. I told HAK if the President ordered me directly to do something I assured him I would do it immediately but if you pass it through a third person then I have to clear it with my boss. I think that's the problem and the position for me to do that's the way it stands right now." (Ibid.)

Moorer and Kissinger talked again at 2:50 p.m.:

"HAK: Where are you.

"Ans [Moorer]: Home.

"HAK: I talked to Mel right after we talked.

"Ans: He called me. We are going to have a meeting tonight.

"HAK: I understand the second order will go out at 1500 this afternoon.

"Ans: We are going to have a meeting at 2200 as I understand it and he asked me to get over to the Pentagon and we will put out then and we are setting up a little briefing on it again.

"HAK: I talked to the President and want to repeat again his . . . I talked to the President and whether we were going to have to review the whole outfit—we want a 48 hour strike starting when the weather is good and to be done at Abrams' discretion and that there should be no misunderstanding about that.

"Ans: Not from me.

"HAK: He wanted to be sure that they understand the risk and that there are no contradictory orders and we don't mind waiting to pull out but he will not accept a misunderstanding on it.

"Ans: I will see to it the way it goes I'll let you know.

"HAK: He was afraid you would get them to fly immediately (Laird), then the 48 hours would lapse.

"Ans: We aren't children. He is not going to do anything that degrades from the number one effort; of course, and it would depend on the weather and resources. We will do what is right. We know how these things are done.

"HAK: We are assuming everything is okay so I am assuming it is going out at 2200 tonight and that this will not impose any restrictions and [*on*] our plan. You can alert Abrams that it is coming so that he can put it in his thinking.

"Ans: Abrams and McCain have been made aware of your thinking."

At the end of this conversation, Kissinger returned to the issue of approving the authority for the 48-hour strike:

"HAK: I don't want to better the President but I have talked to him 3 times since we last talked and just checking his understanding, he thinks order has been issued and I am not in the business of telling him that his orders are not being obeyed but if you say it is going to go at 2200 that's the way I'll leave it.

"Ans: I'll let you know when you get back. I assure you, Henry, I understand the orders perfectly and so does Abrams." (Ibid.)

Once Moorer determined, by way of the telephone conversations with Kissinger, the President's desires on the bombing authorities, he instructed his staff to draft the necessary implementing messages. However, until they received the signature of the Secretary of Defense, these remained drafts rather than execute messages. As it turned out, Laird signed off quickly on the authority to attack 25 miles north of the DMZ, but delayed approving the 48-hour strike. At first, Laird wanted to wait until the next morning, Monday, April 3, to make the decision, but he agreed to attend a briefing on the 48-hour strike at the JCS at 10 p.m. Sunday evening. At the meeting he approved the authority but limited its duration until May 1. In an 11:35 p.m. telephone conversation, Kissinger told Moorer that they could live with this restriction because the date could be revised if necessary. Although inclement weather prevailed in southern North Vietnam at the moment, the requisite authority to effectively carry out a 48-hour strike—an execute order—was now in hand. (Moorer Diary, April 2; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

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50. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 3, 1972.

[Omitted here is a brief exchange on political leadership in the Pentagon.]

Kissinger: It is clear that there's a massive attack.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 700–2. 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, 8:54–9:09 a.m. Portions of the transcript are printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 79.

Nixon: Well, we knew that yesterday.

Kissinger: They've now got 50 tanks near Dong Ha.

Nixon: I noticed this morning, it says Abrams considers the situation is grim, which he, of course, shouldn't say.

Kissinger: Of course. I've asked him to—

Nixon: And—and, of course, the press is using the terms they did in Laos—rout, disarray, and so forth, and so forth. I don't think it's that bad, but nevertheless I don't know.

Kissinger: I think—

Nixon: The GIs, they say, are voicing opposition to the war. And Abrams—and Abrams, or MACV, is saying that ARVN was taken by surprise. Now, for Christ's sakes, we're in charge of the goddamned intelligence out there. We can't—the military can't cop out on this one, Henry.

Kissinger: That's right—

Nixon: And, goddamnit, the only thing I want to be sure is that Laird isn't going to say that. We're sure that they had the orders to do that bombing since we came back from China.

Kissinger: Right. They're—no, he isn't going to say that, because he's been sitting on every attempt to do any bombing.

Nixon: Okay.

Kissinger: No, the opposite is much more. They have not let over here any disquieting information. For example, I cannot believe that they did not have the information that they were building up right near the DMZ.

Nixon: Yeah. They never talked about it—

Kissinger: But they were afraid you'd order an attack—

Nixon: They were talking about B–3 and a lot of other things.

Kissinger: And last week, on Thursday,[2] I told Haig, "This is the attack." He called Pursley, that peacenik General aide of Laird's. He said, "Oh, we just have a lot of alarmist reports." It wasn't until Saturday at midnight that they confirmed to me that this was more than isolated attacks.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: I made a fool of myself with Dave Kraslow,[3] even, who called me. And I said, "Let me just check the Pentagon." And he said, "They are coming across the DMZ." I checked with Moorer and Laird—

Nixon: Well, you told me the same thing.

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[2] March 30.

[3] Washington Bureau Chief, *Los Angeles Times.*

Kissinger: I told you the same thing.

Nixon: We're withdrawing on the basis that we're under artillery fire and so forth.

Kissinger: That—that's what I told you, I gave you the information.

Nixon: Well, there's no reason for us to lose our cool, Henry. We've managed to have [unclear]—

Kissinger: Mr. President, if you lose your cool in a crisis, it'd be the first time you've done it—

Nixon: The point is—the point is I just want to be sure. Now, have they started the bombing attacks or not? What's happening?

Kissinger: That's what I want to find out. I have the uneasy feeling that Laird has called Abrams and told him that his promotion to Chief of Staff is coming, and that he'd better do what Laird tells him. And because we gave him the authority—

Nixon: What the hell does Laird want to do, lose?

Kissinger: Well, Laird himself isn't so bad, but he has his peacenik General.

Nixon: Yeah, Pursley. And Pursley wants to lose? Is that it?

Kissinger: Basically, yeah. He's Clifford's protégé[4] and—McNamara's and Clifford's, but above all Clifford's. And—

Nixon: Well, we can't do that.

Kissinger: But I'll get—

Nixon: I could send a message directly to [unclear]—to Abrams right now.

Kissinger: Well, I think, Mr. President—

Nixon: We're not going to let Laird get away with this.

Kissinger: No, but listen, all—

Nixon: You called Laird this morning?

Kissinger: Yeah—no, but I—

Nixon: You call him and raise hell. I just—I called, as a matter of fact, I called you at 8:30 and you were in staff meeting, and I raised holy hell that I had asked for that this morning and I expect it over here. And I want it on the double.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: If you get him off his ass—

Kissinger: I think, Mr. President, you should not call because—

Nixon: You call him—

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[4] Clark Clifford, Secretary of Defense, March 1, 1968–January 20, 1969.

Kissinger: —because if they start leaking, you ought to be kept out of it that you ran day-to-day military operations.

Nixon: No, but we've got to run them.

Kissinger: We'll run them. I'll take care of it. I'll—by the end of the day these guys are going to be shaped up. I have a 10 o'clock WSAG meeting here. If you would consider letting me bring in Rush and Moorer, say at 10:45, for five minutes, if you could tell them you'll hold them personally responsible or something like that.

Nixon: Rush won't do anything. I told Laird [unclear].

Kissinger: Well, I'll get Laird under control—

Nixon: Goddamn Laird, we should throw him out of there as fast as we can.

Kissinger: Once Laird knows what's going—that if we go through this, by the end of the day, they'll—

Nixon: Was he aware of the time—?

Kissinger: We'll—I'll have him shaped up and I'll get it done. They'll be attacking by tonight, I'll guarantee you, if they have to, to walk over—

Nixon: There's got to be something we can hit.

Kissinger: They'll attack—

Nixon: With our [unclear]. What in the name of [unclear]. What the Christ is—?

Kissinger: Well, I talked to John Ehrlichman this morning and, you know, he asked me what the situation was. He said, "Why don't they fly?" I said, "Because of the weather." He said, "Hell, they flew all over the Battle of the Bulge dropping bombs during blizzards." And he's right.

Nixon: He's got it. There's something wrong, something wrong here. That's all right. It isn't lost. It's just a question—

Kissinger: Oh. It's really—

Nixon: [unclear] They're withdrawing, and they're having the attack and let these goddamn press—the press is just reveling in this. Now if you—I'd hit that, but, frankly, though, you're letting the press up there I see.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: They're seeing—of course, they're reporting that. Some of the press have been there now—there's—now, you're sure it was a messenger that—? You said you sent it through the DOD? Did it get through—?

Kissinger: And through Moorer.

Nixon: Did it get through to them to knock off this business of having press men being carried up there by American helicopters to cover this thing?

Kissinger: I am sure they're not carried by American helicopters, but I'll check that—

Nixon: [unclear] Well —

Kissinger: I'll check.

Nixon: It's a huge operation. We should—we should not make the press' job. Just put it on the basis it's too dangerous for 'em. [unclear]—

Kissinger: But I think, Mr. President, that so far, they've lost 10 miles—15 miles. This is their new division that was only formed last year. It's the Third Division.

Nixon: Right. Why the hell do they have a poor division out there?

Kissinger: Because, no one expected them to come across the DMZ in force. Their good division is protecting Hue and Da Nang.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: We've always expected that they might take one, or two, or three provincial cities.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: We could lose Kontum City. In fact I expect us to lose Kontum—

Nixon: And Quang Tri?

Kissinger: And we might lose Quang Tri. But, in a way they're—

Nixon: Those goddamned cities aren't worth a damn—

Kissinger: —they're attacking close to the centers of—close to their own border—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —shows how far they've been pushed out. And I think we shouldn't panic now. We—what—in a way it's a godsend. We should give them a tremendous punishment.

Nixon: Yeah. Because—

Kissinger: I believe—

Nixon: It's a godsend because they could've done this, what they've done now, they could do next October. Although the weather would still be bad, it wouldn't be as good then as now, would it?

Kissinger: Well, in October it will be about like now. It will be the end of the rain.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: They can—

Nixon: It's the same thing.

Kissinger: —do it in October.

Nixon: It's just as good, well, to have it right now.

Kissinger: It's just as well. We can now precipitate. I'm going to get Dobrynin in and I'm going to tell him, I'm just going to threaten him with the non-ratification of the Berlin treaty.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: I'm going to say, "Now this is it."

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: Having in mind the fact that, you agree, we still want to drive a hard bargain on the summit. Oh, they want that summit [unclear]—

Kissinger: Mr. President, they can no more afford to not have that summit.

Nixon: They can't trade Vietnam for this. The Chinese—you've already sent a message now?

Kissinger: No, that's going tonight. Or, or as soon as I get them on the phone, we'll get somebody up there to deliver it.

Nixon: Oh, I see.

Kissinger: I think we could play this into an end of the war.

Nixon: I think you're right.

Kissinger: I think it's a—

Nixon: I think you're right but, I'll tell you, it will provided this bombing attack that we put on is one of the—is the best, is the finest goddamn thing that's ever been, for the military, that's ever been done. Should I get the Chiefs in, pray tell?

Kissinger: No, if you'd just let me bring Moorer in for five minutes.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And just tell him you'll accept no excuses, you want a massive effort. And—

Nixon: Why? I'm going to scare him with it [unclear]—

Kissinger: And that you're—

Nixon: —any good.

Kissinger: Oh, no—

Nixon: Well, he'll go back and—

Kissinger: That's good, sir—

Nixon: —we need Laird [unclear]. Maybe you ought to get Laird in with him.

Kissinger: No, get—if you get Rush and Moorer. Rush—

Nixon: [unclear] nice guy that Rush and Moorer wanted. If Moorer wanted it, what do we say?

Kissinger: Yeah, but they, they need this so that they can say they're carrying out your direct order.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: Then Laird won't challenge it. If you get Laird in he'll give you so much bullshit that you won't ever be—you know, it could just take you half an hour to stick out—

[Omitted here is discussion of plans for handling the press on the North Vietnamese offensive.]

Kissinger: If the ARVN collapses, we've done everything we can, Mr. President—

Nixon: We lose if the ARVN collapses. Don't say—that's just a, that's a—that's a question that we can't even think about. If the ARVN collapses a lot of other things will collapse around here. If they were going to collapse, they had to do it a year ago. We can't do it this year, Henry.

Kissinger: Right. They're not going to collapse. I know—

Nixon: You see what I mean? We can't take it.

Kissinger: I agree. That's why we've got to blast—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —the living bejeezus out of North Vietnam. We will gain nothing for restraint—

Nixon: That's right—

Kissinger: —and it would be—

Nixon: That's right—

Kissinger: I think if we shock the bejeezus out of them, we can get Japan—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —Hell, we can get Russia and China to help us, because they cannot want to have this whole thing. But we've got to get them to move now.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And Laird is already saying the 48-hour strike won't be done now at least 'til Friday.[5] We've got to hit fast.

Nixon: Why?

Kissinger: Well, partly weather, partly because he says he needs the air assets in the combat zone. But if we build enough of a fire under the Chiefs, they'll get it done. Maybe we can wait 'til Wednesday, but we ought to hit soon.

Nixon: Yeah.

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[5] April 7.

Kissinger: I'll go and get that briefing now.

Nixon: Well, well—

Kissinger: And I'll report to you.

Nixon: Like I say, let's don't talk about, "Well, if the ARVN collapses we've done everything we can." Yeah, that's fine with regard to this, but we're playing a much bigger game. We're playing a Russian game, a Chinese game, an election game—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —and we're not going to have the ARVN collapse.

Kissinger: I agree.

Nixon: It isn't going to hurt us. This, this, this kind of an attack isn't gonna hurt us if provided, provided we, we, we fight back and the ARVN holds.

Kissinger: Mr. President, by May 1st we'll be through it. I think it will lead to negotiations—

[Omitted here is discussion of the President's schedule.]

Nixon: But, on the other hand, this is the time to really get tough and to see it through. And—

Kissinger: But you could say—

Nixon: I'm not. And—

Kissinger: I—

Nixon: As I've said, don't, don't—we're not gonna be weak, we're not leave you down in the—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: —you've got to be confident about this—

Kissinger: I'm absolutely—I'm confident.

Nixon: You've got to expect some, some things. But it's just as I told you, you've got this usual situation when the press contemplates—

Kissinger: Well, we've got our usual situation—

Nixon: It's a hell of a damn hard thing for the press, though, to play against Americans. Americans aren't getting killed there now. What they're saying is that, "Well, this proves Vietnamization isn't working." It doesn't prove anything of the kind.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: Christ, this is in the north of the country. As nobody—anybody who has been to Vietnam—for Christ's sakes, there're not enough Vietnamese up there to flip a goddamned [unclear]. There're only a few thousand—

Kissinger: Mr. President, it is impossible to defend 600 miles of a frontier against every attack without giving ground somewhere. The attacker always has the advantage that he can concentrate.

Nixon: What—and this is the final thing—what does your report show this morning? Is it still going, is it—?

Kissinger: The report this morning shows that they're pouring in a lot of tanks and artillery—

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah.

Kissinger: But they seem to be—

Nixon: Are they taking any losses—?

Kissinger: In every unit there—

Nixon: Are they slowing down at all? What is it?

Kissinger: Well, that—let me get to the briefers, and it will only take 10 minutes.

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51. Editorial Note

As Jon Howe, a National Security Council staff member, recalled in a memorandum to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger: "When the offensive initially began, Secretary Laird's office refused to pass timely reports to your office and appeared to be attempting to create an impression that things were not as grim as they might seem." (Memorandum from Howe to Kissinger, April 26, 1973; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 55, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Summary, 1972–73) Because the White House needed accurate and up to the minute information to formulate policy, President Richard M. Nixon signed a memorandum, dated April 3, 1972, to Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, with a copy to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, stating the following: "During the remainder of the current North Vietnamese offensive all reports from COMUSMACV will be transmitted immediately upon receipt in Washington to the White House for my personal review. Effective immediately a briefing officer from the Joint Chiefs of Staff will be designated to brief me or my Assistant for National Security Affairs at hours designated by my Assistant for National Security Affairs." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 231, Agency Files, Defense, Apr–Jul 1972, Vol. 17) The first briefing occurred on April 3. (Memorandum of conversation, April 3, 9:16–9:40 a.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 43, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Briefings, Apr.–Aug. 1972)

52. Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, April 3, 1972.

[Omitted here are greetings and an exchange of pleasantries.]

Nixon: Let me come, maybe, directly to the point, because I want—Admiral Moorer has heard me speak in this vein before. I want you to hear it, too, because Packard,[2] of course, was quite familiar because he was at WSAG meeting and so forth and you're not. And, first, I think there has to be a very clear understanding that—of a matter which I have discussed with the Admiral on occasion before, and that is that I am Commander in Chief, and not Secretary of Defense. Is that clear? Do you understand that?

Moorer: I do indeed.

Nixon: Now, I ordered a briefing on Vietnam this morning, yesterday, and to be over here by about 7 o'clock. It didn't come until 9:00–8:30.[3] That's a direct violation of orders, and I want somebody who was supposed to be here to be demoted or reprimanded. That's to go in his file. Is that clear? I ordered that, and I was told he would be here at 7:15, and I understand well the Secretary of Defense said he couldn't come until 8:30. Now, I'm not going to have that kind of crap any more. From now on, that man is to have his ass over here in this office at 7 o'clock every morning. Is that clear?

Moorer: Yes, sir. He'll be here.

Nixon: All right, no more crap. The second point is I ordered the use of strikes, you know, in this zone above the DMZ. There were 500 sorties that could have been flown; they flew 100 yesterday—125—

Moorer: 138, sir.

Nixon: 138. Yeah. The excuse is weather. I understand.

Moorer: No, sir. In all fairness, you see, we got that directive, Mr. President, at mid–day and they, as they will tell you, they had their schedules laid on, their LORAN laid on—

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 700–5. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portion of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. According to the President's Daily Diary, the meeting was held from 10:06 to 10:20 a.m. and Rush was also in attendance. (Ibid., White House Central Files)

[2] Nixon confused David Packard, former Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Rush, the current one.

[3] See Document 51.

Nixon: That's right.

Moorer: I asked Abrams last night and we started right way.

Nixon: I understand. Now, let's come to Abrams. Why didn't he think of that? What is—what is his job out there? Just to do it in the numbers or is it his job to try to see that this kind of offensive is stopped? Now, I want you to understand, there's some talk of Abrams going to Chief of Staff of the Army. I want you to know that I don't intend him to have to go to Chief of Staff of the Army because of his conduct in this business. He's shown no imagination. He's drinking too much. I want you to get an order to him that he's to go on the wagon throughout the balance of this offensive. Is that clear?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Totally. The other thing that's going to happen is that he is going to start coming up with some ideas as to the use of the Air Force and so forth and as to the planning here, rather than just sitting back on his ass waiting for things to happen. Now, I have read the reports that came from Defense on this thing, on Friday, on Saturday, they've—that's from out there.[4] They did not—they were not accurate. They did not explain what the facts were adequately. And what is happening here is that at Defense, in its usual way, is temporizing with the situation which is serious, but which can be turned to our advantage. But it can only be turned to our advantage with the massive use of all of our assets, and also in terms of our air power by not waiting until it's ceiling-unlimited before we get out there and clobber them where they are. Now, from the moment you leave this office, I want somebody to get out there have out there, and I want everything that can fly, flying in that area. And good God! In the Battle of the Bulge they were able to fly even in a snowstorm. Now what in the hell is the matter with the Air Force that they are unable to, to, to conduct offensive operations in this area? So they're going to fly down and drop it over a cane field in Cambodia? Sure, they'd get another Purple Heart—I mean an air medal for that. But I want this Air Force, and I—that includes the Navy—you've only got, as I understand it, that instead of having the four carriers we ordered in, we got two. Is that right?

Moorer: No, sir. There are three there. The fourth one will be there very shortly, sir.

Nixon: How shortly?

Moorer: About—I would say they have 50 hours.

Nixon: All right. That's too long. Too long. We shouldn't have left it. When those four carriers are there—now, we have got to use this air power in a way that will be as effective as possible. The other thing is

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[4] Nixon was referring to the daily situation reports from MACV in Saigon.

an immediate study is to be made of the use of B–52s in the—a study and I need the recommendation within eight hours, and I don't want to go through the—I'm not going to crap around with the Secretary of Defense on this either—I need the use of B–52s if it will be helpful in that 40 mile—[5]

Moorer: 45 miles.

Nixon: That's right. If it will be helpful. Understand? The idea that if, if we don't have the assets that can do it otherwise, we'll use '52s. Now, if the reason for not using the '52s is because they are vulnerable, I understand that. If, on the other hand, the use of B–52s, after you've taken out the SAMs, would be helpful, we'd better use them. Because the thing that I am concerned about here is that—well, first, I don't like this business of not getting information when I ask for it. I was on the phone all day yesterday and couldn't get a goddamn thing out of the Department of Defense. I got one half-assed memorandum,[6] which was so disgraceful in terms of it being inadequate, that I really don't, I'm really ashamed to have it in my file. I have it in my file, but I'm going to keep it personal and I hope I don't have to write a book. But from now on, we're to have the truth and that guy is going to be over here. Incidentally, not just in the morning; he should be here at 7 o'clock at night. Let him work a little overtime over there. Is that clear?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Get him over here. And I want the plans—I want what he's done and I want what has been done to carry out these orders. Now as far as this, as the—and then Abrams and that MACV staff and all the rest, they're to knock off all the parties. Is that clear?

Moorer: Very much, sir—

Nixon: There isn't to be anything out there. And from—until they get this thing contained, they have got to have what we need from them. What we need from them are some ideas on their part as to what they're going to do, rather than we'll run the same numbers, you know, we'll hit same targets here, here, here, here, here, here and here. The idea that we could have been surprised by this, the idea that we didn't—I mean, we thought the B–3 thing was coming and so forth. Well, they had more tanks there than we expected; and they had more forces there than we expected, and all that sort of thing. I don't buy that.

Moorer: Our reason—

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[5] The length of the DMZ from Laos to the South China Sea was 39 miles.

[6] Not found.

Nixon: Now, it isn't we being surprised. I mean it's—this is ARVN being surprised. That's what they said, that MACV was pissing on the ARVN. We're the ones that are supposed to have the intelligence. The ARVN doesn't have much in terms of intelligence. But my point is that, I know we don't have many assets out there in terms of ground forces. And we're not going to have any. This is not going to be said, but we've got some very considerable assets in terms of air power. But those assets have to be, they have to be concentrated, concentrated in areas that will provide shock treatment now as we did in the B–3 area.[7] Remember? We had a couple day strike; it did a little good. Now, we've got to concentrate in these areas and give it some shock treatment. And, incidentally, rather than 25 miles, you've got to go up to 30 miles in order to do the job.

Kissinger: We have that Dong Hoi area.

Nixon: Take out the Dong Hoi area right now. Now, the 48-hour strike is not going to wait 'til Friday;[8] it's got to go Wednesday. Is that clear?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Yeah. Unless—is the purpose of waiting 'til Friday weather?

Moorer: Well it's not—it's not too bad—

Nixon: You can't get it ready?

Moorer: No, sir. It'll go—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Moorer: Nothing, no problem if the weather is satisfactory it can go—

Nixon: Well, don't go if it isn't; the weather—

Moorer: There's no restriction on it 'til Friday, sir. There's no order to go Friday—

Nixon: What's the problem you said about Friday?

Kissinger: Laird told me last night it wouldn't go 'til Friday—

Moorer: Well, he was just guessing at the weather.

Kissinger: Oh.

Nixon: All right—

Moorer: There's no, no—

Nixon: Weather is one thing. But let me say the decision has been made. We need it Wednesday. We need it Wednesday for a number of reasons, not the least of which is military. There are other reasons, too, that are supplemental, but the military is the most important one. And

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[7] See Document 17 and footnote 3 thereto.

[8] April 7.

we may not get a chance to whack some of those supplies up now, and they might be coming in September and October. So, let's get that damn strike off, I mean, if the weather is reasonable. I don't want to go off in bad weather.

Kissinger: It shouldn't go if they can't do a good job.

Nixon: No, no, no, no. I don't—

Moorer: We'll deal with it—

Nixon: There's absolutely nothing. If they can't do an adequate job there's no reason to go over North Vietnam. It's got to be an effective job in the North. But right now, right now when the ARVN is under a very serious attack the Air Force has got to take some goddamn risks, just like the Air Force took some risks in World War II in the Battle of the Bulge because we were under serious attack. If the Air Force hadn't taken some risks, we'd have lost the battle. Now, that's really what it boils down to—

Moorer: Yes, sir. Well, the Air Force is not reluctant in any sense to take risks, Mr. President. The problem is that north of the DMZ is that in these—with these missile sites, they're moving them around all the time and you need some kind of visibility in order to get the—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —sites themselves. Now, in all fairness to General Abrams you should know that he and CINCPAC, Admiral McCain, have repeatedly asked for authority to, to attack these missile sites north.[9] And we hadn't been given the authority, because you just gave it to us here yesterday. But we knew that they were accumulating these forces in tanks and mobile artillery and so on north of the DMZ. And with—the way the weather is this time of year, the only way to do that right is for the man on the scene to be—to have the authority to go make it. You might get fours hours a day, or two hours all of a sudden. It's just the—

Nixon: That's right.

Moorer: The flow shifts back and forth. And it's very difficult, almost impossible, to run that from Washington. And so far as the reports to you are concerned, let me tell you right now, that if I am directed to give the reports you will get them precisely when you ask. But I am not running this reporting business. And I am passing the information up to the Secretary of Defense and it's being run from up there, but it's—

Nixon: Right. I am directing you—

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[9] See Documents 35, 42, 44, and footnote 7, Document 44.

Moorer: If you want me to do it, I can do it—

Nixon: I am directing you, and if the Secretary of Defense raises the questions, I am directing you. I have to have them directly, and they must be unsanitized. And also when an order goes, it's got to go from me. The Secretary of Defense is not Commander in Chief. The Secretary of Defense does not make decisions on these kinds of things—

Moorer: I understand that, Mr. President—

Nixon: He's a procurement officer. That's what he is and not another goddamn thing. And from now on this has got to be done this way. So under these circumstances we can go. Now, getting back to this thing, let's see what kind of an excuse is being developed here. You say that—

Moorer: I'm not giving excuses—

Nixon: No, no, no. What Abrams was dropping. You—I thought I asked you about this earlier, Henry, about this authority with regard to hitting. You said they had it already in the DMZ area?

Kissinger: Well, you gave—well, they—you gave the authority in February.[10] Then it was stopped during the—

Nixon: China thing.

Kissinger: —during the China thing.

Nixon: That it hit North Vietnam, no?

Moorer: Yes, sir—

Kissinger: That's right. In the DMZ—they have had authority to hit in the DMZ, but then the authority was never implemented after you came back from China for this 19-mile area that we had agreed to because the offensive didn't come. Then when they asked for it again, we gave it and you actually ordered a wider belt than the one they asked for—

Nixon: When was that?

Kissinger: This weekend.

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: But we asked, sir, on the 8th of March for this authority to go north of the DMZ and it was turned down and—

Kissinger: It was never really discussed in here—

Moorer: —then we asked again, and we finally got the authority yesterday. But he cannot handle a threat, such has accumulated north of the DMZ, unless you really work on it—

Nixon: That's right.

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[10] See Document 15.

Moorer: —when you have the weather.

Nixon: Fine.

Moorer: When you have the weather that's the way that works—

Nixon: All right. I understand—

Moorer: You've got to see the target—

Nixon: I understand. Now, the situation, though, is now is that as far as sorties and so forth are concerned, they'll go to 500 a day. Will they at least? You can—you can at least do something in this area at this time can you not?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: All right.

Moorer: Now we are, Mr. President, putting all of the B–52s, every one we have, up there.

Nixon: Good. Where? Where? In the DMZ area?

Moorer: In the DMZ area. Yes, sir.

Nixon: They can—they can go above that stuff, can't they [unclear]—?

Moorer: Well, we're going up to the DMZ. Now, we've got to get up there and get out to some of those missile sites to make it viable—

Nixon: Is it possible?

Moorer: To make is feasible so we won't—

Nixon: Yeah. I understand that we can't lose B–52s.

Moorer: Yes, sir. Now, we're working on that—

Nixon: I'll tell you what I want now. From now on, you get those reports in to me. And the second thing is, I want Abrams braced hard. His promotion depends upon how he conducts himself. Now—just—you weren't here at the time. He screwed up Laos.[11] He's not going to screw this one up. Is that clear?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: All right.

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[11] A reference to Operation Lam Son 719.

53. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 3, 1972, 10:31–11:10 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
John N. Irwin
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Warren Nutter

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Lt. Gen. John Vogt

CIA
Richard Helms
William Newton (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—The State Department would prepare a press guidance paper, showing how the North Vietnamese offensive violates the 1968 understandings.

—The Joint Chiefs of Staff would submit a report on the maximum reinforcement effort we can make.

—The State and Defense Departments would issue statements at their daily briefings, hitting hard at the North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Accords and the 1968 understandings.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, let's start off with your briefing.

Mr. Helms: You asked for a briefing on the military situation and the North Vietnamese objectives. I will begin with the military situation. [Reads attached briefing.][2]

Dr. Kissinger: [Referring to the statement that the NVA were zeroed in on Dak To, page 2 of the briefing.] If we know the NVA are ze-

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets are in the original. The WSAG met 18 times in April.

[2] Helms's briefing, "The Situation in South Vietnam," April 3, is ibid., Box H–085, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 4/3/72.

roed in on Dak To, that must mean we know where the artillery pieces are. That being the case, why don't we take them out?

Adm. Moorer: We know the general vicinity where they are, but we don't have precise locations. At Fire Support Base Delta, south of Dak To, they claimed yesterday to have killed 500 of the enemy.

Dr. Kissinger: Can't we figure out with more precision where the enemy positions are located?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, we're doing it.

Mr. Helms continued reading his briefing.

Dr. Kissinger: [At the end of the section on the military situation] How long do you think the offensive will last?

Mr. Helms: I think it will go on for some time.

Adm. Moorer: It will last a good twenty to thirty days.

Dr. Kissinger: And then the enemy will run out of supplies?

Adm. Moorer: No. They will begin to run low on supplies, and their operations will slack off.

Mr. Irwin: Are you saying the offensive won't last longer than twenty or thirty days?

Mr. Helms: I think it can go on longer than that.

Mr. Irwin: I think so, too. Twenty to thirty days is a very optimistic figure.

Adm. Moorer: The main problem will be lack of ammunition. All the ammo they are using now was stored just north of the DMZ, and it was ready to move.

Mr. Helms continued to read his briefing. At the end of the section dealing with North Vietnamese objectives, he added:

I asked this morning about the 1968 understandings, and I was told that they are threadbare. Frankly, I don't even see one thread, and I think this is so obvious that every eye can see it.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) Bill, can you pull a paper together for us, which we can use for press guidance, on the violation of every understanding which was agreed to in 1968?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes.

Mr. Irwin: The paper should include an answer to the accusation against us: namely that our bombing is also a violation of the understandings.

Adm. Moorer: I would like to follow up a little bit, if I may, on Dick's briefing. I agree that the enemy objective is to seize Quang Tri and possibly Kontum—even if they do not hold those places indefinitely. There is no question that the North Vietnamese have committed all their main force units to the offensive. The 308th division, for example, which had been held in reserve at Dong Hoi, has now moved

south. The point is that they are in the enviable position of being able to send every available man into battle—and not worry about an invasion from the south or about defending North Vietnam. They are shooting the works.

Their operations in MR 3 are designed to commit the ARVN reserves and to reduce the number of reinforcements which can be sent north. The situation today is that the 3rd Division, as you know, the newest South Vietnamese division, is in position south of the DMZ. The 1st Division, the best ARVN division, has the mission of defending Hue. Most of the fighting so far has involved the 3rd Division and two Marine Brigades. Eight North Vietnamese regiments have attacked in a southerly direction, and three other regiments, from the 304th Division, have attacked to the East. The North Vietnamese have also used elements of three artillery regiments and elements of two tank battalions.

The ARVN defensive line now runs along the Cua Viet river, through Fire Support Bases Pedro, Scorpion and Barbara. The South Vietnamese are attempting to consolidate this line, and they have been ordered to hold Dong Ha and Quang Tri at all costs. Three Marine Brigades have been sent up there as reinforcements. President Thieu is also forming nine additional Ranger battalions.

For our part, we have three carriers on station, and the *Constellation* is coming from Japan. We have added 18 VF aircraft.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we add more than that?

Adm. Moorer: I think so. We can take a look at it. We are also conducting over fifty B–52 strikes a day. We are looking to surge even more, but the aircraft might be needed in Laos. At any rate, just about all of the B–52 effort now is going to MR 1.

The NVA have fired 55 SAMs, seven of which were in Laos, and we have lost three aircraft—a RB–66, an A–1 and an OV–2—to the SAMs. The B–52s, incidentally, are using chaff and electronic countermeasures—causing many of the missiles to miss their marks.

Concerning our ground forces, we have the 196th Brigade in MR 1, providing security for Danang, and one air cavalry unit with 27 helos. That doesn't include the advisors stationed with ARVN units.

Finally, we have four destroyers off the coast, providing fire support. I have asked for a cruiser to join them, and we have amphibious forces ready to evacuate American personnel, if that becomes necessary.

Dr. Kissinger: What can we provide in the way of reinforcements? We will not get any award for being defeated with restraint.

Adm. Moorer: We can return many of the aircraft, but that depends a lot on base availability.

Dr. Kissinger: Can you give us a report by the end of the day on the maximum effort we can make on reinforcements?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Mr. Irwin: What will happen if the North Vietnamese also strike in the highlands?

Adm. Moorer: For one thing, Abe [General Abrams] will have to divide his air. As I said before, all of the B–52 effort is now directed at MR 1. The ARVN have the 22nd Division and two airborne brigades up the highlands. In terms of troop strength, they are not outnumbered. As I also said earlier, Fire Support Base Delta reported killing 500 of the enemy yesterday.

Dr. Kissinger: We also had a report that some battalions were lost.

Adm. Moorer: Two battalions were reported lost and two regiments were reported ineffective.

Gen. Vogt: The two lost battalions, by the way, were from the two ineffective regiments, the 2nd and 56th.

Mr. Irwin: How many regiments did the South Vietnamese have there?

Adm. Moorer: Five.

Mr. Irwin: Two out of the five regiments, then, are ineffective.

Adm. Moorer: Yes. But the Marine Brigade has been sent there to provide reinforcements.

Mr. Irwin: Will the additional forces bring the South Vietnamese back to their pre-attack strength?

Dr. Kissinger: Will they fight?

Gen. Vogt: There is no question about that. They will fight effectively.

Dr. Kissinger: But will they fight very effectively?

Adm. Moorer: I just asked Abe these same questions. Let me tell you what he said. [Reads cable, gist of which is as follows:]

Adm. Moorer: How well did the ARVN perform?

Gen. Abrams: The ARVN have been under great pressure, from four NVA divisions, artillery and bad weather, which has hampered air support operations. But they have performed well. Only two battalions—at Camp Carroll—have surrendered. There have been 2,500 wounded. KIA figures are still incomplete.

Adm. Moorer: What are the ARVN intentions?

Gen. Abrams: Three divisions are defending the line formed by the Cua Viet river and Fire Support Bases Pedro, Scorpion and Barbara. Quang Tri and Dang Ha will be held at all costs. President Thieu has emphatically reinforced this point. A tank battalion will be used in a mobile role for defense. General Lam has requested that the Marine Brigade be used for reinforcement, and he has also asked for other divisions. At a meeting at Camp Eagle, in which President Thieu and

General Lam participated, Thieu made a major point of saying that reinforcements will be provided to MR 1 and that Hue will be defended.

Adm. Moorer: What provisions were being made for the possible evacuation of American personnel? [Adm. Moorer said Gen. Abrams had given him a detailed answer, but he did not elaborate.]

Adm. Moorer: Should there be a surge in B–52 sorties?

Gen. Abrams: If the NVA attacks continue, a surge would be essential.

Adm. Moorer: What is the mission of the 196th Brigade?

Gen. Abrams: The mission of the Brigade is to (1) protect Phu Bai, (2) provide security for the evacuation of the Loran site there and (3) evacuate U.S.-sponsored personnel, if necessary.

Adm. Moorer: How will the new operating authorities be used?

Gen. Abrams: The authorities will be used to the maximum, as soon as the weather breaks.

Adm. Moorer: How is the ARVN morale?

Gen. Abrams: Morale varies. In MR 1 it is high, but it is difficult to know if it will hold up. If the enemy offensive continues, it may discredit the South Vietnamese.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer) If we can get your recommendations on the maximum possible reinforcements from all theaters, it would be a great help. (to Mr. Irwin) Jack, what do you think?

Mr. Irwin: There are two sides to this, the military and the diplomatic. We support whatever must be done on the military side. On the diplomatic side, the South Vietnamese Foreign Ministry put out a very good statement.

Dr. Kissinger: Is Bunker going back?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. He will be back in Saigon Tuesday evening.[3] He has been waiting to get clearance for his plane to overfly India.

Mr. Irwin: The South Vietnamese statement is very good. It identifies the NVA divisions, describes the violations of the 1968 understandings and calls for governments to condemn the North Vietnamese actions. Now it is a question of whether we and other governments should issue statements, too.

Dr. Kissinger: What other governments?

Mr. Irwin: Any and all. The South Vietnamese statement also raises the possibility of Security Council action. We don't think, however, that any action is called for.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we keep the political section in the South Vietnamese Embassy under control? They usually start flapping.

Mr. Sullivan: They haven't started flapping yet.

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[3] April 4.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's try to keep it that way. Can we also keep the military spokesmen under control—and not have them make alarmist statements?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: State and Defense should make the initial reaction today. Then Ziegler will back it up at his 3:00 p.m. briefing. We should hit hard at the violations of the Geneva Accords and the 1968 understandings. The President wants a strong statement put out at State's noon briefing.

Mr. Sullivan: The South Vietnamese statement identified the NVA divisions. Can we call these operations an invasion?

Dr. Kissinger: I think so. What would we have to lose by doing that?

Adm. Moorer: It is an invasion.

Mr. Sullivan: We will still get the line that the ARVN are fighting Viet Cong, not North Vietnamese main force units.

Dr. Kissinger: Who will make the initial statement?

Mr. Sullivan: I think we should do it.

Mr. Helms: I like the idea of using the word "invasion."

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. If asked, we will also confirm that we had a WSAG meeting this morning and that the President is in touch with various Cabinet members. We will do that here, though.

Mr. Sullivan: Should we echo the South Vietnamese statement, calling for a return to the negotiating table?

Dr. Kissinger: Concerning the negotiations, we should say that all the time we were trying to negotiate, the enemy was building up for an attack. That's why Porter acted as he did last week.[4] We should say we are always ready to go back to the negotiating table, but not when we are under military pressure.

Mr. Sullivan: What about the bombing of the North? Should we say all the wraps are off?

Dr. Kissinger: You can say that the President is reviewing the situation and following it very closely.

Mr. Sullivan: Should the Department spokesman make this statement?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, and tell him not to hype it. Who will do it? Bray?

Mr. Irwin: Yes. I think we should also refer to the South Vietnamese statement.

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[4] See Document 45.

Dr. Kissinger: After the State briefing, Defense can supply added information at its briefing.

Adm. Moorer: I would suggest that we try to be as solid as possible in these statements and that we not use colorful adjectives.

Dr. Kissinger: I fully agree with you. But the problem is not here—it is in Saigon. It was in Saigon that they used the words "critical," "serious" and "grim."

Adm. Moorer: I realize that.

Dr. Kissinger: We should keep them from using such words. I can understand if they say "serious." But "critical" and "grim" have certain meanings.

Mr. Sullivan: Should we express confidence in the South Vietnamese ability to handle the situation?

Dr. Kissinger: One thing we can say is that we expect to lose territory and cities in the offensive.

Mr. Sullivan: I don't think we should say we expect to lose cities.

Mr. Negroponte: We can say we expect losses.

Dr. Kissinger: That's better. Use the word "losses."

Adm. Moorer: We can also make a reference to the Tet offensive and say that you can't draw conclusions in a short period of time.

Dr. Kissinger: No. Don't invoke Tet at all. We had been predicting an offensive, and now they have launched one. The fact that we have been predicting it will help us.

Mr. Nutter: Abrams is saying that the lines will bend, but not break.

Mr. Sullivan: What should we do about Thieu's proposal on the prisoners?

Dr. Kissinger: We were going to ask for a meeting on the 13th to discuss this proposal, but I don't think that would be appropriate now. If the attacks continue, we shouldn't ask for a meeting.

54. Memorandum for the Record by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

CJCS M–18–72 Washington, April 3, 1972.

SUBJ

Meeting with President Nixon, Monday, 3 April 1972, White House

1. Following the WSAG Meeting, Doctor Kissinger asked DepSecDef Rush and me to accompany him for a visit with the President.

2. The President was clearly in a very unhappy mood.[2] He was frustrated over the news reports and the fact that he was convinced that SecDef was deliberately withholding information from him. He was particularly critical of Gen Abrams and inquired as to where were Gen Abrams' recommendations for action to counter the enemy's attack in Military Region 1. He said he would take no excuses and he wanted forces augmented and action taken against the enemy without delay.[3] He was particularly irritated by the fact that a request for a briefing, submitted by the White House for 0745, was not fulfilled until about 0900. This was due to the fact that SecDef had scheduled his review of the same briefing at 0745 and, obviously, the Briefers couldn't be in both places at the same time.

3. I told the President that I was making no excuses—that the SecDef had issued an order that he, or his Executive Assistant, would

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret; Sensitive. The memorandum is attached to Admiral Moorer's April 3 Diary entry.

[2] H.R. Haldeman characterized Nixon's frustration with the military, especially the Air Force, in these terms: "He really banged Moorer around yesterday on the Air Force's inability to get moving. Problem is they keep saying that the weather is such that they can't bomb. The P's massing a huge attack force, Naval ships for gunning from the sea, tremendous number of additional bombers, and he's going to start using B–52s for the first time to bomb North Vietnam as soon as the weather clears. He'll base the bombing on the violation of the DMZ and move in hard. He feels that this will give us a fairly good chance of negotiations, which he has never really felt we've had up to now, but thinks they're doing this as a desperation move and then will go to negotiate. Henry has the same view." (*Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition,* April 4)

[3] To this end, Moorer cabled the following to McCain and Abrams the next day: "I request that each of you give this air offensive your personal and continuous attention and fully utilize every opportunity to effect a massive impact on the enemy. The President has clearly stated that he expects imaginative, aggressive and continuous attention to be focused on the current crisis throughout the unified command system. Request you advise me immediately of any additional authorities and resources which you require." (Telegram 6826 from Moorer to McCain and Abrams, April 4; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1016, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's Visit to Vietnam, April 14, 1972)

pass on all information given to the White House and that if the President would simply publish *written* instructions to the contrary he would get the information directly and immediately. Furthermore, after he had instructed me to reprimand the Briefing Officer who was late arriving at the White House, I told him I was not in charge of the briefings—they were handled by SecDef and, if he wanted the briefings on time and at the time specified, all he had to do was give me the task of providing the briefings direct and the Briefer would there. I also told the President that, in all fairness to Gen Abrams, I had to point out that he, as well as Adm McCain backed up by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had repeatedly requested authority to take actions designed to prevent the very thing that had happened; namely, the build-up of NVN forces including missile forces, just north of the DMZ. (The chronology of recent requests is outlined in my MFR M–17–72). The President has apparently forgotten that on Saturday, 18 March, he had personally signed a paper turning down the authorities after some rather weak positions taken by the SecDef.[4] (I told him that specifically I had turned in a very urgent request on Thursday, 9 March[5] and that it was finally turned down the latter part of March). H seemed surprised at this and directed HAK to investigate. He reiterated what he told me before—he was an elected official and the SecDef was appointed and, as he put it, was only a "procurement officer."

4. That afternoon, after DepSecDef Rush and I had informed SecDef of what had happened and the fact that the President was convinced SecDef was withholding information from him, SecDef endeavored to get an appointment with the President but the President as DepSecDef Rush described it was taking a "strategic nap." I have now been informed that SecDef has seen the President and the situation is cooled off considerably. In any event, the net effect has been to at least partially clear the air and I hope decrease the very heavy influence that MG Pursley exercises over SecDef Laird.

T.H. MOORER[6]

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[4] See footnote 7, Document 44.

[5] See footnote 3, Document 35.

[6] Moorer initialed "M" above his typed signature.

55. Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, April 4, 1972.

Moorer: Good morning, Mr. President.

Nixon: Hi, how are you? I noticed that you only got off 126 missions yesterday, which I understand because of weather. Now I ask—

Moorer: No, we actually, that's—

Nixon: Oh, you got six more, huh? 132, is that right—?

Moorer: It's over 200, sir.

Nixon: Yeah. Well, let me ask you a question. I don't want them to fly in bad weather, but what, where is that report that I was supposed to have here at 9:15 with regard to whether or not you could not, and without having those planes just sit on the deck, hit in the B–3 area, where they have that immense concentration? What about that?

Moorer: Well, they have been hitting, sir, in the B–3 area, and—

Nixon: Well, how about—how about taking everything that flies, while this weather is bad, and socking it in there for awhile again, giving them a massive punch? Is there—is—you see, you've got the planes sitting on the deck now.

Moorer: No, sir. The planes are operating. I think we had about 500 sorties over the last 24 hours, sir. They're operating in the, along the Ho Chi Minh trail, in the B–3 Front, and along the—down in Military Region 3. And we actually had over 200 in Military Region 1 and just across the DMZ.

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: As you know, some of them got through a hole and destroyed the bridge over the Ben Hai River, and then came down the road and knocked out three tanks.

Nixon: I saw that. Uh-huh—

Moorer: By visible, but I think—

Nixon: That's good. Good.

Moorer: I think that he's made—the report that they made, sir, over there of 100 and—that was cut off at a certain time.

Nixon: Yeah.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, White House Telephone, Conversation 22–73. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. According to the President's Daily Diary, Nixon and Moorer spoke on the phone from 9:24 to 9:28 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files)

Moorer: And I telephoned out there.

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: I sent your instructions yesterday.

Nixon: Yeah. Right. Right. Right—

Moorer: That you wanted a maximum effort.

Nixon: Yeah. Understand, I don't want anybody to fly in bad weather and just to drop it out in the boondocks. But my point is, if you can't hit there then hit—you know, from reading the morning report, you say that you expect that the next blow is going to come in the B–3 area. Is that not correct?

Moorer: That's right. Yes, sir. And they are working hard there—

Nixon: Are we working that as hard as we can?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: There's nothing more we can do—?

Moorer: Yes, sir. We don't have any aircraft on the deck—

Nixon: Um-hmm. Yeah—

Moorer: Let me assure you.

Nixon: Now, point two. Have you carried out the order that I gave last night—12 hours ago—with regard to using naval gunfire on the road above the DMZ in North Vietnam?

Moorer: Yes, sir. I did that right away—

Nixon: Now, is there—does that, can the naval gunfire reach that road?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: It can?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: All right. Have you—and—and that's—that will be done? Now—

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Now, what additional ships are available to get out there? I mean, do you have a few that you could—

Moorer: Yes, sir—

Nixon: —send from Singapore and other places?

Moorer: Yes, sir. We, we've sent four additional destroyers and I've sent in a cruiser—

Nixon: Um-hmm. Well, have you got any? How long would it take anything to get from Pearl? Is that where most of them are?

Moorer: What I think we can use are the ones in the Western Pacific, sir. In fact, they're already there. I had, I started this action as soon as I—

Nixon: How many? How many could you get there, Tom? How many? I mean, could you get a significant number? Because I have a more important assignment that I'll have Henry give to you orally.

Moorer: Yes, sir. We could get, certainly get more there from the Seventh Fleet. It would take, you know—

Nixon: Great.

Moorer: —about eight days or so to get them—

Nixon: Eight days?

Moorer: —from Pearl. But from the Seventh Fleet, we can get them within—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —anywhere from four hours—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Moorer: —to four days.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. And that includes what? Cruisers? Destroyers?

Moorer: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm. Um-hmm—

Moorer: But right as of this moment, there are eight—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —on the line, sir.

Nixon: Yeah—

Moorer: I told them to put four south of the DMZ and four north.

Nixon: And they are, but you can't get—couldn't you get more than that—?

Moorer: Yes, sir. We can get [unclear] a few—

Nixon: Well, order every, every—order everything that is used. Incidentally, forget the SIOP and all that crap—

Moorer: We have, sir—

Nixon: That doesn't mean anything anyway. And get all the cruisers and destroyers in the Seventh Fleet in that area. We have another purpose for 'em. And get 'em there as fast as you can. And give me—give Henry a report by 10 o'clock,[2] because I have a reason I have to have them there. Okay? And he'll let you know. Okay?

Moorer: Yes, sir. Thank you.

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[2] Moorer called Kissinger at 9:54 a.m. to tell him he had the list the President requested and could bring it over then or at 10:45 when the WSAG meeting convened. Kissinger said 10:45 would be fine and, as Moorer recorded in his diary: "And they want Abrams to understand that we are not going to lose this one no matter what it costs. He also wants every commander to give us the maximum without restraint. I said I had already told them that, and for them to let me know if they needed any additional authorities or resources." (Moorer Diary, April 4, 9:54 a.m.; Ibid., RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

56. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 4, 1972, 10:50–11:47 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
John N. Irwin
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Warren Nutter

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Lt. Gen. John Vogt

CIA
Richard Helms
William Newton
(only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—The State Department should send a message to Amb. Godley in Laos, telling him to ask for whatever air support he needs, regardless of what he thinks may be available.

—The Defense Department should draw up an operations plan for hitting the storage facilities at Dong Hoi, augment the fire support ships off the Vietnamese coast and transfer the Ironhand squadron of F–105s to Vietnam.

—Additional F–4s should be sent to Vietnam. Dr. Kissinger will obtain Presidential guidance on whether to send Marine F–4s from Japan or Air Force F–4s from the U.S.

—The State Department spokesman should again hit hard at the North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Accords and the 1968 understandings. He should also mention the massive Soviet supply effort.

—Clark MacGregor and David Abshire should begin contacting members of Congress, seeking support for the Administration position.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 78, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, Mar. 1971–Apr. 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

57. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 4, 1972.

Nixon: Hi, Henry.

Kissinger: Hi. We had just a good WSAG meeting.[2] You've really charged these guys up now.

Nixon: Did we get some weather, did you say?

Kissinger: Well, we're getting some weather, but they are really pouring in naval ships now.

Nixon: Did he [Moorer] get the point with it?

Kissinger: Oh.

Nixon: Did you tell him about the—is he ready for a mining exercise?

Kissinger: He'll have a plan first thing in the morning. He said thank—tell the President—

Nixon: Leak it.

Kissinger: "Not since '64"—No, I'm—we're doing it even better. I've told him to start loading mines in the Philippines—

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: —on ships.

Nixon: How about—?

Kissinger: That will leak it.

Nixon: How about having—telling Helms. Did you tell him that?

Kissinger: Yep, that's good.

Nixon: Would you mind giving Helms the word that I—?

Kissinger: Helms, of course he's a bit of a whore, but he's thrilled. Now, Rush asked to see me yesterday, asking me to see me after the meeting. He said he reviewed the whole record. And, he said whatever you said yesterday was an understatement; Laird has been playing games with us.[3] And—

Nixon: And about giving the reports of—

Kissinger: Yeah.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 701–14. 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, 12:13–1:15 p.m.

[2] See Document 56.

[3] See Document 54.

Nixon: —both sides.

Kissinger: And also the request for authorities. You see, one reason I was so leery is they wanted to hit logistics and SAMs. Laird didn't approve it; he just wanted to hit SAMs. And to me the price just was too high for that.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Well, I just want you to know that. This thing—

Nixon: What is it? Have they got—they've gotten a little charged up then?

Kissinger: Oh, God. We—they're now. We have one question, I don't really—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —know whether I need to bother you with it. I think we ought to put in some more aircraft.

Nixon: Well, where the hell is it?

Kissinger: Well, the choice is to move 36 Marine planes out of Japan or 54 from the United States Air Force. The Marines would have to—

Nixon: Bring them—

Kissinger: —bring in 500 more people with them because of they don't have their ground support—

Nixon: They are to be stationed in—in this country—?

Kissinger: In Da Nang—

Nixon: In-country? If we can do it—

Kissinger: In order to move the Air Force out.

Nixon: Yeah. The Air Force thing is not considered to be an increase in our complement there, is it?

Kissinger: Not—no. Maybe a hundred people, but that would be—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —absorbed by the withdrawal.

Nixon: The Marines are better. The Marines will do a better job. Let's do whatever does a better job. What do you think?

Kissinger: All right.

Nixon: First you're going to raise more aircraft. Oh, the Air Force isn't that bad. Let's not [unclear]. We shouldn't blame those pilots; they're brave. The poor sons-of-bitches are all POWs and this and that. You know? They fought well. It's these goddamn airplanes that are no good.

Kissinger: Well, they're both using the same planes. Let me check with Haig who he thinks will do the better job.

Nixon: But would you give me it quickly? Would you say that—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: —would you say, first, that Moorer is charged up now? Huh?

Kissinger: Absolutely. And the whole admiralty. I said, I repeated what you had said this morning. I said, "The President said he doesn't want to be told about political campaigns or anything else. He has the responsibility for the security of this country. He has concluded that for us to be run out of Vietnam would undermine our foreign policy. And he has an obligation to do the right thing. So all you people are obliged to do is to tell him what the right thing is."[4] And—

Nixon: Except pouring them in.

Kissinger: Except pouring them in. I said, "Anything short of ground combat we want to do."

Nixon: So what'd they say?

Kissinger: "There's not—you are responsible for telling all your subordinate commanders—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —that they should think of things to do." He said, "God, I haven't heard"—Moorer said, "I haven't heard this since '63."

Nixon: Oh, yes. He's heard it from me.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: He forgets it.

Kissinger: Yeah. And—

Nixon: Very well.

Kissinger: Well, they are now, they—they're moving 20 B–52s out there.

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: They've already moved 18 F–4s.

Nixon: Good.

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[4] Later that day, Moorer made certain that senior commanders from Honolulu to Saigon understood the President's new policy, telling them: "According to high-level thinking in Washington, we have entered into an entirely new situation with respect to the conflict in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese have departed from their previous concept of protracted war and have now, in total violation of the previous understandings, launched a major invasion across the DMZ by main force units, including a significant part of their reserves. Consequently, it is necessary for all commanders and all staffs to give this problem their continuous attention. We do not expect to lose this one and, consequently, must bring as much air and naval force to bear as possible in order to give the enemy a severe jolt. We must take a new look at old plans previously discarded because of lack of authority and, in addition, come forward with as many imaginative recommendations as possible." (Message 7951 from Moorer to McCain and Abrams, April 4, also sent to Rosson, Clay, Clarey, Mack, McNickle, and Cooper; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1016, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's Visit to Vietnam, April 14, 1972)

Kissinger: They are moving—

Nixon: Are they moving another carrier?

Kissinger: Well, the other carrier they think would take too long.

Nixon: All right, fine.

Kissinger: And they'd have to move it—

Nixon: These four would be enough, probably.

Kissinger: These four would be enough—

Nixon: And how about the fleet? Can they get some more of them? Get some more than four destroyers? Let's put in—

Kissinger: No, no. They've already—

Nixon: —put in 100 destroyers.

Kissinger: They've already got 10 destroyers there; they're moving 8 more down, plus 3 cruisers. And—

Nixon: Well, that's a hell of a lot of firepower.

Kissinger: That is. And you remember these have 5-inch guns. And, I told him to start hitting logistics installations in Dong Hoi, to start hitting the airfield in Dong Hoi.[5]

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: He said, "Do you mean it?" I said, "Of course we mean it."

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: Is Dong Hoi an airfield? Can it be reached by, by this—?

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: Have we done it before?

Kissinger: Never.

Nixon: We haven't? Why not?

Kissinger: Because of the bombing understanding.

Nixon: Oh, you mean we haven't. But it was done by Johnson, I presume?

Kissinger: Right, but never by naval gunfire, because—

Nixon: The naval gunfire, it seems to me, would be better than bombing.

Kissinger: Yeah. Oh, yeah. We should really pour it in there now.

Nixon: Geez.

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[5] Located in southern North Vietnam, Dong Hoi contained military barracks, an airfield, and an important bridge, and was a major logistics center with a railway terminal just south of the city.

Kissinger: They'll scream like crazy. But I think—my view is this, Mr. President, this is not going to break open the war.

Nixon: Your view also is, I think, correct, that we ought to delay a 48-hour strike because the weather has been bad.

Kissinger: I—

Nixon: Has there been any improvement in the weather? You say they got 200 strikes off. I hope that Moorer didn't go drop 'em over the boondocks—

Kissinger: No, no—

Nixon: —because of the number of strikes.

Kissinger: No, no—

Nixon: Goddamnit, that isn't what I was telling him.

Kissinger: I've talked to—I've talked to Moorer, incidentally. He thinks if we give him unlimited authority to hit up to the 18th parallel—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —in other words, just extend it 5 more miles—

Nixon: Do it!

Kissinger: He'd prefer that to the 48-hour strike all over South Vietnam.

Nixon: All right, fine.

Kissinger: And it gives us a better position because we can then say we're just supporting the immediate combat zone.

Nixon: That's right. We're supporting the combat zone and that's all.

Kissinger: And we can then, as we—

Nixon: And then we can do more in a smaller—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —place.

Kissinger: That's right. And—

Nixon: And then also it's a signal to them we might do more later. Now, you see, the mining, though, will really be the—will really be the thing that'll tick them off. We've got to—I think that one has got to come—

Kissinger: But we should wait at least a week—

Nixon: —quite soon. Quite soon. I'm not so sure we have to even wait. I'm not so sure [unclear]—

Kissinger: But it wouldn't take effect, Mr. President, for a month or two.

Nixon: I know, but you know we're in a position now where—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: —a bold play is going to make the difference.

Kissinger: But I think, Mr. President, they've given us a chance. They threw down the gauntlet and if we now break them, if the South Vietnamese can form a line, this is beyond contention—

Nixon: Did you tell Moorer about my theory about retreating?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: You see, I read again last night. I went back to, deliberately, and read Churchill's chapter about March 21st. And as you know, [Lieutenant General Sir Hubert de la Poer] Gough, a great one of the British military commanders, the hero of '16, was cashiered as a result of the damn thing. And then—and Churchill finally said it, it was a—and then he pointed out why it was a German defeat and a Brit—and an allied victory. He said for the first time in the war since Ypres, he said that the Germans lost 2 to 1 on the offensive in casualties to the British, and 3 to 2 in terms of officers. But look, but look—but look what it looked like, I mean what it looked like in terms of the battle. The Germans captured, Henry, in the first four days of that battle, they captured 60,000 British. Captured 60,000. Captured over a thousand heavy guns. They killed and wounded 200,000 British in the course of the day. And everybody said, "a great German victory." Ludendorff was whining. He [unclear] and it was a hell—and, as Churchill said, it was a defeat.[6]

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: And we've got to—

Kissinger: Mr. President, I agree—

Nixon: But how—let me tell you, the other point that I, which I particularly noted, Churchill made the point of retreat. And he said, they kept going back, and they kept going back, and they gave up ground, but they won [laughs] the war. The hell with the ground! Unless it's—unless it's Hue, or—you know what I mean?

Kissinger: Hue and Da Nang you can't lose—

Nixon: Did you—did you tell—did you tell him that? Has he—have they been figuring about a strategic retreat?

Kissinger: Yeah, I've told him, and of course, Thieu's interest, he doesn't want to lose any cities.

Nixon: All right.

Kissinger: But—

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[6] President Nixon was probably conflating two of the major 1916 battles on the Western Front—taking the date of March 21 from Verdun (February 21–December 18) and his talking points about the British from the Somme (July 1–November 18). British troops did not take part in Verdun. General Sir Douglas Haig commanded the British forces at the Somme. See footnote 11, Document 13.

Nixon: We're trying to win the war—

Kissinger: I believe, Mr. President, if we can hold the line, as long as it doesn't mean the loss of Hue and Da Nang, if we can hold the line then we've got them out in the open where they are concentrated; there's no jungle there. And we are going to grind them down. And if they then have to withdraw north of the DMZ, Mr. President, we will be able to do to them politically what they did to us after Laos.

Nixon: They invaded and retreated?

Kissinger: They invaded and retreated. No one will care how many casualties.

Nixon: The North Vietnamese—the South Vietnamese have got to attack—

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: —to drive them out.

Kissinger: And if we get that done, then we must offer a negotiation fairly quickly after that. And then we may be out of the war before the end of the year.

Nixon: That's irrelevant. [unclear] Henry, getting out the war before the end of the year doesn't make any difference from a political standpoint. If we're not out before the election, then I'll have [unclear]—

Kissinger: That's what I mean—

Nixon: —can go on four years [unclear]—

Kissinger: No, no. What I mean is before the election—

Nixon: —we can do the right thing—

Kissinger: I mean before—

Nixon: We've got to. We've got to, in terms of before the election, the only thing that is going to do us any good is to do it in June, before the Democratic Convention. That's when we have to have our big announcement, you know. That's why I say it. That's what we're talking about it here. So as to—It's the—the war is not the problem; it is the issue that is the problem. You see my point?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: And the main thing is to have this battle now in B–1 [Front], where we kick the stuffings out of the bastards.

Kissinger: So, that they can't come—

Nixon: And win one.

Kissinger: And, so that they can't come back before the end of the year.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: But before the election—

Nixon: But I think that in terms of the—but I think that in terms of the negotiation, if this battle moves fairly fast, if there's any chance for it to move, if the weather breaks, my guess is that you'll have your negotiation quite soon.

Kissinger: That's what I think.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: That's what I think. That's exactly my opinion.

Nixon: When will the Warsaw thing be announced?[7]

Kissinger: Well, that will take us a week to announce—five days. We've notified them today. We've notified State to notify Warsaw. Of course, it came in through Warsaw channels, not through State channels.

Nixon: Hang on.

Kissinger: But the major thing is not to tell Laird he did right. Well, not to tell him he did wrong, either. Just have him forget about the past. The major thing is to get this battle won.

Nixon: Yeah.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

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[7] A reference to Nixon's planned stop-over in Poland after the summit meeting with Brezhnev.

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58. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 4, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of political leadership in the Pentagon.]

Nixon: He's[2] got to realize, Henry, that—everybody around here has got to realize—we aren't going to lose this damn thing. Look, you know that when he says that if the weather doesn't break in 48 hours we lose I don't believe that. I just—

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 701–17. 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, 1:17–1:32 p.m. Portions of the transcript are printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 82.

[2] The President was referring to Laird.

Kissinger: I don't believe it either.

Nixon: If it doesn't—I don't think battles are won or lost that soon. But God Almighty, there must be something, something, something that son-of-a-bitchin' Air Force can do in bad weather. Goddamnit!

Kissinger: That's what kills one. That's what really kills us.

Nixon: Huh?

Kissinger: That's what kills us.

Nixon: Well, the [B–]52s can certainly drop them in bad weather, can't they?

Kissinger: I have—

Nixon: Now, incidentally, he said that it isn't wise to use '52s above—in the above area. Now—

Kissinger: Mr. President, basically he—

Nixon: And he also pissed on the naval gunfire thing. Now, what the hell? Who's right and wrong?

Kissinger: I trust Moorer on the naval gunfire a hell of a lot more than I trust him—he told you seven kilometers. The range is ten miles, which is sixteen kilometers.

Nixon: All right. Use it. Use everything we can.

Kissinger: Well, the worst is it doesn't hit anything. It doesn't hurt anything.

Nixon: No. Okay. All right, you've got naval gunfire in.

[Omitted here is further discussion of political leadership in the Pentagon and of how to utilize the President's reputation for risk-taking to achieve policy goals. A portion of the omitted section is printed as *Foreign Relations*, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 82.]

Kissinger: And we'll, we'll escalate it. And it is—that's why we've got to pour things in there. All these guys who say, "What's effective?" Hell, nothing is going to be. [unclear] pure cost-effectiveness. If we start shelling Dong Hoi with naval gunfire that's something we haven't done yet. And—

Nixon: Is Dong Hoi a city?

Kissinger: Yes, sir. Well, I mean, they have supplies outside of Dong Hoi.

Nixon: I see. We'll hit those, though.

Kissinger: That's right. If we stop and the air—if we start hitting with B–52s north of the DMZ, that's a signal. When we start pouring more airplanes in there, that's a signal. You can't have approved of every one of them, and if we start getting hit on the B–3 Front he'll need every airplane he's got.

Nixon: Out there. Yeah.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, it would work there, too, won't it?

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: On the B–3 Front?

Kissinger: Actually where they are now we ought to be able to cream them, because in the B–3 Front they are out in the jungle—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —but, so we won't be able to see so well. But in the other front it's a classical infantry battle, and if we can ever get a good day in there, we just ought to wreck them.

Nixon: Goddamnit then. I can't believe the weather could hang on like this. I can't believe it. Do you think—does the weather sometimes hang in for weeks at this time of year?

Kissinger: It doesn't normally but those—it's, of course, a disgrace, Mr. President. They have to fight—if they—in China, in Russia, in any one of our major enemies, we're going to have weather like this. This is not unusual weather around the world if you look at conditions, so why design an airplane in which you can only bomb visually? It's not only visually, they've got to be 5—4,000 to 5,000 feet. Well, hell, I don't know, this is probably 5,000 feet. Commercial aircraft can land—

Nixon: Mel doesn't know—when he's talking about the Battle of the Bulge, he says the weather cleared; it did in the movie, but it didn't actually out there. Those bombers went in and bombed through the snow, didn't they—?

Kissinger: That's right, and Al Haig tells me that in the early stages of the Vietnam war when they still had the old planes, he was never worried about air support, it was always there.

Nixon: Is that right?

Kissinger: Yeah. And, hell, commercial planes can land with 300 feet. Here they require 4,000 feet. It's ridiculous.

[pause]

Nixon: What did Helms say?

Kissinger: Helms—

Nixon: He's a bellwether.

Kissinger: He's a good bellwether. He said this was exciting, this was the first positive thing he has heard. He said keep it up. He said that's the only way to do it. He used almost the phrase—not as eloquently as you—but he in effect said they won't blame you for succeeding and they won't give you credit for failing. I mean he didn't use exactly those words but that was the sense of what he used.

Nixon: But, on the other hand, suppose the goddamn line breaks? Suppose they take Hue. Then all we're left with, we'll then—then we'll have to go to the—we'll go to the blockade.

Kissinger: Mr. President, I don't think Hue will fall that quickly. They've got their best division in front of it, and the weather has got to clear by then.

Nixon: No, we—we're not going to borrow trouble [unclear].

Kissinger: I think this is, this is our Battle of the Bulge.

Nixon: With no Patton.

Kissinger: With no American troops, so we're dependent on a bunch of—

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: —Vietnamese.

Nixon: Goddamn it, we trained these troops. They have our equipment.

[Omitted here is brief discussion of political leadership in the Pentagon and a press conference.]

Nixon: Henry, let—the 38th parallel is fine. Is that what it is? 38th—?

Kissinger: 18th.

Nixon: 18th. I'm sorry. I'm thinking of Korea. All right, the 18th. What does that matter?

Kissinger: I'm sort of torn on that strike up to the 19th. I—I've got nothing against it, I just thought the more we can say it's geared to the battle the better off we are here.

Nixon: Well, we don't have to do that right away anyway.

Kissinger: No. Why don't we get the other one started?

Nixon: Hmm. [clears throat] Let's let them concentrate on getting the—that one and then have that as the next option.

Kissinger: That's, I think, if we do the other one—

Nixon: We've got to have something in reserve, so we'll just knock the hell out of everything right up to the 18th. And the 19th, I want plans to have that as one of the contingencies. And also, I want this mining plan ready [unclear]—

Kissinger: The mining—

Nixon: They're loading mines, are they?

Kissinger: They're loading mines in the Philippines.

[Omitted here is discussion of Great Power politics, crisis management, and the Moscow Summit.]

Nixon: So, so your view is, as far as the Russians are concerned, they'll [unclear]—

Kissinger: In fact, I told State. State got—

Nixon: Let me say it. Let me say, if the Russians—if the Russians knock off the summit as a result of this—

Kissinger: They won't.

Nixon: Well, let me say, if they do, I'm simply going to say I, that we are not going to have the Russ—the Communists determine our foreign policy.

Kissinger: They won't.

Nixon: We'll hit them right in the nose.

Kissinger: Inconceivable, Mr. President. They will not do it—

Nixon: What'd did you say at State? What'd you tell them—?

Kissinger: Well, State got a question yesterday about, "What do we think of that Russian military mission in Hanoi?" And he avoided it. I told them today if the question comes to say, "Let's not forget, the Russ—we're not saying the Russians are planning these operations. We are saying it's Russian equipment that's making them possible."

Nixon: Well, be sure that that's in Mel Laird's statement Friday, would you? The Russian equipment point.

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: It's the Russian tanks, Russian planes.

Kissinger: And Russian tanks—and Russian trucks.

Nixon: And jeopardizes—this just jeopardizes Soviet-American relations.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: That's it. Isn't that a good idea?

Kissinger: Excellent.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger's meeting with Joseph Alsop.]

Kissinger: I like your phrase, Mr. President: "No one will blame us for success, and no one will give us credit for failure."

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: If we—if we can get them back behind the DMZ, we can crow all over the place.

Nixon: All right. You think that's possible?

Kissinger: Yes. I think—

Nixon: I assume only if the North—if the South Vietnamese will charge. They just ought to charge.

Kissinger: No, they just have to hold. I do not believe—This may go like Khe Sanh in '68.

Nixon: Did they go back?

Kissinger: They just melted away. So, we'll have to take several weeks of heat here with liberals screaming for peace and everything else.

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59. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 4, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of Haig's view of the Marine Corps and close air support compared to the Air Force, how many troops to withdraw in the next round, and Kissinger's recent telephone conversation with Nelson Rockefeller in which Rockefeller recommended going after Haiphong.]

Nixon: I have a feeling the weather is going to break. It's beginning to break here. [laughs] Not that means anything half way around the world, but in some ways it's bound to start to break, Henry.

Kissinger: It's got to break.

Nixon: Huh?

Kissinger: It's got to break—

Nixon: It's going to break—

Kissinger: —and at any rate—

Nixon: —and then all hell will break loose out there.

Kissinger: If we can get—I—I was talking to Haig. It really is unbelievable, Mr. President. Every single idea has come out of this office here or out of my office; I mean out of the White House—

Nixon: I know that.

Kissinger: Nothing from Abrams, not one thought on what to do. He does this by the numbers. We have a computer out there.

Nixon: Who? Who? Who?

Kissinger: Abrams.

Nixon: Oh! Yes, yes, yes. That's what I said to—

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 702–7. 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, 3:45–5:06 p.m.

Kissinger: Haig says, correctly, if he were out there he'd be flying over the battlefield and throw[ing] monkey wrenches out of the plane, on the theory that it would hit somebody.

Nixon: Yeah, that's what I mean. Why don't we just drop personnel bombs and figure that it's [unclear]? And I—well, coming back to my—the proposition I wanted to talk to you about, to be sure we understand that they are—the proposition that we—that our call should figure out where a line can be drawn.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: And plan to get back to them. Now, incidentally, I noticed from the news summary that indicated that we have withdrawn from what they call 16 bases. That's good. That's what they should do. They should get out of those 16 bases,[2] whatever it is.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: Now, if they feel that Quang Tri, or whatever it is, is significant and it's worth holding, hold it, but that I'd be in a position of giving up [unclear]—it's, it's—I'd rather them give up territory, win the battle. That is the way to fight battles.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: The Russians have won wars that way. The Germans have won 'em—

Kissinger: That's right—

Nixon: The Brit—French. Christ, Napoleon didn't always attack. Huh? Not always.

Kissinger: He almost always attacked.

Nixon: Well, he believed in the theory of attack, because he usually had smaller forces.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: But on the other hand—

Kissinger: Well, he was sometimes on the defensive—

Nixon: He'd do the sleight of hand now and then.

Kissinger: Well, actually, his best campaign, which he lost, but it was a miracle that he fought it so long, was when he had 60,000 against 400,000, and he withdrew into France, and he threw his 60,000 back and forth and was really defeating them. The trouble was, every time

[2] South Vietnamese Forward Support Bases just south of the DMZ.

he defeated one of them, if he lost even 5,000 men he was weakened to a point where he couldn't—[3]

Nixon: And finally at Waterloo—

Kissinger: —sustain it. But that was before Waterloo—

Nixon: Or the Battle of the Nations?

Kissinger: No, he—at the Battle of the Nations they were still fairly even, but he had no cavalry left, so he lost that. Then, after he lost the Battle of the Nations he withdrew into France. The Austrians came in from the south, the Prussians and English came in from the north. He stood in the center and first defeated the Austrians, then he threw the whole army north against the Prussians. He beat the Prussians, then he moved back against the Austrians. And he was holding them off for six months with these lightening strikes.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But then the Austrians decided to hell with it and just formed a line and ground ahead. And so he—they didn't have their forces divided.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: At Waterloo, well that was just screwed up. He nearly—he should have won Waterloo—

Nixon: He should have won. Well, anyway, that's a war of a different time, but basically it's like football. Strategy never changes with football or—you know what I mean? You—you give ground in the middle of the field, hold the line at the goal line, and then score a touchdown.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: That's the way it's done.

Kissinger: Yeah. I think if we can really get to work on them, Mr. President—

Nixon: I think that will—

Kissinger: —if we—

Nixon: The point is, you see, Henry, this gives us one hell of an opportunity, an opportunity to really clobber them, something we've been wanting to do—

Kissinger: Right.

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[3] Nixon and Kissinger were discussing the Battle of Leipzig, October 16–19, 1813, also known as the Battle of Nations, in which an allied army of approximately 370,000 Russians, Prussians, Swedes, and Austrians fought Napoleon's 198,000 troops. Napoleon lost the battle, suffering 73,000 casualties to the allies' 54,000.

Nixon: —and now, by God, they have walked into it.

Kissinger: Right—

Nixon: They've just been hitting in the B–3 Front. We couldn't do it, but we can clobber them up and down over that DMZ—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —like nobody's business.

Kissinger: That is right. And I think we can just level that area south of the 18th parallel.

Nixon: Do you have any, any thoughts with regard to, to anything more? Now, just think a minute. We don't want to force anything. Anything more? If you—let me, let me suggest one thing that I had in mind that you might get. Rogers isn't going to have a press conference—

Kissinger: No—

Nixon: —is he?

Kissinger: No, no.

Nixon: Christ. He should. He should step up to the damn plate—

Kissinger: Well, except he'd just—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —make it [unclear]—

Nixon: Right. One thing I would like for you to work out, to get out, maybe through State in their briefing tomorrow, is this: How much of the population is under the control, still, of Saigon? Do you know what I mean? Now, you know, when we talk about the losses and so forth and so on, I think it's just as well to keep the perspective a little clear. Would you—do you agree?

Kissinger: Exactly. Actually—

Nixon: It must be 85 to 90 percent.

Kissinger: Nelson [Rockefeller], incidentally, thinks that the public is on our side.

Nixon: Is it? [unclear] It doesn't make any difference. I wouldn't care if was 10 percent on our side, because I don't know if they want to be doing it, and I know that at this point we cannot top this. You think of—I mean, I—as we said earlier, Henry, that we would weaken. You wouldn't have a viable foreign policy for a reason when an asshole like Muskie, who knows better—McGovern, who doesn't know any better—but when Muskie says, in effect, "Don't react here. I hope we don't do anything precipitate." Henry, he's a guy that might be sitting in this chair. You realize—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: —that if we should lose here, that the United States will never again have a foreign policy? We don't go fight anyplace.

Kissinger: Mr. President, if McGovern—if Muskie sat here—the worst is if Humphrey sat here. Let's take somebody who acts tougher. He wouldn't do anything. He would find excuses—

Nixon: Terrible.

Kissinger: —to do nothing, and the whole thing would come apart. All it would take for you is to take a laissez-faire attitude and the Pentagon would be, in effect, doing what they did in Tet; just be paralyzed, not hit back.

Nixon: Is that what they did? Paralyzed?

Kissinger: Absolutely. We are the ones that are energizing it out of here.

Nixon: I don't think they would have been hitting back or thinking. How—what would they have done had we not called them in and said get off your ass?

Kissinger: If we had not called them in, they would have hit the SAMs in a belt of 15 miles—[4]

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —instead of 45. They would not have hit logistics installations. They would have limited it to three or four days. They would have kept a ceiling on sorties. They wouldn't—certainly not have sent additional planes out. They would have said publicly—

Nixon: They would not have sent them out—

Kissinger: —that we are not going to reinforce, that the withdrawals continue. They would have done just enough to make us look impotent and not enough to do anything successful.

Nixon: One of the things about it, Henry, what we are doing has got to make us look—this point, as I'm sure you get out of that banged up territory that we have, is that the South Vietnamese Government isn't gone. Is it? But the point is—

Kissinger: From this point it's not even under severe pressure yet.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: I mean all the—[unclear] is in the northernmost province, the one that's closest—and Joe Alsop says, correctly, when a government puts its whole army on foreign soil and if it then doesn't win, this is an act of desperation. This is not—no longer an act of policy. And I tend to agree with him—

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[4] Kissinger was referring to a string of surface-to-air missile emplacements 15 nautical miles north of the DMZ.

Nixon: I agree with him. I agree. I think this is one of those things that if [it] isn't the last gasp, they are supermen. They are not supermen.

Kissinger: This is the last gasp, Mr. President. If we hold firm and if we scare the Russians enough, but for that we have to act ferociously, and I even wonder whether we shouldn't give a pop to Haiphong.

Nixon: Well again, where do you put it?

Kissinger: Well, just bomb the goddamn town.

Nixon: All right.

Kissinger: For 24 hours—

Nixon: We could do that. We could really do it. I'm perfectly willing.

Kissinger: Let me look into that.

Nixon: All right. If there's anything you could hit in the Haiphong area, now let me say, anything that we could hit.

Kissinger: Just level the goddamn docks.

Nixon: Well the point is, it depends whether ships are there, Henry, civilians and all that sort of thing.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Yeah. Understand, I'm for it. I'm—would you prefer to do that to mining?

Kissinger: No. Mining would be better, but also that would get us—

Nixon: It would last longer—

Kissinger: —a first-class crisis.

[pause]

Nixon: Well, let's think. Let's think. What will the pop to Haiphong do, Henry? Just think about it. I'm all for it. But understand, I, I thought that all through, though—

Kissinger: Well, Mr. President—

Nixon: We're going to do the—we'll—I'm prepared to blockade—

Kissinger: We have—

Nixon: —we're prepared to mine. I'm prepared to take out that railway to China—

Kissinger: We have to nav—we have to navigate, Mr. President, if we're doing something that's spectacular and scares them—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and something we can sustain.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: If we bomb day after day—I've checked the military. They prefer to bomb day after day south of the 18th parallel than to

make one massive effort and have to knock it off. And I think that makes sense, because that way they can work on the whole system—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —and grind it down. And I think we—on the whole, I lean toward systematically grinding them down, and then giving them a big pop, and then knocking the whole thing off. By the end of the month—what I think is, by the end of the month, if we have broken their back in the 18th parallel, we could give them a big pop up north and then knock the whole thing off and say, "Now we've done it," if the mil[itary]— if the offensive has stopped by then.

[pause]

Nixon: I think the pop shouldn't come now. Think of it. What—what would it do? Let's just think if we did it now. What's it going to do to put the hellish pressure on Russians? [pause] What do you think?

Kissinger: Well, let me find out. Let me get some reconnaissance.

Nixon: Fine. Is there anything short of it? I mean is there anything in the Haiphong area you could hit? Something, understand, that'd be a shot across the bow? You know what I mean? That's what I'm thinking.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Just let 'em have one. More will be coming. In other words, with the bombing they inflicted, they have violated the so-called "understanding."[5]

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Totally. They've done it other times, but this time it's for real. They came across the DMZ. Correct?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: Does anybody say that there was not an understanding about not violating the DMZ? Nobody. That's one thing. They may chat—they chatter about other understandings but this one there was. Correct?

Kissinger: Yes, sir.

Nixon: All right. They violated it. All right, since the understanding is violated we ought to hit something in the North we haven't hit before. That's the thing I'm concerned about. That's why, you know, I felt hit the 19th parallel or whatever it is. But let's come again. Maybe the idea of hitting something in Haiphong is better. What would you do just with one shot? One—

Kissinger: I think you could do it—

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[5] See footnote 5, Document 2.

Nixon: —with one run?

Kissinger: —with one, one shot. Just take out some docks because there the symbolism is more important than anything else.

Nixon: Let's see, you take out the docks then you have great squeals from people here saying: "Don't bomb Haiphong." Right?

Kissinger: That's right. And you'd certainly get a violent Chinese response. You'd certainly get a violent Russian response.

Nixon: Hmm. People respond when a friend hurts.

Kissinger: That's right. But let me see what ships are in there.

[pause]

Nixon: Well, let's just let State do it at secretary-level tomorrow, huh? I figure Bill [Rogers] wouldn't, wouldn't go on the damn thing. You know, goddamnit, though, it's really not fair. It's really not fair. You know, here we—here we are, Henry. Somebody ought to step up and say, "What can we do to help?" At least Mel is willing to do that.

[Omitted here is discussion of Rogers's dealing with the press, his role in the coming Presidential campaign, Laird making campaign speeches, Rogers building up the State Department, a message to the Chinese and the Russians, a North Vietnamese request for a meeting in Paris, Kissinger writing a book about the Vietnam War, and what Zhou Enlai may have told the North Vietnamese.]

Kissinger: One thing we must do, Mr. President, just symbolically, is go in with B–52s north of the DMZ.

Nixon: Oh, I ordered it. Was there any—was there any question about that—?

Kissinger: Because that will be a signal to them—

Nixon: Well, that's what I mean. Let me say that, that's at least one shot across the bow that's cheap as hell.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Now, would you please put that down in—?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Can't we do that even tomorrow?

Kissinger: Well, we have to suppress the SAMs first. We need a day of this, of working on the SAMs, and then we go in with the B–52s.

Nixon: All right. Can you find some of the extra targets up there?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Why not take Vinh out for example? Can we do that—?

Kissinger: [unclear] beyond that.

Nixon: Well, but boy, I mean, this is music to my ears. I've been pressing for it for a long time. Let's put some B–52s north of that, north of the DMZ.

Kissinger: Correct.

Nixon: That tells them what's going to be coming. Doesn't it?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: It's a warning: "Look here, you knock this off or we're going to continue to move."

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: We're also in a very good position. You realize all this bombing can be justified as being solely for military purposes?

Kissinger: But this is the beauty of it. This is where they made their mistake. If they had struck in Kontum, all we could have done is two or three days. Now they've hit on the demilitarized zone and we're just not going to let go for a few weeks. And they—This is an act of desperation on their part. Now, Alsop told me that John Vann thinks, he's in correspondence with him, that, you know who he is—

Nixon: I know John Vann, yeah.

Kissinger: —who's in charge of the 2d of the B–3 area.[6] He says our air attacks have so demoralized the North Vietnamese that they haven't been able to launch a concerted attack.

[Omitted here is discussion of H.G. Wells and whether one's level of education makes one more or less bellicose.]

Nixon: Now that's a problem. It's supposed to rain tonight, but maybe it will rain and clear it up or make it worse.

Kissinger: Oh, I think it's got to turn, Mr. President, because this is the time of the [unclear]—

Nixon: Goddamnit, it's got to turn. It's the same thing. You know, when it does turn what's going to happen?

Kissinger: Well, when it does turn, you know, get out everything that flies—

Nixon: Huh?

Kissinger: —then we're going to shore up what they got on the battlefield and we're going to hit north of the DMZ, and we're just going to clobber them.

[pause]

Nixon: Look, if it rains, if you get any—once you get another report on the weather, is there any point where we can keep hitting them?

Kissinger: About 8 o'clock tonight.

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[6] The term "2d" refers to the U.S.-designated Military Region 2 (MR–2). "B–3" refers to a North Vietnamese-designated area in the highlands, the B–3 Front, which was located within MR–2.

[Omitted here is a brief, unrelated aside.]

Kissinger: At 8 o'clock tonight.

Nixon: Do you get a report on the weather?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Who sends it to you?

Kissinger: I check with the—Moorer calls Abrams. If—if this isn't fought more aggressively in another, by early next week, you might want to consider relieving Abrams. We just cannot play these games with the supremacy of the field commander. I know it's rough and brutal, but that guy just does it too much by the numbers.

Nixon: He's had it. Look, he's fat, he's drinking too much, and he's not able to do the job. I [unclear].

Kissinger: He shouldn't be the one who said they've come up with all the ideas. There's one idea that's come that we've—that's been carried out this week that didn't—

Nixon: Can you call Moorer today saying I'm just waiting for those ideas he's supposed to get? Has he got some more? Incidentally, would you also ask Helms if he's got any with regard to any activities? Then I want you to tell Helms about the mining exercise.

Kissinger: [unclear]

Nixon: Well, tell me about that and look into the Haiphong thing [unclear]—

Kissinger: I'll have that looked at immediately.

[Omitted here is discussion of the weather, the performance of the Air Force and Navy in the air war, command arrangements, and the pilots who are shot down and become prisoners of war.]

Nixon: I've been trying to figure as to—we're sort of busy these days. Try and get the weather. Goddamnit, if any of you—if you know any prayers, say it for weather out there. Just get that weather cleared up over there. The bastards have never been bombed. [chuckles] They're going to be bombed this time. Of course, we've got to have weather.

60. Memorandum From Philip A. Odeen of the National Security Council Staff to Richard T. Kennedy and John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff[1]

Washington, April 4, 1972.

SUBJECT

Our Options in Southeast Asia

Most of the discussions of our options and possible actions during the current SEA crisis seem to focus on what we can do unilaterally. *Yet, we all recognize that the key is not what we do but what the South Vietnamese do.*[2]

I suggest that we give more attention to what we can do to help the GVN to defeat the NVN attack. If we rely on bombing and the GVN copes with the NVN assault, the press will say, "U.S. aircraft bail out the ARVN." Such headlines do little to convince the American public that the Vietnamization policy has been a success. Thus, our emphasis both publicly and operationally should be on the ARVN role.[3]

What follows are some random thoughts on what we might do now to help the ARVN.

Military Actions

As you know, my personal prejudice is that our air operations are not likely to be crucial to the outcome of the MR–1 battle. The real question is, will the ARVN stand and fight effectively. U.S. efforts should focus on how we can help them do this. Our options are limited, but there are some things we might do:

—Provide whatever tactical airlift is needed to move reinforcements. MACV has undoubtedly done this, but we should make sure.

—Help the GVN plan an amphibious end-run, to cut off the NVN forces and regain lost ground.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 96, Vietnam Subject Files, Air Activity in Southeast Asia, Vol. III, January–August 1972. Secret. On a covering note, Odeen wrote: "John—Some random thoughts on SEA. Pass on to all if you think it would be helpful." Haig agreed that the memorandum should be circulated.

[2] Haig highlighted the paragraph. In his memoirs, Kissinger wrote: "But neither Nixon nor I recognized any such thing. North Vietnam had brutally and cynically chosen a test of arms." Kissinger added: "On April 3 I told the President that the attack would now precipitate matters; we would get no awards for losing with moderation. If we defeated the offensive, we would get a settlement out of it. The North Vietnamese had thrown everything into their effort; if it failed, they would have no choice except to negotiate." (*White House Years,* p. 1109)

[3] Haig placed a checkmark in the margin next to this sentence.

—Replace equipment (e.g., artillery) lost during the initial attacks.[4]

—Provide specialized logistics and maintenance support. This might include moving some U.S. support units north.

—Return some limited number of key advisors. Could we find 15 or 20 former advisors to the ARVN who were exceedingly effective during their tours or who have excellent relations with the key Vietnamese commanders? If so, let's send them back on 30 days TDY.

—Provide funds for some financial incentive for the ARVN. The units moved north are liable to have serious desertion problems. Could we provide some special relocation pay? Perhaps we could provide some financial incentives to leaders or soldiers who perform in an outstanding manner.

—Prod the GVN to fire some incompetent commanders. Our advisors know which leaders need to be replaced. If a key commander blows it, let's press the GVN hard to get rid of him. This could have significant military as well as psychological impact.

Psychological Steps

This is the big test for the GVN and the ARVN. Are they treating it as such? If there is more that they can do, we should press hard to get them to act. For example, the CIA report today stated, "Saigon was calm."[5] This beats having a panic, but one would hope a more positive spirit would emerge.

—Tet 68 was a real turning point for the GVN. The current attack provides another opportunity to mobilize support and attack problems that seemed beyond solution a week ago.

—Has Thieu been on radio and TV accusing NVN of a blatant attack, violation of the Geneva accord, etc? If not, why not?

In laying out a series of steps, we believe the GVN should take it as important to remember they will equivocate and resist. Thus, we should overbid, hoping that some fraction of the needed actions are taken.

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[4] Haig placed checkmarks next to this and the previous point.

[5] Not found.

61. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 5, 1972, 10:08–11:01 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
Mr. John N. Irwin
Mr. William Sullivan

Defense
Mr. Kenneth Rush
Mr. Armistead Selden

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Lt. Gen. John Vogt

CIA
Mr. Richard Helms
(Mr. William Newton, only stayed for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC Staff
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Mr. Richard T. Kennedy
Mr. John Negroponte
Mr. Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—General Abrams and his senior staff should try to meet daily with General Vien and the senior members of the Vietnamese General Staff.

—The State Department will ensure that the Voice of America follows the Administration line on the current crisis.

—CIA will provide an assessment of a possible resumption of the leaflet campaign in North Vietnam.

—The two squadrons of Marine F–4s based in Japan and three squadrons of Air Force F–4s based in the U.S. will be sent to Vietnam.[2]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–085, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 4/5/72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

[2] Laird ordered the deployment of the five squadrons that day. However, as he pointed out in a memorandum to Nixon, one of the five was made up of F–105 Thunderchiefs rather than F–4 Phantoms. (Ibid., Box 117, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Offensive Permanent File (2 April 72)) According to the minutes of the meeting, on the relationship between air power and policy, Kissinger said: "I cannot stress enough the President's determination to do whatever is necessary. He will not be run out of Vietnam. He wants no excuses from subordinates or commanders that he has not done enough. The North Vietnamese have committed their whole army while we still have massive air power available, and we will take advantage of it."

The State Department will check to see if we have ever given advance notice to the Japanese about pending movements of military aircraft stationed in Japan.

—Dr. Kissinger will obtain Presidential guidance on sending another one of the Pacific-based carriers to Vietnam and on basing the additional B–52s at Kadena, on Okinawa.

—A message should be sent to Thailand, giving a sense of what we are trying to do in Vietnam.

—The Joint Chiefs of Staff will look into the possibility of launching a South Vietnamese amphibious operation against North Vietnam.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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62. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, April 5, 1972.

SUBJECT

Operations against North Vietnam

Director Helms recommends that CIA phase out paramilitary action operations against North Vietnam and requests agreement in principle to develop deception and disinformation operations against the North Vietnamese (CIA memorandum at Tab A).[2]

(1) Phase-Out of North Vietnam Paramilitary Operations

These started at my request in early 1970. Twenty-two paramilitary teams have been infiltrated from Laos in shallow penetration of North Vietnam. Ten teams failed completely. Twelve shot their rockets towards the enemy target; however, no damage assessment reports were obtainable. The program has cost over $3 million and the results have been minimal in both military and psychological terms. While the Agency has a capability for deeper penetrations, the difficulty of obtaining good low-level photography and the increasingly effective

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[1] Source: National Security Council, NSC Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 17 Jan 72–2 Oct 73. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for action; Outside System. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Printed as Document 37. A notation on the copy of the attached memorandum indicates the President saw it.

North Vietnam antiaircraft capability make the selection of landing sites for helicopters risky. The use of [*less than 1 line not declassified*] helicopter crews would add a major political risk.

(2) Development of Deception and Disinformation Operations against North Vietnam

North Vietnam is particularly susceptible to a carefully orchestrated covert disinformation program. The Agency believes it has the channel to convincingly move such deception material to the North Vietnamese. Close cooperation with the NSC Staff will be needed to ensure consonance with Presidential policy and the negotiating situation between the U.S., North Vietnam, the People's Republic of China and the USSR. Mr. Helms proposes the assignment of a member of the NSC Staff to work with the Agency to develop the actual scenarios for the deception and disinformation themes, examples of which are outlined in the memorandum at Tab A.

Mr. Helms believes the deception/disinformation program has the potential for causing North Vietnam much more difficulty at much less risk than the minor paramilitary harassment achieved by CIA's operations to date. The objective of the proposed program is to make a negotiated settlement more attractive in Vietnamese eyes.

Recommendations

(1) That the paramilitary action operations against North Vietnam be discontinued.

(2) Agreement in principle to develop a series of deception and disinformation operations against North Vietnam and the appointment of an NSC Staff Officer to work out the scenarios with CIA.[3]

[3] Nixon initialed his approval of both recommendations.

63. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, April 6, 1972, 1135Z.

56. Subject: Meeting with President Thieu, April 6, 1972.

1. In long meeting with President Thieu today, General Abrams and I discussed the country situation; enemy dispositions and intentions; U.S. air reinforcements and capabilities; target authorizations and present employment of air assets. General Abrams will report through his channels.[2]

2. We were agreed on order of enemy priorities as:

A) Capture of Quang Tri/Hue.
B) Capture of Kontum.
C) Occupation of Tay Ninh and Binh Long Provinces.
D) Introduction of sappers into Saigon, followed by
E) Call for cease-fire and coalition government.

3. President Thieu explained proposed disposition of RVNAF forces, including reinforcements to mount counter-attack in MR 1 and to meet enemy threats in B–3 Front in MR 2 and to Binh Long and Tay Ninh Provinces in MR 3.

4. General Abrams enumerated the additional Air Force squadrons which had been supplied and were to arrive; the additional B–52s with accompanying F–105s; the four aircraft carriers, one of which will probably be used to support MR 3; the additional destroyers and the cruiser *Oklahoma*.

5. General Abrams listed air priorities as, first, MR 1 (250 Tacair sorties per day, weather permitting); second, MR 2 (100 Tacair sorties per day; MR 3 (100 Tacair sorties per day). MR 1 has been assigned 42 B–52 sorties per day with 9 to MR 2. (As the weather has become favorable today, SAM targets have been attacked up to the 18th parallel.)

6. Thieu said that General Vien had proposed moving the 9th Division from MR 4 to MR 1 as a back-up division, releasing the 2nd Division for the counter-attack against the enemy. General Abrams

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1014, Alexander M. Haig Special Files, Haig Trip Papers, April 14–19, 1972. Secret; Eyes Only; Immediate.

[2] In message 34090 from Saigon, April 6, Abrams recounted his visit to the senior South Vietnamese field commanders on April 5 and 6. His conclusion was that: "All of these commanders are serious, determined and confident; their knowledge of the situation is comprehensive and detailed." (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–10 VIET)

suggested it would be preferable to move the 21st Division from MR 4 as a more aggressive unit which could be employed directly in the counter-attack without going through the process of substitution. Thieu agreed and will take up the matter with General Vien tomorrow. He feels that with the 21st, the 9 Ranger battalions which are to be constituted into a division, and the three Marine brigades together with the three regular divisions in MR 1, he will have adequate forces. He thinks that MR 2 with the present reinforcement of the two airborne brigades will be able to handle the situation there. One airborne brigade is to be retained in MR 3. Thieu also said that he had instructed General Vien that the regional forces must be rearranged where necessary, used to fill any gaps and to replace manpower.

7. I mentioned the need to improve GVN information facilities, especially in MR 1. Widespread apprehension and anxiety was reported among the people who were living on rumors and counter-productive misinformation. The GVN radio signal is reported weak in parts of Quang Tri. We felt there was an urgent need for improved GVN information and psyops programs. It was also important that Saigon and MR 1 coordinate on the same wave length.

8. I think the meeting was useful. We seem to be agreed on all essential points. Thieu appears to be calm and confident and Abrams feels that with any kind of break in the weather (which we should be getting now), the situation can be handled.

9. Do you wish me to repeat this in abbreviated form through regular channels?

10. Warm regards.[3]

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[3] Kissinger sent an immediate response to Bunker: "Your Saigon 0056 greatly appreciated. It is most helpful to have periodic personal appraisals of this kind. Agree completely that a repeat of this message in abbreviated form through regular channels would be constructive." (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1014, Haig Special File, Haig Trip Papers, April 14–19, 1972) On April 7, the Embassy sent an abbreviated text in message 4803 to the Department. (Ibid., Box 159, Country Files, Vietnam, April 1972)

64. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, April 6, 1972, 8:16–9:27 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, Ambassador of the USSR
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

I met with Dobrynin for breakfast in General Scowcroft's office for a quick roundup on where we stood prior to my departure for Key Biscayne with the President.

Vietnam

I opened the meeting by pointing out to Dobrynin the inadmissibility of what was going on in Vietnam. I recalled a conversation in January in which I had indicated that we might have to take action to bring the war to a decisive conclusion.[2] At that time Dobrynin had said that he could understand our taking action if there was an offensive, but that if the war just wound down he saw no reason why we should precipitate a showdown. I had been impressed with that argument, and as he knew we had shown enormous restraint.

I said now we were confronted with a situation in which there was an all-out attack on South Vietnam, putting in jeopardy the 69,000 Americans who were remaining. This was absolutely intolerable for us. Dobrynin said perhaps we took the situation too gravely, because after all the Soviets' estimate was that the situation was far from being out of hand, and the South Vietnamese probably would have a chance to defend themselves. I said I hoped so for their [the Soviets'][3] sake.

Dobrynin asked whether I really thought that they had anything to do with planning it. I said there are only two possibilities, either they planned it or their negligence made it possible. In either event, it was an unpleasant eventuality.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the Military Aide's Office at the White House. The memorandum of conversation is printed in full in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 84.

[2] See footnote 2, Document 6.

[3] Brackets are in the original.

65. Diary Entry by the Assistant to the President (Haldeman)[1]

Washington, April 6, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

He [the President] feels we've really got to hit Kennedy hard on his Vietnam line.[2] We need to get out the record on the peace talks again, try to get Rogers to do this. We've got to decide on whether to have a press conference Wednesday, but decide on Tuesday, whether to have it. It is a problem, too risky because of the Vietnam thing.

He then had me stay in when Henry brought General Vogt in to discuss his show.[3] The background of this is that in a briefing the other day,[4] Vogt mentioned to Henry that he was terribly distressed with the way the military and particularly the Air Force were handling the Vietnam situation, particularly their failure to carry out the Presidential orders and an even worse failure to come up with any ideas of their own on how things ought to be handled. Vogt made the comment to K that he would like to give up his 4th star that he was about to get for going over to NATO and be assigned to Vietnam and get the thing straightened out. As a result of this, K suggested exactly that to the P and he bought the idea. Vogt is being transferred to Vietnam, although he's still getting his 4th star and he's going to go out there this weekend.

The P called him and really laid it to him, saying that he was making this change because it had to be done and that he was very upset with the military, things weren't being handled right out there, that he expected Vogt to step in and take it over. He then made quite a dramatic point of the fact that this may very well be the last battle that will be fought by the United States Air Force, since this kind of war probably will never happen again, and that it would be a tragic thing if this great service would end its active battle participation in a disgraceful operation that this Vietnam offensive is turning out to be. Problem being, of course, that the Air Force is relying on weather problems

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[1] Source: *Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition.*

[2] The following had appeared that morning in *The New York Times*: "Also today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, linked the enemy offensive with Mr. Nixon's suspension of the Paris peace talks and said it 'brutally demonstrates the moral and military bankruptcy of the President's policy in Vietnam.' " The article concluded: "Mr. Kennedy urged the President to call publicly for an immediate cease-fire at the border area and to return to the Paris talks 'tomorrow, to seek an immediate end to the war.'" (*The New York Times,* April 6, 1972)

[3] According to the President's Daily Diary, General Vogt met with the President from 9:26 to 9:55 a.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

[4] Not further identified.

as an excuse for not moving in on the attacks that the P has ordered. Vogt said he understood what the P was saying loud and clear and that he'd move in and get it solved. The P told him to bypass Abrams, that he did not have confidence in Abrams, that he'd been a great commander in W.W.II, but that he was over the hill now and that Vogt was to get things done. If he had any problems he was to let the P know, not just let the thing simmer.

Vogt then raised the point that his hand would be greatly strengthened if he were made Deputy Commander out there instead of just Air Commander and the P said that is to be done and ordered Henry to get it done. It was quite a dramatic meeting, and I think undoubtedly had a dramatic effect on General Vogt.[5]

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

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[5] On April 10, General Vogt was named Commander, 7th Air Force, and Deputy Commander, MACV.

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66. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 6, 1972, 9:54–10:20 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
Mr. John N. Irwin
Mr. William Sullivan

Defense
Mr. Kenneth Rush
Mr. Warren Nutter
R/Adm. William R. Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

CIA
Mr. Richard Helms
Mr. William Newton
(for Mr. Helms' briefing only)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Mr. Richard Kennedy
Mr. John Negroponte
Mr. Mark Wandler

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Preparations would be made for a resumption of the leaflet campaign in North Vietnam, but the decision to go ahead with the campaign will be made later.

—Messages—similar to the one sent to Thailand—will be sent to Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Korea, giving those countries a sense of our involvement in the current crisis.[2]

—The CIA study on North Vietnamese logistical operations in and near the DMZ, especially the construction of four new roads through the DMZ, provides useful background information.[3] The State Department spokesman should discuss the subject at his briefing today.

—We can confirm the movements of units, once the movements have been completed. We should not say anything about additional air authorities or limits on our actions. If questioned, we should say we are attacking military targets which support the North Vietnamese violations of the DMZ and which are directly related to the battle in South Vietnam.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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[2] According to the minutes of the meeting, regarding the messages to the allies, Kissinger said the following to his WSAG colleagues: "Our line has to be made very clear: the North Vietnamese offensive is in flagrant violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords on the DMZ and the 1968 understandings on the bombing halt. That should be in the message, and it should be our press line." See message 58624 to Bangkok, April 6, printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972, Document 159.

[3] Not found.

67. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 6, 1972.

SUBJECT

SEA Contingency Planning

The following is a suggested program of steps needed to develop an operational plan for further actions against North Vietnam should the current enemy offensive continue unchecked.

Objectives. The objectives of this intense military effort against NVN would be:

—To force NVN to halt the current offensive and withdraw forces from territory recently occupied in MR–1.
—To force NVN to negotiate seriously on the basis of our peace proposals.

Assumptions. The primary assumptions underlying this concept are as follows:

—South Vietnam has failed to stop the current offensive in MR–1 and considerable territory has been lost. The situation in MR–2 (and possibly western MR–3) is also deteriorating.
—The conduct of U.S. air and naval actions authorized to date and under active consideration has failed to alter the situation.
—The President accepts the domestic and diplomatic price of an expanded air and naval effort against NVN, including the risk of cancellation of the Soviet summit.
—The effort should achieve objectives quickly and have a major impact well before the planned Moscow trip.

A more detailed list of assumptions is at Tab A.[2]

Military Concept. Following a buildup of forces to the maximum extent possible within time constraints, an intense no-holds barred air and naval campaign against the North is envisaged. This would include:

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 57, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Trips, Haig, Alexander M., April 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Haig did not initial the memorandum. In his unsigned covering memorandum to Kissinger, Haig wrote: "Attached is the Contingency Plan we discussed. The conceptual parameters, I think, are responsive to the realities of the political-military situation. You may wish to review this with the President, with the view toward getting an all-out planning effort underway as soon as possible."

[2] Tabs A–D are attached but not printed.

—Bombing of all areas of NVN (except a buffer zone along the PRC border), including the Haiphong port area and military targets in Hanoi. The strikes would be as intense as possible within the constraints of aircraft availability and concentrated on areas likely to produce the maximum psychological and military effect. Rules of engagement and target selection would be liberal.

—A companion naval campaign with shore bombardment all along the coast, the mining of Haiphong and other lesser ports, blockade of ports and interdiction of coastal shipping.

—A parallel psychological campaign against the NVN people and the leadership. All possible diplomatic actions would be taken to pressure NVN to stop the aggression and negotiate.

An illustrative simplified diplomatic and military scenario is at Tab B.

Considerations

In addition to the political and diplomatic implications of these steps, there are important military considerations. The assets available to implement the plan are likely to be about half those used in 1968 during the major bombing campaign, and there are difficult time constraints on initiating actions likely to cause heavy military and psychological damage to NVN prior the Summit. Unless we are willing to begin the operation piecemeal, nearly three weeks will be needed to plan and position forces. Thus, even if you give an early go-ahead for contingency planning, it is likely to be near the end of April before the attacks commence. This would be less than one month before the Moscow trip.

In this timeframe it is problematical whether these measures would achieve the objective of forcing the DRV to the bargaining table. There is, however, a greater likelihood that they would force the enemy to halt his offensive and facilitate an ARVN counteroffensive. In any event, these measures would enhance U.S. credibility in light of earlier warnings and the extreme provocation by the DRV.

A simplified game plan illustrating the planning time constraints is at Tab C.

Recommendation

Given the need to start detailed contingency planning promptly, I recommend you seek the President's approval of the draft directive to Secretary Laird at Tab D.

68. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Contingency Plan for Air Strikes Against Haiphong

Attached at Tab A is the plan submitted by the JCS for a one-time air operation against key military targets in the Haiphong complex.[2]

Essential Features. The plan has the following major elements:

—*Targets.* The air effort will be concentrated against 10 targets in the Haiphong area including port facilities, warehouses, petroleum storage and the airfield (see separate map).

—*Duration.* The strikes will be limited to a 24-hour period.

—*Forces.* With 48-hours warning, carrier and air force units can provide 570 sorties.

—*Aircraft losses.* Aircraft losses may be as high as 3 percent of the sorties in the initial strike phase but would subsequently decline.

—*Weather.* The strikes must be conducted during periods suitable for visual bombing. During April, weather may require a delay of several days or longer after the order to execute.

—*Precautions.* Care will be taken to minimize the risk to third country shipping and to avoid penetration of the 25/30 nautical mile buffer zone along the PRC border.

—*Civilian Casualties.* About 300 civilian casualties are anticipated.

Aspects Requiring Refinement. In his memo to you commenting on the plan (Tab B),[3] Secretary Laird identified several areas requiring further refinement and lists questions he has asked the Chairman, JCS to address on an urgent basis. These include:

—*Civilian Casualties.* Will casualties be higher than estimated due to the lower alert status in comparison with earlier U.S. bombing efforts? He also has requested an assessment of the impact of bombing involving "substantially larger civilian casualties." I have also asked Admiral Moorer to take another look at the plan with the view toward minimizing civilian losses.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1133, Jon Howe, Vietnam Subject Files, May 8 [1972] Plans. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] Tab A is attached but not printed.

[3] Attached but not printed at Tab B is Laird's April 6 memorandum.

—*Shipping.* What third country ships are likely to be in the harbor and what is their proximity to proposed targets? Laird wants an evaluation of the impact of casualties to third country shipping.

In addition to Secretary Laird's points, the following minor questions should be addressed with regard to execution of the plan:

—Can 570 sorties be spared if the battlefield situation in South Vietnam has deteriorated to a point requiring the strikes? What impact would holds for weather have on air operations throughout SEA?

—Since visual bombing conditions are required, what will the actual time duration of the attack effort be? (Presumably about 12 hours)

—What are the maximum U.S. aircraft loss rates anticipated? (Since the percentage estimates decline after the initial attack wave, it is difficult to determine the anticipated range of losses precisely.)

Game Plan. At Tab C[4] is a simplified military/diplomatic/political scenario for implementation of the plan. The essential features are:

—Special staff task group makes detailed assessment, prepares diplomatic/political scenarios, and explores options for diplomatic and military follow-on actions in the weeks after the strike.

—Meetings of principals and final assessments 3 days in advance.

—Execute orders to field commanders 2 days before D-day, with final clearance in Washington prior to launch.

—Briefings, statements, diplomatic consultations with allies, and messages to the USSR, PRC and NVN on the day of the strikes.

Secretary Laird's View. In his memo (Tab B) Secretary Laird is very negative about the psychological and military value of this operation. He makes the following points:

—Since the PRC and USSR are the production sources for NVN war material, attacks against military targets in North Vietnam are only against the distribution system. The NVN can easily substitute other distribution systems.

—The positive political value of bombing is principally in the threat of loss of the relatively small NVN growth base. Once bombing has destroyed this growth base, Hanoi has little to lose through continued U.S. bombing.

In a personal note to you Secretary Laird writes that: "The political impact of these plans (referring to both mining and air strikes) may be what is wanted by the President. The military impact would be minor and the impact on present battle would be even less. If the Russians want an excuse to stop their present major (80% supplies)

[4] Tab C is attached but not printed.

contributions to North Vietnam, mining might have that political impact but I would doubt it."

His general attitude is reflected in several additional questions he reports having asked the CJCS to address:

—"What impact might such air operations have on our efforts to extract our POWs?"

—"What other target options are there which might achieve the basic objective but a less risk to U.S. forces and to the DRV civil populace?"

Comment. Although Secretary Laird is stretching a point in trying to find reasons for not conducting the operation, some of his points are valid. While this limited campaign is intended to produce a psychological effect by demonstrating U.S. ability and willingness to resume full-scale operations against North Vietnam and to create the impression that drastic actions are planned, it is by no means certain that this operation *alone* would have the desired impact. The domestic and international costs would be high and this small an effort would probably not be substantial enough to appear convincing to the enemy. In addition, it would allow time for generation of a strong domestic reaction in the United States which would diminish the validity of any threat of further operations. It can, of course, be depicted as limited retaliation for the enemy invasion and consistent with earlier Presidential warnings. In my view the political cost and likelihood of limited impact on North Vietnam would raise serious questions about the value of carrying out this step alone.

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69. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, April 7, 1972, 8:17 a.m.

TELECON/IN—from Dr. Kissinger—Subject: SEA SITREP

HAK is going to talk to the President and wants an update. He wondered why there were only 50 Tacair strikes in MR–I. I said you do not have the entire day, you have from 0600 to 1600 and they are scattered around. They are having trouble in MR–I, MR–III, so they are not all in one spot.

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

I went over what is planned and what had been flown to date, the better two or three hour period is at the end of the day in this season. There were 71 [sorties] in MR–III, 95 in MR–I, 84 north of the DMZ which makes 391 total. He said the President wants to wallop RP–I,[2] that is what they did. HAK said the President wanted to know why they were only attacking SAM sites. They do not have reports on anything else. I said they are attacking POL, SAM sites, Supplies, AA, Coastal Batteries, etc. They think we are only hitting SAMs and that is not true. The President thinks the reporting is lousy and that is a point for Vogt to know.

I told him that I would see if we could get better reports.

He then asked about BDA. The report we get does not have very much BDA, it comes out in OPREP 4s and lags behind. They have to cover fields, ships and remote locations—tie it all together before it will make sense. HAK wants BDA and when Vogt gets out there he wants a more conceptual reporting and what the prospects are. I said I talked to Abrams and he has improved a little bit in the current reports. The only problem is that they lag because of the time it takes the pilots to get back to the fields and carriers and to accumulate the information. The President just has to realize that they are always going to be a little behind.

HAK asked if there was a big fight in MR–III and I said yes. In Kontum Province they had tanks and we flew 95 sorties. This included B–52s. HAK is worrying that Hue and Quang Tri could get cut off. Abe has been asked why 1st division is further south than the 3rd which is not the best division. In South Vietnam Hue is the second capitol. We agreed to put the Airborne Brigade in there to prevent them slicing in between Hue and Quang Tri.

In told him how well I thought the carriers had done, they turned out 391 strikes and soon we will have 2 squadrons of Marines in the act and 2 squadrons of Air Force F–4s from the States, the *Midway* will run it up to somewhere over 500 aircraft.

HAK said for political reasons they want the B–52s as soon as possible. SAC is looking for a good target that is worth the B–52s. The further north you go the greater the MIG threat but also the more valuable the target. HAK wondered if we were willing to risk a B–52. I said I do not have any problem with that and neither do the commanders. We do not want to go for nothing, we want a worthwhile target. I said I tried to give them that impression yesterday when I talked to the Overseas Writers. HAK was pleased with the presentation that I made.

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[2] Route Package 1 was the area immediately north of the DMZ.

He said at the WSAG tomorrow that I should reassure the President that we are really going to work on it and not hold anything back.

HAK is counting on Vogt and I said he will be great. I told HAK that he had to overcome a little inertia. HAK said fire people. I said he will not have any problem in his own command. HAK said they are about ready to replace somebody out there and DePuy[3] would be a good one, some tough-nutted guy. I said if things start moving fast enough then they might do it.

[3] Lieutenant General William E. DePuy, Assistant Vice Chief of the Army.

70. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, April 8, 1972, 2:26 p.m.

TELECON/IN—From Dr. Kissinger—Subj: Air Authorities

HAK said the President concurs with Freedom Train to 19 [parallel] but he does not like the way we are using the air forces. He wants to make sure we hit lucrative targets and that we do not stay away from them to hit around 19N. I said Henry that hurts me to think that you have to worry about that. He said the maximum effort will do the most good and we want to get Naval Gun Fire Support up there too. Naturally, we are going to concentrate some around the battlefield and north of the DMZ and then on up further to pick up units of the 325th [North Vietnamese Division]. The President said to watch and he will give you the authority. I said I am watching it 24 hours a day, he does not have to worry about that. He wants as many destroyers shooting as he can get also. I said there are 10 of them going out with *Midway* that will be there in a couple of weeks, in the meanwhile we will have to have the barrels replaced on the ones there because they are shooting so much.

Laird has agreed to hit any MIG south of 20 that is airborne but I want to hit any MIG south of 20. He said you have the authority Tom, the only thing we will not give you right away is Haiphong. He said

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

get a picture of the truck parks and you will get your authority.[2] We are sending up 2 or 3 drones, they might get shot down, but we are working on it.

[2] Kissinger and Moorer had talked about this authority just an hour earlier. According to Moorer's account of their telephone conversation, which began at 1:19 p.m, "I got Laird to agree to let us declare any aircraft south of 20 hostile. HAK said you can also attack airfields up to 20 degrees and he asked if I told him that. I had a discussion with SecDef on that, he wanted to leave it just airborne aircraft south of 20 and I want it on the ground or in the air." (Ibid.)

71. Message From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain) and Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Abrams)[1]

Washington, April 8, 1972, 2308Z.

3492. Deliver upon receipt. Ref: A. MACV080750Z Apr 72.[2]

1. You will shortly receive a directive to conduct: (A) B52 bombing attack on North Vietnam south of 19 degrees north and (B) provide Arc Light support to the Barrel Roll area with particular emphasis on the Long Tieng battle. It must be realized that both of these actions have very heavy political as well as military objectives.

2. With respect to item 1.(A) above, the President was extremely out of patience with me this morning. He said that he had indicated his desire that the B52s attack NVN on 6 April and, so far, nothing has happened. He said here is a case where the military commanders have been given authorities and been given the resources over and above those requested and that, so far, nothing other than routine operations have occurred. He fully appreciates the military rationale contained in reference (A), but he wants to give the North Vietnamese as well as the

[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 1–15 April 1972. Top Secret; Flash; Specat; Exclusive. A handwritten note reads: "No Dist."

[2] A copy of MACV message 80750Z, April 8, from Abrams to McCain and Moorer, is attached to Moorer's Diary, April 8. In this message Abrams gave his assessment that the use of B–52 Arc Light strikes in Operation Freedom Train would not significantly affect the enemy offensive and was inadvisable. (National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

Soviets a clear message that he intends to use whatever force is necessary in light of this flagrant invasion. He does not want to hear any more rationale—he wants action.

3. With respect to item 1. (B) above, as you might imagine, the State Dept is heavily involved in this one. Through State channels considerable concern has been expressed by the Thais with respect to the extent of the air support provided the last few days. The Thais consider that the provision of air support was a quid pro quo for providing Thai irregulars for the battle in Laos. They are now suggesting that if they cannot receive adequate air support then it will be necessary to withdraw the Thai forces from Long Tieng. Consequently, the President desires that some B52 and Tacair support be provided as indicated in separate message. He believes that the additional resources provided makes this feasible.

4. You should be aware of other actions that the President has directed in order to further build up our capability. They include expansion of the air and gunfire support ship operation from 18 degrees to 19 degrees, as well as approval to assume all MiGs in the air and on the ground south of 20 degrees north to be hostile and subject to attack by air and ship missiles at any time. Further, *Saratoga* has been ordered from the LANTFLT and should arrive in Tonkin Gulf in about 30 days. Last night we ordered SAC to deploy all available B52 D configured acft to Guam. This should provide about 28 acft in excess of those available a short time ago. We also are giving consideration to additional B52Gs recognizing that their maximum load is 27 vice the 66 bombs carried by the B52D acft. So far I have been unsuccessful in acquiring authority to operate the B52D aircraft from Kadena. Other actions to provide additional resources and authorities are under consideration and I will keep you fully informed. I cannot impress upon you too strongly how intensely involved the President is in this operation, how determined he is that the enemy does not succeed in their objectives, and how forthcoming he is when presented with requests for authorities and additional resources—however, he does expect immediate action and forceful response.

5. Warm regards.

72. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 10, 1972, 10:13–11:01 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
John N. Irwin
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Warren Nutter
R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas Moorer

CIA
Richard Helms
William Nelson
William Newton
(for Mr. Helms' briefing only)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Ambassador Porter should leave Washington on Wednesday and arrive in Paris on Thursday.[2] If he has anything to say to the press, he should do so in Paris.

—No attempt will be made to correct the false impression in the press about the areas of North Vietnam being bombed by B–52s.

—The State Department will prepare a draft reply to the letter from Thai Foreign Minister Thanom.

—Dr. Kissinger will raise the issue of basing B–52s on Okinawa with the Japanese during his visit to Japan next week. Adm. Moorer will prepare a position paper for Dr. Kissinger.

—The State Department will check to see if the VOA has stepped up its Vietnamese broadcasting and if it is following the Administration line.

—The telegram on preparations for the resumption of a leaflet campaign in North Vietnam should be sent out tonight.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 78, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, Mar. 1971–Apr. 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

[2] April 13.

—The end-of-tour and reinlistment bonuses for Thai irregulars will be increased to 8,000 Baht ($380) per man.

—We will look at the issue of Helilift Support for Forces in Laos when we get the letter Secretary Laird sent on this subject to Secretary Rogers.

[Omitted here are briefings by Helms and Moorer on the military situation.]

Mr. Kissinger: If the North Vietnamese don't succeed now, I don't see how they will be able to do so later on.

Adm. Moorer: I agree—and that's why we are taking this action. To stop it, though, you have to do something at the Hanoi level, not the Danang level.

Mr. Irwin: If we break the back of the offensive and the North Vietnamese pull back, do the South Vietnamese have the capability to chase them?

Adm. Moorer: Sure they do.

Mr. Irwin: We won't have the situation, then, that we had in the Civil War, when Grant didn't follow-up.

Mr. Kissinger: You're talking to the wrong guy. On the political side, I talked to the President. He wants us to tread a thin line. He doesn't want us to say anything about conditions under which we will or will not resume negotiations. He wants our basic posture to be ominous, and he doesn't want us to get into public debates or to protest our peaceful intentions.

We should say the record is clear about who broke off the negotiations. We have asked for serious negotiations, something we have never had in four years. There is no question about who used four months to build up forces and supplies for an offensive while we tried to talk. The President doesn't want us to say we are ready to go back to the negotiating table at any time. Nor does he want us to specify conditions under which we will go back.

Mr. Sullivan: I spoke to Porter. He would like to stay through Tuesday and arrive in Paris on Wednesday.

Mr. Kissinger: I think it might be better if he leaves on Wednesday and gets to Paris on Thursday. Then there is no question about a possible meeting.

Mr. Sullivan: He can do that.

Mr. Irwin: Yes. It is better for him to go back Wednesday.

Mr. Kissinger: Good.

Mr. Sullivan: Porter also said he doesn't want to speak to the press.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you mean the press here?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: We won't let him say anything here. If he wants to say something he should do it in Paris. This is the President's view, too.

[Omitted here is discussion of inaccurate press reports about B–52 bombing of North Vietnam, press policy, use of B–52s from Thailand and Okinawa, leaflets for North Vietnam, Thai irregulars in Laos, and helicopters in Laos.]

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73. Memorandum From Philip A. Odeen of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 11, 1972.

SUBJECT

CIA Assessment of Enemy Intention in South Vietnam

Attached is the fresh assessment of VC/NVA intentions in the current offensive you requested on April 8.[2]

The CIA Assessment

In assessing the Communists' overall objectives, the CIA reaches the following conclusions:

—The overall objective is the offensive to destroy the growing cohesion and strength that the GVN has demonstrated since 1968. If the offensive is successful, Hanoi will, in the CIA's judgement, have "gone a long way toward recovering the losses of the past four years."

—To meet these objectives, "The Communists have turned to relatively straight-forward conventional invasion." "This time they are likely to fight for territory and position, particularly at the Northern end of South Vietnam."

—While the Communists are willing to accept very heavy losses, this is not a "do or die effort." Even if the offensive is not successful,

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–085, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 4/13/72. Secret. Urgent; sent for information.

[2] The memorandum, entitled "Communist Intentions in the Current Campaign in South Vietnam," is in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box SCI 23, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group.

the NVA will be able to continue the war, though not without an "agonizing reappraisal" in Hanoi.

—The Communists are, however, in a situation similar to the allied situation in 1965—absence of clear victory will mean defeat.

On the whole, the CIA is convinced that the offensive is an all out effort that will last "for many weeks" and "with recycling" will probably be extended until mid-summer or beyond.

The immediate NVA tactical objectives and likely results of the offensive are seen as follows:

—The overall objective is "to seize and hold virtually all of the Thua Thien and Quang Tri provinces, including the cities of Hue and Quang Tri." While a major effort will also be made in MR 3 and to a lesser extent in MR 4, these are seen as diversionary attacks.

—The enemy will use all his main forces in seeking these objectives. *The local forces will be withheld, except in the Delta, until the NVA get "a clearer picture of the likely outcome."*

—The enemy offensives are likely to be geared tightly to the weather—with more action in MR 1 to be expected shortly while the offensive in the highlands (MR 2) may be held up until late May or early June—the onset of the Southwest monsoon.

Given this effort, the CIA predicts mixed results for the enemy:

—*In Northern MR 1,* "Given the size of the enemy forces, repelling them will not be easy." The CIA notes that the NVA will commit three divisions against Quang Tri city which is defended only by one regiment of the 3rd ARVN division and the VNMC/Ranger battalions recently sent as reinforcements.

—*In Southern MR 1 (Hue),* the CIA thinks the enemy will "have a hard time taking Kontom City, let alone holding it or pushing east to the sea." Despite their impressive numbers, the CIA does not think the enemy's MR 2 forces can do too much because they lack good combat units.

—*In the Saigon area,* "The threat to Binh Long and Phuoc Long is *high,* but these provinces, by their nature, are not lucrative targets for the North Vietnamese." Moreover, the CIA thinks that "any drive toward Tay Ninh City and points south would be extremely vulnerable *. . . and the government almost certainly has enough forces nearby to push them back out and certainly enough to limit their progress toward Saigon.*"

—*In MR 4,* no substantial threat is foreseen.

In general, this represents, I believe, a generally optimistic assessment of the situation. I would, for example, raise the following questions.

—If the enemy is able to concentrate three divisions against Quang Tri on a cloudy day, won't he succeed in seizing it? Once it is overrun, can't he defend it without being extremely vulnerable to air attack?

—If Quang Tri and Hue were put under simultaneous attack, what would be the outcome? ARVN reserves are largely committed and more bad weather is not unlikely? Could we substantially reinforce either city at this point?

—The argument that the enemy's forces, including the 320th, are weak in the highlands is not entirely convincing. Aren't the 21st and 22nd ARVN divisions—the units in the firing line—about the worst the GVN has? If so, can we be as confident as these assessments that they will be victorious? I think the CIA assessment understates the risks.

—The assessment implies we have nothing to worry about in MRs 3 and 4. I would question this judgement since it seems that the entire outer tier of MR 3 provinces (Binh Long, Phouc Long, and Tay Ninh) are very exposed to enemy attack. Even if they are not "lucrative targets" can we or the GVN afford to lose them? If we really are secure there, should we investigate moving more units North to MRs 1 and 2 where the threat is greater?

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74. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, April 12, 1972, 9:25 a.m.

TELECON/IN—From Gen Vogt (Secure)

John said the weather was improving considerably and should be good up through MR1 and workable up to Dong Hoi. I told John I had been getting caustic questions about the air strikes in the north and for him to really lay it in there. Vogt said the B–52 operation took a lot of their capability. I told him about the flap last night concerning the Compass Link[2] pictures on the B–52's. Vogt said they did not miss completely, they cut the rail lines in the rail yard in three places. They did not hit too well on the POL but the accuracy would be bad if we were in close to the city. I said the President has been twisting our arm on the B–52 strike. He issued the the orders that we add on logistic targets. HAK thinks the Air Force only wants to bomb the other side's Air Force. Abrams wants to bomb the other side's Army.

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

[2] Photographic facsimile transmission program.

I told him that I got the word last night that they may want a very heavy effort later this weekend well up north. I told him to have his people to do a little studying on the targets in the Hanoi and Haiphong area. If the weather breaks we may get all the way up there. I want the Buffalo Hunter[3] pictures of those truck parks. Be sure you know that the President is personally involved in this. We need some good weather.

Vogt said Abrams thinks there is a critical situation incountry. He is reluctant to even release carriers to any operations north of the DMZ unless they are immediately associated with the battle front. Abe does not like us to divert much air to the targets in the north.[4] Every time Abe calls a Corps Commander they tell him they are hanging on because of the tacair, send more. The IV Corps Commander had to give up the 21st Division which was sent to save the situation north of Saigon and he almost had a fit, so I got him some tacair immediately. Abrams is not sympathetic to the strikes in the north unless he can go to real pay dirt.

The President does not think Abe understands the real problem. Abe is absolutely right from a purely military point of view but we are playing a political problem with the Russians. We spent a long time getting the message to Ho Chi Minh and now we want to get it to the Russians. We are increasing surveillance on Soviet ships; we are going to have submarines surface beside them. Vogt had not seen it.

HAK called last night and was concerned if we had authority north of 18 that we would spend most of our time up there. He wants to make sure there is effort to and north of the DMZ and keep that cleaned out. I am having trouble with him because he thinks all we go after is SAM sites and airfields. He wants to hit only logistics. Abrams wanted Vogt to observe the 325th division carefully, watch for armor on Highway 1 because it could be serious if they came through. I told John to go ahead after the division if you found them. You could run up and down Highway 1 and if you could not get the division you could get

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[3] A program in which USAF unmanned aircraft carried out photographic reconnaissance missions over (mostly) North Vietnam and Laos.

[4] In message 38158 from Saigon, April 8, Abrams stated: "The battlefield is SVN and the immediate approaches thereto. The battles which will determine the outcome of the current campaign will be fought and decided during the next several weeks with friendly forces immediately available and enemy forces that are already deployed into the three threat areas of the DMZ, the B–3 Front and COSVN. The full weight of the B–52 effort should be applied against the enemy forces and their logistics that are already deployed out of NVN and are in position in SVN and the immediate approaches thereto." (Attached to Moorer Diary, April 8; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

some supplies. John said he talked to Cooper[5] and got him to tentatively agree to have two carriers released from in-country operations to hit in the north. Abe was not happy about that and wanted all the carriers committed to the in-country operation. This was a personal to McCain so he recommended we be careful how we use it.

I told John the President said that Abrams did not request any additional 52's, he did not request the extra carriers, and he did not request the additional tacair, they were sent from Washington. So he argues that he has been given all this extra capability, says that he has got to use all of it on the land battle. What would he have done if it were not sent out there. As you know, not one request came in from Abrams for additional forces.

John thought Cooper was trying to do the right thing. However, he knew that Abrams was dead against it and as a Component Commander of Abe's, John is going to have trouble initiating anything in the north while Abe thinks the situation is serious in-country.

I said Abe's reports the last few days are optimistic. Vogt said he has made some trips and has reflected Corps Commander's thoughts. They all cry they need all the air they can get.

I said they are going to send Haig down to talk to Abrams and I told John to play it cool and not get cross-threaded with Abe until he gets his feet on the ground. He will have to use considerable diplomacy.

I said do not forget the Moscow visit is big in their minds. This trip is moving a lot of actions.

John asked if I was getting access to Ryan's[6] messages. He has been sending special SITREP's the last two days. I told him I had not had time to turn around, I had been testifying for hours on end, one meeting started 15 minutes after the other one ended over there at the capitol.

I filled him in on the general situation in Southeast Asia. I told him Congress is more behind us on this one than ever before.

[Omitted here is additional discussion of the offensive.]

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[5] Admiral Damon W. Cooper, Commander, Task Force 77, was in charge of carrier-based aircraft carrying out missions in South Vietnam and North Vietnam.

[6] Air Force Chief of Staff General John D. Ryan.

75. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 12, 1972, 10:29–11:25 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Warren Nutter
Maj. Gen. Fred Karhos

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

CIA
George Carver
William Newton
(for Mr. Carver briefing only)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—The State Department should call in the French Chargé and protest the French statement calling for a resumption of the negotiations.

—The two CIA papers will be discussed in detail at tomorrow's meeting.

—The Defense Department will prepare for tomorrow's meeting an assessment of the ARVN capabilities for the next three to five months.

[Omitted here are briefings by Helms and Moorer on the current military situation in Vietnam.]

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Johnson) Welcome back, Alex. Now we've got the first team again.

Adm. Moorer: The press reports about the situation in An Loc have been overstated. An Loc was never surrounded the way the Alamo was. The South Vietnamese have held well. They have the 21st Division in reserve north of Bien Hoa, and the airborne brigade has moved up the road.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of text, are in the original.

We're not faced with a frontal assault on Saigon. Somebody asked me yesterday if it was true that the enemy was only 25 miles from Saigon. I answered: "The enemy's always been 25 miles from Saigon."

Mr. Kissinger: Has the weather improved?

Adm. Moorer: I just talked to Johnny (Vogt), and he tells me we will be making more of an effort in the air. By the way, our gunfire support ships have worked over Dong Hoi. They are moving their way up to Vinh. If I'm not mistaken, they've fired more than 9,000 rounds already.

Mr. Kissinger: Will more ships be coming on the line?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. It will end up looking like a Russian fishing fleet. All the ships we've ordered to Vietnam—including the *Saratoga* and the *Newport News*—have now left the U.S.

Mr. Johnson: How are we handling the fire control?

Adm. Moorer: For those ships south of the DMZ, it's done with spotters who are ashore. For ships north of the DMZ, it's done with FACs [Forward Air Controllers] when the weather permits and with radar when the weather is bad.

Mr. Kissinger: I just told McCloskey that you guys have finally figured out a way to keep me under control: the press doesn't need any leads from the White House when McCloskey is briefing so well. We've received many compliments from the press on the way we've handled the PR side. McCloskey has been superb.

Mr. Sullivan: Are you aware of the Kalb [Marvin Kalb of CBS] story last night?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. What happened?

Mr. Sullivan: Bob [McCloskey] put out—on background—figures on Soviet military aid to North Vietnam. He said he made it very clear that the figures did not include such things as trucks or POL—items we always include in the aid figures. Marvin obviously ignored this caveat. The story he put out made the point that Soviet aid to North Vietnam has been one-tenth of our aid to South Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: That was a mistake on Bob's part. These things will always happen, though.

Mr. Sullivan: He will pick it up today.

Adm. Moorer: This is one of the things that always gets me. The Russians and Chinese are giving rice—and this means that every man in North Vietnam is available for military service.

Mr. Kissinger: Bob made a mistake.

Mr. Rush: [Gives paper to Mr. Kissinger] Here are the figures Bob released. Frankly, I was shocked when I saw them.

Mr. Kissinger: Why did he do it?

Mr. Sullivan: It was the result of some slippage. He gave me a little note of explanation. The press, it seems, had carried some figures, and he asked INR for our figures.

Mr. Johnson: He will pick it up at the noon briefing today.

Mr. Kissinger: We've got to get off the figures. We always get in trouble when we start talking about figures. This is the sort of mistake that can happen at any time. Bob has really been superb.

[Omitted here is discussion of how to respond to the French statement favoring the resumption of negotiations.]

Adm. Moorer: As you know, I spent six hours on the Hill yesterday. The current Congressional attitude is very different from the attitude during the Cambodian operation and Lam Son 719.

Mr. Kissinger: I know. I saw Scott and Ford after the Republican Leadership meeting, and I had to slow them down. They were ready to go off and say that all of North Vietnam should be open for bombing. If the Republican leaders want to say that—and have to be stopped at the White House—that's not a bad domestic situation.

At the meeting, we concentrated on talking about South Vietnam. We mentioned the optimism about halting the enemy drive, and we said we were only bombing military targets which were supporting the offensive. But the Congressional leaders hit us for not doing enough. There was not one question from the group, which admittedly was basically conservative.

Aiken accused the President of being too soft on the Catholic issue. He said the President wasn't being hard enough. Frankly, I was astonished, given Aiken's close friendship with Mansfield. He was one of the most hawkish guys there. The leaders said they and the public were behind us.

Adm. Moorer: I am going to be appearing before the Senate Appropriations Committee today. What should I say?

Mr. Kissinger: You can say it is very obvious that this is not a civil war any more. The Communists are now waging a regular conventional war in South Vietnam. Whatever you have been saying in the past has been fine. All the Congressional leaders praised you.

During the Laos operation, the Congressional leadership said we had to get out because they couldn't take it domestically. Brock was one of the most emphatic. Now they are telling us to do more. And I was prepared to be defensive.

Adm. Moorer: It's a whole new ball game in Vietnam now.

Mr. Kissinger: Right—and that fact should be of use to us.

[Omitted here is additional discussion of the French statement about negotiations.]

Are there any other issues we have to discuss? Our position on the Hill is good.

Mr. Carver: Symington was friendly to us at the CIA subcommittee meeting Stennis called last week for Symington's benefit.

Mr. Kissinger: We've kept Scott and Ford from slamming the Russians.

Mr. Sullivan: Victor Zorza said in a recent column that there is a split between the Department and the White House.[2] I don't know if you've seen the column. It says the White House and Defense emphasize linkage, but State doesn't want to.

Mr. Kissinger: I haven't seen the column. But I do know we've all been together on this. There has been a minimum of backbiting.

Mr. Nutter: This was really about linkage between economic matters and political issues.

Mr. Sullivan: If the question is raised during the briefing, McCloskey will deny it.

Mr. Kissinger: Good. We probably don't have time today to discuss the two CIA papers. I'm sorry because I know you did a lot of work over the weekend. Can we discuss them tomorrow?

All agreed.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me just ask you, though, if you think there is anything in them which will cause us to reassess our position?

Mr. Carver: No.

Adm. Moorer: I agree with George.

Mr. Carver: We did the studies jointly with DIA, so I don't think there are any disagreements within the community.

Mr. Rush: There's one slight disagreement, I believe. As I understand it, DIA feels the enemy can sustain operations for one to two months, while you think he can do it for three months.

Mr. Johnson: You didn't deal with the ARVN capabilities or the weather variables in the studies, did you?

Mr. Carver: No. We just concluded that for the next three months they won't have serious logistical constraints.

Mr. Kissinger: You say they may put off launching an offensive in MR 2 until late May or early June. Why?

Mr. Carver: This wouldn't be by choice, but because they are not ready. If they do wait until late May or June, the weather will be bad—and that will cut both ways.

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[2] See Zorza, "Nixon Weighing Soviet Viet Role" in *The Washington Post*, April 12, 1972, p. A19.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you think they would open a new front while we are in Moscow?

Mr. Carver: Yes, it's possible.

Adm. Moorer: They've already got tanks and artillery out there.

Mr. Kissinger: What sort of an attack would it be? Won't the ground turn to mud?

Mr. Carver: It will. And they may have to abandon much of their equipment if they are defeated.

Mr. Kissinger: Even if they win, won't they have to abandon a lot of equipment?

Mr. Carver: Yes. But I think the political gains would be worth it. They would take equipment losses if they could seize and control territory. The equipment losses can always be made up.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you think they will deliberately wait until late May or June to launch the attack on Kontum?

Mr. Carver: No. I think they wanted to launch the attack earlier, but the 320th Division was not ready to move. My point now is that they may persist and launch the attack, anyway, despite the rain.

Mr. Sullivan: I noticed you didn't mention the 2nd Division in the study. How come?

Mr. Carver: We mentioned the division in passing, I think. The main threat in the Highlands comes from the 320th Division, plus a few other units.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. An additional regiment and a tank battalion have joined the 320th. There are also two other divisions in the area. The 320th, though, has taken heavy casualties, and it is down to half its complement.

Mr. Carver: Its combat record isn't so good, either.

Mr. Kissinger: Your conclusion, then, is that there are no logistical constraints on the enemy.

Mr. Carver: Let me put it this way. The logistical constraints will not make them call off what they had intended to do.

Mr. Kissinger: What about the weather? Could that have an effect?

Mr. Carver: It could. But we don't think the weather would necessarily inhibit them from launching an attack in MR 2 in early May.

Mr. Kissinger: What about in June?

Mr. Carver: That depends on how far forward they are. If the artillery is forward and ready to salvo Kontum and Pleiku, they can go ahead with the attack. If their equipment is not far forward, it would be difficult for them to launch the attack. If they have to move five

kilometers, it is one thing. But if they have to deploy their equipment 25 or 30 kilometers in the rain, it would become an iffy proposition.

Operations in the Kontum area are conducted off one main road. You can move men through the trails, but you need a road for the 130-mm field guns, which are, as you know, on tracked vehicles. You can't move them long distances without a road.

Mr. Kissinger: When those guns fire, we will know where they are—and we should be able to knock them out. Your study doesn't take into account the weather, the political context or the ARVN capabilities. I would like to discuss tomorrow the net balance. Can we do that?

All agreed.

Mr. Kissinger: Will the enemy have logistic difficulties in MR 1?

Mr. Carver: No, not too much—mainly because of relatively short supply and communications lines. This leads to discussion of two separate—but related points—on logistical capabilities, especially in MR 1. As Adm. Moorer said, the North Vietnamese are operating from the supply tail, rather than the nose, in MR 1. The first point is the amount available, and the second is the distribution. They can have all the ammunition they need, for example, in Quang Tri Province. But what counts is the distribution of that ammunition to the right unit at the right time. Our air strikes are a very effective means of disrupting the distribution.

In general, the enemy supply losses in MR 1 will not drawdown the area inventory, which can be augmented fairly easily from North Vietnam.

Mr. Sullivan: You feel they launched the offensive now—rather than wait until next year—because they thought the determination of the South Vietnamese would work against them?

Mr. Carver: Yes. However, there is a split in the community about that. I am persuaded that the thesis which says they would be better off waiting until next year is a loser. The strength of Thieu and the South Vietnamese has created a situation where it is no longer possible, in my belief, for the North Vietnamese to wait.

Mr. Kissinger: If they don't have a spectacular success, it will be bad for them.

Mr. Carver: That's right. They have much to win, with a big success. On the other hand, they can also suffer big losses. There is a lot of talk about the Tet 68 offensive—which is really shorthand for four series of attacks: February, 1968; May, 1968; August, 1968; and February, 1969. When all the accounts were finally balanced, it was agreed that the Communists suffered a total defeat in terms of administration and organization.

It's too early to make predictions about what will happen now. We can expect a three, five or six-month cycle of attacks.

Mr. Kissinger: Where did the fighting take place in May, 1968?

Mr. Carver: In MR 3, for the most part. But there was also fighting in the Delta and in MR 2.

Mr. Kissinger: What happened in August?

Mr. Carver: That's when the North Vietnamese attempted to overrun Bien Hoa airbase. That attack was the first tip we had about the degradation they were suffering. Three regiments attacked the base. One got there on time, one was badly hit by artillery and one was lost—it never got there. The execution of the attack was very sloppy.

Mr. Kissinger: The regiment that got lost is now with the 5th ARVN Division.

Mr. Sullivan: It's still lost.

Mr. Kissinger: Can General Minh handle the III Corps?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, I think so. It's unfortunate that Thieu won't release him from the Saigon area.

Mr. Sullivan: He has been released. General Khang is taking over Saigon.

Adm. Moorer: Good. He should do better, but he is more conservative than Tri [the late general].

Mr. Carver: Even if the North Vietnamese are defeated, it won't drive them to the negotiating table, although it will probably create stress in the leadership. In fact, it may cost Le Duan his job.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you think he is responsible for the offensive?

Mr. Carver: Yes. It's his war. He's the First Secretary of the Party, and he is responsible for the overall strategy.

Mr. Sullivan: (to Mr. Kissinger) He will be in Moscow one week before you.

Mr. Johnson: I don't think there is anything that will drive them to the negotiating table. If the offensive fails, they will probably go back to the strategy of protracted war.

Mr. Kissinger: They finally discovered that we were leaving last year. If we are not run out now, though, they won't be able to make it later on. If this offensive fails, it will mean that they cannot make it as long as we have some forces there. Suppose we get out. They could have two years of peace and then resume protracted war. Why should they wait, though, if they are confident they can win this year?

Mr. Sullivan: That's the reason for the conventional attack now. They see their assets in South Vietnam wasting away, and they feel it is now or never.

Mr. Kissinger: If they are defeated now, there is a chance they may decide to negotiate.[3]

Mr. Carver: If they are defeated, there will certainly be stress on the North Vietnamese leadership. Several things could then happen which would offset judgments we have made. A defeat would probably cause them to rethink their strategy, but it would not make them give up their objective of controlling South Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: Of course not.

Mr. Carver: They tried the big war strategy in 1968 and 1969—and it failed. Then they went to the local war strategy, which did not work. Now they are attempting the big war strategy again. However, we must remember that they have not yet played all of their cards.

Mr. Kissinger: What do you mean?

Mr. Carver: Their units are deployed, but some of them have not yet been put into action. If the big war strategy doesn't work now, the drawing board will be blank.

Mr. Kissinger: And if it doesn't work, it will be because the South Vietnamese ground actions prevented it from working.

Mr. Carver: Exactly. That will cause great heartburn in Hanoi. In addition, the RF and PF forces have played a role in stopping the enemy sapper attacks.

Mr. Kissinger: The only thing preventing negotiations is our refusal to put a Communist government in Saigon, or to put in a government which will certainly be overthrown by the Communists. All the other issues are merely debating points.

The North Vietnamese have three objectives: (1) overthrow Thieu and the Saigon government; (2) failing that, get us to do it; and (3) failing that, go through a phase where they will accept some elements of the Saigon government, but where they will eventually overthrow the government.

They have underestimated the strength of Thieu and the Saigon government, and they may have overestimated the degree of pliability the President has in this election year. If the first two options fail, they may decide to negotiate this year.

Mr. Carver: There is a lot to what you say. But Option 3 is not a sure thing for them. It is a gamble. They gambled in 1954, you know, when the odds were a lot worse—and they lost.

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[3] In a memorandum later that day to Helms, Carver informed him of his discussion with Kissinger on this topic: "Kissinger would like to believe that if the offensive flops, serious negotiations will become the most attractive option for the Vietnamese Communist Party. I argued forcefully but respectfully that this was not necessarily the case." (Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–B01673R, Box 3, WSAG Meetings)

Mr. Kissinger: What other options do they have? If the offensive is defeated and if the President is re-elected, they will face four more years of U.S. air power.

Mr. Sullivan: Even so, they would still have enough assets to conduct a protracted war.

Mr. Kissinger: But maybe they can do better with a settlement.

Mr. Sullivan: It's possible they might authorize friends to put out some feelers for them.

Mr. Carver: They may also prefer to accept the present situation, too.

Mr. Kissinger: The war has been going on for ten years. How is the morale in the North? Can they keep it up much longer?

Mr. Carver: They are having increasing difficulty.

Mr. Johnson: The war won't end in a clear-cut way. It will be ambiguous.

Mr. Sullivan: It's won't be ambiguous in MR 1.

Mr. Kissinger: If they don't take Hue and Danang, the offensive in MR 1 will be a failure.

Mr. Carver: That's right. And if they don't take Kontum, it will be a failure in MR 2. If they don't threaten Saigon, it will be a failure in MR 3. The South Vietnamese population will come to the conclusion that the North Vietnamese have tried their best—but that it wasn't enough. They will then conclude the North Vietnamese are not so strong, after all.

Mr. Johnson: Your assumptions are very clear-cut. The situation could be more ambiguous, and the Communists could do something to improve their infrastructure in South Vietnam.

Mr. Carver: We think the Communists are in the position we used to be in: if they don't win a clear-cut victory, they lose.

Mr. Kissinger: This has been interesting. Let's talk about the papers in more detail tomorrow. Let's also get an assessment of the ARVN capabilities for the next three to five months.

Mr. Carver: Shouldn't Defense do that?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Adm. Moorer: We'll do it.

76. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, April 12, 1972, 12:55–2:40 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, Ambassador of the USSR
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

It was one of our regularly scheduled weekly luncheons.

Dobrynin began the conversation by talking about Vietnam. He said that as of the day before, the April 24 meeting was still on.[2] He considered the April 24 meeting very crucial and he hoped nothing would happen to interfere with it. I said we had cancelled the plenary sessions that were supposed to precede this meeting, and that maybe now the other side would cancel the meeting itself.

Dobrynin said that he could assure me that his leadership was not interested in this conflict. I said "Let's be realistic. You are responsible for this conflict, either because you planned it or because you tried to score off the Chinese and as a result have put yourself into the position where a miserable little country can jeopardize everything that has been striven for for years." This was essentially a Soviet decision to make, I continued. The Soviet Union must have known when it signed two supplementary agreements during the year that it was giving the North Vietnamese the wherewithal to launch an offensive. What did the Soviet leaders expect? Did they expect the President to wait while the South Vietnamese army ran the risk of being defeated and 69,000 Americans were taken prisoner?

Dobrynin interjected by saying that the North Vietnamese had often offered to repatriate them immediately. I said "Anatol, this is not worthy of comment, and that situation will not arise. There must be a meeting this month. It must lead to concrete results, and if it does not there will be incalculable consequences. I might also point out that our whole attitude on a host of issues depends on it. How could the Soviet leaders ask us to proceed on the Middle East or to give support for the ratification of the Treaty while the war was taking this acute form? We were prepared to let it wind down. Why did the North Vietnamese not wait if they felt so confident? But now that the situation

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 10. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in the White House Map Room.

[2] Dobrynin was referring to the scheduled meeting in Paris between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho.

had arisen in which we were being challenged directly, we had no choice but to proceed."[3]

I was also bound to tell Dobrynin that I was not authorized to discuss any of the other subjects with him.

Dobrynin replied that it seemed to him that a visit by me to Moscow was more urgent than ever. He thought that we should reconsider the decision for me not to go. He felt that I should go and discuss Vietnam with their leaders and at the same time accelerate preparations for the Summit. I told Dobrynin I would put this proposition to the President.

Later on that afternoon I called him to tell him the result. [Telecon attached.][4]

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[3] At the WSAG meeting the day before, Kissinger said: "From the Russian point of view, the worst thing that could happen would be for the offensive to succeed. If we are run out of Vietnam, the Moscow trip would be called off, or we would go there as tough as nails. We couldn't possibly make any concessions." The WSAG also concluded that the South Vietnamese-American response to the offensive had generated only mild reactions from the Soviet Union and China, that ARVN was holding its own although it was too early to say the offensive had been blunted, that tactical air support was effectively supporting the South Vietnamese military, that bad weather and pilot unfamiliarity with North Vietnam would temporarily hinder bombing the North, and that as a result of the offensive a great deal of South Vietnamese military equipment and weapons would have to be replaced. (Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group meeting, April 11; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 78, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, Mar. 1971–Apr. 1972)

[4] Not printed. Brackets are in the original. After speaking with Nixon, Kissinger called Dobrynin at 3:15 p.m. to tell him that the President's inclination was to approve Kissinger making a secret trip to Moscow around April 22 and 23 as long as it took place in conjunction with his (Kissinger's) planned trip to Paris on April 24. The full text of the conversation is printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 97.

77. Memorandum for the Record by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

CJCS M–23–72 Washington, April 14, 1972.

SUBJ

North Vietnamese Offensive, April 1972 (U)

1. *Situation.* Midnight, Thursday, 13 April land battle underway in South Vietnam. Major action taking place due to enemy effort to capture An Loc. As many as 160 Tacair sorties and 18–21 B52 sorties per day allocated to the battle. The 5th, 7th, and 9th NVA Divisions engaged.

2. *Background.* Upon directions received from the White House orders were issued to CINCPAC to prepare for a heavy attack against Haiphong to be conducted by B52s and Tacair. The President and HAK are in Canada today without adequate secure communications—MG Haig preparing to visit Saigon to advise Gen Abrams of the President's desires with respect to the current activity in Southeast Asia.

3. In a telephone conversation with Gen Vogt (7AF) I learned that Abrams was preparing a message requesting cancellation of the strikes in NVN. At about 0130 I received a telephone call from CINCPAC stating he had received MACV message and which he had read.[2] CINCPAC followed up with a message agreeing with Abrams.

4. At the request of Abrams, Ambassador Bunker, at the same time, sent a message to the President pointing out the requirements for Tacair and B52s in SVN and requested delay of the proposed strike in Hanoi/Haiphong.

5. Later I learned from Haig that this message simply drove the President up the bulkhead and that it confirms his suspicions that Abrams is receiving instructions from Laird contrary to the instructions issued by the President.[3]

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Sensitive—Hold Close.

[2] What Abrams requested in this message, dated April 14, 0545Z, was not cancellation but postponement of the Freedom Porch strikes until April 21 or 22. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1016, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's Visit to Vietnam, April 14, 1972)

[3] In a telephone conversation the next day, Kissinger characterized the President's reaction in this manner: "Well, I can tell you when I showed the President Abrams' message he practically went into orbit." (Moorer Diary, April 15; ibid., RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

6. At shortly before 0700 I reported to the Office of the SecDef for the normal briefing and to advise him of Abrams' message and my recommended reply. Initially Laird brought up the fact that I had sent a message to McCain/Abrams telling them that Haig was visiting Saigon with "full Presidential authority." Laird was very upset and, among other things, related this to the Johnson/Goldwater campaign stating, in effect, that I had given authority to Haig to drop nuclear weapons. I did not tell Laird that this message was sent at the direction of the President and that my message was a *direct quote* of my instructions received via a telephone conversation with HAK of which I have a verbatim transcript.[4] I simply said that I had made a mistake and that I would correct the message. The real problem is that Laird wants Abrams to think that he, Laird, is sending Haig out to Saigon rather than the President. The real purpose of Haig's visit is to get across to Abrams what the President really wants. So far, Abrams has looked inward and confined his efforts to the land action inside SVN. Since the President has directed the augmentation of US forces in Indo China amounting to about 3 aircraft carriers—16 destroyers—2 cruisers—3 Air Force tactical squadrons—and 3 Marine tactical squadrons—without receiving a single request from Abrams, he does not understand why Abrams needs all of the forces in-country regardless of how many forces are sent out there. The strike on Haiphong is part of a progressive and heavy escalation being made for political purposes in an effort to negotiate the war.

7. I related my experiences with Laird over this message to Ken Rush who thoroughly understood my predicament, since he had been caught the same way. I told him that the President had said that he and Laird have different fish to fry and said that I understood this perfectly, but I do not particularly enjoy the fact that they both fry their fish in my pan!

8. In our discussions DepSecDef said that he had been advised of this situation prior to taking the job and that he understood the problem thoroughly. He pointed out that Laird frequently telephones Abrams, particularly with respect to the Withdrawal Program, which he has been pushing so hard (This, of course, is well known to me). Among other things, DepSecDef stated that his Aide, Ray Furlong, had been instructed by MG Pursley to, in effect, "spy" on the DepSecDef and

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[4] In his diary entry on April 13, Moorer recorded his 11:49 a.m. telephone conversation with Kissinger: "He has been talking to the President and wants me to send a message to Abrams making it clear that Haig is coming out there with full Presidential Authority and that he is to be given full cooperation, that he is carrying personal instructions from the President. I said I have already sent out the itinerary and I will send this right away. HAK asked if there was anything else I needed to get it into Abrams' head that the party was over." (Ibid.)

keep SecDef advised of his activities. Ken became aware of this little activity and took rather positive action to correct it. It is just one more example of the disruptive influence of Pursley.

9. I prepared a message turning down Abrams' request to cancel the strike which Laird finally approved and which satisfied the President.[5] I also called Abrams and McCain so, at this moment, no one is happy—but everyone is satisfied!

T.H. Moorer[6]

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[5] In message 9098, April 14, Moorer explained the decision to McCain and Abrams in the following terms: "It is recognized that under present tactical circumstances in-country that 200 Tacair strike sorties and 36 B–52 sorties will not fully meet the requirements of MACV to support the land battle. However, there are other very high level considerations which dictate a firm requirement for a heavy air strike in the Hanoi/Haiphong area during the coming weekend." (National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 1–15 April 1972) The heart of these considerations was that Nixon and Kissinger, on the eve of Kissinger's departure for Moscow to discuss the upcoming summit, wanted to send a message to the Soviets about American determination in Vietnam. (Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War,* p. 254) Nixon later wrote: "Any sign of weakness on our part might encourage the Soviets to provide more arms in hopes of giving the North Vietnamese a military advantage." (*RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon,* p. 588)

[6] Printed from a copy with this typed signature.

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78. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 14, 1972.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Negotiations

Background

Hanoi is obviously eager to talk to us, I doubt with genuine compromise in mind, but there can be no question that they want to get discussions under way with a variety of possible objectives in mind

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 854, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XIII. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information.

such as (a) restraining our response to their current offensive; (b) locking us into a position before they have joined the battle on all the fronts where they now have forces and supplies positioned; and (c) demoralizing the GVN/RVNAF, particularly if word of private U.S. talks got out.

The scenario is not new. You yourself have referred to the analogies between now, 1964 and 1968. The principal difference is that we are not now on the defensive domestically—not yet at least—and the Communists are probably not as confident as they were in earlier episodes of this sort that if the military drama is allowed to play itself out that the outcome would be so favorable to them. It might even be calamitous for Hanoi.

Hanoi's eagerness to get us into conference is accentuated by the fact that they are openly signalling Le Duc Tho's readiness to come to Paris—*even as we are bombing North Vietnam*—an almost unprecedented phenomenon since they perceive our present response as moving up the escalator rather than down. Their agreement to talk with LBJ in 1968 was under the converse circumstances.

An added feature which suggests that Hanoi may not have anything serious in mind is their insistence on resumption of plenaries, which they know to be sterile, as a fig leaf for Le Duc Tho's return. If they were really earnest, the fact of plenaries or no plenaries would be an irrelevancy to them.

The foregoing notwithstanding, Hanoi may have some substantive wrinkles to add to their position designed to move us away from our negotiating posture or take us up on aspects of our position which would have appeal to them in the current military context.

With 12 divisions outside their borders and only 3 or 4 of them really bloodied so far an *in place cease-fire* could have some appeal *if they can register some significant military successes.* I would define significant as the capture of two or three major province towns, the encirclement of Saigon and other populated areas and a *major* disruption of our LOC's.

Were they to achieve this, then an in place cease-fire would enhance their professions of victory and in effect be seen by them as ratification of their right to deploy their whole army throughout Indochina.

Another aspect of the situation which may be giving them pause is our massive air and naval redeployments. I can think of no single factor which might compel them, more than ever before, to consider separating the military from the political issues—*particularly if they could achieve this before their offensive has expended itself.*

Arguing against this approach, is that Hanoi is probably reluctant to give President Nixon even a partial settlement before the elections, probably thus assuring him another term in office.

The Situation on the Ground

The situation on the ground is clearly the commanding variable; but the record of the war shows that more often than not Hanoi's willingness to talk has usually been associated with major offensive activity and almost always *signalled prior* to the activity itself:

—This was true in *1954* when the allied foreign ministers in Berlin, meeting from *January 25–February 18,* agreed to call for a conference at Geneva to discuss Indochina and Korea. The siege of Dien Bien Phu began on *March 13* and Dien Bien Phu fell on *May 7.* The Geneva conference opened on *May 8.*

—This was true in *1968* where the *Tet* offensive *followed* their shift in language from "could negotiate" to "will negotiate" if we stopped bombing the DRV.

—Again in *1968* it was true when following Hanoi's *April 1* announcement that it was ready to talk with us, it then proceeded to mount preparations for the second wave of its Tet offensive and kicked it off on *May 4* nine days *before* the first procedural meetings between us and the DRV in Paris on *May 13.*

—There was another high point in *August 1968* following two months of private meetings between Vance and Ha Van Lau in June and July—meetings which laid out the essence of the understandings subsequently reached between Harriman and Le Duc Tho in September and October.

—A final high point in the *Tet sequence* came in *February 1969,* after we had opened four-way talks in Paris on *January 25.*

—The next major communist assault was launched on *August 12, 1969* against 100 SVN cities, towns and bases barely a month after *Thieu's July 11 political proposal* and after your first private meeting with them.

The foregoing chronology could be used to argue both ways as to the most appropriate timing for substantive negotiations; but *on balance and, taking into account only the situation on the ground in Vietnam, without reference to great power relationships, I believe the weight of evidence suggests we should move slowly on the negotiation front until Hanoi's offensive has played itself out.*

As you know from the WSAG meetings, the time frame foreseen for this eventuality is mid-summer. By that time we will have a more decisive picture of the situation on the ground, bearing in mind that even if Hanoi shoots its bolt in April and May, the GVN will need a month or two to pick up the debris, pull up its socks and restore whatever disruption has occurred to its pacification figures as a result of deploying its regulars to the fields of battle. *Time is probably on our side but, given its rigidity, this point can probably only be driven home to Hanoi by a decisive defeat on the battlefield.*

79. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 15, 1972, 3:37 p.m.

TELECON/OUT—to Dr. Kissinger (Secure)

CJCS—Report to the President all 52s "feet wet" that means all over Tonkin Gulf and are heading home. I haven't heard from the A–6s but the big planes got in and out.[2]

HAK—A6s go in there too?

CJCS—Suppression helps them in there, were on instruments too, Navy's all weather plane.

HAK—We should have more of them.

CJCS—That's good news any way all home free, haven't landed yet, but obviously out of danger.

HAK—How many?

CJCS—18; 1200 bombs.

HAK—Hit oil storage depot?

CJCS—That's what its target was, we are watching for COMINT and any other indication all of the aircraft first phase out safely.

HAK—How many A6s?

CJCS—14.

HAK—They didn't go after storage tanks?

CJCS—Prime targets aimed to what they call flak suppression what they don't disrupting missile firing for B52s go later against them had go after those trucks—photographs I got for you on storage and barracks most of them were about, 10 of them, during SAM suppression and others after the trucks.

HAK—Other waves won't go until 2100 tonight?[3]

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

[2] Seventeen B–52s had attacked an oil tank farm and other targets near Haiphong, the first time American bombers had hit that far north and that close to North Vietnam's capital. The mission of the A–6s was to strike surface-to-missile sites before the B–52s made their bombing runs. (Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back,* p. 226) According to an unsigned "Key Events" chronology, the first raids against the North took place on April 6–7, and then the first, second, and third B–52 raids took place on, respectively, April 9, 12, and 15, each one shifting the target area further north. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 252, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Peace talks, Summary, 1972–73, n.d.)

[3] This was a raid by 32 F–4s on a tank farm near Hanoi. All aircraft returned safely. (Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back,* p. 226)

CJCS—2030, weather permitting, leaves they have got time to delay a couple of hours and still do the same job before dark. We will just have to do the best we can, real pleased over the fact no losses, won't give those little bastards propaganda claims.

HAK—If they hit something.

CJCS—Henry, with 1200 pound bombs going over there I can assure you they hit something—and caught their attention. 66 bombs each airplane, somewhere around 12.

HAK—How many F4s carry?

CJCS—About 12 on that mission, about 5 is good. F4s, of course, little more accurate since releasing on pinpoint, kind of hard but that is helpful operation.

HAK—Congratulations. You are not our problem—you are our solution.

CJCS—I will keep you posted—you can breathe easier until 2030.

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80. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, April 16, 1972.

SUBJECT

Situation in Southeast Asia

Based on initial conversations with General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker, a personal visit to MR–3, and result of staff member's visit to MR–4, General Haig has made the following significant points:[2]

MR–3

—The situation along the length of Route 13 from Loc Vinh to Lai Khe has been most tenuous. The only factor which has prevented a major debacle has been US air, especially B–52s.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 96, Vietnam Subject Files, Air Activity in Southeast Asia, Vol. III, Jan–Aug 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates that the President saw it.

[2] Haig's report is in backchannel message 64 from Saigon, April 16. (Ibid., Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, From Amb. Bunker—Saigon—1972) Haig visited Vietnam April 16–18. His written report, submitted to the President on his return, is ibid., Box 1014, Haig Special Files, Haig Trip Papers—4/14–4/19.

—The situation in and around An Loc was worse than anticipated. Three enemy main force units reinforced by tanks and artillery have been deployed against one of the ARVN's weakest divisions along a route leading directly to Saigon.

—Yesterday the situation stabilized in and around An Loc due to massive US air and modest ARVN reinforcements. General Hollingsworth estimates that the enemy has lost up to 50 tanks in the An Loc–Loc Vinh area, including many T–54s. Yesterday beleaguered forces in An Loc started destroying tanks with infantry anti-tank weapons. As a result, the morale of the garrison has materially improved.

—The enemy has slipped around An Loc and is also applying greater pressure against the 21st ARVN Division at Chon Thanh. The division, however, is inflicting considerable punishment on the enemy.

—The 21st Division commander is very aggressive and impressive. His units' morale is very high. However, General Minh, the commanding general in III Corps is slow, unsure and definitely not up to the task.[3]

—There are some very tough days ahead in III Corps area, but ARVN will hold and by the end of the month the enemy should be driven out of III Corps with great losses.

MR–4

—There has been heavy combat in certain areas of the delta. The initial phase of the enemy offensive seems to be ending but more heavy combat can be expected.

—Other areas of the delta are quiet. The roads are open and everything appears normal.

—Despite heavy fighting, there is broad confidence that the situation is under control. Reinforcements are enroute to the threatened areas and advisors feel there are ample South Vietnamese forces available.

Air

—When large B–52 strikes are conducted in the north, much of the carrier aircraft reinforcements are lost to the battle. The movement of the carriers causes delays in availability of these assets to meet threats in southern South Vietnam. To alleviate this problem General Vogt is refueling Thai-based aircraft in the Saigon area.

—The participation of US air and naval forces has been a significant factor in maintaining public confidence.

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[3] Nixon circled "General Minh," referring to Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Minh, and wrote in the margin: "Tell Thieu he must be replaced *immediately*."

—General Abrams understands completely the necessity for escalation of the air effort in the north.

Political

—Ambassador Bunker is most enthusiastic about special diplomatic plans which he believes should be followed up.

Conclusions

—ARVN with US help will weather what is clearly the major North Vietnamese effort of the war.

—All the serious threats are coming from main force units.

—There is a surge of nationalistic spirit evident but this is fragile.

—We have a good basis for confidence that the situation will hold together but there may be some tough moments between now and the end of the month. Following this, we will have some rebuilding to do before new enemy efforts which may come in July. Subsequent enemy efforts, however, should be far less virulent and should fail.[4]

—Ambassador Bunker believes the planned diplomatic project offers the best long-term hope for the situation, and believes that President Thieu's offer to step down and not run for re-election is still valid.

—We should be able to proceed from a posture of confidence that the situation in South Vietnam will hold together for a long time. Events will improve during this next year with the greatest danger coming after that if there is no settlement.[5]

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[4] Nixon circled "may come in July."

[5] The President wrote the following comments on the last page: "K—In view of this memo I believe we cannot go on the longer game plan of getting an interim withdrawal across DMZ in exchange for Bombing Halt & resumption of talks. (1) I have *no confidence* whatever that Soviet will help on talks if we take off the pressure (2) We have to go on with the blockade."

81. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 17, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of backchannel message 65 from Haig in Saigon, the North Vietnamese offensive and Nixon's trip to the Moscow Summit, and Hanoi's offer to resume the plenary session and send Le Duc Tho to Paris if the United States stopped bombing North Vietnam. Portions of the transcript are printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 113.]

Kissinger: Mr. President, I think you've always done what you said you would do. And I have every—no, I think that's what you will do—

Nixon: Look, Henry—

Kissinger: —and I think that's what you should do.

Nixon: Look, Henry, you see, if you—when you really carry out, Henry, to your, to the extreme, your analysis, that you can't have the North Vietnamese destroy two Presidents, and in that it isn't really quite on all fours because Johnson destroyed himself, and in my case I will not do it that way. I will do it, frankly, for the good of the country. But nevertheless—

Kissinger: No, no, but that is for the good of the country. That's why I'm saying it, Mr. President, with all my—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —loyalty I think we cannot have these miserable little bastards destroy confidence in our government.

Nixon: Sure. Well, anyway, I was going to tell you that I'm convinced that the country—you see, for me, let me be quite—Kennedy, even leading a nation that was infinitely stronger than any potential enemy, was unable to conduct a very successful foreign policy because he lacked iron nerves—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —and lacked good advisers.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: All right. Johnson was in the same position for other reasons, because he didn't have any experience. Now, I am quite aware

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 709–8. 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, 8:58–9:34 a.m.

of the fact that because of the—what is happening here and the rest, I mean that, that there is a limit, a very good chance—I mean I don't, and it doesn't bother me one damn bit from a personal standpoint—there's a very good chance that sitting in this chair could be somebody else. It could be a Muskie; it could be a Humphrey; it could be a Teddy;[2] one of those three on the Democratic side. And on the Republican side it won't be Agnew or Reagan, but it—Rockefeller probably couldn't get the nomination, I don't know who, who they would nominate, but nevertheless, but here's the point: I have to, I know that, I have to leave this office in a position as strong as I possibly can because whoever succeeds me, either because of lack of experience or because of lack of character or guts, heading a weaker United States would surrender the whole thing. You understand—?

Kissinger: No question. I know—

Nixon: So that is why, that is why what I have to do, I have to do it not only to assure that if I am here we can conduct a successful foreign policy, I have to do it—and this is even more important—so that some poor, weak son-of-a-bitch sitting here, with the best of intentions can conduct it. It will be hard enough for Hubert Humphrey in this chair, it will be hard enough for him to conduct a foreign policy of the United States that's knocked the hell out of South Vietnam. It'll be very hard because he is a gibbering idiot at times; well-intentioned but gibbering. Muskie has proved that he has no, no character. And Teddy is a—well, unbelievable, I mean. It's his up and down. Now, what the—what the hell can you do? So, you cannot leave—you just can't leave the thing. Now, under these circumstances, as I've often said, that it may be that [clears throat] I'm the last person in this office for some time, until somebody else is developing along the same lines, I mean, who's tough and experienced, who will be able to conduct a strong, responsible foreign policy. So goddamnit, we're going to do it. And that means—that means take every risk, lose every election. That's the way I look at it, just as cold as that. Now people say, "Oh well, if you win you're going to lose your path." I'm not sure, but the main point is, we have no choice, you see?

Kissinger: That's my view—

Nixon: The foreign policy of the United States will not be viable if we're run out of Vietnam. That's all there is to it.

[Omitted here is additional discussion of the offensive, the Middle East, the Soviets, and the prospective summit.]

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[2] Nixon was referring to Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D–MA).

82. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 17, 1972, 11:05–11:48 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Armistead Selden
R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas Moorer

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton
(only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Richard Kennedy
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—The Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff should prepare a joint paper on replacements for ARVN equipment losses. The paper should include what we have learned about the mix of equipment being provided.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, do you have anything for us?

Mr. Helms: Yes, but first I want to mention that the study you asked for on Soviet assistance to North Vietnam is in front of you.[2]

Mr. Kissinger: Does the study prove what we wanted it to prove, or should it be withdrawn?

Mr. Helms: It's a little bit of both. [Reads attached briefing][3]

Mr. Kissinger: [After Mr. Helms read that the North Vietnamese statement said U.S. bombing of Haiphong should be stopped] Did they say "should" or "must."

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of text, are in the original. Portions of the minutes are printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 118.

[2] See ibid., Document 117.

[3] Attached but not printed is the April 17 CIA briefing, "The Situation in South Vietnam."

Mr. Helms: It says "should" here, but I think you can read it as "must." [Continues to read his briefing.]

Mr. Kissinger: [After Mr. Helms read about the current situation at An Loc] What would the North Vietnamese have if they captured An Loc?

Mr. Helms: A provincial capital.

Adm. Moorer: (to Mr. Kissinger) You asked the other day about the slow movement of elements of the 1st ARVN Division up Highway 13. It was smart to move so deliberately because we now know that the 7th NVA Division was detailed to cut them off. The South Vietnamese are only seven kilometers from An Loc.

Mr. Sullivan: Where is the 5th NVA Division?

Adm. Moorer: It's north of An Loc, and the 9th Division is to the west of the city.

Mr. Helms: [Finishes reading his briefing] I have one last item—a telegram from Saigon—which I want to read to you. It presents a new twist, but I think we should treat it with caution and prudence until we have a chance to check it out. [Reads telegram, gist of which is as follows: An Australian major, an arms expert, stationed at MACV made a trip to the Quang Tri area. He reported on April 15 that he looked at some captured equipment and that a tank which we believed was a Soviet T–54 was in fact a Chinese T–59.]

Mr. Kissinger: How could he tell it was a Chinese tank? Did the buttons go from top to bottom, instead of across?

Mr. Helms: The cable said this was the first evidence of Chinese tanks in Vietnam. We have also captured a Chinese-made rocket launcher, a solid state transmitter, rifles and a 100-mm tank round. The cable from Saigon says this information will be checked out today with Abrams and J–2.

Mr. Kissinger: Will you let us know as soon as you get a confirmation?

Mr. Helms: Yes.

Mr. Sullivan: [Referring to Mr. Helms' briefing] You said the Soviet statement of protest to us mentioned damage to their ships.[4] I don't think they said that in public, though.

Mr. Johnson: No, they haven't.

Mr. Sullivan: In the public statement, they just mentioned the barbarity of attacking Haiphong. I don't think our press statements should say anything about damage to Soviet ships.

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[4] The note is printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 110.

Mr. Kennedy entered the room at this point.

Mr. Johnson: If the Soviets want to keep the ship business quiet, let's help them do it. The Tass statement said nothing about ship damage. The press here and in Moscow assumes Tass' statement contained the substance of the note to us. Let's let it ride.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree. But the press is getting leary. Joseph Kraft called over here this morning, and he was amazed that the Soviets seem to be ducking a confrontation.

Adm. Moorer: The skipper of one of the Soviet ships sent a message to Moscow, which we intercepted. The message described some of the damage.

Mr. Rush: I thought we were not sure that the damage was caused by us.

Mr. Johnson: That's right.

Adm. Moorer: The North Vietnamese fired over 200 missiles.

Mr. Johnson: There was a radio report this morning of an East German statement which said the Soviet ships were damaged as a result of our air attacks.

Adm. Moorer: That's correct. But the German report was based on the report of the Soviet skipper, who also said all crews are seeking safety—a wise move.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer) Tom, do you have anything to add?

Adm. Moorer: You had a briefing this morning. I will answer any questions you have, but I don't want to be repetitious.

By and large, the South Vietnamese are now controlling An Loc, and they are conducting some probes outside the city. Although there is some heavy fighting, An Loc is not in immediate danger of falling.

Abe [General Abrams] sent in an evaluation of the ARVN forces in MR 1, giving high marks to the tank units. They started with 41 M–48s, and they still have 39 left. We are providing whatever spare parts they need. Abe also gave high marks to the Marines. According to him, they are ready. Parts of the 3rd Division are in good shape, too.

Generally speaking, he gave fair marks to the ARVN forces around the Cua Viet perimeter. Those were the main things in his message. Air activity is heavy, and the weather is good.

I have nothing else to add. We are going to review today how to supply the added ammunition which is needed as a result of the surge in activity. The South Vietnamese during the last 24 hours have been fighting well—and they are not in extremis.

Mr. Johnson: Are the South Vietnamese planning to initiate some action on the northern front?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. They are planning some moves in the Cua Viet area.

Mr. Kissinger: We saw Lam's offensive actions last year.

Adm. Moorer: At least he is not withdrawing now.

Mr. Kissinger: I know. I am satisfied that he is holding what he has. It's just that I don't think he is offensive-minded.

I want to bring up the subject of replacing South Vietnamese equipment losses again. Can we get an estimate of just what replacements the South Vietnamese need?

Adm. Moorer: We are taking vigorous action on this. Some of the equipment can be taken from stocks ear-marked for retrograde movement from South Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: We should also find out if the fighting shows weaknesses in the South Vietnamese supplies. Do they need heavier equipment, or different types of equipment? Some people were making the argument early on in the offensive that the North Vietnamese artillery was outdistancing ours.

Adm. Moorer: You're talking about the 130-mm guns, but they are not being used very much during this offensive.

Mr. Kissinger: I have no views on this subject, and I don't want to pass judgment on it. But I do think we should take advantage of the opportunity now to review the situation.

Adm. Moorer: I might mention that there was also something in the evaluation report from Abrams about the South Vietnamese artillery. The artillery, evidently, is well-manned, and morale is high. The one problem seems to be poor control. Our people are looking into this. The report, however, was complimentary to the ARVN artillery.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Rush) Ken, can you give us a memo on the equipment situation? I think we asked for one at the April 11 meeting. Anyway, the President asks me about it every day. Perhaps you can do a joint memo with Tom.

Mr. Rush: We'll get to work on it.

Adm. Moorer: We'll do a joint memo.

Mr. Kissinger: Good. On the press side, we don't want to get drawn into an endless debate on who said what, when and where or what our conditions are for a resumption of negotiations. I assume the Secretary got some of these questions at this morning's session [before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee].

Mr. Johnson: Yes, he did.

Mr. Kissinger: He was supposed to be very vague in answering those questions.

Mr. Johnson: He was.

Mr. Kissinger: We don't want to debate *The New York Times* or the *Washington Post* either. The record is overwhelmingly clear on what happened to the negotiations.

Mr. Sullivan: Bob [McCloskey] needs some guidance for the noon briefing. For example, we should know if the North Vietnamese statements about the resumption of meetings are factually correct.

Mr. Kissinger: They have publicly proposed a meeting for April 27.

Mr. Sullivan: The North Vietnamese said they sent us a note on April 15, proposing a meeting on April 27.[5]

Mr. Kissinger: The important thing to stress is that we agreed to resume the meetings. I showed the Secretary [Rogers] what we have done.

Mr. Sullivan: He is clear about what was done on April 1, 2, 4 and 6. The new element, though, is the latest North Vietnamese statement. Should Bob call them liars?

Mr. Kissinger: He should duck the issue. We know their proposal is to resume the meetings on April 27. Our position remains what it has been. Their note to us is irrelevant, anyway, because they made a public call for a meeting on the 27th.

Mr. Johnson: That's right.

Mr. Sullivan: (to Mr. Carver) I haven't seen the text of their statement today. Have you seen it?

Mr. Carver: Not yet.

Mr. Kissinger: We should say that they know how to talk to us. The channels are open. Their declarations are nothing but propaganda. They built up their forces for the offensive while we were trying to negotiate. All Porter ever asked for was business-like negotiations.

We have had a plethora of statements. The one today says that if the plenary sessions are resumed, Le Duc Tho will come back to Paris. I would say there is nothing new in this. In fact, we shouldn't say anything. Their statement is propaganda. If they want to talk seriously, we are ready. And they know how to talk to us.

I've found that this posture is confusing to them. It's better to say very little than to go back and forth confirming or denying everything they say.

Mr. Johnson: To change the subject, I have a message from Unger [U.S. Ambassador to Thailand]. I gather from the message that the Air Force is going to increase its deployments in Thailand. Unger is not questioning this, but he is asking if he should walk the Thais back on the closing of Takli airbase.

Adm. Moorer: We're just making some preparatory investigations. As of now, no new forces are being ordered to Thailand. However, if

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[5] See Document 45.

we do have to send additional planes, we want to know if we can pack them into Korat and Udorn. The Air Force says we can squeeze two more squadrons in. We originally thought we may have to reopen Takli. The big problem is getting the Thais to truck the bombs and supplies up there. As you know, they have been operating at a high tempo at Korat and Udorn. We could pack one more squadron in Korat, and we could squeeze another squadron into Udorn. Beyond that, though, we would have to open up Takli.

Mr. Kissinger: How many planes are in a squadron? Eighteen?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. We're just making an exploratory investigation—a prudent thing to do. No new units have been ordered to Thailand.

Mr. Johnson: I can tell Unger then that you are simply exploring what may be required later on. I can say you will be in touch with him if we have to move additional planes in?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: Getting back to the press side, we should not be apologetic about the negotiations. We don't want to give the impression, though, that we don't want negotiations. We should point out the cynical behavior of the North Vietnamese—they know how to deal with us, but they are making propaganda.

I have not had time to read the paper on Soviet aid. Can you tell me what it proves?

Mr. Carver: It shows that there is a great deal of lead time between stockpiling aid and using this aid in tactical situations. It's obvious that the Soviets tried to make up the Lam Son 719 losses. They must have been aware, too, that they were augmenting the North Vietnamese offensive capabilities. I doubt, though, that there was an orchestration between the step-up of aid and the launching of the offensive. The schedules indicate the aid requests were placed before Hanoi jelled its plans for the offensive.

Mr. Kissinger: When did Hanoi jell those plans?

Mr. Carver: The North Vietnamese probably decided late last summer to go to main force action in Vietnam this year. They probably decided in late September or October on the step-up of activity in Laos.

Mr. Kissinger: Isn't time running out in Laos?

Mr. Carver: Yes. I would think they only have two or three weeks left.

Mr. Kissinger: Would the whole thing be worthwhile if they don't take Long Tieng? Among other things, they had an extra division in Laos this year. Is it possible that they couldn't take Long Tieng?

Mr. Carver: I don't think they could take Long Tieng. The operation this year started out like a reprise of the 1970 operation. As you

remember, for a period of 36 hours in 1970, they could have taken Long Tieng with a corporal's guard. This year they rushed across the Plain of Jars in December and then paused. During that pause, the defense got set, and since then, they have not been able to push out.

Mr. Kissinger: From Hanoi's point of view, is this a failure?

Mr. Carver: Yes, I think so. They put in two divisions, supplemented with extra regiments, tanks and heavy artillery. Still, they couldn't take Long Tieng.

Mr. Helms: There's no doubt, however, that they tried to take it.

Mr. Kissinger: You don't think it was their intention to go only this far?

Mr. Carver: No.

Mr. Johnson: Would you say they made the maximum effort possible in Laos this year?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Sullivan: I don't think they made their last push yet.

Mr. Helms: You're right. We can expect at least one more try.

Mr. Sullivan: They announced in January that they had taken Long Tieng. We may therefore have a situation similar to the one we had at Tchepone—where they made a premature announcement of its capture. They eventually did take Tchepone and hold it for a brief period of time.

Mr. Kissinger: Even if they capture Long Tieng, they won't stay.

Mr. Carver: I think the fears we had in early December about them taking Long Tieng and threatening Vientiane have been dissipated. They will have to wait for next year in order to threaten Vientiane.

Mr. Kissinger: This war has its own rules. I remember when we had our first Laotian crisis, Alex told us to keep our shirts on. He said this goes back and forth every year—and he was right.

Mr. Johnson: Ever since 1954, it looks as though we are going to lose Laos every year—but Laos is still there every year.

Mr. Carver: Nevertheless, the pendulum swung closer than ever during this campaign.

Mr. Johnson: I know. I thought it might be different this year.

Mr. Kissinger: What will Hanoi do next year? It seems to me that they would have to do more than they did this year.

Mr. Carver: That depends on the outcome of the fighting in Vietnam and on the political equation. I doubt that Hanoi can be overly sanguine. I think they will have to materially augment the forces they had in Laos this year—and that won't be easy.

Mr. Sullivan: For one thing, they would like to see the Symington ceiling lowered from $350 million to $150 million.

Adm. Moorer: Our air activity around Long Tieng has played a significant role. We've dropped thousands of tons of bombs, and I'm sure the five regiments out there have suffered heavy casualties.

Mr. Sullivan: They don't have much room to hide on the Skyline Ridge.

Mr. Kissinger: I am amazed that their morale has held up. It must be a harrowing experience to be caught in a B–52 attack.

Mr. Helms: There was a report [*less than 1 line not declassified*] that the North Vietnamese are chaining tank drivers to their seats.

Mr. Kissinger: Is that true?

Mr. Helms: It may be.

Adm. Moorer: I don't know how true it is.

Mr. Kissinger: We had reports last year that they were getting drunk on rice wine in order to get up for battle. I thought we might get a comparative report between that and the Marines who were high on marijuana. (to Mr. Carver) You don't think, then, that the increased Soviet aid shipments and the launching of the North Vietnamese offensive were part of an orchestrated plot?

Mr. Carver: No, I don't.

Mr. Kissinger: But you think the Soviets knew they were increasing the North Vietnamese offensive capabilities.

Mr. Carver: Yes, I'm sure the Soviets knew.

Mr. Sullivan: The increased POL shipments alone should have told the Soviets that.

Mr. Carver: Of course. The Soviets knew the increased POL shipments had to augment the North Vietnamese capabilities.

Mr. Kissinger: We can say therefore one of three things: (1) that the Soviets didn't know anything—that this was really the normal flow of aid; (2) that the Soviets knew the specific target date of the attack; and (3) that the Soviets didn't know the specific date, but they did know they had given the North Vietnamese a considerable improvement of offensive capabilities.

Mr. Carver: I think number three is where we would come out.[6] The supply shipments increased at the end of the summer, but Hanoi's plans had not yet jelled.

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[6] The Embassy, as reported in message 3568 from Moscow, April 17, agreed with the third option, stating: "Moscow is fully committed to provide DRV with means to conduct military operations in Indochina under conditions of Hanoi's own choosing, including current offensive." The message is printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 115.

Mr. Kissinger: You mean the timing of the offensive, don't you?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: But the Soviets knew their increased aid would certainly make it easier for the North Vietnamese to launch an offensive.

Mr. Carver: Of course they did.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm not trying to put words into your mouth. I'm just trying to understand the situation. Would it be correct to say that a prudent Soviet Government from January on—knowing that the Summit was approaching in May—might have known with each passing month that the coincidence between the Summit and the North Vietnamese offensive was becoming much sharper?

Mr. Carver: That's correct. It's also inconceivable that when Marshall Batiskiy left North Vietnam the Soviets did not know what was on Hanoi's mind. The main task of the Batiskiy mission was to review the North Vietnamese air defenses—and they obviously did that because they knew they would have to use these defenses in the near future.

Mr. Rush: Let's assume for the sake of argument that the offensive was supposed to start in February and that all the supplies were in the pipeline. As the date slipped from February, could the Russians have done something to cut the pipeline—and stop the offensive, so that it would not interfere with the Summit?

Mr. Carver: It's not that neat. Even if the Soviets did that, Hanoi could draw down on the existing stockpiles. You can't plot the movement of a particular shipment to the tactical situation. The supply system doesn't work like that.

Mr. Rush: Everything was all geared up for the February offensive, and the Russian and Chinese supplies were coming in. Did the supplies continue to come in when the offensive was delayed? The Russians could have been concerned about the delayed offensive coinciding with the Summit, and they may have cut the supply flow when they found out the offensive was delayed.

Mr. Carver: That didn't happen. Anyway, the supply system is not that responsive.

Mr. Kissinger: Since February, though, the Russians should have been expecting the offensive with each passing week.

Mr. Helms: It's interesting to look at the POL shipment line in our study.

Mr. Carver: You can see a very obvious surge in the line in the fourth quarter of 1971 and the first quarter of 1972.

Adm. Moorer: That's due to several reasons. First, the North Vietnamese are using more trucks to deploy men and supplies. Second, they are operating more tanks—a long way from home, too. Third, they are flying the MiGs more often, and the MiGs gobble up fuel.

Mr. Kissinger: Will our air strikes on Haiphong have much of an effect on POL distribution?

Adm. Moorer: The strikes won't have much of an effect on this offensive. But the effects will be felt later on.

Mr. Rush: Let me repeat the question I asked earlier. Seeing the delay in the offensive and not wanting it to coincide with the Summit, couldn't the Russians have cut the supply flow?

Mr. Carver: They could have done that. But if the cut had come after the first of the year, it would not have had any effect on Hanoi's stocks.

Mr. Kissinger: They may not have known the exact day the North Vietnamese planned to launch the offensive. But sending a military mission to Hanoi a week before the offensive was no sign that they wanted Hanoi to call it off.

Mr. Carver: Even if the Soviets wanted Hanoi to call the offensive off, they would have taken much criticism from the North Vietnamese and the Chinese. There is simply no evidence that Batiskiy told the North Vietnamese to call it off—because of the Summit or any other reason.

Mr. Sullivan: The Soviets may have known the offensive was laid on for February, in the hope that it would cause us a maximum embarrassment during the China visit. Then, although the offensive was delayed, they were committed—and they couldn't turn it around.

Mr. Kissinger: They wouldn't tell Hanoi to let the offensive run to May 5, would they? They would have to let the offensive run its course.

Mr. Helms: That's right. Once they are locked into something, they take their losses to the bitter end. They have to go all the way with the North Vietnamese. Otherwise, as the leading Communist power, they would be open for a great deal of criticism. When we went into Cambodia, we had a time limit for getting out. On the other hand, if the Russians had been in our place, they would have let the operation run its course. They are not subject to domestic pressures.

Adm. Moorer: The North Vietnamese are now shooting the works. They can go all out, and when they are finished they can be refurbished by the Soviets and the Chinese. They are not gambling because they know they won't be invaded.

Mr. Kissinger: Assuming the North Vietnamese are defeated in the South, there is nothing the Russians could do in time for the Summit, even if they quadrupled their aid.

Mr. Rush: Is there anything the Russians could do to make the North Vietnamese disengage before the Summit?

Mr. Carver: No.

Adm. Moorer: George is right. But the Soviets could make sure the North Vietnamese don't launch another offensive.

Mr. Johnson: Won't the Chinese pick up the shortfall in supplies if the Soviets let up?

Mr. Carver: The Chinese will pick up some of the shortfall.

Mr. Sullivan: I'm not sure the Chinese are totally behind what the North Vietnamese are doing. They support a protracted war strategy.

Mr. Carver: I don't think the Chinese are anxious to see a big North Vietnamese victory.

Mr. Kissinger: You think the Chinese interest is to keep the war going?

Mr. Carver: The Chinese will not welcome a big North Vietnamese victory in the near future. If the war continues and the North Vietnamese are kept occupied on their southern borders, that will be okay with the Chinese.

Mr. Kissinger: Otherwise?

Mr. Carver: Otherwise, Hanoi might start flexing its muscles—in Thailand, for example. I'm not suggesting that Peking doesn't want the North Vietnamese to win. It's just that continued North Vietnamese concern for problems closer to home will not be a bad thing for Peking.

Mr. Kissinger: We'll meet tomorrow at 10:00.

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83. Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Secretary of Defense Laird, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, April 17, 1972.

[Omitted here is President Nixon's discussion with Secretary Laird regarding Laird's testimony the next day before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.]

Nixon: Now, one thing that's very important, it seems to me, [unclear] in the event that, and who knows who we'll get support from, but in the event the enemy starts to move back, rather than having our bombing subside, is to keep it at the maximum. The time to hit the

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 710–4. 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, 5:02–5:50 p.m.

goddamn enemy is when it—it's when you can shoot them in the back. And boy we'll let them have it. Right?

Moorer: Yes, sir. But I've already talked—

Nixon: You understand? Now, you remember what they did to the poor damn South Vietnamese when they were getting out of Laos.[2] I want to give it to them ten times right in the butt.

Moorer: Right.

Nixon: You see?

Moorer: Exactly. Don't worry.

Nixon: And this is an opportunity because our tendency will be that after the battle cools and all that just say, just sort of let them, you know, let them out later on. But boy if they start moving around if they're in—I don't know where or whether you can see them or anything. You can see some of them, can't you?

Moorer: Well, you can—

Nixon: Up in I Corps, I would think now you'd, you ought to be able to see 'em and knock their brains out.

Laird: Hell, they're hitting out there. In the last 24 hours they've been doing a good job.

Nixon: Have they?

Laird: Sure. If—the weather has been good, you see.

Moorer: We ought to follow them all the way [unclear]—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: We don't have the weather, I know—

Laird: Even when we had a 2,000-foot ceiling, I think I should stress more of the fact that those South Vietnamese were in there flying with those old, older planes because you can't fly a jet in there.

Nixon: I know—

Laird: But they were down there flying sorties and doing a damn good job.

Nixon: [unclear]

Laird: When you came in as President, Mr. President—

Nixon: Yeah?

Laird: —there were 182 aircraft that the South Vietnamese could operate.

Nixon: What do they have now?

Laird: Over a thousand. And they're maintaining them.

Nixon: This is great.

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[2] Nixon was referring to Operation Lam Son 719 in February–March 1971.

Laird: And they've been trained to fly them, and they've been trained to maintain them. It's really quite a—

Nixon: Well, that way you can point them out as Vietnamization succeeding on the ground, but it's also—it's succeeding in the air. And that the—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: —we're going to leave a South Vietnam able to defend itself against future invasions by itself. That's our game. That's our goal. Right? But, I, I, I—

Laird: I don't think you should turn this into a bloodbath—

Nixon: The idea—the idea, too, Mel, of you and the Admiral talking, and of great pride in Americans risking their lives, you know, to save their men. [unclear] Now, if the POW thing comes up, well, you know what to say about that.

Laird: Well, I'll go with the humanitarian thing. That's the only way I can handle the POW question—

Nixon: I know, but I mean don't ever get into the business of we're trading them. Well, we just stop there. And that silly proposal where if you stop the bombing you would—that we'll come back and talk. Now, we—they sold us that once. They ain't going to sell that to us again. That's the way I'd put it. Look, they sold us that once in 1968, before this administration was here. Stop the bombing and we'll talk. This time we've got to have some negotiation. If they want to negotiate, and if they want to stop their invasion, we'll negotiate. Right? Stop the bombing and negotiate.

Laird: Well, I—I'd like to be a little harder on that [unclear]—

Nixon: Sure, it's all right with me.

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: What do you want to say to them?

Laird: Just stopping the invasion at the DMZ, I don't think it's quite enough by itself—

Nixon: I agree.

Kissinger: Then to withdraw?

Laird: Yeah, I think they've got to withdraw across the DMZ.

Nixon: Oh, absolutely.

Laird: You see, I'd like to take it— and then if somebody wants to change that, let somebody else change it and [unclear].

Kissinger: They've got to withdraw those three divisions—

Laird: Right—

Kissinger: —that came across the DMZ—

Laird: And I would much rather take that position and then let somebody else overrule it—

Nixon: They have to withdraw the forces that they've moved across the DMZ. Totally.

Laird: Right.

Nixon: Right—

Laird: That's the way I'd like to say it.

Nixon: And you take that and I back it all the way.

Laird: Well I—you might want to get off that.

Nixon: Hell no.

Laird: I don't want to get off it.

Nixon: Now, that's the bargaining position we're using.

Laird: And I [unclear]

Nixon: I think that, incidentally—I think that—I think the point—

Kissinger: It's a good point.

Nixon: The point, Mel, that you, and you all, have got to have in mind on this, is something that I'm sure you know. We're—it became rather easy to just let this thing go its usual course and grind down, but we have deliberately put everything on the line. We're putting on the line even our relationship with the Soviet on this. And we're doing it quite cleverly because, to put it candidly, if the Soviet Union is allowed to get away with supporting a country's—one country's invasion of another country, a naked invasion of another country, without a reaction from the United States, if it happens then, the United States, from that time on, will not have a credible foreign policy with the Soviet Union, it isn't—the summit—isn't worth a damn. It'll happen in the Mideast next. All they've got to do with all this—you put in—as you well realize, if they put in Soviet personnel operating those SAMs in the UAR, Israel is going to have one hell of a time. And, so if you—if the Soviet Union is allowed to get away with this, basically the—what we—by stopping this kind of aggression here, we reduce the possibility of this kind of aggression in other parts of the world. If we do not stop it here, the risk of this kind of aggression being tried in other parts of the world—indirect aggression—is infinitely escalated. And so this is really essential in our whole program of trying to build a peaceful world. Now, as far as the Soviets are concerned, we're glad to talk to them, all that and the other thing, but we cannot tolerate a situation where they're doing that. Does that line bother you, Henry?

Kissinger: Well, I think taking on the Soviets in terms of equipment is all right. Charging them with engaging in the aggression itself, that goes a little further.

Nixon: Well, supporting—

Kissinger: Supporting it.

Nixon: Supporting them in this—

Kissinger: Yeah, and encouraging it.

Nixon: Well, I think we need to say so.

Laird: Well, they'll get into the problem of questioning, too, about Vietnamization, and logistics, and so forth. I think we can turn that into a plus. I go over the logistics report every morning and look at the—we've got a good program moving there, and not only in artillery, but the air, and logistics, in all these areas the South Vietnamese are performing well.

Nixon: [unclear]

Laird: They had help—

Nixon: If there's something now I would say about Vietnamization, I'd say, I'd just smile at them and say: "You know, gentlemen, you've been rather interested in reading the stories over the last two weeks, and some of the gentlemen of the press wrote their leads too early that Vietnamization had failed." I said: "Vietnamization has not failed. The proof of Vietnamization is not how it does when there's no battle, but how it does when they're under attack. And now, that they've been under attack, they have sustained the attacks, they have fought well, and are fighting back, and Vietnamization is going to succeed." I think if you could say that, that's very helpful.

Kissinger: Was there any action overnight, Tom?

Moorer: Not any significant action. We knew at An Loc they've withdrawn, the North Vietnamese have. So it's a relatively quiet—

Kissinger: Withdrawn a bit?

Moorer: A bit, yeah, but we're going to have more fighting there, but, nevertheless, they did not carry out their objective of capturing the city.

Nixon: Yet. I mean—

Moorer: Yes—

Nixon: —they're still, they're still shooting at it, though, huh?

Moorer: Yes, sir, but they are not making, you know, essentially human wave assault lines and penetrating the perimeter. They've drawn back.

Laird: And we have other forces in there. We're now—they're receiving [unclear]—

Nixon: We're pounding them with the air in there.

Moorer: Very hard. Yes, sir.

Laird: The 21st Division is moving into the area. They're in contact now. And—

Kissinger: They're what, four—seven kilometers from the front—?

Moorer: Yeah. Right. Seven.

Nixon: Are they going, are they moving on the roadways? I thought they were stopped on the roads.

Moorer: Well, they're moving on the road [unclear]. They're also moving to clear the road, to prevent the North Vietnamese from coming in. And I told Henry this morning that, that thing I told you last night, I think they did the right thing, because if they had raced in, then the 7th Division could have come in behind them, between them and Saigon, and that wouldn't have been—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —good at all. So, what the, what the 21st Division has been moving up the road, but maintaining their, well, protecting their flanks in the process. Because, Mr. President, they have, the North Vietnamese, have the three Cambodian divisions—the 5th, 7th and, 9th—plus this 271st Special Regiment, which came all the way from Hanoi in this total infiltration they just conducted.

Kissinger: Which is what, an artillery regiment?

Moorer: No, no. It's an infantry regiment, plus an artillery regiment, plus a tank battalion, and—

Nixon: Yeah.

Moorer: —all in this general area.

Nixon: Let me just say one thing that the—what is also on the line here—I've said that American foreign policy—what is also on the line, as I'm sure you know, is the whole future of the—and putting it in melodramatic terms, the honor of the armed services of this country.

Moorer: Right.

Nixon: The United States with all of its power has had 50,000 dead. If we get run out of this place now, confidence in the armed services will be like a snake's belly. So we can't let it happen. And that's why at this point these [unclear] have to realize how much is on the line. Let's see if it works. How long in case we have to go to a blockade? How long would it take for you to impose one?

Moorer: Oh, sir, I think just 48 hours or less.

Nixon: Good. Okay. It affects—does that mean everything? Mining, ships, and so forth?

Moorer: Well, a blockade we wouldn't mine. [unclear] if we, if we—

Nixon: Well, I thought you could supplement it with mines.

Moorer: Yes, sir, we could. But I think if you mine you wouldn't have to blockade.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Moorer: I mean, I don't think both would be necessary. I think we could do it either way.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: The advantage of mining is you don't have to stop ships.

Nixon: Yeah, this is how it will look, Henry, in terms of mining. If—if a blockade is not [unclear], but the advantage of a blockade is that you can let through hospital, and that kind of, you know, and food and so forth. On the other hand, if your blockade is going to be total, you might as well mine.

Moorer: Right.

Laird: Well, then if you mine, Mr. President, in order for the mining operation to be effective, you have to, I believe, use airpower over there.

Nixon: You mean to take out the—

Laird: And that's a recommendation—

Nixon: On shipping? No, airpower [unclear]—

Laird: I'm not—

Moorer: On the barges, since they might anchor outside and try to take some barges to—

Laird: Because they can, they can lift it in all through—

Nixon: I see.

Laird: —through the minefield, and they can, they can do that there. And so I think you have to take those ships.

Nixon: Well, these are things that you've all thought through.

Laird: We've gone through all of these plans and—

Nixon: Good.

Moorer: But this would stop big ships from going in to the piers. Definitely.

Laird: But that's not all of it. They still would be able to get their supplies in.

Moorer: But not at the same rate, though. Not at the same—

Nixon: You're prepared to do either? To blockade or to mine, right?

Moorer: Yes, sir, and very short notice.

Laird: We've got a lot of equipment out there now, Mr. President. We can do it.

Nixon: Yeah, I think, I understand that we do have a Navy after all.

Moorer: I'm sorry there was ever any doubt, Mr. President.

[laughter]

Nixon: I knew about it. I just wanted it at the right place at the right time. Well, okay—

[Omitted here are Moorer's discussion abut the rescue of a Navy pilot shot down off the coast of North Vietnam, and Nixon and Laird's discussion of Navy gunnery practice near Puerto Rico.]

Nixon: Well, we appreciate what you're doing and remember: don't lose. That's all. It's the only order you've got. Not now.

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84. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 17, 1972.

SUBJECT

Interim Report on Covert Disinformation Program Against North Vietnam

1. We took prompt steps to implement your 5 April request for a covert disinformation program[2] leading the North Vietnamese to conclude that the United States is prepared to mine the port of Haiphong if current NVA attacks in South Vietnam continue.[3]

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[1] Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 17 Jan 72–2 Oct 73. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. According to handwritten note on the first page, Richard T. Kennedy of the NSC staff passed the memorandum directly to Kissinger.

[2] The April 5 request from Kissinger has not been found. Helms, however, responded on April 7, setting forth a number of steps he intended to take to implement the disinformation program. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 418, Backchannel, Covert Operations in North Vietnam)

[3] A week earlier the disinformation program's objective became momentarily crossed with the real possibility of mining the harbor. On April 10, Carver talked with Pursley, who "raised matter that Admiral Moorer was strongly pushing the mining of Haiphong and apparently was indicating that the SecDef concurred in this thought. I asked if Moorer was really serious or if he was just lending a hand to deception operation that Kissinger had asked us to undertake. Pursley said that Moorer was serious, that he had misinterpreted Laird's joking remarks to Kissinger about the 'advisability' of closing the rail lines at the China border points and mining the port of Haiphong. Moorer apparently believed that the Secretary was in a momentarily hawkish phase of which the Chiefs intended to take full advantage." (Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–R01720R, Box 4, GAC [George A. Carver] Daily Log 1970–1973)

2. The following is a brief interim report of the covert actions which have been taken in conjunction with this program:

a. [*5½ lines not declassified*] he was reluctant to proceed because he had heard that the Americans were planning direct military action against the port of Haiphong [*3 lines not declassified*]. The Vietnamese official stated that the information could possibly be important and was most effusive in expressing his appreciation for the information. [*3 lines not declassified*] When the subject of a possible raid on Haiphong was broached, the Vietnamese official's facial expression and demeanor changed visibly and he became very serious and spoke in a low voice. The Vietnamese official [*less than 1 line not declassified*] and said that he would appreciate any additional information on this subject and asked him to go back to the source and obtain additional details. [*5½ lines not declassified*]

b. [*2½ lines not declassified*]

Mines for Haiphong Harbor? 9 April (Olangapo City Special) Reports from Olangapo City indicate that Subic Naval Base personnel have recently been involved in the workup and shipboard loading of aerial mining weapons for possible use in combat air operations off the coast of North Vietnam. Filipino personnel working on the base claim that these weapons are designed for harbor and shipping lane use and are detonated by either acoustic or magnetic field change actuations.

These same Filipino sources reported the recent loading of these weapons aboard U.S. Navy replenishment ships which daily resupply U.S. aircraft carriers presently operating against North Vietnam forces and their supply lines. In addition to the mining weapons special racks which are used by aircraft launching them are also being loaded simultaneously on the replenishment ships.

According to competent observers there is only one harbor in North Vietnam where these mining weapons can be used—Haiphong.

The *Manila Chronicle* Radio Station, DZMN, broadcast the entire PNS release on its 0700 hours newscast 11 April. The release was published on the front page of the *Manila Evening News* on 12 April. *The Manila Times* carried the entire release as part of its 13 April news coverage of Vietnam developments. The 13 April *Daily Mirror* also headlined the same story. On the evening of 12 April the Agence France Presse representative in Manila telephoned to the Subic Naval Base Public Information Officer in an effort to verify the information in the PNS news release.

c. [*7½ lines not declassified*] he had learned that the Americans were planning to mine Haiphong harbor [*7 lines not declassified*].

d. [*10½ lines not declassified*] discussed the ostensible request for detailed information on Haiphong harbor, the DRV official became visibly agitated and his hand began shaking as he took detailed notes of

the conversation. [*6 lines not declassified*] In the course of their discussion, the DRV official stated that the situation in the battle areas of Vietnam is very serious and that the DRV Embassy has an urgent requirement to determine:

(1) How far north the Americans will bomb, particularly in DRV Military Region 4. The DRV official commented inter alia that B–52 strikes had been made in Thanh Hoa Province at 0240 hours, 13 April, and that the DRV anticipates additional strikes in the same area.

(2) The capability of South Vietnamese troops to withstand North Vietnamese Army attacks both with, and without, American air and naval fire support.

The North Vietnamese official concluded the conversation by reiterating that the situation is very serious and that American escalation of bombing of the DRV is a critical factor in determining success or failure.

3. In addition, another element in the scenario is being conveyed to a [*1 line not declassified*]. That action and any reactions to this operation will be reported.

Richard Helms[4]

[4] Helms signed "Dick" above his typed signature.

85. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 18, 1972.

[Omitted here is a discussion of whether Laird, Pursley, or Abrams leaked information to the press about the bombing campaign; a Chinese diplomatic note protesting the bombers' route over Chinese islands in the South China Sea; the impact of the bombing on American public opinion; the military situation in South Vietnam; the failure of the Air Force in the conflict; the effect of the bombing on North Vietnam and the Moscow Summit; Senator Mansfield's commitment; and how to respond to Indian criticism of the bombing.]

Kissinger: Our decision next week will have to be, if I come back from Moscow[2] without anything—which the odds favor that I won't get anything—then are we—

Nixon: Then what do we do?

Kissinger: —are we just going to subside?

Nixon: Oh, no.

Kissinger: Or are we just going to bomb, or blockade, or something like that, them to smithereens? Now, I believe, Mr. President, after what we've cranked up, if we simply back off—

Nixon: We won't. No, no, no. I see. I see what you mean.

Kissinger: I mean, that's a big question. Now, if they give us—as you remember yesterday, I told you we should not lightly knock off the Russian Summit.

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: But—

Nixon: We could.

Kissinger: No, I don't think we should do it.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 711–3. 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, 9:20–10:02 a.m. Portions of this transcript are printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 121.

[2] Kissinger was scheduled to depart for Moscow to meet with Soviet leaders to plan Nixon's official visit in May. While Kissinger was in Moscow, April 20–24, the President prohibited U.S. bombing in the Hanoi–Haiphong area.

Nixon: The only thing is, I'm thinking that—I'm thinking that the Russian Summit may have something in it for us, provided we have given Hanoi a hell of a good bang. That's what I mean.

Kissinger: Yeah, but we haven't given Hanoi a good bang yet.

Nixon: Not yet. Not yet. We've given them enough of a bang for your trip, but not for mine.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: That's how, you know, that's the magnitude.

Kissinger: No, for my trip, we are in good shape.

Nixon: Well, you have two choices then: We either have the choice of what we call a three-day strike kind of an operation, which could be a hell of a thing, you know, let everything that flies knock the bejeezus out of the things up there; or, we have the choice of a blockade. Now, if you have a blockade, you've got to look down the road to see what the Russians—and what do they have to do? What do they say? Of course, these are the things that you'll have down in your paper, as you know.

Kissinger: Well, what I have to do, Mr. President, in Moscow, though, is to give them the impression that you may well have a blockade.

Nixon: Yeah, I know. I'm just trying to think, through—

Kissinger: You'll never get as much—

Nixon: I thoroughly intend to do either the blockade or the, or the strike, you know. We're—you—we were between the two. Yesterday, you were raising the point that the blockade would take too long and we'd be in constant—

Kissinger: You see, the trouble—

Nixon: —confrontation and all that sort of stuff. Well, I'm not so sure—

Kissinger: You see the trouble—

Nixon: —want to be sure.

Kissinger: But so would they. You see, the trouble is, right now, we have a plausible force out there.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: If we don't do something with it for two months—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —we'll have to start pulling them out again. And—

Nixon: Well, let me tell you what my feeling is—the reason I've gone through this exercise with you. You see, what we really confront if you don't get something out of Moscow, probably our only choice is a blockade.

Kissinger: I'm afraid there may be a lot in that.

Nixon: And—but, it's a—so, maybe it will go on for six months. I think the American people would rather have a blockade going on for six months than—but with the blockade, would the things give us our prisoners? Well, we'd have to set it up in a pretty tough way, I mean, in a clever way. Well, we'll have to see.

[Omitted here is discussion of a meeting that afternoon in the Rose Garden with the table tennis team from the People's Republic of China and of public demonstrations against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war.]

Nixon: You see, on the blockade, Henry, we've got the force out there to do it. You see, now, I can't get over this Laird thing—

Kissinger: You see, they [the Soviets] are leery of a confrontation, Mr. President. They ordered all the ships that are coming into Haiphong to slow up.

Nixon: I heard that from Moorer. Yeah—

Kissinger: And I saw—

Nixon: I wonder if that's true.

Kissinger: No, I saw the intercept. I saw the order they sent to their merchant ships, not to proceed very [unclear]—

Nixon: They must be afraid of a blockade then.

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: Or mining.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Do you agree with the fellow, though? This is only a technical matter, but Moorer, he seemed to favor mining over a blockade.

Kissinger: Well, if you mine, then you may have the problem that they'll send minesweepers down.

Nixon: Then you have to bomb them, huh?

Kissinger: And you have to police them. Mining avoids the problem of daily—

Nixon: Confrontation.

Kissinger: Of daily confrontation with the Russians. That takes care of shipping, also, with a lot of other countries.

Nixon: Well, mining plus bomb—bombing. Blockade—blockade sounds better, diplomatically. You know what I mean? It sounds stronger.

Kissinger: The advantage of the—if you blockade, there ought to be, you know, a week of heavy raids to run down their supplies and to reduce 'em; five days, three days of heavy raids. God, a few more days of raids like we had yesterday and they'd be in—they really hurt.

[Omitted here is discussion of Laird and bombing North Vietnam, the effect of the bombing in the North and the ground war in the South on the negotiations in Paris, the Moscow Summit and the Vietnam war, the improvement of Air Force performance under General Vogt, and the military situation in South Vietnam. Also omitted is the President's brief telephone conversation with Laird about how to deal with the press vis-à-vis the continued bombing of North Vietnam.]

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86. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 18, 1972.

Nixon: What I am concerned about is something you talked about on your schedule. I thought that when you talked to Dobrynin, you only gave him assurance that we would not hit the Hanoi–Haiphong area—

Kissinger: That is correct.

Nixon: —while you're there. Well, the feeling that we're going to sort of keep the level relatively—

Kissinger: No, no—

Nixon: —down. Let me tell you that we have a desperately difficult problem with our domestic situation if there is any indication—

Kissinger: Right—

Nixon:—that we aren't bombing the hell out of them now.

Kissinger: No, no.

Nixon: It would be just—you see, what ruined Johnson was to start and stop; he—you remember how many bombing halts he had. Now, we cannot be in that position, even though you're going, because you don't know what you're going to—what we'll be doing here. I'd—what I'd like to see is, in this next week, I mean this week while you're gone, I think on the battlefront, I think everything that can fly

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 711–5. 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, 11–11:24 a.m. Portions of this conversation are printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 123.

should be hitting the whole battlefront, including the stuff up to the 19th Parallel.

Kissinger: Of course.

Nixon: Just be sure they understand that.

Kissinger: Oh, no. When—

Nixon: But you see I don't [unclear]—

Kissinger: The point is, Mr. President, if you say—

Nixon: You see, the story out of Saigon indicated two things: one, we would not hit Haiphong–Hanoi; and that we would cut the number of sorties in the South. Now, we must not do the latter.

Kissinger: I—I have had a talk with Moorer, and I've had a talk with Rush this morning, with exactly this theme. My concern was, Mr. President, that when you say, "maximum effort," they will interpret this to mean that they should go slow in the South and put it all into the North. Then we are going to have stories to the effect—

Nixon: Yeah—

Kissinger: —that you are detracting from the battle. They have—they are flying—

Nixon: I don't mind that. I just want them to hit there. I—I have to get it to say drop it all in III Corps, if necessary. All of it. But I want—I want what appears to be a maximum effort some place.

Kissinger: All over the country.

Nixon: Let's hope—

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Let me put it this way: a concentrated effort. So they say the biggest strike, concentrated strike—so we get a story or two out like that in the South. I don't care. I—

Kissinger: Yes—

Nixon: —just want it definitely to be in the North.

Kissinger: Actually, Mr.—they have—are—what they are doing in the North now, they haven't done it the last two days but they are starting again tonight, and they haven't done it because of some monkey business that Laird must have been engaged in.

Nixon: What's this?

Kissinger: They are flying about 150 sorties, Mr. President, in the North. That's more than we ever flew on any protect—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —protective reaction strike—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —that you ordered. So this is pretty massive.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: That's—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: That's in the area south of 19th. On top of it, they're flying about 600 in the South and the distribution now is they're making massive—the biggest effort is in Military Area Region 3.

Nixon: All right.

Kissinger: I genuinely believe they—that—

Nixon: You mean [unclear]—

Kissinger: —the battle is going so well all over the country that we ought not to give them bombing targets. I think—

Nixon: No, I, we—I think we never do.

Kissinger: I think they're doing really—I get a detailed briefing of every B–52 strike—

Nixon: Let me tell you one point that I emphasized to Moorer which we have never done in this war to date, is that if the—when the enemy starts to break off, instead of reducing the bombing, increase it.

Kissinger: And, of course—

Nixon: You understand, that is when you really can punish an enemy. When an enemy is in retreat, you can kill him.

Kissinger: And, of course, we are getting another bonus. This week, ten more destroyers are going to get on that line. And that we should go forward on.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I mean, that's not affected by anything.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But tonight they are starting again hitting the North with at least 150 planes.

Nixon: That's the stuff south of the 19th?

Kissinger: South of the 19th.

Nixon: Fine. I don't want anything in the Haiphong–Hanoi. I think that's a fair deal with, with, with the Russians.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to criteria for bombing North and South Vietnam.]

87. Message From the Embassy in Laos to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Abrams)[1]

Vientiane, April 19, 1972, 0825Z.

2984. 1. The recent Arc Lights that you have placed in MR II seem to have broken the enemy's back. We are not repeat not positive but there are several indications that the enemy is pulling back his cutting edge and could be undertaking a withdrawal, particularly of his heavy equipment, from the immediate area north of Long Tieng. Tacair in the last two days has been extremely effective and even the relatively few sorties we have gotten have destroyed at least two 130mm guns, two tanks and damaged another heavy field piece which has not been positively identified.

2. In view of the foregoing, I am not repeat not submitting any request for Arc Light strikes today for I believe that these highly effective weapons will probably serve us better in South Vietnam or some other area. I am, however, requesting through 7/13 AF that we receive a blocking belt package on the extremely vulnerable portion of the new road just off the "nipple" of the southern PDJ. If this belt can be put in expeditiously I believe we will bottle up in the Tha Tam Bleung Ban Hintang area heavy enemy equipment which we can then clean up at our relative leisure.[2]

Godley

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 LAOS. Top Secret; Specat; Exclusive; Nodis. Repeated to the State Department exclusive for U. Alexis Johnson, JCS exclusive for Moorer, CINCPAC exclusive for McCain, 7th AF exclusive for Vogt, 7/13 AF exclusive for Searles, and 8th AF exclusive for Gerald W. Johnson.

[2] This telegram prompted an exchange between Johnson and Kissinger in the April 19 WSAG meeting. Johnson said: "As usual, the one bright spot is Laos." To which Kissinger replied: "You mean Long Tieng?" Johnson confirmed, saying "Yes." The minutes of the meeting are in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 78, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, Mar. 1971–Apr. 1972. According to the Summary of Conclusions of the meeting, the only decision made was to "continue to follow the press line laid down by Secretaries Rogers and Laird."

88. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 19, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of bombing North Vietnam, the ground war in South Vietnam, and Kissinger's forthcoming trip to the Soviet Union in relation to the negotiations in Paris.]

Kissinger: And, you see, next week the mere fact, Mr. President—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —that the Soviets discuss Vietnam with me—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —in the week that we bombed Hanoi and Haiphong, which these sons-of-bitches are condemning—

Nixon: Now they will ask, "At whose initiative is this meeting taking place?" I think we've—that I've got to make this another thing. We've got to say that it was at their initiative. I don't want it to appear that we went hat in hand to Moscow.

Kissinger: No. Well, Mr. President, I—

Nixon: Or we can just say mutually.

Kissinger: I'd say it was, was mutual. These things always are mutual. We have, it's important—what they are doing is really screwing Hanoi.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: I mean, imagine if they were bombing Iran—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: —and then you received Gromyko here at the White House the same week that they're bombing one of our allies, what impression that would make on the Shah. There's no possible—

Nixon: Yeah, and if the Chinese ignore it. Let me go over a few of the items now—

Kissinger: [unclear]—

Nixon: Take some notes. One thing, that on the very limit of what we want to get out of these bastards, we've got to get something

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 713–1. 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, 3:27–5:01 p.m. Portions of this transcript are printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 126.

symbolic on the POW thing. Now, what I would say is if we could get the POWs that have been there five years, or something like that, or sick POWs. In other words, we'll release so many if they release, and something along that. The second point is that we've got to, and, and, and—

Kissinger: That I must include in the proposal.

Nixon: Huh? Just include that in the proposal.

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: Yeah. We just need something. It's a human—it's a humanitarian gesture. You understand?

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: Don't you think we can include it—?

Kissinger: It's essential.

Nixon: I don't think you're going to get it.

Kissinger: No, I'll—no, no. I think we must hold out—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Mr. President, we've got some sweating on our—

Nixon: Well, we'll—we'll, we'll—we will do this.

Kissinger: I must—the risk, with your permission—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —but because it's your risk—

Nixon: Yeah? Yeah.

Kissinger: —if I fail there, it may be because I'm turning the screw too much, rather than not enough. Now—

Nixon: No, no. If you turn it too much—there's no greater pleasure, frankly, that I would have than to leave this office to anybody after having destroyed North Vietnam's capability. Now, let me tell you, I feel exactly that way, and I'll go out with a clean conscience. But if I, if I leave this office without any use of power, I'm the last President—frankly I'm the only President, the only man with the exception of Connally, believe me, who'd have the guts to do what we're doing. And you know it and I know it. The only man who'd have the possibility to be President, and Connally's the only other one who could do what I'm doing. Reagan never could make President to begin with and he couldn't handle it—

Kissinger: Connally would do it without your finesse, though.

Nixon: Well, Agnew, Agnew would—

Kissinger: Agnew. Well, Agnew would have [unclear]—Agnew would be in a worse position than Johnson was—

Nixon: Yeah, but you know what I mean. The point is, as you know, as considering electability, I'm the only person who can do it. Now,

Henry, we must not miss this chance. We're going to do it, and I'll destroy the goddamn country, believe me. I mean destroy it, if necessary. And let me say, even the nuclear weapon if necessary. It isn't necessary, but you know what I mean. What I mean is that shows you the extent to which I'm willing to go. By—by a nuclear weapon, I mean that we will bomb the living bejeezus out of North Vietnam, and then if anybody interferes we will threaten the nuclear weapon.

[Omitted here is discussion of domestic opposition to bombing in Vietnam, the coming election, and post-election policy for Vietnam, as well as additional discussion on the Moscow Summit. The President and Kissinger also talked about how Kissinger should approach Soviet leaders in his April 20–24 trip to Moscow, negotiations with the North Vietnamese in Paris, and American public opinion on the situation in Vietnam.]

Kissinger: Mr. President, you've played this with a nerve that's [unclear].

Nixon: Well—

Kissinger: The safe thing for you would be to let—well, the seemingly safe thing—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: You mean, to let South Vietnam fall?

Kissinger: Yeah. Already we've done our best [unclear].

Nixon: Yeah and that we've done our best, you know, to get the Americans out, as hard as we can, and Thieu has to face that. Huh?

Kissinger: That's right. That point you made—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: I think the—I think that's quite true, quite true. Well, I know, but the thing is that Laird is so totally wrong. I think based on what I've—with what we've seen, South Vietnam, it might have survived, who knows?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: But I just don't think it would have survived, not if we hadn't moved that stuff out there—

Kissinger: Not a chance. You've talked to Haig. I've talked to him. That situation in Military Region 3 was touch and go.

Nixon: Touch and go, but he thinks that our power may have tipped the balance.

Kissinger: Yep.

Nixon: Does he?

Kissinger: Absolutely, and our reinforcements, and—

Nixon: And, of course that stuff pouring out there now must just scare the living—don't you think, but it must give 'em pause—?

Kissinger: Right. From the point of view, also, of this exercise, Mr. President, it's happening perfectly, because I was wrong about the *Midway*. It's only coming out there next Monday. So we don't—right now, we haven't pulled back from anything yet.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: So, they must think you are just getting into the blockade [unclear].

Nixon: Um-hmm.

[Omitted here is discussion of the President's schedule and arrangements at Camp David, including the cover story for Kissinger's trip to Moscow.]

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89. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 19, 1972, 5:51 p.m.

Secure—TELECON/IN—From Dr. Kissinger—1751

HAK:—You going on Thanh Hoa thing tomorrow night.

CJCS:—My instructions are to do it the best time tomorrow night.[2] I am talking Washington not later than Friday night.[3]

HAK:—We would prefer tomorrow night.

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

[2] Moorer met with his senior planners at 3:58 p.m. He recorded in his diary: "I told them to make an implementer for a strike in the Thanh Hoa area and I wanted to include Route 1A, route 7, Hanoi/Vinh railroad, if feasible desire the strike to be executed on 21 April, Saigon time, otherwise no later than 22 April, Saigon time. We should use laser weapons. Or Smart walleye bombs on the famous Thanh Hoa bridge. These should be the large 3,000 pounder weapons. We should plan 18 B–52s, split between the transshipment point and the POL. Tacair can go in on the railroad yards, the thermal power plan and we want to conduct an overall heavy strike on the Thanh Hoa area. Tacair should also hit Bai Thuong." (Entry for 3:58 p.m.; ibid.)

[3] The night of April 21.

CJCS:—Everybody knows it. I telephoned 2 or 3 hours ago to that effect.[4]

HAK:—What would be the effect of that?

CJCS:—Matter of getting all the operations coordinated I think probably they could as it really gives them 26 hours to get ready to target suitable for 52's those 2 canceled the other night anyway late in the middle of the night briefed because problems coordinating I think do all right.

HAK:—If it has got to be Friday, it has got to be Friday.

CJCS:—I understand. We know what you want and we are trying to produce.

HAK:—The President is wondering if there is any way to block that channel into Haiphong. Can we tow concrete blocks in there or something like that?

CJCS:—We have looked at several plans, sinking old submarines in there, etc. Another scheme we have blowing up all the buoys and causing them to go adrift. Ships could not navigate in there. Another scheme we have one of the problems you have to look at as I see it silts up Red River comes down that channel so that it is a little, it would be difficult to do with concrete blocks actually.

HAK:—You get the idea something that can be done just to make shipping more difficult.

CJCS:—One of the things we can do may be remove all the buoys for them and try that. I will talk to the Fleet Commander on the things looked at other than mining, sinking some kind of ship in that channel.

HAK:—That is a possibility, sinking a ship in mouth of harbor busy for a month or so.

CJCS:—If it is in the right place or CIA could do it. Give me a minute or two to think on it.

HAK:—I don't need it until next week.

CJCS:—I will have three plans by then.

HAK:—You know what is wanted on the other things.

CJCS:—I will take care of it.

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[4] At 4:28 p.m., Moorer called McCain. He told McCain that the Pacific Command would receive orders within the hour to conduct the attack on Thanh Hoa. Moorer gave him the gist of the message, including the 14 targets to be hit so that McCain's staff could begin work on the strike. (Moorer Diary, April 19; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman) In message 5651 to CINCPAC, April 19, Moorer sent the orders at 6:27 p.m. (Ibid., Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 16–30 April 1972)

90. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 20, 1972, 10:05–11:31 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
R/Adm. William R. Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

CIA
George Carver

NSC
Richard T. Kennedy
John H. Holdridge
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Admiral Moorer should bring in some damage assessment photos of the target areas in Hanoi and Haiphong.

—CIA should check on the exact location of the 325th Division.

—The Departments should continue to follow the PR line set down by Secretaries Rogers and Laird.[2]

—The Departments of Defense and State should develop a plan for the South Vietnamese Navy to stop and search three trawlers bringing supplies to the North Vietnamese forces in the Delta. The plan should also deal with the "Chinese flag" problem.[3]

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

[2] According to the minutes of the meeting, Haig said the following: "I talked to Henry and the President about this last night. The President wants us to stay with the tough PR line. He wants us to follow the leads of the Secretaries, and he wants us to avoid implying that something is going on—when it may or may not be going on."

[3] According to the minutes of the meeting, Carver said: "We know the vessels. They undoubtedly have Chinese flags in their lockers, which they can run up if a South Vietnamese destroyer approaches. But I think we can make a pretty strong case that these are North Vietnamese ships." That being so, U. Alexis Johnson said: "Let's get our people together—including the lawyers—and develop a proposition." Moorer agreed, adding: "And whatever action we decide on, it will be the South Vietnamese who actually do it."

91. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, April 20, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Moscow Summit and Thieu's view of it, and the status of the negotiations in Paris.]

Nixon: What is the situation? I was reading a story in the paper this morning about "town falls" and all that bullshit.

Haig: Right, sir.

Nixon: What is that out there? That's a [unclear] much expected, et cetera, et cetera.

Haig: This is—this is the area in southern I Corps and northern II Corps, Binh Dinh.

Nixon: Is it anything like Hue? Is that what's involved?

Haig: No, sir. It's an area that the Vietminh hold—a Vietminh stronghold, in Binh Dinh Province. It's an area that we know. It's always been pacified the least. It's the toughest area—

[Omitted here is a brief conversation with the President's steward.]

Haig: It's the toughest area. Well, that outpost, it's [unclear]—

Nixon: You can't bomb there?

Haig: Oh, yes, they have close air support in there. They have a hell of a lot going in there now.

Nixon: I see.

Haig: And that thing is not overrun. As of this morning they're still fighting, but they're badly outnumbered. And it's, it's going to be a tough one. It's not as severe—

Nixon: How many North Vietnamese are in South Vietnam at the present time would you say?

Haig: I'd say about 120,000, sir. I'll have to get you precise figures.

Nixon: Nobody else will give it a look. Oh, we will. We will. In the end we've got to with all the air and the rest. It really depends on their arms. For Christ sakes, you can stop 120,000.

Haig: Yes, sir. You know they—we have that fighting there. The Koreans, who are trying to open up the road on that Route 19, and got a bloody nose at the An Khe Pass.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 714–14. 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, 12:30–1:07 p.m.

Nixon: They failed then?

Haig: Well, they had to reinforce. They got there and they're in a tough fight there. And that's not bad. I'd like to see the Koreans—

Nixon: It's about time. Have they had any casualties at all since the war began?

Haig: Well, yes, they did in the early days. They had quite a few. [unclear] fighting. Now, they're into it and they've got to reinforce. The other place where it's very active today is in III Corps again, the area that's dangerous—

Nixon: An Loc?

Haig: An Loc. There's fighting in the town again. They sent an ARVN battalion of Marines down, an airborne battalion south of the town got badly hit. And they've come back into the town. And also the enemy is attacking at Dau Tieng as I indicated they would. They slipped by and they hit it this morning. And that's a tough fight going on right now. We're—we can expect this for another couple of weeks, sir.

Nixon: Yeah, but I mean, I just want to know whether or not the South Vietnamese are fighting well.

Haig: They're fighting, yes, sir. They're fighting well. And the 21st Division is fighting well. This Minh, who's the Corps Commander, is just a sorry son-of-a-bitch.

Nixon: I understand.

Haig: And he's developing—

Nixon: But, basically, in the An Loc area and the rest, they're—they are—you say they're—you say the battalion got a bloody nose, which means what? That they were—just was it put out of action?

Haig: No. No, sir. But it got—it got mauled. They had a lot of casualties and had to come back in. They were—

Nixon: Did it give any casualties?

Haig: Pardon, sir?

Nixon: Did they dish out any casualties?

Haig: Oh, yes. We had 190 air sorties in there last night alone in that one area. So, they've just been banging the hell out of it. And there were 18 B–52 strikes in support of that action. So, we—we've just got to be clobbering them.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Haig: But they fell back and used those four days to regroup and now they're trying to take it again.

Nixon: In—in III Corps?

Haig: Exactly.

Nixon: But your point is that each time that—when this happens they don't have as much punch the second time, do they, Al?

Haig: No, they don't, sir.

Nixon: First of all, their morale goes down some, doesn't it? After you've taken a hell of a mauling?

Haig: Their morale goes down. The—

Nixon: They don't have much equipment, do they?

Haig: Equipment is down. They're still knocking out tanks there. They knocked down, I think, 13 last night. But this is going to be a tough fight and it's going to stay tough. But I think we're going to do it.

Nixon: We will with all the power we've got there in the air—

Haig: That's right.

Nixon: It's got to just, just pulverize those bastards.

Haig: That's, that's an incredible number of sorties to put in there. 18 B–52 sorties. Geez.

Nixon: On top of the—

Haig: 190 fighter-bombers—

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: —and gunships that are always on station.

Nixon: Yeah. That's in that III Corps area—?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Is it true that the South Vietnamese are flying with their—are flying about half of the tactical air sorties?

Haig: Yes, sir. They have been.

Nixon: Are they flying pretty well?

Haig: Well, it's 42 percent. It's not quite half of it—

Nixon: Are they fighting pretty well?

Haig: They're—

Nixon: Do they fly pretty well?

Haig: They're flying very well and their support has been better than ours because they've been able to come in lower.

Nixon: But their planes are not as good as ours [unclear].

Haig: Hell, they've had some planes shot down because of it. They—

Nixon: But they go in there, do they?

Haig: They're going in and the ARVN troops are very high on them, [unclear] the ones—the commanders I talked to, very high on them. Now, they're getting a little tired, and we—that's why it was good we reinforced, because they've been going at full bore. In I Corps everything's there, except for that southern province there, which we

knew was going to be tough. That—that's a guerrilla stronghold, and always has been, and it'll stay tough.

[Omitted here is discussion of news reports on the Vice President's speech.]

Haig: It's hard not to, but these are all infinitesimal things. Those firebases that were overrun in the first days that they reported? They weren't firebases. They were goddamn OPs that were put up there to watch infiltration and to keep the eyes and ears open, and, Jesus, they just weren't intended to be held. They were not defensive positions.

Nixon: In the meantime, when you talk about a town falling it's probably not worth saving.

Haig: [unclear]—

Nixon: [unclear] I actually believe in the strategy at An Loc. Do you think they should try to keep An Loc? I wonder if it isn't—if it makes sense to back out of the town and bomb it to smithereens.

Haig: In a military sense—

Nixon: Right. It's psychological—

Haig: —it doesn't make sense—

Nixon: It's psychological. It's like Verdun.

Haig: For Thieu, he can't. He just—Thieu is the man who has put out these orders, and for him it's psychologically essential that he hold. We could give up some stuff in II Corps. Hell, that place is—if they lost Kontum or Dak To City it would be a very minor incident.

Nixon: On the other hand, I suppose trying to hold them has its points. In one sense, in that we certainly are punishing the enemy if he's willing to take the heat.

Haig: [unclear]—

Nixon: The only thing is that—what I was thinking, Al, our purpose here is not to hold territory; it's to destroy the enemy. If you could retreat and get the enemy in a more exposed position for bombing, then I'd retreat and then destroy it and go back in. Doesn't that make sense?

Haig: That's the way—that's the way the book says to do it, and that's the way I would do it.

Nixon: Well, you think they won't do it?

Haig: They won't because of the psychology of it.

Nixon: Well—

Haig: And on the other hand, it's not so bad because they still have to concentrate around these.

Nixon: And, maybe, too [unclear] from here. Their guys will fight and—

Haig: It takes a good, disciplined army to be able to withdraw and fight. Once you start moving back, and I think that's another problem Thieu's confronted with—

Nixon: Hmm.

Haig: —these little guys are good in defense if they have good, strong positions, and they dig in and hold. And they—you'd need a very sophisticated army to be able to withdraw—

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Haig: —and fight well.

Nixon: I know. You know—of course, there are reasons in it for Thieu, but beyond that, the Germans did it fantastically well against the Russians, you know, in World War I.

Haig: They were so professional. That's right.

Nixon: But Jesus Christ, I mean they would draw back, you know, and then just clobber the shit out of them. The Russians would come marching in and they'd just kill 'em, just kill 'em.

Haig: Well, they—

Nixon: The Russians armies would go, in World War I, in both on the Northern Front, the Eastern Front and also even the [unclear]. They'd have an enormous victory and number of something, and the Germans would reinforce and just knock the bejeezus out of them. In other words, remembering the maxim of war is not to hold territory but destroy the enemy.

Haig: Exactly.

Nixon: That's something we have to do out there—?

Haig: That's the way they're fighting that way in I Corps—

Nixon: Huh?

Haig: They're fighting that way in I Corps. This, this division commander in the 1st Division,[2] he's crazy. He said, "Hell, I don't care about these firebases." He said, "As long as I can kill them if they are concentrating on it, then I'll keep it up, but when it gets too hairy I'll pull back and we'll hold it at the next one." He hasn't pulled back from one yet, and they've killed about 2,500 in [Fire Base] Bastogne. And they, incidentally, opened the road to them yesterday and completely re-supplied and put reinforcements in. So, that's a good strong position, still.

Nixon: This town down in III Corps, it's—well, we can't worry about it. Now, Abrams has got it all, certainly, charted out, and they'll fight—

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[2] South Vietnamese Major General Pham Van Phu, Commander, 1st Infantry Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

Haig: They'll fight—

Nixon: —and lose some, win some.

Haig: [unclear]—

Nixon: What—what good do you think this strategy does? It's more psychological than anything else, is that correct? Do you consider it psychological or what?

Haig: Yes, but I think—

Nixon: Psychology is important, is it not—?

Haig: Psychology's important, especially now where Henry is.[3] The news will get to them while Henry's there and that's, that's good. The other thing is this thing is going to get more of a logistics exercise—

Nixon: Yeah. And every time we can reduce their logistics thing—

Haig: And what's going to happen is—and I think they're in there to hold. That's their strategy, isn't it? They're sitting at a high point and then go on—

Nixon: Can we? Hell, yes. You mean to hold—stay in South Vietnam? To hold the line—?

Haig: Stay there this time and to get their infrastructure built back and to destroy pacification and Vietnamization. And that's why their logistics are going to become a more—

Nixon: What the hell have the Russians agreed to on it? Seriously, what in the hell did they agree to?

Haig: Well, here's what I would hope, sir.

Nixon: Yeah?

Haig: If we could get them to agree [unclear], the Vietnamese would go back, the North Vietnamese.

Nixon: Go back? From where? Just from I Corps, you mean?

Haig: No, status quo ante before the attacks started, which would mean III Corps and I Corps. II Corps, they were in there and, hell, that's worthless country anyhow. And it's going to be mucked down in rain here very shortly. Then we would stop bombing. And hold—and everyone would negotiate; hopefully get some prisoners back—

Nixon: That's good—

Haig: —as a token exchange.

Nixon: Well, that's good [unclear]—

Haig: And hold this for a year, with a Soviet firm guarantee in writing. God, I think you—then they would have had the course, be-

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[3] At the time Kissinger was in Moscow preparing for the upcoming Summit meeting in May. Much of the discussion in Moscow related to the North Vietnamese offensive and U.S. reaction. See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Documents 125–170.

cause you would get absolutely swept into office on the head of something like that. Kennedy and the doves would be licked. And then they'd be faced with a four-year President who they know goddamn well won't put up with a second round.

Nixon: Well, there's one other course of action we may have to handle and that is if we can get this, through this point—

Haig: That's right. That's right—

Nixon: If I can keep this, as you know, as support for [unclear], but in my view, then you're faced with the blockade problem. My own feeling is that a blockade, that public support for it now will probably be higher than at a later time. But on the other hand, it may be the best time to throw the blockade is about three weeks before the election.

Haig: I—

Nixon: You see the point? [unclear] then nobody can find out. And on the basis, "now we're doing this 'til we get our prisoners back." You see? Then you've got something very, very tough. Before that we can't say we're going to blockade and lift it when we get our prisoners, but you destroy South Vietnam. But at that point, you could—if they make an issue out of prisoners, we blockade and say: "All right, we're going to keep to it until we get our prisoners back."

Haig: That would be all right if—I don't think a blockade would, would solve this thing in the short run.

Nixon: No?

Haig: In a military sense or in a political sense. In a military sense, we've had several studies made now. An awful lot of this stuff can come through China, even the—

Nixon: Sure—

Haig: —Soviet stuff.

Nixon: By air, too.

Haig: And by air. So we, we shouldn't fool ourselves about that. It's great now to get the Soviets' attention. They have to—

Nixon: Yeah, but we've got their attention. I think we've got their attention. Correct—?

Haig: Totally. Totally.

Nixon: And we'll find out.

Haig: And the thing in the long run, that is going to discourage everyone, is to kill those bastards down there. Just wipe 'em out.

Nixon: 100,000 is a lot to wipe out, Al.

Haig: Yes.

Nixon: Well then, they could do it to them, couldn't they?

Haig: Well, if they lose—

Nixon: They're just sitting there—pound away.

Haig: When you hear these prisoners, there's nothing left in the villages but wounded veterans. The wounded veterans are telling the few kids that are left to go and hide.

Nixon: They say that?

Haig: Yes. The young girls have no men, so they have a social problem. The young girls are consorting with older, married men and having illegitimate children. The society is very disrupted by that—

Nixon: This is in the VC country you mean?

Haig: It's in North Vietnam.

Nixon: Oh.

Haig: In the North. One prisoner just, he said, "it's an incredible situation."

Nixon: The men are gone?

Haig: No, no young men.

Nixon: Of course not. [pause] It drives me to think they've had, at least, to have 500,000 in there.

Haig: That's right. And they claim that when they came down they all knew they were going to die. They do have deserters up there and the training centers are deserting. They have short training. They're not ready for it. They get down on the battlefields, some of them are wandering around; that's how these RF and PF are killing them. They don't know what they're doing.

Nixon: What is the situation with regard to the bombing of the Hanoi and Haiphong? Do you buy the proposition that actually it stiffens their resolve on absolute victory?

Haig: I think it has that effect in the short term. But this country has been through it before. They've had it. I think at this point in time it's not so much so. They're just sick of it, too. And when the 1968 bombing halt came, we had run it through so long initially it did anneal them, and made them fight harder. But by 1968, when we stopped bombing, they were, they were on their knees. And that was showing, too—

Nixon: Well, as a matter of fact, too, the type of bombing that we intend to do, that we're doing now is really more effective than the '68 bombing, isn't it?

Haig: Oh, yeah—

Nixon: Right? What I'm getting at is [unclear] the 1968 bombing was picking out of targets and all that sort of thing.

Haig: It's entirely different.

Nixon: Because this strike was an enormously effective strike compared to most of those. Or was it? Am I wrong?

Haig: Hell, it was. First place, our techniques are better. Secondly, instead of Robert McNamara, as he used to do, sitting at the desk picking the targets, you've allowed the field commanders—

Nixon: Commanders—

Haig: —to do this and they're doing it more effectively without, what I call, are debilitating these strikes. And that's what they had all during the '68 period. They just constantly shifted the targets, and they were all run from here where the people didn't know what the hell they were doing in a close [unclear] were oriented on restraint. I think we've done an awful lot in these few strikes that we've put in there, especially when you put B–52s in. That's just—

Nixon: That was not done?

Haig: Never done.

Nixon: I take it that's an enormously potent ordeal, isn't it?

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: And that hits even up there.

Haig: It was a—it's just a frightening weapon. It's a frightening weapon when you're on the ground. I've used it close in to our troops, and I'll tell you it's—

Nixon: It's really something?

Haig: God, you know, you just see these shockwaves. The whole ground trembles and you get no warning because they're up higher and you can't see them when they're coming. You just hear all of a sudden this whistling, an eerie whistle.

Nixon: And the ground shakes?

Haig: And the whole ground shakes. It does get your attention.

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92. Message From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) in Moscow[1]

Washington, April 23, 1972, 1945Z.

CPD–203–72. Memorandum for Henry Kissinger from the President.

I am dictating this message personally to you rather than transmitting through Haig so that you can directly sense my views with regard to the state of play in your historic journey.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 74, April 1972, Kissinger Trip to Moscow. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Also printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 157.

First, there is no question whatever among any of us here about the skill, resourcefulness and determination you have displayed in conducting your talks to date. I have read each one of your messages carefully and have been enormously impressed with how you have had exactly the right combination of sweet and sour in dealing with them.

Second, as Haig has already indicated, I have no objection to your staying until 1500 Moscow time or even until 1700 or 1800 Moscow time, provided that you determine that your staying on may make some contribution on Vietnam.[2] It is important for you to arrive at Camp David before midnight on Monday so that we can go back to Washington and thereby maintain our cover and have time to prepare the announcement for Tuesday noon and Tuesday evening,[3] as well as getting your recommendations with regard to what I should say on Wednesday or Thursday.[4] As I am sure it has occurred to you, your hosts have already gained one of their goals—that of having you stay longer in Moscow on your first visit than you stayed in Peking. Of course, this is of very little concern to us and a few more hours makes no difference on that score.

It was predictable that they would give no ground on Vietnam although it seems to me that their primary purpose of getting you to Moscow to discuss the summit has now been served while our purpose of getting some progress on Vietnam has not been served, except, of course, in the very important, intangible ways you have pointed out—the effect on Hanoi of Moscow receiving you three days after we bombed Hanoi–Haiphong, of course, the obvious result of keeping Peking balanced vis-à-vis Moscow.

As far as what they have agreed to—sending messages to Hanoi, I suppose that in the long run this might have some beneficial effect. At least it enlists them in the diplomatic game in a way that they have refused to become enlisted before. However, we cannot be oblivious to the fact that while they have agreed to send messages, secretly, they will be continuing to send arms, publicly, and the latter fact will be the one our critics at home on both the left and the right will eventually seize upon.

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[2] Nixon recalled in his memoirs the following about Kissinger and his performance in Moscow: "If he had followed my instructions and insisted on a Vietnam settlement as the first order of business, perhaps Brezhnev would have dug in, called his bluff, and told him to go home—and that might have meant the end of the summit, with everything that it could accomplish, while still producing no progress on Vietnam. This was a risk I had thought worth taking. In any event the summit was held, and undoubtedly it owed a large measure of its success to Kissinger's negotiations during this secret visit to Moscow." (*RN,* p. 592)

[3] April 25.

[4] President Nixon addressed the nation on April 26; see Document 99.

Whether your hosts were in collusion with Hanoi is, of course, a question none of us can answer without knowing their innermost thoughts. But as far as the observers who will be trying to appraise the success or failure of your trip and later the summit, if it comes off, there is one hard fact that stands out—anyone who gives a murder weapon to someone he knows is going to kill with it is equally responsible for the crime. You and I might have reason to believe that both Peking and Moscow would like to de-fuse the situation in Southeast Asia but cannot do so for reasons of which we are aware. On the other hand, in dealing with our own opinion at home, this sophisticated analysis makes no dent whatever.

On the domestic front, the way the scenario may develop is as follows:

(1) The announcement of your trip on Tuesday noon will be a bombshell. But the primary interest in it, unfortunately, except for a few sophisticates, will be whether anything was accomplished to bring the Vietnam war to an end.

(2) The announcement later in the day that we are going back to the conference table, unless it is handled very skillfully, could be extremely detrimental when coupled with the announcement of your Moscow trip. The demonstrators—and, as you have heard, the "uproar" we all feared is far less than anticipated, have all been calling for us to go back to the conference table. When we announce six hours after announcing your trip to Moscow that we are going back to the conference table, the doves who will never be with us will say that we finally have rectified a bad error that we made in ever leaving the conference table; and the hawks will be desperately disillusioned because they will think that Moscow twisted our arms to get us to make this move, particularly when we have said we wouldn't be going back except with the understanding that we have a private meeting but this is going to pose a very serious public relations problem for us which I will have to tackle in any remarks which I make on either Wednesday or Thursday.

After the first shock of the announcement of your trip wears off—by the end of the week a chorus will arise from both the doves and the hawks raising two questions: First, what did Kissinger discuss with the Russians? (and here there will be insistence that you inform the Foreign Relations Committee and all others on this score) and (2) what did the Kissinger trip accomplish in terms of getting progress on Vietnam?

You and I know that it has to have accomplished a considerable amount indirectly by the message it sends to Hanoi and also that it may open the door for future progress on Vietnam where the Soviet may play a more helpful role. On the other hand, we must batten down the hatches for what will be a rising chorus of criticism from our

political opponents on the left and from our hawk friends on the right for going to Moscow and failing to get progress on the major issue.

I have deliberately painted this picture at its worst because, of course, we must prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Haig makes the point and I share it to an extent, that Hanoi will be under enormous heat to be more forthcoming in their private meeting with you on May 2nd. On the other hand, they may hold firm. It is then that we will have to make the really tough decision. It is my view that if they give no more than they have given on the twelve previous meetings they have had with you—and I believe those meetings were constructive of course but not on the decisive issue—then we will have to go all-out on the bombing front.[5]

That is why it is vitally important that your hosts know that all options—repeat—all options as far as actions against the North are open in the event that the meeting of May 2 turns out to be as nonproductive on the really critical issues as have the previous meetings you have had with the North Vietnamese.

Going back to our major goals, I could not agree with you more that the summit in terms of long term interests of the US is vitally important. However, no matter how good a deal we get out of the summit on SALT and on the other issues, we must realize that now the Soviet summit, far more than the Chinese summit, due to the fact that your trip directly dealt with Vietnam, will be judged as a success or failure depending upon whether we get some progress on Vietnam. My feeling about the necessity for resuming attacks on the Hanoi–Haiphong complex in the event that the May 2 meeting is a dud is as you can recognize quite different from the decision I made with regard to activities we would undertake prior to, during and after the China visit. For four weeks before we went to China, for the two weeks that we were there or on the way and for three weeks after we were there we made a decision, which I think was right, not to be provocative in

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[5] Kissinger responded the next day to the President's memorandum: "I agree completely with your strategy. If the plenary session and the May 2 private meeting fail to make major progress we must make, before the end of that week, a major onslaught on Haiphong. The question is whether we are in a much better position now. I have no doubt that Moscow is pressing Hanoi to be responsible. I am certain that Moscow will try to avoid a confrontation with us over Vietnam though there is a limit where things will get dicey. [This sentence was underlined by the President.] We have used the summit ruthlessly as a means of pressure. And on the summit we have harvested concessions. The major issue is not what they promise but what they will do. I have no doubt they got the message." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 74, April 1972, Kissinger Trip to Moscow) Printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 161.

our bombing of targets north of the DMZ even though we knew from all intelligence reports that an enemy build-up was going forward. I think that decision was right at that time.

[Omitted here are brief comments concerning SALT and Kissinger's trip to China.]

We have painted ourselves into this corner—quite deliberately—and I only hope that developments will justify the course we have followed.

In sum, we risked the summit by hitting Hanoi and Haiphong. After we have gone through your meeting of May 2, we may be faced with the hard decision to risk it again and probably damage it irreparably because we may have no other choice if that meeting turns out to be a failure.

I cannot emphasize too strongly that except for a few sophisticated foreign policy observers, interest in what we are able to get on a SALT agreement, trade, a better communiqué than the French got, etc., will not save the summit unless one way or another we are able to point to some progress on Vietnam. Of course, I am aware of the fact that if your hosts still want to go forward with the summit, despite the actions we may have had to take after May 2, we will do so because we know that the substantive agreements that we will reach at the summit are in and of themselves substantively very important even without progress on Vietnam. What I am trying to emphasize is that we must face the hard fact that we have now convinced the country that Soviet arms and Soviet tanks have fueled this massive invasion of South Vietnam by the North. Having done so, it is only logical that our critics on both right and left will hammer us hard if we sit down and meet with the Soviets, drink toasts, sign communiqués, etc., without getting progress on Vietnam.

However it all comes out, just remember we all know we couldn't have a better man in Moscow at this time than Kissinger. Rebozo joins us in sending our regards.

93. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Abrams Assessment of Current Situation

The following is a summary of General Abrams' personal assessment of the military situation in Southeast Asia (Tab A).[2]

General Current Situation

The enemy has not taken the vital areas of Quang Tri Province. He has been unable to open Route 547 and reach Hue. He has not taken Kontum Province although the situation there is serious and unresolved as of this moment. He has not taken An Loc and has suffered heavy casualties in his attempts to do so. His objectives in the Delta are less clear than in other areas and his achievements there to date have not been of decisive proportions. One of the most significant features of the current general situation is the absence of any widespread uprising throughout the Republic by local force guerrillas.[3] Overall the South Vietnamese have fought well under extremely difficult circumstances.[4] There has been a mixture of effective and ineffective performance, as in any combat situation, but on the whole the effective far outweighs the ineffective. Thus far the South Vietnamese have prevented the enemy from achieving his major objectives.[5] U.S. and VNAF air power in combination with determined resistance on the ground have been one of the decisive elements in achieving the relatively favorable situation that now exists.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Vietnam Subject Files, Box 130, HAK/PRES Memos (NVA) Situation in Vietnam (Apr 72). Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Haig initialed for Kissinger. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates that the President saw it. All brackets are in the original.

[2] Tab A, Abrams's personal assessment of the situation in Vietnam as of April 24, is not attached but a copy is in the Abrams Papers, Historical Resources Branch, U.S. Army Center of Military History. On April 23, Laird directed Abrams to prepare the paper as soon as possible and an additional one by 0800 EST, April 26. Laird's message is in the National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 69, JCS Out, Eyes Only Messages (1 Jan–31 July 72). Haig also sent the President a memorandum on April 24 analyzing Abrams' paper. A note on that memorandum indicates that the President saw it. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Vietnam Subject Files, Box 130, HAK/PRES Memos (NVA) Situation in Vietnam (Apr 72))

[3] Nixon underlined "absence of any widespread uprising throughout the Republic by local force guerrillas."

[4] Nixon underlined "South Vietnamese have fought well under extremely difficult circumstances."

[5] Nixon underlined this sentence.

Military Region 1

Enemy offensive has been stopped in Quang Tri Province, and ARVN forces are slowly expanding their defensive positions westward. Stubborn ARVN defense of Fire Support Base Bastogne has prevented the movement of enemy tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft and heavy equipment over Route 547 for attacks on Hue. Also enemy attempts to move eastward in the Quang Nam and Quang Tin border area have been successfully blocked. Quang Nam Province (in the southern part of MR–1) has experienced harassing and terrorist attacks and pacification has been set back, but no decisive actions have occurred in the province. South Vietnamese leadership in MR–1 is outstanding, aggressive and competent.[6] The enemy is still capable of launching a new offensive with reinforcements from the 325th Division (which is still in North Vietnam).

Military Region 2

As of this date (April 24) the enemy has not launched the coordinated all-out offensive in MR–2 of which he is capable. An attack which began against the 22nd ARVN Division headquarters at Tan Canh this morning may be such an offensive [Tan Canh has subsequently fallen to the enemy]. It is too early to tell. Thus far the enemy has conducted heavy attacks against individual ARVN units and positions, but these have been local rather than general. The presence of the enemy on Rocket Ridge (now abandoned by friendly forces) jeopardizes the security of Route 14 which is now interdicted in 3 places. The Joint General Staff has ordered ARVN forces north of Kontum to redeploy to defensive positions immediately north of Kontum City. This redeployment will be greatly complicated by present enemy attacks in the area. The situation in Binh Dinh Province continues to be difficult and Route 19, the key line of communication to the Pleiku/Kontum area, is still interdicted in the An Khe Pass area.

South Vietnamese military leadership in MR–2 is neither strong nor aggressive. The 22nd and 23rd Divisions in MR–2 both have new commanders. But the performance of the 22nd Division commander has been inadequate.[7]

Military Region 3

The battle for An Loc has been costly for the enemy but he continues to launch daily attacks. ARVN forces in the town have done an outstanding job. Their morale is high and they are determined to hold the city. Enemy ground attacks and attacks by fire against An Loc have

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[6] Nixon underlined this sentence.

[7] Nixon underlined most of this paragraph.

gradually diminished in intensity since April 16. Enemy activity throughout the remainder of MR–3 is low level and of little significance. But the pressure on Dau Tieng has been increasing in the last several days. The leadership in MR–3 is steady and dependable but not aggressive.[8] The outcome of the battle in MR–3 should be in favor of the South Vietnamese.[9]

Military Region 4

The overall situation in MR–4 is more difficult to assess than in the other regions. Enemy attacks have been primarily widespread low level attacks against outposts, national police, small ARVN units, and communications routes. The enemy main force effort is expected to continue to concentrate on Chuong Thien Province and he has made significant efforts to take over Kien Tuong Province. While the situation in Kampong Trach (just over the border in Cambodia) continues unchanged and the situation looks unfavorable, major elements of the 1st North Vietnamese Division have been tied down and have taken heavy casualties.

MR–4 has probably the most capable regional commander but he has a large geographical area to control and must reply primarily on RF and PF units.

Laos

The situation in Laos seems to have changed very little since the beginning of the enemy offensive against South Vietnam.

Cambodia

In Cambodia the enemy has increased pressure on the Mekong River convoys and has interdicted Route 1.[10] The opportunity exists for the conduct of FANK operations to complicate the enemy situation in Vietnam, but to date no effective action has been take; however, plans are being made for FANK operations along Route 1.[11]

Performance and Problems of Friendly Forces

South Vietnamese forces (RVNAF) would not have had sufficient mobility without U.S. airlift support. Their logistics system has however functioned effectively in the current situation.

—President Thieu has provided sound guidance to the Joint General Staff and has made prompt decisions and timely visits to combat areas.

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[8] Nixon underlined most of this sentence.

[9] Nixon underlined this sentence.

[10] Nixon underlined "Mekong River" and "interdicted Route 1."

[11] Nixon underlined "exists for the conduct of FANK" and "to complicate" in this sentence.

—The integration of air, armor, artillery and infantry elements has been outstanding.[12]

—The Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) has provided outstanding support for ground forces. ARVN artillery is very good.

—There has been a minimum of command bickering and no known instances of high level commanders refusing to carry out their orders.

—U.S. air, naval, advisory and airlift[13] support has played a key, if not decisive, role thus far.

—Korean units have concentrated primarily on security operations in their fixed areas and work relatively independently of RVNAF. They will have little impact on the outcome of the current situation because of their inflexibility and reluctance to become deeply involved in high threat areas.

Enemy Intentions

The enemy has neither lost his resolve nor changed his aims and will probably continue to initiate new actions through at least mid-May.[14] A maximum effort has still not been attempted in the B–3 Front (MR–2).

A recent COSVN directive (51) reportedly indicates that the enemy's attack in Quang Tri Province was designed to draw ARVN reinforcements to the north whereupon the enemy would then attack in MR–3 in order to further reduce ARVN reserves and launch sapper and rocket attacks against key government installations in Saigon. Once these attacks had widely spread the ARVN forces and reduced their reserves, the enemy would then demand a ceasefire in place and attempt to install a coalition government. The enemy is apparently attempting to force the ARVN to accept a piece-meal defeat or to withdraw to concentrated positions thus abandoning a substantial percentage of the rural population and obviating pacification success. (The enemy continues to heavily attack pacification targets in all 4 military regions.)[15]

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[12] Nixon underlined this sentence.

[13] Nixon underlined this phrase.

[14] Nixon underlined "his aims and will probably continue to initiate new actions through at least mid-May" in this sentence.

[15] Nixon underlined the last three sentences of this paragraph.

94. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, April 24, 1972.

SUBJECT

My Trip to Moscow

I spent thirteen hours with Brezhnev and Gromyko and five more hours with Gromyko only. Dobrynin was present at all sessions and other Soviet officials attended the Brezhnev sessions. The central results and conclusions are as follows.

Vietnam

—The Soviets endorse and are transmitting to Hanoi our *procedural* proposal on resuming the private and plenary talks on Vietnam. This has already resulted in their acceptance of the May 2 date for a private meeting.

—The Soviets are also forwarding our *substantive proposal* to Hanoi, despite an undoubtedly negative reaction.

—Katusev, the Central Committee member in charge of relations with other Communist parties, left for Hanoi at 5:25 a.m. 23 April while I was in Moscow.

—Brezhnev countered with a proposal for a *standstill ceasefire* which I made clear was unacceptable with the presence of invading North Vietnamese divisions. It is nevertheless noteworthy that he put forward any proposal; and a ceasefire-in-place would not be very attractive to Hanoi either, when its forces have failed to capture a single major town and would have to see their major psychological and military efforts frozen short of major objectives.

—The Soviets, on the other hand, gave *no actual promise that they would lean on their friends,* either for deescalation or a final settlement. They disavowed any responsibility for the North Vietnamese offensive. They hinted that they had not answered new requests but they also had the gall to maintain that they hadn't provided all that much offensive equipment in the first place.[2]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Memcons, January–December 1972 [3 of 3]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Printed in full in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 169.

[2] According to the minutes of the April 18 WSAG meeting, Kissinger and Helms discussed the question of both Soviet military assistance to and possible Soviet diplomatic pressure on Hanoi. Kissinger concluded that: "The Soviets would like to pay no price in Vietnam and they would also like the offensive to succeed. The question is how far are they willing to go?" (Ibid., Document 122)

—I made very clear that *we held Moscow to account* for the escalation just prior to the summit and that *we would prevent an allied defeat* no matter what the risk to our other policies, including U.S.-Soviet relations and the summit. I emphasized that there had to be a private meeting by May 2 and that if there were not significant progress at that session, we would resolutely pursue our unilateral course.

—Furthermore, *you would have to turn to the right domestically* and gain the support of precisely those elements who were not in favor of better U.S.-Soviet relations in any event. This would clearly inhibit your flexibility at a summit meeting, assuming there still was such a meeting.

—This all took place against the *background of our bombing* of Haiphong (and damage to Soviet ships) and Hanoi, continued bombing up to the 20th parallel during this period, and the clear option of bombing wherever we like after May 2 if there is no movement at the conference table.

—*In short, we did not achieve a breakthrough on Vietnam. On the other hand,* we got our message across; involved the Russians directly in transmitting our proposals to Hanoi; have certainly annoyed the North Vietnamese by just being in Moscow; will issue a joint announcement that, together with Le Duc Tho's return for a private session, will assuredly help us domestically by suggesting something is up; and have effectively positioned ourselves for whatever military actions we wish to pursue after first having once again demonstrated our reasonableness.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam.]

95. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 25, 1972, 10:10–10:37 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Maj. Gen. David Ott

JCS
Adm. Elmo Zumwalt

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton
(only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—The Joint Chiefs of Staff should develop a plan for a South Vietnamese amphibious landing—or a feint of the landing—on the North Vietnamese coast.

—The Defense Department will submit as soon as possible its plan for resupplying the ARVN.

—State and Defense will update the study on a cease-fire in place.

—We will get a military judgment on the question of the enemy divisions remaining where they are.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, what do you have?

Mr. Helms: [Reads his briefing, which is attached.[2] Also read a report about the impact a leaflet with a picture of the President and Chinese leaders on it had on an NVA unit near Pleiku on March 29.]

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Zumwalt) Bud, do you have anything for us?

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets are in the original.

[2] The briefing, entitled "The Situation in Vietnam," is ibid., Box H–086, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 4/25/72.

Adm. Zumwalt: Not much. The situation in South Vietnam remains essentially the same. We are nervous and uncomfortable about II Corps. The situation in II Corps is far from a disaster, however, and the South Vietnamese are falling back in good order.

Mr. Kissinger: What ARVN forces are left in MR 2?

Mr. Johnson: Hasn't the 22nd Division been knocked out?

Adm. Zumwalt: No. The division commander was killed when the command post was attacked, and the division has taken heavy casualties. General Dzu is handling the situation fairly well.

Mr. Kissinger: I don't know why the ARVN forces get so strung out. I know that they don't want to lose provincial capitals, but that may not be a good idea, if they lose divisions in the process of holding the cities.

Adm. Zumwalt: They are not giving up divisions. Several battalions and regiments are still intact and are operational.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm not concerned so much with what forces are left. We can survive the loss of Kontum, but we can't survive the loss of divisions if that happens on a regular basis.

Adm. Zumwalt: I wouldn't write the 22nd Division off yet.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm not writing it off. I'm just suggesting that it may be better to back off and concentrate forces so that we can beat the enemy, instead of staying and fighting as isolated units.

Adm. Zumwalt: The scheme is to hold off the enemy long enough to make him concentrate his forces. When that happens, we destroy the enemy with air power. This scheme has been successful most of the time, but not this particular time. The ARVN forces are now moving down to Vo Dinh,[3] where they will get reorganized. In the meantime, you should also remember that they have inflicted heavy casualties on the North Vietnamese.

Mr. Kissinger: I am aware of that. The 3rd, 5th, and 22nd ARVN Divisions have been badly clobbered.[4] How long will the South Vietnamese be able to stand and fight before they collapse?

Adm. Zumwalt: The other side has been clobbered, too. They have suffered more than 18,000 killed in action.

Mr. Kissinger: Then it becomes a question of who will collapse first. (to Mr. Carver) George, what do you think?

Mr. Carver: I think it's a little early to be talking about a South Vietnamese collapse. The 3rd and 5th Divisions were badly hurt, but the 5th Division has been somewhat effective around An Loc.

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[3] An ARVN staging area northwest of Kontum in MR–2's Central Highlands.

[4] ARVN divisions stationed in, respectively, MR–1, MR–3, and MR–2.

Mr. Kissinger: Haig says the 5th Division was no good at all at An Loc. The RF and airborne troops were the only ARVN forces of any value there.

Mr. Carver: The 22nd Division is dispersed now. However, component battalions and regiments of the division are not out of the ARVN order of battle. They will regroup.

Mr. Kissinger: Where will they regroup?

Mr. Carver: We don't know for sure. The plan, as Bud [Zumwalt] said, is for them to regroup at Vo Dinh. From a political point of view, Thieu feels it is important not to lose Kontum.

Mr. Sullivan: He apparently is dead set against losing Kontum.

Mr. Kissinger: At least one general is always wrong in every war.

Mr. Sullivan: Thieu is also thinking back to what happened during Lam Son 719, when the ARVN took a worse beating than it is getting now—yet was able to reconstitute itself. Thieu feels that his forces will be able to do that again.

Mr. Helms: One U.S. adviser estimates that about two-thirds of the 22nd Division will eventually struggle into Vo Dinh. If that's the case, the Division should be reorganized in fairly short order.

Adm. Zumwalt: That's right. We also expect a battalion of the 47th Regiment and the 9th Airborne Battalion to make it to Vo Dinh.[5] The key thing in the battles for An Loc and Kontum is what the people sense has happened. Great significance will be attached to the loss of these cities.

Mr. Kissinger: I have no problem with An Loc. But, as you know, my worry has always been with the deployments in the central highlands. I raised this subject regularly at these meetings. The most important thing is to keep the North Vietnamese from scoring big victories. We want them to waste the dry season.

Adm. Zumwalt: We want to get them in a position where they are standing and fighting. Then we can hit them with air.

Mr. Kissinger: True—as long as we're not losing divisions.

Adm. Zumwalt: We haven't lost any divisions.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) Bill, what is the political situation in Saigon?

Mr. Sullivan: The situation is surprisingly stable. An opposition Senator put a fairly mild motion in the Senate yesterday. We don't think it will pass, although the Senate has been critical of Thieu in the past. The An Quang Buddhists are criticizing the North Vietnamese offensive. There is some effort on the part of the Catholics and Buddhists

[5] Units belonging to the 22d ARVN Division.

for a peace offensive—which would also call for the North Vietnamese to withdraw from South Vietnam. Thieu obviously sees the loss of a provincial capital as being more significant than seeing his troops take heavy punishment.

Mr. Kissinger: He has survived extraordinary vicissitudes.

Mr. Sullivan: He's a cool fellow.

Adm. Zumwalt: I'd like to bring up two other points. The situation in MR 1 is such that the enemy can still send the one division remaining in North Vietnam across the DMZ. Since North Vietnam is a sanctuary against invasion, they may decide to take this gamble.

Mr. Kissinger: You're talking about the 325th Division?

Adm. Zumwalt: Yes. We are also worrying about the troops that are moving away from the An Loc area. These troops may camp out during the rainy season, and they may be able to reinforce NVA main force units in other areas.

Mr. Kissinger: Except if the fighting in MR 3 closes down. Then the South Vietnamese can also move out their troops.

Mr. Carver: If the North Vietnamese pull out the 312th and 316th Regiments, it will take several weeks to refresh and reconstitute them. These regiments would need a rather complete refitting before they would be ready for new action.

Mr. Sullivan: If they decide to commit the 325th Division, they could bring the 312th Regiment up to take over the division's functions in North Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Zumwalt) You know, we have no objection to a feint of landing operations on the North Vietnamese coast, although I realize that the ARVN don't have the forces to carry this off.

Mr. Sullivan: The Marines could do it.

Mr. Rush: All the Marines are already engaged.

Mr. Kissinger: The Marines wouldn't be able to do it.

Mr. Carver: If the 325th Division were committed to action in the South and the infantry regiments were brought back to defend North Vietnam, the defense would be pretty light: only 12 infantry regiments, six of which are training regiments. Basically, they would have only six infantry regiments to defend North Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: We would have no problem if you plan to undertake—or fake—a landing on the North Vietnamese coast. There would be no flack from the President—as long as no U.S. forces are involved.

Mr. Carver: A successful landing would give the Politburo acute heartburn and loss of face on its home territory.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Zumwalt) Why don't you develop a plan? Then we'll see what it looks like.

Mr. Zumwalt: Okay.

Mr. Kissinger: I want to emphasize again that the President is determined not to lose in Vietnam. Anything you come up with will be very welcome. I heard on the television this morning that the FANK are moving into the rear of the North Vietnamese. There is no report of panic in Hanoi, is there?

Mr. Sullivan: No.

Mr. Kissinger: Are those Soviet ships which turned away from Haiphong after the B–52 strikes now headed for Haiphong again?

Mr. Helms: Yes. A couple of them already got in.

Mr. Sullivan: A Polish ship, too.

Mr. Carver: There are signs of port congestion.

Mr. Johnson: Is the port operational?

Mr. Carver: Yes, but not yet at full capacity. We have signs that there are delays in berthing, for example.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Rush) Ken, you were going to do an urgent resupply plan for the South Vietnamese. Will we have it soon?

Mr. Rush: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: When will we be able to implement it?

Mr. Rush: We've already begun the implementation of it.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's get the plan. We want to get as much as possible into Vietnam during the next month.

Mr. Rush: We're doing that.

Mr. Kissinger: I understand the leaflet business is working out well.

Mr. Helms: You missed the great leaflet caper yesterday.

Mr. Sullivan: We got another cable yesterday from Bunker and Abrams. They are very much against the campaign.

Mr. Kissinger: Abrams would oppose it if it takes one plane away from him.

Mr. Sullivan: That's part of it, of course. We asked them again last night what texts they wanted.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Johnson) Alex, are you against the leaflet campaign?

Mr. Johnson: McCain says the campaign would not make him divert his resources. On the other hand, Abrams says he is flatly against it. I just don't know.

Mr. Rush: McCain would be the guy who implements the campaign.

Adm. Zumwalt: That's right. We would be using McCain's planes.

Mr. Nutter: We could also do it on a cloudy day, when the planes are not otherwise occupied.

Mr. Johnson: We agreed yesterday that we first want to see the texts of the leaflets.

Mr. Kissinger: Will we receive the texts soon? It's been four weeks since we asked for them.

Mr. Sullivan: We asked them again last night to get the texts over here.

Mr. Kissinger: On the press side, we are in reasonably good shape.

Mr. Sullivan: The focus is beginning to fall on the President's upcoming statement.

Mr. Kissinger: We'll discuss that when some of the decisions have been made. There is one other thing I wanted to bring up today. We talked earlier about the possibility of the North Vietnamese—or some one else acting on behalf of the North Vietnamese—proposing a cease-fire in place. We don't have a policy for that contingency.

Mr. Johnson: Yes we do. We have a paper on it.

Mr. Kissinger: But that was in a different situation.

Mr. Sullivan: The fundamentals of both situations are consistent.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) Would you sum up the position for us?

Mr. Sullivan: We would want a cease-fire in place in the three Indochina states, not just Vietnam. We would insist on supervision. There would also be no U.S. withdrawals from Thailand or the offshore fleet.

Mr. Kissinger: We don't want a cease-fire to be contingent on American withdrawals.

Mr. Sullivan: I don't think the other side would cooperate if U.S. withdrawals were not part of the cease-fire.

Mr. Kissinger: Would we or the South Vietnamese accept a cease-fire if nine NVA divisions remained in Vietnam?

Mr. Sullivan: Bui Diem raised this issue with me recently. He assumed that any cease-fire offer made by the other side would be accepted by the U.S. The offer could also be accepted by the South Vietnamese, Diem said, if the NVA did not hold any provincial capitals. The South Vietnamese would have to reject the offer if provincial capitals were in enemy hands.

Mr. Kissinger: And this would be the case even if nine North Vietnamese divisions remained in South Vietnam?

Mr. Sullivan: According to Diem, the answer is yes.

Mr. Kissinger: He should not assume that the U.S. would do anything.

Mr. Sullivan: The way Bui Diem stipulated it, South Vietnam will look for Hanoi to propose a cease-fire in place. It's Diem's judgment that even with enemy divisions on South Vietnamese territory and even

with the current deep penetrations, Thieu would accept the proposal if no provincial capitals were in North Vietnamese hands.

Mr. Johnson: Would Hanoi propose a cease-fire if it didn't hold any provincial capitals?

Mr. Carver: No. They would lose face if they don't control anything more than jungle and swampland.

Mr. Kissinger: How many provincial capitals would they have to hold in order to offer a cease-fire?

Mr. Carver: They would have to hold Kontum, Quang Tri, Hue and An Loc.

Mr. Kissinger: Just Kontum alone would not be enough?

Mr. Carver: No.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) Bill, can you go through the paper and up-date it? Then we can talk about it tomorrow.

Mr. Sullivan: Yes.

Mr. Carver: This is why the North Vietnamese are fighting so hard at An Loc.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we also get for tomorrow a military judgment on the question of NVA divisions remaining where they are?

Adm. Zumwalt: We'll do that.

Mr. Sullivan: I see the trawler story has hit the press, without any kind of a ripple. I understand the South Vietnamese briefer was asked the name of the ship, and he said that he didn't know because it was written in Chinese.

Mr. Rush: Yesterday, we discussed the possibility of getting the Koreans to do more in Vietnam. Warren [Nutter] has something to bring up in regard to the Koreans.

Mr. Nutter: Yes. It's the question of whether the Korean purchase of PT boats counts in the modernization ceiling. The Secretary sent a letter over here in March, and the Koreans have asked several times about this.

Mr. Kissinger: We'll take action on it today. Does State agree?

Mr. Rush: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Kennedy) Dick, will you see that it is approved today?

Mr. Kennedy: Yes.

Adm. Zumwalt: Getting back to the question of a landing in North Vietnam. Might it be possible to ask Thieu to make a statement on the need for moving the DMZ up north, to the vicinity of Vinh. That would shake up the North Vietnamese.

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

Washington, April 26, 1972.

SUBJECT

Laos Contingencies

REF

My memorandum on same subject of 29 January 1972

In my earlier memorandum,[2] I recommended that we explore courses of action open to us to replace the Taksin planning in the event of possible Laos contingencies. The current tactical situation in MR II suggests that enemy forces may retain their positions forward of the Plaine des Jarres throughout the rainy season, and initiate offensive operations at the beginning of next year's dry season from a much more advanced position than has been the case in the past. The threat to the Vientiane plain will increase commensurately. In this situation, there are three courses of action available to the United States:

A. Reaffirm the Taksin concept.

Taksin contingency planning envisages joint Thai/US forward deployment in Laos to preempt NVA access to the Mekong. Since this planning was done in the mid-'60s, the Church Amendment prohibiting the introduction of US ground combat forces into Thailand or Laos has been endorsed by the Administration and enacted in each of the last three fiscal years. This endorsement was predicated on our perception of US objectives in SEA and appropriate courses of action in pursuing those objectives. To my mind, these perceptions remain valid today. To override this statutory restriction would require a Presidential Determination that US ground force deployments to Thailand or Laos are required as an emergency measure to cope with an enemy concentration which constituted a serious threat to American forces in SVN. Not only would this be a difficult proposition to sustain, but also it would be contrary to the thrust of our policy in SEA and provoke strong public disapproval.

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–75–0155, 0000.1 Laos. Top Secret; Sensitive. A copy was sent to the Secretary of State. Drafted by M.A. Martin, Office of International Security Affairs (East Asia and Pacific Region), Department of Defense.

[2] See footnote 2, Document 11.

B. Renegotiate the Taksin concept.

This option would require renegotiation of Thai/US contingency planning for joint action in Laos. The new concept of joint action would envisage RTA forward deployment. US logistical support for the operations of regular Thai forces in Laos is now prohibited by the Fulbright Amendment, but given the deteriorating situation in Laos, the President might obtain relief from this statutory restriction. He could go to the Congress to seek relief, or alternatively, he could determine that Thai operations in Laos were essential to the safe withdrawal of US forces from SVN. The former approach might not succeed; the latter is not credible and would, therefore, entail a high political cost.

This option also presupposes from the Thai both an assessment of the situation and a choice of responses which are congruent with our own. While past actions by no means predetermine future choices, the RTG has, to date in this dry season, rejected various US suggestions to commit RTA regular units to Laos even with proffered US support under Lao MASF. The Thai position is based on a reluctance to downgrade further their CI efforts out of fear of the potential political price at home and abroad, and on a desire to avoid provoking direct confrontation with NVN. On the other hand, although they are well aware that their own logistic capability is inadequate to sustain a tactically significant deployment for longer than a few weeks, confronted with the possibility of an NVA advance to the Mekong, the Thai could determine unilaterally to commit regular forces without US logistic support forward of the Mekong to meet this threat.

C. Replace the Taksin concept with a more realistic basis for Thai/US security cooperation.

Option A would require an unlikely course of US action; Option B depends in the first instance on an improbable course of Thai action. We favor a third approach, aimed at a candid examination with the Thai of the possible threats and options for response which are more appropriate to the present situation than the Taksin planning of the mid-'60s. In our relations with the Thai the USG has often avoided talking frankly with them—apparently anticipating an adverse reaction on their part, that would affect our operating rights in Thailand, to changing US policy parameters. The Thai have been understandably upset by past actions such as our public endorsement of the Cooper–Church prohibition on US ground forces in Thailand and Laos, juxtaposed with private reassurances regarding the continued validity of the Taksin concept. The Thai leadership has a sophisticated grasp of the US political scene, which makes equivocation on issues fundamental to our cooperative relationship unnecessary as well as undesirable. A close look at Thai/US relations reveals the practical basis of this relationship and

underscores the desirability of such a candid examination of issues and alternatives in Laos with the Thai.

The reduction of the US role in SEA in recent years has given impetus to a Thai reevaluation of their defense and foreign policy options. However, practical alternatives to continued close association with the US and reliance on US military power are limited at this time. Neutrality would only become practicable in the context of a broader agreement between the powers on the region as a whole. Accommodation (as opposed to capitulation) with Peking as a long-term basis for their continued national security cannot be accomplished in the short-term, and Thai leverage in bargaining with China will be greater if there is a US military presence in Thailand. The Thai expectation that the US will continue to play a major, though reduced, role in Southeast Asia for a few more years makes it unlikely that they will initiate a break in Thailand's close relationship with the US and Thai cooperation with the US in SEA.

This dry season and next, Thailand and the US also have common objectives in Laos—to fight with what is available and hope that a combination of weather, friendly capabilities, terrain, and the limits of enemy interests and logistic capabilities will prevent him from moving in strength onto the Vientiane plan. To prevent the dissipation of their regular Army resources, the Thai rejected our suggestions last fall to deploy regular units. We have similarly begun to realize that, in North Laos, additional resources applied do not necessarily lead to increased military effectiveness, and that we have about reached the outer limit of US resources to be applied to the problem without unacceptable political risks and resource costs relating to our primary SEA objectives. Furthermore, notwithstanding the self-imposed limitation on our Laos commitment, US use of Thai bases for at least several more years is essential to our SEA objectives; similarly, continued intensive application of US airpower in SEA and continued US military presence in strength in Thailand is desirable to the Thai as evidence of US determination to continue to be an active ally in SEA security efforts. This commonality of national security objectives in SEA commends a more direct and positive dialogue with the RTG on alternatives for response to the changing tactical situation in Laos. A possible scenario for such discussions is appended for your consideration.[3]

I recommend that an interagency review of the above issues be undertaken to explore various courses of action and to develop a USG position.

Melvin R. Laird

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[3] Attached but not printed is an undated appendix containing the scenarios.

97. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 26, 1972, 10:03–10:58 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Rear Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (stayed only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC Staff
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig
Richard T. Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—State and Defense will draft a letter from the President to President Park of Korea, urging more ROK activity in MR 2.

—Admiral Moorer will check on the report that North Vietnamese troops machine-gunned refugees south of the Dak To area.

—We will reassess our PR position tomorrow, in the light of the President's speech tonight.

—The State, Defense and CIA papers on a cease-fire will be discussed at Friday's meeting.

[Omitted here is discussion of the military structure, the ROK forces in Vietnam, and the international attitude to U.S. policy in Vietnam.]

Mr. Kissinger: What about the papers on the political and military aspects of a cease-fire proposal? Have they been done?

Mr. Johnson: We have a first draft of our paper.[2] Bill [Sullivan] worked on it last night, but we feel it needs some more work.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

[2] Sullivan's paper, entitled "Possible North Vietnamese Call for a Cease-Fire," April 25, is ibid., Box H–086, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 5/1/72.

Mr. Kissinger: I would like to take a look at it, anyway.

Mr. Johnson: Okay.

Mr. Kissinger: I won't be here tomorrow, so I would like to have a full discussion of the papers on Friday.[3] Is that alright with everyone?

All agreed.

Mr. Helms: We also are preparing a paper. George [Carver] is ready to brief on our paper, if you want.[4]

Mr. Kissinger: That's a good idea, especially since the President will probably ask me about the papers. By the way, I don't want to mislead you about the cease-fire proposal. We have no inclination to propose a cease-fire, but we just want to be ready for all contingencies.

Mr. Carver: In our paper, we look at two basic issues: (1) whether the other side can offer a cease-fire and (2) whether it would be to our advantage to accept it. The other side has already made a proposal which also stipulates withdrawal of U.S. forces. Technically, they have an offer on the table. The question is would they broaden that offer to include the GVN as well as the U.S.? Would they include all of Indochina, instead of just Vietnam? Would they separate out the cease-fire proposal from the entire package? We don't think they are very likely to do these things.

Mr. Kissinger: Would it be fair to say that in the improbable event they do decide to discuss a cease-fire separately, we would have a situation where they recognize GVN control of a substantial portion of South Vietnam? This would untie and separate out the issue of territorial control.

Mr. Johnson: The North Vietnamese don't have to untie that issue.

Mr. Kissinger: They could go back to our May 31 offer.

Mr. Carver: There are two historical considerations we have to bear in mind. Up to now, they have been very cautious—but that could change. The present leadership in Hanoi is adverse to taking gambles. They were burned badly in 1954, when they gambled and lost. Le Duan was hurt most of all. In 1965–66, they could have gotten the U.S. out of Vietnam. But they didn't display interest in achieving a solution which did not guarantee them a shot at taking over power in South Vietnam.

Second, the North Vietnamese negotiating posture is that everything should be considered in one package—including the dismantling of the GVN and the cessation of U.S. support, particularly air support. They want this whole package to be considered. They have insisted

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[3] April 28.

[4] The April 27 paper is in the Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–T01719R, Box 3, Likelihood and Consequences of a Sudden Vietnamese Communist Cease Fire Offer—27 April 1972.

that we meet certain conditions which would in effect give them power in South Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: You are saying, then, that they will not propose a cease-fire.

Mr. Carver: I'm saying that if they do propose a cease-fire, it would be a radical departure from their past policies. In addition, the cadres in the South have been told that Hanoi is not in favor of a cease-fire. Their people have been told that the offensive will bring much larger results to them, and it is not billed as a temporary measure.

Adm. Moorer: A COSVN paper said that the offensive is a make or break effort.

Mr. Carver: The North Vietnamese have said these things fairly consistently.

Mr. Kissinger: And what would happen if the offensive doesn't succeed?

Mr. Carver: They would have a lot of explaining to do. They have made the point internally and in their propaganda to the South Vietnamese that the offensive is a major effort designed to bring total success to the North.

Mr. Kissinger: If they don't achieve more than they have up to now—if they just have small victories here and there—will it be a major setback for them?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: How will they see it?

Mr. Carver: Privately, they will of course realize they were defeated. Publicly, though, they would have to put their best face forward.

Mr. Kissinger: Being the devil's advocate for a moment, couldn't they argue that since they knocked off the 3rd, 5th and 22nd ARVN Divisions in a month, they will knock off the other ARVN divisions in another month? Would that be a tenable position for them to take?

Mr. Carver: Yes. Some people are probably arguing for that position in Hanoi right now. However, if after two more months, they haven't achieved more than they have up to now, the offensive will not be regarded as a success.

Mr. Kissinger: The key date is July 1?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Adm. Moorer: You could turn the argument about knocking out divisions around. If they have knocked out the divisions, why haven't they penetrated any deeper into South Vietnam?

Mr. Kissinger: They could say that when they've knocked out a few more divisions, all the ARVN forces will collapse.

Mr. Carver: The 3rd ARVN Division has not been destroyed. And more important, from Hanoi's point of view, the North Vietnamese have not made any political gains.

Mr. Kissinger: Have the North Vietnamese suffered the equivalent division losses of the ARVN?

Mr. Carver: In terms of the number of casualties, the North Vietnamese have suffered an equal or greater loss. In terms of unit integrity, we don't know yet. We do know, though, that they have a command and discipline problem the same as we do.

Adm. Moorer: There's no question that they have suffered greater casualties than the ARVN.

Mr. Kissinger: It's statistically improbable that we never hit anything with all the strikes we've flown.

Mr. Carver: Remember that Dong Ha has not fallen, nor has Quang Tri. An Loc is still in South Vietnamese hands, despite enemy claims to the contrary. The enemy is getting no nourishment in the Delta, and he is making a big effort now to take Kontum—but so far hasn't succeeded.

The North Vietnamese may therefore reformulate their position in Paris, perhaps putting the cease-fire as point number 1. We don't feel, however, that they have to call for a cease-fire. But, if they did, we should exploit it as a defeat for the North Vietnamese. Their call for a cease-fire would be an admission of defeat. I want to emphasize, however, that it is unlikely they will call for a cease-fire. We shouldn't bite if they do offer one. Instead, we would be well advised to insist on our conditions.

Mr. Johnson: That gets to the heart of the issue. When the point comes that we are talking about a cease-fire, will it be to our net advantage or to the other side's net advantage to accept?

Mr. Carver: I'm talking in more indefinite terms. I don't mean to say that if Hanoi proposes a cease-fire on Thursday, we should stop firing on Friday.

Mr. Sullivan: Assuming they propose a cease-fire under the best case—when they control several provincial capitals—they will probably tie their usual conditions to the cease-fire, such as a dismissal of the Thieu government. The proposal would be unacceptable to this Administration, but it will very likely be supported by other people, including, for example, the French.

On the other hand if the North Vietnamese offer came when they didn't control any provincial capitals, we would read it as their admission of defeat. South Vietnam would then want to tie in our conditions. In other words, Hanoi would make an offer, but Saigon would say it isn't time to consider the offer. We could be caught in the middle.

If you go back in history, you see in 1953–54 Pham Van Dong insisted for the better half of the Geneva meeting on first achieving a political solution. Then Chou and Molotov came around with a territorial solution. They were looking for a political solution in those days because they realized they were overextended as a result of Dien Bien Phu.

Mr. Johnson: They also attempted to get a cease-fire in place in 1954.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me see if I can sum up briefly. (to Mr. Carver) You are saying the North Vietnamese will not offer a cease-fire proposal. In the unlikely event they do, the offer will have conditions which are unacceptable to us.

Mr. Carver: That's right.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) You are saying if they do offer a proposal, it would be an admission of defeat.

Mr. Sullivan: Yes.

Mr. Carver: In the best case—where they hold Quang Tri, Hue, An Loc, Kontum and possibly other cities—the offer would be keyed to us: perhaps a trade off of the POWs for a cease-fire. They will try to cause a split between us and the GVN.

Mr. Kissinger: We would never accept that.

Mr. Helms: We have to keep in mind what they would regard as a defeat. The media in Hanoi have been filled with stories about great victories in the South and popular uprisings. When they can't produce these victories, this will be seen as a defeat in the eyes of the people.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's go through the papers systematically on Friday. In the discussion, we should also talk about the military implications of the cease-fire under various hypotheses.

98. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, April 26, 1972.

SUBJECT

General Abrams Personal Assessment

Ambassador Bunker has sent you a copy of General Abrams personal assessment of the situation in South Vietnam which is expected to be forwarded through Defense channels.[2] In his appraisal, General Abrams makes the following significant points:

—The clear purpose of the North Vietnamese invasion is to destroy the Armed Forces of South Vietnam, to seize, occupy and hold territory in South Vietnam, control as many South Vietnamese citizens by military force as possible, and cause the downfall of the present South Vietnamese Government.

—The decision to undertake this decision was made many, many months ago.[3] The enemy has abandoned the tactics of the past and with modern, sophisticated equipment has elected to try to overcome South Vietnam by conventional warfare[4] where his doctrine of protracted warfare has failed in the past. He has committed himself to a make or break campaign for 1972.

—No important citadel has been given up to the enemy. Some 200,000 South Vietnamese citizens have been forced to flee their homes in the face of the invasion.[5]

—On the whole, heroic performances by the South Vietnamese stand out as the trademark of this battle to the death. Most units have fought bravely. The young South Vietnamese Air Forces have flown hard and the South Vietnamese Navy has continued to protect coastal areas effectively. Some of the most heroic actions of this war have been those of the people and their militia fighting for their homes and

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 75, May 8, 1972 Vietnam Speech. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] Attached but not printed is the April 26 assessment. In transmitting the assessment Bunker noted that Nixon's guidance to Abrams in drafting the assessment was to make it suitable for use in his speech to the nation that evening.

[3] Nixon underlined this sentence.

[4] Nixon underlined "elected to try to overcome South Vietnam by conventional warfare" in this sentence.

[5] Nixon underlined "Some 200,000 South Vietnamese citizens have" in this sentence.

families. This is a battle between the defenders of South Vietnam and the invaders from the North.

—Ten times the U.S. air power could not have done the job if the armed forces of South Vietnam had not stood and fought.[6]

—In eleven of the 44 provinces important fighting has gone on and continues. In the remaining 33 provinces the government and population continue to function in a normal way with a quiet confidence that their government and armed forces have the strength and will to endure. The South Vietnamese Government and its armed forces and its people are holding together in this crisis.

—We can anticipate more heavy fighting and additional hardships for the people of South Vietnam, but the fabric of what the South Vietnamese have built with our assistance has survived its severest test. The qualities demonstrated by the South Vietnamese people assure that they will continue to hold.

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[6] Nixon underlined this sentence.

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99. Editorial Note

On April 26, 1972, President Richard M. Nixon delivered his second address to the nation on Vietnam since the year began, and his first since the North Vietnamese launched their offensive on March 30. He reviewed details of the most recent United States offer to Hanoi to win the war, made first in October 1971 and then repeated in January 1972 with only slight differences. He characterized the proposals in the offer as generous. The response was negative, the President stressed: "Now, Hanoi's answer to this offer was a refusal to even discuss our proposals and, at the same time, a huge escalation of their military activities on the battlefield." Subsequently, the probability of a major offensive by the North against the South increased. Nonetheless, the U.S. did not react militarily. According to Nixon: "Instead we patiently continued with the Paris talks, because we wanted to give the enemy every chance to reach a negotiated settlement at the bargaining table rather than to seek a military victory on the battlefield—a victory they cannot be allowed to win.

"Finally, 3 weeks ago, on Easter weekend, they mounted their massive invasion of South Vietnam. Three North Vietnamese divisions swept across the demilitarized zone into South Vietnam—in violation

of the treaties they had signed in 1954 and in violation of the understanding they had reached with President Johnson in 1968, when he stopped the bombing of North Vietnam in return for arrangements which included their pledge not to violate the DMZ. Shortly after the invasion across the DMZ, another three North Vietnamese divisions invaded South Vietnam further south. As the offensive progressed, the enemy indiscriminately shelled civilian population centers in clear violation of the 1968 bombing halt understanding."

In the wake of the "invasion," Nixon announced in his speech three decisions bearing on the war. First, because Vietnamization was going well, the President would continue to withdraw American troops. Over the next two months another 20,000 would be pulled out, leaving the number at about 49,000. Second, he had ordered Ambassador Porter to return to the plenary sessions in Paris on April 27. Third, Nixon would continue air and naval attacks on military targets in North Vietnam until the North stopped its offensive against the South. On the relation between bombing and negotiating, he said: "I have flatly rejected the proposal that we stop the bombing of North Vietnam as a condition for returning to the negotiating table. They sold that package to the United States once before, in 1968, and we are not going to buy it again in 1972." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, pages 550–554)

In his memoirs, Nixon wrote: "It was a tough speech, and afterward I wished that I had made it even tougher." (*RN*, page 593)

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

Washington, April 28, 1972.

We have just received the following flash message from the President:[2]

"Immediate

"From: The President

"To: Henry Kissinger

"1. The absolute maximum number of sorties must be flown from now thru Tuesday.[3]

"2. Abrams to determine targets.

"3. If at all possible 1,000 sorties per day.

"4. This will have maximum psychological effect.

"5. Give me report soonest by message as to how this order is being specifically executed.

"6. There are to be no excuses and there is no appeal."

Please provide me with a basis for response to paragraph 5 in the foregoing.[4]

Henry A. Kissinger

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0095, 385.1, Viet. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. This memorandum had an attachment that was not found.

[2] The President was vacationing at Key Biscayne, Florida, and in mid-afternoon flew by helicopter to Grand Cay, Bahamas, where he spent the night before returning to Key Biscayne the next day. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary)

[3] May 2.

[4] Kissinger called Moorer at 5:40 p.m. and read the President's message to him. Kissinger ended the short conversation with the following: "Can you send me something over, can you give me message or something within an hour what you are going to do that I can flash to him and I will do it in your name and I will say this is what I got from Moorer in response to your request." Moorer called Kissinger at 7:05 to read to him the order about to be sent to McCain, after which he said: "I just wanted you to know, fills all the points the President made." At 7:36 p.m., Moorer called McCain to read the message to him, saying: "That's exactly what the President said and I am only sending it to you knowing that you will pick it up and issue other instructions." (Moorer Diary, April 28; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman) The message itself went out at 7:47 p.m. and is ibid., Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 16–30 April 1972.

101. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, April 28, 1972, 10:06–11:11 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Rear Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (only stayed for Helms' briefing)

NSC Staff
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig
Richard T. Kennedy
John N. Negroponte
Mark Wandler

[Omitted here are the Summary of Conclusions, briefings by Helms and Moorer on the military situation in the South, discussion based on the briefings, Sullivan's briefing on the plenary sessions in Paris, and Carver's briefing on North Vietnamese military manpower and logistics. The latter focused on how combat and infrastructure losses might affect the enemy's ability to continue the offensive.]

Mr. Kissinger: Do we have anything on what Le Duc Tho might do in Paris? Do we think he will negotiate seriously next week?

Mr. Carver: It's unlikely that he will.

Mr. Kissinger: You think they won't even begin to take a serious look at negotiations until June?

Mr. Carver: If they want to negotiate seriously right now, they are in worse trouble than we think.

Mr. Sullivan: I asked our people what they thought Le Duc Tho would bring with him, and the answer was: "nothing that would interest us." Our people think he will try to do something which has a lot of appeal to the political mix here. For one thing, he may offer to

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

return our POWs, in return for a complete U.S. withdrawal by a certain date.

Adm. Moorer: If he does that, we will have great trouble. The Senate will be in a shambles. It's already cutting our budget every day. In fact, I don't know why the North Vietnamese wouldn't offer that proposition.

Mr. Johnson: I suppose they still include all our air when they talk about total withdrawal.

Adm. Moorer: If the North Vietnamese made that kind of an offer and said they would return our prisoners, we wouldn't be able to handle it.

Mr. Kissinger: What do the bright people say we should do if Le Duc Tho makes that kind of an offer?

Adm. Moorer: If the negotiations don't move fast, I would suggest that we get out of them—quickly.

Mr. Kissinger: We're determined to do that if the negotiations don't move fast enough. If the other side sticks to its old positions, it will be easy for us to get out of the negotiations. If they have new positions, though, we may have great problems.

Adm. Moorer: I don't think we should spend much time there if they don't have new positions.

Mr. Kissinger: Le Duc Tho will either have a new position, or he won't. There's no in between with him. If there is no new position, we can break off the talks without much trouble. If there is a new position, what we do depends on what the position is. We could have a massive problem.

Mr. Carver: That's basically the line we suggest in paragraph eleven of our cease-fire paper.[2]

Mr. Johnson: It would be so natural for the North Vietnamese to make an offer which would guarantee return of our prisoners. But I don't know if they would do it. In the past, they have missed so many opportunities which seemed like naturals.

Adm. Moorer: They don't want to give the impression of weakness.

Mr. Carver: And they don't like to gamble, either.

Mr. Kissinger: But what kind of a gamble would it be? Let me ask again what the bright people say we should do if Le Duc Tho makes that offer?

Mr. Sullivan: It would certainly cause a shambles in the Senate, as Tom said.

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[2] See footnote 4, Document 97.

Adm. Moorer: We would be faced with an unmanageable situation.

Mr. Sullivan: [Reads passage from State paper, gist of which was that we should make a generally positive response, which includes conditions for a general cease-fire.][3]

Mr. Nutter: Why should we do that? The North Vietnamese wouldn't accept a cease-fire.

Mr. Sullivan: They would if their tail were whipped.

Adm. Flanagan: Our assessment is that we should not accept a cease-fire at this moment. We need to have the North Vietnamese pull their forces back before we talk cease-fire with them.

Mr. Johnson: Why do you think the North Vietnamese wouldn't accept?

Adm. Flanagan: I didn't say they wouldn't. I just said it is our assessment that a cease-fire is not viable for the U.S. right now.

Mr. Kissinger: Why not?

Adm. Flanagan: If there were a cease-fire in place now, we feel that the North Vietnamese would take advantage of the situation.

Mr. Johnson: Let's assume the ARVN holds on. If so, should we accept a cease-fire?

Adm. Moorer: If the ARVN holds, the other side wouldn't propose a cease-fire.

Mr. Kissinger: How long will it be before the North Vietnamese break a cease-fire? If we can buy six months of time, it might be worthwhile.

Adm. Moorer: The other side will violate the cease-fire less than six hours after it goes in effect.

Mr. Nutter: They never adhered to the 1954 accords.

Adm. Flanagan: That's right. They were guilty of flagrant violations.

Mr. Johnson: But we're talking about a different type of cease-fire.

Mr. Rush: The North Vietnamese will certainly violate the cease-fire.

Mr. Kissinger: You know, we could get legislated into a cease-fire. If the other side makes a public proposition for a cease-fire, and we reject it, we could get into deep trouble.

Mr. Rush: We could say we accept the proposition, but with certain conditions.

Mr. Kissinger: What conditions?

Mr. Rush: That the North Vietnamese withdraw.

Mr. Sullivan: The President has already proposed a cease-fire in place. Our position is on the record.

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[3] See footnote 2, Document 97.

Mr. Negroponte: The gut of the issue is what is the definition of withdrawal. The other side says it includes all our air and naval support. We say it doesn't.

Mr. Sullivan: You're right, but that's a bit down the road. First, we have to consider if they will propose a cease-fire.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree with the CIA paper. I don't think they will propose one until they capture a few major cities. Do you agree?

All agreed.

Mr. Kissinger: The question is should we propose a cease-fire now, knowing they won't accept it?

Mr. Sullivan: That depends in part on the interpretation the Hill would put on it.

Mr. Rush: If we were to make a cease-fire proposal, I think it would be seen as a sign of weakness on our part.

Adm. Moorer: And it would definitely hurt Thieu.

Mr. Rush: The papers are already saying there are two wars going on: the one the President sees, and the one the press reports on—which we are losing. If we propose a cease-fire now, everyone will assume we are losing the war.

Mr. Kissinger: That depends. If we lose Quang Tri, An Loc, Hue and other cities, it's one thing. If we hold on to those cities, it's another thing.

Mr. Helms: In two more months, we might be in a weaker position than we are now. So far, the enemy has not taken any provincial capitals. He's just captured FSBs.

Mr. Rush: And most of the territory he has is sparsely populated.

Mr. Johnson: So you think we would be better off proposing a cease-fire now because we may be in a worse position later?

Mr. Kissinger: If we could get a cease-fire for the rest of this year, even if it is violated, it would ruin the strategy the other side is using on our body politic. However, I don't think they would accept a cease-fire because it would mean they have to accept the GVN as a reality. In addition, they haven't gained enough to make a cease-fire worthwhile. But I'm worried about what would happen if they make an offer.

Mr. Carver: They can play the POW card any time they wish.

Mr. Kissinger: We can delay the cease-fire proposition in technical discussions if we are confident the situation won't get any worse while we are talking. If George's analysis is correct, our biggest worry is the political pressure right here. What George says is good: we should try to exhaust the North Vietnamese and reduce their options for next year. In 1971, they couldn't have withstood what we're doing to them now. If we had done this last year, they would be dead now.

It is in our interest to get the superheated political atmosphere cooled down. If not, we could lose too much. The State paper says many U.S. leaders are already committed to accepting the proposal Hanoi may make.

Mr. Sullivan: Congressman Leggett[4] went to Paris to make a proposal concerning the return of POWs. He got kicked in the teeth for his troubles. The other side said it wasn't interested in any arrangements which would leave Thieu in power. In a way, we can be saved by this dogmatic insistence on having us dispose of Thieu. If they change their position, though, we will be in trouble.

Mr. Nutter: Leggett was turned down before the North Vietnamese offensive began. Why wouldn't they offer to send back the POWs in return for a cease-fire?

Mr. Sullivan: The North Vietnamese maintain that all U.S. and Korean forces would have to withdraw during a cease-fire. It's all tied up in one package.

Mr. Kissinger: This might crack the ARVN.

Mr. Carver: If the other side made a proposal which the U.S. seemed to be nibbling at, this would have an uncertain effect in Saigon.

Mr. Sullivan: Judging by Leggett's experience, if we put forward a proposal, the other side will turn it down.

Mr. Rush: Hanoi won't make any decisions for another month. If we make an offer now, as I said before, it will be a sign of weakness on our part.

Mr. Sullivan: Anyway, we could never get Thieu to agree to a cease-fire proposal now—except if the other side made it. If that were the case, Thieu would take it as a signal of defeat for Hanoi.

Mr. Rush: So would we.

[Omitted here is discussion of leaks to the press, the administration's press line, the use of tear gas in Vietnam, WSAG papers on a possible cease-fire, relations with Congress over Vietnam, and the defense budget and the war.]

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[4] Robert L. Legget (D–CA).

102. Editorial Note

As the North Vietnamese Army continued its offensive against the South Vietnamese in MR–1, other elements of the Army opened fronts in the Central Highlands, in the coastal provinces of MR–2, and in MR–3 north of Saigon. At the same time, both sides engaged in discussions about the negotiations, a process that Henry Kissinger called in a message to Alexander Haig the "minuet with the other side." (Backchannel message 2045 to Saigon, April 15; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1014, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Haig Trip Papers, April 14–19, 1972)

On April 4, 1972, the North Vietnamese side handed a note to the United States side in Paris demanding that the plenary meetings be restarted and that one be held on April 6. The Acting Chief of the U.S. Delegation in Paris, Heyward Isham, suggested that the reply simply reaffirm the position taken by Ambassador Porter, Chief of the Delegation, on March 23 when Porter suspended the talks (see Document 45), saying that the United States would not return to the bargaining table until North Vietnam indicated it would meaningfully discuss both sides' proposals. In Washington, John Holdridge of the National Security Council staff recommended that Isham be authorized to add that the United States would not meet with North Vietnam as long as Hanoi continued its offensive. Haig, standing in for Kissinger, placed a check mark by this recommendation and wrote "must w/draw" at the bottom of the page. (Memorandum from Holdridge to Kissinger, April 4; ibid., Box 191, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, January–June 1972)

Parallel to the intensifying military action in North and South Vietnam, the "minuet" over when to meet in Paris continued. On April 6, at Haig's instruction, the Air Attaché at the Embassy in Paris, Colonel Georges R. Guay, USAF, delivered a message to the North Vietnamese, which reads in part: "Because of this grave escalation of military activity, and the flagrant violation of the Geneva Accords and the understandings of 1968, Ambassador Porter will not now propose a plenary session for April 13, 1972. A decision about the plenary session for April 20 will depend on the circumstances existing at that time." (Backchannel message to Paris, April 4, delivered April 6; ibid., Box 854, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XIII)

Because the situation had not changed in any material way by April 10, Haig sent Guay a message to deliver to the North Vietnamese the following day, the heart of which was that the United States saw no reason to meet on April 27. Nonetheless, the note did indicate that the United States was still prepared to meet privately with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy on April 24. (Ibid., Box 869, For the President's Files

(Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972) The Communist response, given to Guay on April 15, was to reject the American contentions—any failure in the negotiations was the fault of the United States. Nonetheless, if the United States agreed to meet in a plenary session on April 27, the North Vietnamese would arrange for Le Duc Tho to meet Kissinger in private on May 6, amended on April 19 to a few days prior that. (Both ibid., Box 867, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David HAK II, May 2, 1972–October 7, 1972 [5 of 5]) The United States response, sent to Guay on the April 21 and delivered to the North Vietnamese on the April 23 was to agree to attend the April 27 plenary session and to propose May 2 for the private meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. (Ibid.) The following day, April 24, the other side agreed. (Ibid., Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [5 of 5]) The private meetings, in abeyance since mid-1971, would now begin again.

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103. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, April 30, 1972.

I have some later views on the strike on Haiphong–Hanoi which you should have in mind prior to your meeting Tuesday.[2]

Looking at our long-range goal of giving the South Vietnamese a reasonable chance to meet attacks that may be launched next year or the year afterwards, as well as the subsidiary reasons of the possible effect in getting faster action on negotiation, as well as the effect on the American public opinion, I believe it is essential that a major strike for three days, rather than two, involving a minimum of 100 B–52s, as well as much Tac Air as can be spared, should be planned starting Friday of this week.[3]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1971—. No classification marking. Printed from a copy that was not initialed by Nixon.

[2] With Le Duc Tho in Paris on May 2.

[3] May 5.

The only factor that would change my decision on this is a definite conclusion after your meeting Tuesday that the North Vietnamese are ready to make a settlement now, prior to the Soviet Summit.

By settlement, I do not mean, of course, accepting all our eight points,[4] but a very minimum, something like a cease fire, a withdrawal of all their forces to the pre-Easter lines and the return of all POWs.

We have to recognize the hard fact—unless we hit the Hanoi–Haiphong complex this weekend, we probably are not going to be able to hit it at all before the election. After this weekend, we will be too close to the Russian Summit. During the Summit and for a couple of weeks afterwards, our hands will be tied for the very same good reasons that they were tied during and after the Chinese Summit. Then we will be in the middle of June with the Democratic Convention only three to four weeks away and it would be a mistake to have the strike at that time. Another factor is that the more time that passes there is a possibility that the Congress will act to tie our hands. Finally, support for taking a hard line, while relatively strong now, will erode day by day, particularly as the news from the battle area is so viciously distorted by the press so that people get a sense of hopelessness, and then would assume that we were only striking out in desperation.

On Tuesday, the tactics of your host will be to try desperately to give us some hope that we are going to get a settlement in order to keep us from making a strike on the Hanoi–Haiphong complex. They will offer to discuss the eight points, they will offer to discuss the cease fire, they will offer to discuss POWs. All of this you must flatly reject. They may say that they have to report to the politburo. This you should also reject on the ground that they have had our eight points for seven months and our latest offer for three weeks. It is time for them to fish or cut bait on Tuesday with some very substantial action looking toward an immediate settlement.

Incidentally, as I have already told you, you ought to withdraw our proposal of release of only those POWs who have been held for four years or more on the ground that their stepped-up attacks now make it necessary for us to demand the total release of all POWs as a minimum condition. I am not suggesting that they will agree to this but that is the position you must go into the talks with.

Under no circumstances in talking with them is the term "reduction of the level of violence" to be used. I saw it in one of the papers which someone on your staff prepared prior to your trip to Moscow. This is the kind of gobbleygook that Johnson used at Manila and also

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[4] See Document 8.

that was talked about at the time of the 1968 bombing halt. It means absolutely nothing at all and is too imprecise to give us a yard stick for enforcement.

What you must have in mind, is that if they get a delay as a result of their talk with you, we shall lose the best chance we will ever have to give them a very damaging blow where it hurts, not just now, but particularly for the future.

Forget the domestic reaction. Now is the best time to hit them. Every day we delay reduces support for such strong action.

Our desire to have the Soviet Summit, of course, enters into this, but you have prepared the way very well on that score, and, in any event we cannot let the Soviet Summit be the primary consideration in making this decision. As I told you on the phone this morning, I intend to cancel the Summit unless the situation militarily and diplomatically substantially improves by May 15 at the latest or unless we get a firm commitment from the Russians to announce a joint agreement at the Summit to use our influence to end the war.[5]

In effect we have crossed the Rubicon and now we must win—not just a temporary respite from this battle, but if possible, tip the balance in favor of the South Vietnamese for battles to come when we no longer will be able to help them with major air strikes.

We know from experience, based on their record in 1968 that they will break every understanding. We know from their twelve secret talks with you that they talk in order to gain time. Another factor is that as we get closer to the Democratic Convention, the Democratic candidates and the supporters of Hanoi in the Congress, will increasingly give them an incentive to press on and not make a deal with us with the hope that they can make a deal with the Democrats after the election.

I will be talking with you about the statement you will make when you see them, but my present intuition is that you should be brutally frank from the beginning—particularly in tone. Naturally you should have a few conciliatory words in for the record because the record of this meeting will without question be put out at some time in the future and possibly in the very near future. In a nutshell you should tell them that they have violated all understandings, they stepped up the war, they have refused to negotiate seriously. As a result, the President has had enough and now you have only one message to give them—Settle or else!

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[5] See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 176.

104. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

May 1, 1972, 8:40 a.m.

P: Hi Al.

H: Yes Sir.

P: How are you?

H: Fine sir.

P: Fine. I'm calling to get the morning report. Have to leave in half an hour.

H: Situation in I Corps, M.R. 1, is still very hairy and tenuous. Last report is that Quang Tri City is in a critical state. Abrams has pulled out U.S. advisors from Quang Tri, some 122 of them. It doesn't look good there.

P: Pulled them out by helicopter?

H: Yes, that's the way I understand it. The enemy has put tanks into the city and there's not much really viable resistance there. Attacks on Hue are building up but haven't made much headway yet.

P: We got a good division there?

H: Yes, it remains to be seen. They will have to cut it there.

P: Is Abrams getting enough air in there?

H: There were over 300 sorties in there alone, 342 together with 35 (?) B–52s. One of the problems is these guys aren't targeting properly. They have this problem when they get under this kind of pressure.

P: On the ground they aren't getting the targeting we need? You say Quang Tri looks like it's going to go?

H: Yes, if it hasn't gone already.

P: Be gone by today?

H: Yes.

P: I trust everybody has handled it in such a way that . . . giving a briefing to show its lack of significance.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons 1972 [2 of 2]. No classification marking. The President was in Floresville, Texas, visiting Connally; Haig was in Washington. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) All blank underscores are omissions in the original.

H: That's what we anticipate, although it isn't good to pooh-pooh it too much. Say that it's not critical but it's serious.

P: But that the situation is not unanticipated.

H: That's right, it's not unanticipated, and it's still an activity that bears on two percent of the population and only two provinces out of 44 are in trouble.

P: That's a good way to put it.

H: The situation in III Corps continues to improve. All but destroyed first regiment of enemy in Tay Ninh—about _____ percent wiped out according to the prisoners. An Loc is quiet—they are sending in forces to link up there. No heavy enemy activity. It looks better there.

P: Good.

H: In II Corps the enemy has not attacked at the Kon Tum perimeter. But it will be tough when it drops.

P: The slow-down that Henry predicted—has it occurred?

H: Not in I Corps at all.

P: That's what I gathered.

H: We don't know whether the 325th[2] is in there or not.

P: But we are still using maximum air power we can and are attempting to do more adequate briefings?

H: That's right. There will be a briefing today—tomorrow Saigon time—from MACV.

P: What do you hear about the morale generally?

H: We have a report coming in for you today from General Abrams. There are lots of reports that Third ARVN has not held up, but the marines have fought well. There will be a lot of bad stories out of Quang Tri. That's the kind of thing that happens when the situation deteriorates. The next fight will be in Hue. This will be important in my view.

P: When will that come?

P: I think our air is so inadequate that my recommendation—that Henry rejected—should be reconsidered, that we need air if the battle(?) should be taken. Could they lay on a strike on the Hanoi–Haiphong area if we ordered it?

H: They could do it with 48 hours, yes. They would need 48 hours though their planning is all done.

P: But our air has been effective there. We may as well sock it to them in places where it will hurt in the long run since we can't do a lot in the short run.

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[2] North Vietnamese division.

H: I think air has had to have had an effect.

P: I agree. But I don't see that two days in Hanoi–Haiphong . . . I think it could have an enormous psychological lift. Anyway, when Henry gets out of the meeting, tell him I think it should go off sooner, when he is in Paris. This is something I don't think he understands. He is going to go in there in a weak bargaining position.

H: That's right. I think they have peaked off . . .

P: What was that?

H: I think they have peaked off for this meeting.

P: That's right. We couldn't get anything off in 24 hours?

H: It would be difficult; it wouldn't be the kind of thing you would want.

P: What's really required is to hit that area. I get to the airport at 10:15 your time. The problem is that he is so desperate . . . anxious about the talks. He doesn't want to hurt them. He doesn't realize that what hurts us most is to appear like little puppy dogs when they are launching these attacks. What really gets to them is to hit in the Hanoi–Haiphong area. That gets at the heartland. I think we made a mistake not doing it sooner and more. We may have to update that strike. There's a good reason to do it for American public opinion. I feel there is much to be said for hitting them now. You are to ride herd to see that we get all the positive things out of this we can.

H: They're doing quite well in III Corps.

P: And the situation in II Corps hasn't yet developed?

H: No, and I don't think it will be good in the critical stages.

P: ARVN doesn't have a lot in there?

H: No, and they're not very good.

P: How can the enemy have it every place?

H: It has it focused in three places—that's the problem.

P: And you tell Henry I think we have got to step these up and to hell with the negotiations, and he may have to reconsider going there at all.

105. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, May 1, 1972.

SUBJECT

General Abrams' Assessment of the Situation in Vietnam

Attached at Tab A is General Abrams' personal assessment of the situation in South Vietnam which apparently was made before the fall of Quang Tri City today.[2] He makes the following points of particular significance:

—The present enemy power tactics will continue for several weeks.

—The South Vietnamese capability to turn back the offensive is a function of two intangibles: (1) resolve and will to fight, and (2) damage that has been done to the enemy.

—Command and control problems in Quang Tri were very serious and the poor display of will to fight by the 22nd ARVN Division in MR 2 was discouraging.

—As the battle has become brutal, the senior leadership has begun to bend and in some cases to break. With the exception of the 1st Division and IV Corps Commanders, the leadership cannot be depended upon to take the measures necessary to stand and fight.[3]

—If the South Vietnamese leaders can spark the necessary will to fight, the offensive can be defeated.

—The battle for Hue is about to begin and the battle for Kontum is imminent. In light of the leadership problem there is no confidence that Hue or Kontum will be held.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 130, Vietnam Subject Files, HAK/Pres Memos (NVA) Situation in Vietnam (May 72). Top Secret; Sensitive. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates that the President saw it. Haig initialed for Kissinger.

[2] Not attached. Abrams's cable containing his assessment is ibid., White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 75, May 8, 1972 Vietnam Speech [1 of 2].

[3] Near the end of his report, Abrams wrote: "In summary of all that has happened here since 30 March 1972, I must report that as the pressure has mounted and the battle has become brutal the senior military leadership has begun to bend and in some cases to break. In adversity it is losing its will and cannot be depended on to take the measures necessary to stand and fight." Kissinger took this memorandum in to the President and began to read it aloud to him. According to Haldeman: "Henry hedged around before getting to that part of the Abrams report, but the P kept telling him to get to the point of the summary. Henry finally did. Then the P took the report, read it himself, and we spent quite a little time just talking over the various questions of how the Vietnamese have fallen apart." (*Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*, May 1)

—It is imperative that MR 1 be reinforced as quickly as possible. If An Loc and Route 13 are cleared in MR 3 two airborne brigades will be available.

—In-country use of air assets should have first priority over requirements outside the battle zone.

General Abrams indicates that he will give his assessment to President Thieu in a meeting at 8:00 p.m. Washington time tonight. He feels that in light of present circumstances, he should not have a backgrounder with the press.

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106. Memorandum From Winston Lord of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 1, 1972.

SUBJECT

Haiphong & Hanoi

We may well face a watershed decision on May 3 whether or not to resume bombing of the Haiphong and Hanoi areas. Put more directly, it is essentially a decision whether to play summit chips in the Vietnam game. Obviously, you have thought through the implications ad nauseam, and I am fully aware of the tremendous pressures on you coming from various quarters. I believe I understand the strategic rationale for bombing in these areas and I acknowledge some valid arguments. But nevertheless the risks seem to me heavy and the possible benefits unlikely.

The decision revolves crucially around Moscow's reaction. The other factors are as follows:

—*Presidential credibility* with various audiences argues in favor of the bombing. He has said he would do whatever is required, and our position is in effect that all options are open, save nuclear weapons and the use of U.S. ground forces. Failure to hit the H–H areas could look

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Staff, Director's Files, 1966–1977: Lot 77 D 112, Box 334, Winston Lord—Chron September 1970. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. A handwritten notation reads: "Seen by HAK, 5/2/72."

like a deal with Moscow, a failure of Presidential determination, a nervousness about domestic political considerations, etc. *However,* the overall question of credibility is pegged to whether he will permit South Vietnam to "lose." If that happens, the fact that he bombed Hanoi–Haiphong won't help him very much, if at all. And my view is that if the South Vietnamese are destined to "lose," bombing the H–H areas is not going to make a difference.[2]

—The *military arguments* cut both ways. Raids could have some impact on operations a few months hence, but they take away assets from more urgent and lucrative targets in the battle zone. The longer the raids in the H–H areas, the greater the longer run impact, but past experience should convince us that it will not be decisive, and meanwhile this means longer run diversion from the pressing requirements further south.

—The *psychological impact* on our South Vietnamese friends would certainly be a plus. *However,* it cannot by itself make the difference in morale—the ground battles and the urban situations will do that.

—The *psychological impact* on the *North Vietnamese* is difficult to judge. There is some evidence that the one-day raids shook up the North Vietnamese. *However,* the past record certainly suggests that the net effect will be merely to rally the population, not discourage it.

—*Chinese reaction* does not seem a decisive factor. They have been restrained to date, are probably somewhat impressed by strong actions, and in any event, know that it is Moscow, not Peking, that is involved at this juncture. *However,* a certain risk persists. And certainly a souring of US–USSR relations cannot but hurt us in Peking.

—There is no question that there will be significant *civilian casualties,* an unalloyed argument against the bombing.

—The U.S. *domestic scene* has to be an argument against the bombing. The right might be given a temporary lift, and the left will be critical no matter what the President does. But the decisive weight of American opinion would shift against the President if the bombing did not bring rapid results on the ground or diplomatically. The negative shift would be even more pronounced if the bombing is seen to be the cause of sinking the Moscow summit and an historic SALT agreement. And since one can agree that bombing the H–H area won't directly affect the ground situation, we come back to the crucial diplomatic factor of Moscow's reaction.

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[2] Kissinger highlighted the last three sentences in this paragraph.

The Moscow Role

Arguments for the bombing because of the impact in Moscow rest on two assumptions:

—That Moscow, getting the dangerous message, *will* choose to pressure Hanoi rather than scuttle the Summit, SALT, etc.

—That having chosen to pressure Hanoi, it *can* do so effectively and quickly.

Neither assumption looks very plausible to me. We know, from the Moscow trip, that the Soviets (or at least Brezhnev) are panting for the summit. But we have no assurance whatsoever that this takes such precedence that Moscow will really lean on its difficult ally. They may find Hanoi's timing awkward and hope to muddle through the summit period with the offensive and our reaction manageable as background music. However, if we press them to choose between the summit and their ally, we can have little confidence how Brezhnev will come out, and even less confidence how the Politburo as a whole will allow him to come out.

Furthermore, even assuming that Moscow does want to be helpful in order to salvage US–USSR relations, what precisely is it to do over the next crucial several weeks? How does it go about blowing the whistle on Hanoi? The North Vietnamese have the equipment they need to carry on the current offensive and they have momentum going. Can the Russians really make them desist, particularly with the Chinese looking over their shoulders? I just don't see Hanoi—when it may think it has victory in its grasp—doing what big brother wants it to do.

Thus there are these two doubtful propositions that Moscow will choose, and that Moscow will be able, to pressure Hanoi. The more likely choice is for them to sacrifice the summit if that is the only alternative. We will then have the worst of both worlds—no help on Vietnam and all the setbacks of fractured U.S.-Soviet relations, including:

—The loss of an historic SALT[3] agreement whose long range significance is momentous indeed. Instead of the most important arms control agreement ever, we will face a heightened arms race, in which the Soviets will have a decided edge, given our domestic mood on defense spending.

—The aborting of all the other specific areas of agreement with Moscow that have been ripening. The whole concept of interlocking interests preventing future confrontations would be lost.[4]

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[3] Kissinger underlined the word "SALT."

[4] Kissinger underlined "other" and "areas" in this sentence.

—The loss of our major leverage on Peking.[5] Our China initiative could well be jeopardized. Less likely, but conceivable, would be stirrings toward some improvement in Sino-Soviet relations.

—A strongly negative U.S. domestic reaction[6] to the crumbling of the President's foreign policy achievements and vistas.

In short, I believe we are much better off refraining from bombing the H–H areas and using our military assets where they count, pocketing a SALT agreement that is in our interest irrespective of what happens in Vietnam, and muddling through the summit as best we can. It is not a particularly attractive prospect. But the alternative is almost certainly not going to be decisive in Vietnam and very likely will cost us heavily in other areas.

This begs the question of what the Soviet Union will think of us as a partner (or adversary) when we have supposedly "flinched" on the bombing question. I know this is at the heart of your concern about the decision. It is, of course, a dilemma we have created for ourselves. But again whether we flinch or not is subordinate to whether or not we let South Vietnam "lose," and again, I don't think the bombing will be decisive diplomatically (i.e. Moscow wants to and can pressure Hanoi) or militarily.[7]

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[5] Kissinger underlined the word "Peking."

[6] Kissinger underlined "domestic reaction."

[7] Lord expressed similar arguments in an April 8 memorandum about effective and harmful bombing. The former, which he fully supported, was taking place in the Southern battle zones, while the latter, aimed at Northern targets and then under consideration, he feared might wreck the chances of peace. (Memorandum from Lord to Kissinger, April 8; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 244, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Easter Offensive, 1971–72)

107. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 1, 1972, 11:03–11:36 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Rear Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (only stayed for Helms' briefing)

NSC Staff
Richard T. Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—All participants of the meeting will make a special effort to keep the discussions and papers closely held.

—Ambassador Porter and all spokesmen should take a tough line on negotiations.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, what do you have?

Mr. Helms: I can summarize my briefing fairly quickly.[2] As you know, Quang Tri City has fallen. 120 U.S. advisers were airlifted out of the city, which is the first provincial capital to fall during the current offensive.

We assume the North Vietnamese will spend a few days cleaning up the Quang Tri area before they start sending large forces down south to Hue. However, we do have some indications they are already moving some units into Thua Thien Province.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets are in the original.

[2] Helms's briefing, "The Situation in Vietnam," May 1, is in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 78, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, Mar. 1971–Apr. 1972.

Mr. Kissinger: It's statistically impossible that our planes haven't hit the North Vietnamese. How does the enemy continue to move south?

Mr. Johnson: Our ships have been pouring a lot of fire on them, too.

Adm. Moorer: I talked to Vogt about this. He said we're attacking 24 hours a day, with flares illuminating the battlefields at night. He said the Tac Air was the only thing that prevented the North Vietnamese from surging forward. Tac Air has stopped them over and over again. Nevertheless, the ARVN ground forces must stand and fight.

Mr. Kissinger: They won't stand?

Adm. Moorer: That's right. Vogt said our air attacks have been very heavy. Time and again, we've made the enemy turn back and regroup. But that's not the complete answer. The South Vietnamese must stand and fight.

Mr. Rush: (to Adm. Moorer) You said our planes were attacking at night.

Adm. Moorer: Correct. We're dropping flares, and the planes are flying around the clock to attack the North Vietnamese assaults whenever they are made. Vogt told me the North Vietnamese losses were "tremendous."

The same thing is true for the naval gunfire support, which is being used around the clock. But the ships can't fire into the middle of a tactical situation: they must have ground spotters to help direct the fire. In the last 24 hours, the ships have fired 2,900 rounds into the Quang Tri area. We won't get any BDA, though, unless the friendlies go in and assess the situation.

The North Vietnamese seem to be willing to take unlimited losses. Vogt told me we've spotted a convoy coming through the Ban Kerai pass. There are more than one hundred trucks, and some supplies are piled up more than forty feet high. Vogt also thinks part of the 325th NVA Division may be coming down Route 137, through the A Shau valley and then in to the Hue area.

Mr. Rush: Could our naval guns reach those troops?

Adm. Moorer: No. They are coming through Laos.

Mr. Sullivan: What's happened to the troops defending Quang Tri? Is the 3rd ARVN Division still intact?

Adm. Moorer: Six battalions and one Marine regiment were at Quang Tri base, which is north of the river. The city itself is south of the river. The troops at the base withdrew in good order. When they got across the river, they blew up the bridge. Then they left the city. The command and control situation of the 3rd Division is unknown right now. Since the American advisers are gone, we have a big

problem in knowing what is going on with the division. The Marines are still under effective control, but we don't know about the 3rd Division.

Mr. Kissinger: What will happen when the enemy begins to assault Hue?

Adm. Moorer: We may very well lose Hue unless the South Vietnamese can organize a good defensive line north of the city. If the troops from the Quang Tri area don't form a good defensive line north of Hue, the 1st ARVN Division will probably have to thin itself out and make a fishhook movement around the city in order to defend it from the north, as well as from the west.

Mr. Sullivan: Is Route 1 closed between Quang Tri and Hue?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Mr. Sullivan: Then the South Vietnamese can't get their units down to Hue.

Adm. Moorer: Although the road is closed, they can move south from Quang Tri and set up a defensive line north of Hue.

Mr. Kissinger: If they are under effective control.

Adm. Moorer: That's the key question, and, as I said, we don't know about the 3rd Division right now. The 1st Division has defensive positions west of Hue.

Mr. Kissinger: Would the ARVN have been better off if they had pulled out of Quang Tri two weeks ago?

Adm. Moorer: In my opinion, yes. This was discussed with Lam, who said he had orders from Thieu to hold Quang Tri and Hue at all costs.

Mr. Kissinger: Lam lost all the engagements he's been in during the last two years.

Mr. Johnson: But Thieu issued an order to hold the cities. Lam had to stay.

Mr. Kissinger: If Thieu loses a division every time he loses a provincial capital, he's going to end up losing the country.

Adm. Moorer: We've talked about this with Lam as he was setting up his defense north of Hue. He said he had to carry out Thieu's orders to hold Quang Tri at all costs.

Mr. Kissinger: Lam has carried out the order.

Mr. Helms: To change the subject, the North Vietnamese are also closing in on Kontum. The only cheerful bit of news today is that all of the Skyline Ridge is now in friendly hands.

Adm. Moorer: In MR 3, the ARVN have expanded their perimeter at An Loc, and they got more supplies into the city yesterday. The situation there seems to be somewhat better. The North Vietnamese appear to be moving east and southwest, away from An Loc.

The independent 271st NVA Regiment, which came down from Hanoi, is now south of Tay Ninh City. It suffered more than 400 casualties recently, as verified by a body count by U.S. advisers.

Mr. Kissinger: Getting back to MR 1, why do you suppose the ARVN will be able to hold north of Hue when they couldn't hold at Quang Tri? They've lost half their forces in the area. How can they hold?

Adm. Moorer: First, the North Vietnamese have also suffered heavy casualties. In the immediate future, they probably won't be able to apply the same kind of pressure to Hue that they applied to Quang Tri. Second, the 1st ARVN Division will be influencing and supporting the defense of Hue. However, all the South Vietnamese forces must stand and fight.

Mr. Kissinger: We don't know what ARVN units are left.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. After Dak To, the 22nd ARVN Division formed a defensive line north of Kontum. The forces at Hue have to do the same thing now.

Mr. Kissinger: But the 22nd Division hasn't been attacked at Kontum.

Adm. Moorer: True, but it did form a defensive line. First we have to find out what was lost at Quang Tri. Then we have to regroup and organize a good defense at Hue.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you think it's likely the 22nd Division may not distinguish itself again?

Adm. Moorer: That's possible.

Mr. Sullivan: I think the 22nd Division may be by-passed by the North Vietnamese.

Mr. Kissinger: You mean the enemy will go straight for Pleiku?

Adm. Moorer: But we're talking about the defense of Kontum.

Mr. Kissinger: Bill [Sullivan] is saying the North Vietnamese might attack Kontum from the south.

Adm. Moorer: I'm talking about the defensive line seven kilometers north of Kontum.

Mr. Sullivan: At Vo Dinh?

Adm. Moorer: No. Vo Dinh is further north than that. I think there's a chance the 22nd Division may hold.

Adm. Flanagan: You know, you can make the proposition that the 3rd Division—which was hit by two NVA divisions—has not performed that badly. Also, the 1st Division—except for some action at FSB Bastogne—hasn't been hit like the 3rd and 22nd Divisions. The 22nd is the worst the South Vietnamese have.

Mr. Kissinger: And it won't get any better as the offensive goes on.

Adm. Flanagan: No, it won't.

Mr. Johnson: Do the South Vietnamese have reserves to use at Kontum and in MR 1?

Adm. Moorer: They've got the Ranger battalions and the one Airborne Brigade, which was sent to An Loc and then pulled back to Saigon.

Adm. Flanagan: This raises the question of whether it is more important to hold territory or to maintain a semblance of integrity in all the forces. Thieu wanted to hold Kontum, Quang Tri and An Loc at all costs. Now we're faced with a judgmental question of what is more important: holding Kontum or maintaining integrity of forces.

Mr. Johnson: You are right. But aside from the wisdom of what is more important, I just asked if the South Vietnamese had any available reserves.

Mr. Nutter: They don't have much.

Adm. Moorer: They will have to transfer a unit—perhaps the 9th Division, which is currently in the Delta.

Mr. Kissinger: If they do that, it would leave the Delta completely open. Didn't Thieu recently move the Rangers out of I Corps and to the central highlands? Are the Rangers good now? They weren't so hot in Laos.

Adm. Moorer: I think the Rangers, Marines and Airborne forces have done better than the regular ARVN divisions. The problem is that the Ranger and Airborne units are lightly armed. They are mobile, but they don't have heavy artillery. As infantry fighters, they are much better than the regular divisions.

Mr. Kissinger: I wonder if someone should talk seriously to Thieu about his strategy. If Thieu piddles away a division every two weeks trying to defend a provincial capital, he's going to lose the war.

Mr. Johnson: (to Mr. Kissinger) What do we think?

Mr. Kissinger: I don't know for sure. We're just lost the 3rd Division. We lost 17,000 men at Quang Tri. When we say the troops are not under effective control and when we say they are out of communications, it will be a miracle if some of the force is saved.

Mr. Negroponte: I think most of those men will straggle back in.

Adm. Moorer: I don't think we'll lose 17,000 men.

Mr. Kissinger: Maybe not. But we'll lose a good part of that number.

Adm. Moorer: I can't give you an answer right now. The American advisers are gone and the communications are out. We'll just have to wait a little while.

Mr. Johnson: What is Abrams' view?

Adm. Moorer: We asked him for his views yesterday, but the reply hasn't come in yet. We gave him a list of questions, and I think the answers should be in today.

Mr. Kissinger: The President is waiting for the answers.

Adm. Moorer: One key factor is how long the North Vietnamese will be able to keep their steam up, considering all the losses they are suffering. They just keep feeding additional forces into the battles, and they have a large pool of replacements to draw on.

Mr. Rush: The enemy must be facing serious supply problems, particularly food problems.

Adm. Moorer: Not in MR 1. But the further south they go, the more serious their supply problems become.

Mr. Johnson: They certainly are making lavish use of rockets, artillery and heavy equipment.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. Quang Tri alone took 4,400 rounds in recent days.

Mr. Kissinger: How many tons is that?

Adm. Flanagan: Figure on 100 pounds a round.

Adm. Moorer: That's about 200 or 220 tons.

Mr. Johnson: Very good tonnage indeed.

Adm. Flanagan: I believe a DIA report I saw recently estimated the North Vietnamese are losing one to two regimental equivalents a week during the offensive.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Carver) What do you think, George?

Mr. Carver: There's no question about the heavy losses the North Vietnamese are suffering. I don't have much comfort, though, with our figures. The reports are too erratic. I don't think the North Vietnamese can sustain the pace they've had at Quang Tri for the last 72 hours. They'll probably need a lull in the action while they regroup and prepare to move south.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you think Kontum will be next?

Mr. Carver: Yes. There's a separate force down there. I think we can expect an attack on Kontum within the next 48 hours.

Adm. Moorer: If not sooner.

Mr. Carver: You sort of have the second team against the second team at Kontum, with the 320th NVA Division facing the 22nd ARVN Division.

Mr. Sullivan: We received a cable this morning, saying the Koreans are beginning to panic.

Mr. Kissinger: You mean if Kontum is lost?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. But the Koreans are also worried about the northern part of Binh Dinh Province.

Adm. Moorer: The Koreans don't have to worry about Binh Dinh Province.

Mr. Kissinger: I haven't seen the message. What does it say?

Mr. Sullivan: Basically, it says if the South Vietnamese collapse, the Koreans want out.

Mr. Rush: Why don't the Koreans fight first?

Adm. Moorer: They only lost eighteen men in the fighting at the An Khe Pass.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we stop briefing Murrey Marder?[3] He seems to know what's going on at these meetings. Somebody is feeding him information about the cease-fire papers we've done. This cease-fire work is being done for the President, but he hasn't made any decisions about it. In fact, I don't know if he will. This leaking has to stop.

Mr. Sullivan: Cease-fire talk is all over town—and in Saigon and Paris, too.

Mr. Johnson: Just because people are talking about a cease-fire, it doesn't mean that the discussions at our meetings are being leaked.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm not sure the President would accept a cease-fire.

I see we have the paper on the ARVN tank situation in MR 1. When I'm done reading these papers, I don't know what's happening any more.

Mr. Rush: In brief, we have a lot of tanks in Vietnam, more in fact, than the Vietnamese can use.

Mr. Kissinger: Heavy tanks, too?

Mr. Rush: Yes.

Adm. Moorer: We have enough tanks in Vietnam, but the ARVN have not requisitioned them. If need be, we are also prepared to fly additional tanks in from the Japan overhaul areas. The problem is getting the South Vietnamese personnel to operate the tanks.

Mr. Kissinger: What is your judgment on how long it would take for the South Vietnamese to collapse altogether?

Mr. Helms: Why package everything together? The engagements so far have been far apart. If I knew how Thieu and his entourage felt, I could give you an answer. But I don't know how they feel. I don't know why we have to create a domino effect.

Mr. Nutter: The political and economic situation in Saigon is quiet.

Mr. Kissinger: Can Hue be held?

Mr. Johnson: That's the key question, alright.

Mr. Helms: I agree.

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[3] Diplomatic correspondent for the *Washington Post.*

Adm. Moorer: The defense of Hue depends on what contribution can be made on the northern approaches of the city by the remnants of the forces from Quang Tri. It's too early to give an answer until we see what forces are left from Quang Tri.

Mr. Kissinger: Will the same North Vietnamese methods work this time? They pound the ARVN senseless with artillery and then overrun the ARVN positions.

Mr. Rush: I think the casualty rates should begin working against the North Vietnamese. They don't have unlimited manpower and equipment. Although they have been suffering heavy losses, they keep coming.

Adm. Moorer: Hue is one of their major objectives. They will make a maximum effort to take Hue.

Mr. Johnson: I agree with you.

Mr. Carver: First, there will probably be a lull for a few days. They have to move the artillery they used at Quang Tri into position for the assault on Hue. The question is can the 1st Division—which really hasn't been tested, except for the action at FSB Bastogne—together with the remnants of the forces from Quang Tri organize and hold a good defensive line?

Adm. Moorer: The specter of the wet season is also approaching. Vogt told me we've seen trucks embedded in mud in Laos.

Mr. Carver: But that won't bother the enemy at Hue.

Adm. Moorer: It should bother him overall.

Mr. Helms: The tragedy at Quang Tri was that the ARVN held once, but never moved out on the offensive. They always sat and waited for the enemy to attack.

Mr. Kissinger: I thought Lam was on the offensive. He had all those arrows on the maps.

Mr. Helms: If the South Vietnamese moved more than a yard, it was never firmly established.

Mr. Sullivan: We are assuming the North Vietnamese are trying to create the impression of continuous countrywide action—by concentrating in one area while enjoying a lull in another area. If it is their intention to carry on and perhaps call for a cease-fire when they have the winning hand, they are probably willing to take enormous losses.

Mr. Kissinger: We can't consider a cease-fire if the North Vietnamese are achieving success on the battlefield.

Mr. Johnson: But that's the only time they would propose a cease-fire.

Mr. Helms: And we can't accept under those conditions.

Mr. Kissinger: Bill [Sullivan] seems to think we should.

Mr. Sullivan: Considering just the military terms, we would be under a great disadvantage. But the paper we pulled together over the weekend considered all the factors.[4]

Mr. Johnson: On the military side, we can't answer any questions now. If the hostilities continue, though, do we think the ARVN can come back and regain at least some of what they lost? This is the judgment we have to make now. Admittedly, the ARVN haven't shown much offensive mindedness, but it's been tough on them.

Adm. Moorer: Have we had a readout from Bunker during the last 24 hours?

Mr. Johnson: No. But we should have one today.

Mr. Helms: We should also get the results of the debriefing of the U.S. advisers, who are now at Danang.

Mr. Rush: Didn't we anticipate a massive North Vietnamese assault, some victories for them, and an attempt to capitalize on these victories by calling for a cease-fire?

Mr. Johnson: We didn't anticipate the latter, although, as you say, we did anticipate a major offensive.

Mr. Rush: And negotiations after they had some success, not after they had been stopped.

Mr. Sullivan: We will have a problem in Paris on Thursday, when the other side speaks first. There was one slightly new point in Le Duc Tho's statement yesterday. He talked in terms of the dismissal of Thieu, not of the entire government.[5]

Mr. Kissinger: He also talked about the oppression of the Saigon government.

Mr. Sullivan: In the past, they insisted on a dismantling of the machinery of oppression. Now they talk about changing the policy of oppression. Everything else in the statement was what we heard before.

Mr. Johnson: We should get something out to our delegation in Paris.

Adm. Moorer: (to Mr. Sullivan) What kind of problem were your referring to before?

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[4] Sullivan and a small working group made up of State, CIA, and Defense officers had combined a CIA paper and one he had written (see, respectively, footnotes 2 and 4, Document 97) on the policy ramifications should the North Vietnamese make a cease-fire offer in the near future. The working group's draft, "Possible North Vietnamese Cease-Fire Offer," May 2, is in Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–T01719R, Box 3, Likelihood and Consequences of a Sudden Vietnamese Communist Cease Fire Offer–27 April 1972.

[5] For excerpts from Le Duc Tho's statement, see *The New York Times,* May 1, 1972, p. 10.

Mr. Johnson: What should we say? What should the tone be like?

Mr. Kissinger: It should be tough.

Mr. Helms: Have you seen the quote in *Time* that is attributed to the President?

Mr. Kissinger: It's from some guy named Whelan, a speech-writer who worked in the 1968 campaign. I never saw him around here.

Mr. Johnson: What did it say?

Mr. Helms: It's not terribly important. You can get it from *Time.*

Mr. Kissinger: I've been talking to the President. He doesn't want any waffling this week, and he doesn't want to see any stories in the press about proposals we may be considering. Porter and all the spokesmen should take a tough line. The day we proposed a plenary session, the other side started the offensive.

Mr. Johnson: Are we going to have another meeting in Paris next week?

Mr. Kissinger: I don't know. There's a good chance the President may order Porter to walk out.

Mr. Rush: I don't want to sound Pollyannaish, but we have a mixed bag here. The situation at An Loc is fairly good, and we made a fine defensive effort at Quang Tri. There has been no debacle. The North Vietnamese have not blitzkrieged the ARVN. Now is the time for us to show our confidence in the South Vietnamese.

Mr. Kissinger: The President may order Porter out next week.

Mr. Sullivan: Just for the one meeting?

Mr. Kissinger: He may tell Porter not to agree to a meeting next week. This is still open, though. In any case, we should have a very tough statement this week.

Mr. Johnson: Porter is good at that. I want to bring up one other thing: The casualty figures. Are they up again?

Adm. Moorer: There's still a lag in the figures. This week we will report 2 KIA and 17 missing.

Mr. Johnson: We have the same old problem with the casualty figures.

Mr. Kissinger: What about the ten flyers who were shot down? Are they dead or missing?

Adm. Moorer: We list them as missing.

Mr. Nutter: This is standard practice. We list them as missing until we find the bodies.

108. Paper Prepared in the Department of Defense[1]

Washington, May 1, 1972.

POINT PAPER

I. Perspective—the War up to January 1969

A. War of increasing intensity—1965 through 1968

• *DRV*—tried various approaches, including major overall military on-slaught in 1968 (bigger in size/scope/intensity than current attacks by many parameters)

—mil goods and supplies: all from USSR/PRC (80%/20%)

—DRV supplied manpower/leadership/will & desire—no way to deprive them of these

—casualties [over 400,000 KIA since 1960—like 4 million in US]

• *RVN*—started from scratch (Forces, *all* components, about 600,000 in 1965)

—built to 800,000 by end 1968

—*no* capability to handle DRV; some capability to fight VC

• *US*—increasing involvement; troops from 800 to more than 625,000

—objective never truly clear—what US interests to justify over $20B per year and over 14,000 KIA per year?

—tried ground combat; bombing ops @ 35,000 sorties per month (15,000 per month at times over NVN): NGF

—forces in RVN reached 540,000; offshore, 42,000; Thailand 45,000

—casualties [about 30,000 through Dec. 1968. Now nearly 46,000]

• *3d Nations*—Some help, under US pressure, from Australia, N.Z., Philippines, Thais, and ROKs. But mostly, those nations did not see *their* interests threatened enough to participate

B. US Costs

—Continuing escalation, in dollars and lives; and especially US divisiveness

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, 385, Viet (May 1–15, 1972). No classification marking. Secretary Laird probably saw this point paper since documents on Vietnam generally and routinely crossed his desk. Moreover, the three handwritten sentences referred to in footnotes 2, 3, and 4 are in the hand of Laird's military assistant, Major General Pursley. A key adviser to Laird on the war in Southeast Asia, Pursley drafted many of the Secretary's important memoranda and correspondence on Vietnam. Therefore, it is likely that he drafted the paper (or supervised its drafting) and that Laird saw it. All brackets are in the original.

—Two Presidents tied all US policy (foreign and domestic) to SEA

—Social disruption

—Increasingly shrill Vietnam debate (affected *all* aspects of US life)

—Economy put badly out of kilter, as Admin had trouble facing reality of massive SEA costs while maintaining other obligations

—National security: Modernization forestalled and USSR allowed to pull abreast

C. US Policy

Essentially hamstrung. No military victory; mining, etc., considered, but rejected; some negotiating progress; but no clear way out. Negotiations had produced (a) bomb halt on US/GVN side, on basis (b) DRV understood they would

—not violate DMZ
—not shell cities
—negotiate with GVN, and
—(implicitly) not fire on our unarmed recce over NVN

II. Perspective—the War January 1969–Dec 1971

A. War not of 1968 intensity—but still major conflict

• *DRV*—suffered 350,000 more KIA [like 3.5 million in US]

—kept pressure in RVN, Laos, Cambodia, but not enough to prevent progress by RVNAF and GVN

—continued to supply manpower/leadership/will & desire

—Soviets continued to be main military supplier, though both USSR and PRC aid down

• *RVN*—forces built up from 800,000 to 1.1 million

—mission changed. Charged with handling VC *plus* DRV

—make major gains in military, economic, social, and political field

—equipment, training, force guidance and advice all given RVN

—US could not supply will and desire

• *US*—new course set—dual tracks of Vietnamization and Negotiation

—severest prospect of all for Hanoi would be a viable RVN, able to face and stave off DRV

—changed MACV's mission—a risk, but soluble risk

—US supplied RVNAF *everything* but will and desire

—*Gains* for US and President Nixon from Vietnamization/Negotiating approach

1. Lessened divisiveness in US—social calm

2. Opp. to approach other foreign and domestic problems—SALT; Middle East; Biol/Chem Warfare; MBFR; Berlin; trade; adjustment of US economy (DOD budgets cut massively); allowing new uses of resources; modernization within DOD, allow catch-up with USSR; prospects to go zero draft; concentrate on such major initiatives as PRC/USSR trips; handle other crises like Mid East and S. Asia; make generation of peace credible.

B. Lower US costs in lives and dollars

—US objectives and interests shifted; but hard to tell what they were to justify even $8.0B per year

—DRV continued essentially to abide by Understandings. Made above approach credible.

—Key was still RVNAF and GVN and RVN people will and desire. No way to substitute.

• *3d Nations*—they dropped out, for all intents and purposes

III. Situation—late 1971 to early 1972

A. DRV

• Increased build-up (increased infiltration flow in people and supplies)—undoubtedly had been accumulating stocks for many months on premise of a 1972 major campaign

• *Alarms.* Big push in North Laos

Artillery and armor above DMZ

Roads in DMZ

Troops massed near MR–I and MR–II

Start firing more on US recce aircraft

B. RVNAF

• Go on alert. Put 3d Div near DMZ, on premise of diplomatic security through Understandings of DMZ.

• RVNAF still an "expansion team going against the league champs." RVNAF well supplied. *Key still will and desire on ground.*

C. US

• Redeployments continue. Forces more than 85 percent out

• *Bombing increases.* Air (B–52s especially) keep DRV timetable off, in all probability. Monthly air tonnage doubles—from 40,000 per month to 80,000

• US Force augmentations start in Jan/Feb with more B–52s, more F–4s, more ships, more authorities

D. 3d Nations

• Not much help—an RVNAF/US show against DRV

IV. Situation Now

A. Issues

1. What *are* the US objectives and interests now? Are there any which justify *increased* US involvement? Increased US costs in dollars, lives, and lost opportunities?

2. Should still a third Administration tie everything (foreign and domestic) to SEA?

3. Is there a policy—or are there policies—which can

- Maintain support of US people?
- Be within tolerable economic limits?
- Not destroy fabric of RVN and rest of SEA?
- Not disable us from being able to honor other obligations around the world?
- Not result in alienation of friends and allies?
- Not precipitate a wider, more costly, and longer conflict?
- Put burden where it must—on RVN will and desire?

B. Options

1. Military victory—*no* way, without US on ground in SEA, and probably in DRV (*no* way) to do this—history attests to that)

2. Help RVNAF in air and sea power—more supplies and advice—moral support; keep negotiations track open with DRV; try to get USSR and PRC to diminish military aid levels.

Note: No way to affect current military campaign in south through strategic bombing/shelling.[2]

3. Put pressure on Hanoi through unusual initiatives, like mining, bombing Hanoi/Haiphong, take out dams/dikes/locks—pressure on DRV government and people as the target and objective.

- Nothing in history to indicate any likelihood of success.[3]
- Might have some popularity in US temporarily—probably go rapidly to disdain and rejection since impact is not much on war, but rather on civil populace—a starve them out policy.
- Key in war is still RVNAF on the ground, and RVN will and desire.[4]
- Key in negotiations is USSR/PRC on mil aid levels from here on.
- Risks all the pluses accumulated so far.
- Hanoi drags a 3d Administration into total involvement in SEA.

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[2] Pursley added the following handwritten sentence: "Impact is to *increase* military risk in the South because US assets are diverted."

[3] Pursley added the following handwritten sentences: "Targets are civilians. Hanoi has sufficient assets and time to adjust. US takes assets from battle area."

[4] Pursley added the following handwritten sentence: "Can be bolstered most by helping them where they need it—in RVN now."

Summary

We have a military course that is viable—or as viable as it can get—RVNAF and GVN the key

• We have a negotiation framework—USSR and PRC the keys

• We have a minimum—acceptable level of support in US—tenuous, however, at best; can be upset easily.

• Actions like mining do *not* address essentials of the situation or problem. Incremental military, political, economic risks far outweigh incremental military gains (minimal at best), political gains (hard to see at all), or economic gains (none).

• Other augmentation actions are sufficient.

• No discernible US interests or objectives that justify going further.

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109. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Paris, May 2, 1972, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Le Duc Tho, Special Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation at the Paris Peace Talks
Xuan Thuy, Minister and Head of North Vietnamese Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks
Phan Hien, Member of North Vietnamese Delegation to Paris Peace Talks
Nguyen Dinh Thuong, Interpreter
Two Notetakers

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Helmut Sonnenfeldt, NSC Staff Member
Winston Lord, NSC Staff Member
John Negroponte, NSC Staff Member

Kissinger: It is a pleasure to see the Special Adviser and Minister today, although these are not the circumstances I would have chosen.

Xuan Thuy: Shall we begin our work today?

Kissinger: Certainly.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [5 of 5]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at 11 Rue Darthe, the North Vietnamese residence in Paris.

Xuan Thuy: It is of great regret that the United States Government interrupted the private meetings here. Since the United States has now resumed the meetings we are ready to hear new ideas from the Special Adviser, but before doing that I would like to raise two questions to determine the problem.

Kissinger: Did he say we interrupted the meetings? We shouldn't start on this basis. We must get serious.

Xuan Thuy: The first problem is that you said that these private meetings should be kept secret but on January 25 President Nixon unilaterally made these meetings public.[2] The first time President Nixon divulged the private meetings was at the time of Ambassador Cabot Lodge and the second time he made these meetings public was on January 25. I wonder whether these meetings should be secret or not. If the U.S. wants to keep the meetings secret, we are prepared to do so. If the U.S. wants the substance made public we are also prepared to do that.

The second point is that the plenary sessions are the basis for private meetings. However, the U.S. side invoked groundless pretexts to suspend the sessions at Avenue Kleber, thereby creating obstacles to private meetings. Therefore if the Vietnam problem is to be settled by negotiations the U.S. side should attend the Kleber street sessions as usual.

Before we begin our work today I would like to hear the Special Adviser's views on these two questions.

Kissinger: Regarding the first question, there is no point in reciting the circumstances which led us to publish the record of private meetings, including the fact that we were being asked to answer the seven points publicly when we had already answered your nine points in private, when we were challenged to give you answers which you knew very well we had already given. But I won't go into that now. We will waste too much time talking about history. Let us speak about the future.

I agree that the substance of these talks should in any event be kept secret and will not be revealed by us. I was going to ask the Special Adviser and Minister whether we should consider making a brief announcement of the fact of our meeting and say no more about it. Because the Special Adviser is so well known and given to so many enigmatic statements that people are likely to draw the conclusion anyway. We could agree on one sentence such as Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy met with Dr. Kissinger yesterday in Paris. But I would like to hear your views on this. We would not discuss the

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[2] See Document 5.

substance. What do you think, Mr. Minister? Or should we wait until the end of the meeting to decide?

Xuan Thuy: Yes we better wait until the end of the meeting.

Kissinger: But in any event we will agree that whatever is done it will be done by mutual agreement.

Regarding the Minister's second question, whether plenaries and private sessions should be concurrent, we have always agreed that plenaries and private talks should take place side-by-side, with the plenaries working on the technical implementation of what is agreed at private sessions.

On the other hand, it is our view that progress now must be made. We have heard the eloquent general statements of the Minister and his lady colleague now for three and one-half years, but the time has now come to make progress. If there is progress then there is no problem about continuing either the private or public forums. So our present intention is to continue the plenary sessions in this framework.

Xuan Thuy: It is the common intention of both sides to reach a rapid settlement. We also want a negotiated settlement. If the war drags on it is not our fault. Now we don't want to return to this question but we should determine one point, that plenary sessions at Kleber Street should be held as usual to lay the basis for what we are doing here in private meetings.

Kissinger: This depends on what happens in these private meetings. As much as I enjoy the company of the Minister and his Special Adviser, I would prefer to reserve our general discussions for after the war.

Le Duc Tho: If the war is ended then there will be no need for discussions.

Kissinger: If the war is over then the Special Adviser will visit me in Harvard.

Le Duc Tho: In that case we will be discussing different subjects.

Kissinger: I see my colleagues have some new documents in front of them.

Xuan Thuy: These are old documents. We are looking forward to listening to your new documents. These documents are records of past statements you have made to us, and a white paper.

Kissinger: It is impossible to have a record of what I have said to you in such a little folder. I talk at such great length.

Xuan Thuy: They contain the gist of your statement only. Now please, it is your turn to speak first.

Kissinger: Mr. Minister and Mr. Special Adviser, I don't have any new proposal, all the more so since you have never replied to our October 11 and January 25 proposals.

I have, however, a very brief comment to make to express our general attitude. As I have told you before, the President would not send me across the ocean now for the thirteenth time unless he were seeking a rapid and just solution to the war. We remain prepared to reach a settlement that is fair to both sides and to abide by whatever outcome results from that settlement. As I have told you often, we realize that you will be in the area after we withdraw and that a settlement must meet your concerns if it is to be permanent.

Thus, I am still ready to discuss an honorable settlement that preserves your independence and your dignity. But you must have no misunderstanding. We will not hold such discussions at the point of a gun. There is no sense talking about future agreements while your invading armies are tearing up old ones. And it is difficult to trust your intentions when one considers the cynical game you have been playing in recent months with your careful orchestration of military offensives and the scheduling of our private meetings.

Because I am here to lay the basis for a rapid settlement, I do not want to waste our time in reciting all the evasions of recent months. But I have a document here which states our point of view as to what has happened, which you can read at your leisure. (Mr. Kissinger hands document to Xuan Thuy, attached at Tab A.)[3]

Now obviously you know the facts of this paper very well. My only purpose in giving you this document is to make unmistakably clear to you that these particular maneuvers must end. We will no longer play this game and we will not yield to pressure.

In recent months you have refused even to discuss our 8 point proposal. Your response has been a massive invasion, geared to your repeated cancellation of private meetings. You have deployed almost your entire army outside your borders.

It is a complete violation of agreements to which you have been party, notably the Geneva Accords of 1954 and the 1968 Understandings. I will not spend time on summarizing these understandings since the Special Adviser and the Minister were present when they were negotiated. These understandings involve the status of the DMZ, the question of not shelling or rocketing major South Vietnamese cities, and the question of prompt and productive negotiations.[4] All of these have been violated.

We will do what is necessary to remedy that situation and we will not depart from that course. I have often warned the Special Adviser

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[3] Attached but not printed is a brief memorandum reviewing the negotiations since September 15, 1971.

[4] See footnote 5, Document 2.

and the Minister not to attempt to play domestic politics in the United States and I will do so again today. We are meeting with you today in the expectation that you have something constructive to say.

There are three requirements for effective negotiations. First, your offensive must stop. Second, the 1968 Understandings must be restored. Third, there must be serious, concrete and constructive negotiations leading to a rapid conclusion of the conflict.

We are prepared to make our contribution to this last point. We are willing to work with you to bring about a hopeful opening towards a peaceful settlement. But I don't want to underrate the seriousness of the point at which we meet and your side, which has chosen to launch a major offensive while pretending to prepare for private meetings with us, now has the responsibility to put forward concrete suggestions.

That is all I have to say at this moment. Besides, I understand your allies have already told you some of the ideas we have.[5]

Thank you.

Xuan Thuy: I feel that Mr. Special Adviser today you have not brought anything new, and you have repeated the old allegations of Mr. Nixon which we have publicly rejected before. You say that we have violated the Geneva Accords but we repeatedly pointed out that it is the U.S. Administration which has violated these agreements. We have pointed out this fact many times. Moreover this fact has been revealed in the Pentagon secret papers.

You also referred to the so-called 1968 Understandings. Myself and Mr. Le Duc Tho, we held repeated private meetings with Mr. Harriman and finally we came to an agreement without any understanding. The U.S. cessation of bombardment of North Vietnam was complete and unconditional. Now you repeat these points and this is not leading us to any settlement. The documents are public and if you want them we can give them to you again.

Kissinger: Which documents?

Xuan Thuy: The documents we distributed at my April 17 and April 20 press conference.

Kissinger: When the Minister returns to Hanoi *The New York Times* will have to cut its staff considerably.

Xuan Thuy: It's up to them whether to cut its staff or not. If you want to read these, I can give them to you.

Kissinger: I think we should give this debate to our colleagues at Avenue Kleber.

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[5] In a letter sent after Kissinger's return from his April 20–24 trip to Moscow, Brezhnev informed Nixon that a DRV delegation recently visiting Moscow had discussed a political settlement in Vietnam with the Soviets. See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 181.

Xuan Thuy: But since you referred to the Geneva Accords and the 1968 Understandings, I brought up these points. You raised precisely what has been said at Kleber and now you refer to the 8 points published by President Nixon in January 1972.

On the 2nd of February the Provisional Revolutionary Government made a proposal in the form of two crucial points, two key points on which the PRG gave elaboration, more clarification on the basis of the 7 point plan, and you have not responded to these two crucial points.[6]

As to these private meetings, they have been proposed by the U.S. side, but it is the U.S. side which has postponed them many times, so this meeting was delayed until today.

Kissinger: I don't know what world you live in, but I'm under the illusion that you postponed the private meetings. In fact, a man who says he's your representative was giving us notes, so we have it in writing.

Xuan Thuy: This private meeting should have been held long ago, but you have postponed it many times until today. If the facts are to be published then we should go to the origin of this problem. But I think we should not return to this point. I would like only to point out that what you just said has not brought anything new that can help these negotiations. Moreover, the points you have raised we have replied to many times at Kleber Street and in public. I don't think it is necessary to repeat them again.

I now give the floor to Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho who may have something to tell you.

Le Duc Tho: I last met with Minister Xuan Thuy 7 or 8 months ago. I thought then that when I came here I would be able to listen to you going into the question of a solution that is intended to bring about the best solution to the conflict. Contrary to this, I feel I have not heard anything new from you today. I have heard again you say that you have come long distances for negotiations and you have said this many times. But the distances for me are longer and it takes longer for me to come.

And you assert many times that you want serious negotiations, but through your statement today I do not have such impression that you want serious negotiations.

I do not want to return to the past, but since you have recalled past questions and have asserted that we have made military pressures, we've made invasions, we have violated the Geneva Accords, and we have violated the 1968 Understandings, I feel obliged to return to the past situation in order to make it clear.

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[6] See footnote 3, Document 20.

Who has made military pressure? Who has made invasion? Who has violated the Geneva Agreements? Who has violated the Understandings? The situation, the facts must be made clear.

If now the war is still prolonged, if the war is more and more atrocious, the responsibility is on the U.S. side. Since Mr. Nixon became President almost four years have elapsed. His term is soon going to come to an end. It is public knowledge that under Mr. Nixon's Administration the war, the aggression has been expanded to Cambodia, and Xuan Thuy and I were holding private talks with you and it was the aggression against Cambodia that broke up the private talks at the time.

Kissinger: I think if Mr. Special Adviser consults his diary, he will find he left for Hanoi before the invasion of Cambodia. But I don't want to waste time on this because we are not going to get anywhere. We can save all of this for the joint seminar in history that Mr. Le Duc Tho and I are going to give at Harvard.

Le Duc Tho: At that time you staged the coup in Cambodia to prepare for the invasion. Then early in 1971 you conducted a major offensive against Route 9 in Laos. Then at the end of 1971 and during the first three months of 1972 the U.S. bombing of the DRV has been considerably intensified, and then there was your military offensive involving tens of thousands of troops which was carried out in the border region in Eastern South Vietnam and Cambodia.

These offensives show that you have used military pressure along with negotiations to compel us to accept your terms. That is why the people of the two zones of Vietnam have to oppose these offensives.

Let me quote from a recent statement published by Senator Fulbright . . .

Kissinger: I won't listen to statements by American domestic figures. I have told this to the Special Adviser.

Le Duc Tho: I would like to quote a sentence from Senator Fulbright to show you what Americans themselves are saying.

Kissinger: Our domestic discussions are of no concern of yours, and I understand what the Senator said.

Le Duc Tho: I would like to give you the evidence. It is an American source, not our source. Senator Fulbright said on April 8 that the acts of the liberation forces in South Vietnam are in direct response to your sabotage of the Paris Conference . . .

Kissinger: I have heard it before. There is no need to translate. Let's get on to the discussion.

Le Duc Tho: I would like to quote . . .

Kissinger: I have heard it before. Please go ahead.

Le Duc Tho: We are not alone to point out these facts. Even Americans of conscience have realized the facts and the truth.

Now you affirm we are making an invasion of South Vietnam. This is absurd. We have not sent our troops to the United States. We are not bombing the United States. We have no ships in U.S. territorial waters. You sent one-half million troops to Vietnam and thousands of planes to bomb North Vietnam. So who is making the aggression? So your affirmation that we are conducting an invasion is groundless.

You have said that we violated the Geneva Accords, but it is the U.S. which has wrecked the Geneva Accords. The Pentagon papers have revealed this fact. So you have distorted the facts.

Now as for the understandings of 1968, Mr. Xuan Thuy and myself held many private meetings with Ambassador Harriman. The record is still there. We have partially published the record and you have said we violated the understandings. It is wrong for your side to accuse us of such facts. We should not spend so much time discussing these questions.

Kissinger: I agree.

Le Duc Tho: Because we said it many times. I have answered all these questions in my statements on arrival in Paris.

Kissinger: That's the trouble with the Special Adviser. He gives his answers before there are questions.

Le Duc Tho: Because we know beforehand what you will ask.

Kissinger: Does the Special Adviser know of the cartoon of General DeGaulle who once held a lengthy press conference and at the end of his monologue asked, "Now, does someone want to ask a question to my answer?"

Le Duc Tho: I have not seen this cartoon.

Now you accuse us of delaying private meetings. It is not we who have delayed private meetings. It is you who have delayed them. We have not refused any proposals for a private meeting by you. But you have canceled a meeting.

Kissinger: Which one?

Le Duc Tho: The one of November 20. At that time I was really ill, not like your illness when you were in Pakistan.[7] But you refused to meet Minister Xuan Thuy, and Xuan Thuy had plenipotentiary

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[7] As an official Vietnamese history later noted, Le Duc Tho had only suffered from "a political illness," that is, he was not ill at all but the Politburo in Hanoi used his "illness" as Le Duc Tho's reason for not meeting in Paris on November 20. (Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger Negotiations in Paris,* pp. 204–205) The Pakistan reference is to the July 1971 occasion when Kissinger was in Pakistan and by prior arrangement with the Pakistani government, Kissinger was struck down by a stomachache, requiring a few days rest at a remote hill station. Actually, the story was cover for Kissinger's secret trip to China, which paved the way for Nixon's trip in 1972. (Kissinger, *White House Years,* p. 739)

powers to settle matters. But you refused to meet. Then you proposed another meeting and we accepted. But then you bombed North Vietnam and interrupted the Paris Conference at Kleber Street. In any case we have not refused to hold any private meetings. This shows our serious intent.

Now regarding a solution to the Vietnam problem. You have proposed 8 points and we have answered; we have made two qualifying points and you have not answered. And you pretend we are using the domestic situation in the United States. That is not true. It is the people of the United States who are opposing the Nixon Administration because it prolongs the war to the detriment of their interests, and they are opposed to it.

In a word, your statement today criticizes us and shows that these statements are not correct and that you are not yet willing to engage in serious negotiations to settle the problem. In a war, offensives and counteroffensives are natural.

Kissinger: The Special Adviser considers it only natural when your side does it.

Le Duc Tho: It is the laws of war. So you have been bombing the DRV very fiercely in violation of your agreement to stop the bombing of North Vietnam. You have been using massive naval and air forces to bomb North Vietnam. It is natural that the Vietnamese people have to strike back.

I think that the best thing since you have come today is to let us find a solution, the best solution to the conflict.

Kissinger: I agree.

Le Duc Tho: And not to make incorrect statements. I think it is time now that you and we find a solution to the Vietnam conflict.

Kissinger: I agree.

Le Duc Tho: If you agree, we should start now. But if we start, and you raise your 8 points, then this won't do. I have heard Secretary Rogers say that you will show flexibility and that the 8 points are not an ultimatum. Now show us what flexibility you have, and I am prepared to discuss your new flexibility, the new position you will express. We know that time is not on your side. In our view you have raised many obstacles to settling the problem. I have told you that many times. But since your ambition has been so great, no settlement has been reached yet.

Our meetings at the end of 1969 and early 1970 presented an opportunity to settle the problem. There was especially an opportunity in June and July of 1971 during our private meetings with you when we agreed to the 7 points of the PRG and we put forward our 9 points. It was an opportunity to settle the war.

At that time there were many different problems, but the most difficult problem was the question of power in South Vietnam and the change of Nguyen Van Thieu. At that time there was an election in South Vietnam, and we thought that was the best opportunity for you to change Thieu. But you refused to do that. These facts showed you put too much hope in the Vietnamization policy. You launched invasions against Cambodia and Southern Laos, and you pinned your hopes on Vietnamization.

This policy cannot work. We want to reach a peaceful settlement to the problem beneficial to us and also to you. You claim we don't want to settle the problem and that we want to humiliate the United States. It is something very strange to our thinking. We have no such thoughts. We want a settlement so that after a settlement is reached then relations between our two countries will be established on a good basis in all fields. You said once and repeated that we wanted to deprive President Nixon of reelection. This is not true.

Kissinger: That is our problem. We can handle it.

Le Duc Tho: That depends on the U.S. people. We don't want to create any difficulties for President Nixon on that subject. We want a peaceful settlement of the problem based on a logical and reasonable basis, on the basis of respect for our fundamental national rights. I think that is the only way to come to a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem in our interests and in your interests. These few words are added to what Minister Xuan Thuy said to answer your statement today.

Kissinger: Mr. Special Adviser, Mr. Minister, we are interested in a rapid and just settlement, but we face objective realities. We can't make new proposals until your offensive stops. And I must say that if your offensive continues, more and more drastic consequences will follow. The day we notified you we were prepared to return to plenary sessions, you attacked in the area of Kontum. The day plenaries started you attacked in the area of Quang Tri. As I sit here those operations continue. So I am awaiting your proposal on how to end this objective situation. I will, of course, respond to any proposal that you choose to make.

Xuan Thuy: I thought you would make new proposals and we were prepared to listen to you, because our two point clarifications have not been answered by you.

Kissinger: It may be a lack of imagination on my part, but I don't find anything new in those two points as compared to the 7 and 9 points. So we have already given you our answer.

Xuan Thuy: If you find nothing new in the two points, then I feel obliged to point them out to you.

Kissinger: I am always delighted to be instructed by Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho.

Le Duc Tho: The war is going on. The most important thing is not to put conditions on stopping of offensives or continuing offensives. The important thing is to find a solution, to quickly put an end to the hostilities. I think this is the best way. If we can now find a solution, then the war can end immediately. This depends on you, not us.

Kissinger: Why doesn't the Minister read the paper in front of him? Then I will respond.

Xuan Thuy: I have noted down your statement here. Regarding the two clarifying points . . . if you want me to refer to it I can.

Kissinger: I have them here. I can understand the language. I don't see what's new in them. What do they add to the 7 and 9 points?

Xuan Thuy: Since you have the text in hand, it is quite clear. The first point deals with the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the cessation of the U.S. air war and all U.S. military activities in Vietnam. It says (reading) "the U.S. Government should stop its air war and all military activities in Vietnam, rapidly and completely withdraw from South Vietnam all U.S. troops . . ."

Kissinger: What's new about that? I have read it. I know what it says. What do we have to answer? We went through the 7 and 9 points. Is there anything there that we did not discuss last summer?

Xuan Thuy: It says that . . . (continues to read from point 1 of the 2 point elaboration).

Kissinger: I have read it. There is no need to read it again. That's not my question. This is what we discussed last summer. We gave an exhaustive answer last summer. What additional answer is needed?

Xuan Thuy: You don't set a specific date for withdrawal of your forces. You put only a six-month period.

Kissinger: I know you are asking for the same thing we refused to do last summer. I'm asking whether you said anything new that requires an additional answer.

Xuan Thuy: But since you refused, we have to continue our demand. The more you refuse, the more we have to continue our demand.

The second point of the 2 point elaboration deals with the political problem in South Vietnam. (He reads point 2) "The U.S. Government should really respect the South Vietnamese peoples' right to self-determination . . ."

Kissinger: I have read it. I know the words very well.

Xuan Thuy: You don't respond.

Kissinger: We rejected it not because we don't understand it but because we understand it only too well.

Xuan Thuy: Since you still refuse to answer, it shows you have not understood. So if you want us to present it again, I will.

Kissinger: You don't have to present it again.

Is that all you have to say, then?

Xuan Thuy: We are here to listen to you and look forward to new points to be raised. Since you have no new points, there's nothing to discuss.

Kissinger: In that case I regret that there is nothing more we can do. (He starts packing up.)

Le Duc Tho: Now we have come here to meet you to find a peaceful solution to the problem. You put forward 8 points. We put forward two points of elaboration and you have not answered.

Kissinger: We have answered the two points. First of all, I have to tell you again, the offensive must stop. When we discussed a private meeting in February there was no military offensive. Secondly, under these circumstances the first order of business must be an end to military operations.

Xuan Thuy: It appears to me that Mr. Special Adviser often forgets what the U.S. has done. At the end of 1971 the U.S. was bombing very fiercely the DRV and since the beginning of 1972 the bombing has been continually carried out against North Vietnam. And since the interruption by your side of the Kleber Street sessions on March 23 the bombardments have become increasingly vigorous in North and South Vietnam and all the other countries of Indochina, and in the meantime you have bombed Hanoi and Haiphong, using even B–52's to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. And before the resumption of the Kleber Street sessions, you enlarged the bombing from the 17th parallel to all the provinces in the Red River Delta.

Why are you so silent on these attacks by the U.S. to compel the Vietnamese people to accept your position and make the Vietnamese people exercise the right of self-defense to oppose aggression? You want to deprive the Vietnamese people of the right of self-defense. Whenever aggression comes against people they have the right to oppose it. The South Vietnamese people have the right to oppose aggression. So do the people of Laos and Cambodia have the same right.

The principal question now that we should talk about is how to put an end to the aggression, and then the war will be ended. I have always been here. Mr. Le Duc Tho came here from Hanoi with the intent of serious negotiations to settle the war. But, since you say nothing different from what you have publicly stated, I wonder how we should proceed now?

Kissinger: I think we should defer this discussion until someone has something new to say or until your offensive stops.

Le Duc Tho: It is up to you, but the responsibility is entirely on your side. We have come here with the intention of negotiating seriously but you are not willing to do that.

Kissinger: I am willing to negotiate seriously.

Le Duc Tho: There should be some subject to discuss.

Kissinger: That's right, and we have made an 8 point proposal to which you replied by stating exactly what you said before. That does not require an additional answer.

But I have one concrete interim proposal. Let us restore the situation as it was on March 29th, the day before your offensive started. We will then withdraw our additional forces we have sent into the area and we will stop the bombing and we can then begin conversations in a calmer atmosphere.

Secondly, I want to point out to you that in our proposal of October 11, which was repeated by the President on January 25, we made a number of steps towards your position. You said our withdrawal timetable was too long, so we shortened it. You objected to the continuation of technical advisers, so we eliminated them. In September, you complained that our political proposals lacked concreteness, so we spelled them out in greater detail, and even if you don't like our particular formulation we have invited a counter proposal. You have never made a serious reply.

But I don't think there's much sense in continuing this exchange.

Xuan Thuy: I think that you are disregarding realities. You base your arguments on the position of your side only. Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho said that in 1969 there were many favorable opportunities to settle the problem but you refused to do that. In 1970 you extended the war to Cambodia and all of Indochina. In 1971 you launched your offensive in South Laos. In 1972 you left the conference table and intensified the air and naval war. And you said nothing about extension of the war, and you said nothing about returning to the situation before you launched those attacks. The war was limited to South Vietnam, and you keep silent on this subject.

Kissinger: I have told you now that we will stop these operations when you return to the situation of March 29.

Xuan Thuy: So you make proposals that are only to your advantage. When you extend the war to Indochina, you say nothing about this, and when the people of South Vietnam counter-attack, you want to stop the offensive, and want to tie their hands.

Kissinger: Mr. Special Adviser and Mr. Minister, much as I enjoy this conversation about the history of the war, I don't see that you are ready to talk seriously about bringing about a rapid solution to the war. Since that is not the case, much as I regret coming a long distance for a very brief meeting, I propose that we adjourn the meeting and meet again when either side has something new to say.

Le Duc Tho: It is up to you. If you decide that, then we agree.

Kissinger: Alright.

Xuan Thuy: Now let us return to the first question you raised at the beginning on publicity concerning our meeting. There are three possibilities. First, not to say anything about the private meeting since there was no result at all. Second, we could agree mutually to say something. Third, it could be up to each side to say whatever it likes.

In my view, we should not say anything because at this meeting you have not brought anything new and you propose cessation of the meetings. And therefore you are responsible for that, but we do not want to stress your responsibility for that. Therefore, my view is that we should not say anything about this meeting.

Kissinger: I want to make it perfectly clear that we notified you in February that we were prepared to discuss our 8 points and include discussion of your points. You have refused to discuss our 8 points at all. Since you are prepared to discuss only your points, points which we already explored last summer, there is no basis for discussion. We have invited you to make counter-proposals to our suggestions. But they have not been made. We have asked you whether there was anything new in your proposals and you simply read me your proposal. We told your Soviet allies last week what we wanted to discuss and they said they would transmit them to you. I find it difficult to understand why you meet with us at all since you knew what we wanted to discuss.

I want to make it absolutely clear, so that there is no misunderstanding, we are prepared to discuss any political process which genuinely leaves the political future of South Vietnam open. We are not prepared to discuss proposals which have the practical consequence of simply installing your version of a government in Saigon. We told you this last summer. We tell you this again. Now maybe our knowledge of South Vietnamese conditions is not adequate enough to come up with exactly the right formula, and therefore we invited your counter-proposals.

Xuan Thuy: Before Mr. Le Duc Tho says something, I would like to point out that you said you put forward your 8 points and we did not respond. I said also I have made two points of clarification and you said I only read them again.

In connection with your 8 points, with regard to troop withdrawals, your proposal is not specific enough. With regard to your political proposals, your policy is always to maintain the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration. You maintain that this administration is a legal government that has the confidence of the people. In our view this administration is illegal and hated by the whole Vietnamese people and public opinion. Therefore in our 2 clarifying points we propose that Nguyen Van Thieu resign immediately and that the Saigon Administration without Nguyen Van Thieu should change its policies. So you

have not answered our counter proposal, and we have answered you. In these two crucial clarified points there are new elements.

Kissinger: And this is what I have asked the Minister an hour ago, to tell me what the new elements are.

Xuan Thuy: So I have proposed that Nguyen Van Thieu should resign immediately.

Kissinger: What's new?

Xuan Thuy: And the Saigon Administration without Nguyen Van Thieu should change its policies. Do you agree to this?

Kissinger: I am trying to understand. What do you consider new in this? What is new in that proposal from the one made last July? I am trying to understand.

Xuan Thuy: I will let Mr. Le Duc Tho speak. I have made it clear. Since you refer to our ally, so we will give you the word.

Kissinger: I only made clear what we would discuss with you and they said that they would transmit the message to you.

Le Duc Tho: In our negotiations many times I have pointed out to you that we deal directly with you and vice versa. I have also repeatedly pointed out to you that we don't deal through any intermediary, neither now nor in the previous four years. I told you that. Therefore, anything you wish to deal with us, now please speak directly to us. We are prepared to listen to you. We are prepared to settle with you. If now we can listen directly from you it is clearer. We are prepared to discuss your proposal and it is more simple than dealing through a third person. You can directly bring it here to me. Since we are your interlocutors, you should bring things here directly to us.

Among the 8 points, your 8 points, we paid attention to two crucial points, the military question and the political question. Regarding the military question, our demand is for total withdrawal of U.S. forces and allied forces including military advisers, war materials, etc. And we also requested a specific terminal date and not a long period, but a prompt withdrawal. You proposed a period of withdrawal of six months after the date of signing an agreement. We don't know when an agreement will be reached, so the troop withdrawal will be prolonged.

Regarding political problems, previously we demanded a change of the Nguyen Van Thieu Administration and the formation of a new Saigon Administration favoring peace, neutrality, independence and democracy, and this new Saigon Administration will engage in conversations with the PRG to settle the problem. But now we demand only the resignation of Nguyen Van Thieu, the immediate resignation, and then the Saigon Administration without Nguyen Van Thieu should change its policy, that is, stop terrorist measures, the oppression of the people, that is a return to Article 14c of the Geneva Agreements.

So there is some difference in these two points.

And what you propose now, anything you want to propose, please propose it directly to me, because we are the interlocutors. We never go through an intermediary. So if there is any idea, proposal, make it now. We are prepared to discuss it with you.

Kissinger: We have told you our position, and our position is this. First, we have indicated that we are prepared to separate the military from political problems and to discuss separately with you the issue of the withdrawal of our forces. In that case, since it would be the only issue for discussion it could happen quite rapidly. This, of course, you have refused and I assume you continue to refuse, or have I misunderstood you?

Le Duc Tho: No, you have quite well understood me on that score. You have agreed with us on this point. Now you want to reverse it?

Kissinger: In other words, I want to be sure you insist political and military questions must be linked.

Le Duc Tho: Yes.

Kissinger: This is your position.

Le Duc Tho: Yes, you agreed to settle all the questions.

Kissinger: Since you insist that military issues cannot be separated from political issues, even though, as you know, I offered at every session to separate the military from the political to show our good will and make progress, we agreed to link the military and political. And therefore you are correct; we have agreed to discuss political and military issues together since you refused to do anything else. That is a correct summary of the situation, is it not? (Le Duc Tho nods agreement.)

Correct. Alright.

Now then, to turn to the political issues, we have made specific proposals. First, let me speak about our military proposal in relation to our political proposal, and then I'll speak about our political proposal.

We proposed that we have an agreement in principle, first, on the whole 8 point program, military and political. We were then prepared to begin the withdrawal of our forces as soon as an agreement in principle was achieved, even before the details of the political agreement were completely worked out, in our proposal we transmitted to you in October. We did this in order to meet your concern that withdrawal would be indefinitely delayed.

Now, with respect to the political situation. Our objective is not to maintain any particular administration. Our objective is to find a political process in which all realistic forces which exist have an opportunity to express themselves and a reasonable opportunity to gain

power. We have given you our way of bringing this about, and we have invited your counter proposals.

Now I want to clarify one point you have made. Are you saying that if President Thieu resigns, the rest of the Administration can stay in office?

Xuan Thuy: So far as I understand the two-point elaboration of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, the political problem will be dealt with in the following way. First, Nguyen Van Thieu must resign immediately—immediately, not like in your 8 points, only a few months before election, but immediately.

Secondly, the people who remain in the Saigon Administration should change the policy of the Administration, that is to say cancel their machinery of coercion and repression, disband concentration camps, release political prisoners and ensure democratic liberties. The reason why the PRG has made this proposal is because in your 8 point proposal Nguyen Van Thieu will resign only one month before the elections and, when the election occurs, all the machinery of coercion and repression will still be there. These will not be possible conditions for democratic and free elections. The Election Commission you propose will not be able to ensure the democratic liberties necessary for the election. I think that the way proposed by the PRG can ensure the genuine democratic character of the election. You often claim that the PRG wants to overthrow the Saigon Administration and establish a communist government there. That is not true. I think that a three segment government is something reasonable, logical. And South Vietnam will be independent, neutral, and democratic. It is something reasonable, too, and we support this.

Kissinger: Let me understand precisely what you are saying. You are saying that all the members of the existing administration except Thieu can continue under this proposal?

Xuan Thuy: But they should change their policy. The main thing is that they should change their policy. Because if the policy does not change then how can the PRG talk to them? But how to change the policy I have described to you.

Mr. Le Duc Tho has something to say.

Le Duc Tho: Here we propose that Nguyen Van Thieu resign immediately. It means that all the other members remain in the Administration. But the change of an individual is not important. What is important is the change of policy.

I remember that once you asked me whether it were possible to change policy only and not change individuals. So now our proposal is that without Thieu, anyone can do. But the thing is to change policy.

Kissinger: What do you mean concretely by that?

Le Duc Tho: That means the machinery of oppression, repression and terrorist measures should be canceled and there should be genuine democracy in South Vietnam. It should not use fascist measures to oppose the people.

Kissinger: What does this mean concretely?

Le Duc Tho: This can be done not only by public official statements but also by acts.

Kissinger: Like what?

Le Duc Tho: To implement the statements already made, and if this can be done, then it will create a favorable political atmosphere for South Vietnam and help create a government of national concord. Otherwise, no government of national concord can be formed and no elections will be possible.

If you want now to withdraw from South Vietnam and create a peaceful, independent and democratic South Vietnam, there must be a political and democratic atmosphere in South Vietnam. Otherwise no national concord is possible. And I think this way of solving the problem is not only in the interest of the South Vietnamese people but also in the interest of the U.S. If a government can be formed of peace and neutrality this is also in the interest of the U.S. The political situation now in South Vietnam calls for such a solution, such a settlement, in the interests of both the people of the United States and Vietnam. Then a peaceful solution can be reached. And as for our stand, we have repeatedly told you such is our stand, and you still claim we want to put a yoke, establish a communist regime in South Vietnam. It is not true. Such a government would include three sectors of the population. This is taking into account the realities of the political situation in South Vietnam, and if you don't agree to it, it will be difficult to settle the problem. This is the political process you mentioned in South Vietnam.

Xuan Thuy: I will add some concrete acts to be taken in South Vietnam, in the framework of a Saigon Administration without Thieu and with a changed policy. For example, Thieu has set up in many parts of the country many concentration camps, so the concentration camps should be dismantled now. He has arrested so many prisoners; these should be released now. Everyday too many papers are confiscated. So these should be free.

Kissinger: It is different from North Vietnam as far as publishing is concerned. Can anybody publish a paper in North Vietnam? I ask just for my own education.

Xuan Thuy: The Democratic Republic of Vietnam has a completely different system and we do not impose this system on South Vietnam.

If now they require us to apply a system like South Vietnam, we refuse that.

Le Duc Tho: In our view the social democratic system is, however, the most democratic form of government.

Xuan Thuy: What we want to do is to take into account the real situation in South Vietnam.

Kissinger: One other piece of information, since I may not have the pleasure of seeing you again soon. When in your judgment should Thieu resign? When an agreement is signed? Prior to an agreement? When precisely should he resign?

Xuan Thuy: The sooner the better. If Thieu resigned tomorrow, it would be better, so a rapid settlement can be reached.

Le Duc Tho: But what is the reason for you to maintain Thieu in power for a few months more? That will do harm to you.

Kissinger: I think I understand your position, Mr. Special Adviser and Mr. Minister, and I think we should leave it that if either side has anything new to say we will meet again.

With regard to this meeting and what we say publicly about this private meeting, whether we should speak about it publicly. One difficulty is that my movements are so carefully watched now by the press it is quite possible that I have been missed in Washington today. I don't know—I haven't been in contact.

I think we should leave it that either side should be free to say that the private meeting took place, without revealing the subject. Neither side should make a formal announcement or seek an opportunity to make a formal announcement. Our difficulty is that if we are asked whether I met with Special Adviser Le Duc Tho what I should say.

Le Duc Tho: Then you should say "no comment."

Kissinger: I can't say "no comment." I would have to say we don't comment on private meetings. From "no comment" the conclusion will be drawn that there was a private meeting.

Le Duc Tho: Since you raised the question of private meetings, I would like to add this. In our view public and private meetings are necessary forums for negotiations. You requested us and we agreed not to make public the content of our private meeting. Although this is a minor question, since you made public our private meetings, you have acted at variance with your engagement, and from this minor question to major questions, I think in most cases you have violated your word. Now you have agreed with us that private meetings should be kept secret, the substance should not be made public—we agree with that. Therefore in our view we think that the fact of a private meeting and the substance of the private meeting should not be made public. Now if you pledge this, you should keep your promise. You once referred

to mutual trust. You have damaged that trust we have from minor things. We should create an atmosphere of mutual trust; that would make an easier settlement.

Kissinger: I don't think the Special Adviser suffers from excessive trust in people, especially Americans.

Le Duc Tho: It is definite that we cannot have confidence in you because you have violated our trust so many times. But in negotiations, to reach a settlement, at least we should have some mutual understanding, at least there must be minimal trust in each other. If, in everything we say, we mistrust each other, our experience is that the violation has always come from your side.

Now you agree not to publish the fact or the substance of this private meeting. We agree to that. But if now you tell newspapers you make no comment on private negotiations, they can speculate what they think.

Kissinger: We have a real problem. I have no difficulty promising we won't reveal the substance of the meeting. That is a promise we can make and shall keep it.

Le Duc Tho: You will promise it and keep it once again (referring to the revelation of private meetings by the U.S. on January 25).

Kissinger: I have listened patiently to many of your accusations because of the high respect I have for you Mr. Special Adviser, but if we are speaking of mutual trust, we endured seven months of being accused by you of not responding to the seven points when you knew very well we had responded to these points. We had made a proposal to which you never had even the courtesy to reply. We had asked for a meeting which you in effect cancelled three days before the meeting. And then even if you were ill, we said we were prepared to meet any other time, and even then you did not even give us the courtesy of a reply.

Le Duc Tho: I always reply to all your proposals, although sometimes with a bit of delay.

Kissinger: There was no reply to our message in November when we said we were prepared to meet anytime, or anytime when your health permitted. We did not hear until February 15, which is over two months, which is three months; so therefore, let us not talk about accusations of bad faith. I have been confronted at meetings here with the Special Adviser three days after he met with newsmen or Senators, misleading them about a possible separate military solution.

I am prepared to practice mutual trust. I have attempted since 1967 to bring about an end to this war on a just basis. But if the Special Adviser starts a propaganda campaign again, then inevitably we will have to defend ourselves. But we will not reveal the substance of the talks—I have given this assurance.

As to the fact of a meeting, if my absence from Washington is noted today, we will be in a very difficult position.

Le Duc Tho: You can say that you were on a long weekend or taking a picnic.

Kissinger: Of course, we can say no comment in answer to a question. I promise you we will make no formal announcement and do our best—our answer will be no comment on private meetings but that part of it will be more difficult to maintain. The substance is in our control, and about that we will not speak. Is that agreeable to you? If asked, whether Dr. Kissinger met with Le Duc Tho, our answer will be that we do not comment on private meetings.

Le Duc Tho: The main thing is that both of us when asked about private meetings, say nothing about private meetings.

Kissinger: There is a danger of the press following close now. If there are photographers at every airport . . . I don't consider this meeting as one I particularly choose to remember so I have no interest in having this one publicized.

Le Duc Tho: The press may follow you very closely, but they don't necessarily know where you have gone. If asked you can say "no comment."

Kissinger: My answer will be we don't comment on private meetings, but do not get surprised if the speculation gets excessive. For example, newsmen assigned to the White House have a solution now. They call my office three to four times a day to see if I am there.

When the Special Adviser arrived here, he was not exactly retiring in his comments. Because even though he may not like it, his name is associated with me.

Le Duc Tho: I have made comments, but I did not refer to private meetings at all.

Kissinger: But the Special Adviser has a great ability to suggest things without saying them.

Le Duc Tho: You can see newsmen and tell them "no comment" and let them speculate anything they wish.

Kissinger: I want to have no doubt—if the Special Adviser becomes a TV star again and if he appears in the columns of his favorite newspaper, as he has a tendency to do, making accusations, we will respond.

Xuan Thuy: What is certain is that first we should insist on your undertaking of 1968 to stop the bombing of North Vietnam.

Kissinger: Let's not get into that. Oh, you mean in public. I see.

Xuan Thuy: We insist on it here, too. The second point is we should insist on the cessation of Vietnamization.

Kissinger: You are not the most retiring interlocutor we have encountered.

Le Duc Tho: Any statement I make is to repeat our demands. I don't refer to the substance of private meetings. I keep my promise on that score.

Kissinger: You only say things you know are not true once you know about private meetings. That's worse. All last summer—you know well—there was a whole succession of journalists and Senators who came to see you. They came away with the impression that you were prepared to discuss a military solution only. It is true that you never said so explicitly, but with great skill you left that impression. You have to remember that most Americans are not as intelligent as Vietnamese. So you take advantage of our intellectual underdevelopment. After we heard that for 6 months, we made clear our side of the story.

Let me sum up where we go from here. We are prepared to reopen these talks either on the military issues alone, that is the complex of issues on withdrawal and prisoners of war. But my impression is that at this moment you are not prepared to discuss this. I want to make sure I learned my lessons properly.

Le Duc Tho: So you have correctly learned this lesson because I never separated these two questions. And when I talked to newspapermen I did not tell them this. The newspapers were just speculating.

Kissinger: But you didn't do much to discourage them.

Le Duc Tho: They speculate too much.

Xuan Thuy: There is a lot of speculation about you, too.

Kissinger: Oh, about me. Secondly, we are prepared to resume these talks about a realistic political program in South Vietnam in which certain modifications of our eight points are possible provided there is a genuine desire on both sides to leave the political future to the South Vietnamese people to decide.

If you are prepared to discuss either of these two points, I will, of course, be prepared to have discussions with you leading to a rapid conclusion of the war.

Le Duc Tho: I have told you many times, and today I reiterate once again, that Minister Xuan Thuy and I come here with serious intent and good will to end the Vietnam war with a peaceful settlement. But this cannot be done unilaterally. I told you many times. There should be an effort from our side and your side, and the sooner the better to end the war. I am looking forward to meeting you again to settle the problem, and your proposals, if made, we are prepared to discuss them, to find out a really logical and reasonable solution which is in our interest and yours. And from now on if you have anything to tell us, please tell it to us directly.

I would like to furnish you some documents for your information. (He hands them over.)

Kissinger: Is Mr. Special Adviser staying in Paris for some time or is this a brief visit?

Le Duc Tho: If you want to meet me and Minister Xuan Thuy again, then I will remain here, but if you find no settlement possible, then I will reconsider my program and return to my country.

Kissinger: I think we should review the situation. Under present circumstances I cannot agree to another meeting.

(The meeting then adjourned.

(There was small talk for a few minutes. Dr. Kissinger stated that there could have been a settlement if the North Vietnamese would only be willing to leave something to history. The North Vietnamese said that the U.S. had missed good chances for a settlement, i.e. during the South Vietnamese Presidential election. As Dr. Kissinger got up to leave, Le Duc Tho declared that his side's prospects were "good".)

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110. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, May 2, 1972.

SUBJECT

My May 2 Meeting with the North Vietnamese

I spent three hours today with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy in a session that was thoroughly unproductive on substance but served to bolster further our negotiating record.[2] I laid out various approaches for discussion, all of which they rejected. They made very clear that they were not prepared either to deescalate the fighting or offer anything new concerning a settlement.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 854, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XIII. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates that the President saw it.

[2] See Document 109. In conversation with Haldeman that day the President noted how very disappointed Kissinger had been with the lack of progress in the negotiations. Nixon went on to say: "But the point is, Bob, we have got to realize that on this whole business of negotiating with North Vietnam, Henry has never been right. Now, I just can't help it, but just have to say that, just a straight, flat-out conclusion." Haldeman replied: "Well, Al [Haig] never thought he was going to get anything." To this, Nixon responded: "Well, I didn't either." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 717–19)

In light of their intransigence, which is almost certainly keyed to the fluid military situation and possibly the expectation of further unilateral concessions on our part, I broke off the private talks until either side has something new to say or their offensive stops. I briefed Ambassador Porter after my meeting and arranged for him to suspend the plenary sessions again at the end of this Thursday's[2] meeting. He will state that there has been no negotiating movement in any channel, which should make it obvious that we had a fruitless private meeting this week.

Highlight

The major utility of this session was to *reconfirm their intractability on negotiations,* both for our own calculations and, when necessary, the public record. Specifically, I suggested, and they refused, each of the following:

—That they stop their offensive which is a euphemism for ceasefire.

—That they agree to return to the status quo ante March 29, 1972, thus allowing deescalation on both sides.

—That they restore the circumstances for the 1968 bombing halt understanding.

—That they separate military issues from political issues. (At one point I even raised, without response, the suggestion that we talk about withdrawals and prisoners, not mentioning ceasefire.)

—That they offer any counter proposals to our eight point plan.

—That they offer a political solution which did not include the installation of a government they would dominate but which would leave the future genuinely open.

They had absolutely nothing new to propose and kept reading verbatim the PRG's February 1972 *two point elaboration* of its seven points as their answer to our secret October and public January plans. When I pressed them for what was new in these elaborations, they emphasized that they required only that Thieu himself resign. In response to my questions they confirmed that everyone else in the Saigon government could stay, but added that the governmental policies of "coercion" and "repression" would also have to change. They cited such measures as dismantling police programs, stopping pacification, dismantling "concentration camps" and releasing political prisoners, in effect disbanding the entire existing GVN apparatus. In addition the U.S. had to stop Vietnamization.

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[2] May 4.

Other *highlights* of the meeting include the following:

—They stressed coldly that we should deal with them directly and not through their friends. They refused even to acknowledge that Moscow had transmitted our demands that they restore the status quo ante and 1968 understandings.

—They used generally mild language in complaining about our various alleged sins and struck conciliatory poses about their desire for a negotiated settlement. They even professed that they were not working against your reelection, to which I brusquely replied that that was none of their business.

—I warned them that if their offensive continues, "more and more drastic consequences will follow."

—I repeatedly suggested deescalation and a separation of military from political issues in a settlement. They consistently refused to consider either approach. We have a clear record on both counts.

—They were anxious not to have public revelation of our meeting. I agreed to forego an announcement or confirmation, knowing that Porter's Thursday statement coupled with inevitable speculation should make clear what has transpired.

What Happened

Thuy opened with their usual complaints about the U.S. having exposed the contents of our previous private meetings through your January 25 speech.[3] He also said that the plenary sessions are the "basis" for private meetings and must be held "as usual."

I told Thuy that there was no point in rehashing the past record and circumstances which had led us to publish the contents of our private sessions. The time had come to make real negotiating progress after three and a half years of sterile debate. I then read my prepared statement, making the following points:

—We remain prepared to negotiate a settlement fair to both sides but not at the point of a gun. There is no sense in talking about future agreements while their invading armies are tearing up old ones.

—We were completely aware of their "talk-fight-talk" tactics and were no longer prepared to play this game. (I handed over a four-page document detailing their orchestration of military moves and repeated postponement of private meetings.)[4]

—They must stop their offensive; the 1968 understandings[5] must be restored; and there must be serious, concrete and constructive negotiations leading to a rapid conclusion of the war.

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[3] See Document 5.

[4] See footnote 3, Document 109.

[5] See footnote 5, Document 2.

—I emphasized the seriousness of the circumstances under which we were meeting whereby they were launching offensives while professing to be prepared for serious talks.

Thuy replied that my statements brought nothing new and repeated standard DRV allegations that it is we who are violating the Geneva Accords and that there were no understandings in 1968.

Le Duc Tho repeated Thuy's assertion that we had brought nothing new; he dismissed our charges of an NVA invasion and accused us of intensifying the war through the 1970 Cambodia operation, and Lam Son Operation in 1971 and the recent bombings of the DRV. Tho emphasized his view that our statement of today showed we were not willing to engage in serious negotiations and that it was a "law of war" that there be offensives and counteroffensives. Tho also:

—Asked what flexibility there was in our eight points;

—Referred to past opportunities to settle the war, especially last summer when the elections presented the U.S. with the "best opportunity" to replace Thieu but the U.S. refused.

I replied that we are interested in a rapid and just settlement but we face objective realities. We cannot make new proposals until the offensive stops and if it continues more drastic consequences will follow. I recalled that the very day we agreed to resume private meetings they had attacked Kontum and the day that plenaries had started they renewed their assault on Quang Tri.

—I said I awaited their proposals as to how to bring this objective situation to an end.

The discussion then went around several times as to whose responsibility it was to take steps toward ending the war.

Xuan Thuy insisted on reading me extensive excerpts of the February 2 PRG two point elaboration of their seven points, accusing us of not ever having responded to them.

I asked what was different about the two point elaboration from the seven and nine points of 1971, which we had answered in rather complete detail.

Xuan Thuy's reply was that they had nothing new to add to previous explanations and they wanted to see if we had anything new to say.

I repeated our position that as a first order of business the offensive must stop and, as far as the two point elaboration was concerned, it contained nothing that we hadn't already addressed in our replies to the seven and nine points last summer. I added that if the situation prior to March 29 were restored we would withdraw the reinforcements we had deployed and stop bombing the DRV.

I pointed out however: (1) that we were prepared to talk about military issues alone i.e. the complex of operations involving prison-

ers and withdrawal; (2) I hinted strongly that we were prepared to start discussions with ending the offensive alone; (3) I said our political proposal was not inflexible. Our primary concern was not to maintain any one person but to have a genuinely open process.

Thuy contended there were new elements in their two point elaboration of February 2. I asked him what they were.

Thuy and Tho explained that all they demanded now was the immediate resignation of Thieu, the adoption of a policy by the Saigon Administration of peace, independence and neutrality, an end to "Oppression," "concentration camps," guarantee of democratic liberties as provided by the Geneva Accords, freedom of the press and so forth. [This proved to be a mere rehash of the PRG two point elaboration publicly put forth in February and I replied that in substance it did not differ from what they demanded last summer.][6]

I asked whether they were prepared to grant the same liberties in the North. Tho replied that they had a different and better system to which this did not apply.

I then engaged Tho in a discussion of whether they still insisted that resolution of the military and political issues be linked, in other words would they discuss the end of the war separately from political outcome. I said we wanted to be absolutely certain of their position in this regard.

Tho repeated on several occasions that this remained their position and that any impression gained to the contrary by U.S. journalists and Senators last summer was not his fault.

Thuy again reviewed their political proposal insisting that Thieu must resign immediately, disband concentration camps and so forth.

I asked for the sake of precision whether this meant that all other members of the Saigon Administration could stay in office except Thieu.

At this point both Tho and Thuy emphasized that it was the policy of Saigon that must change as well. The change of an individual is not important, Tho said; it is the policy and in operational terms this means dismantling the machinery of "oppression and terrorism"—there should be no more "fascist repression." Without these steps there will not be a suitable atmosphere for the creation of a government of "national concord," elections, and the guarantee of democratic liberties. In reply to a question Thuy said Thieu should resign tomorrow, "the sooner the better," irrespective of whether or not there is a negotiated agreement.

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[6] Brackets are in the original.

I told them I understood their position and believed that there was no point in continuing our meeting. I suggested we leave matters that either side propose another meeting when it felt it had anything to say. Under the present circumstances we would not agree to another meeting.

In closing I reiterated my understanding that they were not prepared to separate military and political issues, adding that we were prepared to discuss withdrawals and POWs.

Tho answered that my understanding was correct and that he had never separated the political and military questions.

Our session ended in agreement that we would not divulge the substance of our private meeting today. They were also quite insistent that the fact of our meeting also be kept secret and that if asked we simply refrain from public comment. I consented to do our best on this but pointed out that the occurrence of the meeting would prove far more difficult to protect than its substantive content since my movements were monitored closely by the press and a "no comment" at this juncture would be tantamount to confirmation.

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111. Editorial Note

On May 1, 1972, the theater commander in Saigon, General Creighton W. Abrams, informed Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird in message MAC 4021 that strategically important Quang Tri City in MR–1 was about to fall to the enemy. He further feared that the same fate awaited the Highlands stronghold, Kontum City, and the old imperial capital, Hue. Consequently, Abrams asked Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to arrange a meeting with South Vietnam's President, Nguyen Van Thieu. (Abrams Papers, Historical Resources Branch, United States Army Center of Military History)

At the meeting, Abrams first let Thieu read the message he had sent to Laird:

"When he finished I described for him my conviction that the real problem for South Vietnam was the effectiveness of his field commanders. I described in some detail the ineffectiveness of individual commanders by name in northern MR–1, the B–3 Front and MR–3. I told the President that it was my conviction that all that had been accomplished over the last four years was now at stake, and, at this stage, it was the effectiveness of his field commanders that would determine the outcome—either winning all or losing all. At this point President

Thieu talked to Executive [Officer] and directed that all commanders be called to the Palace today. President Thieu then continued, advancing the view that if Hue and Kontum held for four days they would have won the battle. I told the President that no one should think in any less terms than six weeks more of heavy, bloody fighting and maybe more. This is a battle to the death, the Communists have planned it that way and will not quit until they have been totally exhausted.

"This was a candid meeting, but at no time did President Thieu show either irritation, impatience, or disagreement." (Message MAC 4039 from Abrams to Laird, May 2; ibid.)

In backchannel message 81 from Saigon, May 2, Bunker, who also attended the meeting, told Kissinger: "We made it clear to him [Thieu] the need to act decisively and quickly to straighten them out. We emphasized the massive air support the President has provided but pointed out that this is a battle of will on both sides and that no amount of air support would be effective unless there is also the will on the part of ground forces." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, 3 April–15 June 1972)

Kissinger received the message enroute to meet Le Duc Tho in Paris. He immediately cabled Haig in Washington:

"1. Am appalled by Saigon 0081. It is a self-serving egg-sucking, panicky lecture by Abrams. Does he think Thieu needs instruction on the gravity of his situation? He cannot make up now for his errors of the past two years.

"2. In the context of today's Paris private meeting Thieu can only construe this as the preparation for a sell-out. Do we want a rout?

"3. Bunker is to be made aware of my views immediately. He is to call on Thieu immediately and assure him of full U.S. backing. He must understand that we will not deviate from our game plan in Paris or elsewhere. He will be given full report as soon as I return.

"4. This must be carried out without delay." (Message from Kissinger to Haig, May 2; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972)

Haig immediately cabled Bunker a message from Kissinger: "It is essential that you again urgently see Thieu and reassure him of our full support especially in light of my discussions in Paris today." (Backchannel message WHS 2057 to Saigon, May 2; ibid., Box 854, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XIII) To Kissinger, Haig wrote: "I agree completely and have carried out the instructions contained in your message. It is my strong suspicion that this action was taken at the urging of Secretary Laird who with others is equally culpable and panicky." (Backchannel message from

Haig to Kissinger, May 2; ibid., Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972) In backchannel message WHS 2058 to Saigon, May 2, Haig directed Bunker to meet with Thieu, and to deliver a personal message for Thieu from President Nixon pledging full American support in the defense of South Vietnam. (Ibid.)

The earliest Bunker could meet with Thieu was the following morning, May 3. When he so informed Kissinger, he also observed: "I do not believe Thieu has any doubt about our full support which I repeated to him this morning nor do I think he doubts our motives at Paris but I shall, of course, give him the reassurance contained reftel [2058]." (Backchannel message 82 from Saigon, May 2; ibid., Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, Box 107, Country Files, Far East Vietnam Negotiations, Paris Negotiations, January 25, 1972–January 1973)

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112. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Paris, May 2, 1972.

SUBJECT

Some Quick, Concrete, Confidence Building Steps for ARVN

Here are some thoughts on what we can do to bolster ARVN which I think will have salutary effects on the JGS and Thieu as symbols of our commitment to their long term survival. Their short term symbolic impact will be favorable as well, taken in conjunction with the cancellation of plenaries, which will have a strongly favorable psychological impact.

1. A High Level Mission to Saigon à la Batitsky:

I recommended this to you a few weeks ago.[2] You said it was a good idea but should be held in reserve. *This should be done immediately.* Send the Secretary of Air Force or Army immediately accompanied by

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 23, Chronological File, 22 Apr.–31 May 1972. Secret; Sensitive. The memorandum is on White House stationery but both Negroponte and Kissinger were in Paris.

[2] Negroponte's earlier recommendation, to send to Saigon a U.S. equivalent of the Soviet military mission to Hanoi, is in his April 10 memorandum on which Kissinger wrote: "Agree—but a little later." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1135, Jon Howe, Trip Files, John Negroponte Negotiations File, 1972–1973)

Armor, Air and Artillery experts. *It should be a crack team and highly touted.* They will be welcome in Saigon and the signal will not be lost on Hanoi or Moscow.[3]

We will have answered the Batitsky mission; but only after having tried the diplomatic route first.

2. *Authorize Formation of a New ARVN Division Immediately Above the Present Personnel Ceiling:*

This also can be done immediately. Thieu seems to want it; ARVN needs it. It will only increase the ceiling by whatever number of spaces a division is—a piddling 15–18,000.

The idea of elevating some RF to division status instead of forming a new ARVN division has some serious pitfalls: It would further denude the countryside and expose the people to the VC which is one of the principal aims of this communist offensive—e.g. suck regular units into isolated areas and away from populated ones.

Again, let's do this decisively, despite the inevitable bleats from the Pentagon.

3. *Systematically Step Up the Military Pressure on the DRV but in a Fashion Sustainable Over the Long Haul:*

This means hitting hard short of Hanoi/Haiphong, concentrating on significant military targets POL for tanks, logistics movements, other key transshipment points, e.g. Thanh Hoa and Vinh.

4. *More Air Resources for Use in the Trail Area:*

If at all possible we should get enough air out there to bomb the Trail more. They are in a major logistics push at the moment; moving trucks down the trail by daylight and meanwhile because of other urgent tactical concerns our interdiction campaign has fallen off sharply.

5. *Energize the Lao, Thai, and Cambodians a Bit More:*

(a) *Laos.* This is a theatre wide effort; that's the way the DRV sees it. Vang Pao should harass retreating NVA forces if he still has it in him. We shouldn't discourage moves to press back towards the PDJ.

(b) *Cambodia.* Be more responsive to Lon Nol's appeals for help. He has just written a letter asking for support in equipping more men. We haven't replied yet and State/DOD will doubtless throw cold water on it to stay within our $341 million ceiling. Eventually the Cam-

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[3] On May 2, Kissinger sent a message to Bunker informing him that Nixon had decided to send a high-level team to Saigon the following evening: "Its mission will be to assess on an urgent basis equipment replacement and modernization needs for the Vietnamese armed forces." (Ibid., Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972)

bodians will use our reticence as an excuse for an elegant or not so elegant bug-out.

We shouldn't let the ceiling deter us and besides the political choice of punching the Lao or Cambodian ceiling in FY–73 is far less onerous than some of the other choices facing us.

(c) Get the *Thai* to fly more sorties in Laos and Cambodia. Now is the time to put the arm on them and show this is an Indochina-wide effort. Minor added costs; if any, be damned.

(d) Be more responsive to Indonesian and ROK indications of interest in helping train Cambodians. See if the Aussies can do more to help us there.

In short go on a sort of politico/military offensive to show our earnest and determination rather than simply meeting tactical emergencies as they arise.

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113. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 2, 1972, 10:04–10:49 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Rear Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton
(stayed only for Helms' briefing)

NSC Staff
Richard T. Kennedy
John H. Holdridge
Mark Wandler

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Defense will continue to stay abreast of the ARVN tank situation.

—CIA will check out the intercept revealing that 22,000 NVA wounded are returning to North Vietnam via the Laos infiltration system.

—The State Department should follow the White House lead in commenting on Marvin Kalb's story about Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Livingston.

—All concerned agencies should instruct their personnel not to make statements about Vietnam which will get us into traps later on. The Departments should make sure all personnel in Vietnam know what the decision-making system is for pulling out advisers.

—We will make a decision next week on whether or not to go ahead with the leaflet campaign over North Vietnam.

—Ambassador Porter's instructions for this week's meeting in Paris should go out today.

—The cease-fire paper, which should be closely held, will be discussed at tomorrow's meeting.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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114. Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, May 2, 1972, 4:49–4:51 p.m.

Nixon: Yeah?

Haig: Yes, Mr. President.

Nixon: Oh, Al, I got you in a meeting, have I?

Haig: No, sir. As a matter of fact I'm in the sauna bath.

Nixon: Oh, good. Good, good, good. Well, that's good. I hope you're fine. I was just going to check, is there anything new? I was looking at the paper and they were talking about the panic in Hue and

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 23–114. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portion of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume.

that sort of a thing, but that—there's nothing new that we have from your morning report, is there?

Haig: No, we have two reports on the Hue situation. One is that there's an extreme nationalism that's very high, with people wanting to be armed and to kill the enemy if they come.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: Which is—

Nixon: I hope we can get a little of that reported.

Haig: Yes, sir. Some of it's bravado, of course, 'cause they haven't gotten close enough yet.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: And the other is that there are many, many officials moving their families south on the roads, and that there's some 4,000 on the roads south of Hue.

Nixon: Well, that's expected isn't it?

Haig: Yes, sir. They, they—

Nixon: Let me ask you this for you to consider before we meet: why don't we, frankly, just make a command decision that you don't fart around any more in the Kontum area? You know what I mean? Do—well give it enough so that they fight there but really concentrate the air power in the—where the real battle is to be fought. Put it there. In other words, the enemy concentrates, maybe we better concentrate where it counts.

Haig: That's right, sir. I think the problem in Kontum is if they, if they move the few forces that are in there out—

Nixon: Yeah?

Haig: —they'll get ambushed on the road—

Nixon: But you—right—

Haig: And that'll be the end of them.

Nixon: Yeah.

Haig: I think they feel that the best thing to do—

Nixon: Well, maybe as you say they fight very well when they're—

Haig: When they're cornered, they fight—

Nixon: Yeah. Fine.

Haig: —which is a bad—

Nixon: But you have no information on Hue except that we—you still have that good division there? Right?

Haig: The good division's there and we know that some of the units out of Quang Tri have joined.

Nixon: Some have gotten through?

Haig: Yes, sir. We don't have precise unit identification, but they—the last report we had is that they're trying to—

Nixon: You see, if they start shelling Hue, the city, then the holds, the bars are off with regards to bombing the dikes, right?[2]

Haig: Yes, sir.

Nixon: Don't you agree?

Haig: Yes, I do.

Nixon: Okay. Bye.

Haig: Bye.

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[2] Intricate centuries-old system of dikes that controlled irrigation in the low-lying areas of the Red River Delta of North Vietnam and protected those who lived and worked there.

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115. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 3, 1972, 10:09–10:42 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas Moorer

CIA
Richard Helms
[*name not declassified*] (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Mark Wandler

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Defense will deploy the additional tank and air assets to South Vietnam as soon as possible. In order to make room for the additional air assets, Defense should promptly negotiate the reopening of Takli airbase with the Thais.

—Mr. Kissinger will obtain Presidential guidance on the three options Ambassador Porter has in regard to next week's plenary session and forward this guidance to State by 1:00 p.m.

[Omitted here is discussion of the President's attendance at the funeral of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, the possibility of a military coup in South Vietnam and Thieu being killed, Abrams's and Bunker's May 2 meeting with Thieu, the timing of a possible enemy assault on Hue, Thieu's request for tanks, the President's desire to add more naval and air power to the Southeast Asia theater during the offensive, and the military resupply mission to Saigon.]

[Mr. Kissinger:] Concerning the plenary session, what are Porter's options tomorrow if we don't want to attend the meeting next week?

Mr. Sullivan: He has three options: First, he can accept. Later on, we can cancel under any number of excuses. Second, he can reserve judgment tomorrow. We can say our liaison people will be in touch with them later on to see if we will attend the next meeting. Third, he can categorically refuse to attend the next meeting.

Mr. Kissinger: What should he do if nothing significant happens tomorrow?

Mr. Sullivan: My guess is that the North Vietnamese are aware of the possibility we might walk out, and, consequently, they may present something which they hope will be seductive to the public. They will try to put our people at a disadvantage.

Mr. Kissinger: In what way will the other side present something seductive to the public?

Mr. Sullivan: They could try to play on something like the Zorza article in the *Post* today,[2] creating the impression they are splitting the problem into two separate tracks: political and military.

Mr. Kissinger: They won't do that. If they continue to insist that Thieu leave and that the machinery of oppression cease, the whole South Vietnamese government will fall.

Mr. Sullivan: That's right. The other side could also play on the POW issue and try to present something which *The New York Times* says is forthcoming.

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[2] "Vietnam Deal In the Making," *The Washington Post,* May 3, 1972, p. A21.

Mr. Kissinger: When the North Vietnamese say something should be done to change the machinery of oppression, they really mean the entire government should be changed.

Mr. Sullivan: In French, Le Duc Tho's statement said the policy of oppression.

Mr. Kissinger: But he really means bringing down the South Vietnamese government.

Mr. Sullivan: I suppose that if Thieu goes, the entire government will be brought down.

Mr. Kissinger: Didn't Le Duc Tho say at the airport that only Thieu had to go and that the others could stay?

Mr. Sullivan: No. He never said that. He said Thieu must go and the policy of oppression must change. The *Times* and the media have interpreted the statement to mean that other government leaders could stay.[3] But Le Duc Tho never said it. They choose their words very carefully.

Mr. Kissinger: Suppose the North Vietnamese do say that other government leaders could stay, provided Thieu goes and provided the policy of oppression changes. Isn't that merely another way of bringing down the entire GVN structure?

Mr. Sullivan: I guess it would depend on the opportunistic nature of the government officials who stayed. If Thieu were to go, Tran Van Huong would probably become the Acting President, and he would most likely be stiff. If Huong were to go with Thieu, I don't know what kind of a situation we would have with people like Khiem and others.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, what do you think?

Mr. Helms: I don't know.

Mr. Kissinger: Where is Carver today?

Mr. Helms: He's working on something else. You know, we've had so many South Vietnamese leaders during the last ten years. Not one of them has been a strong leader.

Mr. Kissinger: Except Thieu.

Mr. Helms: Even he's not been a roaring lion.

Mr. Johnson: He's been stronger than the other leaders, though.

Mr. Helms: Yes, but we're talking about the next best after him. I just don't know.

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[3] "Tho Seems to Ease Hanoi's Terms a Bit," *The New York Times*, May 1, 1972, p. 1.

Mr. Johnson: When the North Vietnamese talk about changing the policy of oppression, it means arresting suspects and stopping the pacification program.

Mr. Kissinger: And releasing political prisoners.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: In effect, it means the end of the South Vietnamese government.

Mr. Johnson: Provided there is somebody in the South to do their work for them.

Mr. Kissinger: Right. Could the non-communists survive?

Mr. Sullivan: I don't know. There would surely be a rapid disintegration of the government, though.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) You think the other side is likely to propose something like this?

Mr. Sullivan: Perhaps. They would dress it up with cosmetics so that the *Times* and other people would say it is great and we should jump at it.

Mr. Kissinger: Especially since we refused to jump at the other side's point number one last year.

Mr. Sullivan: If they do make a seemingly attractive proposal and if Porter refuses to attend next week's meeting, we will get a lot of flack here. I think it's best Porter reserve judgment about the next meeting.

Mr. Johnson: Bill [Sullivan][4] is right. Porter should say we will get in touch with the other side about the meeting.

Mr. Kissinger: Even if the other side presents pure boilerplate?

Mr. Sullivan: They will give us boilerplate in any case. If they make an outright attack on the President, Porter will have cause to break off the negotiations. However, if they make a proposal which is seductive to the public and Porter refuses to attend the next meeting, we will get a lot of flack.

Mr. Kissinger: We'll get a lot of flack here, anyway. I understand the three choices for Porter.

Mr. Sullivan: We have to send instructions to Porter within the next six hours.

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[4] Brackets are in the original.

Mr. Kissinger: I'll speak to the President about this when I see him in a few minutes, and I'll call you by 1:00 p.m.[5] Are there any other problems?

Adm. Flanagan: The leaflet message was finally sent out.

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[5] Porter's instructions were as follows: if the North Vietnamese were inflexible, Porter was to do the following: "Once you have elicited their negative replies and have commented on the sterility of their presentation, you are authorized, in this contingency, to state that you see no rpt no grounds for a meeting next week and suggest that we resume the plenaries whenever they indicate that they are seriously interested in the negotiation of matters of substance." However, if the other side presented a seemingly reasonable proposal and appeared to be flexible, Porter should take a different path: "But, in this contingency, instead of rejecting outright a proposal for a May 11 Plenary, you should say that we will wish to study the full record of the meeting to determine whether a basis exists for a meeting next week, and indicate that our liaison officers will be touch with theirs on the subject." Finally, he was reminded: "You will note that there is no rpt no circumstance in which you are authorized automatically and unconditionally to accept a Plenary meeting for May 11." (Message 77030 to USDel Paris, May 3; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Paris Talks/Meetings, Box 191, Paris Talks, January–June 1972) In a backchannel message, Kissinger informed Porter that the supplemental instructions came with White House approval. (Backchannel message 21240 from Kissinger to Porter, May 3; ibid., Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972)

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116. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, May 3, 1972.

SUBJECT

Meetings with President Thieu

Ambassador Bunker has conveyed your message of support to President Thieu[2] who expressed appreciation and great pleasure in receiving it. President Thieu was obviously encouraged and "tremen-

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 56, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Situation Reports, Feb.–July 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates that the President saw it.

[2] Message 83 from Bunker to Haig, May 3, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 107, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam Negotiations, Paris Negotiations, January 25, 1972–January 1973.

dously pleased" by this reaffirmation of your strong support. His mood is decidedly positive.

During the course of the conversation,[3] President Thieu stated that the troops were willing and able to fight; there had been serious defects in leadership, organization and planning. He outlined changes which are being made to improve the military leadership:

—General Lam, the Commander of MR–1, will be relieved by General Truong, the highly-regarded Commander of MR–4.

—The Commander of the 21st ARVN Division, which had been sent to reenforce MR–3, will take over command of MR–4.

—The Deputy Commander of the Airborne Division will take command of the 21st Division.

—It has been agreed that General Dzu, the MR–2 Commander, should be replaced but his successor has not yet been determined.

—The Commander of MR–3, General Minh, has been told he must act decisively and kill the enemy.

Based on his meeting with his military commanders, President Thieu plans the following steps:

—As soon as the situation in the An Loc area is cleared up, the Airborne Division will be reassembled and prepared to move to MR–1. Two Airborne battalions are being moved from Pleiku to Saigon immediately. The airborne together with the Marines may be able to organize some defensive moves in the Hue area.

—Either the 9th or the 21st ARVN Division will be used in MR–3, MR–4, or Cambodia as a mobile reserve force.

In discussing reports from U.S. observers of a defeatest attitude in Hue and surrounding villages, Ambassador Bunker made several suggestions for demonstrating the backing of the national leadership for those fighting in Hue. President Thieu agreed with the assessment of the situation and proposed to accompany the new MR–1 commander to Da Nang and Hue tomorrow.

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[3] Bunker reported on the conversation in message 6374 from Saigon, May 3. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 241, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, January 1970–December 1974) Abrams's report of the same meeting, also dated May 3, is ibid., Box TS 56, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Situation Reports, Feb.–July 1972. A notation on Abrams's report indicates the President saw it.

117. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 3, 1972, 6:25 p.m.

[Omitted here is brief discussion of Kissinger's speaking engagement in New York, Nixon's eulogy the next day at J. Edgar Hoover's funeral, Kissinger's protest to Dobrynin about Soviet naval vessels in Cuba, and the military situation in Vietnam and adverse reports about it.]

P: In that respect, I think that my feeling that we probably should have hit them before you went was probably right.[2]

K: You know, you're right.

P: You would have been in a little stronger position over there. You know what I mean, they might have cancelled[3] but on the other hand—

K: You mean, hit them over the weekend?

P: Yeah.

K: Well, I wasn't against it. What stopped it over—I was in favor of it after the Quang Tri attack started. What stopped it over the weekend was that Abrams was screaming for the planes for himself.

P: I know, I know. But we run into that everytime though, Henry.

K: Well, at that time with everything coming apart—

P: It would have been rather critical.

K: Since that guy is dying to find an alibi.

P: Well, he sure does on that one. None of us are going to second-guess on the alibi business now. We're going to do the best we can and keep our cool; that's the main thing.

K: I think the problem with Abrams was—the problem with Le Duc Tho yesterday was he wants to see how far this offensive goes and he wasn't going to settle in mid-stream and he wasn't going to give me something we were going to use domestically to give our people hope. So that was the basic problem and whether we hit over the weekend or not, I don't think made a hell of a lot of difference.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 14, Chronological File, May 1–5, 1972. No classification marking. The transcript is printed in full in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 191.

[2] Reference is to the possible bombing in the Hanoi–Haiphong area of North Vietnam before Kissinger's April trip to Moscow.

[3] Reference is to the possible Soviet cancellation of the Moscow Summit.

P: Right. Well, look, we didn't so that's that. The important thing now is to it seems to me that we have to set this up so we can—I mean the cancellation, which of course seems to me inevitable at this point. I'm thinking that we might have to move it up to Friday.[4]

K: No, I think that would be a little early.

P: Do you?

K: The one thing we might consider, and I'd like to think about it, with your considered judgment, is whether one way of scaring the Russians with it is to say—you know, I'm having lunch with Dobrynin on Friday—I could say, "Now, look, Anatol, we're realists. There just can't be a summit with a President sitting in the Kremlin while Hue falls."

P: That's right.

K: Why don't we agree now on postponing it for two months.

P: Or one month.

K: Or one month.

P: There's some advantage, in my view, to have it one month.

K: That's right.

P: Obviously before the nominations. You could say we're just postponing it one month. We know damn well that the thing will have creamed out one way or another, won't it?

K: That's right.

P: And we could just say we're going to postpone it for one month. If we could get a mutual agreement, that would be the best of both worlds. But then on the other hand, of course,—Aren't you convinced that we do have to hit Hanoi/Haiphong once—

K: Mr. President, I believe that if—your real choice is between postponing and hitting—I mean, it's an immediate decision. If you postpone, you'll also want to hit afterwards.

P: Yeah.

K: But I do not see how you can do nothing.

P: Oh, Christ, my view is—I think that the [omission in the original] might be hitting and running the risk of their postponing.

K: That's right.

P: Which I think is a very real option.

K: That is a real option.

P: A real option.

K: But then it is better to do it earlier than later.

P: That would be this weekend.

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[4] May 5.

K: If you're going to hit without and not postpone, it would be better to do that as early as you can but not before you have the Russian reply.[5] There is no sense—

P: Yeah, yeah; I agree.

K: In playing that one without having the cards. But another option we can consider is my telling Dobrynin—first of all, that makes it look serious. If we are thinking about talking about postponing.

P: Yeah. We'll lay the foundation for it too.

K: Right.

P: No, I've concluded that we can't—I mean, we're probably inevitably—Well, we go in with one proposition—we have to hit; the sooner, the better. Right?

K: If we are not going to postpone, we have to hit. If you are going to play the hitting game, it's better to do it with as much time between it and the summit as possible.

P: The difficulty with however postponing and then waiting for a week to hit. I just don't think the postponing is going to have that much effect on the situation in the South. If we're going to have any marginal effect in the South—

K: Mr. President, the point may be that nothing is going to have any effect on the situation in the South.

P: I couldn't agree more.

K: That's the tragedy of this situation.

P: Right.

K: In fact, if we were confident, we could hold the situation. If Laird had been telling us the truth, we could play it very cool. You could go to Moscow in a very strong position and say, "All right, we are licking your sons-of-bitches." Then you could have the best of both worlds.

P: Um-hmmm, um-hmmm.

P: We're going to keep our cool and do what has to be done. We have to realize that there aren't any good choices but we'll make them. But you had no idea that anybody would consider doing nothing; good God, the only one that would do that would be Laird.

K: That's right.

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[5] On May 3, Kissinger and his aides drafted a letter from Nixon to Brezhnev about the unproductive private talks between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho the previous day. The letter stated: "They were deeply disappointing, the more so since there had been reason to believe, as the result of Dr. Kissinger's exchanges with you and Foreign Minister Gromyko, that progress would occur not only on the procedure of the talks but on their substance." For the full text, see *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 190.

P: Laird and Abrams. And I don't know why the hell they would be for that. Then they'd have no scapegoat at all. Anybody else suggesting that we do nothing?

K: Well, I guess Rogers probably would be in favor of doing it.

P: Well, we're not going to ask him.

K: Well, I think the choices are between hitting over this weekend and there is something about delaying the attack until Sunday.[6]

P: Um-hmmm; I agree.

K: Well, I don't know with all these stories of disaster; they have plenty of unfavorable news with it.

P: I'm inclined to think that as far as weekly news magazines, I'd rather hit and have that in it.

K: On Saturday?

P: Yep. You've got to remember that's our story. You see, you change the story when you hit.

K: There's a lot to be said for that.

P: You change the story; you change the headline, Henry. You know, that's why I've been a very strong opponent. I guess Friday won't work; that's too soon but boy!

K: I don't think we can—we have to wait for the Russian answer unless the answer doesn't come on Friday. Then we can say we gave them 48 hours.

P: Um-hmmm. Well, I'm inclined to think we have to wait for the answer; I agree.

K: But I think if we don't have it by Friday noon; we should just order whatever we want to order.[7]

P: Let me ask you this, what is your schedule tomorrow? Do you have another engagement tomorrow night or a dinner, I suppose, of some sort.

K: Well, I was going to go to New York actually to speak to a group about the Russian Summit.

P: I wonder if you could cancel that. Do you think you could? Or put it off?

K: I suppose I could, yes.

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[6] May 7.

[7] Brezhnev replied on May 6. See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 200. In his memoirs Kissinger characterized the reply in these terms: Brezhnev "could assure us that North Vietnam was ready to seek a political settlement; of course, he added offhandedly, this required a coalition government. In other words we could have peace by accepting Hanoi's terms; for this insight Breznhev was not needed." (*White House Years,* p. 1182)

P: Well, I think we ought to have—wait a minute, I don't think you need to. Say from about 3 o'clock on tomorrow—

K: Oh, that's easy.

P: You clear your schedule and what time would you have to leave to go to New York? 5:00?

K: 4:30.

P: Um-hmmm.

K: I could save from 2:30 on.

P: Um-hmmm; I'll see what I can do. Well, let's have a good talk tomorrow. Let me ask you to do this—

K: I'll cancel this thing too but I think there's an advantage in being cool.

P: Oh, no, no; I wouldn't cancel. Let me ask you to do this—why don't you in the thing—I'd like for you to run down in your own mind and sort of put it on paper what happens as we cancel the Russian summit. Do you get my point?

K: Yeah.

P: I mean, so we can't pull the summit, then what are the consequences and so forth having in mind the fact that certainly as I pointed out that we have drawn the sword on them; they will have to respond.

K: Well, maybe not necessarily.

P: I agree; I know. Let's assume the worst. Do it like you do your usual thing, it could be this way or it could be the other thing; this would be very helpful to me in making the decision, see.

K: Right.

P: And the idea is so—the way I look at it, you could cancel. And so the Russians gin up their opposition and, of course, the Democrats will go wild; the candidates, so forth and so on. I guess Bob told you about his poll; he brought it in to me tonight.

K: Yes, yes; we had a good talk this afternoon.

P: I told him to pass it over. I said it wasn't going to affect me but I'm glad he did it because—

K: Oh, I think it's important.

P: It tells you what we're up against; public opinion wise. I was rather surprised frankly that, you know, they would, despite the Hawks and so forth, that so many people—sort of like China in a way, you know, the damn China Summit, the people wanted it even though they knew—so they're sort of big news. I guess we've talked ourselves into this with the idea that talking is a good thing, Henry. That's our problem isn't it?

K: The last thing we did from a situation of strength.

P: I know—you and I know that the Russian thing, however, is one where we can't possibly be there in a position of weakness and I'm just not going to be there.

K: I'm wondering about so many things. If you're there when Hue falls—

P: It may fall before we get there.

K: Well, that's possible but supposing you're there while 10,000 Americans are captured in Binh Long? I mean this thing could turn into a horrible defacto. Under what conditions will you be there in general? After having made all these threats?

P: No way, no way. No, we've got to start the hitting of the North but let's—even the hitting of the North, what does that—we've got to do it in any event so let's be strength in whatever position we have and perhaps provide something—Incidentally, I was somewhat encouraged by the actions that Thieu had taken and changed the command and the rest. That seemed to be rather good.

K: They are good.

P: Then also they apparently have a pretty good order of battle up there in the Hue area, have they not?

K: They do if they fight. The problem, Mr. President, is—here I'm trying to be realistic and I was talking to Haig about it—there just isn't any ARVN offensive action, they are just not fighting.

P: Anyplace, huh?

K: Right.

P: Only defensive.

K: Only defensive and then only sporadically. And there is just too much unraveling in too many places.

P: Well, maybe we have to make a big play. Maybe we have to go to Thieu and say, "Look, here, boy." Get my point? You know, I don't believe in just letting what seems to be a disaster develop without going to the heart of the matter.

K: Before we do that, I think we ought to go to the North Vietnamese. Well, even then you shouldn't do that in Moscow.

P: Oh, hell, no. No, we go to the North Vietnamese first by hitting them. Hitting them goddamn hard!

K: Well, there's no sense in going to Thieu and asking him to resign unless you have a prior deal with the North Vietnamese.

P: Um-hmmm. Yeah, but look in any event, you've got to go first. You've got to go first, Henry, with a—you've got to have a damn good strike in the North. That is absolutely indispensable to our policy. Would you agree?

K: Right.

P: And soon, huh? Unless we cancel. Of course I agree the cancellation has a psychological effect but what more I don't know. And then you've got to look down the road to what is the Russian reaction; that's what I want to see if we cancel, what will they do. You see, that's the kind of thing I want to go over with you to see what you think we're going to do. We have to look down the road to see whether we basically want—what happens if they see McGovern and Humphrey are there to deal with them, what happens if we are there in a position of—I don't mean now at the summit but later—you see, you have the proposition where you cancel the summit—here's as I see it, you lose in Vietnam, all right. And [omission in the original] survive the election, who knows; things are very strange at the present time in this country. But then where are you?

K: If you cancel the summit and survive the election?

P: Yeah.

K: Oh, then you are in a very strong position.

P: That's a very, very big risk but if you cancel the summit and lose in Vietnam, winning the election is going to be a hell of a tough thing to do unless we are able to lose in Vietnam and do something about the POWs and so forth.

K: Right.

P: And, of course, then we are going to have turn very hard on the critics and blame them for the failure of negotiations. As you well know, we can make a hell of a case.

K: Right.

P: So these are some of the things we should think about but let's look down the road as to how it's going to—put your mind to that, which you like to do anyway. And when you are in New York, over there at the Metropolitan Club—

K: I'll be very confident.

P: Be confident as hell. I mean, I think the way I did the Leaders today was the right way. Look, this is a tough damn battle and you're up against enormous odds and they're fighting, you know. We all know they're not fighting too well in some places but they've got to be doing something, Henry, good God, unless Abrams has been lying to us.

K: He admits he has.

P: He admits he has, huh?

K: Yeah.

P: Well, they've done something, Henry. Good, God, at An Loc, don't you think they did something there?

K: They were encircled; they had no place to run to.

P: Um-hmmm. And Hue? Does Haig have any information on that? I'll call him and get it from him?

K: I've just reviewed it with him. About the looting, we don't have any information.

P: The looting and the—this and that. I have a sort of a feeling that that may be an exaggeration, you know what I mean? We've had that sort of thing before, haven't we?

K: Right. And that wouldn't be decisive in itself.

P: No.

K: But it's a tough situation.

P: I have a gut reaction that we've got to give them one good belt.

K: So do I.

P: Come hell or high water, you know.

K: There's no question about that.

P: And Laird is to the contrary. Not withstanding, it's got to be for two good solid days; just belt the hell out of them.

K: I agree.

P: That's one thing we've got to do. Because at least we have indicated—After all, I've built the whole thing on we're not going to go out there without doing our best, everything we can.

K: That's right.

P: If we do everything we can and they still can't make it, then it's not our fault.

K: And I'm going to have some contingency plans made here for that eventuality, Mr. President, because we can't have to do it in panic. I'll just get Haig and one other person working on that.

P: On what?

K: On what happens if the whole thing unravels.

P: Oh, hell, yes; hell, yes. You have to leave for New York tomorrow at what, 4:30?

K: Right, but I'll cancel that thing if necessary.

P: No, no, no.

K: But it may give an impression of a great crisis.

P: Well, to an extent it is, isn't it?

K: Oh, yeah; it would be clearly understood. Or I can set my remarks for later and go down on a later plane and tell them to do the dinner without me.

P: You might say that you have a meeting that will not finish till 5 o'clock. Could you do that?

K: Sure. And then take a plane and still get there by 8:00; we can do that.

P: Why don't we do that then? We will plan to meet between 3:00 and 5:00 and sit down and talk this thing over a little more.

K: Good.

P: In the meantime, do your thinking about the whole thing. And get off to your dinner tonight and as I say, By God, play it like I did with the Leaders today.

K: Absolutely, Mr. President.

P: Cold and tough. We haven't gotten anything—what about that poor Bunker, has he sent us anything in yet or any of his evaluations? I suppose he is probably just about dying, huh?

K: I'll ask him tonight for his evaluation.

P: Yeah. If you would get his evaluation. I don't think Abrams' evaluation is worth a tinker's damn.

K: I'll get his evaluation.

P: Particularly with regard to the South Vietnamese—will they survive; that's really what it boils down to.

K: Right, right.

P: If you could get that for us, that would be helpful.

K: I'll get that in the meantime.

P: Enjoy your dinner.

K: I'll be speaking.

P: Uh-huh.

118. Message From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Abrams) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Saigon, May 4, 1972, 0425Z.

88748. Deliver during duty hours. Subject: Frame Glory (U). References: A. COMUSMACV 031204 May 72 (TS/Specat). B. CINCPAC 030402Z May 72 (TS/Specat). C. CJCS 022232Z May 72 (TS/Specat).[2]

1. (TS) Reference A is my special assessment of the situation in RVN as of 2 May and actions being taken by President Thieu to get things under better control. References B and C direct planning for execution of Frame Glory on 6 and 7 May 1972.

2. (TS) The situation in RVN at this moment and for the next several days will not permit the diversion of B–52s and 7AF assets to Frame Glory on 6 and 7 May.[3] We have elements of two enemy divisions in the DMZ with good evidence that they are moving south into RVN. Kontum is expected to come under attack at any moment. The defenses protecting Hue are under attack by fire and ground attack could begin at any time. The command and control problems in MR1 remain critical. President Thieu has attacked the command and control problem by making key command changes. Gen. Truong took command of I Corps yesterday and we have got to pour the air support to him, both

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 62, COMUSMACV General Service Messages, March 1972. Top Secret; Flash; Specat; Exclusive. When he attended the WSAG meeting at the White House the morning of May 4, Moorer brought Abrams's and McCain's messages with him (the latter's message is cited in footnote 2). In an 11:28 a.m. conversation with Rush he said: "While we were away those two messages I showed you from Abrams and McCain? Pursley came down and ordered my Exec not to send them over to the White House. Of course, I had already taken them over. My orders from the President are all evaluations from the Field Commanders are to be sent to the White House. I did not see anything extraordinary about it but Pursley said that the SecDef is pleased with the messages because he did not think strikes should go anyway but did not want them to go to the White House. I am probably going to get a blast but I don't care." (Moorer Diary, May 4; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

[2] All ibid., Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 62, COMUSMACV General Service Messages, March 1972.

[3] Later in the day, McCain wrote to Moorer: "General Abrams and I are in full agreement that Frame Glory should not be executed at this particular time. The situation in MR–1 and MR–2 requires that maximum Tacair and Arc Light support be provided to the ARVN ground forces. In addition, President Thieu has requested General Abrams to give MR–3 a higher priority for Tacair and B–52s in order to expedite clearing up the situation on Route 13 and around An Loc." (Message 89204, May 4, 0805Z; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 46, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Military Assessments, Apr.–Dec. 1972)

to sustain his already strong will and to hold the main enemy forces off of him with air and buy time while he regains control in MR1. President Thieu's strategic concept includes clearing up An Loc immediately and releasing the Airborne Division (-)[4] for movement to the critical MR1 area. To help accomplish this disengagement of the Airborne Division (-), President Thieu has asked me to give top priority on air support to MR3 for the next three days. I have already issued the necessary guidance to accomplish this. I feel that President Thieu has taken the correct decisions and that we must give him our full support. In this situation we are dealing with the central problem of will to fight and any interruption in our support to the key RVNAF commanders is reflected in their will and determination. We must stay with them at this critical time and apply the air power where the immediate effect is greatest.

3. (TS) If Frame Glory must be executed for reasons not known to us here, the solution that would have the least effect on in-country operations would be to employ the carrier force, leaving the B–52 and 7AF effort for in-country use.[5]

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[4] The minus sign indicates that the Division would be sent without some of its units.

[5] Although eventually deferring to Abrams, the White House was at first adamantly against giving up the B–52 strikes. In a conversation with Nixon on May 2, Haig said: "Admiral Moorer and Rush are sorting out the timing on the B–52s and the strike for Friday [May 5]. It probably will take place on Friday afternoon our time. The first would be, and that'll be very early morning Saturday time, with B–52s the first wave. I told him to get very heavy on the B–52s, to tell Abrams right now—" Nixon interrupted in agreement, and Haig continued: "—that, by God, he's going to have to count on losing those assets." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 717–10)

119. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 4, 1972, 10:05–10:36 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas Moorer

CIA
Richard Helms
William Nelson
[*name not declassified*] (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—We should make a better effort to correlate intelligence reports of enemy logistic activity with the BDA reports.

—Defense will show some of the captured Soviet equipment at its press briefing today.

—The message on possible courses of action in Laos should be coordinated and sent out today. In addition, the Defense representative going to Laos to explain the interpretation of the Symington ceiling should also brief Ambassador Godley.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, what do you have?

Mr. Helms: [Read his briefing.][2]

Mr. Kissinger: Those units in MR 3 are eerily out of contact. I wonder where they are going. What do you think?

Mr. Sullivan: You mean the North Vietnamese units?

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

[2] Helms's May 4 briefing, "The Situation in Vietnam," is in the Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 79–T00862A, Box 4, DCI Briefing for 4 May 1972 WSAG Meeting.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. They seem to be disappearing from the An Loc area. But where are they going?

Adm. Moorer: As you know, the North Vietnamese had three divisions plus the independent 271st Regiment at An Loc. Abe [Gen. Abrams] thinks the 7th and 9th Divisions are at 50 percent strength. Two regiments of the 5th Division are south of An Loc, and Abe thinks they may swing around to Tay Ninh City when they are refurbished.

Mr. Kissinger: Has the 25th ARVN Division moved out of its base camps yet?

Adm. Moorer: They've had some skirmishes during the last 24 hours, but they haven't been as aggressive as they should be.

Mr. Sullivan: Ambassador Bunker said that Thieu gave Gen. Minh three days to clean up the An Loc area.

Adm. Moorer: That's right, and two of the three days are already gone. We've had some scattered reports that the North Vietnamese are beginning to come down Highway 1 to Saigon. In one case, a tank track was reported. None of these reports, however, have been substantiated. We do know, though, that the 271st NVA Regiment is in bad shape.

The South Vietnamese strategy now is to transfer the Airborne forces to the north of Hue. This will involve two movements.

Mr. Kissinger: The Airborne unit has been moving around so much that it may get airsick. Has it fought yet?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. They saved the day at An Loc. They were also sent north of Kontum, and they saved the situation there, too. One Airborne Brigade has been kept at Saigon.

Mr. Kissinger: How quickly can the Airborne forces be sent to Hue?

Adm. Moorer: In general, it should take about five to seven days for all the new South Vietnamese deployments to be made.

Mr. Kissinger: Do they have that much time?

Adm. Moorer: It's difficult to say. Hue is already getting some pressure from the enemy artillery. Johnny Vogt says the artillery is the main problem for the South Vietnamese. He says no ARVN unit has pulled out as a result of a ground assault. What's happened is that they have been subjected to intense concentrations of artillery fire—and then they pulled out.

At Hue, we've made a detailed terrain study to pinpoint the most likely enemy artillery positions. We also sent a team out to Hue to help our people in using the infrared component of the gunships in pinpointing artillery positions at night. Once we have the artillery pieces spotted, Tac Air will take them out during the daytime. We're making a big effort to disrupt and degrade the enemy's use of artillery at Hue.

According to Vogt, no NVA ground assault has overrun an ARVN position. The South Vietnamese just leave after being subjected to

hundreds of rounds of artillery fire. Don't forget that Quang Tri was hit with more than 4,900 rounds—and that's a hell of a lot.

Mr. Kissinger: If the enemy is firing so many artillery rounds, why don't our planes spot the guns?

Adm. Moorer: For one thing, there is a mix of shells. I don't know the exact breakdown of artillery, mortar and rocket fire at Quang Tri. It's hard to pinpoint the source of the fire because it comes from three or four different directions miles away from the city. The enemy has obviously been able to do a good job of artillery placement.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm amazed that we can't spot the guns. They must be in a ten-mile arc of the city.

Adm. Moorer: Yes, but many of the shells are coming through the jungle.

Mr. Kissinger: There's jungle area at Quang Tri?

Adm. Moorer: Yes—on the western side of the city. That area is pretty well-covered. There are even trees in the DMZ. The DMZ is not all flat.

Nonetheless, Vogt said he thinks the North Vietnamese are suffering staggering losses. There was a report this morning that the 304th and 308th Divisions are being combined into one division. Vogt said there's not a truck moving on Highways 137 and 1032—from the South Vietnamese positions up to the DMZ. We've been attacking those roads 24 hours a day. We've also been attacking the roads in the DMZ and the Ban Kerai Pass. As I told you a couple of days ago, our pilots reported seeing many trucks and mounds of supplies forty feet high at the Pass. Vogt has our aircraft attacking the enemy logistic lines day and night—with excellent results.

One of the problems is that we can't correlate the results of these attacks with the intelligence reports. For example, we get intelligence reports on truck movements or the sighting of thirty PT–76s or fifty sampans. We also get BDA after the air strikes. But we can't correlate the BDA reports and photos with the intelligence reports. Vogt says he takes immediate action when he gets an intelligence report. When we get the raw intelligence data, though, we don't think they are taking any action out there.

I told Vogt that our aim should be to get more correlation between the intelligence reports and the BDA. We should try to get something along the lines of the classic war reports, which read: "Sighted sub, sank same."

Mr. Johnson: (to Adm. Moorer) I'm glad you are finding as much difficulty with these reports as we are.

Adm. Moorer: We're trying to work out a better reporting system. The North Vietnamese are suffering serious losses, but we don't have

a precise picture of these losses. During the last few days, no enemy tanks have been sighted at An Loc. And only PT–76s—amphibious tanks—were sighted at Quang Tri. However, that may be because the bridges were blown up at Quang Tri. Anyway, we don't know if the North Vietnamese lost 300 tanks, or if the tanks are moving to other areas, or if the tanks can't operate because they are out of fuel and ammunition.

We don't have a precise picture of what is happening to the other side. When we spotted the large enemy convoy on Highway 1, we jumped on it, backed it up and chewed it to pieces. Vogt assures me there is no enemy truck movement on the highway—from the South Vietnamese positions up to the DMZ.

Mr. Johnson: Part of the problem is that the reports come in separately from two channels: (1) the intelligence—CIA, DIA and J–2—channel, and (2) the operations—J–3—channel. We should be bringing the two together, but that is never done.

Adm. Moorer: And it's particularly difficult to do that when we're reporting on a 24-hour basis. I'm trying to organize a better system. (to Mr. Johnson) I have the same problem you do: when there are 234 sorties, and when we get reports of four or five trucks destroyed, that isn't right.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm worrying about the Airborne troops moving out of MRs 2 and 3. They may never get to Hue, especially if they keep one brigade in Saigon until the 21st Division reaches An Loc. That may take a while.

Adm. Moorer: Abe points out in his message that this is a risk. He's more concerned about MR 2 than about MR 3. This is a risk, but the South Vietnamese don't have any more mobile forces. They must go on the offensive. If they continue to stay on the defensive, they will be chewed up. Consequently, I don't think we should try to discourage them at this moment.

Mr. Nutter: Aren't they planning to take one division out of MR 4?

Mr. Kissinger: But there's only one division left there.

Adm. Flanagan: The 7th and 9th ARVN Divisions are both in the Delta. Abrams said that Thieu may move the 9th out.

Adm. Moorer: I think he said in his message that Thieu was planning to use both divisions in MR 3, as well as in MR 4.

Gen. Haig joined the meeting at this point.

Adm. Moorer: I told Vogt to get some better BDA and to tie all the reports together—as Alex [Johnson] suggests. Vogt keeps using the word "staggering" to describe the enemy losses. He makes all the FACs report directly to him after their missions. They've been telling him

that the mounds of supplies north of the Ban Kerai Pass have been chewed up.

Mr. Rush: Why aren't we getting any reports from Vogt?

Mr. Nutter: Maybe they are too busy blowing up the supplies to write reports.

Mr. Rush: Vogt should have the time to prepare a message.

Adm. Moorer: Vogt doesn't report directly to us. He reports to Abe, and then Abe forwards the reports to us. I'm trying to straighten this out.[3]

Mr. Sullivan: After we get these reports, can't we also make some of them public?

Adm. Moorer: I think we should be able to do that. We could release some photos, too.

Mr. Kissinger: Couldn't Vogt give a briefing out there?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, I think so.

Mr. Johnson: He handles those briefings so well.

Mr. Rush: You know, we're playing the Vietnamization story hard. The refugee problem is especially tragic, but it could possibly have a reverse twist with the American people—and it could help us.

Mr. Johnson: I agree. We were talking about this on the Hill yesterday. In a perverse way, the refugee problem could help us—and make the opposition play right into our hands.

Mr. Kissinger: Did the DOD logistics team leave yesterday?

Mr. Rush: Yes. It left at 3:30 in the afternoon.

Mr. Kissinger: Was it in the newspapers?

Mr. Rush: Yes. All the papers carried the story.

Mr. Kissinger: Are you going to show the Soviet equipment at your briefing today?

Mr. Rush: Yes. We'll show it at the 11:00 a.m. briefing. We were supposed to do it yesterday, but the signals somehow got crossed.

Adm. Moorer: We're starting to move the aircraft out to Takli.

Mr. Kissinger: Has there been a readout yet from Porter?

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[3] At 8:43 a.m. that morning, Moorer spoke with Vogt in Saigon, telling him that he (Moorer) needed information to show the White House and the Secretary of Defense the key role of air power in countering the enemy offensive. Vogt replied: "I will try to fill my reports out with more of that. In actual fact I have dozens and dozens of statements from reports that our advisers sent in from the field, all saying without any question, if it was not for air they say done a long time ago time after time air saved their neck, they say. I don't emphasize these things with Abrams. After a while he would think blowing my own horn. The fact no mistaking it everybody understands out here holding together out here is air power. More of that in my reports." (Moorer Diary, May 4; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

Mr. Sullivan: No. I spoke to Paris at 9:40 this morning, but they weren't back from the meeting yet. I left word that they are to call over here as soon as they get back. The only thing the press has so far is the two opening statements.

Mr. Kissinger: It doesn't look like the North Vietnamese will make a new proposal.

Mr. Sullivan: That's right. Le Duc Tho didn't even go to the meeting. The other side presented the same old boilerplate.

Mr. Kissinger: I take it Porter understands what he should say if he doesn't agree to another meeting next week. He should say we are ready to go back any time the other side has something new to say. He should not emphasize that we are adjourning the talks.

Mr. Sullivan: All that was explained to Porter yesterday—over the phone and in the cable of instructions. He will emphasize the negativism of the other side, and he will say we are ready to go back when they start to negotiate seriously.[4]

Adm. Moorer: Six of the M–48 tanks were delivered by air to Danang yesterday.

Mr. Johnson: Did the South Vietnamese have drivers available to get the tanks off the planes?

Adm. Moorer: Don't worry. We got the tanks off.

Mr. Kissinger: I see Godley sent a cable in about possible courses of action and the Symington ceiling.

Mr. Rush: I should point out that we are now in good shape on the ceiling. We're within one percent of it. There's no hope, though, of getting it increased.

Mr. Kissinger: Can the operations Godley suggests be put off until July?

Mr. Sullivan: We think so. That's the essence of a message we want to get cleared and sent out today.

Mr. Helms left the meeting at this point.

Mr. Sullivan: Godley wants to harass the NVA units in southern Laos.

Mr. Johnson: The essence of the matter is—as Ken [Rush] says—that the ceiling cannot be lifted. Therefore, we have to figure out what we can do now to stay within it and what can be postponed until July.

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[4] See footnote 5, Document 115.

Mr. Rush: We swallowed $30 million, and Godley doesn't realize that yet. So we think Godley is really asking for another $20 million rather than $50 million, as his $400 million estimate would suggest.

Mr. Sullivan: I assume you are sending someone out to Laos to explain the new interpretation of the ceiling.

Adm. Flanagan: Yes. Col. Morris[5] is on his way out there.

Mr. Sullivan: I hope he sees Godley. I told the Laos Desk to tell your people that the person who goes to Laos should see the Ambassador and tell him orally about the new interpretation.

Adm. Flanagan: Col. Morris will do that. He's in the Comptroller's shop.

Mr. Johnson: The new DOD interpretation should be explained to Stennis because we don't want to deceive him.

Mr. Rush: We'll take care of Stennis.

Mr. Sullivan: But we may not be able to take care of Symington.

Mr. Rush: That's right.

Adm. Flanagan: When the GAO comes to us, we will argue it. But we won't say anything before that time.

Mr. Kissinger: How long can the enemy sustain these attacks logistically? Where is Carver?

Mr. Nelson: George is on the Hill—briefing the House Armed Services Committee. Our estimate was that the enemy could keep going for six months.

Mr. Kissinger: I don't believe that.

Adm. Moorer: The estimate was for six months—interspersed with lulls in different areas at different times. Given the activity of recent days, though, I think it will probably be difficult for them to keep it up for six months.

Mr. Rush: If the North Vietnamese are losing as much of their equipment as we are losing of ours, they won't be able to sustain the offensive for six months.

Mr. Johnson: I think Henry was referring to how long they can keep up the tempo of recent days.

Mr. Kissinger: That's right.

Adm. Moorer: I think their tempo has been somewhat dulled.

Mr. Johnson: (to Adm. Moorer) You feel they are past their peak?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. But I do think there will be one more big bash at Hue—and maybe at Kontum, too. The first onslaught across the DMZ has been dulled.

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[5] Not further identified.

Mr. Johnson: We have to keep in mind that the 312th and 325th NVA Divisions may be coming into the fight.

Adm. Moorer: Two regiments of the 312th Division are still in Laos.

Mr. Johnson: But the 325th Division is fresh.

Adm. Moorer: One unit of the 312th—the Headquarters—has moved to Vietnam. But two of the division's regiments are still on the Plain of Jars.

Mr. Nelson: Nonetheless, it looks like the 312th Division will be coming out of Laos.

Adm. Moorer: Our aircraft are working Highway 7, looking for the division.

Mr. Johnson: The 325th Division has fresh troops, and it's insertion into the battle could bring the activity back to a high level.

Mr. Nelson: We also have some tenuous indications the 316th NVA Division is moving back from Laos.

Mr. Kissinger: From North Laos?

Mr. Nelson: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: Weren't these divisions used up and didn't they take heavy casualties during the campaign?

Adm. Moorer: If they had not taken heavy casualties, they would have captured Long Tieng.

Mr. Nelson: We think they are at less than 50 percent strength.

Mr. Kissinger: What will happen as they withdraw from Laos? Will Vang Pao follow them?

Mr. Nelson: No. The Symington ceiling won't allow us to do that.

Mr. Kissinger: What's the problem? Is there no money? Can't we borrow against next year's funds?

Mr. Nelson: We've just about reached the ceiling now.

Mr. Kissinger: I don't care so much about southern Laos. But we should follow the enemy in Northern Laos.

Mr. Sullivan: I'm sure Vang Pao will follow them a bit. He's already sent a unit in the direction of Phou Pha Sai.

Mr. Johnson: We'll have to face up very shortly to the decision of whether we want to encourage Vang Pao to move out. And we have to remember that his operations on the PDJ last year were very expensive.

Mr. Nelson: Last year, he went to the edge of the PDJ.

Mr. Kissinger: We never let him go beyond it.

Mr. Sullivan: One of the most significant things this year is that the Thais have performed very well.

[Received message about today's plenary session, which he read.][6]

Message was: "The other side presented no new proposals. Their presentation was entirely hardline boilerplate, with no ostensible flexibility. They repeated all standard demands, including necessity to respond to seven points. Our side followed contingency A of guidance, posing eight questions. The other side made no effort to respond to our questions. Instead they made irrelevant statements, quoting from press articles, etc.

"We said we saw no grounds for meeting next week and suggested plenaries resume when the other side indicates it is seriously interested in negotiating substance. The other side indicated it was ready for this move by reading prepared statement denouncing our sabotage of meetings and calling for continuation of plenaries.

"As he was leaving meeting, Porter told press that our decision was based not merely on developments at today's meeting but on our inability to make progress in all available channels."

Mr. Kissinger: Are there any other items of business?

Adm. Moorer: Generally speaking, the last 24 hours have been quiet.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me bring one other thing up. Just in case the situation in the South becomes unstuck, do we have any forces we can put in to protect U.S. personnel?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. We have 3,000 Marines available for that.

Mr. Kissinger: Where are the Marines?

Adm. Moorer: On ships, off the beaches.

Mr. Kissinger: Are they there now?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. We're keeping them out there.

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[6] Message 8581 from USDel Paris, May 4. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 191, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, January–June 1972)

120. Diary Entry by the Assistant to the President (Haldeman)[1]

Washington, May 4, 1972.

Hoover funeral this morning.[2] P did the eulogy and did an extremely good job. Rest of the day was devoted to the debate over the point of the Summit cancellation. P called me in first thing this morning, said he had just gone over things with Haig, he's concerned about the public information operation in Vietnam, feels we have to ride Laird harder on watching the news reports, that they're letting incorrect things get out and not correcting them. Then he said he wanted K and me to see Connally, give him a cold turkey briefing on the Summit situation, get his judgment, says the other possibility for conferring would be Mitchell. In any event I called Connally from his office and set up an appointment for right after the funeral, and then the P said he had added an extra ingredient in the whole thing that he had thought of last night, which is that if we cancel the Summit, we go for all the marbles, including a blockade.[3] Then he deplored again the problem of the military being so completely unimaginative.

He said that I should try to get Connally to stay till June 1, that he can't leave in the middle of the Soviet flap, and the war will also be in better shape by then.[4] He's concerned that if we cancel the Soviet thing, we'll dash the hopes that we've created in the minds of people by the Soviet trip, that we'll get a very big bang against us with the Democrats on the warpath with Soviet support.

He said he wanted me to run another poll, saying that the North Vietnamese hold 400 Americans as POW's, some for as long as five years, and they refuse to release them. Would you favor the P imposing a naval blockade on North Vietnam to be lifted only when all POW's

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[1] Source: *Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition*. Also printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 192.

[2] FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

[3] In a mid-morning conversation with Haldeman that took place between 9:06 and 9:59 a.m., the President said: "I said every argument against the blockade has just disappeared [unclear] and the rest. And, we'll say we're going to blockade, we're going to keep the blockade on and starve those bastards. Of course, you have to [unclear] air strikes. See the blockade is a more humane thing in one way than air strikes; you don't kill any civilians—not as many. You've got to do some bombing, Bob, to have a blockade. You know, you gotta keep out runners and so forth, but—" Haldeman interrupted, "But not like the level of bombing—" A moment later Nixon replied, "You blockade and then you have to take out the railroads and the highways to keep them constantly attrited." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 719–4)

[4] Connally resigned as Secretary of the Treasury on June 12.

are returned and there's a cease-fire obtained in South Vietnam? Then to add, even though this would mean United States Naval ships stopping Russian ships delivering arms to North Vietnam.

Henry and I went over and had a one and a half hour meeting with Connally.[5] Henry spent most of the time giving him the background and making the case that we were now faced with three alternatives: one, was to do nothing, and in effect back down on our bluff; second, would be to bomb the North, and Hanoi and Haiphong, with the attendant risks, including the great risk of the cancellation of the Summit; and the third, would be to cancel the Summit ourselves and then follow it up by bombing the North. Before I could make the case for the other side, Connally leaped in and said he felt very strongly that under no circumstances should we cancel and then bomb the North, that people want the Soviet Summit, and we should not be in the position to cancel it, if it's going to be canceled we should let the Soviets cancel it. He says you've got to start with the basic premise, however, that the P cannot take a military defeat in Vietnam, it's absolutely imperative that we not let this offensive succeed, so we have to do anything and everything necessary in order to deal with that. On that basis he also feels that the P is now in a very good position in this country in that he's got to have the guts to meet this situation, and that we've got to make it clear to the Russians that we are not going to be defeated, and we are not going to surrender, as the P has said. In other words, the P has got to back up his public posture.

I came back. Henry had to go on to the luncheon. I reported this to the P and he was inclined to agree with the Connally view, saying that's basically the conclusion he had already come to and that this confirmed it, that he, therefore, wanted to meet with Henry and me at 3:00 and go over the thing, so we went over to the EOB then and P made the point that he had made up his mind, that he can't lose the war, that the only real mistakes he had made in his Administration were the times when he had not followed his own instincts. On the EC–121 situation with North Korea,[6] he knew we should move in and hit all their air bases but he let himself be talked out of it because Rogers and Laird both threatened to quit if he went ahead with it. After the

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[5] According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger met Connally and Haldeman at the Treasury Department between 12:05 and 1:20 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76, Record of Schedule Aug 1970–Aug 1973)

[6] On April 15, 1969, North Korean aircraft shot down a United States EC–121 Constellation on a reconnaissance mission over the Sea of Japan, killing the entire 31-man crew.

November 3 speech, when he swung the nation behind him,[7] we should've gone ahead and bombed the North at the time, although we didn't. If we had moved on that kind of move then, we wouldn't have these problems now. Same with Laos, that although Henry did basically follow his instincts on this thing, it worked as well as it could have. He said that he had been thinking it over, and that he's decided that we can't lose the war, that we're going to hit hard, that we're going to move in. The Summit is not important in this context, and that going to the Summit and paying the price of losing in Vietnam would not be satisfactory.

He put it very toughly to Henry. He said he's made up his mind, didn't want to get into a discussion about it, didn't want to be talked out of it. Henry kept trying to interrupt, but the P went on very strongly in this vein. He obviously sensed something of the drama of the moment and he was pushing his position very hard. When Henry finally did get to talk, he said that he, too, had been thinking about it, that the objectives that he came up with were the same as the P's, that he agreed that we couldn't lose the war and that we had to do something. His difference, however, was that we should not move ahead with the bombing, as the P thought we should, but rather should first move to blockade Haiphong. The point being that bombing was what they were expecting and it's better to do the unexpected, first of all. Second, the blockade would in some ways be a less aggressive move than the bombing, although it would be a stronger signal to them and would do us more good. Henry's opposed to just a symbolic bombing, he feels that if we bomb we should do it totally, and that it would be better to blockade first and then on a continuing basis. Also by blockading it gives us a little more time to keep the bombers in the South, where the military wants them during the current tough action.

The more the P thought about it, the more he liked Henry's ideas as long as it was followed up with continued bombing, so that became his conclusion.

He then had Connally and Haig come over and join the meeting. When they got there he reviewed the history again about not following his instincts and so forth, the point that he can't lose the war. He said that we won't lose the country if we lose the Summit meeting, but we will lose the country if we lose the war. Then he said what he had

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[7] In his November 3, 1969, address to the nation, President Nixon described his administration's peace initiatives, the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and the policy of Vietnamization. See *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pp. 901–909. It is known as the "silent majority" speech because at its end, Nixon said: "And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of Americans—I ask for your support." Nixon considered the speech a great success (*RN*, pp. 410–411); *The Washington Post* saw it as a qualified one ("The President and the War," November 5, 1969, p. A18); and *The New York Times* characterized it as a "failure" (James Reston, "What is the President Up To?," November 9, 1969, p. E14).

decided was a blockade of Haiphong plus bombing. There was a question as to whether this would work, and there's a greater risk to the Summit than just bombing, but those are problems we're going to deal with.

He then got Connally to agree with him, gave him strong support on it. He then got into the question of whether Abrams was to be replaced, and felt that he had to be, that he was not following orders, that he lost his steam and so on. The decision was to replace him by sending Haig to Vietnam. Then decided that it wasn't such a good idea, that we'd lose Abrams there, but send Haig out for a couple of weeks as an observer for the P. Also decided to call Rogers back Sunday, since the P will announce this Monday night on television.[8]

After an hour and a half with that group we added Moorer, and the P very strongly put the thing to Moorer that this was his decision, that it was to be discussed with no one, especially not the Secretaries or anybody at State, or anybody over in Vietnam, but that Moorer was to put the blockade plan together, get everything ready to pull it into motion so that it would take effect Tuesday morning after the P's address Monday night. He hit Moorer on that this is a chance to save the military's honor and to save the country. Moorer said he could do it; he also suggested that there ought to be some offensive action on the part of the South Vietnamese, and it was agreed they would try to mobilize enough troops, 2,000 or 3,000 for an amphibious landing north of the DMZ by South Vietnamese using all our support and troop capability.[9]

K had to leave for dinner. The P talked a few minutes more and then Moorer and Haig left and we kind of wrapped it up with Connally. Then the P talked with me a bit about the whole thing, feeling that he's done the right thing, that we justify the blockade as a means of keeping lethal weapons from the hands of murderers and international outlaws, and along that line. I think he feels good that he's made a decision and that he feels it's the right one. He also feels that it's quite a dramatic step, because it is a basic decision to go all out to win the war now, under, of course, totally different circumstances than Johnson was faced with, because we've got all our troops out, we've made the peace overtures, we've made the China trip and laid a lot of other groundwork that should make it possible for us to do this.

My feeling is that the public reaction is not going to be so great on the blockade, even though it is a big move, because it's not aggressive, but the bombing that goes with it will, over a period of time, scare some people up. Some question as to what the quid pro quo will

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[8] May 8; see Document 136.

[9] See Document 121.

be on this, probably something to the effect that the blockade will stay on until there's a cease-fire, all POW's released. When that takes place, we'll lift the blockade and we'll remove all of our troops from South Vietnam within some time period.

Connally was absolutely astounded at the P's description of the problems he'd gone through and the other things, especially the lack of support and the lack of loyalty on the part of Laird and Rogers. I think he can't even understand why the P would even keep them around and thinks it's a sign of weakness that he hadn't fired them long ago, and that he doesn't fire them now. He also strongly feels that he should pull Abrams back.[10] The P backed off on that, and I think rightly so. Haig called me later this evening and said he thought it was a very bad idea for him to go out to Vietnam for any extended period because with a tight crunch around here he's needed to keep Henry in tow, which I totally agree with.

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[10] Recording of the conversation, Nixon asked Connally what he thought of replacing Abrams with Haig. Connally replied: "You know, Mr. President, I think we put too much importance on the removal of Abrams. Hell, I would do it even faster. I wouldn't question that, and I certainly think Al would be a great successor, and I don't think it's gonna create that much of a ripple. And if it does, so what? Who gives a damn? If he's not doing the job then remove him!" Kissinger added: "No one knows better what we need than Al." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Executive Office Building, Conversation 334–44)

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121. Editorial Note

The President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger, called the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, at 4:52 p.m. on May 4, 1972. According to a transcript of the conversation, they had the following exchange:

"HAK: Can you come right over to my office without telling anybody?

"CJCS: Sure, in about 10 minutes or so. I have a Chinese Admiral and as soon as I can get him out, I will.

"HAK: Get rid of him as fast as you possibly can, the President wants to talk to you. Do not tell anyone you are coming over.

"CJCS: Right." (Moorer Diary, May 4; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

At 5:15 p.m. Moorer entered the Executive Office Building. President Richard M. Nixon, Kissinger, Secretary of the Treasury John Con-

nally, and Assistant to the President H.R. Haldeman, all in the President's Executive Office Building hideaway office, were at the end of an extended discussion about what to do next in Vietnam (see Document 120). The President had come to a decision and Moorer was there to learn of the decision and to receive his orders to plan its implementation. According to a White House tape recording, Nixon and Moorer had the following conversation:

Nixon: "Admiral, what I am going to say to you now is in total confidence of the relationship with the Commander in Chief and the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff. Nothing is to go to the Secretary. Nothing is to go to Vietnam. Is that clear?"

Moorer: "Yes, sir."

Nixon: "What I'm about to say."

Moorer: "Yes, sir."

Nixon: "I've decided that we've got to go on a blockade. It must—I'm going to announce it Monday night [May 8] on television. I want you to put a working group together. Start immediately with absolutely the best people that you've got. I think you've done a lot of work on it already."

Moorer: "Oh, that's right. We're all set—"

Nixon: "And, if I announce it Monday night, if I tell you now, which I am now doing, can you be ready so that it can it be in place Tuesday?"

Moorer: "Oh, yes, sir."

Nixon: "All right. Now, what we have in mind, in addition to blockade, is that I want as much use of our air assets as we can spare from the battle group. I don't want to take Abrams's word on it, clearly, but I—it's our air assets so that we can at the very least take out the railroad units—that has to go out—and then the POL, the power plants, et cetera, et cetera. After the ships get out, we'll take out the docks. Now, the—the [unclear] as you can imagine, momentous [unclear]. I'll do that on Monday. [unclear] Now, what—what—can you tell me what, what you can do? What—can you do this in secrecy and the rest and bring this thing off? Or, how? I—I'm just asking the question. I don't want you to tell Abrams. He can't know. Nobody is to be told out there. What can you do?"

Moorer: "Well, sir, as you know, we've done quite a bit of thinking about this already."

Nixon: "Yes, sir."

Moorer: "And it would simply be a matter of diverting some of the ships and combining air surveillance on the approaches to Haiphong with the positioning of the ships, making the necessary announcements, and giving the ships their rules of engagement as to what

they'll do, and I think they're prepared to do that. I would use the destroyers for this purpose."

Kissinger: "Could even more ships help there?"

Moorer: "Well, I think that—oh, I think we—"

Nixon: "You've got quite a gang up there—"

Moorer: "We've got quite a few ships, and we've got some more arriving. I think we've probably got enough ships to start, sir."

Kissinger: "And, if you could, by tomorrow, give us a rough outline of the plan, then we can meet."

Moorer: "Yeah."

Nixon: "And, also, I need a rough outline of the air assets that can be spared for strikes. Now, understand, I am not ordering the two-day strike. [unclear]—"

Moorer: "Yes, sir. [unclear]—"

Nixon: "We're gonna let Abrams use those, but I want, as I've already told you, I want for once—for once—I want a massive [strike]. I want 50 B–52s on the Hue perimeter for just one night. Can you do that?"

Moorer: "Yes, sir. A 24-hour strike."

Nixon: "That's fine. Would you do that just one time?"

Moorer: "Yes, sir."

Nixon: "Anything that moves on the Hue front. You've got to remember, Hue is like Verdun. The Germans made a mistake. The French probably made a mistake trying to defend it, but it was—it had to be defended, and with the Germans' psychology it had to be attacked because of its symbolism. Hue is exactly the same thing. You can lose Kontum, and you can lose a hell of a lot of other things, but you can't lose Hue. Now, we've gotta get, gotta get, those '52s in there and we've gotta take one damn, good whack at them if there's enough to hit 'em."

Moorer: "Yes, sir, Well, they've been, as you know, working heavily on the—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Moorer: "—A Shau Valley, the most important thing. Some of the [unclear]. Again, I talked to General Vogt on the phone, and he said that during the daylight hours, which is the last time we really hit 'em, we hit 'em really quite well. We can put them—"

Nixon: "[unclear]?"

Moorer: "Yes, sir."

Nixon: "I'd like to have one massive B–52 strike in that area [unclear]."

Kissinger: "Mr. President, I'll excuse myself."

Nixon: "Yeah. Okay."

At this point, 5:25 p.m., Kissinger left the meeting. The conversation continued:

Moorer: "Yes, sir."

Nixon: "So, you get ready for [unclear]. But, it will not work, you understand. Of course, you know, over a period of time it won't work; it will not work without very extensive air support. I mean, there's no sense in blockading without taking out the POL, the railroad lines, and the other routes in—"

Moorer: "Well, we can get to those docks once [unclear] Mr. President, at the end of that op."

Nixon: "Yeah. That is from the sea. But I mean there are other ways they can come in. Why don't you go ahead and send the materials—the matériel. Don't you think they're on the docks, unloading them on the docks?"

Moorer: "Yes, sir. Quite a bit on the docks. What I meant, though, is we can destroy the docks—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Moorer: "—once the ships get split up in a big way—"

Nixon: "Right. Yeah. Now my point is what about—about the POL, what is left there? See, well, what I mean is that the purpose of the blockade is not to just keep it on for 18 months. The purpose is to put it on, and then systematically destroy everything that you possibly can that's already there. They've got a helluva lot of stuff stored up."

Moorer: "Oh, yes, sir."

Nixon: "So what I am thinking of, what I am directing, is bombing, all out in that area. In fact, if we weren't involved in the South [unclear] all of our assets there [unclear]. You are to hit, in terms of your bombing, North Vietnam in this period in the Haiphong area. You are to aim for military targets. You are not to be too concerned about whether it slops over [unclear]. The most important thing is to get those military targets. If it slops over, that's too bad. That's the way it's going to be, because we—I've made the decision and we now have no choice but to: we will avoid the defeat of the South. I think we can. We could, but we sure as hell are gonna be making a large effort."

Moorer: "We'll do that."

Nixon: "And, that's the way it's going to be. Now, can you do that?"

Moorer: "Yes, sir. Now I think what we really need at some point is for the South to defend itself, for the South Vietnamese to take some kind of initiative. In other words, to either use their own aircraft to attack Dong Hoi, or to use their ships to shell another North Vietnamese area, or to use their aircraft to mine the channel, or to do something;

for them to do something in retaliation, which they haven't done yet. What they've done is just simply falling back on these strong points. And, they haven't moved out against the enemy."

Nixon: "Well, find a way that they can play a role in the blockade then. Can they do that?"

Moorer: "Well, they—"

Nixon: "You talk about the channel [unclear]. Couldn't they do something—?"

Moorer: "To—to some degree, yes, sir." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Executive Office Building, Conversation 334–44)

Moorer immediately returned to the Pentagon after meeting with the President. His diary entry reads:

"*Met with—RADM Freeman—in office*—I briefed him on what would be required based on my meeting with the President, that we would be required to break out our mining plans that we have on the shelf and to be prepared to conduct this mining of the North Vietnamese ports, particularly Haiphong, commencing at 2100 our time on the 9th. I told Admiral Freeman to collect the plans and all the information that we have available and that I would get in touch with Admiral Zumwalt and we would set up a Task Force to plan this operation. I wanted Admiral Freeman and Admiral Zumwalt and myself to get together later tonight in Admiral Zumwalt's office to work out the details of this mining operation." (Ibid., RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974)

Although the task was time-sensitive and secret, Moorer believed he could comply with the President's orders on both counts. To organize the work, at 6:50 p.m. he consulted with the Chief of Naval Operations:

"*Met with—Admiral Zumwalt—in office*—We discussed the mining plan and I asked him to collect a few of his good people on a very close hold basis, lay out a plan for the mining of Haiphong Harbor utilizing CINCPACFLT's basic mining plan and point out some of the legal problems that would be involved. Work up all the intelligence information that would be required for me to give the presentation on this to Dr. Kissinger and the President by tomorrow. I do not want anything fancy, I think just a butcher paper presentation as long as I have the basic information as to where the mines and how many will be laid and what factors to deal with, this would answer the problem. This must be held on extremely close hold basis and therefore Admiral Freeman and I will join you at about 2300 tonight if you can get your team going, we will be there to see how you progressed and get a briefing from you at that point. Admiral Zumwalt assembled a team of some of his newly selected Admirals, Dave Emerson, Kin McKee, Rex Rectanus and Rob-

bie Robertson who along with his EA, Don Pringle, laid out the basic plan and worked throughout the night to generate this briefing. Ken K. [not further identified] prepared the ROE and later the DEFCON increases which might be prudent accompanying this operation." (Ibid.)

Moorer visited the planning group at 11 p.m. His diary entry reads:

"*Arrived* at the *Pentagon with Ken* [Rush, Deputy Secretary of Defense]—proceeded to CNO's office for a briefing on the mining plan and to check on the progress of this special team that was preparing this operation. They had arrived at a very substantial progress and it looked like they were going to be in good shape by morning. I gave them a few ideas and a little guidance and I think it is going to work out very well." (Ibid.)

Moorer left the Pentagon at 12:30 a.m., May 5, and by 8 a.m. the group had completed its work and the plan was ready for presentation.

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122. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, May 4, 1972, 2236Z.

WHS 2063. Deliver as soon as possible. The President is nearing the end of his patience with General Abrams on the issue of air action against North Vietnam. It must be clear to him that we are playing the most complex game with the Soviets involving matters which extend far beyond the battle in Vietnam as crucial as it is. Furthermore, without any requests from General Abrams and against massive bureaucratic opposition, the President since March 30 has ordered deployed 56 more B–52's, 3 more aircraft carriers, and 129 land-based F–4's to be available during this period. In addition, 72 more F–4's have been directed to deploy and will begin arriving shortly.

The fact that General Abrams would dispatch an on-the-record cable to the effect that the diversion of some of these assets for a 48-hour effort in the North jeopardizes our security[2] is increasingly difficult to comprehend. As you know, General Haig was sent to Saigon for the

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, 3 Apr–15 Jun 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] Document 118.

specific purpose of making these broader political considerations clear to General Abrams.

There is some suspicion here that confusing signals from sources in Washington may be contributing to the problem. General Abrams must understand that henceforth the President's thinking on questions of this import will come to him only through you and that any contrary signals, no matter what the source, are inaccuate.

Of course, if there is in fact an overriding security problem, the President expects and must have General Abrams' judgments and in such instances he would expect that you will be the channel for these views which will then be provided to the President in a clear and unfiltered way.

Please see General Abrams at the first practical moment and discuss this problem with him in the frankest terms. In the interim, the President has, in the light of General Abrams' official recommendation, deferred action on the 48-hour Hanoi/Haiphong strikes.

Warm regards.

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123. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 5, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger's speech to the Asia Society in New York the previous evening, his upcoming meeting with Dobrynin, leaks to the press, and military planning for Vietnam.]

Kissinger: Now, I feel I must put before you this consideration, Mr. President. We must do something drastic. There's no question about it.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: The advantage of a blockade is that it commits us irrevocably, that after that we've struck, and there's no turning back. That's a great advantage. And the other side must then do something. The disadvantage is that it confronts the Soviets most directly.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 720–4. 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, 8:55–10:09 a.m. Portions are printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 196.

Nixon: That's the thing I said the other day.

Kissinger: They can hardly step back from that. They may, but my Soviet expert thinks that it is more likely that they'll step back from a blockade than from a bombing, but—

Nixon: The disadvantage of bombing is, as you put it so effectively yesterday, is that they expect it—

Kissinger: But—

Nixon: —and in their thought it's already been discounted.

Kissinger: The disadvantage of the bombing is that it will trigger every goddamn peace group in this country.

Nixon: So will a blockade.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: Either does that, Henry. It's the line—"major escalation"—that they're all talking about.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: And either the blockade or the bombing will—they're going to trigger the peace groups, so have no doubts about that.

Kissinger: But it's hard to turn off a blockade.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: I mean, for you to turn off—you can always stop bombing for a day or two, or a week, or—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —or two weeks, and therefore—

Nixon: So, and then it would be ineffective.

Kissinger: The bombing?

Nixon: We cannot have a stop—a stop and start thing again. We've been around it—

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: —and around it and around. I understand the problems with the blockade.

Kissinger: No, I just wanted to put it—

Nixon: Not only—not only—there's that problem. It confronts a lot other than the Soviet Union—the Indians, and the Chinese—

Kissinger: Those are no problem. But, the Chinese are a problem, too.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But in a way, of course, it's always been a question of degree. A prolonged bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong—

Nixon: They have to react.

Kissinger: —will do the same thing. It will send the question—

Nixon: The other thing is that the bombing has been done before. It's the same old routine: "He's back to bombing, bombing, bombing, bombing, stop the bombing, stop the bombing." So, they're going to say, "Lift the blockade, lift the blockade." On that point, it isn't as strong of a case for it. The blockade is not as—is not as good a target as the bombing in terms of the riots.

Kissinger: You can, well, of course, say there's got to be bombing, too, with a blockade.

Nixon: Oh, I understand, but the people are going to look at the blockade. The blockade is going to be so overwhelming in terms of its—

Kissinger: And you—

Nixon: —public relations.

Kissinger: And you—

Nixon: I can understand. Look, Henry, the main point is that we ought to raise these points, which you've got to raise. There are no good choices.

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: There are no good choices. Sure, there's a choice of a two-day pop, and then, then, then go back and then hope to Christ that they'll then negotiate about something. And it isn't going to happen. Hmm?

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: You have no other evaluation of the war situation, do you, that's any more encouraging—?

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: What is it this morning? Anything new—?

Kissinger: Well, it's quiet again—

Nixon: Well, then they're building up again. That's—

Kissinger: In terms of—

Nixon: —what always happens when it's quiet—

Kissinger: That's—oh, yeah. That's—

Nixon: It's ominous.

Kissinger: Well, what it is proves two things. One is, they're weaker than we think. I mean, take Kontum. It shouldn't have taken them two weeks to go from Dak To to Kontum. If they had really a lot of stuff they would have just rolled into it. But they're sort of inching up to it again and taking a lot of casualties. On the other hand, they're doing it methodically, and they'll certainly attack again. And it's a, a tragedy. Of course, they wouldn't do it. If we had one American division to go into the panhandles, they'd be finished. That's—the problem is we can't do it—

Nixon: Hell, if we had an American regiment to land, for Christ's sakes, and then it would finish this damn thing. It'd frighten them to death.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: You know? They, they—they'd call off two divisions off the attack, and the South Vietnamese then might inch forward, even.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Oh, I know. I know. I know.

Kissinger: But—

Nixon: I know—I've got that, about that the—Henry, the, the, the arguments. I mean, you can—we've been around this track about 18 times. But I must say it's very compelling to me when you say that if we go the bombing route, we're going the same way. It's expected, and, frankly, there's—it's almost a certainty it isn't going to work. The blockade may not work either.

Kissinger: Well, the blockade has got to work.

Nixon: It'll work in the end—

Kissinger: It may not work fast enough. I mean, there's no way the blockade cannot work. It's already—even that one bombing of Haiphong, incidentally, they've got such a congestion in the port now, that there's one Polish freighter that has to wait a month in Hainan to be able to get into the port. I, in fact, have to say, Mr. President—you keep talking about your instinct—I think your instinct was right. We should have hit soon after that first strike began. And, on the other hand, we have positioned what we have to do now.

Nixon: [laughs] We sure have.

[Omitted here is discussion of what Kissinger should say to the press.]

Kissinger: No, I'm strongly for the bombing, too.

Nixon: Yeah? No, no, no. Do you know what I mean? Do you favor the bombing, followed by a blockade, which is the other line? That's it.

Kissinger: Another advantage of the blockade is that you can go to the American people, while you can't go to the American people—

Nixon: About bombing.

Kissinger: —about bombing—

Nixon: I've already—I've already presented that to the American people on April 26th.[2]

Kissinger: And you can rally the American people for a blockade, while you cannot rally them—

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[2] See Document 99.

Nixon: That's right. That's right.

Kissinger: And that's not an inconsiderable—

Nixon: It's a helluva considerable thing.

Kissinger: —factor.

Nixon: The bomb—the blockade has the advantage that it's—first, it's a total commitment; it's decisive. I mean, in the end, let's face it—in the end, we've got to figure, Henry, that probably that we may lose the election, and so forth, and so on, but in the end, with a blockade we'll win the war.

Kissinger: Yep.

Nixon: And, by golly that's—

Kissinger: Well, if you win the war you won't lose the election—

Nixon: Yeah. If you win it soon enough and, you see, that's the problem. The blockade, we know damn well that in 8 months we'll have them at their knees.

Kissinger: Oh, I think that with bombing we'll have them quicker—with bombing, before they can get alternative routes organized.

Nixon: So, my view is that the blockade rallies the people; it puts it to the Russians. I mean, the only advantage, as I told you earlier, as I said to you earlier, about the—which is the line that Connally came up with—is to start bombing again, and then, if the Russians still do not break off the summit, we'll have it. You see, the bombing–blockade thing has this possible advantage, which I ran by you yesterday: you bomb, and after bombing, the Russians bitch, but they do not break off the summit. Then we continue to bomb them. Then, I suppose, we can go to the summit.

Kissinger: Well, if you bomb enough, they'll break off the summit. There's no question about it.

Nixon: Well then, that perhaps is the convincing reason, because we can't bomb unless we bomb enough. We can't bomb and then have—but you can't bomb them and then have them kicking us around while we're in Moscow. You see? That's the point that you made which is tremendously compelling. I cannot be in Moscow at a time when the North Vietnamese are rampaging through the streets of Hue or, for that matter, through the streets of Kontum.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: So—[pause]. Well, let's go by it again and give the case its best hearing that we can. If we bomb [unclear]. He'll be gone [unclear] rather than Monday.[3] With the bombing, we'd have to do it on Sunday. [unclear] we could Saturday night.

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[3] May 6.

Kissinger: Sunday—

Nixon: Or on Sunday. [unclear]—

Kissinger: That makes an overwhelming difference—

Nixon: Well, the main thing is to get it done, to get it going—

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: —so that it's going to affect the battle and so forth. Hit 'em.

Kissinger: We've heard from Abrams, incidentally. I've had a—I wrote a cable—I wrote Bunker. I sent a cable to Bunker, saying that I thought that you were—we were beginning to lose patience with Abrams, that every time we want to do something we just want to make sure there are no confusing signals being given to Abrams, and therefore I want him to know that any authentic words from the President comes from me to Bunker to Abrams.[4] There are no other authentic words. If anyone tells him that there are—that you want something, it is not true unless it comes from me to Bunker. That doesn't mean they shouldn't carry out military orders. It's that when they psychoanalyze you.

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: Now, it turns out that he did get crossed signals. So Laird, that bastard, has been talking to him.

Nixon: Crossed signals of what? About bombing?

Kissinger: No, that you probably—I would not—I believe, and Moorer believes, that Moorer told Abrams that you would welcome a request from Abrams— that Laird told Abrams that you would welcome a request from Abrams that gave you an excuse not to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong.

Nixon: You think he did that?

Kissinger: Yeah. Moorer thinks it. Rush thinks it. And Bunker two-thirds confirms it.

Nixon: See, Laird is so tricky that he's capable of that.

Kissinger: Oh, yes. Someone who's clearly capable of that.

Nixon: But why does Laird want to say that? Because if Laird—why doesn't Laird want to bomb Haiphong—?

Kissinger: I think Laird—why? Because Laird has got political ambitions, and he's positioning himself on the peace side of this.

Nixon: He's got about as much chance for a political future—

Kissinger: But that he doesn't believe.

Nixon: —of being murdered.

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[4] Document 122.

Kissinger: He doesn't believe it. Now, I don't want to drive you off what you've decided because I think we ought to keep on this course now. I just want you—

Nixon: To consider it—?

Kissinger: —to consider—we should go on this as if we were going all-out on it, and I'm saying this to you—I'm not saying it to Haig, or to Moorer, or to Connally, or to anyone else. I mean, we still have a few pieces that have got to come in. We still have to get the Russians' reply.

Nixon: That's right—

Kissinger: So, if it doesn't come by the end of the day, it's too late. But I—I'm sure it will come today.

Nixon: Yes?

Kissinger: See, another problem you face is you bomb Hanoi and Haiphong, and then the Russians do to you what they did to me, say: "Come, and we'll talk about it." And then you've got to stop again. Of course, you could say: "Fine, but I won't stop now until—"

Nixon: You couldn't—well, putting that case at its best, we bomb Hanoi and Haiphong and then the Russians say: "Look—look, you come, and we'll have sort of a pause while we have the summit," as we did at the Chinese summit. And, you remember, I said that it is a possibility. That's one thing that could happen.

Kissinger: Of course, we shouldn't look back to the Chinese summit. I suppose we weren't bombing the North then, Mr. President—

Nixon: I know. Let's suppose—let's look at this and leave that out of it—

Kissinger: Every single raid to the North—

Nixon: Still, the Russians still might say, "We'll—during this period of time, we'll cool it," and that'd be the condition of our going. Then we go, and when we come back, we start bombing again. [pause] The problem is, is that [will] bombing Hanoi and Haiphong do the trick, Henry?

Kissinger: Well, Hanoi isn't so important except for these rail lines.

Nixon: I know that. But Haiphong, or the bombing of Hanoi—will it do the trick?

Kissinger: The great—the conclusive argument to me in favor of the blockade is that you cross the Rubicon. That—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —what they are trying to do to you, is that it's obvious. They're trying to kill you now. And I'm not sure—I said this to this group last night, I—they said, "What are the Russian intentions?" I said, "Look, there's nothing that the Russians would rather do than to

get rid of the President. He's the only thing that stands between them and dominating the world." I said, "Now"—

Nixon: You know, that's quite true.

Kissinger: That is true. But, I was amazed by that group, because now—

Nixon: You said it well. That's why they were [unclear] what was said, probably, rather than disagree—

Kissinger: So—so, I believe the only thing now—I don't believe they started out trying to overthrow the President, but if he gets too vulnerable at home, then you people are—or, whoever starts nagging at him—is responsible. But what I think the—

Nixon: Those people are sensible enough, for Christ sakes, to think, to know that Humphrey or McGovern or Teddy would be patsies for the Russians, aren't they?

Kissinger: Oh yeah.

Nixon: Aren't they?

Kissinger: Oh yeah.

Nixon: Okay.

Kissinger: It was, I—I must tell you, I had a—these last two evenings have been amazing in this respect, because usually I get nagged at—

Nixon: Oh, Connally's point, of course, he's from Texas, but Connally talks to other people apart from polls and everything, he thinks that we've got—he said—he says, "You can count on the support of the country now, because now is the time to do something—"

Kissinger: You see, I don't—I never, actually, you know, they—one question was, "How do you defend escalation?" I said, "I'm not going to defend escalation." I said, "I'm—"

Nixon: Who escalated this?

Kissinger: I said, "That's not the issue. There are only two issues. One is, does the United States put a Communist government into power and ally itself with its enemies to defeat its friends? The second issue is do we—can any President permit 60,000 Americans to be made hostages, and will the shame and indignity not wreck our whole domestic structure?" Those are the only two issues—

Nixon: And also, I think the issue [is] that, how can the United States stand by after offering peace in every quarter and do nothing in response to an enormous enemy escalation? We're only responding to an enemy escalation. That's the real point I mean.

Kissinger: See, I think what the Russ—what the North Vietnamese are saying to themselves is "all right." They know we're going to bomb. I mean they know—

Nixon: There's the problem—

Kissinger: And they say to themselves, "All right, we're going to take this." And—

Nixon: I think they're prepared to take the bombing, Henry—

Kissinger: Yeah—

Nixon: —and they've had it before. You see, I—look, Henry, there's nobody that's more aware, because I, like you, [unclear] one of the reasons [unclear] is that we both take the long view, which goddamn few Americans do. That's why I said when we put out a little game plan if we wanted [unclear] canceling the summit first and then doing that, which I think we're absolutely right in not doing.

Kissinger: No, that is certainly not—

Nixon: That was good advice on the part of Connally because—

Kissinger: That is certain—

Nixon: —he had seen something that I had not seen. And I led you into that. I led you into that—

Kissinger: No—

Nixon: Yes, I did. Because I—I remembered what Eisenhower did, but I had really forgotten that, well, it didn't hurt Eisenhower when the Russians canceled the summit. It didn't hurt him. Goddammit, the American people don't like to be kicked around. It didn't hurt Eisenhower when the goddamn Japanese canceled his trip. Remember?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: All right, now, it didn't hurt me as Vice President. I'll never forget when I got stoned in Caracas. It helped me.

Kissinger: It helped you.

Nixon: People thought it was great.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Now, it depends on how you react to it. Here's the problem. Looking at the long view, bombing might turn it around. It runs a better chance of keeping the summit alive. The Russians can live with bombing, where they might not be able to live with a blockade. All right, that's the advantage of that. But, we constantly come back to the, basically, Henry, to the fundamental problem. And Connally, with his, you know, with his animal-like decisiveness, and which I also have, except I have through—

Kissinger: You're much more subtle—

Nixon: —through many years, I've put much more layers of subtlety on it. But anyhow, but Connally comes quickly to the point. He says, "Look, the summit is great; I hope you don't knock it off. I think you could do both, and I hope you can do both. I think you will do both." "But," he says, "even if you don't, if you're going to put first

things first, you've got to remember: you can do without the summit, but you cannot live with defeat in Vietnam. You must win the war in Vietnam. Or, putting it another way, you must not lose in Vietnam." That's crystal clear. So, everything's got to be measured against what wins or loses in Vietnam, and here is the weakness of bombing. Bombing might turn the war in Vietnam around. The blockade certainly will turn it around. Now, here, the blockade plus the bombing—you understand? What I'm really saying here is that I think that's what convinced me—

Kissinger: And the blockade—

Nixon: —like I say: win the war.

Kissinger: The blockade gets you across the Rubicon. There's no way it can't be ended without the blockade—

Nixon: Well, everybody knows then, that I've thrown down the goddamn gauntlet, and there it is. And they want to pick it up? And, you see, that I'm going to live with the blockade as I've said. Well, it's an ultimatum.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Bombing is not an ultimatum.

Kissinger: Bombing, they cannot do it. This is the argument for the blockade, now: it heightens the chance of a confrontation with the Russians.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: It will start the Chinese screaming.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And you'll be accused of having blown up everything of your foreign policy—

Nixon: I know—

Kissinger: —which is, on the other hand, a disadvantage—

Nixon: Now that brings sadness to me. It brings sadness to me. We've had a damned good foreign policy.

Kissinger: You haven't been wrong, Mr. President—

Nixon: Even if it all goes down the tubes, we'll just—we will be remembered, as Clare Booth Luce says, as the ones who went to China. And in the future, that'll work out.

Kissinger: Mr. President, you—it would—actually, if you get reelected, it will make your foreign policy. It's the same as the Laos operation.[5] Everyone said that you've now, well, broken it with the Chinese, and three months later we were there. And a year later, you were there. So, I think it won't—

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[5] Kissinger was referring to Operation Lam Son 719 in February–March 1971.

Nixon: Henry, if you come back to the fundamental point, I mean, as I took you up to that map yesterday and I showed you that little place, and we looked at it, and we think of this whole great, big, wide world, everything rides on it. If there were a way, believe me, if there were a way we could flush Vietnam now, flush it, get out of it in any way possible, and conduct a sensible foreign policy with the Russians and with the Chinese—

Kissinger: We'd do it.

Nixon: —we ought to do it. We ought to do it, because—because there's so much at stake. There's nobody else in this country at the present time, with the exception of Connally, in the next four years, that can handle the Russians and the Chinese and the big game in Europe and the big game in Southeast Asia. You know it, and I know it. And the big game with the Japanese five years from now. Who could help? Who else could do it? All right, so that's at stake. I mean that's why I—the only reason that I had doubts earlier in the week was that I had to face up to the fact because I saw the inevitability of McGovern, or Humphrey, or if they'd have him, the only other possibility is Teddy, who might be the worst of the three.

Kissinger: Certainly the worst—

Nixon: But any—in any event—

Kissinger: Well, McGovern is—

Nixon: —because I saw that—well, McGovern would be the worst for sure if he gets in, but Teddy would be so stop-and-start that he might get us into even worse trouble. Anyway, if you're going to go for peace, you might as well surrender right off the bat, rather than the cost of it all in slaughter. So, my point is, Henry, that I had to put that into the, into the equation. And therefore, I had to go down the line of saying how in the hell can we save—how the hell can we save the, you know, the Presidency, and that meant, frankly, the present occupant. And that meant saving the summit. All right, I have considered it all, and I don't think there's any way you can do it. I don't think there's any way you can do it, and at the same time temporize in Vietnam. I have reached the conclusion that we're in a situation where Vietnam is here and, and I assured Rogers and Laird, [unclear] let's make another offer, and have we agreed to offer this. I don't know whether we have. You know, and they're whining and bitching about it. But, Henry, you know and I know it that it's not true.

Kissinger: No. Mr. President, you and I know, perhaps as the only ones, if they had given us a face-saving way out—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —I was prepared to take it.

Nixon: Well, I told you before you left—

Kissinger: You told me—because you told me that. They want us out in a humiliating way. They want us to put a Communist government into power. Goddamnit, let's face it, if they had accepted our May 31st proposal last year, they would have taken over Vietnam within a year or two.

Nixon: [laughs] I'll say. Thank God that I know. I still wish they had, but nevertheless.

Kissinger: Of course. But it isn't that we've been intransigent in our offers. Not at all.

Nixon: You see, if we could survive past the election, Henry, [unclear] and then Vietnam goes down the tubes, it really doesn't make any difference.

Kissinger: I agree with you. That's been the whole—

Nixon: But we have no way to survive past the election.

Kissinger: Well, I think—

Nixon: You see what I mean—before we can go, given their—there's the other, other argument for bombing. Maybe we could bomb, not blockade, and still have the summit—

Kissinger: No, I think they'll—

Nixon: —we might survive past the election.

Kissinger: Mr. President, I think they're going to kill you. They're going to put you into the Johnson position. This is the other argument for the blockade.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: They're going to have you as the bomber. The guy—when I looked at that DRV statement, they wanted you to break off the peace talks, Mr. President—

Nixon: That's right. That's right.

Kissinger: So you're the guy who doesn't talk.

Nixon: Well, I hope they know, but got across that they helped to break them off—did Porter make that [unclear]—?

Kissinger: Oh, yes, it got across. But all of this is minor because the—these peace groups are going to keep backing—

Nixon: Yeah. The headlines are that we broke off the talks.

Kissinger: So that six months from now—three months from now—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —it's forgotten that there was an invasion, and therefore—

Nixon: Well, Henry, let me put it this way: I know that you've been thinking about this during the night as I have, but I've never—I come back to the fundamental point, leaving the President out and so forth.

And who knows? Something could happen. Maybe the Democrats could get smart and draft Connally, so I could be defeated.

Kissinger: That's impossible; inconceivable.

Nixon: Well, if they did, it would save the country.

Kissinger: But, Mr. President, they're more likely to draft you—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: They will not draft Connally—

Nixon: But anyway, my point is, we have to face this fact: leaving me out, leaving McGovern out, all I care is that the United States of America at this point cannot have a viable foreign policy if we are humiliated in Vietnam. We must not lose in Vietnam. It's as cold as that. Right?

Kissinger: I agree.

Nixon: And they have not given us any way to avoid being humiliated. And since they have not, we must draw the sword, so the blockade is on. And I must say, that I—I'm—and incidentally, but I want one thing understood, you said bombing that's where Moorer is right. We're—the surgical operation theory is all right, but I want that place, whenever the planes are available, bombed to smithereens during the blockade. If we draw the sword out, we're going to bomb those bastards all over the place.

Kissinger: No question.

Nixon: And let it fly. Let it fly. [unclear]—

Kissinger: The only point I disagree is we can do all of this without killing too many civilians. I said, no way—

Nixon: I don't want to kill civilians. You know that I—and don't try to kill any, but goddamnit, don't be so careful that you don't knock out the oil for their tanks.

Kissinger: Oh, God, no.

Nixon: See my point?

Kissinger: God, no. Those have to go. And—

Nixon: You can—incidentally, would you please still study the dike situation?

Kissinger: Yes, sir.

Nixon: I need an answer on that. I don't think it's 200,000.[6]

Kissinger: Well, let's—

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[6] In an Executive Office conversation on April 25, Kissinger averred that if the United States destroyed the dikes in the Red River Delta as many as 200,000 might be drowned. (Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files,* p. 217)

Nixon: I don't—I don't think that what really is involved in the dikes. I think I know that country, because I've been up to Hanoi. Have you ever been to Hanoi?

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: I have, in '52.[7] What is involved there is that it's these low kind of things, you know, the purpose is really for the rice lands and the rest. The people could get the hell out of there. It isn't—it isn't a huge dam. The torrents of water will go down and starve the bastards. But it'll do it. Now if that's the case, I'll take 'em out.

Kissinger: Yes.

Nixon: You see my point?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: I want that studied.

Kissinger: Well, we'll, um—we'll have an exciting week next week. That's for sure.

Nixon: You see, we've got to come back. And I'm—I think you're ought—you're absolutely right to raise questions with me, and I know why you're raising them, because I—

Kissinger: I'm raising them with you—

Nixon: It's like when you raised them for the same reasons you raised questions before Cambodia.

Kissinger: That's right. I'm with you on that—

Nixon: You did the same just before Laos because you know that I have to consider these things, and you know how much is at stake. And I think—I appreciate your raising them, but we come back to the fundamental point, and I ask this question before you go: isn't there a serious doubt that bombing without a blockade may not accomplish our goal of preventing a loss in Vietnam? And second, is it not also true that a blockade, plus surgical bombing, will inevitably have the effect of bringing North Vietnam to its knees?

Kissinger: Unless the South Vietnamese collapse within that period.

Nixon: So the South Vietnamese collapse, but they still have to give us our prisoners. We've got something. America is not defeated.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: That's my point.

Kissinger: That's right.

Nixon: America is not defeated.

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[7] Vice President Nixon visited Vietnam in late October–early November 1953. (*RN*, pp. 123–126)

Kissinger: That is right.

Nixon: We get our prisoners, and—there's one other thing we have to think about if the South Vietnamese collapse—incidentally, I don't know whether that collapse theory is going to hold out anyway. I'm not as—I just hope I'm not too Pollyannaish, but I think that those lines are tougher than—all the time there. Well—

Kissinger: They're gonna lose Kontum. But to me what is so fascinating is that two weeks ago they were routed up there. They still haven't moved against Kontum. Now, for all I know, they may take it next week. But if they take three weeks to build up from provincial capital to provincial capital, we're going to kill them.

Nixon: Did you notice they set up a—a government in Quang Tri? That was inevitable. Remember, you always said that that's what they would to do.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: What the hell is Quang Tri? So they have a government in Quang Tri—

Kissinger: Well the northernmost province of South Vietnam, so if—

Nixon: Well—

Kissinger: If they continue to take these losses, then every succeeding push in Military Region 3, either because they're regrouping—

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —or because they've run out of steam—

Nixon: Yeah. When you talk to the—yep—

Kissinger: That—

Nixon: But—but answer my question. Is it not true, is it not true, can you—is it not true that, insofar as our goal of preventing a loss in Vietnam—?

Kissinger: A blockade is better.

Nixon: It's not only better, but it's the only way that is relatively sure?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: What the hell else have you got?

Kissinger: That's right. That's right. I think it is right. I think that the other big advantage—

Nixon: If you would go in today and offer Thieu's head on a platter, and—

Kissinger: They will not let us out, Mr. President, in a way that saves our dignity.

[Omitted here is discussion of the President's schedule.]

Nixon: Also, with the blockade, with the blockade plus the surgical bombing, I think you would agree, too, if psychology has anything to do with South Vietnam's will to resist, and I don't know whether it affects them at all, my God, it'll be dramatic as hell, will it not?

Kissinger: Oh, it will affect them enormously.

Nixon: Because they'll know that we're in, and the die is cast.

Kissinger: Incidentally—

Nixon: And, also, John Connally makes the point: won't it have some effect on the North Vietnamese?

Kissinger: Oh, yes. And if we drop leaflets and make it clear what happened. Mr. President, one other point—

Nixon: Oh, shouldn't Al—he should be brought in, yes.

Kissinger: Yes. I don't think we can send Haig over there. We need him here while this is going on. I think Haldeman agrees with this, too. The trouble is—while these things go on—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: First of all, you may want to send me off. I mean, supposing—

Nixon: Yeah? Can I send anybody over there? That's the point. I need to send somebody over there as a cop to watch that son-of-a-bitch Abrams. I mean, Connally's right. We should be firing him.

Kissinger: Well, I—I would consider sending [Lieutenant General William] DePuy who is a tough, mean, son-of-a-bitch—

Nixon: Where is DePuy?

Kissinger: He's in the Pentagon now. He's got the reputation of being a nutcutter. You get him in here and tell him what you want. And Haig and I'll tell him—

Nixon: Well, could he do that—?

Kissinger: Sure, and he's first—

Nixon: All right. I'll do it. I want you to deal with it—

Kissinger: He was 1st Division commander—

Nixon: Look, I know DePuy from years back.

Kissinger: He's—

Nixon: He's a tough, little son-of-a-bitch—

Kissinger: And he would—

Nixon: —but I don't want him to go over there and suck eggs.

Kissinger: Well, he was 1st Division commander—his trouble, he's going to be—he's going to be tactless. But let Bunker smooth that out.

Nixon: That's right. But he's got to go over there, and we—I mean, and he's going to be a direct line of communication to us and report to us as to what the situation is. Send him over on a mission for two weeks.

Kissinger: No, I think he could—ought to replace Abrams.

Nixon: Oh, good. Well, good Christ, if we can get Abrams replaced. Goddamn, I don't know. Or is that—has he—hasn't he got too many friends? Why don't you call Laird in and say that we're thinking of replacing Abrams. Do you want [to] bite that bullet for me?

Kissinger: Oh, certainly. Another thing, Mr. President, is—

Nixon: I'd much rather replace Abrams—

Kissinger: —we ought to get Laird in on this. I know he's a son-of-a-bitch. I know he'll try to screw us, but that's nothing compared to what he's going to do to us—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —if this thing was cranked up without him.

Nixon: All right, when are you going to do it? Today—?

Kissinger: Tomorrow morning.

Nixon: Tomorrow morning. You're authorized.[8]

[Omitted here is discussion of domestic politics and Vietnam.]

[8] Kissinger so informed Laird at a working breakfast at the Pentagon the next morning. See Document 126.

124. Memorandum for the Record[1]

Washington, May 5, 1972, 10:31 a.m.

SUBJECT

Meeting of Dr. Kissinger, Admiral Moorer, Deputy Secretary of Defense Rush, Mr. Haldeman, General Alexander M. Haig and Commander Jonathan T. Howe

The purpose of the meeting was for Admiral Moorer to present a plan for mining North Vietnamese ports. Dr. Kissinger asked to have a liaison officer who was familiar with the plan and could work with members of Dr. Kissinger's staff. Admiral Moorer readily agreed and

[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 45, Geopolitical File Vietnam, Easter Offensive, 1971–1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in Kissinger's office. The time of the meeting on the original, 11:30, is incorrect; according to Kissinger's Record of Schedule, it began at 10:31 and ended at 11:15 a.m. (Ibid., Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76)

said someone would be assigned. Dr. Kissinger remarked that on the following day he would like to have a master scenario outlining the actions which everyone should take.

Admiral Moorer then began his briefing which he said would cover, inter alia, the concepts, intelligence, indications of threat, mining operations, blockade and legal opinions.

With regard to the status of ships heading toward North Vietnam, he stated that 17 were enroute. This was the normal monthly average and the ships came from Cuba, Soviet Union, East Germany, UK, and Somalia. He pointed out the ways the ships approach North Vietnam, which is usually to come around Hainan Island. Two-thirds of the Soviet ships come from the Black Sea and the other one-third from Petropovlovsk.

The North Vietnamese have some mining capabilities but the U.S. does not believe this will present any real problem for our ships. The Soviet fleet's major threat to our ships is their cruise missile submarines armed with the SSN–3 missile. Mr. Kissinger asked if we would have a sufficient ASW capability to cope with this threat and Admiral Moorer said that we would. In discussing the Chinese forces he stated that they have 40 boats with the Styx missile. He noted that the position of the Chinese would be important and if the PRC did not let the Soviets use Chinese bases or over fly Chinese territory, this would put the Soviets at a great strategic disadvantage. Dr. Kissinger asked what we would do if the Chinese did in fact provide these facilities to the Soviets and Admiral Moorer replied that he would get to this point later in the briefing.

Admiral Moorer then discussed the Chinese and Soviet air threat, pointing out that the Soviets could use their air-to-surface missile equipped aircraft (TU–16s and Bears) and pose more of a threat. This would make defense of our ships a little more difficult.

In considering the possible reactions open to hostile countries, Admiral Moorer stated that the North Vietnamese did not have much they could do although we would want to strike their aircraft facilities. He indicated that the Soviets could make a covert attack on our ships, harass them, escort their ships, etc. Dr. Kissinger asked what we would do if they decided to escort a ship. Admiral Moorer replied that if it were a merchant ship, they wouldn't directly attack our ships. He pointed out that the PRC would have the option of obstructing our ships and that others could also harass our ships.

Admiral Moorer then described the mines which would be used. The large mines would be dropped in Haiphong Harbor by aircraft. These mines had selected delays of one and three days before activation. They could also be sterilized within a certain period of time. They were influence fused. We could also use pressure activation mines but we have difficulty sweeping these. It would also be planned to use

MK–36 destructors in shallow water, ports and rivers. These would be dropped in the channels two days after the mines were placed in Haiphong Harbor since they are armed after only 24 hours. Besides Haiphong it was also planned to drop larger mines in Hon Gai.

Dr. Kissinger remarked that the whole approach should of course be to do the operation ferociously. Admiral Moorer indicated that most of the ships were located in Haiphong. Dr. Kissinger asked that if this were the case, why were we doing both ports and Admiral Moorer answered that he would explain that later in the presentation.

Admiral Moorer then stated that if the mining were done right then with the current settings, the ships in Haiphong would have 72 hours to leave port. The 42 ships there would have two alternatives, either to get out or stay there for the duration. We could then either sink them or leave them alone since the docks would not be available if the harbor were mined. Dr. Kissinger commented that if the ships left, the first thing we would do would be to eliminate the docks with B–52s. Admiral Moorer added that we could mine to a depth of 80 or 90 feet and that Haiphong Harbor was excellent for mining.

In discussing a possible blockade, Admiral Moorer noted that there would be four patrol areas for destroyers, with one carrier to provide surveillance and protection against torpedo boats. They might place two destroyers in each of four slices that would be defined by arcs drawn at 60 and 160 miles from Haiphong. Aircraft surveillance would also be laid on to track ships enroute to North Vietnam.

With regard to instructions which would be given to the ships involved, Admiral Moorer explained that the concept would be to use minimum force to do the mission and to minimize interference and personnel casualties. An effort would be made to divert approaching ships to another port. Dr. Kissinger commented that a review in much greater detail would have to be made of the rules of engagements, especially the instructions which would be given to the captains of U.S. ships. Admiral Moorer explained that once the rules were worked out, he intended to send a special briefing officer to each ship to ensure that the rules were understood. He noted that the normal sequence is visit and search, seizure, and if necessary destruction of ships violating a blockade.

In explaining the air operations which would be employed for the mining, he explained that air defenses in the area would have to be suppressed whether the air operation was done in daylight or at night. At night less aircraft would be required; however, it would probably be better in the day because then the North Vietnamese could see the mines going into the water.

Dr. Kissinger then asked if Admiral Moorer saw mining as an alternative to blockade or whether both would be required. Admiral

Moorer replied that mining alone had the political advantage that it would not bring a direct physical confrontation. If they chose to run the mine field, it was their decision. If they blew up, they would have done it to themselves. Dr. Kissinger questioned what we would do if they were able to sweep our mines, and Admiral Moorer answered that we would simply drop more mines. He commented that Soviet survival was not at stake in this operation.

Dr. Kissinger then asked how reliable the mines were. Admiral Moorer responded that the mines were very reliable and that ships were not going to take a chance of running through the mine field. He explained that the first ship that sunk would close the channel. Dr. Kissinger asked what would happen if they stayed out of the mine field and used lighters? Admiral Moorer explained that both Secretaries Laird and McNamara had been concerned about lightering being used to circumvent a blockade. However, it was a difficult and a slow process to move fuel this way. We would be able to take on the lighters with our ships and aircraft. Dr. Kissinger commented that we were going to pay the price for mining anyway and if they lightered we would have to stop them. Admiral Moorer indicated that he felt it would take some three weeks for the North Vietnamese to get organized.

Dr. Kissinger then commented that if the President chose to go this route he would do nothing less. If the mines didn't stop the supplies coming in, the Navy could. There were advantages of course in preventing a U.S.-Soviet ship confrontation and in that sense it was useful to execute the blockade by the use of mines. If this could all be done with mining, it was better. Admiral Moorer remarked that it would be best to do both. We could always add on other actions later. Dr. Kissinger then asked if Admiral Moorer would want to announce the blockade and mining and Deputy Secretary Rush interjected that the ships simply could be used to warn away those that were approaching the mine field. Dr. Kissinger asserted that we would not allow any other ships to go into North Vietnam and Mr. Haldeman warned against gradual escalation. Dr. Kissinger indicated that we would say that we were mining, warning ships and taking measures to keep ships way from North Vietnam. There would be no more shipping into North Vietnam. We would stick to mining to the extent that we could get away with it.

Admiral Moorer then showed a chart of where various ships were located and explained how control of the Tonkin Gulf would be maintained. Submarine barriers would be established off the coast of the Soviet Union to observe any ships exiting from those areas and a U.S. anti-submarine warfare barrier would be established with aircraft as a matter of prudence. Nuclear submarines would be positioned at the entrances to the Tonkin Gulf and one submarine would be located off

Petropovlovsk. Dr. Kissinger asked if we could have all ships in place by Monday evening[2] and Admiral Moorer responded that we could do it even before that if necessary. This included positioning the ships for blockading purposes.

Admiral Moorer then discussed some of the legal aspects including the various international forms of coercion. He explained that with a blockade it is assumed that the parties are at war. A specific blockade would be one imposed only against the ships of North Vietnam. Since they only had about six ships, this was ruled out. There was also the Cuban quarantine concept. An important aspect was that you must be able to enforce the measures and they must be reasonable. Any lawyer can justify them under the law. Factors might include that fact that the North Vietnamese have violated the 1968 understanding, have been unproductive in peace talks, and have committed a grave provocation against the South Vietnamese people by their invasion. We, of course, do not have the missile threat against the United States as we did in the case of Cuba.

Mr. Haldeman then asked if mining raised any legal problems. Admiral Moorer responded that mining in territorial waters was similar to bombing. Dr. Kissinger asked why we did not use mining in Cuba, and Admiral Moorer replied that there were Soviet missiles in Cuba and we were trying to get them to remove them. To mine would have been counterproductive.

Mr. Haldeman argued how this might be so, but recalled that the quarantine was based on the ships coming in. Admiral Moorer pointed out that in the Cuban case, it was the missiles that were treated as contraband. In this case, food and arms, in effect everything, would be treated as contraband. Dr. Kissinger commented that the advantage to mining was that there was no question what was prohibited. The U.S. ship captain did not have to worry about what to exclude. He noted, however, that the adversaries might figure out ways to defeat the mining. Therefore, we would have to take all other steps necessary to prevent ships at sea from entering North Vietnam. Mr. Haldeman stated that our policy should be that there would be no shipping into any port and Dr. Kissinger commented that the President could say that he had ordered the mining of all ports. In addition, the Navy was to take all other measures necessary to prevent ships from delivering supplies to North Vietnam. He pointed out that by emphasizing mining alone we could take away some of the negative impact but still explain what we would really do. No supplies could come in from sea. Admiral Moorer agreed that the President could simply say that no supplies

[2] May 8.

would come in by sea and that we would not have to use a rationale which would make us more vulnerable.

Dr. Kissinger noted that within several days of the mining there should be strikes against the railroad facilities at Vinh and Hanoi. Admiral Moorer asserted that all military targets would be hit. However, Dr. Kissinger cautioned that he would want to look at all targets and then we could see what could be hit. Admiral Moorer explained that there was an ideal place in the middle of Hanoi which would be particularly good for interdicting railroad traffic. He said he would like to show the targets to Dr. Kissinger. He also predicted that third country nationals would leave Haiphong. Dr. Kissinger asked if we could make the rail system inoperative with bombs. Admiral Moorer answered that they had tried before with the restriction that they had to keep away from the ships. They bombed in the circle around Haiphong.

Dr. Kissinger then commented that he would want a planning group to get together that afternoon and that starting Sunday morning other departments should be brought in. Admiral Moorer commented that directives should go out to the forces by the following morning. He cautioned that mines were almost human and had to be carefully prepared. Dr. Kissinger remarked that we would have to decide when to bring Secretary Laird into the problem.

A discussion then ensued as to whether there was sufficient time for third countries to order their ships out of Haiphong. Dr. Kissinger wondered whether it would take more time for the ships to get out of Haiphong and noted that in the Cuban crisis it took the Soviets three days to turn their ships around. Dr. Kissinger asked General Haig if 72 hours was enough. Admiral Moorer interjected that the mines could be set to activate within three days or one week. General Haig responded that what counted was the rate of getting ships in and out. Admiral Moorer observed that if it took the Soviets 48 hours to make a decision they might have a problem. He said that it was a technical problem which they would look into. They certainly could have their boilers fired out immediately so that they could exit the area quickly. He also noted that if the USSR waited until last, they probably would not be obstructed by the other ships, which would already have left.

At this point the meeting concluded.[3]

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[3] According to the minutes of the Washington Special Actions Group meeting, which began at 11:16 and continued until 11:41 a.m., the WSAG discussed the military situation in Vietnam and Kissinger instructed the participants that U.S. officials should not discuss a potential cease-fire with the news media. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72)

125. Conversation Among President Nixon, the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 5, 1972.

[Omitted here is preliminary discussion of mining Haiphong Harbor and its effects on the summit, and on Soviet military assistance to North Vietnam.]

Kissinger: I think the [May 8] speech should be low key and calm.

Nixon: Oh, I couldn't agree more.

Kissinger: And very cold. That this is what you've done.

Nixon: With this one—

Kissinger: This is what these bastards are—

Nixon: —I've heard the tone-outs, already—

Kissinger: Never do this—

Nixon: It's going to be this: that I have done this, and I'm not going to get any rhetoric in it, and this and that—

Kissinger: And very conciliatory to the Russians, at the end. Put the—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger:—onus on them.

Haldeman: Just to be clever, or—

Kissinger: [unclear] I'd put it—

Haldeman: —bombastic, because—

Nixon: No, no, no, no, no—

Haldeman: —we actually—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: The action is strong—

Kissinger: That's exactly it—

Nixon: I always say: "When action is strong, rhetoric—it can be weak. When action is weak, rhetoric has to be strong."

Kissinger: And I think the—they should feel—

Nixon: That's why [the] November 3d [speech] had to have strong rhetoric[2]—this doesn't need—

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 720–19. 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, 12:44–1:59 p.m.

[2] See footnote 7, Document 120.

Haldeman: This is—

Nixon: —need strong rhetoric—

Haldeman: But this is just the opposite.

Kissinger: I mean—

Nixon: As a matter of fact, I could almost go ahead and say: "Ladies and gentlemen, the—Hanoi has turned down everything that we've done, this thing, and so forth, and, consequently, I'm ordering a blockade. Thank you very much. I appreciate your support—"

Kissinger: No, that would—that'd be too short, but I think ten—

Haldeman: That's, with a little packaging—

Nixon: That's why I've told them it has to be ten minutes.

Kissinger: Ten—fifteen minutes at the outside—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Haldeman: Incidentally, 9 o'clock is the time to go for it, so you've figured out how to [unclear]—

Kissinger: Conciliatory toward the Soviets—there should be a conciliatory paragraph to the Soviets—

Nixon: Yes.

Kissinger: —at the end, sort of putting it up to them, and, perhaps, two sentences on asking public support—

Nixon: How about the Soviet and the Chinese, both?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: To those that are supporting this.

Kissinger: Right. That is it's not directed at you. We're asking nothing of Hanoi that a self–respecting people should not be eager to accept. And—but major powers have a responsibility for the general peace—

Nixon: Have you given this to—

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: —to the speechwriter, yourself?

Kissinger: Yeah, to [Winston] Lord.

Nixon: He should put it in. Lord'll get it in to me, and I'll start working on it tonight.

Kissinger: And I had—

Nixon: I'll work my tail off trying to get something together then.

Kissinger: I'd—well, you'll have to—

Nixon: [unclear] does not have another speech next week. And we can only go through this—these things about should we [unclear]—

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: I think, Mr. President—the more I think of it—

Haldeman: Well, if you've got a reason, you can do it.

Kissinger: This is going to be dramatically—what I found so interesting is that Nelson [Rockefeller] came in. I hadn't asked to see him, and he said the same thing—

Nixon: He was great this morning—

Kissinger: —in fact, that Connally said. He said: "Look, the President has no choice." He said: "If he does something drastic and wins," he said, "then, there he has no political problems. If he loses, there is nothing he can do in any other area that's going to—"

Nixon: There's a more important thing, Henry. The thing that I—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: —I want you to—I want you to have in mind, because I've—I think this decision, not only gravely, but probably irreparably risks the summit. I think it very gravely risks the election.

Kissinger: I agree.

Nixon: And I—but I'm perfectly willing. There is nothing that I can see, however, that is an option which would not—possibly permanently—damage the United States of America. So, to hell with it. I—I know I'm throwing myself on the sword, and I don't give a damn.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: We're gonna do it—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: —we'll do the best we can, but have no illusions about the election. Bob, I don't want to hear that. I don't want to hear Colson and Ehrlich—and Ehrlichman, of course, and all the rest—and then they will. They'll say: "Jesus Christ, why do we have to—"

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: "—demand a peace and the rest." Crap on them.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: We've got to do what's right and that's what we're doing.

Kissinger: And, what's more, we've got to stay ferocious. If only—

Haldeman: If you do what's right—if you do what's right it isn't going to lose the election.

Kissinger: I personally think it might—

Nixon: The whole ferocious thing—Henry, you don't have any idea. The only place where you and I disagree, at the present time, is with regard to the bombing. You're so goddamned concerned about the civilians—

Kissinger: Yeah—

Nixon: —and I don't give a damn. I don't care.

Kissinger: No, I'm concerned about the civilians, because I don't want the world to be mobilized against you as a butcher. We can do it without killing civilians.

Nixon: We're not trying to kill them.

Kissinger: We can do it without killing very many, Mr. President—

Nixon: All right—

Kissinger: That's [unclear]—

Nixon: I'm for that, I'm for that—

Kissinger: We can knock out these railways, we can knock out these docks—

Nixon: But, let me tell you, I am not going to do what Johnson did; pick out every damn target and then say: "Now, you've got to guarantee you're not going to kill any civilians." I'm not going to do that—

Kissinger: No, but if you don't watch these military—

Nixon: They go too far—

Kissinger: —they are totally irresponsible—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and—

Nixon: All right.

Kissinger: —I mean, we have run this as a very tough thing. What I mean by "ferocious"—that's not the problem, anyway, about ferocity. The problem, with respect to ferocity, is that people would start nibbling away at: "Can they do this? Can they do that?" The answer has to be: "They can do nothing. No ship is going into North Vietnam."

Nixon: No, sir. No hospital ships. Nothing.

Kissinger: Nothing. That can go in through China. That any—

Haldeman: Bomb them on the way in.

Kissinger: I beg your pardon?

Haldeman: And then bomb them on the way in.

Kissinger: No, if they want to run a hospital train in, or something like that—

Haldeman: Pummel them.

Kissinger: —but let's, first, knock out all the rail lines.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And—

Haldeman: So the trains can't get through. [chuckles]

Nixon: But we—we can do that. They'll never get—they'll never be able to use the rail lines. What they will use, though, they'll—look, there are no rail lines from North to South. What really disturbs me about our goddamned Air Force is that with no railroad lines—when

they talk about "highways" down the Laotian Trail, it's no goddamn highway, Henry. It's a damn—it's an animal, dog track—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: —and they are—and they have brought heavy guns and heavy tanks down there—

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: —and have not been knocked out.

Kissinger: And do you know what they've been using now against the artillery around Hue?

Nixon: What?

Kissinger: The gunships, which you ordered out there that they didn't want.

Nixon: Our, our guys are flying them?

Kissinger: Yeah. We have, now, 34 gunships, which we, which we rammed down their throats. If we had, if we had 200 of the goddamned things—we just don't have them, otherwise, we'd order them out there.

Nixon: You can't get any more, huh?

Kissinger: So—

Nixon: Remember, Henry, I come back to this, and I know that you vetoed it at the time. Haig did, I think—my, my—

Kissinger: The B–25s?

Nixon: Yes, goddamnit! Sure they are inefficient, and the rest of it, but damn it, they're better than gunships. The B–25 is a hell of a good close support weapon. You were in World War II—

Kissinger: What they mean by gunship is C–130.

Nixon: I know, Henry.

Kissinger: With cannons on them.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: But the sort of thing which the Air Force didn't want, which we had to ram down their throats, and that's what—

Haldeman: And that's the only thing we've got to hit the artillery with?

Kissinger: That's what they are now shooting—getting the artillery with.

Haldeman: Jesus. That new Vietnamese General[3] looks pretty good in the public frame. That's—we're getting some good stuff—

Kissinger: No—

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[3] Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong.

Haldeman: —out of that—

Kissinger: No, that General is all right—I am just—they had a plan to get an extra division up there—well, I don't want to bother you, because that's Abrams. If—they were going to scrape that division together by getting a regiment out of one place, a regiment out of another place. Of course, none of these regiments are getting out, because they are all—

Nixon: Scraped together?

Kissinger: —fighting. No, no. Those are the few that are fighting. If we get another division up to Hue, we are going to give them a hell of a fight up there. I'd better go and see my friend—

Haldeman: That new General has some class, though. He went out and started—

Kissinger: I'm going to see—

Haldeman: —he started shooting deserters, and set up an execution wall.

Nixon: Good, good, good, good.

Kissinger: If he says anyone on the—

Nixon: Do it like the North Vietnamese do!

Haldeman: That's what he did.

Nixon: Good.

Haldeman: He sent a hundred trucks down the road with—and ordering deserters shot on sight—

Kissinger: And he disbanded the Third Division. He made them replacements. He said that's no longer a fit unit.

Haldeman: And they real—they took an offensive action, which is also reported in the paper, and reopened the highway. And that may not have happened, but that's what the press is reporting. I mean, it was a damn good story.

Kissinger: That was.

Nixon: Let me ask you this, though, Henry, the thing is that you've got to realize is that—remember all of it, the one thing that we all have to do now: there can be no turning back.

Kissinger: I agree.

Nixon: There can be no—we must not let Laird and Rogers come in here and piss all over this thing,[4] and all that and so forth. They are to be ordered.

Kissinger: I think Rogers—

Nixon: I am so sick—

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[4] Mining North Vietnamese harbors, including Haiphong.

Kissinger: —should be brought back Sunday,[5] because it's a free day on his schedule, so it's easy for him to get back.

Nixon: Well, the only thing is, I don't want to have to see him until—

Kissinger: Monday morning.

Nixon: Well, Monday morning, I will. [sighs]

Kissinger: I think that's the best thing to do.

Nixon: Monday morning.

Kissinger: He can come back—

Nixon: I'll just tell him that I've made this critical decision, and I appreciate your coming in, and, of course, he'll say: "Well, is it still open, Mr. President?" And I'll say: "No."

Kissinger: I've got to get Laird in tonight, Mr. President, because there are too many ships being moved—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —and it's too dangerous—

Nixon: You want me to get him in, myself?

Kissinger: No, I'll tell him.

Nixon: I'll do it, if you think it'll help.

Kissinger: It isn't necessary. If it's needed, I'll tell him.

Nixon: Yeah—no, I'll tell you what you [unclear]—

Kissinger: I'll tell you and then you can have him come up for something.

Nixon: No, no. I think what you should do is this, if I may suggest. I'd like you to call Mel and say: "Now, Mel, we're telling you this. We're not going to tell Bill until Monday morning, because we know that he'll probably oppose it. The President believes he will." Put it that way. Get him in on the conspiracy, and then say: "The President knows that you're—that you will support this thing. We need your support. It's decided. He's—he knows he's risking everything. It may not work, but he knows nothing else will work, and we're gonna go balls out. We will not lose in Vietnam." Just say that.

Kissinger: Of course, we are going to get some sort of Soviet move this weekend.

Nixon: Against us?

Kissinger: No, to calm us down. They've got—

Nixon: Never.

Kissinger: No, no, they'll get it.

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[5] May 7. Rogers was in Europe to confer with officials in various countries. On May 6–7 he was to meet with West German Foreign Minister Walter Scheel.

Haldeman: Did you [unclear] letter about it?

Kissinger: No, but, but a senior North Vietnamese is in Moscow now. We can pick it up from VIP traffic.

Nixon: Nah, bullshit, but Henry—

Kissinger: No, no, it won't help us. They may propose a four-week cease-fire, which, incidentally, we couldn't accept because that means they could build up and then after four weeks kill us. We—we could [unclear]—

Nixon: Whereas we could blockade them.

Haldeman: Sure.

Kissinger: Yeah, but we could accept it only if they agreed to stop re-supply activities in some way.

Nixon: Let me tell you, if they give—if they offer a four-week cease-fire, we might get the best of both worlds. I think they're not going to offer anything. I don't think they're going to do anything but thumb their noses at us. But let me tell you that—let me tell you, Henry, it's done now, and I know it ended. I told Bob this earlier, that you did exactly what you did this morning, raising questions we can't have, as you did in Cambodia and Laos—

Kissinger: I wanted you to feel comfortable with the decision—

Nixon: I'm not. I don't feel comfortable about anything. All that I know is that what—you do what is right, and there isn't any other choice—

Kissinger: Mr. President, you don't—I don't need bucking up, because I'm passionately for it.

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: I—my nightmare was that we would—that, that for a variety of reasons, we would try to straddle the fence, which, which anybody else would have done, even including Nelson [Rockefeller].

Haldeman: That's right. That's the obvious truth. It really is—

Nixon: I know it is—

Kissinger: And—and that was—

Nixon: Straddled the fence—

Haldeman: You and Connally are the only two who would—

Nixon: Who'd cross the Rubicon—

Kissinger: I felt strongly—once I realized that you were willing to have them cancel, then we could go all-out on the military side, and then the blockade is better, but I had to give you the way, to give you the other argument so that afterwards you didn't feel I had blown it away.

Nixon: As a matter of fact, we'll—when you talk about ferocious, though, believe me, it's going to be the goddamnedest ferocity, and I

am going to—we've got to fire some people over there if there are any leaks out of that State Department about a cease-fire, or—and once we—you work on it. Incidentally—but one thing I should tell you about the speech, Henry, when I said that we will lift the blockade if they give us the POWs and international supervised—superviso—what you said—

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: —cease-fire, and what was the other thing?

Kissinger: And then, four months later we will—

Nixon: And then four months later withdraw. Let me say, except for the POWs, I don't care about the rest. Put in whatever will let us survive, and what seems to be reasonable. Understand?

Haldeman: Yep.

Kissinger: If we can handle an internationally-supervised cease-fire, because we can negotiate the terms—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —I think, then, it's an attractive phrase.

Nixon: The POWs—the POWs is going to be one hell of a thing for these sons-of-bitches to be against. Incidentally, we'll have no more problems with POW wives then for a while, will you?

Kissinger: Yes, and I don't see what more they could want.

Nixon: Well, the enemy, then, might offer—I suppose they might come back. If I were them—

Haldeman: Give you the POWs?

Nixon: No, they'll say: "We'll give you the POWs if you'll stop the bombing and lift the blockade." We'd refuse.

Haldeman: That's the one [unclear] they should have pulled a long time ago. I can't understand why they haven't.

Kissinger: We stop the bombing and lift the blockade—

Nixon: They'll give us the POWs.

Kissinger: I don't know. They might consider that, but they won't do that.

Nixon: Why in the world—you mean we would get?

Kissinger: If we stopped the bombing all over Vietnam, or just in the North?

Nixon: In the North, and lift the blockade. We'd get POWs. You mean, we'd put it on them? You mean—

Haldeman: We don't—

Nixon: —stop bombing for POWs? Why would we, Henry?

Haldeman: You get nothing for that.

Kissinger: Well, because—

Nixon: You still lose the war. That's my problem.

Haldeman: We don't want the POWs.

Kissinger: No, because we could, then—once we got the POWs back—well, they won't offer that—

Nixon: But, suppose they did?

Kissinger: No, they'll—first, they'll wait for about two or three weeks, in my judgment—

Nixon: They'll hope to build their [unclear]—

Kissinger: —and then they'll offer something like withdrawal for the POWs.

Haldeman: The worst thing they could have done any time in the last few weeks is to just return the POWs.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Mr. President, if they had accepted—

Haldeman: Put 'em on a boat and send it in to Honolulu.

Kissinger: If they had accepted our May 31st proposal last year, they would have won now.

Nixon: [unclear]

Haldeman: If they had sent back the POWs [unclear]—

Nixon: Henry, remember—

Haldeman: —before the invasion.

Nixon: —don't give them any impression that we're going to do anything.

Kissinger: No, I'll refuse to discuss Vietnam with him—

Nixon: Yeah, just say—just use the term that you've just been with the President, and the President has said: "Look, he under—he, he, he regrets that you haven't been able to do anything, and, and as he's of—as he's told you, Anatol, that you recall that this is now our problem, and anything we do is not directed against you, but we want [unclear]. He feels very strongly about going ahead with the summit, now let's go ahead."

Kissinger: Now, one—

Nixon: Just—just slobber all over him.

Kissinger: Henry—Henry Hubbard was in, and he said he's in a terrible brawl with his New York office. The New York people say the President has gone irrationally dangerous, that he might go totally irrational, and that, actually, from the point of view—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —of the impact on Moscow, that's a good story to put out. He said—but I said: "What do you think, Henry?" I said: "I bet you the President's the calmest man now, that everything he's doing

is cold and calculating and that he knows exactly what his game plan is." [unclear]—

Nixon: Tell me this: where does this irrational stuff—who the Christ puts that out, Bob, from here? Who the hell is doing it?

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: *The Washington Post* had a—*The Washington Post* had an editorial.[6] Actually, it's not, in terms of foreign policy impact, it doesn't hurt any, but it's—but what I find interesting is that the people who watch you close up, here—for example, Hubbard told me that the*Newsweek* man who was on the ranch said it was the coldest, most calculated speech, that there was no emotionalism involved, you knew exactly what you were doing at every step, and—

Haldeman: There's no question about that. The [unclear]—

Nixon: Well, I tell you what we've got, though—you've got to have the fact that our left—our left-wing friends are going to try to build up the myth of irrationality.

Kissinger: They won't get away with it.

Haldeman: Some of 'em.

Nixon: Hmm.

Haldeman: And then that's a small—you don't get very much of that. You get it in his circles. you don't see much of it beyond that. Actually, the *Post* editorial is not bad, because they say you now have a—have the best chance of all, on both sides, to negotiate. That's their argument, but then they say that it's absolutely clear that the President cannot inflict a Communist government on South Vietnam.

Nixon: Did they say that?

Haldeman: Yeah. I couldn't believe it. I went back and read it a couple more times.

[Omitted here is discussion of the funeral arrangements for FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Kissinger departed at 1:19 p.m.]

Nixon: You know, it's interesting; Henry coming in, saying he wants the speech to be short and calm. Goddamnit, if his people would write the fucking thing—

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[6] The editorial, an analysis of the President's April 26 speech on Vietnam (see Document 99) first posited that Nixon seemed to be signaling Hanoi that a deal to end the war was possible. However, the editorial continued: "Mr. Nixon also appears to be telling Hanoi that if it acts in a way to humiliate the United States—say, by imposing a Communist regime in South Vietnam or, more likely, by keeping its troops conspicuously and successfully on the offensive, especially in the provinces alongside the DMZ—then there is no deal, and harsh reprisals might be taken against the North." ("The President's War Policy: Hostage to Hanoi," *The Washington Post,* April 28, 1972, p. A26)

Haldeman: He started—he started in with me on that, and I said: "Well, the key thing, Henry, is, for God's sake, let's not go through all the litany of who met whom, at what time, on—at what address, because that's the last thing he needs here. He's taking an action, and all you need is a very general—you know, that we've moved these directions and this is what's—where we are, this is what I'm doing, and that's that." This is one where actions speak much louder than words.

Nixon: And, also, the delivery doesn't make all that much difference.

Haldeman: You know, if you've got a four-week cease-fire and didn't agree to it until after you've mined Haiphong—

Nixon: Hmm.

Haldeman: —it'd be kind of interesting if we just leave the mines there and take the cease-fire.

Nixon: He's never going to get anything from the Russians. Henry—Henry's always saying he's going to get something out of the Russians—

Haldeman: Yeah—

Nixon: —through some senior man down there. Christ, there was a delegation that's been down there.

Haldeman: [laughs]

Nixon: Le Duc Tho stopped [unclear] Russia, on the way back.

Haldeman: Yeah.

Nixon: He goes through this litany, time and time, again and again. In fact, he really shouldn't be lunching with Dobrynin today.[7] Right?

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: Probably he should have canceled it, but he thought that was too much of a signal. I don't know why in the hell he would be doing it today. Do you?

Haldeman: Except that he had it set.

Nixon: Well, of course. I'd just postpone it. By God, after that meeting, I'd postpone it. But I did give him some good advice, because Henry tends to overreact one way or the other, and I didn't want him to go over there and be cold, and menacing, and the rest. But I said: "Slobber over the son-of-a-bitch. Dobrynin treats us that way. Slobber over him. Make it appear that we're not going to do anything." We've got to do something, you know. It's like, like the bluff with poker. You don't shout it out and the rest when you've got the cards. You just sit there and that's the whole key to it. [pause] Well, I was going to say,

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[7] According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger and Dobrynin lunched at the Soviet Embassy between 1:25 and 3:08 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76)

Bob, that we don't want to allow this business about the—this anger, and irrationality, and so forth to—

Haldeman: Right.

Nixon: —to get to be enough to get out, because—

Haldeman: I don't think it hurts us—

Nixon: I know something, though. You're—you are confident that our staff is keeping its damn mouth shut?

Haldeman: Very much so.

Nixon: I mean—

Haldeman: And the—what?

Nixon: Henry, every time I raise this, thinks Scali's leaking this sort of thing.

Haldeman: Oh, no.

Nixon: I don't think Scali ever does things like that himself. Right?

Haldeman: Scali's playing the other thing. Scali has—

Nixon: Totally [unclear]

Haldeman: —done a superb job on the stuff that we've given him to do.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

[Omitted here is discussion of the media and the President's public appearances.]

Nixon: Well, in a way, it's been a rather a good week [unclear] regardless of what anybody might say.

Haldeman: It has.

Nixon: No, really. I mean, in Vietnam we've had a few setbacks [unclear] stories. Huh?

Haldeman: But it's not closing out on too bad a note.

Nixon: What do you mean?

Haldeman: Vietnam.

Nixon: Because why?

Haldeman: Because there's—it's calmed down.

Nixon: Not fully enough.

Haldeman: Because we lost—

Nixon: Why?

Haldeman: We lost a base, and everybody was com—and we lost this [unclear] capital,[8] and now that's recognized—that you can lose

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[8] There are several candidates for the base: in MR–1, for example, Dong Ha fell on April 28 and Camp Evans and Fire Support Base Nancy on May 2; and in MR–2, South Vietnamese troops withdrew from Vo Dinh on May 1 and Fire Support Base November on May 2. The capital referred to is Quang Tri City in Quang Tri Province.

a capital without the war ending, being lost. There's a air of optimism, I think, on the Hue thing. Thieu went in there and did a good job, apparently.

Nixon: Did he?

Haldeman: Yeah. Very upbeat, cocky. It cranked him up, and this new General is from a PR viewpoint—I don't know whether he's worth a damn as a General—from a PR viewpoint he's absolutely sensational, because he just—

Nixon: Chews them out—

Haldeman: —just charged in. He said: "Get your asses back here and defend the city. Get the refugees out"—which they're doing—"and get the troops in." And then, he built a wall over it, and he says: "That's the execution wall. That's where we shoot the deserters." [laughs] He's left it there to remind them.

Nixon: It's the only way to do it.

Haldeman: But, there's a—and then they went out and opened this road. And they're billing that as the first offensive action they've taken in the war, just the thing—

Nixon: What—where was that, now?

Haldeman: On Highway 13, I think it was.

Nixon: That's all right. Right. Good. Good.

Haldeman: Highway 14, in the Highlands—their first counterattack of the offensive. The ARVN have reopened Highway 14 in the Highlands. [pause] And then they've made a big thing out of more planes and tanks are on the way.

Nixon: Hmm.

Haldeman: And I think this stuff that something new is going to happen isn't bad at all. I mean, it's building up to, to an action that—what most of them are talking about is that there'll be more bombing of Hanoi. [pause] We only lost two dead. Those were ARVN paratroopers, designed to end the isolation of the road to Kontum, and it succeeded. So, they've opened the road to Kontum.

Nixon: Um-hmm. [pause]

Haldeman: All the people fleeing to get out of the cities—but hell, we're not chasing them out, the North Vietnamese are.

Nixon: Okay.

[Omitted here is discussion of the President's public appearances and image, the FBI Directorship, the bicentennial, Tricia Nixon Cox, Patrick Buchanan, and the media.]

Nixon: It was really quite an exercise for the Navy, isn't it? Just think what it must mean to those Navy guys, the poor sons-of-bitches

that—who'd love to do something, you know? They get to blockade somebody.

[pause]

Haldeman: These new mines they use are fascinating. They can set those to become active whenever they want them and to become inactive whenever they want them. I mean, they have an "on" and an "off" switch that they can set it on an automatic timing mode.

Nixon: Well, but—but they can't—they're not operated from a distance—?

Haldeman: No, no. Once they've set it, it's set, as I understand it. And let's hope they're not going to put any "off" switch on it, and they're going to leave them "on." And Moorer is a guy—he just, just practically chortles, you know. He's so—he just loves the mining part, especially.

Nixon: Does he?

Haldeman: Yeah, because it's, it's damn effective. These mines, I guess, are much more sophisticated than the stuff we knew about in World War II. They're all—they go down to the bottom. They go down and just lie on the bottom until something comes over them and then it magnetically it shoots up and hits it.

Nixon: Hmm. Let's hope one of our own boats isn't sunk by one.

Haldeman: There probably will be.

Nixon: This is war.

Haldeman: Somebody will sail into 'em. Mining is a beautiful thing, though, really, because that—you lay the mines down, and you tell the people they're there. If somebody sails into it, you didn't do anything to them, they did it to themselves.

Nixon: Hmm. Well, let me tell you, for a few days after we announce this blockade, it's going to be goddamned hard. If I were a member of the House or Senate I'd take this on—or a candidate, particularly when you put it on the basis of POWs, and our 60,000 Americans who are in Vietnam, and preventing the imposition of Communist government after we've offered everything but that to the North. Correct?

Haldeman: Yep.

Nixon: It'll be goddamned hard, particularly when a blockade is aimed not at destroying North Vietnam, but preventing the delivery of lethal weapons which are going to be used to kill people in South Vietnam.

Haldeman: Who could possibly—I mean, even—you know, how can McGovern, even, argue that? Nobody can rationally argue the right of North Vietnam to get more arms.

[Omitted here is discussion of the press conference, the Executive Office Building, and miscellaneous small talk.]

126. Editorial Note

Although work on the plan to mine Haiphong Harbor had begun on May 4, 1972, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird had not been informed of the operation. At the time only a few individuals in the White House and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were privy to the plan. Concerning when to let Laird know about the operation, Henry Kissinger and Admiral Thomas Moorer had the following conversation at 4:01 p.m. on May 5:

"HAK: When do we have to get Laird into the act?

"CJCS: I would think before we sent out the execute message. It ought to go out not later than noon tomorrow [May 6].

"HAK: I will see Laird at breakfast, that would be time enough?

"CJCS: Yes, if we can get the message right out then and there, in other words, you got to give him about 48 hours from the time that the President speaks.

"HAK: You can alert them that would give them more than 48 hours.

"CJCS: Taking some time for transmission and dissemination.

"HAK: Only other choice I have as I have to go up to New York, I could drop by to see Laird now.

"CJCS: If you are having breakfast with him.

"HAK: We also want to make some command changes.

"CJCS: That is fine. If you get approval by that time, that will be fine.

"HAK: What do I tell him, whether you know about it?

"CJCS: I will tell him I know about it from an informal talk with the President, he called me on the telephone. You can tell him that I have been asked about the plans, I don't know about a decision having been made, that is the best way. Of course, I know about the plans, I have been talking about it all along, which I have but tell him that I have not been advised actually going to take place, this is great, Henry. You going to have breakfast in the morning, one thing I got the message all ready to go on that collection of tanks and vehicles, I need Haig to call Pursley or something to get this thing released, we had those pictures of all those tanks and transporters North of Hanoi, you wanted to go with it tomorrow night. I need somebody to break the log jam.

"HAK: That is right.

"CJCS: Not any later than in the morning for Laird.

"HAK: It will not." (Moorer Diary, May 5; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

In anticipation of the breakfast meeting with Laird, Haig prepared a number of talking points for Kissinger. Haig wrote:

"At this morning's meeting you will wish to discuss the President's decision with respect to North Vietnam. Because Secretary Laird is not aware of what actions have already taken place between you, Under Secretary Rush, and Admiral Moorer, it is necessary that you approach this topic gingerly. You should make the following points:

"1. The President wishes to have a plan for execution as early as Monday evening, Washington time, which would:

"a. Mine all North Vietnam ports.

"b. Establish a physical naval barrier (blockade) of the entire coast of North Vietnam.

"c. Extend authorities for unrestricted air war against military and military related targets throughout North Vietnam with a 25-kilometer restricted barrier south of North Vietnam's border with Communist China.

"d. The President wishes to have the mines activated in a way that adequate time is permitted for shipping to depart Haiphong and other North Vietnamese ports. After the activation of the mine field, all port facilities will be destroyed by U.S. air action. He would like to have the concept for such a plan briefed by Admiral Moorer at the special WSAG meeting at 5 p.m. this afternoon. These plans should be in excellent shape since they were reviewed in 1969 and 1970 and preparatory steps such as mines and adequate naval and air forces have already been provided for.

"2. Point out the President's determination to take all necessary action to bring the conflict in Vietnam to a conclusion." (Memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, May 5; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 129, Papers Related to President's Speech Vietnam, May 8, 1972)

During the morning of May 6, beginning with Kissinger's breakfast with Laird at the Pentagon, principals in the policy circle—including Kissinger, Moorer, Haig, Laird, and Zumwalt—refined the plan, as a series of entries in Moorer's Diary, including a transcript of a conversation between Kissinger and Moorer, show:

"0759. *Met with—Admiral Zumwalt—in office*—Discussed details of mining plan with Admiral Zumwalt and his experts. We went over some of the final touches and I told them that Admiral Freeman had prepared the execute message and that I wanted to go over it one more time. I asked Kin [McKee] to work up the DEFCON requirements and fill in the briefing with this information."

"0830. *Met with—SecDef—in his office*—along with Dr. Kissinger and we explained the mining plan to SecDef. I laid out the whole plan and went over the whole pitch with him."

"1027. *TELECON/OUT—To DepSecDef—Subj:* Rush wondered how Mel took the mining plan. I said he is negative. I played it cool like I

had never heard of it. He told me to go write the message. HAK really filled him in alone at the breakfast, so I was not there."

"1033. *Met with—LTG Zais—in office*—told him to start plans for an interdiction campaign. Make a target survey and look over all the bridges, ferrys, fords out of Haiphong as well as the railroads and marshalling yards all the way from the DMZ to the Buffer Zone." (National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

According to his Record of Schedule, Kissinger arrived at the Pentagon at 8 p.m. and left at 9:45. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) After he returned to the While House, he placed a call to Moorer on a secure line at 10:53 p.m.:

"CJCS: I am writing up, I have been told by SecDef, to write up the message on mining only.

"HAK: What do you mean mining only?

"CJCS: He did not mention anything about blockade to me. Do you want both or just one?

"HAK: Mining plus what other measures are necessary to keep from going in there.

"CJCS: This brings up the question whether to do both immediately or to link the mining with the President's statement that says we are going to take whatever actions are necessary.

"HAK: Why don't we do the mining first and do the second on night of the President's speech.

"CJCS: That is all right, that is fine. I am going with mining the whole coast and Haiphong against ocean going ships, the coastline against small coastal logistic craft and I am going to set the serialization in the mines for 6 months, which I think is about right, then if we have to extend it we can put them down again.

"HAK: I am just trying to find out what options we have if we get any nibbles coming in. We can call it off as late as Monday can't we?

"CJCS: This is not an Execute, just a planning message. We can call it off on Monday." (Moorer Diary, May 6; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

With Kissinger's confirmation that the next step in the American counter-offensive would be to mine, not blockade, Haiphong Harbor and other coastal ports in North Vietnam, policy seemed to be set. Moorer quickly communicated this critical information to Zumwalt under whom worked the small group of Admirals who had developed the plan. At 11:07 p.m. he called Zumwalt and said: "After talking this thing over, the decision has been made to go with mining only. I think that might be better. Although I agree with your point and that doesn't

mean it is not going to be changed again. That is the way it is going to go with the first alerting message." Zumwalt asked: "Does this mean to restructure our briefing?" To which Moorer replied: "No, just leave it the way it is." (Ibid.)

Kissinger later explained why he supported the blockade-by-mining option: "I favored a blockade because it would force Hanoi to conserve its supplies and thus slow down its offensive at least until reliable new overland routes had been established through China. Since most of the supplies would be Soviet, this would not be an easy assignment. I preferred mining because after the initial decision it was automatic; it did not require the repeated confrontations of a blockade enforced by intercepting ships. Even though the brunt of stopping the offensive would still have to be borne by the forces of South Vietnam, once enemy supplies in the South were exhausted, the mining would create strong pressures for negotiations." (*White House Years*, page 1178)

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127. Memorandum for the Record[1]

Washington, May 6, 1972, 2:45–4:30 p.m.

SUBJECT

Contingency Plan for Operations Against North Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Major General Alexander M. Haig, Jr.
George C. Carver, Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs, CIA
Helmut Sonnenfeldt
John Holdridge
Richard Kennedy
John Negroponte
Winston Lord
Jonathan T. Howe

Dr. Kissinger assembled a group of NSC staff members plus a CIA official, who had just completed a study of the impact of a blockade, to discuss the effects of and possible international reactions to various

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Office Files, Box 146, US Domestic Agency Files, 1972 Offensive Misc. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. Also printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 199.

contingency actions which were under serious consideration by the President. These actions included mining of North Vietnamese ports and interdiction by air of rail lines and other logistics targets throughout North Vietnam.

The meeting began with a presentation by Mr. Carver on the impact of closing off supplies to the port of Haiphong. (A copy of the report is at Tab A.)[2] The paper did not consider the effects of parallel steps which might be taken to interdict the logistics flow. After intensive discussion of various aspects of the supply problem, including differences in the situation in 1969 from those at present, Dr. Kissinger asked various staff experts for their assessment.

Hal Sonnenfeldt expressed the view that it was probable that the Soviet Union would cancel the Summit. However, he did not believe that the contemplated action would lead to a war. A variety of possible Soviet reactions were discussed. Sonnenfeldt felt that a paper he had prepared in 1969 concerning possible contingency actions was still valid with the exception that the United States was now better postured in its relations with the Soviet Union.

John Negroponte stated that the actions would have a major impact on ARVN morale and thereby greatly increase their fighting effectiveness. He stressed that the Government of North Vietnam was in a fairly precarious position and that mining and all out bombing could result in a shakeup of the current power structure.

John Holdridge outlined various options for the PRC and indicated that they might feel obliged to provide some manpower, allow use of Chinese air fields as a safehaven for North Vietnamese planes and open ports in South China. He felt the actions would cool relations with the United States and that the emphasis in U.S./PRC relations would focus almost exclusively on people to people contacts for a while. However, he did not believe these actions would lead to a major confrontation with the PRC. Holdridge also pointed out that relations with China were much better and our understanding of them had increased since earlier years when there was great concern about the intervention of Chinese forces in Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger made the point that if the decision were made to carry out these operations, they must be done brutally and could not be restricted to halfway measures. A discussion ensued as to whether it would be better to carry out these operations before or after the Summit and before or after the battle of Hue. Most present agreed that the time for the operations, if they were to be conducted at all, was then—before the battle of Hue commenced and before the Summit.

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[2] Attached but not printed.

George Carver raised the possibility that the North Vietnamese might harm our prisoners but several in the group, including Dr. Kissinger, disagreed, believing that there would be a major upswelling of indignation in this country and that the enemy would not do such a foolish thing.

Dr. Kissinger then pointed out that in analyzing the supply situation, consideration should be given to the technical possibility and probability that the North Vietnamese would shift to other means of supply before resources in the South were entirely depleted. In other words, in order to protect their forces they would have to take action before they ran completely out of supplies. All emphasized the importance of the ground battle in South Vietnam to the success of the plan. It was essential that the South Vietnamese go all out and win some battles.

Dr. Kissinger then summed up some of the arguments which had been presented:

—The North Vietnamese have manpower constraints. This would be the most severe test that they had faced and would undoubtedly affect their morale and cause strains in their own fabric. There were limits to what they could ask their people to endure.

—In 1965 the North Vietnamese felt that time was on their side. Now it was eight years later and they were faced with a blockade and a stronger South Vietnamese army in the South. It was possible that the blockade might affect their calculations in their convulsive and all out effort in the South. (Mr. Carver indicated that he felt there would be a change in the people sitting around the table. By that he meant Le Duan would not survive and there would be a new leadership alignment.)

—Morale in the South would be favorably affected and the operation might result in silencing President Thieu's opposition. This would dispel any doubt that the United States had worked a deal behind the back of the South Vietnamese and indicate that President Thieu was the man who had delivered the Americans. It would strengthen Thieu's hand politically. We in turn could say to the South Vietnamese that it was essential that they make a maximum all out effort. (Carver pointed out that there was a tendency to let the Americans do the job for them and we would have to be careful to ensure that this feeling did not prevail.)

—It would give us something to bargain with for our prisoners which we would not have had otherwise.

—There was a small chance that the actions would produce, after a period of delay, a more rapid negotiation to the end of the war. In the first weeks following the announcement, the North Vietnamese would want to maintain a tough position in order to see how the battle went in South Vietnam and whether there was major domestic opposition in the United States to the bargain. They obviously would not go immediately to the bargaining table.

On the other hand there were a number of disadvantages:

—With the U.S. having further invested its prestige, the defeat would be greater if the operations failed.

—The loss of the Summit was almost a foregone conclusion and could have a very negative effect on SALT and other important negotiations with the Soviet Union.

—There was likely to be a cooling of relations with the PRC.

Mr. Carver pointed out that the North Vietnamese had been lucky in Tet of 1968 in bringing the U.S. Government around to their position even though the North Vietnamese had suffered a serious defeat. If the North Vietnamese were checked on the ground in the South, they would be in a serious situation when faced with renewed bombing and mining.

Dr. Kissinger then asked each person present whether he was for or against putting the contingency plans into effect:

—Mr. Carver said that he would do it but do it thoroughly and do it soon.

—Mr. Holdridge said that he would favor the operation if we had enough resources to carry the day. If there were sufficient military resources, his vote was yes.

—Mr. Negroponte said he felt that he was more optimistic about the chances for success of the operation than others present and that he favored it without reservation. He felt the result would be quicker and more decisive than others anticipated. The morale factor would be a key to the success of the ARVN.

—Mr. Sonnenfeldt said that he favored it and that we should do it soon and sustain it.

—Mr. Lord said that Dr. Kissinger knew that he was against it. First, he didn't think it would work. Second, he thought our losses would exceed our gains and third if it didn't work, it would be throwing good money after bad and would compound our losses.[3]

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[3] Lord made his opposition to the mining even clearer in a memorandum to Kissinger on May 6. Developing what he believed to be a likely scenario of events if the blockade-by-mining took place, he concluded: "No matter what we achieve we nevertheless certainly *will* suffer some of the losses suggested in the scenario: Summit, SALT, other agreements, at least some cooling with Peking, civilian casualties, etc. We *could* have other losses: a more serious break with Peking, some Moscow–Peking rapprochement, etc. *In short, even if we 'succeed,' would there be a net gain? And if we don't succeed, we'll have compounded our losses*—politically, psychologically, diplomatically. There is also the chance of heading into a *direct confrontation* with the Soviet Union—a Cuban missile crisis with the following *differences:*

"—The issues would not be demonstrably crucial to our national security like missiles off Florida.

"—Strategic parity instead of superiority.

"—U.S. domestic opinion basically against us, not with us.

"—The same for world opinion." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 45, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Easter Offensive, 1971–1972)

—Mr. Kennedy said that he would favor doing it but with the same reservation expressed by Mr. Holdridge concerning resources. His second reservation would be with regard to the possible negative domestic reaction. If we started the operation, we must be willing to pay the price and recognize that the other side might simply wait out the President's tenure. On balance, however, he was in favor of it.

—Commander Howe said that he would favor the operation provided it was done thoroughly and intensively.

—General Haig indicated that it was a tough decision and his major concern was on the domestic front but that on balance he favored it.

Dr. Kissinger then thanked all those for attending the meeting and expressing their views frankly.[4]

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[4] In a late afternoon telephone conversation with the President, Kissinger reported on the meeting. Regarding the blockade-by-mining proposal, Kissinger told Nixon the following: "And to my absolute amazement, then at the end I went around the table and said all right now, you give me your opinions so that when the President asks me I will be sure that I have weighed every consideration. And all except one came out for it." (Transcript of telephone conversation, May 6; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 14, Chronological File)

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128. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, May 7, 1972, 0043Z.

WHS2066. 1. President Nixon is tentatively planning to announce Monday evening EST, May 8, the closing of DRV ports by mining and blockade, intensified naval bombardment of the DRV coast and intensified air interdiction throughout the DRV.

2. You should not inform President Thieu of the foregoing at this time. We will, however, provide you with text of a Presidential message to Thieu to convey to him two hours prior to mining of DRV ports.

3. The President wants you and General Abrams to know that he visualizes this operation as a maximum effort designed not only to

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 241, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, January 1970–December 1974. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Drafted on May 6.

close off sources of sea supply but to interdict internal DRV logistics routes and above all, through early and massive application of firepower against rail lines, to preclude or at least severely complicate development of rail from China as a compensating source of supply.

4. To put it in the bluntest terms, we are not interested in half-measures; we want to demonstrate to Hanoi that we really mean business; and we want to strike in a fashion that maximizes their difficulties in sorting out what their priorities should be in responding to these retaliatory actions.

5. There should be no question in either your or General Abrams' mind that we want to devote the necessary assets to this action. If in your judgment the assets required for operations in the North lead you to conclude that more air is needed to meet tactical exigencies in the South, then that air should be promptly requested and we will get it to you.

6. Concurrent with these actions, we will be counting heavily on you to impress upon President Thieu and his entire military leadership the need to energize RVNAF to the utmost of their abilities. With the United States having taken such steps, there can be no remaining doubt about the steadfastness of our purpose, our willingness to do everything within our power and our determination to do everything we can to help SVN defend itself.

7. But having taken these measures, which we can only assume will have overwhelmingly favorable impact in SVN, it is incumbent upon the RVNAF and the entire GVN political apparatus to follow-up aggressively on the ground regaining the initiative against the NVA wherever they pose a challenge and recouping pacification losses wherever they may have occurred.

8. The President's message to Thieu will cover some of the points in paragraph 7 above; but we cannot overemphasize importance of point that steps we plan to take must be accompanied by absolutely maximum GVN effort in days and weeks ahead to turn back NVA offensive. With the dramatic new U.S. measures contemplated we believe this can be accomplished.

9. In view of above we need SVN civilian casualty figures resulting from offensive requested yesterday in State channels on urgent basis for possible use in Presidential speech. Do not hesitate to give us ball-park figures and we will not object if they incline towards the high side.

10. Warm regards.

129. Memorandum From President Nixon to the Assistant to the President (Haldeman)[1]

Washington, May 7, 1972.

In speaking to John Mitchell[2] yesterday, he as you might imagine indicated strong support of the decision we are going to announce Monday night. However, he did raise a rather disturbing note when he said that he thought that our PR operation at the time of the April 26 speech was not adequate. He said we did not get across to our supporters in the country generally following the speech the reasons that I had outlined for bombing of the North, i.e., protecting 60,000 Americans still in Vietnam, preventing the Communist takeover, etc.

Whether his criticism is justified or not, I am not prepared to say. On the other hand, as I have told you, the most important assignment you and every member of the staff have for the next two or three weeks is to go all out presenting and defending the line I will be taking on Monday night and attacking the attackers in an effective way.

There needs to be some simple fundamental points that are gotten across.

1. A major purpose of the blockade is to get back our POW's.
2. A major purpose of the blockade is to protect 60,000 Americans whose lives will be imperiled if the Communist offensive is allowed to roll on without action of this type being taken.
3. A major purpose of the blockade is to prevent a Communist takeover of South Vietnam with all of the consequences that would follow.
4. A major purpose of the blockade is to serve the cause of peace by discouraging this kind of aggression in Vietnam and thereby discouraging it in other places. You will recall that the strongest response we got on our poll was to the line that I used over and over again that I want to bring our men home from Vietnam but I want to do so in a way that the younger brothers and sons of those who have fought and died in Vietnam do not have to fight in some other Vietnam in the future.
5. A major purpose of our blockade is to avoid an American defeat with all the repercussions that will have both within our country and the terror it would strike into the hearts of our allies and friends around the world.

A subsidiary issue should, of course, be that of pointing out the courage of the President in going all out for peace in his journey to

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 75, May 8, 1972 Vietnam Speech [2 of 2]. No classification marking.

[2] Mitchell resigned as Attorney General on March 1 to become the head of the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

Peking and in making this decision. Also, the courage of the President in rejecting a crass political decision where it would be very easy for him to follow the advice of the bug-outers—withdraw all Americans, blame the two previous Administrations for getting us into the war and sending 549,000 Americans to Vietnam and taking credit for bringing our men home—regardless of consequences. This point should also be made in terms of the line that those who were silent or even supported the decisions which sent 549,000 men to Vietnam are now sabotaging the President's effort to bring our men home and to end the war and win an honorable peace.

I think what John Mitchell refers to is that we did not have enough good simple lines that we hammered over and over again—lines that would get through to the American people. My guess is that he felt that while the speech was well received there was a tendency for us not to have the follow-up on the critical issues that I have listed above. In any event, it is now, of course, urgent that we do everything within our power to follow up—with an effort far exceeding the speech of November 3. This speech will not have the impact of November 3rd because it is an action without too much emotion in rhetoric. Therefore, it will require enormous effort on the part of all of our subsidiary speakers to get across our point.

As I have already told you, this means that all of the hawks, not only in the Congress but in the media and among the Governors, etc., be mobilized. It requires the use of ads by the "Tell it to Hanoi" group or any other group we can think of. It requires getting out positive reactions if such reactions can possibly be obtained. It requires stimulating mail and wire response to the speech to the White House so that we can use it as we did after November 3.

We have to use all of our big guns in this. Laird, of course, to the extent he is willing to be used and the same with regard to Rogers provided he is here rather than in Europe. However, here is one where I think Connally could really take off the gloves and go all-out for us. On the dovish side Richardson could be effective as well as Bush, and here I think Finch, Rumsfeld and others of that type must be told that this is it—we have crossed the Rubicon and we must now win the battle—not just in Vietnam but even more importantly public opinion wise in the United States.

130. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, May 7, 1972, 9:42 a.m.

Secure TELECON/OUT—to MG Haig

CJCS:—I tried to get a hold of Henry and need to clear up a couple of points. Point one is at the meeting this afternoon,[2] who is going to be there and how much do they know. I do not want to spill the beans.

Haig:—When the time is set just the principals will be there, Johnson, Helms, and so on.

CJCS:—Point Two is assure them wouldn't know that we have gone that far.

Haig:—Not a chance of it real convulsion over here yesterday.

CJCS:—That is fine, the real important thing and as I told you I have had the Chiefs together all enthusiastic about doing it. They think we should do it.

Haig:—For your information we went out back channel to Bunker and asked that he talk to Abrams and both are elated at it.[3] Abrams said he did not need more assets constant requirement between 200 and 300 a day to keep this thing effective and if he needs more assets ask for them. He said he did not think he needed any.

CJCS:—Work up interdiction plan use something like between 300–400 a day. HAK wanted between that and 3 up there anyway. Additional 4 squadrons and *Saratoga*. Abrams is not going to lose anything compared to what he has had and I told HAK I am sure Mel will approve it. Last night I was talking to McCain about great question could send 3 cruisers up there at once, *Newport News*[4] just arriving and

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

[2] Moorer was referring to the upcoming WSAG meeting. Although no record of the meeting has been found, Kissinger's Record of Schedule indicates that it began at 6:08 p.m. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 438, Miscellany, 1968–76) According to talking points prepared for Kissinger by Haig, May 7, the purpose of the meeting was to review contingency planning for possible actions against North Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–087, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 5/7/72)

[3] Backchannel message 88 from Bunker to Kissinger, May 7. (Ibid., Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, From Amb. Bunker—Saigon, 1972)

[4] U.S. Navy heavy cruiser that operated off the coast of Vietnam from May through November 1972.

to shelling while other thing going on. Main thing I am going to get Laird going on to do that. Two 6 inch cruisers and one 8 inch cruiser and the 8 inch can reach 3 of the SAM sites. Another thing, I told HAK actually turned out we had quite a discussion last night back and forth about the duration of the sterilization of the mines and 116 days is what it is instead of 180. In message we should not change it. If you open up mines would not have water tight integrity but it will be 4 months instead of 6.

Haig:—I think that is better.

CJCS:—All kinds of flexibility you can replenish. I have instructed them to be sure put some of the mines in at 69 reason for that following up there until sometime 7–8 ten Red River Valley temperature of the weather regardless of what the weather it. President would not be worried yesterday about whatever he wants to say. I understand in his talk will be firm if we have any gap as soon as fog burns off if we days at this moment now conducting.

Haig:—Refers to going on now.

CJCS:—That is right, the point if we don't do it exactly like we want to then and there going on if it needs correcting, I am not suggesting it will need correcting. Establish point 72 hours there to finish off during the day finish off just about starting at 0900. On this command thing I got my people working on it.[5] The whole problem as you well know, has been the fact Abrams is getting double instructions only problem in terms of command main problems in personality we ought to be able to get some people there to support senior Air Force and Navy officers to put work with whoever is going to take Abrams' place and work out that way. Hope it will not disrupt the system interdiction plan mining, blockade plan. That fellow simply will not be able to do that particularly cut in communications down tight expand out if get into other things does not have time anyway. I am just trying to figure out what to say to the President and, at the same time, not to go into convulsions. I do not think we can afford convulsions there.

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[5] Reference is to the President's brief attempt in early May to reform the command system that controlled the air war over North Vietnam. For a discussion of the issue, see Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back,* p. 221, and Kissinger, *White House Years,* p. 1112.

The North Vietnamese Offensive Falters, Negotiations Resume, May 8–July 18, 1972

131. Memorandum for the President's Files[1]

Washington, May 8, 1972, 9 a.m.–12:20 p.m.

SUBJECT

National Security Council Meeting

PARTICIPANTS

President Nixon
Vice President Agnew
Secretary of State Rogers
Secretary of Defense Laird
Secretary of Treasury Connally
Director of Central Intelligence Helms
Director of Office of Emergency Preparedness, Lincoln
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Kissinger
President's Press Secretary Ziegler
Mr. John Negroponte, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

President Nixon: As you are all aware we have an important decision to make today on Vietnam.[2] The current situation which is certainly not as critical as portrayed by the press is nevertheless in the balance. There are serious questions as to Vietnam's equipment and will. General Abrams needs more assets. We've sent air primarily. The Soviet summit is jeopardized by each option open to us:

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Memcons, January–December 1972 [2 of 3]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. According to the President's Daily Diary, Haig also attended the NSC meeting. (Ibid., White House Central Files) Portions of the memorandum are also printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 204.

[2] Writing in his memoirs about deliberations between and among the President, Connally, Haldeman, and himself on May 4, Kissinger noted: "Nixon then and there decided upon the mining of North Vietnamese ports. He would speak to the nation on Monday evening, May 8, or as soon thereafter as the mining could be implemented. He would convene the National Security Council on Monday morning [May 8] to give his advisers an opportunity to express their opinions." (*White House Years*, p. 1179) In a telephone call shortly after the NSC meeting, Moorer observed to Rush: "The President had gone to his office and cogitated with a decision within the hour." Rush responded: "Made before you met, in my opinion. Don't you think so, he just couldn't say so?" To which Moorer replied: "Never says at the NSC Meeting no matter what the issue—how important or not, never says." (Moorer Diary, May 8; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

—Doing nothing
—Only bombing the North
—Blockading or mining and bombing

Thus today we need a cold-blooded analysis.

Regardless of how we have helped the South Vietnamese, we have done reasonably well in some places and poorly in others. I am surprised at the fact that we have provided inferior equipment to that furnished by the Soviets. They have provided 13 new weapon systems, big tanks–big guns; this shows what the South Vietnamese are up against. The South Vietnamese fighting performance is a mixed bag. Even by the most optimistic assessment there is a substantial danger that South Vietnam may not be able to hold up particularly in Hue; but in Military Regions III and IV where most of the population lives they are doing quite well.

Hue is of symbolic importance and they may attack within the next few days.

Putting it in those terms the real question is not what will happen to South Vietnam but what we have to do to affect the situation. We could wait the situation out. This is a tempting course. If the South Vietnamese can't do the job on the ground it would be tempting for political reasons. We could blame the opposition for getting us into the war and then for not letting us out. Congress undermined us at the negotiating table and we could tell the U.S. people let's flush it because South Vietnam couldn't hack it. This is a tempting proposition. It could be sold. Our Democratic friends would buy it and a great number of Republican friends would buy it as well.

But there are problems. The major one is that, if in the future after all the effort in South Vietnam, a Soviet-supported opponent succeeds over a U.S.-supported opponent this could have considerable effect on our allies and on the United States. Our ability to conduct a credible foreign policy could be imperiled. This leaves out the domino theory; but if you talk to the Thai, the Cambodians, the Indonesians and the Filipinos, as I have, the fact of a U.S. failure and a Communist success would be considered a failure of U.S. policy.

Secondly, the diplomatic track is totally blocked. The public sessions have been unproductive. Henry was in Paris last week and made every offer we had made previously and even more.[3] They flatly refused and insisted on our getting rid of Thieu, releasing everybody from prison and so forth making a Communist takeover inevitable. The Communists now think they're winning and they're getting tougher at the bargaining table.

Thirdly, there is a considerable body of military opinion, not a majority, that we should put more air strikes into Hanoi and Haiphong.

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[3] See Document 109.

The difficulty with this course is, first the DRV will be better prepared, second General Abrams needs assets for the battle in the South and third, there is the serious question of effectiveness of resuming bombings on a regular basis. This raises problems similar to those previously faced and the question of what would be accomplished.

The fourth and final course would be to adopt a program of cutting off the flow of supplies by sea and rail. The effect of cutting off supplies by sea can be conclusive but the question of rail is in doubt because of our experience from 1965–68.

Whatever we do it won't affect the battle immediately in the South except perhaps the psychological effect. The real effect will be three of four months from now for sure.

As regards the summit, this latter course might jeopardize the summit. I think we have to realize that if the situation in Vietnam is as it is today there can't be a summit. The summit is jeopardized by all these courses of action. That consideration we have to assume. There will be no summit.

There is no good choice. The bug-out choice is a good political one but I am not sure what this office would be worth after doing that. The other military choices would have grave foreign policy consequences and political consequences at home. Nothing we can say is sure and all have serious risks regarding the summit, public opinion and Congress.

Anyone who raises a question of risk must look at the choices. We face a situation where nothing is sure. There are grave political risks and risks to the country if we try one of these policies and fail.

I believe the first course of action is the least viable. It is the best politically, but it is the least viable for our foreign policy. Escalation in the bombing or a naval and air cutoff have questionable value. Neither will surely tip the balance to the side of success. It is only a question of degree. The only question in regard to increased bombing or a cutoff is whether this provides South Vietnam with a better chance of success.

Admiral Moorer will brief on the military aspects of the mining and air activities.

Admiral Moorer: I will first address the mining plan. There are two kinds of mines, the large mines and the second kind are the smaller Mark 36 destructor mines—a special mine for the interdiction of small craft. The area of concern is the Haiphong Channel. It is ideal for mining because it is a narrow channel. The green area is where we would place the big mines and any ship which hit a mine and sank would block the channel. The red area shows where we would put the destructors.[4]

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[4] Admiral Moorer was apparently using maps for his briefing.

There are an average of 42 ships per month in Haiphong. The pier can accommodate 16 to 17 ships and there is a separate off-loading pier for POL supplies. The three mile limit is there. It's been put in by the International Lawyers.

President Nixon: The State and Defense Department lawyers have been working on this.

Admiral Moorer: The DRV claims a twelve mile limit. The lawyers contend that because other countries such as the Norwegians and the Japanese claim a three mile limit and we mine beyond that three mile limit, they could claim that mining up to the twelve mile limit would set a precedent.

Dr. Kissinger: Ambassador Johnson came up with a formulation yesterday whereby we could make a proclamation that does not force a decision. We could simply state that the mining is taking place within DRV territorial waters rather than specifying whether it is within claimed DRV territorial waters or territorial waters as we view them legally.

Admiral Moorer: We shouldn't say what we won't do. At 9:00 p.m. tonight 30–45 minutes before laying the mines there would be preliminary suppressive air actions prior to the mines going down.

President Nixon: Would they all be dropped by air?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. Each plane drops four mines.

President Nixon: How many planes would we lose?

Admiral Moorer: We will be using A–6's and A–7's. We will not lose many. It is not as much of a risk as our previous bombing of Haiphong. There will also be gunfire support.

President Nixon: When will the *Newport News* arrive?

Admiral Moorer: It is arriving tomorrow. The big mines will be set for 72 hours. There is no flexibility on the destructors for the small mines and they can only be set for 24 hours; so the destructors will be dropped 24 hours later. The sterilizers make the big mines inactive within 120 days. This is not absolutely precise but about 120 days. We don't propose initially to put destructors in the channel itself because they have a life of 180 days.

These mines are magnetic; we have other mines which are more difficult to sweep but we are not putting them in in the initial effort. We could put them in if the other side makes a concerted sweeping effort. The mines are set off at random so that if a sweeping could be made they could be set for three or four or five passes. They are not moored mines like the old World War I mines. They are implanted on the ground. The situation then would be that 72 hours after the first drop the mine field would be activated.

We would lay the larger mines in this area and we would lay the destructors inside the rivers further south. The black line is the three

mile limit; the red is the twelve mile limit. Near the DMZ we would lay destructors at Dong Hoi, Quang Khe and Thanh Hoa. These ports are used by little craft that hug the coast to supply routes leading to the Ban Karai and the Mu Gia pass. We will reseed the mines as necessary and we can continually go back and reseed. Associated with this action would be the suppressive air support for the mine laying aircraft.

With regard to the interdiction of the rail lines there are three rail lines from Hanoi to the Chinese border. We would attack the marshalling yards, the junctions, the railroad lines and the highway bridges. We have already done some good work on the lines of communication. As far as the level of effort is concerned we are already putting 200 sorties per day in the Freedom Train area. We would augment this by 100 sorties. This would leave ample assets in the South. Four additional squadrons and the *Saratoga* have been involved in the augmentation effort and would be used for suppression of air defenses and then to hit the rail and supply lines.

The ships could withdraw or stay. If they stayed, they would block the dock area but we would continue with the attacks against warehouses. If the ships leave we would totally destroy the docks. Laying the mines will be simple.

President Nixon: Regarding the seaborne traffic, is mining enough? Won't we have to stop the ships?

Admiral Moorer: The ships come from two directions. Most come from South of Hainan. The Soviet ships come from the Black Sea and not from Soviet Pacific ports. The destroyers would provide a screen to warn ships that the channel has been mined and we would take steps to be sure that cargo is not off-loaded on the beach. They cannot go into the ports without a pilot and there is not a chance of them going up knowing that the channel is mined.

Secretary Laird: We have the names of all the ships on the way and the cargo they are carrying.

Admiral Moorer: Mr. Helms will talk about the logistics aspects.

President Nixon: How could our interdiction effort be more effective than it was from 1965 to 1968? Will we be using more B–52's?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. In 1965 to 1968 since so many supplies were by sea the railroad was being used at 10–15 percent capacity. Now there would be many more trains and targets and they would have to operate in the daytime. The interdiction would be much more effective now.

President Nixon: Would we have more planes now or less?

Admiral Moorer: We would have slightly less. In 1968 we were running at 30,000 sorties per month, about our present level.

President Nixon: The only advantage could be the B–52's?

Secretary Laird: We're now running 500 sorties a day or about 15,000 per month.

Secretary Connally: Couldn't we knock out the railroads?

Admiral Moorer: The advantage is that then the railroads weren't used to full capacity. When you get to the question of fuel there is an estimated 100,000 tons available which could last three months. It is a very different proposition to bring fuel and food in by rail. You cannot go after a logistics system one category at a time.

Secretary Rogers: Are you satisfied that the mining will block the channel?

Admiral Moorer: Yes.

Secretary Rogers: What about off-shore unloading?

Admiral Moorer: They will try some off-shore loading and perhaps they will use some of the China ports. That's why we will be interdicting both the ports and the railroads. But we can cut down the lighters to a trickle.

Secretary Laird: They'll use lighters. They have thousands of them. They off-loaded Soviet ships near the DMZ with 500 lighters.

Secretary Rogers: In effect it would be a blockade if we attack the ships.

Dr. Kissinger: If it is inside territorial waters it is interdiction. If we stop vessels outside territorial waters if would be a different matter.

President Nixon: The difference would be one of not stopping vessels on the high seas.

Secretary Rogers: If they off-load on the high seas?

Mr. Lincoln: If we attack ships off the coast then why wouldn't this be a blockade?

Dr. Kissinger: We have the option of only attacking the lighters.

Secretary Laird: You can't have both the mining and attacking the docks.

Vice President Agnew: If the boats have 72 hours to get out?

Dr. Kissinger: Why can't you go after the docks?

Secretary Laird: I'm sure the Soviets will keep ships at the docks.

Dr. Kissinger: The immediate operational question is that of whether you attack the lighters or the ships.

Secretary Laird: The docks must go out in any event. The military significance will be in four or five months. Most of the stuff is economic in nature and food. Almost all the military equipment comes in by rail.

President Nixon: What about POL?

Secretary Laird: The POL comes through port facilities but they have four months' supply in-country.

Secretary Connally: What about the tanks?

Secretary Laird: The tanks come in by rail—so do the SAMs.

Admiral Moorer: We have never been able to verify whether the SAMs come in by rail or by sea.

President Nixon: The main thing is the oil.

Secretary Laird: They have four months' supply. If they go on ration they could stretch it to five months.

President Nixon: Does that assume the planned air strikes?

Admiral Moorer: The additional air strikes on POL storage points and warehouses have thus far been limited to south of the 20th parallel.

President Nixon: It would not make sense to take this risk unless we go all out on the rail facilities in a fashion better than in 1968 and we cannot have any stop-start bombing. We must stop movement into Haiphong, particularly the oil; we must bomb the power plants and the attacks must be heavy. There is no easy way. I would like to think that the mining is easy but there must be mining; we must hit the railroads so they cannot divert to rail and we will be hitting stock piles in a substantially increased way north of the 20th parallel. Either we do all that or nothing.

Admiral Moorer: Compared to 1968 the number of DRV motorized vehicles and artillery is much higher.

President Nixon: It is a different war.

Admiral Moorer: The consumption rates are much higher.

Mr. Lincoln: How many planes will be diverted from South Vietnam?

Admiral Moorer: The plan will leave General Abrams with what he needs in view of the recent augmentations.

President Nixon: Tell us what assets we had when we began and what we have there now.

Admiral Moorer: We began with 17 destroyers, now we have 36. We began with three CVA's, now there are six. We have ten more squadrons of aircraft and we have doubled the B–52 capability.

Secretary Connally: In a real sense we are not taking anything away from General Abrams.

President Nixon: Abrams has double the resources.

Secretary Connally: Is there any doubt that you can't knock out the three rail lines?

Admiral Moorer: I am confident we can.

Secretary Connally: I don't think we should do this if our planes cannot knock out the rail lines.

Vice President Agnew: What about SAMs?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, they have SAMs. They fired 250 of them on the last Hanoi raid and achieved one hit. Last night just west of Hanoi there was only light SAM firing.

Secretary Laird: They still have 8,000 SAMs and have fired 7,000 of them.

Secretary Rogers: How effective will these measures be? Do you think they are the most effective or is there something else we could do?

Admiral Moorer: The only other more effective measure would be an amphibious landing.

President Nixon: That is the other option. We have the Marine division in Okinawa. I have said we would not introduce ground troops. Leaving the mining out, can we step up the bombing on Hanoi and Haiphong?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. We could hit the marshalling yards and the warehouses on the docks.

President Nixon: The problem with respect to bombing is the restraints. The difficulty is civilian casualties. Mining may be the most humane course in this kind of situation.

Secretary Rogers: We would be doing all three. First maximum effort in South Vietnam, secondly the docks, third a blockade.

President Nixon: I have to decide at 2:00 p.m.

Admiral Moorer: We are planning to execute.

President Nixon: Whatever we do we must always avoid saying what we're not going to do, like nuclear weapons. I referred to them saying that I did not consider them necessary. Obviously, we are not going to use nuclear weapons but we should leave it hanging over them. We should also leave the threat of marines hanging over them. To protect our 69,000 forces, if the GVN collapses, the 18,000 U.S. personnel in Da Nang would be in great peril. In terms of ground forces, an offensive role is one question, a defensive one is something else. We shouldn't give reassurances to the enemy that we are not going balls out. I like the three to twelve mile limit question. I think we should leave it open. Whether we hit ships or lighters should also be left open.

Admiral Moorer: There are enough supplies in the DRV to permit the continuation of current operations. The question is what happens next August and next year if we leave the situation as it is.

President Nixon: It is tempting to do nothing. We are already doing a hell of a lot. We have doubled the B–52's. We have upgraded the army. But we must think of where we are going to be. There is no way we can go to Moscow with the situation as it is. Further down the road in September or October, assuming South Vietnam holds, they will have an enormous incentive to give us one last punch just before the elections. Whoever the democratic candidate is, McGovern, Humphrey or Teddy Kennedy, both the DRV and Moscow would like nothing better than to have these men in office.

When we are out can South Vietnam survive? The problem is if South Vietnam goes down the tube next year, we have to look at this in terms of U.S. foreign policy. Should we not do things now to seriously impair the DRV ability to attack them?

One thing I am certain and that is that we cannot be sure that this will work. It depends also on South Vietnam. Do we take great risks regardless of whether the GVN flops or not. The bombing option is perhaps open. The difficulty is that, unless we take off the wraps, your feeling is that it is not going to be effective.

Mr. Helms, will you now brief the situation.

Director Helms: (Director Helms then read the briefing paper attached at Tab A.)[5]

Secretary Connally: (To Director Helms) Why doesn't your assessment give consideration to continuation of what we're doing now? What if the 69,000 troops are trapped? Where are you with respect to U.S. opinion and world opinion. What happens if we continue the way we are?

President Nixon: When we asked Dick to prepare a briefing it was to brief on the effects of the contemplated course of action.

Secretary Laird: I have sent you a net assessment on the capabilities of North and South Vietnam.[6]

President Nixon: That is only part of it. The bigger question is that of the effect on the U.S. and world opinion of continuing what we're doing and failing or doing what we are considering and failing. The best of both worlds would be to continue as we are and succeed. The reason we are considering this or bombing is that we feel the current situation is one which carries a great risk of failure. How much will this change the situation? I think there is a better than even chance that if we do nothing we will fail. I think there is a better than even chance of success if we do this.

Secretary Connally: The greatest risk is failure by doing nothing more. We have been there ten years. If there is a Dunkirk then this will

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[5] Not attached. A copy of Tab A, Helms's May 8 briefing paper entitled "The Effect of a U.S. Policy to Interdict Land and Sea Imports to North Vietnam," is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–033, National Security Council Meetings, NSC Meeting Vietnam 5/8/72.

[6] Presumably Laird was referring to one of two documents: a CIA memorandum entitled "Net Assessment of North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese Military Forces" that he had earlier requested and which Admiral Moorer summarized on April 27 (Memorandum from Moorer to Laird; Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–75–0155, 381 Vietnam), or an ISA memorandum entitled "Assessment of Enemy and Friendly Forces in South Vietnam," which Moorer summarized on May 4. (Memorandum from Moorer to Laird; ibid., FRC 330–77–0094, 385 Vietnam (1–15 May))

be a failure on the part of the United States. It will destroy a viable foreign policy for the United States. It will ensure your political defeat, Mr. President, if we fail. If anything happens you can't win with the doves. You can't run the risk of 69,000 American soldiers being trapped.

President Nixon: Your point is to provide greater leverage if South Vietnam collapses.

Secretary Connally: Yes.

Secretary Laird: We wanted two years. The election in 1968 was decided on the Vietnam issue. The problem is in South Vietnam—in MRs 1, 2, and 3. The problem is not caused by equipment. In MR–1 not a single M–48 tank has been knocked out by a T–54.

President Nixon: The ARVN had 48 tanks—they have 500; I saw the figures.

Secretary Laird: The problem facing South Vietnam is whether they are willing to stand and fight and search out the artillery. Their marines are doing a good job but not the others. We have the guns but we need the spotters.

President Nixon: We don't have spotters. Regarding the tanks, all but nine of ours were knocked out. Our small tanks are no match for the T–54s. North Vietnam has ten times as many tanks. You recall that the Defense Department opposed my sending heavy tanks there.

Secretary Laird: The problem is spotting artillery. The South Vietnamese spotters work within the South Vietnamese camps. The North Vietnamese spotters are better. They accurately pinpoint the South Vietnamese. The reverse is not true. We are using C–130s with infrared against their artillery. This is becoming more effective. When the NVA put 4,600 rounds of artillery into Quang Tri on the last day it caused panic. General Lam was not so good. He had disagreements with General Abrams. We are making certain changes. The point is that the battle in South Vietnam is going to be decided on the ground. Air and naval support are important but they won't win unless there are improvements in the RVNAF leadership. General Minh, the Three Corps Commander, wants out. The ARVN has to change its leaders.

The ground battle in South Vietnam is important. If we take the course we are contemplating it will have an effect in four to six months. I think North Vietnam will stay the course with a U.S. election coming up. These actions will give the impression of working for four to six weeks but then after that they will not.

President Nixon: It might help next year.

Secretary Laird: I agree it might help next year. We are already extended to 1.6 billion dollars. We can't get money from Congress. We are drawing from all over the world for this. I have seen two administrations place everything in Southeast Asia. This Administration has

been able to build its strength in Europe. It has come to certain understandings with the USSR and China. If we do this, I think we will go into the campaign on the defensive and it will be a minus. We should not be on the defensive.

President Nixon: You disagree with Secretary Connally. You mean that we should just look at this question from the point of view that if the South Vietnamese can't make it, just resign ourselves to the fact and make a plus out of our other policies.

Secretary Laird: I think South Vietnam can make it. Hue may go but it will not be as bad as 1968.

President Nixon: Your point is South Vietnam can make it without either the strikes or sea interdiction. You don't think from the psychological standpoint it would be helpful even beyond the elections.

Secretary Laird: It will not have a bearing now.

President Nixon: But what about the future?

Secretary Laird: Yes. But even in the future it is perhaps doubtful.

President Nixon: Suppose we are wrong? Suppose Vietnam fails? How do we handle it? You don't assess the risks for our policy?

Secretary Laird: We must hedge on equipment. We have given them everything they have asked for and will continue. If they don't have enough incentive, then all the equipment in the world won't save them.

Secretary Connally: Why do you use the argument that cost is too great? You aren't going to save any money.

Secretary Laird: The military equipment route is the cheapter route.

Secretary Connally: Explain that to me. Haven't all the assets already been sent there?

Secretary Laird: We are conducting a massive air campaign in the DRV and in South Vietnam. It runs up into tremendous amounts of money. Just to give you an example, one B–52 strike costs 40,000 dollars in ammunition.

Dr. Kissinger: What you are doing is arguing against the present scale of air effort.

Vice President Agnew: I don't think, if we just let things go, we can afford to let South Vietnam slide. When South Vietnam goes it will be utter collapse if something isn't done. It will be a complete loss of U.S. diplomatic credibility around the world. We must move the Soviets off center. We must move off gradualism. We should stop saying what we are not going to do. We are not in a confrontation with the Soviets. There is still the possibility of a face-saving solution in Paris. Before a confrontation with the Soviets they could go to the DRV and say let's find a solution. What will happen if we let South Vietnam slide into defeat?

President Nixon: These are all things we don't know.

Vice President Agnew: If there is a collapse, the Soviets will be encouraged in the Middle East, in the Indian Ocean. It will be a green flag for wars of national liberation anywhere. I personally believe in the domino theory.

President Nixon: We could do this and still fail. Mel (Laird) is aware of this. The South Vietnamese could still collapse. Then it would only be a chip for our Prisoners of War.

Vice President Agnew: By not doing anything more we would be giving testimony to our weakness. The Europeans have let us be out in front of every fight they have. If something happens with the Soviets then let the Soviets be nervous. Politically and domestically I think it will be vicious for the Administration but, Mr. President, if I were sitting where are you I would say we have got to do something. We're the greatest people in the world for handcuffing ourselves. We are compulsive talkers. I don't think you have any option. The effect could be great in South Vietnam. It could stop the erosion of the internal structure and beat DRV morale.

Mr. Lincoln: I believe the domino theory.

President Nixon: I think we all do. The real question is whether the Americans give a damn any more. Americans don't care about Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Philippines. No President could risk New York to save Tel Aviv or Bonn. We have to say it—our responsibility is to say it—because we must play a role of leadership. A lot of people say we shouldn't be a great power. That is all well and good if there were not another couple of predatory powers on the scene. The Soviets already have a tremendous capability and the Chinese are developing one.

If you follow *Time*, the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and the three networks, you could say that the U.S. has done enough. Let's get out; let's make a deal with the Russians and pull in our horns. The U.S. would cease to be a military and diplomatic power. If that happened, then the U.S. would look inward towards itself and would remove itself from the world. Every non-Communist nation in the world would live in terror. If the U.S. is strong enough and willing to use its strength, then the world will remain half-Communist rather than becoming entirely Communist.

Mr. Lincoln: We really have to hedge against a failure in South Vietnam even if the chance of failure is only ten percent. Those who criticize us will say why didn't we do it sooner. This action hedges against it. Four or five months from now it is likely to be of some help. It is a less inflammatory step than just actually bombing.

I have one technical concern and that is the question of availability of air power. In the short run can it be better used in support of our air mission in South Vietnam than in this interdiction?

President Nixon: I understand the problem. Hue is a little bit like Verdun. The Germans and the French decided it was important and fought for it. Three million men were killed as a result. Hue is a hell of a symbol. General Abrams is using as much as he can.

Secretary Laird: Abrams is dividing up his planes between MR's 1, 2 and 3.

President Nixon: Abrams has 35 B–52s which he does not allocate every day. They are used for targets of opportunity.

Admiral Moorer: He also has a call on the resources operating north of the DMZ.

President Nixon: One advantage of this operation as distinct from bombing more is that, if we bombed more, our credibility will be diminished. If we do this option it will be with the assumption that Abrams will have all the resources he needs. The main battle is in the South. The reason there was no second strike on Hanoi and Haiphong was because General Abrams did not want to divert the resources. I was much persuaded by the needs that he expressed and if the military commander says what he needs, we will support him.

Vice President Agnew: Whatever we do, we should do it all. First, we should free up the air. Second, we should surprise them and third, we should lessen the domestic impact. The docks are part of this. We should go the whole route.

Secretary Connally: I couldn't agree more. It is not only a question of Vietnam but Laos, Cambodia and all of Southeast Asia. Mr. President, you say United States people are sick of it. You said we will withdraw. If Vietnam is defeated, Mr. President, you won't have anything. I agree it won't happen in three weeks but it is a mistake to tie our hands as we did in the mid-1960's. At that time many Americans thought we were doing this on a no-win basis. If we move we ought to blockade, we ought to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. It is inconceivable to me that we have fought this war without inflicting damage on the aggressor. The aggressor has a sanctuary. If Russia gets away with it here like it did in Bangla Desh then it will be all of Southeast Asia. Where next? The Middle East? We must think about these things. The other problem is South Vietnam's ability to survive.

President Nixon: Then you would approve this operation.

Secretary Connally: Don't let them nibble you to death on this. You've got to make a conscious decision one way or another. What the people want is leadership.

President Nixon: There is no sure choice. I will have to decide before 2 o'clock. Everything you say will have to be weighed. Secretary Rogers will evaluate the world aspect. We see risks of confrontation. We must have in mind the fact that the USSR, with so much on the plate, might move to cool it rather than heat it up; so there is a question about

the USSR there. I think we have to bear in mind that they expressed concern about the problem. They expressed an interest in getting Hanoi back to the conference table. I don't know whether they can influence Hanoi to do something. But as far as the USSR is concerned this course may be an incentive or disincentive.

Secretary Rogers: If there is a failure in South Vietnam that is disastrous for our policies.

President Nixon: Even if we try?

Secretary Rogers: Secondly, we shouldn't be carried away. I think the U.S. people think you have done enough and that you have done very well. The question, therefore, is whether there is something more you can do to be effective. I agree with Dick's (Helms) paper. It is a good one. We assume the effect will be good. LBJ said that it didn't work. Do we think it will work? It is clear that it won't have the effect militarily in the short term and maybe it won't have any effect at all. It could have a psychological effect on both South Vietnam and North Vietnam and, if so, that would be worthwhile.

But it could have the opposite effect both on the battlefield and domestically. I think it's going to be a tough one with our people and with our allies. We will have some help from the British and a few others.

As for Congress and public opinion, I think they will charge that this will have no military effect. It looks from Dick's (Helms) paper that most supplies can come by rail. Maybe they can't but I'm assuming that the CIA paper is right on this.

If we do this and fail, I think that would be worse and more damaging to our prestige. I don't know whether it will be effective or not. We must rely on the military. If this will strengthen the military hand and the hand of the South Vietnamese, I think we should support it. Could we wait? Perhaps a week? Is there a time factor? I learned in my discussions from the Europeans that the DRV wants to destroy the summit.[7]

Secretary Connally: This will put the summit in jeopardy but I don't think it is certain that they will cancel it.

Dr. Kissinger: I think that if we do this there is a better than even chance that the Soviets will cancel the summit.

President Nixon: I couldn't go to the summit if conditions in South Vietnam are the same as now or worse.

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[7] In their telephone conversation after the meeting (see foonote 2 above), Moorer commented to Rush regarding Rogers's view of bombing and mining the North: "Rogers, in effect, said if it was successful he was all for it but if it wasn't successful he was against it." In his memoirs, Haig recalled that while Rogers was speaking Kissinger passed him a note. Summing up his impression of what the Secretary of State was saying about the President's proposal, Kissinger wrote: "If it works, I'm for it; if it fails, I'm against it." See Haig, *Inner Circles*, p. 287.

Secretary Connally: It is better for the Soviets to cancel the summit than us.

Secretary Rogers: The question is is it going to work or is it going to hurt us?

Vice President Agnew: I think we are better off if we do it even if we lose Hue.

Secretary Laird: Let's not make so much out of Hue. We lost it in 1968.

Vice President Agnew: The media are making a big thing out of Hue. That is something we cannot help.

Secretary Laird: The problem is one of assets.

Dr. Kissinger: The problem with all these figures is that one cannot construct a program analysis approach type model. The fact of the matter is that they would have to redirect 2.2 million tons of seaborne imports. At present they are only importing 300,000 tons by rail. We did not stop all of their rail transport in 1965–68.

President Nixon: It is very different now. Sihanoukville is cut. Now we will cut off the port.

Dr. Kissinger: They have a theoretical capacity but they can't use trains by day and if you analyze every segment of the railroad in China you will find that one segment of the railroad is apt to get overloaded. You can't throw these figures around without a better analysis. It is easy to say that they have a four months' capacity and could go all out and end the war but they would end with zero capacity. Another possibility is that they would try everything in one month or alternately cut way down on their activities. One thing is certain they will not draw their supplies down to zero.

President Nixon: The key point is if it is militarily effective. Looking to the future we have to think about whoever sits in this chair after the election. We must consider the long term advantages as well as the short term. If South Vietnam goes and we have done this, Bill's (Secretary Rogers) view is that we are worse off. John's (Secretary Connally) and the Vice President's view is different.

My view is that either way, if South Vietnam goes, as far as the political situation is concerned we are done. What is on the line is an election. The only effective thing is to decide now that, if South Vietnam isn't going to succeed, then we should withdraw before the debacle, blame it on the Senate and pull out. I could make the God damnedest speech to this effect and win the election, but I couldn't bring myself to do that because I know too much. I'm not sure that U.S. training is equal to Communist style training. This is no discredit to us. We are different and we believe in permissiveness. The North Vietnamese fight because they're afraid of what will happen to them if they don't.

My main point is that I will consider the possibility of simply chucking it now, blaming the doves for sabotaging the negotiating track and encouraging the enemy and telling the North Vietnamese we'll do everything they want to get back our prisoners of war.

The price they are demanding for our prisoners of war is not just a deadline for the withdrawal of our forces. We've tried that. They won't give back those prisoners of war until we get out of Southeast Asia totally. At least with this option we have something to bargain for POWs. We certainly can't pay the price that they have demanded.

Vice President Agnew: I disagree that this is a viable political alternative. I don't think we can sell it.

President Nixon: We have several choices. The first is a bug-out. The second is the choice of continuing to do what we're doing. The risk of this course is failure. In any event we are not going to Moscow. When I came back from Communist China I didn't get a damn thing on Vietnam.

We go to the Soviet Union, we agree on principles, credits, and we toast each other at a time when Soviet tanks are kicking hell out of our allies. If we act and then we have a summit, perhaps we can do that. The real proposition is, are we better off letting the dust settle or will more drastic action tip the balance in a decisive way? I will have to weigh these. All of you come down on these matters in varying degrees and shades. It comes down not to whether we lose in Vietnam but first what can we do to prevent that and second what should we do to make the losses palatable if we do in fact lose.

Secretary Connally: One option was negotiations and last fall and spring there was hope for negotiations but that hope is down the drain. We have lost the negotiating option. At the moment our country's future is in the hands of the South Vietnamese and whether they stand and fight. We cannot allow this situation to continue.

Secretary Laird: I am limited to 2.4 billion dollars annually. I have put in 2.9 billion dollars already, hiding it under the table. I am taking it out of the hide of the Services.

Secretary Connally: You're already pregnant.

Secretary Laird: It's a question of where you are next year. If you are to have a viable policy, you can't break down your whole force posture. You've got to have the support of the people and the Congress.

Vice President Agnew: If we don't get anywhere on the Vietnam question, then we won't be anywhere anyway.

Secretary Connally: We can't make this decision on the basis of cost. You can't convince me that if you bomb the railroads, the ports of Haiphong and Hanoi, you can't persuade me that it won't affect the psychology both in South and North Vietnam.

Secretary Laird: I agree.

Secretary Connally: Maybe you can give the South Vietnamese the necessary will by doing this.

President Nixon: The U.S. way of training may not be the most effective.

Secretary Laird: That may be so but I would only say that in the battle of An Loc, when the North Vietnamese tanks attacked, the only NVA who was not chained to his tank was the tank commander himself.

Secretary Rogers: Is it going to work with respect to South Vietnam and North Vietnam? Is it going to work with respect to public opinion. Congress and so forth?

President Nixon: The answer is that we aren't sure. I have to balance all these things. The risks of doing what we're doing versus the risks of doing more. I find Mel's (Secretary Laird) analysis of the military situation reassuring but General Abrams' message of May 2 was not reassuring. Mel, would you agree that you would not be surprised to see South Vietnam fold?

Secretary Laird: Out of 44 province capitals maybe the Communists will take five.

President Nixon: I'll decide by 2:00 p.m. In the meantime, if we decide to do this, I will want the operative aspect to be checked with Secretary Rogers and Secretary Laird. If we do this we want to put it in the most conciliatory terms and yet in strong terms as well. This is a decision of great import. We must keep this in confidence. Everyone must support the decision. I don't want to see columns appearing in the papers saying who agreed and who didn't agree. If we decide to do this, it won't work unless we do it with all-out ferocity. I don't know how it will affect the Vice President's trip to Japan.

Vice President Agnew: A few hundred thousand student demonstrators won't bother me. I would not want to assume that the summit is cancelled.

Secretary Rogers: I won't go back to Europe. Assistant Secretary Hillenbrand is over there.

President Nixon: If we do it, we will need all the big guns here in Washington.

Secretary Laird: I think it would be a mistake for me to cancel my meeting with the military planning group of NATO the week after next.

Secretary Rogers: Whatever you decide, Mr. President, you will have our total support.

President Nixon: First, I will weigh Mel's options. Second, I will weigh the bombing option which I don't like; and third, I will weigh the operation we have discussed today which does not take so much from General Abrams.

The meeting ended at 12:20 p.m.

132. Editorial Note

After the National Security Council meeting on May 8, 1972, President Richard M. Nixon, Treasury Secretary John B. Connally, and the President's Assistant for National Security, Henry A. Kissinger, and later Assistant to the President H.R. Haldeman met in the Oval Office and continued to discuss the arguments for and against mining. Portions of the conversation are printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 205. During the conversation the following exchange took place:

Nixon: "I think if we do it—I mean, I think the decision is to either do it today or to not do it at all. Well, or at least not do it this week. [chuckles] And that probably means we're not going to hit at all. But let's, say, let's get your evaluation, John. After listening to the whole thing [the NSC meeting], you just be as cold and deliberate as you can. Tell me what you think."

After additional discussion as to exactly what the President wanted to know, Connally said:

"The safest thing is always to, basically, let the status quo remain the status quo. Whatever the ultimate result, that's the safest thing. That's the basic bureaucratic approach, that you never want to disturb things. That, somewhat, is reflected in both Mel and Bill's attitude. Secondly, I think you have to assume that Bill really would not like to see the summit come off, the Russian Summit. He would like to see it postponed—"

Nixon: [laughs]

Connally: "—for whatever reason, but he'd just like to see it go by the boards. Third, I think there's—I think there's some argument there to be made, on behalf of Mel's argument, that, well, you know, it's costing us a hell of a lot, but, dear God—"

Nixon: [unclear]

Connally: "This doesn't—this doesn't make a lot of sense to me."

Nixon: "No, no. That, that, that argument—"

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: "That has nothing to do with the operation, because if you follow that argument, you have to stop the air—"

Connally: "Sure."

Kissinger: "—because we—"

Connally: "We'd have to get out completely."

Later in the conversation, Connally returned to the question of the cost of the war and its relation to policy, referring to an earlier conversation with Secretary of Defense Laird and Secretary of State Rogers after the National Security Council meeting on May 8:

Connally: "Mel said: 'Now, there's a real problem on these finances.' And I said: 'Mel, I know that,' but I said, 'hell, if you're going to take that argument, you ought to pull out all your air forces and all your, all your navy ships. Save some money. Or, you've got to go for broke, get it over with.' And then, Bill said: 'Well,' he says, 'as a matter of fact, I would probably go for just complete devastation of Hanoi and Haiphong. Just bomb them.' He said: 'I just think we ought to raze them.' He said: 'I'd probably support the option of razing them to the ground.' And Mel then said, he said, 'Well, the thing that kills us, are these pinpointing these damn targets. That if we didn't have these restrictive targets placed on us,' he said, 'that's why we have to make so many sorties trying to just pinpoint particular targets.'"

Kissinger: "That's a lie, too."

Connally: "And he said—I said, 'Well,' I said, 'I might support, strongly support, razing Haiphong and Hanoi and just devastating them.' I said: 'I might do that.' 'On the other hand,' I said, 'I might well support a move by the President, right now, to go and undertake this action and then, at the same time, withdraw the 69,000 troops.' 'But,' I said, 'the thing I cannot support is just the continual degradation of our position and the position of the South Vietnamese, and leaving in the hands of the South Vietnamese the viability of the whole foreign policy of the United States.' And, I said: 'That, that I just can't, I can't go for." He said, 'Well, we'll support—'"

[unclear exchange]

Connally: "I'm sorry."

Nixon: "Excuse me. Then they said what?"

Connally: "They said: 'Well, we'll, we'll sure support whatever decision is made.' And I said: 'Well, that's the important thing, that we all support it.' And I said, 'I don't care what.' I said, 'I have strong feelings, but whatever the President's decision is, I'm going to be for it.' And that's the way we broke up. Now, I—"

Nixon: "What is your—how do you balance that [unclear] question that was raised—? And I'd like to get Henry's judgment on that, too. I mean, let us assume that South Vietnam is gonna—all right, then the question is: are we better off for having done this, or worse off? And it's, frankly, I think if South Vietnam goes down, we ought to go down, the U.S. and our foreign policy has suffered a shattering blow in any event. But, is our foreign policy—is our position better, if we have tried—done this, or worse? Rogers says it's worse if we've done this and it goes down. And you think maybe it's better if we've—"

Connally: "Yes."

Nixon: "—done this and it goes down."

Connally: "Yes, sir."

Nixon: "What's your argument for that?"

Connally: "Well, the argument is that, at least, we, we have sent a message to other aggressor nations that they're going to suffer some damage. And this is one of the great weaknesses that we have in the American position, always, that we have constantly been on the defensive. We bomb North Vietnam, yes, but it's been targets of—highly selective targets, and so forth. There's been no devastation. People in Viet—in North Vietnam have been relatively free of these fears of retribution."

Nixon: "[unclear] civilians, that's right."

Connally: "Civilians. And fear of retribution is a powerful motivating force. And we've let them go ten years without it. And at the same time, these poor bastards, the South Vietnamese, everybody says that they stay there, that they've got stay so many rounds, just to make it—"

[unclear exchange]

Connally: "—and then, they may break, it's just the sheer—the fear that they're going to get killed. And I don't blame them for evacuating civilians. But, you see, at least, you would accomplish that much by sending a message to other countries around the world that you just can't be an aggressor with complete impunity."

Nixon: "Um-hmm. Um-hmm."

Connally: "That you're going to suffer some damage."

Nixon: "Also, I think—and I'd like to get Henry's view on that—but on that critical question, alone, you know, let's assume it goes. Let's—let's assume. Are we better off from having done this, or worse off? What's your view, Henry?"

Kissinger: "My view is that we're, we're better off."

Nixon: "Why?"

Kissinger: "Because, if this thing—"

Nixon: "The reason he mentions, and what else?"

Kissinger: "Well, because if this thing goes without our having done something, we'll have 60,000 Americans in their hands without any card to play at all."

Nixon: "You mean, you really think there's a chance they could be captured?"

Kissinger: "I think if—when this thing goes, if it goes—"

Nixon: "It's gonna go bad—"

Kissinger: "—there'll be a massive disintegration—"

Nixon: "[unclear] You think—you agree with the Agnew theory, rather than the Laird theory? Do you—"

Kissinger: "Absolutely."

Nixon: "Do you agree with Laird's evaluation of the military situation?"

Kissinger: "No. I—remember, Mr. President, when I came back from the Soviet Union, up in Camp David I told you the whole thing is misconceived in terms of the North Vietnamese objective. I do not believe they were after provincial capitals. I believed they were after the disintegration of ARVN, and that they're going to chew up one division at a time, until the remaining divisions are so demoralized that you get a massive collapse."

Nixon: "Um-hmm."

Kissinger: "Or an upheaval in Saigon."

Nixon: "And then?"

Kissinger: "And then you can get all kinds of situations. You could get some of these ARVN commanders turning on Americans—"

Nixon: "Yeah."

Kissinger: "—in order to prove to the Communists that they're really nationalists."

Nixon: "Yeah. Yup. Yup."

Kissinger: "What you can then get is quite unpredictable. You might get a guy in, in Saigon forming a coalition government, and—"

Nixon: "Well, not to mention, but, I still get back to the point that, if I may—I still—I do think that this POW issue is a terribly moving, emotional issue among the Americans. At the present time, we've got no card to get the POWs. The problem—"

Kissinger: "You—"

Nixon: "—is getting a card."

Kissinger: "You'll—"

Nixon: "Do you feel that—?"

Kissinger: "You'll be in the position, then, if the thing disintegrates in the South, of having Americans—that you have to go, practically on your knees, to this bastardly little country. And if you then do a blockade, it looks like total—"

Nixon: "Yup."

Kissinger: "—peevishness, and then, then they might really stick a blockade, because they don't have any drain on their supplies, anymore."

Nixon: "Yeah. Well, let's wait this thing, through. Let's look down the road. If we do the bombing, and the ARVN contingent still collapses, then where are we? That's what I'm getting at—"

Kissinger: "Well, Mr. President, if you do the blockade, and the ARVN still collapses, then you trade the blockade for the prisoners. And, at least, you've got a halfway reasonable negotiation. What you

also have to consider is the degree to which this reduces the possibility that ARVN collapses, because—"

Nixon: "Oh, yes. I know."

Kissinger: "—what will happen, at least in the short term, as a result of the blockade in Saigon, is that the opponents of Thieu will be discredited, because, after all, Thieu did deliver the Americans. I'm just looking at it cold-bloodedly."

Nixon: "Yeah. I know."

Kissinger: "And—and for a month or so, at least, they're going to get a big shot in the arm. Now, I also believe—I—that the fact that all these measures will do nothing is absurd. That is just insane—"

Nixon: "That's the funny thing. Mel's point is that they don't accomplish anything."

Kissinger: "That just isn't rational. Now, whether they'll do as much as Moorer says is questionable. But, if you were a prudent leader in Hanoi, and you have four months of POL supplies, and for you to get them overland from the Soviet Union, you'd have—or China—you'd have to get an agreement between those two countries. You'd have to see how this thing works. You'd have to know how your railway system can handle the bombing attack that's going on. You don't just go balls out for four months and wait 'til you get to, to zero."

Nixon: "Of course you don't—"

Kissinger: "That just is insane."

Nixon: "Of course you don't—"

Kissinger: "You'd have to be irrational to do this. Now, what decision they make, whether they'll say we go balls out for a month and then settle—that is—that's a conceivable strategy, that they'll just chew their words for a month and then settle. But, it will have an impact. It's got to have an impact. My expert thinks that they were pretty closely divided before they went into this operation. Now, you also have to look at that leadership problem. They've got 15 divisions in the South. They've got to keep that southern front supplied. That's a major undertaking all by itself. Now, you close the port, tonight, or whenever, that means 90 percent of their supplies have to be redirected, their whole logistics system has to be changed, new depots have to be created, new, new storage facilities. Even assuming that it's possible to do all of this, that's a massive undertaking. Have they got the manpower? Have they got the command and control facilities? Can they do all of that and still plan an unlimited operation in the South? It's hard to believe."

Near the end of the conversation, Nixon declared:

"Well, let me say this, if I could go into it, the thing that I—the thing that I just, on the military side, I think there's now—I would—I

don't know how much—I think there's a 40 to 50 percent chance that the South Vietnamese will go down the tube if we do nothing. On the military side, I believe that doing something gives us a bargaining position for the POWs, and a bargaining position for the balance of the Americans there; where we would have none, if they went down the tube the other way. Also on the military side—that's the diplomatic side—but on the military side, I believe there is a chance that it will discourage the North Vietnamese, hamper their military operations. I said in there for their benefit, four or five months from now, we could hammer them within a month or two—"

Connally: "That's right."

Nixon: "—if they start thinking, and that, from a military side, it will give some immediate encouragement to the South Vietnamese—"

Kissinger: "I—I would think if it hampers them at all, it will begin within two months. They're not going to the end of their POL supplies. They'd—"

Nixon: "Well—"

Kissinger: "They'd be insane to do that."

Connally: "Not only that, but if our bombing is at all effective, if we start knocking out their utilities, it begins to affect them within 24 hours, because when you—"

Nixon: "Those power plants gotta go now—"

Connally: "You knock out utilities, and knock out the communications, and it has to affect them adversely. Now, I don't care how they fight a war, but you just have to affect them." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 721–11)

Following that conversation, which ended at 1:15 p.m., Kissinger was to bring to Nixon, before the 2 p.m. deadline, papers to sign to authorize the mining. The deadline, established by Admiral Moorer, was the last moment that the military could issue the "execute" order so that the mining would take place, as planned, at the same time as the President's speech scheduled for that evening. At the appointed moment, Nixon said: "Well, it's 2, the time's up. We go." (*Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition,* May 8, 1972)

At 2:16 p.m. Haig called Moorer and told him: "it is a go." (Moorer Diary, May 8; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman) Twelve minutes later, Moorer called Admiral John S. McCain, Commander in Chief, Pacific, at his Honolulu headquarters informing him the operation was on and promising a cable authorizing "Pocket Money," the operation to mine Haiphong and other North Vietnamese ports. (Ibid.)

The cable left the Pentagon at 2:39 p.m. Its first sentence reads:

"This is execute repeat execute message." The rest of the short message told McCain to carry out the mining plan in accordance with earlier developed instructions—namely, to lay the first mine in Haiphong Harbor at 9 a.m., Saigon time, May 9, as the President began to address the nation at 9 p.m., May 8. (Message 98253 from Moorer to McCain, May 8; ibid., Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 1–15 May 1972)

At 3:30 p.m., May 8, Henry A. Kissinger convened a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group to review the several military and political scenarios the United States might take consequent to the mining of Haiphong Harbor. U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, discussed the letters he had drafted to foreign heads of state and to the United Nations Security Council as well the President's speech to be delivered at 9 p.m. that evening. Johnson emphasized that critical information provided earlier by the Joint Chiefs of Staff—that the mines would activate in 72 hours—had to be absolutely accurate. (Johnson, *The Right Hand of Power,* page 536) As Moorer later explained to the Chief of Naval Operations, however, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, the 72-hour figure was not precise:

"CJCS: I got really embarrassed up there a while ago, we finally got Ken [Captain McKee] to get digging into this thing and we found that statistically time of 72 hours could vary anywhere from 58 to something like 80. Of course, we put 72 hours in President speech and everything and I finally came down with why don't you just say we gave them three daylight periods of activity, sunset on third afternoon actually happens assuming worse case and they laughed and laughed, people like Helms and Nutter who didn't want to do this in the first place said, 'HAK, I told you so, etc.' Anyway that's the first, put in 58 hours HAK said we can't put in 58 hours, that doesn't make any sense, it is sunset I said the third daylight day and we gave them three days, fact is not going to come out that night anyway.

"CNO: Just astonished our guys didn't bump into it sooner, holding so close that they couldn't talk to all the experts. They did have in there the guy in charge of mining and interrogated him but I'm surprised didn't come up with that." (Moorer Diary, May 8, 5:39 p.m.; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

Kissinger informed the President during a 5:24 p.m. telephone conversation: "We found incidentally, Mr. President, that some of these mines are going to go off in 58 hours so we've had to change a sentence of yours. And since 58 hours sounds like such a nutty period," Kissinger told the President, the language was changed to "three daylight periods." (Transcript of telephone conversation; ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 14, Chronological File) Moorer observed in his Diary that day: "This almost was

a disaster." (Moorer Diary, May 8, 5:39 p.m.; ibid., RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

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133. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 8, 1972, 6:15 p.m.

TELECON/IN—from Dr. Kissinger (Secure)

HAK—On the follow-on air campaign.

CJCS—I was prepared to talk about that.

HAK—Absolutely sure that we are not going to fritter our stuff away on secondary targets, we want absolute top priority on POL and transportation.

CJCS—That's the way it is set up.

HAK—No air defense except minimum necessary.[2]

CJCS—We understand that.

HAK—We want to start them with a few really massive jolts, we are counting on 52 strike tomorrow night.

CJCS—You mean 24 hours from now.

HAK—That's right.

CJCS—Or following morning? It would have to be tomorrow afternoon our time, less than 24 hours.

HAK—That's all right with me.

CJCS—I'll see if I can organize it that fast.

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

[2] At 6:35 p.m., Moorer called Vogt to tell him that the operation had been approved. Regarding Kissinger's targeting instructions, he said: "I have been working on HAK for a long time and haven't gotten him educated yet, that you have to take out defense and then place total attention on the job at hand. So he always said let [*that*?] pilots want to attack airfields instead of attacking supplies, all I am telling you when you send in your reports is just talk about what you have hit with your strike aircraft and except for say the fact that you shot down some MIGs or something, leave defenses out of it, break up missile sites, that's all right too unless you have some BDA on defenses don't highlight the fact that you just save me a telephone call, that's all emphasized on plans portions and POL and basic objective emphasize rather than going after defense I understand you have to go after them." (Moorer Diary, May 8; ibid.)

HAK—Didn't Haig tell you that?

CJCS—I haven't had any instructions about tomorrow night, B52s, no.

HAK—We want to go after railroad marshalling yard outside Hanoi as quickly as possible. Give quickly, jolt as we can hit any planning refineries again.

CJCS—Talking to Vogt actually and he wanted to go, he has come in and Abrams for the Hanoi Bridge road highway bridge that goes into Hanoi, hit with smart weapons, electronic optical weapons.

HAK—You won't have any problems with us.

CJCS—Give definitely use 52s, put as many weapons with support aircraft loading up aircraft to go with 52s, we can do more damage to the marshalling yard.

HAK—As quickly as you can.

CJCS—I can get them[3] ready faster than I can the 52s, that's the point. I will go ahead and strike in that area, Hanoi, right away next day.

HAK—That's right, within 24 hours, so that they don't even begin considering to go with alternative route as soon as possible after Haiphong POL again and then work these bridges, etc.

CJCS—I have got that laid out.

HAK—Thank you.

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[3] Moorer was referring to tactical aircraft (Tacair), fighter-bombers, as opposed to strategic aircraft, B–52s.

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134. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 8, 1972, 6:55 p.m.

K: Mr. President.

P: The one thing I was wondering about which I assume has been covered is that the peace offer has been cleared with Thieu.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 14, Chronological File. No classification marking.

K: Not really. He'll have a few hours warning but there's nothing in that peace offer that we haven't in some way offered before. It's just . . .

P: I meant the ceasefire could be interpreted as one in place, I suppose.

K: But we are just leaving that vague. There are some parts of it he won't immediately like but we've just got to do this.

P: I know; I know. Oh, I agree. I'm all for it, and if he doesn't like it, that's too bad, huh.

K: That's right. We had no choice.

P: What other part wouldn't he like?

K: That's the only part. The four-months withdrawal he won't like.

P: But hell, that's after they . . .

K: But, Mr. President, if the North Vietnamese stop their offensive under these circumstances, it is a smashing victory for us.

P: Hell, yes. And it's the only thing that matters.

K: Today he's got to worry about Kontum and Hue.

P: Yeah; well, that's the way it is, and frankly, if under these circumstances, he takes this wrong, then . . .

K: He can't take it wrong. We are saving his neck.

P: Yeah. If it can be saved. The other thing is—have you got Helms going on a massive leaflets and all that stuff.[2]

K: Oh, yes. That's being done.

P: Right. Good. Covering both their forces and their troops in the field, as well as . . .

K: Absolutely.

P: I don't know how well we do that, Henry, but I hope in this case we do it well.

K: Well, we will have that on the way tomorrow.

P: Good. Okay.

K: Right, Mr. President.

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[2] At 6:58 p.m. Kissinger called Rush and directed him to start a massive leaflet campaign the next day against North Vietnamese troops in the South and North Vietnam generally. The troops in the South were the higher priority. (Ibid.) At 7:09 p.m. he called Sullivan and told him to do the same thing. (Ibid.) At Sullivan's behest, the Department sent message 80376 to Saigon, May 8, directing Bunker to immediately initiate the leaflet campaign. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 1086, Jon Howe, Vietnam Chronology Files, May 8, 1972) In telegram 7459, May 9, 0328Z, Moorer sent similar instructions to McCain. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0095, 400 Viet (South))

135. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, May 8, 1972, 8:20–8:55 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin
Henry A. Kissinger

When Dobrynin entered the office, I told him that I regretted taking him away from dinner. Dobrynin said that he knew my habits by now. He knew that when I called him before a speech it would not be good news. I said that the best way to handle the matter was for me to show him a copy of the letter which the President was writing to Brezhnev (attached).[2] He asked whether I had a text of the speech.[3] I said no, I wouldn't have it, but I would send it to his office just before 9:00. He said it was odd that I didn't trust him to keep it secret for even 15 minutes.

Dobrynin then read the President's letter. He said there were many ambiguities in it; for example, what did we mean by stopping seaborne supplies? Did we really mean interference with Soviet ships? That, of course, would be an act of war. He said he could almost certainly predict what the reaction in Moscow would be and it would be very unfortunate. It had taken him years to get matters to the present point, and now all was being jeopardized. And what was worse, he said, once Soviet policy got set in a certain way it was likely to stay that way for quite a long time. He asked whether there really was no alternative.

I told him that if he read the records of my conversations with Brezhnev[4] he would find that I had told them and told them that we were going to do something drastic. Dobrynin said he wasn't surprised, although the particular action was perhaps one that would not have occurred to him, but it would be much harder to understand in Moscow. He said that if he could explain American conditions in Moscow, it might be easier, but he was far away. He seemed very resigned to a drastic Soviet response.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 494, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting was held in Kissinger's office. Also printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 207.

[2] Attached but not printed. The May 8 letter is printed ibid., as an attachment to Document 207.

[3] See Document 136.

[4] See Document 94.

He asked why we were turning against them when Hanoi was challenging us. I replied that he should put himself into our position. What would the Soviet Union do if we armed Israel two months before a Soviet Summit and encouraged an attack or at least tolerated an attack which would threaten the Soviet force in Egypt. Dobrynin became uncharacteristically vehement. He said, "First of all, we never put forces somewhere who can't defend themselves. Second, if the Israelis threaten us, we will wipe them out within two days. I can assure you our plans are made for this eventuality." He then relapsed into a more diplomatic attitude again, and said that now matters would take a rather bad turn.

At this point, we received a text of the President's speech and I showed it to Dobrynin. He read it through and asked for clarification, specifically on what we meant by stopping seaborne supplies. I told him we would take all measures but that we would confine our actions initially to territorial waters. Dobrynin also pointed out that a phrase which was in the speech at that point, according to which I was sent to Paris to meet with Le Duc Tho on May 2nd[5] based on Soviet assurances, was very strong and would be taken very ill in Moscow. I told him I would see whether I could still get it taken out and left him for a few minutes to go into the President's office. The President agreed to delete the phrase, and we also had it taken out of the press copy. Dobrynin said that, well, at least we had achieved a minor success, and we had come closer to getting somewhere than we had in the entire period that he had served as Ambassador in Washington.

At this point the meeting broke up.

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[5] See Document 109.

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136. Editorial Note

On May 8, 1972, at 9 p.m., President Richard M. Nixon addressed the nation in a televised speech on the mining of Haiphong Harbor and other North Vietnamese ports. The full text of the speech is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972,* pages 583–587. The President reviewed what had happened in the war since late March and then presented three courses of action: immediate withdrawal, continued negotiations, or decisive military action. He then specified his chosen course of action:

"All entrances to North Vietnamese ports will be mined to prevent access to these ports and North Vietnamese naval operations from these

ports. United States forces have been directed to take appropriate measures within the internal and claimed territorial waters of North Vietnam to interdict the delivery of any supplies. Rail and all other communications will be cut off to the maximum extent possible. Air and naval strikes against military targets in North Vietnam will continue.

"These actions are not directed against any other nation. Countries with ships presently in North Vietnamese ports have already been notified that their ships will have three daylight periods to leave in safety. After that time, the mines will become active and any ships attempting to leave or enter these ports will do so at their own risk.

"These actions I have ordered will cease when the following conditions are met:

"First, all American prisoners of war must be returned.

"Second, there must be an internationally supervised cease-fire throughout Indochina.

"Once prisoners of war are released, once the internationally supervised cease-fire has begun, we will stop all acts of force throughout Indochina, and at that time we will proceed with a complete withdrawal of all American forces from Vietnam within 4 months."

After the speech, Nixon met briefly with his Cabinet and, after noting that the decision had been a difficult one, said the following: "But now the decision has been made, the action has been taken, and it is essential that we have unanimity of support within the Administration—that we speak with one voice, and not indicate any turning away from the hard line that has been taken." According to the minutes of the meeting:

"Secretary Rogers noted there were a couple of things he would like to say, first as a legal point, this is *not* a blockade. It is not a challenge to ships on the high seas. The actions we take will be entirely within the 12-mile limit and the internal waters of North Vietnam. Second, this shows the unfairness of the war—and how one-sided things have been. The enemy have done this themselves—they've mined Da Nang and the Saigon River, they've blown up our ships and South Vietnamese ships with mines—but no one complained then. At the briefing for the legislative leadership tonight, Mansfield and Fulbright complained about our action—but they didn't challenge the other side when *they* did it.

"He noted that there are two parts to the war—on the battlefield in Vietnam, and here at home. He planned a meeting of his people at the State Department in the morning, and he felt that 'all of us in the Departments should get the word out immediately to our people'—and should say [when] the chips are down, it's easy enough to support the President when things are going well, but we also want you to support him now, when it's difficult and that this is important."

(National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 88, Memoranda for the President, Beginning May 7 1972) Portions of the minutes of the meeting are printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 209.

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137. Memorandum From Philip A. Odeen of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 8, 1972.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Economy

As the enemy offensive continues, its impact on the Vietnamese economy intensifies. It still appears that the GVN will be able to keep the short-term inflation problem under control and overcome other immediate problems. Nonetheless, some short-term actions on our part are needed. John Bushnell, my economics expert, is currently in Saigon. I have had several calls from him and Chuck Cooper, the Economics Counsellor, to discuss needed action.

The GVN is planning a series of steps to boost taxes and encourage public support of the war effort through bond sales. But before they act, they wish to be sure prices, particularly rice, are under control.

This memorandum examines the immediate steps that need to be taken and gives you a status report on the longer term issues.

Short-Term Impact

The offensive has had two different short-term impacts. First, it has led to pressure on price levels in South Vietnam. In part this is due to uncertainty and speculation and in part to shortages of matériel, food, and other supplies caused by the war. *The second impact is to increase GVN budget costs*. The large numbers of refugees (now estimated at over 700,000) will generate substantial expenditures, there will be recovery and reconstruction costs and added military expenditures.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–231, National Security Decision Memoranda, NSDM 154. Confidential. Sent for action. Haig initialed for Kissinger. Copies were sent to Holdridge and Richard Kennedy.

Steps are already underway to cope with these problems.

—PL–480 rice is being sent to Vietnam. Thirty thousand tons will be sent to Saigon over the next two months to build government stocks and keep rice prices from increasing sharply. This is the top priority short-term action according to Cooper. PL–480 sales will also generate additional counterpart funds which the South Vietnamese can use to meet war costs.

—DOD is increasing its expenditures in Vietnam. Secretary Laird's letter of May 2, 1972 (Tab B)[2] reported on the planned DOD program for FY 1973 which developed in response to NSDM 154.[3] This will divert approximately $30 million in additional spending into Vietnam during the second half of this year and another $30 million during the first half of next year.

While these steps will help, there are other measures which can be taken. One is to find some way to reduce the impact of the supporting assistance funds being diverted to Jordan from the South Vietnamese program. Unfortunately, South Vietnam has only recently been notified that their supporting assistance allocations for FY 1972 were to be reduced by some $6.5 million in order to free funds for Jordan. This notification came after the North Vietnamese offensive began, at a time when the South Vietnamese were seriously concerned over increased spending and the need for additional help. Even though the reductions were small, the psychological impact was adverse. Another aspect is that the role of Ngoc, the Economics Minister and one of the most effective members of the GVN, has been undermined. He is known as a close associate of the Americans and the man who is able to get our support when required. This reduction is a blow to him.

While the amount of money is small, I believe it would be very useful to find some way to at least reduce the scope of this cut. Even if it were only reduced to half, it would be a good move at this time. AID has agreed to defer the implementation of this reduction temporarily. This will give us time to see if we can find ways to restore some or all of the cut.

Longer-Term Program

The impact of the current offensive on the South Vietnam economy over the next several years will be serious. It has dealt a severe blow to GVN efforts to encourage exports since rubber and timber, two of the prime exports, have been directly affected by the offensive. In addition,

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[2] Attached but not printed.

[3] Document 29.

interest in longer term development by the South Vietnamese and outside investors has been reduced to almost zero. Prior to the offensive, interest in longer run development projects was beginning to build and there were reasonable prospects for substantial and growing private investment in the future. The outcome of the current battle will certainly influence investment prospects. But even if it comes out well, the psychological impact will deter investment for an extended period.

The implications are that substantial U.S. aid is going to be required for South Vietnam for a long time. Even rapid economic development would not permit the level of U.S. aid to drop sharply. Current events will make future reductions much more difficult.

As you will recall when we began this current round of Vietnam economics studies last December, a two-part effort was directed. The short-term study looked at the current year and resulted in NSDM 154. The second part was a longer term study looking at Vietnam economic prospects and our aid requirements for the next five years. That study is well along and John Bushnell's current trip to Vietnam will help us wrap it up. I expect that in June, after your Moscow trip, we will be in a position to address the longer run economic issues.

Recommendations

Enclosed is a brief memo to Secretary Laird thanking him for the DOD work supporting our economic support for SVN during CY 1972. In addition to stressing the importance of this support, it approves the program as submitted.

Recommend signature on memo to Secretary Laird (Tab A).[4]

[4] Kissinger signed the attached memorandum and sent it to Laird on May 19.

138. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, May 9, 1972, 1040Z.

89. Ref: WHS 2066.[2]

1. As instructed, I presented the President's message[3] to Thieu this morning. He was, of course, tremendously pleased and encouraged by it.

2. I asked General Abrams to accompany me so that we could impress on Thieu the need to energize RVNAF to the utmost of their abilities. I said I was certain that the actions which the President is announcing could leave no doubt in his mind about our support and our determination to do everything within our power to help South Vietnam defend itself. We assume the measures we are taking will be met with an overwhelmingly favorable reaction by his people. At this critical period, it is essential that not only the Vietnamese armed forces, but the entire governmental organization be energized to take aggressive action all along the line. Initiative against the enemy must be regained and pacification losses recovered.

3. I recalled to Thieu that he had mentioned that the defeats which RVNAF has suffered have been primarily due to failures of leadership and organization. We believe this is so and, therefore, the time has come when the most competent officers who can lead and command the loyalty and allegiance of their units must be placed in charge regardless of any considerations, political or other. Half measures or compromises will no longer suffice.

4. I added that recent intelligence indicates that successes have increased the enemy's appetite and he is determined now to continue his offensive to ultimate victory. A situation such as this demands not only the sternest military measures, but requires enlisting the support of the entire population. Up to the present, there has been a degree of complacency among people in those areas not threatened, but the situation facing the country no longer permits such an attitude.

5. Thieu agreed that these were matters which must be addressed promptly. He asked General Abrams' views concerning the situation

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, From Amb. Bunker—Saigon, 1972. Top Secret; Immediate; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] Document 128.

[3] Printed in Nguyen and Schecter, *The Palace File*, pp. 373–374.

in Kontum and the question of a suitable replacement for General Dzu as commander in MR 2.

6. General Abrams replied that the enemy is continuing preparations in the Kontum area, but also has been badly hurt. Forces are available to defend the area, but the problem lies with the commander who lacks determination himself and cannot instill it in others.

7. After discussion of several candidates suggested by General Vien, none of whom seemed satisfactory, there was agreement that General Toan, former commander of the 2nd Division, now engaged in reorganizing the Armor command, would probably be the best available choice. General Abrams noted he had been a first rate division commander and is a good tactician.

8. In further moves, Thieu said that he was dispatching an Airborne brigade to Hue today and had sent General Vien to MR 4 to try to secure another brigade for transfer to MR 1. He hopes to have the whole Airborne division in MR 1 within a week. General Truong now has available to him the Marine division, the First ARVN Division, one regiment of the Second Division and will shortly have these additional reinforcements. Thieu said that he had instructed General Truong to go over to the offensive as soon as possible.

9. General Abrams cautioned that the counterattack should not be mounted too soon. It will take some days to train men in the use of the new anti-tank missiles which are being supplied and plans are being worked out for a flanking operation involving coastal landings by helicopters. Thieu commented that he had instructed all his commanders that the objective now should be to regain terrain and inflict casualties on the enemy.

10. General Abrams and I will be following up on these and other problems which Thieu and the GVN face. Not nearly enough has been done to arouse and energize the people and to marshall their support. Criticisms of the government on this score have come to us with increasing frequency. Leaders of political, social, and religious groups should be called in and their support enlisted. There is much volunteer work to be done, especially among the refugees, already an enormous problem. The manpower problem needs to be tackled and emergency taxes raised in order to assist the fighting men and for refugee relief. People need to be dealt with frankly in news about the current situation. These are all matters which we shall be pursuing.

11. Warm regards.

139. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 9, 1972.

It is vitally important that we not psychologically downgrade the firmness of our action by protesting that it is not a blockade. People understand what a blockade is. They don't understand what mining is.

The way everybody in the Administration should handle this question is to say that the order of the President's action has the purpose and effect of a blockade—to completely stop the delivery of all seaborne supplies to North Vietnam. We find that we are able to accomplish this goal through mining and through naval and other activities against shipping within the 12-mile limit claimed by Hanoi. This means that we have not found it necessary, in order to accomplish our goal of stopping all deliveries of supplies by sea, to stop ships in the high seas.

In other words, from a technical legal standpoint there is a blockade only when ships are stopped in the high seas. This we are not doing at this time—but only because it is not necessary to accomplish our goal of completely cutting off seaborne delivery of supplies to North Vietnam.

What must be emphasized is that the action the President has ordered, both on sea and on land, has as its purpose completely denying to the enemy the supplies it needs to wage aggressive war. We will order those actions that are necessary to accomplish this goal. The fact that the initial order does not include stopping ships on the high seas—which in the parlance of international law is a blockade—in no way should be indicated as a sign of weakness or firmness of resolve. We are not doing that only because we find it is not necessary and that there is a more effective way to accomplish our goal—mining and naval and air actions within the 12-mile limit claimed by North Vietnam.

I want you to make this point strongly in your briefing, and I want it circulated to all Administration spokesmen so that our action, both by the enemy and by the American people, does not run the risk of being considered so restrained as to be ineffective.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 45, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Easter Offensive, 9 May 1972. Top Secret; Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. On June 4, while at Key Biscayne, Nixon wrote the following comment on the memorandum: "K reread—& Haig also—before filing." On the same day Haig forwarded the memorandum to Kissinger with a note that reads: "Henry—The President sent this in via Alex Butterfield this morning (Sunday) and asked that we both reread it. I am afraid that Rebozo will rekindle the fire over the weekend and we must all be ready for the ritual." (Ibid.)

With regard to bombing strikes in the North I have decided that it is imperative that they be at the highest limit that Abrams can spare from the battle area in the next few days.

I mentioned that our primary target, except for the rail lines, should be POL. This, of course, should be our long-term goal. But over the next few days I also want some targets hit which will have maximum psychological effect on morale in North Vietnam. That is why it is so important to take out the power plants. If your operational group thinks of any other targets of this type hit them and hit them hard.

Remember that we will have more support for strong action than we will in the days ahead. As each day goes by criticism will reduce support for our action and also the failure to get results will reduce the enthusiasm of our supporters.

You have often mentioned the necessity of creating the impression in the enemy's mind that I am absolutely determined to end the war and will take *whatever steps are necessary* to accomplish this goal.

The time to take those steps is now.

That is why some extensive B–52 strikes in the North should if at all possible be directed against military targets in North Vietnam this week.

I am concerned by the military's plan of allocating 200 sorties for North Vietnam for the dreary "milk runs" which characterized the Johnson Administration's bombing in the 1965–68 period.

I cannot emphasize too strongly that I have determined that we should go for broke. What we have got to get across to the enemy is the impression that we are doing exactly that. Our words will help some. But our actions in the next few days will speak infinitely louder than our words.

I am totally unsatisfied at this time at the plans the military have suggested as far as air activities are concerned. On an urgent basis I want on my desk late this afternoon (Tuesday) recommendations to carry out this directive which I am now dictating. I intend to give the directive directly to Abrams in the field and I will inform Laird and bring him into line if there is any question in that direction.

Our greatest failure now would be to do too little too late. It is far more important to do too much at a time that we will have maximum public support for what we do.

What all of us must have in mind is that we must *punish* the enemy in ways that he will really hurt at this time. Over a longer period of time we can be more methodical in directing our air strikes to two specific targets—the rail lines, highways and POL supply areas. I have an uneasy feeling that your present plans are simply too restrained and too much in the pattern of the 1965–1968 debacle.

Now that I have made this very tough water shed decision I intend to stop at nothing to bring the enemy to his knees. I want you to get this spirit inculcated in all hands and particularly I want the military to get off its back side and give me some recommendations as to how we can accomplish that goal.

Needless to say, indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas is not what I have in mind. On the other hand, *if the target is important enough,* I will approve a plan that goes after it even if there is a risk of some civilian casualties.

I think we have had too much of a tendency to talk big and act little. This was certainly the weakness of the Johnson Administration. To an extent it may have been our weakness where we have warned the enemy time and time again and then have acted in a rather mild way when the enemy has tested us. He has now gone over the brink *and so have we*. We have the power to destroy his war making capacity. The only question is whether we have the *will* to use that power. What distinguishes me from Johnson is that I have the *will* in spades. If we now fail it will be because the bureaucrats and the bureaucracy and particularly those in the Defense Department, who will of course be vigorously assisted by their allies in State, will find ways to erode the strong, decisive action that I have indicated we are going to take. For once, I want the military and I want the NSC staff to come up with some ideas on their own which will recommend *action* which is very *strong, threatening* and *effective*.

I want as part of the plan this week, on an urgent basis, making strikes on all air fields in North Vietnam, particularly in the Hanoi–Haiphong area. I realize that they can be put back into operation a few days after a strike, but the psychological effect could be considerable. On this score, I particularly want to hit the international airfield where civilian planes land.

Also, this week I want *one major strike*. Get Abrams to collect his assets and have one 500 plane strike by Thursday[2] or Friday of this week so that the enemy will know that we mean business all the way.

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[2] May 11.

140. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and President Nixon[1]

Washington, May 9, 1972, 12:55 p.m.

TELECON/Out—To PresUS

CJCS:—This is Admiral Moorer, I am returning the President's call.

OPT [Operator]: Thank you, Admiral, just a moment. There you are.

CJCS:—Good morning, Mr. President.

Pres:—I just wanted to tell you we are depending on you to see that we don't flub this one and, particularly, zero in. Do not go to secondary targets. We are going to get rail lines, POL, secondary planes, power plants and airfields, but there is no damn excuse now. You have what the military claimed they never before got authority to do.[2]

CJCS:—We are going to do it Mr. President, I thought that was a magnificent talk.

Pres:—I understand you called last night.

CJCS:—And wrote you a note this morning.[3]

Pres:—Do any good with Stennis?[4]

CJCS:—Yes, sir. I had Stennis and most of the Armed Services Committee this morning.

Pres:—Able to get him? We need Stennis if we can get him.

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

[2] Less than 5 hours after talking to President Nixon, Admiral Moorer met in his office with what he called the "Target Gang" after which he wrote the following: "We laid on strikes for the following day to interdict the rail lines and lines of communication near Hanoi/Haiphong primarily between the cities and the Buffer Zone and coming south." Moorer told the "gang" this was the beginning of a "long interdiction program." (Moorer Diary, May 9, 5:35 p.m.; ibid.)

[3] Not found.

[4] Moorer had testified that morning before the Senate Armed Services Committee, chaired by Senator John C. Stennis (D–MS). The Senators seemed especially concerned about whether the United States might attack enemy vessels along North Vietnam's coastline. Later Moorer told members of the WSAG: "I was before the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier today, and they asked me what we would do in certain circumstances. I think I fudged the answers well enough. I told them that I would not say what we would or would not do." (Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting, May 9; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72)

CJCS:—I think I can get him working on several I thought it might be a little hostile, perhaps, but in fact my hearing this morning was two and a half hours and was very good.

Pres:—Very good.

CJCS:—Thank you sir, you can depend on us.

Pres:—Carry on!

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141. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 9, 1972, 2:39–3:19 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Mr. Henry A. Kissinger

State
Mr. U. Alexis Johnson
Mr. William Sullivan

DOD
Mr. Kenneth Rush
Mr. G. Warren Nutter
Rear Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Captain Kinnard McKee

CIA
Mr. Richard Helms
Mr. George Carver
Mr. William Newton (only stayed for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC Staff
Major Gen. Alexander Haig
Mr. Richard T. Kennedy
Mr. John Negroponte
Mr. Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—The Defense Department should make sure that we stay away from Chinese ships when interdicting supplies being brought to North Vietnamese harbors.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

—The Defense Department should set up a photographic system in order to note all ship movements in North Vietnamese harbors.

—We should say in press briefings—on an if asked basis—that we are not prepared to comment on the report that UN Secretary General Waldheim has offered his good services to all the parties in this crisis.

—We should bring out in press briefings all the statements of support from foreign leaders for our current actions.

—The new rules of engagement should be held very closely.[2]

—The Defense Department should have the results of its study on air interdiction efforts beyond the 25-mile buffer zone ready for consideration at tomorrow's meeting.

—The message to Ambassador Unger on the reopening of Takli airbase should be coordinated and sent out today.

—The State Department should send the transcript of Mr. Kissinger's press conference to key posts and circulate it in the Department.[3] It should also send out the list of neutral ships hit by mines in South Vietnamese waters.

—The State Department should prepare by tomorrow a check list of possible Soviet actions.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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[2] As discussed in the minutes of this WSAG meeting, the rules of engagement stated that United States naval vessels and military aircraft could take action against a ship outside the harbor and beyond the 12-mile territorial waters claimed by North Vietnam as it was being off-loaded if Washington gave permission. In addition, if the ship was within the 12-mile limit, the vessel to which cargo was being transferred could be attacked. Escort ships and aircraft were to be treated the same as merchant vessels. On May 13, the Navy and Air Force received permission to attack North Vietnamese vessels engaged in, suspected of, or configured for carrying out mine-clearing operations. (Message 4545 from JCS to Pacific Command, May 13; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 1–15 May 1972)

[3] For Kissinger's news conference, see *The New York Times,* May 10, 1972, p. 18.

142. Message From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Washington, May 9, 1972, 2356Z.

8619. Subj: NVN Interdiction Plan (U). Refs: A. JCS 7421/090247Z May 72.[2] B. CINCPAC 080408Z Apr 67.[3] C. COMUSMACV 090155Z May 72.[4]

1. This is an execute message.

2. You are authorized to continue the coordinated campaign initiated on 10 May 72 to interdict/destroy NVN transportation system (Ref A applies). Guidance follows:

A. Conduct a continuing Tacair and NGFS interdiction effort, augmented by B–52 sorties as required, to destroy and disrupt enemy POL and transportation resources and LOC in NVN; e.g., POL storage and pumping stations, rails and roads, bridges, railroad yards, heavy repair equipment, railroad rolling stock and trucks. Utilization of resources to neutralize defense is also authorized. In addition to attacks against fixed installations, armed reconnaissance is authorized against choke points and other time-sensitive transportation/interdiction targets that develop outside restricted areas.

B. Air and NGFS operations are authorized as applicable in NVN except within the Chinese buffer zone.[5] Minimize civilian casualties and avoid damage to foreign shipping.

C. The areas of primary responsibility for operations in NVN requested in paragraph three of Reference (C) and which are assigned in paragraph C.F., of Reference (B) will apply.

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 1–15 May 1972. Top Secret; Flash; Specat; Exclusive. Information copies were sent to Commander, MACV, Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command; Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet; Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces; Commander, 7th Air Force; Commander, 8th Air Force; Commanding General, Fleet Marine Forces; Commander, Seventh Fleet; and Commander, Carrier Task Force 77.

[2] The May 9 cable was the execute message from Moorer to McCain to initiate the air component of the interdiction campaign against North Vietnam. Attached but not printed.

[3] Not found.

[4] The May 9 cable contains General Abrams's message of support for the campaign against North Vietnam and his recommendations that the 7th Air Force be immediately tasked to attack critical railways and bridges in the North. Attached but not printed.

[5] American aircraft on missions over North Vietnam could not fly closer than 25 miles to China.

D. Maintain a continuing strike/support effort consistent with a determined and early accomplishment of the objectives referenced in sub-paragraph 2A. It appears that arrival of the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing and the use of three carriers for NVN targets will permit a substantial sortie level to be sustained without reducing the current level of support for the land battle in RVN. When a tactical emergency requires, COMUSMACV is authorized to divert sorties from this effort.

E. Initial efforts should give first priority to POL storage facilities as well as rail LOC in area between Chinese buffer zone and Hanoi; Hanoi and Haiphong areas and LOC leading out of Hanoi/Haiphong complex to south. Also, strike remaining lucrative POL and LOC targets in route packages one, two, three and four.

F. Plan to take maximum advantage of EO/Walleye capability against appropriate transportation targets as well as command and control facilities, and air defenses. You are authorized to seed LOC and key choke points with MK–36/40 weapons.

G. The following fixed targets are validated for strike by Tacair/NGFS as applicable.

[Omitted here is a list of 53 named targets.]

Authorization includes only those areas that can be targeted with aiming point not closer than 800 feet to non NVN shipping for Tacair; not closer than 250 feet from non NVN shipping for EO/LGB weapons.

H. Include AAA, SAM defenses and supporting command and control system in your targeting plan as required.

I. B–52 strikes require approval of target by SecDef 24 hours in advance of proposed TOT except in route package 1.

J. Fixed transportation/interdiction targets may be added to the validated Tacair/NGFS list at your discretion. Advise JCS of this action. However, targets within a 10 nautical mile radius of Hanoi or Haiphong; or in Chinese Communist buffer zone must be validated by JCS prior to inclusion in this list for any strikes in this area; para 2G above applies.

3. Reporting instructions.

A. Routine planning and operational messages pertaining to activities covered herein will normally be classified Secret/Limdis. However the appropriate classification will be determined by the originator based upon contents of the message. Messages pertaining to highly sensitive operations and execute directives will be classified Top Secret/Limdis. Take all precautions to maintain maximum security of these operations.

B. Operational reports will be as prescribed in CINCPAC Inst 0480.1 and will include OPREP 1 through 5. Report preliminary results

of strikes by OPREP 3 Pinnacle with Flash precedence. Follow up with normal OPREP 4 giving information in more detail.

C. The unclassified nickname Linebacker repeat Linebacker will be used as a flag word in all communications pertaining to all air operations against NVN in lieu of the old flag word Rolling Thunder.

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143. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 10, 1972.

As you know, I have very little confidence in the CIA insofar as its developing programs that are imaginative on the propaganda side such as we used so successfully to discourage the enemy in World War II.

On an urgent basis, I want the CIA to implement programs whereby broadcasts, leaflets and every other device are used so that the North Vietnamese troops which are in South Vietnam, and the North Vietnamese populace, particularly in the Hanoi area, are told of the massive public support for the President's decision, of the damage that is being done to installations in North Vietnam, of the ships that are with the Marine Division on it that are menacing the coast of North Vietnam and any other story with regard to our military activities which might discourage the North Vietnamese leaders and general population.

I think it would be well to indicate that many North Vietnamese regiments have ceased to exist because of the pounding they have taken from massive B–52 air strikes and that very serious morale problems are developing among the troops in South Vietnam. The other side of this coin is that to the extent the troops in South Vietnam which the enemy has stationed there can be reached by such means they should be told of massive strikes on the North, of significant morale problems, draft dodging, etc.

I want you personally to supervise this project on a crash basis and see that CIA does a better job than they have ever done before. I just have a feeling, from looking at the CIA materials that have crossed my

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 993, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Chron, May 1–20, 1972 [2 of 2]. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Printed from a copy that was not initialed by Nixon.

desk, that they are more interested in numbers of hours of broadcast, numbers of leaflets—in other words, simply how much they are doing—than the quality of what they are doing. I also think, as I have often said, that they show a total lack of imagination in terms of using such tactics as I have described above.

I am not suggesting that the tactics I have described are new and I am not suggesting that there may not be added to those tactics even better things that we can do. What we need from the huge bureaucracy at CIA are some better ideas as well as implementing the ones that I have outlined in this memorandum.[2]

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[2] Regarding this memorandum, Haig wrote to Kissinger on May 10: "The President is, of course, exactly right here except he thinks CIA does it all. These operations are controlled by Sullivan's Interdepartmental Group. I think we should brutalize Sullivan at tomorrow's WSAG and insist: a. That by the end of tomorrow they provide us with a specific plan to implement the President's directive. b. That the means and themes to be used are clearly delineated so that we know that the job has been done." (Ibid.)

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144. Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Sullivan) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson)[1]

Washington, May 10, 1972.

SUBJECT

Covert Psychological Warfare Against NVN and NLF

CIA has provided a status report on covert psychological warfare conducted from South Vietnam against North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front and asked the Committee to approve continuation of the program.[2] FY 1973 costs are estimated at $124,000 as against $167,000 for FY 1972 and $248,500 for FY 1971. Originally a part of

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[1] Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 40 Committee Files, Vietnam, January–June 1972. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Stuart (INR/DDC) and concurred in by Askew (EA/VN). Sent through William McAfee (INR/DDC) for the Director of INR.

[2] Attached but not printed is the May 9 CIA report to the 40 Committee entitled "Periodic Report on Covert Psychological Warfare Operations Against North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front."

OPLAN 34A and a combined MACV/CIA operation, the program was turned over to CIA by MACV on December 31, 1971. All operations are conducted with the cooperation of the Vietnamese Ministry of National Defense. Current arrangements provide for the training of Vietnamese, looking toward an eventual GVN takeover of the program.

Four black radios—[*1½ lines not declassified*]—along with a black letter operation directed toward North Vietnamese individuals make up the current program. Two radios [*1½ lines not declassified*] were dropped at the time CIA took over the program. One radio, the [*less than 1 line not declassified*], was added. CIA has also discontinued the earlier black leaflet project.

Response to black radio broadcasts was greater in 1971 than in any previous year. More than half of all North Vietnamese ralliers had listened to [*less than 1 line not declassified*]. Captured enemy documents and the regular warnings in NVN media indicated concern over the harm being done to the morale of the North Vietnamese population by psywar operations. This concern was reflected in the comment of Mme. Binh to the effect that intensification of US psychological warfare in SVN had produced a growing confusion among the SVN population as to whether the program of the NLF was in their best interests.

Recommendation

I recommend that you support continuation of covert psychological warfare operations against NVN and NLF.[3]

[3] Johnson initialed the memorandum at the bottom and wrote: "OK."

145. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 10, 1972, 10:45–11:46 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Rear Admiral William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Captain Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (stayed only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC Staff
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig
Richard T. Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

It was agreed that:

—Mr. Kissinger will take care of the O'Donnell memorandum about high-level officials speaking in various cities.

—We will not discuss in detail any of the figures concerning North Vietnamese logistics.

—We should try to get out some of the details in regard to Communist execution of government and police officials in Binh Dinh Province.

—The Defense Department should continue its study of the rules of engagement near the Chinese border. It should also pay attention to the question of North Vietnamese planes seeking refuge at Chinese airfields or in the airspace of the buffer zone.

—The draft contingency statement to be used in the event of a Soviet cancellation of the summit is all right.

—The State Department should call in Indian Ambassador Jha and protest the Foreign Minister's latest speech, in which he said that hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese have been killed by American bombs.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

—All the departments should work together on preventing passage of end-the-war resolutions.

—The Defense Department should check to see whether we have notified any foreign vessels that they were approaching the mine field at Haiphong harbor.

[Omitted here is discussion of high-level administration officials speaking in various cities, Kissinger's press conference the previous day, recent polls on the President's Vietnam war decisions and policy, Sullivan's briefing of Republican members of the House of Representatives on the proposed cease-fire, comments to Sullivan by Czechoslovak diplomats about the cease-fire, North Vietnam's reaction to the President's May 8 speech, and Cuban ships in Haiphong Harbor.]

Mr. Kissinger: Nobody seems to be leaving Haiphong.

Mr. Helms: The only ships that left are the two that sailed out yesterday.

Adm. Moorer: We've heard that the harbor master has directed all ships to stay in the harbor. We're trying to check this report out.

Mr. Sullivan: You mean the North Vietnamese harbor master?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. The Haiphong harbor master.

Mr. Johnson: If the North Vietnamese refuse to supply tugs and pilots, isn't it true that the ships will not be able to leave?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. But it's also possible that the North Vietnamese don't want to take the responsibility of getting all those ships out of the harbor. If the harbor master has indeed instructed all the ships to remain, this may account, in part, for his decision.

Mr. Rush: Why should we really care if the ships remain in the harbor? The only way we would be affected is if the ships are tied up at the docks and used as hostages against our air strikes on the docks.

Mr. Kissinger: The docks will be marginal targets, anyway, as long as the harbor is closed.

Mr. Nutter: The North Vietnamese could also anchor the ships throughout the harbor—making it difficult for us to hit the lighters darting between the ships.

Mr. Kissinger: That won't be a problem because new ships won't be able to get into the harbor.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. And we've always accepted the fact that the ships in the harbor right now will be offloaded.

Mr. Sullivan: If the Soviet ships are kept in the harbor at Moscow's direction, it seems to me that the logic of that move would indicate that they are preparing to move on the negotiating front.

Mr. Kissinger: Why do you think so?

Mr. Sullivan: Because if it were not the case, it would mean they are prepared to leave the ships there for an indefinite time period—and I don't think they would want to do that.

Gen. Haig rejoined the meeting at this point.

Adm. Moorer: When the mines were first put in place, the Soviet ships did not leave because they knew the mines could be dangerous. Subsequently, [*2 lines not declassified*].

Mr. Kissinger: Can all the ships in the harbor get out in one night, if they want to?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. The Soviets are the greatest experts in the world on mines. And they are bound to become more nervous as the time for activation of the mines approaches.

Mr. Johnson: Tonight is the night we should know what they've decided to do.

Mr. Kissinger: Meanwhile, no ships have entered the harbor. Is that correct?

Mr. Rush: Is it possible for ships to enter?

Adm. Moorer: Ships can still sail into the harbor, but none have done so since we laid the mines.

Mr. Rush: It wouldn't make much sense for new ships to enter because I understand all the dock space is already taken.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. The ships are pretty much packed together.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer) Will you mine the other channels tonight?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Mr. Rush: I understand we lost a few F–4s during the Tac Air strikes around Hanoi and Haiphong yesterday.

Adm. Moorer: Yes. We lost four F–4s in what may have been the biggest dogfight since World War II. The enemy sent up 24 Migs, seven of which we shot down.

Mr. Johnson: You're right. There probably hasn't been such a big dogfight since World War II.

Mr. Sullivan: Were our planes all shot down by missiles?

Adm. Moorer: We're not sure yet. The North Vietnamese fired less than fifty missiles.

Mr. Sullivan: Did we lose all the crewmen in the four aircraft?

Adm. Moorer: We rescued two of them.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you mean men or F–4 crews?

Adm. Moorer: I mean two men. They were picked up in the water near Haiphong. By the way, it seems as though we knocked off the

remaining POL facilities in Hanoi yesterday. [Gen.] Vogt says we also scored some direct hits on the railroad bridge. He says we'll finish it tomorrow. And we'll also get some pictures of it.

Mr. Kissinger: How does he know we hit the bridge?

Adm. Moorer: The pilots reported seeing several direct hits. We took some pictures, which are being developed in Udorn. When they are ready, they will be phoned over here.

Mr. Kissinger: You're sure we got the rest of the Hanoi POL facilities?

Adm. Moorer: We think so. It's a little difficult to sort out because some of the remaining tanks had been emptied after the B–52 raids. When the tanks are hit now, they don't explode in the usual manner. We also hit the Yeh Vien railroad yard north of the bridge. Vogt told me he wants to hit the railroad bridge further north. Then he can take out all the rolling stock caught between the two damaged bridges.

We don't have much BDA yet, but we should have it shortly.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we instruct our pilots to keep off the Soviet ships for a few days?[2]

Adm. Moorer: Yes. There's been a lot of noise about the tanker we supposedly hit. We again debriefed all the pilots who took part in the operation, and we still think we didn't hit the tanker. The only ammunition expended was ninety rounds of 20-mm fire by one pilot—when he was five miles from the closest ship. We think the tanker was hit by North Vietnamese anti-aircraft batteries firing at our planes.

Incidentally, I sent out instructions yesterday, as you directed, about keeping away from Chinese ships.[3]

Mr. Kissinger: Good.

Mr. Johnson: What happened with the Soviet coal ship?

Adm. Moorer: That's the ship I'm talking about. The way we run it down, there is no way we could have hit the ship. The mining aircraft could not have done it.

Mr. Johnson: Are we attacking the road between Cam Pha and Haiphong?

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[2] In a telephone conversation at 6:25 p.m., May 10, Moorer told McCain: "I am going to send you a message particularly careful not to hit Chinese or Russian ships for the next few days due to political discussions underway and we had a very delicate period right now, so we do not want to throw the balance. (Moorer Diary, May 10; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

[3] Although the message has not been found, Moorer, in a telephone conversation with McCain at 5:01 p.m., May 9, said: "We want to be very careful we do not hit these Chinese ships off by themselves in particular, because I think the Chinese kind of play ball with us on this." To which McCain replied: "I think they will be too delighted to see what is going on between U.S./USSR." (Moorer Diary, May 9; ibid.)

Adm. Moorer: Yes. There's a little road that goes from Cam Pha, through Hon Gai, on to Haiphong—and we're working it over.

Mr. Johnson: What about coastal fishing vessels? Are we attacking them? In the past, I think we've left them alone.

Adm. Moorer: In general, we don't attack the coastal fishing vessels. However, if a group of them approach at night, we do shell them—because a PT boat may be concealed among them. We don't engage in random shelling, though.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer) And the other ports will be mined tonight?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. All the mines will be activated within 24 hours.

Mr. Helms: Before we go any further, I'd like to get some guidance. One of Secretary Laird's speech writers asked me to provide some figures about the North Vietnamese logistics, but I declined to do so. If we don't have one concerted view in the Government, different figures will begin appearing all over town. I think I did the right thing in turning the request down.

Mr. Kissinger: Exactly. If some of the logistics figures get out, we could be forced to the point where we would have to put George's [Carver] figures out. I'm sure George's figures are right, but I'm also sure he would be the first to admit the figures are subject to different kinds of analyses—along the lines of what we did at the NSC meeting on Monday.[4]

Mr. Helms: That's right.

Mr. Kissinger: If we say the railroad can carry 6,800 tons, does that mean both ways, or just one way? If it's just one way, then the two-way figure jumps to 13,000.

Mr. Carver: The railroad can carry 9,000 tons.

Mr. Kissinger: Okay. If we mean that is what it carries both ways, then it can only carry 4,500 tons one way. This is the kind of problem we will have if we release statistics.

Mr. Carver: I'll check on the tonnage figure for the railroad. But I do agree with you about not releasing the statistics. If we do, it will mean nothing but trouble for us.

Mr. Helms: That's my view, too. I just wanted to get your support.

Mr. Kissinger: Don't put any of the figures out. These figures are based on a lot of assumptions: uniform distribution of rolling stock, operation day and night and no intervention. George would readily admit that many of these assumptions will not stand up.

Mr. Carver: That's right.

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[4] May 8; see Document 131.

Mr. Helms: There will be a lot of talk in the next few days and weeks about this. I think it would be useful for us to stay away from it.

Mr. Kissinger: My view is that we have had our say. Now we should be quiet. Our actions should take over now. If they work, that will be good. If they don't work, we will have problems. The more we talk, though, the more nervous we appear to be. If we talk about logistic figures in detail, it is a losing game. It's all right, though, to talk in general terms. We can say that the North Vietnamese have fifteen divisions in South Vietnam, that Sihanoukville is not in operation and that the North Vietnamese have a big supply problem.

Mr. Johnson: I agree completely.

Mr. Helms: But it won't do us any good to talk about isolated logistic figures.

Mr. Kissinger: We can say, for example, that ninety percent of the seaborne tonnage enters North Vietnam through Haiphong.

Mr. Carver: Yes. And we can also say ninety percent of all the supplies coming to North Vietnam are brought in by ship.

Mr. Sullivan: Is that true? I recently heard somebody say this was seventy-five percent.

Mr. Kissinger: However, if we get into arguments about how much is transported by rail and how much by road, it will be bad.

Mr. Sullivan: Are we satisfied with the figure of ninety percent of the tonnage coming in by sea?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Helms: You have to remember, though, that the ninety percent figure covers gross goods, including peanuts, peanut oil and other things like that.

Mr. Kissinger: We're pretty sure 2.1 out of 2.4 million tons come in by sea.

Mr. Carver: That's right. Ninety percent of the supplies—by tonnage—come in by sea, and ninety percent of that comes into Haiphong.

Adm. Moorer: On the Hill this morning, I was asked if most of the military items are being brought into North Vietnam by the railroad. I said that our photos show a lot of equipment being carried on the rail lines. Nonetheless, I muddied up the answer pretty well.

Mr. Helms: A lot of those questions may have been generated by the NSSM 1 paper which has been made public.[5] But that paper was only the first draft, and the final product was changed a great deal.

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[5] One of Kissinger's first acts as the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs had been to issue NSSM 1 on the situation in Vietnam, which comprised 6 pages of questions—28 major, 50 subsidiary—that Kissinger required involved departments and agencies to answer. See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 4. The answers are summarized ibid., Document 44.

Mr. Kissinger: The NSSM 1 paper also dealt with guerrilla war. We have a whole new situation in Vietnam now.

Adm. Moorer: When I was asked on the Hill if we were attacking the rail lines, I replied that we are attacking military targets. I'm good at muddying things up.

Mr. Johnson: I was talking this morning with the Secretary about the executions the Communists are carrying out in Binh Dinh Province. We wonder if any of this has gotten out yet.

Mr. Carver: The North Vietnamese are executing government and police officials.

Mr. Johnson: We think it may be a good idea to get this out to the public—not in general terms, but in specific terms about Binh Dinh Province.

Mr. Carver: The North Vietnamese are also doing the same thing in the Loc Ninh area. This is their standard practice.

Mr. Johnson: It's one thing to say it's their standard practice, but it's another thing to get the details out.

Mr. Kissinger: Do we have any precise figures?

Mr. Carver: No.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's try to get it out.

Mr. Helms: I heard a report that the B–52s are laying down a protective path for the ARVN to follow north of Hue. (to Adm. Moorer) Is there anything to that report?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. In fact, Abe [Gen. Abrams] has found that this created some impressive results north of the Marine line at Hue.

Mr. Helms: The report didn't say how far the South Vietnamese have advanced, or if they are meeting with success.

Adm. Moorer: It's gone several klics [kilometers] north of the Marine line.

Mr. Sullivan: Tran Van Don has been called back to Saigon, and he has already left Paris.

Mr. Nutter: Thieu probably called him back to help carry out the emergency proclamation.

Mr. Sullivan: I think it's good that he left Paris.

Mr. Helms: I'm a bit puzzled by the lack of movement in Haiphong harbor. The ship captains certainly saw the mines, but they may not have known the mines wouldn't be activated for 72 hours. Is there any doubt about the captains not knowing this?

Mr. Sullivan: Their governments certainly understand what is happening.

Adm. Moorer: A notice to mariners was also put out. The Haiphong harbor master knows, too, and he should have told the captains.

Mr. Johnson: Is Moscow clear on this? Have the Soviets been told anything—apart from what was said in public?

Mr. Rush: The Soviets must be totally clear on everything.

Mr. Kissinger: I gave the President's speech to Dobrynin, and I went through it with him, sentence by sentence.[6] I don't know how the Soviets could misunderstand what the President said. I thought his speech was so clear.

Mr. Helms: During the mining operation, NSA picked up a report from the ships that the mines were being laid in the channels. At that time, the Soviets obviously weren't sure the mines were not set to be activated in three days.

Adm. Moorer: That's correct. When they saw the mines in the water, they didn't know the mines were not active.

Mr. Johnson: But we covered all this thoroughly in the President's speech, in the letter to the UN, in the notice to mariners and in notes to governments with ships in Haiphong.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Johnson) Did you give the Soviets a separate note?

Mr. Johnson: No, not as such. The letter to the UN and the notice to mariners were circulated, though. And we did talk to the Poles.

Mr. Kissinger: But the Polish ships are not leaving Haiphong, either.

Adm. Moorer: The only reason the *Pevek* left was because she had been damaged.

Mr. Sullivan: The Poles told us they were waiting to see what Moscow would do.

Adm. Moorer: There's no question that the Soviets know what will happen. That's one reason, I think, why the *Pevek* left.

Mr. Johnson: We're getting close to the critical time.

Mr. Kissinger: Is there any other item of business? (to Adm. Moorer) Tom, do you have anything?

Adm. Moorer: I want to mention that Abe sees a pattern developing: he thinks the North Vietnamese may try to do something before Ho Chi Minh's birthday on May 19, perhaps by attacking An Loc, Kontum and Hue during this time. This is based, by the way, on interrogations of prisoners. Abe proposes to use all the B–52s—the first day at An Loc, the next day at Kontum and the day after that at Hue.

Mr. Rush: That will undoubtedly cause a lot of fireworks.

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[6] See Document 135.

Mr. Sullivan: He wants to use all the B–52s at each one of those cities?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Mr. Nutter: The B–52s will be bumper to bumper.

Mr. Kissinger: That's Abe's problem. If he wants to do it, it's all right with me.

[Omitted here is discussion related to military activity in Thailand.]

Mr. Kissinger: Have you done some more work on the rules of engagement near the Chinese border?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. I want to show you what the problem is. [Goes to special briefing map.] At present, our orders tell the pilots to stay outside the 25-mile buffer zone around the Chinese border. I had our people look to see what lucrative targets there may be within the buffer zone. One such target is Lang Son, and there are about six others. We still have to study this a bit more. I don't think we'll ask for authority to hit targets on the border, but we may ask to go as close as twenty miles to the border.

Mr. Kissinger: Where are the targets closest to the border?

Adm. Moorer: One is Dong Dang, about two miles away from the Chinese border. There are a couple of others six or seven miles away, and the rest are at least fifteen miles from the border. We want to work on it a little more, though.

Mr. Sullivan: Have we ever breached the buffer zone before?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. In fact, we had some aircraft go down in China. We used to go as close as ten miles before the buffer zone was established.

Mr. Johnson: Isn't there an arc around Haiphong which the planes can't penetrate without special permission?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. There is a ten-mile circle around the city, and the aircraft have to receive special authorization from Washington before they can attack targets within the circle, except for specific targets already approved.

Mr. Johnson: Is the same thing true with Hanoi?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, it's exactly the same with both cities. If the targets are outside the circles, the pilots just have to notify us. If the targets are inside the cities, the pilots have to request permission to attack.

Mr. Sullivan: Do the Chinese know about the buffer zone?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes, although they may not know how many miles it is from the border.

Adm. Moorer: I don't know if we ever told the Chinese. But they certainly can figure it out by watching our flight operations.

Mr. Sullivan: So you think they probably know we don't penetrate within 25 miles of the border.

Mr. Kissinger: They don't know that. I'm sure we could go twenty miles without their noticing it. If we tell them there is a 25-mile buffer zone, we would have a problem if we want to go twenty miles.

Adm. Moorer: To repeat, there are about three or four targets twenty miles from the border which we could hit.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's take another look at it when your people have completed their studies.

Adm. Moorer: Fine. I just wanted you to know what the problem was.

Mr. Johnson: What about the rules for hot pursuit?

Adm. Moorer: We don't fly over China.

Mr. Johnson: Do we fly into the buffer zone, or do we break off the pursuit when we come to the buffer zone?

Adm. Moorer: This hasn't come up yet. But I think we would probably break off the engagement at the buffer zone.

Mr. Johnson: I'm talking about whether the North Vietnamese planes seek refuge at Chinese airfields or in the buffer zone.

Mr. Kissinger: There are no airfields in the buffer zone.

Mr. Johnson: I mean the airspace of the buffer zone.

Adm. Moorer: I don't know. We'll have to take a look at this. For one thing, the North Vietnamese don't have any confidence about knowing precisely where the buffer zone is. We have plenty to do for the next few days. After we see what happens and after we study this a bit more, we may ask for additional authorities if we think they will be useful.

Mr. Kissinger: Good. I now want to come back to something we've talked about before. No more forces should be pulled out of Vietnam without coming back here for permission.

Adm. Flanagan: Simply for management purposes, we put expiration dates on unit deployments and operating authorities. But these dates are always reviewed. It doesn't mean we have decided to bring the units home or to end the operating authority on that date. We will take care of this.

Mr. Kissinger: Good. We don't want any forces pulled out.

Mr. Johnson: What about the withdrawal program? Won't that continue?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. But we don't want any degrading of our Air Force and Navy forces.

Adm. Flanagan: Don't worry. These are just review dates.

[Omitted here is discussion related to the Soviet Union and the Summit.]

Mr. Kissinger: Are there any minesweepers in North Vietnamese waters?

Adm. Moorer: No. The North Vietnamese would have to get them from the Soviet Union or China.

Mr. Kissinger: Is it your judgement that they can't sweep up the mines as fast as we can seed them?

Adm. Moorer: That's right. They would have difficulty sweeping the mines—even with divers—because the channel bottom is muddy and silty.

Mr. Sullivan: Wouldn't that also make it hard for the divers?

Adm. Moorer: No, not necessarily. The first problem for the North Vietnamese is to find the mines. Once the mines go in the water, they wiggle around.

Mr. Johnson: Has there been a new concept in mine warfare, or have we just improved what we had in World War II?

Adm. Moorer: There's been a constant improvement since World War II.

[Omitted here is discussion of a possible Soviet reaction to the mining of North Vietnamese harbors, how to respond if North Vietnam accepted the U.S. cease-fire offer, and U.S. domestic response to the mining.]

146. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 11, 1972, 11:21–11:59 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas Moorer
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
George Carver
[*name not declassified*] (only for Mr. Carver's briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Mark Wandler

[Omitted here are the Summary of Conclusions and discussion related to the Soviet Union, which is printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 216.]

Mr. Kissinger: You know, it's possible for us to go back to the Paris negotiations at any time and table the President's new proposals. In fact, I think we should do that. But it's probably better to wait at least another two weeks before we do it. (to Adm. Moorer) Tom, what do you have?

Adm. Moorer: I've got three or four things.

Mr. Kissinger: Did the North Vietnamese sweep up the mines before they became activated? That's my nightmare.

Adm. Moorer: Don't worry. The mines are still there. (Went to special briefing map of North Vietnamese coast) The first thing I want to bring up is the fact that two Soviet ships have left Haiphong and gone to Cam Pha. In the meantime, we mined the approaches to Cam Pha.

Mr. Kissinger: That means the Soviet ships can't get out of Cam Pha.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

Adm. Moorer: Right. They won't be able to get out after 5:00 p.m., our time, when the mines become activated. Perhaps we should notify them of this. The information was contained in documents that have already been circulated, and I'm sure the Soviets went into Cam Pha knowing that the channels will be mined. But I thought that we might be able to improve our position by making certain that they know what the situation is.

Mr. Kissinger: They would only have four hours in which to get out.

Adm. Moorer: Yes, but at least the ships won't be sunk.

Mr. Kissinger: I'll take care of this.

Adm. Moorer: (Displayed another map showing the power grid system in the Hanoi–Haiphong area.) You asked yesterday about the North Vietnamese power supply. As you can see, the map shows the generating system—the power grid system—in the Hanoi–Haiphong area. We've already taken two of the generating stations out down south. The others have not been targeted yet.

(Displayed another map, showing interdiction targets.) Our interdiction effort is going well, I think. You can see the two railroads going through the buffer zone and on into China. One railroad spur comes from Haiphong, and all the railroads join at the bridge north of Hanoi. The bridge was hit again yesterday and last night. We scored hits with five 3,000-pound bombs. And we have a picture of it, too. I would say the bridge is impassable.

Mr. Johnson: Five 3,000-pound bombs hit the bridge?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. My people tell me the bridge is not usable at this moment. In addition, we've taken out some of the railroad bridges further north.

Mr. Kissinger: Do all the railroad lines go across that one bridge north of Hanoi?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. The North Vietnamese are still able to move some supplies by rail down to Vinh. From there, they distribute the supplies by boat and truck further south. But we're making a big effort in the Hanoi–Haiphong area right now. We have the rolling stock trapped between the two bridges north of Hanoi, and we'll work on the stock tonight. We also plan tonight to hit another bridge further to the northwest of Hanoi. Then we hope we can maintain that situation, while attacking the rolling stock and the yards south of Hanoi.

Mr. Johnson: How far south does that go?

Adm. Moorer: Down to Vinh. The railroad ends at Vinh. At that point, the North Vietnamese have to truck the supplies down Highway 7, into Laos. They also have to truck the supplies through the Mu Gia and Ban Kerai Passes.

Mr. Kissinger: Even if they offload the ships in Haiphong, they won't be able to transport the supplies.

Adm. Moorer: Except by truck.

Mr. Kissinger: And if they make a big effort with the trucks, they will use up even more of their POL.

Adm. Moorer: One thing is for sure. They won't be able to maintain the volume of delivery that they had before.

I want to say something about the North Vietnamese air defenses. Their Migs weren't as active yesterday as they were the day before. There is also some tenuous evidence—from communication intercepts—that a Soviet pilot who had been training the North Vietnamese was airborne yesterday. This isn't anything that should worry us, but I just wanted to pass it on to you.

Concerning the An Loc situation, I talked to Johnny Vogt about an hour ago. He told me we're laying on heavy Tac Air, gunship, VNAF and B–52 strikes. The B–52s are laying on the 72-aircraft delivery program. We anticipated the renewed attack on An Loc, and the timing of our intensified air effort has worked out well.

Once, when the B–52s were laying down a long line of bombs, the North Vietnamese broke and ran into the perimeter wire—where they were cut down. I just mention this to show how close we're bombing to the perimeter.

Vogt says we've destroyed twenty or twenty-five enemy tanks. It also seems as though the South Vietnamese are holding. I already mentioned the regimental executive officer who surrendered.

Mr. Johnson: The latest reports are that ten Migs were downed yesterday. We originally thought only seven of them had been shot down. Did this all happen during the same action?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Adm. Flanagan: One of the Navy pilots even got three Migs in one flight.

Adm. Moorer: That's not all. After he got the three planes, he was hit by a SA–2 missile. He had to bail out, but we picked him up. Now he's back on the *Constellation,* ready to go again. In addition, he already had two Migs to his credit before yesterday's action.

Mr. Rush: Doesn't that make him the first ace in the war, now that he has five kills to his credit? Did anyone else ever get three planes in one flight?

Adm. Flanagan: Yes. One of our pilots once shot down five enemy planes in a flight during World War II.

Mr. Rush: I guess you have to send this Navy pilot back home now.

Adm. Moorer: No, we don't. We'll tell him to go out and get five more.

Mr. Johnson: What weapons did he use to shoot the Migs down?

Adm. Flanagan: Sidewinders.

Mr. Johnson: Are they working now?

Adm. Flanagan: The Sidewinders have always worked. It was the Sparrow that gave us trouble.

Mr. Johnson: What did the North Vietnamese use to get our planes?

Adm. Moorer: The Mig 19s use 20-mm cannonfire. They apparently got two planes. SAMs got the other two.

Mr. Nutter: One French journalist in Hanoi reported that he saw three parachutes. He also reported that the railroad bridge was badly damaged.

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. That was Joel Henri.

Adm. Moorer: This action took place yesterday. Today, one of our planes was shot down near the Laotian border, but we expect to rescue the crew very shortly.

Yesterday we also hit the command and control center outside of Hanoi. The center is underground, and we used laser bombs in an attempt to destroy it. I don't know if we were successful. This center controls all the North Vietnamese planes and missiles. I'm sure they have alternative centers, but this is the main one—the Colorado Springs of North Vietnam.

I also told you about the plan to insert South Vietnamese Marines behind the lines, didn't I?[2]

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Mr. Rush: We spoke to the State Department about sending two additional squadrons of C–130s to Taiwan, and we both feel this should be done.

Mr. Kissinger: Why?

Adm. Moorer: We need these aircraft to provide some extra logistic support.

Mr. Rush: This would involve transferring about thirty aircraft and about 800–1,000 personnel from the U.S. to Taiwan.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we keep the move quiet?

Mr. Rush: Yes.

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[2] After the fall of Quang Tri City, the South Vietnamese planned and carried out, under the code name Song Than, a series of thrusts into the territory recently won by the North Vietnamese in MR–1. The purpose of Song Than was to keep the enemy off balance and slow its movement to the south toward Hue. The operations began on May 12 and the most unusual one was a 2-day amphibious and helicopter assault on a beach a few miles south of Quang Tri on May 24. The operations succeeded in their operational purpose but had little long-lasting strategic significance. (Andrade, *America's Last Vietnam Battle,* pp. 165–171)

Mr. Johnson: We wanted to make sure there were no other alternatives before we agreed to the move. It seems as though there are no other alternatives.

Mr. Rush: There are three C–130 squadrons on Taiwan now, and we want to send two more squadrons.

Adm. Moorer: It shouldn't cause a great problem because these are not combat aircraft.

Mr. Rush: (to Mr. Kissinger) Is it okay to go ahead with it?

Mr. Kissinger: They [the Chinese] won't like it.

Mr. Johnson: I know, but there is nothing else we can do.

Mr. Kissinger: Their reaction so far has been very mild.

Mr. Johnson: That's right.

Mr. Carver: The reaction has almost been pro forma.

Mr. Kissinger: What about getting additional gunships to Vietnam? Can we do that?

Adm. Moorer: You mean the fixed wing gunships?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Adm. Moorer: We are sending them out there as fast as possible.

Mr. Rush: Can we get some more out there?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. We are surging whenever we can.

Mr. Kissinger: How many have we sent recently?

Adm. Moorer: We sent six at one time a little while ago. I'll get you a report on this and what we are doing.

Mr. Kissinger: What about the VNAF study?[3] We need a specific plan, with specific dates—not a paper with general terms. If a cease-fire ever does come into effect, we will be grateful for whatever augmentation we've made in the Vietnamese Air Force. It's important to have a specific plan.

Mr. Rush: Barry Shillito is back, and he can make some useful contributions to the study.[4] We'll work on it some more over the weekend.

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[3] Reference is to a Department of Defense study being prepared to determine the needs of the South Vietnamese Air Force. Its findings were merged into a larger program called Project Enhance, which Nixon approved on May 24. According to an official Air Force history, its purpose was "to restore the armed forces of South Vietnam to their pre-invasion strength and effectiveness, while attempting modest improvements." (Nalty, *Air War Over South Vietnam,* p. 350) For a more detailed examination of the study and Project Enhance see Webb and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1971–1973,* pp. 213–219.

[4] Assistant Secretary of Defense for Installations and Logistics. He led a team of senior logistics officers on the Joint Staff and the Army Staff, and representatives of the Navy and Air Force, to Saigon to determine urgent needs of the South Vietnamese armed forces. See footnote 3, Document 112.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we have the plan Tuesday[5] morning?

Adm. Moorer: I think so.

Mr. Rush: We'll get it to you.

Mr. Kissinger: Good.

Mr. Sullivan: I think it would also be useful if the Agency gives us a map of Indochina, showing what a cease-fire would look like. After seeing that, we might decide, for example, to clean up the Bolevens Plateau before we go ahead with the cease-fire.

Mr. Kissinger: We're not committed to a cease-fire in place, you know.

Mr. Sullivan: That's right. But we may still want to improve our ground position as much as possible.

Mr. Carver: We'll get the map for you. It will probably be large-scale, though.

Mr. Sullivan: That's okay.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Republic of Korea's request for equipment and support for its troops in South Vietnam, the Korean soldiers' fighting ability, actions to take in relation to the Soviet Union, an attempt by the British to persuade the Chinese to recommend to the North Vietnamese that they should accept Nixon's peace proposals, whether to use the Geneva Convention machinery for Vietnam, President Nixon's directive to carry out a psywar campaign in North Vietnam, a nationwide public relations program to support the peace proposals, and whether the summit would be cancelled.]

[5] May 16.

147. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, May 15, 1972.

I know that both of you, Moorer and, undoubtedly, Abrams, think I am sticking my nose into business I have no knowledge on when I suggest a massing of what tanks we have left for at least one surprise offensive against the enemy in some area where they can effectively be used.

I do not pretend to have any knowledge or experience whatever in military matters. But I do know that military men generally are noted for the courage and loyalty of their character and notorious for the plodding mediocrity of their strategy and tactics. Particularly where American military men are concerned, all they seem to be obsessed with is superior numbers (with even quality a secondary consideration) and with doing things the way they have been taught to do them in the book. The element of surprise is practically unknown in top American military circles and has been with rare exceptions throughout the period since World War II and, as a matter of fact, through much of World War II this was the case also. That is why a Patton and a MacArthur were never favorably looked upon by the top military strategists. They didn't do things by the book. As a result, they incurred the wrath of those who followed the way to success in any organization, and particularly in a military organization—"The way to get ahead is not to make mistakes. Don't try anything that hasn't been approved or tried before because if it fails you will get a bad fitness report. Ergo, do things by the book with total loyalty, dedication—and *blindness* and you will eventually get to the top."

I do not mean to suggest that Abrams from to time did not fit this mold, particularly when he was under Patton in World War II. Haig certainly is an exception. But we will have to admit that while the bravery of our forces in Vietnam has been far beyond the call of duty, our military leadership has been a sad chapter in the proud military history of this country. I know that the military make the politicians the scapegoat—and in some instances with pretty good reason. But during the past three and a half years when we have begged them to come up with new initiatives, they have invariably failed to do so and when

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1971. Personal and Confidential.

we have come up with new initiatives they have dragged their feet or even openly blocked them. The excuse that Laird was opposed to such initiatives is totally unacceptable. After all, every military commander from Moorer down knows that the President is the Commander-in-Chief and my views have been expressed orally and in writing so often that they can have no doubt as to what I expect them to do and also no doubt that I will back them up to the hilt, win or lose. You will recall in this instance, the memo I wrote *before* My Lai. I was just pleased that they had come up with a daring idea. I was prepared to take, as I did take, the sole responsibility for the failure of the idea. And then after that we haven't heard a peep out of them as to any new ideas.

This brings me back to my suggestions about the more effective use of tanks. I accept all the military arguments that this is not like World War I or even World War II, that the South Vietnamese aren't very good at using tanks, that we don't have many left, and that we ought to play things by the book.

I would only respond by pointing out that in the first four weeks of the enemy offensive, they made an enormously effective use of tanks primarily because they used surprise and mass numbers. Using big headlights on tanks and using them at night is an idea which, of course, would never have occurred to any of our present group of timid (as far as their strategy is concerned) tank commanders.

In order for you to get the flavor of my thinking I am sending with this memo a copy of Churchill's "The World Crisis, Part II, 1916–1918" which we have gotten from the Library of Congress. I would like you to go to the appendix and pick out and read all the pages that have to do with tanks—particularly read pages 342 to 346 on the Battle of Cambrai. As you read it, start with the assumption that nothing at all in Vietnam is similar to the situation that existed at Cambrai in the period of French warfare during World War I. However, what does stand out is that tanks when used massively as a unit and with *surprise* can have a massive demoralizing effect on an enemy dug in for an attack.

The purpose of this memorandum is not to order a tank attack unless there is at least some chance of it succeeding. My purpose is to try to get the military off their duffs and to come up with some new ideas like the landing of the helicopter troops behind the North Vietnamese lines over the weekend. Remember, as you push Moorer and Abrams to come up with something, that all of MacArthur's top command *opposed* the Inchon landing!

148. Memorandum for the President's Files by the President's Military Assistant (Scowcroft)[1]

Washington, May 15, 1972, 10:30 a.m.

SUBJECT

Meeting with Representatives of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, May 15, 1972 at 10:30 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Mrs. Sybil E. Stockdale (wife of Captain James B. Stockdale, USN)
Mrs. Phyllis E. Galanti (wife of Lt. Commander Paul E. Galanti, USN)
Mrs. Maureen A. Dunn (wife of Lieutenant Joseph P. Dunn, USN)
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Brigadier General Brent Scowcroft

Following the introduction of the representatives of the National League of Families to the President, the President asked that all be seated for a photo opportunity.

After the photo opportunity, Mrs. Stockdale indicated that she was the principal spokesman for the group and had several questions which were of concern to the League members. The first question Mrs. Stockdale asked was when the Prisoners would be released. The President replied that the successful completion of a negotiating process required the cooperation of both negotiating parties. The issue of the POW/MIAs has been and will continue to be discussed on every foreign trip. The President added that North Vietnam had indicated that the prisoners could be released only when we agreed to assist in the imposition of a Communist government in South Vietnam, a condition to which we would never agree. The President explained that the actions he announced on May 8 have now given us the leverage to obtain the release of the POWs. The blockade will work now, whereas it would not have worked in 1968 because of the availability of supplies through Cambodia.

Mrs. Stockdale then asked what plans had been made to provide for an accounting for the missing. The President responded that one of the best sources of information would be our returned prisoners. He stressed that we would do everything possible to get a complete accounting for the missing, to include investigating teams from third countries in the event U.S. teams were not permitted in Communist held areas of Southeast Asia.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office File, Box 88, Memoranda for the President, Beginning May 14, 1972. No classification marking.

Mrs. Galanti observed that she had in the past opposed the President's policies but that she now fully supported him. The President asked what those who opposed current U.S. policy would propose as an alternative. Mrs. Galanti replied that most of them would simply have the U.S. withdraw from Southeast Asia. The President responded that the Communists, under those conditions, would never release the prisoners.

Mrs. Galanti wondered what we would do in the event we reached some agreements with the Soviet Union—arrangements for increased trade, for example—and the U.S.S.R. still refused to help us on the POW/MIA issue. The President pointed out that we must separate U.S.–U.S.S.R. relationships from the Vietnam conflict. Attempting to apply pressure to the Soviet Union on the Vietnam issue would serve principally to make it come to the aid of its North Vietnam ally.

Mrs. Dunn then asked whether we had ever offered to North Vietnam a withdrawal of U.S. forces in return for release of the POWs. The President replied that, on May 31, 1971, we had offered a U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam in exchange for a cease fire and release of the POWs.

Mrs. Dunn was concerned about who on the Communist side would be in a position to negotiate for the prisoners held in South Vietnam; and whether or not we had contacts with Communist groups such as the Pathet Lao. The President replied in the affirmative to the latter question and observed that North Vietnam would be expected to negotiate for the prisoners in the South.

Following a short exchange over public opinion on the POW issue, the President concluded the meeting by stating that he had the responsibility to obtain the release of our POWs and to protect the U.S. forces remaining in South Vietnam. The President then gave each of the ladies a compact, escorted them to the door, and bade them farewell.

149. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 15, 1972, 11:14–11:42 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Armistead Selden
R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas Moorer
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—For the time being, we will not reply to the Soviet statement.[2]

—We should not comment on the report that we will stop the aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam while the President is in Moscow.

—We should not make any comments about the Soviets or the Chinese this week. If asked, we should just say we are continuing the preparations for the summit.

—We should hold firm to our policy of not compromising on end-the-war resolutions.

—The Defense Department should present the VNAF study and the ROK paper at tomorrow's meeting.

Gen. Haig: Henry is in with the President. He should be down shortly, but, in the meantime, he asked me to start the meeting.

Mr. Helms: If it is Monday, this must be Hanoi.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 79, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, May 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets are in the original.

[2] Printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, attached to Document 213.

Mr. Selden: He can't be too far because I saw him at the Pentagon early this morning.

Gen. Haig: Yes, he was over there. But he has been in with the President ever since he came back. They've also met with some POW wives.[3] (to Mr. Helms) Perhaps we should begin with your briefing.[4]

Mr. Helms: [Read his briefing.]

Mr. Kissinger joined the meeting at this point.

Mr. Kissinger: [After Mr. Helms mentioned that the North Vietnamese are dispersing some of their transport aircraft to Chinese airfields.] What kinds of aircraft are they dispersing?

Mr. Helms: We have indications they've sent one IL–18 and three AN–24s to China. [Continued to read his briefing.]

Mr. Kissinger: [After Mr. Helms mentioned that there have been no other Chinese or Russian statements since the last situation report.] What statements are you referring to?

Mr. Helms: That last sentence in the briefing was an unhappy one. What it means is that the last situation report—which was put out at 5:30 this morning—contained no new Russian or Chinese statements. And there have been no statements put out since that time.

Mr. Kissinger: You mean there has been none since none was reported before.

Mr. Helms: That's right.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer) Tom, do you have anything for us?

Adm. Moorer: To back up what Dick [Helms] reported, we have also noticed some effort to disperse aircraft to China. There has been a high tempo of air activity in the Hanoi–Haiphong area since our interdiction efforts started. We've destroyed 29 Migs so far—on the ground and in the air. Several of the Migs were shot down in dogfights, and one of our F–4 crews even got three Migs in one flight.

The enemy missile activity has peaked from 44 in the week before last to 130 in the last seven days.

We've lost four planes: two F–4s to Mig 17s; and one F–4 and one F–105 to Mig 21s.

We are watching the enemy's effort to disperse the planes. So far, we haven't attacked airfields, except to suppress them in certain operations. Our focus has been on interdicting the rail lines. We've cut the northeast and northwest lines going out of Hanoi, and we've also destroyed the Hanoi railroad bridge.

Mr. Kissinger: Tony Lewis says we didn't get the bridge.

Adm. Moorer: Who is Lewis?

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[3] See Document 148.

[4] Attached but not printed.

Mr. Kissinger: He's an American, a *New York Times* correspondent who is in Hanoi right now.

Adm. Moorer: He's wrong. We have a picture of the downed bridge. I talked to Johnny Vogt about this a little while ago, and he told me the North Vietnamese have put down pontoons by the side of the bridge—in an attempt to drive trucks across the river. The bridge is down, and we will hit it again to make sure it stays down.

The Thanh Hoa railroad bridge is also down, as are almost all the bridges between Hanoi and Haiphong.

There is no significant activity to report with respect to our mining operations. I told Alex that the South Vietnamese have now sent a ship to join us on the notification line. I guess this makes everything legal now, but I don't think the GVN ship will make much of a difference.

As far as the land activity is concerned, the South Vietnamese Marine operations were apparently successful and well-executed. Friendly forces are back in FSB Bastogne, which is west of FSB Birmingham. I understand we've captured a good deal of command and control equipment—enough for a regiment. I don't know if the South Vietnamese are planning to stay at Bastogne or if they were just sweeping through. I'll get some information on this a little later today.

Mr. Johnson: Are you disappointed that the Marines pulled out, or was that part of the plan?

Adm. Moorer: I'm not disappointed. The plan called for them to pull out and join with other forces.

Mr. Kissinger: Wasn't it a two-day plan of operations?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. It was a coordinated plan, and the Marines did what they were supposed to do. They found 263 enemy KIA, captured two 130-mm artillery pieces and destroyed three tanks. All that was at a cost of nine men. The operation was a success.

In the Kontum area, the enemy is moving in the direction of the city. The night before last, we saw the lights of some enemy tanks on the road, and the ARVN attacked with artillery, Tac Air and TOW missiles. As a result, ten of the North Vietnamese tanks were destroyed. And again, we found over 200 enemy KIA. That particular assault was stopped. Another assault, coming from the northwest, was also stopped—with at least 150 of the enemy being killed.

We have a report that one battalion of the 320th NVA Division is down to less than 100 men. The enemy is bringing in the 2nd Division in an attempt to bolster the 320th Division. Reports of heavy losses were confirmed by a prisoner who said that there were only 25 men left in his company.

Mr. Kissinger: But wasn't that in III Corps?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. In IV Corps, the North Vietnamese are trying to infiltrate troops through the Seven Mountains area, near the

Cambodian border. The South Vietnamese are aware of this, and they are moving against it.

There's been no significant activity in Cambodia. I should mention, though, that Highway 5 has been reopened.

In general, all the operations are continuing.

Mr. Johnson: I would like to return to the Migs for a moment.

Adm. Moorer: You should be aware that the figures I cited before pertain to operations since our interdiction efforts began.

Mr. Johnson: I realize that. But I wonder if you can tell how many Migs are left? Have we cut down the North Vietnamese air force enough so that the environment for our pilots won't be so hazardous?

Adm. Moorer: The most Migs that the enemy has had in the air at one time was sixty last week. Our attacks have had an effect, but the North Vietnamese can get all the planes they want. The Russians have the same problem in supplying Migs to the North Vietnamese that we have in supplying M–48s to the South Vietnamese: there aren't enough trained people to operate and maintain the equipment. During the operations in Laos in January and February, the same North Vietnamese pilots were flying all the time. We have the names of most of the pilots. And I think they have less than twenty people who can fly at night.

Mr. Johnson: Nonetheless, the North Vietnamese still have planes and crews in China, which they can bring in, if they want to.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. I wouldn't want to be held to these figures, but I think they have thirty or forty.

Mr. Johnson: For the time being, then, the North Vietnamese can continue to put up a good fight in the air.

Adm. Moorer: Yes. We haven't attacked the airfields, though. There's also a new element: the SA–4 missile. This is a mobile, with the launcher and radar on tracks. The missile is not as fast as the SA–2, and it can be easily identified. So far, there have been no hits with it.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer) Do you want to say a few words about the current rules of engagement? What do we do about minesweepers and about lightering? This is just so that everybody here knows what our policy is.

Adm. Moorer: Okay. Actually we have five situations which could involve the rules of engagement. First, there is the case when merchant ships approach the notification line. Our ships have instructions to come alongside these ships, inform them that the Haiphong channels are mined and urge them to leave the area. This has already been done.

Second, there is the case of counteractions to take if the North Vietnamese attempt to sweep the Haiphong channels. If the minesweepers are unmistakably identified as North Vietnamese and if the action would be without hazard to third country shipping, the minesweepers will be taken under fire.

Third, there is the case where merchant ships are at anchor—either inside or outside North Vietnamese territorial waters—and are transferring their cargoes to North Vietnamese lighters. When the merchant ship is outside territorial waters (12 miles), the lighters will be taken under fire when they enter territorial waters. If both are inside the territorial waters, the lighters will be taken under fire when they are a good distance away from the merchant ships. This will be done regardless of what Soviet ships may be present.

Fourth, there is the case of Soviet combat ships taking up positions in the Tonkin Gulf. This has not yet developed. If it does, we will deal with it by trailing the Soviet submarines with our submarines and by maintaining a continuous surveillance on the Soviet surface ships.

Fifth, there is the case of the classic blockade, where you fire a shot across the bow of a ship and attempt to board and search it. We haven't issued orders to our ships for this situation, but we have these orders ready.

I think the rules of engagements are very clear. We can solve any problems which may come up in the future. One thing in our favor is that these operations are not time-sensitive. We will get a warning if the Soviet minesweeper leaves the Sea of Japan. And if the four minesweepers in the Indian ocean—presently clearing up Chittagong harbor—are brought to North Vietnam, they will have to be towed.

Mr. Johnson: Is there any sign that the North Vietnamese are trying to improvise minesweepers?

Adm. Moorer: Net yet, but they may try. We are keeping a close watch on them. They will never really know for sure what we will do. It remains to be seen if they would be willing to risk a merchant ship—and whose—to clear the channels.

Mr. Kissinger: We won't permit them to clear the channels. If need be, we will seed the mines faster than they can sweep them. We don't want to play any games. The first time they try to sweep the channels, we have to stop them. There should not be any doubt that there aren't enough mines out there. If they do manage to sweep some mines without our catching them, we will have to seed more mines.

Mr. Sullivan: What would we do if some Quakers, or another similar group, attempt to sail a mercy mission to Haiphong in a wooden-hulled vessel?

Adm. Moorer: What kind of mercy mission are you talking about?

Mr. Sullivan: Some kind of mission to bring medicines into Haiphong.

Mr. Johnson: We had one fellow try to do that once when I was in Japan.

Mr. Sullivan: What would we do if that happens again?

Mr. Selden: The ship may very well hit a mine.

Mr. Sullivan: But if they knew how to navigate very well, couldn't they get a wooden hull through the mine field?

Mr. Johnson: As I say, we had this once before, but I doubt that it will happen again. Even if it does, we should have plenty of advance notice, and we would be able to take care of it.

Adm. Moorer: We just wouldn't let them go up the channel.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. We could deal with this problem later.

Mr. Johnson: We would have plenty of time to consider what to do.

Adm. Moorer: We have several contingency plans. One ship is prepared to reseed the mines on very short notice. We simply won't let the North Vietnamese open the channels.

Mr. Kissinger: Fine. (to Mr. Johnson) Do you have any problems, Alex?

Mr. Johnson: No. You probably know we sent over a proposed reply to the Soviet statement.[5] Our recommendation, though, is that we don't issue the reply. I think we're getting by fine.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree. And the President is not eager to reply, either.

Mr. Sullivan: Our press people need some guidance on the report that we will suspend our activities during the Moscow visit.

Mr. Kissinger: What report is that? What does it refer to—the mining?

Mr. Sullivan: No. It refers to the bombing and the naval bombardments.

Mr. Johnson: I haven't seen that report.

Mr. Sullivan: It came from France, from the *Figaro.*

Mr. Kissinger: Do we have to say anything?

Mr. Sullivan: We're being asked about the report.

Adm. Moorer: We should just continue to say that we will not say what we will or will not do. I don't think we should make any other comments.

Mr. Helms: That's right. I think it would be ill-advised to make other comments.

Mr. Kissinger: We should just say we have no comment.

Mr. Johnson: I agree with Tom [Moorer].

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[5] INR characterized the Soviet statement as mild and analyzed it in the following terms: "The Soviet Government's statement of May 11, issued the day the US mines in North Vietnamese harbors became activated, does not mention the summit and studiously avoids treating the US actions to disrupt Soviet shipments to the DRV as a direct challenge to the USSR. Instead, Moscow has elected to view them as violations of international law deserving censure but not to address their larger implications or possible consequences." (Intelligence note prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, RESN–63, May 11; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–2 VIET S)

Mr. Kissinger: Absolutely.

Adm. Moorer: People think we would be stupid to make other comments. They don't expect us to.

Mr. Kissinger: Not all people.

Mr. Johnson: The Secretary said that he got an excellent reaction from his speech at Hot Springs[6]—even from the women.

Mr. Helms: That's right. The Secretary made a very good speech. And when I walked in, the stock market went up two points, too.

Adm. Moorer: [After receiving a message from the Sit Room.] The ARVN are still holding FSB Bastogne.

Mr. Kissinger: We don't want any comments about the Soviets this week. We don't want any expression of relief or of worry. If asked, we should just say we are continuing the preparations for the summit. We don't want the Soviets challenged, so just say nothing. What about the extra gunships? What are we doing to get more of them out there?

Adm. Flanagan: Do you mean the VNAF study?

Mr. Johnson: No. This was a separate question.

Adm. Flanagan: I defer to Adm. Moorer on this.

Adm. Moorer: We're getting six more gunships ready, and we will send them out as fast as we can.

Mr. Kissinger: How long will it take to get these six gunships over there?

Adm. Moorer: They are in different degrees of completion, and we'll have to send them over one at a time.

Mr. Kissinger: When will that be? In a month?

Adm. Moorer: I think all of them should be out there in a month to six weeks. We're working as fast as we can. It's difficult to convert the aircraft, though, because we have to install gun mounts, infrared sensors and radar sensors. This is a complex job.

Mr. Kissinger: But we're pushing ahead as fast as we can?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, I can assure you of that.

Mr. Kissinger: What about the ROKs?

Adm. Moorer: We'll have a paper for you tomorrow. We have to rely on Barry Shillito for a large part of this paper, and he just returned the night before last. The paper will be ready tomorrow.

Mr. Kissinger: We shouldn't make any comments about the Chinese, either. They have been amazingly quiet so far.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, they have.

Mr. Sullivan: Chou En-lai made a statement at the Somali banquet last night which was a little heavier than the earlier statement. But it was still a fairly quiet statement.

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[6] Rogers addressed the Business Council, Hot Springs, VA, May 13. (Ibid., Rogers Office Files, Entry 5439, Box 20)

Adm. Moorer: Perhaps Chou had to use some stronger words because the Somalis have ships in Haiphong. The Somalis are also a special case because the Chinese are trying to work with them on the Horn of Africa.

Mr. Helms: Chou's speech was mild. He repeated almost word for word what he said in his earlier statement. And there was no mention of the President or of the alleged damage to Chinese ships by U.S. aircraft.

Mr. Kissinger: Okay.

Mr. Sullivan: We have a major problem on the Hill with the end-the-war resolutions.

Mr. Kissinger: This comes up every year. As long as there is no compromise on our part, we are in good shape. Our policy has always been to hold firm.

Mr. Sullivan: I heard this morning that Scott was moving toward a compromise—perhaps as early as tomorrow.

Mr. Kissinger: He's not doing that with our approval.

Mr. Sullivan: Scott, I understand, wants to change the Church–Case resolution. Instead of the present clause about North Vietnamese agreement to release our prisoners, he wants the clause to read: "after the release of our prisoners."

Mr. Kissinger: We will not yield. We don't want to compromise on a resolution which says the Congress doesn't trust the President. We don't want to compromise on a resolution which threatens to cut off funds in order to make the President carry out promises he has already made. We should get the Congressional liaison people out.

Mr. Sullivan: They are out. My people say Scott may move tomorrow.

Mr. Kissinger: Whenever we agree to compromise language, other people always come along and want to compromise the compromise. We don't want that. We are not in bad shape now. Even if this passes, it will only be a sense of the Senate resolution.

Mr. Johnson: The Secretary's feeling is that the Senate may vote to cut the funds off, but the House won't go along. The conference committee would then work out a compromise which would say something about policy but which would not cut off the funds.

Mr. Kissinger: We could live with something like that. We're in the driver's seat. Any Senator who moves too far, may jeopardize all sorts of things.

Mr. Selden: Secretary Laird said in his staff meeting this morning that there should be no compromises with the President's position.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's meet at 10:00 tomorrow morning. Then, depending on the situation, perhaps we should meet every other day.

150. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to Secretary of Defense Laird[1]

CM–1848–72 Washington, May 15, 1972.

SUBJ

Air Campaign in North Vietnam (U)

1. This responds to your memorandum of 10 May 1972, which requested the Line Backer plan and information on certain related topics.

2. The objectives of the air campaign (Line Backer) are to destroy and restrict the flow of war material through the North Vietnamese land mass and contiguous coastal waters by disrupting lines of communication and destroying transportation assets and supplies. The air campaign operates in concert with the mining operation (Pocket Money), which is designed to restrict the flow of maritime shipments into NVN.

3. NVN depends entirely on imports to support its war machine. The transportation target system consists of elements of the military supply and distribution network through which these imports move to the battlefields in Laos, Cambodia, and most particularly RVN. These elements primarily consist of the principal choke points along the rail/highway LOC, the means of transportation (trucks, rolling stock, and water craft), the repair facilities for maintaining them, war supplies and war support materials, the ports, transshipment points, and supply points through which the imports move, and the other critical components throughout the NVN transportation system.

An initial priority effort is the reduction of existing POL stocks and the destruction of the major fixed POL storage facilities. The national POL storage capacity in fixed sites is 160,000 metric tons. Twenty-three principal POL targets represent more than 50 percent of this capacity, most of which is stored in underground tanks or dispersed sites which are difficult to dig out. The remaining POL stores are contained in some 250 fixed site facilities ranging downward from 700 metric ton capacity. In addition, there are innumerable transitory drum sites with an estimated capacity of 60,000 metric tons. These targets become less and less lucrative and more difficult to destroy as their size decreases.

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0095, 385.1, Viet (January–May 1972). Top Secret; Sensitive.

4. There are eight key bottlenecks along the Northeast and Northwest rail lines. Successful interdiction of these lines will complicate the North Vietnamese efforts to increase overland shipments now that their sea lanes are closed. They will be forced to use time-consuming shuttling operations and to divert rail shipments to the road network.

5. Sealing off the ports was the first milestone. This move shut off maritime shipments which represent 95 percent of all imports. Rail shipments from China have been averaging 600 short tons per day. Imports will be limited to these quantities until the Soviet and Chinese increase their overland inputs. It will probably take the enemy several months to accommodate to the loss of his port facilities and the disruption of his principal overland lines of communication. Our primary effort in the early phases of Line Backer will be directed toward delaying this accommodation. If imports can be kept below the minimum required to sustain planned levels of combat and essential domestic functions, the enemy will have to draw down on his stockpiles. How long North Vietnam can continue the present combat level relates directly to our success in curtailing imports over an extended period.

6. As indicated above, the successful mining operation is expected to create a gap in the flow of supplies that will reduce imports below essential minimums. The enemy is now faced with the enormous task of completely readjusting his supply and distribution system to handle increased rail shipments from China. It will take 4 to 6 months of uninterrupted effort for the enemy to complete the readjustment. Our interdiction campaign is aimed at keeping the supply line capacity from the Chinese border to the battlefield reduced to the lowest possible level.

Once the key bridges and choke points along the two rail lines and the principal highway alternates have been successfully interdicted, the campaign will continue at the reduced level necessary to maintain interdiction of these bottlenecks and to destroy and harass logistic traffic. Some strike forces can then be diverted back to the ancillary effort of reducing the enemy's military capability and his war support facilities.

7. The near-term results will be disruption of the military supply and distribution system. Over the long-term, we can expect the campaign will impact seriously on the enemy's ability to maintain an adequate logistic network and will degrade his capability to support his supply lines in Laos by requiring diversion of trucks, repair assets, and AAA to cover the entire length of the logistic network. The cumulative effects of the interdiction campaign and the supplementary effort to reduce the North Vietnamese war-making capability should cause the enemy to lower the level of combat.

8. Based on previous experiences, North Vietnam can be expected to resort to lighterage in attempts to accommodate to the mining and

the air and NGFS attacks. The enemy will probably also focus immediate attention on developing alternate means of moving supplies, similar to methods he has employed in Laos. Our forces and tactics will require continuous adjustment based on the enemy's efforts to accommodate to closure of the ports, and his ability to reconstitute his defenses and develop alternate LOC. As new targets are developed, they will be struck with available air assets and NGFS.

9. The USSR and PRC can be expected to apply psychological and diplomatic pressure on behalf of North Vietnam. They will probably also take measures to continue the supply flow to North Vietnam by overland routes through China. I feel it is unlikely that either USSR or China will directly involve their combat forces in an offensive role. However, we are watching carefully for actions which indicate otherwise.

10. Friendly loss rates are estimated at less than one half of one percent overall. The rate is expected to decline as the operations progress. Loss rates apply primarily to strike aircraft. A lower loss rate is estimated for support aircraft because they generally experience less exposure to active enemy defenses. Overall, the losses are considered acceptable in light of the significant objectives.

T.H. Moorer

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151. Editorial Note

On the eve of President Richard M. Nixon's trip to the Soviet Union, the White House staff became concerned with when and where Air Force and Navy aircraft could bomb in the Hanoi area during the time that Nixon was actually in the Soviet Union and Poland, which he was also scheduled to visit. Nixon, Henry A. Kissinger, his Assistant for National Security Affairs, and Major General Alexander M. Haig, his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, feared the ill effects that large numbers of civilian casualties might have on the Moscow Summit and so wanted the bombing temporarily, but only locally, restricted. This requirement set off many telephone calls and meetings in the Pentagon. The conversations and meetings are recorded in the Moorer Diary, May 15, 1972; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman.

According to a transcript of their May 15 conversation, when Kissinger called Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at 7:44 p.m., they had the following exchange:

"HAK: I understand there has been again some hanky-panky going on just have to know what restrictions are over here. We can't deal with everybody like a group of politicians. I thought there was authority to hit military targets? I did not know there was 10 NM circle.

"CJCS: I think somebody gave you the wrong information. They have got authority to hit any target outside of 10 NM inside we validate targets. We have 18 targets they can hit any time they want to, it is just up to Laird to get additional targets so they do not have to go to Laird.

"HAK: Don't have to go every time to hit a target?

"CJCS: Furthermore, any target outside that circle in south can hit any time they want to.

"HAK: Haig thinks you are not authorized to hit that bridge. I don't think President could be more explicit in his instructions to hit the bridge.

"CJCS: Laird told me you said between now and Friday [May 19] we were to restrict our activity between 5–10 NM?

"HAK: Only because he was coming back to me, just let me make absolutely clear you can hit between now and Friday any military target on the authorized list.

"CJCS: That was my understanding.

"HAK: Plus any other targets in the 5–10 NM circle anything remaining authorized.

"CJCS: That was what we expected.

"HAK: That is what you are going to get.

"CJCS: He came back to me . . .

"HAK: I will handle that!

"CJCS: Any target already authorized in addition hit any other military target in the 5–10 NM circle except we do not want civilian casualties.

"HAK: As long as you keep an eye on civilian casualties we will not get into the military targeting business.

"CJCS: You shouldn't.

"HAK: We do not want to.

"CJCS: I just want you to understand 10 NM only comes into play when we add another target. The ones you authorized.

"HAK: They can hit any time day or night. I want to take Pursley out of the targeting business.

"CJCS: He fuzzes up everything we try to do.

"HAK: We understand each other.

"CJCS: I have already put out message which said balls out until Saturday laid off until 2 June and then 5 June all restrictions lifted.

"HAK: We may extend 2 June to 5 June too much confusion on balls out. Tom, I just want to make sure don't put 200 planes in Hanoi area.

"CJCS: They don't have them to put in there.

"HAK: Don't make them have it look like an escalation.

"CJCS: I understand.

"HAK: You have to use your judgment. I don't want to tell you how many to put in there. Fly north in 20s trip the weight a little in that direction.

"CJCS: I will talk to Vogt and you will not have any problem.

"HAK: Between you and telephoning, we're in one hell of a time.

"CJCS: I do most of my business by telephone out to Vogt.

"HAK: You are our good strong arm over there, Tom.

"CJCS: Thank you." (Moorer Diary, May 15; ibid.)

In the telegram spelling out the restrictions to Admiral John S. McCain, Commander in Chief, Pacific, which, as Moorer informed Kissinger, he had already sent, Moorer addressed what should be done before the restrictions were in place:

"In view of the above temporary restriction, from now through Friday, 19 May Saigon time, you should, consistent with other priority requirements and weather limitations, concentrate air strikes inside the 10-NM radius of Hanoi against those targets authorized for strikes and which you consider would most contribute to success of our interdiction program." (Message 6177 from Moorer to McCain, May 15; ibid., Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 16–31 May 1972)

152. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, May 16, 1972, 8:45 a.m.

P: Without being too rough, the point is this. When a bold move has to be made, if someone tries and fails I understand and I will back him up, but if somebody doesn't try, then they're out. For the bureaucrats the main thing is whether they fail; most people go up in the bureaucracy who don't try. So you tell Abrams, God dammit, I want him and Thieu and the rest of them to think in terms of trying things. I don't want them to make big mistakes, but it's sitting on their asses and not trying . . . do you understand?

H: I understand.

P: My rule for promotion from now on is not whether I see a fitness report . . . I made those out for the little boys underneath me when I was in the Navy. They give the impression that his shoes are always shined, he says yes sir . . . I don't care about that. What we want is guys who try. If they try and fail I will understand and I will back them, but if they don't try, they're out on their asses.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 999, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons, 1972 [2 of 2]. No classification marking.

153. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 16, 1972, 10:06–10:49 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Armistead Selden
R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (stayed only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander M. Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Negroponte
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—CIA should provide a paper for tomorrow's meeting on possible Soviet actions, especially after the German treaties are ratified. In addition, all WSAG participants should pay close attention to the Soviet moves in the next few days.

—We should send the instructions on what to say about future plenary sessions to our delegation in Paris.

—The VNAF study and the ROK paper should be staffed out by the NSC today. The papers will be discussed at tomorrow's meeting.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–116, Washington Special Actions Group, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1–3–72 to 7–24–72. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

—We should tell the British to delay their approach to the North Vietnamese in Paris until after the Moscow visit.[2]

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

[2] The British Government proposed reconvening the Geneva Conference to establish a negotiating framework to settle the Vietnam war. In a memorandum to the President, May 17, Rogers argued that the Conference, because of its flexibility of membership and procedures, and because it had dealt with similar issues, was a viable alternative. The Paris talks, public and private, had failed and the UN—given its unwieldy size and political coloration, and North Vietnam's refusal to allow any UN intervention—was an inappropriate forum. Still, he believed it prudent to delay action until after the Moscow Summit in case a breakthrough occurred. Absent such a breakthrough, however, Rogers recommended that the President support the British effort. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–14 VIET S)

154. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 17, 1972, 10:12–10:48 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Armistead Selden
R/Adm. William Flanagan

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (stayed only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander M. Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Philip Odeen
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—We should have a list ready for Presidential consideration on Friday[2] morning of equipment which can be sent out to Vietnam on a

[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 79, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, May 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

[2] May 19.

priority basis. We should also have a judgment for the President on whether we are supplying the right mix of equipment to the South Vietnamese.

—Mr. Odeen should head a Working Group to consider the recommendations pertaining to the VNAF study.[3] These recommendations should also be ready for Presidential consideration on Friday.

Mr. Helms: (to Mr. Kissinger) I have the papers you requested yesterday. As it turned out, we had to do two papers.[4] Both of them are slightly defective, but in view of the time frame, I thought I should distribute them. Everybody should be indulgent with the papers, though.

I don't think the first paper pays enough attention to the feelings the Soviets may have had about the North Vietnamese behavior. For example, were the Soviets hoping that the offensive would be on while the President was in China—thus embarrassing him? When that didn't happen, did they want the North Vietnamese to hold off a bit so that the President wouldn't be embarrassed when he was in Moscow? Do the Soviets now want the North Vietnamese to cool off the situation? I think the paper would have been better if it had considered things like this.

The second paper doesn't pay enough attention to possible actions the Soviets could take if they want to embarrass us. I think it would be a better paper if these actions could have been related to the hypothesis which holds the paper together. I should also mention that there is a very good chronology at the end of this paper.

Mr. Johnson: Yes. The chronology is excellent.

Adm. Moorer: It's darned useful.

Mr. Helms: I hope so.

Gen. Haig joined the meeting at this point.

Mr. Kissinger: What can the Soviets do with their show of naval force in the Gulf?

Mr. Johnson: We were speculating about this just before the meeting began, and we talked about it at the Department yesterday afternoon. One thesis is that the Soviets would very ostentatiously "convoy" their merchant ships piling up in that area to a Chinese port. Then they would say they've done this under the noses of the 7th Fleet. They would say they have reasserted the freedom of the seas—and we did not challenge them. After doing this, they could say that it is now up to the Chinese to get the supplies to North Vietnam.

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[3] See footnote 3, Document 146.

[4] Not found.

Mr. Kissinger: Everything I have heard suggests that the Soviets are most concerned with freedom of movement on the high seas.

Mr. Johnson: That's right. And the thesis I just outlined is consistent with that concern.

Mr. Kissinger: They don't seem to be too terribly concerned about the mining.

Mr. Johnson: They will do something we won't prevent them from doing in any event. Then they will crow about it.

Mr. Kissinger: Even if it was our intention to stop their ships, they couldn't do anything about it.

Mr. Johnson: I'm sure the Soviets know what our real intentions are.

Adm. Moorer: (to Mr. Johnson) Alex, you said before that the Soviet merchant ships were piling up in the area. That's not so. Several ships have been diverted.

Mr. Kissinger: Where have they been diverted to?

Adm. Moorer: Some of them are now heading for Vladivostok.

Mr. Kissinger: It's strange that they come all the way from the Black Sea, only to be diverted to Vladivostok.

Adm. Moorer: I think the Soviets can use some of those cargoes in Vladivostok, anyway.

Mr. Johnson: I used the word "piling," but that obviously was not the right word.

Adm. Moorer: They are down to five or less ships heading for Haiphong. I think they have to make some kind of use of the six surface ships and the one submarine they have out there. If nothing else, it could be a face-saving operation, as Alex suggests.

Mr. Johnson: This is just speculation on our part. We have nothing to support the thesis.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, you seem eager to give us your briefing.

Mr. Helms: [Read his briefing.][5]

Mr. Kissinger: I saw a report this morning that said the 22nd ARVN Division is being moved to the coastal region of II Corps. Is that report accurate?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. Two of the division's regiments are being moved.

Mr. Johnson: Are they going to the Qui Nhon area?

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[5] Attached but not printed is the May 17 briefing entitled "The Situation in Vietnam." Brackets are in the original.

Mr. Kissinger: Wasn't the 22nd Division at Kontum?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, but it's being moved to Binh Dinh Province.

Mr. Johnson: If I recall, the 22nd Division was the first South Vietnamese unit beaten in the Kontum area. Isn't that correct?

Mr. Kissinger: I think they lost their headquarters, too.

Adm. Moorer: I don't have all the details on this. As I understand it, though, the ROKs were ambushed on Highway 1, and the South Vietnamese are trying now to offset the enemy presence in Binh Dinh Province by moving in some elements of the 22nd Division.

Mr. Kissinger: Don't get me wrong. I'm all for this movement. The division should never have been up there in the highlands. It's just that I thought the South Vietnamese had no more forces left to move around.

Adm. Moorer: It's true that the division was scattered during the Dak To operations. But since then, they have regrouped. As I said, I don't have all the details yet, but I will get them a little later today.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you think Kontum will hold long enough for our air power to be effective? What is your estimate?

Adm. Moorer: The North Vietnamese are obviously trying to bring as much power to bear on Kontum as they can. Our Intelligence people feel the enemy preparations are almost complete. I talked to Johnny Vogt less than an hour ago, and he says the morale of the South Vietnamese forces in Kontum is high. He says they now feel they can knock out the enemy tanks. As you know, the South Vietnamese were petrified by the tanks at the outset of the offensive.

Mr. Kissinger: The worst mistake the North Vietnamese can make is to trap the ARVN forces. They should always leave one road open as an escape hatch. The South Vietnamese may bug out, but they won't surrender.

Adm. Moorer: I should point out that Vogt's estimate is more optimistic than the estimate of the Intelligence people.

Mr. Kissinger: Does he think Kontum will be held—or may be held?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. He is also encouraged by the situation in MR 1. He reports that Truong is pushing his people out—and preventing the North Vietnamese artillery from coming within range of Hue. The probes and the Marine activities north of Hue have been quite effective.

Mr. Kissinger: Have the Marines undertaken any other actions besides the big operation?

Adm. Moorer: Nothing as big as that operation. But they have been actively probing the enemy positions. They are not sitting back and waiting for the offensive to begin. Vogt says Truong is making a significant impact on the South Vietnamese forces. By the way, he is going up to MR 1 tomorrow, and I will let you know what he reports.

Vogt also disagrees slightly with the Intelligence estimate of the situation in MR 3. DIA reports that the 7th NVA Division is still intact, although the 5th and 9th Divisions have been badly chewed up. Vogt says that's not so. He claims the 7th Division has also taken heavy casualties.

Based on what Vogt reports, I have to say that Kontum is probably the most vulnerable area.

Mr. Helms: I think we all agree with that. If there is a collapse while the President is in Moscow, it will most likely take place at Kontum.

Adm. Moorer: The enemy is getting close enough to Kontum to shell the airfield. In fact, they hit one C–130. We've gotten reports from prisoners, though, that some enemy units have been denied permission to withdraw. Some units have also been denied replacements they have requested. This same general line is being passed on by prisoners taken at Hue, An Loc and Kontum. I think it may be quite significant.

Mr. Kissinger: When does the rainy season begin in Kontum?

Mr. Carver: It should start in the first or second week of June.

Adm. Moorer: The heavy rain has already started in the Trail area. Ten days ago, we received over 1,000 sensor indications. Now we are down to 250 or so indications. This radical drop is caused by the torrential downpours which have just started. I think we're just about on the verge of getting the effect we've been waiting for from the rains.

Mr. Kissinger: We've been over this ground many times before, but I'm still not sure who will be helped more by the rains. Is the rain better for us or for the enemy? During the rainy season, we can't fly. What is it that the enemy can't do?

Adm. Moorer: The heavy rains help us more than they do the enemy.

Mr. Carver: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Kissinger: The North Vietnamese can't move tanks and artillery during the rainy season.

Adm. Moorer: More important than that, they can't move supplies. Most of the South Vietnamese population is on the coast. Even during the rainy season, we can use Tac Air to help support them. But the North Vietnamese can't move their supplies into position.

Mr. Kissinger: I used to read that even if the enemy took Kontum, they couldn't hold it during the rainy season. Is that true?

Adm. Moorer: I think it would be difficult for them to hold it.

Adm. Flanagan: It would be difficult for them to hold. Nevertheless, they would still have to be attacked and cleared out by the South Vietnamese. Vann is the one who said the North Vietnamese couldn't hold Kontum. It remains to be seen how good a prophet he is.

Adm. Moorer: Vann said: "Let the North Vietnamese come. We're ready for them." Well, they came. Actually, I think it's better than fifty-fifty we could retake Kontum. And farther south, in the Pleiku area, the terrain is easier for the South Vietnamese to defend.

Mr. Rush: Is the rain pattern in Pleiku the same as it is in Kontum?

Mr. Johnson: Yes. It's the same pattern throughout all the highlands.

Mr. Carver: You have to remember that it doesn't rain for twenty-four hours every day. One day may be overcast all day long. Another day may have intermittent showers. When the weather lifts, though, we can use the Tac Air. But the roads won't dry out in that brief period, and the enemy will not be able to take advantage of the break in the weather.

Adm. Moorer: There's no question, too, that the North Vietnamese are several weeks behind schedule—because they just couldn't get started on time.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Do you agree with that?

Mr. Helms: Yes. We've always said that, in fact. The offensive was supposed to start in February.

Mr. Rush: But is the enemy behind on the schedule which began when the offensive was launched on March 30?

Adm. Moorer: I don't think they had a schedule at that point. They are just trying to do everything as fast as they can. If the offensive had started in the beginning of February, they would have had a certain timetable—and of course more time to accomplish their objectives.

Mr. Kissinger: If we have only lost Quang Tri and Kontum by the time we reach July 1, that will not be a spectacular victory for the North Vietnamese.

Adm. Moorer: No, it won't. And I even think that may be the worst that can happen.

Mr. Helms: Keep your fingers crossed.

Mr. Kissinger: It won't be too bad if we have only lost Quang Tri and Kontum.

Mr. Johnson: Hue will be in for quite a bit of trouble before this is all over.

Mr. Kissinger: We haven't seen the enemy's best divisions yet, and Hue has not yet been subjected to a massive attack.

Mr. Carver: It's true that the 324th NVA Division hasn't really been thrown into the battle yet, and it hasn't been coordinated with the 304th and 308th Divisions. Nonetheless, the enemy has been active in Thua Thien Province for six weeks now—and he has suffered some heavy losses. There's no doubt that they will try to mount a two or three-front assault on Hue as soon as they get fully organized.

In the abstract, it's easy to say that they should have moved straight forward as soon as they took Quang Tri. They didn't do that because they always prepare their attacks very carefully. But it's also true that we prevented them from getting set as soon as they would have liked.

Adm. Moorer: It was like the battle of Bull Run, when there were so many Congressmen on the road that the Confederates couldn't move on to Washington.

Mr. Carver: Even the 325th Division has one of its regiments in the DMZ. The North Vietnamese don't have that many reserve forces left, either.

Adm. Moorer: This morning I heard that a prisoner said his battalion received 400 replacements but that they are now all gone. Another prisoner said his battalion received nine groups—about eighty to one hundred men are in a group—and all of them are gone, too.

Mr. Kissinger: Where did this happen?

Adm. Moorer: The first report came from MR 1, and the second came from MR 2. Two other reports—from MRs 1 and 3—say that enemy units have been denied permission to withdraw.

Mr. Kissinger: Okay. The next subject I want to discuss is replacements for the VNAF. The problem with these papers is that I can't get a conceptual hand on the issue. I feel we may be studying it to death. We want two things, one of which has not been done at all. The first is that we want to get the maximum amount of equipment into South Vietnam as soon as possible. If there is a settlement, the South Vietnamese should be in the strongest position possible—in case there are any restrictions on bringing additional equipment into the country.

Second, we want to know if we have learned any lessons from the recent events about the composition of the VNAF. I'm not saying that we have to change the composition of the VNAF. I just want to know if we are supplying the right equipment. Or, in the light of recent events, do we feel we should change the equipment mix?

I find it hard to understand how the ARVN will be able to handle the North Vietnamese with only 1,200 A–1s—when we need 130 B–52s and a huge amount of Tac Air just to contain them. The same thing is true with artillery and tanks. Perhaps we are giving them the right equipment. But I don't think this should be a forgone conclusion.

Adm. Moorer: I think it's fair to say we are giving aircraft to the South Vietnamese as fast as they can absorb them.

Mr. Kissinger: But are we giving them the right planes?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, I think so.

Mr. Kissinger: What would happen if the North Vietnamese come down into the Panhandle with the Mig 21s after we leave? Could the South Vietnamese handle the situation?

Adm. Moorer: If the North Vietnamese did as you say, there is no question that the South Vietnamese would have a difficult time defending themselves. But this depends, in part, on the time period you are talking about, too. I would hope, for example, that we would maintain a force in the area for two or three years to help deter such actions. I think we should keep some carriers out there and some squadrons in Thailand.

Mr. Kissinger: Keep in mind, though, that the Congressional climate for U.S. military actions after a settlement will not be good.

Mr. Johnson: I think we all realize that. Nonetheless, I, too, hope we can maintain some forces in Thailand. At least, that's the concept we've been working on.

Mr. Kissinger: Me too. I wonder why we can't give the South Vietnamese planes which are the equivalent of the North Vietnamese Migs. What are the equivalent aircraft?

Adm. Moorer: That depends on the rate with which the South Vietnamese can absorb them. We've thought of giving them F–4s.

Mr. Kissinger: But we never have.

Adm. Moorer: No. The South Vietnamese would like to have F–4s. It's a question of money, though. We're draining the U.S. Air Force to give F–4s to Israel and Korea. Everybody wants F–4s. But we don't have the money to produce an endless supply of F–4s.

Mr. Kissinger: Israel has 74 F–4s. You don't mean to say that 74 aircraft are draining the Air Force.

Adm. Moorer: In a way it does. There are no replacements for us. We keep making larger commitments, and the budget keeps going down. The whole problem is one of balancing a total distribution of resources, on the one hand, with the ability of the South Vietnamese to maintain and operate a sophisticated aircraft like the F–4 on the other hand. This is why we are giving them F–5s.

Mr. Kissinger: If the North Vietnamese can handle Mig 21s, does it mean that the South Vietnamese are inferior to them because they can't handle F–4s?

Adm. Moorer: No. The F–5 is in many ways the equivalent of the Mig 21, which is an air-to-air fighter. The planes are really about equal.

Mr. Kissinger: What is the equivalent of the F–4 then?

Adm. Moorer: You mean the Soviet equivalent?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Adm. Moorer: I would say the Foxbat and other newer aircraft. When the Soviets were done with the Mig 21, they didn't build any more long-range air-to-air fighters. They concentrated on the shorter-range planes.

Mr. Johnson: Is the Mig 21 an all-weather fighter?

Adm. Moorer: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: After we withdraw from Vietnam, the North Vietnamese can have complete domination of the air if they move the Mig 21s down into the Panhandle—unless we maintain the carriers and the bases in Thailand.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. And that's why we are giving the F–5s to the South Vietnamese—so that they have an air defense capability. They have eighteen F–5s right now. They are scheduled to get eighteen more next year. Ultimately—by FY 75—they will have seventy-two F–5s.

We never considered equipping the South Vietnamese Air Force as fast as the ground forces because there are more complex operating and maintenance problems associated with aircraft. Another thing to remember is that the North Vietnamese have no helicopters. All their capability is in the Migs. In fact, the South Vietnamese have three times the number of flying vehicles the North Vietnamese have. If you want to give the South Vietnamese a sophisticated air defense capability, it will take a lot of money and a lot of time. The Vietnamization program is based on the assumption that the carriers and the bases in Thailand will provide the air defense capability until the South Vietnamese have all of their seventy-two F–5s.

Mr. Kissinger: We have two problems. First, the President wants to make a decision on Friday—before he leaves—about what equipment can be sent out to Vietnam right now. Second, he wants a judgment on whether we have learned anything from recent events which will make us change the composition of the South Vietnamese forces.

I don't want to prejudge the issue. Can we get by Friday morning a list of things which could move on a priority basis while we are gone? We should err on the side of boldness. The same thing goes for tanks, too.

Adm. Moorer: We sent sixteen additional M–48 tanks to Vietnam, but the South Vietnamese only have nine crews for these tanks. This is the problem we face. We have to strike a balance between establishing a large inventory out there—which will have to be guarded and which will be subject to sapper attack—and achieving our objectives.

Mr. Kissinger: But if there is a settlement—although there is no evidence of that—it will be much better to have the equipment already in place. There will be no restrictions on training. But there may very well be restrictions on bringing new equipment into the country.

Adm. Moorer: We sent a lot of equipment in last fall on a priority basis, as you know. And this is, in part, what saved the day now. There hasn't been one instance so far of the South Vietnamese losing a bat-

tle because of the lack of logistic support. We will do everything we can.

Mr. Kissinger: Good. Do everything you can—and then add fifty percent more.

Adm. Moorer: Okay. Everybody should be aware, though, of the tremendous costs we are running up. Sometimes, there are 1,000 Tac Air and 75 B–52 sorties a day. The 40,000 naval rounds that have been fired in recent weeks amount to six times the figure we budgeted for. In short, we are shooting up our war reserves. We need relief to restore our worldwide resources.

Mr. Kissinger: I know. But you always have to go with your best pitcher, too, when the situation warrants it.

Adm. Moorer: I realize that. I'm just pointing out that a year from now we will have a difficult job getting our worldwide forces back into shape. Do you want that list by Friday morning?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Mr. Rush: We will do the best we can.

Adm. Moorer: And then we'll add fifty percent more.

Mr. Kissinger: Put this into shape so that the President can approve it on Friday. And do the same thing for the ROK paper. (to Mr. Odeen) Phil, you should get a Working Group together—with DOD, JCS and State people—to staff out the RVNAF recommendations.[6] The WSAG isn't qualified to go over those items one by one.

Mr. Odeen: Okay.

Adm. Moorer: I want to point out that it will be impossible to give the South Vietnamese a much better air defense capability in the next six months.

Mr. Kissinger: I understand that. Still, we should thoroughly review the situation. As I said before, there may be a settlement with limitations on what can be shipped into Vietnam. There may even be a Congressional limitation after a settlement. Therefore, every tank and every piece of equipment we get in now means we will be that much ahead of the game after a settlement.

Adm. Moorer: Speaking of tanks, there has not been one instance where a South Vietnamese tank has been destroyed by the enemy.

Mr. Kissinger: That's because the South Vietnamese tanks don't come within range of the enemy.

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[6] Kissinger's directive resulted in Odeen's May 18 memorandum, "Additional Equipment for RVNAF." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–087, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 5/19/72)

Adm. Moorer: You may be right.

Mr. Johnson: Did you hear the press report about a journalist who interviewed one of the ARVN tankers? The South Vietnamese was bragging that his sight was broken. When the journalist asked if there were any spares, the tanker answered that there were plenty of spare sights. But he said he didn't want to install one because it would mean that the tank is combat-ready again.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

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155. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's DeputyAssistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, May 17, 1972, 5:50 p.m.

P: What's the evening report? Anything new?

H: No, sir. It's been weirdly quiet today. At An Loc we haven't word [*heard*?] they have linked up but they are on the verge of it. Attacks have broken off completely there.

P: Are they continuing to hit them there?

H: The sorties are at 1260.

P: How about Kontum?

H: The Kontum attack should break within the next 48 hours. Abrams said units are all in position now.

P: Does he know where they are?

H: No, except that communications anticipate that. I think we are doing quite well. An Air Force General told the Chairman this morning he feels the tide is just turning. We sensed that 3–4 days ago. From the captives. The general appearance is they are hurt badly.

P: One part—I am going to write a memo on it and I want you to follow up on it. I don't think Helms' outfit is probably doing the maximum in terms of the propaganda they are doing.

H: This is done by an Interdepartmental Group run by State. CINCPAC and MACV actually do it. Millions of leaflets have been dropped.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 999, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons, 1972 [2 of 2]. No classification marking.

P: Are they playing the dirty tricks game? We have to mislead them. Don't tell the truth.

H: CIA has the black broadcast threatening invasion.

P: One point in making a major effort is to get the prisoners to come over. Tell them their homeland is finished.

H: We have a report from a Frenchman from Hanoi who said, thought the control is still good, there are signs of shortages.[2] People are bringing in the bodies killed in air strikes and putting them in the City Hall.

P: Where would these people have been killed? In the north?

H: In Hanoi from the air strikes. The port is in very bad shape.

P: Apart from the mining?

H: Yes, sir. From the air strikes. And this is a pretty reliable guy. Godley gives him high credit. They are in firm control, but there is a stronger sense of disillusionment. They are very concerned about their families. The families are concerned about what has happened to the young. We are trying to stress that in the theme of the leaflets—that the people are devastated.

P: Indicate to Helms that the President ordered doubling of the B–52's. The President ordered another 100 to come in from Europe. Let them get a little frightened. We don't do anything from the NSC group. But we have been terribly weak on the propaganda side. This is war! You remember George Creel in World War I and the silly OSS did well at times.[3] I feel this is the time now if the tide of battle is turning to pour in the propaganda.

H: Yes, it's very important to do it up north where there are heavy losses. I think we may see some increase in sapper attacks and terrorist activity starting Friday.[4]

P: Because of Ho Chi Minh's birthday?

H: Yes, in the Delta and III Corps.

P: Are the guys on alert to that?

H: Yes, sir.

P: You remember you told me about that C5A, was it?, carrying ammunition. Why not put 20 B–52's in that general area? If they pull this sort of thing, show they will be hit. What was that—a rocket attack?

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[2] The French Chargé in Vientiane showed the report to Ambassador Godley who read it and sent his summary to Washington in message 3777 from Vientiane, May 17. (Ibid., Box 550, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 9)

[3] George Creel directed the U.S. Government's propaganda effort in World War I; the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) ran intelligence and clandestine operations in World War II.

[4] May 19.

H: We didn't know whether it was artillery, mortar, or what—it was a lucky hit on the plane. That airfield in Kontum is under heavy fire.

P: Abrams is hitting that area around it?

H: They broke up an attack yesterday with B–52's. Attacks by fire are continuing.

P: Well, we are doing everything we can. Tell them on the propaganda side I really want to see by Friday noon before I leave what new ideas they can come up with on propaganda. What new things they can suggest. We want to be sure to pour terror into the hearts of the enemy.

H: I did have a memo being prepared now.

P: I want new ideas. Have them work all night. This is not routine business. The guys in that plane—seven are dead. Let these bastards back here work all night.

H: I will get on it right now.

P: Apparently Vogt is doing a good job.

H: A superb job.

P: Okay, thank you, Al.

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156. Editorial Note

On May 17, 1972, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kenneth Rush sent a memorandum to President Richard M. Nixon bringing him up to date on the leafleting project that had begun a week ago in South Vietnam but not yet in North Vietnam. Rush wrote: "No specific date for the start of leaflet operations against North Vietnam is available, inasmuch as it depends upon either favorable wind conditions for the C–130 operations, or the availability of tactical air assets for dropping leaflet bombs." (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, 385, Viet (May 16–31, 1972))

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas H. Moorer and the Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Major General Alexander M. Haig spoke on the telephone at 6:15 p.m. According to a transcript of the conversation, they had the following exchange:

"Haig: I just finished 16 of the bloodiest minutes I have had with the President on psy war business memo Rush signed on pamphlets. President is infuriated.

"CJCS: I will get after Abrams. Put a few below, several million I think actually.

"Haig: 5 million or so. The other thing, where is that plan to take some action to the north blaming on Helms and quite frankly he is mad at him and is about to fire him.

"CJCS: What has happened is we have sent out directive they will have to stop what they are doing so we can drop some with F–4s.

"Haig: Get to point ridiculous sees report from people of Hanoi upset and short of food and disturbed thought what happening to men down RRs cut that type, seem to get comprehensive program out of them quite frankly he is right.

"CJCS: Problem let's face it. Abrams has never been too enthusiastic about dropping leaflets and I will see to it that they are dropped. I will take charge of it myself." (Moorer Diary, May 17; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

Responding to Haig's call for action, Moorer talked to Admiral John S. McCain at the Pacific Command at 6:40 and told him that Nixon "just is raising hell, he thinks [it was] done back about the 10th. He is really teed off. Call me back." A short while later, at 6:55, Moorer and McCain talked for a second time, focusing on Abrams as an obstacle to the leafleting and on the President's requirement for additional ideas for psychological warfare against the North. At 7 p.m., Moorer talked again to Haig to report progress and problems. (Ibid.)

On the telephone again at 7:06, he spoke with Brigadier General Leroy J. Manor, JCS Deputy Director for Operations/Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities. After telling Manor "I know the problem is Abrams, he is not interested in this," he asked whether the leaflets dropped in South Vietnam would be suitable for North Vietnam. Manor replied: "In my opinion [it] would be because those dropping in SVN, dropped, were geared to the President's message directed against the NVN troops there recently; however, authorized us to gear it to the civilians and we are working on them and all geared to the President's message of 9 May." (Ibid.)

Moorer spoke at 7:15 p.m. to Rush. According to a transcript of their conversation, they had the following exchange:

"CJCS: I just wanted to tell you in case you get called about it, the President is very anxious to get some leaflets dropped up North and I am about to have McCain, who had gone to Abrams, get something rolling. Sullivan's Committee is going to have a meeting tomorrow morning at 0830. The point is that Abrams does not want to do it so I told McCain to build a fire under him and get something done very soon. I did not want you to be ambushed in the morning.

"Rush: I might be if I am, I will know what to say. Thanks." (Ibid.)

As a postscript to these events, on May 19, the President and Kissinger had the following conversation:

Nixon: "And first of all, I mean, I know you think that I've been bugging you too much on this psychological warfare."

Kissinger: "No, no, no, Mr., President—"

Nixon: "I mean, I have an intuition about these things—"

Kissinger: "You were—you were one thousand percent right. I had been naive. I thought there was a Presidential order. They had all agreed to it in my presence. So, I thought it was being done. So, when you went after Haig this week, I thought his answers that he would get was this is in full swing. I was shocked and outraged that they had done nothing. So, I then went after Rush. I said, 'How could that happen?' Well, it turns out that Laird and Abrams had been in collusion." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 726–11)

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157. Message From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Abrams) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Saigon, May 18, 1972, 0305Z.

27954. Subject: B–52 Usage in the Hanoi/Haiphong Area (TS). Reference: CINCSAC 162238Z May 72 (TS/Specat).[2]

1. (TS) Reference proposes use of B–52's in the Hanoi/Haiphong area as a bad weather alternative to Tacair and suggests alternatives for providing B–52 support for MACV.

2. (TS) I can think of no diversion of assets from the battle for South Vietnam that would be as damaging to the outcome of this war at this time than the premature redirection of the Arc Light effort. Night and day in all kinds of weather since 30 March the B–52's have pounded directly and relentlessly at the enemy forces attempting to overrun this country. The fact that RVN is still in this war at all is due to the B–52's

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 62, COMUSMACV General Service Messages, May 16–31, 1972. Top Secret; Immediate; Specat; Exclusive. Repeated to Moorer; Commander, Strategic Air Command, General John C. Meyer; and Commander, 8th Air Force, Lieutenant General Gerald W. Johnson.

[2] Not printed. (Ibid.)

and Tacair. I am convinced that we have hurt the enemy badly but we have to go on punishing him at the points where the war is to be won or lost until this thing is decided. I believe that we are approaching a condition in which the B–52 effort and additional Tacair should and will be shifted away from the close-in life or death targets to the enemy logistics system in country, in the border area of Laos and in RP 1. The An Loc situation in the past few days has improved to the extent that we are beginning to reduce the B–52 effort there. We still must get the close-in enemy off our backs in the Kontum and Hue areas. We are watching what appears to be an eastward shift of the enemy logistics system into the western DMZ–Khe Sanh–Ashau area. We are now completing our targeting against this system and will shift the effort to it as quickly as the Kontum and Hue situations permit. We are hurting the enemy in the Kontum–Hue areas with the B–52's and Tacair and it is now a matter of timing as to when we can hurt him most by shifting to the close-in logistics that he will need to resupply and re-equip his units for the final Kontum–Hue efforts. I am watching this carefully. We have developed appropriate B–52 targets in the area north of the DMZ that will have an immediate effect on his efforts in SVN and Tacair is working this area every day now. I do not question that B–52 strikes against the Hanoi/Haiphong area will hurt the enemy but they are of little significance if, in the meantime, we lost the battle for South Vietnam. As you know, the efforts of 3 CVA's plus Tacair from 7th Air Force are already being applied to targets in the northern portions of NVN. I am opposed to the diversion of B–52's to that area at this time.

158. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, May 18, 1972, 10:03 a.m.

Met with—LTGEN Knowles and Captain McKee—in office

We discussed the meeting with the Sullivan group at State this morning. Godley's message started it all off, talking about the decline of morale in North Vietnam.[2] There is a requirement to get a list to the President tomorrow so he can pick out some options that he may want to have conducted in the psyop business and "Dirty Tricks" program. They discussed the Voice of America and the broadcasting by CIA; Carver is working on that and we are giving him the assistance.[3] The AGC may be used, 3 special aircraft will be available for this and 3 ground stations at Singapore, Taiwan and Philippines may be used. They discussed the amphibious feints, amphibious raids, possibility of hitting Radio Hanoi with strikes and cut out their broadcast—they want daily progress reports on everything we do. Want the NVN listen to broadcast they want to work in this radio broadcast program on their frequencies. In any event General Knowles has the thing well in hand; we will be going back to another meeting tomorrow and coming up with a final report on it.

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

[2] See footnote 2, Document 155.

[3] See Document 161 and footnote 2 thereto.

159. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 18, 1972.

As I told Al on the phone last night, I am still totally unsatisfied with the efforts we are making on the propaganda front on Vietnam.[2] What I am referring to here is not so much to what is said in Washington by White House spokesmen or in Paris by Porter, but statements that are made by Mac V and, even more important, the propaganda directed to the people of North Vietnam and North Vietnam's military forces in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

What concerns me is that my study of every war in this century indicates that a propaganda chief was an almost indispensable adjunct to the military and political leaders. This was true in World War I and World War II particularly. In Korea, of course, we forgot everything we learned in previous wars and did most things pretty poorly.

It is too late perhaps to do anything except on a patchwork basis as far as this present operation is concerned. At least, however, we can push Helms and the intelligence community to come up with some fresh ideas with regard to how we deal with propaganda directed to the North Vietnamese wherever they may be.

But looking to the future I think we have to have a topflight man probably on the White House staff and of course as a direct deputy to you at the NSC to advise on and to direct where necessary the propaganda offenses which are always needed to complement our military and political actions. Of course at the present time we rely on a number of people around the White House to give us advice in these fields—Ziegler, Scali, Klein, and even sometimes Haldeman.

But we must realize that not one of these that I have mentioned has the all-round qualifications to assume the responsibilities that I have in mind. I want someone *full time* who will direct his attentions to how we handle things in a propaganda way, both covertly and overtly. I do not have in mind that this individual should ever directly or indirectly talk to the Press. He should be an inside man advising us and also carrying out the ideas that we may have on the propaganda front. This is a very specialized field and we need someone who will bring us a broader gauged understanding of the situation so that we do not make mistakes with the best of intentions in the PR area, and

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1971. No classification marking.

[2] See Document 155.

also so that we take better advantage of some of our positive actions than has previously been the case. Immediately upon our return from Moscow I want to talk to you about this and see if we can't work out some way to tackle the problem.

The President[3]

[3] Printed from a copy with this typed signature.

160. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, May 18, 1972.

While we are in Moscow it is vitally important that our bombing activity continue, at least at its present level and if possible above the present level in the event that the other carrier or other squadrons arrive on the scene and are available for use. The only restriction is that we do not want to hit in the Hanoi area as you are aware. However, it is particularly important that strikes in North Vietnam and around the area of Hanoi and Haiphong, except for the small area of Hanoi itself, be kept up at their present level so that there can be no charge at home that we have let up on our strikes, and also so that the enemy will not get any impression that because of our Moscow trip we let up on our strikes.

Due to the fact that we did restrain our military activities in the period before, during and after the Chinese trip there will be an expectation that we will reduce our efforts at this point. Under no circumstances must we make that mistake.

When we return, assuming that there has been no progress on the negotiating front, I want Abrams and Vogt to have for my consideration a major B–52 strike in the Hanoi–Haiphong area. One obvious target is the power plant in the center of Hanoi which, of course, is off limits at this point. In addition to that however, there must be some pretty good areas where B–52s would clean up where the smaller planes have already done some damage. A B–52 strike could have ma-

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1971. Top Secret; Eyes Only.

jor psychological effect at that time and we want to get it in while we still have the public support for this kind of activity. The only excuse for not authorizing such a strike, which I will consider, other than progress on the negotiating front, is Abrams' judgment that he continues to need all the B–52s on the battlefront. That, of course, would have to take priority.[2] But by that time it is my judgment that he would be able to spare half his B–52s and I would prefer around 50 of them for this kind of a strike. Get the planning at least under way so that I can have something on my desk on the 2nd or 3rd, or whatever the day is when we return.

On the propaganda front I think one theme that should be hit among the North Vietnamese forces in the South is a story to the effect that two Marine divisions from Japan and Okinawa have been ordered to North Vietnam and will be landing in the Hanoi–Haiphong area between the 1st and 15th of June. Another line that might be very effective would be to indicate that all women and children are being evacuated from Hanoi and that riots are occurring in Hanoi and in other cities in the North, and urging the soldiers to go home to defend their families against the expected attacks.

I hold no brief for either of these ideas, but they at least do give you an impression of the kind of broadcast that we should have been making long ago but that now is imperative. It will also give you an impression of the total lack of imagination we have from our own intelligence forces, both in the military and in CIA in coming up with ideas like this. I want you to really stir that pot and force them to give you some other ideas of this type that could be effective. The psychological offensive could prove to be more important at this point than the military offensive although, of course, it would not have a chance if the military offensive were to fail. Let's be sure that we get some creative thinking going on the psychological offensive immediately. I know that I have hit this theme over and over again in other conversations and memos to you and Henry, but I am totally unsatisfied with the results that we have had so far from the Departments, and I want you to call in the main leaders and boot them hard to get some action.

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[2] Abrams had made such an argument in an earlier message. See Document 157.

161. Memorandum From the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency (Carver), to John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff[1]

Washington, May 18, 1972.

SUBJECT

Brainstorming Session Results

We have separately submitted reports on current and projected Agency activities in the field of psychological warfare against North Vietnam.[2] We herewith offer for your consideration and use the following series of essentially brainstorming suggestions for psychological warfare exploitation. These are submitted in no particular logical order and were developed with no special thought or reference as to which component of the government should execute them:

a. If feasible, knock out Radio Hanoi and usurp its frequency.

b. Build audience for offshore shipboard radio by announcing in advance actual targets for naval bombardment.

c. Spread the rumor that General Giap is dead and that a double is now acting in his place.

d. Go on the air with simulated NVA tactical radio broadcasts in which great losses are stressed; utilize frequencies which will enable general populace to listen in.

e. Spread the rumor that Le Duan is acting strangely these days: accordingly, he is never alone/he is always alone.

f. Use radio messages and erratic flight pattern to simulate dropping of men behind enemy lines; drop parachutes in area of simulated team drop.

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[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–B01720R, Box 7, GAC [George A. Carver] Chronology, May–June 1972. Secret; Sensitive. Copies were sent to Sullivan, Lieutenant General Knowles, Rear Admiral Flanagan, Brigadier General Manor, and Mr. Crane.

[2] Carver sent at least two reports on May 18 to Richard Kennedy. The first discussed what could be done with an existing psychological warfare activity—a "Disinformation Program to Convince Hanoi Leadership that the U.S. Government is in Clandestine Communication with Dissidents Within North Vietnamese Officialdom." The second proposed establishing a radio station to broadcast programs similar to those Axis Sally and Tokyo Rose broadcast in World War II. About this proposal Carver wrote: "The basic pitch will be very simple: the war is madness and it continues only because of the blind ambition and insane policies of the top Party leadership in Hanoi." (Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–B01720R, Box 7, GAC [George A. Carver] Chronology, May–June 1972)

g. Float rubber boats ashore at strategic positions.

h. Run harassment flights toward Hanoi to keep alert mechanism going 24 hours a day; perhaps use drones for this purpose.

i. Use cloud projection device to bring certain key messages forcefully to attention of the masses.

j. Drop leaflets entitled "How to Find Out Where Your Soldier Son Is Today."

k. Disseminate outdated or otherwise troublesome quotations from Ho Chi Minh (in his own voice, if possible).

l. Splice together an invented speech by Le Duan—one which would cause him ridicule.

m. Drop gift packages including transistor radios.

n. Put our own voice messages on tail-end of encrypted NVA tactical messages.

o. Announce new austerity measures on black radios.

p. Drop leaflets simulating actual currency.

q. Surface Ho's "last letter" warning against insularism and adventurism.

r. Focus on paucity of men left of marriageable age.

s. Write new lyrics to North Vietnamese political songs to ridicule the leadership.

t. Cannibalize old speech tapes of Ho Chi Minh and provide daily advice from the grave to the populace.

u. Airdrop weekly Vietnamese newspapers.

George A. Carver, Jr.[3]

[3] Carver initialed "G.A.C. 2" above his typed signature.

162. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, May 18, 1972.

SUBJECT

Psychological Warfare Operations Against North Vietnam and North Vietnamese Forces in South Vietnam

In accordance with your request, following is a report on the psychological warfare operations now under way or in the planning stage against North Vietnam and North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam.

Leaflets

A. Under Way

—144 million leaflets have been or are being printed. Three separate texts are included, directed at North Vietnamese forces and the civilian population in the North. They inform the readers of your May 8 speech, and call on North Vietnamese soldiers and civilians to press for peace on the basis of your proposals and stress the theme of severe setbacks to North Vietnamese forces.

—Of these leaflets, 15.7 million have been dropped in three separate areas of South Vietnam (see map at Tab A) since May 11.[2] These leaflet drops are continuing.

—600,000 leaflets were dropped over Hanoi by F–4 strike aircraft at 2400 Washington time on May 18.

B. Projected

—Dissemination in the next day or so of a minimum of 10 million leaflets has been directed by CINCPAC within the area of the Red River Delta and contiguous territory. 5 million more are to be disseminated by wind-drift in the North Vietnamese panhandle.

—Preparations are being made to use B–52's for mass leaflet dissemination.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 5, Chronological File, May 1972. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Haig initialed for Kissinger. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Attached but not printed. The map of Vietnam showed that 1,000,000 leaflets were dropped north of Hue on May 11; 2,350,000 in the Highlands west of Kontum and Pleiku on May 13, 15, and 16; and 12,350,000 in the An Loc area north of Saigon on May 10, 12, and 15.

—Leaflet operations are being considered on-going, and materials will be updated as appropriate.

Radio Broadcasting

A. Under Way (Overt)

—VOA has doubled its programming to North Vietnam since May 8. It now broadcasts five hours daily during prime evening time (6–11 p.m.), using five transmitters with strong medium and short wave signals. The last two hours of a million watt, medium-wave transmitter are beamed directly at Hanoi. There has been no jamming.

—VOA's signal has been upgraded further for beaming into North Vietnam by renting satellite transmission facilities.

—Programming has consisted of your May 8 speech, official U.S. Government statements, coverage of the restrained Chinese and Soviet reaction to the mining, reportage of favorable U.S. opinion polls on your actions,[3] and war correspondent reports emphasizing the positive side of the military situation in the South from our standpoint.

—The GVN General Political Warfare Department's Voice of Freedom is broadcasting 20 hours daily to North Vietnam (1100 to 0700 hours, Hanoi time). Content has emphasized South Vietnamese resistance, the support of South Vietnam's allies, and North Vietnamese casualties.

B. Projected (Overt)

—Widespread dissemination in North Vietnam by air-drop of simple, one-channel radios is being investigated. Some stocks are believed to be on hand, and more can be ordered.[4]

—Refining of VOA programming to increase effectiveness will be undertaken. For example, favorable military information which up to now has not been broadcast due to its classified nature will be declassified.[5]

—Friendly foreign radio broadcasters which are believed to have substantial North Vietnamese audiences (e.g., BBC and Radio Australia) will be requested to include favorable, but accurate, accounts of

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[3] The President underlined the phrase beginning with "reportage" and ending with "actions," and wrote in the margin: "*good.*"

[4] In the margin beside this paragraph the President wrote: "*good.*"

[5] President Nixon underlined the last five words in this sentence and after it wrote the following: "(put out that French report on Hanoi morale)." He was referring to the report submitted by Ambassador Godley based on material the French Chargé in Vientiane had provided. See footnote 2, Document 155.

the military situation in South Vietnam and of foreign reactions to our military measures which are disadvantageous to North Vietnam.

C. Under Way (Covert)

—Existing black and grey CIA assets (Radio Saigon, Voice of Freedom, and other black and grey stations in both South Vietnam and Laos) are concentrating on carrying the message to North Vietnamese troops and the civil population in the North that dissension exists, popular morale is poor, and that criticism of the regime is widespread.

D. Projected (Covert)

—A plan has been drafted for setting up an intensive, "Tokyo Rose" or "Axis Sally"-type 24-hour a day broadcasting effort against North Vietnam. The basic pitch will aim at the people over the heads of the top leadership, and will have a very simple theme: the war is madness and continues only because of the blind ambition and insane policies of this top leadership. The announcers will be persons who speak the North Vietnamese dialect.

—To gain audiences, the programming will be made against a background of carefully selected musical entertainment, spot news conveying an aggregate message of North Vietnamese defeat, and accurate information about such matters as killed or captured North Vietnamese soldiers and areas where the population will be affected by communications cuts.[6]

—CIA communications specialists are already working with their counterparts in the military service and the Defense Department to arrange for transmitters, determine optimum broadcast frequencies, and resolve the many technical problems this project poses.

—Consideration is being given to the possibility of using a shipborne transmitter if necessary. The U.S. Navy communications ship "Blue Ridge" has been offered by the JCS for this purpose.

Disinformation

—CIA has a covert program underway to convince the top Hanoi leadership that the U.S. Government is in clandestine communication with a high-level dissident faction within the North Vietnamese Party apparatus.[7]

—The first phase of this program involves "leaking" through a trusted agent in Vientiane the alleged word of an American official that "there are some people in Hanoi who *also* want to end this stupid

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[6] In the margin beside this and the previous paragraph the President wrote: "*good.*"

[7] In the margin beside this paragraph the President wrote: "*good.*"

war" and "thank God not everybody on the Central Committee is crazy."

—"Evidence" will then be provided from a variety of sources and agents to develop the legend that the U.S. Government is in secret contact with a dissident faction in the North Vietnamese hierarchy. It might even be said that it was this faction which recommended the mining of Haiphong as the only tangible way to break the power of the hardliners in Hanoi.[8]

—The effects of this disinformation program could be significant—tensions and suspicions within the already-paranoic Hanoi leadership might increase, and the unity of this leadership might be weakened.

Other

(All of the measures below are under study for early implementation)

—Air-drop of empty parachutes, radios, and other equipment in various parts of North Vietnam to suggest airborne agent insertions.

—Placement of rubber life-rafts and associated equipment on North Vietnamese beaches to suggest sea-borne agent insertions.[9]

—Collection of sea-borne assets and deployment along the North Vietnamese coast to suggest that amphibious assaults are impending.

—Actual launching of small, commando-type operations along the North Vietnamese coast.[10]

—Location of the Radio Hanoi and Liberation Radio transmission facilities in North Vietnam, and inclusion of these facilities on regular USAF target listings.

All of the foregoing operations (with the exception of the disinformation program) are being coordinated by the Indo-China Ad Hoc Committee which is chaired by Ambassador Sullivan. Its members include senior representatives of State, CIA, OSD/ISA, the JCS, USIA, and the NSC Staff. The psychological warfare program is being handled at this level to assure rapid decisions and implementation of agreed actions. Under this committee, an intensive effort is now under way to develop more steps to increase the impact of our total psychological warfare program. Regular progress reports will be submitted to you.

Following your telephone conversation with General Haig on May 17,[11] we have undertaken a major effort to rejuvenate and energize all

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[8] The President highlighted this sentence and wrote in the margin: "*good.*"

[9] In the margin beside this and the previous point the President wrote: "*good.*"

[10] In the margin beside this point the President wrote: "*good.*"

[11] See Document 155.

facets of our psychological warfare. Themes will be broadened to encompass those facets of the program included in your May 18 memorandum to General Haig.[12] General Haig has spoken personally to Director Helms, Ambassador Sullivan, Admiral Moorer and all other key officials associated with this program and General Haig is confident that dramatic improvements will follow.[13]

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[12] Document 160.

[13] In the margin beside the last sentence of this paragraph the President wrote: "*good*." At the top of this page Nixon handwrote instructions to Haig as follows: "*Al—Include:* 1. More B52s & more carriers are on the way—(double the present number). 2. *Regular* stories of casualties in South. 3. *Heavy* play on Soviet Summit. 4. Drop a lot in *Hanoi* itself (at time we don't bomb). 5. *Warn* more escalation is coming if they don't settle. (R.N.—out of control etc)"

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163. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972, 10:06–10:44 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Armistead Selden
Maj. Gen. David Ott

JCS
Adm. Thomas Moorer
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Philip Odeen
Mark Wandler

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 79, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, May 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Mr. Kissinger will obtain a Presidential decision on the options presented in the Defense paper on Augmentation of Military Assistance to the RVN.[2]

—We will go ahead with the plan to provide two additional M–48 tank companies to the Koreans.

—Mr. Kissinger will obtain Presidential guidance on whether to go ahead during the next two weeks with the psychological warfare operations which intrude on North Vietnamese territory. The other psywar operations should proceed as scheduled.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Helms) Dick, what do you have?

Mr. Helms: [Read his briefing.][3]

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Mr. Kissinger: I assume that the North Vietnamese are not attacking Kontum because they can't launch the attack yet. I assume the delay is not part of their strategy. (to Mr. Carver) Is that right, George?

Mr. Carver: Yes, I think so. The North Vietnamese have been trying for three weeks to get into position for the attack on Kontum. The 320th and the 2nd Divisions just haven't been able to get set. Some captured North Vietnamese ralliers have told us, for example, that the B–52s hit their assembly areas and caused heavy casualties.

Adm. Moorer: That happened two times.

Mr. Carver: I think we must say that they have delayed the attack on Kontum because of their inability to get it off the ground. This doesn't mean, though, that they won't eventually launch the attack.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Mr. Kissinger: What about the situation at Hue? The delay in the attack there isn't part of the enemy strategy, either. Or is it?

Mr. Carver: It's not part of the North Vietnamese strategy up there. You have to remember that the North Vietnamese took very heavy casualties at Quang Tri, and this slowed down their preparations for the attack on Hue. In addition, they have been pushed back somewhat by the South Vietnamese operations around FSB Bastogne. In order for the North Vietnamese to get to Hue from the west, they have to push

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[2] The May 19 paper is a memorandum from Deputy Secretary of Defense Rush to the President; ibid.

[3] Attached but not printed is the May 19 briefing entitled "The Situation in Vietnam."

through the fire support bases—and get their artillery into position to fire on Hue. They have not yet been able to do this.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. There's no question that they have been slowed down at Hue.

Mr. Sullivan: What about the report I heard that two Soviet tankers have been diverted from their run to Haiphong? Is that true?

Mr. Carver: Yes. They were ordered yesterday to go to Odessa.

Mr. Sullivan: Are there any more Soviet tankers heading for Haiphong right now?

Mr. Carver: No.

Adm. Moorer: One of the two tankers Bill [Sullivan] mentioned is in the Baltic.

Mr. Johnson: Have any of the Soviet ships gone into Chinese ports yet?

Mr. Sullivan: I think some of them are going to Singapore.

Mr. Carver: At any rate, none of them are heading for Haiphong.

Mr. Kissinger: Have some of them gone into Chinese ports?

Mr. Johnson: That's what I just asked.

Adm. Moorer: Not that we know of. A couple of ships—none of them Soviet—have gone to Hong Kong. I think one of the East German ships went to Hong Kong.

Mr. Kissinger: Have all the ships in Haiphong been offloaded by now? How long does it take for that?

Adm. Moorer: It takes quite a while. The maximum number of ships they were handling—if I recall correctly—was forty a month.

Mr. Sullivan: I think four ships were diverted to Hong Kong—and they are there now.

Mr. Helms: The *Frieden*—the East German ship Anthony Lewis wrote about yesterday—just got docked. It's been in the harbor, though, since April 7. There's obviously been quite a jam-up in the harbor.

Gen. Haig joined the meeting at this point.

Mr. Sullivan: Have we noticed any signs yet that the Chinese are beginning to change their transportation system around—to accommodate the North Vietnamese?

Mr. Helms: No, we haven't seen any signs of that so far.

Adm. Moorer: It will be very hard for the Chinese to adjust on a basis of transporting 200,000 tons a month to North Vietnam.

Mr. Johnson: We should probably be able to detect increased truck movements—if the rail lines are cut.

Adm. Moorer: If we use the figure of 200,000 tons a month, that means 400 trains a month—or thirteen trains a day. That's an awful lot of supplies to move and a big adjustment for the Chinese to make.

Mr. Johnson: I agree. But I think that the first signs we will probably pick up will be the increased truck movement in North Vietnam.

Mr. Rush: If that's the case, it will eat up even more of their POL.

Mr. Johnson: I gather that we haven't yet spotted an increase in the truck movement.

Adm. Moorer: No, we haven't. But we're watching for it.

Mr. Kissinger: Are we bombing the road bridges, as well as the railroad bridges?

Adm. Moorer: Sure.

Mr. Kissinger: How are the roads? Are they in good enough condition for the North Vietnamese to move huge truck convoys?

Adm. Moorer: The North Vietnamese can come down in two ways: one road runs parallel to the railroad, and the other road more or less runs along the coast.

Mr. Johnson: Do both roads have hard surfaces?

Adm. Moorer: Yes. The coast road splits up at Cam Pha into two roads. In any event, all the roads use the Doumer bridge—and we've knocked it out.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Adm. Moorer) Tom, do you have anything for us?

Adm. Moorer: Not really. The activity within the last twenty-four hours has been light. I agree with George [Carver] that the enemy is trying like hell to get Kontum—but he hasn't been able to launch the attack because he has sustained heavy losses. The TOW missile has been put to good use up there—accounting for the destruction of APCs, as well as tanks. The North Vietnamese have almost come to the wire a couple of times with sappers, but that's as far as they got. The South Vietnamese are also planning to mount an operation with Rangers and tanks to open up the Kontum pass on the road between Kontum and Pleiku.

Mr. Kissinger: Isn't it better when the South Vietnamese forces are surrounded? They seem to perform much better when they are surrounded.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, it certainly seems like it.

Mr. Helms: The South Vietnamese may bug out when there is an escape hatch available to them, but they don't surrender when they are surrounded.

Mr. Rush: There's another factor, too, which may have an effect on this. When the South Vietnamese Marines are captured, the North Vietnamese kill them.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. The North Vietnamese don't keep the Marines as prisoners.

Mr. Sullivan: But the South Vietnamese do the same thing.

Adm. Moorer: I also agree with Dick [Helms] in that we should keep a sharp watch on the Delta—on MR 4.

Mr. Kissinger: Maybe Thieu should put the 21st Division back there. It doesn't seem to be doing much where it is right now.

Mr. Johnson: It's only three miles away from An Loc right now.

Adm. Moorer: I promise you that the 21st Division will be in An Loc before you leave Washington. Some advance elements of the division have already made contact with the forces in the city.

Mr. Kissinger: What about the report that the division would already be in An Loc if the B–52s had not done so much damage to the road?

Adm. Moorer: There isn't anything to that report.

Mr. Sullivan: The British gave us a cable that their man in Hanoi sent in after talking with the Poles in Hanoi. The BDA reported in the cable is very interesting. It says that the North Vietnamese have lost about eighty percent of their industry. It also reports that the port of Hon Gai has been knocked out, and, consequently, that the North Vietnamese are no longer able to export their coal.

Adm. Moorer: That's right.

Mr. Sullivan: The cable goes on to say that the road bridge over the Red River has also been knocked out. It's estimated that the bridge won't be repaired for several months. The Poles have sent their women home, too.

Adm. Moorer: That's the correct thing to do. Our diplomats don't go into areas under attack.

Mr. Johnson: They shouldn't, but it happens from time to time that they do.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Rush) Ken, can you tell us briefly about your paper?

Mr. Rush: Yes. We gave consideration to three basic options. The first option—with the equipment listed on page six—is a minimum action and includes only those items which we think are necessary to sustain the South Vietnamese during the current situation.[4]

The second option—with the equipment listed on page seven—includes Option 1 and provides additional equipment we think the

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[4] Option 1 consisted of the following: an additional 32 UH–1 assault helicopters, 30 STOL aircraft, 850 60-millimeter mortars, and 100 TOW anti-tank weapons, 5 additional F–5A Freedom Fighter aircraft, 48 additional A–37 aircraft, and 4 patrol craft inshore ships. (Talking Paper for the Deputy Secretary of Defense for the Washington Special Actions Group, May 22; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 79, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, May 1972)

South Vietnamese would need if we were to withdraw from Southeast Asia in the next two to four months. Some of the items in this option could not be effectively used by the ARVN right now, but they would eventually provide the ARVN with greater military capability. This option has two sub-options: 2A, which includes items the South Vietnamese would need if we withdraw quickly; and 2B, which includes additional items that would provide them with even greater military capability.[5]

The third option—with the equipment listed on page eight—provides additional equipment which would demonstrate our highly visible support. In all probability, though, this equipment would not be useful for the South Vietnamese for two or three years to come. We don't recommend this option.[6]

General Ott worked on this paper all night, coordinating it with all the services. I think he can fill you in on some of the details.

Gen. Ott: Mr. Rush outlined the basic options. I should point out, however, that the cost figures in the paper are soft. Nonetheless, we think they provide a good feel for the order of magnitude of the decisions.

In addition, there is no requirement to approve the three options in their entirety. Each item in all of the options can be considered separately.

Mr. Kissinger: The President can't address this issue item by item. He has to deal with the options.

Gen. Ott: I know that. The President can choose any option he wishes—say Option 2A or 2B—and then we can take care of the items. All of the items are listed on pages six, seven and eight.

Mr. Kissinger: This is a good paper. The President can handle the options.

Gen. Ott: Once he decides on the option, we can handle the items for you. We would like some flexibility with them, though. For example, we would have to know how you want the items transported to Vietnam. If we fly them out, it will take three days. But if we send them

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[5] Option 2 included Option 1 items plus 14 RC–47 reconnaissance aircraft, 23 AC–119K fixed wing gunships, 23 EC–47 intelligence collection aircraft, 3 WHEC coastal patrol and naval gunfire support ships, 12 C–119G maritime patrol aircraft, 32 self-propelled twin 40-millimeter air defense guns, tanks for two M–48 tank battalions, howitzers and guns for 3 field artillery battalions, 28 C–7 transport aircraft, and 64 Vulcan 20-millimeter automatic anti-aircraft weapons. (Ibid.)

[6] Option 3 included: helicopters for one air cavalry troop for each military region in South Vietnam (144 attack helicopters, 160 light observation helicopters, and 182 multipurpose military helicopters); four missile air defense battalions; 52 A–4B Skyhawk aircraft; and three squadrons of F–4 Phantom aircraft. (Webb and Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam, 1971–1973,* p. 216)

by ship, it will take three weeks. Some of the items are ready to go now, and we can get some high visibility by flying them out.

Adm. Moorer: We have the transportation capability to do whatever the President wants.

Gen. Ott: Inclosure one of the paper lists what we are doing now. All the services have done a tremendous job in making up the South Vietnamese combat losses and in getting as much as possible out there.

Mr. Kissinger: Somebody told me that we knocked out all the ARVN M–48s with air strikes. Is that true?

Adm. Moorer: We did destroy some of the M–48s, especially in the Quang Tri area, after they were abandoned.

Mr. Kissinger: That's what someone told me.

Mr. Rush: We did it after they were abandoned and after the bridge was knocked down. If we hadn't destroyed the tanks, the North Vietnamese would have captured them.

Gen. Ott: There was also a report that we were using termite grenades. But that was a mistake. The report should have said thermite grenades.

Adm. Moorer: And we destroyed some of the artillery pieces the South Vietnamese abandoned, too.

Mr. Rush: As I recall, we destroyed twenty-eight artillery pieces.

Gen. Ott: I believe our paper is in a form the President can handle.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's say the President chooses a certain option. Does that mean that the equipment listed in the option is on top of what we are sending now? Or will someone say that the President has simply approved what we already are doing?

Adm. Moorer: This is additional equipment. For example, the minimum essential needed for immediate combat capability is: 32 HU–1 assault helicopters; 30 STOL aircraft; 850 60-mm mortars; and 30 TOW anti-tank weapons.

Mr. Kissinger: Which option is that?

Adm. Moorer: It's 1A. And it is additional equipment to what is already being sent.

Mr. Kissinger: As I understand it, Option 1B includes Option 1A. Each option starts with 1A and then builds on top of that. Is that correct?

Gen. Ott: Yes. And we can't pick Option 3—for highly visible support—just by itself. The other options would be included in Option 3.

Mr. Kissinger: It's cumulative. Everything starts with Option 1A.

Adm. Moorer: That's right. As you notice, too, the various items are listed in two ways. When it says "provide," that means this is an

additional item which had not previously been programmed. When it says "accelerate," it means we will speed up the delivery of an item which has already been programmed.

Mr. Kissinger: This is a good job. What are your recommendations?

Mr. Selden: We don't recommend Option 3 because it has a lot of disadvantages. It will take two or three years to train the people to use the equipment, it will draw down our inventories and it will cost a tremendous amount of money. We put it in just so that we could give the reasons why it should be knocked out.

Mr. Rush: That's right.

Gen. Ott: I would recommend Option 1 right now. Option 2 is cease-fire oriented, in that it lists what we can do to fill out the entire South Vietnamese capability. The South Vietnamese won't be able to make immediate use of much of the equipment listed in Option 2. But at least it would get the equipment there. If you are thinking in terms of a settlement, it would be better to approve Option 2A, or both 2A and 2B.

Mr. Kissinger: Just in military terms, how long can the North Vietnamese go on with the heavy losses they are sustaining?

Mr. Carver: In the northern part of the country, there hasn't been much heavy activity since Quang Tri was captured. I think the North Vietnamese can hang on for another month to six weeks. At An Loc and in the southern part of the country, the North Vietnamese can't keep up the activity they have sustained for the last four weeks. We've gotten an intercept indicating that some of the battalions of the 5th and 9th NVA Divisions have been hit hard. And when the rainy season starts, the terrain in the south won't permit the enemy to use tanks and artillery on a large scale.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we assume that they are depleting their stocks in MR 3?

Mr. Carver: Not necessarily. They've been building up some of the stockpiles in Cambodia for three years. Since we don't have a handle on the precise level of the stockpiles, it's wise not to gamble and say the stocks will be used up. I think the stocks will last for at least several more weeks. It's more likely that the manpower loss and the weather will make it impossible for them to continue the large-scale operations in four weeks.

Mr. Kissinger: Once they get the manpower replacements, can they start the offensive again?

Mr. Carver: First they have to refit and reorganize the units. I think the earliest they will be able to go back on the offensive is November or December. And at that time, I suspect the political dynamics will have more of an impact on the decision to renew the offensive than the logistic or military dynamics.

Mr. Kissinger: Is the same thing true for the situation at Kontum?

Mr. Carver: Kontum is the diciest situation of them all. The North Vietnamese are poised for the attack, and they can launch it any time within the next couple of weeks. Frankly, I'm bearish that Kontum will be held because the quality of the GVN forces there isn't very high.

Mr. Kissinger: I think we all wrote off Kontum four weeks ago.

Mr. Carver: I don't know if the GVN forces will be able to hold once the attack on Kontum begins. The North Vietnamese have four more weeks in which to try to get everything together. After that time, they will probably have to begin to pull back.

Mr. Kissinger: Whether they've taken Kontum or not, they will have to begin to pull back in four weeks.

Mr. Carver: Even if they do take Kontum and then have to pull back, they will still be able to harass Pleiku and Highways 14 and 19. However, the weather will force them to close down large-unit operations in the western highlands in four or five weeks.

Mr. Kissinger: MR 1 is the most dangerous area for us because there are no limits on the enemy stockpiles.

Mr. Carver: They have not taken heavy losses up there in the last couple of weeks, nor have they expended their stocks very much. Since Quang Tri, they have been probing and harassing the South Vietnamese.

Adm. Moorer: The enemy is working hard to establish a logistic base at Khe Sanh.

Mr. Carver: That's right. The Binh Trams have been moving from Laos to Khe Sanh.

Adm. Moorer: I agree with George [Carver]. We'll only have the threat of large-scale operations for six more weeks. Maybe the enemy will have the same difficulty at Kontum that he has at An Loc. But in five or six weeks, the North Vietnamese will have to go into a harassing posture. Some of the units will probably be called back to North Vietnam.

Mr. Helms: The history of this war is that people say we didn't know the North Vietnamese could bring tanks and logistics down to a certain area, or that we didn't expect this, or that we didn't expect that. With this consideration in mind, I think you have to be a pretty gutsy person to say the enemy will run out of supplies anywhere in South Vietnam.

Mr. Sullivan: Has the Trail been closed down now? Are the transportation units being called back to North Vietnam?

Mr. Carver: The Trail is still open, and the 472nd Transportation Group is still active, as are most of the Binh Trams.

Adm. Moorer: They haven't ordered any transportation units back to North Vietnam. In fact, they didn't even do that last year.

Mr. Sullivan: I realize that. But sometimes the water can get to be ten or twelve feet deep in certain places on the Trail. When that happens, the supplies can't be moved.

Adm. Moorer: I mentioned the other day that the sensor count is down to almost zero now, and that's because the torrential downpours are beginning. In the north, the enemy has plenty of supplies. It's now too difficult for them to bring in supplies for the attack on Hue. They can bring the supplies down the DMZ and then through the A Shau Valley.

But then they will have to go up to the Hanoi–Haiphong area for more supplies if all the forward stocks are really exhausted and if they are without access to ready refills.

Mr. Kissinger: When will that happen?

Adm. Moorer: I suppose they are already thinking about it right now.

Mr. Sullivan: What about the POL situation?

Adm. Moorer: Once the heavy rains begin, the North Vietnamese won't use as much POL as they have been using in recent weeks. Besides, almost all the bridges are down, and they won't be able to transport any supplies.

Mr. Sullivan: Do the Soviet tankers in Haiphong constitute a floating POL reserve for the North Vietnamese?

Mr. Carver: It's not too much of a reserve—only about twenty days' supply.

Mr. Sullivan: What are the ships—10,000 ton tankers?

Mr. Carver: Yes. If after another month—say at the end of June—the North Vietnamese have not achieved by military means the things they told the cadres and the faithful that they would achieve, then they have to begin to rethink the political costs of their investment. At that point, I think, the political factors will begin to have more importance than the support and logistic factors.

The North Vietnamese said early on in the offensive that they had taken An Loc—but they haven't done so. They claimed they were achieving great victories and smashing the ARVN—but they haven't done so.

Mr. Kissinger: Even if they take Kontum, that won't mean they won a smashing victory over the ARVN.

Mr. Carver: That's right. And my point is that they haven't even taken Kontum. If, after another month, they only have Quang Tri and Loc Ninh, that isn't very much.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's assume they do take Kontum. We used to sit around this table and say that we expected to lose Kontum—and that was even before the offensive began.

Mr. Carver: Okay. Assume that the North Vietnamese are holding Quang Tri, Kontum and Loc Ninh after another four or five weeks. That isn't very much to show for the all-out effort of virtually their entire army.

Adm. Moorer: Especially after an all-out effort for fifty days.

Mr. Carver: The people sitting around the Politburo table in Hanoi may say that this is reminiscent of Tet 1968. Only this time, they've also lost their ports, and the bridges are down, too—thereby cutting the transportation system. The debate could be quite grim.

Mr. Kissinger: This may explain why Le Duc Tho has not gone home.

Mr. Sullivan: Porter feels that Le Duc Tho has remained in Paris so that he can call for a cease-fire when the North Vietnamese are at the peak of their achievements—whether they have accomplished all their objectives or not. Many of us, I should point out, are not attuned to Porter's thesis.

Adm. Moorer: I'd like to return to the paper on augmentation of military assistance. Another possibility might be for the President to direct the execution of an option—say Option 1—with selected items from Option 2. We could start moving the items in Option 1 right now. Then we could screen other items from Option 2 on a selected basis.

Mr. Johnson: Do we know what the budgetary impact of these options will be?

Adm. Moorer: Not entirely. The budget figures are soft.

Mr. Kissinger: What about the M–48 tanks for the Koreans?

Adm. Moorer: That's a separate question.

Mr. Johnson: Defense recommends that we provide two additional M–48 companies to the Koreans.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you have a problem with that? It sounds as though you are not in complete agreement with it.

Mr. Johnson: I agree with the recommendation. But I'm also thinking about the question of balance. If we provide the additional M–48s, the replacement cost will be, I think, about $14 million. What will we get from the Koreans? Hopefully, the minimum we would get from them would be an agreement to stay in Vietnam until the end of the year. I don't think we could hope to get any more than that from them.

Mr. Selden: You are right. The replacement cost will be $14 million.

Mr. Sullivan: Our people agree that we should provide the two additional M–48 companies. But they point out that we may have a problem bucking the Koreans if we ask them to move the two companies from Korea right now and wait 190 days for the replacements. We may have some hard bargaining ahead with the Koreans.

Adm. Moorer: The Koreans can't lose. No matter how they look at it, they will end up with two more tank companies.

Mr. Sullivan: We agree with you. I'm just pointing out that the Koreans may try to drive a hard bargain.

Mr. Kissinger: Are there any other items of business?

Mr. Sullivan: We're going flat out on psychological operations, as a result of Gen. Haig's intervention. We dropped seventeen million leaflets last night. George is working on the program for black radio, and VOA will double its broadcast time. We also plan to drop 800,000 leaflets on Hanoi.

Mr. Kissinger: Not while we are gone.

Adm. Moorer: We're scheduled to do it.

Mr. Sullivan: Couldn't we just drop the papers?

Mr. Kissinger: No.

Adm. Moorer: If you don't want us to do it, you have to tell me today—so that I can cancel the orders. The plan calls for the aircraft which normally dispense the chaff to carry two canisters of leaflets and to drop the leaflets along with the chaff.

Mr. Kissinger: Do we drop chaff over Hanoi?

Adm. Moorer: Sure. But the chaff probably never hits the ground.

Mr. Kissinger: I understand.

Adm. Moorer: It's simple to stop the operation—if you want us to.

Mr. Sullivan: Tom [Moorer] has some other things, too—such as raids by small South Vietnamese teams.

Adm. Moorer: There are several things which will have to be implemented by CINCPAC.

Mr. Sullivan: (to Mr. Kissinger) Do you want us to hold off on these things until you return from Moscow?

Mr. Kissinger: [Taking paper from Mr. Sullivan.] Let me see the paper.

Mr. Johnson: The plan calls for landings by small South Vietnamese teams?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes.

Adm. Moorer: We would also drop some money. We've got an interesting bag of dirty tricks.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm not quarreling with them. The question is, though, do we want to do them in the next two weeks?

Adm. Moorer: In any event, we can make the preparations and be ready to go ahead with them when you get back. Bill [Sullivan] was going to send a message to the Embassy, too.

Mr. Sullivan: I was going to say that a number of action messages are being sent out at the direction of the highest authority. I was going to tell the Embassy to snap to and to implement these actions.

Adm. Moorer: But CINCPAC will have the implementing authority.

Mr. Kissinger: I'll talk to the President and see what he wants to do during the next two weeks. If we do these things and if they surface, they will be noticed as new activities.

Mr. Johnson: That's right.

Mr. Kissinger: I'll get the President's view.

Mr. Sullivan: What should we do about the plan to increase broadcast time?

Mr. Kissinger: There's no problem with that. I'm talking about the physical intrusion of North Vietnamese territory. If we do that, the North Vietnamese will go running to the Soviets and complain about what bad guys we are to be doing these things while we are in Moscow.

Mr. Carver: Should we go ahead with the disinformation program?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. There's no problem with that.

Mr. Sullivan: I suppose we can drop the leaflets in the Panhandle.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes. I'll speak to the President about the leaflet drop on Hanoi, though.

Adm. Moorer: If you want me to get a cancellation message out today, you should let me know by 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Kissinger: I'll let you know before that time.

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164. Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Head of the U.S. Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks (Porter)[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972, 12:55–1:04 p.m.

[Omitted here are introductory greetings and discussion of Porter's schedule.]

Nixon: Well, I don't think you have anything to do in Paris for a while. You might as well stay here for three or four months.[2]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 726–8. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume.

[2] As of May 4, the United States placed the public talks in Paris on an indefinite halt. ("Break Indefinite: Porter Implies Secret Sessions Are Also in a Deadlock," *The New York Times*, May 5, 1972, p. 1)

Porter: Well, I'll stay wherever you want me to, sir, but we'll have things to do. This place is extremely interesting, and I can at least contribute something to the scene. I think that there they are trying to position themselves to do something quickly, and that's why Le Duc Tho is kept in Paris. It's not an easy matter for them to move a man from Hanoi—especially a Politburo man—from Hanoi into Paris, because the protocol requires that he stop two days in Peking, and then stop in Moscow, also, to balance things out. And, there's at least two or three days travel involved. So, I think they just made up their minds that he's going to have something to say sooner or later, and I don't think that what he will say eventually will perhaps resemble what they'd hoped he'd have to say. [unclear]—

Kissinger: Bill thinks that their offensive is way out of kilter now.

Porter: Oh, I have, what else, my own—

Nixon: They're getting killed.

Porter: They're getting—they're getting killed, and —

Nixon: Wait 'til—wait 'til next week.

Porter: Well—

Nixon: Of course, because I've just decided [unclear] I mean, I'm—the biggest error we've made was to fail to bomb them before China, and during China, and after China, and it's not going to be made again. These sons-of-bitches are going to get it.

Kissinger: Well, we didn't have the excuse then [unclear]—

Porter: I—I—

Nixon: It's decided. They're going to get it now, because this—the die is cast. We cannot have a situation, cannot have a situation having cast this die, where we worry about somebody saying: "Well, then, maybe we shouldn't hit them this way or that." There're no limits—except nuclear.

Porter: I think they're going for cease-fire sooner or later, but a cease-fire not involving South Vietnam only. I think to cease the activity in the North. They'll do it to create a diversion, if nothing else. They haven't got their—they haven't reached their objectives in the South by any means, and that will not be the main motivation. But, if you keep up this, giving them this kind of punishment, then what we're doing in the North will become even more important than what they haven't achieved in the South.

Nixon: But then there's no leverage—

Porter: I think—

Nixon: —there's no leverage to get a cease-fire, or a return of our POWs, unless you're doing something to them that hurts them.

Porter: Exactly.

Nixon: And they're going to get a little more hurt. We're not doing enough, actually, now—

Porter: Well [unclear]—

Nixon: —except for the pusillanimous—

Porter: Yes.

Nixon: —activity, they—

Porter: Yes, sir.

Nixon: —we haven't done enough in the North [unclear]. We'll need a hell of a lot more shocks on your little—

Porter: Yeah.

Nixon: —little scaredy cats in the State Department, as usual. But that's all right, they've been shocked before.

Porter: Well, I'm very pleased to hear—

Nixon: You ought to tell them develop a little more backbone in the Foreign Service. And, incidentally—

Porter: I think it's [unclear]—

Nixon: —in the Foreign Service—in the Foreign Service, it isn't just—

Porter: Sir—

Nixon: It isn't just the Foreign Service. The Pentagon is as bad—

Porter: Hmm.

Nixon: —a bunch of spineless bastards. [unclear]—

Kissinger: Well, I just gave hell to McCain.

Porter: Yes?

Nixon: Well, what the hell—what did he say? What—

Kissinger: Well, I said—

Nixon: —in the name of God? You know Agnew. Now, Agnew is a—you see, talking to him and Church here, Agnew is a wonderful guy, a super hawk, and very simple because he can't really understand these things. So, he goes out there and McCain says, "Oh, gee whiz. We'd do a lot better, but they—our orders restrict us in the bombing the North." That's just bullshit, absolute bullshit! They have restricted themselves. They won't bomb. They haven't bombed for four days, because they say that the ceiling isn't high enough, 5,000 feet. Now, for Christ's sakes, how in the name of God—I mean we should be hitting the North before this trip[3] every goddamned day! Right?

Porter: Yes, sir.

Nixon: [unclear] those books. I wish to God—what'd McCain say?

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[3] Nixon and Kissinger were about to depart for the summit meeting with the leaders of the Soviet Union.

Kissinger: Well, he said he'd have to check into it. I said I'd never seen the President so angry.

Nixon: You're right.

Kissinger: I said—

Nixon: And he's going to see me a lot more angry, because he's supposed to be our guy.

Kissinger: I said that—

Nixon: He is, and if he wants to stay on the job—and I want him to stay on; I like him, but, damn, not this way—he's going to start taking his orders from here, or else! Now, I'm not going to have this crap anymore.

Kissinger: Well, and you know, I looked at the pictures. I never look at bomb pictures, but the only restriction we've put on them until tomorrow morning is the 20-mile zone near the Chinese border.

Nixon: Which we should have. We shouldn't bomb near China because if they head over the Chinese border it's an unnecessary irritant. And, of course, it's not necessary. They're not even hitting anything—

Kissinger: There are only three targets in that area. One is two bridges. One of those bridges is right on the border and connects China—

Nixon: Have we hit it?

Kissinger: —and Vietnam. We cannot hit this. We've taken out the other bridge, and the third target are railroad marshalling yards, where they switch from one track to the other. And we have—of course, if that picture is halfway accurate—we've destroyed those marshalling yards 100 percent, which you never get. I mean they got some lucky hits and they seem to have leveled those completely. So, I don't know what these guys are talking about.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: There's no train moving right now in between Hanoi and the border—

Nixon: I'm going to deal with the North—

Porter: Hmm.

Nixon: We've got to be in the North. There's no limits there, there's no more.

Kissinger: And—

Nixon: And no trucks.

Kissinger: Trucks they haven't ever used before. They haven't started it—

Nixon: Well, basically, you're going to—we can—you can take out. Believe me, with rivers to cross they've got a problem—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: Those pontoon bridges are easy to hit—

Kissinger: It's not a doable proposition anyway to put two hundr—two million, two hundred thousand tons of supplies on trucks. They've never done that before—

Nixon: Well, seriously, I know that you have to go back to Paris, and I know you've got to continue the charade and all the rest, but do it. And—but one day it may, the thing's going to come. When it does, then you—

Porter: It'll come.

Nixon: —then you'll earn your money.

Porter: It'll come—

Kissinger: He agrees that we shouldn't have a plenary session until we've had a private session that had real progress.

Nixon: Absolutely.

Porter: Oh, yeah—

Nixon: Otherwise you'll have a plenary, you see—well, you've got—you have a plenary session and everybody here in this country will say: "Well, let's stop the bombing when we have the plenary session." Oh, no! We—they sold us that once; they're not going to sell it again.

Porter: Our position, as I've gone over it with Henry this morning, [is] you've made your offer. You've got them at a disadvantage right from the moment you put the offer through, regardless of which channel you use—

Kissinger: That's right.

Porter: —and that's the way to go at it, and also the last time the public is quite convinced of that, they came and said nothing, and that we tried to follow through with a plenary and they said more of nothing.

Nixon: That's right.

Porter: And we've now got them in a position where they're—

Nixon: They're next with it. It's their move. It's their move—

Porter: It's their move. Exactly—

Kissinger: And we will say that we offered through the Russians to meet with them on the 21st. They never even answered up 'til now.

Nixon: Yes. Do you think they might offer that clever plan which, of course, I suppose which in desperation they might now say: POWs for withdrawal? We will never accept it. But if they do?

Kissinger: No.

Porter: I don't think they're going to do it.

Nixon: No?

Kissinger: Because—

Porter: They have too many other things. POWs for withdrawal is so contrary to everything that they've said, and are still saying that—

Nixon: Good.

Porter: —a turnover of that nature is very improbable—

Kissinger: I don't know what Bill thinks, but I think their actions prove that *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* isn't right that they have won in the South. If they thought they had won in the South they would offer it, because then they'd get us out and knock over the ARVN. But what they're asking of us is that we should knock over Thieu.

Porter: Because they still have to ask it. They haven't achieved their objectives.

Kissinger: If they had achieved—

Nixon: They can't knock him over and they're asking us to knock him over—

Porter: Oh, yeah—

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: Don't you think, Bill, that if they thought they could do it, they would get us the hell out of there—?

Porter: That's right. If they had managed to break out of our large pocket there, they'd be proceeding with us separately figuring it's just a question of getting down towards Saigon—

Nixon: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, the networks all are doing wishful writing and wishful talking.[4]

Porter: Yes.

Nixon: That the—that they won in the South. Hell no; they haven't won in the South. They're not going to. Let me say—no more. Well, we appreciate what you're doing—

Porter: Mr. President, I admire what you do [unclear]—

Nixon: Well, there're lots, lots of good, lots of good things in the Foreign Service, despite when I bitch now and then. Let me say it's bureaucrats. That's the problem.

Porter: I know.

Nixon: I mean that's the trouble with the goddamned Russians: they've got too many bureaucrats. But don't ever become a bureaucrat.

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[4] Nixon was probably referring to such articles in *The New York Times* as "Tensions Over Vietnam," by Max Frankel on May 2; "Nixon's Hardest Decision," by James Reston on May 3; "The Real Decisions," by Tom Wicker on May 11; and "Military Effect," by Craig R. Whitney on May 14. Similar in substance and tone were articles in *The Washington Post* such as "Vietnam: A Time of Reckoning," by Peter Osnos on May 7; "A Gamble Not Worth Winning," by Richard Holbrooke and Anthony Lake on May 14; and "Relentless Patterns to Our Vietnam Nightmare," by Richard Holbrooke on May 15.

Porter: I haven't yet, and I've been there too long. Now, I think I'm set in my ways—

Nixon: Right. Bye. Good. All right. Bye. Bye—

Porter: Bye, bye, sir.

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165. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972.

SUBJECT

Ambassador Bunker's Assessment

Attached at Tab A is an encouraging assessment from Ambassador Bunker concerning recent developments in South Vietnam.[2] He considers your decision to mine to have been pivotal in the improved posture of the South Vietnamese. It has restored confidence at all levels. Ten days ago there was fear that by now An Loc might have fallen and that battles for Hue and Kontum would be raging. Instead, the enemy appears to be having some difficulty in each area. General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker believe that, thanks to your actions and subsequent steps taken by the GVN, we can view the future with greater confidence than we could after the fall of Quang Tri.

Military Developments

—General Abrams believes that the enemy has suffered very heavy personnel and matériel losses.

—The enemy is obviously having difficulty in moving supplies and replacements in the face of air interdiction and worsening road conditions in the Laotian Panhandle.

—The enemy has had only minimal assistance from local force units and guerrillas, evidenced by the fact that since the beginning of the offensive there has been significant activity in only 16 of the 44 provinces.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 130, Vietnam Subject Files, HAK/Pres Memos (NVA) Situation in Vietnam (May 72). Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. At the top of the page Haig wrote: "Kennedy see me."

[2] Not attached. Bunker's backchannel message 94 to Kissinger, May 19, is ibid., Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, From Amb. Bunker—Saigon, 1972.

—South Vietnamese forces have a good chance of holding Hue and inflicting a major defeat on the enemy.

—Preparations for defense of Kontum are sound and the defenders there have a reasonable chance of holding the city, given the massive air support they will receive.

—Although ARVN efforts to relieve An Loc have continued to be disappointing, the critical point appears to have passed. The leadership of the MR–3 commander, General Minh, has been disappointing.

—Although hard fighting is expected in MR–4, it is not expected that recent enemy activity in the area will prove decisive.

—It may soon be possible to shift some of the air effort away from immediate support of ARVN forces and concentrate it on the enemy logistic system.

—General Abrams perceives a noticeable improvement in the fighting spirit in MR–1 and a degree of improvement in MR–2. He believes that we are approaching a turning point in the battle and that with the air and fire support we can provide we can now commence to persuade the South Vietnamese that the time is near when they can go on the offensive.

U.S. Actions

—The President's decision to mine North Vietnamese harbors has had a tremendous psychological impact in South Vietnam.[3] It underlined U.S. determination and resolve and created a climate in which the GVN could and did take significant steps to improve its defense posture. Your bold decision has heightened the resolve of the Vietnamese leadership and the population.

—The Vice President's visit has also provided a positive and tangible manifestation of U.S. interest and support.[4]

—U.S. bombing of North Vietnam is being carried out in a thoroughly professional manner.

—The U.S. Military Airlift Command is doing a particularly effective job in flying in supplies.

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[3] The President underlined this sentence and wrote in the margin: "H—Find a way to get this out. Bunker could help do it."

[4] Vice President Spiro T. Agnew traveled to Tokyo to represent the United States at a ceremony on May 15 to return Okinawa to Japan. Then Agnew flew to Bangkok and from there made a day-trip to Saigon on May 17. During the morning Agnew met with President Thieu, the President's senior political and military advisers, and senior Americans, including Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams. (Message Vipto 30 from CINCPAC, May 18; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1086, Jon Howe, Vietnam Chronology File, May 8, 1972) In the afternoon, Agnew and Thieu met privately for 20 minutes. (Message Vipto 29; ibid.)

South Vietnamese Actions

—After addressing the nation following your speech, President Thieu declared martial law throughout the country and has taken additional steps to mobilize South Vietnamese resources. He is seeking emergency powers to legislate by decree in most areas of government.[5]

—This weekend or by early next week the GVN is expected to announce an emergency taxing program. It has already announced that price controls will be strictly enforced.

—The nation has responded well on the whole to Thieu's call for unity and belt-tightening. He has effectively asserted his leadership and brought home to the population the seriousness of the situation.

Pacification

—There has been a continuing erosion of local security in many areas and the enemy is maintaining a high level of terrorism and proselytizing. Many areas are virtually untouched by this problem but the enemy has succeeded in others almost by default.

Economic Conditions

—The GVN over the short term faces a serious business recession but it is not now at a crisis point. If military activity remains high unemployment problems could become critical.

Leadership

—Having seen what his new commanders have been able to do in MR–1 and MR–2, President Thieu will probably be more aggressive in cleaning out dead wood.[6]

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[5] On May 10, after a Presidential declaration of emergency, Thieu imposed martial law in South Vietnam.

[6] The President highlighted this sentence, underlined part of it, and wrote: "Haig—push him *hard* on this."

166. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972.

SUBJECT

General Abrams' Assessment

Attached at Tab A is a comprehensive report from General Abrams on the situation in South Vietnam.[2] You are already familiar with much of the information and the summary section was incorporated in the report received earlier today from Ambassador Bunker.[3] However, the following new points are of particular interest:

Military Region 1

—ARVN command and control of forces in MR–1 has improved significantly with the arrival of Lt. General Truong.

—A viable replacement system has been established and the personnel strength of the 1st ARVN Division is higher now than it has been at any time during this campaign.

—Twenty crews have been trained on TOW anti-tank weapons and 6 anti-tank helicopters were moved to the Hue area on May 18.

Military Region 2

—As in MR–1, new leadership has improved the situation in MR–2.

—The newly assigned TOW systems and TacAir have been effective against recent tank attacks and have built ARVN confidence in their ability to cope with enemy armor.

—The situation around Kontum remains serious but the enemy is taking a heavy beating from the massive air power being devoted to the area.

—The South Vietnamese have decided to fight the main battle of the central highlands in Kontum. Pleiku is only lightly held.

—Because of damage inflicted by air strikes, improvement in leadership and correction of command and control deficiencies there is a reasonable chance that Kontum can be held.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 130, Vietnam Subject Files, HAK/Pres Memos (NVA) Situation in Vietnam (May 72). Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Not attached. The report is in message 30984 from Abrams to McCain, May 19. (Ibid., RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 62, COMUSMACV General Service Messages, May 16–31, 1972)

[3] See Document 165.

Military Region 3

—The enemy has suffered severe damage and is believed to have pulled most of his surviving forces away from An Loc and is keeping pressure there through fire power alone.

—The crisis appears to be past in the province and air support around An Loc is being reduced and shifted to more critical areas.[4]

Military Region 4

—The action in MR–4 continues to be on a small scale with widely scattered ground attacks.

—The main concern at the moment is the movement of elements of the 1st NVA Division out of Cambodia into MR–4.

—Pacification has been set back in parts of MR–4 but there are presently no major crises.

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[4] The President commented in the margin: "*Haig*—continue to hit them when they break off."

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167. National Security Decision Memorandum 168[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT

Military Assistance to the RVN

The President has reviewed the Department of Defense study on ways to augment our military assistance to the RVN and directs the actions spelled out below.

Options 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b in the Defense study are approved and should be implemented immediately.[2] It is understood that these actions are in addition to on-going resupply actions to rebuild stocks and

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 364, Subject Files, National Security Decision Memoranda, Nos. 145–264. Top Secret. A copy was sent to the Director of Central Intelligence.

[2] For a listing of the items in Options 1 and 2, see footnotes 4 and 5, Document 163.

replace combat losses. Defense may exercise flexibility in implementing these options should some aspects prove infeasible after more detailed review or if added items are determined to be needed and consistent with the objectives of the approved options. The President should be informed promptly of any changes that are made.

The President noted the large volume of matériel already enroute to South Vietnam or scheduled for early shipment. He directs that the matériel that has yet to be shipped be reviewed to see if its arrival in RVN can be accelerated. In particular, critical weapons and other high priority items should be shipped so as to arrive prior to August 1, if possible. The President wishes to be kept informed of actions taken to this end.

The President has directed a further study of the RVNAF to see what other changes in organization and equipping are needed. The objective should be to assist the RVNAF to cope with the new NVN tactics and weapons that we have seen during the current offensive. In addition, it should consider further steps to enable the RVNAF to carry out essential missions in the absence of U.S. combat and support forces. DOD has prime responsibility for preparing the study with the Department of State participating as appropriate.

This study should be prepared and submitted for consideration by the President by June 5, 1972.

Henry A. Kissinger

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168. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972.

SUBJECT

Further Reports from Foreign Diplomats in Hanoi

Two further reports covering the situation in Hanoi since the bombing and mining of the North have been passed on to us by

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 160, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, May 1972. Top Secret. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. On the first page of the memorandum Nixon wrote in the margin: "Haig—get these out to press without compromising *the sources*."

Indonesian and British sources in Vientiane. Although brief, the reports tend to corroborate the information we gained via Vientiane from the French representative in Hanoi which I passed to you on May 17.[2]

According to [*less than 1 line not declassified*] in Vientiane, Indonesian representatives in Hanoi have been reporting that:

—There is considerable unrest in Hanoi as a result of U.S. air strikes and the mining of North Vietnamese ports.

—The prices of basic commodities have doubled or tripled and a black market has come into existence which the DRV authorities appear unable to eliminate. There are stories going around about executions of black marketeers.

—In paying a farewell call on Giap, a departing Indonesian found him morose and taciturn, in contrast to his "usual self-confidence."

The British [*less than 1 line not declassified*] in Hanoi, in a sensitive report made available by the British intelligence representative in Vientiane, noted that:

—The Paul Doumer Bridge in Hanoi (the main highway and railway link between Hanoi and China) was out as of May 10, with one span severed completely 20 yards from the northwest abutment. As of May 16, no repair work was in progress, although a one-way pontoon bridge had been constructed alongside which was in use.

—North Vietnamese citizens listen to BBC news broadcasts and accept straightforward reporting as true, but information accredited to a particular source such as "a military spokesman in Saigon" is often not accepted. An NVA colonel had heard on the BBC that the Thanh Hoa Bridge was down, and passed this word as confirmed to visiting *New York Times* reporter Anthony Lewis.

—Morale has stiffened under the bombing attacks. Following the raids, work is immediately resumed and no fuss is made of the interruption.

You will recall that like the Indonesians, the French representative in Hanoi mentioned black marketing, high food prices, and widespread popular knowledge of the cutting of communications lines and the downing of bridges. The British [*less than 1 line not declassified*] report also underscores popular knowledge of what has been happening. There is a discrepancy between the Indonesian and the French descriptions of the people's attitude and that of the British, with the former two tending to speak of the populace being disturbed and the latter telling of stiffening morale. However, the outward responses of a disciplined, stoic people as seen by [*less than 1 line not declassified*] may

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[2] See footnote 2, Document 155.

differ considerably from what they actually think, and the Indonesian and French reports are probably closer to the mark.

The hard information contained in all these reports is being incorporated in our intensified psychological warfare campaign directed against the North Vietnamese people and armed forces. There would definitely appear to be receptivity in North Vietnam to such information.

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169. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972.

I am thoroughly disgusted with the consistent failure to carry out orders that I have given over the past three and a half years, and particularly in the past critical eight weeks, with regard to Vietnam. It is easy, of course, to blame the bureaucracy for failing to carry out orders. But we always have the problem of the bureaucracy. It is our responsibility to ride the departments hard to see that when I give an order it is carried out faithfully, or that I am told as quickly as it is known that the order is not being carried out, and why that is the case.

I refer specifically to the fact that I have ordered, on occasion after occasion, an increase in the quantity and quality of weapons made available to the South Vietnamese. All that we have gotten from the Pentagon is the run around and a sometimes deliberate sabotage of the orders that I have given. I want it clearly understood, that from now on the moment that I find another instance where there is such insubordination the man who will be held responsible, and whose resignation will be requested, will not be the one down the line in the woodwork but the man at the top, whoever he is.

The performance in the psychological warfare field is nothing short of disgraceful. The mountain has labored for seven weeks and when it finally produced, it produced not much more than a mouse. Or to put it more honestly, it produced a rat. We finally have a program now under way but it totally lacks imagination and I have no confidence whatever that the bureaucracy will carry it out. I do not simply blame

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

Helms and the CIA. After all, they do not support my policies because they basically are for the most part Ivy League and Georgetown society oriented. On the other hand, the Pentagon deserves an even greater share of the blame. After all, they are supposed to take orders from the Commander-in-Chief. The trouble is that we left too many of the McNamara people around in high places and they are constantly sabotaging everything we are trying to do.

Finally, I have told Henry today that I wanted more B–52s sent to Vietnam. I want this order carried out, regardless of how many heads have to roll in carrying it out. Even though the bomb load is smaller until they can be remodeled, the psychological effect of having 100 more B–52s on the line in Vietnam would be enormous. I either expect this order to be carried out or I want the resignation of the man who failed to carry out the order when it was given.

The crowning insult to all this injury is to have the military whine around to Agnew that they were not getting enough support from the Commander-in-Chief in giving them targets they could hit in North Vietnam.[2]

I want you to convey directly to the Air Force that I am thoroughly disgusted with their performance in North Vietnam. Their refusal to fly unless the ceiling is 4000 feet or more is without doubt one of the most pusillanimous attitudes we have ever had in the whole fine history of the U.S. military. I do not blame the fine Air Force pilots who do a fantastic job in so many other areas. I do blame the commanders who, because they have been playing "how not to lose" so long, now can't bring themselves to start playing "how to win." Under the circumstances, I have decided to take the command of all strikes in North Vietnam in the Hanoi–Haiphong area out from under *any Air Force jurisdiction whatever*. The orders will be given directly from a Naval commander whom I will select. If there is one more instance of whining about target restrictions we will simply blow the whistle on this whole sorry performance of our Air Force in failing for day after day after day in North Vietnam this past week to hit enormously important targets when they had an opportunity to do so and were ordered to do so and then wouldn't carry out the order.

The examples I have given above are only a small number of those that I could point to if I had the time. What I am saying is that I want

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[2] During Agnew's visit to Saigon (see footnote 4, Document 165), in the afternoon of May 17, with only senior Americans present, he received a briefing from General Abrams. At the end, Agnew asked if there were anything militarily that was not being done that should be done. According to the report: "General Abrams responded in negative and said that he had plenty of air including that now enroute." (Message Vipto 28 from CINCPAC, May 18; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 VIET S)

some discipline put into our dealings with the State Department, with the Pentagon and with the CIA, and I want that discipline enforced rigidly from now on out.

I want you to convey my utter disgust to Moorer which he in turn can pass on to the Chiefs and also convey it to Abrams and Bunker in the field. It is time for these people either to shape up or get out.

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170. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972, 8:05 p.m.

M: Henry, I think you ought to get this to the President whenever you can. I just talked to Johnny Vogt and called the Fleet Commander. They've got all the authorities that they can handle, their morale is high, they are knocking the hell out of them. They're glad to have this support. The Wing Commander said his people think this is terrific. . . . restraints that the President is putting on people out there. I don't know where this is coming from. I've talked to Guam, Saigon, Hawaii and out to the Fleet; morale is high. Johnny Vogt says we are really accomplishing something. I just don't know where this is coming from. They have adequate authorities; they've got more than they can handle anyway.

K: I've checked with the Vice President's people; I think he exaggerated what he was told.

M: He must have. Johnny Vogt said things have never looked better. And you did see Abrams' report on the situation in Hue?[2] He thinks we can hold Kontum, An Loc has eased off and Hue has been enforced up to full strength. They believe they can inflict defeat on the enemy.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 14, Chronological File. No classification marking. The call was on the "Secure Phone." All brackets are in the original.

[2] See Document 166.

K: Just hold things together while we're gone. But, Tom, we have got to move some B–52s out there. I have a memo here that would curdle your blood—[3]

M: We are looking at it now.

K: I am getting hell for not transmitting all the orders I am getting.

M: We'll get some out there. We can't get a hundred but—

K: 100 is probably too much.

M: We will get some.

K: Right. After tonight, you are not dropping any leaflets.

M: No leaflets anywhere?

K: You can do them in the Panhandle.

M: But none in Hanoi.

K: Put the other things in standby till we come back.

M: We're working on planning—

K: Go ahead with the planning but just don't execute while we are gone.

M: [Something about Haig . . . ?]

K: Haig was carrying out . . . one particular assurance to the Soviets that I wanted to have in the President's mind.

M: When you get back, I want to go for radios and command control.

K: Do that starting that Sunday.

M: Have a good trip, Henry.

K: Thank you, Tom.

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[3] Document 169.

171. Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency[1]

Washington, May 19, 1972.

SUBJECT

Meeting of President Thieu [*less than 1 line not declassified*]

1. President Nguyen Van Thieu held a two-hour tour d'horizon [*less than 1 line not declassified*] on 17 May 1972. After a review of the military situation, Thieu observed that the enemy's objective was to take the Quang Tri/Thua Thien area and Kontum and Binh Long provinces, which would give them a "leopard skin" hold on the country. They would then call for a ceasefire and set up coalition administrations in those occupied areas. Thieu thought that they wanted to achieve that goal by August to enable them to present a package peace proposal at the Paris talks which, in view of the election period in the U.S., would be very attractive to everyone at that time. If the enemy attained their objective, South Vietnam (SVN) would be placed in a very weak position and would have to accept a coalition government or else lose everything. As far as neutralization was concerned, it was Thieu's opinion that a neutral state could only be maintained if an area was "designated not to be used by any foreign power, including economically," that is, no foreign power could be allowed to occupy an area or to exploit it. Thieu felt, however, that in any peace solution, the most SVN would agree to would be to hold elections. Thieu emphasized that SVN could not agree to the setting up of a coalition government.

2. Speaking about President Nixon's stand on the war, Thieu noted that he was taking a strong position, but that because he was a Presidential candidate Nixon hoped that between the time of his Moscow trip and the elections there would be a breakthrough in bringing the Vietnam war to an end, thus eliminating it as a campaign issue. Thieu pointed out, however, that Nixon did believe in the domino theory and that although North Vietnam was making an all out effort to defeat

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 28, Vietnam, May 1972. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. In the May 22 transmittal memorandum to Rush, Helms wrote: "Attached is a report from a very sensitive and reliable source in Saigon on a 17 May conversation between President Thieu and [*1 line not declassified*]. The conversation contains useful insights into Thieu's thinking about North Vietnam's current strategy and about the present policy of the United States toward Vietnam. Thieu also expresses very clearly his desire for National Assembly approval of the emergency powers which he has requested." (Ibid.)

Vietnamization, the U.S. was making an all out response to their aggression.

3. Referring to speculation that U.S. troops might be sent back to SVN, Thieu said he had told the Americans that he would never request U.S. troops to return, nor would he do anything to prevent troop withdrawals. He told [*name not declassified*] that only the U.S. Government could make decisions related to those two matters.

4. Lastly, Thieu spoke about the pending bill in the National Assembly (NA) authorizing him to assume special powers. Thieu said he had asked the Deputies and Senators if they wanted him to fail in the struggle against the enemy and lose the entire fatherland. He had explained to them that all he wanted to do was combat the Communists and that he needed the power to do so. During this difficult period, he needed the NA, all the nationalist political parties, and the people "standing behind him." With that help, and the help being given by the Americans the nation could be saved. Thieu had assured the NA members that he would not sign any peace or war declarations without first bringing them before the NA and obtaining its approval. If the Communists agreed to serious negotiations, the NA would have a voice in any decisions, even though the South Vietnamese peace delegation in Paris already included some Senators and Deputies. Thieu said he would let the NA choose a "supervisory committee" with representatives from both houses to "go to Paris and Geneva to help us" in negotiations for a solution and to give their opinions on topics discussed. Thieu noted that in granting him special powers, if the NA wanted to put a time limit on those powers, that was up to the NA. Thieu told [*name not declassified*] that he had asked the NA not to consider whether the proposed bill would be helpful to him personally, but to consider whether it would be helpful or harmful to the nation. Thieu added that he thought the NA was afraid that he might use the special powers in some way detrimental to the nation's best interests.

172. Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, May 20, 1972.

I have covered the points I will be making in this memorandum for the most part in conversations with Henry and with you, but I simply want to put them in writing so that you will have guidance for the period that we are gone on our trip to Moscow.

With regard to Vietnam, it is vitally important that there be no abatement whatever in our air and naval strikes while we are gone. It is particularly important that any stories in the press indicating that we are letting up during this period be knocked down instantly, preferably in Saigon, if necessary at the Pentagon and if necessary even by you at the White House. There is nothing that could hurt us more in the minds of public opinion than some suggestion that we made a deal with the Russians to cool it in Vietnam while trying to negotiate agreements with them in Moscow.

Just to be sure that there is absolutely no misunderstanding with regard to my orders they include the following:

1. There should be a minimum of 1200 air sorties a day[2] and with the *Saratoga* on station this might be increased to 1300. What I am saying is that the number of sorties should be at maximum level during the entire period we are gone, unless you receive orders to the contrary from me directly.

2. At least 200 of these sorties should be on targets in the Hanoi–Haiphong area. With the *Saratoga* on station that number might well go up to 250 or 300.[3] In fact, it would be well to increase it just slightly in that period so that there can be no implication at all to the effect that

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1971. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. An information copy was sent to Kissinger.

[2] On May 15, Nixon made the same point to Kissinger. In a telephone conversation between 9:29 and 9:35 p.m. the President said: "Now, with regard to Vietnam, you're sure that Abrams is continuing to pound the hell out of them now? I don't want any, any letup. I want 1,100 to 1,200 sorties a day. Right?" To which Kissinger replied: "Absolutely." (Telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, May 15; ibid., White House Tapes, White House Telephone, Conversation 24–126)

[3] On May 23, Moorer wrote to McCain, who was in charge of the air war against North Vietnam: "Higher authority desires that heavy air strike pressure be maintained on North Vietnam during coming week. Insure that at least 200–300 sorties daily are flown in Route Packages 4, 5, and 6 with emphasis on the Hanoi/Haiphong area and northeast railroad." (Message 5988 (corrected by hand to 5675); ibid., RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 16–31 May 1972)

we are letting up because of our trip to Moscow. The only restrictions to the air sorties in that area are the 15-mile area around Hanoi proper and the belt of 15 miles or whatever we have previously ordered next to the Chinese border. But otherwise I want a relentless air attack on our targets in North Vietnam during this period—particularly on rail lines, POL and power plants. Concentrate on those targets which will have major impact on civilian morale as well as accomplishing our primary objective of reducing the enemy's ability to conduct the war.

3. On the propaganda front, I expect not only implementation of the orders I have previously given, some of which were covered in the memorandum you prepared for me,[4] but I want some new ideas developed and implemented as quickly as possible. The entire effort should be to create pessimism in the North among the civilian population and pessimism in the South among the North Vietnamese forces there. What disturbs me is the routine way that CIA and USIA simply report the news of my speech rather than putting out reports with regard to more planes landing expected, riots in the streets of Hanoi and desertions in the troops in the South. This patty-cake method of handling the propaganda is typical of our conduct of the war on the military side, and I want it changed instantly to conform with my thinking as to how we are to act militarily from now on. As I have pointed out on several previous occasions, we shall have to admit that this is one of our major failures—not having an adequate propaganda and public relations effort going along-side what I believe is a superb foreign policy in most respects. When I get back I have some other ideas as to how we can correct this and we will probably set up a new office in the White House directly under Haldeman, similar to the one C. D. Jackson[5] had under Eisenhower, so that we can finally begin to get the benefit we deserve from our foreign policy initiatives.

4. I want you to direct Abrams and Bunker to get out more information with regard to morale in the South. This certainly is something we should be able to do because it is true and also because it will help at home. If they say they don't want to get out on a limb ask them what they think I have done. I also believe that that French report or any other reports that you have through secret channels of morale problems in North Vietnam must be leaked into the press—not in a column which is read by a few hundred people, but some way in to wire service or television stories. Colson will know what to do if you give him the material. Follow up.

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[4] Document 162.

[5] Special Assistant to President Eisenhower responsible for international affairs, cold war planning, and psychological warfare.

[Omitted here is discussion of how to deal with Congress over the SALT agreement. It is printed in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972, Document 250.]

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173. Message From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Washington, May 21, 1972, 0033Z.

3432. Deliver during waking hours only. Subj: Special Operations (U). Ref: A. JCS 121229Z May [*codeword not declassified*]. B. JCS 6177/152340Z May 72.[2]

1. Recently, several independent reliable sources have reported that while the population of Hanoi and Haiphong is generally calm, stresses are becoming apparent. Stepped up military activity and frequent air raid alerts are obviously extremely disturbing. Authorities are exerting major effort to bolster the people but family dislocations, food shortages, rising prices, black marketing and general disruption of transportation and communications systems are beginning to result in serious protests. Increased NVN casualties in SVN, stepped up air attacks with resultant casualties and damage in NVN, and perhaps the reaction to the mining, aggravate this condition.

2. Higher authority has requested that all efforts be made to exploit these and other weaknesses in NVN. The object is to convince the people of NVN of US resolve by whatever means necessary.

3. MACSOG has been disestablished; its missions and tasks cancelled reference A. These facts notwithstanding, request that as an urgent matter, MACV begin negotiating with the RVNAF Strategic Technical Directorate (STD) with a view toward STD planning for the operations listed below, and any others targeted against NVN, which are within STD current capability. Additionally, other operations which are outside STD capabilities but within your current capabilities, some of which are also listed, should be planned for early initiation.

A. Conduct direct action missions against fuel pipe lines, communications lines, power lines, and railroads in NVN using RVNAF

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 16–31 May 1972. Top Secret; Flash; Exclusive. Repeated to General Abrams and Focal Point Officer.

[2] Neither found.

Strategic Technical Directorate personnel supported by US air and naval assets.

B. Create the impression of presence of friendly agent teams in NVN by inserting resupply bundles, dummy parachutes, rubber boats, and pseudo agents, briefed as reinforcements for notional teams.

C. Drop fire fight simulators in selected areas of NVN to create impression of attack.

D. Insert counterfeit money in NVN by air, agents or mail. (CIA to provide money and mail delivery capability.)

E. Insert bogus documents, revealing weaknesses in the regime, in NVN by air, agents or mail. (CIA to provide documents and mail capability.)

F. Insert former NVA personnel wearing enemy uniforms in RVN as short duration agents to perform a variety of missions.

G. Conduct amphibious diversionary operations using the PACFLT amphibious ready group and/or VNN amphibious ships.

H. Insert radios, gift kits, and propaganda literature in NVN using air or water float techniques.

I. Insertion of photographs of NVA invasion of the Republic of Vietnam.

J. Support of other agency approved activities falling within your capability.

4. Operations in subparagraphs A, B, C, F, and G are authorized for planning only at this time. Operations in subparagraphs D, E, H, and I are authorized for immediate execution on a continuing basis except that US support to GVN for use of agents or friendly agents is authorized for planning purposes only at this time. In executing these operations, and until advised otherwise, the following restrictions will be observed:

A. No repeat no US personnel will operate in NVN, although supporting US aircrews may be employed over NVN and US advisors may accompany RVNAF forces during combat operations in SVN and aboard vessels operating in NVN territorial waters.

B. No operations will be conducted within prohibited areas for bombing around Hanoi in the time periods defined by reference B.

5. Further request:

A. That on a continuing basis additional concepts for covert/clandestine operations such as reinitiation of [*less than 1 line not declassified*] be developed and forwarded via this channel for approval.

B. That availability of required resources, e.g., specially configured C–130/C–123 aircraft, etc., within PACOM be determined and any shortfalls for support of these operations or lack of authorities to introduce available assets into SVN be forwarded earliest.

C. That consideration be given to using personnel assigned to Advisory Team 158 (STDAE) to temporarily reconstitute a SOG-type organization to assist in the coordination of these operations.

D. That your comments on current capabilities to conduct the operations listed in paragraph 3 above, together with proposed timing, be forwarded at your earliest convenience.

E. That a daily report on progress of actions taken in connection with tasking assigned herein.

F. That prescribed OPREP reports covering these operations be submitted via this channel to limit distribution of this sensitive information.

6. Other agencies have been tasked similarly to examine activities within their purview and will cooperate with/support/complement these operations. All activities will be coordinated at the interagency level here.

7. Warm regards.

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174. Message From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Washington, May 21, 1972, 2327Z.

4035. Deliver upon receipt. Subj: Linebacker (U).

1. Results of Linebacker operations to date have been most impressive. However, for maximum impact it is highly desirable to extend our air effort over NVN around the clock in order to force the air defenses into a continuous state of alert and also interfere with repair efforts and movement of supplies that are undoubtedly taking place at night. Accordingly, request you take immediate action to initiate A–6 operations against Linebacker targets north of 20 degrees north during periods of darkness. Current Linebacker restrictions apply.

2. Targets which have been struck in the afternoon and are left burning as well as bridges and marshaling yards and transformer stations which have previously been hit and are undoubtedly under repair by night crews also offer suitable targets.

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 68, JCS Out General Service Messages, 16–31 May 1972. Top Secret; Flash; Specat; Exclusive. Repeated to Admiral Clarey, Admiral Mack, Admiral Cooper, and General Abrams.

3. B–52's will also be considered as soon as four or five cells can be released from the current requirement in SVN.

Warm regards.

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175. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 22, 1972, 11 a.m.–12:04 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Major General Alexander M. Haig

State
U. Alexis Johnson

DOD
Kenneth Rush
Armistead Selden
Major General David Ott

JCS
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer
Captain Kinnaird McKee

CIA
George Carver
William Newton (only stayed for Mr. Carver's briefing)

NSC Staff
Richard T. Kennedy
John H. Holdridge
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—The Defense Department should knock down the story of the Soviet captain who claimed he sailed his vessel out of Haiphong harbor without incident on May 13.

—We should make a better effort to see that our Ambassadors are kept informed about all troop movements in their countries.

—The State and Defense Departments will coordinate a message to Ambassador Unger in Thailand on the urgent necessity of moving fifteen tankers from U Tapao to Don Muang.

—We will prepare a Presidential message to President Thieu, informing him of the decisions made on augmentation of logistic and matériel support for the GVN.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 79, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, May 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

—The Defense Department will provide Gen. Abrams' message about forming additional ARVN battalions to the WSAG participants. The group should then focus on the question of creating an additional division—from the regular forces or by converting some RF/PF forces. The group should also focus on the possibility of pre-positioning equipment for the division—in case we decide to organize one at a later date.

—We should be more imaginative and aggressive in our use of psychological warfare operations. We should all think in terms of the current activity culminating in a final settlement. And the President should be kept fully informed about our psywar activities.

—We should straighten out today the operational snag in Saigon which is preventing CIA from carrying out its instructions pertaining to black radio.

—We should do a much better job—especially in the U.S.—of getting out the good public affairs stories and points. William Sullivan's interdepartmental group should be kept at a high level of personnel and intensity. It should also be expanded to include people who will work primarily on the domestic side.

—The State Department will again check the legal aspects of providing munitions and POL support from Cambodia for Thai aircraft in Cambodia. This legal problem must be solved.

—Gen. Haig will check with Mr. Kissinger on the feasibility of preparing a long-range planning paper—tying together the DIA, CIA and State papers.

[Omitted here is discussion of Chinese and Polish views on the situation in Vietnam, tracking of Soviet ships including a damaged one in North Vietnamese coastal waters, the military situation in South Vietnam, bombing over North Vietnam, the situation in Haiphong Harbor, reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam, the sources of a *New York Times* reporter, maritime insurance rates, the movement of additional military aircraft to Southeast Asia and where to put them, the President's desire to deploy additional B–52s, and the NSDM on augmentation of logistic and matériel support to South Vietnam (Document 167).]

[Gen. Haig:] I want to say a word now about the psychological operations. They may have looked a bit uncertain after the last meeting. But I can assure you that is not the case. We have two four-page memos from the President on this subject,[2] and he is upset at what he considers to be our lack of attention to it. On Thursday, I sent him a list at Camp David of all the things we have done so

[2] Documents 160 and 169.

far.[3] He wrote that this was very good. On Saturday, he said it was a sorry exercise.[4] He wants us to use more imagination and ingenuity, and he is even thinking of establishing a new organization to carry out the psywar operations.

Mr. Johnson: What is the problem?

Gen. Haig: We have several problems. In the first place, we have two problems in trying to reassure the President. If something is done quietly, he doesn't know about it unless we report it. On the other hand, if he doesn't see something reported in the press, he mistrusts us and doesn't think we are doing the job. So we have the problem from both sides in trying to convince the President that we are doing the job.

He said that MACV is not getting out the word about North Vietnamese casualties, and VOA is not pushing this word up North. He also wants us to drop hints about possible escalation. This is a sensitive subject, of course, and we have to handle it in a delicate manner. Perhaps we can do something on the black radio side. But the President probably wants more public hints, too, that we can do more.

He wants to see more reports about the reinforcements we are sending to Vietnam. He wants to see more material in the press about our air strikes in North Vietnam. And we have to be careful no imagery develops about our turning down the effort in the North because of the Moscow visit. The President said MACV and the Embassy should do more to get out the reports of high morale and the will to win among the South Vietnamese. The last point can be dangerous because we can say something one day and see it blasted apart the next day. But, nonetheless, these are the things the President wants us to do.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, that last point can be very tricky.

Adm. Moorer: We could get burned on it.

Gen. Haig: Perhaps it can be done with black radio directed at the North Vietnamese. It could be tricky here in the U.S., though.

Mr. Johnson: My impression in the last ten days or so is that the press is presenting a more balanced approach to the Vietnam situation.

Mr. Carver: Yes, but it is done very grudgingly.

Mr. Johnson: I know.

Mr. Carver: If there is the slightest tactical setback at Kontum, the press will lose no time in returning to the pessimistic line.

Mr. Johnson: I realize that, but I was just giving my impression.

Adm. Moorer: In order to do what the President wants, we would have to reconstitute MACV.

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[3] Document 162.

[4] Document 172.

Mr. Johnson: Is the SOG gone?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, but it's getting started again.

Gen. Haig: The President senses—based on the 1960's experiences when we did things like this and when we were very often made to look foolish—that there is a great inhibition on the part of government officials. They do not want to repeat what the President calls the Rostow syndrome.

Mr. Rush: That's true.

Gen. Haig: But he feels that we must overcome it. This is the final exercise, and we will not be faced with it again. He wants us to do the total job now and put maximum pressure on Hanoi. He wants to get all the support he needs. His great criticism about every issue is the problem we have with the old syndrome. The President feels that everyone is looking to prevent defeat and that no one is thinking in terms of victory. He wants to reverse this—not the military terms, but the thinking. Everyone should think in terms of the current activity culminating in a final settlement.

Mr. Carver: The Task Group met Saturday,[5] and it will meet again today. We're doing everything we can.

Mr. Johnson: (to Mr. Carver) Are you the chairman of that group?

Mr. Carver: No. My deputy is the chairman.

Mr. Kennedy: Sullivan's group is meeting today, too.

Mr. Carver: On the black radio business, we sent instructions to Saigon. But we have just about been stopped dead in the water. For one thing, Frank Shakespeare sent a cable to Lincoln, telling him to take charge of all radio operations. The Ambassador also set up a committee which has pre-empted the radio assets. The committee is thinking in terms of doing more of the same—only in increased amounts and hours. The Station Chief can't fight the Ambassador, and we can't carry out the instructions we were given last week unless somebody gets the Ambassador off dead center.

Mr. Johnson: I don't fully understand the problem.

Mr. Carver: We told the Station Chief to get on the air within one week with black radio operations directed to the North Vietnamese. He was going to use the Embassy's spare transmitter, and start out the programs with music to catch the attention of the North Vietnamese. Then the station would broadcast news items about the bridges in North Vietnam being knocked down, about the very high casualties, about the high morale of the South Vietnamese. We would go after the North Vietnamese in an offensive way.

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[5] May 20.

The Ambassador, however, has now given Lincoln and the JUSPAO Task Group all the radio assets. As I said before, they plan to augment what is now on the air, but with very minor changes in substance. Thus, the spare Embassy transmitter has been co-opted, and the VOA transmitter is not available to us. If we are to do what we were instructed to do, somebody has to talk to the Ambassador.

Mr. Johnson: (to Mr. Carver) Have you talked to Bill [Sullivan] about this?

Mr. Carver: No. I wanted to do that this morning.

Mr. Johnson: Bill is before the Proxmire committee this morning—getting some money for the war.

Gen. Haig: I think we can work it out today.

Mr. Carver: There's no bad will in Saigon about this—just some confusion.

Mr. Kennedy: We'll work it out this afternoon with Bill.

Gen. Haig: It might seem a bit fuzzy about where we are heading, so I want to say a word about that. The President feels that the mining operations and the interdiction efforts are working. He feels that the premises he based these actions on were accurate. There's no question that there is a leadership problem in Hanoi, and the President feels that the best solution will come about with a change of the North Vietnamese leadership. He thinks it is essential that the leadership be changed. That's his target. I must say, too, that all the assessments so far seem to bear this out.

Mr. Rush: Yes, they do.

Mr. Johnson: That's right.

Mr. Carver: To be very crass about it, if our goal is to change the leadership, we have to do more than we have done in the past. What we've done before was not good enough, and it won't be good enough now.

Gen. Haig: The President's strategy is to win. He's becoming alienated with our style, as it is fed back to him. He thinks we are all following the "don't lose" syndrome. He's impatient these days about this, and we simply have to do much more.

Mr. Johnson: This discussion has been very useful.

Gen. Haig: On the public affairs side, there are a number of stories we can get out. We can say something about the communist assassinations of GVN police and government leaders. We can also say something about what the South Vietnamese are doing to help themselves.

Mr. Johnson: You're right.

Gen. Haig: Have we put out the word about the assassinations of South Vietnamese officials? Has the VOA carried it? The President has not seen any indication that we've done those things.

Mr. Johnson: We talked about this the other day. We discussed what was happening in Binh Dinh Province. If I recall, though, the information wasn't too solid, and we were going to check it out some more.

Adm. Moorer: The information doesn't have to be absolutely solid for us to use it.

Mr. Johnson: That's right. We can talk in general terms, without referring to specifics. We can say there was a report that fifteen police and three provincial officials were executed in Binh Dinh Province on May 14. That kind of report is good enough for us to use.

Mr. Carver: We planted a story in the *Bangkok Post* Friday about the COSVN directive to move against Tay Ninh City calling for liquidation of South Vietnamese officials. The story doesn't do much good in the *Bangkok Post,* however.

Adm. Moorer: It should have been in the *Washington Post.* You have your *Posts* mixed up.

Mr. Johnson: (to Mr. Carver) Do we have that directive?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: I mean something we can use right now?

Adm. Moorer: We need some sort of central control to get these things out here.

Mr. Rush: I thought Ziegler was doing it, in coordination with the Department spokesmen.

Gen. Haig: We have a committee to handle these things. Bill [Sullivan] should sit in on all the meetings. When everyone is there, they should decide how a story will be played and who will do what. The Chairman sent Gen. Knowles to the last meeting, and George [Carver] was also there.

Mr. Johnson: Was Bill there?

Gen. Haig: Yes. But in a week the meeting will be back down to a low level. I think it's better to keep the meeting at a high level of personnel and intensity. The committee should report to the President and confirm whatever actions have been taken.

Mr. Johnson: Who chairs this committee?

Gen. Haig: Bill does. It is the Psywar Group.

Mr. Carver: You have to remember that the Psywar Group is basically overseas oriented. We're concerned now with the domestic aspect of the problem.

Mr. Rush: Who is on the committee from Defense?

Mr. Carver: General Knowles, General Manor and Bill Flanagan.

Mr. Johnson: George is right. The group is overseas oriented.

Mr. Carver: The question is how do we handle the domestic problems?

Gen. Haig: Perhaps we can expand the group.

Mr. Johnson: McCloskey, Friedheim and some other spokesmen have a daily meeting. Maybe they can handle some of the load.

Adm. Moorer: Those guys just execute on a day to day basis the policy that the planners have decided on. I don't think it would be right to bring them into this.

Mr. Rush: Who handles the domestic side?

Adm. Moorer: I think it may be a good idea to expand Bill's group.

Gen. Haig: We have to decide what level it should be at and where—the White House, State, Defense?

Mr. Carver: I think the same body should be concerned with overseas and domestic affairs—so that what's put out here is in harmony with our song overseas.

Gen. Haig: At the very least, why don't we add a DOD representative?

Mr. Selden: We have one: Bill Flanagan.

Gen. Haig: I'm talking about the interdepartmental group which sets themes and does things like that.

Mr. Rush: That's Bill's [Sullivan] group.

Mr. Johnson: Yes. Bill Flanagan is on the Agency's sub group.

Mr. Carver: That's right. We do things on the working level—like setting up frequencies.

Gen. Haig: If we had someone from McCloskey's shop, we could use Les Janka as a bridge to the White House, so that Ziegler could be clued in on everything.

Mr. Johnson: Who is Janka?

Gen. Haig: He's the NSC press liaison officer.

Mr. Johnson: I see no problem with that.

Mr. Rush: Neither do I.

Gen. Haig: George put his finger on the problem. Even if we do significant things in the field, the President does not see the results in the domestic press.

Mr. Johnson: We have to get the President information on what is being done.

Mr. Holdridge: Should Herb Klein's shop have a representative on the group?

Gen. Haig: Yes, I think so.

Mr. Johnson: I'll tell Bill about it when he gets back to the office.

Mr. Kennedy: We'll get in touch with Klein.

Mr. Johnson: Tell him to expect a call from Bill. Who will be on the committee from Defense?

Mr. Selden: Dennis Doolin is our man, but he is away. Bill Flanagan is substituting for Dennis.

Gen. Ott: Bill [Flanagan] told me that he wanted me to take his spot when he leaves for Vietnam.

Mr. Rush: Okay. That sounds like a good idea to me.

[Omitted here is discussion of Thailand.]

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176. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, May 22, 1972, 2 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

General Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Mr. Ken Freed, Associated Press
Mr. Eugene Risher, United Press International
Herbert Kaplow, National Broadcasting Co.
Bonner Day, *U.S. News & World Report*
Jerry Greene, *New York Daily News*
Orr Kelly, *Evening Star*

Les Janka, NSC Staff
Neal Ball, White House Press Office
Ken Clawson, White House

General Haig opened by saying that his remarks were to be considered for "deep background, off the record," which could be attributed only to a White House official. He said that in view of recent reporting from North Vietnam about our activities of mining and bombing yesterday, he felt that it would be useful for him to give the press a flavor of what we have from intelligence reports from a variety of different sources. In response to a question he said that he was not attempting a direct refutation of Anthony Lewis, but he did feel that many people wanted to know if our efforts are working. He would, therefore, try to give the press some indications of what we were doing to North Vietnam in terms of matériel supplies and to the morale of the people of North Vietnam.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Memcons, January–December 1972 [2 of 3]. No classification marking. The meeting took place in Kissinger's office.

General Haig first pointed out that there is no solidity in point of view in the Hanoi leadership hierarchy, that Hanoi's actions have indicated an ambivalance of action attempting to maintain a blend of guerrilla and main force actions. He noted there was also some differences on the totality of the North Vietnamese commitment for such high stakes. After the bombing and mining started we began getting reports that all was not well in Hanoi. For example, on May 11 radio Hanoi as reported by FBIS made a strong pitch against saboteurs and those who are taking advantage of the war time situation to undertake hooligan activities. The report also gave evidence of a drastic rise in prices and flourishing black market activity.

We have evidence to show that moderate elements in the North Vietnamese leadership are very concerned about the heavy casualties North Vietnam is taking in the South. General Haig's tentative and cautious estimate was that nearly 75,000 to 100,000 casualties, killed and wounded, have been suffered by the North since March 30th. A North Vietnamese source said that they have lost more men in the last three months fighting than in the last four years. General Haig pointed out we cannot vouch for the total accuracy of that report but it is a manifestation of the North's concern for its great losses and over rumors coming back to Hanoi about the wisdom of its new invasion of the South.

General Haig categorically denied that any ships have transited the mine fields since its activation and that North Vietnamese ports are completely closed, cutting off the 90 percent of the North Vietnamese total imports which come through these ports, this being mostly food stuffs, POL, trucks, and other unidentified items. He said that the bulk of the war matériel came in via rail, being about one-seventh of the North's total annual imports but the important fact is that all POL comes through the ports. This sudden closing of the ports and the interdiction of rail lines will require a great effort to redirect supply efforts to rail transportation and will require a massive diversion of people. This will make a very difficult task for Hanoi to continue its "high consumption" conventional invasion against the South. This invasion of tanks and heavy rapid fire artillery eats up supplies at a great rate. Therefore, our interdiction efforts are putting a great deal of pressure on Hanoi.

Asked how many months' stockpile the North had built in the South, General Haig said we don't know precisely, perhaps three to six months worth but one has to look at the several key commodities which are highly sensitive to a cut off at the source. We have already intercepted directives to line units to conserve certain types of ammunition supplies, especially in the MR–1 area. Also we know that a very large percentage of the North's in-country stocks of POL have been destroyed.

We also have reliable reports that some black market profiteers have been executed by the Hanoi authorities which is another mani-

festation of the supply crunch. There has also been a large evacuation of children from Hanoi but because these evacuees are being exploited by the people in the provinces, this price gouging has driven them back into the city. We have indications, contrary to the reports by Lewis of the high mortality in Hanoi, that prostitution has increased in Hanoi due to the impact of inflation on fixed income families. Another evidence of a moral problem is the fact that young girls in villages cannot find young males and are now going after older, married men and thus disrupting community social structures.

In response to a question, General Haig also noted that rail shipments from China have been considerably cut off. These efforts have led to great labor shortages and there are strong indications that wounded veterans have been telling young men to avoid military service. Hanoi has issued a call for reordering of work patterns and priorities. The cut off of food stuffs, for example, is putting a much greater demand on the local production of food with the resultant diversion of manpower into this area. We have also noted a great concern for the contingency of renewed flooding such as occurred last October and November.

General Haig said it was important to note that these strains are showing up very early in this interdiction operation and that one should keep in mind the fact that no military strategist can fight until his prepositioned supplies are exhausted before changing his decision making assumptions. In recent weeks we have seen a pattern of declining coordination in the NVA attacks and that they have recently undertaken some very desperate moves with considerably less artillery support than at the beginning of the offensive.

We also have seen signs that the ARVN is fighting much better since the President's actions announced on May 8th. This was a great boost to the ARVN morale. For example, the battle at An Loc was an historic defense with a magnificent show by the ARVN against which the enemy threw two of their best divisions unsuccessfully against a much smaller force.

Asked if Hue can still be taken by the NVA, General Haig responded that it is hard to say since there are so many imponderables involved. However, the situation looks much better today than it did a couple of weeks ago. There is a new Commander there with some very good units involved and the good weather is now on our side for air support. Asked if this added trouble was reflected in the negotiating stance in Hanoi, General Haig said that he did not want to get into negotiations. He did say that it would be difficult for the other side to call for a ceasefire and start negotiations in view of its tremendous commitment of resources and "face" to this invasion, especially in view of a divided leadership in Hanoi. It will be hard for them to negotiate

until they expend all they have trying to achieve the objectives they have set for themselves.

Asked if he could project how much longer the North could continue, General Haig noted that they are way behind their initial schedule and while it was hard to predict the enemy's capabilities, the rains will have a great impact on their offensive after mid-June. Asked if the ARVN could push the North Vietnamese back when the rains start, the General noted that the rains will hurt the ARVN less than the NVA.

General Haig refused to identify the moderates in the Hanoi leadership, obviously to protect them, but he said the moderates are those who want to scale down the military objectives and those more patient people who reject the North's efforts to impose a hegemony on the South militarily.

Asked what are the problems facing our side, General Haig noted that the ARVN is paying high price in good troops and equipment and there have been obvious strains on the ARVN leadership. But the individual South Vietnamese soldier is a superb fighter when properly led.

Asked just how serious is the trouble in the North, General Haig said it was hard to answer exactly but that the strain is showing much earlier this time since there is not the flexibility in the body politic of the North now. There is a considerable strain on the Hanoi leadership in supporting this massive conventional invasion with all of its troops away from home, especially when their public can see that when the men go South they do not come back. We have evidence that wounded NVA troops are kept in Laos for a while to cool off so they will not spread morale problems when they return to the North. There are also indications that these strains existed in the North before the offensive but are now magnified; however, General Haig would not predict any political collapse in the North, at least not in the foreseeable future.

We have considerable evidence that the massive tank attacks by the North were not well trained or well coordinated and that the ARVN has proven it can handle such attacks very well. General Haig guessed that maybe 350 to 400 NVA tanks have been knocked out but he could not answer how many the North had to start with. Asked if he considered the North Vietnamese offensive a failure, he said it is not a failure but it has failed to achieve its objectives and its original schedule. The popular uprising the North expected just did not occur as expected. He cautioned, however, against assuming that the enemy infrastructure was not present, it could be waiting for military successes that have not yet occurred. If the NVA does not achieve its successes in the next month, there will be a respite in the fighting which will permit the South to prepare more than the North can, pointing out that the North took four years to build up for this attack, their obvious inability to resupply during the rains with their long logistic lines. Further-

more, the North's troops are just not as capable in the wet environment as the Southerners are.

Asked if he thought that the thorough success of the B–52 penetrations against the best Russian air defense have made the Soviets pause in their support efforts, the General replied affirmatively. Asked to compare the current air offensive against the earlier one, the General noted improved ordnance, improved counter measure tactics, less restrained and better targeting, and a bombing effort which has been very precise, very scientific which has resulted in low civilian casualties. In conclusion, the General listed the heavy attrition of POL stocks, communications facilities, rolling stock power stations.[2]

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[2] According to a memorandum from Kissinger to the President, June 1: "We continue to benefit from Al Haig's backgrounder as more articles reflecting North Vietnamese difficulties appear daily." See footnote 2, Document 188.

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177. Backchannel Message From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, May 27, 1972, 1847Z.

WHS2074. The steps in the program you outlined in your Saigon 0097[2] represent a major effort toward achieving the President's objectives in the massive psychological campaign he has ordered directed against the North Vietnamese, both in the South and in the North.

In Henry's absence, I wanted to take this opportunity to explain further the President's thinking. He is convinced, based upon reporting from all sources, that North Vietnam including the government, the people and the NVA, is now highly susceptible to psychological pressure, more so than at any time in the past. The combined effects of the President's strong reactions in bombing intensively and widely over the North and mining of all potential sources of imports from

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, To Amb. Bunker—Saigon, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusive; Eyes Only.

[2] Backchannel message 97 to Kissinger, May 27, summarized the psychological warfare campaign already underway against North Vietnam. (Ibid., From Amb. Bunker—Saigon, 1972)

the sea, the extraordinary losses inflicted on the NVA in the South by the massive application of U.S. air power, the enormous and fully publicized reinforcement of air power and naval gun fire capabilities, the effects of his visits to Peking and now to Moscow, and the obvious failure of the NVN/VC efforts to undermine the GVN and generate any significant uprising or even dissent, are clearly taking their toll. He therefore believes strongly that we must undertake immediately the most intensive no-holds barred psychological campaign against the North to exploit every possible opening, however small. The fact that these exist is underlined by your Embtel 7919.[3] This report has served to reinforce the strongly held view that the DRV can be reached and significantly affected by the intensive psychological effort which is already in process on all fronts. Indeed, the themes for part of the campaign already in process in other areas were aimed at precisely situations described in Saigon 7919.

When the President directed that this effort be given top priority, he insisted that every asset available be brought to bear and that anything additional required be made available immediately. In this connection he directed the Director of CIA to undertake a greatly expanded black and grey radio campaign with high power and aimed at the NVA in both the North and South, and urban and rural population and government cadres in the North, to sow the maximum possible doubt and confusion. This particular facet of the campaign is a significant part of a much broader black effort which is already underway. He has assumed that this radio operation will be on the air shortly on a 24-hour basis carrying programming which could not be handled in any other way but which will dove tail with the other broadcast systems. It is important, therefore, that this activity have available to it equipment of high power and any necessary resources for the accomplishment of this mission. It was with that thought in mind that Henry assured you in WHS 2071 that any resources which you needed would be made available.[4]

The President is aware of the superb efforts you are already undertaking and appreciates them. The organizational arrangement which you have established will strengthen the program enormously and provide the means for coordinating the special CIA effort with all of the other aspects of the program there.

Warm regards.

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[3] Not found.

[4] Backchannel message WHS 2071 to Bunker, May 23; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 993, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Chron, May 21–31, 1972.

178. Editorial Note

Shortly after he became President, Richard M. Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger, began negotiating with the leaders of the Soviet Union to establish a limitation on strategic arms. By early 1972 they had agreed to restrict the number of anti-ballistic launch sites each could have and to freeze the number of intercontinental and submarine-launched missiles in each other's arsenal. To formally ratify this progress required a summit meeting between President Nixon and General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. Discussions by the two sides about when and where the two should meet to sign the arms agreements, as well as other less controversial agreements, resulted in a decision to hold a summit in Moscow in late May. For a detailed examination of the path to the summit and the summit itself, see *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972.

North Vietnam's launching of the Easter Offensive on March 30 complicated Nixon's diplomacy because the Soviet Union was North Vietnam's major supplier of munitions and equipment in its war against South Vietnam. As Nixon wrote in his memoirs: "It was hard to see how I could go to the summit and be clinking glasses with Brezhnev while Soviet tanks were rumbling through Hue or Quangtri." (*RN*, page 601) The failure of Kissinger's meeting in Paris with Le Duc Tho, the chief North Vietnamese negotiator, on May 2 (see Document 109) further increased the difficulty.

After consultation with Kissinger; Assistant to the President H.R. Haldeman; Major General Alexander M. Haig, Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs; and Treasury Secretary John Connally, Nixon decided to continue and substantially intensify the American military response to the offensive with additional air and naval action against North Vietnam (see Document 121) and leave it to the Soviets to cancel the summit. That is, he would not lose in Vietnam, even if commitment to that goal caused him to lose the summit (see Document 120).

As it turned out, the Soviet response was, as Kissinger put it, "tepid and mild." (*White House Years*, page 1193) In the immediate aftermath of the mining of Haiphong Harbor and the start of intensified bombing against the North on May 9–10, the Soviet Union did nothing more than protest the American decision. At the same time, senior Soviet officials working with Kissinger on the summit focused on the details of the upcoming event, making clear to him, as he wrote later, "The summit was on." (Ibid., page 1194)

Nixon and Brezhnev met in the Soviet Union from May 22 to May 29. At the summit the leaders signed strategic arms limitation

agreements (the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Interim Agreement on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms) and others on the environment, medical science and health, science and technology, the non-military exploitation of space, trade expansion, and on the principles of mutual relations between the two nations. Although not formally on the agenda, the two sides discussed Vietnam—including an evening session in which the Soviet leaders harshly criticized Nixon's decision to bomb and mine the North—but reached no conclusion or agreement. (*White House Years,* pages 1225–1227; *RN,* pages 613–614, 617–618)

According to Kissinger's report to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon, during the Vietnam discussions in Moscow:

"President set forth our positions on military measures and negotiations. North Vietnamese actions had left us no choice but to act decisively. Soviets must recognize responsibility in this and future situations of exercising restraint in arming smaller allies lest localized situations get out of control. President emphasized that our preferred way to end the conflict was through negotiations and that choice is now up to Hanoi whether it wished to endure further tests of strength.

"On negotiations we reviewed both the U.S.–GVN January peace plan and the President's May 8 speech. The Soviets asked if these two proposals could be combined. We said our past proposals including the January plan still stood but stressed that these issues should be discussed at the conference table by the other side in a serious manner.

"Soviet leaders took predictable line with considerable intensity but without making demands. They did not condition progress in other areas on Vietnam in any way. They expressed support for DRV/PRG negotiating positions, sharply criticized our bombing of DRV and pressed hard for return to plenary sessions in Paris.

"We rejected enemy's political demands as unacceptable and reaffirmed our refusal to replace SVN. As for plenaries we stated that we rejected stale propaganda performances of the past where they consider their own proposals as the only ones to be discussed. We said that if the other side agreed to discuss our proposals point by point we would consider return to plenaries later in the month. We will now await any Communist response. Until then no repeat no agreement has been reached concerning plenaries or private meetings.

"You may assure Thieu that any rumors of meetings between high-level DRV officials and US representatives are completely without foundation." (Backchannel message WHS 2075 from Haig to Bunker, May 31; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972)

179. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, May 30, 1972, 11:14–11:40 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig

State
John N. Irwin
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Major Gen. David Ott

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
[*name not declassified*] (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Richard T. Kennedy
John H. Holdridge
Mark Wandler

It was agreed that:

—We will try to obtain more precise information about the report that two North Vietnamese divisions are leaving III Corps and returning to Cambodia.

—We agree with the way our Delegation in Paris proposes to inform the other side that we do not agree to another plenary session.

—Now that we have Presidential guidance on the number of B–52s to be sent to Guam, State and Defense should prepare a package for the Thai, articulating our requirements in Thailand.[2]

—We should continue to hold off on the leafletting operations over Hanoi until we have Presidential guidance on the subject.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 79, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, May 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

[2] On May 23, Haig conveyed to Rush the President's guidance and approval to deploy an additional 58 B–52s to Guam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–088, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 5/24/72) Haig, U. Alexis Johnson, Moorer, and Rush also discussed the B–52 issue thoroughly in the May 24 WSAG meeting. (Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting, May 24; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 79, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, May 1972) The minutes are printed in *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972, Document 166.

—Amb. Sullivan's group should staff out the plan for preempting Radio Hanoi. When the plan is complete, it should be brought before the WSAG.

[Omitted here are conclusions unrelated to Vietnam and the minutes of the meeting.]

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180. Diary Entry by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)[1]

Washington, May 31, 1972, 10:30 a.m.

Met with—LTG Zais and LTG Knowles—in office

Told them to prepare a memo to SecDef summarizing the operation in North Vietnam listing the BDA, show the bridges that have been destroyed, the rolling stock, the thermal power plants, show where the mining has occured, transformer struck, etc. Current plans are to provide for continuation of strikes against the railroad and roads. Also have plan to seal off the WBLC routes from China.

Abe[2] has stated his intent is, following the stabilization of the land battle, to concentrate against the storage areas in RP 1 and 2.[3] Use B–52s that are available.

We have three months of good weather ahead of us, have the air units in place, probably will be the last opportunity to force the NVN to a reasonable negotiation. We must take advantage of the situation to inflict the maximum damage aimed to force NVN to negotiation posture. Move forward with a very aggressive bombing campaign, which will not only interdict NVN efforts to bring in supplies, but also destroy power supplies in Hanoi and Haiphong areas.

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

[2] General Abrams.

[3] Route Packages 1 and 2 were the target zones in North Vietnam closest to the DMZ.

181. Memorandum From the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency (Carver) to Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Council Staff[1]

Washington, May 31, 1972.

SUBJECT

Follow-Up Report on Covert Disinformation Program Designed to Convince the Hanoi Leadership that the U.S. Government is in Clandestine Communication with Dissident Elements in North Vietnam

1. Our project to convince the Hanoi leadership that the U.S. Government is in clandestine communication with a high-level dissident faction within North Vietnam hit a snag when our double agent asset [*less than 1 line not declassified*] muffed his lines in a 22 May session with the North Vietnamese intelligence officer with whom he has been in contact. Unfortunately, at the point in the conversation where the agent was to allude to information about American contact with dissidents allegedly provided by the agent's notional "American friend" (the purported source of the earlier data on mining), the agent strayed from his prepared script and the North Vietnamese did not pick up the point or pursue it.

2. Although we are disappointed in this setback, we had a stroke of luck the following day (23 May) when the press carried remarks by General Haig to the effect that there is "no solidarity of views among the northern leadership" over the current invasion of the south and that moderates (in North Vietnam) want to "scale down the ambitions of the regime" and "draw back from the blood-letting in the south."[2] We plan to use these published comments of General Haig to get our disinformation program back on the rails. In their 22 May session, the North Vietnamese intelligence officer did ask our asset to find out how far the Americans are likely to go in applying pressure on North Vietnam and whether the U.S. will invade North Vietnam with American troops. Within the next few days, our asset will re-contact the North Vietnamese intelligence officer, report some filler-type generalizations on the troop and invasion issue (suitably slanted) and then re-broach the thought that the Americans are being advised by the high-level North Vietnamese dissidents with whom the U.S. is in contact, alluding to General Haig's remarks to buttress the fictional specifics provided by our asset's notional "American contact."

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[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–R01720R, Box 7, GAC [George A. Carver] Chronology, May–June 1972. Secret; Sensitive. The memorandum was dictated by Carver and revised in VNO/NVN.

[2] *The New York Times*, May 23, 1972, p. 14.

3. We are also setting up (probably from Takhli[3]) a series of one-way voice radio messages to North Vietnam which will provide further evidence of covert communication between the U.S. Government and a dissident faction within the DRV.

4. The above activities are being reinforced by the establishment of a second double agent operation [*less than 1 line not declassified*] which will be used to feed corroborative material back to the North Vietnamese.

5. As you recognize, structuring this kind of disinformation in a manner that whets the target's appetite and remains plausible is a tricky proposition which cannot be rushed and which is always subject to the vagaries of chance and human nature. We will keep you advised of progress as it occurs.

George A. Carver, Jr.[4]

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[3] Location of Royal Thai Air Force Base used by the United States Air Force to conduct missions over Vietnam during the Easter Offensive.

[4] Printed from a copy with this typed signature.

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182. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, June 1, 1972, 10:07–11:15 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPATION

Chairman
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig

State
John N. Irwin
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Major Gen. David Ott

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
George Carver
William Newton

NSC Staff
Richard T. Kennedy
John H. Holdridge
James T. Hackett

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, June 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—The State Department will prepare a draft telegram to Korea asking President Park to authorize the Korean forces in Vietnam to engage in a temporary exercise outside their area of operations to open the Kontum Pass. Gen. Haig will seek the President's approval of the proposed telegram.

—The Chinese ships off-loading onto lighters at an island near Vinh will be kept under surveillance but not interfered with at this time.

—Ambassador Ingersoll should be informed that we will move some B–52s to Japan if Typhoon Lola strikes Guam. In addition, the Vietnam Working Group should review our arrangements with the Japanese for prior consultation on aircraft movements.

—The Thai Government should be informed that we wish to augment our tanker fleet in Thailand for about six months.

—The psywar proposal to preempt Radio Hanoi will be presented to the President in conceptual form, including a warning on the likelihood of criticism, for his decision.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to psychological warfare operations.]

Gen. Haig: This proposal of Carver's (on a psywar operation) is very imaginative, very spicy.[2]

Mr. Sullivan: I'll provide some additional details. We have proposed knocking out Radio Hanoi by bombing several transmitters around Hanoi, with a target date of June 15. We need about fifteen days from the time we get a green light to get this ready. We have to activate Coronet Solo, some old C–131s from the Pennsylvania National Guard that have the necessary communications equipment, and we must get together the Vietnamese who will cut the tapes. We can't expect to pre-empt the signal for long; they will have a backup transmitter on the air sooner or later. We could have anywhere from 15 minutes to about three days at the outside. We're hoping for one to three days. Once it's done, it will become known as a U.S. hoax and I want to make sure the President is aware of this and agrees to it before we

[2] A detailed, formal explication of the proposal (Operation Archie Bunker) is in a June 2 memorandum from Sullivan to Kissinger. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–089, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 11/2/72)

put anything on tape. We intend to stay within a general theme of credibility in our broadcasts.

Mr. Rush: Will these be picked up by any foreign elements?

Mr. Carver: Not many. Agence France Presse in Hanoi will pick them up and probably the diplomatic community, but that's about all.

Mr. Sullivan: Is the main transmitter right in Hanoi?

Mr. Carver: No, it's out of town. Our objective is to stir up trouble by suggesting that there is a dissident element in the leadership.

Mr. Irwin: What will be the result after ten days?

Mr. Carver: Well, we expect it to cause the leadership trouble. They will have to accuse us of doing it and that will be an admission that they cannot protect their own frequency. We will suggest disagreements among the leadership, report factually on the problems they are having and the casualties they are taking in the South and show that their allies are not rushing to their aid. Hanoi is full of rumors anyway, and this will feed them. It should also leave a suspicion with many that there is a dissident movement. We have struck that theme before.

Adm. Moorer: When it becomes public knowledge the President can merely say that the North Vietnamese people were not getting the truth and we wanted to see that they had it.

Mr. Sullivan: I don't think there will be any strong opposition to it. We will probably get some snide remarks from *The New York Times,* but I think the general public will consider it a pretty good idea.

Gen. Haig: I suggest that we put the concept to the President in brief form, for planning purposes, and let him know that there is a chance we may be criticized for using dirty tricks. I'm quite sure he will say yes, enthusiastically, but only if the situation on the ground at the time justifies it.

Mr. Sullivan: I'd like to move quickly on this. The longer we sit on it, that many more people will learn about it and the chance of a leak will increase. The two key factors involved are the activation of the aircraft and their crews and making the arrangements for the Vietnamese to cut the tapes.

Adm. Moorer: There are eight planes involved. Two can be ready to go into action in twelve days, the other six in twenty days. They can fly out of Clark and refuel at Danang, using Clark as home base. They will operate about thirty miles off the North Vietnamese coast, circling over a ship that will provide protection. We will also provide fighter cover. We can get the operation going with two planes, but they are National Guard and will have to be activated. The cost will run between one and a half and two million dollars.

[Omitted here is discussion of press leaks and further discussion of Operation Archie Bunker.]

183. Message From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Abrams) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Saigon, June 6, 1972, 0855Z.

64753. Deliver during duty hours. Subject: Strike Force Utilization (U). Ref: CINCPAC DTG 032237Z Jun 72 (TS/Specat/Excl) (Notal).[2]

1. (TS) In reviewing referenced message, several considerations, as seen from here, are worthy of discussion. First, I think we all agree it is essential that we defeat the current all-out effort by the enemy to achieve major objectives, both political and military, in several key areas in SVN. I believe he has failed at An Loc, and probably does not have the where-with-all to mount another major threat to that city. However, the situation in MR II is by no means resolved. I see a continuing requirement for extensive B–52 strikes in MR II until the siege of Kontum is lifted and the LOCs are reopened. In Thua Thien, the battle for Hue has not yet been fought. Current indications are that the enemy efforts to seize that important city may be imminent. B–52 strikes are being employed now to disrupt these preparations and to destroy the logistics support he will need to mount a major attack. Further, there are continuing requirements for in-country B–52 strikes where the enemy is making a determined effort to seize District capitals. The activity in Binh Dinh has been increasing for several days. In short, I see a requirement in the foreseeable future for all of the B–52 support now programmed. Each day lucrative targets remain unstruck because we do not have enough missions to cover all the priority areas. As you are aware, it takes more than seven B–52G sorties to equate to three B–52Ds.[3] In addition, because of mission duration, aircraft based at Guam produce approximately one half as many sorties as those based at U-Tapao. In terms of numbers of bombs on target, the extensive B–52G augmentation at Guam has not produced a comparable impact in the target area. For the same reasons, any proposal to divert substantial numbers of B–52Ds to out-of-country efforts can only be viewed with concern by this headquarters.

2. (TS) I support the need to continue maximum pressure on the enemy in the North as well as in the South, however, three-fourths of

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Top Secret; Specat; Exclusive. Attached to Moorer Diary, June 6. Repeated to Admiral Moorer and General Meyer.

[2] Not found.

[3] B–52Ds were upgraded to carry a substantially heavier bomb load than the B–52Gs.

the carrier effort is now devoted to strikes in the North and only one carrier remains committed to the war in the South. The Marine sorties generated by Danang and Bien Hoa, which average about 80 per day, do not begin to make up for the Navy sorties now employed on operations out-of-country. Additionally, the 75 plus USAF Tacair sorties devoted to the war in the North on a daily basis is not without impact on the in-country war, on some days, for example 22 May, more sorties were flown in NVN than in-country by Tacair. I have supported fully this diversion of USAF Tacair because I believe it has achieved very substantial results in the North. In addition to interdicting the northwest rail lines, these operations have succeeded in destroying POL, thermo plants, transformers, storage and warehouse areas, railroad yards, and other high-value targets, primarily because of the effectiveness of the smart bomb techniques being employed. Many other high-value targets would have been attacked except for the ten-mile bombing restriction of the last two weeks.

3. (TS) In assessing the relative value of B–52 operations in NVN vs in-country, several factors should be considered in addition to those mentioned in your message. While it is true the B–52s possess an all-weather capability, they require an extensive support package from both the Navy and USAF tactical air forces. Approximately 75 USAF Tacair sorties are required for each B–52 mission into high threat areas. If these tactical forces are not available to support the B–52s because of unfavorable weather conditions in the refueling areas or cloud levels too high to permit F–105 Iron Hand operations, the B–52 force cannot bomb without undue risk. Since they must employ synchronous bombing procedures, resulting in a larger CEP, B–52 strikes must be limited to area targets. In short, the magnitude of effort required to achieve destruction of area targets by B–52s must be weighed against that required for the more selective bombing by Tacair. The impact on Tacair operations both in NVN and in-country must also be considered. On balance, I conclude that the value of the B–52 is considerably greater in its current application in-country than if utilized in the high risk areas of the North. I agree with the ongoing air attacks against key targets in NVN and appreciate fully their contribution to the overall effort to defeat the enemy. However, I suggest that it is not possible to lose the war in the North but it still is possible to lose the war in the South and we must not turn loose of this until the job is done.[4]

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[4] Moorer highlighted the sentence beginning with "However" and in that sentence underlined the phrase "it is not possible to lose the war in the North."

4. (TS) We will continue to plan for the utilization of B–52s on strikes in the north when directed. The tactical forces under my opn [operational] control will be made available if higher authority concludes the psychological and political advantages of B–52 operations in the North outweigh the military considerations I have pointed out above.

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184. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, June 6, 1972, 10:05–10:29 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson

Defense
G. Warren Nutter
Dennis Doolin
Maj. Gen. David Ott

JCS
R/Adm. Mason Freeman
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Defense should come up with a way of providing the air assets needed for the pre-emption of Radio Hanoi—without activating the

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, June 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

Pennsylvania Air National Guard unit.[2] We should also carry forward our scenario past the point where FBIS would pick up the broadcasts.

—Defense should plan to bomb the North Vietnamese pipeline, to prevent the enemy from extending it to the Chinese border.

—CIA should review the North Vietnamese supply situation, looking at the situation which will prevail in the South for the next few months and at the longer term prospects for the enemy.

—Defense should prepare a special study on the recession in South Vietnam.

—State and Defense should work out a plan for providing safe-haven for the B–52s based on Guam when a typhoon threatens Guam.

[Omitted here is discussion of the proposal to bomb Radio Hanoi transmitters and broadcast American-created programs on the same frequency.]

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Carver) George, do we have a present estimate of the North Vietnamese supply situation and of the enemy capability to sustain operations in the South? Have these questions been formally addressed in the last week or so?

Mr. Carver: No, they haven't.

Mr. Kissinger: Do you think it would be worthwhile to take a formal look at them now?

Mr. Carver: Yes, I do.

Mr. Kissinger: As I recall, we asked about six weeks ago for an estimate of the enemy's offensive capability, and you gave us one then. Has anything new come in since then to make us change our estimate?

Mr. Carver: No, nothing new has come in. The big problem, I think, is the POL situation. There are also a few tenuous signs of unit rationing—of trying to conserve SAMs and artillery rounds. I don't think the supply situation will make the North Vietnamese curtail their offensive in MR 1. In any case, we'll take a look at the evidence that has come in during the last six weeks and revise our estimates accordingly.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes, it would be a good idea to do that.

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[2] According to the minutes of the meeting, the Guard unit was the only one in the Air Force possessing the special equipment and specially trained pilots and crew to carry out such a mission. If that unit were not used, aircraft from other units would have to be reconfigured and other crews trained, which would take time. Using the Guard unit, however, would require its activation, which would then become a matter of public record, and that might compromise the mission. Kissinger's response to comments such as these by Carver, Nutter, and Freeman was: "Our experience has always been that the first time we look at something like this, we are told we can't do it. Then, if the President wants it enough, he will order it—and we will find a way to carry out the order. We've had the same experience with other issues: the B–52s, to name one."

Mr. Johnson: Do we have any up-dated information on the truck movements in North Vietnam?

Mr. Carver: There has been a little bit of truck movement, but there certainly has been no major diversion of ground assets to offset the effect of the mining and the cutting of the rail lines.

Mr. Kissinger: Is there any evidence that the Chinese are sending truck traffic into North Vietnam?

Mr. Carver: No.

Mr. Helms: We thoroughly scrub down the photos taken during every mission over North Vietnam, and there is no evidence of a significant truck movement from China into North Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger: Is it fair to conclude that the North Vietnamese have lost one month's worth of sea-delivered supplies and that they have received fewer supplies by rail than they normally receive?

Mr. Carver: Yes, that is an accurate conclusion. And while the Russians and Chinese are fussing about how to deliver supplies to the North Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese are losing precious time.

Mr. Johnson: That's very true. I saw a DIA report this morning which estimated that the enemy has lost about fifteen percent of the POL which was in storage facilities. Frankly, I was a little surprised because I thought the figure would be higher than fifteen percent.

Mr. Nutter: The report referred to the fact that fifteen percent of the stored POL has been destroyed. But don't forget that the North Vietnamese are also using up their POL at a fast rate.

Mr. Johnson: I realize that. Still, I thought the figure would be higher.

Mr. Doolin: There's also no indication that the amount of rolling stock on the Chinese side of the border is increasing.

Mr. Nutter: That's right. The rolling stock is not piling up there.

Mr. Kissinger: Is it going through into North Vietnam?

Mr. Nutter: There's no evidence that it is going through.

Mr. Helms: Warren [Nutter][3] is right.

Mr. Carver: Some of the rolling stock is going through to the transshipment point on the North Vietnamese side of the border, perhaps ten or fifteen miles inside North Vietnam.

Mr. Helms: True, but the stock isn't getting through to points where it can be effectively used.

Mr. Kissinger: It's true to say, then, that the North Vietnamese are getting less by rail than they got before our interdiction efforts began.

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[3] Brackets are in the original.

Mr. Helms: Yes. So many of the railroad bridges are out that the two railroads are effectively cut. What is leaking through is very small.

Mr. Kissinger: As I recall, we were told about six weeks ago that the North Vietnamese had a four-month supply of POL on hand.

Mr. Carver: That was our estimate. Remember, though, that it can be stretched out a little bit.

Mr. Kissinger: One month's supply is gone, and an estimated twelve to fifteen percent of the stored POL has been destroyed. That means about forty percent of the POL they had on May 8 is gone.

Mr. Carver: Yes, I think that figure is fairly accurate.

Mr. Kissinger: So by the end of June, close to sixty-five percent of the POL will be gone. The question is will they run down the POL supply to zero?

Mr. Carver: I have great respect for the resourcefulness of the North Vietnamese. They must find alternate routes for the POL flow by mid-July at the latest, or else they will be taking a bigger gamble than I thought they would take.

Mr. Helms: They are not extending the pipeline to Kep just to get the exercise. This is an alternate POL route they are going to depend on.

Mr. Kissinger: Will they be able to depend on the pipeline?

Mr. Carver: In order for the pipeline to be effective, they have to extend it to China.

Mr. Kissinger: Where is Kep? How far is Kep from China?

Mr. Carver: It's about sixty or seventy kilometers from China.

Mr. Kissinger: Will they be able to get the POL from China?

Mr. Carver: Yes, once they complete the pipeline.

Mr. Kissinger: And that's what they are trying to do now?

Mr. Helms: I think so. It must be what they have in mind because they've never done anything like that before.

Mr. Kissinger: Can we bomb the pipeline?

Adm. Freeman: Yes, but it may be difficult to destroy it, especially if parts of it run underground. I'm sure, however, that we can cut the line.

Mr. Carver: It may be best to keep going after the pumping stations.

Mr. Kissinger: Will the pipeline have enough capacity to satisfy the North Vietnamese requirements?

Mr. Helms: It won't have enough capacity to solve all their problems. But it will help alleviate the critical problem they are now facing with regard to the POL situation.

Mr. Johnson: I've been away for a few days. Is this a new pipeline they are building?

Mr. Carver: Not really. They are extending the old pipeline up to Kep, where the railroad spur comes from Thai Nguyen.

Mr. Kissinger: Where did the pipeline go before?

Mr. Carver: It used to end up not far north of Hanoi.

Adm. Freeman: We estimate that they can finish extending the pipeline to the border by the end of June.

Mr. Kissinger: That's if we don't bomb it. Will we bomb the pipeline?

Adm. Freeman: Yes, our intent is to bomb it.

Mr. Carver: We'll look at this when we review the entire supply situation.

Mr. Kissinger: Good. How much do they need in the South in order to maintain their operations there? In early May, we estimated they could keep the offensive going from the supplies already in place for the better part of the summer. Is that correct?

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: In the light of recent activities, have we revised that estimate?

Mr. Carver: No. Remember that those supplies were already deployed when the offensive began.

Mr. Kissinger: That's true. But if things become very tough in the North, it might compound the difficulties the enemy has in the South.

Mr. Carver: If they continue to use up all their supplies in the South, it will be like writing a check against a bank account when there is no more money coming in.

Mr. Helms: We will review the entire situation for you.

Mr. Kissinger: Good. Look at the situation which will prevail in the South for the next few months, as well as the longer term prospects for the North Vietnamese. I will be grateful for this review.

[Omitted here is discussion of minesweeper activity off the coast of North Vietnam, South Korean forces operating in Kontum, the economic situation in South Vietnam, and where to send B–52s based on Guam in bad weather.]

185. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Vogt)[1]

June 8, 1972, 8:27 a.m.

Secure TELECON/OUT—To General Vogt

CJCS:—I just got authority to hit the dam and I just wanted to give you a little background on it so you will know what to do.[2] The way I wrote the message was, I called it the Lang Chi HPP and Adjacent Substation, because you had said you were interested in the Substation.

Vogt:—We can hit both.

CJCS:—Hit one at a time. Here is what happened, I will read you the message the way I wrote it and then the way it is coming out. I said, the following target is validated. Then I named the Plant and Substation and I said concentrate strike efforts on transformers adjacent to generator building additionally you are requested to take special precaution to minimize damage to the dam. Authority expires on 1 July, is what I put in there.

Laird got ahold of the thing and I want to read you the way it is coming out. It will be all right, I think you can live with it. The strike effort about generator house right behind transformers about 8 or 10 feet, doesn't make any difference, hope you can hit both of them. Strike effort will be limited to transformers and substation (I know that you can not be that precise, don't worry about that, concentrate on generators and transformers, one bomb in generator house would be great) it says additionally you are limited to the use of laser weapons (that is like telling you how to suck eggs) take special precaution to damage to the dam and spillways. This time he changed the authority to 16 June a week, in other words. This thing is exactly the way you are going to get it, it names the HPP and adjacent substation but that is the way it is coming out to you. I think you can live with that all right.

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Moorer Diary, July 1970–July 1974. Secret. Moorer was in Washington; Vogt was in Saigon.

[2] Nixon, Kissinger, and Laird were concerned that the power plant's proximity to the dam might result in breaching the dam and causing injury or death to those living in the path of the water that would be released. On June 3 at 10 a.m., Nixon and Kissinger discussed Moorer's request. Kissinger told Nixon: "Unfortunately, it's close to a big dam and if that dam bursts it's really going to be something. They claim they can avoid it." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 14, Chronological File)

Vogt:—We will probably go day after tomorrow my time. Work highway bridges tomorrow, work probably with Wings and very carefully go over this. The longrange weather forecast is good for tomorrow and the next day.

CJCS:—I was going to say, be sure you don't let the 8 days slip by because this thing took me a week to get and I have been drawing pictures of dams and spilling water talking about Noah and the Mount on the floods raining in circles. I think I would not put it off too long.

Vogt:—In all probability we will go day after tomorrow.

CJCS:—When you go in there first time, really cream it.

Vogt:—What I will do is have 3 flights and let the first go in, if they do it I will wave off the others and have them come on back, but if not, we will let the second and third go up there and be sure of it.

CJCS:—Instead of waving the other one off, put him on Substation instead of let's not waste anything, knock out the Substation since you are up there. You will get the message in an hour.

Vogt:—Read you loud and clear, ready to go. We will take the whole works out.[3]

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[3] The Air Force hit the site two days later, using laser guided bombs, and effectively took offline over 50 percent of North Vietnam's electricity-generating capacity. See Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back,* p. 251.

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186. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, June 8, 1972.

SUBJECT

Hanoi Informed that U.S. Has "Contacts" with High-Level Dissidents in North Vietnam

CIA has "revealed" to a North Vietnamese intelligence officer that the U.S. Government has "clandestine contacts" with high-level

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[1] Source: National Security Council, NSC Intelligence Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 17 Jan 72–2 Oct 73. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. Outside System. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

dissidents in North Vietnam.[2] The officer did not react to this revelation but took careful notes which may stimulate a reaction when his reports reach Hanoi.

The channel used for this disinformation was the CIA asset [*less than 1 line not declassified*] who had established his credibility with the intelligence officer by reporting in advance on U.S. intentions to mine Haiphong harbor. The officer told CIA's asset that Hanoi had cabled its congratulations on the Haiphong report. Because of the accuracy of his earlier reporting, the asset's current account of U.S. "contacts" with dissidents may trigger probing questions from Hanoi.

The intelligence officer plans to vacation in North Vietnam in July and seemed despondent, admitting that recent U.S. actions had hurt North Vietnam and that his family was suffering hardships by being split up. He said he recognized that the U.S. could carry on the war for a long time, but the U.S. problem was that it did not know when or where the North Vietnamese will continue the struggle. He asked the CIA asset if the South Vietnamese Army would invade North Vietnam.

Mr. Helms' memorandum which includes the fictional conversation the CIA asset related to the North Vietnamese intelligence officer is at Tab A.[3]

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[2] In the margin beside this sentence the President wrote: "*good.*"

[3] Attached but not printed is the June 5 memorandum. The meeting between the double agent and the North Vietnamese intelligence officer took place on June 1. Another meeting took place on June 13. A report on that meeting concluded: "On balance, the double agent has the impression from this, and other recent conversations with DRV officials, that Hanoi is extremely anxious to find a way out of its dilemma and is reviewing the options to see what realistic bargaining points it has for renewed negotiations." (Memorandum from Latimer to Kissinger, June 29; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 160, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, June–July 1972)

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187. Editorial Note

After the Easter Offensive began on March 30, 1972, military, not diplomatic, action dominated events in Vietnam for the next two months. On May 4th, the United States formally suspended the public talks, after informally doing so after the offensive began. (See Footnote 6, Document 119) In a May 15 memorandum to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger, John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council staff observed: "What emerges more clearly than ever from this press conference [Le Duc Tho's in Paris on May 12] is that the DRV is holding firmly to its course

of insisting on a political settlement as the precondition for resolving any other issues. Tho also left no doubt that we must be the cat's paw in changing the Saigon Administration." He concluded: "For the moment then, there has been absolutely no change in the DRV negotiating posture and we doubt there will be until the military situation evolves more decisively in one direction or another." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 160, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, May 1972)

Hanoi's representatives in Paris, continuing to see the public sessions as productive propaganda platforms, each week demanded that the United States return to the plenaries. A U.S. Delegation message summarized one such demand as follows: "DRV and PRG liaison officers telephoned notably brief messages to USDel morning May 23, calling on US to end its alleged acts of war escalation in Vietnam and demanding a meeting of the Paris Talks on Thursday, May 25, as usual." (Message 9819 from USDel Paris, May 23; ibid., Box 191, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, January–June 1972)

The United States Delegation responded vigorously: "While calling for another meeting on Thursday, May 25, 1972, your side has confined itself to repeating the same propaganda themes, without, however, giving the slightest indication of what it would be willing to discuss.

"In the meantime, the situation in South Viet-Nam since the last plenary session shows that although you have not attained the military successes that you were hoping for, your forces are nonetheless continuing their offensive relentlessly, while additional units of the North Vietnamese regular army have crossed the demilitarized zone to join the divisions already present in South Viet-Nam.

"Everything seems to indicate that what you are seeking is still a military victory in the field and not a negotiated solution at the conference table. Under these conditions, our side sees no useful purpose in meeting on Thursday, May 25, 1972, as usual." (Message 9864 from USDel Paris, May 23; ibid.)

Hanoi repeated its demand for resumption of the talks on June 1 and June 8. (Message 10287 from USDel Paris, May 30, and message 10795 from USDel Paris, June 6; ibid.)

Kissinger wrote to Ambassador Bunker in Saigon on June 6: "To insure that we maintain the best possible posture here, the President's current thinking is that we offer renewal of discussions in the secret channel on or about the 27th of June. This meeting would be designed to explore whether the proper conditions exist for the resumption of plenaries. While this schedule is not yet firm, I wanted you and President Thieu to be aware of our thinking at this early stage." (Backchannel message WH 2076 from Kissinger to Bunker, June 6; ibid., Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972)

On June 10, General Haig cabled Colonel Guay, the American intermediary with the North Vietnamese in Paris, to convey the following message to the other side:

"Since the last private meeting between the North Vietnamese and the U.S., major events have transpired on both sides. They serve further to underline the importance of bringing the war in Indochina to a rapid conclusion on a basis just for all.

"The U.S. side therefore proposes a private meeting between Special Advisor Le Duc Tho and Dr. Kissinger on June 28 at 1:00 p.m., at the usual location preparatory to resumption of the plenary sessions of the Paris conference. The purpose of this meeting would be review in detail the positions of both sides so as to find possible means of resolving differences and to provide adequate instructions to the negotiators at the plenary sessions.

"The U.S. side, for its part, would approach this private meeting with a constructive and positive attitude." (Message 2 from Haig to Guay, June 2; ibid.)

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188. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, June 12, 1972.

SUBJECT

Psychological Warfare Campaign

An intensive psychological warfare campaign against North Vietnam, which you directed, is solidly launched and gaining momentum. We have given you two previous reports.[2] This report advises you of further progress. A full range of approaches continues to be employed, including leaflet operations, saturation radio coverage (overt, black, and

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 24, Chronological File, 6–14 June 1972. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Haig initialed for Kissinger. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] The President wrote in the margin beside this: "good." Kissinger sent these reports to the President on May 23 and June 1. A draft of the first, "Psychological Operations Against North Vietnam and North Vietnamese Forces," is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–088, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 5/24/72; and the second, "Psychological Warfare Campaign," is in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 66, Memoranda to the President, January–June 1972.

grey) beamed at North Vietnam and North Vietnamese troops in the South, a disinformation program designed to confuse and dishearten the North Vietnamese leadership, and covert and unconventional warfare operations. The following psychological warfare operations are now being waged against North Vietnam and North Vietnamese forces.

Highlights in the Last Week

—More than 44 million leaflets were dropped in NVN during the last week which makes a total of 92.6 million leaflets dropped. These missions used a mix of 13 new leaflets developed since the beginning of our campaign. Themes emphasize the culpability of the Lao Dong Party leadership, the hopelessness of the war, heavy NVA casualties, and the effectiveness of our mining and bombing.

—Six overt, grey, and black radios are broadcasting to NVN a total of 64½ hours each day. The newly repaired VOA transmitter at Hue has begun operation, which increases signal strength to NVN. Names of POWs and factual war news play prominent roles in the broadcasts to attract listeners. Commentary stresses USG strength and determination, the futility of the war, the drive to power of northern leaders, and the U.S.–GVN desire for a negotiated peace.

—Three recordings of Ho Chi Minh speeches have been located, and a doctored transcript is being produced.

—We are arranging with the RLG to use Lao radio facilities to broadcast news and purported coded messages to NVN minority groups.

—The press has increasingly reported NVN difficulties. For example, on 5 and 6 June there were many stories based on a Radio Hanoi account of northern problems. The 9 June *Washington Post* page one article on a captured COSVN document resulted from our purposeful declassification of it.

—The world press has also carried numerous stories of our bombing accuracy, on Hanoi's guilt in escalating the war, and the SVN population's rejection of the NVA "liberators." We are feeding these articles into North Vietnam in our campaign.

—[2 *lines not declassified*]

—POW interrogation procedures have been changed to search out complaints, hardships, and dissension in NVN and the NVA . . . including any POW knowledge of our leaflets and broadcasts.

Summary to Date

Forty-four million leaflets were delivered last week, citing the effectiveness of our mining-interdiction operations, stress the great toll of NVA killed and wounded, place the responsibility for continued North Vietnamese losses and destruction on the Party leadership, mention ARVN military successes, cite the benefits of peace, cite the increasing isolation of NVN by its allies as reflected by your cordial

welcome in Moscow, and urge the North Vietnamese people to persuade their government to accept the generous U.S. proposal to end the war.

—On June 4, 17.8 million leaflets were dropped in the Panhandle of North Vietnam and on June 6 an additional 26.4 million were dropped. Two samples are at Tab A.[3]

Radio Broadcasts

Six radios, overt, covert, and grey, are broadcasting messages aimed at NVN and NVN forces in the South.

1. *VOA* is now broadcasting 17 hours a day in Vietnamese. Several times each day lists of recently captured North Vietnamese POWs are broadcast. To date, 376 names have been broadcast and VOA is receiving ten names a day from the GVN. Other themes include the continuing impact of your Moscow trip, the effectiveness of ARVN troops at Kontum, An Loc, and Hue, and the effectiveness of U.S. airstrikes in the North.

2. The GVN Voice of Freedom (*VOF*), which is on the air 20 hours daily, also repeats names of prisoners held. Other themes have been: NVN opposed U.S.–USSR talks because the DRG wishes to continue the war, USAF in one day destroyed over 100 boats in NVN waterways, and ARVN forces are on the offensive.

3. There are three *black radios* in operation, broadcasting a total of 14½ hours. All describe in detail the heavy losses of the NVA in the South, and the determination of the USG to see through its responsibility by a massive response. Though specifically targetted at NVN troops in the South, these can be received in NVN.

—Two of the three radios mimic NVN broadcasts and stresses the need for the populace and troops to prepare for more suffering to achieve victory, thus driving home the idea that the leadership in Hanoi cares only for its ambitions, not for the people.

—The other radio pretends to be the voice of national anti-regime groups and plays on the theme that the leadership is wasting the lives of NVN people to fight a war that it must lose.

4. The grey radio, which went on the air last week, broadcasts 13 hours daily on a frequency designed to take advantage of audiences of the BBC. Besides broadcasting a combination of themes used by VOA, VOF, and the black radios, it stresses the useless waste of the fratricidal war that North Vietnam has brought to the South.

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[3] Attached but not printed are the texts of two of the leaflets in English.

Leaflets continue to solicit listeners by announcing broadcast time and frequencies. To increase listenership in NVN, 30 thousand receivers will be purchased for delivery in about 6 weeks. They will be infiltrated into NVN. Tests have been conducted by VOA and show these radios will survive being airdropped in ½″ foam packing without parachutes and will also receive our broadcasts satisfactorily.

Special Operations

A series of carefully orchestrated black operations are being undertaken to deceive and confuse the DRG leadership and the North Vietnamese people.

—Three recordings of Ho's speeches have been located and are being doctored to produce a speech by Ho criticizing the current leadership policies of the DRV.

—CIA assets, with proven credibility to the DRG, have initiated an operation to convince the Hanoi leadership that the USG is in clandestine communication with a dissident faction at a high level within the North Vietnamese apparatus.

—Arrangements are being made with the Lao Government to use its radio facilities to broadcast straight news to minority groups in NVN. Inserted in these programs will be bogus coded messages to suggest to the DRG that elements within NVN minority tribes are actively scheming against the regime.

—The mechanics for knocking out Radio Hanoi and replacing it with our mimic broadcasts are being worked out. It is planned that the mimic will make a special announcement declaring that the Party has shifted to a peace policy and will report the resulting favorable benefits to the population—more food and clothing and the return North of their men.

—Rumor themes, designed to confuse and discourage the North Vietnamese, have been sent to the Saigon task force which has initiated a rumor program.

—The GVN is expected to cooperate in selecting South Vietnamese for proselytizing teams. They will approach North Vietnamese abroad with a view toward defecting them or at a minimum conveying to them in the process information that will raise questions about the fruitless war policy the DRG is following.

All our activities—leaflets, radios, rumors, and special operations—give the impression of U.S. iron determination and strength.

Special Press Activities

Domestic Press

—Wilson Frye's column in the *Kansas City Times* described a significant dwindling of military supplies to Hanoi since NVN land and sea routes were interdicted.

—AP Hong Kong monitored and filed a report attributed to Radio Hanoi in which Hanoi admitted the difficulties which North Vietnam is experiencing in coping with the mining of the ports and the U.S. bombing. It was prominently replayed by American news media on 5 and 6 June.

—On 9 June, the *Washington Post* carried an article quoting a captured COSVN document which says the communist offensive has reached fewer than half its goals and blames Viet Cong cadres for halfhearted support. Declassification of this document was at the urging of the Washington PPOG.

—On June 9 the *Baltimore Sun* carried a Reuter's report, datelined Peking, stating that visitors to Peking from Hanoi say there are indications that the Politburo in Hanoi favors a possible reassessment of the war.

—A 7 June *Washington Star* article, datelined Saigon, mentioned Hanoi's annoyance that the Viet Cong has been ineffective in arousing the people of SVN to support the invasion.

Foreign Press

—In the effort to demonstrate Hanoi's deteriorating position as a result of its invasion, CIA supplies Saigon Station daily with Foreign Press articles which support themes used in our leaflets and radios. Cities of origin so far have included Paris, Taiwan, Mexico City, London, Athens, Djakarta, Panama City, Islamabad, and Montevideo. Paris weekly *L'Express* noted the accuracy of new American bombing techniques, and Paris daily *Le Figaro* said the peasants did not support the invaders. Mexico City daily *Excelsior* explained Hanoi's guilt in initiating and escalating the war.

Organization

—[*4 lines not declassified*]

—The GVN's Voice of Freedom has agreed to let JUSPAO's and VOA's radio staff use VOF studios and its extensive tape and live-performer resources for recording the "Golden Music" programs.

—To better support the intensive psychological campaign against North Vietnam with POW information, CIA's Saigon Station has adopted new procedures in the conducting and handling of NVA POW interrogations held under CIA control. It is searching for all available problems, hardships, complaints, dissension, and dislocations in North Vietnam as well as among NVA/VC main force elements. Two priority subjects that POWs may have knowledge of are leaflets and the foreign radio broadcasts heard by NVN soldiers.

—On 5 June, repairs were completed and operation began at VOA's medium wave relay in Hue. This significantly strengthens the reception of VOA broadcasts in NVN.

—The Saigon Task Force has consulted with RVNAF to coordinate Task Force and RVNAF loudspeaker Psyops to NVA troops in South Vietnam.

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189. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, June 20, 1972, 10:30–11:27 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Major Gen. David Ott

JCS
Lt. Gen. Richard T. Knowles
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
George Carver
[*name not declassified*] (only stayed for Mr. Carver's briefing)

NSC Staff
Richard T. Kennedy
Philip Odeen
William Stearman
Mark Wandler

It was agreed that:

—CIA will check out the special intelligence report about a possible new North Vietnamese line on negotiations.

—CIA and DIA should prepare by Friday[2] a joint assessment—coordinated with the field—on what we think the North Vietnamese can do between now and the end of July. The report should focus on potential enemy activity in MRs 3 and 4. In the light of this assessment, we should evaluate possible ARVN activities.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, June 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

[2] June 23.

—CIA should try to submit by Friday the answers to the questions handed over by General Haig. The questions attempt to refine the June 8 CIA study on North Vietnamese capabilities.[3]

—We will not send the DOD note concerning reconnaissance overflights of Chinese ships to the Chinese Foreign Minister. If possible, Mr. Kissinger will bring the subject up in his discussions in Peking.[4]

—We should make an assessment of the effectiveness of the leafletting operations so far. We should also try to resolve the operational question of diverting air assets for the leafletting operations.[5]

—State should provide the political input to the ARVN equipment study.

—CIA should distribute to the WSAG participants the maps of the various territorial situations which could result from a negotiated cease-fire.

—We should send a decision paper to the President on the options for aircraft and crews to be used in the operation pre-empting Radio Hanoi.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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[3] See footnote 2, Document 193.

[4] Kissinger was in Beijing from June 19 to June 23 to brief the Chinese leadership on the Moscow Summit.

[5] This issue was raised in the WSAG meeting because Frank Shakespeare, Director of the United States Information Agency, at the time in Saigon on an official visit, attended a dinner hosted by Bunker. At the dinner Shakespeare asked for an assessment of the leaflet program over North Vietnam. From the discussion, he concluded that: "Mission elements, including Bunker, Abrams, CIA, USIA unanimously and strongly agreed that diversion of military effort, risk and expense were not worth it. Leafletting undertaken solely in response to Washington direct orders. Abrams and Vogt say they have much better uses for planes in bombing strikes, etc." He suggested an immediate standdown and program review. (Backchannel message 781 from Shakespeare and Garment to Haldeman, June 20; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, From Amb. Bunker—Saigon, 1972) Prior to the WSAG meeting, NSC staffer Kennedy drafted a memorandum for Haig, June 20, detailing the context within which the leafletting was taking place and noting, "it obviously cannot be done without the use of some assets." Kennedy's memorandum is ibid., NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–088, Washington Special Action Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 6/20/72.

190. Message From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Washington, June 22, 1972, 1223Z.

1255. Subj: Assessment of Future RVNAF Objectives (U). Refs: A. COMUSMACV 101000Z Jun 72. B. JCS 8243/202221Z Jun 72. C. COMUSMACV 210834Z Jun 72.[2]

1. (U) Ref A reviewed the current situation in the RVN, presented a look ahead through Sep 72, and provided the rationale for modifications to the US force structure in the RVN. Ref B requested a short-term assessment of enemy capabilities and possible RVNAF actions.

2. (U) This message analyzes the results of allied efforts to date and the course of action discussed in Ref A in view of Washington-level considerations.

3. (S) The steady improvement in the friendly situation in recent weeks has been marked. The main enemy offensives appear to have been blunted. The GVN has retained its stability, and the people have not rallied to support the enemy. The enemy continues to suffer heavy losses in both manpower and material, and the impact of air and naval campaigns in NVN should further aggravate his resupply problems. The delays imposed on the enemy have provided time for the RVNAF to strengthen their defenses and prepare for counteroffensive action.

4. (TS) It is recognized that the destruction of the enemy's armed forces and warmaking capacity is being accomplished in an unprecedented manner, and that his objective of exerting influence on the population of the RVN has been frustrated to a large extent. However, retention of present levels of US forces in-theater (including Tacair and B–52s, naval gunfire, amphibious lift, and airlift), as well as necessary levels of budgetary support over any extended period of time, will be extremely difficult. Thus, the prospects of a long stalemate along presently held lines would give rise to the difficulties previously experienced here and can only hasten the reduction in US support levels. This situation presents what is, in all probability, a final opportunity to regain the momentum lost after 30 Mar 72. Accordingly, the intent voiced in Ref A to move ahead and place the RVN in a superior position by Sep 72 is most timely.

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 69, JCS Out General Service Messages, 1–30 June 1972. Top Secret; Immediate; Specat; Exclusive. Repeated to General Abrams.

[2] None printed. (Ibid.)

5. (TS) It would appear that the overall goal within the next 3 months should be to reestablish GVN control over the key areas lost as a result of the enemy offensive in order to present the strongest possible negotiating position at the Paris Peace Talks and to demonstrate to the world community the military strength of the GVN. In examining the operations discussed in Ref A, as well as other appropriate territorial objectives, it appears that the highest priority RVNAF operation should be to retake Quang Tri City and the coastal lowlands south of the Cua Viet River, with the ultimate objective of seizing the territory along the coast of the DMZ. The JCS are encouraged that first steps toward this objective are being taken, as reflected in Ref C. The other practicable territorial objectives appear to be to restore GVN control to the areas of MRs 3 and 4 lying west and northwest of Saigon, to restore GVN control to Binh Dinh Province and to remove the enemy threat to Kontum City.

6. (TS) In view of the foregoing, it is requested that discussions be held with GVN and RVNAF Joint General Staff to underscore the urgency of regaining the territorial initiative and to ascertain the South Vietnamese appraisal of the proposed objectives. In addition, it is requested that CINCPAC provide his assessment of the capability of the RVNAF to accomplish these objectives within the timeframe under discussion, (i.e., through Sep 72) and CINCPAC's recommended priorities.

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191. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, June 22, 1972, 9:33–10:07 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
Rear Adm. Harry D. Train

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, June 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

JCS
Lt. Gen. Richard Knowles
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (stayed only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC Staff
Richard T. Kennedy
Philip Odeen
William Stearman
Mark Wandler

It was agreed that:

—Defense will work out alternative plans for basing the tankers after the 120-day time limit at Don Muong runs out.

—Defense will provide an options paper for the President on the aircraft and crews needed for the pre-emption of Radio Hanoi.

—We should make sure we get all the pertinent facts out about the situation in the North, our battlefield accomplishments and the South Vietnamese economic situation—in order to counter the backfire the enemy is trying to develop here.

—Defense should try to get its review of the South Vietnamese economic situation over here as soon as possible.

—We should pull together for the President all the facts relating to the delivery of additional equipment to the South Vietnamese and to the possible creation of another ARVN division so that he can see how his decision to send the equipment looks in reality.

—Gen. Haig should seek Presidential guidance about compromising on Case amendment.

[Omitted here is discussion of the military situation in South Vietnam, the POL pipeline the North Vietnamese were extending northward to China and how to destroy it, relocating U.S. aircraft in Thailand and associated political and financial problems, the possibility of basing the aircraft in the Philippines, the black operation against Radio Hanoi, and using drone aircraft to leaflet North Vietnam as well as manned aircraft during bombing missions.]

Gen. Haig: I have a feeling from reading the News Summary this morning and from recent intelligence reports that Hanoi is working in concert with the French Communist Party, trying to build a backfire here about the intensive bombing and about the "disastrous" situation in South Vietnam. After three weeks of intensive press play, some of these issues are starting to turn sour. One issue is the dikes.[2] Another

[2] The dikes around Hanoi and the Red River Delta were crucial to crop irrigation and to keeping Hanoi and the other cities in the area from being flooded. From time to time North Vietnamese leaders suggested that the dikes were potential targets of or had been targeted by American military aircraft.

is the Stern story we talked about the other day.[3] Still another is the economic problem in Saigon. Since I read the News Summary this morning, I'm pretty sure it will generate a reaction in the oval office. I'm sure the President will ask me about it during the course of the day. We ought to think of things we can do to counter the enemy effort. We've had some good briefings—some good backgrounders—out of the Embassy and MACV, and we should continue with them. We don't want any overkill; we just want to refocus the facts in an attempt to counter this enemy backfire. Let's make sure all the facts get out. What is the enemy doing now? What are our battlefield accomplishments? Abe, incidentally, did a good job in reporting these accomplishments in his assessment report last night. What is the economic situation in Saigon? I'm a little concerned about that.

Mr. Sullivan: I think the economic situation has bottomed out.

Mr. Nutter: That's right. The economy is in much better shape now, and it has reacted well to the various measures which were applied to it. We can tell a much better story about the South Vietnamese economy now.

Mr. Sullivan: In that same vein, we've had a chance to take a closer look at the Moose and Lowenstein report, and they say the economy is in good shape now.[4] The economic part of the report came from Cooper, so it is okay.

On the military side, the report plays the same line Stern writes about. It says the North Vietnamese accomplished their goals. Moose and Lowenstein say the North Vietnamese never wanted to capture An Loc or Kontum. According to Moose and Lowenstein, the enemy just wanted to concentrate the South Vietnamese forces, in order to go around them and mess up the pacification program. In a somewhat contradictory way, however, they say the North Vietnamese were only stopped at An Loc and Kontum by the massive use of U.S. air power. The conclusions they reach, quite naturally, are that Vietnamization is a failure and that the enemy offensive was blunted only by U.S. air.

On the political side, Moose and Lowenstein write that Thieu has no support, except for the U.S. They report that there is corruption throughout the country and that all U.S. officials wink at the corruption.

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[3] "Analysts Measure Hanoi's Goals and Results," *The Washington Post,* June 18, 1972, pp. A1, A14.

[4] Reference is to "Vietnam: May 1972," June 29 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), a report for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee prepared by staffers Richard M. Moose and James G. Lowenstein after their May 23–June 6 visit to Vietnam. Sections of the report were deleted at the request of the Department of State, Department of Defense, and Central Intelligence Agency.

I assume the report will be issued before Congress recesses on June 30.

Mr. Nutter: That's a safe assumption to make.

Mr. Sullivan: I've asked our people to start getting all the statistics on pacification. We can say that the pacification has dropped as a result of the offensive. Nonetheless, compared to the 1968 and 1965 levels, the current pacification figures are still way up there. Only three percent of the population has come under Communist control. I should point out that we may have a problem in releasing these figures because the HES statistics are still classified. Do we want to declassify them?

Gen. Haig: We have to be very careful with the statistics because if there is a new offensive coming we don't want to set ourselves up for something worse than we already have.

Mr. Johnson: You're right. That's always possible.

Gen. Haig: When will we get the DOD economic study?[5]

Mr. Nutter: I sent the study to Secretary Laird, but I haven't heard anything more about it. I'll check on it when I get back to the office.

Mr. Sullivan: What study is this?

Mr. Nutter: It's a review we've prepared of the economic situation in South Vietnam.

Mr. Sullivan: This is a DOD review?

Mr. Nutter: Yes.

Mr. Sullivan: That's interesting. I'd like to see it.

Mr. Nutter: Sure. We'll send you a copy just as soon as the Secretary clears it. By the way, I'd also like to see your review of the economic situation.

Gen. Haig: We're going to wrestle today with the funding issue for additional equipment and costs resulting from our intensified efforts in recent months. We should have the problem resolved by the end of the day.

Mr. Rush: Good.

Gen. Haig: Are there any indications that Thieu's inability to get the full emergency powers he sought is eroding his support in Saigon?

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[5] The report reached Kissinger on June 26. In his transmittal memorandum Laird wrote: "The paper concludes that the South Vietnamese economy is resilient and flexible, and the reforms and emergency measures already instituted have made it even more responsive to changes in the economic situations. The fact that the enemy apparently did not target the economic infrastructure (whether to minimize popular resentment of the invasion or to preserve the economy intact in the event of success) points toward probable achievement of a relatively rapid recovery." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–088, Washington Special Action Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 6/28/72)

Mr. Sullivan: No. There doesn't seem to be any erosion of support because of that. He is still up against the same combinations that have always been against him. As usual, the request for full emergency powers wasn't handled very smoothly by the Palace. Thieu could probably get some of the emergency powers if he went in with a truncated government-sponsored bill. Still, the Senate is suspicious that he will convert the powers granted in truncated bill into the full powers he has been seeking. But I think he could get some of the emergency powers if he settled for half a loaf instead of the full loaf.

Mr. Carver: Bill's analysis is correct. He could get some of the powers, but he is being stiff-necked in insisting on getting everything he wants. The Senate is demonstrating its independence.

Mr. Sullivan: We can sympathize somewhat with Thieu because the Senate wants to cut out the powers dealing with finance and taxation—just the powers we want him to have.

Mr. Nutter: That's right. He already has most of the other powers enumerated in the bill, as a result of the martial law decrees. We feel that now is the time to move on the financial and taxation matters, and we would like him to have the appropriate powers in those areas.

Gen. Haig: When Henry gets back, he will want to know about the plans to deliver the additional equipment called for by NSDM 168.[6] Are most of the items going to be delivered by August 1?

Mr. Rush: We sent a paper over to you about that. Have you seen it?

Mr. Odeen: You mean the paper dated June 17?

Mr. Rush: Yes.

Mr. Odeen: Dave Ott and I got together on this yesterday.

Gen. Haig: As I understand it, we will have a shortfall in tanks. Do we want to draw down tanks from other sources in order to get them to Vietnam by August 1? Recent intelligence reports indicate we could get a cease-fire proposition very shortly. Would we want to accept the shortfall in Vietnam, or would we want to draw down other stocks, with possible implications for our worldwide posture? This, I think, is the key question that has to be addressed.

Mr. Odeen: I went over this fairly thoroughly with Dave Ott yesterday, and I think we have a good handle on it.[7] The tanks and APCs

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[6] Document 167.

[7] The result of Odeen and Ott's effort was a memorandum to Haig from the former dated June 19 and entitled "Military Assistance for RVN—NSDM 168, June 20 WSAG." On a note attached to the memorandum, Odeen wrote: "I have made marginal comments where my questions were answered in follow-up discussions with OSD." (National Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–088, Washington Special Action Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 6/28/72)

are the biggest problems. The only way of meeting the Vietnam requirement is to draw the tanks and APCs from other units. DOD feels that the cost of drawing down APCs, Vulcans and a few other items from units will be too great because it may downgrade our overall posture. Six or seven items of consequence will not get to Vietnam by August 1. All the other items will go as scheduled.

Gen. Haig: What about creating an additional ARVN Division? How do we feel about that?

Mr. Odeen: Defense feels that we shouldn't do it.

Mr. Nutter: We don't think this is the moment to create another division. The South Vietnamese will need additional forces just to maintain and operate the equipment we are sending them. Most of these additional forces will have to be taken from the PF.

Gen. Haig: We ought to pull all these things together for the President and tell him how his decision to send additional equipment looks in reality.

Mr. Sullivan: I want to bring up for discussion the amendment Senator Case wants to attach to the foreign assistance bill. If passed, this amendment would forbid the use of Thai SGUs in Laos. Peter Dominick, acting for the Administration, is sponsoring a resolution coming up for debate Friday which, if passed, would eliminate the Case amendment. Case contacted Dominick yesterday and offered to compromise. To me, that indicates Case doesn't think he has the votes for his amendment.

The important point in all of this is that a compromise would establish the principle that U.S.-supported forces cannot engage in hostilities outside their country without Congressional approval. We're faced, therefore, with choosing between expediency and principle. We could get approval for the use of Thai forces at the expense of giving up the principle. We are negative about compromising. I gather the Agency is trying to come up with something which will gut the amendment even more.

Mr. Helms: I think you stated the issue fairly. We can accept the compromise and get the use of the Thai SGUs for another year. Or we can say the principle is more important than the SGUs. If that's the case, then Dominick will call for an executive session to debate the matter.

Gen. Haig: The President thinks that in the next few weeks we will have more strength on Southeast Asia than we are ever likely to have again. He feels the Mansfield amendment and other riders must be met head on, and I think he is right. Because of the summits, the feeling of good will and other similar things, we probably have the votes on our side right now. A perfect manifestation of this is the vote in support of the President's Vietnam policy at the Mayors' Conference yesterday.

The President wants us to be tough, to insist we are doing the right things. He thinks we will have the support we need.

Mr. Helms: The suggested compromise would be an amendment that would be a nonsense issue.

Mr. Kennedy: The amendment is directed against foreign forces in Thailand. It's a non-issue operationally.

Mr. Sullivan: Should the issue come to a vote on the floor, the vote could go either way. Our people don't know how it would come out. If there is a floor vote, it would come after the executive session debate.

Mr. Helms: Al [Haig],[8] I suggest you talk to the President about this. You should try to find out if he wants to cash his checks on this issue, which is not really very big.

Gen. Haig: You're right.

Mr. Kennedy: If there is an executive session on the floor of the Senate, it would undoubtedly get a lot of attention. Do we want this issue to be aired in the press?

Mr. Nutter: We're talking about the Senate. The House won't behave the same way. Even if the Senate passes the amendment, the House will probably not pass it.

Mr. Sullivan: I think the general feeling is that you are right. It's most likely that any Senate action would not survive the conference committee. But if the action did go to conference, Fulbright would designate the conferees—not Stennis. Fulbright would probably be one of the conferees, and he would probably select Case as the other conferee.

Mr. Helms: I think the Senate has bigger fish to fry than this.

Mr. Nutter: Fulbright didn't sign the report.

Mr. Sullivan: No. Case did.

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[8] Brackets are in the original.

192. Memorandum From the Special Assistant to the Ambassador (Polgar) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

A–5085 Saigon, June 27, 1972.

SUBJECT

Indications of a Possible Change in Communist Negotiating Position

1. Three reports from separate sources (and subsources) have recently stated that the Communists have dropped their insistence that President Thieu be removed as a sine qua non to substantive negotiations. In addition, the French Ambassador has reported through Embassy channels that the North Vietnamese Chargé in Vientiane in a recent conversation failed to mention the removal of Thieu as a condition of political settlement, something on which he had always insisted in the past. Finally, the unofficial joint USSR–North Vietnamese statement at the conclusion of Podgorny's recent trip to Hanoi failed to mention Thieu's removal and, in fact, dealt only generally with conditions for a peace settlement.

2. Two of our reports on this subject are fairly well sourced. One is from a VC cadre in Saigon, who received his information from a medium level VC functionary who returned in early June from a meeting in Cambodia of other cadre. The subsource appears to have reported accurately what he was told in briefings while in Cambodia, including the fact that Thieu's removal is no longer a prerequisite. Some of the things he was told in the briefings are clearly propaganda (e.g., that North Vietnamese aircraft might be introduced to the war in South Vietnam) but the item about Thieu was presented in some detail, with supporting explanations why the change in negotiating position was made. It appeared as if the briefer knew the change would surprise and perhaps dismay his listeners and that therefore prompt explanation would be required.

3. The second fairly well sourced report is from a former VC who rallied and was later cooperative with us in recontacting former VC colleagues.[2] The VC are currently in the process of trying to re-recruit this man and occasionally his VC contacts feed him tidbits of information as part of their recruitment process. He, too, received his information from a medium level cadre who in turn learned of the change

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1016, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Haig Trip to Vietnam, June 29–July 4, 1972. Secret. A copy was sent to Whitehouse, General Weyand, and Bennett.

[2] The report, June 20, is in the Central Intelligence Agency, Executive Registry, Job 80–R01284A, Box 6, 1 June–31 July 1972.

in negotiating position at a cadre meeting he attended in June in Cambodia near the Tay Ninh/Cambodian border. (The timing and location indicate that the meetings mentioned in the two reports, though similar, were distinct and separate gatherings. Thus, the ultimate source of the information in the two reports is almost certainly different.) This second report states a settlement with the U.S. could come without a ceasefire. The information in both reports seems for the most part quite reasonable and consistent with what we know and/or believe about Communist feelings on important subjects. Both, for example, display concern about U.S. diplomatic maneuvering with China and the USSR, but both attempt to make the case that North Vietnam will be able to overcome any resulting problems. There is nothing in the reports to make them mutually exclusive.

4. A third report mentioning the change in negotiating posture is less well sourced. It comes from a Saigon cadre who learned the information from a village level cadre in Dinh Tuong Province. Unlike the other two reports, it adds a condition to the retention of Thieu, that he would accept the NLF 7-point peace proposal.[3] This report also states that the acceptance of Thieu is a temporary, tactical decision to facilitate his later removal, a point allegedly made at the cadre meeting in Cambodia reported by our first source.

5. On balance, it appears that at least some VC are being told that Thieu's removal is no longer a sine qua non for substantive negotiations. They are being told this despite the deleterious effect such a statement might have on their morale and the questions it might raise. Thus, there is a ring of truth to the statements. And while the reports are second or third hand, they do appear quite specific on the point of a change in policy toward Thieu's retention.

6. There has not yet been a positive shift in Communist propaganda to reflect the possibility of change of policy but there have been some interesting omissions in the propaganda on the Podgorny visit and the statement of the NVN Chargé in Vientiane reported through Embassy channels. The change is far from a confirmed fact but it is an intriguing posssibility.

Thomas Polgar

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[3] The heart of the July 1, 1971, proposal was that the United States and its non-South Vietnamese allies would withdraw their troops during a specified time period and, in the same period, the Communists would release the American prisoners. See footnote 4, Document 26.

193. Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, June 27, 1972.

SUBJECT

North Vietnamese Military Capabilities

CIA, in a June 27 Intelligence Memorandum (Tab 1) presents answers to NSC queries on topics treated in the June 8 CIA memorandum "The Effect of the Past Months' Events on North Vietnamese Military Capabilities." These questions and answers cover a broad spectrum of North Vietnamese logistic capabilities and problems throughout Indochina and the combat effectiveness of enemy main forces.[2] CIA's answers are summarized below:

I. Petroluem

A. How long will POL stocks last and when do you estimate consumption plus losses will force major cutbacks in activity levels?

Unless a reliable flow of petroleum is established, and significant quantities are received in the meantime, major cutbacks in activity levels in North Vietnam would probably have to occur soon after mid-July when stock theoretically would correspond to about 30 days supply; however, these widely dispersed stocks would be difficult to distribute and are subject to some destruction by U.S. interdiction.

B. Can the North Vietnamese import a substantial part of the average annual rate of 400,000 tons (first quarter of 1972 would stretch out to 600,000 tons per year)?

C. How much by truck?

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–088, Washington Special Action Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 6/28/72. Top Secret.

[2] The June 27 intelligence memorandum, attached but not printed, originated with Kissinger's reading of the CIA memorandum, "The Effect of the Past Months' Events on North Vietnamese Military Capabilities," June 8. (Ibid.) In an undated memorandum to Helms, Kissinger wrote that the June 8 memorandum was "a most useful study. A reading of it, however, stimulates further questions." He then posed questions about current POL stocks, the importation of additional POL by truck and pipeline, U.S. efforts to interdict POL importation, and the impact on operational effectiveness of the loss in battle of North Vietnamese soldiers and equipment. Kissinger's memorandum is attached to a June 14 memorandum from Kennedy and Holdridge to Kissinger; ibid., Box 115, Vietnam Subject Files, Net Assessment of North and South Vietnam (Defense).

D. How much by the pipeline under construction?

The pipeline under construction could theoretically meet North Vietnam's minimum requirements of 1,000 tons of POL per day; however, it probably cannot be used for multi-product service and presumably will be used to meet Hanoi's minimum needs for motor gasoline. The pipeline might be completed in a week or two.

The daily (400 tons) diesel fuel requirement would require about 135 3 ton capacity tank trucks moving south each day and about 540 tank cars making the four day round trip from the Chinese border to Hanoi. Other POL products (of which 100 tons a day are needed) would require 50 2 ton capacity southbound trucks per day and about 200 cargo trucks between China and Hanoi.

E. Would the amount of POL that you estimate the North Vietnamese will be able to import materially affect North Vietnamese ability to sustain a high activity level in the South?

Basically, no. Petroleum requirements for use outside of North Vietnam are just over 5% of Hanoi's total imports. Heavy rains during the summer severely restrict vehicle traffic in most of the Indochina combat and logistic areas and sufficient POL has probably already been stockpiled to meet most of the enemy's wet season needs. Beyond this period, Hanoi can—albeit not without difficulty—probably meet its battlefield needs; however, POL needed to sustain Hanoi's domestic transport system could place constraints on POL available outside of North Vietnam.

F. How effective would our interdiction be against the estimated imports?

It is unlikely that the enemy's POL pipelines can be effectively interdicted; however, interdiction of truck transported POL is more effective. Whether the North Vietnamese will be able to meet their minimum requirements for both civil and military uses cannot as yet be determined.

G. With the lower level of tank activity in the South, is the North Vietnamese POL requirement substantially less?

No. Diesel fuel for tanks is only a small part of the enemy's total POL demand and will amount to no more than 1,000 to 2,000 tons this summer.

H. To what degree has the diminished tank POL consumption been offset by increased truck operations required as a result of interdicted rail lines?

The net impact of reduced out-of-country requirements in the South and increased activity in the North is to raise POL requirement by a minimum of 75 tons per day or slightly more than 2% of the total POL needed during the wet season.

II. Armor and Artillery

A. Can we expect to see armor used as it was at the beginning of the offensive? Have losses of tanks and skilled personnel been so great as to rule this out?

The considerable losses of NVA tanks and experienced armor personnel, coupled with the oncoming monsoons in MRs 2 and 3 and the Laotian Panhandle, will mean a reduced capability to deploy and use armor in these areas of South Vietnam during the next several months. The enemy's overall armor capability has been degraded by losses, unskilled personnel and poor tactics.

B. Have the North Vietnamese been able to replace losses in the South?

No. Hanoi has not even made up its tank losses in MR–1.

C. What effects will weather have on the North Vietnamese ability to use armor and artillery and on its ability to move heavy supplies (e.g., ammunition and fuel)?

Except in MR–1, which has dry weather through August, rain will, in the coming weeks, considerably restrict the enemy's movement of supplies and heavy weapons and his use of armor and artillery.

III. Trucks

A. What is the North Vietnamese truck inventory?

The North Vietnamese have between 18,000 and 20,000 trucks of which some 4,800 are used out of country.

B. Are North Vietnamese increased demands for truck transport supportable?

Yes, assuming transportation of only those items essential for basic economic needs and to continue the war at near present levels (also assuming no food imports will be needed).

IV. Combat Effectiveness of Main Forces

How much has combat effectiveness of the main force units been hurt by personnel losses, particularly NCO and officer losses? How do we assess the quality of replacement personnel and how will this affect combat effectiveness of particular units?

What North Vietnamese units are now ineffective? What percentage of the forces?

How long will it take to put these units in good fighting condition? (It would be most helpful to have a unit-by-unit assessment in response to the questions on combat effectiveness.)

As many as 40% of the enemy infantry regiments committed to the current campaign are at best only marginally effective. During the

current offensive, the time needed to rebuild depleted units has varied from two weeks to over a month. Almost all regiments used in the offensive have been rebuilt once and many more than once. Each time a unit is rebuilt, its combat capability is progressively reduced, both quantitatively and qualitatively, since troop replacements are generally inferior and experienced cadre are hard to replace. The enemy's losses have been heavy in MRs 1, 2, and 3, but his main force strength in or near MR–4 remains relatively intact.

While the enemy's main force offensive capabilities have been weakened, even his ineffective units could probably give a good account of themselves in a defensive role, especially when they're deeply dug into defensive positions.

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194. Note From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, June 28, 1972.

Henry:

Here is yet another and more detailed report on COSVN instructions to its cadres about cease-fire and political settlement. CIA has confirmed that this is a totally reliable source and I think it is essential that we look carefully at what is contained in the attached message. It is, of course, tailored for local cadres and packaged in a way which is more worrisome than its underlying reality.

The key points are as follows:

1. Seize as much land as possible preliminary to a cease-fire in place or a readjustment. In the latter case, greater leverage is provided.

2. Abandonment of a demand for war indemnification.

3. Elimination of demands for withdrawal of U.S. forces and bases within a fixed period.

4. *Abandonment of the demand that Thieu be removed and the Saigon Regime overthrown.* In lieu thereof, cadres are urged to improve the po-

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 993, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Chron, June 13–30, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Kissinger initialed the note. Attached but not printed is a CIA Information Cable, June 28, TDCS–314/0510–72, entitled "Major COSVN Military and Political Policy Decisions Concerning the War in Vietnam and an Eventual Ceasefire."

litical base through which Thieu can be overthrown following the cease-fire and political settlement.

5. In terms of tactics, the enemy will lay low until just before the cease-fire is to be accepted, at which time they will attempt to overrun as much territory as possible.

6. Cadres are being postured in a way that makes it look as though it would be Nixon who was backing down before his election when we know the opposite is the case. On the other hand, this lays great credence to LBJ's advice of yesterday which I believe came from a larger base of knowledge than his isolated Ranch posture would suggest.[2]

I think we must be very, very wary of the strong possibility that Hanoi has been in close touch with McGovern or McGovern elements, that a deal has been worked out through which the Democratic Party will be able to achieve credit for the settlement and that we will be standing with egg on our face in November because both the Democrats and Hanoi and their friends throughout the media will portray the breakthrough as coming directly from McGovern's pressure on the Administration. It is inconceivable to me that President Johnson would have spent from 11:00 am yesterday morning until 6:30 pm last night in an emotional way talking to me about the importance of this issue.

This is purely speculative at this point in time but I very much suspect that this is the game plan and that it is, in fact, designed to strengthen, not weaken McGovern. We cannot, and must not, lose sight of the realities which are that Hanoi has been forced into this strategy as a result of the strong action taken with the mining and the bombing and also as a result of the disastrous losses in the south. I urge you to think the implications of this thing through very carefully. The President's press conference tomorrow evening could be critical in preempting what the Democrats may hope to turn very much in their favor.[3] I have never for a moment doubted the total and complete collaboration between Hanoi and the McGovern camp and especially those individuals around McGovern. If we proceed under any other assumptions, we are totally naive.

Al Haig[4]

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[2] At Nixon's direction, Haig visited former President Johnson on June 27 at his Texas ranch to brief him on the SALT talks. During their conversation, according to Haig: "President Johnson told me that he considered a McGovern Presidency a disaster. He stated that as a life time Democrat, he could not vote Republican but he would not vote Democratic either." Later in the conversation, "President Johnson went to some length in expressing his concern for the tactics and character of the McGovern camp. He noted that McGovern supporters had totally devastated the Democratic party machine in Texas by employing the most irresponsible and revolutionary campaign tactics." (Ibid., Box 998, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Memcons, January–December 1972 [2 of 3])

[3] The transcript is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972,* pp. 705–718.

[4] Haig initialed "AH" above his typed signature.

195. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, June 28, 1972, 10:02–10:48 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
Armistead Selden
Maj. Gen. David Ott

JCS
Gen. John Ryan
Capt. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
William Christison
William Newton (only for Mr. Helms' briefing)

NSC
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—CIA should provide a paper as soon as possible on the effectiveness of our interdiction effort in North Vietnam. The paper should describe the impact of our actions during the last two months, estimate what we will face from the North Vietnamese during the next four months and list the options we will have.

—The State contingency paper on Vietnam should be discussed at Friday's meeting.[2]

—Mr. Sullivan should tell the French that we do not support Foreign Minister Schumann's idea with regard to achieving a settlement in Vietnam. Our position should also be conveyed to the South Vietnamese.

—We should prepare one package for the Thai, listing all the additional deployments we wish to make there.

[Omitted here are Richard Helms's briefing and discussion of South Vietnamese plans to retake Quang Tri City.]

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, June 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

[2] June 30. See Document 198.

Mr. Kissinger: I'd like to have a brief discussion now of the CIA estimate on where we stand. The paper is fascinating.[3]

Mr. Johnson: It is. I told Dick before that I thought it was a first-class paper.

Mr. Kissinger: It's outstanding. By the way, where is Carver today?

Mr. Helms: He's on a brief vacation. Bill Christison worked very closely with George on the paper, and he is much more qualified than I am to answer your questions on it.

Mr. Kissinger: When I read the paper, I came to the conclusion that nothing we have done during the last two months really makes a difference in the North Vietnamese logistic situation. When you strip away all the words, our recent actions have not made a difference.

Mr. Christison: That's not exactly so.

Mr. Kissinger: Oh, no? Perhaps I missed something when I read it.

Mr. Christison: We answered your list of questions as specifically as we could.[4] You have to realize, though, that the basic material for answering the questions was already contained in the original memo.

Mr. Kissinger: We sent out the questions because we didn't feel the original memo was precise enough in certain areas. The questions were an attempt to refine the study.

Mr. Christison: All the statements that we made in the original memo are still applicable. When you asked the question about the POL situation, for example, we gave a specific answer to the question, and we didn't discuss the overall disruption of the North Vietnamese transportation system.

Mr. Kissinger: We sent over the questions because the original memo seemed to conclude that nothing we've done in the last two months has made a real difference. We thought we could at least pinpoint certain critical areas by asking specific questions. However, that doesn't seem to be the case. It's against common sense to think that the paper's conclusions are true. But they may be.

Mr. Johnson: I didn't get the same reading out of the paper that you did. I thought the paper concluded that the enemy would be physically able to continue the operations in South Vietnam for the next few months—but that the level of operations would be lower than it has been.

Mr. Kissinger: That's not what I got out of the paper. As I read it, the enemy could continue on the same level of operations.

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[3] See footnote 2, Document 193.

[4] See Document 193.

Mr. Johnson: I read it to be a lower level.

Mr. Christison: What we actually said was that until about the middle of July, there would be no effect on the level of operations. After that time, certain constraints could develop.

Mr. Kissinger: But what will happen if the pipeline is completed by the middle of July—that's a possibility, you know.

Mr. Christison: Even if the pipeline were completed, it would have no effect on the delivery of gasoline for the vehicles.

Mr. Kissinger: It's my understanding from reading the paper that the motor gas would be transported in the pipeline and all other POL would be transported in trucks.

Mr. Christison: We didn't say that the North Vietnamese wouldn't try to truck down the POL. It's our judgment that they will try to do so. If they do, it will require a heavy interdiction effort on our part to slow them down. And we didn't make a judgment about how effective the interdiction effort would be.

Mr. Kissinger: Don't get me wrong. This is a superb piece of work. I'm not attacking it; I'm just trying to understand it a little better.

Mr. Christison: As I say, we made no judgment about the effectiveness of our interdiction.

Mr. Kissinger: As I understand it, you feel they have the capability of trucking in the POL they need. In fact, it seems as though they would only have to use about twenty-five percent of their truck inventory to meet this transportation requirement. And, based on our experience along the Trail, it will not be possible for us to interdict this truck traffic. Is that right?

Mr. Christison: We did not make the judgment that it will be impossible to interdict the traffic.

Mr. Kissinger: Maybe not. But you came very close to it, by saying they could move the trucks at night and drive along by-pass roads.

Mr. Christison: It's our judgment that the North Vietnamese can bring in an unknown quantity of POL. However, we don't know if this unknown quantity will be enough to meet their minimum requirements. It will be harder for us to stop this traffic than it will be for us to halt the flow of motor gas in the pipeline.

Mr. Helms: Isn't it true that weeks ago when we were all sitting around this table thinking of actions we could take, we all agreed that no matter what we did it would have no effect on the North Vietnamese activities until July or August?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes, but if the paper is right, our recent actions won't even have an effect on the enemy in July or August. And the pipeline could very well be completed in two weeks. The combination of the

trucks and the pipeline means, if the analysis is correct, that POL will not be a constraint on the enemy.

Mr. Sullivan: That's right. And it will be even less of a constraint if the Chinese cooperate more than they have done so far.

Mr. Christison: This is a difficult problem to analyze. We made no judgment about the quantities of POL which will get through. That depends on the interdiction effort.

Mr. Kissinger: Have we made plans to take out the pipeline?

Gen. Ryan: Yes. There are five main storage areas on the pipeline, but they are hard to get to because they are buried.

Mr. Kissinger: But do we have plans to take them out by air attack?

Gen. Ryan: Yes, CINCPAC has the plans. I just want to caution you, though, that it will be extremely difficult to do so.

Mr. Johnson: Are the pumping stations fixed, or can they be moved about to different locations on the pipeline?

Mr. Rush: They can be moved about.

Mr. Johnson: Do these pumping stations operate on diesel power?

Gen. Ott: Yes, and sometimes they hook truck engines up to provide the power. When the task is finished, they just disconnect the trucks and drive them to other locations. Naturally, it's very difficult to pinpoint that kind of a target.

Mr. Rush: One of our purposes in attacking the North Vietnamese power plants was to make the enemy increase use of POL for the civilian economy.

Mr. Christison: Other than on motor gas, we make more optimistic statements about the POL situation. The enemy can get the POL down by truck, but we make no judgment about whether this quantity will meet his minimum need. We think it's still a bit too early to make that judgment.

Mr. Kissinger: From the number of trucks we estimate they can make available to this task, there's no doubt they can get what they need.

Mr. Christison: That depends on what we can destroy during the interdiction effort.

Mr. Kissinger: Are we making route reccys?

Gen. Ryan: Yes, we're doing what we can. But it's difficult to reccy certain sections of road because the AAA is intense.

Mr. Kissinger: So the conclusion has to be that POL will not be a major constraint on the enemy.

Mr. Christison: By next month, according to our estimate, the enemy will have only one month of POL reserve on hand. At that time,

if no major reserves have been brought in, critical distribution problems could develop.

Gen. Ryan: I haven't had a chance to read the paper yet. Still, I want to point out that we shouldn't relate this interdiction effort to the effort on the Trail. Although the enemy may have all the trucks he needs, we now have the repair stations and the truck parks on our target list. Consequently, our interdiction should be much more effective now.

Mr. Kissinger: What do you think, Bill [Christison]?

Mr. Christison: First of all, we must realize that they have all the trucks they need. Even if they should need more later on, it will be easy for them to get the additional trucks from China. Therefore, the question is can we make a big enough and sustained interdiction effort to stop the traffic?

Mr. Kissinger: Gen. Ryan says we can't. For one thing, he says we can't make the route reccys that we need.

Gen. Ryan: We can reccy some sections of road. On other sections, we run the risk of being knocked down if we make the reccy. However, we can take out all the bridges.

Mr. Kissinger: Are we doing that?

Gen. Ryan: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: I understand that the coastal road between China and Hanoi would not be vulnerable. I don't think there are any major streams, passes or bridges on that road.

Gen. Ryan: That's right.

Mr. Johnson: As I read the paper, it's my understanding that the North Vietnamese can continue their activity indefinitely—as long as they lower their level of operations. They were getting 6,800 tons—gross—a day, but according to the CIA figures, they are now getting 2,700 tons a day.

Mr. Kissinger: You can also show that this is being done by looking at the cuts in the civilian economy.

Mr. Johnson: And the economy wasn't very lush to begin with.

Mr. Christison: Let me describe briefly the logic we used in this analysis. The figure of 2,700 tons is the minimum amount we think they need to keep the economy and the war going. Using that figure, we then estimated the number of trucks they need to handle the tonnage. It was then our judgment that they have the means to handle the tonnage. It was not our business to make a judgment about whether the interdiction will or will not stop them, even though we came close to making the judgment on motor gas. On other things, we made no judgment about whether the interdiction can or cannot stop them from

getting the minimum amounts through. We just gave some reasons why it will be difficult to interdict the trucks and supplies.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's turn this around if we can. Dick [Helms] can you give us a paper as soon as you can on the effectiveness of our interdiction up to now? Show the differences, if any, resulting from the May 8 and subsequent actions. What effects are we having now and what effect will we have in the next few months on the North Vietnamese capabilities?

Mr. Christison: It will be difficult to make that assessment now. We should wait for another month to go by in order to provide useful answers to your questions.

Mr. Johnson: I was a little surprised by the way you dismissed the civilian food problem in the paper. I understand that there was a substantial amount of food and grain in the 6,800 tons a day they used to receive. At the moment, the food rations in North Vietnam are not generous, yet your conclusion is that food will not be a major issue.

Mr. Christison: That's right. Food should not be a major issue, if at all, until the end of the year or early next year. We looked at last month's harvest. At the mimimum level, this harvest should last until October, when the next harvest comes in. If the harvest is average, it will get the North Vietnamese through January, 1973. If the harvest is less than average, they could have severe shortages by the end of the year. If the harvest is above average, on the other hand, they will be in good shape on food for the first few months next year.

Mr. Johnson: At the very minimum, then, it would not be until January before they could begin to feel the squeeze on food.

Mr. Christison: That's right.

Mr. Johnson: That's the way I read it, too.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's try to get an estimate of what we will face from the North Vietnamese during the next four months. We should also try to see what pressures the enemy might feel for negotiating—so we can form a realistic assessment of our actions. The last thing we want to do is kid ourselves. We're not looking to get a favorable report. We just want to get a real grip on the situation. Will the North Vietnamese still be able to launch large-scale attacks, for example, during the next four months?

Mr. Christison: In answer to that question, I would have to say that the logistics half of the equation is less critical than the problem they face from having many units chewed up on the battlefield. The constraint is greater on the battlefield than it is on the logistic situation. It's our judgment that the logistic constraint is not great in this instance.

Mr. Kissinger: Suppose we had not interdicted the ports and the roads. Are you saying that we didn't have to do those things, that the enemy battle losses have not been affected by those decisions?

Mr. Christison: The interdiction effort has not affected the battles, but it has disrupted the transportation system and lowered the morale of the North Vietnamese. There's no doubt about that. As a result, some heavy pressures have been put on the North Vietnamese government.

Mr. Sullivan: Don't forget the North Vietnamese are very resilient. They undoubtedly feel they have to hang on until November 7. If McGovern gets elected, they think they will get everything they want on a silver platter. Therefore, they must feel they can accept austerity in civilian and military matters until November 7. At the same time, they will make proposals which will give the Administration fits and, hopefully, influence the election. Perhaps they won't launch major attacks. But they will take dramatic actions and make teasing proposals at Paris. I think this is what we should expect from them between now and November 7.

Mr. Christison: Logistically, they may not be confident they can hold on until November 7.

Mr. Sullivan: What would happen if they were thrown out of Quang Tri? It's possible the South Vietnamese could do that to them.

Mr. Christison: At the moment, I think that's about a fifty-fifty chance. I suspect Thieu started the operation too early. The North Vietnamese are strongest in MR 1, and it is very easy for them to get replacements. The weather is good, too, although that cuts both ways: it enables us to provide air support, but it also enables the enemy to move in supplies and replacements.

Mr. Helms: Every time we bash one of the North Vietnamese units during a B–52 attack or destroy a unit on the battlefield, it gets us closer to where we want to be. Christison is right: that's our only salvation.

Mr. Kissinger: How do you explain then that until May 8, the North Vietnamese were very truculent about the negotiations. I think you can argue they were trying to create a situation which was hopeless for us. Since May 8, however, we have had all sorts of signal flags that they want to talk. But so far we haven't seen what they want to talk about.

Mr. Sullivan: I think they are likely to be even nastier now than they were before.

Mr. Helms: They got us to give up the bombing once before. The North Vietnamese always move along the political and military tracks. Now that the military track seems to be running out of gas, they may start the political track again.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) You think they may be nastier than before?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. They will come up with tricky proposals which are designed to be attractive to *The New York Times*, for example. These new proposals may very well be harder to handle than the old proposals.

Mr. Kissinger: When we have opponents who will always be in opposition, no matter what we do, we have more freedom to act than our predecessors had. We will not have the support of *The New York Times*, no matter what happens. (to Mr. Sullivan) You think the North Vietnamese proposals will be tricky, and they will try to hold on until the election?

Mr. Sullivan: If I were in Hanoi, I wouldn't have any other view.

Mr. Johnson: That's right.

Mr. Kissinger: Unless we were hurting them so badly that they needed a respite. And that's precisely what I'm trying to get at.

Mr. Helms: Our hope should be that by October, they don't have any main force units strong enough to really rock the boat.

Mr. Sullivan: If that's the case in October, the units will probably be pulled back into North Vietnam. When the next dry season starts, they won't have any capability for launching large-scale attacks. Thieu should then utilize the opportunity to reestablish his control over the countryside.

Mr. Kissinger: Why would the units have to be pulled back to North Vietnam in October?

Mr. Sullivan: That's when the weather would permit.

Mr. Christison: There's one other possibility. If it's clear in August that the President will be reelected—if there is lots of evidence for that—the North Vietnamese would take it into account and could possibly change their approach on negotiations. However, they will not do that until they are convinced that the President is going to be reelected.

Mr. Selden: I was down in Alabama last week, and I can report that the people down there are one hundred percent behind our actions in North Vietnam.

Mr. Johnson: I was out in California, and I can report that our actions are not as popular out there as they are in Alabama.

Mr. Selden: True.

Mr. Kissinger: Okay. Can we get an extract from the paper so that I can fully understand its conclusions? What's been the impact of our actions during the last two months? What options will we have in the next two to four months? Despite everything we said today, this is a superb paper.

[Omitted here is discussion of the possibility of a change in the North Vietnamese attitude to Thieu's presence in a coalition government,

U.S. opposition to a French proposal for a settlement, and U.S. forces in Thailand.]

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196. Editorial Note

On June 14, 1972, Ambassador William J. Porter in Paris talked by telephone with Major General Alexander M. Haig, the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, and then sent Henry A. Kissinger, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, a message. Concerned about how best to prepare those outside the government for a return to the talks, he wrote: "This matter requires careful preparation in view of the tough line that we have been following in that regard. Sudden announcement of intent to resume, without adequate preparation of media and public, would probably evoke accusations that we are capricious and playing domestic politics. As matters stand now we are in better position if decision is made to resume.

"Generally speaking I prefer to speak softly when we are swinging a big stick, as we are these days. Mild words mix well with strong actions, and later speak their own language. I believe it is possible Thuy will return with some kind of proposal designed to restart Paris talks. If he does, I think we will have to go in and listen to him. Le Duc Tho will probably want to take it from there. Part of their design will be to affect U.S. domestic politics over coming weeks." (Backchannel message 780 from Porter to Kissinger, June 14; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 419, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, 1972 Paris—Watson and Porter)

Later the same day, Kissinger sent a backchannel message to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon to give him the President's current thinking on the Paris talks. Kissinger wrote: "On the negotiating front, we are still awaiting a response from the other side on our proposal that we meet privately on the 28th. [See Document 187.] In the event they refuse to meet or insist that the private meeting be preceded by a plenary session as with the last round, we would then propose to attend a plenary on July 13th providing they agree to a follow-up private meeting on or about July 18.

"You should also inform Thieu of the negotiating game plan stressing that the President wants him to know that we have not made the great sacrifices that the recent enemy offensive has incurred merely to concede at the negotiating table what the enemy has been unable to achieve on the battlefield. Assure him that the President continues to

support him fully but at the same time can muster maximum domestic support through a continuing blend of forceful action on the battlefield combined with demonstrated flexibility on the negotiating front." (Backchannel message WHS 2077 from Kissinger to Bunker, June 14; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, 3 April–15 June 1972)

On June 19, Colonel Georges R. Guay, Air Attaché at the Embassy in Paris and point of contact with the North Vietnamese, received a request from Vo Van Sung, one of their diplomats, to meet the next day. When they met on June 20, Vo Van Sung handed Guay a note that replied to the American proposal to restart the private talks. Haig in Washington sent the North Vietnamese note to Kissinger, who was in Beijing to discuss the recent Moscow Summit with the Chinese. The note contained the following counterproposal:

"The American side now proposes a private meeting for 28 June 1972. The RDVN side clothed by its good will, agrees to private meetings and deems it necessary to resume as usual the plenary sessions of the Paris Conference on Vietnam which serve as a base for the private meetings as has been previously agreed. From now til the end of the first week of July, Special Counselor Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy are engaged in work previously scheduled in Hanoi. Consequently, they will be prepared to meet Dr. Kissinger privately on 15 July 1972 at the usual place, after the resumption of the plenary sessions of the Paris Conference not later than Thursday, 13 July 1972.

"Once again the RDVN side reaffirms its disposition to seek a peaceful solution, just and reasonable to the Vietnamese problem." (North Vietnamese note, June 20, enclosed in message Tohak 71, June 20; ibid., Box TS 48, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Peace Talks, Chronological File, 2 June–31 July 1972)

In message Tohak 71, Haig told Kissinger that in late June or early July the North Vietnamese might begin an additional offensive push to better position themselves before they returned to the talks. Haig concluded: "You will want to consider this carefully in preparing your reply. I await guidance."

Upon receipt of the message and the enclosed note, Kissinger replied to Haig as follows: "Colonel's message fits right into my preferred game plan. Next week, after my return, we should accept plenary for the 13th and private meeting for around the 18th. But do not position message until I can see it. This will enable President to announce resumption of plenaries at his June 29 press conference without being accused of playing politics." (Message Hakto 10, June 21; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XIV) About the North Vietnamese reply Kissinger

later wrote: "Contrary to the predictions of our critics, bombing and mining had greatly improved Hanoi's manners." (*Ending the Vietnam War,* page 294)

On June 24, Haig sent the U.S. response to Paris for transmittal as a note to the North Vietnamese. The note agreed to July 13 for the plenary meeting but noted that July 19 was preferable for the private meeting. The note concluded: "The U.S. will enter these talks with the intention of bringing about a rapid, just and reasonable solution to the war." (Message from Haig to Guay, June 24; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972) In response to the note, delivered by Guay on June 26, the North Vietnamese agreed to the dates. (Message from Guay to Haig, June 29; ibid., Box 867, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David 1972 HAK II, May 2–October 7, 1972 [5 of 5])

On June 29, President Nixon announced at his evening press conference: "We have returned to the negotiating table, or will return to it on the assumption that the North Vietnamese are prepared to negotiate in a constructive and serious way. We will be prepared to negotiate in that way. If those negotiations go forward in a constructive and serious way, this war can be ended, and it can be ended well before January 20. If they do not go forward on that basis, the United States will continue to meet its commitments. Our bombing, as far as that is concerned, our mining, is for the purpose only of preventing Communist aggression from succeeding, to protect the remaining Americans, 40,000 or so, that are still in Vietnam, and to have some bargaining position in getting our POW's back." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1972,* page 706)

197. Memorandum From the Director, Joint Staff (Seignious) to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Nutter)[1]

DJSM–1272–72 Washington, June 30, 1972.

SUBJECT

Proposed Radio Operation (U)

1. (S) Reference is made to your memorandum, subject as above, dated 26 June 1972 in which you requested an appraisal of the Archie Bunker concept.[2]

2. (S) The Defense Intelligence Agency performed an independent study in response to the first two requests in your memorandum, drawing on all available intelligence on the broadcasting system of North Vietnam and on the five targets that would be struck in the Archie Bunker attack. Their conclusions (which I support) are as follows:

a. On the intelligence basis for and probability of actually knocking Radio Hanoi off the air: "Intelligence indicates that the five nominated targets are the primary radio broadcasting facilities used by the North Vietnamese for propaganda and informing the populace of those items the government wants released. They are supplemented by a separate, extensive wired broadcast network, connected to loudspeakers throughout the city of Hanoi. This network relays major Radio Hanoi broadcasts. If the nominated targets are successfully destroyed simultaneously, the probability of knocking Radio Hanoi off the air is very good."

b. On the best estimate of Hanoi's capability to restore broadcasting: "Radio broadcasts from possible substitute facilities probably could not be initiated immediately. Radio broadcasting probably could be restored with greatly reduced efficiency by using local low-powered transmitters, but this might take several hours."

3. (S) In your third request, you asked for an appraisal of the importance of the Archie Bunker operation to the success of the overall psychological operations offensive. The Archie Bunker project presents

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–75–0155, 381 North Vietnam. Secret; Sensitive.

[2] In his attached June 26 memorandum requesting this appraisal, Nutter noted that "the Secretary of Defense continues to have reservations about the efficacy of proposed operation to knock out Radio Hanoi called Archie Bunker."

an opportunity to reach a large portion of the North Vietnamese population by taking advantage of North Vietnam's own internal communication system. Intelligence indicates that tight controls are maintained on the distribution and use of the 500,000 to 600,000 radio receivers in North Vietnam. Sets are registered, the sale of batteries is controlled, some private receivers have been modified to receive broadcasts only on government frequencies, and listening to other than government radio broadcasts is forbidden. The Archie Bunker concept calls for the destruction of Radio Hanoi's transmitters in the minutes just preceding the major evening news broadcast which is received off the air and relayed live outside Hanoi by a few low-powered local transmitters and by hundreds of wired loudspeaker networks. As each Hanoi transmitter leaves the air, it would be replaced on its own frequency by a broadcast from the Coronet Solo aircraft. This taped broadcast would purport to be an emergency transmission from Radio Hanoi, thus gaining immediate access to Hanoi's national audience and to the local transmitter and wired loudspeaker networks relaying Radio Hanoi. This access would continue in the Hanoi area until lower-powered replacement transmitters could go on the air, and for longer periods elsewhere, where the Coronet Solo transmissions would be more powerful than Hanoi's low-power replacements.

4. (S) Until now, the US psychological warfare offensive against North Vietnam has relied primarily upon leaflets, shortwave broadcasts that require scarce and expensive receivers, and on medium wave (broadcast band) transmissions that can only be heard in North Vietnam at night by those willing to violate the prohibition against listening to foreign broadcasts. Archie Bunker would permit us to reach, for a short period, an audience that might never be available to our other broadcast programs, and would only occasionally see or read a leaflet.

5. (S) The government of North Vietnam has both historically and currently recognized the threat inherent in any breach in its monopoly on public information. In addition to the restrictions on radio listening mentioned above, they have prohibited citizens from reading or possessing leaflets and have organized campaigns to collect leaflets and destroy them. Radio transmitters are heavily guarded, and the transmitter buildings are protected by blast walls that will require use of guided bombs in any attack against them. The destruction of the transmitters would be a new demonstration of American power carried to the individual citizens of North Vietnam. Secondly, the project would be exploited to bring to the large listening audience, immediately after the attack and in follow-on broadcasts in competition with Hanoi transmissions of reduced effectiveness, the facts on the impact of the war, including the stalemated Northern offensive and the huge losses of the NVA in the South. A credible broadcast that tells the truth and gives the details of the President's cease-fire proposal and of the luke-

warm Chinese and Soviet support for Hanoi should be read by the leadership as a real threat to their control of the country.

6. Though Coronet Solo aircraft would probably be effective as covert transmitters for only twelve to twenty-four hours, CINCPAC suggests that in the follow-on period the aircraft could be used in many other roles, including overt Psyop broadcasting, deceptive tactical broadcasting, support of notional activities, jamming, and interference with enemy air defense control. An additional bonus benefit would be the utilization of Coronet Solo to replace the USS *Blue Ridge* Psyop broadcasting when the ship returns to CONUS at the end of July 1972.

7. (S) The broadcast portion of the Archie Bunker concept relies heavily on the 193d Tactical Electronic Warfare Group (TEWGp) whose Coronet Solo aircraft would be used for Archie Bunker broadcasts. Its base near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was affected by the recent floods. The Coronet Solo aircraft and their transmitters and receivers escaped damage, but some spare parts for electronic equipment were flooded. The damaged spares are unique to Coronet Solo equipment, but they are standard commercial items available for purchase on a quick-reaction basis. A survey team arrived in Harrisburg on 29 June 1972 to make a detailed report by 30 June on the effect of the flood on the 193d TEWGp. An analysis of the implications for the Archie Bunker project will be made as soon as the Air Staff receives the report.

George M. Seignious, II
Lieutenant General, USA

198. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, June 30, 1972, 10:08–11:18 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman	JCS
Henry A. Kissinger	Gen. John D. Ryan
State	CIA
U. Alexis Johnson	Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters
William Sullivan	William Christison
Seymour Weiss	William Newton (CIA briefing only)
Defense	NSC Staff
Kenneth Rush	Richard T. Kennedy
Armistead Selden	John H. Holdridge
Maj. Gen. David Ott	Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—CIA should provide an operational definition of the "bare minimum" economy in North Vietnam so that we can understand how long the enemy can sustain his efforts and what adjustments he will have to make. The paper should explain where the enemy is now and what cuts will have to be made to go down to 2,700 tons a day.

—CIA should also prepare two sets of maps—one for possible use during negotiations with the North Vietnamese and one for our use—showing the population control in South Vietnam in the event of a cease-fire.

—Defense should develop a plan for using US forces to free our POWs in North Vietnam.

—We should obtain from Defense the rationale it used in estimating that the Soviets could airlift 1,540 tons a day into North Vietnam. We should analyze the alternative routes and supply points that could be used in the airlift—and develop a plan for countering it.

—We should analyze the threat to our operation in the event the North Vietnamese aircraft inventory is increased, particularly if the new aircraft are deployed to Chinese airfields.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, June 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting, including Walters's briefing of the situation, further discussion of the CIA paper discussed at the previous WSAG meeting (see Document 195), and discussion of Department of State/Department of Defense/CIA contingency papers. These papers put forward the following contingencies: a possible North Vietnamese offer to swap U.S. POWs for U.S. withdrawal; a North Vietnamese offer of accommodation with Cambodia; the use of U.S. POWs as hostages; Chinese permission for North Vietnamese aircraft to use its airfields as safehavens; the possibility of a large-scale airlift by the Soviet Union and/or China to resupply North Vietnam; and the introduction of new weapons, especially surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, into North Vietnam. The WSAG agreed that none of the contingencies was likely.]

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199. 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, July 1, 1972, 1425Z.

106. Arrived Saigon on schedule this a.m. and spent morning in discussions with Ambassador Bunker, CAS Chief Polgar, General Vogt and General Weyand. Reviewed with Bunker the proposed discussions with Thieu. He agreed completely with scenario and is confident Thieu will easily agree with two months proviso and anticipates 3 or even 4 months would be acceptable to Thieu. He also feels Thieu will volunteer without reference from me to decline to run under provision of modified January 27 proposal.[2] Bunker agrees with possible outcomes we discussed prior to my departure and would favor either but anticipates Thieu would balk at ceasefire in place given current enemy positions. Thieu followed President's press conference with statement of his own here in South Vietnam. He stated to populace he would not

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Cables, 24 June–29 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Immediate. An undated report by Haig on his trip to Indochina is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1016, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Haig Trip to Vietnam, June 29–July 4, 1972. According to Kissinger's memoirs, Haig was in Saigon "to assess the war and to consult with Thieu about the positions we proposed to take" in the impending Paris talks. (*White House Years*, p. 1309)

[2] For the January 27 proposal, see Document 8.

accept ceasefire in place and would demand withdrawal of all foreign troops from GVN soil. I anticipate some problem on this if situation were to arise but also believe it would be manageable depending on precise circumstances. I will not raise this as direct proposal to Thieu however and will hold strictly to talking points you outlined.

I discussed bombing scenario with Vogt as outlined in your msg to me.[3] He will comply. I also discussed with him your philosophy on Hanoi and other targets. He understands completely. We reviewed all of his targeting and I am very impressed with post-strike photos of targeting in Hanoi area where smart bombs are being used exclusively. He is most anxious to concentrate on vehicle repair facilities as the best method to affect truck traffic from China. He insists buffer restrictions make it impossible to effectively prevent truck resupply from reaching Hanoi due to multiplicity of routes south of buffer. He could not however offer much better prospect for effective interdiction if buffer were removed. I told him to propose specific lucrative targets within buffer when they occur. He is carefully watching the pipeline and is confident that the best counter is to strike pump stations now under construction. He believes this will be effective at least initially. He is now aware of need to hold down press crowing to avoid needless emotion at home. There are still plenty of good targets in Hanoi area which are well clear of the center of the city. Vogt does urge that the power station and the railroad center in Hanoi be cleared since he is confident they can be surgically neutralized with a few smart weapons. He is also confident and displays photo proof that bombing in North has been devastating. Each of the two RR lines north to China has been cut in over 12 places. No rail traffic is moving and thus situation can be maintained with ease.

Weyand understands completely the game in D.C. and will employ Bunker channel where needed.[4] He expressed voluntarily his concerns to me about any ceasefire in place which he believes would pose unacceptable risks given the present enemy dispositions. I did not pursue matter. He also explained that all are aware that counter offensive in MR–I involves some risks due to enemy's ability to hit flank of

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[3] In backchannel message Hakto 2 to Haig, July 1, Kissinger instructed: "Reference Hakto 1, in your conversation with General Vogt be sure to make it clear that we feel it is important to keep the bombing pressure up while diplomatic negotiations are in progress." (Message WHS 2082/Hakto 2; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1016, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Haig Trip to Vietnam, June 29–July 4, 1972)

[4] Special backchannel communication channel that allowed Weyand to send messages directly to and receive messages directly from Kissinger at the White House. General Weyand replaced General Abrams as Commander, MACV on June 29.

Marines and Airborne from west. He insists however that the risks are manageable given our firepower and desirability of getting enemy to commit himself.

Spent PM in MR–III where it is evident that enemy losses in the An Loc battle have been staggering. I worked over Minh on the need to open Route 13 but he's not the man to do the job. My fear is that ARVN here is resting on its laurels except for our adviser Hollingsworth who is a diamond in the rough and a key factor in successes thus far. I do not believe that the enemy is capable of serious new offensive threats in this area. He is apparently fighting a delaying effort and is now moving some of his units (5th, 9th Divisions) to Parrots Beak area with view toward seeking some success in northern MR–IV areas bordering MR–III. However, his units have been so badly mauled that it doesn't seem likely that he can achieve any real gains.

Tomorrow I'll visit MR–I and provide a first hand report on ARVN offensive there which appears to be making very great gains. There is a sense of considerable confidence evident thus far, however, I also sense a degree of weariness which confirms the desirability of seeking early settlement if opportunity presents itself. This is especially evident in Bunker's thinking. I'll provide more detailed assessment following tomorrow's MR–I visit. All here send best wishes and compliments on recent diplomatic achievements. President's press conference was superb and great source of encouragement here.[5] Warm regards.

[5] Reference is to the June 29 press conference; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972*, pp. 705–718.

200. Central Intelligence Agency Information Cable[1]

TDCS 314/05113–72 Washington, July 1, 1972.

COUNTRY

South Vietnam

DOI

1 July 1972

SUBJECT

Appraisal of situation: The Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army (VC/NVA) offensive at the end of three months

ACQ

Vietnam, Saigon Field No. FVS–30,210

SOURCE

This is a field appraisal. It presents the views of this Agency's senior officer on the scene. It is an interpretation based on previously reported information. Prepared primarily for internal Agency use, it is disseminated in the belief that it may be useful to intelligence analysts in their own assessment of the situation.

Summary: At the end of three months of the North Vietnamese offensive, the VC/NVA hold most of the limited gains achieved in the first month of fighting but there are indications that the tides of war are turning. Depending in part on the outcome of current ARVN attacks in Quang Tri Province there may be significant changes in the offing. Enemy gains in the campaign thus far have been more apparent than real, and for these he has paid heavily in manpower and matériel both on the battlefield and in North Vietnam. Probably the most significant shortcoming in the enemy campaign to date has been his failure to fatally damage ARVN, which far from collapsing is stronger numerically and probably more effective in combat now than at the start of the enemy drive. It is perhaps too early to say that the enemy has been defeated, but he has been stalled. Nevertheless VC/NVA forces are still formidable, and remain capable of continued military pressures and attacks in the next two or three months. Given continued U.S. air support, these can probably be contained. The cru-

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1093, Jon Howe, Vietnam Chronology Files, 7–2–72. Secret; No Foreign Dissem. Sent to INR, DIA, NMCC (for the Secretary of Defense, JCS, and the Service Chiefs), CIA, NIC, NSA, SDO, ONE, and CRS.

cial question is no longer whether the enemy can be stopped but how effectively ARVN can go on the offensive and eject VC/NVA main force units now in South Vietnam. *End summary.*

[Omitted here is the full report.]

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201. 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, July 3, 1972, 1345Z.

108. Ambassador Bunker and I spent two hours with President Thieu this evening and I am providing this abbreviated report of the discussion which was far ranging and satisfactory in every respect. Because of its complexity and my very tight time schedule I will reserve comment on details which can only be adequately covered in a lengthy report which I will provide to you personally upon arrival in San Clemente.[2]

Thieu had obviously been thinking long and hard about negotiations and with minimum prodding launched a lengthy and at times rambling assessment of where we are headed.

He estimated that he can by the end of July clear the enemy from the higher profiled holdings in Binh Long, Binh Dinh and Quang Tri. He states that he will need until September or October to drive the enemy completely from the areas it has seized since March 30. Finally, he believes that he will have all of the population reinstated and the damage repaired by December.

He does not believe that the enemy will discuss possible settlements until August. Beyond that he does not anticipate any acceptable offers from the enemy until after our elections.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, 24 June–29 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Immediate.

[2] An account of the meeting, which took place at the Presidential Palace and began at 5 p.m. local time, is in a memorandum of conversation, July 3. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1016, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Haig Trip to Vietnam, June 29–July 4, 1972)

He accompanied this assessment with a lengthy and complex rationale which reflects a new sense of confidence on his part. Both Bunker and I believe that this new assuredness will not tend to make him as flexible as he has been during less favorable periods in the past. He would not offer any problems on the two months provisions but he does not consider that negotiations will evolve in this manner.

His major concern and obvious hang-up is with any form of coalition including one in which he was in the driver's seat. In the short term he expects the enemy to offer a modified version of the May 8 proposal which would limit the proposition to POW's in return for termination of mining and bombing. To avoid hardening of his attitudes on any possibilities I did not push on any option. The exchange was open and easy throughout.

I had a similarly constructive meeting with Lon Nol this AM which lasted 90 minutes. I will withhold my report on this due to the tight schedule.[3] Warm regards.

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[3] A detailed account of Haig's meeting with Lon Nol on July 3 is in telegram 4219 from Phnom Penh, July 3. (Ibid., Box 513, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. 15)

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202. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Weyand)[1]

Washington, July 6, 1972, 9:13 a.m.

Secure TELECON/OUT—To General Weyand

[Omitted here is discussion of what Haig in his July 1–3 visit to South Vietnam may have talked about to Thieu, the military situation in South Vietnam, Kissinger's concern about Hue holding against North Vietnamese attacks, the replacement of and additions to South Vietnamese military equipment, the visit to South Vietnam of J. Fred Buzhardt (General Counsel of the Department of Defense), and General Abrams's confirmation as Chief of Staff, U.S. Army.]

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

[MACV]—Going back to this original thing I will nose around on that.[2] Do you think that Haig had some special message he came with he was laying on Thieu that probably we are not sure about.

CJCS—I just thought I don't have anything documented reason for it being special, I just thought that he really, I was talking to him to find out how far they are willing to go in negotiations because HAK is somewhat right now zeroed in on negotiations track and your point for instance that Thieu's leaning towards euphoria and saying he is adamant to no ceasefire, that kind of thing really interested in but I want to repeat I don't want you to be too obvious. Just really my kind of curiousity feel for what position I might take and watch for back here—nothing for you to make special effort about.

MACV—I understand, just actually Bunker's so open with me and he was with Abrams too, obviously there are some of these things that he gets particularly on this very subject you are talking about then he keeps to himself any case if I get anything beyond what I already told you I will get on the horn.

CJCS—Let's face it, the Administration is very much anxious to get some kind of settlement before the elections in November—no question about that.

MACV—That was obvious. Al told me that he really by May 1 assume talking about him and HAK and the President, expected something after this next private meeting on the 19th.[3] They really think something is going to bust loose while Al discussed some parts of this with Thieu it would be making sense must have said something about some aspect of that negotiations he surely met with Haig pretty sure sometime after the 19th there will be some movement. I will put it that way.

CJCS—My only concern now is that we have made all the effort in terms of augmenting forces and fighting now since 30 March that we don't turn around and snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

MACV—That would be a disaster.

[Omitted here is discussion of the infiltration of another regiment from North Vietnam, bombing the North, and the military situation in South Vietnam.]

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[2] In his diary that day, Moorer wrote: "I asked Fred if he knew how President Thieu felt after Al Haig had briefed him on the outcome of the discussions in Moscow and China. He did not know since he had not been present at the meeting; however, he could ask Ambassador Bunker if I needed to know." (Ibid.)

[3] Kissinger was scheduled to meet in Paris on July 19 with Le Duc Tho.

203. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, July 15, 1972.

SUBJECT

Sir Robert Thompson's Report on Vietnam, June 17–July 3

Attached at Tab A is a report submitted by Sir Robert Thompson on his most recent visit to Vietnam, June 17–July 3.[2] The following are the highlights of the report:

Summary:

Sir Robert concludes that the North Vietnamese offensive has been militarily defeated and has caused little damage to the Vietnamization and Pacification programs. The enemy, however, will seek to continue operations as far into September as possible. Over the long term, the North Vietnamese will remain intransigent and will return to protracted warfare. The GVN should be able to contain any future enemy threats and its programs will accelerate at an unprecedented pace by the beginning of the next year.

In the course of his report, Sir Robert urges that we apply the "greatest pressure" on the GVN for the appointment of more competent and aggressive ARVN commanders. We should also continue our advisory efforts to ARVN and to CORDS. The GVN itself should concentrate on reducing costs, increasing taxes and expanding investment and production. ARVN should be restructured to increase the number of topflight national divisions while downgrading the operational strength of its remaining territorial divisions. Its capability for ground interdiction of enemy logistics and infiltration should be improved.

On the subject of enemy intentions, Sir Robert believes that the North Vietnamese will never accept a supervised cease-fire. In the short term, however, the enemy is likely to offer an in-place cease-fire in order to influence our Presidential election. The offer would also include a release of American POWs, and a demand for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces by January 1, 1973 but would *NOT* require President Thieu's

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 116, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson (1972). Secret. Sent for information. The President wrote the following comments at the bottom and side of the page: "K—His recommendations for restructuring of ARVN are absolutely essential. We have done a *lousy* job—building ARVN in *our* image. I want Haig et al to come up with some new ideas on this point. We can't continue doing more of the same."

[2] Attached but not printed.

resignation or a halt to aid. He strongly recommends that we "stand firm" by our May 8 proposals. An in-place cease-fire, he believes, cannot be delineated nor supervised; the enemy will not keep it and it will not settle the war or end the fighting.[3]

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[3] In message 967 from Phnom Penh, February 17, Ambassador Swank reported on Thompson's visit to Cambodia, noting that: "Sir Robert stressed repeatedly his view that Hanoi will not accept a cease fire, will not engage in meaningful negotiations before the US presidential elections, and has every intention of pursuing the war." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 513, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. 15)

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204. Message From the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks to the Department of State[1]

Paris, July 15, 1972, 2014Z.

13617. Subject: Analysis of 150th Plenary.

1. Xuan Thuy's presentation at 150th Plenary[2] of a general, partly ambiguous, yet uncharacteristically measured formulation on the differing negotiating approaches and the distinction between US and Vietnamese responsibilities in contributing to a political settlement represents, in our judgment, a tactical shift with important substantive implications.

2. The content of the formulation broke no new ground: it is consistent with DRV contention that the war cannot be ended and democratic freedoms achieved in SVN if the US persists in maintaining the Thieu regime (a point which Thuy made in the form of a rhetorical question during his first additional remark).

3. Yet there was enough in the formulation, and in the tone Xuan Thuy adopted in presenting it, to make a distinct contrast between previous DRV negotiating ploys, such as the seven points, which played to the US anti-war opinion more than to the administration.[3]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 192, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks [3 of 3]. Secret; Immediate; Nodis. Repeated to Saigon.

[2] On Thursday, July 13.

[3] See footnote 4, Document 26.

4. For the first time in our experience of the plenaries, Xuan Thuy addressed himself to the central substantive issue, the relationship of military to the political questions, in terms which, while they compromised no DRV position and misrepresented the US position with respect to a comprehensive solution, seemed directed less to make polemical points than to suggest that a different basis susceptible to negotiation might be found.

5. Gone was the familiar moralizing tone, the patronizing manner, the effort to imply that virtue resided exclusively in their position and that the entire burden of policy change rested with the US. In fact, his phrase that "you and we" should reflect further on what he had said today introduced a distinctly new note of modesty and mutuality of obligation in seeking a formula to resolve the differences he defined.

6. This new posture, the implicit downgrading of the PRG, and the direct way Xuan Thuy addressed his words at Amb. Porter, evidently did not sit well with Madame Binh. In her final remarks she struck a discordant note by condemning the US policy of "aggression and crude intervention" and again proposing the US Delegate study the seven point proposal seriously. To play along with an ostensibly more flexible attitude, however limited, will try Madame Binh sorely.

7. There were other suggestive features of the DRV presentation, including Nguyen Thanh Le's carefully uncategoric response to the question whether the Americans still had to accept the principle of tripartite government: "This is an extremely logical and reasonable solution which is approved by all men of goodwill throughout the world."

8. All of this is no doubt an adroit, and overdue, tactical adjustment taking into account such factors as Soviet representations, the Chinese aspect, and the need to set a constructive tone for resumed private exchanges. It would be designed to keep DRV options open while awaiting the turn of events in Saigon and on the battlefield and assessing further how US political developments could be exploited.

9. Nevertheless, such a tactial shift could have substantive implications for settlement, and it is that which will require the most careful exploration.

10. The accentuation of US/GVN divisions, of course, is a major aim of this changed posture, and we will have to consult with the GVN most closely in handling this tactic. Phong today expressed worry that implicit differences over NVN withdrawal, cease-fire, and eight points vs. May 8 proposals[4] would come to the surface as fighting continued.

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[4] See Documents 8 and 136, respectively.

11. In sum, Xuan Thuy's new instructions, tactical and limited as they may be, seem to foreshadow a different, more complicated and crucial phase of both the semi-public and the private talks. Whatever the balance of eventual advantage to the adversaries, Xuan Thuy's performance at the 150th Plenary seemed designed to get the message across that the time for serious talk was at hand.

Porter

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205. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, July 15, 1972.

SUBJECT

Psyops Campaign Against North Vietnam

Since I sent you the last psyops report on 16 June,[2] there have been the following indications that our campaign is *striking a raw nerve* of the DRV leadership:

—Recent articles in Hanoi's military newspaper take a swipe at "U.S. psychological warfare machinery" which has spread "false optimistic arguments" in an attempt to cover up ARVN's "painful setbacks." At a minimum the series indicates that the DRV regime believes the U.S. psywar campaign has had enough impact to necessitate a direct refutation.

—The Neutralist Front Radio, the Voice of the Laotian Communist Front, on 28 June angrily denounced the "thousands" of psychological activities which are "aimed at causing confusion by splitting the unity of the armed forces and the people. Moreover, they employ tactics to split the unity of Laos and Vietnam." The broadcast continued to cite examples—"They set up fake radios to distort the revolution and deceive the people. They use newspapers to make slanderous charges; they drop agents into populated areas to unite the people and at the same time use airplanes to drop propaganda leaflets."

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 24, Chronological File, 6–14 June 1972. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. He wrote across the top of the first page: "*good*."

[2] Kissinger probably meant the June 12 report, Document 188.

—On 4 July, the Pathet Lao Radio issued a similar statement warning about our psychological warfare campaign.

—A recent intercept of an NVA air defense element directed subordinate units to stop listening to enemy radio stations, warning—"All units must have a strict inspection to prevent any cadres or troops hearing enemy radios." Offenders are to be punished.

Our campaign is vigorously exploiting the deterioration of enemy morale and discipline, as reflected by the following intercepted enemy reports:

—A message intercepted 18 June stated that since 1 June, 53 men had deserted from an NVA anti-aircraft artillery regiment in Quang Tri Province. The next day regimental officers were reprimanded for poor performance of duty and some regimental personnel were "expelled" from the regiment.

—A message from another NVA anti-aircraft regiment in Quang Tri Province on 19 June reported that soldiers were deserting from one battalion and six comrades had refused to fight the "enemy."

—On 22 June, another NVA regiment in the same province instructed two of its battalions to "evaluate their men, isolate those who are afraid to fight, and reeducate them with a fighting spirit."

—A message sent 23 June by an AAA regiment stated that "because of enemy air strikes, some of our men have deserted . . ." The commander of the unit from which the men had deserted was ordered to capture and "severely punish" them as an example to deter future desertions.

The Saigon Government has prepared a White Paper, entitled "The Open Invasion of the Republic of Viet-Nam by the Communist North" (Tab A).[3] 10,000 copies in English are on the way to Vietnamese missions abroad for wide distribution. The GVN is encouraging their missions to produce French, German, and Spanish translations.[4]

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[3] Attached but not printed.

[4] Nixon wrote the following note on the last page: "K—David Sarnoff—once strongly urged we air drop very inexpensive transistor radios in Eastern Europe—which could pick up R.F.E. broadcasts. Could Helms explore the possibility of doing this in battle areas & in Hanoi?" Haig's reaction, in a handwritten initialed memorandum to NSC staff member Richard Kennedy was: "Note Pres' comments—we can finesse doing this—should have brief memo advising." (Ibid.)

206. Memorandum From Richard T. Kennedy and John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, July 17, 1972.

SUBJECT

Plan to Knock Out Radio Hanoi and Preempt Its Frequencies (Operation Archie Bunker)

You will recall that we drafted a memorandum from you to the President on this operation recommending its approval, but that before sending it forward you asked Mr. Rush (at the June 30 WSAG meeting) to develop possible alternatives to the use of aircraft and personnel from the Air National Guard.[2] He agreed to do so.

From contacts in Defense we learned that a memorandum covering the possible alternatives was in fact drafted in ISA and sent forward by Mr. Nutter to Secretary Laird.[3] The Secretary, however, did not choose to forward this memorandum to you but instead has sent you a separate memorandum (Tab A) stating that after reviewing the matter he has decided not to proceed "due to the marginal nature of the operation and the likely repercussions."[4]

Secretary Laird's objections are both military and political. Militarily, he feels we have no assurance that Radio Hanoi's facilities could be totally knocked out, of if they were, could be kept out long enough for the operation to be effective. Politically, he considers that we would

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 160, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, June–July 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. Sent through Haig. At the top of the page, Kissinger initialed the memorandum and wrote: "Agree."

[2] According to the minutes of the June 30 WSAG meeting, the only reference to the Radio Hanoi operation was made by Armistead I. Selden, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, who, in response to a question by U. Alexis Johnson about Operation Archie Bunker, said: "A memo on that is being prepared for the President." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, June 1972) The operation was discussed in detail in the June 20 and June 22 WSAG meetings. Minutes of both are ibid. For the June 22 meeting, see Document 191. See also Document 197.

[3] Nutter's undated memorandum to Laird is in the Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, Viet (North) 370.64 1972. After discussing the pros and cons of the project he wrote: "I recommend you concur in the Archie Bunker concept which will require Presidential approval." Nutter also drafted a memorandum for Laird to send to Kissinger if he (Laird) rejected the proposal. (Ibid.)

[4] Tab A, dated July 15, is attached but not printed.

be subjected to both international and domestic criticism for disrupting the nonmilitary communications handled by Radio Hanoi, and believes that this would be a particular problem domestically if National Guard aircraft and personnel were used. He doubts that it would be practicable to carry out the mission using active duty personnel due to degraded effectiveness and operational delay caused by the need to give special training.

On the military side, Secretary Laird's position conflicts with that taken by the Joint Chiefs, who maintain that Radio Hanoi's facilities have been fully identified and can indeed be taken out. We of course have no way of judging the accuracy of Secretary Laird's assessment of international and domestic reaction, although some criticism certainly would ensue. The Air National Guard aspect is an important one, but while it might require some time to train active duty personnel, it is not immediately apparent why such personnel would necessarily degrade the effectiveness of the mission.

Accordingly, before taking further action on Operation Archie Bunker one way or the other, you may wish to ask for more discussion of it at next Thursday's WSAG meeting on Vietnam. Both Ambassador Johnson and Ambassador Sullivan have come out strongly for it.

Recommendation

That you raise Operation Archie Bunker at the July 20 WSAG meeting.[5]

[5] Kissinger did not initial either the approve or disapprove option, but Haig wrote at the bottom of the page: "*done*—Drop plan as written."

The Parties Move Toward Agreement, July 19–October 7, 1972

207. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Paris, July 19, 1972, 9:52 a.m.–4:25 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Le Duc Tho, Special Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation at the Paris Peace Talks
Xuan Thuy, Minister and Head of North Vietnamese Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks
Phan Hien, Member of North Vietnamese Delegation to Paris Peace Talks
Nguyen Dinh Phuong, Interpreter
Two Notetakers

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Winston Lord, NSC Staff Member
John D. Negroponte, NSC Staff Member
Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff Member

Kissinger: It is a pleasure to see my two colleagues again. The Special Adviser is the one man I know who has a better gift for publicity than I. I read the speech he made on arrival at the airport. It was fine. But I read it.

I have one special problem I would like to raise. As you saw from the newspaper, my absence from Washington has been noticed. They [journalists] are going to spend the whole day in Washington—which will begin in about four hours—checking up on me. And therefore I would like to propose that our spokesman be authorized to say that I am meeting with you—but nothing about the substance. I promise we will say nothing about substance, regardless of what happens at the meeting.

Let me read you what we would propose to say at 10:00 a.m. Washington time. What we would say is, "Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, is meeting in Paris today with Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy of the North Vietnamese Delegation to the Paris peace talks. Dr. Kissinger is

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [5 of 5]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at 11 Rue Darthe, Choisy-le-Roi, the North Vietnamese residence in Paris. On July 24, the White House sent slightly edited versions of this memorandum of conversation to Ambassadors Bunker in Saigon and Porter in Paris. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

expected to return to Washington this evening." Of course you are free to say the same thing from your delegation. I would give you our assurance that we would say nothing else, that we would not describe the content of the meeting or make any other comment. Otherwise, they will say it anyway, and the speculation will be excessive.

[Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy laugh.]

What do you think, Mr. Minister, Mr. Special Adviser?

Xuan Thuy: On several occasions I have told Dr. Kissinger that our meeting here will be kept secret if you wish it so. But if you want to make it public, we are prepared. Because even if we disagree, you will make it so! [laughter]

Kissinger: Last time you released it before we did! [laughter]

Let us understand this clearly. We will release this at 10:00 a.m. Washington time, which is 3:00 p.m. here. You are free to confirm this—or you can use the same text if you want to. We will say nothing else. We will not characterize the meetings. We will say nothing else.

Xuan Thuy: But if we are asked by journalists, what should we say?

Kissinger: That we are both agreed to say nothing about the content.

Le Duc Tho: I feel that the content of our negotiations here should not be made public, now or later, because the content of our negotiations is important not only for the present time but for a long period.

Kissinger: I agree with the Special Adviser. This will be done.

Le Duc Tho: Because all negotiations, not only our negotiations, should never be divulged.

Kissinger: The difference between our talks and Avenue Kléber[2] is that we will say nothing whatever about substance. But I think what we should do in the future is to announce the fact of the meeting on the day it takes place, just to stop speculation. Just the fact of the meeting. Assuming there are other meetings.

I have Colonel Guay waiting outside. I want to give him the text to send to Washington. It will take five minutes.

My apologies to your interpreter, who has to carry a double load.

Xuan Thuy: Colonel Guay has to carry many responsibilities. So you have made good use of a good personality.

It said today in the paper that you brought your family to New York today.

Kissinger: I brought my family—my children—to San Clemente and then to Boston today. I will be missed in Washington today.

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[2] Reference is to the public plenary talks at the International Conference Center on Avenue Kléber in Paris.

Actually my children will be in Paris 10 days from now. I thought we would put out an announcement, "Kissinger is in Paris." He is 11 years old, my son.

I have just heard from Joseph Kraft, who was in Hanoi.[3]

Le Duc Tho: [smiles] Ah!

Kissinger: I have not read what you said to him.

Le Duc Tho: Have you spoken with him?

Kissinger: No. He is in Paris now. He spoke to a member of our Embassy in Vientiane and gave some quick impressions.

Somebody in Hanoi called him a reactionary, which made him extremely unhappy.

Le Duc Tho: No one called him a reactionary!

Kissinger: No, not you.

Le Duc Tho: When I met him, he conveyed a message from you.

Kissinger: What was it?

Le Duc Tho: You asked him to convey it; you must know it!

Kissinger: I want to hear what he conveyed.

Le Duc Tho: Did you ask him to convey it?

Kissinger: I asked him to convey, first, my high personal regards, and second, that we were prepared to talk seriously. But frankly I wouldn't give him anything important of substance. I said to him this was the moment for serious negotiations.

[Colonel Guay enters. Dr. Kissinger gives him the language of the announcement, tells him to call General Haig and to tell Haig that this language was approved by the North Vietnamese delegation for release at 10:00 a.m. Haig is also to tell all agencies to make no comment at all. Colonel Guay then leaves.]

Xuan Thuy: We should repeat that we are very pleased to meet Dr. Kissinger and we are prepared to listen to your new views.

Kissinger: [Pointing to a thick black briefing book in front of him]: These are old views!

Before we proceed may I ask you another question? We have been harassed by a Mr. Taub who is a lawyer for Mr. Hoffa.[4] He has been in contact with the Special Adviser and claims he has an offer for Hoffa to go to Hanoi and that some prisoners will be released. He [Hoffa] is a convict, he has just been in a penitentiary and is on probation. Therefore he is still under sentence. I cannot believe you would have us

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[3] Kraft visited Hanoi in July to gather material for an article that appeared as "Letter from Hanoi" in *The New Yorker,* August 12, 1972.

[4] William L. Taub was the lawyer for former Teamsters Union President James F. Hoffa.

release a convict in order to release prisoners to him. He says he has documents you gave him.

Xuan Thuy: Spell the name.

Kissinger: T-a-u-b. And H-o-f-f-a. Taub claims to have met the Special Adviser in Sofia.

Le Duc Tho: When I was in Sofia, there was an American, probably Mr. Taub, who requested to meet me in Sofia. But I did not meet him. So now at present Mr. Taub is requesting an interview with me. But I will not meet him.

Kissinger: It is entirely up to you. I want you to know what he is doing in America. He is claiming that you have invited Mr. Hoffa to come to Hanoi so you can release prisoners to him. He is also claiming that for this reason the President should give a pardon to Mr. Hoffa—because at this moment Mr. Hoffa is on parole and is not permitted to leave Detroit. Taub is the lawyer for Hoffa. He now says if we don't give the pardon he will make a public attack on us.

From our point of view it is an advantage for you to deal with Hoffa, because there is no one in America who has any respect for him. And you are free to do what you want. If you want to release some prisoners to Hoffa, that is your privilege. But frankly I wanted to hear it from you rather than from him, just to hear what your intentions are. Taub is really a very shady character. I am not saying this as a criticism of you; I just want to learn the facts.

Le Duc Tho: In sum, when I was in Sofia, Taub requested to meet me and I refused. Now he is requesting to meet me, and I will refuse. As for Mr. Hoffa, he requested a visit to Hanoi. So far I have not met Mr. Hoffa, and I have not yet decided to let him go to Hanoi. His trip to Hanoi will be decided by the responsible services in my country. But I believe there is no transfer of prisoners to Mr. Hoffa. Because he may make visit like other Americans, but I believe there will be no transfer of prisoners.

Kissinger: The problem is that he is under sentence and may not leave Detroit, much less America, except under special permission. We would have to pardon him for him to go to Hanoi. He is not a political activist. It is not political. He is in prison for allegedly stealing money. We would let him go to Hanoi only if you said you would release prisoners to him. And then it would be an interesting question why you would release prisoners to someone who is under sentence in the United States.

Le Duc Tho: [laughs] We don't know the curriculum vitae of Mr. Hoffa. We know only that he is a trade unionist.

Kissinger: Formerly.

Le Duc Tho: And previously a number of trade union leaders have visited Hanoi. This will be decided by our friends in Hanoi.

Kissinger: Whether you invite him is entirely your business. We don't want to interfere. The prisoners were the only concern of ours. You have had a friend of mine, Mr. Gibbons—I believe the Special Adviser met him—he is a good friend of mine.

Le Duc Tho: I met him.

Kissinger: He may want to go to Hanoi—but that is up to you.

We were only concerned about prisoners. I understand the prisoner issue. He [Hoffa] was put in prison by Robert Kennedy, not by us. As long as Mr. Hoffa doesn't concern prisoners, Mr. Hoffa doesn't concern me.

Le Duc Tho: Quite right, there are Americans who want to visit our country, like Joseph Kraft and many others.

Kissinger: Shall we begin?

Le Duc Tho: Yes.

Kissinger: Mr. Special Adviser and Mr. Minister, you put a question in what has become your special way, which is that we must have something new to say.

[Tho and Thuy laugh.]

Le Duc Tho: Naturally there must be something new to say. If we only repeat old proposals, there will be no settlement.

Kissinger: The Special Adviser has already given me a preview in his statement at the airport.

I believe part of our difficulty is what is reflected in this. I believe we both must be prepared to say new things and use a new approach. Because I have come here to make one last effort in this Administration, I thought a way to proceed was for me to tell you candidly what I believe our problems have been in our previous thirteen meetings and then to propose a procedure for proceeding, to give both of us an opportunity to see whether we can take account of the other side's point of view. I do want to say I am here because we do want to make a serious effort to make a solution and we believe that with goodwill and a new approach on both sides, there is a possibility of such a solution.

I know the Minister and Special Adviser get impatient with me when I become too philosophical. [They laugh.] But I would like to make a few general observations first, partly for my colleagues here and partly for my colleagues in Hanoi who will undoubtedly study this record.

I want to explain why we have—you in particular—have not made full opportunity of this particular channel. We have settled major problems with other countries, with some of which we have had no contact for two decades, by using this particular channel—for two particular reasons: When I negotiate on behalf of the President, I have authority to make big decisions, and then to carry the bureaucracy with

me. I can go to the essence of a problem and then let the technical people work out the details. We have settled with other countries—with some of which we have had hostility for many decades and which are of more concern to us than Vietnam could possibly be, because they were willing to settle the big things and leave the details for the future. Once we have done that, we were meticulous and precise in carrying out every commitment and every understanding. And you can talk to those countries yourself if you want their impression.

I don't want to be misunderstood. I am not saying we have discussed Vietnam with other countries; I am saying that the bilateral problems we have had with other countries have been settled on that basis. As for Vietnam, one thing we have reached agreement on is that the problem of Vietnam will be settled in Paris and not in the capital of any other country.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by how to settle issues on the basis of what can be done now and what must be done in the future. And I will speak with great frankness, because that is the only thing that will distinguish this channel from Avenue Kléber.

When I made my first trip to Peking, this was a very serious matter for us and we were very serious about improving our relations with the People's Republic of China. We had worked on it for many years. But if at that first meeting the Chinese side had said to us, "We have seven demands—they read as follows: You must . . . you must . . . you must. . ." And if when I said anything else they had said "You are not very specific." Or if they had said "The first thing you must do is replace President Chiang Kai-shek with a government that stands for peace, independence and neutrality, and after that we will talk to you"—we would have made no progress. I am not trying to win an argument with you, because either we will settle or we will not settle. But I really believe you have not understood us. I really want to make sure that if our discussions fail, it will not be because you didn't understand us. I am saying we could make progress because we could decide what we could do then and what we could do later, and because we made a minimum of confidence in each other.

Now I want to tell you, Mr. Minister and Mr. Special Adviser, that we are at least as serious about wanting to end the war with you on a just basis as we have been in the policies which I have described to you. And the reason we have failed—in my judgment—is that you have dealt with these negotiations as if we were lawyers drafting a document and you were looking for escape clauses by which we would trick our way back into Vietnam after we had left. In my view, you have used the plenary sessions not to negotiate but to mobilize public pressures. And you have used the private meetings again not to negotiate but to find if we were prepared to yield secretly to demands we had failed to yield to publicly.

In this—if you forgive me—obsession with avoiding what happened in the past, you have misunderstood our real objectives. It is true, we have attempted to separate the military outcome from the political outcome, but not for the reasons you believe. We are not looking for an opportunity to reenter Vietnam. We are not seeking to perpetuate a political conflict in Vietnam. We are seeking to separate our direct involvement from the political outcome, so that what happens later is the result of Vietnamese conditions, not of American action. And we want to do that for very general reasons, not because we want to back into Vietnam. I must tell you I have never understood—not to win an argument—why if you have confidence in yourselves you cannot at least explore this approach.

Let us take for example the situation last year in 1971. If you had accepted our proposal of May 31,[5] we would be out of Vietnam by now. The election in Vietnam last year would have taken place with all Vietnamese knowing we were withdrawing. And therefore the possibility of the government to take unilateral action would have been circumscribed. And I believe your position today even in the political field would have been even stronger than it is.

Or,—I am not trying to score points, but I am talking seriously, this is why I am not making specific proposals in this first part—take the situation in July 1971. Let me explain to you what I was trying to do, although I did not say that in so many words. We understood what you were proposing very well. But if I may say so, you were too formal and too legalistic. We believed that if we could have agreed in July 1971 on an agreed withdrawal of American forces and a statement of principles about the political evolution, the events that then happened in August with respect to the election would have been impossible, and there might have been a good chance for a free and democratic election in October.

Finally, when I came here on May 2 [1972] to discuss with you, we were prepared to accept a ceasefire, and at that time your military position was better than it is today, and therefore your political possibilities would have been better.[6]

The Special Adviser has explained to me very often that you have political objectives. We understand this. And we do not oppose political objectives that reflect your real strength. But we do not want to accomplish them for you, but we will not shrink from consequences that flow naturally from the decisions we make. If we could have agreed last year on the disengagement of American forces and the return of

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[5] See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume VII, Vietnam, July 1970–January 1972, Document 207.

[6] See Document 109.

prisoners, and if you had shown some patience, many of the events of this year would not have occurred.

Let me tell you once again what our principles are with respect to a settlement in Vietnam:

In a period when we are reducing our presence elsewhere in Asia, we can have no incentive to maintain American troops or American bases or American predominance in one little corner of Asia called Vietnam.

Secondly, when we can live with governments that are not pro-American in the largest Asian nations, why should we insist on a government that is pro-American in Saigon?

Third, if we can coexist with Moscow and Peking, we can coexist with Hanoi. Our two countries do not pose a long-term threat to one another. Indeed, strange as it may seem, once this war is over, we have every interest in your independence, autonomy and well-being.

Fourth, your nation will continue to be a permanent factor in Indochina when we will have withdrawn 12000 miles. We thus genuinely want to negotiate a solution that respects your independence and meets your reasonable concerns.

Fifth, we *are* interested in Southeast Asia in the independence and neutrality of the region and not in any bases or alliances with us.

Sixth, we are not wed to any particular personalities or any particular[7] orientation in South Vietnam. We are willing to let events in South Vietnam take their natural evolution, without our presence and without our predominant influence. We are not looking for an excuse to return.

These are our basic principles. But there are also some immediate necessities to recognize for both sides. One, neither side should seek to impose a military solution on the other. The political outcome must be left to the people of Vietnam. The withdrawal of American forces from Southeast Asia is not only a military fact but a political fact, that will have a profound political influence. Any attempt to use these negotiations to affect the American elections will end these negotiations until after the elections. In fact, we now find the following irony. [The interpreter asks Dr. Kissinger to repeat the previous point.] Any attempt to use these negotiations to influence the American elections means that we will end these negotiations until after the elections. In other words, we will not be affected by the elections. The history of the negotiations has produced the following irony: The practical effect of our proposals has been to withdraw from Vietnam; the practical ef-

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[7] The words "personalities or any particular" were bracketed for deletion in copies of the memorandum of conversation sent to Porter and Bunker.

fect of your proposal has been to keep us in Vietnam so we could accomplish the political objective you want us to do for you.

So this is where we are. We do not believe there can be a military solution. We do not believe there can be any change in the overall political circumstances.

You can of course gamble on our elections. You will have seen in the *Herald Tribune* today the latest polls indicating the prospects [Reuters account of *Newsweek* survey, Tab A.][8] And you know, of course, that President Nixon's term ends on January 20 and not on November 7. And you will have to decide whether you really want to turn this election into a referendum on Vietnam, because if the outcome goes as now appears practically certain, you will have weakened your supporters in the United States enormously.

But I am not here to discuss our domestic politics. I am here to remind you that you will get no better terms after the election.

But also I am here to meet with you in a spirit of conciliation and goodwill. I hope we can abandon unilateral demands. I hope we can look understandingly at each other's point of view. We will not use third parties, official or unofficial, appointed or self-appointed. I propose that we talk openly with each other. And I propose that we set a specific work program for ourselves. We should set an overall goal of what we are trying to achieve. We should decide on the relation between what we do here and the public sessions. And we should try to establish a specific schedule.

The Special Adviser and the Minister have always accused me of a lack of concreteness and specificity [they laugh], by which they meant that I did not sign the documents they put before me. But what has been lacking is a genuine understanding of what we have been trying to achieve. Neither of us will be able to trick the other. Once we agree on general objectives, we will find practical solutions relatively easily. Once we deal with each other on the basis of goodwill, you will find us meticulous and reliable in carrying out our promises. This has been the experience of all the countries we have dealt with, including some of your allies. We made eight agreements in Moscow in one week, and we have carried out every nuance of every agreement. So I want to tell you from our side that we want to do this with you. Since you've tried every other approach why not try this new approach?

I promise you this will be the last general thing you will hear from me. I will have something specific to say about how to proceed, but I want to hear your reaction to this, Mr. Special Adviser, Mr. Minister.

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[8] Attached but not printed at Tab A is the July 19 article entitled "Poll Shows a Landslide for Nixon If the Election Were Held Now."

Xuan Thuy: We think we have come here to find a way to peacefully settle the Vietnam problem, and the sooner the better. For our side, we think that the United States in the past has missed many opportunities that have been offered, and you should have settled the problem soon. And now we do want to negotiate with Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger with goodwill and a serious attitude to settle the problem. Therefore we are prepared to listen to the concrete schedule that Dr. Kissinger will present.

Le Duc Tho: I have been listening to your presentation, what you might call "the general line of the United States." And we wish to listen to your concrete schedule. After that we will express our general line and then our concrete line too. Because if there is always such a general statement about a general line then no settlement is possible. Because if a settlement is to be reached you should be frank and bold in presenting your views and we will do the same. Because it is the time now to reach a settlement. This should be your objective requirement, and ours too.

Kissinger: I agree with you. But these negotiations will end like all the others if Hanoi takes the position that you have reached a condition not reached by any other human beings, namely infallibility. It is impossible that all proposals must come from us and that the test of concreteness is how closely we approximate the unilateral demands of my colleagues.

Xuan Thuy: We have also made many proposals too, to be discussed by both sides.

Kissinger: Yes, you've made many proposals, but. . . .

Le Duc Tho: Now, I would move a little break. After the break, I would wish to listen to your concrete schedule and we shall express ourselves. Because, since we start the discussions to find a method to solve the problem, both sides should express their views.

[It was 11:20. The group gets up from the table.][9]

[Omitted here is a 22-minute informal discussion between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho.]

Xuan Thuy: Mr. Special Adviser Dr. Kissinger has expressed your general views on Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Let us now express our own views on Vietnam and Southeast Asia. After that, we would propose that you present your concrete schedule as you have raised.

Now, Special Adviser Le Duc Tho will speak about our general attitude.

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[9] In copies sent to Porter and Bunker, the last sentence was deleted and "There was a 20-minute break" was substituted.

Le Duc Tho: You have just let us know your general line. Let us now express our own views on the general situation so far in the negotiations between the two sides, and our general observations on the general situation and general policy of ours. And then we would prefer to listen to your concrete views on the settlement of the Vietnam problem. And then we shall express ourselves.

Kissinger: That is fair enough.

Le Duc Tho: So far the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States have had a dozen private meetings. We feel that this 14th private meeting has its important significance, because if the two sides make a new effort toward an adequate solution of the Vietnam problem, then this meeting will be a turning point.

Now I will express myself in a comprehensive way. First, I would like to review the process of the negotiations between you and us, and our general position regarding Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, our policy toward the Southeast Asian region, and our policy toward the United States.

Now, let me speak about the first question. You are a university professor, a statesman and a diplomat. You have been following the Vietnam problem a long time now, and you are in charge of direct negotiations with us. You know Vietnam is a small country. We have been subjected to aggression for 1000 years by powers many times stronger than Vietnam. But the Vietnamese people have stood up to every aggression, despite every sacrifice and hardship, to seize back our independence and freedom. And many times in the past we have won glorious victories. This is the past history of the Vietnamese nation.

Enhancing this tradition of gallantry and nonsubmission, the Vietnamese people have stood up against French colonialism and now U.S. aggression. The United States is the biggest power in the world, and it has poured millions of tons of bombs and shells to devastate our country—a small country with an underdeveloped economy. We can say that no inch, no acre of our country can be spared U.S. shells. In every inch there is Vietnamese blood poured. Though we can make every sacrifice, our people are determined not to submit our country to be enslaved again. Even if we lose everything, we are not prepared to lose our freedom. The victories we have won against French colonialism and the victories we have won in the last fourteen years over U.S. aggression testify to this fact. Our people have toiled endlessly for their freedom.

But the Vietnamese nation is also a peaceloving nation. We know full well that for a small country, a war should be settled not only by armed struggle but finally by peaceful negotiation. And after a settlement, the two sides can maintain good relations. Vietnamese history has testified to this. This is why over the past 25 years the Vietnamese have carried out many negotiations—in 1946 with the French, in 1954

at the Geneva Conference on Indochina, in 1962 at the Geneva Conference on Laos. Therefore, we feel there is no reason why we cannot achieve a peaceful settlement with the United States.

But what is the reason why our negotiations have not come to any result over the past four years, as you have just said? Actually the negotiations between Vietnam and the U.S. are different from the negotiations you conducted with the Soviet Union and China, very different. And therefore there are difficulties. It is not so easy as you have done with the Soviet Union and China. You have carried out an aggression very deep and very long in Vietnam. Therefore to get out is not easy. Because you are not concerned with Vietnam only, you are concerned with other parts of the world. This is a difficulty.

As for us, we are one people, determined to win back our freedom and our independence. And we will not yield to military pressure. The objectives of the United States and the objectives of Vietnam are different. It is different from the negotiations you conduct with the Soviet Union and with China because these are with big powers.

Therefore now let us review our negotiations here, why over the past four years the negotiations were not fruitful. Today at this forum I am reluctant to engage in polemics about which side is responsible for the failure. I would like to point out the fact that since President Nixon came to power, U.S. policy is centered on Vietnamization of the war. You have been continuously expanding and intensifying the war throughout these four years of negotiations. That is why you have been carrying out very fierce, very cruel sweep operations throughout South Vietnam with a view to build up and consolidate the Saigon Administration. And this for the purpose that after your withdrawal you would be in a position to continue your policy in Vietnam. Then you extended the war to Cambodia and to Highway Number 9 in southern Laos. And now you have carried out a fierce air and naval bombardment of Vietnam and have blockaded and mined our seaports. And with such acts of war, how can we negotiate? And so it is clear you are not ready to negotiate. You have missed many opportunities to settle the Vietnam war peacefully. We think with your policy of Vietnamization of the war you still want to force us by military pressure to accept your terms. That is, you want to get out of Vietnam but after you get out you still want to implement in one form or another your neocolonialist policy.

You used the pretext that the North Vietnamese Army launched an offensive against the South to justify the mining and bombing. You wanted to stifle North Vietnam in violation of the U.S.'s engagement of 1968 with us. The reasons you invoked for intensifying the war are not legitimate. Because over the past ten years since the U.S. aggression against Vietnam began, the Vietnamese people in both zones, North and South, have united and have stood up in one common front

to strike back and defend the independence of their country. This is the legitimate right of self-defense of every country in the world. You know full well that the military forces that fought on Highway Number 9 in Laos are the same forces that fought in Quang Tri and Thua Thien. There are no other forces.

Kissinger: On whose side?

Le Duc Tho: The Liberation forces. There are no other forces.

Kissinger: One could argue that they had no right to be in Laos in the first place. But you can finish your statement. You cannot derive a right to fight in South Vietnam from the fact that they are already in Laos and Cambodia. But I'll let you finish.

Le Duc Tho: Your bombardment and your blockade of North Vietnamese seaports are aimed at forcing us to surrender, and at winning a strong position in the negotiations for you. Today I would like to point out to you that the bombing raids are not aimed solely at military targets but at densely populated areas, at dikes and dams, at targets that have no possible military significance. Journalists, politicians, friends, have been visiting us and witnessed this. Nevertheless President Nixon has affirmed that the bombs are aimed only at military and not civilian targets. This is utterly false.

We wonder, if the U.S. really wants an adequate peaceful solution, how President Nixon can continue the bombing and mining. It is time now to enter negotiations to really settle the problem. Your actions will but deepen the hatred of our people, will prolong the war and hinder our negotiations. Therefore we think that in order to create a propitious atmosphere for the negotiations that are coming now to a turning point, the U.S. should stop the bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of our ports. We think you should carefully think over and look over past experiences. Continuation of the bombing of North Vietnam may create more destruction and more sacrifice for our people, but the bombing will not succeed in subduing us and will not settle the fate of the war.

And the continuation of the Vietnamization policy that is now failing in South Vietnam will get the U.S. involved indefinitely in Vietnam, and no one knows when the U.S. will get out of Vietnam. If now the U.S. still thinks you can settle the problem by continuing military measures and trying to settle from a position of strength, certainly it will be a great mistake in the term of President Nixon.

We firmly believe the American people will not allow President Nixon to continue such actions, which are not in the interest of the American people, of the Vietnamese people, or of the world's people. The best way to settle is by negotiation. For our part we really desire a peaceful settlement. It is time now for you and us to enter serious

negotiations, to discuss questions of substance and reach a logical and reasonable settlement acceptable to both sides.

Settlement of the Vietnam question directly involves you and us. It would be a useless effort if you try to find another way than negotiating, if you resort to other diplomatic maneuvers. The problem will not be settled that way.

Kissinger: He doesn't like my traveling.

Le Duc Tho: And the experiences of the last four years of negotiations are evidence of this. In our negotiations there is a very important factor, that is, a common desire to reach a settlement, a mutual understanding. And it is also important to create minimal trust between the two sides, as you have just said. You have just said, if a settlement is to be reached, we should express our views in a frank, open-minded, straightforward way. Because the two sides have been separated by a deep gap of hostility and mistrust. Therefore a settlement requires a mutual understanding and confidence, a minimum of understanding and trust, and a realistic outlook. We are prepared to enter into negotiation in this same spirit but we wonder if you are prepared in the same spirit.

Hitherto we have negotiated and signed many documents with you, in 1954 and 1962. But up to now these agreements have been torn up. Even the U.S. agreement of October 1968 regarding cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam is not honored by you. Even in the less important things, such as divulging the private meetings, you have never kept your promise. We have been deceived too many times.

Parenthetically, when I met Joseph Kraft, I told him so. After the meeting he told another journalist. He confirmed that actually the North Vietnamese have been deceived too many times. This is a fact. So the fault is not on our side.

Kissinger: It is unfair to put our journalists up against the Special Adviser. Last year he defeated Anthony Lewis, this year Joseph Kraft.

In fact if you kept Kraft in Hanoi, he would be in the last batch we would repatriate.

Xuan Thuy: He is now back.

Kissinger: To my regret. Now he will attack me.

Xuan Thuy: So your last man has now left North Vietnam [laughter]! You will not ask for others.

Le Duc Tho: So we are now going to negotiate and settle the problem. But we wonder if the agreements will be kept for a long time, or if they will be reversed no sooner than signed. If so, no good results will come of the negotiations. Are you prepared to keep your words, and strictly respect agreements reached, and match words with deeds? In a word, we will now begin serious negotiation and settle the problem for

the immediate and long-term interest of both sides. Then we should realize mutual agreement, mutual confidence. All agreements, signed and unsigned, should be honored to wipe out hostility, to build confidence in the future and a long-term relationship between the two sides.

Let me speak on another question, that is, our general view of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. I will also first speak on our policy toward the U.S., in the immediate as well as long-term period.

After World War II, in 1945, we seized back our independence from the hands of the Japanese fascists and founded an independent country. You see, in the midst of resistance against Japanese fascism, on the Vietnamese front, we had contact with Americans. The U.S. was one of our allies against Japanese fascism. The Americans came to our base in Viet Bac [northern Vietnam] and gave advice and training. And it is not mere coincidence that in our declaration of independence we quoted some sentences from your Declaration of Independence of 200 years ago. It was said, "All men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This shows that from the early days of our independence, in 1945, when the Vietnamese people turned a new page in our history, we had already a good intention to have a new relationship with the United States on a new basis.

Unfortunately, shortly afterward the French colonialists returned to Vietnam and the U.S. helped the French, and changed its policy, to put a colonial yoke on Vietnam. After nine years of resistance we won a very great victory, and the Geneva Agreement of 1954 recognized the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Vietnam. Immediately after, the U.S. replaced the French, and sent troops directly, for aggression against Vietnam, with a view to make Vietnam a base for a neocolonialist policy. And the U.S. sent its air force to bomb North Vietnam, and the whole people stood up against U.S. aggression.

The object of our policy is to defend, preserve, the fundamental principles of the Geneva Agreement of 1954. Vietnam is one. The Vietnamese people are one. Definitely, Vietnam will be reunified. This is the deepest aspiration of every Vietnamese in the two zones. And we stand for the reunification of the two sides by peaceful means, by common agreement by the parties. Pending the peaceful reunification of our country, we have no other desire than to see the South and the North as independent and neutral, as provided for by the 1954 Geneva Agreements. North Vietnam will not allow foreign military personnel and military bases, and North Vietnam will not join any military alliance with foreign powers. South Vietnam should do the same, and not allow foreign military bases or military personnel and should not join military alliances. South Vietnam will not impose a socialist system as we have in the North. But South Vietnam should not be a

neocolony of the U.S., and should follow a progressive democratic system. Pending reunification of the country, the two zones, North and South, should maintain a close relationship in all fields. We hold that the two zones should maintain peace and contribute to lasting peace in the area.[10]

This is our basic objective with respect to the real situation between North and South Vietnam at present.

What is our policy toward Laos and Cambodia? Over the past four years, the U.S. has not only carried out a war of aggression against Vietnam, but also has extended the war to Laos and Cambodia. Faced with such a situation, the Vietnamese people have united with the Lao and Cambodian people to fight aggression and defend their independence and freedom. This is a historical necessity. Vietnam is a small country; Vietnam will never carry out aggression against any other country. We consistently respect the independence, neutrality, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Laos and Cambodia. We will respect the provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreement on Cambodia and the 1962 Geneva Agreement on Laos. The internal problems of each country, Laos and Cambodia, must be settled by its own people. The problems concerning the Indochinese countries should be settled by the Indochinese parties on the basis of respect for their independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, without interference by other countries in their internal affairs. For its part, North Vietnam is prepared to participate in a settlement of these problems. Since our political objectives with respect to Laos and Cambodia are so clear, that we have shown restraint on our military activities is known to you.

Kissinger: Where have you shown restraint? I just want to know the localities; I am not arguing.

Le Duc Tho: In Laos and Cambodia. You have been following the military situation. This is known to you.

Besides that, in the Southeast Asian region, we stand for a peaceful, independent and neutral Southeast Asia. We state that we are prepared to participate in zonal cooperation for economic development and cultural exchange. This is beneficial to a lasting peace in Southeast Asia.

With the U.S. in particular, we think that after a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem, there is no reason that prevents the relationship between our two peoples from becoming fine again, to open a new page in our relations, and reopen the relations of many years ago, as I stated. We will implement our desire for good relations for two score years. In spite of the hostile past between the U.S. and Viet-

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[10] The last two sentences of this paragraph were highlighted in the margin by an unknown hand.

nam, we are confident that after a settlement of the war in the interests of the two countries, we are sure that Vietnam will maintain good relations with the U.S. as we have done with the French, and history shows we have done so many times.

That is why the Provisional Revolutionary Government has put forward in its Seven Points that Vietnam should follow a foreign policy of peace, independence, and neutrality.[11] And South Vietnam will establish relations with all countries irrespective of their social and political systems, establish economic and cultural relations with all countries, receive the cooperation of all countries to exploit the resources of South Vietnam, accept economic and technical aid from all countries without political conditions attached, and participate in cooperative programs in the field of economy. On the basis of these principles, after the war South Vietnam will establish political, economic and cultural relations with the U.S.

As for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, we will also pursue a foreign policy of peaceful coexistence. We shall establish relations with all countries irrespective of the political systems of these countries. With regard to the United States, we wish for the establishment of relations in all fields with the United States. And we wish that the United States will establish the task of healing the wounds of war and will help rebuild devastated areas. After the restoration of peace, we shall put an end to a period of hostility between the two countries and shift into a new period of good relations on the new basis of equality and mutual interest.

Obviously, all the above is possible only with a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem. In the present international situation, there are plenty of complex contradictions in every area. We do not want to be involved in such complex contradictions. We consistently maintain our independent sovereign policy to settle all internal or foreign problems arising from our own life. This independent and sovereign policy is the sure guarantee of our independence and freedom.

Basing ourselves on this real situation, we have expressed our very basic views on a whole series of issues of practical concern. We would like to hear your views on these issues. This is all the proposals I would like to raise with you. Now I expect you will present your concrete views on the solution to the Vietnam problem. I am prepared to listen to you.

Dr. Kissinger: Mr. Special Adviser, Mr. Minister, first one procedural point. I want to express my appreciation for your having your interpreter interpret for both sides, which must be a strain on him. We will try to find, if we have future meetings, someone who speaks

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[11] See footnote 4, Document 26.

Vietnamese or French and whom we trust. The latter is the limiting condition! We are aware of the fact that this is a great imposition, and this requires great stamina. Unfortunately for your opponents—but fortunately for these discussions—you possess great stamina.

Now I want to say I appreciate the spirit in which the observations of the Special Adviser were put forward. If we proceed on both sides with this attitude, then even if we start some distance apart we can make a serious effort to narrow these differences. That will be our approach.

I will make one observation about the American domestic situation. The Special Adviser has pointed out that "the American people will not permit our government to pursue its present policy." As has been proved over the last four years, our domestic opposition is not capable of stopping our policy. The popularity of the President increased enormously after the decisions of May. Jane Fonda does not represent America. But that should not be the point, because we want to settle the war and we don't need that particular argument.

As I explained to the Special Adviser privately when we were standing outside, we have our own reasons—above all in terms of our overall situation. The original[12] reasons which led to our involvement are no longer valid. I also agree with the Special Adviser that there is a special problem in our negotiations. We have global responsibilities. And therefore we tend to look at certain Vietnamese problems in terms of their effect on parts of the world which are of no concern to you. Indochina is your principal problem, and therefore we have a different perspective. This is no argument against a solution; it means we will have to be somewhat patient with each other in the process of negotiating. It isn't a lack of goodwill on either side.

Now the Special Adviser asked one question, which I think requires a thoughtful answer, which is: If we come to an agreement, will we keep it? I want to tell the Special Adviser and the Minister that if we come to an agreement we will observe not only the letter but the spirit, not only formal aspect but every nuance.

[Tho starts to speak, then stops.]

The Special Adviser needs equal time?

Le Duc Tho: Because I wondered about the word "nuance."

Dr. Kissinger: The reason I use the word "nuance" is, no matter what we write down, there will be two aspects: What conditions does it bring about and what trend does it start? The important thing is whether both sides are willing to live with the trend that it starts, and understand it, so that both are willing to go the road no matter what

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[12] "The original" was changed to "Many of the" in the copies for Porter and Bunker.

happens.[13] Not all proposals will solve everything at once, but some things will have to evolve—even with your proposals.

I formed the impression that the Special Adviser is somewhat influenced by Leninist philosophy. Am I correct? [Tho laughs.] And therefore, seriously, we both know that whatever we sign will be the start of a process. And that is why I wanted to say we must understand the consequences and both sides will live with it. We are prepared. In fact, that in many ways will be the most important agreement we reach, if we reach agreement.[14]

A few other observations of the Special Adviser give us no problem. We don't want to maintain bases or military personnel in any part of Indochina at the conclusion of hostilities. Second, we have no difficulty agreeing to a foreign policy of neutrality for all the countries of Indochina. So we have some positive beginnings.

Now with respect to specific proposals, we can proceed in two ways. One is, I could present to the Minister and Special Adviser some modifications of our May 8 proposals.[15]

Le Duc Tho: Modifications or qualifications?

Dr. Kissinger: Modifications, and at the same time I would be prepared to go over with the Special Adviser and the Minister a point by point questioning of your Seven Points and Two Points to make sure we have understood them correctly.[16]

Another possibility is that since this is going to be a somewhat time-consuming process if we start it now, I would like to pick up a point the Special Adviser made with respect to our military activities. The point being that the Special Adviser seemed to believe that our military activities in North Vietnam had a detrimental impact on the prospects of negotiation. Of course, we believe that your military activities in the rest of Indochina have a detrimental impact on the prospects of negotiation.

It is therefore possible that we could discuss here—and we also recognize that a general ceasefire of indefinite duration presents particular difficulties to you—one approach could be that we agree on a ceasefire of some four months' duration throughout Indochina, during which period both sides would stop their military activity and negotiate the details of a settlement. We would, as part of such an arrangement, propose the release of some prisoners, presumably those who have been kept in prison the longest time.

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[13] This entire sentence was deleted in the copies sent to Porter and Bunker.

[14] The preceding three sentences, beginning with "And that is why", were deleted from the copies sent to Porter and Bunker.

[15] For the May 8 U.S. proposal, see Document 136.

[16] See footnote 3, Document 20.

May I ask the Minister and Special Adviser what they think of this interim approach while we negotiate the details of the other.

Le Duc Tho: Our position regarding a ceasefire is known to you so far. We advocate that you and we should settle all military and political problems and after agreement is reached and after the signing of an agreement, then a ceasefire could take place. And I remember once in our discussions you agreed to this approach. The reason why I hold this view is that only after a settlement of all the problems a ceasefire will last and lasting peace will be assured.

Dr. Kissinger: But I am now speaking of a temporary ceasefire to allow negotiations to go on. Say three or four months.

Le Duc Tho: I think to conduct negotiations and settle the problem both sides should go into reviewing all questions and agree on an agenda of items to be discussed, and to come [enter] into discussions of these items. If in one question we meet with difficulties in our discussion we shall shift the discussion to another. We shall come to an agreement and then a ceasefire shall take place. In our view, such a ceasefire will be a final ceasefire, a definite ceasefire, for a lasting peace.

There is no point to observe a three-month, four-month ceasefire and then [have] hostilities resume. We feel that if you really want serious negotiations, the way we have proposed is the correct one, a practical one. This is the same way we adopted at the Geneva Conferences in 1954 and 1962.

Dr. Kissinger: I have no objection to this procedure. But I want to make clear we are prepared to discuss a temporary ceasefire. In our view, a cessation of military operations while negotiations are going on would create a better atmosphere for negotiations. We for our part are prepared to stop military operations throughout Indochina, if you are prepared to do this, to permit negotiations to proceed in a better atmosphere. But as I understand it, you're not prepared to discuss this today?

Le Duc Tho: We hold our view as I presented it to you.

Dr. Kissinger: We just wanted to understand it. Then let me proceed with some modifications of our May 8 proposal. Then we are prepared to listen to any modifications of your proposal, and if not, I can proceed with some questions on your proposal.

Is this an agreeable procedure?

Le Duc Tho: Please now present your views, modifications, and we will then express ourselves.

Dr. Kissinger: I am talking about the proposal presented by the President in his May 8 speech.

First, you remember it required an internationally supervised ceasefire throughout Indochina. The two sides should enter into im-

mediate discussions to determine its modalities. In case of such a ceasefire, the United States will cease all acts of force throughout Indochina and will cooperate with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in deactivating mines placed in North Vietnamese ports and waterways.

The modification I would like to present is: When I met with you on May 2 we were discussing withdrawal of all your forces to the positions of March 29, prior to the offensive. Our proposal would be that in the ceasefire the armed forces of both sides would stop all offensive action against each other from the positions they now occupy, in other words that the ceasefire would be essentially in-place.

Second, with respect to withdrawal of United States and allied forces, we have proposed that we would withdraw from South Vietnam all U.S. forces and all allied forces within four months of the implementation of such a ceasefire, and within four months after the prisoners have been released.

We are now modifying this proposal to say that the prisoner release can take place side-by-side with the withdrawal.

Third, with respect to political issues, we are prepared, side-by-side with a ceasefire, to agree with you on some political principles which should govern the political future of South Vietnam. These are:

—South Vietnam should be free to decide its future free from outside interference.

—Second, the U.S. will remain neutral in any election, abide by the results of an election or any other political process shaped by the South Vietnamese, and is prepared to define its economic and military assistance relationship with any South Vietnamese government.

—Three, the countries of Indochina should adopt foreign policies of neutrality.

—Four, reunification of Vietnam should be decided through discussions and agreement between North and South without constraint or annexation by either party.

—Five, the problems of 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.

—There should be an international guarantee for the fundamental national rights of the Indochinese peoples, the status of all countries in Indochina and lasting peace in the region.

These are the modifications of our May 8 proposal that I would like to present. It constitutes a definition of ceasefire that differs from what we proposed on May 2, a modification of the timing of the withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces, and some general principles to guide the political process.

Here is an informal copy to help your translation. [A carbon copy of the original at Tab B was handed over.][17]

Le Duc Tho: Now, I would like to have some preliminary remarks, and then I would propose a break.

What you have called a modification and a specific proposal I feel are not a modification and are not specific. Because you still maintain a ceasefire and withdrawal of U.S. forces in four months—because previously it was four months—and release of prisoners. Regarding political questions, I have the impression I am hearing again what you have said over the past thirteen sessions. They are not even as clear as your Eight Points—for example, on the resignation of Nguyen Van Thieu and the timing of elections. So these are not as concrete and specific as your previous Eight Points.[18]

Dr. Kissinger: Which were also not concrete or specific.

Le Duc Tho: But these points are even less specific than the Eight Points in certain points.

At the beginning, you spoke about goodwill and specific proposals. I have been expecting some specific proposal. But what you just said, they are similar to previous statements and to what you said in public statements. But I think in this forum you should speak in a different way.

So these proposals do not match with what you said in the beginning about goodwill and specific proposals. The questions I have just raised about our general position toward Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Southeast Asia, and the United States I feel are more specific and positive. So up to now, [in] what you have just said, besides the general line, there is no positive point. As for us, since the beginning, you should have realized that we desire to have serious negotiation.

Dr. Kissinger: Since the beginning of what?

Le Duc Tho: Of this meeting.

But the statement you have made just now is contrary to my expectation when I listened to you at the beginning.

This is my preliminary remark after listening to you. This is my frank expression. You have not responded to my frankness. So this beginning has not opened up a good prospect yet.

Dr. Kissinger: The Special Adviser has proposed a brief break. Could I suggest that after the break he point out to me which aspects of his presentation we should pay particular attention to, which ones

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[17] Attached but not printed is Tab B, the July 19 "United States Five Point Proposal."

[18] See Document 8.

have positive aspects, because whatever we begin I want him to know we will examine very carefully his presentation. Could we do that? And I also have questions to ask as well. Because I believe the spirit of his presentation was a positive one. Which is more than in fourteen meetings the Special Adviser has ever said about me.

Le Duc Tho: But on the contrary your response is a negative one. In order to bring results to the negotiation both sides should be positive.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree.

Le Duc Tho: I still remember the message you sent us.[19] You said you would come with a positive and constructive attitude. I think the result is the contrary. I still remember also that before leaving last time you also said you would next time have something new. But these points I have already from reading the speech of President Nixon.

Dr. Kissinger: I have said before that in order to proceed constructively we should go over our proposals, which have never been discussed.

[The group gets up from the table, at about 1:34 p.m., and goes to the next room where snacks and drinks are served. Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy leave to confer privately. The American side engages in small talk with the North Vietnamese interpreter and notetakers. There is much eating, and relaxed friendly conversation. After about half an hour Le Duc Tho returns alone.

[Informal conversation took place, along the following lines:

[Dr. Kissinger: Do you trust the Minister to be left by himself?

[Laughter]

[The Special Adviser has the habit of always telling me I am not concrete enough and then a year later telling me I missed an opportunity.

[Le Duc Tho: If you are more concrete, we can reach a solution. Today is another opportunity.

[Dr. Kissinger: Speaking as an historian, the war will eventually be settled—in spite of me! Maybe next year if not this year. But we both have to extricate ourselves from an historical process in which we are both engaged.

[Le Duc Tho: I hope you extricate yourself in this term of the President. The U.S. has solved many problems lately, of not so much difficulty. Vietnam is a difficult problem.

[Dr. Kissinger: You have to help us.

[Le Duc Tho: You and I together. If you succeed you will be number one as a trouble-shooter.

[Dr. Kissinger: I always say that the person who says "flattery will get you nowhere" has never had flattery. May I ask the Special

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[19] See Document 196.

Adviser how long he has been a member of the Communist movement in Vietnam?

[Le Duc Tho: Way back, before the war.

[Dr. Kissinger: It took great moral courage to join then. I have great admiration for the personal courage of you and your leaders.

[There was other small talk. About 2:20, Minister Xuan Thuy returned and the group reconvened at the table.]

Xuan Thuy: You will continue?

Dr. Kissinger: My impression was that the Special Adviser would point out to me now which points of his presentation deserve special attention. And we would then discuss which particular points we should emphasize in reflecting on this meeting, and we would then comment on that.

Le Duc Tho: In the first part of my presentation, I would like to draw your attention to the passage in which I emphasized our goodwill and serious intent. And in this passage I would like also to draw attention to the point that if you also show goodwill and serious intention you should stop the bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of North Vietnamese seaports. Because these do not reflect goodwill. In doing so you want to force us to surrender and want to gain a strong position from which you want to negotiate. I also pointed out that in negotiating we should create an atmosphere of mutual confidence and both sides should respect engagements made. These are the points I should like to draw attention to.

In the second part, I expressed my point of view with respect to Laos, Cambodia and Southeast Asia—these are very fundamental questions—and toward the United States too. Please, I would suggest that you examine them carefully, not only for the present but also for the long term future.

Now, going into the solution itself, I would like to know your view. Throughout the negotiations there are two biggest outstanding questions, first the political solution and second, the way to conduct the negotiations between us. As to the other questions, I feel that in principle we have come to the same view on certain questions.

Before dealing with these questions, I would like to know your views on these two outstanding questions: First, the political question of South Vietnam. How do you envisage the political process in South Vietnam, very concretely? The way you have just expressed was in very general terms.

You claimed we wanted to impose a three-segment government on South Vietnam as a Communist government. It is not true, not correct. Because a government including these three segments cannot be a Communist government. One segment will be chosen by the Saigon Administration without Thieu, as I have said. One segment belongs to the

Provisional Revolutionary Government and will be chosen by the PRG. And the third segment is composed of neutralists in South Vietnam, not favoring the Provisional Revolutionary Government nor the present Saigon Administration. So we believe that such a government includes people of all political colors and tendencies, from rightist to leftist.

Such a government reflects the real political situation in South Vietnam, because at present there are two administrations in South Vietnam; besides, there are neutralist political forces. The existence of these political forces constitutes an objective reality. And I think that to achieve a lasting peace these three forces must realize national concord. Otherwise, if there is no such national concord among the opponent forces, then the war will resume. This is our point of view on the three-segment government.

Repeatedly you make public statements that this three-segment government is a Communist government. It is not true. Because the structural organization, the regime of such a government is quite different from North Vietnam's socialist government—not only in structural organization but also in the economic, cultural area as well. Actually, such a government contains the features of a progressive democratic bourgeois regime. Such is my point of view on the three-segment government. What are your views?

Dr. Kissinger: Let me ask you some questions. I confess I believe that your three-segment government is objectively . . . will lead objectively to a Communist government and that is what you are proposing. You have proposed to journalists that perhaps I didn't understand it, so let me ask about it.

First, what is the relation between your two clarifying statements and the Seven Points? Do they supplement them or supersede them?

Le Duc Tho: Basically speaking, these two elaborations are the same as the Seven Points but they give more clarification and they add something to them.

Dr. Kissinger: What is the new element they add?

[The other side searches for a copy.]

I have them. I want to know what the new element is.

Le Duc Tho: In these two elaborating points, as regards military questions merely speaking, they are like the Seven Points. But previously we set a date, a time limit. Two or three times we tried such a date. But you didn't respond to such a proposal. Now we only move that you set yourself a specific date for withdrawal; we no longer set a specific date. So it is up to you now to propose a date and we will discuss such a date.

Regarding the political questions, previously we demand a change of the Saigon Administration completely and to replace it by a new government standing for peace, independence and democracy. Now

we demand only the immediate resignation of Nguyen Van Thieu. The remaining members of the Saigon Administration may remain but should change their policy to comply with the democratic liberties as required in Article 14(c) of the Geneva Agreement. So it is more flexible than previously.

Dr. Kissinger: Not really. You're asking the same people to follow your policy!

Le Duc Tho: No, only a change in policy to provide the democratic liberties of Article 14(c). I remember you once asked me if a change of policy was enough. So we said here, "a change of policy."

Dr. Kissinger: Let me understand it. First, President Thieu resigns, second, the Saigon Administration without Thieu changes its policy—all this time the war continues—then this government, without Thieu, negotiates with the PRG. All the time the war continues. Only after the PRG and his government have agreed on a new government of national concord will the war stop.

Le Duc Tho: [Nods yes.] After agreement is reached on all questions, including political questions, then a ceasefire.

Dr. Kissinger: So let me summarize. Thieu resigns. Then a government without Thieu changes its policy. Then this government with the changed policy negotiates with the PRG. Then after it has completed negotiations with the PRG there will be a ceasefire. That's correct?

[Tho nods yes.]

Again, so that I know what you're talking about: "Resign immediately." It doesn't mean I agree with it, only that I understand it. I don't want to get the Minister's hopes up! [laughter]

Xuan Thuy: You're understood.

Dr. Kissinger: Next, the Saigon Administration must end its warlike policy. Now what is it you want them to stop?

Le Duc Tho: When we speak of a change of policy by the Saigon Administration, we mean the enforcement of democratic liberties provided for by Article 14(c).

Dr. Kissinger: Like what?

Le Duc Tho: Such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of meeting, stop all terrorist measures, stop all the arresting of opposition people, stop all repression.

Dr. Kissinger: But you say this has no relation to North Vietnam?

Le Duc Tho: In North Vietnam we are constantly applying democratic liberties.

Dr. Kissinger: You have an opposition . . . ?

Le Duc Tho: This was the demand we made in 1954.

Dr. Kissinger: You have freedom of the press? [They nod yes.] Anyone can publish a newspaper?

Le Duc Tho: Anyone can publish a newspaper.

Dr. Kissinger: Even against the government?

Le Duc Tho: There is no one in North Vietnam who wants to publish such a paper.

Dr. Kissinger: You took care of that?

"Disband the machinery of repression." What does this mean? Do they have to disband the police?

Le Duc Tho: In every country there are military forces, there are security forces. It is something normal in each country. But in South Vietnam it is something abnormal; it is a huge machinery for repressing the people. There are concentration camps.

Dr. Kissinger: But that is in a separate point. What is it they have to disband?

Le Duc Tho: We mean here the concentration camps.

Dr. Kissinger: But you mention concentration camps separately.

Le Duc Tho: But in South Vietnam there are also camouflaged concentration camps just to keep the native population on the spot and prevent them from returning to their native villages.

Dr. Kissinger: What happens to the police?

Le Duc Tho: I think that besides the army every country has a police force to keep security.

Dr. Kissinger: Can they keep their present police force?

Le Duc Tho: I think you and I should enter into a discussion of the basic questions, for instance, the question of the three-segment government, the question of the resignation of Thieu, and the government minus Thieu changing its policy and ensuring democratic liberties. Questions such as the police we can discuss later.

Dr. Kissinger: Not unless I know what you mean. What happens to the South Vietnamese Armed Forces?

Le Duc Tho: Now in South Vietnam there are two different administrations, two different armies. In point 3 of the Seven Points it is said that this question will be settled by the Vietnamese parties themselves in a spirit of mutual respect without foreign interference.

Dr. Kissinger: But there are two separate questions: What happens after the Government of National Concord exists, and what happens after Thieu resigns but before the Government of National Concord is formed?

Le Duc Tho: After the resignation of Nguyen Van Thieu and before the formation of the Government of National Concord, the army of Saigon will remain the Saigon Administration armed forces.

Dr. Kissinger: But how can it end its warlike policy if it still has an instrument of making war?

Le Duc Tho: Because after the Government of National Concord is formed and there is agreement on all questions, political and military, the armies of the two sides will end the war.

Dr. Kissinger: No, before the Government of National Concord. You say after Thieu resigns, the new government does certain things and then negotiates with the PRG. If it continues fighting the PRG, you will say it is still pursuing a warlike policy and that someone else has to go.

Le Duc Tho: No, there are two aspects here. On the one hand, democratic liberties should be insured to the people. But when the liberties are insured but agreement is not yet reached, then the armies will go on fighting.

Dr. Kissinger: But then it will be pursuing a warlike policy, will it not?

Le Duc Tho: I think, as it happens elsewhere, hostilities are going on on the one hand and democratic liberties will be insured for the people on the other hand. Then a ceasefire will come. And maybe after the resignation of Nguyen Van Thieu the two sides may agree on a number of things to reduce hostilities, and maybe the ceasefire will come.

Dr. Kissinger: What do you mean by the end of pacification?

Le Duc Tho: It means the cessation of sweep operations and the arrestation of the population. I believe that when the two administrations sit together these questions will be discussed.

Dr. Kissinger: But this is what the administration has to do *in order* that this be discussed. We don't object to this as a result, but you are insisting on this as a precondition of a discussion.

Le Duc Tho: We put forward a number of points for a settlement of the problem. You too put forward a number. We can discuss them. In every negotiation—it is here a practical point—you cannot win everything you put forward, as we cannot win everything we put forward. Here is a subject for negotiation.[20]

Dr. Kissinger: I don't know why the Special Adviser won't win everything he puts forward. He is certainly making a tremendous try for it!

Le Duc Tho: You are, too. Both sides are trying for it. But you, like us, should discuss, negotiate, make an effort. Am I right?

Dr. Kissinger: You are right. Both sides cannot gain everything and we should look at these as points for negotiation. If this is your attitude we can look at yours in a different atmosphere.

Le Duc Tho: So please express your views.

Dr. Kissinger: I have another question. What do you mean by "The U.S. should stop its policy of Vietnamizing the war"? It is in your Seven Points.

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[20] This entire paragraph was highlighted in the margin, apparently by Kissinger.

Le Duc Tho: I mean by that that you want to nourish, nurture, the Saigon regime, consolidate it, build up its army and use its organization to continue the war while you withdraw, to continue what we call your neocolonialist policy.

Dr. Kissinger: This is, you say, our intention. But you cannot proscribe intentions. What is it you want us to stop doing in the first point?

Le Duc Tho: I think that in action you should stop supporting an administration you have set up. You should look at the real political situation in South Vietnam and act in keeping with the real political situation, that is, set up a three-segment government. That will reflect the real political situation.

So I have expressed my views on the three-segment government. What are yours?

Dr. Kissinger: But they are not yet clear to me. Because as I understand it, point one has to be implemented independently of point two, in either case [seven points or two points]. The military point. And because the Special Adviser wants us to keep every promise, and he is asking us to make a promise, I have to understand what he is asking us to promise.

As I understand it, we have to stop Vietnamization of the war. That means we have to stop economic and military aid to the successor government to President Thieu while that government is negotiating with the PRG. Is that correct?

Le Duc Tho: While this successor government to Thieu is discussing with the PRG, then U.S. economic and military aid to South Vietnam will have no change. But when the two parties agree on all points and come to formation of the three-segment government, then this three-segment government will decide its own policy on what economic and military aid. After the formation of the three-segment government, which economic and military aid will be decided by itself.

Dr. Kissinger: Obviously. But then let me ask about timing. Does it mean that U.S. withdrawal will not start until the three-segment government has been formed?

Le Duc Tho: In our view, when agreement is reached on all questions, and signed, and a ceasefire is observed, then the U.S. troop withdrawal begins. In what period, the parties will discuss.

Dr. Kissinger: But the ceasefire won't go into effect until the government of concord is formed.

Le Duc Tho: After agreement is reached on both military and political questions, then the ceasefire will start.

Dr. Kissinger: But if the two sides agree only that the Vietnamese sides will discuss the formation of a government of national concord, is that already an agreement?

Le Duc Tho: In our view, agreement is reached when the two sides sit together, negotiate, and come to agreement on how to form the three-segment government.

Dr. Kissinger: That's when the ceasefire begins? Only after the three-segment government is in fact formed?

Le Duc Tho: After agreement is reached.

Dr. Kissinger: Agreement to form it? or on how to form it?

Le Duc Tho: When agreement is reached on the composition, organization, prerogatives, and tasks of such a government, then an agreement is signed and a ceasefire starts. After a ceasefire, the three-segment government will assume its responsibilities to implement the agreement that has been reached.

Dr. Kissinger: I think I understand now.

Le Duc Tho: Please express your views.

Dr. Kissinger: I will express some preliminary views. I want to tell the Special Adviser we will study everything he has said with the greatest care, both his formal statement and his specific answers.

My preliminary answer is that we do not object to a government of national concord if it emerges out of free discussion among the South Vietnamese parties. The United States would not oppose some of the policies you describe if they were the outcome of a political process rather than a precondition for a political process.

For example, we have no objection to saying that the Government of South Vietnam can determine the amount of economic and military aid it receives. For example, we have no objection to saying that as a result of negotiation among the South Vietnamese parties democratic liberties should be assured.

What we object to is that as a condition of negotiation the objective basis of the Saigon Government should be destroyed so that the subsequent negotiations are a mere formality.

For example—let me be concrete—you have about eleven divisions in South Vietnam today. The PRG has three or four more. If now as a precondition to negotiation you say the Saigon Administration must change its warlike policy and if you define its warlike policy as resistance to these divisions, then you are asking them to yield before negotiations start. If on the other hand you say that political issues are to be settled among the genuine political forces in South Vietnam and they can fight each other until agreement is reached,[21] then many of your political principles in your second point can be accepted.

So the distinction between your proposal and ours is partly a question of timing and partly a question of how it comes about—and partly

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[21] The phrase beginning with "and they can" through "is reached" was deleted in the copies sent to Porter and Bunker.

a question of who does it. We have no difficulty accepting very strict definitions of nonintervention in South Vietnam's political life. We have great difficulty in imposing a particular political solution.

Some of the things the Special Adviser has said were positive, such as that American aid can continue until there is a new political . . . Others were more ambiguous, such as his reluctance to define precisely some of his formulations which, if I know him, he has thought through very precisely.

These are some preliminary reactions.

As I understand him, the lack of concreteness the Special Adviser complained about in the paper I gave you concerned primarily political issues. As I have told him, my concern is partly that sometimes he is excessively concrete. At the same time, I don't think the Special Adviser has fully studied the political impact of some of our military proposals.

I would particularly like to call his attention to my statement that if there is agreement, if he and I reach understanding on the political evolution, he can absolutely rely on our carrying out our understanding—a procedure we have followed in some other instances.[22] We have no desire to leave Indochina by the front door only to reenter by the back door. As difficult as this Administration has been for you in many respects, so it will be meticulous in carrying out its engagements.

So I would propose—but I am willing to continue this discussion—but I propose that both sides study this record. And by next time we will undertake to see if we can give more concreteness to the political side in light of the discussions today, and if the Special Adviser can keep in mind our points have perhaps come up with some concrete proposals of his own. And then we could do as the Special Adviser suggests, put them side by side, and if there is difficulty on one, go on to the next until we either reach agreement or narrow the differences.

Le Duc Tho: May I express some views before . . . ?

Dr. Kissinger: Please. I have time. I just wanted to suggest a procedure. I'm willing to go on.

Le Duc Tho: You blame us that we are too concrete, and we blame you that you speak in too general terms on the political questions.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree. I understand and will take into account.

Le Duc Tho: So there lies the difference. We would like to have your more concrete views on the political questions and your views are not concrete enough. What we would like is to discuss, we and

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[22] In the copies sent to Porter and Bunker, this sentence reads: "I would particularly like to call his attention to my statement that if there is agreement, he can absolutely rely on our carrying it out—a procedure we have followed in some other instances."

you, both military and political questions. After discussing all the problems and after coming to an agreement, you and we, if there remain specific questions that need discussion between the South Vietnamese parties, we hold that discussion of all problems must lead to agreements. And then after the signing of agreements a ceasefire can take place, and implementation of the signed agreements can begin.

The difference between us is the following: First, the political question, and second, the way to conduct negotiations. We would like to discuss both the military and the political questions very concretely, very detailed, and come to an agreement. You want to separate the military and political. You speak of the political questions in very general terms. After agreement comes between us, there will remain detailed questions, military and political, that will need the very thorough discussion of the Vietnamese parties. When all these are settled, then a ceasefire.

As to the other questions, on some we have agreed in principle. On others we need further discussion, but we feel they present no difficulty.

As you propose, I consider the two sides will reexamine the records. I agree with you. Today you have put to me a great deal of specific questions. Next time I would like to hear your views. But today you have not yet said anything. Next time I expect you will speak more concretely, more comprehensively all questions, and we will be prepared to discuss with you.

Dr. Kissinger: You said more comprehensively, not more comprehensibly!

Mr. Special Adviser, Mr. Minister, among the issues left unresolved is who will be the Vietnamese parties that will negotiate.

Le Duc Tho: We will discuss next time.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, but this is one of the questions that must be discussed. There is no need to answer now.

Le Duc Tho: We have clarified on the two elaborating points.

Dr. Kissinger: It would be much easier if the existing Saigon regime were one of the parties. Many things would be much easier for us.

Le Duc Tho: What are your views on the conditions we have put forward, such as the resignation of Thieu and the change of policy?

Dr. Kissinger: The change of policy is easier as a result of negotiations than as a precondition of negotiations. Similarly for the resignation of Thieu. He after all has said publicly he will resign if a settlement is reached. But it is another thing to say before you talk about a settlement that he must resign.[23]

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[23] The last three sentences of this paragraph were deleted from the copies sent to Porter and Bunker.

Another problem is the timing of a ceasefire. At this moment we are not the primary victim of military operations. So it is not to our unilateral advantage to stop military operations. On the contrary, all the advice we get is that it is a unilateral advantage to you. My view is that the timing of a ceasefire—at what stage it occurs—is something you ought at least to consider again.

My final point: Mr. Special Adviser, you sometimes think on the political point that we are more devious than we are. You give us too much credit. But it may also be possibly partly due to the fact that Vietnamese conditions are not all that easy to understand. Therefore I recommend that both sides come to the next meeting with concrete proposals, and not just we. We will see whether we can come up with some concrete political ideas.

Le Duc Tho: Regarding ceasefire, we still maintain we should come to agreement on all questions and it should be signed, and then a ceasefire should take place, not unilateral but all parties. We disagree on that.

Dr. Kissinger: I understand. In principle, if we could come to a rapid settlement of the other issues it would become an academic point.

Le Duc Tho: Quite right. And you should go rapidly to the resolution of other questions.

Dr. Kissinger: Really, Mr. Special Adviser, we are not all that concerned about a ceasefire. So don't overestimate its utility as a bargaining instrument.

Le Duc Tho: [Pause] It is up to you.

Dr. Kissinger: There are a number of practical problems. First, when should we meet again?

Le Duc Tho: It is up to you to fix a date.

Dr. Kissinger: How about August first? Is that too long?

Le Duc Tho: All right.

Dr. Kissinger: 10:00 o'clock.

Le Duc Tho: Right.

Dr. Kissinger: Here?

[They nod yes.]

Le Duc Tho: I expect next time you will bring with you more complete, comprehensive, clearer questions.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't think it's my questions he objects to. It's my answers he objects to. [Laughter]

Le Duc Tho: Quite right.

Dr. Kissinger: Could we do it July 31st if August first isn't possible? I will let you know by Friday.[24] It will almost certainly be August first. I will let you know by Saturday.

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[24] July 21.

You are quite right. I will come up with more concrete proposals. I can't guarantee you will approve them. Can I expect you will do the same, based on our general discussion?

Le Duc Tho: We will study your ideas carefully.

Dr. Kissinger: Will you come up with any ideas of your own?

Le Duc Tho: If you read our statement, both should come here with goodwill and a positive attitude.

Dr. Kissinger: But it is difficult for us if you are always the critics. In other words, don't be shy.

Le Duc Tho: Both sides will present proposals.

Dr. Kissinger: Once before, private proposals were followed by public proposals. May I assume that until you hear from us there will be no public proposals?

Xuan Thuy: At the beginning you said we were using public channels for mobilizing public opinion, and the same with the private, we were not using them for real negotiation. This is not true. We come to the Kléber sessions with a desire to settle the Vietnam question, and the sooner the better. And the Kléber sessions began before we had these private sessions.

And since we met the first time in 1969,[25] we have agreed that side by side there would be two forums. These two forums exist side by side and assist one another. You ask whether what we are saying here will be made public. I will say that what we are saying here is this channel's work.

And the Special Adviser has expressed our side's point of view very clearly, very exhaustively, and we have made comments on your remarks. But I am very pleased that today your questions have been more detailed than previously, and you have shown a more positive attitude, and these more detailed questions have been answered. And I want to say that all the proposals made here can be discussed. You say we want to discuss our proposals and not yours. This is not true. We want all proposals to be discussed, to find a solution.

I agree, next time we will go into details.

Dr. Kissinger: Can I get an answer to my question? Since Mme. Binh is not in this room. Once before you proposed Nine Points in the private sessions, and then a few days later Seven Points publicly. I want to know whether at any time there will be public proposals. I can tell you that we will make proposals to you here. We will not make public propaganda.

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[25] The first private meeting was on August 4, 1969; see *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 106.

Xuan Thuy: Now we should review history a little. Because at that time Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh asked me to convey a message to you to meet you so she could pass on proposals to you.

Dr. Kissinger: That was before she knew my reputation. I didn't want to ruin her reputation!

Xuan Thuy: Since we agreed not to disclose the content of these private meetings, what is said here will not be divulged.

Dr. Kissinger: Look, if either your side or the Provisional Revolutionary Government makes a public proposal while these talks are going on, we have no choice but to construe it as public pressure on us. We will not accept this.

Xuan Thuy: What instructions have you given Ambassador Porter to discuss in the next few days?

Dr. Kissinger: I will tell you. Since I don't think we can get progress unless we do it in this channel, there is no point in confusing everybody with the public forum.[26] I have told Ambassador Porter to just continue discussing our May 8 proposal.

[They laugh loudly.]

Le Duc Tho: If that is what Ambassador Porter will do, then Minister Xuan Thuy will have nothing to do but repeat his old position.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't want to be confronted by you with a new public proposal that was not raised here first. Or by Mme. Binh.

Xuan Thuy: Does it mean that Ambassador Porter will continue to speak of the May 8 proposal and Mme. Binh should continue to speak of the Seven Points and the two elaborating points?

Dr. Kissinger: Right. For at least the next two sessions. And if we make progress here, then Ambassador Porter and the plenary sessions could go into the details of whatever progress has been made. As soon as progress has been made here, we are prepared to move rapidly to the details. If we make progress in these private meetings, we are prepared for Ambassador Porter to meet with you in restricted meetings on details, as well as the plenaries. We can decide that later.

Porter will be instructed to repeat old ground but to use conciliatory speeches and not to embarrass you or to put questions that put you in a corner. [Laughter] I know this is too much to ask of Mme. Binh. [Laughter]

Le Duc Tho: So you are right, and next time at this forum we shall discuss how to conduct the negotiations. This is to go into questions of substance here and at the public meetings just continue.

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[26] This sentence was deleted from the copies sent to Porter and Bunker.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. Now I have two practical things. Next time I will try to bring a Vietnamese-speaking interpreter here, to ease your burden. Engel, if I can find him. [They nod OK.]

Secondly, would it be acceptable to you to have a secretary here to take shorthand notes? It's basically up to us. It's a girl. I know Mr. Special Adviser and the Minister are immune, but I don't want to upset your colleagues.

Tho and Thuy: All right.

Dr. Kissinger: And sometimes could I perhaps bring Ambassador Porter to sit in here so he can understand better what we are doing?

Xuan Thuy: We can decide that sometime. You should know that since he came to Paris, his attitude has been quite different from his predecessors. His attitude does not create favorable conditions for us to enter into substantive negotiations.

Dr. Kissinger: When I am here he will behave himself.[27]

Xuan Thuy: Xuan Thuy has negotiated with Harriman, Lodge and Bruce, but even the American press has said Porter has . . .

Dr. Kissinger: We can have another meeting without him.[28] If we make some progress, it will be helpful to have him here because he will be handling much of the detail. We can decide that later.

We want to be correct with you. We will make no comment about the substance of these meetings. If there is any speculation in the press, it will not have come from us directly or indirectly. We will tell no one, except the President, of course. If we are asked about other meetings, we will say, "Further meetings will be announced as they are held," that is neither yes nor no. And we propose that on the day of other meetings we make the same announcement at 10:00 o'clock that we made today.

Le Duc Tho: Do you propose that we should have an announcement for each meeting? Or that we decide at each meeting?

Dr. Kissinger: I think I am watched so much now that we should just announce it as it occurs. We will make no announcement in advance and nothing about substance. If the occasion should require that we meet especially urgently and secretly, we could meet in, say, Switzerland, and do it separately.[29]

Le Duc Tho: I propose we should decide at each meeting.

Dr. Kissinger: The practical difficulty for me is that since my secret trips, the press have a rotation. They call my office every two hours when they think I am out of town. Then they ask our press office. It is

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[27] This sentence was deleted from the copies sent to Porter and Bunker.

[28] This sentence was deleted from the copies sent to Porter and Bunker.

[29] This sentence was deleted from the copies sent to Porter and Bunker.

very difficult for us to lie, and then be found out. Especially in an election year.

But we would announce it only while we are meeting, not beforehand.

Le Duc Tho: Like today.

Dr. Kissinger: Just as today—and with exactly the same language. In fact, the best would be if you and we did it jointly.

Xuan Thuy: Now if we are asked what is discussed, we should agree on an answer.

Dr. Kissinger: The answer we will give is "By mutual agreement, we will not discuss the content of these private discussions." If they ask me, "Are you optimistic or pessimistic?" I will say "No comment." [They laugh]

We will never vary it. The only thing I can think of is, if they ask how long it was we can say six hours, rather six and a half hours.

Xuan Thuy: All right. If they ask in what place?

Dr. Kissinger: "In Paris, at our usual meeting place." We shouldn't mention it, or we'll have television outside. [Laughter] His publicity bent is such that I don't trust ourselves.

Le Duc Tho: What publicity?

Dr. Kissinger: No, I appreciate the Special Adviser's restraint on this trip.

Le Duc Tho: In the plenaries, we will just expound our point of view.

Dr. Kissinger: That's the problem. That's what you always do! This was our longest session.

Le Duc Tho: Our longest session, but not so much result.

Xuan Thuy: You put to him a lot of questions on political questions and he has answered you. And you should match up your questions and your answers.

Dr. Kissinger: Both sides.

Then we will see you August first or maybe July 31. We will be in touch Saturday.[30]

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[30] Shortly after the meeting ended, Kissinger sent a message to Haig, giving his initial take on the session: "Meeting took place in extraordinarily cordial and conciliatory atmosphere and lasted six and one half hours concentrating primarily on review of each other's positions. There was some movement but its significance cannot yet be determined. Other side presented long non-contentious opening strategy which deliberately avoided all contentious issues not even mentioning seven points or removal of Thieu though it came up later in low key way. Reference to bombing was informal and non-acrimonious." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972)

208. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, July 19, 1972.

SUBJECT

Psychological Offensive—Vietnam

You had indicated the desirability of infiltrating into North Vietnam small radios to increase North Vietnamese listenership of our six radio programs. There has in fact been progress to date in this project:

—*On 21 June,* a contract was signed for the purchase of *30,000 small commercial transmission radios* made in Taiwan. They will be packed in foam suitable for either airdropping without parachutes or float delivery. We expect to have *some* radios ready for infiltration by the end of August and *all* of them by the end of *September.*[2]

In addition to our efforts in the radio field, all aspects of our psywar campaign against Vietnam continue at a high level of activity. For example:

—On 9 July, *VOA* increased broadcasting time to 19 hours daily from the previous 18 hours.

—On 13 July, the first successful *drone leaflet mission* was conducted over the Haiphong area. The drone flew at *800 feet* and dispersed about *144,000 leaflets* stressing the advantages to the DRV of your 8 May proposals—the culpability of the DRV leadership for the useless bloodshed and the benefits for all of peace.

We continue to receive indications that our *psywar campaign* is touching a *sensitive nerve of the DRV leadership:*

—The North Vietnamese journal *Tuyen Huan* (Propaganda and Training) carried in its May–June issue an article that said in part:

"The brilliant victories of the entire nation are making our people highly enthusiastic and proud. However, the violent struggle is raising new problems to be solved in production, in the implementation of tasks, and in livelihood. Our people are now experiencing temporary, definite difficulties."

"More than ever it is necessary to pay attention to *smashing the enemy's psywar activities,* especially in cities and towns and populous areas."

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 5, Chronological File, July 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Haig initialed for Kissinger. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] The President wrote in the margin beside this paragraph: "*good*."

"The *enemy is trying to distort facts and spread rumors* to *sow dissension and confusion among the masses.* The important factor in *resisting the enemy's psywar effort* is to make the masses constantly and firmly grasp developments in current events and in policies and lines of the party and the state through newspapers and through central and regional radio stations."

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209. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, July 20, 1972, 1000Z.

114. Ref: WHS 2087.[2]

1. I gave Thieu summary of your July 19 meeting contained reftel and informed him that I would be in touch with him when I received a fuller report. He expressed appreciation for information and said that it was about what he had expected from the other side.

2. He went on to speculate that in view of the changed situation which Hanoi now faced, it is being forced to develop a new policy for the future, is in the process of doing so, but has not yet reached a conclusion as to what it should be. They have been disappointed and embarrassed by the fact that the military situation on the ground has not worked out as they had expected. They do not want to call off the talks, yet know that their Seven Points are no longer an acceptable solution. Thus the Politburo is in the process of considering what course to follow and debating the problem among themselves. In Thieu's view, this is confirmed by the fact that captured documents and prisoner interrogations reflect the fact that lower echelon cadres are not receiving consistent instructions, e.g., the three points which include destruction of ARVN, imposition of a coalition government, and continuation of the war until after our elections on the one hand; on the

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Cables, Vietnam, 24 June–29 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Immediate.

[2] Kissinger's backchannel message to Bunker, July 20, summarized the July 19 meeting with Le Duc Tho and directed the Ambassador to convey the summary to Thieu. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972)

other, instructions for preparation for a cease-fire; while other documents do not insist on Thieu's withdrawal.

3. In Thieu's view, the Seven Points were a carefully formulated proposal agreed to unanimously by the Politburo. Now they are faced with a new situation and have not yet reached conclusions on how to deal with it. In the meantime, he believes they will adopt a waiting posture. They will want to see what success they may have in a new offensive, which he thinks the enemy may initiate about mid-August and are in the process of moving troops to prepare for it. They also want to appraise the probable outcome of our elections. In other words, he thinks it will be another one or two months before we can expect them to come up with concrete proposals.

4. Warm regards.

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210. Summary of Conclusions of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, July 20, 1972, 10:09–11:07 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson

DOD
Kenneth Rush
Armistead Selden
Major Gen. David Ott

JCS
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer
R/Adm. Kinnaird McKee

CIA
Richard Helms
George Carver
William Newton (for briefing)

NSC
M/Gen. Alexander Haig
John Holdridge
Phil Odeen
Col. Thomas Pinckney
Mark Wandler

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, July–August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Defense will prepare a report by next week on the resupply situation for the South Vietnamese forces. The report should take into account that we want to have 90-day stockpiles in Vietnam.

—JCS should prepare a study on how we can improve the South Vietnamese air defense capability as rapidly as possible. The paper should take into consideration how the air defense over South Vietnam will be maintained once our forces leave Vietnam.

—The CIA control maps should remain with the WSAG principals.[2]

—State should receive copies of the JCS-prepared contingency papers.[3]

—CIA should prepare a paper on the tough decisions the North Vietnamese leaders will be facing in the future. The paper should point out when the leaders will have to make these decisions and what adjustments they will have to make to carry out the decisions. The logistics situation should be woven into this paper.

—We will wait for further information about the Laos ceiling problem before taking any action.[4]

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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[2] Copies of the maps are ibid. Kissinger requested the maps at the June 30 WSAG meeting; see Document 198.

[3] The papers were discussed at the June 30 WSAG meeting; see Document 198. Copies of the papers are in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, July–August 1972.

[4] President Nixon believed he needed $430 million to carry out policy in Laos during the coming fiscal year while the Senate Armed Services Committee wished to establish a $360 million ceiling (known as the "Symington Ceiling"; see footnote 6, Document 40). According to the minutes of the meeting, U. Alexis Johnson said: "I think we have two approaches. The first is to raise the ceiling to what we need, and the second is to change the definitions of certain items to be charged against the ceiling." Kissinger's response was: "We certainly don't want to cut back to $360 million." Helms's comment was: "We can't fight the war [in Laos] with $360 million."

211. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, July 20, 1972.

SUBJECT

My Meeting July 19 with the North Vietnamese

[Omitted here are an overview and highlights of the meeting.]

Major Implications

I see the major implications of this meeting[2] as follows:

—It was useful to us on several counts. We offered a bombing halt as part of a temporary ceasefire and were turned down. They elaborated their political position in a way that, if there is no further progress, will be tantamount to the destruction of the Saigon Government as a precondition to the negotiations with the PRG. We thus once again have bolstered our position if we ever have to go public with the record again.

—On the other hand, their non-polemical approach and ambiguous positions in this initial meeting are compatible with serious negotiations. They gave themselves the option to move in the direction of our January 25 proposal. The channel is reopened to explore this possibility, which should be enhanced by the military and diplomatic realities facing Hanoi.

—Their strategy may well be to see whether we will cave in on the political issue, and they could lead us on until the military situation and our Presidential election clarify their options. Thus they could continue to speak in terms which provide enough momentum to keep discussions going but avoid irrevocable decisions until September.

—However, the next two months is likely to bring them bad news on both the military and political fronts: the South Vietnamese should be able to regain some territorial and pacification losses and our electoral realities should become more clear to Hanoi.

—While they have said nothing which precludes their returning strictly to their old positions, they were about as positive in this first session as we could expect if they do want to settle, especially since

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 867, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David—HAK II—1972, May 2–October 7, 1972 [5 of 5]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] See Document 207.

we must have thrown them offstride by withholding the total package discussed in the USSR.[3]

—If they do move, it could be in the direction of a ceasefire coupled with political principles along the lines of our January 25 proposal, but this would not surface before several more meetings at the earliest. The other possibility is their using the talks to elaborate a position which makes Thieu alone the obstacle to a comprehensive settlement—especially if McGovern makes major gains.

—In any event, we lose nothing and give up no options by playing this string out. The minimum we achieve is building a reasonable negotiating record. The maximum we could gain is either a fair settlement or a temporary ceasefire; while these goals are still distant, we are in a good position to explore the chances.

[Omitted here is a narrative of the meeting.]

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[3] See Document 178.

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212. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, July 22, 1972, 1516Z.

WHS 2089. Deliver opening of business. At next meeting scheduled for August 1, I now plan to pursue the following strategy: present essentially the January 25 8 Point U.S. proposal[2] with the following modifications:

1. Ceasefire to come into effect simultaneously with agreement on the statement of principles, instead of after political agreement as is the case now. This is less favorable to North Vietnam.

2. The deadline by which the detailed political implementation talks are to be concluded will be three months. There is no deadline now.

3. The elections will still be conducted six months after completion of the political settlement—or nine months after the statement of

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David—Cables, January 1–July 31, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only; Immediate.

[2] See Documents 5 and 8.

principles—but as Haig mentioned to you, Thieu would step down two months rather than one month before the elections take place.

We have reason to believe that this is essentially the proposal which the Soviets have urged on Hanoi. Please discuss this game plan with Thieu on an urgent basis with the view toward obtaining his agreement to my proceeding as outlined.

Warm regards.

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213. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, July 22, 1972.

SUBJECT

Radio Hanoi

After reading the minutes of your July 20 WSAG meeting,[2] I can't escape the conclusion that we should proceed with a plan to knock out Radio Hanoi forthwith. I had never realized from earlier discussions that the National Guard was only necessary for the black propaganda that we would substitute.

Clearly these are two separate issues and need not be resolved simultaneously. What is of real importance, in my view, is to deprive Hanoi of a vital instrument of internal political and military control and a means of disseminating its propositions internationally. I think the cumulative impact on the DRV cadre and population would be substantial, not to mention the fact that the South Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians would no longer be able to tune into their favorite Hanoi programs.

Why can't we proceed with this immediately at a time when we want to maximize our negotiating leverage? The major pitfall which I think we would wish to avoid is further accusations that we are bombing civilian targets; but it is inconceivable that we could not come up with a skillfully thought out rationale to the effect that Radio Hanoi

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 25, Chronological File, 15–25 July 1972. No classification marking; Eyes Only. Sent through Haig. Kissinger initialed the memorandum.

[2] Document 210.

serves as a vital political military instrument for Hanoi's activities throughout Indochina.

As for using the National Guard for black propaganda, its merits appear to me considerably more questionable. First, do we want to pay the domestic political cost? Second, might it not be better to try to impose a silence on North Vietnam rather than substituting broadcasts of our own, and lastly, are we really skilled enough to conjure up sophisticated substitute broadcasts?

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214. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, July 23, 1972, 0505Z.

115. Refs: A) WHS 2087.[2] B) Saigon 0114.[3] C) WHS 2088.[4] D) WHS 2089.[5]

1. Thank you for Ref C giving fuller report on July 19 meeting, especially the prevailing atmosphere, which I shall pass on to Thieu. The only point of substance not included in my preliminary report to him (Ref B) was the 3–4 month temporary cease-fire with bombing halt. I think Thieu might find some problems with this in view of previous history of temporary bombing halts, which the enemy used in effect to build up supplies, re-equip and reinforce. As I understand it, it would be in effect a cease-fire in place with enemy forces located in a considerable number of areas in all military regions. GVN's concern would be with situation which enemy could use to proselytize and build-up infrastructure during period of cease-fire. Nevertheless, in view of the other side's response I think it was wise to have made the proposal.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Cables, 24 June–29 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Immediate; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] See footnote 2, Document 209.

[3] Document 209.

[4] WHS 2088, July 21, transmitted Kissinger's fuller report to Bunker on the July 19 meeting in Paris with Le Duc Tho. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XIV)

[5] Document 212.

As you have said, it will bolster our position if we ever had to go public with the record again.

2. I have asked for appointment with Thieu to discuss your proposal for August 1 meeting (Ref D). This seems to me a very good approach and I believe will be in fact more welcome to Thieu than a cease-fire proposal alone unless latter included eventual withdrawal of all foreign forces from Viet-Nam. I doubt that proposed modifications will give him problems, but will discuss with him at early date and report.

3. Warm regards.

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215. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, July 25, 1972, 1010Z.

116. Ref: WHS 2089.[2]

1. I met with Thieu this morning to discuss with him plans for August 1 meeting as outlined reftel. Concerning the three modifications:

1) I pointed out that since a cease-fire would come into effect simultaneously with agreement on the statement of principles this would be less favorable to North Vietnam, since in the January 25 proposals there was no deadline for reaching a political settlement and it could have dragged on for a protracted period, thus delaying a cease-fire.

2) The deadline by which detailed political implementation talks (points 3, 4, 5 of January 25 proposal[3]) are to be concluded will be three months. Under the January 25 proposal, there is no deadline. Therefore, as mentioned, these could have dragged on for an indefinite period.

3) The elections as provided in the January 25 proposal will be conducted six months after completion of the political settlement—or nine months after the statement of principles is signed. With Thieu's agreement, we would suggest that he step down two months rather than one month before elections take place since a criticism, which seemed to have justification, had been the fact that a period of one

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Cables, 24 June–29 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only; Immediate.

[2] Document 212.

[3] See Document 8.

month provided insufficient time to organize elections. I recalled that he, himself, had made this point during previous discussions.

2. I mentioned the fact that we had some reason to believe that this is essentially the proposal which the Soviets have urged on Hanoi, although I made it clear that we have no indication of the latter's response. Nevertheless, this seems to be a line which we would do well to explore.

3. Thieu was not clear about the provision for "agreement on the statement of principles". I explained to him that this had been included in the proposal that we had sent to Hanoi in November last year and that allied troop withdrawals were to have taken place seven months after signing of statement of principles. This had been changed in our joint proposal of January 25 to provide withdrawal of allied forces within six months after signing of agreement. What we are suggesting, therefore, will provide an earlier cease-fire and tighter schedule for reaching a political agreement.

4. Thieu said that his recollection on the differences of the two proposals was not precise and he would like to refresh his recollection on the timing and substance of our previous proposals.

5. Thieu asked how you would propose to present the new points, for example, whether you would plan to do this in the course of discussion or as a new proposal. He said that he was thinking in terms of how this might be presented in case of a leak concerning the talks or in case we should decide at some time to make the record public. He said that his first thought was that it might be well to bring out the points in the course of exploration of the other side's position, perhaps seeking their reaction to our proposals at the last meeting. On the other hand there might be some advantage in being able to say we had made a new proposal, indicating our flexibility.

6. Since it was clear that he wanted a day or two to re-orient his thinking, I left him text of both the January 25 joint proposal and the earlier proposal submitted to Hanoi. I stressed that we needed his agreement urgently so that you would have time to make preparations for the meeting and I hoped he would be able to give me his answer by tomorrow. It would be helpful if you could give me an indication of how you would plan to approach the other side in order to respond to Thieu's question.

7. Warm regards.

216. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, July 25, 1972.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Arab-Israeli conflict.]

Nixon: Well, you've done everything you can on that bill. I think the fact that they killed the foreign aid bill sort of makes the bill easier for us to follow—swallow.[2] What is your candid opinion as to the effect on the North Vietnamese? Makes 'em tougher [unclear]—?

Kissinger: A little bit. But they've seen these things come and go. I think the North Vietnamese, now they're going to wait for the effect of their offensive. But then they've thrown in the kitchen sink. They really, then—now, we have the CIA analysis at last, where even CIA says that next year they can only do guerrilla war.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Middle East.]

Kissinger: Now I have one other suggestion having to do with my talks on Vietnam next week. I think, Mr. President, that one of our objectives has to be to make a good record.

Nixon: Yes.

Kissinger: Because, if these talks are going to stalemate, you might want to consider at the end of September, middle of September breaking them off and saying the election makes it impossible. That you'll resume them on November 9th, in the meantime here is the proposal we have made, and it stays on the table. But, therefore, we need a very good proposal.

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Now, the Vietcong—the North Vietnamese proposal is that the government has to change, and that, then, the changed government talks to the PRG to set up a new constitution. We could rejigger your January 25th proposal[3] to accept those two propositions, but to make the government change result from elections. And to say that, then, their newly-elected government talks to the PRG. That has the advantage—what they want from us now is that the government gets dis-

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 752–6. 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, 9:55–10:35 a.m.

[2] The President was apparently referring to the July 23 defeat in the Senate of the security assistance authorization bill for fiscal year 1973 by a 48 to 42 vote, and, also on July 23, the 49 to 46 roll call vote in favor of an end-the-war amendment.

[3] See Documents 5 and 8.

mantled before negotiations start. This way they have to accept Thieu to work out the details of this arrangement. It's not a sellout. On the other hand, it's a face-saving formula for them, and we can create the same confusion with this. All we need is four weeks of confusion. I mean—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —I'm being cynical—

Nixon: Right, right.

Kissinger: As we did with our January 25th proposal—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —that, substantively, doesn't change a hell of a lot.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: Now, that one part about changing the constitution, we have to present without clearing with Thieu, because he'll just go into orbit. But, one of two things will happen: If they reject it, he won't give a damn that we offered it. If they accept it, then we have a little problem selling it to him. But—

Nixon: Changing the constitution how again?

Kissinger: Well, the constitu—what would happen is this: first, there's a statement to sign a dec—we sign a statement of principles—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —that will—and that will produce a cease-fire. Then, three months—there'll be three months—that will be followed by three months of political negotiations to set up electoral commission. Six months after that, or nine months after the statement of principles, or in other words next August, there'll be elections, in which Thieu won't run. One year after this new government is put in, through elections, that new government will and we talk to PRG about drafting a new constitution, which means, in other words, that government has had two years to establish itself—

Nixon: [clears throat]

Kissinger: —and it has a veto because it doesn't have to accept any constitution that it doesn't want to. If the advantage—

Nixon: That'd be awfully hard to sell to Thieu, wouldn't it?

Kissinger: Well, but it has the advantage, Mr. President. It answers all the people who say: "Why should they run under—why should they live with a constitution imposed by the Americans in '67?"

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: And the argument that we are fighting for Thieu—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —it would be entirely on the basis that these sons-of-bitches want a Communist government for them—

Nixon: Sure. Sure.

Kissinger: —and that one we can win.

Nixon: That's right. That's right. Okay—

Kissinger: It won't be easy to sell to Thieu, Mr. President, but with the other problem we have—

Nixon: We've gone as far, we've gone as far as we can with Thieu—

Kissinger: —is whether we can have McGovern win the election. The—Henry Brandon, who has been on your side up to now, this weekend said: "I'm for your Vietnam policy." He said: "But Henry, for God's sakes, how can the President take a one percent chance of turning this country over to McGovern for the sake of Vietnam?" Now, we cannot screw Thieu. We cannot—

Nixon: That's right. Well, that'll make us—

Kissinger: We'd lose.

Nixon: —lose the election, too.

Kissinger: That will lose the election, also. And it also would—

Nixon: It should lose it.

Kissinger: But, I think this is not an unfair proposal—

Nixon: Well, I agree. That's right. Let me ask [unclear]—

Kissinger: And then I will redo it so that it doesn't look like eight points [unclear]—

Nixon: No, no.

Kissinger: —and I'll get it so—those are the only new provisions, but I'll get it so rewritten that it will take *The New York Times* three weeks to figure out—

Nixon: That's right. That's right. That's right.

Kissinger: I mean, every time we've gone public, we've screwed everybody up for two, three weeks.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Kissinger: But I hope it won't be necessary.

Nixon: You never know, Henry. They may—they may decide to not to risk that November date. There's a little bit trickling through now to that effect that—I know these goddamn Quakers, getting back to those sons-of-bitches, have said, well that their morale in North Vietnam is high, and all that sort of thing. I don't believe that. I don't believe that—

Kissinger: None of our intelligence—

Nixon: I don't believe that Swedish report, and I don't believe that report. What intelligence reports do we have? Any?

Kissinger: Uh—all of the ones—

Nixon: They've got to be hurting or something's wrong with our military.

Kissinger: Mr.—well, Mr. President—

Nixon: With all we know, we know that mining has been effective.

Kissinger: When they've published statements against defeatism and warning their people against seditious acts, something—why the hell would they publish those if there weren't something deeply wrong? Now, in Hanoi [unclear]—now, the line I've been putting out to newsmen is: they say, well, they were very tough with Joe Kraft. I said I'm very encouraged by that. I said if they had been very [unclear] to Joe Kraft, I would have drawn the conclusion that these guys are trying to put public pressure on us.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: If they want to talk seriously with us, I'd expect them not to tell it to Joe Kraft, but to tell it to us.[4]

Nixon: Good.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Paris talks.]

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[4] See footnote 3, Document 207.

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217. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Saigon, July 25, 1972, 2059Z.

WHS 2090. Ref: (A) Saigon 0116.[2] (B) White House 2089.[3]

1. Our message to you on plan for next meeting unfortunately misled you by use of the term Quote statement of principles Unquote which understandably suggested to you a return to something like last fall's plan of two formal stages. Thus because of our cable you may have unnecessarily confused Thieu. You should clarify our intentions as follows.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Cables, 24 June–29 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] Document 215.

[3] Document 212.

2. The only changes we contemplate in January plan are those outlined to you in our message. Our new approach, like the January plan, would be an overall agreement but, also like the January plan, the political aspects in effect would involve guiding principles only. The details of paragraph 3, such as the composition of the electoral commission, would still have to be worked out by the South Vietnamese after the agreement is signed and other operative elements are under way, such as ceasefire, withdrawals and prisoners. This, in fact, was one of the other side's objections to the January plan since they feared that the political discussions would be open-ended in length. In our new approach we would introduce three month deadline for political negotiations to meet this concern, at least cosmetically.

3. In addition, as outlined in our message, we make explicit that ceasefire will come into effect when agreement signed, with details of political settlement still to be worked out. Although this was implication of January plan, just how much of the political details would be completed by time of ceasefire was deliberately fudged.

4. In short, in our new approach an overall agreement, which we misleadingly called statement of principles, would be signed and ceasefire, withdrawals, and prisoner release would all begin. On the political side there would in effect be principles agreed to but the details would still have to be worked out in the three-month period which is now stipulated. As we outlined in our message, the election would still be six months after all political details are worked out, or nine months after the overall agreement is signed. Thieu would step down two months before this election or seven months after the overall agreement is signed.

5. Our idea now is to present this new approach in course of discussions but we would probably want to call it a new proposal to bolster our negotiating record.

6. Please clarify this for Thieu and report his reactions.

Warm regards.

218. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, July 25, 1972.

SUBJECT

The Symington Ceiling and Military Activity in Laos

Last year we were able to live within the Symington ceiling on expenditures in Laos by restricting certain military activities, establishing a special accounting system, and a great deal of effort both in Washington and the field.[2]

I believe that this year we should try to avoid a ceiling altogether. However, if a ceiling is unavoidable, it should be at a level high enough to prevent arbitrary financial restrictions upon our military activity. If we are to be successful in either avoiding a ceiling entirely or in achieving a satisfactory amount, clear, firm guidance is required.

Partially because of concern with the impact of military expenditures on the Symington ceiling and partially due to the distraction of critical events elsewhere, there has been a tendency not to focus on military opportunities in North Laos. I believe there is a potential in the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) area to take advantage of the current NVA drawdown, which is both a reflection of normal rainy season procedures and a move to strengthen NVA forces in MR–1 of South Vietnam. Effective military action could (1) reduce the North Vietnamese freedom to transfer additional forces to the key battlefields in SVN, (2) improve Vang Pao's military position for the next dry season, and (3) improve our situation in the event of a ceasefire in place. Here again, I believe clear guidance is required.

With your approval, I propose to send the memorandum at Tab A[3] to State, Defense, and CIA. The memorandum reaffirms your position that preferably there should be no Laotian ceiling, but that—if we must accept one—it should be high enough not to impinge on military strategy. The memorandum also expresses your desire that appropriate measures be taken to regain the PDJ. Such measures would, of course, include provision of adequate tacair and B–52 support.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 550, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 9. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] See footnote 6, Document 40, and footnote 4, Document 210.

[3] Attached but not printed is the July 27 memorandum.

Recommendation

That you approve my forwarding the memorandum at Tab A.[4]

[4] The President initialed his approval.

219. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, July 25, 1972.

SUBJECT

Improvement of RVNAF

On my memo of July 15 (Tab A)[2] sending you Sir Robert Thompson's latest Vietnam trip report, you asked that we follow up restructuring ARVN to increase the number of topflight and mobile national units. This memo summarizes how we are proceeding on this and other key problems identified during the recent visits of Sir Robert Thompson and General Haig to Vietnam.

Force Structure. I have asked Secretary Laird to examine the alternative ways of increasing the number of RVNAF mobile reserve units like the Marines and airborne which are capable of fighting anywhere in Vietnam. We shall probably have to apply pressure and equipment incentives to get the needed increase in the cutting edge of RVNAF forces. A Defense study providing alternative approaches together with the costs and a time-phasing of expected results, should be ready by early August.

Leadership. I am asking DOD to propose U.S. actions to improve RVNAF leadership based in part on a comprehensive evaluation of RVNAF leaders down to the regimental and province chief level. We should have a full range of alternative approaches for your review in about a month. In the meantime, we shall assure that the importance of continued leadership improvement is stressed in our Mission's communications with President Thieu and his key aides.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 116, Vietnam Subject Files, Sir Robert Thompson (1972). Secret. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Document 203.

Vietnamese Air Force. Despite repeated efforts, DOD has still not satisfied me that we have adequately assessed the needs of the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) over the next several years. Therefore, my staff has begun an interagency study to determine the priorities for expansion of the VNAF. This study will identify the shortcomings of VNAF in the absence of U.S. air assets and the constraints on rapid VNAF development. A full range of options in such fields as air defense, including providing the VNAF higher performance aircraft such as F–4s, is being developed. The study will also cover potential political and negotiation aspects of possible additions to the VNAF.

Other problem areas identified by Sir Robert Thompson and General Haig are being addressed in the normal channels.

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220. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, July 26, 1972, 0950Z.

118. Subject: Viet-Nam: Assessment of Present Situation.

1. There has been a lapse in the periodic assessments I have submitted as it seemed redundant to report during the visits of General Haig and Sir Robert Thompson. Since my message of May 19, 1972,[2] most aspects of the situation here have progressed satisfactorily, but it is obvious that the month of August will see further heavy fighting in MR 1 and the Delta.

2. *Summary.* The most dramatic change in recent weeks has been the manner in which the GVN has gone on the offensive in MR 1 and MR 2. In MR 3, An Loc has been relieved. Route 13 is finally cleared, and the situation elsewhere in the region is quiet. These very satisfactory developments must be weighed against the heightened intensity of enemy activity in the Delta and the obvious determination of the enemy to bring his last remaining reserves into MR 1. Pacification setbacks

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Cables, 24 June–29 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only; Immediate.

[2] Bunker's May 19 message is attached to Kissinger's May 19 memorandum to the President as Tab A; see Document 165.

continue only in areas under heavy enemy pressure and the populated areas remain basically tranquil. The passage of the Emergency Powers Bill under rather unusual circumstances does not appear to have hurt President Thieu politically and the essential measures he is implementing by decree appear to be generally acceptable.[3] The recession caused by the offensive has bottomed out and I am encouraged by reports of rising industrial output in a variety of fields.

3. *Assessment.*

A. The ARVN counter-offensive in Quang Tri, the effort to reoccupy northern Binh Dinh which began a few days ago, and the reopening of QL 13, which confirms the lifting of the siege of An Loc, are developments which have been most heartening to the GVN and to the population. There is an atmosphere of confidence in South Viet-Nam notwithstanding the storm clouds which loom over Quang Tri and Hue as the enemy brings reinforcements and additional units toward the battle. The Delta situation is fluid and hard to define. It is perhaps for this reason that it has received little press attention. The increased intensity of the war in Dinh Thuong, the enemy's continued presence in Chuong Thien and the very recent step-up of activity in Kien Hoa are causes for concern however, and are proof that the enemy has temporarily succeeded in infiltrating men and supplies into these traditionally difficult areas. The nature of the war in the Delta precludes definitive battles and I am more concerned by MR 1 and the threat posed by the enemy's build-up in the north. President Thieu is earmarking additional forces to send to MR 1 if needed. The Marines, Airborne and First Division have fought gallantly, and have been in contact with the enemy for many months. I might mention that I would not be surprised to see a step-up in enemy activity in southern MR 1 in the near future. The NVA Second and Third Divisions might well try to apply pressure on Quang Ngai in order to divert focus from the Quang Tri battle. Both General Weyand and I believe that August will be a difficult month in both the Delta and MR 1, but the enemy will be confronting ARVN forces which are well equipped, numerically stronger and more capable and more confident that they were in March. Most importantly they will be supported by U.S. firepower which will be an important if not decisive factor.

B. Success on the battlefield has brought an atmosphere of optimism to most of the country and the problem areas remain those in which NVA units present a threat. The handling of refugees continues to be most satisfactory. Some long-range problems like the eventual resettlement in the South of a significant portion of the former residents

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[3] President Thieu signed the Emergency Powers Bill into law on June 27.

of Quang Tri will not be resolved until the current offensive abates. An interesting phenomenon is the degree to which peace is in the air. We get reports from all over the country that people expect the war to end or at least a cease fire to be declared in the near future. Henry Kissinger's visit to Peking, the resumption of the Paris Peace Talks and of secret talks have, of course, contributed to this atmosphere. Basically, however, people are reaching this conclusion in a very subjective way. This gut feeling regarding an imminent cease fire is spurring the GVN to recapture lost ground. It is clear that the GVN does not intend to be caught napping in what might be a fast moving situation and will be resourceful in utilizing all its assets to prevent a last-minute grab by the enemy if a cease fire is declared.

C. Our continuing interdiction of the supply of war matériel to the North has contributed to a feeling that the tide of war has turned and has also strengthened confidence in United States support, despite a shadow of unease cast by Senator McGovern's nomination. Domestically, the government emerged successfully from a sharp controversy over President Thieu's request for special powers. When finally on June 28 the Senate passed the requested legislation over determined opposition, criticism of the government subsided. The measures Thieu has so far promulgated—in the fields of taxation, conscription, public order and labor disputes—have been generally accepted as essential to the nation's defense.

D. The first decrees, issued July 8, affected manpower mobilization and exchange rates. The mobilization decree law exempts 17-year-olds and men in the 39–43 age group from active service unless manpower exigencies arise; all males between ages 18 and 38 are subject to active service. The only deferments will be on account of health and by reason of being an elected official. Priests, students who keep pace with their course of studies, civil servants, and certain other categories are mobilized in place, a form of deferment which places them under military discipline and makes them legally subject to active service at the discretion of the Defense Ministry.

E. An exchange rate Decree Law of July 8 gives back to the executive the right to establish the exchange system and rates. A Prime Ministerial decree issued the same day eliminates the use of the VN$118 rate for student remittances and government agency transactions; these will henceforth be at the new official rate, currently VN$425. An estimated VN$6 billion per year will be added to National Bank receipts on this account, offset by a scholarship program costing some VN$2 billion. On July 18, the GVN raised POL prices, with premium gasoline rising VN$12 per liter to VN$42, and kerosene by VN$6 to VN$22. Increased revenue is estimated as VN$8 billion annually. Revenues from the tax surcharges levied in May on beer, cigarettes, hotels, etc., are now

re-estimated as VN$4 billion annually, so that the total effect of tax and exchange rate measures and the net saving on student remittance taken since the offensive began is on the order of VN$16 billion.

F. During the last three or four weeks, the economy has been recovering slowly from the recession precipitated by the NVN invasion. Inventories have been dwindling, the liquidity position of business improving, and in a few cases, manufacturing output has begun to rise. Industries reported on the upswing include beer, cigarettes, sugar, pharmaceuticals, and cement. On the other hand, the textile industry is still in the doldrums, as are steel, paper, and a large number of others. The recovery has brought with it some price rises, particularly in perishables, perhaps a precursor of increasing inflationary pressures later in the year.

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221. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, July 27, 1972, 1230Z.

120. Ref: WHS 2090.[2]

1. I reviewed again today with President Thieu our plans for the August 1 meeting. He has no problem with our first two points, i.e., A) a cease-fire and withdrawal from South Viet-Nam of U.S. and allied forces to begin when the overall agreement is signed; B) the details of the political principles agreed to are to be worked out within a three month period.

2. With reference to the third point, i.e., that the President and Vice President would step down two months before the election, he would prefer to have this presented not as a definite proposal but to have you say that you "have reason to believe" that the President and Vice President would be willing to resign two months before the election. Thieu said that as he had mentioned to me and to General Haig the question of whether he resigns one or two months before the election presents no problem. He is not categorical on the deadline for his resignation;

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, To Amb. Bunker—Saigon 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Immediate; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] Document 217.

on the contrary he considers it an entirely negotiable point. He said that on the other hand if it is made as a firm offer and is not publicly revealed, it would cause him embarrassment. On the other hand if it should be revealed publicly in the present conjuncture it could cause internal political problems while efforts are being made to unite the people in support of the front.

3. He feels also that if his offer to resign were made formally to the other side now they would regard it as an indication that the United States is less firm in its support of South Viet-Nam. Two other points which he put forward were that to offer his resignation formally would reflect upon the legal regime of the nation and that it would encourage the other side to discuss South Viet-Nam political matters with the U.S., thus encouraging them to ask us to overthrow his regime.

4. What this adds up to is the fact that Thieu does not object to resigning two months before the elections, but is concerned about the way in which we put it before the other side. He said that when you used the phrase "have reason to believe" that he would resign two months before the election, the other side would be clear about its meaning.

5. Thieu handed me memorandum which I am sending by immediate following message since it will give you some of the flavor of his thinking.[3] He expressed approval of our general approach, especially the point that the details of the political principles should be worked out within a three month period. A prompt settlement, with a short period between the cease-fire and a political settlement he views as highly desirable. I said that I would inform him promptly of the outcome of the next meeting.[4]

6. Warm regards.

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[3] Backchannel message 121 from Saigon, July 27. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, To Amb. Bunker—Saigon 1972)

[4] After reading Bunker's messages 120 and 121, Haig wrote the following to Kissinger in a memorandum, July 27: "We must be very careful to recognize that Thieu's confidence and overall demeanor has changed substantially as a result of recent events. The sacrifices that he considers South Vietnam has made undoubtedly have contributed to this attitude. Additionally, however, he recognizes two other things: (1) the South Vietnamese are winning and are in a far better strategic position than ever before; and (2) he is smart enough to know that President Nixon cannot afford a major break with him or chances of a sellout before an election." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 48, Geopolitical File, Peace Talks, Chronological File, 2 June–31 July 1972)

222. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, July 27, 1972, 10:43–11:23 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Kenneth Rush
G. Warren Nutter
R/Adm. Harry Train

JCS
Vice Adm. John Weinel

CIA
Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters
George Carver
[*name not declassified*] (only for Gen. Walters' briefing)

NSC
Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig
John Holdridge
Col. T.C. Pinckney
Mark Wandler

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Mr. Kissinger will try to obtain agreement from Secretaries Rogers and Laird for a State briefing on the dike bombing issue.

[Omitted here are Walters's briefing on the military situation in South Vietnam and discussion of casualties suffered by, operational performance of, and leadership problems in the South Vietnamese military; the effect of the coming rainy season on North Vietnamese Army operations; how the North Vietnamese number their divisions; and the likelihood of North Vietnamese forces carrying out a major attack on Hue and how the South Vietnamese are preparing for that attack.]

Mr. Kissinger: Let's turn now to the dike bombing issue. (to Mr. Johnson) What is the status of your briefing? Why do you keep announcing it and then cancelling it?

Mr. Johnson: We've only done that once. We announced that we would have a briefing yesterday. But, as you know, we later cancelled it. We are prepared to go ahead with the briefing any time you wish. I understand that Mel [Laird] called the Secretary and said that he was against it. As a result of that conversation, the Secretary is now against the briefing, too.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, July–August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

Mr. Kissinger: I thought Mel was just against releasing the pictures, not the briefing itself.

Gen. Walters: People don't understand what the dike system is, and I think it is very important for us to get this information out. Time is fast running out on us.

Mr. Johnson: I understand Charlie Bray,[2] Mel and the Secretary went round and round on this subject yesterday.

Mr. Kissinger: And we [the White House] supported *no* briefing?

Gen. Haig: Yes. Secretary Rogers called over here to express his opposition to the briefing. We went along with his wishes.

Gen. Walters: This is like the germ warfare issue. It will get worse and worse until we do something about it.

Mr. Kissinger: We can't hypo the issue, but we can put it into perspective. I think we can make an aggressive briefing. Why, if we are systematically bombing the dikes, has not one of the dikes been levelled? And why has there been no flooding?

Gen. Walters: If there are floods this year, as there probably will be because the dikes are not in good repair, the North Vietnamese will try to pin the blame on us, saying that our bombing has destroyed the dike system.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Kissinger: We have no reason to be apologetic about our actions. We should admit there are some craters. But we should point out that these craters were caused by bombs which were aimed at nearby military targets. We can ask why the North Vietnamese haven't filled in these few craters. We can also make the point that there was great flooding last year, flooding which damaged the dike system. Since the system was not fully repaired in the past year, there is a good chance of heavy flooding again this year—and the North Vietnamese are trying to set us up.

Mr. Carver: The word "dike" is being played like a yo-yo. As Gen. Walters said, people don't understand what the system is. We have to explain that the primary system is backed up by a secondary system running parallel to the main dikes. There is also a tertiary system of smaller dikes to divide the rice-growing plains into compartments, to assist irrigation and to control the level of small streams and waterways. In addition, a large number of the dikes serve as bases for roadways, so it is almost inevitable that air attacks directed against transportation targets cause scattered damage to dikes. But there is no evidence whatsoever about damage to the system. Incidentally, Amb.

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[2] Charles W. Bray, Director, Office of Press Relations, Department of State.

Bush[3] didn't bring out the point about the dikes serving as bases for the roadways. This is an important point, one we should bring out in briefings.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree with Mel that we shouldn't release the pictures. If we did, from that point on, we would have to send photo reconnaissance planes along on every mission and release the photos to prove that we were not hitting the dikes. But I don't see why we can't give an oral presentation on the dike system.

Mr. Johnson: Bray, in fact, did some of that yesterday, at the noon briefing.

Mr. Kissinger: Who was supposed to do the special briefing?

Mr. Sullivan: Bray.

Mr. Kissinger: Let's have the briefing. I will talk to Mel about it.

Mr. Johnson: You should talk to the Secretary, too. He's convinced now that we shouldn't do it.

Mr. Rush: I saw Mel at 6:30 the night before last, as he was leaving. He told me he was in favor of giving the briefing, but not releasing the pictures.

Mr. Kissinger: We can't avoid this issue. It won't go away because we do nothing about it.

Mr. Carver: If we get much more behind the power curve, we will never be able to catch up.

Mr. Kissinger: Exactly.

Mr. Rush: To finish up the point I was making before, at my public affairs meeting yesterday morning, Dan Murphy told me that he thought Mel had changed his mind about the briefing. I don't know, though, why he changed his mind.

Mr. Kissinger: I will talk to our two friends. But it won't be possible to have the briefing today.

Mr. Sullivan: You should know that this issue was the major theme of the North Vietnamese presentation in Paris today. And Jane Fonda[4] is returning home tomorrow, so we should brace for another onslaught.

Mr. Kissinger: Every day we fall further and further behind the power curve.

Mr. Sullivan: We're ready to give the briefing this afternoon.

Mr. Kissinger: No, that won't be possible. Can you give it tomorrow?

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[3] George H.W. Bush, Ambassador to the United Nations.

[4] Movie actress and anti-war activist who toured North Vietnam in the summer of 1972.

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. But it will look as though we are in a defensive position as a result of Jane Fonda's accusations.

Gen. Walters: We simply have to get across to people that there will be flooding in North Vietnam this year and that the North Vietnamese are falsely trying to blame us for causing it.

Mr. Johnson: We should also point out that there was massive flooding in 1971—when we were not bombing the North.

Mr. Kissinger: The average intelligent person does not know about the dike system. He thinks we are bombing big concrete dams. We have to make two things clear: (1) what the system is and (2) what we are hitting.

Gen. Walters: And we also have to make it very clear that our bombing is not causing floods.

Mr. Kissinger: That's right.

Mr. Sullivan: We are ready to declassify the material contained in the memorandum Dick Helms handed out at the last meeting.[5]

Mr. Johnson: I think there is a need to release the photos. There has been so much discussion about this issue that people will ask if we can prove what we are saying. They will ask us if we have photos which back up our statement. When we say we have the photos, people will ask to see them.

Mr. Nutter: These same people should also ask what photos the other side has to back up its claims.

Mr. Johnson: I'm sure we will be asked to release our photos. I think it will do more harm to our position not to show the photos.

Mr. Sullivan: One virtue of showing the photos is that people will be able to see that the pockmarks on the craters are close to military targets.

Mr. Nutter: I think we can turn the whole issue around and make the North Vietnamese back up their statements with photos, which they won't be able to do.

Mr. Kissinger: We won't be able to do that if we remain in a defensive position.

Mr. Carver: We can really make some good points if we take the offensive and prove that we are being set up.

Mr. Kissinger: Yes, but we'll have to do that within the next two weeks.

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[5] Intelligence Memorandum No. 7103, "North Vietnam: The Dike Bombing Issue," July 1972. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–089, Washington Special Actions Group Meetings, WSAG Meeting Vietnam 7/27/72)

Mr. Rush: The North Vietnamese are shifting to a more sophisticated approach, you know. Our bombing is so heavy, they are saying now, that even bombs which miss the dikes themselves damage the foundations.

Mr. Kissinger: They can't prove that.

Gen. Walters: That's the set-up.

Mr. Sullivan: Waldheim[6] has a couple of Dutch engineers who say our bombing is shaking the foundations.

Mr. Kissinger: This issue will not go away. We have to deal with it.

Mr. Carver: And when we do, we have to make the strong point that our bombing of the tertiary dike and road system does not cause flooding.

Mr. Kissinger: Where is McCloskey?

Mr. Sullivan: He's on leave.

Mr. Johnson: Charlie Bray can do the briefing.

Mr. Rush: He's done very well, so far.

Adm. Weinel: I just saw an intercept of a North Vietnamese conversation. One of the speakers said this issue was so important to them that they would even use dynamite to destroy some of the dikes, if need be, in order to keep the issue alive.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) What about Laos? What's going on there?

Mr. Sullivan: Souphanouvong sent a tough letter to Souvanna, as you know, and Souvanna has answered it.

Mr. Kissinger: Souvanna actually sent the answer?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. He had the letter delivered to the Pathet Lao representative, Souk Vongsak, July 25. Souk Vongsak will be delivering another letter from Souphanouvong tomorrow morning, but this letter will have crossed Souvanna's and will not be a reply. Our Chargé talked to Souvanna, and he reported that the language in Souvanna's letter was subtle. [Reading from Vientiane 56211] "The Prime Minister said he wished to assure Washington that he was conscious of continued U.S. concern about interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. His proposal to discuss general cease-fire was designed to divert Pathet Lao demand for bombing halt as prior condition to talks. Souvanna wanted us to know, however, that he had not changed his mind about conditions necessary to make cease-fire effective. Specifically, either Communists must agree to effective control measures in area of Ho Chi Minh Trail or, if they refuse to do so, Trail must be excluded from provisions of cease-fire."

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[6] UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim.

Souvanna also told our Chargé that we should not be concerned. He said: "I know U.S. position. We are at beginning of process which will take time. The important thing at this stage is to get contacts started and to find out whether the Communists have anything new in mind."

So, judging from the cable, Souvanna is still okay.

Mr. Kissinger: Won't Point 1 of the Pathet Lao proposal require us to stop bombing the Trail?

Mr. Sullivan: Souvanna said he would be willing to discuss the five-point Pathet Lao proposal if there were a cease-fire. If so, he said he would expect all matters of interest to be brought up at the discussions. He also said he would like to separate the military and political issues, and perhaps even discuss the military issues first. You are right about the first point of the Pathet Lao proposal, though. It would require us to cease our attacks on the Trail and to withdraw the Thai troops.

Do you want to hear what happened in Paris today?[7]

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Mr. Sullivan: The other side's tone shifted, becoming more stiff. They placed a heavy emphasis on our alleged aggression and on our bombing of the dikes. They claimed that our bombing was still the obstacle preventing serious negotiations. Bill [Porter] answered, regretting that they were using a propaganda tone again. He cited articles which pointed out that they had failed to take care of the dikes after last year's flooding. In the rebuttal, Xuan Thuy used a more measured tone. He said there were five objections to our May 8 proposal:

1. It provided for no political settlement.

2. The military conditions would result in a military government imposed in South Vietnam over their civilian government.

Mr. Kissinger: Why is that?

Mr. Sullivan: I don't know. This is what I got over the phone. [Then Mr. Sullivan continued with the rest of the objections]:

3. The cease-fire would be unstable. (This is another point which I don't fully understand.)

4. The POW issue would have been irrelevant if we had accepted their seven-point proposal because we would already have our prisoners back.

5. Our proposal lacks a terminal date for our departure.

Bill said that our original timetable for withdrawing went from one year down to six months, down to four months. Xuan Thuy said

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[7] Ambassador Porter's report on this plenary session, the 152d, is in message USDel 5982 from Paris, July 27. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 192, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks [1 of 2])

our proposal is similar to the statement of the restaurant owner, who says that his food is free tomorrow.

Mr. Kissinger: The other side wants us to set a terminal withdrawal date. Then there will be no progress in the negotiations, and the date will be upon us. We will have made a unilateral withdrawal—with nothing to show for it.

Mr. Sullivan: Incidentally, the COSVN assessment of the offensive and instructions on VC missions for August and September is very much like my analysis.[8] If it isn't authentic, it is a great GVN forgery. (to Mr. Carver) Do you think it is authentic?

Mr. Carver: The fellow who coughed it up is authentic. If he isn't the North Vietnamese are paying a lot to authenticate a double agent. He has already cost them five companies, with information he's given us about tactical situations.

Mr. Kissinger: Have I seen this document?

Mr. Rush: It's the one about VC tactics.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) Wouldn't you expect the North Vietnamese to be taking a harder line in Paris?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes, I would. Their propaganda line will be hard for the next couple of months, especially if there is flooding again.

Mr. Kissinger: I have concluded that the North Vietnamese are not very bright. I used to think they were diabolically clever. Not now, though. From their point of view, they would be better off now if they had taken one of our previous proposals.

Gen. Walters: As someone once said, when you deal with North Vietnamese, you deal with fanatics, not statesmen.

Mr. Kissinger: If they had taken any one of our proposals in the past, they would be in a better position now.

Mr. Carver: That's right. You can go all the way back to 1965 and still be right.

Mr. Kissinger: I'm not so sure. After all, in 1965 they still had the hope that the Tet offensive would produce a South Vietnamese collapse.

Mr. Sullivan: The COSVN document makes interesting reading. It says: "The VC/NVA will hit the GVN hard to force U.S. President Nixon to settle the war on VC terms. If he does not end the war, he

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[8] The COSVN assessment is in Central Intelligence Agency Information Cable TDCS 314/05753–72 distributed on July 26 to the Departments of State and Defense, DIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, NIC, NSA, ONE, and CRS. It is attached as Tab A to Holdridge's memorandum to Kissinger, July 28; ibid., Box 160, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, June–July 1972.

may lose the Presidential election in November. It is the intention of the Central Party Committee to force Nixon to accept the seven-point proposal and then to lose the election. The Party has come to know much about Nixon in four years. If he remains President, the VC will meet great difficulty despite a cease-fire. In the negotiations, the VC may have to make some concessions to end the war and to stop U.S. bombing and blockade of North Vietnam. However, the negotiations must be based upon the seven points, and the VC will offer no other proposal."

This has the ring of truth to it, stubborn as it may sound.

Mr. Kissinger: If the President gets re-elected, the North Vietnamese will have to think in those terms.

Mr. Sullivan: They will have to think in those terms if there is flooding and if the rice crop is destroyed.

By the way, I notice they are getting 36,000 tons of fuel from China. That's more than their monthly figure.

Mr. Kissinger: How are the North Vietnamese getting this fuel?

Mr. Sullivan: I don't know for sure, but it will probably come through the pipeline.

Mr. Kissinger: Are we bombing the pipeline and the pumping stations?

Adm. Weinel: Yes, but it's difficult to do with a great deal of accuracy. They have a four-inch pipeline running from Dong Dang.

Mr. Johnson: Is the pipeline in operation?

Adm. Weinel: Yes, to Kep. They are also working on a second pipeline, so I assume they are trying to get a dual four-inch system.

Mr. Johnson: What's coming in from China by road?

Mr. Carver: That's difficult to tell with any precision.

223. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, July 30, 1972, 1845Z.

WHS 2093. Deliver at opening of business. Concern is developing here that some let-up may be occurring in our bombing efforts against the North. The concern is centered especially on the crucial fixed target areas around Hanoi and Haiphong. I recognize that restraints applied from Washington as a result of earlier alleged incursions of PRC territory may have contributed to a degree of sensitivity which is influencing the conduct of the air campaign against the northern-most target areas. Explanations given here by the Pentagon refer to unusually bad weather and this may indeed be the overriding cause. In any event, the President is concerned that in the weeks ahead, the air campaign in the North be conducted in a most aggressive fashion consistent with existing constraints re civilian casualties and adherence to buffer zone restrictions which have been repeatedly promulgated through official channels. On the other hand, the President will not tolerate any additional restraints which might be applied to meet ordnance expenditure or fiscal ceilings. In the period ahead, our best hope for success in negotiations is the maintenance of a steady and effective level of military pressure against the North.

In order to reassure the President that all possible continues to be done within the political restraints he has imposed, I would be grateful if you would meet on a strictly unofficial basis with Gen Weyand and Gen Vogt and appraise them of our concerns. It is essential, however, that they make no reference to your discussions in official military reporting. If you consider that the risk is too high that this would occur the President would prefer that you defer making the contact and so inform him.[2]

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Cables, 24 June–29 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] In backchannel message 124 to Kissinger, Bunker reported on his meeting with Weyand and Vogt. Bunker conveyed to them Nixon's instructions to press the air campaign in the North more aggressively and reported to Kissinger: "I reviewed with them the campaign against the North. I think it possible that some of the concern you mentioned may have been due to the situation which was encountered last week. For a period of five days we ran into extremely bad weather, unusual and unseasonable at this time of year; the Hanoi area was blanked out and could not be struck. Otherwise, with exception of today, targets in the area are being struck every day weather permits." (Ibid.)

What we have specifically in mind is that you meet privately with Weyand and Vogt and point out that the President has noted an apparent pattern of the diversion of programmed strikes on fixed targets in the Hanoi–Haiphong area and what also appears to be a gradual drop-off in the overall sortie levels which have been maintained in the northern most target areas. He would, therefore, like to have both commanders' views on this trend and their estimate of the reasons for this drop-off if it is in fact occurring. We would also welcome their best unofficial recommendations for remedial action, if justified.

I know he can rely on you to handle this touchy issue in a delicate way. It may be that our concerns are not justified. On the other hand, past experience indicates that on occasion artificial constraints have been imposed.

Please discuss this issue privately with Weyand and Vogt and provide us with their reaction via this channel again cautioning them about the sensitivity of this inquiry and the absolute essentiality of confining knowledge of the inquiry and their response strictly to this channel.[3]

I am departing tomorrow for Paris and the next round and will advise you as early as possible of the results of Tuesday's meeting so that you would be able to see Thieu prior to your departure for Katmandu and a well-earned respite.

Warm personal regards.

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[3] Kissinger also directed Haig to run the question past Moorer. During a telephone conversation with Haig on August 3, Moorer provided a detailed explanation: "The weather is breaking now. They will be going back in there very heavy in the next two or three days. You take the Smart bombs they won't work unless the pilot can see the target. We just don't have the capability of dropping a bomb when you have all the restrictions about dikes, and dams and civilians, etc. If there were no restrictions they could go on up there and bomb blind but they will go up there at every opportunity." After further elaboration, Moorer concluded: "So I am not making any excuses. The point is they can't go in and there is no supportation in physics which will permit us to go in and hit something like truck parks that you can't see. You got to identify them first and all the restrictions we have to worry about if we were just bombing Hanoi or Haiphong it would be all right but they can't stay clear of Soviet ships, and dikes, and dams, and hospitals and everything if they can't see the targets and can't give assurance that they can do that with the weather the way it has been. Tell HAK that they are doing everything they can." (Moorer Diary, August 3; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

224. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, August 2, 1972.

Kissinger: Well, first, it was the longest meeting we've ever had. It was the most complex.

Nixon: Yeah, I noticed that in your report.[2]

Kissinger: And—do you want me to run through it?

Nixon: Sure. Sure. Sure. Anything. Anytime.

Kissinger: Well, but—

Nixon: All I have is Haig's report—

Kissinger: Right. Well, Haig didn't have much—[3]

Nixon: It was just indicating it was a long meeting and they made some concrete proposals.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: You made some concrete proposals, which I assumed.

Kissinger: Well, the proposals I made you know. They were the ones that Brezhnev and you worked out.

Nixon: Yeah.

[Omitted here is discussion of Nixon's July 29 press conference and Vietnam and of Presidential politics and the November election.]

Kissinger: All right, so we spent an hour on that,[4] which was very acrimonious. As I said: "The President has proved that he does not have good will and serious intent?" I said: "Mr. Le Duc Tho, I waited for two weeks to tell you this. The next time you say anything about the President's intentions, motives, or anything else, I will pick up my papers and walk out of this room. We are here to negotiate. The fact that I'm here shows our good will. I'm not going to discuss our mo-

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 759–5. 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, 10:34–11:47 a.m.

[2] The report is apparently the one Kissinger formally submitted to the President the following day, Document 225.

[3] Reference is to a memorandum from Haig to President Nixon, August 1; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XV.

[4] Kissinger was referring to a lengthy discussion between himself and Le Duc Tho in the first hour of their August 1 meeting regarding President Nixon's press conference of July 27, in which Nixon responded to questions on whether or not U.S. military aircraft had targeted the dikes in the Hanoi–Haiphong area, the Communists' use of the dikes as emplacements for surface-to-air missiles, and the current political negotiations in Paris. See *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972,* pp. 744–747.

tives. You discuss our proposals. We'll discuss your proposals. I'm not sitting here to listen to one more word about the President. If you can't take this, I'll walk out now." I figured they were never going to let me walk out.

Nixon: It was a good move, though. You had to test him.

Kissinger: Yeah, so he peddled right back. He said: "I'm not attacking you." I said: "I'm not saying you're attacking me. Attack me, that's your privilege. I'm here. I won't let you attack the President. I represent the President." So—so he started dancing away from me. Well, at any rate, after about 45 minutes of this, I presented in effect what you and Brezhnev had discussed, which I had held back last time, with a few extra frills, which I had mentioned to you, such as a—

Nixon: Yeah, sure.

Kissinger: —constitutional convention, made a very long speech for publication, in which I showed that we had—

Nixon: Good.

Kissinger: —that we had—

Nixon: That'll be good for this record.

Kissinger: That's right. That we had taken every one of their seven points into account, just so that they had to shut up that we had never responded to their seven points—[5]

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah.

Kissinger: —and—and how we had that evidence, and so on, and so forth. I—he asked a few questions and asked for a recess. There was an hour and 15 minutes recess where, for the first time, they served us a hot meal and offered us whiskey, and wine, and tea.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: That never happened before.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: Then he came back, asked a few more questions, then made a 15-minute violent attack on the bombing—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and what you have said about bombing, and—

Nixon: So, then what'd you say to them?

Kissinger: And what did I say to them? I was just cold. I said: "We've offered you a ceasefire. You can accept your power to stop the bombing." I said: "It's up to you, it's not up to us. You can stop the bombing." Then he went on again. I said: "Mr. Special Adviser, on May 2d, when I saw you, you said 'Offensives are the result of long wars.'

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[5] See footnote 4, Document 26.

End the war and we'll end the bombing in the next minute." And then I offered him a cease-fire—a three-month cease-fire, a mutual de-escalation. I said: "Why don't you tell us, privately, you're going to reduce the intensity of your fighting. I promise you we'll reduce the intensity of our bombing."

Nixon: Good. That's good—

Kissinger: Frankly, it's cynical. I just made it for the record.

Nixon: Sure, I know. It was good—

Kissinger: Then he pulled out a long statement, which is the most comprehensive proposal they've ever made. The first, I would say, negotiating proposal they've made. In the past, they've just given us nine brief points. This time it's about an eight-page document, ten points, and then four procedural points. Now, I can get them, if you want them point-by-point—

Nixon: No, no, no. I think—

Kissinger: —or I can give the main—

Nixon: —the gist—what's the heart of the matter?

Kissinger: The heart of the matter is that in the past they had always said that we must set a deadline, which we then will keep regardless of what else happens. In other words, December 1st or whatever. They've given that up. Now, they agree with our formulation that the deadline will be a specified period of time after the signature of the agreement. So they accept our formulation on that. They say one month, we say four months, but I'm sure we can find a point in between. They say one month after the signature of the agreement. That, for them, is a tremendous change because in the past they have always said we must set a fixed date. And only after that phase, and only after we've agreed with [unclear].

Nixon: Which comes first?

Kissinger: Well, they now agree the agreement has to come—

Nixon: That's right. That's right. Which is our position.

Kissinger: Which is exact—they've accepted our position. The only thing we give them now is the length of time, but that's unavoidable. Secondly, they propose a Government of National Concord, but they have changed that somewhat. But, quite significantly in the past, their Government of National Concord was composed, as they said, of three elements: peace-loving elements of the Saigon administration, neutralists, and themselves.

Nixon: Jesus—

Kissinger: And the peace-loving elements of the Saigon administration had to change their policies: disband the army, let people out of concentration camps, and so forth. So, they were paranoid. Now, they say the Government of National Concord should be composed in

the following way: the Saigon government, including Theiu, appoints people to the Government of National Concord, anybody they want. Except, they can't appoint Thieu to the Government of National Concord. But they can appoint anybody else. They, the PRG, will appoint another third. And then the Saigon people—it's not acceptable, but it's a tremendous change for them—the Saigon people and the PRG, between them, select the other third. So, in other words, it's 50–50. That's what it really amounts to. In the past, it was at least 2-to-1 for them, and, probably, completely them, because who is a peace-loving element of the Saigon administration? Again, I repeat: this is not acceptable, but it's the biggest shift they've ever made.

Nixon: It's still a coalition Communist government?

Kissinger: It's still a coalition—50–50—government. Third, they said they are willing—if we agree to some of these principles—they are willing to set up two new forums in Paris. One, direct talks between the PRG and the Saigon government, including Thieu, which they've never been willing to do. Second, direct talks between themselves, the PRG, and Thieu. The first forum would discuss the implementation of the political program. The second forum would discuss the military things that do not involve America. And then—and they have a lot of other clauses which we can hammer out. The big, enormous change they have made is the willingness to talk to Saigon, plus Thieu, about anything. In the past, they've always said Thieu has to resign before—and the government has to change its policies—before anything happens. That was the condition for negotiation, not the condition for settling. Now they say they're willing to talk to Thieu about a political settlement. They still insist that it should be a coalition government, and this is why I say it's still unacceptable. Now, I asked him: "What happened in the provinces? How are they governed?" And then they said something that was quite interesting. He said: "In the provinces, the provinces governed by Saigon remain governed by Saigon. The governed—provinces governed by the PRG remain governed by the PRG. The contested provinces get a Provincial Administration of National Concord." Now, I didn't press him too hard because I didn't want him to get a negative answer. But if he means that, then what you really have is a standstill cease-fire, which brings this about. Oh, and they agreed to a cease-fire. [unclear] That's the fourth point. And they agreed that all prisoners would be released within one month, and we agreed to withdraw within one month. At any rate, they agreed to a total release of prisoners.

Nixon: Contemporaneous withdrawal—?

Kissinger: Right. Now, there are two—the first question is this: if they mean that each administration continues and some sort of super thing is set up, that we could li—conceivably live with. In other words,

if we said—if we reversed the process—if we said: "First, there's a standstill cease-fire," the standstill cease-fire de facto will produce Saigon areas and PRG areas. That's what it's got to do. And then you could say you have some commission over those. That we could live with. If they say: "The Saigon government has to disappear, and only a coalition government can exist," then, we're in trouble. Now, he said one other thing. He said: "You don't have to put this into an agreement. We're willing to write the agreement in a neutral way, provided you tell us privately you will use your influence in the negotiations that will go on between Thieu and us to bring about that Government of National Concord." Now, this gives us a number—first of all, it gives us massive problems, because, if they publish this, this is harder to turn down than their other stuff.

Nixon: Yes. It's harder to say they're imposing a Communist government.

Kissinger: It's harder to say they're imposing a Communist government. It's harder to say they're loading the process because they want it to abandon its army, police, and so forth, because they've dropped all of those demands. Secondly, you have to say that, for them, they have made a tremendous step. It's not—in the past, we used to say they've made a step because of the mood. But this time—we used to say that when they're willing to talk to Thieu, we are halfway home. I think we are halfway home, myself. Third, and this I will say only room, if you told me to sell out I could make it look brilliant. I mean—I'm not ask—I'm not recommending it, Mr. President, but I'm saying—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —that if we got up against a hard place—I do feel this, that a McGovern victory would be worse than a sellout in Vietnam.

Nixon: Oh, Christ. Of course, of course. We know that for sure—

Kissinger: But I also think we shouldn't do it.

Nixon: Why?

Kissinger: We shouldn't sell out, I mean, and fourth—

Nixon: We can survive without it.

Kissinger: Fourthly, Mr. President, I don't believe—

Nixon: It depends upon how much of a price we have to pay.

Kissinger: Fourthly, this is not their last word. It can't be their last word. I mean, they—when they start, they're not going to nail themselves to the blackboard. [What] they have done, in my judgment, is this: they have decided—you see, the easy thing to do is to say that they'll wait 'til October, and then, if you're way ahead, they'll settle with you. I've always said they can't do that, because if they—supposing they had floated this plan in October, we could just—they'd never finish it.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: If you are ten points ahead in November—in October, we'll accept elements in principle, and it gets to be November 7, and they haven't got an agreement. So, if they want to have the option of settling it early in October, they must start talking about it now. As they talk about it, now, they're helping you, because no one—because these meetings—I don't know what they do to public opinion, but I've seen when I talk to Senators—they confuse them. They confuse McGovern—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and even with this proposal, we're in a position to say: "Hell, we were negotiating seriously, and this son-of-a-bitch makes any negotiation—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —impossible."

Nixon: Hmm. Yeah.

Kissinger: So—

Nixon: That's fine.

Kissinger: So I think—and certainly what they have done, now, they've given us a piece of paper which makes it impossible for these talks to break up quickly, because I can now drive them crazy.

[Omitted here is discussion of the Middle East, the Soviet Union, and Japan.]

Kissinger: Now, to get back to this Vietnam thing, Mr. President, I think now, for the first time, we can settle it. And I think—I'm not saying we can settle it on their plan. This is too complex, too detailed, and they're too eager. If you stay ten points ahead, I would say now the chances are two out of three that they'll settle in October.

Nixon: Should we?

Kissinger: Well, that's a different question, but I'm just telling you what I think.

Nixon: Yeah, what I mean—I guess that my question is then another one. Suddenly, we're ten points ahead and we are—and then, will we settle in October? The real question is whether, whether we settle at a cost of destroying the South Vietnamese.

Kissinger: Well, we cannot accept this—

Nixon: Yes, we cannot [unclear]—

Kissinger: —present proposal.

Nixon: We have to have something that would—

Kissinger: Uh-huh.

Nixon: I would like—frankly, I'd like to trick them. I'd like to do it in a way that we make a settlement, and then screw them in the implementation, to be quite candid.

Kissinger: Well, that we can do, too. See, they've given us—

Nixon: We could promise something, and then, right after the election, say Thieu wouldn't do it. Just keep the pressure on.

Kissinger: Well, they can give us a lot of—they've given us a lot of options now. We could—

Nixon: See, we can't—one problem we've got, you've got to remember, we can't—it's very difficult to lift the mining and stop the bombing and then, then restart it again. We could after the election, but—and will—but—yeah. If—you see, here's the advantage. The advantage, Henry, of trying to settle now, even if you're ten points ahead, is that, then, you assure a hell of a landslide. And you might win the House and get increased strength in the Senate.

Kissinger: And you'd have—

Nixon: You'd have a mandate in the country.

Kissinger: And you have the goddamned nightmare off your back, I mean—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: It's—

Nixon: It's very important. Because, you know, it is a nightmare. It's a nightmare being there, but—and so therefore, I think we, I think our goal should be that. I just, I just don't know how far we can go—

Kissinger: No, I've never been—

Nixon: —with the Communists. I don't see how far we can go in good conscience, not only—not because of South Vietnam, but because of the effect on other countries in the world—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: —without screwing up [unclear]—

Kissinger: —we cannot possibly accept what they're proposing.

Nixon: Oh, I know, but—

Kissinger: That is clear. Then, the question is what—

Nixon: What, if anything, has Henry—has Thieu offered? He [unclear]—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: He's never talked about a Government of National Concord, has he?

Kissinger: No. I think what we ought to do is this—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —simply to get some procedural things. On the 14th, I ought to accept, or nearly accept, every point in their proposal, except the political one.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: Because—

Nixon: Oh, I see no problem with that.

Kissinger: There's no problem with that, but that shows major progress.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Then, we ought to send Haig out to Saigon, or, conceivably, even I should go out to Saigon.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger's schedule.]

Kissinger: And then, I could tell them, frankly, at the next meeting: "Let's make as much progress today as we can today, and let's narrow the differences on the political." We can't accept their proposal. Then, the question is: how do we get into alternatives, and I'm really—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I'd like to spend today thinking it through to see—

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: —what we can do to [unclear]—

Nixon: We'll have tomorrow and the next day. Don't press yourself too hard on that [unclear]—

Kissinger: But, for the first time—

Nixon: —keep yourself available for other, bigger shows.

Kissinger: But, for the first time, we have a, we have a real—I mean they've given us so many elements to play with, that, for example, we can accept the procedure immediately. We've been trying for three years, Mr. President, to get them to talk to the Thieu government.

Nixon: Yeah. Let me say this—one thing I—they are thinking you don't have to spell out: they are under no illusions that this offer is not open-ended. They are under no illusions that on November the 7th, there ain't no offers, believe me. None.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: Not even a cease-fire.

Kissinger: Well, I'm not saying it explicitly because I'm afraid—

Nixon: No, because you don't want to use that premise—

Kissinger: No, I don't want to be—no, I don't want to be threatening. I don't want it to be published, but—

Nixon: That's what I mean. You don't want to become threatening in the public, I know. I know, but, you see, that's the way it's going to be. November the 7th, and these sons-of-bitches have strung us along, then we just continue to step it up—

Kissinger: They are not stringing us along—

Nixon: This war is over by the end of this year [unclear]—

Kissinger: Mr. President, the reason I'm convinced they're not stringing us along is that if this proposal gets published, it will be very embarrassing to us. It gives us a tough problem domestically.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But it will be more than murder for them, for them to have offered to us that they will talk to Theiu, which they have said for eight years they would never do under any circumstances. This will have a shattering effect on their guerrillas. I mean, every intelligence document we get holds firm on the proposition that Thieu can't be talked to, so they have made—for what is for them, you know, they are bastards—

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah.

Kissinger: —they are—they would love it best if you got defeated.

Nixon: Oh, sure. Or shot.

Kissinger: Or shot, or anything. You could disappear from the scene. They hate you, and they hate me. I mean, they know who did this.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: But, the question is, now: how can we maneuver it so that we can have a process, so that it can look like a settlement by election day, but if the process is still open? If we can get that done, then we can screw them after Election Day, if necessary, and we can get—I mean, if you pull off—these sons-of-bitches are going to say you're not going to succeed. I mean, that's for sure. They're going to say you lie, and you're not going to succeed.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And, I think this could finish the destruction of McGovern.

Nixon: Oh, yes. And it does.

Kissinger: And it does.

Nixon: Which is just as important—

Kissinger: And I think—

Nixon: —[unclear] the whole damn bunch—

Kissinger: And I think we have two problems here. It isn't just that you win, which is crucial.

Nixon: We've got to win big. I mean, you can't—

Kissinger: And that you win big, but also that, ideologically, if they see—if it is that you knew all along what you were doing—no one is hassling you any more on Russia and China.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But you said you had a plan. You said you'd do it with Russia and China. You did it with Russia.

Nixon: Yeah, and even with Japan, now.

Kissinger: Yeah, we'll come out all right.

Nixon: See, I think with this that the—look, there's no question that—I don't know. I don't know. The real problem, which I guess you've got here on Vietnam—Vietnam poisons our relations with the Soviet, and it poisons our relations with the Chinese. We have suffered long and hard, and God knows how do we get out of it. All it is, is a question of getting out in a way that to other countries—not the Chinese or the Russians so much, they don't give a damn how it's settled, just that we're out—but to other countries, it does not appear that we, after four years, bugged out. That's all we have to do—

[unclear exchange]

Nixon: I'm not—I'm just not sure that South Vietnam can survive in any event, you know? I just don't think that I—

Kissinger: And the South—

Nixon: —the Northerners seem to be—have the more stamina. How the hell they've taken what they have, I don't know. I'll never know.

Kissinger: And the doves should not be able to say—

Nixon: To have a veto on us.

Kissinger: Well the doves should not be able to say—

Nixon: Oh, the doves. I thought you said the South.

Kissinger: No, I said the doves should not be able to say in October that what you did, they would have done in February of '69 and saved—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —20,000 lives.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: So we've got to have something to show for them. We've got to be able to prove that we had honor and a settlement.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: And, therefore, even if we go very far, the settlement has to look as if we haven't done a hell of a lot.

Nixon: Of course, what you're going to have here, basically, is a secret deal. Let's face it. That's—that's the only chance of a settlement, a secret deal where we say, in effect: "All right, we agree to a cease-fire, et cetera. And we agree that we will then use our influence strongly on the side of the kind of a political settlement that we have agreed to [unclear]." Right?

Kissinger: Well, you see I have—

Nixon: And then you don't [unclear]—

Kissinger: I have a number of, a number of things I've thought of I think we should do. One is, we've asked for a general cease-fire. I think, now, one way of handling it—the reason they're opposed to that is that they're afraid if they break it, we have a right to come back in. Now, if we made a dual cease-fire in which every party makes a separate cease-fire with every other party, then if they don't break it with us, they'll break it with the GVN. We may go back in, but we also may not.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And after January, if we beat them up enough, Mr. President, I don't think they can win against the South.

Nixon: I agree. No, I've—from what I've read, you know, and everybody else in here, they're kicking also. Let's face it Henry, we didn't do the mining for fun. That mining and that bombing has got to be hurting these bastards.

Kissinger: That's right. I have an [unclear] feeling about the bombing, Mr. President, that somebody—

Nixon: Is screwing it up?

Kissinger: —is screwing it up. They're not bombing, and if I—

Nixon: Well, I know that the weather's always—

Kissinger: Well, but this is the dry season, Mr. President.

Nixon: I know the point. That's my point. I'm thinking Laird—I'm just wondering [unclear] on this weather crap.

Kissinger: I'm wondering—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —would you would be willing to let me bring Moorer in after some WSAG meeting and tell him now, by God, you want them to go full bore until there's a settlement.

Nixon: Now, if he's willing, I'll—I will order him. Who do you think it is? Laird?

Kissinger: I think Laird—Moorer, basically, is a tricky son-of-a-bitch. After his present term is over, Mr. President—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: —in two years—in a year and a half into your new term—but four years is plenty for him. He won't care. My—my recommendation is too far down. It would be somebody like Haig, who is your man—

Nixon: Of course.

Kissinger: Who understands—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —is energetic—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and, in fact, you don't have to fight back with him—

Nixon: Moorer—Moorer—

Kissinger: Moorer is—any time you give him an order, he's all right for four weeks, then Laird gets to him, again, and Laird is just—

Nixon: The bureaucracy.

Kissinger: And Laird is pretty disaffected. Right now, you know, he took you on yesterday on that debt ceiling.

Nixon: On the, the—

Kissinger: The spending limit.

Nixon: Well, he's wrong on this, and let me—the spending limit does not entail any cut, any limit on defense.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: It's only a limit on the other things. He knows that. But that's all right. Laird's doing all right kicking the hell out of them on these various bases. He's sort of scaring—

Kissinger: Oh, yeah—

Nixon: —the shit out of people—

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: That's always a job. That's the kind of a thing he's good at.

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. Politically, incidentally, he thinks that McGovern has just about killed himself. He told me this morning.

Nixon: I think having Moorer in is an excellent idea. I should talk to him anyway, and, your suggestion, I'll wring him out good. I'll say, "Now, we've got to do it." I'll tell that him we need it from the standpoint of the negotiations—

Kissinger: Now, Mr. President, I don't exclude—I'm looking at this thing totally cynically, now. I don't exclude that you might want to consider when I come back from Moscow, that you—that we stop bombing north of the 20th parallel for the six weeks of—if there's to be major progress in Paris.

Nixon: I agree.

Kissinger: You see, what we need—

Nixon: Oh, I agree.

Kissinger: —is to have something at home that shows constant progress and could—

Nixon: While that's happening we'll stop bombing, but, also, they're to reduce their level of fighting, too.

Kissinger: Right, well that will happen automatically, but my point is, if we stop on September—between September 15th and November 8th they can't do much.

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: After November 7th, if you get—there's no question you'll get reelected—

Nixon: If we win—

Kissinger: We—

Nixon: —after November 7, school's out.

Kissinger: That's right—

Nixon: No foolin' around, because you say—

Kissinger: We can't go through another two years—

Nixon: [unclear] we're going to take out the heart of, the heart of the installations in Hanoi.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: We're going to take out the whole goddamn dock area, ships or no ships. Tell them: "Clear out of there." We'll stay away from the Chinese border. And frankly, Henry, we may have to take the dikes out, not for the purpose of killing people—

Kissinger: Mr. President—

Nixon: Warn the people. Tell them to get the hell out of there.

Kissinger: It's the dry season. I would take the dikes out.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: Right now, you have [unclear]—

Nixon: Sure, but in the dry season, we take them out, and then they have to move, that's all. Isn't that right?

Kissinger: I'll tell them: "Let our prisoners go," I'll make them an offer again, and then I'd [unclear].

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: But, when all is said and done, Mr. President, if they want to take—assuming they have decided they're going to accept your May 8th offer—they couldn't go further than they did yesterday. This was, in all the years of the negotiations put together, this is the biggest concession. Well, that doesn't prove anything, because they've never made a concession.

Nixon: I know. I know.

Kissinger: But they've accepted two of our—I said—we've always said there are three acceptable points. That the deadline has to be conditional on an agreement. They've accepted that. That they have to talk to Thieu. They've accepted that. The only thing they haven't accepted, yet, is the structure of the government. But it was another thing they did which will help us with the record. I read them a long statement last time of, really, garbage, of basic principles. I took it from some of the things you had said to Chou En-lai about how we can coexist with Communist countries.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: I said: "I just want you to know what the President is thinking"—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —and they said they were very impressed by that. It's—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —half baloney, but the fact is they've said it, and we can publish it—

Nixon: Sure. Sure. Sure.

Kissinger: And—and what—they really are serious. They say from now on, after every meeting, let's write down what we've agreed to, and then let's shift it into another forum. I don't think they will make a final thing before the second half of—

Nixon: How about getting Bunker over and letting him do the, the brutalizing of Thieu.

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: That's one other way to get at it—

Kissinger: We can also—well, first of all, we have to know what we want you to do.

Nixon: Yeah, I know.

Kissinger: Which we haven't decided. If we could do two things, we could have, first, Bunker come here. I think either Haig or I have to go out there, at some point. First of all, it will look—if after the next meeting—

Nixon: [unclear] if you wanted to go, because if you go, then that'll have an enormous impact here. I mean, it also doesn't buy time. You have to realize that the more time we buy, the better.

Kissinger: Well, if after the meeting on the 14th, I go to, to Saigon—I mean, I'm looking at it partly now as PR.

Nixon: Oh, I know. That's all it is then.

Kissinger: Everybody will figure: "Jesus Christ, something has—"

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: "—to be going on."

Nixon: My own view is that you really, probably ought go to Saigon after the meeting on the 14th.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger's schedule.]

Kissinger: Now that they've offered a standstill cease-fire, I know they're going to start a big offensive. I mean, they're going to try to grab every square inch of territory—

Nixon: Oh, yes [unclear] that we may agree to a standstill cease-fire.

Kissinger: Well, they've objected—

Nixon: But I must say, I think, as I read these reports, and I'm reading them quite carefully these days, the ARVN may be doing a little better on the ground than we had—than they have. They—they seem to be having a hell of a lot of spoiling operations, and I say that not because of the casualties they claim they're inflicting, but because of the ones they're taking themselves.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: In other words, whenever I see low ARVN casualties, I know they're sitting in their foxholes, but when I see them high, they must be out killing somebody.

Kissinger: They're taking almost as many as the North Vietnamese.

Nixon: They are, are they?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Well, they should be, because they're on the offensive. Now, those spoiling operations, Henry, are pretty hard on these bastards.

Kissinger: Oh, and then, they pick up—yesterday, they picked up six [unclear] of mortar action—

Nixon: I saw that.

Kissinger: —in one place [unclear]—

Nixon: I also saw that in one area, in another province, that, where they came in to an area of training, they found about 180 dead bodies. Just dead bodies from bombing.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: Now there are—that must not be an isolated incident. You know, damn well, these bombs have got to be hitting something.

Kissinger: Well, we think we've killed about 70,000 people. That's not even counting B–52s. Now, if that's true, that means we've wounded another 70,000. I've talked with [Sir Robert] Thompson, who's going around the world for us, around Southeast Asia for us, and he thinks—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —we've—we—he thinks they're through 'til '75.

Nixon: Well then, ARVN—ARVN can survive, then.

Kissinger: And I think, Mr. President, we have a—I'm going to get these terms improved. I mean, we've never yet accepted a first offer anybody made to us.

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: But I will make specific recommendations to you before the end of [unclear]—

Nixon: Of course, you know, you know that you have a very tough partner in Theiu here. He may not be willing even to go along with this, that he won't run again.

Kissinger: That isn't—that is not—that's no longer an issue. Actually, their proposal—

Nixon: Says that he will not?

Kissinger: Their proposal is easier for, for him to handle—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —because it requires a direct negotiation with him. Strangely enough, their proposal is better attuned to Vietnamese psychology than ours is. Their proposal requires that he, that he can participate in the negotiations. Then, he's supposed not to participate in a Government of National Concord—

Nixon: Good. Good—

Kissinger: —but I'm not yet absolutely sure what that Government of National Concord is. Whether that's a super, sort of, structure, or—and Saigon continues, you see? Or whether Saigon disappears? But he's always said, when there is permanent peace, he won't run. So, he has the face-saving—he will resign. So, he could put it into that context.

Nixon: Well, the Government of National Concord could just be a temporary government until new elections are held. That's—

Kissinger: Oh, well, that's what they want.

Nixon: And then new elections will determine the government?

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: You're sure?

Kissinger: Oh, positive.

[Omitted here are a brief continuation of the discussion of Vietnam and discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

225. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 3, 1972.

SUBJECT

My August 1 Meeting with the North Vietnamese

Overview

My eight-hour August 1 meeting with Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho was the longest private meeting ever, and the most interesting session we have ever had.[2]

Both sides presented detailed new proposals and agreed to study them with a view to making further progress at the next session, which we set for August 14. Our plan was a modification and expansion of our January 25 and May 8 proposals,[3] with some new aspects growing out of your discussions in Moscow. They in turn tabled (1) the most comprehensive and forthcoming—although still unacceptable—substantive plan they have ever presented; and (2) for the first time, a plan for negotiating procedures, including direct negotiations between Saigon and the PRG.

Their positions reconfirm that all military and subsidiary issues are basically soluble and that the main problems remain the political question and the timing of an Indochina ceasefire in relation to the settlement of political issues. They made major moves on the political issue, including a willingness to deal with the GVN, including Thieu, on the details of political questions. Their overall plan, however, still contains unpalatable elements such as their insistence that we accept the principle of a three segment government of national concord before talks between the Vietnamese parties themselves and that such government be established before a ceasefire.[4]

There is much interesting new material to analyze, with some suggestive openings to bridge our differences. On the other hand, their

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive, Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [4 of 5]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. At the top of the first page, President Nixon wrote: "K—Splendid job on what must be a very tedious exercise." Tabs A–C are attached but not printed.

[2] The memorandum of conversation, August 1, is ibid.

[3] See Documents 5 and 136, respectively.

[4] The President highlighted much of this sentence and wrote at the end of the paragraph: "It is remarkable how they can so tenaciously stick to the only goal which really matters to them—political victory."

plan is also compatible with their maintaining positions we cannot accept, and if publicized, could cause us public difficulties with its cosmetic appearances. We will need to choose our tactics carefully for the next meeting.

Highlights

—The first hour was marked by their heated attacks on your July 27 press conference,[5] claiming that it had stirred speculation on private talks, and contained military threats. I reacted very sharply. This led to an hour-long procedural wrangle on the announcement of meetings—I insisted on public confirmation that this one took place but without further elaboration (which is in our interest since it means more, not less, speculation).

—I then tabled our new twelve point plan (Tab A) with the following central features:

• Four month allied troop withdrawal in parallel with release of all prisoners, from the date of a general agreement.

• Indochina ceasefire on date of agreement.

• Our January 25 election proposal with informal indication (not in plan itself) that Thieu might accept two month resignation period (i.e., what you indicated to Brezhnev).

• Additional political proposals that don't affect the core of our position but take account of some of their subsidiary proposals—such as possible changes in the constitution a year after new elections; the assurance of democratic liberties; and eligibility for all forces in all branches of government.

• A three month deadline from the date of a general agreement to work out the details of the political questions along the lines of agreed principles.

—I pointed out all our new elements and made clear that while we would live with consequences of a political process, we would not prejudge its outcome or impose a government.

—Le Duc Tho asked a couple of questions before they took a 1¼-hour break, the longest ever.

—After the break, Tho made a sharp attack on our bombing, with special emphasis on the dikes which I curtly rejected, saying they well knew that any damage was accidental. I reminded them they were the ones who have continually refused a ceasefire, and offered then, and later in the meeting, a temporary ceasefire of say three months to permit negotiations to proceed. They turned this down once again.

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[5] See footnote 4, Document 224.

—I also offered mutual deescalation, including a substantial reduction of the bombing of the North. This, too, was refused.

—They then tabled their detailed new proposals on a settlement (Tab B) and negotiating procedures (Tab C).

—On *military questions:*

• They dropped their demand for a fixed withdrawal date, but said final withdrawals should take place within one month after an overall agreement. (This, in effect, would prolong our presence for months while all political details are worked out.)[6]

• All prisoners released in parallel with our withdrawals. (I made clear this had to include all prisoners throughout Indochina and they confirmed this was their intention.)

• Cessation of U.S. military aid when ceasefire and overall agreement are reached. (This is obviously unacceptable but, I believe, clearly negotiable.)

• An Indochina ceasefire at the time of overall agreement. (This still puts it at the end of the negotiating line.)

—On *political questions:*

• They dropped their demand that Thieu resign before a settlement, and essentially met our position that he would step down as part of a comprehensive settlement.

• They agreed to talk to the GVN, including Thieu, about the details of a political settlement once we had agreed on political principles. They maintained, however, that the GVN should modify its policies and composition of its Paris delegation. (Both of these were vaguely put and probably face-saving elements.)[7]

• They stuck to their concept of a three segment government of national concord, but redefined it as essentially being a 50–50 split between the GVN and PRG. (Last summer they effectively proposed control or veto over all the composition of the coalition government; more recently their position amounted to two-thirds of the government.)

—Through their *procedural proposals* they accepted the principle of dealing with the GVN, including Thieu: the PRG–GVN on political issues; the three Vietnamese parties on overall Vietnamese questions; and the Paris 4-party talks on details of all relevant questions, such as military issues and ceasefire.

—On other *subsidiary questions* they reconfirmed basic agreement, e.g., respect for Geneva Accords, international supervision and guar-

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[6] The President highlighted this paragraph.

[7] The President highlighted this and the next paragraph.

antees, etc. The one execution was their inflated demand for war damages which I said was unacceptable.

—In short, the *positive elements* include dropping of a fixed withdrawal date; acceptance of Thieu and the present GVN as legitimate partners to work out political details; some shift in the composition of the coalition government; and negotiating forums which might be suggestive of a de facto two track approach to the military and political questions.[8]

—*Negative elements* include cessation of military aid and reparations (both soluble); continued insistence on three segment coalition government; and delay of ceasefire until all details in all forums are worked out.

—The remainder of the session consisted largely of my noncommittal *questions on their proposals.* The most interesting response was their view that local administration in provinces would be dominated by the GVN in GVN-controlled areas (overwhelming majority); PRG in PRG areas; and three segment administration in contested areas. This, of course, would be the de facto situation in case of a standstill ceasefire and is reminiscent of the Laos situation.

What Happened

We spent the entire first hour on essentially procedural matters, reflecting their pique at your July 27 press conference. They accused you of divulging the substance of our last private meeting. I vigorously disabused them of any such notion explaining that our negotiating offers to which you had referred were the public proposals of January 25 and May 8.

I then tabled our new 12-point proposal along the lines of our discussions with General Secretary Brezhnev last May.[9] The main points were as follows:

—Our withdrawal within four months of general agreement; prisoner of war releases would run concurrently with withdrawals.

—An internationally supervised ceasefire from the date of agreement.

—A presidential election within 6 months of final agreement on the details of a political solution, with the political solution to be negotiated not later than three months from agreement on ceasefire, POWs and withdrawals; and

—Within one year from the election of a new President, the political forces in South Vietnam, including the Provisional Revolutionary

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[8] The President highlighted this paragraph.

[9] See Document 178.

Government, would meet to revise the constitution, agreeing on steps to implement it.

• In explaining our new proposal, I pointed out that its principal purpose was to meet their insistence that Thieu resign and the GVN eventually be supplanted by a new political structure but without prejudging or prescribing the outcome and giving everyone a fair chance to participate in the process.

—After my presentation they asked for a break, which lasted some hour and 20 minutes, the longest interruption ever.

—After the break, Tho first responded to our proposal in an essentially negative way. While acknowledging some of our new language, he said that our offer did not go significantly beyond our earlier proposals in respect to the critical issue—namely the political question.

• Tho also pointed to our major difference with regard to a ceasefire which they believe should come only after settlement of all military and political issues.

• He then launched into a denunciation of our bombing and mining with a predictable emphasis on the dikes, charging that we were bombing irrigation facilities and populated areas and if this resulted in floods our talks would be jeopardized.

—With this off his chest, Tho then tabled a new DRV 10-point negotiating proposal accompanied by a 4-point document on proposed procedures and format for further negotiations.

—Following are the salient features of the DRV's new negotiating proposal:

• It is non-polemical in tone and begins by listing six general principles regarding our attitude toward the region expressed at our last meeting with which they agree.[10]

• Rather than demanding a fixed deadline for our withdrawal, they propose a deadline geared to the resolution of other issues. Tho proposed a complete U.S. withdrawal one month after overall agreement on military and political issues.

• They insist on our acceptance of the principle of a Government of National Concord but once that is agreed, then they would agree to talks between the GVN and the PRG. Thieu's resignation would no longer be a precondition for talks but would come upon implementation of the final agreement.

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[10] See Document 207.

• Tho redefined a Government of National Concord as being one-third selected by the GVN, one-third by the PRG, and one-third mutually agreed between the two: In other words, 50–50 as opposed to earlier demands which would have had as a practical consequence PRG predominance.

• A standstill ceasefire after overall agreement on all questions.

• They demanded 8 billion dollars in reparations, 4½ for North Vietnam and 3½ for the South.

My preliminary response to their proposal was to ask a number of clarifying questions and to reject forthwith unacceptable aspects such as their demand for reparations. We both agreed that our respective proposals required further careful study and that the two sides should seriously seek ways to bridge the gap between our existing positions. We readily agreed to meet again on August 14.

The Significance of Our Meeting and Their Proposal

The significance of our meeting remains to be clarified, and we cannot be sure of its meaning at this stage.

—Their proposal injects a number of new elements hitherto lacking in their position, as I have enumerated above. They no longer seek Thieu's resignation as a precondition for PRG/GVN talks, although his resignation would be part of a final settlement. They have sought to identify areas of similarity in our respective positions and proposed a multiplicity of negotiating forums for resolving differences between us and between the Vietnamese parties themselves.

—On the other hand, they seem to be insisting on our acceptance of the *principle* of a three segment Government of National Concord as the key to progress on other issues.

Two possible interpretations of Hanoi's tactics suggest themselves at this stage:

—The *first* is that all the new elements in their proposal are essentially ornamental and that no real progress is possible until we accept their National Concord principle which would in effect predetermine the political outcome in Saigon. If this interpretation is correct, they are essentially holding to a hard line but establishing a record which would appear more flexible in the event of a breakdown in the talks.

—The *second* is that the variety of new elements advanced are designed to veil real movement toward a dual track approach where we settle the military issues with them and the Vietnamese sort out their political differences themselves. The explicit suggestion of negotiating forums between the Vietnamese themselves could be interpreted to support this thesis. If this hypothesis proves correct, what Hanoi would expect from us is a rejection of the National Concord concept but nonetheless a vague political counterproposal which would not prejudge the

political outcome. Under this approach we would provide them a face-saving formulation whereby they could claim military and political issues were being resolved concurrently, although in fact the military issues would be solved first and the political negotiations would be more prolonged and more of a Vietnamese responsibility.

Where We Go from Here

After a thorough review of the record, I will advance recommendations as to how I believe we should proceed next. At first blush, a number of possibilities suggest themselves although we will want to weigh them more carefully:

—*First,* we can stick essentially to our own proposal, modifying the political aspects to take into account their points short of acceptance of the National Concord principle.

—*Second,* we can work from their new proposal, weeding out the elements unacceptable to us.

—*Third,* we can temporize for at least one or two sessions by probing their new offer with serious but noncommittal questions.

Our two main objectives are:

—(1) to see whether a reasonable settlement is possible by probing their positions on key issues such as Government of National Concord, the timing of a ceasefire, and de facto separation of political and military issues; and

—(2) in any event, to keep the private negotiating process going into the fall, to give them a chance to settle as the certainty of your re-election looms ever larger, and to further bolster our negotiating record.

226. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, August 3, 1972, 1543Z.

WHS 2100. Deliver immediately after Ambassador arises and before his August 4 appointment with President Thieu.

Thank you for Saigon 0126.[2] Agree completely with the note of caution outlined in paragraph two and concur that we should not go beyond the general principles outlined in WHS 2096[3] in your next meeting with Thieu. I am working now to firm up an itinerary which would involve a two-day visit to Saigon, following the meeting on August 14, and an additional day's stop in Switzerland. I will probably arrive in Saigon late in the evening of the 16th and spend 17 and 18 August in Saigon. Obviously, you and I will need prolonged sessions with Thieu and he should be alerted accordingly.

During meeting with Thieu, I hope you will raise the issue of ARVN operations in MR–1. We are concerned that Thieu may be pushing the Marine division to seize as much territory as possible in anticipation that GVN may be faced with sudden cease-fire situation. This would be self-defeating if it were to result in unnecessary casualties to elite South Vietnamese units at a time when the enemy is obviously building up for another offensive round in MR–1. For this reason, you should tell Thieu that the judgment here is that there is no immediate

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] In backchannel message 126, August 3, which Bunker sent to Kissinger after reading the North Vietnamese proposal, he commented: "There are many aspects of the other side's proposal which Thieu will find most difficult. Thus my inclination would be not to engage him in depth at this time; in fact I question whether we should go beyond the general principles outlined in Ref A." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 48, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Peace Talks, Chronological File, 1–15 August 1972)

[3] In backchannel message WHS 2096, "Ref A" cited in footnote above, Kissinger made clear his desire to keep the details of the North Vietnamese proposal vague to Thieu for the moment. The general principles he referred to were as follows: "Gist [of the other side's proposal] is readiness to talk to GVN, including Thieu, acceptance of principle that details of political solution be worked out by Vietnamese, but continued insistence on ultimate aim of Government of National Concord without Thieu." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972)

prospect for a cease-fire. Therefore, his battlefield strategy should not be influenced by this consideration but rather the need to prevent a sudden military setback with its obvious implications for U.S. domestic support. Even should negotiations progress at the most optimistic pace, I cannot visualize our being faced with a cease-fire situation for at least six weeks and probably well beyond that.

I look forward to receiving your views on the proposal submitted by WHS 2097.[4]

Hope you enjoy a well earned respite in Katmandu. Please convey my best wishes to Carol.

Warm regards.

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[4] In backchannel message WHS 2097 to Bunker, August 2, Kissinger conveyed the two North Vietnamese proposals—one on the substance and the other on the conduct of the negotiations—to the Ambassador. (Ibid.)

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227. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, August 4, 1972, 10:06–11:07 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William Sullivan

Defense
Armistead Selden
Dennis Doolin
Maj. Gen. David Ott

JCS
Adm. Thomas Moorer

CIA
Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters
George Carver
William Newton (only for Gen. Walters' briefing)

NSC
Richard Kennedy
John Holdridge
Mark Wandler

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, July–August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was agreed that:

—Adm. Moorer will check on the disposition of forces—friendly and enemy—in the Tay Ninh area.

—We will take steps to counter the effects of the SA–4 missile being used in Vietnam.

—Mr. Kissinger will speak to Secretary Laird about the message for Amb. Godley on the "Symington Ceiling and Military Activity in Laos."

—Mr. Kissinger will seek Presidential guidance about asking the Vietnamese to extend the visas of the Indian members of the ICC.

—The October 19 plenary session in Paris should be cancelled.

—State will prepare a draft letter from the President to President Pompidou, regarding French intervention in the Paris talks.

—The operation in Sayaboury[2] will not be approved.

—We will try to get more information about Souvanna's intentions with regard to separate negotiations in Laos.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Laos.]

Mr. Kissinger: What about Laos?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, there are a number of questions we want to discuss.

Mr. Kissinger: I understand State wants to send out a cable, which DOD is blocking.

Mr. Sullivan: DOD has come up with a counter-draft this morning.

Mr. Kissinger: Then the issue is stalemated.

Mr. Selden: We've come up with a draft which has a few changes for the better, we feel. The Secretary feels we should make a strong effort to remove the ceiling. But he thinks it would be better to make that effort in the Conference than on the Senate floor. Given that premise, we want to tell Godley to adhere to the ceiling until Congress removes it—which should be in about ten days or two weeks.

Mr. Kissinger: But what is the implication of that? If we are spending at the rate of $420 million now, we can always cut back later on, if need be. Now is the time for us to take some decisive action, and if we diddle around, we won't get the operations started this summer.

Mr. Selden: True.

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[2] Reference is to an operation by SGUs against Pathet Lao troops in the northern Lao province of Sayaboury.

Mr. Doolin: Anyway, we couldn't spend at the $420 million rate during the next two weeks.

Mr. Kissinger: So what is the issue?

Mr. Sullivan: We want to tell Godley to operate as if there is no ceiling. DOD, on the other hand, wants to tell him to operate as if there is a ceiling.

Mr. Kissinger: But if it will have no effect on our operations during the next few weeks, why do we want to say anything about it?

Mr. Doolin: Because we will be able to make a better case when the issue comes before the Conference Committee.

Mr. Kissinger: If Congress enacts a ceiling, we will, of course, respect it. Congress, however, is not telling us to spend the money at a uniform rate. We could spend more now and readjust at a later date.

Mr. Selden: The Secretary feels it would be better to adhere to the ceiling until we get Congressional action.

Mr. Kissinger: Is he showing the cable around?

Mr. Selden: No. But he's working behind the scenes.

Mr. Carver: Actually, we have a problem with both of the drafts.

Mr. Kissinger: Are you opposed to both of them?

Mr. Carver: No, we're not opposed. It's just that we don't know if they agree with the President's memorandum of July 27.[3] If you are satisfied with the drafts, that's all right with us.

Mr. Kissinger: What's your problem?

Gen. Walters: The last paragraph of the memorandum says "as a matter of urgency that all appropriate military measures, including provision of adequate tacair and B–52 support, should be taken to regain the Plaine des Jarres during the rainy season. These efforts should be designed to take advantage of the NVA forces reduction in North Laos and to reduce the North Vietnamese flexibility to transfer units from Laos to the critical battle areas in South Vietnam." We're not sure either one of the cables takes that paragraph into consideration.

Mr. Carver: Yes. It's watered down in both drafts.

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[3] The memorandum Carver referred to was sent by Kissinger on behalf of the President to the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and the Director of Central Intelligence and was entitled "The Symington Ceiling and Military Activity." It noted that "the President has reaffirmed his strong preference that there should be no legislative ceiling on our assistance to Laos. If a ceiling is inescapable, the President desires that it be at a level which will not impose arbitrary financial limitations upon military activities." (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, 091.3, Laos)

Mr. Sullivan: (to Mr. Kissinger) While you were out of town, I discussed this with Al. We interpreted "all appropriate measures" to mean getting into a forward position on the PDJ, not necessarily launching an attack to regain it. It was our interpretation that Godley should get into the best possible position and be prepared for the North Vietnamese offensive during the next dry season.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me call the Secretary [Laird] and see if he can address himself to this problem.

Mr. Sullivan: He's already said that he is opposed to a ceiling.

Mr. Kissinger: If there is a ceiling, we would not disobey it. The question is do we pretend there is a ceiling and hold back now, thereby losing a chance to gain some ground in case there is a settlement, or do we get the operations started now and cut back later on if we have to?

Adm. Moorer: If we get into a position where we will be able to engage in a high level of operations during the next dry season, we could run out of money during that dry season.

Mr. Kissinger: If you look at the North Vietnamese, all their divisions are in South Vietnam now. It's unlikely they will be able to come back into Laos with two fresh divisions during the next dry season.

Mr. Sullivan: If there really is a prospect for a cease-fire in Laos, we should make a maximum effort now to gain as much territory as possible.

Mr. Kissinger: The President is fond of repeating something Leo Durocher used to say: "Use your best pitchers today because it may rain tomorrow." That's what he wants us to do in Laos.

Mr. Carver: It's no good if we are sitting tight in Laos. If we let the 316th NVA Division jump off in November, it could be in Long Tieng by Christmas.

Mr. Doolin: I don't think that's so.

Mr. Johnson: We've been talking about the PDJ. But I don't think we should ignore the Bolevens in our calculations.

Mr. Kissinger: No, we shouldn't. We shouldn't do anything at the expense of the Bolevens. At any rate, in the past, our activities on the PDJ and the Bolevens have not been competitive.

Mr. Carver: Another thing to keep in mind is that the entire Meo force has now been retrained and refitted. It should be ready for action again in a couple of weeks.

Adm. Moorer: We also want to ask Godley what his time schedule is. That question should be put into whatever message goes out to Godley. It's hard for us to know what resources will have to be devoted to him if we don't know what his plan is.

Mr. Sullivan: He sent in a plan, and your [Moorer's] people know about it. This was his general rainy season plan. In our draft of the

message, we say: "You should take appropriate steps to inform the military commanders concerned of your operational intentions so that they may prepare in advance for adequate air support." I think this is perfectly clear.

Adm. Moorer: We need to have more specifics in order to provide the air requirements.

Mr. Sullivan: You will get them. We are telling Godley to inform the military commanders.

Adm. Moorer: But what does that mean?

Mr. Sullivan: It means, for example, that he should get in touch with the 7th Air Force commander. You are blocking the message, though.

Adm. Moorer: I'm not blocking it. You can go ahead and send it if you want. What will Godley do after he gets the message?

Mr. Carver: His general rainy season plan needs refinement.

Mr. Sullivan: The message tells Godley to give the specifics of his operational plans to the concerned military commanders. They will be expecting to hear from him.

Adm. Moorer: We can't do anything until we get the specifics from him.

Mr. Sullivan: That's why we are telling him to get in touch with the commanders.

Mr. Doolin: We were able to get through last year—when the situation in Laos was worse than it is now—with the $350 million ceiling.

Mr. Sullivan: But we were only able to do that by putting off $20 million to this year. We did a considerable amount of tailoring to the ceiling last year.

Adm. Moorer: We also have to decide whether we want to go ahead with the helo lift of Thai SGUs at Pak Beng.[4]

Mr. Sullivan: I don't think we should do it because the operation would be right under the noses of the Chinese.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree. We won't go ahead with that operation.

Mr. Sullivan: The Bolevens is lightly defended now. There are four enemy battalions in forward positions. If we crack this screen, though, we could move on to the Bolevens without any difficulty. I think we should mount this operation as soon as possible.

Mr. Kissinger: What do we have to do to get action?

Mr. Sullivan: Just tell Godley to do it. He's ready. The question is if we go north to Phou Pha Sai and past Long Tieng, do we have the

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[4] This was part of the Sayaboury operation; see footnote 2 above.

wherewithal to do it without stripping the forces in South Laos? After all, we never really had the PDJ.

Adm. Moorer: There are 2,000 men, including two SGUs, south of Phou Pha Sai.

Mr. Kissinger: What do we have to do to trigger action?

Mr. Carver: Just tell them to go.

Mr. Kissinger: Does the cable tell them to stop their activities?

Mr. Sullivan: No. It just says they are to act as though there is no ceiling.

Mr. Kissinger: I will talk to the Secretary about it.

Mr. Carver: Once the Meo get back into action, the friendly force on the PDJ will be stronger than the enemy force.

Mr. Kissinger: We want to take actions now which will prevent the enemy from capturing the PDJ early on in the next dry season campaign.

Mr. Carver: Our objective is to inflict heavy casualties on the 316th NVA Division and to make the North Vietnamese stretch their LOCs.

Mr. Sullivan: Godley is doing that. But if we say we are willing to let the Bolevens go in order to achieve those objectives, that's not wise.

Mr. Kissinger: I don't care where we take the action, as long as we do take action to keep the North Vietnamese stretched out to the maximum possible extent.

Mr. Carver: We also want to keep the 316th Division engaged, thereby preventing it from moving into Vietnam. Given the ceiling problem, Godley is acting with prudence now, as any good manager would.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Sullivan) I will get back to you on this.

Mr. Sullivan: Okay. Souvanna seems ebullient about the chance of negotiations. We really don't know why, though. In his mind, there is a good prospect for a general cease-fire in Laos.

Mr. Kissinger: Would that include a bombing halt on the Trail?

Mr. Sullivan: Yes. And this is related to what Tom [Moorer] said earlier. The North Vietnamese are building an all-weather supply complex east of the Anamite mountains, near Khe Sanh. They are not using the Trail so much, and we're not bombing it very much.

Adm. Moorer: It's a quagmire, anyway.

Mr. Sullivan: We also got from one of George's people the proposed Pathet Lao cease-fire line of September 15, 1970. It's a line on a map which was given to Cora Weiss' husband[5] by the DRV delegation

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[5] Peter Weiss, a well-known anti-war activist.

in Paris. This line would give the friendlies better control of the Bolevens and the banks of the Mekong.

I don't know if Souvanna is aware of this. He cancelled his trip to France, and he is trying to move the effort along. Souk Vongsak is in Vientiane, too. Consequently, we may see something move on this front of separate negotiations.

Souvanna is also talking about the international supervision of a cease-fire. He got the idea from the French that the ICC would be improved if the French and Burmese were part of it. We told Souvanna to hold off for a while on making any specific recommendations to that effect.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Laos.]

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228. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, August 4, 1972.

SUBJECT

DRV Negotiating Proposal and Where We Go from Here

Attached at Tab A is a brief analysis of what I believe to be some of the salient elements of their August 1 proposal.[2]

I am particularly intrigued by their procedural document which states that the two parties will "discuss and resolve issues one by one." I was also struck by Tho's invitation to discuss the modalities of troop withdrawals and prisoner releases if we agreed to the military principles he enunciated.

My own calculation is that they continue to expect us to stonewall them on the political issue. If they feel an overriding compulsion to settle they will agree on military issues alone but, as can be seen from point 2 of their negotiating document, they have thrown in an end to

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 862, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Memos, January–August 1972. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for information. Haig initialed the memorandum.

[2] Attached but not printed at Tab A is the undated "The Communist Proposal of August 1, 1972." For the August 1 proposal, see Document 225.

our military aid to the Saigon Administration for good measure and this would be a sticking point.

The procedural document's invitation to "discuss and resolve issues one by one" provides us a good opening for our next meeting to propose a concrete agenda. One way to structure the meeting might be as follows:

A. Begin with a set of general remarks about their proposal, laying out in broad terms areas of agreement and disagreement.

B. Propose an agenda of issues for that and following meetings. For example:

—Modalities of troop withdrawals

(At the August 1 meeting Tho himself proposed our withdrawals, followed by the question of aid to Saigon, followed by the timing of ceasefire as issues for first and "immediate" discussion.)

—Modalities of prisoner releases
—Modalities of a ceasefire
—The political question.

C. If they agreed we might even get into the POW or withdrawal question in somewhat more detail; or perhaps ceasefire modalities.

D. On the political question you could explain that you are not in any position to negotiate in detail because you must first consult President Thieu. This could have the doubly-beneficial effect of demonstrating that we won't go behind the GVN's back and, the fact itself that you are consulting Thieu would discourage them from expecting any major breakthrough on the political front. It may also have the beneficial effect of prompting them to consider showing even more of their hand at the following meeting or two.

One brief comment on the current situation on the ground as it affects our talks. I think Hanoi is engaged in a final supreme effort; their manpower priorities are stretched to the utmost; and everything is now keyed to November 7. I find it inconceivable that Hanoi will do anything but revert back to protracted warfare after that. Meanwhile we will be in for some rocky times in Quang Tri/Thua Thien and parts of the Delta where their strategy is to disrupt lines of communication, hurt the economy and generally make inroads into the population. They may enjoy some temporary successes; but if we hold to the broad lines of our current negotiating position for the next 90 days, I think we stand a good chance of seeing the talks break our way just before the election or, in my view more likely, a reversion to protracted warfare after the election which is likely to prove within the GVN's capability to contain with minimal direct U.S. military involvement—and assuming the few necessary structural improvements in RVNAF, no direct military role on our part within a couple of years.

229. Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, August 5, 1972.

SUBJECT

Hanoi's Decision-Making Process

Attached at Tab A is a CIA Intelligence Memorandum which discusses 12 factors influencing the decision-making process of the 12-odd men in Hanoi's Politburo.[2] The paper predicts that, balancing these factors, the Politburo will conduct a possibly critical review of its current strategy in late August–early September, and will consider three basic options—press on to victory, protracted warfare, or a change of war strategy and negotiating positions, particularly on ceasefire. Conceivably this review might trigger an unprecedented discussion of the long dormant but potentially explosive issue of a choice between Hanoi's fundamental priorities of pursuing the Southern revolution or building socialism in the North. *The memorandum speculates that Ho Chi Minh's death, Pham Van Dong's poor health, and the absence of any demonstrable gains in the offensive could encourage the surfacing of suppressed rivalries among Politburo members and provoke a sharp struggle for personal primacy.*

The CIA paper asserts that Hanoi's decisions are made on the basis of balancing four sets of 12 factors: the "Human Dimension" (common psychology of the Politburo's members); "the North Vietnamese base" (party discipline in the North, popular morale, manpower and U.S. interdiction campaign); the "Situation in the South" (the status of the Saigon government, the Communist Apparatus in the South, Battlefield Developments); and finally "External Factors" (Sino-Soviet support, the International Developments, U.S. electoral situation and U.S. Negotiating Position).

The paper emphasizes the human context and factors of Hanoi's decision-making process—the attitudes and relations among the 12 men of the Politburo who makes all major policies in North Vietnam.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 25, Chronological File, 4–6 August 1972. Secret; Sensitive. Outside the system. Urgent; sent for information. Sent through Haig. A notation on the memorandum reads: "HAK has seen."

[2] Attached but not printed at Tab A is the August 3 CIA intelligence memorandum. In his transmittal memorandum, Helms wrote to Kissinger: "You have indicated to George Carver that you need some paper like the attached in the course of this afternoon. Therefore, I am sending you this draft in the hope that it will be useful for your purposes. It is not an agreed Agency document, so I am making no copies available to the members of the WSAG. You have the only text outside the Agency."

Xenophobia, sharing a Calvinist-like dogma and convinced that history is on their side, these men approach their decisions with a psychology often alien from the way in which we make our own decisions.

Discussing those factors affecting the North Vietnamese base, the paper concludes that Party discipline is unlikely to deteriorate in any great extent and that as yet there are no signs of decisive popular morale problems which could force a change of policy. Pressures on morale, however, are acute and the regime will have to keep a weather eye on this matter while applying strict controls to assure compliance with directives. *Quantitatively, Hanoi's manpower is sufficient to sustain the war in the South at its current level for several years but qualitatively the government is facing significant difficulties. The offensive has seriously weakened the NVA's whole structure, which will need at least 18 months to restore itself to the March 30 levels.* Despite the intensive air interdiction campaign, the communists probably have sufficient stocks of military equipment in South Vietnam to support periodic high points for several months and still have the capability to meet their minimum import requirements while continuing to support the war at a high level. *(The paper assumes the DRV will be capable of food self-sufficiency, an assumption not borne out by the record of the past couple of years.)*

Concerning the "Situation in the South," the Politburo almost certainly assumes that the Thieu government is fairly solidly in control. Hanoi does not expect a serious internal crisis in the near future, provided U.S. resolve does not weaken. Of paramount importance in Hanoi's decision-making process is its concern to protect its Southern cadre for future operations. The Politburo also is aware of the limitations of its local military and political apparatus in the South and probably is dissatisfied with its performance in the current fighting. The situation on the Southern battlefields will be an extremely important one in Hanoi's decisions. The North Vietnamese have not yet decided that the 1972 military campaign as a whole is going badly and clearly plan at least one more round of major military activity. In the context of other pressures, a military setback could contribute in a major way to a decision to revise present policy.

Assessing the "External Factors," the CIA study asserts that the Politburo is acutely sensitive to any signs of diminishing interests on the part of its allies but is reasonably confident their commitment will continue. Sino-Soviet support and Hanoi's dependence on it remains an area where there is a potential for great leverage to be exerted on North Vietnam. While the CIA paper doubts that neither the Soviets nor the Chinese will initiate a cutback in aid, it concludes that Hanoi would be compelled to change its policy if it believed its allies do not *intend* to provide sufficient supplies.

While the "International Environment" will not have a decisive influence on Hanoi's thinking, its leaders undoubtedly view the

changing international situation with considerable disquiet as their rigidity is out of step with new trends toward accommodation. The Politburo will pay closer attention to the electoral politics of the United States but is not likely to base a fundamental policy shift *only* on its expectation of the elections outcome. Hanoi almost certainly believes that President Nixon will be re-elected and thus may consider floating some new negotiating formula to probe U.S. willingness to reach a settlement. Finally, the U.S. negotiating position itself is a factor in Hanoi's decision-making process. However, North Vietnamese strategy probably will not be affected by any proposal other than one giving the Communists a clear shot at gaining control in South Vietnam.

Comment: The CIA Memorandum does not weigh the relative value or importance of the various factors influencing the decision-making process in Hanoi and scrupulously avoids judgments on the outcome of the forthcoming policy review expected in the last of August or early September. The paper nevertheless emphasizes that no one factor is controlling and that a combination of elements will be required to turn Hanoi from its present course. The study implies that of all the factors a military setback in the South coupled with a conviction that President Nixon will be re-elected and a fear of weakening Soviet-Chinese resolve hold the most promise for a revision of Hanoi's present strategy.

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230. Message From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain)[1]

Washington, August 6, 1972, 2018Z.

5195. Subj: Line Backer Targets (U). Refs: A. CINCPAC 030519Z Aug 72. B. CINCPAC 030547Z Aug 72. C. 7AF 031100Z Aug 72 D. COMUSMACV 031151Z Aug 72. E. JCS 3851/241905Z June 72.[2]

Deliver during duty hours.

1. Ref A reconfirms priority of NE/NW rail line interdiction. Ref B addresses plans for B–52 strike operations in northern NVN. Ref C,

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 69, JCS Out General Service Messages, 1–15 August 1972. Top Secret; Immediate; Specat; Exclusive. Repeated to Commander, Pacific Air Forces, and Commander, United States Pacific Fleet, Pacific Command.

[2] Copies of References A and B are ibid., Box 59, CINCPAC General Service Messages, August 1972. References C and E were not found. A copy of Reference D is ibid., Box 63, COMUSMACV General Service Messages, 1–15 August 1972.

among other things, assesses status of NE rail line. Ref D reaffirms continuing requirement for maximum B–52 support of battle in RVN. Ref E validates selected targets in northern NVN for B–52 strikes.

2. I have followed the dialogue as expressed in Refs A thru D with interest. You should note that the picture as seen from here is that a disproportionate share of the air effort is programmed in the NVN panhandle at the expense of targets in the northern route packages.[3] To illustrate my point, less than 25 percent of the validated targets in RP V and VI have been struck. I recognize that many validated targets may never be struck for excellent reasons. Nonetheless, only 74 new targets were struck during July. The July totals including restrikes show only 5 targets were struck in RP V, 48 in HP VIA and 172 in HP VIB. While the need for strong interdiction operations in the lower route packages is certainly appreciated, the limited weight of effort against key targets in the northern area of NVN raises questions as to whether we are holding to our priorities.

3. Therefore, it appears we must increase our overall efforts in the north by refining our concept of operation every way possible for maximum impact on the enemy. For instance, we must make fullest use of all the visual daylight flying weather. Although morning strikes leave more time for SAR, a double or triple punch in one day may well find the enemy in confusion with his defenses degraded and lower our overall losses. As inclement weather becomes more of a factor, we must use more all-weather bombing techniques. For example, while the CVA A–6 is now being used extensively up north, I wish to emphasize the value in using this aircraft to continue harassment of the enemy at night and during periods when weather prevents visual bombing. I am sure you agree it will pay dividends to exploit to the fullest the unique capability of the A–6 in both an alpha strike and armed reconnaissance role. This effort should continue involving all A–6 assets. In this regard, I note the Nam Phong Marine A–6 aircraft are largely operating in MR–1 during daylight hours. Using the Marine all-weather capability in RP I would compound the enemy's problems in this rear support area and should free some USAF sorties for use in the northern route packages. We also have an excellent all-weather system with the Loran F–4 and more extensive applications should be possible in NVN. This will be the subject of a subsequent message. Finally, I am optimistic that the F–111 deployment will be approved for September. The F–111 should greatly assist in our efforts to achieve an all-weather presence in the northern route packages.

4. During periods when good flying weather is forecast over all of NVN, the armed reconnaissance effort in the NVN panhandle should

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[3] See footnote 3, Document 223.

be shifted to bombing in RP V, VIA, and VIB. As a general rule, scheduling a minimal effort in RP I through IV when the weather is good in the north, would allow for a substantial effort against the more lucrative RP V–VI targets. To offset unexpected bad weather in the northern route packages, strikes in the lower route packages should be scheduled as weather alternates.

5. A further source of concern here is the apparent disproportionate effort being made throughout NVN in armed reconnaissance operations as opposed to strikes against valid fixed targets. It is recognized that certain sorties presently being reported as armed reconnaissance actually include strikes against be-numbered targets; however, the reports do not reflect these strikes and the impression therefore is that our armed reconnaissance operations are not carefully developed. Adding to this misconception is the fact that, in some cases, specific route segments against which armed reconnaissance is committed are not identified in the operational reports. These concerns can be corrected by minor changes to our reporting procedures. First, specific route segments should be fragged and reported against armed reconnaissance missions. Second, sorties assigned specifically against hard targets should not be listed as armed reconnaissance. Third, when be-numbered targets are hit incident to armed reconnaissance missions, they should be so credited in the operational reports.

6. Lastly, in reference to your plans for B–52 strikes, I agree that they can be employed profitably in NVN against any of the targets specified in Ref E or against airfields. In addition to the significant military results, periodic B–52 raids into the NVN heartland would forcefully demonstrate the seriousness of our intentions to the Hanoi leadership. I will continue to forcefully present these views to higher authority.

Warm regards.

231. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, August 8, 1972, 1620Z.

WHS 2103. Thank you for your Saigon 0128.[2] Please provide Thieu a copy of the other side's substantive and procedural plans on Monday, August 14. In doing so, you should emphasize that we have no intention of accepting them. However, I would hope to discuss them with him in detail during my visit, with the view toward using some of their positive elements to develop counter proposals which will serve to retain the negotiating initiative for our side. This has the advantage that whatever we work out will seem to Thieu better than what we have before us.

When you see Thieu, please express again our concern about the deployments of ARVN forces in MR–3 and the general lack of ARVN initiative in that area. Briefings given here indicate that General Minh has now deployed essentially all three of his divisions along the Route 13 axis from An Loc to Lai Khe, with minimum forces protecting the Tay Ninh area or the Route 1 corridor to Saigon. Also, I personally continue to have doubts about the wisdom of accepting attrition of the elite Marines in an effort to reduce the Quang Tri citadel which the enemy has apparently decided to hold at any cost.[3] Could you discuss this last point with General Weyand.

Warm regards.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] In backchannel message 128 to Kissinger, August 6, Bunker commented on the North Vietnamese August 1 proposals: " My first impression is that, despite some very tough problems, we may be on the road to seeing some viable compromise as possible between our own and the other side's positions. Certainly it is important to continue the exploration. Development points up importance of your visit to Saigon." (Ibid., Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, To Amb. Bunker—Saigon 1972)

[3] On Kissinger's behalf, Haig had earlier expressed the same concern to Moorer in a telephone conversation with him on August 3: "HAK's concern is that we are, particularly with this picking off of the light units and putting them in a meat grinder which may or may not be so. Truthfully I don't know but he wanted to again be absolutely sure that Weyand and Vogt and the SVN don't have a problem here of rapid seizure of territory for a Ceasefire or something else and contributes to the attrition of a cream unit like that." Haig also conveyed Kissinger's concern about the faltering air campaign against the North. (Moorer Diary, August 3; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

232. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 10, 1972.

SUBJECT

Special Operations (U)

On 18 July 1972, I was notified of your desire to proceed with the task of creating notional agents/resistance groups in North Vietnam without the insertion of pseudo agents.

A notional agents program implemented without concurrently conducting agent or direct action team operations might achieve limited credibility; however, the effectiveness of notional programs is directly related to and dependent upon actual operations to foster credibility. Although black radio operations, insertion of bogus documents, and dummy supply drops might cause some concern within North Vietnam, it is unlikely that significant reaction will result unless there is physical evidence of actions carried out by such a group. This credibility problem is compounded by the fact that tangible support of notional operations ceased within North Vietnam after the 1968 bombing halt and would be difficult to reestablish at this time. Furthermore, even a limited notional agents/resistance group program would require augmentation of air capabilities in Thailand and expose additional US air crews to the air defenses of North Vietnam. Therefore, unless you indicate otherwise, I propose not to proceed with a notional agents/resistance group program in North Vietnam due to the marginal return anticipated and the risks to US personnel. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff concurs.

I have also conducted a review of other programs ongoing or currently held in a planning status with the following results:

—Insertion of bogus documents in North Vietnam.

—A total of 92 letters have been delivered to the CIA for posting to North Vietnam purportedly from overseas North Vietnamese who urge an end to the war or espouse open opposition to the regime.

—No reports of results of this operation are available, but I will report any impact of which we become aware.

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[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, Viet (North) 370.64 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. When he transmitted this memorandum to Laird for his signature on August 8, Nutter recommended Laird send it to the President. Nutter noted: "It not only recommends that he withdraw his directive to proceed with notional operations, but attempts to close out the possibility of an undesirable decision to proceed with other marginal operations and end the unnecessary reporting requirement." (Ibid.)

—Insertion of radios to support psyops broadcasts.

—30,000 radios are to be available in September for air drop or floating ashore.
—I will report when these have been distributed in North Vietnam.

—Small scale raids against North Vietnam.

—This operation has been held in the planning stage since May.
—Review indicates a high risk to US air crews and limited probability of success of the RVNAF direct action teams due to North Vietnamese security measures.
—The teams have, therefore, been returned to normal RVNAF in-country and cross-border (Laos and Cambodia) operations.

—Introduce former North Vietnamese Army personnel into North Vietnam as short duration agents.

—Twenty personnel have completed training.
—Review of this concept suggests limited intelligence or sabotage potential with significant risk to personnel and supporting air crews.
—Such use of PW's (even as volunteers) is in contravention of the Geneva Convention and could cause difficulties.
—Personnel have, therefore, been returned to their normal in-country intelligence duties.

—Conduct amphibious diversions off the coast of North Vietnam.

—Seventh Fleet assets in the Gulf of Tonkin retain capability to execute such operations.
—Credibility of such diversions probably masked by on-going coastal interdiction operations and diminished by use during Lamson 719.

The strategy of applying maximum military and psychological pressure on the enemy is proceeding with all available resources. Psychological operations, particularly, have been expanded dramatically with both leafletting and extensive broadcasting campaigns. I will continue to seek every feasible and practical method of sustaining pressure operations within available capabilities and prudent risks to US personnel.[2]

Mel Laird

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[2] Kissinger replied to Laird in an August 18 memorandum: "The President requests that a plan for creating notional/agent resistance groups in North Vietnam should be pursued vigorously in coordination with the Director of Central Intelligence. This would not require the insertion of personnel, but only give the appearance that we have done so (by dropping parachutes, agent radios, beaching rafts, etc.). This program can be further exploited by radio traffic directed to the notional agents. Even though the DRV may suspect this operation is a ploy, it cannot be sure and must consequently divert assets to counter it." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 7, HAK Administrative and Staff Files)

233. Memorandum From the Deputy Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency (Horgan) to Osborne Day of the National Security Council Staff[1]

Washington, August 11, 1972.

SUBJECT

Points To Be Covered In Report To The President About PPOG Activities

1. I think it might be useful if you make clear that the PPOG objective has not been grandiose but a vague attempt to change North Vietnam's policies. The military effort directed against North Vietnam is intended to change their policies and I have seen the psychological warfare effort as an adjunct to the military effort without which the psychological moves would be wasted. The objective from the beginning has been to create pressure on the North Vietnamese administrative apparatus at as many levels as possible. We set ourselves the limited objective of adding to North Vietnam's worry list, complicating their lives to the maximum extent possible.

2. The clearest indication of our success is the 5 August Hanoi directive from the office of the premier setting out tasks to be accomplished in order to combat the U.S. psychological warfare effort. Included in these tasks is the necessity to re-establish mobile information teams at the village, district, province and city echelons. This is a clear admission of administrative pressure put on the DRV, in that they have had to form teams to combat our program.

3. General achievements of PPOG in the 30-odd meetings since its founding on 20 May[2] have been to organize the United States Government so that the various agencies and departments can be highly responsive to the psychological situation. PPOG has forged a working relationship with the Saigon Psyops Task Force. A good morale exists in Washington and Saigon in an area where apathy was the order of the day. Finally, we have unchained the energy and imagination of the U.S. Government and conducted a truly world-wide overt and covert campaign.

4. Specifically, PPOG has among its accomplishments the resumption and reorganization of the leafletting target against North Vietnam. Starting on a crash basis, we have been able to refine the program to the point where we think we are getting maximum mileage

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[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Files of the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Job 80–B01673R, Box 2, Psychological Operations Group Minutes. Secret; Sensitive.

[2] The PPOG held its first meeting on May 20. (Memorandum for the record, May 22; ibid.)

from it if Hanoi's screams are any indicator. In the area of radio broadcasting, we have stepped up and improved all existing facilities such as VOA and VOF (which includes the innovation of broadcasting of POW names) and we have also developed an entirely new radio voice (Radio Mother Vietnam) which is now broadcasting fifty-five hours per day. The radio themes have improved. On the one hand, they are more forceful and hardhitting; while on the other hand, they are more subtle and on target.

5. There are several tactical successes for PPOG also. We started the drum roll on the dikes when the problem was only a small cloud on the horizon. We were able to stay on top of Hanoi's propaganda and even anticipated their move to the point where the overall U.S. Government looks very good now. The dike issue was something of a chess game which we appear to have won at this point. Another tactical success has been in highlighting North Vietnamese atrocities, reinforcing the "blood bath theory" which is a major North Vietnamese vulnerability in the international arena. A third tactical success came through orchestrating a world-wide message to North Vietnam that the invasion of the South had stripped away the myth of southern guerrilla uprisings and had cost them their international support.

6. PPOG has also found the time to go over everyone's psychological activities with a magnifying glass looking for ways to improve. ARVN activities have come in for re-examination as have our own and our friends' activities in Cambodia and Laos. In addition, we have mounted numerous pressure operations and spread rumors to add to the fan.

7. We will continue to operate with straightforward plays—two or three yards in a cloud of dust waiting for the North Vietnamese to fumble. There are two areas where we would like to be able to move ahead but are constrained by policy consideration. (1) The use of the China theme, i.e., the détente with the U.S. is probably the most demoralizing single factor which we can use. Every North Vietnamese propaganda film I have ever seen which treats of the development and history of the Lao Dong Party has at least one picture somewhere of Chou en-Lai and theoretical reference to Mao tse Tung's works or an integral part of the Communist mythology of North Vietnam. We are really losing an opportunity and shooting ourselves in the leg when we restrain ourselves from disseminating the facts in this case. We do not have to embroider or interpret. A picture of President Nixon and Mao tse Tung together has a devastating effect on the North Vietnamese. 2) Archie Bunker—In the directive which I mentioned earlier, one of the tasks for the cadre is "steadfastly maintain the state-built radio network and maintain and develop radio relay stations for cooperatives where conditions permit" as a countermeasure to our activities. Hanoi is relying heavily on Radio Hanoi as the only legitimate

voice to be listened to by the people of the North. I believe the time has come to take out the voice and for a short time substitute our own which now will have a maximum debilitating effect throughout the administrative apparatus. Furthermore, when we publish our 21st Plenum communiqué,[2] the genie of peace will be let out of the bottle, if only temporarily, and while no one can foresee the consequences of this move, at a minimum, the cadre and Party structure will have to get the genie back in the bottle with a major undertaking at a time when they are already strung out from the Ca Mau peninsula to the Chinese border under bombardment and blockade and with some cracks appearing in their morale. I do not know what arguments have been advanced against Archie Bunker,[3] but I feel if we could hear them, we could show them to be based on misconception.

John P. Horgan

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[2] See Document 261.

[3] See Document 206.

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234. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, August 11, 1972, 4:15 p.m.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to the Paris Talks or the military situation in Vietnam.]

P: Ehrlichman had lunch with Howard Smith.[2] Were you there?

K: No.

P: He said Howard Smith raised a point. To fit into your thinking with regard to your trip to Paris. Looking at Ramsey Clark,[3] what his concern is that Ramsey wouldn't be there just looking at dikes. He might come back with some screwball offer. They may say they will release half our prisoners if we will stop the bombing.

K: No.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 15, Chronological File, Aug 11–30, 1972. No classification marking.

[2] ABC Evening News co-anchor.

[3] Former Attorney General (1967–1969) and anti-war activist in 1972.

P: He told him you and I had talked it over and don't think it will happen.

K: And if they do, we will accept it.

P: He said also that they may offer to release all our prisoners if we stop bombing and withdraw. I said we might accept that. But we don't think they will because they aren't going to be able to handle Thieu.

K: They won't do it because we have already offered something like that. We will say they are offering to one party what they are refusing to the other, but they won't do that.

P: I guess what Smith was harking back to was McGovern's foray into Paris where he came back and said I have a commitment.

K: That turned out to be wrong.

P: I know. And I think there is less reason for them to do that now than then because they have the damned election hanging over them and what might happen in that election, and they don't have that time.

K: Exactly.

P: It would be much more to their interest to get us out of it.

K: I don't think getting us out is their major objective. Their major objective is to get us to overthrow Thieu because they are afraid they won't be able to do it themselves.

P: That all fits in with everything that was in that memo of yours.[4] They might come back and say they have offered to return prisoners if they overturn Thieu. And we can say that is nothing new.

K: Exactly.

P: You don't think they would try to use him as a conduit?

K: No.

P: Why not?

K: Because the sort of proposal you are talking about they know with slight modifications they can get from us. Because that is a solution of the military problem. They have made the point to me that they don't want to settle military problems. They want to settle the political problem. They won't offer any candidate 23 points behind on the opinion polls what if they offered it to us they would settle. That is the hard way to do it. They might surface the proposal they made to me and that would give us a hell of a problem.

P: We could say we are negotiating it, but . . .

K: That is right, but if they were smart they would have accepted our proposal of May 31, 1971, because we would have been out of there

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[4] Document 225.

and they could have probably taken over. I think they will string us along in these negotiations through September and then give us a blow in October. But not that they will make an offer to McGovern that we could answer that they make it to McGovern rather than to us.

P: With regard to the present military situation too, it would appear they may be husbanding their resources for the October blow. I don't know—they certainly are waiting on their Hue attack, aren't they?

K: Maybe they have lost so many people they couldn't get it going. We had a prisoner from the 704 Division the other day. They started out with 550 men in May. Got 250 replacements, but were down to 180 people in the middle of July. They had lost 600 people out of 800. He said in one B–52 attack they lost 110 men. If that is true they may not have had the capability to do it. They may have all sorts of plans. Would like to do it in October and maybe they can do one tremendous pass.

P: If they do they will get a tremendous clobbering too.

K: Exactly.

P: OK. I will see you later.

K: Thank you.

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235. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, August 12, 1972, 10:05 a.m.

TELECON/IN—From Dr. Kissinger (Secure)

HAK—I was talking to the President about our conversation and now he feels he does not have full control of the bombing.

CJCS—He has complete control. I want to send you two messages that I sent out last week, Sunday[2] and CINCPAC's follow-up.[3] I said

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

[2] Document 230.

[3] In a message to Weyand, Clarey, Clay, and Meyer, August 10, 0225Z, McCain made the following points about Operation Linebacker: "In general, we say that much has been accomplished. However, the enemy continues to pursue his goals in RVN, and there

to be sure that the civilian side of the house understands what the President wants but no orders to restrict attacks. They are not taking any orders to cut down on the activity.

HAK—For as long as the negotiations are underway.

CJCS—None of the people are holding back orders. Last week we had a casualty with one of our carriers for three or four days but she is back on the line now. The rate of effort is steady.

HAK—The President is now considering having the air effort run from one place. That is what is being considered right now. He feels that there too many people giving orders and wants to have it run from one place.

CJCS—I don't advise that. Vogt will tell you and so will the people at sea, that the orders are understood. You know we now have the 7th Air Force in Thailand, we had to move them out of Vietnam and 7th Air Force concentrates on the land battle, particularly in SVN, Cambodia and Laos and provides the additional aircraft, with weather permitting, from Hanoi, west. The Aircraft Carriers, we have three up North and they put their effort against NVN up to the Buffer Zone. One carrier stays down South and moves up and down, wherever Weyand wants it to go.

HAK—Okay, you will take personal responsibility of this and we will watch it for the next couple of weeks.

CJCS—I will let you know the minute there is any changes directed.

HAK—There is not any backchanneling going on is there?

CJCS—No sir, especially now that Abrams has left. I just talked to Vogt at midnight and I talk to him and Weyand all the time. In the logistics arena here they are worrying about the NATO stockpile.

HAK—They can worry about that in January.

CJCS—Exactly.

HAK—You will give us any information of any changes directed.

CJCS—I will let you know the minute there is any changes.

HAK—Thanks Tom.

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is much left to be done." Analyzing the situation, he observed: "Although weather has been a factor in diverting strike assets from the northern route packages to the NVN panhandle, greater emphasis on strikes against validated targets in the NVN heartland is required." Wrapping up this general discussion before giving specific orders to various commands, McCain concluded: "To accomplish the foregoing and to signal Hanoi in the strongest way possible that our air presence over their country will not diminish, I wish to intensify the air campaign in northern NVN." (Attached to Moorer Diary, August 12; National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman)

CJCS—I want to send you a copy of those messages. I did not tell Laird or show them to him. They tell them exactly what to do and how to do it. Please hold them private because Laird will probably object if he gets ahold of them.

HAK—Only to me. I will show the President and that is all, they will not go any further. Thanks again, Tom.

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236. Memorandum From Philip A. Odeen of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, August 12, 1972.

SUBJECT

CIA Assessment of the Bombing and Mining

The latest CIA analysis of the impact of our bombing and mining campaign against North Vietnam is a step forward.[2] They are at least looking at the problem by major economic sector and making some tentative efforts to assess the impact in the future as well as at present. But it is still very sketchy in its forecasts and the underlying analysis seems thin.

This memo is a brief comment on the paper, not a summary. I believe you should read the entire study if at all possible.

General Comments

The paper alludes to one underlying fact that was brought out in our discussions with the CIA staff. *We know very little about the situation in the North. Therefore, what we can say is limited and anything that is said is very tentative.* We know almost nothing about the composition

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 161, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A notation on the memorandum reads: "HAK has seen."

[2] The CIA paper, entitled "The Overall Impact of US Bombing and Mining Program on North Vietnam," was sent to Kissinger on August 11 under a covering memorandum from Helms, which indicated that the paper had been requested by Kissinger. (Ibid., Box 96, Vietnam Subject Files, Air Activity in Southeast Asia, January–August 1972, Vol. III)

of the imports, stock levels, and other key variables. Our intelligence about North Vietnam is very heavily dependent on photography. We learn some things via COMINT, but this source is limited and tells us little about the state of North Vietnam's economy, basic logistical problems or morale.

The CIA study confirms the impression one gets from DIA and JCS reports on the campaign. The degree of damage on the North has bottomed out; in fact, the North may be recovering in some ways. The amount of physical damage is essentially stable. Modern industry has ground to a halt; we have destroyed the primary POL facilities and power plants; and the LOCs have been interdicted to the degree we can expect given the redundancy of their systems and the level of our air effort. Yet they are no worse off today than they were a month ago. Moreover, the situation may improve later this year as poor weather makes it more difficult for our air to operate.

The fact that physical damage levels have bottomed out does *not* mean the pain suffered isn't increasing. In fact the difficulties and discomforts will build over time. But it does indicate that if the North is in fact getting sufficient imports via rail and road and can move supplies within NVN we can't expect our air operations and mining to be crucial in policy decisions.

Import Levels

CIA estimates that approximately 3,000 tons per day are being imported, slightly above the estimated minimum requirement of 2,700 tons. The various ways this materiel is brought in is discussed in some detail. The limited COMINT data available indicates that the North is meeting minimum needs; in fact, there is some evidence that nonessential items continue to be imported.

The two most serious potential problem areas are POL and food. It will be very difficult for the North to meet its POL needs unless the pipelines can be kept operating about half the time. CIA still states they are unable to determine whether or not the pipelines are operational. DIA, however, is confident they are, based on fires following air strikes. Thus, it is essential to keep these pipelines inoperable a major part of the time if our import denial efforts are to inflict maximum pain on the North.

Impact on Military Operations

The other serious potential problem is food. The seriousness very largely depends on the success of the October harvest. With a good harvest the North will be in good shape well into 1973. On the other hand, weather or heavy flooding could reduce the harvest and serious food problems could be expected by January. Again, food could be imported but this would greatly complicate the North's import problem.

Impact on Military Operations

CIA sees little likely direct impact on military operations, with the exception of surface-to-air missiles and heavy equipment (tanks and artillery). Obviously petroleum shortages would also have a direct impact should it become critical.

CIA cites extensive evidence indicating that a substantial flow of military supplies continues to move south toward the battle area. Moreover, they point out that based on VC/NVA logistics patterns, particularly in Southern Laos and Cambodia, if we were to see any impact on military operations in the near term, it is likely to be in MR 1.

Implications for Our Operations

Assuming the CIA estimates are roughly right (and they do not differ markedly from DIA views), it would seem appropriate to press MACV and the 7th Air Force to take a hard look at the nature of the campaign.

Questions to be asked include:

—Do we really have a strategy for our operations; what targets are they focusing on and why are the operations of the 7th Air Force, SAC and the Navy [not?] fully integrated?

—What are the plans for the use of our air during the last few months of the year when the monsoon weather arrives?

—Are there operating authorities and rules that significantly constrain the effectiveness of our campaign?

—Do you need more air assets? Could B–52s be used more extensively in the North?

—If air and mining alone won't turn Hanoi around, how can we combine it with ground operations in the South, psychological warfare, political steps, etc., to give us an overall impact that may cause Hanoi to change its policy?

We will review the CIA study in more detail and work with them to try to make further significant improvements. In addition, I will ask DIA for comments on the CIA work.

237. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 14, 1972.

SUBJECT

Today's Paris Meeting

Dr. Kissinger has reported the following results from today's Paris meeting:[2]

—The meeting lasted 7½ hours and was essentially a holding action until our side tables a U.S. political proposal. Kissinger tabled and explained the U.S. view on general principles and on all substantive points except the political issue.[3] (These were essentially a repackaging of the other side's proposal and the U.S. proposal of August 1).[4]

—Kissinger informed the other side that he was proceeding to Saigon to discuss the negotiations. Le Duc Tho, in turn, told Dr. Kissinger that he was returning to Hanoi in a few days to review the North Vietnamese position and it was then clear that he was not about to give anything away prior to that review. Kissinger emphasizes that the PR effect of the nearly simultaneous visit of Kissinger to Saigon and Le Duc Tho to Hanoi should be significant. Kissinger emphasized that the fact of Tho's trip must be held most closely until it surfaces through North Vietnamese sources.

—During the discussions, Le Duc Tho was somewhat negative but when Kissinger noted that his attitude could not but influence his mood for the Saigon negotiations, Tho immediately became more conciliatory and emphasized that all other issues could be immediately settled if we could solve the political situation.[5]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, Box 22, HAK Trip Files. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Message Hakto 3 from Paris, August 14; ibid., Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972. The 7½-hour meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy generated a 65-page memorandum of conversation, which is ibid., Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [4 of 5]. See also Document 246.

[3] See Documents 238 and 239.

[4] See Document 225.

[5] The President highlighted this sentence, circled the word "political," and wrote the following comment to Haig in the margin: "Al—which means we have no progress in 15 meetings!"

—Tho again attacked the U.S. for stirring up speculation on private talks and dragging out negotiations for domestic reasons.[6] Kissinger retorted sharply pointing out that they could not play the game of public stalemate and private progress.

—The North Vietnamese acquiesced reluctantly in a simple confirmation of the fact of Kissinger's meeting providing that there be absolutely no elaborations of any kind (Ziegler followed this strategy precisely in making his announcement this morning).

—The next meeting was set for September 15 since Le Duc Tho will not be back until September 10.

—In sum, the meeting was a holding action pending review in the capitals by both sides, especially on the political issue. We did accomplish the tabling of forthing [*forthcoming*?] documents on all other points and elicited some unreasonable responses from them on the political issues which could be used for the record subsequently if necessary.[7]

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[6] The President highlighted this sentence and wrote the following comment in the margin: "They just use this as a pretext."

[7] The President wrote the following comments to Haig on the last page:

"I. Al—It is obvious that no progress was made & that none can be expected—Henry must be discouraged—as I have always been on this front until after the election.

"We have reached the stage where the mere *fact* of private talks helps us very little—if at all. We can soon expect the opposition to begin to make that point.

"II. Disillusionment about K's talks *could* be harmful psychologically—particularly in view of the fact that the Saigon trip, regardless of how we downplay it—may raise expectations.

"What we need most now is a P.R. game plan to either stop talks or if we continue them to give some hope of progress."

238. Paper Presented by the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Special Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks (Le Duc Tho)[1]

Paris, undated.

1. The United States respects the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Vietnam, as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam.

2. The total withdrawal from South Vietnam of all troops, military advisers, and military personnel, armaments and war material belonging to the United States, and those of other foreign countries allied with the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, and the dismantlement of all U.S. military bases in South Vietnam, will be completed within _____ months after the signing of the overall agreement.

After overall agreement is reached, the U.S. is prepared to define its level of military aid with any government that exists in South Vietnam in direct relation to other external military aid introduced into Indochina.

3. The release of all military men and innocent civilians captured throughout Indochina will be carried out simultaneously with and completed on the same day as the aforesaid troop withdrawal. The parties will exchange complete lists of the military men and innocent civilians captured throughout Indochina on the day of the signing of the overall agreement.

4. [The political problem in South Vietnam][2]

5. The question of Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam will be settled by the Vietnamese parties themselves in a spirit of national reconciliation, equality, and mutual respect, without foreign interference and with a view to lessening the burdens of the people.

6. The re-unification of Vietnam will be achieved step by step, through peaceful means, on the basis of discussions and agreement between North and South Vietnam, without coercion or annexation

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [4 of 5]. No classification marking. Kissinger presented this paper to Le Duc Tho at their meeting in Paris on August 14 as the latest peace proposal by the United States. This paper was Tab B to the August 14 memorandum of conversation among Kissinger, Le Duc Tho, and Xuan Thuy. See Document 237 and footnote 2 thereto.

[2] Brackets are in the original.

from either side and without foreign interference. The time for re-unification will be agreed upon after a suitable interval following the signing of an overall agreement.

Pending re-unification, North and South Vietnam will reestablish normal relations in all fields on the basis of mutual respect.

In keeping with the provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam, while Vietnam is still temporarily divided, North and South Vietnam will refrain from joining any military alliance with foreign countries, and from allowing foreign countries to maintain military bases, troops, and military personnel on their respective territories.

7. The Geneva Agreements of 1954 on Indochina and those of 1962 on Laos will be respected by all parties. The people of each Indochinese country will settle their own internal affairs, without foreign interference.

The problems existing between the Indochinese countries will be settled by the Indochinese parties on the basis of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's internal 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.

8. The countries of Indochina shall pursue a foreign policy of peace, independence and neutrality, establish relations with all countries regardless of their political and social regimes, maintain economic and cultural relations with all countries, and participate in programs of regional economic cooperation.

9. At a time mutually agreed upon, a standstill ceasefire will be observed throughout Indochina under international control and supervision.

As part of the ceasefire the U.S. will stop all its acts of force throughout Indochina by ground, air, and naval forces, wherever they may be based, and end the mining of North Vietnamese ports and harbors.

As part of the ceasefire, there will be no further infiltration of outside forces into any of the countries of Indochina, and the introduction into Indochina of reinforcements in the form of arms, munitions and other war material will be prohibited. It is understood, however, that war material, arms and munitions which have been destroyed, damaged, worn out or used up after the cessation of hostilities may be replaced on the basis of piece-for-piece of the same type and with similar characteristics.

10. (a) There will be international control and supervision of the provisions under points 2, 3, 5, 7, and 9 of this agreement. The composition, tasks, and organization of the international control and su-

pervision commission and the subjects to be controlled and supervised will be agreed upon by the parties.

(b) There will be an international guarantee for the respect of the Indochinese people's fundamental national rights, for the status of Indochina and for the preservation of lasting peace in this region. The countries participating in the international guarantee and the form of guarantee will be agreed upon by the parties.

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239. Paper Presented by the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Special Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks (Le Duc Tho)[1]

Paris, undated.

Procedures Regarding the Conduct of Negotiations

1. The parties agree that there will be the following forums:

(a) *First, a forum of private meetings between representatives of the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.* This forum will discuss and resolve military issues such as the withdrawal of United States forces, cease-fire, the return of prisoners of war and such other military issues as may be agreed between the parties. In addition, the two parties will discuss and resolve the principles and general content of the political questions affecting the settlement of the Vietnam problem.

The two parties will discuss and resolve questions one by one. If, in the course of negotiations, there remain disagreements on one question, the parties will agree to move to the discussion of another question, returning to outstanding points of disagreement at a subsequent time.

As these bilateral negotiations proceed, principles agreed upon between the two parties will be recorded for subsequent discussion in detail in the forums enumerated below. When one question is resolved

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [4 of 5]. No classification marking. Kissinger presented this paper to Le Duc Tho at their meeting in Paris on August 14. The paper was Tab C to the August 14 memorandum of conversation. See Document 237 and footnote 2 thereto.

in this forum, the parties may, by mutual agreement, refer it immediately for detailed discussion to one of the forums listed below.

(b) *Second, a forum of private meetings between representatives of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam and the PRG:* This forum will discuss and implement the agreements on the military questions, as well as the principles and general contents of the political questions, already reached in the forum between the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This forum will also discuss and resolve in detail such other political and military questions which may have not been resolved in the forum between the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This forum will also deal with any other matters mutually agreed for discussion between the Republic of Vietnam and the PRG.

(c) *Third, a forum of tripartite private meetings between the Republic of Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the PRG:* This forum will discuss the settlement of specific questions concerning North and South Vietnam, such as the problem of the Vietnamese armed forces, and any other matters mutually agreed between the three parties.

(d) *A four-party forum between the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the PRG:* This forum will discuss the settlement of a number of specific questions concerning the four parties such as an Indochina-wide ceasefire.

2. It shall be the right of any of the four forums enumerated above to refer a matter to another forum if, after discussion and mutual agreement, this is considered appropriate and helpful to facilitating solution of the matter in question.

3. In the course of negotiation the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam assume the joint responsibility to help overcome obstacles and difficulties which may arise among the parties.

4. When agreement is reached at the above-mentioned forums, an overall agreement will be signed. Besides the overall agreement, the parties may also reach bilateral or tripartite agreements.

5. The parties may also agree on the establishment of a wider international forum to deal with those aspects of a settlement which also pertain to all of Indochina.

240. Message From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, August 15, 1972, 2132Z.

Tohak 26. Deliver in sealed envelope direct to Mr. Kissinger. There are to be no file copies retained of this message.

In connection with our telephone conversation, this morning's announcement received one inch banner headlines in this afternoon's *Star*.[2] The general thrust of the article by Horner is that your meeting on Monday in Paris was obviously closely linked, though not necessarily geared specifically to that meeting. There are also FBIS reports already on the wire concerning your counterpart's return to Hanoi. When this becomes public later today, we are bound to have massive speculation. My personal judgement is that Ziegler's treatment of the issue this morning was about right since it will give you a basis for insisting to the other side that we did not sandbag them and played it completely straight.

Concerning the problem I had this morning with Haldeman, yesterday evening I gave the President a brief wrapup of your reporting cable.[3] This morning Haldeman called me[4] and said that the President had written on the memorandum that it is obvious that the talks are going to go nowhere, and that you and I tend to expect more than will ever come of it. He added that the President's real concern was that today's announcement and what will follow will only raise expectations which by October will not have been realized and consequently could result in intensified disillusionment which peaks off at a critical juncture in the campaign.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 23, HAK Trip Files, HAK's Secret Paris Trip, Switzerland, Saigon, Tokyo, 14–19 August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. After meeting with Le Duc Tho on August 14, Kissinger flew to Laax-Flims, Switzerland, to help celebrate his parents' 50th wedding anniversary. On the evening of August 15 he departed for Saigon. It is not known whether this message was sent from Switzerland or while en route to Saigon.

[2] A transcript of the 12:29 p.m. conversation on August 15, in which Kissinger complained that White House Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler in a press briefing earlier that day had revealed too much to reporters about the previous day's meeting in Paris, thus fueling speculation about progress in the talks at a sensitive time, is ibid., Box 998, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons, 1972 [2 of 2].

[3] See footnote 2, Document 237.

[4] A transcript of the Haig–Haldeman 10:02 a.m. telephone conversation, August 15, is in the National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 998, Alexander M. Haig Chronological Files, Haig Telcons, 1972 [2 of 2].

Haldeman then asked me to review the game plan and I did so using the precise details that you had already given to him twice on Saturday.[5] I pointed out that thus far everything was proceeding precisely the way we had planned and in a way in which we would gain maximum advantage whether or not the enterprise that you are involved in succeeds. Obviously, if it succeeds the problem is solved at the critical juncture. If, on the other hand it is necessary to terminate the activity and go public, we will have set a record which will be most credible while in the interim having bought time during which without this activity we would have been subjected to increasing attack. I also pointed out that the activity with the larger power in September and the subsequent announcement[6] would also confirm to our critics that even if we have no success with respect to your current project we are proceeding without abandoning the principle and while simultaneously achieving continued major breakthroughs with the larger powers.

Haldeman seemed much reassured and seemed to be seeking counter arguments to use with our friend. I personally sense that all of this trouble this morning emerged from discussions with a former Cabinet member who is back in town and whose name had popped up in the conversation.[7] There is little doubt in my mind about the source of the views expressed by Haldeman. I asked if he had any viable alternative and if he were prepared to ride out an alternative course such as immediate termination and a shift to the hard line. I also emphasized that what we have accomplished thus far and our ability to glide through what could have been disastrous spring were a direct result of the strategy laid out in September and October which culminated in the public revelations of January.

My personal view is that the problem is not with the principal but with a very strong minded former Cabinet member who seems to feel compelled to delve into our business. On balance, the temperature level is not anywhere near as high as it has been on occasions in the past and I do not wish to generate undue concern at your end. In fact, I am confident that the dividends of today's announcement and those to come will more than serve to suppress this problem. On the other hand, I do not believe we should lose sight of the influence which the source of the problem may exercise as the game plan spins out.

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[5] August 12.

[6] Kissinger was scheduled to be in Moscow September 10–14 for talks with Soviet officials.

[7] According to the President's Daily Diary, John Connally, who had recently resigned as Secretary of the Treasury, spent about an hour with Nixon on the morning of August 14. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

We are laying on the transportation for next week and will have David in Key Biscayne Wednesday morning and Elizabeth in Washington on Thursday morning. I will have a complete scenario for you shortly.

Warm regards.

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241. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 16, 1972.

SUBJECT

Special Assessment by General Weyand of the Vietnam Situation and Near Term Prospects

Attached at Tab A is a special assessment of the current military situation in Vietnam and near term prospects submitted by General Weyand on August 6.[2] Weyand concludes that with continued U.S. support at current levels (described as "vital and decisive"), the GVN should be able to maintain the initiative and react to anticipated enemy moves in the two remaining high threat areas, MR 1 and 4. The following are the highlights of General Weyand's assessment.

General Weyand reports that the two remaining areas of concern in South Vietnam are MR 4 and MR 1 and that decisive actions are now underway in both regions. In the Delta, the enemy's objective appears to be the seizure of several district towns in the northern MR 4 provinces and the interdiction of strategic Route 4. A military spectacular by the enemy appears unlikely. The Corps commander, General Nghi, has reacted to enemy moves in a timely and effective fashion and ARVN territorial forces have done a creditable job. Although Nghi's task is difficult, Weyand believes that he can do the job if supported adequately.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 5, Chronological File, Mar–Aug 1972. Top Secret. Sent for information. Haig signed for Kissinger. Although the memorandum is on White House stationery, Kissinger was at this time in Saigon. President Nixon wrote at the top of the first page: "Haig—Be sure we use air power in Battle area to *maximum* extent possible *until Nov. 7*. Push *hard* on this."

[2] Attached but not printed is the undated report "Special Assessment of Current Situation and Near Term Prospects."

In MR 1, General Weyand reports that a military spectacular by the enemy remains a possibility but that it is "unlikely he will be able to put it all together in spite of his clear intention to reinforce." In the Quang Tri/Thua Tien area, the ARVN offensive continues at a deliberate pace in the face of NVA reinforcements and enemy plans to counterattack either directly at Hue from the west or to cut Highway 1 between Hue and Quang Tri City.

Weyand states that the Corps commander, General Truong, has realigned his forces to place them in a better position to deal with the enemy's expected counteroffensive. Following the defeat of the enemy attack, and despite the onset of monsoon rains, Truong is planning a counterattack to the north and west of Quang Tri. Weyand supports the feasibility of Truong's plans and notes that ARVN should retain the initiative and achieve its objectives, providing the U.S. continues its high level of support.

Performance of enemy infantry in MR 1 has been poor. There are indications that supporting his operations is becoming increasingly difficult due both to losses from U.S. fire support and heavy rains. The primary deterrent to ARVN success in its Quang Tri operation continues to be enemy artillery. U.S. fire support has provided the primary means of coping with this threat; without it, Weyand notes, ARVN's attack would have bogged down long ago.

Elsewhere in Vietnam, Weyand reports that the situation in MR 3 remains virtually unchanged since the commander's last special assessment (July 10).[3] Route 13 north of An Loc remains interdicted by small enemy forces. No solid contacts with enemy forces have been maintained; major enemy units are unlocated and thus a cause for concern.

In MR 2, the ARVN counteroffensive to recover the three northern districts in coastal Binh Dinh Province has met with general success. While the NVA retains the capabilities of regaining the local initiative, Weyand believes the enemy will not be able to reverse the overall trend of the ARVN's counteroffensive.

In summary, there has been steady progress toward GVN objectives during past months. While the enemy continues to pursue his offensive within the limits of his capability, ARVN should retain the initiative with the current high level of U.S. fire support.

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[3] In COMUSMACV message 101147Z, July 10, Weyand concluded his assessment by observing that "while spectacular events are unlikely, continued progress toward the established goals is foreseen, provided substantial US support remains available." (National Archives, RG 218, Records of the Chairman, Records of Thomas Moorer, Box 62, General Service Messages, 15–31 July 1972)

242. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Saigon, August 17, 1972, 2–3:20 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Ellsworth Bunker, American Ambassador to Vietnam
Thomas Polgar, Station Chief

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Winston Lord, NSC Staff
John D. Negroponte, NSC Staff
Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff

[The conversation began in the sitting room.]

Mr. Polgar: There has been a significant change in our ability to gain access to the enemy.

Dr. Kissinger: I see your reports—at least the ones Helms lets me. You say all the Cadre are demoralized?

Mr. Polgar: Not all, but a significant number. It shows in two ways: It is easier for us to recruit them. And when we capture them they talk without torture—*The New York Times* notwithstanding.

Dr. Kissinger: I must say if I were in the hands of the GVN, I'd talk without torture too!

Is North Vietnam in your area of jurisdiction? Do you think Hanoi understands what's going on?

Mr. Polgar: Yes. The reporting to Hanoi from elements subordinate to COSVN is quite realistic.

Dr. Kissinger: Then how about these grandiose orders to have a national offensive? They don't have the capability.

Mr. Polgar: They don't have. On both sides there is a tremendous gap between what they say they will do and what they have the capacity to do.

Dr. Kissinger: I'm used to the fact that the South Vietnamese, when you ask them, give you an epic poem.

Mr. Polgar: General Abrams once said that with the South Vietnamese you have to differentiate between Yes that means Yes and a Yes that means No.

COSVN, which we have access to, realizes what is happening very clearly.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 58, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Trips, Kissinger Memcons, August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The meeting took place at Ambassador Bunker's residence. All brackets are in the original.

Dr. Kissinger: What do they think we think is going on?

Mr. Polgar: What they wanted didn't work. We have access to COSVN assessments with fair regularity. The question obviously arises, are they real? Yes, because we have captured the identical documents in sweep operations.

COSVN issues an assessment the 15th of every month of the current situation, the overall military situation, the specific military situation, the proselytizing situation, and the political situation. They are very methodical people! Here is a comparative analysis we have done [attached at Tab A].[2]

—In April they said that "our units have achieved great victories throughout the length and breadth of South Vietnam. Countless ARVN units have been totally destroyed and many others have had significant losses."

—In May COSVN found that less than half their objectives have been fulfilled. "Our attacks have been well coordinated but results have only killed a small number of ARVN and captured a few targets."

—In July, the most recent one we have, COSVN found that, "though a number of victories were achieved . . . VC objectives have not been fulfilled. The balance of strength has not been shifted substantially nor have recent victories been decisive."

We don't have June's assessment.

Dr. Kissinger: This could mean either that they are or they aren't better off than they were before.

Mr. Polgar: What they have gained in South Vietnam has to be balanced with the losses they've suffered in North Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger: What have they gained in South Vietnam?

Mr. Polgar: They've reestablished secure base areas in South Vietnam and can move their main force units in South Vietnam pretty far from their base area—Base Area 470, the U Minh forest, for example. The entire mountainous area near Quang Tri is now irretrievably lost; that was held by the Americans. Their main-force divisions in Binh Dinh were badly mauled, but they're there.

Dr. Kissinger: Can they keep these base areas in MR IV?

Mr. Polgar: You asked me what they gained. This doesn't cover our Pacification losses—to which I don't happen to attach the same significance as my colleagues. If you chase the NVA out, pacification automatically returns.

Dr. Kissinger: I'm trying to gauge the negative implications.

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[2] Not found.

Mr. Polgar: Since the counteroffensive in Quang Tri started, their guidance seems to reflect the realization that victory in 1972 just isn't in the cards.

Dr. Kissinger: Is victory ever in the cards?

Mr. Polgar: Here there is a distinction between what the cadre in the South and the leadership in the North are saying. In the South, the cadre realize they have to live indefinitely with the GVN—they're getting bombed, or arrested. The demoralization of the cadre is significant. The orders direct them to fly the flag, to go out and proselytize—they reply that this just isn't feasible. Their people are simply not rising up. This creeps into all these guidances.

[The group then moved to the dining room for lunch.]

Dr. Kissinger: What do you think, as they look at the situation, what do they see ahead for themselves?

Mr. Polgar: Protracted warfare.

Dr. Kissinger: Not a political settlement.

Mr. Polgar: No. As a matter of fact, even if there is a political settlement, they see it as protracted warfare. They say, if there is a settlement, "it will not apply below the district level."

Dr. Kissinger: Do they think they can get a Government of National Concord?

Mr. Polgar: Not from the Nixon Administration. Tran Van Don says the President himself is thinking of having a Government of National Concord—but the cast of characters is different! And not before the Senate leadership elections in October.

Dr. Kissinger: A three-segment government! Buddhists, Generals, and Thieu supporters!

Ambassador Bunker: Broadening the base!

Mr. Polgar: The Senate has to reorganize itself every year. The Chairman of the Senate has important powers.

Mr. Negroponte: In light of our peace terms, very important powers.

Dr. Kissinger: What is the prospect for them with protracted warfare?

Mr. Polgar: They think in a different time frame from us. They say, it will take 50 years to establish socialism in the South.

Dr. Kissinger: What does this require from us? Aid?

Mr. Polgar: I think the ARVN and police can definitely handle protracted warfare. I think the 1972 offensive is confirmation that they realized it was a losing proposition.

The Polish representative in the ICC says the war will go on forever unless it is decided in Washington or Moscow. Washington could

pull the rug out from Thieu, and Moscow contributes to the situation where the GVN controls the situation. It will not be tidy in any event.

If the enemy doesn't have missiles, the ARVN can handle it with its own air force.

Dr. Kissinger: When will the demoralization of COSVN reduce them to the hard core? I can imagine that without victory within a certain predictable number of years, much of their following will slip away.

Mr. Polgar: It is already happening. In the Delta, their forces are 85% northerners.

Ambassador Bunker: This is a great difference between 1968 and this year. It was a largely VC operation in 1968, particularly in the Delta.

Mr. Polgar: They've issued orders again to attack cities—it isn't that they've refrained or haven't tried—but nothing happens. For example, in Qui Nhon, the capital of Binh Dinh province.

Dr. Kissinger: What will happen in the next year?

Mr. Polgar: It is getting steadily worse. For example, they have something called the "legal cadre program." Our Cassandras, like Robert Shaplen, said this was a horrible threat to us. But we find from our sources and interrogations that once the "legal" cadre start getting jobs and earning money, he buys a Honda. Suddenly he has a degree of freedom he never had before. New vistas open up—girls, a TV. Then they start behaving like the western European labor movement.

So the legal cadre is not a viable revolutionary weapon.

Dr. Kissinger: So why does anyone become a Viet Cong?

Mr. Polgar: Family tradition. From resistance days against the French. For example, the Viet Minh married local girls; they were looking to 15–18 years ahead. Recently in Binh Dinh . . .

Dr. Kissinger: Aren't we ahead of them in impregnating Vietnamese girls? Or is our Army letting us down again?

Mr. Lord: What would be the psychological impact on the cadre of a ceasefire with Thieu still in power?

Mr. Polgar: You saw the reports. A "change in policy" is now more important.

Dr. Kissinger: What does this mean? That the GVN stop fighting?

Mr. Polgar: The Czech Communists were satisfied with Benes as President as long as he didn't do anything.

Dr. Kissinger: There can't be a campaign in the dry season of 1973. The earliest is 1974.

Mr. Polgar: The bloodletting they've suffered is incredible. One intercept reported a unit saying "we're getting butchered." The 308th di-

vision that was doing a flanking attack to cut Route 1 near Hue has now been brought north to defend Quang Tri. It shows the losses they've suffered.

Dr. Kissinger: And they lose their freedom of maneuver.

Mr. Polgar: The ARVN has a training bottleneck. Like every army, it hasn't enough NCO's. But it has no real manpower problem.

If you project fighting at this level, the GVN can do it.

Dr. Kissinger: You don't think either the North or the VC want a negotiated settlement?

Mr. Polgar: I see nothing to suggest they want a negotiated settlement except on their terms.

Dr. Kissinger: Well, they're not going to get their terms.

Mr. Polgar: We have to always distinguish between COSVN's assessment and their directives. Their assessments have changed, but the directives they receive have not. The true picture is being reported, but the conclusions drawn from it are different. It is like the German army—the High Command simply rejected the realistic assessments.

Mr. Negroponte: You totally dismiss their propaganda from Hanoi? It has to be hortatory?

Mr. Polgar: Yes. Since July, there has been much more Radio Hanoi internal broadcasting about shoring up the home front, combatting defeatism, etc. And talking to East European Communists, they say, even though the situation is bad, we won't give in.

Dr. Kissinger: Why should they be the first human society that didn't have a break point? Even the Nazis did—though it took a physical occupation to bring that about.

Your prognosis is, the war in the South will die down gradually, and take on the character of protracted warfare.

Mr. Polgar: Unless the Soviet Union and China embark on a really huge resupply program.

Dr. Kissinger: If they do, it will still take a year.

Mr. Polgar: Assuming the Soviet Union and China don't want a massive escalation. For example, if they introduce aircraft, the situation will change in less than a year.

Dr. Kissinger: Even that—ours would have to be out before it could make a difference. Theirs would have to be forward-based. It couldn't be done in less than a year.

Mr. Polgar: This new offensive, advertised in the August–September–October framework, is already rolling. It may intensify a bit. But it won't make a difference.

Dr. Kissinger: If this is the offensive, it's a lot less than we've seen before.

Mr. Polgar: This is the 1968 pattern. There were three "offensives!" They claimed that each was greater than the last, but in fact each was smaller.

In the northern front, they are under too much pressure to do much damage. They have some nuisance value.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you disagree with Weyand, who says they're not dangerous?

Mr. Polgar: No, they will be contained. But we will pay a price for it—a district town here and there.

Dr. Kissinger: If that is true, indefinitely, they can't hold what they have. They're expending capital. The ARVN will gradually move back.

Mr. Polgar: That's true. If everything goes well.

Mr. Negroponte: What could go wrong?

Mr. Polgar: Many things. But on balance, if there is no significant infusion of artillery missiles, etc. they're using what they have and will gradually be pushed back. Not as far back as American forces pushed them in 1968. As I said, I don't think the ARVN will ever go into the Plain of Reeds, the U Minh Forest, or in jungle near An Loc. The ARVN will hold the most populated areas.

Dr. Kissinger: And the VC will stay in their base areas.

Mr. Polgar: And in much geography where nobody lives, the VC will be able to claim control.

Dr. Kissinger: It is not a brilliant prospect for them.

Mr. Polgar: As the Ambassador said, it is precisely for this reason that they did the 1972 offensive.

Dr. Kissinger: Are they now worse off or better because of the offensive?

Mr. Polgar: Somewhat better. This is why I said you have to measure their gains against what they lost.

Dr. Kissinger: If they settle now, they could hold some of the gains. If they don't they'll lose more in 1973.

Mr. Polgar: I and you agree. But is it the enemy's logic?

In this room: The VC fears the GVN won't abide by a ceasefire. The GVN has extensive plans.

Dr. Kissinger: They too.

Mr. Polgar: Both sides approach a ceasefire with the same degree of good will!

Dr. Kissinger: Don't talk about my friends like that! They assure me of their good will and serious intent. I would hate to see them with ill-will and a frivolous intent.

[The group adjourned again to the other room to continue the conversation.]

Dr. Kissinger: What do you think is the most significant thing that I haven't asked you?

Mr. Polgar: In general, the GVN is stronger than it is generally given credit for. Thieu has a following, though the newspapers say he doesn't.

Dr. Kissinger: He's a corrupt military dictator!

Mr. Polgar: That's correct—but he has a following.

Dr. Kissinger: A corrupt military dictator is an ally who resists our enemies! In 1961 Adenauer was one, according to Galbraith and Schlesinger, and those who therefore concluded that the question of the defense of Berlin didn't have to be addressed.

Mr. Polgar: His management doesn't subscribe to the Hatch Act.

Dr. Kissinger: Does he bug the headquarters of the opposition?

Mr. Polgar: Look at how many people have a vested interest in this government—jobs, family with jobs. Remember, people said the Bonn Government would never last.

Dr. Kissinger: You predict that if there is no settlement, then over 2–3 years the GVN will become steadily stronger.

Mr. Polgar: Yes.

Ambassador Bunker: That's my theory.

Dr. Kissinger: Even if they resupply, it will take 2–3 years.

Mr. Polgar: Yes, to mount an attack of a similar level of danger.

Dr. Kissinger: And unless the entire NVA field army is down here, by themselves the VC can never do it.

Mr. Polgar/Ambassador Bunker: No.

Mr. Polgar: Though the GVN will get stronger, the situation will not be tidy.

Dr. Kissinger: No, you pointed out they will still keep their base areas. But compared to the situation today, GVN control will steadily improve. And the situation today is better than it was after Tet, after which there was rapid progress.

Mr. Negroponte: Won't they have a freer ride logistically if they're now established in Ashau, and across the DMZ? Or isn't logistics the key constraint?

Mr. Polgar: If we stop mining and bombing, and the Soviets go all out . . .

Dr. Kissinger: But this won't happen unless there is a settlement. That is their dilemma. With a settlement, they'll pay a price in the morale of their troops, but with the mining lifted. The question then is how quickly can they be resupplied.

Mr. Polgar: [To Negroponte] If the Soviets did that, for the next great offensive, then they would be in a better position.

Dr. Kissinger: No, the resupply would be quicker, but they would not necessarily be in a better position.

Mr. Polgar: The Polish Ambassador recommends to his government that no more supplies should be unloaded in China because there is no guarantee it is getting through.

Dr. Kissinger: Vogt swears the pipeline isn't operating.

Mr. Polgar: The trucks are.

Dr. Kissinger: They can't transport POL by truck. If there is no pipeline, there is no way they can meet all their essential requirements, even with 1,000 tons by truck. It is a real constraint. With a pipeline, and 1,000 tons by truck—assuming it is possible—maybe they can get their 2,700 tons.

Mr. Polgar: When we capture trucks, it's usually because they ran out of gas. In the South, there is no more mechanized transport (in MR–III, IV). In the North, yes, but in the South, they're back to bicycle and sampan. Either there is no POL or no trucks. In Cambodia, the eagerness with which they requisitioned all the Lambrettas and Hondas shows that transport was a problem.

Mr. Lord: Are there differences within the Hanoi politburo? Do we have any analysis?

Mr. Polgar: No one has the raw intelligence. From the ICC Poles, they claim neither they nor the Russians have any insights.

Dr. Kissinger: I believe that's probably true.

Mr. Polgar: Even the Russian diplomats speak of assignment to Hanoi as penal servitude.

Dr. Kissinger: I really appreciate this. Thank you.

243. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Saigon, August 17, 1972, 4:35–6:40 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

President Nguyen Van Thieu
Mr. Huynh Phu Duc, Special Assistant to the President for Foreign Affairs
Mr. Hoang Duc Nha, Presidential Press Assistant

Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Ellsworth Bunker, United States Ambassador to the Republic of South Vietnam
Winston Lord, National Security Council Staff

[Omitted here are polite conversation and small talk about American journalism and politics.]

Dr. Kissinger: Mr. President, I thought we would do two things, if you agree. We could discuss the negotiations, and we could discuss the entire situation, the military and political situation, if this is agreeable with you. I will do this, of course, in any order you prefer, but I thought it would perhaps be best to start with negotiations and then review everything else. We can do it any way you want.

President Thieu: As you like.

Dr. Kissinger: The first thing I want to say before we do anything else is the following. When you read the American press and hear the opposition candidates, you would think that you are the issue in this campaign, and that the only problem is to see how we can manage this. This is not our view. We have worked together four years. We have no intention, after all the sacrifices that have been made, to end our Administration with dishonor. I am not here in order to, as the press speculates, see whether I can get you to do something. (President Thieu smiles.) I am not here to repeat the performance of 1968. I don't believe you are the obstacle to a settlement, nor does the President. I am here to discuss where we stand. I will give you our best judgment; you give your best judgment and let us know if you disagree—you may not.

This is our attitude. We will do nothing behind your back. We will do nothing to betray you. The worst thing would be if either side expected the other to do something and took precautionary steps in order to prevent something it believes was going to happen which was not going to happen.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [3 of 5]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the Presidential Palace. All brackets, except those that indicate the omission of material, are in the original.

Concerning negotiations, for example, I see no immediate prospect for a ceasefire. I don't believe the other side will agree to a ceasefire before the election. Now I have made a record [in the private talks] that we are prepared to make a ceasefire. Now I will move off that since I am not sure that we have an interest in it. We believe it would be better for us not to have one. We have offered a ceasefire, as you know, in the May 8 proposal,[2] and we have repeated this offer in the plenary and private sessions. They always say that there must be an overall settlement first before a ceasefire. I am prepared to make that concession.

I told this to our generals too. Let us do what is right. Let us not move because we are afraid the other side will do something. Unless the other side comes to us with the offer of a ceasefire when we resume private talks—which I don't see happening—I am prepared at the next meeting to accept their offer in their proposal that a ceasefire should come at the end of the process and not at the beginning.

This is subject to your approval, Mr. President. We sometimes have the impression that you and the generals think a ceasefire is imminent. Le Duc Tho absolutely refuses to discuss a ceasefire until there is an overall settlement. You saw the paper that he gave me—I asked Ambassador Bunker to give it to you. (President Thieu nods affirmatively.) I mention this only as an example of where we stand.

Let's get first through these two months, and then the period afterwards, with no more suspicion than is absolutely necessary and hopefully none at all. I cannot control what people say. I understand that this week *Time* Magazine speculates on what we are planning to do. (To Ambassador Bunker) Have you seen it?

Ambassador Bunker: No, not yet.

Mr. Nha: It talks about a two-stage solution, with two governments, a Saigon administration and the PRG, etc.

Dr. Kissinger/Ambassador Bunker: Nonsense.

Dr. Kissinger: In America the only people who know about the negotiations are the President, myself, Ambassador Bunker, and Ambassador Porter. We do not tell anyone in the State Department or anyone in the Defense Department. The only person who sees the entire record beside myself is Ambassador Bunker. There is a lot of speculation, none of which is authorized. I do not talk to the press about negotiations. You have to get used to a lot of speculation about the negotiations. You must keep in mind that whatever we don't tell you, you should not pay attention to. This is very important. It is not against our interest to have a lot of speculation, but only what we tell you should you be-

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[2] See Document 136.

lieve. We are not going to be dishonorable and stupid enough in the last two months of this Presidency to undo everything we have accomplished by having a wedge driven between us.

This is our basic philosophy. We will still have disagreements, but we will be absolutely honest with you.

First, let me tell you my assessment of the negotiating situation and what I believe we should do. Of course, you will give me your views.

First, we have a number of problems. We have an election—that is obvious. You know as well as I do the consequences of a victory by the opposition. Our opponents offer the North Vietnamese more than they even ask for, which is quite something. Therefore, it is essential for us to be always in the position that we can prove that we have made a serious and honest effort and that the only thing we refuse to do is to impose on the people of South Vietnam a government that they have not chosen. We always have to prove that it is not the person of Thieu that is the obstacle to a settlement but rather the demands of the other side to install a communist government. Our whole strategy is to put ourselves in a position where if the talks are published, we can prove that we have done all we can, and they have insisted that we install a communist government. And that we will never do. I can tell you that we will never do that.

Where are we in the negotiations? The Ambassador gave you a brief account of the last meeting.[3]

Ambassador Bunker: Very brief.

Dr. Kissinger: Let me fill you in. You should keep in mind that my effort is always to prove that we are prepared for a reasonable settlement, but that they make unreasonable demands. At the last meeting I told them that we would not discuss the political issue at all, their Point 4, until I could talk to you. I was going to Saigon, so I refused to discuss the political issue. They were not totally happy with this.

I then reviewed all their other points with them, the other nine of their 10 points, from the point of view of seeing how compatible they were with the January 25 proposal,[4] the one we made jointly. In the process they made a number of propositions that, if the talks break up, will be quite helpful.

To be quite frank, Mr. President, I used to overestimate . . . one cannot overestimate Vietnamese intelligence, but I overestimated Le Duc Tho's and Xuan Thuy's intelligence. I found out that if I ask them

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[3] See Document 237.

[4] See Document 5.

a question, they think I am agreeing with them, and they state their views in extreme detail.

For example Point 7, concerning reparations, we said in the President's speech that we are willing to contribute to a program for Indochina after the war as a voluntary decision. Now they say that this must be written into the peace terms between them and us. They say that as a concession we do not have to use the word "indemnity." That is a demand that even McGovern can't meet because our public opinion would not tolerate it.

Secondly, I went through the four forums they proposed and asked them, in order to understand their position, what forum did what. For example, I said I believe that the disposition of your [NVN] forces should be discussed in the GVN–PRG–NVN forum, the three-party forum. They said no, they wanted to discuss it in the forum between you and the PRG. (President Thieu smiles.) I asked him why, and they said because the North Vietnamese forces in the south are under the command of the National Liberation Forces and should be counted as part of the South Vietnamese Communist Forces.

Then I said, what happens when the Government of National Concord is formed? Their proposal was that we should stop aid to your forces and then the ARVN would be amalgamated with their army and become part of one big army.

I won't give you all the details of these preposterous proposals. No one in America will accept them, so this will be helpful if we go public.

There are two things in the negotiations. If we can get a reasonable settlement we will, of course, accept it as you would. If we do not get a reasonable settlement, then we will try to prove why there is not a settlement. In this effort we are making progress.

I believe the North Vietnamese have made a serious tactical mistake in these negotiations. I am speaking to you as I do to Ambassador Bunker—I say nothing to him that I do not say to you. They have the following problem. They really want to talk to us because their military situation is bad and getting worse. But they also want a total victory. Their big hope is that we will do for them what they cannot do for themselves. They would like to wait for McGovern, but McGovern's chances are very poor, so they want to use the election campaign, like 1968, to get us to make concessions before the election so that whoever wins, they can bank concessions. Their dilemma is that in order to get concessions they have to talk to us and, if there is any progress at all, it makes our election more certain, whether they like it or not. So they would help us to get reelected, though it is not essential.

The only way they can avoid this dilemma is to make a public proposal early and then use domestic pressures against us like they did

with the 7-Point Plan,[5] and by the time we explained what was wrong with their plan [we would be in a bad situation] because intellectuals and others are all against what we are doing, though not the public necessarily.

I told them that if they went public, we would break off the talks. They complain that I am always threatening them. There are two things I have said. If anything is published about the substance, I will break off the talks. And if they don't let me say that we are meeting, I will also break off the talks.

So here we are on August 17. I told them last time that I had to see you and that therefore I would not discuss political issues. At the end of the meeting—which was totally fruitless—I told them that I would meet again on September 8. I was apologizing about the meeting being so late, when Le Duc Tho said that he was going back to Hanoi to get new instructions. This is the first time that they have changed their position without waiting for months. He couldn't meet on the 8th, so our next meeting is on the 15th.

I believe that in our next meeting on September 15 we should make a proposal to them which answers their 10 points. We should make a reasonable proposal which I will discuss with you. Then they have the following problem. They can't turn down our proposal—they have to study it. There will be at least one other meeting, and if we are skillful, two other meetings. By that time it will be mid-October, or the beginning of October.

I am giving you what our strategy is—I am relying on your security.

After the meeting breaks up, there will be four weeks left in the campaign. We would have made a proposal, and they would have made outrageous demands. And we will achieve what we did in January. After the January 25 speech there was complete silence for three months. This was because of the astonishment over the secret talks and because we had made very generous offers. It was three months before the opposition could regroup and start attacking again.

If they accept our proposal they put themselves in a very difficult position for this reason . . . let me tell you the positive elements of their proposal.

First, they no longer insist that you resign before real negotiations start. Secondly, they agree to two forums in which your government would participate without the composition of the government changing, although they still ask for a change in policy. That is, their second forum of the GVN and the PRG, and their third forum of the PRG, NVN and GVN.

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[5] See footnote 4, Document 26.

Those are two big steps. Then there are some other concessions, which are not really concessions, but at least changes in their position. In the past they always insisted on a fixed deadline for withdrawal regardless of what happens. Now they make the deadline, as we have always proposed, conditional on a settlement. They say this has to be one month, but at any rate there first has to be a settlement. This doesn't make these acceptable, I am just listing them.

They have changed the nature of the composition of the Government of National Concord. It used to be 2 to 1 for them, and is now 50–50. That doesn't make it acceptable—I am just listing what they are saying.

Of those concessions the most important is the opening of the forum in which your government would participate in the political discussions. That is most important. If that forum opens, you are established in the forum. You first would have a veto over the details of what is done. Secondly, if the process is sufficiently prolonged, and if it breaks down, they cannot go back from their implicit recognition [of you]. And above all, you would control the pace of events so that nothing is possible without the participation of your government. Therefore, we would consider the opening of the second forum to be of considerable consequence, if it is done without paying the price of wrecking your government.

This is our analysis of their proposal. That is the direction in which we want to shape our answer.

Finally, to complete my analysis of what the strategy should be. On October 1, when they finally answer—and it may be October 15 by the time both sides explain their proposal—if they accept our proposal on October 1, that only opens the second and third forums which means that they can't get a settlement before our election. It is physically impossible in four weeks to settle issues like ceasefire, disposition of forces, etc.

They told me that the third forum should discuss the status of the DMZ, the relations between North and South Vietnam after a settlement, and the pace of reunification. I have confidence in you that you can delay those negotiations four weeks. After that we would no longer be under time pressure. That is the third forum.

In the second forum they want to discuss the implementation of the political solution, whatever it is, and the status of the armed forces of Vietnam on South Vietnamese soil. That is a complex situation.

Whatever happens, unless we collapse, either you or we—and that we are not going to do—they have missed their timing. They cannot get a final settlement before elections. The best they can do is to get an agreement in principle under the title of the 10 points.

When I told Le Duc Tho that I was going to Saigon, I told them that we would not go back to the talks and accept their point 4 and the

Government of National Concord. They do not expect me to accept it when I come back. This is not why I am here—I want to make that absolutely clear. I am here to discuss a proposal we have drafted, and I will give you our explanation point by point.

Above all in our proposal we accept the positive elements of theirs so as to make some move in the direction of what they suggest, but also in the framework that the final outcome results from the South Vietnamese political process and not prior determination between them and us or anybody else. So if they reject our proposal they are in the position of saying that it must guarantee their political predominance. That we can live with, especially for five weeks.

After the election, if a settlement is not achieved, we will go back to our May 8 proposal and force a solution on these grounds. Then we will step up our air campaign and force a resolution that way.

This is our strategy. This is the framework in which we want to operate. Do you have any questions about this or observations? Then I will present what we have in mind.

President Thieu: I would like to go point by point through their points.

Dr. Kissinger: Their points?

President Thieu: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: I can give you what we propose, that is a counterproposal to their points. We can either go through their points or we can go into what we would say as a counterproposal.

President Thieu: All right then, let us go through the counterproposal.

Dr. Kissinger: Let me make clear what we want to do in our counterproposal. We want to take some of the framework of our January 25 proposal and retain its essential features. Secondly, we want to show that we have been reasonable—for 9 of their points we have a similar point as an answer. Thirdly, we want to maintain our essential position . . . I don't want to interrupt you if you would rather go through their plan first.

President Thieu: No, let us discuss the counterproposal. (Dr. Kissinger hands over to President Thieu the proposed American plan attached at Tab A.[6] Dr. Kissinger then goes through the plan point by point.)

Dr. Kissinger: Point 1 in effect takes, in effect, their statement that the United States "respects the independence, sovereignty and

[6] Attached but not printed is "US Plan Given Thieu 17 August 1972."

territorial integrity of Vietnam, as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam." We have deleted the word "unity." We have no objection if you want to insert it.

President Thieu: I suggest that we go through all the points first.

Dr. Kissinger: I am just telling you what we have done. We have deleted "unity" and all the phrases about how we must end our involvement, etc.

Number 2, in effect, accepts their ideas of a total withdrawal because it is exactly the same as ours. They want one month. Our last proposal said four months. I suggest, in order to show flexibility, that we change this to three months. We have left it blank. Since the date we made our proposal, four months have passed and the number of troops have diminished. We think it is unreasonable to stick to four months, so I think we should say three months.

The DRV proposal also wants us to withdraw civilian advisers. In our proposal we excluded civilian advisers. We will make no such agreement.

In the DRV proposal there is supposed to be an end to U.S. aid to Saigon at the time of the ceasefire. In our proposal we do not agree to this. We are willing, if in effect they stop receiving aid, to reduce our aid. This is a phrase taken from our January 25 proposal.

Point 3 is the provision on prisoners with no substantive change.

I will skip point 4, the political question, and will come right back to it. It is the most complex and will take the most time. So let us go to point 5.

Point 5. We have picked up their point that the disposition of Vietnamese forces should be discussed by the Vietnamese, but we have added the point in our procedural proposal that this should be put under the forum for the DRV, PRG and your government to discuss. And in our point 7, we have stated the principle from our January 25 proposal, that all armed forces of the countries of Indochina must remain within their national frontiers. You will see it under point 7.

Point 6 concerns reunification and relations between North and South Vietnam. We have picked up much of their language. We have avoided using the phrase "two zones" and have always used "North and South Vietnam." We are prepared to put in "two zones" if you prefer. They have in their proposal that North and South Vietnam cannot accept protection from a foreign power. We have said only that you should not join an alliance. We have not said that you cannot accept protection from a foreign power.

Point 7 is essentially taken from the January 25 proposal. It is about the Geneva Agreements and is virtually identical to what we had in the January 25 plan.

Point 8 of the North Vietnamese plan is taken from their point 4. They say that South Vietnam should pursue a policy of peace, independence, and neutrality. We have expanded this to all of Indochina.

President Thieu: It is from their point 4?

Dr. Kissinger: It is part of their point 4.

Point 9, ceasefire. They say that ceasefire should come into being after all the agreements are signed. We have said "at a time mutually agreed upon", because there is the following problem. If we followed their procedure, there would first be a preliminary agreement in the private talks and then, if there is a preliminary agreement, private talks in the second and third forums would come into being. Our original idea was that a ceasefire would come after an agreement in principle. It depends on your preference—we are prepared to agree with them that it would be only after all forums are agreed. That is, after there is an agreement in principle, the forums would open, but there would be no ceasefire until all are agreed.

I think there is an advantage to this because in a ceasefire we would stop our bombing and mining and if the talks were protracted they would grow stronger. This way we can continue our actions. If the talks are protracted, we will go back to the May 8 proposal.

So we are prepared to say that a ceasefire should come after all agreements are reached. This is partly up to you—we have no strong feelings.

You will have noticed that we have said there should be no infiltration into any of the countries of Indochina [as part of a ceasefire].

Point 10 concerns international ceasefire and guarantees.

We have made point 11 a procedural point. They have a separate document for procedures. We have made it point 11 of this proposal, but we can also make it a separate document.

Here is the difference between our document and their document. We accept in principle the four forums with this difference. We are not saying that in the second forum, the one between you and the PRG, what they are saying, that your government must change its policy and replace its Delegation in Paris. We don't accept that. We insist that they talk to your government unconditionally and with whatever delegation you send there.

They want you in the first forum to discuss both the "principles and main contents" of a political solution. We say that we will discuss "the principles and general content," and will not go beyond general principles; we will leave the details to the second forum.

We have proposed that the third forum discuss Vietnamese forces. I don't think that issue is of overwhelming consequence. We have said that an Indochina ceasefire should be discussed at Avenue Kleber.

The reason I took the liberty of asking for another meeting tomorrow is that obviously you will want to study this proposal and not give a final reaction today.

Now let us go through the political proposal, which is the heart of the problem. Here is what we thought of, but of course, all of this is subject to discussion.

We believe the basic principle has to be that the political structure of Vietnam has to evolve from a process of elections, and any changes in the government have to result from elections.

Secondly, we will not be a party to a process which replaces the existing government by anything other than elections and says ahead of time what the composition of the government is to be by an arbitrary formula. So we will not accept that a Government of National Concord be set up as a result of this.

On the other hand, we have this tactical and substantive problem. I have spoken to you in total honesty. The substantive problem is that we can't be in the position that we are just protecting your person. That is not in your interest or ours. We must be defending the position that a political solution must result from a political process.

Secondly, it is in our interest to pick up as many ideas as we can of their proposal so that we can say we are moving toward them, but within the framework of January 25 which is that there has to be an election. Let me explain therefore what our objective is.

First, we say the South Vietnamese people will decide their system through free democratic elections, with standard phraseology. The electoral process will guarantee rights, etc. irrespective of "political tendencies." We're picking up every sentence of their document that we reasonably can.

Then there is a difference. In this paper we say that the election will be held within five months—we slightly prefer four months—five months after an overall agreement. We said six months previously.

Then we spell out the supervision of the Presidential election, which is the same as the Commission in the other plan, but we pick up the phrase "Committee of National Reconciliation" and give it to the Commission.

For the composition of the Commission we use their idea for the government—one-third will be nominated by you, one-third by them, and one-third by both sides. Now we task this committee with supervising the election.

Incidentally, let me give you my own judgment—there is no chance of their accepting this proposal whatsoever. If they accept it, however, it will go to the second forum. This is my personal judgment—I may be wrong—but I don't think they will accept it.

Then next, concerning the resignation. We had said that one month before the election the President and Vice President would resign. We don't specify here. This is not new from the January 25 plan.

The next provision says that when the new President assumes office, he "will form a new government in which all political forces will be represented in proportion to the number of popular votes they received in the Presidential election." In other words they have said they are entitled to 50 percent; we have said that it would be in proportion to whatever number of votes they receive. It doesn't say which seats in the cabinet would be allotted.

(d) has to do with participating freely in the political process. That is in the other plan.

(e) is an insignificant clause about political discrimination. I don't think it will be difficult for you, but, of course, you will study it.

Finally, in (f) we say that the Committee of National Reconciliation would stay in being after the election in order to revise the Constitution.

Let me explain the theory behind this proposal. From our point of view, the essential elements in the proposal are: One, we are not prescribing the national government of South Vietnam. Two, we are not saying you have to resign as a consequence (sic) of the agreement. Three, we are insisting that the governmental structure evolve as the result of an election. Four, your government first, will be in office after the agreement and the key personnel will be in office until the election, and you would resign at a period mutually agreed upon in the second forum. We would not say one month or two months. We leave a blank phrase and leave this question for the second forum. Five, there is a provision for the revision of the constitution. On the other hand, you continue to have 50 percent of the membership of the Committee of National Reconciliation; and therefore no revision of the constitution is possible that you cannot veto because the membership is one-third, one-third, and the final one-third is in practice fifty-fifty. Sixth, and finally, we have proposed that they get the number of cabinet seats that the vote entitles them.

(To Ambassador Bunker): What is our estimate?

Ambassador Bunker: Ten percent.

Dr. Kissinger: The 10 or 15 percent that they would get. How big is the cabinet now?

President Thieu: Twenty members.

Dr. Kissinger: If there were fifteen you could give them one and a half seats. Twenty would mean two seats, not specified. I don't know how your cabinet operates, but in our cabinet membership does not necessarily mean influence on decisions.

President Thieu: From what point of view? What do you mean?

Dr. Kissinger: I don't assume that because a person is in the cabinet he is a major figure in political life. I am speaking for ourselves, not your system. (Laughter)

(President Thieu turns to Mr. Duc, and the Vietnamese laugh.)

Dr. Kissinger: In our country political opponents are taken into the cabinet not to be given influence but to be deprived of it. I don't wish to talk about Vietnamese politics.

President Thieu: That depends on the leadership itself, the chief of the government.

Dr. Kissinger: This proposal we think has some great advantages. If they reject it, they can't say that we want to deprive them of participation, that they can't participate in the government. If they asked for 50 percent, we would be saying that if they received 50 percent or 5 percent of the votes, that would be their number of seats. If they say that it is a constitution imposed by the United States, we could say that the Committee of National Reconciliation can review the constitution if it wants to. If they say that there must be a change in government, we would say, as with the January 25 plan, that there can be a change but by election.

If they do accept the plan—I don't believe they will, but I don't want to mislead you; maybe they are in such bad straits that they will accept it, but they have said nothing in Paris which leads me to believe that they will accept this; I would say that the strong overwhelming probability is that they will reject it—assuming that they accept this, then every provision must be discussed in the second forum. For example, how do you get the third third of the electoral commission, how is the electoral law formulated, what is the function of the electoral commission, etc.?

If they reject this—which is more probable and I am almost certain they will—then it depends on how we handle the rejection. My strategy is to gain as much time as possible. Then we will publish our plan, jointly of course. We will make clear that at every stage everything was done jointly with you. My judgment is that this will silence even *The New York Times,* not long, but long enough. Then in November there will be a new situation, and we will step up our activity. This is our strategy.

You are worried about a ceasefire. If you agree, I will say that as a concession we will agree to a ceasefire at the end, so as not to be forced into it now.

There is one proviso—up to now they have totally rejected our May 8 offer. They say that a ceasefire must be at the end of the process.

President Thieu: They insist on this?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. It is stupid, but that is their position on a ceasefire. If Le Duc Tho comes back and accepts a ceasefire then we have a

problem, but it will take at least four weeks to negotiate a ceasefire. On the other hand, he is likely to stick to their proposal at the last meeting. He said that a ceasefire must be at the end, so I will say that he has convinced me and that I am making a concession.

Therefore, either there will be a settlement which would have to be discussed in the various forums, which you could delay, and there would be no ceasefire. Or we will not get a settlement and our public position would be impeccable. We can then reassess the situation in November. Then in November there would be a totally new situation. Our opponents have made Vietnam the only issue in the campaign. If they are defeated we will claim a mandate, and indeed we will have a mandate. We will not have to go through another year of good will with our opponents. If we win the election, we will settle the war one way or another. After the election, our negotiating position will be very strong, and there will be a new four-year term. There will be one or two years of time, and the President would not need to get reelected.

I am being brutally honest. The only thing I ask you is not to say that you are satisfied with our discussions.

President Thieu: Why does Hanoi not like a ceasefire before all is settled? What advantages do they see?

Dr. Kissinger: Mr. President, I have come to this conclusion after this round of the negotiations. I used to think they were clever—I have the highest estimate of Vietnamese intelligence. They are extremely doctrinaire. Le Duc Tho said to me that they had not fought 25 years just to see the war end; they have fought 25 years for a political objective. If they don't get their political objective, they can't end the war.

(To Ambassador Bunker): You sent me an FBIS article on this.[7]

Ambassador Bunker: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: We will send it to the President [Thieu] tonight. Let me send you what I sent to the Ambassador concerning what Le Duc Tho said. At our last meeting he went through their proposal. He said they had not accepted the January 25 proposal because you would still be in power—this is not unreasonable from their point of view. Then he said that we wanted a ceasefire while the principles were being worked out; you remember that Ambassador Bunker proposed to you that we set a three-month deadline for the political negotiations and you agreed. They did not like this. They only want everything to be settled before a ceasefire. They are always afraid to release our prisoners. They have concluded that they cannot defeat you. Their only

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[7] Attached to backchannel message 132 from Saigon, August 16; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, To Amb. Bunker—Saigon 1972.

hope is that we overthrow you. For you it is essential that this Administration survive, because we will never overthrow you directly or indirectly. The only way they can get us to do this is to keep the war going—they would rather pay the military price here. That's why they do not give the prisoners or agree to a ceasefire.

They are in a real dilemma. If there is no ceasefire, their military situation deteriorates, and if they don't give back the prisoners, we keep bombing them. So long as they talk to me, this confirms negotiations. I know you think that a ceasefire might come soon. I have that impression. As of our last meeting on Monday, they have totally rejected ceasefire. I have proposed every conceivable variation on May 8. There is no need to offer it any more; we have made a record. At the next meeting I would like to accept their proposal that there be no ceasefire until all is done.

The only thing is that if they come back—I don't want to mislead you—and say that there should be a ceasefire, we must accept it. If they publicly offer a ceasefire, we must accept it. Public opinion would not let us do otherwise. Then we would discuss the details at Avenue Kleber which is a complicated process. I understand you have been doing some planning on a ceasefire.

President Thieu: If they ask for ceasefire, there is no need to apply it right away. There must be discussion.

Dr. Kissinger: Mr. President, there is no chance of their doing this on the 15th. I don't think they are so clever. I don't believe that they would make a ceasefire proposal alone—they would hook it with something else. The best would be after we accept the principles, but Kleber would discuss the technical implementation of a ceasefire—how it would take place, where, etc. From the day of acceptance until implementation would be at least four weeks.

Ambassador Bunker: At least.

Dr. Kissinger: Second, they will not accept a ceasefire; at best it will be in relation to something. They might say that not all four forums must finish their work, but maybe only the first must do so. The first forum is mine, and we haven't even agreed on one point yet out of ten. I see no way even if they change their position on ceasefire that it would take less than four weeks. I don't believe they will accept it.

President Thieu: We have reason to believe that they understand well that if they propose ceasefire we will not apply it without conditions. They understand that if we accept the proposal, we will say the ceasefire is all right, but let us discuss the details. And during the time we discuss the modalities, we will not let them win anything; we should not pull away the blockade. There will be a ceasefire, but they cannot be resupplied by Russia or China. We may cease the bombing, but we will not cease the blockade.

Dr. Kissinger: We will not stop the mining until all prisoners are released.

President Thieu: They understand that at the same time you cease the bombing and also pull away the blockade. If they accept a ceasefire, they think that we gain many advantages. First, public opinion will say that President Nixon can end the war. They do not like to give President Nixon that gift. Secondly—and this is very important—is the morale of their troops in South Vietnam. If they say they accept a ceasefire, the problem is not on our side but on their side. Their troops would not like to fight any more. When they stop fighting, to start fighting again is very difficult.

Their strategy is that they would like to show public opinion that a war is going on in North Vietnam and that President Nixon has not ended the war. They have some hope that public opinion would change at the last minute, and that since the President could not end the war, they wish to elect Mr. McGovern. On the ground, they still hope to have some big battles in September and October, some military victories to demonstrate that Vietnamization has failed.

These are the reasons they do not like ceasefire, and they would like to have a guaranteed political solution advantageous to them obtained before accepting a ceasefire. They give the impression that North Vietnam will continue to fight until they obtain something advantageous.

For our side concerning a ceasefire, we would only apply a ceasefire when the war is completely finished, everything is settled, and there is a supervised guarantee established. We have to be sure that we haven't given them any opportunity, no gap which permits them to fight again after a ceasefire. On our side we think we need maximum guarantees.

Dr. Kissinger: So do we.

President Thieu: There is good will on our side. If the ceasefire is broken, it would always be them, never us. There must be strong enough guarantees to prevent them, not us. They have to weigh many disadvantages, such as the morale of their troops, and the advantages of continuing the war. Their last resolution said that they would prolong the war until after the election—that is what they say.

Dr. Kissinger: Our election?

President Thieu: Yes, until after the election.

Dr. Kissinger: They have a real problem. They have waited too long. The President is 21 points ahead—he won't stay there; this is impossible because the Republicans are a minority party. That is an awful lot to make up for, and it won't be closed by September. If there are no serious negotiations by the end of September it will be too late for them to gain any benefit. They must make some move in the second half

of September—that is why Le Duc Tho went back to Hanoi. If they move, it would help President Nixon, even without a ceasefire.

If they say that they agree to these proposals, even if they are not announced, there will be the three forums opened, the ceasefire being discussed at Avenue Kleber, you and the PRG talking, etc. That suits our purposes. A ceasefire would be better, but it is not essential. It alone would remove 80% of the Vietnam issue from possible discussion. If they do not do this, we will go into a new Administration totally unrestrained. Before when they settled, it was just before the election and inauguration of the President in 1968, in order to commit the President before he was in office. One of the worst things we did—not I—was to urge you to sign an agreement on the shape of the table before 1969. We should have urged you not to agree. In that way you could say that Mr. Harriman did not even get the shape of the table solved. That is water over the dam. It's a minor issue.

They will try to commit us to something before the election. They make decisions so slowly that they may miss the strategic moment. I think they have missed it already. Whatever happens, assuming they accept our proposal, this starts negotiations in the second forum. They won't accept our proposal on September 15. It is inconceivable that they would accept it without changes. We will, therefore, be into October before they accept it, and then open the other forums. We don't need a ceasefire then.

Assuming they reject it, we will make it public. By the end of November we will do what I told you.

On ceasefire, we can insist on having ceasefire now, but I don't know whether that is a good idea. It is up to you.

President Thieu: We have no reason for a ceasefire now.

Dr. Kissinger: Tactically we have made a record which has said that we are willing to have a ceasefire now, publicly. At Avenue Kleber we should continue this line; don't change it.

On September 15, if you agree, we plan to say that we will accept having a ceasefire at the end of the process. Then if the plan becomes public, that will be another concession. I agree the other side is stupid. But at Avenue Kleber we should stick to the official line until September 15. Nothing will happen until Le Duc Tho comes back. They won't agree to anything at Avenue Kleber.

(President Thieu talks to Mr. Duc and Mr. Nha in Vietnamese.)

But the President wanted to tell me his views of their plan.

President Thieu: Before you came here we prepared a memorandum on our point of view. It has our view and assessment of their plan.

Dr. Kissinger: Is it in English?

President Thieu: I would like to give it to you. (He hands over the document at Tab B.[8] Dr. Kissinger and Ambassador Bunker read through it.)

Dr. Kissinger: You will notice that with respect to your point 5, in our plan the proposal [for a ceasefire] is for all of Indochina.

(Dr. Kissinger laughs.) Section A is unacceptable. Section B is unacceptable in principle. Is that a higher form of unacceptability? (President Thieu discusses his notes with Mr. Duc in Vietnamese. Dr. Kissinger leaves the room for a couple of minutes and then returns. Mr. Duc asks Mr. Lord for the Vietnamese text of the North Vietnamese proposals. Mr. Lord said that he did not know whether the American party had the Vietnamese text with them, but that he would check.)

Dr. Kissinger: I believe we have answered most of your comments in our proposal.

On point 1, we have eliminated all the language about what the U.S. must do. In point 2, we have rejected the proposal that technical advisers be withdrawn. We define U.S. bases as those operated by the U.S., not the bases that we give to you. Concerning point 3, since we don't accept withdrawal of technical personnel we can't accept that. On point 4, we have given you our reformulation.

On point 5, we tell you what they said last time. They want to discuss it (Vietnamese armed forces) in forum 2. We don't agree. I will be frank—if negotiations stalemate over this kind of issue, we are in a good domestic position. If they stalemate over who is elected, that the American people don't understand. But if the North Vietnamese say that North Vietnamese troops are under the PRG, all will understand that. If we shift to the second and third forums and you insist, we can stand on that for a long time. This involves principle, so it is no problem for us.

Regarding point 6, our reformulation takes care of most of your points on the proposal. (To Mr. Lord): We have not accepted the language on the demarcation line, etc.

Mr. Lord: No.

Dr. Kissinger: This point only has what was in the January 25 plan. We have not said that you will promptly start negotiations. We have said "after a suitable interval."

With regard to point 7, we don't accept it. We don't mind their maintaining this demand [reparations]; it is a good demand to waste

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[8] Attached but not printed is the memorandum entitled "The Republic of Vietnam's Assessment on the Communist August 1, 1972, 10 Point Peace Proposal and Views on the Communist August 1, 1972, Proposal on the Conduct of Negotiations."

time on. They are stupid. They insist that it be written in the agreement. We will never accept that. (To Ambassador Bunker): Can you imagine an American President accepting that?

Ambassador Bunker: No.

Dr. Kissinger: That not even McGovern can do. Not even McGovern could accept point 7.

With regard to point 8, there is no problem.

With regard to point 9, we apply it to all of Indochina. With regard to point 10 . . . (Dr. Kissinger then reads their comments on procedure but makes no comment).

I think what we should do, Mr. President, if you agree, is that you should study our proposal. I think you will find that what we plan to put forward meets your objectives here, with the possible exception of point 4.

Even on point 4 we are trying to take account [of your concerns]. The government is not predetermined by an arbitrary forum.

We are insisting that the government of South Vietnam not be destroyed as a way of ending the war. In fact it is legally maintained by continuing the government after a settlement and through the election within the existing framework.

We accept the composition which they want for the Government of National Concord in the Committee for the Elections. This still gives you a veto because you still control 50% of the Committee. They want predetermined power, not a fair process. And we accept revision of the constitution, again by a body that you control 50% of.

We want to go to the absolute limit of what is and looks reasonable, but defend the principle that the U.S. will not end the war in which it lost 45,000 men by joining our enemy against our friend, or destroying a government allied with us for 400 prisoners of war, or even to win an election. We would rather not win the election on that basis. The history books will last longer than the election.

We have a common problem. The election is almost as important for you as for us. We have already achieved the fact that they have not made their proposal public. If it were published, McGovern and *The New York Times* would insist it was a tremendous concession and that you were the obstacle.

Now we will survive until September 15. After we have agreed on a common position, no matter what they say publicly, I can explain it to the press. As a minimum, no one will understand what they are trying to say. I would say that this is a joint proposal that demonstrates that you have offered to resign, that you have offered to let communists in the Cabinet proportionate to the vote they achieve in the elections, that you accept their composition of the Committee of National

Reconciliation, that you have offered constitutional revision. I think even McGovern would have to keep quiet for three to four weeks.

President Thieu: What should we do from now until September 15?

Dr. Kissinger: Le Duc Tho is in Paris (sic). Don't appear too satisfied with our meeting. I don't mind if you seem slightly dissatisfied. Hanoi will think that I am moving in the direction of their proposal. We want to keep them from going public very quickly.

Until the 15th of September nothing will happen. I will have Ambassador Bunker and probably Ambassador Porter come to Hawaii. The press will think something tremendous is going on. Le Duc Tho is coming back, I think, on the 10th. Anyway he offered to meet me on the 11th. I wanted to gain time so I said the 15th. I will give a proposal. He undoubtedly will give a proposal. We will study them for two weeks. I have already told them that we will not accept their proposal. When we meet tomorrow, I will tell you what I said.

Either on October 5 or 10, maybe they will accept. If they accept the forums will open, and the problems can't be settled in time. If the forums open, that indicates enough progress as far as we are concerned.

The only thing I would suggest, if you agree, is that on point 9 (ceasefire) we either put that point after the signature of an overall agreement, or I tell them privately that we understand the point to mean that it should come after an overall agreement, as a concession.

Mr. Duc: I would like to ask for a few clarifications. First, up to now you insisted that the ceasefire be throughout Indochina. Is there any change?

Dr. Kissinger: No, it is still throughout Indochina.

Mr. Duc: Concerning elections. Would you see the election only of the President?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, we are saying 5 months (after an agreement). It would look better to say four months, but we can agree on 5, and then give a month away in the process of negotiations. It won't hinge on that. That is a presentational issue.

President Thieu: We meet tomorrow at 10:00. I would also like to review the general situation with you tomorrow or today, whenever you want.

Dr. Kissinger: Today, if you like.

President Thieu: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Tomorrow we will talk about this [the proposal]?

President Thieu: We will study it.

Mr. Duc: Have they defined neutrality for South Vietnam? We do not accept it for South Vietnam alone. It should be for all of Indochina.

Dr. Kissinger: They cite the provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements.

Mr. Duc: The military provisions?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, let me explain. There is a certain advantage to vagueness in the formulations. Then the details are discussed in the other forums. That is the most positive aspect of their document. They would like it that they and we settle all and impose it on you. That is what they want—let's be honest. We want to settle something, then have them talk to you, because once they are at a forum with you the situation changes, particularly if you operate the forums for some time. Therefore our objective is to get these forums open. That will be our basic approach.

They have not defined "neutrality." That will have to be discussed in the forum. Whenever I ask a question, they are totally, utterly unreasonable. Their explanation of their terms is outrageous. I am not saying that they are peace-loving people who see the light. (Laughter.)

We have a tactical problem. They are trying to maneuver us into a position where we destroy you. We are trying to maneuver them into a position that you will survive and do something. They make the first move to deal with you and therefore cannot destroy you. If we wanted to destroy you, we would have done it two years ago. (Laughter.) It is an absolute principle for the President and the White House—we will not end the war by betraying our friends.

Ambassador Bunker completely has our confidence—you can trust him. Don't believe whatever else you read. The more ignorant people are, the more they talk. We have no secret arrangement with the North Vietnamese. There is nothing you do not know. But we need a platform, and this is why we have our proposal. If you became the issue in the campaign, it would be bad for you and us. With this proposal we can survive until November.

That doesn't mean that we can't change our proposal.

Mr. Duc: Concerning the revision of the constitution, do you mean that over 50% must vote for a change in the constitution?

Dr. Kissinger: They must vote for a change. I think we could add a phrase concerning the revision of the constitution, "which then is submitted to referendum." I am delighted you asked the question. It is a good addition.

Mr. Duc: Is it [the Committee] competent to prepare a draft of the constitution?

Dr. Kissinger: We could take our "revision of the constitution" and say instead that the "Committee would prepare a draft of a new constitution and submit it to referendum." This is best for us. On the other hand, "revision" may give the impression of the existing constitution. We could say "draft a new constitution and submit it to a referendum." That is best for us. We are glad to say "draft a new constitution."

Mr. Duc: "After due process."

Dr. Kissinger: "After due process."

I also want to talk about our next withdrawals, by the first of the month.

President Thieu: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: I have talked to General Vogt and General Weyand this morning.[9] We are going to make our next announcement within two weeks,[10] and it will last until December 1 or 15, after the elections. After that, we do not intend to withdraw anything significant. General Weyand says that he needs 29,500 men. We must do a little less, from 25,000 to 29,000. He says he can live with that. It will not be less; it will be 10 to 12 thousand over this period.

President Thieu: The ceiling on September 1 will be 39,000. Now the ceiling on December 1 will be 27,000.

Dr. Kissinger: 27. It may be 27 or 28. It is 12,000 more troops. Does that bother you?

President Thieu: (indicating that it does not bother him). We will discuss the details.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes, the composition of the remaining forces.

Dr. Kissinger: You will discuss it with Generals Vogt and Weyand. I am told that this will not affect the combat operations going on. (To Ambassador Bunker): Is that right?

Ambassador Bunker: Right.

Dr. Kissinger: We will not answer the question whether this will be our residual force. For your information, this will be about where we stay.

President Thieu: Your naval force?

Dr. Kissinger: There will be no reduction. There could be reductions in other countries, but we want them for the campaign after November 7. We don't want to bring them back. We can reduce them; they are not needed; but we want to keep the pressure on North Vietnam, so we have no intention of reducing those.

President Thieu: About the prisoners of war, you have nothing?

Dr. Kissinger: I think they are keeping the prisoners as blackmail. We will raise this issue brutally after November if they don't return them. They won't release them. They have made no proposal.

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[9] See footnote 2, Document 247.

[10] The announcement was made on August 29; see footnote 4, Document 253.

If they accept our May 8 proposal for ceasefire and prisoners, then we must withdraw. That is our official position, and we can't change that. But they won't accept it. There is no possibility.

President Thieu: If there is only one condition, only a ceasefire for North Vietnam, that is most advantageous to them. If we say throughout Indochina, they see no advantage to that.

What if they propose a ceasefire in North Vietnam for an exchange of prisoners? You would cease the bombing and pull out the blockade in North Vietnam in order to get a return of the American prisoners. So they would say the war is finished now for America and North Vietnam in South Vietnam. This would be the most unfriendly proposal.

Dr. Kissinger: I will be honest. If they propose this during the election campaign, we will be in a very difficult position.

They insist that you be overthrown. They insist that we stop military and economic aid to you. That shows your strength, because if they thought they could overthrow you they wouldn't demand that we stop military and economic aid. They show no sign, absolutely no sign, that they are prepared to separate military and political issues. Each time I see Le Duc Tho, I get a half hour lecture on the relationship between military and political issues. Three times we have started negotiations—in April 1970, the summer of 1971, and now. Each time I say we should settle the military issues first. Then I get a lecture for two hours that military and political issues should be settled together. I say, all right, and he treats this as a big concession. So I don't believe they will separate them. I cannot exclude the possibility that they will be clever. (To Mr. Lord): Can you imagine their separating these issues?

Mr. Lord: It would be a total shift in their position.

Dr. Kissinger: It would be a total shift in their position. If they did, we could delay for one session. Keep this in mind. If they never talked to me and introduced to the plenary sessions publicly their plan, we would be dead. Congress would pass resolutions and there would be an endless process. By October 1, Congress will be out of session until after the election. I have their commitment, for whatever it is worth, that they will say nothing publicly.

Therefore I really don't mind at all—seriously—if you leave the impression that there is no excessive cordiality between us. Don't attack me, however. (Laughter.) Don't overdo it. Don't say that you are totally satisfied, though I hope you will be.

President Thieu: We will talk tomorrow morning.

Dr. Kissinger: We would like to discuss the military situation. It is up to you.

President Thieu: Tomorrow I will say a few words. I will give you our view tomorrow morning.

Dr. Kissinger: Also your assessment about what you think is ahead the next two months, the next 6 months, the next year. Secondly, what you need to Vietnamize your air force. Do you have the right planes? I talked to General Vogt also.

So we will settle this tomorrow. If you have any provisions, any suggestions, on how to alter a sentence, or phrase, or the content, we could discuss this tomorrow.

Mr. Duc: I asked Mr. Lord if you had the Vietnamese text of their proposals.

Dr. Kissinger: If we do not have them here, we can send them back from Washington by courier. You would have them no later than the end of next week.

(The meeting then broke up. Dr. Kissinger jokingly commented that the GVN's written comments on the North Vietnamese proposals indicated that the GVN could not accept every detail. (Laughter.) President Thieu and his two aides said goodbye to the American party which then descended the stairs to their waiting cars.)

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244. Memorandum From William L. Stearman of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, August 18, 1972.

SUBJECT

Instructions to Ambassador Bunker on Recent Political Developments in South Vietnam

Attached at Tab A[2] is a draft State Department cable submitted for White House clearance which instructs Ambassador Bunker to make strong representations to President Thieu on the implementation of his emergency decrees (e.g. tougher new Press law, prospective political party law) and the judicial treatment of political prisoners—e.g. Truong Dinh Dzu). The cable expresses high concern that recent political developments will "create a domestic issue in the United States of

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 161, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, August 1972. Secret; Exdis. Sent for action.

[2] Attached but not printed.

dangerous dimensions" and that a "picture here of an increasingly autocratic GVN could have a seriously adverse effect on the prosecution of current U.S. policies respecting Vietnam."

We strongly recommend against clearance of this or any other cable which seeks to restrain Thieu from actions to limit the permissiveness of Vietnamese political life and thereby to better prepare the GVN for a ceasefire contingency. State's cable is, we believe, a prime example of overreacting to initial, scattered reporting and of imposing their judgment of American political reactions on the Thieu regime.[3]

In answer to State's particular concerns we note the following items:

1. State's concern over the new press law is based exclusively on the initial criticism of only two Saigon-based publishers and some local U.S. press coverage. Subsequent information from Saigon makes clear that State overreacted to the situation. Thus, Embassy Saigon on August 17 reported that the press law controversy "continues at a subdued level", and that the National Press Council has urged members to "remain tranquil." It also noted that "there have been no organized protest actions so far," In an August 11 speech in Qui Nhon, also reported by the Embassy, President Thieu denied that the law is aimed at subduing nationalist opposition and noted that "nine or ten" papers (down from over 40) should continue publication. Other sources echo Thieu's sentiment, and predict that 10 papers representing a variety of opinion will survive.

2. The attached cable expresses concern over a prospective political party law which would similarly stiffen requirements for legal recognition of political parties, presently numbering over 30. Again, subsequent information from the field contradicts State's concern. Two of Thieu's closest advisors, General Dang Van Quang and Presidential Secretary Hoang Duc Nha recently have stated that the President does not plan to move on this decree in the near future. The leaders of Vietnam's two largest parties (the Farmer Worker Party and the Progressive Nationalist Movement) have indicated either that they favor tougher legislation or that they have no choice but to accept tighter requirements.

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[3] In an August 12 memorandum to Kissinger entitled "GVN Ceasefire Preparations and Political Developments," Negroponte wrote the following: "We believe that State's concern misses the main issue: how best can the GVN prepare itself for a prospective ceasefire and a political struggle with the enemy. The Department, in our view, once again is overreacting to the situation, imposing its own concern for niceties on South Vietnam and second guessing both Thieu and the American electorate." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1330, Unfiled Material [3 of 8])

3. Answering State's concern over the "indefinite detention" of political prisoners, we note that Thieu has offered a conditional release of Vietnam's most celebrated detainee—Truong Dinh Dzu, a 1968 presidential candidate. On August 4, Embassy Saigon reported that Dzu refused to cooperate with GVN offers to release him in exchange for his agreement to remain in any province of his choosing and not to cause problems for the GVN. With respect to the more general questions of "political" arrests, Thieu obviously is not going to tolerate an irresponsible opposition which parrots the enemy's criticisms at a time when he faces one of the greatest Communist military and political threats in South Vietnam's 18-year history.

4. Lastly, our overall reaction to State's concern over a more authoritarian government in South Vietnam is: So what? Since we have long criticized the disorder of South Vietnam's politics, should we now urge Thieu to ease off on measures designed primarily to remedy the South's chronic permissiveness? We all have long held that greater authority is not only more desirable but also inevitable as Vietnam faces the enemy threat increasingly on its own. Clearly, Thieu faces an extreme situation today with a massive invasion and possibility of a ceasefire. For him to do less by way of political preparations would be irresponsible. In any event, Thieu is not a Diemist leader. He is far more supple and astute, and unlike Diem is willing to accord respect to a middle ground of *responsible* opposition.

Finally, neither we nor State are competent to make judgments on how domestic American opinion and the forthcoming elections will respond to Thieu's use of his emergency decrees. However, we personally believe that battlefield performance and negotiating progress far outweigh in-house GVN politics as a campaign issue. As long as ARVN holds and we demonstrate our negotiating good will, political developments in Saigon will probably have only a limited impact in the U.S.

Recommendation

For the above reasons, we urge that you disapprove the draft cable at Tab A.[4]

[4] Haig circled the word "disapprove" and signed that option.

245. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Saigon, August 18, 1972, 10 a.m.–1:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

President Nguyen Van Thieu
Mr. Huynh Phu Duc, Special Assistant to the President for Foreign Affairs
Mr. Hoang Duc Nha, Press Assistant

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
John D. Negroponte, NSC Staff Member

Dr. Kissinger: Now we can take decisions by a majority vote. [Mr. Nha enters room.] Oh no, it's too late. [Dr. Kissinger hands President Thieu Vietnamese text of DRV August 1 proposal.][2] The English text was their own translation; they handed us this [the Vietnamese text] and the English text. If you find any nuances or differences will you tell our Ambassador?

Mr. Duc: I will do that. [President Thieu hands Dr. Kissinger and the Ambassador a document which comments on our counter-proposal—Tab A.[3]]

Dr. Kissinger: Regarding the first point that may be a better way to do it. We could have two proposals, a 10-point substantive proposal and a procedural counter-proposal. I will first study your document for a moment, Mr. President, if I may. [Dr. Kissinger and Ambassador Bunker study document for about five minutes.]

Mr. Duc: There are some omissions on page 3. I would like to refer to your point 9. Instead of a "standstill ceasefire" we suggest "general ceasefire." At point 10 we would change the last sentence of paragraph (a) to read ". . . will be agreed upon by the *belligerent* parties *prior to the ceasefire.*"

Dr. Kissinger: That you have. [continues to study document.] Your staff works much faster than mine does.

President Thieu: We just finished this morning.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [3 of 5]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the Presidential Palace. All brackets are in the original.

[2] For the August 1 proposal, see Document 225.

[3] Attached but not printed is "The Republic of Vietnam's Assessment on the US Peace Counter Proposal and Views on the US Counter Proposal on the Conduct of Negotiations." For the U.S. proposals, see Documents 238 and 239.

Dr. Kissinger: I have a few preliminary comments and let me review our strategy because I think it is very important. I read the paper you gave me yesterday.[4] We substantially agree with you in our analysis. The other side wants us to agree with them to undermine your government and give them de facto control of South Vietnam. Secondly, they want us to do it because they cannot do it themselves and it would discredit completely anyone who ever associated with us. They also want to prove that you were our instrument and that we betrayed you. Our problem is to get through the next three months. You read in the papers every day what our opponents want to do. They are prepared to do more than even the DRV is asking of us. Secondly, we want to keep the DRV from making their proposal public and we want to advance a reasonable counter-proposal.

Thirdly, we would like to pick up as much language of their proposal as possible to show that we are forthcoming. Fourthly, we want to keep the counter-proposal vague so that as many issues as possible are dealt with in the implementing forums where you have a veto. Fifthly, we want to get you into the forums with them since nothing would do more to establish your legitimacy.

Therefore, it would be tactically unwise to approach the counter-proposal with too legalistic an attitude. There are a number of points where I do not disagree with your additions, but I believe it is preferable to raise them in subsidiary forums rather than to give the DRV those kinds of reasons to reject our counter-proposal. What I want is to force them to accept our proposal and open the other forums, or to reject it because they insist on the installation of a Communist government. I want to keep the focus on their insistence that we install a Communist government.

The President will recall that at my press briefing after our January 25 proposal[5] we succeeded in keeping the DRV on the defensive for three months on this very issue. What we want to do now is gain six weeks. Therefore we want to keep things deliberately ambiguous.

As to your first point [referring to their memo] as far as we are concerned, there is no difference in saying North and South Vietnam. We don't want them to break the talks off on the grounds that we are seeking to keep Vietnam perpetually divided. The first paragraph has no operative significance. Personally I think we should keep it vague.

On points 2 and 3 we have no problem. As for point 4 we will come back to it. On point 5 since we know what point they will make [regarding NVA presence in South Vietnam] and we know it is outrageous,

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[4] See Document 243 and footnote 8 thereto.

[5] See Document 5.

there is no point in making your suggested addition. If we put your suggestion in they will say we have no business raising the matter since we know they will refuse to withdraw their forces from South Vietnam. It is better that the talks break down on this subject with you rather than with us. If the talks break down with us over this point there might be many Americans who think the DRV position is reasonable.

Should we agree in principle and then they say to you that they have a right to keep 11 divisions in South Vietnam, that is a good issue for a deadlock. Therefore since the issue [NVA presence in SVN] has never been raised before in our talks I recommend that it not be put in here.

Regarding point 6 [adding clause *promptly start negotiations towards* reestablishment of normal relations], we can do that. As for the second part [adding clause *except for purely defensive purposes and on a temporary basis* to last sentence of third paragraph], I would not recommend it. It is to our advantage to keep things general. The big negotiations will be on the political issue and we must avoid playing their game.

Regarding point 7, I see no problem; we can substantially accept your suggestion. But I would like to keep it in the framework of what we said on January 25.

Regarding point 9, I think we can rewrite it in such a way that some of your previous points are absorbed. If we said "upon the conclusion of an overall agreement" this would take care of your point 5. A ceasefire would then become part of the overall agreement and the ceasefire would include the disposition of NVA forces to be discussed in one of the three forums. If we include this in the agreements to be reached in one of the four forums then we don't need to call special attention to it in point 5.

Mr. Duc: Would the supervisory machinery and control be worked out after the ceasefire?

Dr. Kissinger: Before. I am trying to keep the document as ambiguous as possible so as much as possible can be discussed in the other forums. Once they are open we can get past November; you will not be under significant pressure from us after November. If we move a ceasefire to the end of the process—this is a concession I am prepared to make to them. I would be prepared to say at our next meeting that the ceasefire will take place after all agreements are signed. This will include a return of foreign forces to their countries, including your point 5 [about NVA in South Vietnam]. It would be a mistake to mention the NVA specifically in point 5. It would produce an explosion in our talks inevitably leading to their breakup.

Mr. Duc: It will take time to work out a general ceasefire. The supervision will take time. So everything will be worked out regarding

the modalities of a ceasefire before an overall agreement is signed. Is that correct?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. Their position is an agreement which must be reached in all four forums and only after that will there be a ceasefire. I have always proposed a ceasefire in accordance with our January 25 proposal or an immediate ceasefire. They always say this is unjust. I think I should yield on this point and agree with them that ceasefire should follow the agreements.

Mr. Duc: The ceasefire would not begin at the time of an agreement on the statement of principles?

Dr. Kissinger: That is correct. I must be frank with you: If the DRV becomes intelligent and offers an unconditional ceasefire our strategy will be to accept, but draw out the discussion on technicalities. We cannot refuse a ceasefire separately if they offer to do so. But then we would insist that the modalities be discussed in Kleber. As I see their position now, they want to settle all the details and principles before the ceasefire. There is no indication that they will change their position. Maybe Le Duc Tho will come back and we will find that they have changed their mind. There is no sign at all that they will accept a separate ceasefire, partly for the reasons that the President gave me yesterday. But if they become clever we have a problem, although they will have a problem too. If they propose that a ceasefire come first, I will propose immediately referring the matter to Avenue Kleber. Then the fact will become known and this will be enough for our domestic consumption and take care of four weeks.

Just imagine how complex the question is. What would a ceasefire be like? What would be involved with regard to control and supervision? This cannot be settled in four to six weeks. In any event, it is my strong view that they will not agree to settling a ceasefire first.

President Thieu: No, they won't do that. One main reason is that they are afraid to be lured by us. Once they accept a ceasefire they can never start again and we will prolong the political talks forever. Thus they want to be sure they have something on the political side before they abandon their means of making war.

Dr. Kissinger: That is why we should handle the ceasefire in a more general way than in your point 5. We should take it out of point 5 and in point 9 say there will be a ceasefire at the conclusion of an overall agreement. That is their point 8. The more we pick their phrases the more it helps us in the United States.

Mr. Duc: Regarding a ceasefire in Indochina, the Cambodians are very concerned because the NVA occupies many areas in Cambodia. So perhaps the word "general" would be more ambiguous and suitable. The Cambodians might protest the word "standstill."

Dr. Kissinger: Let's try that. I think we can probably do that. We will not be able to avoid a standstill ceasefire if they propose one, but for presentational purposes we can use the word "general."

Mr. Duc: Especially because of Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we agree in regard to your suggested change on point 5 that instead we put in point 9 that after an overall agreement a general ceasefire will be observed. You recognize, of course, that I have to discuss this with President Nixon. But it would read "immediately after signature of an overall agreement a general ceasefire will be observed throughout Indochina under international supervision and control."

President Thieu: We have the same assessment as to why the Communists do not want a ceasefire first. Perhaps we better wait about the time of a ceasefire. It is better to keep flexibility for our side.

Dr. Kissinger: Then let us keep it as it is and I can tell them orally that we agree to their timing. If we change our mind we can come back to it. At the next meeting I can tell them as a concession that we agree to have a ceasefire after all agreements are signed.

President Thieu: They will like that.

Dr. Kissinger: It is also in our interest. I thought at first it would be best to have a ceasefire as soon as possible because of our election. But upon reflection I have decided that it is easier if we keep up the bombing through the elections, unless in your view your military situation requires a ceasefire. You see, our strategy is that we are prepared to step up the military pressure on the DRV immediately, drastically and brutally one or two weeks after our election. We want to be in a position that they have rejected our reasonable proposals. After that we will put everything on the prisoner of war question. They think they can use the prisoners of war to overthrow you. If we can move quickly after the elections, we can destroy so much that they will not be in a position to come back and harm you for a long time to come.

Mr. Duc: Are we clear that we are including agreement on supervision before a ceasefire?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, but I don't think there will be a ceasefire. In fact I prefer that they don't return the prisoners of war and that there is no ceasefire before the election. If Le Duc Tho returns on September 15 and proposes a ceasefire I will say in principle that I agree but that the details must be discussed at Avenue Kleber and then we can insist on international supervision before the ceasefire. Second, if their proposal with regard to the ceasefire does not involve a return of prisoners of war, then we will only stop the bombing and not remove the mines. We will not stop the mining until the prisoners of war are returned. Is that clear? It is important that in the next two months there be mutual confidence between us. We cannot control what others say and I do not know where

Time Magazine got its story, but a certain amount of confusion may be desirable in any event. To sum up, we will insist that ceasefire modalities are discussed at Kleber and not separately between us and them.

President Thieu: What advantages is there for us for a ceasefire only after the signing of all agreements? What advantage?

Dr. Kissinger: I assume we are winning. (President Thieu nods.) I assume that they are getting progressively weaker. Therefore, if a ceasefire is delayed until everything else is settled this maximizes the pressure on them. Their big problem is that after we get elected we can step up what we are doing. If there is a ceasefire before the election it will be harder for us to resume the bombing although we will probably do it anyway. We will not accept a situation where they do to us the next four years what they have just done to us the past four years. Under no circumstances will we accept what they have done to us during the past four years.

President Thieu: I agree that we have to win psychologically but there are also situations where we can agree to a psychological concession but in fact we lose nothing.

Dr. Kissinger: Until this round of negotiations I thought they were extremely clever and devious. Now I have concluded they are not so clever. We always assumed they make no mistakes. In fact they have made many mistakes. What have they gained since July 19? Nothing. We have made no concessions and we have disarmed our opponents by announcing the fact of the meetings. If we follow this strategy now, either way we are in a good position. If they accept our proposal, it gives us no problem because every issue must be discussed in other forums where you have a veto. If they reject our offer, it will put McGovern on the defensive in the last three weeks of his campaign. If they had published their proposal on August 1, the Democrats would have said you are the only obstacle to peace; Congress would have published a resolution resembling their proposal and we would have been in trouble. If they had been smart, they would have wanted to settle fast. Instead Le Duc Tho gave me long lectures on Leninism and lectures on the relationship between political and military matters. I agreed with him on the relation between political and military matters. He wasted three weeks to convince me of a theoretical point. It was to his advantage to either settle fast or break up the talks fast.

I think they still may want to settle something in October, but you must look at the history of the January 25 proposal. We made a proposal to them which totally put them on the defensive for three months. For two months everyone talked about our proposal, not theirs. If we can achieve what I propose to you and then if the President is reelected, there will be no Congressional pressures on us in the next congressional session. Their military situation will get worse over the next year

and we are determined not to let them do this to us again. That is why we are not withdrawing our air and naval forces now. Because we want them here on election day so after we win we can use them. We need your help to construct an ambiguous proposal, particularly on point 4. If we had wanted to give in, we could have done that long ago. Last summer they said that, if we agreed with them to rig the election against you, they would have released the prisoners of war and settled everything in July of 1971. If we had wanted to do that, that would have been the time, not in the last two months of a term during which we have lost 20,000 Americans to defend your country. If we wanted to abandon you, I would not be here.

I don't expect you to have your final answer on point 4. Our idea is first to move the concept of National Concord into a committee and, second, to keep the idea of an election and, third, to accept the principle that they can participate in the Cabinet on the basis of demonstrated popular strength. It is inconceivable that they will accept and their rejecting this will make it difficult for our liberal opponents. In effect we are offering a form of coalition and a committee to supervise the election composed exactly as they want it to be. *The New York Times* and *Time* Magazine will not be able to say we are unreasonable. Yet, if you analyze the situation, you will see that you control fifty percent of the committee so no revision is possible without your concurrence and the election law will be discussed in the second forum with you. So even if they accept you would be in a position to control events. But my view is that, if they reject the proposal, as is certain, then after November 7 we will go back to the May 8 proposal[6] and say that we, the United States, will not discuss political issues any more.

President Thieu: I understand fully what you say. We are talking here in the family. I will try to do everything possible to help President Nixon help us. It is like the 8 points and the 2 changes in the 8 points.[7] If I was reluctant at that time, it was first of all because I had no time to study the proposal carefully and secondly because we were not prepared psychologically, even in our own restricted political circles. So a proposal can cause surprises for everyone and it can provoke internal political trouble in South Vietnam, and there are many men ready to take a peace proposal of this kind as a pretext to stir up political difficulty. I recognize that it is necessary in the next two months for the United States to make some move to prevent an initiative by the Communists and to help the United States elections. But you must remember something. In negotiations the communists always reject your proposals, but they put them in their pocket and they record them for

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[6] See Document 136.

[7] See footnote 3, Document 20.

the future. Whatever we give they reject, but they say we cannot take it back and then they always insist that we go further. So they take into their account every little piece of money, one dollar, 10 dollars, one hundred dollars, and then they ask to talk about the next hundred. The situation in Vietnam is very different (than in the U.S.). My duty to the people, the army, political groups and the National Assembly is first of all not to shock them. I must convince them that the proposal is different from a coalition government. I must at least convince restricted political circles and see how they react so that when we publish a proposal it will not cause any problems or endanger stability. Even the 8 points took me a long time to explain to everybody. I had to explain that there would be no coalition, that we would not dissolve the National Assembly and that the Constitution still existed. Everyone has to understand this. Fortunately, we have some weeks until September 15. That is why I say we need time. We have to study the formula. We have to study the titles and the best way to go about this, and even if we accept your proposal we have to study how to explain it. We have to work together.

Dr. Kissinger: As for timing, whatever we mutually agree we will present on the 15th of September, they will not be able to answer right away and they will have to send it to Hanoi, particularly if it is complex enough so that Le Duc Tho is not authorized to deal with it right away. Complexity has a great advantage. Then we will meet on September 29 or October 1 and they will give an answer. I will try to delay again. Assuming the talks break up, the plan will not be published before the sixth of October. So we have six weeks to prepare for it. This will not be published on September 15. Another possibility is that they will keep the talks going into October at which point it may be in our interest to keep them going as well and perhaps not publish the document. My nightmare is that they publish their plan. If McGovern has their plan, we would be in a terrible position. That is the one reason we need an agreed plan to reply. That is why I like the stories that you treated me coolly. Then they think I am doing things to you that you don't like and, if they think that, then they won't publish their proposal. If we dominate events, as I think we can, there is no way that our proposal would be published before October 5. I think you should work with Ambassador Bunker and he will come to Honolulu on August 30. It would be important to have your reaction by then. Then we would still have two more weeks to discuss matters.

Mr. Duc: Does Le Duc Tho have any idea about your counterproposal?

Dr. Kissinger: No, we didn't discuss point 4 at all. We made general comments on the other points. We made a criticism of their point 1 and of their demand for reparations. We discussed with him which

issues would be discussed in which forums. He kept asking me what my view was on point 4 and I told him I could not answer until I had come to Saigon to discuss the matter with you. One thing which may interest you is that I told him, since we both agreed that there should be a ceasefire, that we refer the matter immediately to Kleber for discussion. He refused.

Mr. Nha: You stick to the idea of a ceasefire and [cessation of] mining against prisoners of war?

Dr. Kissinger: In his proposal Tho mentioned a ceasefire. I therefore proposed to discuss the technical modalities of a ceasefire and so forth at Kleber. My idea was just to discuss what a ceasefire would look like. He refused. On the other nine points he has a good idea of our views from our January 25 proposal. He knows our general ideas from the eight points in January. As for point 4, he has no idea whatsoever on our thinking.

Mr. Duc: Regarding point 4, you said yesterday that in an election you thought the Communists would only get about fifteen percent of the popular vote and yet in the committee you are proposing that they have fifty percent representation. Do you see any disparity between your view yesterday expressed and this proposal?

Dr. Kissinger: What you need on the committee is a veto, not control. You would be in charge of the government. If you have a veto on the committee, you have essential safeguards. What we do is to give you the safeguard in the committee while you also have the government.

Ambassador Bunker: The essential point is the veto.

Dr. Kissinger: It is argued by your opponents in the United States that if you control the government, the army and the committee, then this is all eyewash. What we do is accept everything they propose except predetermining the composition of the government. That will be decided by an election and I am confident from your recent history that you will not necessarily fare too badly in such a process.

Mr. Duc: You say that this committee will "among other responsibilities" do certain things. What do you have in mind?

Dr. Kissinger: This is to be negotiated between the parties in the second forum. Besides, that language ["among other responsibilities"] was in our January 25 proposal.

Mr. Duc: Do you have in mind any responsibility apart from the modalities of the election?

Dr. Kissinger: No, we don't conceive of any but again the ambiguity is in our interest to force Hanoi to examine our proposal.

Mr. Duc: This would put pressure on them for international opinion, but it could scare the South Vietnamese.

Dr. Kissinger: We are prepared to listen to counter-proposals but when you formulate them please try to balance South Vietnamese ne-

cessities with international necessities. Try to find a way to avoid their proposal and force them to reject our proposal. The Soviet Ambassador in Washington told me recently that he had never seen a weaker hand played so skillfully. We can modify this.

Mr. Duc: Yesterday regarding our discussion on the revision of the Constitution, I would like to be clear on a certain point. Do you conceive that the committee will discuss the revision of the Constitution and then vote on the final draft but will have no final say on the Constitution?

Dr. Kissinger: You could submit it to a referendum.

Mr. Duc: It would only be accepted if approved by the people in a referendum?

Dr. Kissinger: Assuming they accept this, the next step after their acceptance of this proposal would be that all forums would be open. That would be an endless process. Even with good will it would take two months to figure out a ceasefire. There would be the question of international supervision. Which countries would be acceptable? What would be the headquarters of the international supervisory force? How many people? It would be a long negotiation. After this there would be a minimum of six months before the elections. This assumes a miracle that everyone starts trusting each other.

And according to this procedure our troops would be withdrawn three months after an overall agreement, and assuming that this were signed in late October the election would not likely be until next September. The pressure would be off the United States and you would be in two forums without us and not under the pressure of constant scrutiny by the United States press. If you use the opportunity to focus on NVA forces in the South, then you will be in a good position. So if you analyze this carefully you will see this document gives enormous possibilities for maneuvering. We are determined to have a showdown on prisoners of war before the end of the year. Either they accept this proposal or they give up the prisoners under enormous pressure. And, if you look a year ahead, even if they accept the document the interval gives you a maximum opportunity to establish your government vis-à-vis them in the two forums. It will permit you to discuss NVA presence in the South and it will permit us to force a showdown on prisoners of war. We will not permit the DRV to tear us up for four more years.

Mr. Duc: Regarding point 4, what will be the relation between the National Assembly and the Committee of National Reconciliation? Will the Constitution still be in force?

Dr. Kissinger: Your constitution remains in force. Preferably you don't tell this to the other side in this proposal. When I ask them what happens to the National Assembly, they say it will be abolished, but I prefer that this not be raised in this document, but in the second forum. What we want is, when peace is made, the legal structure of the

Government of Vietnam is kept although the political process is open to all forces. Therefore under point 4 this government remains in existence and in the interval between agreement and the elections you will be in office for several months and the National Assembly will remain until the Constitution is revised, and I cannot see how your constitution would be revised without your approval.

Mr. Duc: What about the relations between the National Assembly and the Committee?

Dr. Kissinger: I haven't thought about that. Do you have any ideas? If Le Duc Tho asks I think I should answer that that would be discussed in the second forum.

Mr. Duc: On point 4, you say the Committee will stay in existence to revise the Constitution and implement its provisions.

Dr. Kissinger: What is meant is that it would stay on to supervise new elections if necessary.

President Thieu: This language is very general. It could be that after they finish their work the Committee would just go home. If we say "agree on steps" it means they would write down the Constitution and go home.

Dr. Kissinger: My view is that the DRV will accept this proposal only if they felt they could maneuver this committee into a government. If they accept our proposal, I think they will lose the war. They will have so many forums going simultaneously the world's press will not be able to focus on the issues and we will keep up the bombing. I don't believe they will accept the document.

President Thieu: If they don't accept the document and if President Nixon is reelected, how do you see an end to the war?

Dr. Kissinger: The DRV always has it in its power to get us out by offering the prisoners of war and a ceasefire. If they do this we will have to weaken them so much while we still have electoral backing and at the same time Vietnamize the Air Force in 1972 and 1973 so that at least we can force them to give the prisoners of war back or at least by 1974 reduce our direct involvement.

In my view in order to affect our elections they are wasting enormous forces and my impression is that in 1973 they will not be able to carry out any main-force activity of any significance and you should be able to make great progress in pacification. The dilemma for them is that, if they revert to protracted warfare, your position is unassailable. Their other alternative is to make a settlement. After the election we will interpret the provisions in the strictest possible ways and I assume that although the war may not end the balance of forces will shift preponderantly in your favor.

President Thieu: How about the return of prisoners of war?

Dr. Kissinger: They may not return the prisoners, or perhaps they will return them when they are convinced we don't care any more. We will make one tremendous effort to get back the prisoners and in this effort I can assure you we will stop at very little. It is out of the question that we will make any additional concessions after the election.

President Thieu: They cannot accept and they will continue to fight but I still believe that after the election they will have to revise their policy. They will have to negotiate a temporary peace or continue protracted warfare. If they continue protracted warfare, we may have the prisoner of war issue if you exert pressure on them. Do you foresee any possibility that they will ask for a settlement which involves only prisoners of war? What kind of offer would you think they might make for a prisoner of war solution?

Dr. Kissinger: At some point we may have to accept the prisoners of war for an end of the bombing. But if so, it will be at a point when we have severely weakened them. At some point we may have to stop the bombing for this. Maybe in the second half of next year. But what they want is for us to also stop military and economic aid. If we agreed to stop such aid we could settle now, but we will not do this. We have to get to a point where you can continue to fight with a minimum of direct U.S. involvement, but with continued military and economic assistance. We can also try to influence their allies not to arm them in such a way that they are capable of repeating military activities on the scale of the past few months.

I must say that my instinct tells me that they are going to settle. They are not as self-confident as they used to be. Before, when they made a proposal they would stick with it for a year. At the last meeting I told them I was going to Saigon and very frankly told them we would not accept point 4. Le Duc Tho said he was returning to Hanoi. It is very unusual for them to re-evaluate their position so shortly after they have tabled a new proposal. In the past they always had a perception of how they could win. In 1965 they counted on the guerillas, but in 1968 the guerillas were destroyed. In 1968 they began to count on their main forces but now their main forces are being destroyed. Now, if they go to protracted warfare, you will regain all of your territory.

President Thieu: They understand that after this offensive they will not have enough troops to achieve their goal.

Dr. Kissinger: After the election I think you should plan some landing operation in Dong Hoi or Vinh for 24 hours.

President Thieu: It could be done.

Dr. Kissinger: It should be in December or January after our elections. You should plan on it. If you could conduct such an operation for 24 to 48 hours, perhaps at Vinh.

President Thieu: There is nothing in Dong Hoi. It should be in Vinh or Thanh Hoa. There is something in Thanh Hoa.

Dr. Kissinger: If a brigade or division could go in and tear up the place and leave, then they would have to return forces to North Vietnam from the South because they have nothing up there now. Maybe the way the war will end is by continued bombing on our part and the landing of your forces in the North.

President Thieu: I don't mean to say that I think by protracted war that Hanoi has any hope to win. What I mean is that they cannot do otherwise. They cannot admit defeat. It would be demoralizing for them and politically dangerous for their regime.

Dr. Kissinger: I think they must be in a difficult position. Otherwise they wouldn't be talking to us with the bombing going on. I think the fact that they have not published their plan and that Le Duc Tho has had no television or news interviews are signs of insecurity. They don't know which way to move. If we publish our counter-plan then we will have neutralized them militarily and politically and this will carry us to November. If they accept the plan, so what?

President Thieu: What assessment did General Weyand give to you about the situation?

Dr. Kissinger: He gave me an assessment of the situation looking ahead to periods of two, six and twelve months, just like I asked the President yesterday. General Weyand thought that offensive operations by the enemy had steadily decreased with their declining capabilities, that no significant objectives had been lost, and that perhaps they might carry out a couple of spectaculars. In six months the enemy will have no conventional capabilities of any major significance and pacification would make major strides and you would regain almost all of your territory, and in 12 months the trend would even be greater. With the coming of the rains in MR–I the situation will become very complex for the enemy and the possibility even exists of a collapse of some of their divisions.

President Thieu: They will start another offensive in the first week of September, perhaps the 25th of August, and it will last during September and October. It will not be the same strength and momentum as the last offensive because they have less tanks and ammunition. They have introduced the 312th Division, but let's not talk about divisions but rather about strengths and capabilities. They will try a conventional offensive combined with pacification-spoiling operations. But this cannot last more than two months and after your election the fighting will subside.

Dr. Kissinger: Can they fight in MR–I in October?

President Thieu: Oh yes, they don't care about the weather or their losses. They fight for political reasons. When the Politburo decides to

fight for political reasons they have to fight irrespective of the conditions. We in the Free World are different but they will fight for political reasons until the elections and we have to judge what they will do then not according to capabilities but according to doctrine.

After the elections the fighting will go down. They have never sustained an offensive for more than three months. The last offensive was the longest because of tanks and artillery, and they used the last dry season for the maximum infiltration of tanks and ammunition.

In six months we will recapture the whole territory and we will begin the first phase of pacification in Binh Dinh and Quang Tri. We will consolidate what has been downgraded in pacification. Speaking frankly, we have had a downgrading of pacification from A hamlets to B and from B hamlets to C, in about 100 hamlets (sic).

In twelve months the situation will be much better. It will be much better than in December of 1971 because the NVA will not be the same in December 1973. If we don't sign anything, the war will fade away and they will have less supplies, less manpower and less regular units in December 1973 than they had in December 1971 or March of 1972. If there is protracted warfare, they have no hope to win but they can try and continue to protract the war as long as they can because they cannot withdraw their troops; they cannot admit to their people that they have lost the war.

Dr. Kissinger: Can they keep their troops in the South indefinitely?

President Thieu: Yes, they have a saying, "Born in the North to die in the South." They can keep 100,000 or 50,000. They can even make some warfare with 10,000. If they want to stir up something, maybe Laos or Cambodia will be an easier place. You might say that South Vietnam is now the bone and Laos and Cambodia are the steak. Their long-range plan is to use military pressure to influence Cambodia and Laos.

Dr. Kissinger: You should be in a stronger position to help Cambodia.

President Thieu: Yes, if they help themselves. The DRV wants to influence the political situation in Laos and Cambodia. They want to stimulate the pro-Communist and neutralist forces; they want to support those who seek to lessen U.S. influence. I call these their "long-range ambushes." After that they may wait for 5 or 10 years to see if things weaken. Now with regard to Cambodia. (sic) Even with a settlement and with international supervision we have to accept de facto control of the Communists in north Laos. We have no troops there and you have no troops there. So for Laos we have to accept the situation. But in Cambodia they can do like the Vietnamese because they are 6 million people and they have an army capable of dealing with the KC and with our help they can defend against the NVA main forces. It will take time; they need pacification; they need cadre; they need good administration. It will take years.

Dr. Kissinger: Unfortunately we don't have Ambassador Bunker in Cambodia.

President Thieu: You can move him there when the war is over here. The Cambodians have lost three years in the present situation.

Dr. Kissinger: Mr. President, that is partly our fault. Some of our people think that the Nixon Doctrine means that we must do nothing.

President Thieu: We must not accuse anybody. The rate of American aid to build the Cambodian army has been faster than the rate of aid to build the Vietnamese army.

Dr. Kissinger: It is not a question of money but of determination. Are you helping the Cambodians develop their army?

President Thieu: We are building their army; we have trained most of the Cambodian army, all of their navy. We have trained colonels, majors, lieutenants and non-commissioned officers. We are ready to help on pacification. [Going to the map of Cambodia and drawing an arc from Kompong Som through Phnom Penh and eastward to the Parrot's Beak] When I spoke to Lon Nol, I suggested that he work in this area eastward toward our border together with us. But they have not followed my advice. They sometimes do one thing and sometimes another and don't know what to do first.

Dr. Kissinger: Mr. President, I have a question about the situation in the North. Frankly I am somewhat concerned about your northern provinces. If, as you say, there is another enemy offensive, I worry about whether it is a good strategy to use your elite troops in storming the Citadel perhaps weakening them for when the big offensive starts. I am expressing my worries very honestly.

President Thieu: I have not given orders to take the city, but to destroy the four divisions. I would like to lure the Communist divisions into Quang Tri. If they defend the area around Quang Tri, they will have to expend more troops and we will destroy the troops. The situation has changed a bit. They have a political need to hold Quang Tri just like we had to hold Binh Long [An Loc]. They have issued orders to hold Quang Tri at all costs. I am only using three battalions to attack the Citadel; they are using two regiments to defend it. We are gaining the double: we destroy two regiments and we cause them political concern.

Dr. Kissinger: Can't you go around them?

President Thieu: We have a plan. For us it is good to attack the 312th Division at Quang Tri because otherwise they could go to Hue and cause trouble. It is better to attack the enemy's troops at Quang Tri then Hue. I do not want to let them disturb Hue.

Dr. Kissinger: Well, where will the offensive come then if they are defending Quang Tri? In MR–I you are on the offensive.

President Thieu: I do not mean to say that they will launch an offensive because more troops have been sent from Hanoi. Now there is a lull and they are using the time to wait for new supplies and trainees. But they will not only act up in the same area [MR–I] but also in III Corps and they will use their main forces plus spoiling operations against pacification. They would like to attack Route 4 in Dinh Tuong and capture Cai Lay as a prelude to an attack on Saigon.

Dr. Kissinger: Can you break their offensive?

President Thieu: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Now let me turn to another matter, Mr. President: that is the question of leadership in the various Military Regions. Our people are very impressed with your commanders in MR–I and MR–4, but everybody is worried about MR–3. (Hearty laughter on both sides of the table.)

President Thieu: Minh has lost his initiative. The Binh Long [An Loc] battle caused, how do you say, a very [rubbing his knuckles together] "uptight" feeling. I have tried to push them to be more aggressive.

Dr. Kissinger: Mr. President, I get a daily briefing on Vietnam and I have been watching General Minh very carefully since last year. If there is a major setback in MR–3, with all the warnings we have had it would be a bad psychological problem in the United States.

Do you expect that the enemy can secure any major victories in the next two months?

President Thieu: Their only hope is in Hue. Before they wanted to attack Hue but they dispersed their forces in three parts of the country and so they achieved nothing decisive. We may lose some districts but we will lose no provinces. This time look at what happened in Kontum. At Tet they believed with the 320th Division they could overrun Kontum and start the whole [unraveling] process, but we attacked them in Laos instead. But they are very doctrinaire and when they get their orders from Hanoi they have to carry out their plan. The local commanders have no initiative. So in March they sent another division to Kontum trying to attract our general reserve. But they did not succeed. In Binh Long [An Loc] they were unable to overrun the province with three divisions and in Quang Tri they used six divisions with tanks and everything and believed that we would only have the Marines to resist them. They didn't expect that we could send troops everywhere and very fast. If they cannot take Hue with five divisions, I don't see how they can take anything in the next two months. And I don't think the Russians and Chinese can send them all the tanks to replace the ones they have lost.

Ambassador Bunker: General Vogt was saying yesterday that they have lost about 650 of the 750 tanks in their inventory.

President Thieu: In this offensive they will use some tanks and their heavy artillery. But the heavy artillery depends very much on the resupply from the DRV. The rains will slow them down. It is very difficult for them to commit many divisions at the same time.

Dr. Kissinger: Even in the next two months?

President Thieu: Even in the next two months.

Ambassador Bunker: Some of their so-called divisions are really only regiments.

President Thieu: Yes, now in Quang Tri they have six divisions while we have two.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you plan to reinforce Quang Tri?

President Thieu: I will wait for one or two weeks to assess the enemy capabilities. I want to retain flexibility.

Dr. Kissinger: Which division will you send up?

President Thieu: At least one from the Delta.

Dr. Kissinger: Will they fight?

President Thieu: It depends on the mission. No one can compare our other divisions with the Airborne, the Marines and the First Division. The First Division cannot be replaced. There are some regiments that cannot be replaced. For example, the First Regiment in Bastogne. It is against the rule but we make an exception and I have provided him the solution of having five percent of these troops on leave at all times for five-day period. (Laughing) How many times has the First Regiment taken and retaken Fire Support Base Bastogne and Fire Support Base Checkmate?

Dr. Kissinger: Can the First Regiment take this indefinitely? At what point is the morale going to crack?

President Thieu: That is why we give them leave. Moreover, when these units fight together their spirit is very high—the Airborne and the Marines have a high morale because they are fighting together.

[At this point Dr. Kissinger took a 10-minute break.]

Dr. Kissinger: One point about the procedural document. I have some trouble understanding the practical consequences of some of the points you make. Take your Point 3 [which rejects a tripartite GVN/DRV/NLF forum]. I don't think Hanoi has any intention of discussing the internal political solution in the three-way forum. In the three-way forum they want to discuss relations between the North and the South, timing of reunification and the status of the DMZ. So the first sentence [which, in the GVN document at Tab A, states that internal political issues would be discussed in the 3-way forum] doesn't apply to their proposal and again I think this should be kept fairly vague. As for your suggestion that there only be a forum between Saigon and Hanoi, they won't accept that. They will want the NLF to participate.

President Thieu: Why should we accept this?

Dr. Kissinger: To build up your status. It is more important to build your status.

President Thieu: We make a distinction between private talks and secret talks. At secret talks anyone can participate, but in private talks we mean officially arranged private talks.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, once the talks open, the existence of these forums will become known. I personally think it is more advantageous to you. If you are talking to them in the four-power forum already, why not in the three-way forum?

President Thieu: It must be with Hanoi on the other side.

Mr. Nha: You remember in 1968 we had the two-side formula.

Dr. Kissinger: As a practical matter you can call them whatever you want and they can call you whatever you want. If in a two-way forum you can deal with them as a separate entity why can't you deal with them in a three-way forum as a separate entity? Once they negotiate with you, they have to accept your status and legitimacy rather than the status of the NLF which will be decided on the battlefield.

Frankly, I think their procedural proposal is the most positive aspect. They want us to agree to the principle of dismantling your government and only discuss with you how to implement this principle. This we won't accept. But I think these three forums are advantageous to you. If you introduce NVA presence into the forum then you would put them on the defensive as insisting that they need outside troops. I don't think they would even agree to a forum which excludes the NLF.

President Thieu: The same formula we now have in Paris could be applied in this case. They call it a four-party conference; we call it two sides. We could do that again. We could call the NLF part of their side.

Dr. Kissinger: On the three-party level you could call it whatever you want.

Mr. Duc: If we officially accept a forum in which the DRV is present and in which there are two South Vietnamese entities, we would be in an awkward position.

Dr. Kissinger: Why?

Mr. Duc: Because if you accept the principle—

Dr. Kissinger: Not if the only issues that are raised are relations between the North and the South, reunification and the status of the DMZ. If that is all that is under discussion, then you could take the position that the NLF is part of their delegation.

Mr. Duc: If we accept this formula we accept that there are two governments in South Vietnam. That's the problem. For the people of South Vietnam it is easy to conceive that we talk with the NLF but they

cannot understand why, when we talk to Hanoi, that the NLF must participate as another government of South Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger: You don't have to recognize them.

President Thieu: In Paris we maintain that the conference is between Saigon and Hanoi. We do not care if Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh or Mr. Pham Van Tien is on their side. We neglect [ignore] the presence of the PRG. We have to. It is logical. Now when we talk with the NLF they can say whatever they want about who they are. We don't care.

Mr. Duc: In Paris we insisted on a two-sided conference. You will remember the whole discussion about the shape of the table.

Dr. Kissinger: Maybe we can avoid "tri-partite." All of this is irrelevant. Either they accept our version on Point 4 or they don't. The utility of the forums is to enhance your legitimacy, not to undermine it. We know they won't accept only a bilateral forum. Maybe we can find a formulation with neutral language, but we do not want a breakup on a procedural issue. None of this would ever take effect until the document is signed.

Mr. Duc: We prefer that the word PRG is not used.

Dr. Kissinger: In practice we on our side use NLF and they use PRG. We can do that. I think between now and August 30 we can work on finding some way of dealing with this problem. We have no problem in calling you the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. In any document we submit we will call you the Government of the Republic of Vietnam and them the NLF. Now as for your problem about "resolve" the principles and general content, I see your point. But we would not go beyond this.

Mr. Duc: Even if you refer everything to us it is not to our mutual advantage that you "resolve" the political questions in your bilateral forum.

Dr. Kissinger: I will see if we can find another word. What we have to avoid is being maneuvered into precisely the position they would like to maneuver us in. They would like to say we continue the war just because of the issue of one person. Therefore, I deliberately want to accept as much of the language as possible but preserve the structure of South Vietnam. Your point about "resolve" is a presentational issue. The real issue is on what question the breakdown occurs. You must have read my briefings after the proposal of January this year. I succeeded in making it absolutely clear that the central issue was whether we were going to ally ourselves with the enemy to overthrow a friend, and I want to be in a position to say this again. This proposal is more likely to become public of it fails than if it succeeds and then, if it becomes public, the whole focus will be on Point 4.

Mr. Duc: If it breaks up and the proposal is published many people will read it word for word.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't give a damn about "resolve." I want to be able to say that we agreed with the DRV on practically everything. We don't mind giving you a veto but we have to avoid the impression of giving you a veto in the next two months. In our own Congressional debate they say that we gave you a veto. Their position is illogical, I agree. It's your own country. Obviously you must have a veto but that is our domestic situation.

Mr. Duc: I agree—even if you don't attach importance to the word "resolve" they will invoke it every time. The question is what will Vietnamese and international public opinion think of our relationship if we put the word "resolve" here?

Dr. Kissinger: I understand your point, but it is a question of tactics. What is the reason that I am here? The reason is that there is no settlement yet. As I told you, last year we could have made peace if we had agreed with them to settle your domestic situation. We did not do that. I understand your point and I have no answer. I just don't want them to break up the conference on the issue of whether you have a veto. You see, we have taken out the part about your having to change your policy because we can prove that is absurd. We rejected these things because they were a substantive point.

Mr. Duc: I have this idea. Why don't we say that the first forum will "discuss" and leave out the word "resolve." Then in the final paragraph we can say when one question has been "dealt with" instead of "resolved."

Dr. Kissinger: I understand your point. You want to take out "resolve" wherever it appears and take out reference to political questions. It is important in your opinion to take out political questions. We could take out "resolve"—that is conceivable. I would like to think about it. I am talking tactics now—not strategy. I am assuming that they want to break up the talks.

Mr. Duc: If you include the political issue you leave yourself open to criticism that you are violating our sovereignty and mixing in our internal affairs and so on.

Dr. Kissinger: But we won't go further than Point 4.

Mr. Duc: It is a question of principle.

Dr. Kissinger: If that is the case, then we cannot discuss the political issue at all.

Mr. Duc: Yes you can, ad referendum.

Dr. Kissinger: My sincere conviction is that these changes are not in your interest. The issue of 50 percent participation in the government is something the United States people can understand. The issue of whether we can talk about political issues is something they cannot, even if we agree with you.

Mr. Duc: I don't mean to exclude it. Instead of saying political we could say something like "such other issues."

Dr. Kissinger: I understand. One approach could be that we would table a procedural document that goes beyond your wishes and you could say that I went beyond my authority. I do not mind your attacking me. Another possibility is that it can be a working document and not a formal proposal.

President Thieu: We are concerned with the propaganda that the communists would make out of this.

Dr. Kissinger: What the communist propaganda does is to present you as a fascist and as having a veto over our policy.

President Thieu: In Vietnam they try to separate me from other people in the country.

Dr. Kissinger: If we separate the procedural point from the main document we could just present the 10 points and see if we can get along that way. We could accept in principle the three forums and make it oral.

Mr. Duc: Even if they are two separate documents, do you think they would ever be published later?

Dr. Kissinger: There are two problems: Do we present a document at all? Or do we talk to their document? It is not even impossible at some point, if we cannot agree [on the content], that we agree here that we will present it and you will publicly disagree with us. This couldn't be the worst thing that could happen to us on a procedural document. We could take out "resolve." I think as far as the word "political" is concerned, that it can be taken to mean the whole political structure. We will take out the word "resolve" every time it appears and substitute "has been dealt with." [Pointing to Mr. Duc] He is tougher to deal with than Le Duc Tho.

Mr. Duc: I remember your phrase in your 1969 article in *Foreign Affairs* that the choreography of negotiations is as important as substance.[8]

Dr. Kissinger: I think that is true, but in this instance the choreography requires the impression of excessive reasonableness. We have kept the focus on one issue. We will not betray an ally and we will not impose a communist government. That is why every time I ask a question of Le Duc Tho he is delighted because he thinks I am agreeing with him and he gives me all sorts of things that I can use. For exam-

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[8] As Le Duc Tho noted, Kissinger argued in the article that "*the way* [emphasis in original] negotiations are carried out is almost as important as *what* [emphasis in original] is negotiated. The choreography of how one enters negotiations, what is settled first and in what manner is inseparable from the substance of the issues." ("The Vietnam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 47 (January 1969), p. 218)

ple, that we have to dismantle your governmental machinery, that we have to merge your army with the enemy forces, that they want 8 billion dollars in reparations—4.5 for the North and 3.5 for the South. Everybody will laugh. Just imagine, they asked for $8 billion in reparations over five years. That would be $1.6 billion a year. Our whole foreign aid is only slightly more than $2 billion a year. I asked Le Duc Tho if they wanted this in a document and he said yes, he wants it in a document. I asked Le Duc Tho if his concession was that they would not call it "reparations" and he said yes that was their concession, but that he wants in the document the $8 billion. When I publish this he is going to look like an insolent maniac. I have a whole catalogue of outrageous demands. We want to be in a position of making almost unreasonable concessions. Your future will not depend on legal nuances. Besides, I believe in November our public opinion will shift. Even attitudes toward the DRV will change.

Mr. Duc: Your remarks related to international opinion at large and not an appraisal of our status.

Dr. Kissinger: I agree to take out "resolve" but we have to keep the reference to political questions.

President Thieu: The communists may not understand U.S. public opinion, but they always follow the tactics of negotiating by asking the highest price and then bargaining. Even in 1954 they asked for everything and then settled for much less. They understand that they have to present a high bill.

Dr. Kissinger: They have not been clever. They have followed the strategy of 1968 literally, even with regard to timing. Now they want to settle in October, not in substance but a settlement which leads to another forum. But they are stupid. Now what they are doing is reassuring the reelection of the President. As long as there are secret talks it is impossible for McGovern to attack him. They have not managed to succeed with our public opinion. Their strategy is to ask a high price. Ours is to ask a low one but get it rejected and then they get nothing. You say they put their concessions in their pocket, but that may not be exactly the case. Every year we gave them a better proposal, but every year their military situation deteriorates faster than the proposals improve. The Chinese are clever negotiators; the North Vietnamese are not. Take the 7 points of last year.[9] What did it get them? Paper victories. They are no further toward their objectives today than they were four years ago and you are infinitely stronger. In my view we have nearly won the war. How can you be destroyed with improving pacification, larger mobile reserves and your international position

[9] See footnote 4, Document 26.

growing stronger? As for our domestic situation, our critics attack a man like you who resists because they want to surrender. In 1961 it was the same thing with Adenauer. People were saying he was a fascist and so forth and two years later he was a hero and all of this was forgotten. I speak with total frankness because I want you to understand our situation.

President Thieu: The problem is the difference between public opinion in the United States and public opinion in Vietnam. What can bring a boost to public opinion in the United States could kill Vietnam. U.S. opinion will understand your reasonableness but the problem is how to handle it here in Vietnam. Five years ago no one dared talk about peace in Vietnam. Three years ago I made my July 11 political proposal offering the NLF participation in elections. Two years before that no one would have dared talk about talking to the NLF and now we are talking about elections with NLF participation.

Dr. Kissinger: Your domestic requirements are different.

President Thieu: The DRV and the GVN each are the same. They each have to demand a high price. In Vietnam the idea of a fixed price is very recent. In Vietnam we bargain about everything, even if it is only for 10 cents. The notion of a fixed price is very new.

Dr. Kissinger: Sometimes I have the impression that even if we accepted the DRV proposal they would withdraw it because they would suspect something wrong.

President Thieu: In Vietnam even in stores where there are fixed prices you can bargain, except for medicine. When a price is on a medicine that is the price you have to pay.

Mr. Nha: You agree that we will present the 10 points formally and the procedural part as an unsigned document?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, and we will leave out the word "resolve."

Mr. Duc: In the first forum leave out the word "resolve" and the third forum leave out "tri-partite" and make it a U.S./GVN/DRV forum in which the NLF can participate.

Dr. Kissinger: We can also leave out the question of Vietnamese armed forces.

Mr. Duc: Or we could try "a forum between the United States and the governments of Indochina in which the NLF can participate." And paragraph (c) [about joint U.S.–DRV responsibility] would be left out and in paragraph (d) [about overall, bilateral and tripartite agreements] we would drop "tri-partite" and substitute "multi-lateral."

Dr. Kissinger: I think we should rephrase it to say "some of the parties may reach agreements with one another." May I make this procedural proposal. We will redraft both the 10 points and the procedural document leaving out point 4 and send it to Ambassador Bunker. You

will do point 4 keeping in mind our domestic necessities and then Ambassador Bunker and I will meet in Honolulu. We have to have your views by the 8th or 9th of September.

President Thieu: Yesterday, you asked about the needs of the VNAF. General Vien has prepared this document. It is in Vietnamese because we did not have time to translate it. (President Thieu hands Dr. Kissinger the document. Translation at Tab B)[10] I don't know if General Vien did it in the spirit of the assumptions you outlined this morning and I have had no time to check it personally.

Dr. Kissinger: I have requested a study in Washington and we will give this matter high priority.

President Thieu: What will we say about our meeting today?

Dr. Kissinger: Nothing.

President Thieu: That we reviewed the general situation?

Dr. Kissinger: We can say we reviewed the general situation including the Paris peace negotiations.

President Thieu: That is fine.

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[10] Attached but not printed.

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246. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 19, 1972.

SUBJECT

My August 14, 1972 Meeting with the North Vietnamese

Overview

The August 14, 1972 meeting with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy lasted seven and a half hours, the longest session ever except for our previous one on August 1.[2] It was essentially a holding action on both

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XVI. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] See Documents 225 and 237.

sides. I avoided the political issues altogether except for generalities, citing my forthcoming trip to Saigon, and concentrated on questions to elicit their views and clear the record. They confined themselves to joining us in a point by point comparison of our respective positions and made no new moves. This was partly because Le Duc Tho is returning to Hanoi in a few days and partly to avoid my request to shift agreed points to the plenary sessions for working out technical details.

Tho was testy at the outset as he repeatedly accused us of stirring speculation on these private talks and dragging out negotiations for electoral reasons. And his point by point critique of our positions emphasized our differences. But when I suggested his performance was making it difficult to do anything useful in Saigon (it was one thing to believe that only the political issue stood in the way of a settlement; it was another to operate on the premise of a stalemate across the board), he and Thuy became markedly cordial. They emphasized both sides' good will; the need to find "neutral," i.e. compromise, positions on the political issues; and the ease with which we could solve all other questions if we could find the right political formulas. They repeatedly stressed that at last we were entering "real" negotiations.

We set the next session for September 15 since Tho won't be back in Paris until September 10.

Significance of the Meeting

The meeting served several useful purposes even though it produced no significant advances toward a settlement. We tabled three forthcoming documents on (1) general principles; (2) substantive points except for the political issues; and (3) procedural points on the conduct of negotiations.[3] These were tailored to the structure and much of the language of their August 1 proposals, without making any significant new concessions. They served to clear away some of the less thorny underbrush if we are to make a settlement; further improved our negotiating record; and gave Tho useful proposals to take back to the Politburo. In addition, I asked some leading, though strictly noncommittal, questions on their political positions which perhaps made them salivate, but in any event produced some patently unreasonable answers that even our opponents would concede were extravagant.

They, in turn, could not be expected to table significant new offers in advance of Tho's return to Hanoi. Their August 1 documents were the most comprehensive and detailed plans they have ever submitted, however distasteful certain of their elements remain. In the past, they

[3] These three papers are attached as Tabs A–C. Tab B is printed as Document 238 and Tab C is printed as Document 239.

would have stuck with these for six months at least. Even if they had some minor suggestions in their briefcase, they could not put them forward once they saw we were avoiding the only issue—political power in the South—which really concerns them now, and on which they almost certainly expected us to say something. Most importantly, they would not give anything away prior to the policy review in Hanoi. And if they are considering revisions it is useful for Tho to go back after a meeting in which our own position was firmly maintained.

Thus, during the next month there will be an intensive review on both sides, particularly of the political issue. We will see what Thieu can live with in terms of stretching our side's position far enough to give Hanoi a reasonable and face-saving (though still somewhat risky for us) solution if it is willing to settle short of its demands.

The North Vietnamese will be watching the polls in our country and the developments in South Vietnam and deciding whether to compromise before November. They have an agonizing choice. They can make a deal with an Administration that will give them a fair chance to jockey for power in the South, but refuses to guarantee their victory. Or they can hold out, knowing that this course almost certainly means they will face the same Administration with a fresh four year mandate that reflects the American people's refusal to cap ten years of sacrifice with ignominy.

In any event, we are sure of at least two more private meetings (they cannot break off negotiations right after we table new proposals) which will carry us well into October. The circumstances surrounding the next private meeting preceded by Tho's return and my trip to Moscow will give us more momentum in September. During this process we have gotten closer to a negotiated settlement than ever before; our negotiating record is becoming impeccable; and we still have a chance to make an honorable peace. (I am sending you a separate memo on the implications of this meeting and where we now stand.)[4]

Highlights

—The meeting began with Tho's carrying to an annoying length their allegations that we were encouraging speculation about the secret negotiations and stretching out the negotiating process for domestic political purposes. He charged that, as usual, we were breaking our promises. Interestingly, however, neither at this point nor at any time in the meeting did they mention our bombing, mining, or the dikes.

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[4] See Document 250.

—I rejected their assertions in very strong terms and said that their charges poisoned the atmosphere for a settlement. I pointed out that they could not play the game of public stalemate and private progress to generate pressures on us, and insisted that we had to announce private meetings as they are held. I once again pledged that we would not elaborate or stir any speculation on the negotiations. (It is essential that we continue to observe this commitment, though, as I pointed out to them, we cannot control the press.)

—I then made a 1¾ hour statement, reading and handing over three documents and comparing our positions point by point, except for the political problem.

—First, I gave them a set of agreed principles drawn from our presentation on July 19[5] and their presentation of August 1 to guide negotiations. These represent a general approach, including both sides' willingness to coexist, negotiate a settlement, respect South Vietnam's free political choice, and respect the independence of the Indochinese countries; and our neutrality toward South Vietnam's political future and our intention to leave no permanent military presence in Indochina.

—Second, I gave them a ten point *negotiating document* answering each of their points except the political one on which I reserved comment until after my return from Saigon. This followed the outline and much of the language of their proposals of August 1.

• It contains all the essentially agreed elements on the subsidiary issues.

• On *withdrawals,* I said our four month period was negotiable and we would modify it next time, but not down to their one month. (With their dropping of a fixed date last time, this is no longer a real issue.)

• On *prisoners,* I emphasized again that the release had to include all men, and account for all missing, throughout Indochina. (Their plan only covers Vietnam on specific issues like this and ceasefire.)

• On *standstill ceasefire* as well, I indicated that we wanted it to cover the whole region. I said that we would consider the timing of a ceasefire in conjunction with our political proposals next time. (They have pressed for it as late as possible, we as early as possible.)

• On *political questions,* we left this point blank in our document, reserving a detailed proposal until after my trip to Saigon and your seeing Bunker in Hawaii. I reiterated that our bedrock principle was that "the political future result from the decision of the South Viet-

[5] See Document 207.

namese people and not by imposition of the U.S. Government." If they would accept this framework we could reach a solution. For our part, we would make a great effort to bridge differences, but we would not prejudice the political outcome.

• After presenting our proposal, I exhaustively reviewed all of their positions which we had essentially accepted, making a forthcoming record.

—Third, in response to a similar document tabled by them on August 1, I gave them a *procedural document* outlining the composition and agenda of the various negotiating forums. I pointed out that the disposition of North Vietnamese troops in the South should be discussed in the forum composed of the three Vietnamese parties. They later made the transparent claim that these were under PRG command and thus should not be considered North Vietnamese, but in so doing made their most explicit confirmation ever of their forces in the South. I also pressed hard to shift discussion of details of a ceasefire to the plenary sessions, but they refused (obviously fearing this would suggest progress in our secret talks).

—I concluded by summing up our remaining areas of agreement and differences.

—During a 45 minute break at this point, Tho raised the idea of our meeting in some other location which I had floated at the July 19 meeting. I responded that this was a suggestion we were prepared to consider if it would help the negotiating process and/or other members of their Politburo wished to meet. He seemed interested, and I returned to the subject at the end of the meeting.

—After the break, Tho predictably complained about our not addressing political questions and tried to draw out our ideas. I refused, saying we had to discuss this in Saigon—making the point implicitly that we work closely with Thieu. I confined myself to saying that their August 1 plan had the positive element of dropping some of their preconditions before negotiations (i.e. Thieu need not resign first; and the Communists would talk to the GVN, including Thieu, about political issues). However they retained the negative elements of prescribing in advance the outcome of the political process.

—After a few questions, Tho made his own 1½ hour presentation:

• He began by attacking our alleged broken promises again, but I cut him off after a short period.

• He then went through all the issues, with his general theme being that we were "still far apart" on many particulars as well as the central question of political power. On the latter issue, he emphasized that in South Vietnam there are two governments, two armies, and three political forces and these had to be reflected in any settlement.

• He stressed that the other forums provided in their procedural document of August 1 (like the GVN–PRG talks) should not begin until we had reached agreement on all the main military and political issues.

—He emphasized again that ceasefire should only come after an overall settlement, reflecting agreement in all forums, was reached.

• On both prisoner release and ceasefire he strongly suggested that coverage throughout Indochina would be acceptable, though their proposal concerns only Vietnam. He said they had to work formally through their allies in Laos and Cambodia.

• He, in effect, said that we could never make North Vietnamese troops leave the South.

• He was hard on reparations, saying we could choose another word, but that the concept (and perhaps the figure) would have to be part of a written agreement.

—After another brief break, I posed a long series of questions which brought out some extreme formulations on such issues as the political question, local/provincial governments, reparations, and their forces in the South. If they were to stick literally to all these positions (which is unlikely) their demands would patently amount to destruction of the South Vietnamese political and military power, guaranteed victory for the PRG, and demand for our formal compensation for war damages. Their often preposterous positions included the following:

• The concept of U.S. reparations (another phrase might be used), and perhaps a specific figure should be written in a peace agreement. This reconfirmed their position on this.

• Local governments in South Vietnam should be run by the GVN or PRG in areas they control, and by three segment administration in contested areas. Practically speaking, however, all parts of the country are contested and thus should be governed by three segment coalition governments.

• The ARVN is deprived of U.S. aid once there is a ceasefire. It will then be amalgamated with the entire Communist army, and this overall force will be under the command of the Government of National Concord.

• Furthermore, the North Vietnamese troops are under the command of the PRG (and therefore presumably will be part of the overall South Vietnamese armed forces). Discussion of their disposition therefore should take place in the second negotiating forum, the bilateral GVN–PRG talks.

—During this process I had them repeat twice that there was no mutual withdrawal linkage of any sort with the 1968 bombing halt under-

standings,[6] thus indirectly shooting down the Shriver/Harriman thesis of a "signal" from them in withdrawal of some of their troops in late 1968. Both Tho and Thuy insisted that they had always firmly rejected the concept of mutual withdrawal and any proposal associated with it.

—The meeting concluded with their very conciliatory statements about their good will and the need for mutual compromise. I said we would make a further effort on the political issue, but they should be under no illusion that we would accept their proposals. They would have to move as well. Tho agreed that we should try to find a middle position.

—We agreed on September 15 for our next meeting and then adjourned at 5:00 p.m. after seven and a half hours.

Substantive Details

—As had become common practice, Tho started the meeting by raising a procedural squabble over our supposed lack of good faith in not keeping our promise to keep the private meetings a secret, as evidenced by a speculative article in the *Baltimore Sun*. I firmly rebutted their charges, pointing out the extraordinary lengths to which we have gone to discourage speculation, and emphasizing the unacceptable nature of their continued charges of bad faith, alone among the many nations with whom we have done business recently. This touched a raw nerve and Thuy responded that Hanoi's position was different from Moscow's and Peking's. For good measure, they added the usual charge about our violating the 1968 agreement, which I countered by citing their own flagrant violations.

—I then said I would reply to the points in their 10-point proposal one by one, excepting the political point, for the purpose of which I was going to Saigon. I tabled three documents and explained them:

—(1) A list of agreed *general principles* to guide a settlement, based on principles they included as part of their 10-point plan, but altered to indicate areas where we both agreed, instead of merely reciting unilateral statements by our side, as their document did. We said we were willing to record these principles as understandings between us. These principles were, in summary:

• The U.S. and DRV pose no long-term threat to each other and can coexist.

• Both sides agree that the time has come to negotiate a settlement respecting Vietnamese independence and meeting each other's reasonable concerns.

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[6] See footnote 5, Document 2.

• Both sides respect South Vietnam's right to decide freely its own political future. The U.S. is not committed to any particular process in South Vietnam.

• Both sides are interested in the independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity of the Indochinese countries. The U.S. does not seek to maintain troops, bases or alliances in Indochina after the war is over.

• Both sides will respect the agreements reached, and this will contribute to the development of relations between them.

• Both sides must create mutual confidence, show good faith and have a realistic outlook.

—(2) *A new 10-point plan,* keyed to their 10-point proposal of the preceding meeting. The two major new elements, in addition to the use of much of their format and language, were:

• We left open the number of months following the overall agreement in which total U.S. withdrawals would take place. I said we would make a proposal next time, making clear it would not meet their position of one month.

• The Indochina ceasefire would take place at a time to be agreed upon by the parties. I said that we would present our thinking on timing for the ceasefire together with concrete and comprehensive political proposals at our next meeting.

• After tabling the plan, I thoroughly went through areas of agreement and disagreement between us, point by point.

—(3) A revised document on *negotiating procedures,* based on the document they presented at the last meeting:

• Basically we accepted their concept of negotiating procedures: Once progress is made in our secret bilateral talks, three other forums should be activated: bilateral between the GVN (including Thieu) and the PRG to work on a political settlement and other matters; tripartite talks among the three Vietnamese parties on issues like relations between North and South; and continuing four power talks to work on questions like the details of a ceasefire.

• However, we proposed that as soon as a problem was essentially resolved between the U.S. and DRV the parties could agree to refer it immediately to one of the other forums for discussion rather than holding up all other forums until our secret talks had agreed on all main issues as they suggest.

• I also pointed out that logic dictated that the question of Vietnamese armed forces be discussed in the tripartite forum, given their divisions in the South, rather than in the GVN–PRG bilaterals which they suggested.

• Our document also seeks to shift more of the political discussion to the bilateral GVN–PRG forum.

• I emphasized the importance we attached to the joint DRV–US responsibility to facilitate the resolution of difficulties which may arise in the other forums.

• In addition to the four forums presented by them, we suggested the possibility of a wider international forum to deal with matters related to all of Indochina.

—I also emphatically stated that if they continued to count on our elections to force us into more concessions, they would be utterly wrong. We would make a serious effort for peace, but this would not be affected in any way by domestic political considerations.

Following the one-hour break, Tho tried to coax forth our ideas on a political settlement before we went to Saigon. He emphasized the necessity of recognizing the existence of two governments, two armies, and three political forces in South Vietnam, which made the formation of a Government of National Concord necessary. He reemphasized the primordial nature of the political question to them and made it clear he was disappointed that we had said nothing about a political solution in our presentation. He then read through a long document, reflecting their analysis of our 12 points of August 1. At times he was quite incisive in his analysis of our position, but his tone was heavily negative. Notable points as follows.

—Tho said there were three major differences between us.

—On the political question, our views were completely different. He delivered himself of some obiter dicta on the Thieu government and said our political proposal of August 1 did nothing to change our desire to maintain that government in power. More specifically, he said:

• Our proposals would make some formal changes in the Saigon government but in reality keep it intact. It would not change its policy or its personnel except Thieu.

• Elections and any other political process would be carried out within the framework of the present government and its organs and thus could hardly be free.

• Our proposals would also preserve the present constitution as there would only be "revisions late in the process," and how this would happen was unclear.

• In contrast, their political proposals would reflect "realities" in South Vietnam, specifically the fact that there are "two governments, two armies, and three political forces."

• Their plan would provide for the formation of a three-segment (equal proportion) government in South Vietnam to take power as soon as a settlement is reached and to conduct internal and external affairs until the general elections they would organize. The election would choose a constituent assembly which would work out a new constitution and set up the definitive government. Thus, he asserted, their plan

would give all political tendencies a fair and safe chance rather than loading the dice for the Thieu regime.

—On the *troop withdrawal question,* he said we still wanted to get DRV troops out of South Vietnam. This we could never implement, since it would be "morally, legally, and politically" wrong to do so. The NVA should be considered as belonging to the PRG for purposes of negotiation.

—On the *timing and implementation of the ceasefire,* he reiterated their position that ceasefire can only follow total agreement:

• Military and political issues should be settled between us before shifting the discussions to other forums; and all the details should be worked out before a ceasefire.

• We, in turn, sought to solve only military questions and the general principles of a political solution before a ceasefire. In practice we were still trying basically to separate military issues from political ones.

• While the DRV would not speak for Laos and Cambodia, he could assure us that the solution of the Vietnam problem would positively contribute to the settling of the ceasefire, as well as the POW problems in these countries.

—Other, smaller differences were:

• Timing of withdrawals, mentioned in minor key.

• Cessation of military aid to the Saigon regime.

• Reparations, for which the U.S. must accept formal responsibility, though he agreed that we needn't use the word "reparations" in a formal document.

—Tho also rejected our idea of shifting generally agreed subjects such as ceasefire to the plenary session for technical implementation.

—Concerning our new plan which we had just presented, Tho said his preliminary views were that while we had rearranged our points to follow theirs, the resemblance was only literary and not substantial.

After a second, short break, I asked a number of questions designed to get them to clarify their position. The following emerged:

—In their view, both the GVN and the PRG would cease to exist after a ceasefire. The Government of National Concord would determine its own aid requirements in accordance with its neutral policy. If we stopped aid, the DRV would also stop its aid.

—Three-segment governments would exist at every local level at which political power was contested, but the "fact" of the matter was that in practically all GVN areas, power was contested.

—The two contending armies in South Vietnam would be merged and put under the command of the Government of National Concord.

DRV forces in the South would be treated for this purpose as part of the "liberation Army."

—Each side could now nominate a certain number of "neutral" members of the government but each name had to be jointly approved.

—Tho came back again to the necessity of solving the political question first. I pointed out that it was he himself who had proposed solving the questions which could be solved and then coming back to points of disagreement.

As the meeting headed toward a close I registered my disillusionment with their generally negative performance. They could hardly expect me to work hard in Saigon on political issues when they were underscoring differences on other issues as well. This had a salutory effect; their tone changed markedly:

—They emphasized that both sides had been showing good will and that we were engaged in serious negotiations.

—They emphasized that neutral ground must be found on the tough questions, like the political issues.

—They opined that if the political problem could be solved, the other issues would fall into place.

—They underlined their desire for rapid progress toward a settlement.

—And Tho informed me that he was returning shortly to Hanoi; this was the first time he had accounted for his travels to me.

In this ambiance, I came back to the question Tho had asked during a break. I restated my willingness in principle, if we made more progress, to meet at some future time with him and other members of the DRV Politburo in a neutral location, if all agreed that would speed up final agreement. He said they would consider this suggestion.

We concluded the meeting by agreeing to study further each other's plans. In discussing the date of the next meeting, Tho said that the date of September 8, which we had proposed, was not possible because he would not be back until September 10. We then agreed on September 15.

247. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 19, 1972.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Military Situation as Viewed in Saigon

In my two days in Saigon I received extensive briefings on the military situation from General Weyand, General Vogt, Ambassador Bunker,[2] the CIA station chief,[3] and other Embassy officers—and President Thieu.[4] I asked them for their estimates of the current military situation and their forecasts for the next two months, the next six months, and the next twelve months.

There were no significant divergences of view. The consensus that emerged was as follows.

1. *The ARVN had already virtually recovered its equipment and manpower losses from the first phase of the 1972 offensive. But the enemy's main-force capability had suffered severe losses in manpower and equipment, especially heavy weaponry, that he had little immediate prospect of recovering.* The GVN was likely to gradually re-expand its area of control in the coming months. The enemy's difficulties would progressively worsen over the coming months, given his losses and his massive resupply problem, the advent of the rainy season (mid-September), our continued bombing and blockade, and the ARVN's recovery of the initiative.

—The enemy's effort in MR I, for example, had already developed into a defense of its Quang Tri position rather than an offensive against Hue. General Weyand estimated that the enemy had suffered 100,000 killed or seriously wounded country-wide since the offensive. General Vogt estimated that 600–650 out of the enemy's 750 tanks have been destroyed.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 161, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Kissinger met with Weyand, Vogt, and Bunker on the evening of August 16 and the morning of August 17. A memorandum of conversation for each meeting is in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 58, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Trips, Kissinger Memcons, August 1972.

[3] For his meeting with Polgar and Bunker, see Document 242.

[4] For his meetings with Thieu, see Documents 243 and 245.

—In MRs II, III, and IV, enemy infiltration of manpower had already tapered off to close to zero, in contrast to 1968 when infiltration continued at a high level late into the year.

2. *Nevertheless the enemy retained the capacity to launch a wave of small-unit attacks by fire over the next two months and give an impression of widespread activity and presence.* This was particularly possible in MRs I and III. Some district towns might be taken, and there may even be shelling and sapper attacks against Saigon.

—COSVN headquarters and the enemy's Sapper Command had moved in-country for the first time in MR III.

—General Minh, contrary to our best judgment and advice, has been concentrating his forces on Route 13 where the battle had stabilized, instead of spreading his forces to meet threats elsewhere in MR–III. I raised this matter with President Thieu who acknowledged that Minh has lost his aggressiveness.

But there was little likelihood of an ARVN disaster or of a sustained two to three week enemy offensive that would have any military impact. The enemy's sapper losses would be severe in the process. The cadre on whom the burden would fall were already demoralized, vulnerable, and increasingly reluctant to take risks.

3. *The middle-term (6-month) prospect was that the enemy would at some point wind up the offensive, withdraw several of the NVA divisions northward, and revert to a protracted-warfare strategy—not because this offered any prospect of success but because he had no alternative.* President Thieu said he thought the enemy would rather revert to protracted warfare, despite its futility, than admit defeat.

—Throughout the country it was apparent that the enemy's strategy was now shaped by his limited capability. He was not husbanding his resources but, on the contrary, was using whatever forces were available to him. Thus he was losing his freedom of maneuver. Cambodia was vulnerable, for example, but the NVA units that had pressed Cambodia were now fighting in MRs III and IV. The division threatening Hue was now drawn back to help hold Quang Tri.

Ambassador Bunker was convinced that the launching of the 1972 offensive had itself been prompted by the earlier failure of protracted warfare to achieve any appreciable political gain.

4. *Our bombing and mining of the North was crucial to all this in the short and middle terms.* The enemy's essential problem was that he had suffered staggering losses and was still running down his stockpiles, while we were hitting him more effectively in the North and compounding all his difficulties of resupply in the South.

—I asked General Vogt to give me a list of any targets in the North that we were not hitting that he thought would be lucrative.

5. *Over the longer term (a year and longer), the deterioration of the enemy's position was cumulative*. Even if he managed to resupply, it would take him two to three years to prepare for another large-scale offensive, just as it took him an extended period to recover from Tet 1968 and the 1970 Cambodian operation.

—The GVN, meanwhile, was inaugurating new programs to upgrade its pacification and territorial forces and reform its mobilization law.

—The enemy had made substantial inroads into pacification during the offensive. But with the fading away of the NVA main-force strength, the GVN's recovery of pacification was almost certain.

There were significant base areas where the enemy might not be rooted out for a very long time—U Minh forest, Plain of Reeds, A Shau Valley, the Khe Sanh area, and the mountains near Quang Tri. *But the enemy faced the prospect that, in the absence of a political settlement, the military balance would be tipping progressively in ARVN's favor over the next two to three years.*

6. President Thieu thought that in the absence of any significant successes in South Vietnam the enemy might focus his efforts over the next several years on Laos and Cambodia, with a view to developing springboards for eventual renewed attacks on South Vietnam. Thieu said he was resigned to the prospect of relatively weak anti-Communist resistance in Laos. But he thought much more could be accomplished in Cambodia if Lon Nol could develop a proper sense of priorities.

Overall, my discussions elicited a consensus that while Hanoi may not yet be on the ropes, their strategy was soon likely to revert to one of protracted warfare within GVN capabilities to contain. Virtually all of the persons with whom I spoke viewed the military situation with considerable confidence and foresaw a continued decline in our direct involvement—provided we continued to provide military and economic aid to South Vietnam and took the necessary steps to repair the remaining gaps in the RVNAF force structure, such as further Vietnamizing the air war.

248. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, August 19, 1972.

WH 2146. Subj: Response to GVN comments on our peace proposals.

1. Herewith our response to the GVN August 18 comments on our proposed peace offer.[2] You should convey our position to the Presidential Palace as soon as possible, and request Thieu's early comments looking toward our Hawaii meeting.

2. First, some general comments. I cannot emphasize too strongly the point I made repeatedly to Thieu that we must keep our eye on the main issue and not get hung up on minor legal technicalities. We want to accept as much of the DRV language as possible on peripheral issues so that if talks ever break up, we are in impeccable public posture and in position to demonstrate beyond shadow of a doubt that failure of negotiation was due to Hanoi's unwillingness to accept our forthcoming political formulation—in short by their insistence on our imposing a Communist government. We cannot afford break-up in which DRV can divert attention from our fundamental political difference by pointing to other nonessential areas of disagreement.

GVN must also bear in mind that accepting Hanoi's language in essentially non-operative clauses will not alter central fact that, should our proposal be accepted, GVN will have veto in various forums and, that if they reject our offer, some of the minor objections GVN has raised will be overshadowed by enormous advantages accruing to both ourselves and GVN from strategy which I outlined in such detail to Thieu. So finally, as a general principle, we cannot slide backwards from US–GVN January plan which GVN comments suggest in some instances.

3. We accept their suggestion that the peace offer and the procedural plan should be considered as separate proposals. We also suggest that the peace proposal be treated as a formal negotiating document while the procedural proposal can be informal in nature.

4. With regard to their point-by-point comments on our counterproposal, our response, keyed to the memorandum they conveyed to us on August 18, is as follows:

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, To Amb. Bunker—Saigon, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only; Immediate. A handwritten note at the top of the first page reads: "For Haig approval before forwarding." Haig checked the "approve" option.

[2] See Documents 225 and 245.

Point 1: We believe it would be most unwise to alter the language in our point 1 to refer to the territorial integrity of "North and South Vietnam." First of all this is a non-operative provision in any event. Secondly, from legal point of view our understanding is that unity of Vietnam has never been at issue anyway but rather means by which it is to be achieved. Article 1 of GVN's own constitution states that Vietnam is a "territorially indivisible, unified, and independent republic." Thus we would view this as a weak point on which to have a showdown with DRV. Also we do not believe this is place to raise theological issue of separate legal status of North and South Vietnam.

In addition, GVN memorandum leaves out phrase Quote as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam Unquote. We believe we should keep this formulation. We have always expressed respect for Geneva Agreements, as reflected in point 4 of our January plan and point 7 of our current proposal. We do not mind unilateral expression here so long as it applies to all parties as well in point 7.

Points 2 and 3: We appear to be in agreement on these points and as I told Thieu, the period for withdrawal, and consequently for prisoner release, will be set at three months. Please reconfirm our intention on this.

Point 5: We do not believe question of NVA forces should be raised in this document. This is a matter which will be discussed in the ensuing forums. You should point out that NVA forces were not repeat not mentioned in our January proposal and this would be a red flag to other side. The problem of NVA forces is clearly dealt with by inference in our point 7. Also it is better raised in a forum where the GVN has a veto.

We note GVN's suggested language also drops word "equality" from paragraph. We understand their point but it is essentially semantic and non-operative. We construe word "equality" in sense of fairness and not to mean that there is parity between GVN and NLF forces. Besides, that problem will be settled in the subsidiary forums, if not on the battlefield.

Point 6: We believe their first suggestion regarding prompt starting negotiations towards reestablishment of normal relations is a minor one, particularly since Le Duc Tho said at the last private meeting that this would be the chief subject for the third forum. But we agree to the change "promptly start negotiations towards," with understanding that we may fall off this should it turn out to be one of few remaining sticking points with DRV. The substitution of the word "various" for "all" fields is semantic, relates to a matter which will be under GVN's complete control in subsidiary forum and therefore we believe it an unnecessary change.

We cannot accept GVN's suggested addition of clause "except for purely defensive purposes and on a temporary basis" at the end of final paragraph.

This would be a major red flag to the DRV and in end of itself could produce the very blow-out over a non-operative clause which we seek to avoid. You should point out that we have already met the GVN point by inference by dropping DRV's language contained in their point 6(B) about the two Vietnam's refraining Quote from recognizing the protection of any foreign power, any military alliance or bloc Unquote. We dropped this clause from our proposal precisely because we had in mind the GVN's right to call on outside assistance for self defense. You should also point out that GVN's suggested language was not in our joint January 25 proposal and would look like a significant new hedge. Cosmetically, with particular reference to our domestic scene, it could be viewed as a loophole to justify continued U.S. involvement.

Point 7: GVN language would (1) move up principle of armed forces staying within national frontiers to first paragraph on Geneva Agreements and (2) introduce phrase Quote four countries Unquote.

We believe that we should stick to our language which is substantially identical to points 4 and 5 of our joint January 25 proposal. Furthermore, we cannot accept injecting idea of Quote four countries Unquote into our formal proposal. Here again, we would be specifying separate North and South Vietnamese countries, a theological point not raised in our previous proposal and again a red flag for Hanoi. We believe our point as presently phrased deals adequately with GVN concerns and would again point out that GVN has ample room for maneuver on this issue in the negotiating forums which would open up.

Point 8: We have no differences.

Point 9: We agree that for presentational purposes the word "general" can be substituted for "stand-still" before ceasefire as suggested at our August 18 meeting.

We also intend to leave in language "at a time mutually agreed upon" at the beginning of the point although you should mention again that I intend to tell the DRV negotiators September 15 that as a concession we are prepared to accept their position that a ceasefire should come after overall agreement on al other issues.

For the same reasons as outlined with respect to point 7, we cannot accept their suggested addition at the end of point 9 concerning four repeat four countries of Indochina.

Point 10: You should point out that we would add point 4 as one coming under international supervision since provision is made for international supervision of the Presidential election, as in the January 25 proposal.

We accept the addition of the word "belligerent" and the phrase "prior to the ceasefire" although the latter phrase may drop out again in the process of negotiations. You can assure Thieu that, as I told him on August 18, we envisage agreement on supervision prior to a ceasefire in any event, and that is one reason why we favor shifting discussion of ceasefire modalities to the Kleber forum as soon as possible.

As for paragraph (B) we accept the insertion of "for the respect of the ceasefire" after words "international guarantees;" we also agree to insertion of word "belligerent" before "parties" at end of paragraph.

Procedural issues:

1. We have already used the correct designation for the GVN. We also agree to their suggestion that any procedural document will refer to the NLF instead of the PRG. We presume GVN will also want to refer to them as NLF in point 4 of our substantive proposal. Should nomenclature prove at some stage to be only obstacle to agreement between us and DRV we are not going to fall on our swords over this. You may, however, reaffirm to GVN that in any formal document we will in the first instance seek to follow standard diplomatic practice of each side using nomenclature it wishes in instances where juridical status of a political entity is in dispute. So we would call the PRG the NLF in our documents and they in turn would probably refer to the GVN as the Saigon administration.

2. We agree to delete words Quote and resolve Unquote from the second sentence of what is now point 11(A) of our proposal. Since, with this deletion, we are no longer referring to solution of political issues in the first forum, there would not appear as great a need to change the words Quote is resolved Unquote to Quote has been dealt with Unquote in the third paragraph; but in view of our discussion on August 10,[3] we defer to the GVN if they insist on this point.

Under the second forum we agree to change Quote may not have been resolved Unquote to Quote may not have been dealt with Unquote in the second sentence.

3. GVN objection to a tripartite forum gives us considerable difficulty and as I pointed out we believe legalistic disadvantages are in our view strongly outweighed by political and legal recognition GVN gains by dealing with other side in as many forums as possible.

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[3] The drafter may have meant August 18. On that date, Kissinger, Bunker, and Negroponte met Thieu, Nha, and Duc in Saigon for a detailed discussion of the South Vietnamese view of the negotiations; see Document 245.

To ease GVN's problem we would suggest deletion of "tripartite" from nomenclature of these private meetings and also delete phrase Quote such as problem of Vietnamese armed force Unquote right through to end of sentence. Also, as I pointed out to Thieu, DRV does not visualize discussion of internal issues in this forum but rather the status of the DMZ, relations between the two zones and steps leading to reunification.

4. With respect to four party forum we propose to delete phrase Quote such as an Indochina-wide ceasefire Unquote so as to be consistent with our approach of being vaguer on what is discussed in the third and fourth forums. This change as it happens, also reverts back more closely to original DRV language at no expense to us. This deletion in no way detracts from our intention that ceasefire modalities be discussed at Kleber.

Regarding paragraph (C) of our procedural proposal, joint U.S.–DRV responsibility, we will delete this in the procedural proposal itself.

On paragraph (D), pursuant to our August 18 discussion, we agree to changing the second sentence to read Quote besides the overall agreement the parties may also reach bilateral or multilateral agreements with one another Unquote, thereby again avoiding reference to tripartite agreements.

5. You should, of course, present our comments in the manner you consider most effective, drawing on the above rationale as you see fit to accomplish our objectives. In so doing, please reiterate to Thieu my appreciation for our constructive discussions and the spirit in which we believe he is considering our strategy and counter proposals. We hope this spirit will infuse his reactions to our positions in this message as well as the central question of point 4. As you know, we would like to have their comments as soon as possible and any event in time for Hawaii meeting.

Warm regards.

249. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, August 24, 1972, 11:34 a.m.

TELECON/IN—Dr. Kissinger

CJCS: Hello Henry.

HAK: I wanted to talk to you about these bombing strikes. The important thing is that we do not want anybody playing games.

CJCS: I talked to you about this before and there is nothing like that going on.[2]

HAK: Look at the figures—70% of the strikes have been canceled.

CJCS: Not canceled—diverted.

HAK: What about the Queson operation[3]—I am sure that everyone is worried that we don't have a major setback.

CJCS: I worked on that last weekend and we sent another Regiment down there.

HAK: The President asked me to call you on these two points before he departed for Chicago this morning.

CJCS: We are going to hold a meeting at CINCPAC Headquarters on this bombing operation tomorrow.

HAK: Don't step it up—(Dr. Kissinger was talking about the bombing strikes at this point (*not the meetings*)).

CJCS: I believe that our responsibility now is to give better reports than have previously been given. The reporting procedures have been poor. I don't believe that you realize that in addition to daylight strikes, we have been delivering night strikes also. For instance, 52 strikes were delivered on pre-planned targets—they are flying the strikes around the clock.

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

[2] Moorer was referring to their conversation of August 12 at 10:05 a.m.; see Document 235.

[3] In August the 711th PAVN (North Vietnamese) Division launched an offensive in the Que Son Valley south of Danang and overran a South Vietnamese regiment—the 5th Regiment, 2d ARVN Division. The South Vietnamese then sent another regiment of the division, the 4th, to reinforce and mount a counteroffensive. (Lam Quam Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon,* pp. 283–285)

HAK: When you say reporting—you don't mean the press.

CJCS: No, I don't mean the press. Reporting has been done improperly—when the aircraft were diverted. In addition to that they have been working well in there. 52 strikes in the Northern area. I am going to get a better display—General Vogt explained this to you.

HAK: There are so many commanders in this.

CJCS: No that is not true.

HAK: Cut back 20%.

CJCS: I haven't seen that paper,[4] but I have talked about it with Haig.

HAK: I am not going to accept this.

CJCS: I hope you don't—I have discussed this with you previously and I will keep you informed. I don't hold a copy of that paper.

HAK: The President asked me to call you on these two problems.

CJCS: No orders would go out there without coming through me.

HAK: Ammunition control.

CJCS: I talked to Al about that and I am waiting for answer from OSD. The ball is in their court—if it bounces back in the wrong direction I will let you know.

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[4] On August 19, Haig forwarded to Kissinger a memorandum from Laird that provided the White House with data on the air war over North and South Vietnam between May and August 12. At the top of Haig's memorandum, Kissinger wrote, "Depressing." According to the data provided by Laird, the Air Force and Navy in that time had scheduled 22,398 sorties over the North and had actually flown 19,429. Focusing on the number of primary targets struck in the North in the same period, as opposed simply to sorties flown, showed that 488, or 53 percent of the total, were not struck as planned, and, further, that 386, or 79 percent, of the targets not struck were weather-related diversions or cancellations. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 96, Vietnam Subject Files, Air Activity in Southeast Asia, Vol. III, January–August 1972)

250. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 25, 1972.

SUBJECT

Where We Are in the Negotiating Process

My separate memorandum to you on the August 14, 1972 meeting with the North Vietnamese[2] explains the usefulness of that session, despite the lack of substantive breakthrough, and touches on the implications for the next few months. This paper will give you a fuller rundown on where I think we now stand in the negotiating process and reflects much of the rationale I used in my talks with President Thieu.[3]

In brief, I think we are much closer than the North Vietnamese to our objectives on the diplomatic front. They seek to gain their negotiating terms either (1) by waiting for McGovern, or (2) pressuring us before the election. We seek (1) an honorable settlement or (2) failing that, a clear record of reasonableness for the American people.

Hanoi's Objectives

Hanoi has been facing an agonizing dilemma. The North Vietnamese obviously would prefer to wait out our elections, hoping for a McGovern win that will yield them their objectives. This would be the natural course, especially for a nation with no single strong leader to make bold decisions. However, even wishful thinking cannot blot out a gap of 20 percentage points in the polls. Thus, they face the prospect of an Administration that won't guarantee their victory being armed with a fresh four-year mandate, including a judgment on Vietnam policy, from the American people.

Given this prospect, Hanoi must calculate that due to domestic pressures, this Administration is more likely to be generous before November than afterwards, and they are therefore better off trying to gain concessions now. However, to accomplish this means showing some

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XVII. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. On Lord's cover memorandum transmitting the revised draft of the text that was sent, Kissinger wrote: "Excellent. Move forward." (Ibid.)

[2] Document 246.

[3] See Documents 243 and 245.

visible progress in Paris—and this in turn reinforces this Administration's election prospects.

Accordingly, the North Vietnamese have been trying to treat the negotiations on two planes. Publicly, they are doing everything possible to create the impression of a total deadlock in Paris. This is designed to deprive the American people of hope for an early settlement, and thus serve both their objectives—increase McGovern's chances and magnify the domestic pressures against us. At the same time, they want private meetings in order to probe for the maximum terms they can get from us between now and November. While they explore our positions, they are unwilling to let any progress made in the talks be registered publicly—whether in public commentary, or energizing the plenary sessions, or opening up other forums.

In brief, they want to combine the reality of private progress with the appearance of stalemate.

This strategy is not working. First of all, we have not let them play the game of public deadlock and secret advance. Much to their discomfiture, we have insisted on announcing the fact of our private meetings (for the legitimate reason that we cannot keep my travels secret). While we have been scrupulous in not commenting on the substance or nature of these meetings, the very fact they are taking place correctly leaves the public impression that serious negotiations are under way. This in turn keeps the opposition off guard and dampens domestic pressures.

Secondly, I have continually warned the North Vietnamese that I will break off the talks if they play domestic politics. This might have had a bearing on the gingerly way they have been treating Senator McGovern to date.

Thirdly, we have so far kept them from making their proposals public. If they had published their August 1 plans, we would have had a serious presentational problem getting beyond their cosmetics and explaining their inherent inequities. This would be particularly awkward while Congress was still in session. Now that we are working with Thieu on a counterproposal, the other side is further restrained from going public. (To help keep them silent I encouraged Thieu to make my reception look somewhat cool so as to reflect give and take on the negotiations.) And after tabling our counterproposal, we can easily demonstrate the unreasonable elements of their plans.

Finally, their objectives clash when it comes to timing. They want any settlement with us to take shape at the last possible moment before November—when they are sure (1) they have wrung every pre-election concession from us and (2) that McGovern has no chance to win. However, the negotiating problems are very complex, unlike 1968 when the bombing halt was the only issue. There is probably too

little time left after September 15 for us to conclude more than an agreement in principle. This in turn would open up other forums to discuss the settlement in depth; it would at least reinvigorate the plenaries and probably launch the GVN–PRG bilaterals as well. We would have a breakthrough toward peace without their having all the details of a settlement buttoned down. They would have legitimized the GVN and Thieu and would be forced to deal with them from here on out.

In short, I have come increasingly to the conclusion that whatever their other formidable qualities, the North Vietnamese have little strategic vision. They would have been much better off now, for example, if they had accepted our military solution of May 1971—we would have been completely out of Vietnam months ago, well before Vietnamization had run its course. This year once again they appear to have missed their strategic moment. They either should have moved quickly enough toward a settlement to get details firmly in place before November, or they should have published their proposals to pressure us. They have done neither; and time is now working against them.

Our Objectives

We, in turn, have two objectives:

—(1) We want to conclude a negotiated settlement, or at least a breakthrough in principle, on honorable terms. In these efforts, we draw the line at imposing a communist government or making its emergence inevitable.

—(2) If a reasonable solution is not possible, we want to make the best possible record for public opinion. In this case, we have to ensure that the negotiations break up over the other side's exorbitant political demands so as to isolate those in our country who would have us accept ignominious terms.

We continue to have a chance for our primary objective. We should know in two more meetings whether a breakthrough is possible. However, even with the best of goodwill, it is difficult to see how we can nail down a comprehensive settlement in the next two and a half months—particularly since Le Duc Tho's trip has delayed our next meeting until mid-September.

The most that can probably be accomplished is an agreement in principle before November; the complex details of such issues as the ceasefire and political process will take more time to work out. This would open up the other negotiating forums, thus locking the North Vietnamese into direct negotiations with the South Vietnamese government, including Thieu.

On the other hand, if there is no breakthrough, the process in Paris would have brought us two to three months of maneuvering room and

a solid negotiating record which, if anything, went beyond safe positions. We have also elicited some outrageous demands from the North Vietnamese that even McGovern could not swallow—the $8 billion dollars in reparations, with our culpability written into an agreement; insistence that the entire North Vietnamese field army is under PRG command; coalition governments at virtually all the local levels, etc.

Thus, I believe we are in a very strong tactical position as the result of the first three private sessions with the North Vietnamese in this series. Our already excellent negotiating record will be further improved when we table our full counterproposal, with political elements, on September 15. Our serious search for a settlement has been reflected publicly in the mere fact of private meetings and my trip to Saigon, depriving Hanoi of its two tier approach to negotiations and keeping our opponents off-balance. And if the private talks now break down in October, we will be in a much stronger position than if we had not made these further efforts and had labored under a Paris deadlock all summer.

The Prospects for a Settlement

At this point, the evidence is inconclusive whether Hanoi is really serious about concluding a negotiated settlement. On substance, they have a long way to go on their political positions to make them acceptable to us and Thieu. But what they have shown to date is not inconsistent with ultimate positions that we could live with. And their movement has not been overly slow, given the complexity of the issues and their traditional glacier pace in changing their positions. They have implicitly recognized the legitimacy of the GVN, and Thieu, in their August 1 substantive and procedural proposals. Our task now is to get them to agree to a general political formula (along with more detailed resolution of the military issues) which avoids a coalition government and shifts the detailed negotiations on a political solution to the GVN–PRG forum.

Other aspects of the North Vietnamese behavior in recent weeks suggest they might possibly be considering a basic agreement before November:

(1) They have been relatively restrained in their public pressures on us. They are doing their utmost to knock down any speculation that the private talks are making progress, which is not totally unreasonable given the uninformed positive speculation by high level US spokesmen which we can't really expect Hanoi to believe is unauthorized. And their vilification of our policies continues in Paris and Hanoi. On the other hand, they have not played their game of last summer when they pressured us publicly on the NLF's 7 points while negotiating privately on their 9 points. Le Duc Tho has given no interviews, and the communists have generally steered clear of envoys from our

opposition (e.g. Salinger saw none of the top people in either the NVN or PRG delegations).

(2) They have not published their new proposals. This gambit would reflect a choice to pressure us rather than deal with us.

(3) They have been willing to let this series of talks stretch out over a considerable period. This continued private activity works against them if they are not serious.

(4) Le Duc Tho has returned to Hanoi. This suggests that the Politburo is reviewing its negotiating position. To do so after only one meeting based on their August 1 ten points, their most comprehensive proposal to date, is unprecedented. In the past, they have stood fast on any of their initiatives for several months.

(5) At our last session, Le Duc Tho evinced some interest in the idea of my meeting other members of the Politburo in some location outside of Paris.

None of these straws suggest that Hanoi is ready to settle on reasonable terms; the odds are still against this. However, these actions are consistent with a desire to settle, and they at least indicate that they want to hold open the option of a settlement until well into the fall.

If they move then, they will, of course, find us a willing partner. If they continue to hold to their unreasonable political position, we will have an unassailable record to present publicly.

The August 14 Meeting

It is as part of this pattern that the August 14 meeting derives its significance despite the fact that it produced no substantive breakthrough:

—We tabled forthcoming offers on principles, substance, and procedure. We repackaged their proposals and made a good record, without conceding any core points and avoiding the political issue pending my Saigon trip.

—Our questions drew out of them some patently unreasonable demands. And we discredited conclusively the Shriver/Harriman thesis of a peace "signal" in late 1968, with the North Vietnamese insisting that mutual withdrawal was never in the cards.

—Combined with our earlier meetings, we have both brought about some significant changes in the other side's positions and kept them from publishing them.

—Furthermore, the chance for a breakthrough remains, for all the reasons cited above.

Likely Scenarios

As a result of our meetings to date, we now have the following advantageous prospects:

—After completing our consultation process with Thieu we will table our new plan including political proposals, at the September 15 meeting. Le Duc Tho should return from Hanoi with some new ideas as well.

—Each side will have to study each other's new plans. Certainly we will have presented enough new elements to make it impossible for the North Vietnamese to break off the talks at that point.

—There would be at least one, and probably two, more exploratory sessions; this will take us to the beginning or middle of October. We will then know whether a deal is possible.

—If the other side is interested in our plan, one of two things will then happen during the month of October:

• Either we will sign an agreement in principle and announce it publicly, with dramatic impact; or

• We will at least open up the other forums among the Vietnamese parties, as well as energizing the plenary sessions, on the details of various issues. This by itself would have major public impact.

—On the other hand, if the talks collapse in October, we can take the offensive—as we did last January—by publishing our proposals and efforts. We would underline our (and Thieu's) reasonableness and the other side's intransigence, including some of their preposterous positions that, if taken literally, no American President could accept. Having essentially met the other side's positions on all issues except the political one, and having been generous on that one as well, we could demonstrate that negotiations broke down over a single issue: their insistence that we effectively guarantee a communist takeover in South Vietnam.

—We kept our opponents silent for several months last winter and spring. We can certainly do so for several weeks this fall with an even more impressive negotiating record.

—After November, our bargaining position is obviously much stronger. You will be armed with a fresh four-year mandate that includes the American people's judgment that we should not crown ten years of sacrifice with dishonor.

To sum up. Hanoi is now in the position that (1) the benefits of a breakup in the talks for them have been minimized, if not eliminated; and (2) progress in the talks would ease our domestic pressures but probably not yield a final settlement before November. Either scenario would enhance the already strong prospects for the re-election of this Administration and a renewed mandate.

On the other hand, we have a reasonable chance to achieve a breakthrough toward a settlement with all the positive international and domestic fallout. If not, we and the North Vietnamese have written a

record that demonstrates that the U.S. tried everything for a settlement short of betrayal.

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251. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 26, 1972.

SUBJECT

Further Analysis of DRV August 1 Peace Proposal

I have already summarized for you the highlights of our August 1 meeting at which the DRV tabled its new 10-point peace proposal and a separate procedural document.[2]

Since our own new counter-proposal draws on the format and some of the substance of their proposals, I wanted to give you a fuller rundown. This memorandum analyzes the other side's proposal according to the following outline:

—Overall significance

—What the DRV plan proposes

—What is new

—Positive elements

—Unacceptable elements

—A point-by-point discussion.

Significance

The DRV has put forward a 10-point peace proposal and an accompanying document on negotiating procedures which, while advancing several new elements, maintains its essential, unacceptable demand that we agree to the establishment of a three-segment Government of National Concord in Saigon. Our acceptance of this demand is made the stepping stone to enter into the other phases of the negotiating process, which the DRV has sweetened with some concessions, sub-

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 862, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Memos, January–August 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. Tab A (August 1) and Tab B (undated) are attached but not printed.

[2] See Document 225.

stantive and procedural. Thus military issues such as timing of U.S. withdrawal have assumed a clearly secondary character to our meeting their fundamental political demands and Thieu's resignation is a precondition for overall settlement but not for bilateral PRG–GVN talks.

I see one of at least three possible interpretations of Hanoi's latest negotiating offer:

—First they could be stonewalling us, in effect simply repackaging their old demands in a somewhat more conciliatory tone but retaining their bedrock demand that we work out the contents of a political solution directly with them. If they stick to their political demand as presently formulated, then the short-term prospects for a settlement are not good.

—Second, they could be keeping their options completely open pending the developments on the battlefield and our domestic scene—in effect, a delaying action. Nothing in their proposal precludes a shift towards serious negotiations at a later stage. They could for example modify their position on the timing of a ceasefire; or they could drop their insistence on bilateral U.S.–DRV agreement on the "principles and main content" of the political question, settling for a vaguer, more general but face-saving agreement, then allowing the other procedural forums they have proposed to begin operation in which the GVN would be represented and indeed have a veto.

—Finally, they may already have decided to settle, but they want to probe us for any last minute political concessions we might have before coming to terms.

Our planned meeting on September 15 should give us some insight as to which of these three interpretations may be correct. Since we have not, however, tabled our own political counter-proposal, which we plan to do on September 15, it most likely will take at least one more meeting after that to judge with any certainty whether Hanoi is prepared to do a serious deal before November.

What it Proposes

The DRV's proposal calls on us to agree to total withdrawal within one month of the signature of an overall agreement, and to agree to the establishment of a three-segment Government of National Concord to take office in South Vietnam when the overall agreement is signed, at which time Thieu would resign. A standstill ceasefire in Vietnam under international control would also begin upon signature of the agreement. Prisoner releases in Vietnam would be carried out simultaneously with our troop withdrawals. The U.S. would be held responsible for reparations in North and South Vietnam.

The DRV also proposes a concrete formula for negotiations, according to which the U.S. and DRV would first resolve the military

questions and the "principles and main content" of the political questions, that is to say the establishment of a tripartite Government of National Concord. After, but only after, this was done, the PRG would talk to the GVN under Thieu and discuss the details of the military and political questions in a new bilateral forum. There would be two additional forums: a tripartite forum among the GVN, PRG and DRV, to discuss relations between North and South, and the present 4-party Kleber forum, to discuss matters pertaining to all sides. The opening of these forums would also have to await agreement on the basic questions in the U.S./DRV forum. Only when all problems were resolved in all the forums, would the overall agreement be signed, and a ceasefire begin.

What is New

There are a number of salient new elements in the DRV plan:

—Regarding the *military questions:*

• We are no longer asked to set a definitive, unconditional date for withdrawal of our forces.

• The DRV specifies that among the personnel to be withdrawn are "technical personnel (without any exception)," presumably referring to our civilian personnel.

• The DRV demands that we cease our military aid to Saigon as soon as a ceasefire takes effect, that is, according to their plan, when an overall agreement is signed.

• They specifically agree for the first time to an exchange of prisoner lists on the day of the agreement's signature.

—Regarding the *political questions:*

• Thieu is no longer asked to resign as a precondition for detailed political discussions between the PRG and the GVN, although these discussions would be predicated on Thieu's eventual resignation and the formation of a three-segment Government of National Concord.

• The composition of the Government of National Concord is elaborated to make it clear that, on the surface at least, a 50–50 power split is envisaged. This would be done through joint PRG–GVN agreement on the composition of the third segment of the Government of National Concord. Formerly, the Communist position could have been interpreted to mean that they insisted on two-thirds of the pie.

—Regarding *international control and supervision:*

• The DRV specifically subjects a ceasefire to international supervision for the first time.

• The DRV provides for the establishment of an international control and supervisory commission, whose organization, tasks and composition, as well as subjects under its purview, would be decided among the parties.

—The DRV concrete procedural proposals are new in their entirety:

• Inclusion of the GVN *with Thieu* as a negotiating partner would give the GVN a veto power in discussions on many important questions, as long as we do not accept the DRV political solution beforehand, as they presently insist.

Positive Elements

Leading the list of positive elements in the DRV proposals is their dropping of their demand for Thieu's immediate resignation, even though they continue to maintain that Thieu cannot remain as part of a final settlement. This presents us with little difficulty in the sense that Thieu himself is willing to step down as part of a final settlement in any event.

Second, they no longer demand a unilateral fixed date for our withdrawal but rather have come around to our position of setting a time limit as part of a settlement. They say we should get out one month after an overall settlement, as contrasted to our proposal of four months. The figure is obviously negotiable and, therefore, the issue of our withdrawal deadline has lost much of its former importance.

Third, the DRV plan is more concrete than any they have tabled previously, including their separate procedural proposal for the formation of the various negotiating forums once certain fundamental issues have been resolved bilaterally between the DRV and ourselves. This may actually turn out to be the most important new element of the DRV proposals, since we might at some point be able to get the other forums opened up, with Thieu still in office and the GVN thus having a veto, even before we have reached any agreement on political questions with the DRV.

Unacceptable Elements

Despite the positive aspects noted above, the DRV plan contains major unacceptable elements, some of them of fundamental importance:

—They still insist that we and they bilaterally agree to the establishment of a three-segment Government of National Concord. Clearly the DRV intention is that the implementation of a Government of National Concord, or possibly even the mere fact of our bilateral agreement to its formation, would disintegrate the anti-Communist forces. We have made it quite clear to them that this is the principal stumbling block between us, and that we will never agree to impose any particular form of government in South Vietnam, although we are prepared to accept any outcome the South Vietnamese decide among themselves.

—The DRV limits its provisions on prisoner release and ceasefire to Vietnam alone. In discussion, Le Duc Tho has indicated that once

the Vietnamese war is settled, the Laos and Cambodia aspects should be easily resolved. Regarding the prisoner issue, I have clearly told them we will not compromise, and I have also been firm in our insistence on an Indochina-wide ceasefire.

—Their demand that we accept responsibility for reparations in a formal negotiating document is unacceptable. I have told them we are prepared to engage in a substantial reconstruction program for Indochina as a voluntary undertaking.

—We cannot accept their demand that we agree to the formation of a Government of National Concord before opening up the other negotiating forums they propose, since once we have accepted their political solution it will be meaningless for the GVN to discuss the details of a predetermined future. Our counter-proposal therefore must find a way to move the political issue into the bilateral PRG/GVN forum at an earlier stage than they envisage. We also shouldn't accept their position that other issues where essential agreement has been reached cannot be referred to the other proposed forums before bilateral agreement on the political issue.

Point-by-Point Discussion

The DRV proposal is in the form of a 10-point plan (Tab A).

It opens with a preamble which restates a number of basic principles raised by our side at our July 19, 1972, private meeting.[3] Some of the principles, as restated by the DRV, are not precisely in the context which we advanced them but they are an essentially accurate characterization of our overall perspective toward Indochina. This preamble is then followed by the 10 points, summarized as follows:

—*Point 1: A Unilateral U.S. Undertaking:* The first point, in effect, asks that the U.S. undertake a series of unilateral steps such as ending all U.S. involvement in Vietnam, refraining from interfering in Vietnam's internal affairs and stopping all our military activities in North and South Vietnam, including the mining and bombing.

Point 1 clearly cannot be considered an operative provision of their proposal. It is completely unconditional, and its acceptance by us would in and of itself make the remaining points irrelevant. We interpret this point, therefore, as a DRV statement of doctrine as opposed to a provision advanced for serious bargaining purposes. Indeed the North Vietnamese to date have not stated or suggested that its implementation would come before anything else.

The one aspect we can accept is U.S. respect for the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam, since later in the plan *all* parties are to do this.

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[3] See Document 207.

—*Point 2: Withdrawal of U.S. Forces:* This provision calls for the complete withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces within one month after the signing of an overall agreement. The formulation differs from past DRV/VC demands in two respects. First, we are no longer asked to set a definitive, unconditional date for withdrawal. Second, the DRV specifies that among the personnel to be withdrawn are "technical personnel (without any exception)," meaning our civilian advisors as well. We are always careful to phrase our own position in terms of withdrawal of military personnel only and we should continue to do so.

The DRV also demands as part of this point that we cease our military aid to the Saigon Administration as soon as a ceasefire takes effect, that is, as soon as an overall agreement is signed. We take the position that we are willing to define our military and economic aid with any government which exists in South Vietnam. In a sense, our positions are not so far apart since we both agree that any government which emerges from a settlement will have the right to define its relations with other countries.

The real difficulty posed by this DRV condition is if they ever change their position in regard to timing of a ceasefire and agree to a ceasefire *before* an overall settlement, then we cannot agree to a complete military aid cutoff while the political outcome remains in doubt. In fact, under such a scenario Hanoi's calculation might well be that a ceasefire, combined with an end to our military aid, would be sufficient to begin the process of erosion in the GVN's position, thereby guaranteeing eventual Viet Cong predominance.

—*Point 3: Prisoner Release:* This provides for release of all captured military men and civilians *in Vietnam* to be effected simultaneously with troop withdrawals, and is essentially a restatement of their previous position. It is unacceptable in that it does not provide for prisoner releases in Laos or Cambodia. However, Tho has indicated that once the Vietnam problem was settled, the Laos and Cambodia aspects should be easily resolved. They seem to be saying that they have to work formally through their allies but will exert the necessary influence. In any event I have made clear that we cannot compromise and must have all of our prisoners back.

—*Point 4: The Political Provisions:* It is in this point that the DRV makes its most significant apparent concession, though the essence of its demands remains unacceptable. The DRV continues to ask us to agree to the formation of a three-segment Government of National Concord to assume office on the day of signature of the overall agreement. This Government would organize general elections, elect a constituent assembly, work out a new constitution and set up a definitive government of South Vietnam but clearly the DRV intention is that the implementation of a Government of National Concord would disintegrate

the anti-Communist forces to the point that their strength would be irrelevant by the time of any elections.

This formulation differs from previous DRV/VC demands in two important ways: First, it spells out that the third (neutralist) segment of the Government of National Concord will be jointly agreed on by the PRG and the Saigon Administration, a provision which would assure the Communists a 50–50 split of power. The vague way in which they had previously stated their demand could have been interpreted as a bid for effective control of two-thirds of the government. Second, it calls for Thieu's resignation upon signature of an overall agreement, rather than immediately. This means that the Communists agree to talk to Thieu about the details of the future political arrangement, though he himself would be barred from any future role and U.S. agreement to a National Concord government is a precondition for the holding of such talks. In its procedural suggestions which followed the presentation of this plan, the DRV demands that the GVN change its domestic policies to guarantee democratic liberties and modify the representation of its Paris delegation before these talks would open, but they would clearly be flexible about this if ever we got that far. In view of the relatively vague terminology of this demand that the GVN change its policies and its delegation, I do not interpret this to be a serious precondition. These procedural demands represent a watering down of their earlier demands that the entire GVN apparatus to dismantled as a precondition for talks and the DRV appears to be assigning this point lower priority by making it a procedural rather than substantive demand.

—*Point 5: Vietnamese Armed Forces in South Vietnam:* This point restates their view that this problem will be resolved by discussions among the Vietnamese parties, though it specifies for the first time that the "parties" are the PRG and Saigon. From this it appears that the DRV envisages solution of this problem before an overall agreement is signed. The interesting point emerged in subsequent discussion that in the DRV view the North Vietnamese forces in the South will be considered for this purpose to be part of South Vietnam's "Liberation forces." It was astounding to hear Le Duc Tho claim with a complete poker face that the 12 NVA divisions now in South Vietnam are under indigenous Viet Cong control.

—*Point 6: Reunification:* This point affirms their view of the temporary nature of the division of Vietnam and calls for peaceful reunification, step by step, on the basis of discussion and agreement between the two zones, with normal relations in all fields to be established in the meantime. The two zones would respect the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreement, and not join any military alliances. This point is essentially acceptable to us with minor modifications and does not differ from their earlier formulations.

—*Point 7: Reparations:* The DRV demands here that the U.S. accept responsibility for reparations in both zones in a formal negotiating document. Tho in fact has specifically asked for $8 billion, $4½ for North Vietnam and $3½ for the South. I have made it clear to them that we cannot accept the concept of reparations in a negotiating document although we are prepared to engage in a substantial reconstruction program as a voluntary undertaking.

—*Point 8: Standstill Ceasefire:* This calls for a ceasefire—in place—to be observed in South Vietnam after the overall agreement is signed, under international control and supervision. They maintain their position that the ceasefire should come after agreement on all other issues and that it should apply only to Vietnam and not Cambodia or Laos. We, of course, have preferred an earlier ceasefire and insist on its Indochina-wide application. Here, too, however, Tho has indicated that once the war in Vietnam ends there would be no reason for it to continue in Cambodia and Laos, assuming, of course, it ends in Vietnam in a way acceptable to the DRV.

—*Point 9: International Controls and Guarantees:* The DRV calls in this point for the establishment of an international control and supervision committee whose composition, tasks, and organization, along with the subjects under its purview, would be agreed between the parties. There would also be an international guarantee for the neutrality of South Vietnam and for lasting peace in the region. Their 10 points don't mention neutrality for the rest of Indochina. We are willing to accept a guarantee for the neutrality of South Vietnam provided it applies to the other countries of Indochina as well.

—*Point 10: Respect for Geneva Agreements:* The final DRV point asks for settlement of the internal affairs of each Indochinese country by that country itself, and states that problems among those countries will be settled by the Indochinese parties on the basis of mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and noninterference in each other's internal affairs. This causes us no problems, though we want to add specific reference to barring infiltration.

Procedures

In an unusually concrete departure from their earlier vague formulations, the DRV has proposed a specific series of procedural forums to be opened once we have agreed with them on the military questions and on the "principles and main contents" of the political question in South Vietnam (Tab B). The other forums would include a secret bilateral forum between the GVN and the PRG and a secret tripartite forum among the DRV, Saigon and the PRG.

The principal obstacle here is their insistence that we agree with them to predetermine the broad outlines of a political outcome as a

precondition for opening the other forums. Specifically, they want *us* to agree with *them* to the principle of a three-segment Government of National Concord. If we agreed to this, the other forums could prove to be irrelevant. On the other hand, should they fall off their insistence that South Vietnamese political issues must be resolved between the U.S. and DRV, then the other forums they propose open considerable room for flexibility and maneuver. In fact, the GVN would gain substantial status as an acknowledged negotiating adversary of the DRV and the GVN would also have an important veto power over issues most affecting its vital interests.

A potential problem is the proposed tri-partite forum, to which the GVN has already objected because they believe it would have the practical consequence of acknowledging two governments in the South. The problem for the GVN is that the trilateral forum would deal with matters external to South Vietnam, whereas the GVN–NLF dialogue in the bilateral forum could be explained away as an internal South Vietnamese matter. We are working to find language which gets around this GVN concern.

I am intrigued by the fact that the DRV has tabled concrete procedural proposals and, even though unacceptable in certain respects, they could be taken as an indication that Hanoi seriously expects some forward movement in our negotiations.

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252. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, August 28, 1972.

SUBJECT

Psychological Offensive—Vietnam

Mr. Helms reports[2] Hanoi has indicated continuing concern over the effects of our psychological warfare activities on the North Vietnamese populace.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 116, Subject Files, Vietnam Psychological Warfare against NVN. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] In an August 17 memorandum to Kissinger; ibid.

—On five separate occasions within the past month, Radio Hanoi has denounced our Radio Hanoi Mimic and replayed portions of our programs to point out differences between Radio Hanoi and our mimic.[3]

—In harshly attacking our "Mother Vietnam" radio on 10 August, Radio Hanoi explained how "Mother Vietnam" parodies popular militant North Vietnamese songs by substituting pro-peace lyrics. It characterized our parodies as "CIA Mimic."

Responding to the demonstrated sensitivity in Hanoi, "Mother Vietnam" broadcasts have included in each hour of broadcasting at least one playing of the parody-song followed by a repetition of the lyrics at dictation speed so the North Vietnamese audience can copy them.

A further indication that Hanoi is increasingly sensitive to our psywar campaign is contained in an editorial in the party daily of 19 August. In telling Hanoi's audiences at home and abroad that the Vietnamese communists remain capable—materially and morally—of carrying on the struggle, the editorial blames "cunning U.S. psychological warfare schemes" for speculation that the North Vietnamese are at the end of their tether.

We have clearly reached the point in our psywar campaign where Hanoi's public denunciation of our psywar efforts gives us excellent opportunities to keep pouring salt into Hanoi's wounds.

[3] In the margin beside this paragraph and the next the President wrote: "good."

253. Memorandum From President Nixon to Secretary of Defense Laird[1]

Washington, August 28, 1972.

SUBJECT

Force Redeployments from Vietnam

I have read with great interest your memorandum of August 19, 1972 concerning force redeployments from Vietnam.[2] As you know, we are presently in a critical stage of the negotiations with the North Vietnamese. Troop levels, as well as the strength of our forces sent to the area in response to the enemy offensive, are important bargaining chips in these negotiations. Therefore, until the negotiating situation is further clarified, I do not believe we can afford to reduce our air or naval forces or make a precipitous cut in troop levels. I also note that COMUSMACV, CINCPAC and the JCS feel that a 29,000-man ceiling is the absolute minimum force required until the level and character of combat activity changes significantly.[3] In view of these considerations, I have decided on a troop ceiling of 27,000 men as of December 1, 1972.[4] I will, however, continue to assess progress in negotiations.[5]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 115, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam Troop Withdrawals. Top Secret; Sensitive.

[2] The memorandum is in the Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 330–77–0094, 370.02 Viet (May–December) 1972.

[3] In his August 19 memorandum to Nixon, Laird recommended that the year-end troop level be 12,500, for the following reason: "The present stability of the ground combat situation in South Vietnam is working in favor of RVNAF. Our air efforts, both in support of GVN ground forces and against the enemy's logistics base have unquestionably contributed to the failure of the enemy offensive to date and will make it even more difficult for him to renew his efforts in the future. The onset of the rainy season in MR 1 will contribute to the enemy's difficulties.

"At the same time, the impact of sustaining the current level of US air and naval activity, the anticipation of fiscal 1973 funding reductions, and the possibility that the Vietnamese may become overly reliant on US combat support all argue in favor of reducing the augmentation force. I believe you have an opportunity here to take advantage of such a reduction by announcing it since I believe it to be an inevitability in the very near future."

[4] On August 29 at the Western White House in San Clemente, Ziegler read a statement that the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam would drop to 27,000 by December 1. See *The New York Times,* August 30, 1972, p. 1.

[5] According to a transcript of a telephone conversation between Laird and Kissinger on August 25, the two men discussed the Secretary of Defense's memorandum. Kissinger characterized the White House position in the following terms: "Our problem is frankly that given the negotiations in the phase they are in now we shouldn't do any jiggering [with the troop numbers] even if it's on military grounds." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 15, Chronological File, Aug 11–30, 1972)

Should they succeed, I would consider a more dramatic reduction in troop levels.

I know I can count on your continuing strong leadership and skillful management of Defense assets to cope effectively with the difficulties caused by maintaining our current naval and air effort and a troop level of this magnitude.

Richard Nixon

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254. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Oahu, Hawaii, August 31, 1972, 7:55–8:45 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff

Dr. Kissinger: Where do you think we stand?

[Omitted here is Kissinger's expression of surprise at Japan's normalization of relations with China.]

But back to our problem. What bothers me most is, do you think we've made an unreasonable proposal?[2]

Ambassador Bunker: No, I do not think so.

Dr. Kissinger: We haven't sacrificed all these years in order to sell out now. If you think this is unreasonable, we'll change it. And we'll pay whatever price we have to.

Ambassador Bunker: The guts of it, of course, is Point 4.

They feel—and I've tried to dissuade them of this—that the Committee will be seen as a disguised coalition government, or at least as a first move towards getting to one. On the other hand, their proposal for a referendum is unrealistic.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [3 of 5]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The breakfast meeting took place in Kissinger's room at the Kuilima Hotel. Nixon and Kissinger were in Hawaii to meet Japan's new leader, Kabuei Tanaka. Ambassador Bunker had been brought in from South Vietnam so that Nixon and Kissinger and the Ambassador could discuss President Thieu and the September 15 meeting in Paris.

[2] Tab B, attached but not printed, was a copy of the August 14 U.S. proposal (Documents 238 and 239).

Dr. Kissinger: Isn't it a patent fraud? The same objections to the election will be made to this.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes. If the referendum is held with the government in power, it will be rigged just as the Presidential election of last October was—unnecessarily rigged.

Dr. Kissinger: Does Charlie Whitehouse know of this?

Ambassador Bunker: Yes. He's the only one.

Dr. Kissinger: That's all right. I just want to know. What does he think?

Ambassador Bunker: He agrees it's a reasonable proposal.

They (the South Vietnamese) also feel they might lose control of their part. They fear that if we surface it, they'll be charged with giving away too much. It's a question of their resolve, and the morale of the armed forces.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes.

Ambassador Bunker: And finally, there is a feeling that South Vietnam is not yet ready to face a political confrontation with the Communists, frankly.

Dr. Kissinger: Neither side feels ready to face up to a political confrontation.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes. They fear they are not yet well enough organized to compete politically with such a tough disciplined organization. Their efforts at integrating politically are feeble.

The evidence of all this is that Thieu for the first time consulted with his full Security Council—The Vice President, the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister. Nha told me this.

Dr. Kissinger: Will they leak?

Ambassador Bunker: No.

I went to see him. I wrote out the whole sequence of events for you. (Tab A).[3] I think he was too embarrassed to tell me. He asked me to send a memorandum first, and then he would see me, so I sent one. Then I waited for an appointment. I told Nha I certainly should see the President anyway.

Dr. Kissinger: Do they recognize that we have accepted many of their proposals?

Ambassador Bunker: They should; I pointed it out to them.

So I waited until 7:30 for an appointment and called Nha. He said it couldn't be arranged but they would have a message. Meanwhile the

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[3] Attached but not printed is "GVN Reaction to Our Response to Their Memoranda on Our Peace Proposals," undated.

Palace called Eva (the Ambassador's secretary) and told me a messenger would come by at 7:30. Nha came himself at 7:30, with no memorandum. Nha said they were shocked at our turndown of their proposals.

Dr. Kissinger: I think we're better off sticking where we are, with no referendum.

If we go too far, Ellsworth, you tell us.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: If all of this works, with all these elaborate forums, the process will last at least through November. We then can say it's a mess, we can go back to the proposal for the military issues alone. We can say, give us the prisoners and a ceasefire; we're getting out.

Ambassador Bunker: They won't accept it anyway.

Dr. Kissinger: That's right. And even if they did, this is the January 25th proposal with the Electoral Commission called a Committee of National Reconciliation.

Ambassador Bunker: That's quite right.

Dr. Kissinger: We've changed parts to meet their concerns. We say we will "review the Constitution for its consistency with the conditions of peace." We've taken out "equality." We've taken out "neutrality."

But where do we go from here?

Ambassador Bunker: They promised to have a memorandum for me when I got back.

Dr. Kissinger: But we cannot have a confrontation now. It will be their death, and our death. We have positioned ourselves domestically so that a confrontation would prove McGovern's case. It would be the biggest boost for McGovern.

They can't have the President go through the whole election without their help and then have a confrontation with the North Vietnamese in November as we plan.

Should we write a letter to them?

Ambassador Bunker: That may be a good idea. You draft it, putting down your points.

Dr. Kissinger (to Rodman:) We should say, first, on the basis of the Ambassador's report, we've made adjustments which the Ambassador will explain. On the other hand, it is essential for us to have a position from which we can demonstrate to the American people that the only obstacle is the Communists' insistence on our putting them in power. Once we do this, we can survive a stalemate and have a basis for returning to the May 8th position—settling the military issues alone.

We have to survive if the letter surfaces. Don't say the May 8th position. Say that it will show world opinion the lengths to which we

are willing to go, and provide a basis for handling the consequences if it fails.

Their suspiciousness is unbelievable.

Ambassador Bunker: This is Thieu's defect.

Dr. Kissinger: But it's true of Le Duc Tho, too. They'll never accept this.

Our plan is this, to be precise: If there is no settlement by November 7th we plan to walk out by November 9th.

If Thieu wants to do a heroic landing operation, let him do this. Seriously, is he planning this?

Ambassador Bunker: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Seriously. Let him do it.

We're facing sabotage in Washington. Laird has just recommended a 20% cut in the augmentation forces, a 40% cut in the sortie rate, and a cut in our ammunition supplies—and all this in a written memorandum to the President![4] Tell Weyand this. And at this moment! If Thieu wants to deal with Laird . . .

We brought Laird to San Clemente, not for the draft but to tell him he can't do it. The President handed him a written order not to make the cuts.[5] Then Laird went out and told the press that 27,000 wasn't the final figure—which we had gone to great lengths to avoid doing. Then he asked Moorer to make a military request for the cuts!

You have to stick with us. You always have. I have to be the headmaster of a reform school. When we hit some Chinese lifeboats, MACV came out with a denial. The Chinese sent us an apologetic note explaining why they had to protest publicly!

Tell Thieu: His only friends are the President and I. Therefore I'm really concerned by his attitude towards you.

Ambassador Bunker: I think Thieu was embarrassed to tell me he didn't have a memorandum.

Dr. Kissinger: In the letter, we should say, "I have come through four years. We will not overthrow our ally. What we do is in the mutual interest. The only danger we face now is mistrust between us. Please work with Ambassador Bunker in the spirit of total frankness that we have always had. We have told you our every move. It is essential now."

After November we will be in a unique position. We have never had a mandate for an honorable end to the war. In 1968 we promised

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[4] See footnote 3, Document 253.

[5] Document 253.

to end the war. Even if it's only by 51%, we can claim the other guy made it an issue and we won.

We've got theater planned through November. Monday[6] we'll announce I'm going to Moscow. Have I told you this?

Ambassador Bunker: Yes, you told me you were going.

(At this point, Dr. Kissinger spoke on the phone with General Haig, instructing him, inter alia, to tell DOD that the President wanted no further comment on troop withdrawals.)

Dr. Kissinger: Here are the papers for you. There is a new substantive proposal (Tab B) and a new procedural proposal (Tab C). And here is an annotated copy of our August 18th paper showing which of their suggestions we have accepted and which we have not. (Tab D).[7]

Ambassador Bunker: That's helpful.

Dr. Kissinger: On Point 4, we've addressed many of their concerns.

Ambassador Bunker: You've taken out "neutrality."

Dr. Kissinger: Yes.

Ambassador Bunker: (reading): "Review the Constitution for its consistency with the conditions of peace." That's good.

Dr. Kissinger: So they don't have to "revise" it. And a "referendum" is in there to ratify it.

Ambassador Bunker: Good, yes. "Fairness" you did accept.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. Frankly, if it becomes a sticking point we'll have to fall off it.

Ambassador Bunker: Yes. (Reads:) "Lessening the burdens of people." They wanted it out?

Dr. Kissinger: What does it mean?

Ambassador Bunker: I don't know.

Dr. Kissinger: Maybe we should accept all their sacramental phrases.

Ambassador Bunker: I don't know what it means.

Dr. Kissinger: Even if Thieu should tearfully say, "Let's sign it," we wouldn't be able to sign it right away. If we table this on September 15th, it will take through October. I will take personal charge of confusing who offered what. We will be able to say to McGovern that the only thing we haven't offered is a Communist government. I don't see why Thieu is so obtuse.

Ambassador Bunker: Some of their proposed changes are meaningless: "Various" in place of "all." Some we rejected, with good reason: "for purely defensive purposes."

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[6] September 4.

[7] Tabs B, C, and D are attached but not printed.

Can I use this?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. We thought it would help you run through it with Thieu.

Ambassador Bunker: You say "Deal with" in the procedural part.

Dr. Kissinger: They wanted to say "discuss" and not "resolve". We propose "deal with," which is more neutral.

Le Duc Tho is the same. They'll raise a theological point and stick to it forever.

One other thing they (the North Vietnamese) keep coming back to: At one meeting I said in passing that if it was useful I would be willing to meet with any other Politburo members in complete secrecy, at a different location if necessary. They keep coming back to this. And in messages, too. They haven't proposed it, but they mentioned Laos, or Hanoi. I don't know how physically I would do it.

Would a visit by me to Hanoi wreck everything in Saigon? Or would it depend on the outcome?

Ambassador Bunker: It would depend on the outcome.

Dr. Kissinger: I'd go to Saigon first, I suppose, and then disappear to Hanoi.

(At 8:45, conversation broke up and Dr. Kissinger accompanied Ambassador Bunker to see the President.)[8]

(The letter to Thieu drafted later for the President's signature is at Tab E.)

Tab E[9]

Washington, August 31, 1972.

Dear Mr. President:

I was most pleased to receive from Ambassador Bunker in Hawaii a full and current report on your views with respect to the ongoing peace negotiations, on which our two governments have recently had a number of detailed exchanges. On the basis of the Ambassador's report, we have made a number of adjustments in our substantive and procedural proposals, which the Ambassador will be able to discuss with you. I believe our new drafts represent a constructive peace pro-

[8] See Document 255.

[9] No classification marking. Bunker delivered the letter on September 6; see Document 258.

posal reflecting our mutual interest in an honorable peace settlement which insures the South Vietnamese people the right to determine their future without an imposed solution or outside interference. The Ambassador will give you our thinking in detail. You can be certain that he speaks for me.

At this delicate moment in the negotiations, let me assure you once again, personally and emphatically, of the bedrock of the U.S. position: The United States has not persevered all this way, at the sacrifice of many American lives, to reverse course in the last few months of 1972. We will not do now what we have refused to do in the preceding three and a half years. The American people know that the United States cannot purchase peace or honor or redeem its sacrifices at the price of deserting a brave ally. This I cannot do and will never do.

Our essential task now is to work closely together, on the basis of complete frankness and trust, as we have done so successfully throughout these years. Our objective is a common and mutual one. I have instructed Ambassador Bunker to maintain the closest contact with you, to insure meticulous and thorough consultation with you at every stage.

I believe our new proposals reflect unmistakeably that we have offered every legitimate concession for a fair political process. If the other side rejects these proposals, it will be proven to even the most skeptical that the obstacle to a settlement is not one leader, but their insistence on being handed at the conference table what they can win neither at the ballot box nor on the battlefield. If they accept our proposal they must accept your Government as a negotiating partner, and you will be fully protected by being present in each forum.

Finally, Mr. President, I want to express to you again the American people's admiration for the courage and performance of the people and armed forces of South Vietnam in their successful defense against the North Vietnamese invasion, and for your sterling leadership. The courage and unity of your people is the ultimate guarantee of their freedom. But for us to succeed on this last leg of a long journey, we must trust each other fully. We must not hand the enemy through our discord what we have prevented through our unity.

With my best personal regards.

Sincerely,

Richard Nixon

255. Memorandum for the President's File by the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Oahu, Hawaii, August 31, 1972, 9:30 a.m.

SUBJECT

Meeting with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Secretary Rogers, and Dr. Kissinger

Ambassador Bunker had come to Hawaii to report to the President on our consultations with President Thieu over new peace proposals being readied for Dr. Kissinger's September 15 private meeting in Paris. [Dr. Kissinger had discussed earlier drafts of the planned U.S. proposal with President Thieu in Saigon August 17–18,[2] and in Hawaii had just given Ambassador Bunker a new U.S. draft to discuss with President Thieu.[3]]

Ambassador Bunker noted that President Thieu looked at this new proposal as a possible entering wedge for a coalition arrangement. Thieu was afraid that if this new proposal surfaced he would be vulnerable to charges at home that he had conceded too much. The Ambassador felt frankly that the GVN did not feel it was ready for a political contest with an opponent as disciplined and tough as the Communists.

The Ambassador himself was convinced, however, that our new political proposal was a very reasonable one. In any case we did not think the other side was likely to accept it. Thieu was by nature suspicious. The Ambassador recounted his experience in trying to meet with Thieu to get further GVN views on the proposal before leaving for Hawaii. He could not get an appointment with Thieu; he was promised a detailed memorandum of GVN views but then never received one.

The President emphasized that Thieu had to trust us. We could not have the process break down over a subsidiary issue. The President wanted the Ambassador to reassure Thieu that we were not going to abandon him. We were going to build up the South Vietnamese Air Force. We must not let Thieu himself become the issue in the negotiations. After November we would cooperate with him; for now Thieu must cooperate with us.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XVII. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the President's Suite at the Kuilima Hotel. All brackets are in the original.

[2] Documents 243 and 245.

[3] See Document 254.

[Secretary Rogers joined the meeting at this point—at about 9:40 a.m.]

The conversation then turned to the military outlook. The Ambassador pointed out that the enemy would be trying to keep the pressures on during the election campaign.

Secretary Rogers asked, what if they offer a deal based on return of our prisoners in exchange for Thieu? Ambassador Bunker thought this unlikely.

Is there any breaking point?, The Secretary asked. If we do all-out bombing would they continue to fight indefinitely? The Ambassador thought not. The President did not see how they could continue suffering this attrition indefinitely. Secretary Rogers remarked that in the name of humanitarianism we had lost lots of lives by our restraint.

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256. Memorandum From Philip A. Odeen of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, September 8, 1972.

SUBJECT

Assessment of the Campaign Against North Vietnam's Capability to Wage War

From your cover note it is apparent you have looked at the latest DIA assessment (Tab A).[2] As the DIA format does not facilitate a quick review, this memo draws on the DIA report as well as other current intelligence to organize the intelligence data around four major analytical topics:

—Import denial,
—Bomb damage,
—Battlefield supplies,
—Disruption costs.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 115, Vietnam Subject Files, Net Assessment of North and South Vietnam (Defense). Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Kissinger initialed the memorandum.

[2] Attached but not printed. On the title page of the August 22 study, "Assessment of the Campaign Against North Vietnam's Capability To Wage War," Kissinger wrote: "Rather depressing."

Import Denial

One of the key ways in which the current campaign is different from the bombing in the 1960s is that by mining the ports we have denied the enemy his primary means of importing the goods essential for his economy and war effort. The enemy has reacted by concentrating his effort on establishing alternative import routes.

—*Two pipelines* have been completed to the Chinese border area and *POL arrivals are now estimated to be at least equal to current consumption.* A third pipeline is nearly finished.

—*Rail LOCs* between China and the Hanoi area have been the primary focus of enemy repair effort. After an initial period of slow reaction while repair crews were mobilized, the northeast rail line has been kept open for shuttling during much of July and August despite our weather-constrained efforts to keep it more fully interdicted. Enemy repair efforts on the less important northwest line have been slower, but that line has also been open for some shuttling.

—*The roads* from China south have been the prime enemy alternative to seaborne imports aside from POL. Our strikes at road bridges and supply areas have caused only occasional delays and damaged and destroyed only a small fraction of the supplies and trucks involved. The weather will soon cause some deterioration in the roads but the clouds will also limit the effectiveness of our road and rail bombing even more.

CIA estimates imports in June and July were slightly less than half of last year's average daily level (3,000 vice 6,100 tons). DIA states that China planned to deliver at least two-thirds of the 1971 average daily import level to the border in August (about 4,400 tons).

Intelligence intercepts indicate the enemy is giving priority to POL and food. We can assume needed military supplies are receiving an even higher priority. Some lower priority items such as fertilizer apparently are not yet being imported overland. The planned volume of food deliveries in August would be sufficient to bring average food deliveries for June–July–August up to the average monthly level for 1971.

We have little information on the extent to which the USSR and China are providing replacements for losses of military equipment. But DIA identified 12 heavy tanks and 54 armored vehicles in the border area in late July. CIA reports another 112 vehicles, including 12 tracked vehicles (probably tanks) and 50 armored personnel carriers, on the border at the end of August.

In short, the most critical period for import shortages has past as NVN actions and those of its allies are succeeding in increasing the volume of imports to a level sufficient to support the war and essential civilian needs. We can expect this level to be maintained or even increased over the next few months as the monsoon severely limits air operations.

Bomb Damage

Most of the military and economic targets where bombs could do major damage had been hit by July. Little additional damage has been inflicted during the past two months.

—About 75 percent of electric generating capacity is out; only a couple of facilities have been repaired and these have been rehit.

—Most large industrial plants have ceased to function either because of bombing (cement, paper, major textiles) or because of shortages of raw materials.

—A number of smaller industrial plants, presumably including those considered most essential, have been dispersed to rural locations. Such dispersal will substantially reduce production and add to costs.

—There are now few attractive industrial targets. In August strikes were made on a brickworks, a wood products plant and a few light fabrication plants.

—A number of industrial facilities such as the two largest sugar refineries, the largest coal processing plant and the Hanoi power station have not been hit because of current target rules.

In short, because we have already hit most of the high impact targets, we are not adding substantially to the bomb damage inflicted on industry and other non-transportation targets although continued bombing denies NVN the opportunity to reopen damaged facilities.

Battlefield Supplies

Much greater damage has been inflicted on the LOCs south through the Panhandle than to LOCs north of Hanoi. The southern rail line is out and the enemy has attempted few repairs, probably because of the priority use of repair resources in the north. Roads have been damaged. Since March 31 over 1500 water craft and over 1600 trucks have been destroyed. The enemy has moved substantial additional resources into this area to repair roads and to increase the number of available trucks and barges to keep up the throughout despite the higher losses. The number of trucks and barges destroyed is less than 10 percent of NVN's estimated inventory.

—Some Panhandle roads are being improved including use of concrete slabs for surfacing to permit intensive use during the wet season which starts in about a month.

—We picked up few reports of supply movements through this area in late July and early August but at least 10,000 enemy troops transited the area during this period.

—Beginning in mid-August we picked up reports of a major supply offensive including the movement of ammunition at rates far above consumption levels. Troop movements picked up also.

—There are reports that enemy forces in Laos, also dependent on the Panhandle LOC, are being forced to await supplies while efforts are concentrated on the more critical areas south of the DMZ.

—Although there have been scattered reports of food, fuel, and ammunition shortages in northern SVN, these shortages may have been caused primarily by local distribution problems. Recent rates of artillery fire do not indicate any serious ammunition shortage in MR–1.

Draw downs on stocks in NVN, SVN and Cambodia may limit enemy activity next dry season unless both war material imports and southward movement can be increased above current levels. We do not know how much the enemy has drawn down his forward stocks in MR–1, and logistics may become a constraint as rains limit supply movements in the NVN Panhandle during the next few months. It may be that the enemy is making an intensified supply effort and drawing down stocks even to critically low levels in order to keep up maximum pressures through October.

We have almost no intelligence on stock levels but what few reports we have indicate stocks within MR–1 are low.

Disruption Costs

Although the enemy is overcoming the most serious direct effects of the bombing and mining, he is only able to do this at great cost. Priorities have been drastically changed. In one way or another most North Vietnamese have been required to work more while consumption of non-food items has been reduced.

—Large numbers of people are required to repair the damage to LOCs and to operate the much less efficient transportation system. Much of the work is on a part-time basis which is an added strain to the population. Shuttling and truck transportation take thousands more people than importing through the ports.

—New construction has virtually halted. Presumably most construction workers are now engaged in damage repair.

—Most of modern industry is closed. Additional facilities will have to close as supplies of raw materials are exhausted or transportation bottlenecks limit movement of low priority items. For example, the shortage of cement has curtailed activities at many concrete products plants.

—The shortage of electric power reduces both consumption and production. Some irrigation and flood control pumping now relies on manually operated equipment, reducing efficiency and requiring use of more manpower.

—The industrialization program to which the regime was giving high priority is virtually halted.

—Requirements for manpower to offset effects of the bombing must compete with requirements to recruit replacements for losses in the south.

NVN will probably become increasingly efficient in overcoming the effects of the bombing. But the cost of the bombing will continue to mount. New problems will arise as inventories are exhausted and the economy must adjust to lower levels of domestic production. The costs will also mount for the Chinese and USSR who will be asked to provide additional imports to offset the losses in domestic production and the losses caused by the bombing and less efficient transportation system.[3]

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[3] On August 22, Helms had sent to Kissinger, as requested, a similar memorandum, entitled "An Assessment of the US Bombing and Mining Campaign in North Vietnam." In his memorandum of transmittal, Helms emphasized: 'The record of World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam since 1965 strongly suggests that bombing alone is unlikely to transcend the realm of severe harassment and achieve true interdiction in the sense of stopping the movement of supplies a determined, resourceful enemy deems essential and is willing to pay almost any price to move." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 115, Vietnam Subject Files, Net Assessment of North and South Vietnam (Defense))

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257. Memorandum From John H. Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, September 8, 1972.

SUBJECT

Report That VC Planning for Ceasefire and Ready to Separate Military from Political Questions

Director Helms has sent you a sensitive intelligence report from a former VC source who alleges that, according to VC briefings which took place between August 14 and 28, the Communists are prepared

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 26, Chronological File, 8–12 September 1972. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Haig initialed for Kissinger.

to settle the war on the basis of military issues alone. This is the first report of its kind and runs counter to the trend of all other reporting.[2]

Much of the source's report has a ring of plausibility to it, although we must await confirming evidence before assigning it any credibility.

One note of caution is sounded by the Agency, which is that the source elicits information rather than debriefs his VC contacts because his meetings are of insufficient duration to press for full particulars. So it could be that our source just got the first part—the military half—of the briefing.

Source will be seeing his VC contact again in a few days and the Agency will report anything further of value.

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[2] The August 29 report is in the Central Intelligence Agency, Executive Registry, DCI Files, Job 80–R01284A, Box 6, 1 August–30 September 1972. The transmittal memorandum, dated September 5 and signed by Helms, noted: "The attached report, which implies that the Communists are now willing to separate the military from the political questions in a peace settlement, is at variance with reporting from other sources. The source has fairly good access to medium level Viet Cong cadres, however, and we believe he is reporting accurately what he has been told."

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258. Editorial Note

On September 6, 1972, Ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker reported in backchannel message 148 to President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry A. Kissinger on his meeting with the South Vietnamese President, Nguyen Van Thieu. At the meeting Bunker delivered a letter that he had helped draft while in Hawaii on August 31 to brief President Richard M. Nixon and Kissinger. The letter informed Thieu of adjustments the United States had made in its negotiating stance as a result of South Vietnamese proposals and assured him that the United States fully supported and would not desert South Vietnam in the Paris talks. The letter is printed as Tab E to Document 254.

According to Bunker: "I was unable to see Thieu until late this evening when I presented the President's letter. He was very pleased by the letter and the assurances it contained. I went over with him the considerations governing our peace proposal, covering the points you had previously made and those we discussed in Honolulu. I stressed particularly that it is essential to achieve through our joint and mutual acts both here and in the negotiations support in the United States for the President's policy through the November elections; that we must

have an offset should the other side decide to surface their proposal, otherwise we should be placed in a difficult and embarrassing—perhaps impossible—position vis-à-vis our critics; and if we present a reasonable and forthcoming proposal and if the other side rejects it, we are then in position to say that they insist on a settlement which guarantees their political predominance. I said that we had revised our proposal so as to meet as many of the GVN's objections to our original (August 18) draft as we think consistent with a proposal which will be sufficiently forthcoming to achieve our mutual objectives. We believe that in its revised form it ensures that the outcome will be a political process determined by the South Vietnamese. The veto powers which the GVN will possess in the various forums will enable it to protect adequately its interests."

The Ambassador also told Kissinger that: "It developed in the course of conversation that the GVN's major concern is the question of internal political stability and how the composition and function of the Committee of National Reconciliation (CNR) will affect it. The GVN is continuing to study the problem in an effort to find a formula which it believes will be acceptable to the various nationalist, political and religious groups without causing political turmoil." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 413, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, From Amb. Bunker—Saigon, September 1972)

In backchannel message 149 to Kissinger, September 7, Bunker conveyed Thieu's anxieties that the CNR was a Trojan Horse of coalition government, and forwarded his comments: "We take note of the USG comment that the CNR is for the supervision of the elections and not the government.

"However, we confirm that the South Vietnamese people consider the CNR with a 50/50 composition as a de facto coalition government.

"The CNR will be considered as a super government because (1) it will eliminate the National Assembly, the Supreme Court, and the Executive in matters pertaining to the drafting of the election law, the organization of the election, the determination of the qualification of the candidates, and the final pronouncement on the results of the election, and (2) the results of the new presidential election will affect the foundation of the future government which proportionately reflects the popular will." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, 24 June–29 August 1972)

Bunker and Thieu arranged to meet during the morning of September 7 to review the latest American proposal. Thieu informed the Bunker that his chief adviser, Hoang Duc Nha, and national security adviser, Nguyen Phu Duc, would also be there. Bunker would bring the Deputy Ambassador, Charles Whitehouse.

Meanwhile, Kissinger sent Bunker a brief message: "I just wanted you to know before your appointment with Thieu that while we recognize his problems, we believe that we have met all of his serious concerns. As regards any further modifications to our position, we believe that the considerations we have outlined to him are overriding. We hope you can persuade Thieu of need to table text identical to or as close as possible to our latest version. While we need to maintain our plan, we could consider suggestions to drop or modify particular clauses. (Backchannel message WHS 2155 from Kissinger to Bunker, September 6; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XVII)

Bunker reported on the meeting in backchannel message 150 to Kissinger, September 7: "I explained that important revisions had been made in the draft under consideration in order to meet the GVN concerns, that the draft had been reviewed in my meetings with you and the President in Honolulu and that we felt that all of their major concerns had been met. I called Thieu's attention to the major changes, especially those affecting Point 4 with which they had been most concerned. I said that the proposal in its present form was essentially the January 25 offer but with the composition of the electoral commission [the CNR] spelled out in somewhat greater detail."

Bunker also conveyed Thieu's additional views on the topic. "After reading the revised drafts, Thieu discussed paragraph 4 and specifically the difficulty of selecting 'representatives of various political and religious tendencies.' The essence of his comments was that the principle was a good one, but actually reaching agreement on these individuals would raise many practical problems. He noted that the negotiations might bog down on this point. This might be fine if that was our objective, but if agreement with the Communists was being sought this method of selecting representatives for the CNR would indubitably prove to be a stumbling block."

In response to Thieu, reported Bunker: "I pointed out that in specifying that the neutral element should be composed of 'various political and religious tendencies in South Viet-Nam' this should include opposition political parties, religious elements such as the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai and ethnic minorities, all of whom were nationalists and anti-Communists."

Toward the end of the session: "The discussion then turned to future contingencies. Thieu asked whether an even more conciliatory proposal would be made if the present one were rejected by the other side. I assured him this was not envisaged and that we would not ask him for anything more than this.

"Thieu then asked what would happen if this proposal is rejected. I recalled to him your statement that if the other side rejects this proposal we would return to the President's May 8 proposal and would increase our pressure on the Communists.

"Thieu then asked what would happen if the May 8 proposal were accepted. I replied that I envisaged negotiations on the establishment of a cease-fire. I noted that in all our cease-fire proposals we have demanded international supervision and implementation of the principle that all military forces remain within their national frontiers.

"Thieu then commented 'We are beginning to see light' and asked for a day to study the proposal further. I informed him that you would be leaving Washington on the 9th and I wanted to get word to you before your departure. We agreed to meet Saturday morning and I hope to have a message to reach you late on the 8th or opening of business on the 9th.

"I then talked with Thieu alone and, citing the reasons, impressed on him how essentially important it was for us to be in a position to table this proposal and assured him we would not ask anything more of him. I think he understands clearly all the considerations involved. He was in a cooperative mood and I hope to report substantial progress." (Ibid., Box 413, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, From Amb. Bunker—Saigon, September 1972)

The substance and tone of Bunker's message encouraged Kissinger. As he thanked Bunker for his good work he enjoined him: "Please repeat to Thieu the major thrust of the President's letter, i.e., that we have not cooperated and sacrificed so much over all these years to undermine our friends and our objectives in the homestretch." (Backchannel message WHS 2157 from Kissinger to Bunker, September 7; ibid., Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972)

Over the next few days, the wires hummed with messages between Bunker in Saigon and Kissinger in Washington and, from September 9, from Kissinger abroad as he flew to Moscow on business unrelated to Vietnam, then to England on September 14, and to Paris on September 15 to meet with Le Duc Tho. During these days, the differences between the two allies became progressively smaller. Thieu remained obdurate, however, on the same substantive element in the proposal—Point 4 (A). In a memorandum given to Bunker on September 13, and sent to Kissinger, Thieu made the following point:

"With regard to Point 10 of your memorandum concerning Section 4 (A) on the composition of the CNR, we regret that we are not able to accept any wording which implies or makes people think of 3 distinct components of whatever body, be it a committee or a government which the Communists have advocated." His underlying reasoning, by now

familiar to Kissinger and Bunker, further explained why Thieu rejected Point 4 (A): "As we have stated in our previous memoranda, we consider that the important responsibilities given to the CNR make it a super government which replaces the National Assembly, the Supreme Court in the task of electing the most important position in SVN and which affects the composition of the future government." (Backchannel message 156 from Bunker to Kissinger, September 13; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, 5–30 September)

Consequent to Thieu's unwillingness to budge on what Kissinger later characterized as a "hair-splitting issue" (*White House Years,* page 1326), Bunker wrote from Saigon: "I am frankly disappointed by the GVN response. It seemed to me our arguments were both logical and persuasive, but it is evident that the GVN is greatly concerned by what they believe the implications will be of the composition of the CNR on their domestic political situation." (Backchannel message 155 from Bunker to Kissinger, September 13; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, 5–30 September) Kissinger, still in Moscow, took in the message traffic and reached the following conclusion, which he communicated to Haig in Washington:

"You will note from Bunker's cables that GVN has failed to agree to one aspect of our political point, namely composition of committee to supervise elections, as well as some minor points in procedural plan, despite efforts over past weeks to meet GVN concerns. We believe it is imperative to table our plans as they now stand. We don't have time for another turn around in Saigon. I need the President's authorization to go ahead despite few remaining differences." (Message Hakto 24 from Kissinger to Haig, September 13; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XVII)

259. Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, September 14, 1972.

SUBJECT

Issue Between US and GVN in New US Peace Proposal

Since Henry's last Paris meeting, we and the GVN have been consulting closely and in detail—on Henry's stopover in Saigon, through your and Henry's talks with Ambassador Bunker in Hawaii, and in extensive cable traffic to Saigon—on new proposals which Henry plans to table in Paris this Friday.[2] We have reduced our differences to minor ones on the procedural proposal, and have reached agreement with them on all points except one in the substantive proposal.

This last substantive issue is troublesome, and we need your decision.

We and Thieu are in accord in proposing to the other side the creation of a "Committee of National Reconciliation," which would then run the elections. The difference now remaining between us and Thieu is how the composition of Committee is to be described:

—The US would stipulate that the Committee would be composed of representatives of the GVN, the NLF, and third forces. We would *not* say that the parts are equal; however, our formulation does imply tripartite composition, which the GVN believes might set a precedent for a subsequent three-segment coalition government.

—Thieu is insisting on a vague formulation which says only that all political forces will be represented and that the NLF is considered as one of these.

Henry wants your authorization to go forward in Paris with the US formulation in spite of President Thieu's reluctance.[3] He believes Thieu's concerns are misplaced:

—We are only talking about the commission to run the elections, and we specify in our proposal that the eventual government must proportionately reflect the votes received in the free election.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XVII. Top Secret; Exclusively Eyes Only. Attached but not printed are copies of the United States and the South Vietnamese proposals.

[2] September 15.

[3] Kissinger made the request in message Hakto 24, September 13; see Document 258.

—If the other side accepts the US political proposal—which is very unlikely—the details would still have to be negotiated between the GVN and NLF bilaterally. In that forum, the GVN will be in a strong position to protect itself, either by mobilizing an effective majority in the Committee of National Reconciliation together with third forces, or by producing a stalemate.

—The US plan explicitly preserves the integrity of the GVN constitution and governmental machinery through and even beyond the electoral phase.

It is probably crucial to our strategy to include our formulation in Friday's proposal:

—We have already drastically watered down our new political proposal in response to Thieu's concerns. If we accept this further dilution there is little left that is significant on the political issue that goes beyond our public plan of last January 25. Without our new language the Committee is no more than the "mixed electoral commission" of our past proposals.

—We have already told both Peking and Moscow that we would be making significant new political proposals. To come forward essentially empty-handed now would cost us in those capitals as well as with our domestic opinion.

—The other side may be already edging toward public disclosure of their August 1 offer, as indicated in its statement of September 11.[4] We should move decisively to be able to preempt it. Their offer has cosmetic aspects which look attractive. Our position should appear equally or more forthcoming—which it will—if we are to carry out our strategy.

In sum, Henry feels the difference with Saigon is over a legalistic subtlety of phraseology, which is dwarfed in importance by (1) the substantial insurance which our political plan in fact gives the GVN, (2) the unlikelihood that the other wide will accept it anyway, and (3) the strategic benefit of the forthcoming and comprehensive new peace offer we are making. Henry feels that we should now move ahead over Thieu's objection.

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[4] On September 11, the Provisional Revolutionary Govement released a statement in Saigon that called for an end to U.S. support for the current South Vietnamese Government and proposed a three part coalition government of national concord "to take charge of affairs in the period of transition and to organize truly free and democratic general elections." ("Vietcong Restate Peace Terms," *The New York Times,* September 12, 1972, p. 12)

—In the likely event that Hanoi rejects the U.S. proposal the issue becomes academic and Thieu has no incentive to make our differences public.

—In the unlikely event that Hanoi accepts the U.S. proposal we will be in a whole new ballgame and this language difference will be a relatively minor aspect in the wake of a dramatic breakthrough. It would be very difficult to scuttle the breakthrough in these circumstances and given his continuing dependence on our support.

Recommendation

That you authorize Dr. Kissinger to proceed in accordance with the current U.S. draft as it pertains to the composition of the Committee of National Reconciliation.[5]

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[5] The President checked the approve option.

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260. Message From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) in Moscow[1]

Washington, September 14, 1972, 1447Z.

Tohak 97. Note: Do not retain file copies of this message. Deliver all copies and residue to addressee.

I just completed a forty five minute discussion with the President in which I reviewed the problem between Thieu and ourselves on the description of the composition of the electoral commission. I drew precisely upon each of the talking points that you had furnished[2] and, in addition, prepared and provided a very detailed memorandum outlining the issues for the President.[3] He was extremely reluctant about accepting our proposal. He based this reluctance on the fact that he had just received a poll which confirms the fact that the American

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, Box 24, HAK Trip Files, HAK's Germany, Moscow, London, Paris Trip, September 9–15, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusive; Eyes Only. Sent via Lord.

[2] In Hakto 24, September 13; see Document 258.

[3] Document 259.

people are two to one against any kind of coalition with the Communists. I reiterated over and over again the fact that this was not a coalition in any sense but rather a fig leaf for an election commission without which our proposal would have absolutely nothing new in either a public or private sense. The President is totally unimpressed by the need to have anything new in a public sense. I finally turned him on the importance of maintaining credibility with Peking and Moscow. He stated that the NSC does not seem to understand that the American people are no longer interested in a solution based on compromise, favor continued bombing and want to see the United States prevail after all these years. I pointed out that this very attitude was fragile and had been accomplished simply because we had been able to carefully blend a series of strong and forthcoming measures in a way that reestablished Presidential credibility. I said the important thing now is to be able to keep Moscow and Peking in a position where they cannot claim that we deceived them or are proceeding in our efforts to solve Vietnam in a way which is unacceptably damaging to their interests. The President finally agreed but insisted that in conveying his approval to you that I emphasize to you his wish that the record you establish tomorrow in your discussions be a tough one which in a public sense would appeal to the hawk and not to the dove. I again told the President that the record thus far of these meetings was unassailable and that I was confident that it would remain that way following tomorrow's meeting.

Concerning your press conference the President agreed that you can proceed on Saturday.[4] He insisted, however, that you could only do so after you brief Rogers and at first insisted that you see Rogers before you see him to keep him out of a tense meeting with the two of you. I insisted that he see you first and he finally agreed. He told me to call Rogers this morning and tell him that you were arriving late on Friday and would see Rogers the first thing Saturday morning to brief him on the outcome of your Moscow talks. I explaned to the President how you had finessed the European Security Conference issue through the vehicle of a Soviet note. He was very relieved and pleased. In the interest of time, I have kept this exchange very brief. There was much more to the discussion which I will give you in a subsequent message.

Warm regards.

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[4] The press conference was scheduled to be held in Washington on Saturday, September 16, about Kissinger's recent trip to Moscow and the September 15 negotiating session in Paris. For a report, see "Kissinger Hints Little Progress at Paris Session," *The New York Times,* September 17, 1972, p. 1.

261. Memorandum From the Deputy Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, Central Intelligence Agency (Horgan) to the Executive Director–Comptroller of the Agency (Colby)[1]

Washington, September 15, 1972.

SUBJECT

The Status of the Psychological Pressure Operations Group (PPOG)

1. In response to your request for a sampling of current progress reports in the psyops campaign, we find that the most recent reports are fragmentary in nature and do not give an adequate grasp of the totality of our efforts. Therefore we have prepared this separate report to give you an overview of the tangible and the intangible progress we have made.

2. Most psyops campaigns begin with the hope that through psychological operations the enemy will be persuaded to adopt a particular line of action. This is the conventional wisdom. Our new psyops campaign rejected this approach and instead opted to create every feasible kind of psychological pressure on Hanoi's administrative apparatus. We believe that the basic pressure to be applied is military, and that psyops should try to magnify and capitalize on the morale situation created by this basic military pressure. The difference may appear semantic, but in practice different consequences flow from the different approaches. The conventional approach leads to a step up in conventional operations. The pressure approach leads to a spirit of getting the job done without over concern for conventional jurisdictions. The result is reflected in the title of the interagency organization—the Psychological Pressure Operations Group (PPOG).

3. One of the primary internal accomplishments of PPOG in the 40-odd meetings held since its establishment on 20 May has been to organize the various components of the U.S. Government (CIA, State, DOD, USIA and NSC) into a responsive, action-oriented, integrated group. According to the testimony of the participants, PPOG is proving to be far superior to any predecessor interagency psyops committee. It has good morale and the members have a sense of

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[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Executive Registry, DCI Files, Job 80–R01284A, Box 6, 1 August–30 September 1972. Secret; Sensitive. In his September 15 transmittal memorandum to Colby, Carver wrote: "When the first 'blue ribbon' panel was convened [the first meeting of PPOG] under Sullivan's aegis at 1000 on the morning of 20 May, I quickly grabbed for the Agency bureaucratic control of the Washington effort and nominated my deputy as its day-to-day director. The move was made before anybody else could come up with alternatives and, in the rush of trying to be seen to be responsive to the President's 'get cracking' order, nobody made any serious objections."

achievement. PPOG has also developed a relatively good working relationship with the Saigon Mission's Psyops Task Force. Illustrative of this relationship is the establishment of a regular reporting mechanism between Saigon, with its psyop sitrep cables twice a week, and Washington with our own "PPOG messages." The Saigon Station has also been responsive to PPOG suggestions and ideas.

4. Other State posts and Agency Stations (in Indochina [*less than 1 line not declassified*]) have been brought on board by PPOG and Headquarters. In the effort to solicit fresh ideas, Ambassador Porter at the Paris talks has been asked to suggest psych ideas and themes for exploitation, and PPOG has furnished him with materials for his use. (Porter used a PPOG cable in his presentation at the 31 August Paris meeting.)

5. Organizationally, PPOG works effectively but just as important, it has functioned as a hopper for psych ideas. The interagency cross-fertilization of ideas has brought new dimensions to the overall U.S. Government psychological attack against North Vietnam. CIA's own effort has been enhanced through PPOG. For example, many of the features of the new gray radio, Radio Mother Vietnam, owe their genesis to PPOG and non-Agency contributors. The so-called Archie Bunker project—the still languishing proposal to knock out Hanoi Radio and substitute our own broadcast of the official Radio's medium wave home service—was originally discussed and proposed at an early PPOG session.[2] (Our substitute broadcast is potentially one of the most dramatic and unsettling psychological events of the war, one that we believe Hanoi will be ill prepared to counter simply because they have no precedent to go on. In brief, we propose to broadcast our own special resolution of the "21st Plenum" which has not yet been held which declares the end of the armed struggle and the return of essentially peaceful political competition. We propose to let the North Vietnamese get the genie back in the bottle once it is out.) Another PPOG proposal, which our Headquarters has sent out for GVN implementation, involves the dispatching of a team of GVN proselytizers to Paris targeted against DRV/PRG officials. Another PPOG idea which is being implemented is a bogus "Ho Chi Minh letter"—a document Ho is supposed to have left with a trusted confidant questioning the leadership ability of Le Duan, and pointing out Le Duan's inflexibility in situations where there is no historical precedent to go on. There are numerous other examples that can be noted here, the point being that PPOG is the primary USG focal point for psyop concepts, ideas and suggestions. The energy and imagination of specialists throughout the U.S. Government has been uncorked in PPOG, which despite its problems (some inherent in any interdepartmental committee) has orchestrated and directed a worldwide overt and covert campaign.

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[2] See Documents 197 and 206.

Specific PPOG Accomplishments

6. Some specific achievements include the resumption of leafleting operations against North Vietnam, using drones, C–130's and B–52's. The leaflets themselves are periodically reviewed as to the suitability of their contents. New and potentially even more effective leaflets have been developed. One leaflet that has been inserted within the past few days is a so-called inflation leaflet on which a facsimile of North Vietnamese currency is printed. Judging from past results in the 1966–67 period when a similar currency-style leaflet was dropped, this leaflet will probably cause an element of disruption in North Vietnam. It is possible that North Vietnamese recipients of the leaflet will cut off the facsimile currency representation and try to pass it. Two other leaflets, which have not yet been approved by the White House, deal with the Nixon visits to Peking and Moscow and prominently show photographs of the President with Brezhnev and Chairman Mao. If authorized by the White House (which is hypersensitive on anything touching China), the latter two leaflets should prove most effective in North Vietnam.

7. In order to provide responsive managerial control over the leafleting operation, PPOG has reorganized this activity by returning the authority to develop leaflets to the Saigon Mission. This step was intended to provide one centralized authority with the task of developing effective, intelligible and thoroughly pre-tested leaflets. Saigon's Leaflet Development Unit is now beginning to function along the lines that PPOG devised.

8. In the field of radio broadcasting PPOG has developed an all-embracing master theme list for world-wide use. We have greatly stepped up and improved the primary media facilities such as VOA. We have also developed the Agency's entirely new "Radio Mother Vietnam" which is now broadcasting 55 hours per day over medium and short wave frequencies. The radio themes have improved across the board and are believed to be more hard-hitting and effective than in the past. A screening mechanism of all relevant and exploitable intelligence materials has been instituted in Saigon to support the radio media facilities with usable declassified data.

9. The broadcasting of NVA POW names over VOA and the GVN's Voice of Freedom (VOF); the step-up in the broadcasting of "Yellow Music" (a form of popular South Vietnamese sentimental music) by VOA, VOF and Radio Mother Vietnam; and Radio Mother Vietnam's parodying of martial-sounding North Vietnamese songs were all ideas either generated or given new impetus by PPOG. These three radio broadcasting features have provoked recent criticisms from Hanoi or North Vietnamese officials.

10. PPOG began planning contingencies on the dike question before it was an issue and has contributed its share in the successful countering of Hanoi's charges of deliberate U.S. bombing of the dikes. PPOG

has also managed a world-wide psych effort to signal Hanoi that its invasion across the DMZ and from Laos and Cambodia has stripped away all pretense of the so-called southern peoples' rebellion against the government and at the cost of Hanoi's international support. In another area, PPOG has been pushing the "blood bath" line and is continuing to highlight North Vietnamese atrocities in the South and thereby expose in the international arena this harbinger of things to come if the Communists take over South Vietnam. As Hanoi's offensive in the South wanes, we are prepared to hit hard on the theme that Vietnamization is a success and Ho's successors are pygmies compared to him, that they have led the country to destruction.

11. As noted previously, it appears that some elements of our total mix of intensified activities are hitting tender nerves in Hanoi. Perhaps the clearest indication of reaction to date has been the recent issuance by the North Vietnamese Premier's Office of a directive on the "reorientation of the information tasks." One of the directive's aims is the thwarting of our psychological warfare efforts, and the directive has a provision calling for the re-establishment of mobile information teams at the village, district, province and city echelons in North Vietnam. Still another Hanoi reaction admonished Party officials and secretaries for listening to Allied radio broadcasts. And in a virtually unprecedented event, a recent issue of the *People's Army* daily newspaper devoted one entire full page of its regular normal four-page format to a series of articles on the need to counter the Allied psychological effort. Almost weekly reports are being received from prisoners and ralliers that attest to the effectiveness of some phase of our efforts. The most dramatic is rallier Le Xuan Thy, a soldier of the 324th Division, who turned himself in as a result of listening to Mother Vietnam and who says that our broadcasts have prompted other members of his unit to desert and return to their families.

12. In sum, while much remains and always will remain to be achieved, the U.S. Government does now have a psychological warfare effort against North Vietnam that merits such a name and this collective effort of various agencies and departments reflects a quantum improvement over the various government components separate efforts that existed in one form or another (and, sometimes, largely on paper) prior to the President's 17 April directive.[3]

John P. Horgan[4]

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[3] The May 11 WSAG meeting (see Document 146) mentions the directive. On May 10 and May 18 (see Documents 143 and 159) Nixon drafted memoranda to Kissinger, and on May 18 to Haig (see Document 160), on this subject. In each memorandum Nixon expressed unhappiness with the way intelligence agencies and military departments were conducting psychological warfare against North Vietnam and directed that new ideas, new programs, and new insititutions arise to carry out his psychological warfare policy.

[4] Printed from a copy with Horgan's typed signature.

262. Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, September 15–16, 1972.

[An unknown portion of the conversation was not recorded while the tape was changed.]

Kissinger: "You [Le Duc Tho] just don't understand America." I said: "If you had released those three prisoners to us, you would have put us under some pressure to reciprocate. Releasing them to a peace group that's better known in Hanoi than in America," I said, "hurts you."[2]

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: I said: "I've got trouble enough advising in Washington. I don't want to advise in Hanoi. But I just want to tell you, whatever little advantage you get from releasing three prisoners, you've destroyed by giving it to, I think, giving these prisoners to these people." Well, [unclear] he said: "'Peace group?' We don't know any peace groups. This is a social welfare organization. It's the first time I hear that it's a 'peace group.'"

Nixon: Jesus Christ.

Kissinger: [laughs] And, about the announcement, he said: "Why do you think we would object to it? Of course make the announcement." And—so, this, this set the mood. Then I presented our proposal. But then, he said—then I told him I had to go to Pompidou. He said: "Well, if we don't finish, maybe we can meet tomorrow."

Nixon: Hmm.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 780–1. 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, 11:43 p.m.–1:01 a.m. In this conversation, Kissinger reported the high points of his September 15 meeting with Le Duc Tho in Paris.

[2] Hanoi announced on September 2 that it would release three U.S. prisoners into the custody of the anti-war Committee of Liaison with Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam, co-chaired by Cora Weiss and David Dellinger. It did so on September 25 and the three prisoners—Navy Lieutenants Markham L. Gartley and Norris A. Charles, and Air Force Major Edward K. Elias—arrived in New York on September 28.

Kissinger: I said, at first, "All right we'll meet tomorrow." And I was thinking of staying over. That would have given us a tremendous press play, but then, the more I thought about it is, without preparing Saigon, if I stayed over—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —Saigon, on top of that peace plan, would have thought we had sold them out.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: So, then—

Nixon: That's true.

Kissinger: Then he presented maybe 30 pages of documents[3] of—and when you consider that, in the past, they've never presented more than one—now, their new peace plan is still not acceptable, and I'm not arguing that one. But, they're moving stuff out. It's already amazing that every meeting they propose a new plan. Formerly, they made one plan, then stuck with it for a year—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: When we started, they said Thieu had to go and a provisional government had to be set up. Then they said Thieu could stay as long as we promised to set up a provisional government, later. Now they say: "The administration in Saigon can stay even after the provisional government is set up, to administer the part of the territory it controls." That also—that's also not acceptable. All I'm saying is that they're moving step-by-step. But, I don't want to go into the details now, but I can do it tomorrow.

Nixon: Well, sure.

Kissinger: When he was through all of this, I said: "I've thought about it Mr. Special Adviser, there isn't enough here to meet tomorrow, and this is so much we've got to study." He said: "Well, when can you meet again?" I said: "Well, I propose the 29th." And I have a State Department interpreter, a reliable guy, who was apparently—he said he'd never seen anything like that. He said Le Duc Tho went to pieces. He said: "I must know one thing from you, but you must tell me now: do you want to settle it?" I said: "Yes, we want to settle it, but I want to say, simply, we don't have to settle it before the election. Actually, settling it is a liability for the election." And I read him the Harris poll.

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[3] At the September 15 meeting, the Communist side submitted four papers: the principles that should guide the settlement of the war, the DRV peace proposals, the U.S. obligation to rebuild the North Vietnamese economy, and how the negotiations should be conducted. They are, respectively, Tabs B–E attached to the September 15 memorandum of conversation. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Senstive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [3 of 5])

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: And I read him the other one. So, I said: "If you really want other concessions from us because of the election, frankly, we'd really a little bit prefer not to settle it before the election for political reasons, but, because this is so important for the sake of mankind, we'll settle it before the election, if you let us. But don't count on any more concessions."

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: He—he said: "You have to tell us if you want to settle it. All our plans could be made to settle it. If you tell us you don't want to settle, it's childish." I said: "Yes, we want to settle it." He said: "Give me a day." I said: "Well, October 15th." He took my hand and said: "Our first agreement. We'll settle it October 15th." Then he said: "October 15th, between you and us, or between everybody?" I said: "I think we'll be doing, probably doing, between you and us. The others, I will see." He said: "Oh, no, no, no. We ought to get them all done by the end of October, anyway, with Saigon and everybody else." So, I then, I said: "All right." I said: "I'll have to check with the President. Let's—we'll aim for next Friday or early the following week." He said: "Can you come for two days?" So, I said: "I'll try." And I pretty well promised it to him, because I figure if I go for a day, they announce we'd meet in the morning. Then, in the evening, we announce that I've extended it for a day, which we have pre-positioned Saigon, so that they don't get nervous—

Nixon: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

Kissinger: After that, our domestic opposition has to shut up. I mean, something has to be going on—

Nixon: Well, yeah.

Kissinger: —if we are meeting for two days.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And Hanoi has to shut up. Now, frankly, I don't see how it can be settled—

Nixon: No.

Kissinger: —with all these issues unresolved. But, he said: "Let's do it this way." He said: "Let's agree on all the things we agree on and draft language on it." He said: "Let's agree on the International Control Commission, and let's spend a whole day on the political settlement." I, frankly, don't see how it's going to get solved. But I—he was absolutely—I cannot overemphasize how candid he was. Now, you can say he's stringing us along, but if he's stringing us along he would delay the meeting.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: He—what does he get out of a two-day meeting? A two-day meeting enables us to say [unclear] that there must be something going on.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: It takes care of us for three weeks after that. By that time, we will be so close to the election, that if they go public we'll just say they're trying to affect the election.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: Then, we won't even have to go public anymore.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: I think he's out—he's, he's been totally outmaneuvered.

Nixon: [clears throat] What do you think his reason is?

Kissinger: I think they are terrified of you getting re-elected.

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: Not one word—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: Not one word about bombing.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: Not one word about inhuman acts. Not one word about how they're winning. Not one word about how they're going to fight for all eternity.

Nixon: Never.

Kissinger: I said: "You know, one thing I want you to remember, Mr. Special Adviser," I said, "you and your friends have turned this election into a plebiscite on Vietnam. And after November the President is going to have a majority for continuing the war."

Nixon: Because of them.

Kissinger: "Therefore," I said, "you'd better think about what the negotiating position will be in November."

Nixon: Good. Good.

Kissinger: And he didn't say—if I had said this to him a year ago, I would have heard an hour speech about how the Vietnamese people have fought everybody.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: And—but, I don't want to mislead you. If he were Chou En-lai, I would now say: "We'll settle it."

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But surely—

Nixon: They just may not have the capability of doing it.

Kissinger: They, they are in a panic. They would like to settle. They don't know how to do it. They keep making moves. For them, they have made huge concessions.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: I mean, considering where they started, that in three months they have moved—

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: —from disbanding everything in South Vietnam, to keeping Saigon in charge of the admin—of the area it controls. That's an unbelievable move for them, but it's not enough, and whether they can go the rest of the way, I would doubt. But, in order to go the rest of the way—but, in order to find that out, they have to do so many things to help you.

Nixon: Um-hmm. That's right.

Kissinger: Then—and—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: It's, it's really—I was stunned by that—

Nixon: Hmm.

Kissinger: —by, by, by their behavior. Usually, it's extremely unpleasant—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —to sit with them. It was a six-hour meeting, but—

Nixon: Hmm. Goddamn—

Kissinger: —but they were really—well, they wanted more. I, I broke it off, partly because I had to see Pompidou,[4] but I'll have a real problem keeping this thing going for two days. But I'll come up with enough bravado. We shouldn't make another significant move now.

Nixon: No. We can't—

Kissinger: We should let them make the move. But, if we hadn't done—it was really—I was very—

[unclear exchange]

Kissinger: If we hadn't made this—first of all, their offer now washes out our proposal anyway, but if we hadn't made that proposal, that was the one new thing in that, in our—

Nixon: Um-hmm?

Kissinger: And it makes no practical difference, and I'm certain that Thieu, now that he sees this whole evolution, sees that we—what Thieu is really afraid of is a cease-fire.

Nixon: He is?

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[4] Kissinger was in Moscow September 10–13 to discuss with Soviet leaders a variety of economic and financial issues. On September 14, he flew to England to brief Prime Minister Edward Heath on his discussions and early the next morning to France to do the same for President Georges Pompidou. Briefing Pompidou was also cover for the private meeting with Le Duc Tho that day.

Kissinger: Yeah. Now, there is this possibility, Mr. President: it may be that they have decided to cave, but that they're not going to cave before—until midnight of the last day that they had set for themselves. That they say to themselves, they can cave soon enough. That's—I mean, they can cave whenever it—whether they cave at the last second, or two weeks earlier—

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: —doesn't get them any benefit. Brezhnev said what the Russians did to them. Le Duc Tho was in Moscow Sunday—Sunday night, Monday morning. He saw Mazurov,[5] number 14 on the Politburo. I saw Brezhnev for 25 hours.

Nixon: Geez—

Kissinger: Brezhnev did not receive Le Duc Tho.

Nixon: 25 hours?

Kissinger: 25 hours I saw him.

[Omitted here is discussion of Kissinger's meeting with Brezhnev, Mutual Balanced Force Reductions, European security, Strategic Arms Limitations Talks and U.S.–USSR trade.]

[5] First Deputy Premier Kiral Mazurov.

263. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, September 19, 1972.

SUBJECT

My Meeting with the North Vietnamese, September 15, 1972

Overview

I met for almost 6 hours with Le Duc Tho on September 15.[2] It was in many respects the most interesting we have ever had. They were de-

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 855, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XVII. Top Secret; Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. Kissinger had earlier sent to Haig an untitled, shorter report of his meeting with Le Duc Tho in Hakto 33, September 15, 2005Z, which Haig provided to the President. A stamped notation on the covering memorandum indicates the President saw it. (Ibid.)

[2] The transcript of the meeting is in a September 15 memorandum of conversation, 9:55 a.m.–3:55 p.m. (Ibid., Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China

fensive; they professed eagerness to set the earliest possible deadline for an overall settlement; and they have never been so eager to have early and frequent meetings. They repeatedly, and almost plaintively, asked how quickly we wished to settle and there was none of their usual bravado about how U.S. and world opinion were stacked against them. For the first time in the history of these talks I sensed that they were groping for their next move and their tack was devoid of any apparent, clear-cut strategy. Indeed the tone of our exchanges may prove more significant for the future than actual content of their remarks at this meeting.

On the purely substantive side, we tabled our new proposal building on our August 14 offer but adding the political element which we had withheld at the last meeting pending consultations with Saigon. With your prior concurrence, one element of our political proposal, namely the tripartite nature of the committee to supervise the Presidential elections, was tabled without complete Saigon agreement. This was because of the inordinate delay in receiving Saigon's comments on our proposals and the fact that without this element our proposal would have had practically nothing new as compared to our January offer.

I also came down hard on their recent handling of POW releases and their recent public statements which have edged on divulging the private negotiating record.

For their part, the DRV also tabled a new proposal. It contained a number of elements including a proposal that the GVN and PRG should continue to exist even after the formation of a Government of National Concord, with the latter acting as a sort of super-government while the GVN and PRG continue to exercise administrative functions over their local jurisdictions. They also added a number of elements of concreteness to their proposal. They were specific for the first time about when Constitutional Assembly elections would take place under their proposed Government of National Concord, namely within 6 months of an agreement; the proposed specific countries for participation in international supervision and guarantee mechanisms; and they advanced a concrete agenda for our future private talks.

At the end of the meeting we agreed to study each other's respective positions and meet again on September 22 or 25 subject to confirmation. At their suggestion, we tentatively agreed to meet for two successive days in a maximum effort to find a breakthrough.

Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [3 of 5]) The four papers the DRV negotiators submitted are also ibid. See footnote 3, Document 262.

Despite further movement in their position, their views, particularly on the political issue are still far from ours; but I was struck by the tone and attitude of our meeting. They now appear to have a greater appreciation of U.S. political realities and seem to be more aware of the ever diminishing significance of the Vietnam issue in the context of our overall foreign and domestic policies.

It is not entirely clear what they have to gain by being so eager to pursue the dialogue. Their dilemma is that further talks strengthen our domestic position and negotiating record without in any way restricting our military flexibility, while if they break them off, they have no hope of settling before November which I sense from our meeting is their strong preference.

My surmise is that they are deeply concerned about your reelection and its implications for them but, with their collective leadership, they may be having deep difficulties coming to grips with the very political concessions they will have to make to move the talks off dead center. They continue to pose unacceptable demands, perhaps because they lack imagination, perhaps because they wish to defer the necessary concessions to the last possible moment.

Whatever the case, we are in an unassailable position. By tabling our new proposal we have built an excellent negotiating record. This will be enhanced by the next meeting and their eagerness to talk will carry us into October. At that point Hanoi will face the choice of moving off its political position in order to reach early agreement or having to deal with you after the election.

Highlights

—I first tabled our new proposal. It essentially builds on our January 25 offer[3] with the following new elements of significance.

• Our withdrawal would be 3 rather than 6 months after a settlement.

• The committee to supervise Presidential elections would be tripartite in nature with equal representation for the GVN, NLF and a third segment of neutral forces whose composition would be mutually agreed between the GVN and NLF.

• Political forces would be represented in the new cabinet in proportion to the number of votes received in the presidential election.

• The committee to supervise the election would remain in existence afterwards to participate in revision of the Constitution.

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[3] See Documents 5 and 8.

• We gave them an understanding that a ceasefire would come *after* settlement of all political and military issues rather than earlier in the process as had been our original position. Although we portrayed this as a major concession, my own judgment is that objectively at this stage they have more to gain than we by an immediate ceasefire.[4]

—Le Duc Tho first reaffirmed a DRV statement of policy and principles which their side had tabled on August 1.[5]

—He then tabled a ten-point proposal which is based on their August 1 proposal. In regard to the new proposal, Tho emphasized the following aspects:

• First they insist on our affirming respect for the unity of Vietnam lest the country be perpetually divided.

• Second, on *military questions* we should agree to withdrawal 45 days from a settlement—this is 15 more days than their August 1 position. They were also very insistent on their demand that we end military aid to the Saigon Government from the time of a ceasefire.

• On *political questions* Tho reaffirmed their August 1 position but adding 2 new elements: first, instead of abolishing the GVN and PRG when the three-segment Government of National Concord is formed, the GVN and PRG will continue to run areas under their jurisdiction while the National Concord Government serves as a super-government; second, the National Concord Government will have primacy in foreign affairs but is circumscribed by the GVN and PRG in domestic matters. National Concord Committees would also be established at the local and regional levels. Tho also made the concrete proposal that Constituent Assembly elections under the National Concord Government be held within 6 months of a settlement.

• Finally, Tho dwelt at some length on reparations and, in what I found to be an astounding example of their arrogance, demanded 1 billion dollars more in reparations for South Vietnam than they had the last time, bringing the total they demand for the 2 Vietnam's alone to 9 billion dollars, 4.5 for the North and 4.5 for the South.

—Tho also made a number of concrete proposals on such peripheral issues as who would be in the international control and supervisory body and which countries would participate in guarantees of the status of Indochina.

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[4] Nixon highlighted this paragraph and underlined the phrase beginning with "at this stage" to the end of the sentence. He also wrote in the margin: "True *militarily* but not politically. As far as we are concerned—only a cease fire would have any political effect at this time."

[5] See Document 225.

—On procedural questions Tho reaffirmed their position that the key political and military questions must be settled between us first before the subsidiary forums can be opened (e.g. those in which the GVN and NLF would participate).

—We then engaged in a rather vigorous exchange about attitudes towards negotiations. Tho accused us of seeking to delay the talks and prolong the war. I countered that we had worked hard to table a new proposal at every session and it was he who had gone to Hanoi for 4 weeks, making more frequent talks impossible.

—Tho then betrayed an unusual impatience for further meetings when he protested my suggestion that we meet again two weeks from now after we have had a chance to study their new documents. I finally agreed to meet again on either September 22 or 25 subject to confirmation. I pointed out, however, that while the DRV insists it wants to make rapid progress, it refuses to move agreed subjects immediately to subsidiary forums until we have agreed to their political demands. I again repeated our position that the modalities of a ceasefire would be an appropriate subject to refer immediately to the plenary forum. Tho rejected this.

—In specific response to certain points Tho had made, I told him their hopes of a formal commitment to reparations was illusory; I reminded them of the need to consider seriously our proposals and not only demand that we work on a basis of theirs and that our position on the political issue was about as far as we could reasonably go. I also made the point that India would be unacceptable to us as a participant in any supervisory mechanism as they proposed.

—Finally, after asking a few detailed questions about their newest proposal, I proposed to Tho that at our next meeting we concentrate on seeking to find agreed language on those issues where we have reached essential agreement such as the military questions and international guarantees. We would also, of course, seek common ground on the political questions.

—Tho agreed, but emphasized their desire to focus on the political question.

What Happened

I began by pointing out the other side's clear violation of our understanding—not to divulge the content of our private meetings, as evidenced in the PRG's political statement of September 11.[6] I emphasized that the problem was not overly difficult for us, but we should all keep to our understandings with each other. I also came down hard

[6] See footnote 4, Document 259.

on the current POW release, pointing out to them the fact that their choice of method assured them that the U.S. public would react in exactly the opposite way of that they intended. Finally, I agreed to stay over until the next day and continue to negotiate if we did not get a chance to finish our business in one session.

Xuan Thuy felt constrained to reply, saying that the PRG made no mention of private meetings, and at any rate was merely replying to our convention platform on Vietnam. They recalled that this was not the first prisoner release they had made to the Liaison Committee, which he called a "humanitarian" organization with whom the DRV had had regular dealings.

Following these defensive reactions on their part, I presented our new proposal. I outlined its history, emphasizing the difficulties we had gone through in our consultations with Saigon and the fact that we had sought consistently to find middle ground and shape a solution that would be just to both sides. I laid particular emphasis on our new political point, which contained the following new elements:

—The three-segment composition of the Committee for National Reconciliation, which would organize and supervise the Presidential elections.

—The date of the Presidential elections would be advanced from six to five months following overall agreement.

—Proportional representation for all political forces in the new government to be formed after the presidential elections, according to votes obtained in the elections.

—Revision of the Constitution for consistency with the conditions of peace.

Subsequently, I supplemented our formal political position with a series of unilateral undertakings which we were willing to make.

—The three segments of the Committee of National Reconciliation would be of equal proportions, similar to the DRV formulation in respect to the composition of the National Concord Government.

—We would use our influence to assure that revisions would be made in the Constitution after a ceasefire, and that the Committee of National Reconciliation would play a major role in this revision.

—We were confident that Thieu's resignation date, specified as one month before elections in our January plan but left vague in our present offer, would be negotiable.

I also underlined the following additional new elements:

—While the language of our formal proposal continues to say that a ceasefire will be observed "at a time mutually agreed upon," we were willing to agree with them that a ceasefire should take place only after an overall agreement is signed.

—We noted that we had advanced the timetable for total U.S. withdrawal from 4 months to 3 months after signature of an agreement.

I concluded our presentation by stressing our desire to end the war rapidly and urging them to approach us in a constructive spirit, so that we could fulfill our responsibility toward our two peoples.

The other side took a break to consider our proposal, during which Le Duc Tho made a point of engaging me in a rather warm conversation, in which he bent over backwards to convey the impression that they were interested in reaching a prompt settlement.

After the break, Tho embarked on a lengthy prepared statement.

—He first took up what he called the DRV's *general principles and policies*. He rejected our principles which we gave to them on August 14[7] but said that he envisaged that each side could issue its own statement of principles and take note of the other side's statement. In particular, he noted we had failed to mention two points which we had previously discussed (he then gave us a document setting forth DRV views):

• The fact that the U.S. did not require a pro-US administration in Saigon, and US willingness to commit itself not to return to Vietnam.

• A statement that the US did not want alliances in the Indochina region.

—Concerning the substantive content of a solution, Tho handed us a new 10-point proposal, following the format of their old plan. Tho said there were 4 important points closely linked to each other. These were:

• US respect for the *unity* of Vietnam, as expressed in their point one. Tho called this a question of principle on which they would not cede. He further pointed out that this was stated clearly in the 1954 Geneva Agreements and wondered why we hesitated to mention it.

• Concerning the military questions, the DRV felt that one month after agreement was long enough for total US withdrawal, but was willing to extend the deadline to 45 days.

In relating their demand that the US end military aid to the Saigon regime at a ceasefire, Tho reaffirmed his statement of last time that in actuality both sides in the South would refrain from accepting any military aid.

—Regarding the *political point,* Tho said his preliminary view was that we had put forward nothing basically new. He then outlined the new elements in their own new plan. Where their previous plan proposed the abolition of the Saigon Administration and the PRG simultaneously with the formation of a Government of National Concord

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[7] Document 238.

(GNC), they now proposed that the GNC would be formed above both the GVN and PRG, both of which would continue to exist. National Concord administrations would also be established at all local levels side-by-side with the existing administrations, to carry out internal functions under the competence of the GNC, which would be more limited than formerly envisaged, principally, to the enforcement of the agreement signed by the parties. Foreign affairs would be concentrated in the hands of the GNC. Tho said it was necessary to set the GNC over the two contesting forces to prevent a resumption of hostilities.

—On *reparations,* Tho said it would be necessary to include specific reference to US responsibility for reparations, although they didn't insist on that particular word. The DRV plan asks for 9 billion dollars, divided equally between North and South.

—In reviewing other aspects of their new plan, they made the following points:

• Tho and Thuy claimed that the North Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam consisted primarily of Southerners regrouped to the North in 1954, but later admitted there are a substantial number of North Vietnamese "volunteers." (Thuy claimed, however, that a number of regular army units remained in North Vietnam to defend their rear.)

• Tho noted that both sides were now agreed on timing of a ceasefire.

• The DRV plan specified that their conception of an international control commission would include 5 countries, the present three members of the ICC, plus a country appointed by each side. They proposed that Laos, Cambodia, the USSR, China, France, Great Britain, the 5 countries of the International Control Commission and the UN Secretary General participate in a conference to define the international guarantees for the status of Vietnam.

—Tho also presented a more detailed procedural proposal which spells out the specific topics to be deal with in each of their proposed four forums.

Tho then asked what my views were on a timetable for our negotiations. I replied that my view had always been that we should give the existing Kleber forum something concrete to do by giving it the ceasefire issue to discuss in detail, since this would take a long time to work out. They stuck to their position that all problems between us had to be solved first. After I proposed that we should meet again in two weeks, Tho launched into a repeated accusation that we wanted to prolong the negotiations. I pointed out the ample evidence that exists to the contrary. Tho continued to press for my ideas on a negotiating timetable. I suggested that it would be highly desirable if we could reach a settlement by October 15.

As a result of this, we agreed that we would try to reach a settlement between the two of us by October 15, after which the other forums would be opened.

Tho kept repeating that the situation was ripe for a settlement but presented little in the way of concrete ideas on how to go from here to a settlement except to repeat that we should focus on the political issue. We finally agreed that we would try to meet again on September 22nd or 25th. In either case, I will plan on staying two days if the situation warrants.

After another break, I asked a number of questions with the aim of getting an elaboration of their proposals. These were the salient elements of their response:

—By "technical" personnel whose withdrawal they demand, they meant military, not economic, personnel.

—We could discuss inclusion in the formal agreement their oral commitment that the PRG would cease receiving military aid at the same time as the GVN.

I emphasized that if they wanted to reach a rapid agreement they should realize that there were certain points in their position which were unacceptable to us, such as reparations and their political point. They agreed to study what we have said.

I concluded by emphasizing our desire to settle as quickly as possible. To this end, we should make an attempt to amalgamate our separate proposals and get them into concrete form. Specifically, we should do this vis-à-vis the military issues, on which we are essentially agreed.

—Work to agree on an acceptable common text on the military issues.

—Draft a common text on international guarantees.

—Continue our discussion of the political issues.

Tho accepted this agenda, but said we should finish our discussion on the political question before dealing with the others. He said that with solution of the political questions the military questions would be solved as well.

264. Memorandum From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, September 21, 1972.

SUBJECT

Comments by GVN Prime Minister Khiem—GVN Concern Over Negotiations

Attached at Tab A is a report of a conversation on September 15 between our Station Chief in Saigon and South Vietnam's Prime Minister, Tran Thien Khiem. Mr. Helms has also sent you a covering memorandum which includes additional, particularly sensitive comments by the Prime Minister on the GVN's concern over our ceasefire negotiation position, possibly resulting from your recent talks with President Thieu.[2]

In the basic memorandum of conversation, Khiem discussed the anticipated enemy offensive in October, ceasefire prospects and GVN's need to be more tightly organized, and his belief that President Thieu is acting with a greater degree of urgency than he (Khiem) feels is warranted. Khiem also noted that the situation in Cambodia is going very badly and that he has lost confidence in President Lon Nol's ability to exert the necessary leadership.

In his supplemental covering memorandum—distributed only to you—Helms reports that according to Khiem, President Thieu is very much concerned that Hanoi will make an offer which President Nixon just cannot resist. Khiem speculated that this feeling may have resulted from your recent talks with the President and noted that Thieu is accordingly stepping up his controls to be ready for any eventuality.

Helms adds that Khiem's comments are the latest in a series of indications that something said during your recent session with the President has caused a considerable degree of nervousness at the top level of the GVN. There seems to be the feeling, he concludes, that the U.S. is committed to accept almost any form of ceasefire which involves the simultaneous release of U.S. prisoners of war by North Vietnam and the PRG.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 27, Chronological File, 20–23 September 1972. Secret; Sensitive; Outside the System. Sent for information.

[2] Attached but not printed at Tab A are the report, dated September 19, and Helms's September 19 memorandum.

265. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, September 23, 1972, 0145Z.

WHS 2168. In consonance with White House 2165,[2] I wish to emphasize the point made in paragraph six in which I indicated that there is a good possibility that the September 26 meeting could be carried over to a second day of meetings on September 27. You should bring this to Thieu's attention since he might read the possible announcement of such an extension as an indication that a settlement is about to be concluded. It is important that he understand that there is great cosmetic value in a second consecutive day of meetings should the opportunity present itself.

It is also important that Thieu understand that in the sensitive period facing us, his discernible attitude on the negotiations could have a major influence on Hanoi's strategy. If Thieu is genuinely worried that we might settle prematurely, he must understand that the appearance of differences between Washington and Saigon could have the practical consequence of influencing Hanoi toward a rapid settlement in the secret talks so as to exploit what they might perceive as a split between the U.S. and GVN and the resulting political disarray in Saigon.[3] This would disrupt the carefully measured pace we are attempting to maintain. Our strategy at this point is to force further movement in Hanoi's position and maintain the appearance of constructive activity in Paris while continuing to apply maximum military pressure. Therefore it is essential that Thieu stay close to us so that we demonstrate solidarity to Hanoi.

Warm regards.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] In backchannel message WHS 2165, September 18, Kissinger summarized his September 15 meeting with Le Duc Tho and directed Bunker to convey the information to Thieu. (Ibid.)

[3] In backchannel message WHS 2166, September 21, Kissinger expressed a similar anxiety: "We have become increasingly concerned about tenor of Thieu's recent public remarks on negotiations. We, of course, recognize that his primary audience is different from ours, and that the other side has not been blameless in their public commentary. On the other hand, Thieu must recognize that his comments get global attention and can seriously complicate our position. We are engaged in a delicate process which is designed to further mutual US–GVN objectives. We cannot afford to have the strategy we have outlined to Thieu jeopardized by public comments which undercut our domestic posture or which the other side might cynically seize upon as a pretext." Kissinger instructed Bunker to make these points to Thieu the next time he saw him. (Ibid.)

266. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, September 23, 1972, 1035Z.

164. Refs: (A) WHS 2165;[2] (B) WHS 2166;[3] (C) WHS 2167;[4] (D) WHS 2168.[5]

1. I met with Thieu this morning and first gave him amplified report of the last meeting as contained Ref A. I described the other side's defensive attitude, the absence of their usual bravado and their professed eagerness to set the earliest possible deadline for an overall settlement. I said that you had the impression that they were grouping for their next move and did not seem to have a clearcut strategy.

2. I then went over with Thieu our peace proposal as tabled, pointing out that it was as agreed with the GVN with the exception of two items in Point 4, i.e., in 4A) the reference to "review of the constitution" and the composition of the CNR.

3. We believed that reinstatement of the phrase "review of the constitution" in 4A) was consistent with its use later in the same point. Concerning the CNR I pointed out that we did not make any reference to equal representation on the committee, neither had we tabled any procedural proposal in view of the various objections raised by the GVN. We had tried to go as far as we possibly could to meet their concerns without undermining altogether the strategy which you had outlined when you were here. Had we not tabled Point 4 as we did, we would have had really nothing to point to in our political offer. We had been careful also to word the functions of the CNR so as to avoid any of the meaningful administrative functions of the GVN. As worded it becomes an essentially supervisory committee with carefully circumscribed powers. In any event, our new proposal does not seem acceptable to the other side.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 44, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Cables, 5–30 September 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only; Immediate.

[2] See footnote 2, Document 265.

[3] See footnote 3, Document 265.

[4] In backchannel message WHS 2167, September 21, Kissinger informed Bunker that French President Pompidou had, as Kissinger suggested, backed away from endorsing a tripartite coalition government for South Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 414, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, To Amb. Bunker—Saigon, 1972)

[5] Document 265.

4. Concerning the new substantive and procedural proposals tabled by the other side, we took the position that these contained political demands which are unacceptable and that they would have to modify them. I added that you had strongly criticized the recent public statements by the other side, especially the PRG statement of September 11. At our next meeting we will not table any new proposal, but will attempt to force further movement by the other side.

5. As evidence of their impatience, the other side suggested meeting September 22 and were clearly disappointed when we suggested the 29th. We finally agreed to meet September 26 and to continue on the 27th. We think that a meeting for two days will be extremely helpful in the U.S. I handed Thieu memorandum with the wording of the changes in paragraph 4A) and in the composition of the CNR which he accepted without comment. He raised no objection and I do not believe he will do so, having made his views clear in his letter to the President.[6]

6. I also gave Thieu substance of your report on Soviet attitudes (Ref A, paragraph 11) and emphasized that this information was strictly for him alone.

7. I then said that I wished to talk with him very frankly about a situation which is important to our mutual interest. This had to do with the effect of some of his public remarks on negotiations. I said that I recognized that he was addressing an audience different from ours, in most cases his military forces who had been fighting tough battles continuously for six months; this, of course, was especially true of the troops in MR 1. On the other hand, he must realize that his remarks are reported all over the world and especially picked up by all the media in the United States. What concerns us is the fact that their increasingly uncompromising tenor and hard line can seriously harm our position. It can play into the hands of our critics at home and abroad while we are engaged in a very delicate process. I said that the President with great skill had mustered support for our Vietnam policy and we are concerned lest the tenor of Thieu's remarks alienate support for it.

8. I said that concern extended to Congressional as well as public opinion, for in the American system the President is not a free agent; the Congress shares equal responsibility. Funds for support, military and economic, must be authorized and appropriated by the Congress and unless the legislation is forthcoming from the Congress, there is nothing which the President can do to provide support. Consequently, it is extremely important that the President should be in a position to

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[6] A reference to Thieu's September 16 letter to Nixon. (See Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1334)

carry through on the strategy which you had outlined when you were here if we are to achieve our mutual objectives.

9. Thieu said that he had talked as he had, first because he was talking to troops, wanted to recognize and praise their achievements yet emphasize the fact that there was much fighting still to do. Secondly, there had been current—he described it as a fever or flu—rumors about an imminent settlement and cease-fire and he was fearful that this would undermine morale and the will to resist. The third point which he wanted to emphasize was the fact that if a political settlement is to be reached, the Communists must be willing to talk to the GVN. I said that I understood these concerns, but it is essential that we maintain a flexible posture and a forthcoming attitude toward negotiations, especially in the next six or seven weeks. We must give the impression that we are sincerely seeking a negotiated peace, that we want reconciliation, not extermination. Thieu said that he understood our problem and concerns and I feel certain that he will be guided accordingly.

10. Finally I passed on to Thieu the report (Ref B)[6] of your talk with Pompidou and noted the result which had already become evident in the latter's press conference. Thieu was pleased by the result of your talk although obviously resentment at Schumann's attitude and statements still smolders.

11. Warm regards.

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[6] This is an error. The reference should be to Ref C.

267. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon[1]

Washington, September 28, 1972.

SUBJECT

My Meetings With the North Vietnamese September 26–27, 1972

Overview

I met for six hours September 26[2] and five and a half hours September 27[3] in our first two-day session ever with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy. The sessions both narrowed our differences in some areas, and demonstrated how far we have to go in others. The North Vietnamese tabled a new plan which, while still unacceptable, contains certain political provisions that might signal a possible opening. They professed continued eagerness for a rapid settlement, and, after seeing our repackaged ten point plan, complained we were moving too slowly in our positions. We agreed to meet again for three successive days starting October 7, which we may want to slip a day.

On the first day they displayed the same sense of urgency for an early end to the war that they did on September 15. They took up the first two hours laying out a concrete work program designed to wrap up an overall settlement within a month, pushing again the idea of a trip by me to Hanoi to overcome final differences. After a businesslike point-by-point review of our agreements and differences, Tho tabled their third new comprehensive proposal in four meetings—in the past they stuck with their plans for at least six months. Furthermore he did this after I said I wanted to withhold our own proposal to reflect on his comments overnight.

Their new plan, though still unacceptable, shows major movement in some respects. Though retaining the three-segment Government of National Concord, it continues their steady trend of stripping away

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1039, For the President's Files—China/Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. A stamped notation on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] The full text of the 52-page, September 26 memorandum of conversation is ibid., Box 864, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David Memcons, May–October 1972 [2 of 5]. The various American and North Vietnamese papers handed around and mentioned in Kissinger's memorandum are attached.

[3] The full text of the 47-page, September 27 memorandum of conversation is ibid. The various American and North Vietnamese papers handed around and mentioned in Kissinger's memorandum are attached.

both (1) its powers and (2) the levers for communist domination of its composition:

—*Powers*

• In this newest plan the Government of National Concord has largely advisory functions centered on implementing the overall agreement and mediating between the two sides. It would have no army, or police, or defined territory. And it would only "supervise" the foreign policy of the two sides. The GVN (and PRG) remain in existence with armies and police intact. They would administer the areas they control and conduct their foreign policy.

• *This represents a major and continued evolution in their position.* The unacceptable principle of a "government" remains, but it is steadily being shorn of meaning. Their August 1 plan[4] assigned this government "full power in dealing with domestic and foreign affairs." The GVN and PRG would cease to exist.

• Their September 15 plan[5] stated that the GVN (and PRG) would remain temporarily in existence, but they had to implement the decisions of the Provisional Government of National Concord in the framework of the latter's tasks and prerogatives as described above and any laws contrary to the provisions of the DRV plan would be "abrogated."

—*Composition*

• In this newest plan the Provisional Government of National Concord and its subordinate commissions "will operate in accordance with the principle of unanimity." The government is composed of three equal segments, one-third from each side plus mutual agreement on the other third, and there is a stipulation that "no party may dominate" the coalition government. It is almost impossible to visualize how this three-headed "government" could take any meaningful decisions since all its elements must be in agreement.

• *This too represents a major and continuing evolution.* Before this summer's proposals the other side's position was that one-third of the coalition government would be from their forces, one-third neutral (according to their definition), and one-third from the Saigon Administration (over which they would have a veto). Furthermore, this "government" was going to negotiate with the PRG! In the August 1 and September 15 plans there was no mention of how decisions would be taken, implying majority rule.

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[4] See Document 225.

[5] See Document 263.

This plan is still far from acceptable because elements like Thieu's immediate resignation upon signature of an overall agreement and the continued presence of the North Vietnamese army in the South, would all but ensure the psychological demoralization and political deterioration of the GVN. But from Hanoi's perspective it represents major movement. And if surfaced, this plan would look much more reasonable to public opinion than their past plans. In fact, it is not inconsistent with their eventually turning their coalition government into an irrelevant committee in order to give a facesaving cover to a standstill ceasefire and de facto territorial control by both sides.

I withheld our political proposals the first day, tabling only our repackaging of other points which maintained our essential positions. On the second day, I gave them a new comprehensive plan which further incorporated some of their language without significant substantive change. The main features were two suggestions I said we would recommend to Thieu during General Haig's trip to Saigon[6]—giving the Committee of National Reconciliation some additional conciliatory functions, and providing for National Assembly, as well as Presidential, elections.

Both sides reviewed all issues again, specifying agreements and disagreements. *Among the more significant points that emerged:*

—Their assurances that there were no American POWs in Cambodia and that the few in Laos would be released by their friends.

—Their explicit confirmation that North Vietnamese troops were in Laos and Cambodia and their guarantee that they would be withdrawn after a settlement. Though they won't put this in writing, this is the first time they have ever addressed this issue in any fashion.

—Their repeated emphasis on settling within the next month, reflected in their work program, their interest in getting me to Hanoi, their desire to emasculate the other forums, and their dropping of subsidiary issues like general principles and procedures.

—Their repeated underlining of their political concessions, including the lesser functions of the coalition government (and larger role for the GVN and PRG); and the unanimity principle for that government's operations.

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[6] According to backchannel message WHS 2170 from Kissinger to Bunker, September 25, Haig's objectives in Saigon were threefold: "1. To gain an updated personal assessment for the President, of military situation and prospects; 2. Discuss U.S. policy in support of South Vietnam after the November elections; 3. Discuss the current status and prospects of the negotiations in Paris." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 413, Backchannel, Backchannel Messages, To Amb. Bunker—Saigon, September–December 1972) See also Document 272. Haig was in Saigon October 1–4.

Toward the end Tho's tone hardened as he claimed they had made major concessions while we were inching forward and concentrating on peripheral issues. He stressed they had made their "final" offer—which may or may not be a bargaining ploy, but in any event probably reflects their view that they have made a major move in their political position. However, they remained eager for a three-day series of meetings next time which they said would be "decisive." I emphasized we would never overthrow friends we had worked with for so long and that we could not accept their new plan. Both sides agreed to review their positions.

Comment

It remains clear that the North Vietnamese want a settlement if at all possible before our elections give this Administration a fresh mandate. The central question is, of course, whether they want it badly enough to accept terms that we and Thieu can also accept. Their plan is still far from that point, and the very complexity of the issues make a settlement in the next month highly unlikely.

This latest encounter suggests three possibilities:

—Their September 26 plan may indeed be their "final" offer. They may find it impossible to water down their political position any further after twenty years of struggle.

—They may be keeping up the tempo in the conviction that preelection pressures will make us cave in at the last moment. (Dobrynin has told me that this is what they are telling Moscow.)

—By stressing the finality of their proposal, they may be trying desperately to prove to their hawks in Hanoi that we won't budge further and that further concessions from them are needed.

Under the first two hypotheses, when we make clear next time once again that we will not accept an imposed coalition government, however diluted, the talks could be suspended. In that event we would be in a strong position. We would have no need to go public ourselves, but if the North Vietnamese did (which is by no means certain) we could dominate public debate with our negotiating record and the unreasonableness of some of their stands. The other side's military prospects in both North and South Vietnam are hardly promising; it is doubtful that they could pull off any spectacular psychological stunts on the battlefield, let alone make meaningful strategic gains. Once this were apparent, say early next year, they could return to the bargaining table, perhaps to make a deal on military issues alone.

Under the third hypothesis, the North Vietnamese, because of their military and political predicament, still have a decisive card to play which could produce a negotiated solution that leaves the GVN intact and every chance to maintain control. Thus Tho's emphasis on their having made

their "final" proposal would be a bargaining ploy to extract every possible concession from us for the benefit of the Politburo before making their final painful move. In this case a rapid and honorable settlement would be possible, and our major problem would probably be with our friends.

Whatever the actual North Vietnamese position—and they appear sufficiently off balance that they may not have made a final decision—our immediate task is to convince Thieu of the importance of public solidarity with us as we continue the negotiating process through at least one more round. Our proposals, while generous, substantively maintain the integrity of the GVN and its governmental system; the only major political departure since January is to specify that the electoral commission (now called the Committee of National Reconciliation) is composed of three forces. However, as you know, Thieu maintains he is anxious about the possible psychological impact in his country, and he is not on board with that section of our political point.

Thus we will want General Haig to reemphasize to Thieu our continuing commitment to the GVN; point out the major efforts we have made in his behalf the last four years; explain our strategy; stress that he must show understanding of our problems; and secure his agreement to a new proposal which maintains a serious posture.

We are exploring possible variations of our September 27 plan that take advantage of the possible openings in the other side's positions. We must shape elements that will continue to preserve the GVN's integrity while having enough of interest to the other side to accomplish one of two objectives:

—If they are ready to settle, getting them to do so.

—If they are not, inducing them to study our proposal and meet again.

We will want to gain Thieu's understanding of our strategy, acquiescence in a new plan, and in any event assurance that he will not publicly sabotage our efforts.

What Happened—First Day

Without prompting, Tho opened up the discussion, and we spent the first two hours on a *work program* for the coming weeks.

—They repeatedly emphasized the need to complete a comprehensive settlement during October. Tho asked if we were merely trying to drag out negotiations past the elections, or if we really wanted a quick settlement signed by October 15, as they urged at the previous meeting. He said they were prepared to cope with either eventuality.

—I emphasized the popular support in the U.S. for your Vietnam policy. It was not because of the election that we wanted a settlement. Nevertheless, to be realistic, there were numerous points of disagree-

ment between us, and even on those points on which we were near agreement there were differences in nuance. It was difficult to see how we could finish quickly unless they joined us in drafting agreed language and there were political breakthroughs.

After considerable discussion, we agreed to the following *work schedule,* which is unreal in view of our remaining differences:

—Meet again in ten days for three successive days in order to reach basic agreement on all issues.

—At the conclusion of those meetings decide whether a trip by me to Hanoi would be useful to overcome remaining obstacles. They raised this project again and urged us to prepare a schedule and agenda for the trip. They said cessation of bombing and mining would create favorable conditions for the trip; I refused to agree to this.

—Once there is basic agreement between the U.S. and DRV the experts would work on the details so that an overall agreement could be signed by the four parties by the end of October.

They clearly have decided to render *the other forums* meaningless. I continued to stress that the four-party and GVN–PRG forums would have to do the basic negotiating after US–DRV agreement in principle. And I emphasized that our schedule was meaningless unless we made progress on the substantive issues and agreed language for a settlement.

After a break, Tho again spoke first, going through every point and comparing the two sides' positions. He was in effect drawing upon their new proposal which he tabled at the end of the meeting. *Highlights of his presentation and my later comments* on it were as follows:

—He stressed the need for our affirming the *unity of Vietnam.* I later made the point that this did not yet exist, but we would not stand in the way of reunification and would respect it once it's achieved. (This is largely a semantic point which is soluble.)

—He said they wanted *Constituent Assembly elections* rather than Presidential elections. (They fear a rigged election for the winner-take-all post, and also want to challenge the current government framework.) I later emphasized the forthcoming aspects of our proposal, but said we would consider their point about a Presidential election alone.

—Tho stressed the need to spell out what *democratic liberties* would be guaranteed in South Vietnam. This reflects their concern about reprisals. I said we would consider whether we could be more specific.

—He showed apparent interest at this first session in our *Committee for National Reconciliation,* but said that it should do more then supervise elections. I made clear that we could not give it governmental powers but would see what other functions might be assigned to it. (We could in fact add some essentially empty tasks of conciliation between the two sides.)

—He particularly underlined a less ambitious role for their *Provisional Government of National Concord.* They would be "realistic" and only assign implementation of the provisions of the overall agreement to this government. Meanwhile the GVN and PRG would remain in existence, govern the regions they controlled and run their foreign policies. But Thieu would still have to resign right after the overall agreement. (Even more important is their provision that the provisional government and its committees must make decisions on a unanimous basis. Tho emphasized this aspect of their plan on the second day.)

—On U.S. *withdrawals* they maintained a forty-five day limit. I stuck to our position of three months. (This issue is manageable.)

—Tho said *military aid* and troop reinforcements should be cut off both from the GVN and the PRG after a settlement, with only weapons replacement allowed. I later pointed out this was unrealistic unless North Vietnam were similarly restricted; otherwise Hanoi would ship supplies to its friends.

—He maintained that the question of *Vietnamese forces* (including North Vietnamese) should be settled between the GVN and PRG alone.

—On *ceasefire,* he again limited its scope to Vietnam alone, stressing that it would soon follow in Laos and Cambodia. I later emphasized that all of Indochina would have to be covered since they had troops in all three countries. He wanted us to spell out in writing what we had already agreed to—that ceasefire should come upon completion of an overall agreement. (This is no problem for us.) Finally he said the ceasefire should be standstill. I replied later that we preferred the neutral formulation, "general" ceasefire, but our views on its modalities would make clear its standstill nature.

—He began to back off somewhat from their arrogant position on *reparations,* but still insisted on watered down language in an agreement and maintained their sum of $9 billion for Vietnam alone. I left no doubt that we would never acknowledge responsibility for reparations and that their figures were out of the question. (Innocuous language on reconstruction may be possible here.)

—Tho gave further views on *international supervision and guarantees.* Concerning the international supervision body, he suggested that this be composed of four members, two nominated by each side. They were dropping the fifth member, thus responding to my flat statement on September 15 that we would never accept India. For example, he saw no reason that international guarantees cover a ceasefire since it would be supervised internationally. As a "private stand" he thought that an international conference to provide guarantees for all of Indochina might be useful once the problems in all three countries were settled.

—He concluded that a *Vietnam settlement alone* would speed agreement and soon lead to solution of the Laos and Cambodia problems.

I responded to his statement, indicating what was unacceptable and where we might find new language. In particular, I stressed:

—We had a massive amount of work to do if we wanted an early settlement. We had to reach agreement in principle on each issue; draft common language for a settlement; and agree on some details of implementation to speed up the work in the other forums.

—We would conclude no agreement unless all *prisoners* in Indochina were released. He later said that no American military personnel were being held in Cambodia; few in Laos; and they would make sure their friends released them in any event.

—I handed over an *illustrative paper on the modalities for withdrawals and prisoner release,* each paced evenly over three months.

—On *international supervision,* I said we were suggesting the substitution of Indonesia for India in a five member commission, but we would consider their proposal of four members only.

—On some of the *subsidiary issues,* like reunification, I indicated where we might make adjustments in our language.

—On the *political issue,* I summed up our differences. I stated flatly that we could not overthrow our allies. We could agree to start a historical process to give all forces a fair chance. But their approach was unacceptable. The American people strongly supported our position and would never tolerate our dumping an ally we had worked with for so long.

—I emphasized that we had made major efforts to come up with new proposals and that we had had great difficulties with Saigon.

Tho made some final comments, prefacing his new proposal which he called their "final" plan and a great step forward.

—On the *political question* he emphasized that the GVN and PRG would remain in existence while the Provisional Government would be limited to implementing the provisions of the agreement.

—In addition to his assurances that all our prisoners would be released, his most interesting comment was on *their troops in Laos and Cambodia.* In response to my pointed questions, he did not deny they were in those countries and assured us they would all withdraw as part of the Laos and Cambodia settlements which would quickly follow the Vietnam one.

—He refused to put this assurance in writing, claiming (as on prisoners and ceasefire) that the U.S. and DRV could not unilaterally decide matters for Laos and Cambodia. (This verbal commitment, of course, means nothing in itself, but we can perhaps build on it. It is the first time they have ever addressed this problem.)

—Tho also showed further interest in our *Committee of National Reconciliation* concept, urging that it be assigned more tasks.

—He pointed again to what he called their "great concession" on military aid being cut off to the PRG as well as the GVN once there is an agreement. They would write down this commitment.

At the end of the meeting, Tho tabled *the new DRV 10-point plan*, whose highlights are as follows:

—Point 1: They maintain their language on *U.S. respect for Vietnam*, including unity, as recognized by the Geneva Agreement. The U.S. will not interfere in Vietnam's internal affairs.

—Points 2 and 3: U.S. *withdrawal* and *prisoner release* will take place in 45 days, as in their September 15 plan.

—Point 4: Here they presented their *political proposal* with what could be very significant changes:

• General elections for a Constituent Assembly would be held six months after signing of an agreement, as in their former plan.

• Democratic freedoms would be materialized—these are spelled out.

• The Government of National Concord would have the following tasks:

—Implement signed agreements, direct and supervise implementation by the two SVN parties.
—Materialize democratic liberties and national concord and direct and supervise enforcement by the SVN parties.
—Review policies and laws of the two SVN parties and stimulate latter to amend or abrogate policies and laws conflicting with signed agreement.
—Organize elections.
—Draft a new constitution.
—Supervise applications by the two South Vietnamese parties of the foreign policy of peace and neutrality.

• *Comment:* These tasks obviously remain too ambitious. However, the steady trend of *watering down the government functions* continues. The Provisional Government used to conduct in effect all internal and foreign policies of South Vietnam. Now the GVN (and PRG) administer their areas of control, maintain their armies and police, and conduct foreign policy, while the so-called Provisional Government's role is increasingly one of conciliation.

• The three segments of the GNC will be equal, and there will be necessary measures to ensure that no party dominates.

• The GNC will be composed of 12 members, with Chairmanship rotating among the three segments. All decisions will be taken by *unanimous vote.*

• As in the past, *National Concord Committees* will be established at *all levels* to implement the agreement locally. These too will act only with *unanimity.*

• *Comment:* This *unanimity principle* could prove to be very important. Given the three segment composition, with no one dominating, it is hard to see how the so-called government could decide anything. Thus, no matter what tasks are nominally assigned to it, it could be virtually a powerless figurehead.

• *The GVN and PRG would continue to exist temporarily* to administer the areas controlled by them, and both would have the right to maintain their existing foreign relations. However, they would still have to implement decisions of the Government of National Concord.

• As in previous plans, *Thieu would resign* on signature of the agreement.

—Point 5: The question of *Vietnamese armed forces* in South Vietnam will be solved by the GVN and PRG, as in earlier plans.

—Point 6: Their point on *reunification,* stressing the unity of Vietnam and gradual reunification based on discussions between North and South, is unchanged.

—Point 7: The U.S. has the responsibility to heal war wounds in North and South Vietnam. Nine billion dollars is still suggested.

—Point 8: The DRV now states that the U.S. stop *bombing and mining* in North Vietnam as soon as the U.S. and DRV have reached agreement on the 10 points. Thus these actions would stop before an overall agreement is reached, although under the DRV-suggested work program this would only be a matter of two or three weeks. A *ceasefire* in South Vietnam will be observed on signing of the overall agreement. As part of a ceasefire, neither South Vietnamese party will accept military aid or reinforcement. The ceasefire will be internationally controlled and supervised.

—Point 9: The *international supervision* and control commission is to composed of four rather than five, countries, with each side presenting two members for the approval of the other. Troop withdrawal and releases, as well as the ceasefire, will be controlled and supervised. General elections will be supervised. The ICSC will not interfere in internal Vietnamese affairs. There will be international *guarantees* for respect of Vietnamese fundamental rights, South Vietnam's neutrality, and the preservation of lasting peace. The 15 guarantee countries (the four parties in Paris, Laos, Cambodia, the three ICC members, the five UN Security Council members, and the UN Secretary General) would work out a joint declaration.

—Point 10: The *problems of the Indochinese countries* will be settled by those countries themselves.

We then agreed to adjourn overnight and study each other's positions.

What Happened—Second Day

Tho opened the next day's session with a report that VC cadre were being killed in South Vietnam's jails. He asked us to use our influence to stop it. I replied that we would look into it and if it were true we would use all our influence to stop it. However, we had reports that their side was carrying out its own program of assassination—I read from a captured Communist document. This had to stop.

As an introduction to my presentation of our revised plan, I made the following points on *procedures:*

—As soon as we reached agreement between us, we should activate the PRG/GVN and the Kleber four-party forum. The U.S. and DRV could not—and should not—do all the work and present the other parties with a fait accompli.

—We should announce the agreement between us in order to speed up work in the other forums. If they wished, we could do this after the election, thus assuring them that we were not influenced by our elections.

—I then asked Tho whether he wanted to discuss the general *guiding* principles for a settlement on which both sides had exchanged several drafts. I said we were ready with a new draft of principles. (These documents spell out the overall attitude of both sides toward the long term aspects of a settlement, e.g. the future U.S. role in the area and the future orientation of the region. They would at most provide a general framework and, if published, might give some impetus to the negotiations.)

—I then went through our new proposal, point by point, discussing the new elements in each. In the middle of my presentation Tho displayed impatience and wanted me to get right to the political point. I replied that if we couldn't agree on the points on which we were already close, how could we come to agreement on the political question? I pointed out the following important *new elements* in our plan:

—In point 1 we specifically stated we would not obstruct the *unity of Vietnam* and would repeat it once achieved, in response to Tho's stated concerns.

—Our point 3, on prisoners, remained the same. However, I referred to the implementation paper we had handed them the previous day, stressing access to detention facilities, verification of MIA's, and the necessity of getting back all our POW's throughout Indochina. I noted the assurances Tho had given us on our prisoners in Laos (as well as there being none in Cambodia).

—On point 6, I pointed out that, at their request, we had dropped the phrase that *reunification* would be achieved "after a

suitable interval", thus making it clear we were not trying to keep Vietnam divided.

—In point 7, we had a new statement on U.S. acknowledgment of the unity of the *Indochinese countries,* as stipulated in the 1954 Geneva Accords.

—In point 9, I pointed out that while we maintained the phrase "general" (instead of "standstill") *ceasefire,* our implementation paper made it clear that our definitions were the same. I then handed them a paper spelling out our ideas.

—In point 10, I summed up our new implementation papers on international supervision and international guarantees, and handed them over.

—I then returned to point 4, the *political issue,* pointing out the changes we had made, responding to their specific observations in previous meetings.

• We spelled out what we meant by "democratic liberties" (freedom of speech, press, etc.).

• We provided for new elections for a National Assembly, in addition to the Presidential election. This was a tentative suggestion until we cleared it with the GVN.

• We expanded the functions of the Committee for National Reconciliation (CNR) to include resolving differences between the two sides in implementing the agreement and playing a general conciliatory role. This too had to be cleared with Saigon.

• We specifically included their position that the political forces would deal with each other on the basis of "mutual respect and non-elimination" (they are concerned about annihilation of PRG members).

• We added our statement of principle that the U.S. was not committed to any particular political force or personality in South Vietnam and did not insist on a pro-U.S. government there.

• *Comment:* None of these changes affect the essence of our position.

I then ran down a list of concerns Tho expressed the day before to show him we had concretely answered almost every one.

Tho then made a tough statement, stressing the major moves they had made in contrast to our small gestures. (He was undoubtedly disappointed that our modifications were not central and that we had not responded more enthusiastically to what they probably consider significant political concessions on their part.)

—He said Vietnamese unity was a basic principle of their position which we should recognize explicitly in our proposals. Our language changes were not sufficient.

—On the *political point* he stuck to the necessity of organizing their three-segment Government of National Concord. Without such a government, it would be impossible to bring about a lasting peace. Interestingly, he emphasized that decisions would be taken by *consultations and unanimous vote,* and that neither side would dominate. He called our concept of the Committee of National Reconciliation neither realistic nor concrete. He repeated that their new plan was their "final" proposal. If there were not a settlement based on it, the fighting would continue.

—Concerning *elections,* he repeated their point that Presidential elections would lead to personal dictatorship, and that elections should be for a Constituent Assembly. This Assembly in turn would appoint the various officers of the state.

—We had not spelled out *democratic liberties* at sufficient length.

—On *Thieu's resignation,* he wanted to know our concrete ideas on the timing. I later replied that we had stipulated one month before elections and this might be stretched to two months.

—On *military subjects,* he repeated their stands in their plan.

- He said they would study our *ceasefire* paper and reply later.
- Re *reparations,* he agreed to drop a set figure from the formal agreement but still insisted that one sentence stating U.S. responsibility be included—the language could be negotiated.

—He commented on our proposals and papers on *international supervision and guarantees.* He said the International Control and Supervision Commission should not supervise the political point (except elections) or the disposition of Vietnamese armed forces in SVN, as this would be interference in the internal affairs of South Vietnam. There was no need for a guarantee of ceasefire since this was already under the supervision of the ICSC. He rejected our paper's proposal for a supervisory force of 7–12,000 men (i.e. a meaningful force). This would be one more occupation force, which would lead to resumption of the fighting.

Tho followed with a list of principles on which he said they would not change. In response to my assertion that this looked like an ultimatum, he said the language on these points was negotiable, though not the essence.

—On *political questions,* these included the unity of Vietnam; an administration with the power and the concrete tasks to implement the agreements; elections for a Constituent Assembly, not the Presidency; the assurance of democratic liberties.

—On *military questions:* the U.S. must end its aid to Saigon after an agreement (aid to the PRG would stop as well); and the question of DRV troop withdrawals should not be covered in our forum.

—On *Indochina questions:* they would not interfere in Laos and Cambodian affairs (e.g. ceasefire for Vietnam alone). He said they would fully implement the assurances on prisoners and North Vietnamese withdrawals they had given us the previous day. Once the Vietnam problem was solved, solutions in Laos and Cambodia would quickly follow.

Tho then listed what he called the *major concessions* they had made:

—They no longer called for Thieu's immediate resignation. I pointed out the absurdity of their supposed concession on this issue—i.e. their saying Thieu should resign upon signature of an overall agreement gave Thieu four more weeks in office under their work schedule.

—This was their third proposal in succession on a Government of National Concord.

—They had lengthened the timetable for U.S. withdrawals and had committed themselves to end military aid to the PRG. I pointed out that giving us 15 more days to withdraw was hardly a concession. As for military aid, we could not stop our assistance to the GVN so long as Hanoi received aid which they could funnel south.

—They had dropped the word "reparations." I again made emphatic our stand on this issue.

—They had given us an assurance about foreign forces (i.e. including their own) in Laos and Cambodia.

He concluded by stressing the generosity and finality of their proposal and their view that the movement we were making on our own was too slow. He complained that we were spending too much time on peripheral issues.

I reacted sharply to Tho's presentation. Both sides had their principles and would have to recognize the other side's point of view if we wanted to settle. Also, if we were to reach early agreement we would have to agree on common positions on non-political issues as well as get over the obstacles on the political one. He agreed but said the political question was top priority. He acknowledged that their formulations could change but not their basic tenets.

After a break, I asked Tho a number of questions about his statement and his proposal, which produced little new specifically, but a generally more conciliatory attitude on their part.

The meeting ended with both sides agreeing to study each other's proposals. I stressed our view that if we were ultimately to meet our timetable, we would need to start drafting specific language on points on which we were near agreement, in addition to trying to narrow our gap on the political point. We would study their proposal

seriously and make an effort on various points. They would have to do the same with our plan.

Tho said it was clear that our next three-day meeting would be "decisive." He emphasized the need to concentrate on the central questions first, including the political ones. When the big problems were solved, the others would come easily.

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268. Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting[1]

Washington, September 28, 1972, 3:03–4:12 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam and Cambodia

PARTICIPANTS

Chairman
Henry A. Kissinger

State
U. Alexis Johnson
William E. Sullivan

DOD
Kenneth Rush
Warren Nutter
Major Gen. David Ott

JCS
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer
Vice Adm. John P. Weinel

CIA
George Carver
William E. Nelson
William Newton

NSC Staff
Major Gen. Alexander M. Haig
Richard T. Kennedy
William Stearman
James T. Hackett

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

—JCS and OSD will complete and submit the VNAF study as soon as possible.

—JCS will submit a request for permission to strike in Route Package #1.

—Mr. Kissinger will see the Korean Foreign Minister and will ask the President to receive Korean President Park.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 80, National Security Council, Committees and Panels, Washington Special Actions Group, September–October 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room.

Mr. Kissinger: I thought it might be useful to have a wrap-up of where we stand. George (Carver), would you like to begin? Mr. Carver then read a nine page CIA briefing paper (copy attached).[2]

Mr. Kissinger: Did you say the communists did not achieve any of their objectives in the offensive?

Mr. Carver: No, I said they did not achieve many of them.

Adm. Moorer: I agree that the communists' chance of taking Hue is now gone.

Mr. Kissinger: The worst mistake the North Vietnamese made was to surround South Vietnamese units instead of horseshoeing them. They should never surround the South Vietnamese. When they are surrounded they fight like hell for the same reason they run in other circumstances, because they're scared to death of the North Vietnamese.

Now you said that the percentage of the population of South Vietnam living under firm enemy control had risen as a result of the offensive from one half of one percent to about three percent, or some 400,000 people. If there were a ceasefire today, would that be the situation?

Mr. Carver: Yes, that would be true with respect to the number of people under firm enemy control, 400,000 out of a population of 19 million, which still is not very many, but the enemy would control a lot of territory. We must update our maps on this, but they do control a large amount of unpopulated territory.

Mr. Rush: They claim 28% of the land area of South Vietnam. This would be contested territory in the event of a ceasefire, but we probably could slice that claim down the middle.

Mr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Carver) You say they are planning a new effort before the election. How can they do that with the casualties they have had? How many do you estimate they have taken?

Mr. Carver: We estimate 100,000 out of action, that is, killed or seriously wounded.

Mr. Kissinger: And how many wounded but not out of action?

Mr. Carver: Well, that's hard to say. Probably a great many.

Mr. Kissinger: Can't they replace them?

Mr. Carver: No, not readily. It should take them about 18 months to resupply and refit their main forces in the south.

Mr. Kissinger: But they can control both their casualty rate and when the casualties begin again, can't they?

Mr. Carver: Yes, to a certain extent. With the heavy cover in the area, they can infiltrate without taking too many casualties, if they choose to conserve their forces.

Mr. Rush: How do their losses compare to those of the South Vietnamese?

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[2] Attached but not printed is the September 28 paper entitled "Vietnam."

Mr. Carver: I don't have the precise figures, but the South Vietnamese are generally in much better condition, both physically and psychologically. Don't you agree Admiral (Moorer)?

Adm. Moorer: Yes, I do. The Marine Division is in very good shape. They took heavy casualties, over 900 killed in action, but they have no recruiting problem and the division is fully intact. The Airborne Division is not quite as good, but it is ready, too.

Mr. Kissinger: The plain fact is that there are only three divisions in South Vietnam that are worth a damn. The divisions in MR–3 haven't done a damn thing. We can mislead ourselves by counting all these South Vietnamese divisions that don't fight.

Mr. Carver: An exception in MR–3 is the Fifth Division. They are good.

Mr. Kissinger: They fought well because they were trapped, that's the only reason. Otherwise, they would run like the rest.

Mr. Carver: Now wait a minute. You're overlooking the morale boost these victories have given them. The morale and confidence in battle of the South Vietnamese increased substantially in 1969–70 and now the same thing has happened again after their successful battles with the North Vietnamese main force units. This is important for the army psychologically.

Mr. Kissinger: Suppose there is no settlement and the war goes on after November, are the North Vietnamese going to stop their effort any time soon?

Mr. Carver: Well, I don't know about stopping, but they will have to curtail their effort and remain at a low level of activity for at least a year.

Mr. Kissinger: Do they have to reach a settlement?

Mr. Carver: No, they don't have to settle, they can switch to protracted warfare. If they change their tactics to emphasize terrorism and political agitation, they can maintain guerrilla units in the south without much difficulty.

Mr. Kissinger: But at a lower level than in 1970–71?

Mr. Carver: That's right.

Mr. Johnson: A new factor in the equation is the bombing and mining. That changes the situation considerably from 1970–71.

Mr. Carver: That's true, and the GVN can get itself in a relatively solid position by re-establishing firm control over the populated areas. They don't have to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail or strike across the borders. What they have to do most urgently is re-establish their own political control internally, but they can't sit on their duffs, they have to get out and do it.

Mr. Sullivan: But the North Vietnamese will be doing something, too. Suppose they decide to rebuild their army in the south? How long would it be before they could launch another offensive?

Mr. Carver: If North Vietnam wants to reconstitute its field army and launch another main force effort, it will require at least 12 to 18 months to build up.

Mr. Sullivan: What if they want to establish a guerrilla force instead?

Mr. Carver: Yes, but they can't just convert the main force units. They can't go in and mix with the local population. It will be necessary for them to train special guerrilla warfare units.

Adm. Moorer: They are already doing that in some areas. The key question is, can they launch another major effort with main force units in the coming weeks?

Mr. Carver: I think they can.

Mr. Kissinger: What are we doing about it?

Adm. Moorer: We would like to strike the movement of supplies in Route Package #1.[3]

Mr. Kissinger: Why don't you?

Adm. Moorer: We can't. Those are the rules of engagement.

Mr. Kissinger: Your briefers have been telling me you aren't ready to strike in Route Package #1 because the radar isn't adequate.

Adm. Moorer: I'm told now that we can work on it with either B–52's or tactical air.

Mr. Kissinger: We haven't received a request.

Adm. Moorer: I just got the report this morning. You'll be getting a request.

Mr. Kissinger: I would like to ask a basic question. Suppose the North Vietnamese pull out their main force units now and we pull out our air support, and then the North Vietnamese come back in with a new offensive two years from now. What sort of air support will the South Vietnamese be able to provide for themselves?

Mr. Carver: If we pull out our air, they will still be weak in air support two years from now, but they should learn to rely less on airpower and more on artillery, just as the North Vietnamese do. Now I recognize that it is difficult to get them to rely less on air support, after we have taught them to expect it. But I think we also have to ask whether the North Vietnamese can have their main forces stand down without any political gains in the south and then two years later get their cadres all fired up again for a new major effort. I think that would be very difficult for them.

Mr. Sullivan: There is also the question whether the Chinese would let the North Vietnamese build up for a new assault.

Mr. Kissinger: Why wouldn't they? What would they have to lose?

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[3] Designation for the area just north of the DMZ.

Mr. Sullivan: North Vietnam could turn into another Soviet protectorate like Mongolia, if it becomes too dependent on Soviet aid and equipment. China doesn't want anything like that, nor does China want a belligerent North Vietnam with delusions of grandeur, with hegemony over all of Indochina. The Chinese would much prefer to have four small, divided states on their southern flank.

Mr. Carver: So, assuming there are no great breakthroughs in the next two months, either politically or militarily, you will then have a different ballgame than you have now. They have been planning for a new offensive high point for months, but haven't been able to bring it off. They will try their damnedest in October and if they can't do it then, they will try to get it going in November. They are continuing to push for a coalition government and are emphasizing that it would not be dominated by them.

Mr. Kissinger: They have to say that.

Mr. Carver: Yes.

Mr. Kissinger: Why, with all the bombing, can they move supplies to the south in such large numbers?

Mr. Carver: They had large stocks in Laos and Cambodia before the offensive began, and they have a track record of being highly resourceful in the movement of heavy equipment under adverse conditions.

Mr. Johnson: I understand that two thirds of the former volume of supplies is getting across the border.

Adm. Moorer: Three thirds is getting across the border, because we are not bombing within twenty five miles of the Chinese border.

Mr. Kissinger: I don't think that makes any difference. The question is how do they get it all the way down to South Vietnam? What is your assessment of the situation, Admiral (Moorer)?

Adm. Moorer: (referring to maps) The situation in northern MR–1 is very good. The marines plan to go across the river here (in Quang Tri Province) and the Airborne Division kicks off tomorrow to go west of Quang Tri to recapture some firebases there. We are picking up intercepts that indicate the enemy is having supply trouble in this area. The rainy weather is closing down roads and most of the roads in northern MR–1 will soon be out of service. Hue is pretty safe now and I don't think they can do much against Danang. They would like to get some of the rice stocks in southern MR–1, if they can. One of our weak spots is northern MR–2, where the Vietcong have been strong for three generations, but we have been holding our own there. The situation elsewhere in MR–2 depends on how long the ROKs are going to stay.

Mr. Kissinger: Can't we talk with the Koreans about this?

Mr. Johnson: I just had lunch with the Korean Foreign Minister. He is tying their presence to ours. He's concerned that our forces will fall below 25,000.

Mr. Kissinger: I don't think they will. What is the schedule?

Adm. Moorer: On December 1, we should be down to 27,000.[4]

Mr. Johnson: The Foreign Minister is in favor of an early pullout. He says it is a domestic political problem more than anything else. They're planning on starting in January and being all out by July.

Mr. Sullivan: They want the President to receive Park. I think they will insist on that if we push them on staying.

Mr. Kissinger: He'll do that. I'm sure he will do it when he understands what is at stake. You can go ahead and plan on him seeing Park. The Foreign Minister wants to see me, but I turned him down today. Do you think I should see him?

Mr. Johnson: It would help. He's dying to know what's going on. One of the things the Koreans will insist on is closer consultation with us.

Mr. Kissinger: O.K., I'll do it.

Adm. Moorer: (still briefing) In MR–3, the leadership is weak . . .

Mr. Kissinger: The military actions there have been a disgrace. Gen. Minh is a total disaster. He's been sitting on that road for months without moving.

Adm. Moorer: I've asked why they don't relieve Minh and they always say he is about to begin some movement.

Mr. Kissinger: He is incompetent.

Mr. Sullivan: But politically reliable. That's the route to Saigon. It's too close to home to put in a competent field commander who may decide to take over.

Mr. Carver: Truong would be good there, but Thieu would be very uncomfortable. He is the first general to rise to the top by fighting the communists. All the others got there through politics or friendships.

Gen. Haig: He is a peasant, too.

Mr. Kissinger: Does he have political savvy?

Adm. Moorer: He is a very sound military man. Very thorough.

Mr. Carver: He doesn't have much presence, you'd never pick him out of a crowd, but he's done everything well that he has ever been given to do.

Adm. Moorer: (still briefing) The situation is pretty good in MR–4. The level of activity is low.

Mr. Kissinger: There is only one North Vietnamese division there fighting three South Vietnamese divisions. Why can't they drive the North Vietnamese out?

Adm. Moorer: No, the enemy has more than one division there. They have some smaller units, besides. So, in summary, the situation is pretty good throughout the country. A new offensive is expected, but

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[4] See footnote 4, Document 253.

the South Vietnamese are confident they can hold. Truong is confident he can hold in Northern MR–1, which is probably the most critical area. Now in Cambodia, the whole southeast part of the country is flooded and they are trying to prevent the communists from controlling the river.

Mr. Kissinger: Why doesn't the FANK go on the offensive while the North Vietnamese Army is occupied in South Vietnam?

Adm. Moorer: The Cambodian Army is in pretty bad shape.

Mr. Johnson: What is most discouraging is the rapid buildup of the Khmer Rouge. That looks bad for the future.

Mr. Kissinger: I agree.

Mr. Sullivan: Practically the entire FANK general officer corps is in the process of being sent out of the country. They are going abroad as ambassadors and whatnot. They just weren't prepared to fight for more than a couple of months.

Mr. Carver: The communists gave the Cambodians a pasting at Chien La[5] and they haven't been anxious to fight since.

Adm. Moorer: That's right, they're not aggressive at all.

Mr. Kissinger: Is there any action we should take with regard to Cambodia? (There was no reply). Well, on another subject, when can we expect to receive the VNAF study?

Mr. Sullivan: I just read a report that the Chinese are now providing North Vietnam with MIG–19s.

Adm. Moorer: The question is whether we are going to give the South Vietnamese a full air force capability or something less than that. The problem is money. We don't know how much will be available for this purpose.

Mr. Kissinger: We have to make a decision first on what we are going to do, but how can we make a decision if we don't have a proposal to consider? There is strong domestic opposition to our continued air effort in Vietnam. We have fought the opposition down every year, but how long can we continue to do that?

Adm. Moorer: We are converting seven squadrons to the Vietnamese Air Force.

Mr. Kissinger: The basic question is whether or not we are going to be there with our Air Force forever. If not, then we will have to Vietnamize their air force. You say their pilots are as good as the North Vietnamese and our planes are as good as the Russians', so we should be able to Vietnamize their air force. What we need is a proposal on what to do and how fast to move.

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[5] Chenla II, not Chien La, was an August to December 1971 Cambodian operation against North Vietnamese troops to open up one of the highways leading out of Phnom Penh and in doing so achieve several other strategic objectives.

Adm. Moorer: We will give you a study.

Mr. Kissinger: But when?

Gen. Ott: We expect to have it on October 3.

Mr. Kissinger: If we are going to make a basic decision, we must have some information to base it on.

Mr. Carver: The South Vietnamese are not structured to fight an air war by themselves.

Mr. Kissinger: If there is no settlement, is the air war to be fought by us or by them? If it is them, then we need the VNAF study. This is no reflection on what's been done before, we are now looking to the future. We did a study on the ground forces in 1969;[6] perhaps we should have done one on the air force in 1969, too. The President has already said publicly that if there is no settlement we will build up the South Vietnamese Air Force the same way we built up their army.

Mr. Carver: A study on the Vietnamese Air Force couldn't have been done in 1969. There was nothing then to base it on.

Mr. Nutter: Including the helicopters, we have already built them up from 200 aircraft to 1,000.

Mr. Kissinger: But we have to know how long it will take to build them up the rest of the way. People are always accusing me of favoring the F–5 for the Vietnamese over the F–4. Actually, I don't know the difference between the F–5 and the F–4, and what's more I don't give a damn. That's your business, not mine. Why don't we have a study comparing the two?

Adm. Moorer: The difference is two million dollars.

Mr. Nutter: We don't have the F–5E, it's not in production yet.

Mr. Johnson: A comparison study of that kind will generate a lot of discussion.

Mr. Kissinger: We've already had a lot of discussion.

Adm. Moorer: We can certainly give them an independent air capability if we want to.

Mr. Kissinger: We need the paper.

Adm. Moorer: We have a paper from the Air Force and we are working on it now.

Mr. Kissinger: We haven't seen it over here.

Mr. Rush: We haven't reached a final conclusion on the study yet.

Mr. Kissinger: We have to make a decision. We'll make it without your paper if we don't get it soon.

Mr. Rush: You'll get it.

Mr. Kissinger: The President has said we are not in Vietnam for all eternity. If you (Defense) can't agree on what you want to propose, we will make the decision without your proposal.

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[6] See *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 87.

Mr. Rush: We turned the study over to the Air Force on July 17. The Air Force finished it and the JCS is now reviewing it. We (OSD) hope to receive it from the JCS on October 3.

Mr. Kissinger: Well, get it to us as soon as possible. Are there any problems in Laos that you want to discuss? When does the rainy season start?

Mr. Carver: Here is a chart showing that.

Mr. Kissinger: You people really fouled me up. When I arrived in Paris, Le Duc Tho told me the rainy season had just ended in Hanoi, and I thought it was just beginning.

Adm. Moorer: That's right, it has just ended in North Vietnam. What he meant was that there is no more danger of flooding in the north.

Mr. Johnson: I have had a long talk with Sisouk,[7] who made two basic points. First, he is opposed to the use of Thai forces in excess of 25 units. He has had a lot of trouble with them and doesn't want any more. He would prefer to increase the Lao units by five. Second, he wants more air support. He claims he just isn't getting enough.

Mr. Kissinger: I thought we were going to provide all he needs.

Adm. Moorer: He has all he needs. But he is never satisfied, no matter how much we provide. We don't have enough targets in Laos as it is.

Mr. Carver: Mr. Nelson will provide a briefing on Laos.

Mr. Nelson: Vang Pao's forces have not done well. Task Force Delta had heavy casualties in the area north of the Plaine des Jarres, 201 killed in action, and has been brought out. Task Force Bravo has also encountered heavy pressure, particularly heavy shelling, to the south of the Plaine, and has retreated. They did discover two large caches of ammunition in the south. Enemy units have broken into small outfits of ten men each, apparently to make smaller targets for air strikes, and these small units have been quite effective. The sum of it is that Vang Pao is having trouble moving into the Plaine.

Mr. Kissinger: In spite of the withdrawal of one communist division?

Mr. Nelson: Yes, in spite of that.

Mr. Kissinger: Sorry, but I have to leave.

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[7] Sisouk na Champassak was Acting Minister of Defense in the Royal Lao Government.

269. Conversation Among President Nixon, the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, September 29, 1972.

Kissinger: See my worry, Mr. President, isn't the election. My worry is that—

Nixon: Oh, I know, I know. That's just what I—just what—Bob agrees with me, and I said exactly that I was prepared, that I'm prepared, and I know we have to end the war. I know that now, but when we really decimate the place, you've got pretty serious problems. But nevertheless, the real question is, it's the old—the old irony: if we don't end it, end it before the election, we've got a hell of a problem. But, if we end it in the wrong way, we've got a hell of a problem—not in the election. As I said, forget the election. We'll win the election. We could—Bob, we could surrender in Vietnam and win the election, because who the hell is going to take advantage of it? McGovern says surrender, right?

Haldeman: Yeah—

Nixon: But the point I make—

Haldeman: It doesn't affect the election; it affects—

Nixon: It affects what we're going to do later. It affects our world position. [unclear] And, so that's why—why Thieu will. Hell, yes they're hurting—

Kissinger: Let me—

Nixon: —if we get a landslide.

Kissinger: Let me make a few things. See, I don't think it is technically possible—even though these silly North Vietnamese think it is—to get all the documents signed by the election.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah.

Kissinger: The best we can do by the election is a statement of principles.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: That can absolutely do you no damage, and must help you, because it has—

Nixon: Forget about it—

Kissinger: —prisoner release in it—

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 788–1. 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, 9:45–10:45 a.m.

Nixon: It sounds right.

Kissinger: —cease-fire—

Nixon: Right—

Kissinger: —with withdrawal—

Nixon: Oh, oh. That's, that's fine, but even if—

Kissinger: —and no coalition government, and continuation of the GVN.

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: And no withdrawal—no resignation of Thieu.

Nixon: Both a Committee of Reconciliation, or a Committee—

Kissinger: A Commission of National Concord or Commission—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: —of National Reconciliation, and any knowing person—I mean, this will go like SALT, believe me.

Nixon: Yeah. I—I agree with you on that. The question, though, there is what we do require Thieu to do. If we do—if he does get out, does it unravel in South Vietnam, Henry? That's the point.

Kissinger: That is—

Nixon: Goddamnit, you know, you can't have.

Kissinger: That, Mr. President, we cannot do.

Nixon: That worries me.

Kissinger: Me too.

Nixon: Especially.

Kissinger: And if—because if we had wanted to do that—

Nixon: Yeah. Well, if we'd wanted to do it, also—

Kissinger: We had—

Nixon: —Henry, the effect, when you didn't see what's happening, if it is happening as always. But what you see is—you know, you know these little Indonesians and all the rest. They'll all come apart at the seams. There is—there is a domino. That's what really—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: —worries me—

Kissinger: Well, it depends, Mr. President—

Nixon: On how Thieu does it.

Kissinger: Well, it depends how this thing—this is why he cannot, his resignation can't be written into the agreement. He has to resign—

Nixon: That's all right—

Kissinger: —after peace is restored, saying he's done everything.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —if this thing is played intelligently, he may never resign. I don't believe this agreement—what I believe this is agreement will do, practically, the practical consequence of what we're now working on is—and, there are so many—I may have mislead you a little bit yesterday—there are so many technical issues in there—

Nixon: Oh, yeah. I know about that—

Kissinger: —that it may never even get signed. But assuming it got signed, I believe the practical results will be a cease-fire, an American vindication, and return of prisoners, and everything else in Vietnam—

Nixon: And then it'll end and then it'll sit screwed up.

Kissinger: And they'll go at each other with Thieu in office. That's what I think.

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270. Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, September 29, 1972, 3:16–3:30 p.m.

Nixon: I was thinking that maybe about 5 o'clock that maybe you and Haig and I could talk a little more—

Kissinger: Good.

Nixon: Have you got some time then?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah.

Nixon: Is that a good time?

Kissinger: Good.

Nixon: 5:15 maybe?

Kissinger: Excellent.

Nixon: Fair enough. Because I want to make sure Al has the feel for everything. I know—

Kissinger: Yeah—

Nixon: —you've been talking to him.

Kissinger: Well, I've—at least, we talked until about 2 o'clock last night.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 788–11. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: But he should get it from you.

Nixon: Well, he may. I'll just see—

Kissinger: Now, I—

Nixon: I'll see if he has any questions.

Kissinger: Yeah.

Nixon: That's the main thing.

Kissinger: No, I can just, you know, give him the state of the negotiations and so forth. It's essential that he talk with you.

Nixon: Well, I guess the really, really gnawing concern we both have is that—

Kissinger: Well, Mr. President—

Nixon: —not doing something that's going to flush South Vietnam.

Kissinger: Yeah, but on the resignation—

Nixon: I'm with you, that it's South Vietnam.

Kissinger: But on the resignation, Mr. President, the way that would happen is—in a way, this is easier to handle than the other one, because he wouldn't have to resign unless he was satisfied with the military condition.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Kissinger: What we would table as a formal proposal doesn't include his resignation.

Nixon: I suppose they'd leak it, wouldn't they, Henry?

Kissinger: And if they do we can deny it.

Nixon: [unclear] Yeah. Well, it isn't just that, I mean. As I meant, it's the fact of the resignation when that happens. Do you think they'll survive if he resigns?

Kissinger: If it's—if we can get—

Nixon: Anybody else won't be any better—?

Kissinger: If we can get their forces out of Laos, or a—substantially, at least, out of southern Laos—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —if we can get them out of Cambodia, and if we can get them to reduce them in South Vietnam, yes.

Nixon: What about that Chup plantation? That, you think, has to be put off 'til after election?

Kissinger: Yes. Well, not necessarily, [unclear]—

Nixon: It's interesting that the French raised this point of stopping the bombing, and we're just not going to do it. In fact, that shows you

that they're very sensitive about it, and that's why I keep the heat on them.

Kissinger: Oh—

Nixon: I noticed the sorties have come up a bit. They're a little bit higher than they were.

Kissinger: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah—

Nixon: 326, I noted.

Kissinger: Well, if we—if we could get an agreement in principle, we might stop bombing north of the 20th.

Nixon: Oh, sure.

Kissinger: But, we're not there yet. Yeah.

Nixon: What do you anticipate, then, at your meeting?[2] If you have Haig come now? That—that would be one hell of a signal, wouldn't it? It—

Kissinger: But it depends what you're—

Nixon: It might raise expectations an enormous amount. I don't know. I'm not—I'm not—

Kissinger: Well—

Nixon: —against it, I just—

Kissinger: Well, Haig's presence has this advantage. If the negotiations get serious about the military conditions—

Nixon: Yeah?

Kissinger: —I'd have somebody there who knows what he's talking about.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And also, frankly, I'm looking at it for some theater to keep—

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: —to keep Hanoi guessing a little longer.

Nixon: Yeah. Yeah.

Kissinger: And if it gets really serious, my present assistants are very good at sort of nitpicking the thing, but they don't have the strategic—

Nixon: Right.

Kissinger: I'd have somebody that we then could control.

Nixon: Yeah. Oh, I tell you, you need somebody to talk to. That's the point.

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[2] Kissinger was scheduled to meet with Le Duc Tho in Paris October 8–11.

Kissinger: I mean, particularly—you know, when it's one day I can think it out ahead of time.

Nixon: Sure.

Kissinger: But when it's two days I'd like talk to somebody at night.

Nixon: In between.

Kissinger: And I can't put it all in a cable to you.

Nixon: You don't think you could use a telephone?

Kissinger: No, that's tapped.

Nixon: Is the Embassy phone tapped?

Kissinger: Yeah. I can do it. I can do without Haig if you have any doubts about it—

Nixon: No, no, no, no, no. Hell, raise the expectations. He's got every right to come there. If he—I think what we should position his trip as is one to just look over the military situation. Is that what you're going to do? Or how are you going to explain it—?[3]

Kissinger: Well, it's already been announced. We just say it's for a—for consultation with General Thieu—with President Thieu about the whole complex of issues.

Nixon: I see. That's all right. Well it's good that he's a military man. [unclear]

Kissinger: I have told him—

Nixon: Why don't you take him?

Kissinger: —he should see Thieu without Bunker and without Thieu's assistants.

Nixon: Oh, sure. Sure. Sure. And you think what he does is just to take him on the mountaintop and say, "Look, here we are."

Kissinger: Well, he has two problems. First of all he has to send our new proposal to him, which is already a nightmare enough to drive him up the wall because that abolishes the existing constitution in South Vietnam, and creates a new constitution. I mean we are, we are offering a constituent assembly.

Nixon: And he hasn't approved that yet?

Kissinger: No.

Nixon: You didn't discuss that with him before?

Kissinger: No, but I discussed with him a new Presidential election within the present constitution.

Nixon: Well, I suppose that would be—that'd mean that he may just be [unclear] right there?

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[3] Nixon was referring to Haig's trip to Saigon, October 1–4.

Kissinger: I just think if he can't risk that goddamn constitutional assembly, he hasn't got control of his government, because he'd remain in control of his area. I mean, the GVN would retain control of its area.

[pause]

Nixon: That's a—is that a—is that key?

Kissinger: Well, we can go back. We can go to the country—to the election.

Nixon: But, I mean, I'm assuming, I'm just asking. If he doesn't take it, then, you have to go back to the election, right?

Kissinger: Or we present it without him.

Nixon: Yeah, so it should be in a position, if it goes public, we've returned something to them.

Kissinger: They won't accept it without this in it.

Nixon: Well then, let's understand that, in other words, if he doesn't accept that, he isn't going to resign.

Kissinger: Well, he's already agreed in our proposal that after the Presidential election there'd be a review of the constitution.

Nixon: So what?

Kissinger: I think this present proposal is simpler than the other one. The other one provides, first, for Presidential elections, then for National Assembly elections, then for a review of constitution.

Nixon: And this one?

Kissinger: Just—no Presidential election. No other elections. Just a constitutional assembly, which creates a new government.

Nixon: But who makes up the constitutional assembly?

Kissinger: The elections, through free elections, which he runs in his country—his part of the country, so—

[pause]

Nixon: Well, Haig will have a hairy three days—two days, won't he?

Kissinger: Oh, yeah. No doubt.

Nixon: Well, he's a good one to go; he'll be strong. He knows everything about it.

Kissinger: Well, we can—if he can [unclear] absolutely refuses that, then you have to make the decision whether you want to go back to what he's already accepted, namely Presidential elections and National Assembly elections.

Nixon: But you've offered that already?

Kissinger: Yeah. They've already turned that down. But we would still have expanded functions for the Committee of National Reconciliation and Concord—

Nixon: Which you've offered?

Kissinger: Which we can offer.

Nixon: But you've offered that already?

Kissinger: Not yet, specifically. There's no question that the constituent assembly, plus the committee would have a sex appeal.

[pause]

Nixon: Understand, I'm not quarrelling with what we would offer [unclear]—

Kissinger: See that election [unclear]—

Nixon: Let's think of what we can try to get him to accept, that's—

Kissinger: You see, Mr. President, this is all baloney. Because the practical consequence of our proposal, and of their proposal, is a cease-fire. There'll never be elections. The election would be run by a committee, or in their case by a Government of National Concord, which makes decisions by unanimity. There'll never be an electoral law. They'll never agreed on an electoral law on the basis of unanimity. Therefore, there'll never be elections. In either case—

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: This is—

Nixon: Then what happens? Do we just resume the war later on?

Kissinger: There'll be a cease-fire.

Nixon: But we'll be gone?

Kissinger: Yes. This is their face-saving way. We've always said: "Will they ever separate military from political issues?"

Nixon: I know.

Kissinger: They've said so often that they won't separate them.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: The practical consequence of their proposals, nine out of ten, is that there'll never be elections and a cease-fire.

Nixon: Yeah. That's what—and Haig talked that frankly with Thieu to be sure?

Kissinger: Of course, Thieu doesn't want a cease-fire—

Nixon: Um-hmm. He's gonna get one—

Kissinger: —and he doesn't want us out. I mean, let's face it.

Nixon: He wants us to stay, huh? I guess that's it.

Kissinger: The real point is that our interests and his are now divergent. We want out. We want our prisoners.

Nixon: Yeah—

Kissinger: We want a cease-fire. He wants us in. He thinks he's winning. And he wants us to continue bombing.

Nixon: And for another two or three years.

Kissinger: For as long as needed.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: But I saw it again with each time. I think, of course, if we don't settle it now, we've got to keep going, so it's—because, I've now found out that Laird has screwed us in a way that is not to be believed. He's not Vietnamized this Vietnamese Air Force. They've got propeller-driven planes where the others have high-performance jets. It's an unholy alliance of the Navy, the Air Force, and Laird. The Air Force and Navy want to do both, but the Navy believes—it wanted to hold onto its two carriers, the Air Force wanted to hold onto its bases, and Laird wants to save money, so that in the air, you know, if this war continues, the very first thing we have to do is to give them high-performance aircraft.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And force feed it in there, and then I think that by next summer we just have to get out, completely.

Nixon: Oh, sure—

Kissinger: Blast the bejeezus out of them.

Nixon: Well, by next summer, you have to—Christ, by next summer, Henry, we have to get out. I think that by then you'd have to announce it. [unclear] I'd just announce it get it—and get it done with, I mean. But, I think—you know what that means? Get the air out, too.

Kissinger: Well, that's right. That's why we have to force-feed them high-performance airplanes in there. But, we'd have to leave the prisoners there.

Nixon: Jesus Christ, it's a hell of a choice.

Kissinger: That's why I'm so much—

Nixon: Interested in pushing Thieu?

Kissinger: You know, next to you, I've been the hardest guy on Vietnam.

Nixon: I know that. South Vietnam, at least, of course, we just know how much is at stake and not doing something [unclear]—

Kissinger: But, I—but we can't have a Communist government [unclear]—

271. Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)[1]

Washington, September 29, 1972.

Haig: I think we don't want to have a breach with the man, but I think he's got to know that he's [unclear].

Nixon: Well, I think you could make it, of course, as clear as you possibly can, because, after all, we're his friend and a breach with us is not going to help him. And also, a breach with us would destroy him here in this country. Good God, I mean, he's got no place to go.

Kissinger: I mean, no one can make it credible that you are betraying a man for whom you risked the summit, Cambodia, Laos—

Nixon: I realize that—

Kissinger: —bombing, mining.

Nixon: —and he's—he's got to realize that. The other thing is that he's got to realize that this, this war has got to stop. I mean, that's all there is to it. [unclear] We cannot go along with this sort of dreary business of hanging on for another four years. It's been too long. It's been too long. I'm convinced of this. I'm convinced of it. If I thought—believe me, if I thought, if I was reasonably sure that immediately after [unclear] going all out—I mean after the election, the goddamn war would end, and the President's back and so forth, and you wouldn't be quite as concerned about trying to do something now. But I'm not sure. [unclear]—

Kissinger: We've got to do it. If we can't end it this way, we've got to go all-out after the election.

Nixon: I understand that. I know. What I meant is, if I knew that option would work, I would say to hell with this.

Kissinger: Right.

Nixon: I would try doing it. But I'm not sure it'll work, that's why we've got to try this.

Haig: I think we have to make an honest effort to do this—

Nixon: Yes.

Haig: Do all we can without dishonoring ourselves, which I don't think is possible under the arrangements that we've talked at.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation 788–18. No classification marking. The editors transcribed the portions of the tape recording printed here specifically for this volume. The conversation occurred at an unknown time between 5:15 and 6:30 p.m. Haig was about to depart for Saigon to meet with Thieu as President Nixon's personal emissary.

Kissinger: And, you see, if we have made this effort, and then if you have to go all-out—the strength of your position up to now has been that we've always been able to present to the American public both strength and moderation. We've always alternated a peace proposal with a tough line. We've never been in the position—you've never been in the position of Johnson, who was bombing mindlessly day after day, without ever making a peace proposal. So if this doesn't work, we haven't—it gives us three, four, six months of, of, of quiet. I don't think anything less than this will work. Al, you've looked over these papers, now what do you think?

Haig: It doesn't matter what I think. I think it would be awfully difficult to reject what they have given to us in this last session. [unclear] because anybody would [unclear] it seems that they have really given up the objective of [unclear].

Nixon: That's what—and that's what he's got to understand—

Kissinger: And, therefore the argument of saying they don't want a Communist government there just no longer holds the water—

Nixon: That's the thing that concerns me about our position at this point, that we cannot say that they are insisting on a Communist government. Because they are getting a chance for a non-Communist government to survive, are they not?

Kissinger: Yeah, of course, what they think is that if they can get Thieu to resign, plus all these changes made, plus keeping their army in the country, that they can create so much chaos that the remnant is going to collapse. And, therefore, our scheme requires that if Thieu agrees to this constituent assembly rule, that then we will require that they have to pull some of their army out of Vietnam, and all of their army out of Cambodia and Laos. And if they don't do that, we wouldn't settle. And on that I think we can stand. I mean, they can't demand both that the constitution be abrogated, and that they can keep their whole army in the country.

Nixon: I would put it to 'em. I guess that you can be just as strong as you want, Al, in this respect. You can be just as tough as you want [unclear]. First, [unclear] make it, make it very clear to him that this has nothing to do with the election.

Haig: Yes, sir. Absolutely, sir—

Nixon: This is why we're doing it, but that—make it very clear to him, however, that after the election, we've got to live with this problem, and we've got to have a solution to it. That—that our—that after we get in, we cannot just continue to sit there, that this POW thing is a pretty good indication of the enormous buildup that's goddamned [unclear]. And—and that we've got to have a solution, and we're going to find it. And that it isn't going to work that other way, you know what I mean. It's—therefore, we believe that this is the best thing we

can do [unclear]. What—how do you have it in mind to presenting it to him—?

Haig: Well, I was going to structure it just this way. This is why we discussed it. We'll start out talking about what the past four years has represented in terms of our interest for a non-Communist South Vietnam, the risks we have taken. [unclear] Then I'll make it very clear that this is different than 1968, where Johnson had to try to achieve some progress at the negotiating table to help his domestic election chances.

Nixon: That's right.

Haig: That we are in precisely an opposite position this year, that you don't need this.

Nixon: Uh-huh.

Haig: But that you want to use your strength, domestically, here, to put pressure on Hanoi for concessions—

Nixon: That's right—

Haig: —and that they are moving. And that we do have [unclear] some interesting possibilities, it's not yet acceptable. But that's what I want to discuss with them. Then, I want to go through the realities of the strategic picture; what we could hope for if we don't get a settlement; the fact that we are going to have been faced with disabling legislation.

Nixon: But point out that we still wanted—that the last Senate vote should not be reassuring, because it was still a margin of only one vote.

Haig: We give him that—

Nixon: So, in reality—

Haig: At a time when you're 30 points ahead in the polls—

Nixon: That's right.

Haig: —we win a vote for cut-off of funds by two votes.

Nixon: That's right.

Haig: So, that this is—this is very damaging. And I'm going to recall his discussions with me last October, when he said if he felt there was a true peace in the making that he would step down—

Kissinger: And he repeated it on May 8th.

Haig: And he repeated it on May 8th.

Nixon: [unclear]

Kissinger: Or May 10th, whenever he made it.

Haig: Then I will go through our counterpunch, which does not yet get him into the proposal that he sent out. We will go through it in the detail, and, of course, the paragraph [unclear] political arrangements is the toughest, and I will discuss those, but, in reality, what they've offered us is a fig leaf for an advisory group that is without

power, and that the South Vietnamese Government would still control the army, the police, and the territories they currently hold—

Nixon: What I mean is that on this case, what I would like for you to do is to say to the President, if you could say: "Now, Mr. President [unclear] asked me here. He's a pretty shrewd analyzer—analyzer of these things." Why don't you [unclear]? "It seems to me like this is the way you might be able to see it." In other words, put it out that I've analyzed this thing, and that I wish to call it to his attention. See?

Haig: That's right, and if he can't select the man—well, I won't get into that—

Nixon: Yeah. That's right—

Haig: —until we get through the whole proposition.

Nixon: That's right.

Haig: Now, he'll have problems with that, because it calls for a constituent assembly and a new constitution, and—

Kissinger: Yeah, but he will, in effect, dominate the election because the electoral law—the election can never take place because its electoral law will be written by a commission—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: —which requires unanimity. I don't see how you can ever agree on any actual laws—

Nixon: [unclear] noted his interest in the proposition. And that he—and, therefore, I think that he should be very, very generous, insofar as what happens after that due to the unanimity proposition. Now, he'll say [unclear]. And, also, how much of this needs to be public at the present time. [unclear] But the main thing, I guess, Al, that I want you to get across to him, is that he can't just assume that because I win the election that we're going to stick with him through hell and high water. This war is not going to go on. Goddamnit, we can't do it. We're not going to do it. We're not going to have our—we're not gonna have, let alone, our guys getting killed, and our prisoners, so that's just that. We're not going to have him get killed. And we happen to have our relationships with the Russians and the Chinese. There's that, and, also, I'm not going to have it keep us from doing some other things that we need to do. We've got to get the war the hell off our backs in this country. That's all there is to it.

Haig: And off his people's back.

Nixon: Oh, I feel that, too. Tell him that I know those casualties show 300 a week being killed. I said, "I take no comfort out of the fact that we—our casualties were one last week when his are 300." I said, "To me, that concerns me and that, I doubt that I'd be here." I think you now know, I want you to know you can go very far in saying that I believe that he ought to accept this proposition. That's my view. I

wouldn't indicate that I'm not going to press him on it, either. I'd indicate that we might just [unclear].

Haig: Well, I think—I think once—

Nixon: And, incidentally, I just want it to be arranged so that Al has plenty of time with him. I want to be sure that he has—

Kissinger: Oh, yes.

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: Now, we got a cable that he sees him twice. Monday morning—

Nixon: Yeah, yeah.

Kissinger: —and Tuesday afternoon—

Nixon: Well, look, but you better send a message indicating that I want him to take plenty of time [unclear]—

Kissinger: Well, I think once he hears the subject, he's going to take plenty of time. It's too much in his interest. I don't think we should get him all stirred up—

Nixon: All right—

Kissinger: —before Al gets there.

Haig: [unclear] But I don't think, either, that we should force him into an answer in the first session there, or even the second, necessarily, because this is the kind of thing that he'll want to think out in the greatest detail. He ought to know that we're very strong for him.

Nixon: Whatever, he's got to think. He may not decide at the second session, then you'll get away, and he'll sit down and talk with his own people.

Kissinger: That doesn't make a difference—

Nixon: [unclear] Huh?

Kissinger: We'll table this proposal anyway the following week, and it doesn't make any difference what he agrees to.

Nixon: Let's suppose—yeah, let's see. Are you going to tell him that you're going to table his proposal?

Haig: Tell him we're going to move.

Nixon: How?

Haig: We intend to move. Of course, if it looks like it could cause a public break—

Kissinger: We can't. It isn't desirable to have a public break, because—

Nixon: No, that would be bad. A public break would hurt us. That'd hurt us in the election.

Kissinger: That would. Also you'd be accused by McGovern, then, that you strung along with Theiu, and when it served your interest—

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: —just before the election, you killed 20,000 people.

Nixon: That's right.

Kissinger: So, we should avoid—

Nixon: We can't do that—

Kissinger: —a public break.

Nixon: What you've got to say there is that this—you've got to point out that this President has stood by him with no support. The House is against him. The Senate is against him. The media has been against him. The students have rioted. All sorts of hell-raising loose. He's made these tough decisions. And, now, he's got to have something from him, in return. We've got to have [unclear], an agreement, an acceptable proposition that I think he can live with. That's really what you get down to.

Kissinger: Mr. President, nobody would have believed that they would make a proposal which would keep the Saigon government in power with its own army and police, but without Thieu. Never have they gone that far before. All their previous proposals were that Saigon has to disappear and that the other government, the Provisional Government of National Concord, replaces it. Because that would have led to a sure Communist takeover. And that was easy to reject. We were never tempted for one minute. You could have settled it in July, announced those terms. We were never tempted for 30 seconds by any of those—

Nixon: [unclear]—

Kissinger: But here we are with—confronted with a proposal of a Government of National Concord that has no power, no police, no army, and, moreover, we won't even accept the word "government" for it. We'll call it "Committee" or "Commission for National Reconciliation."

[Omitted here is further discussion of Vietnam.]

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272. Editorial Note

In backchannel message WHS 2171 to Saigon, September 27, 1972, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry A. Kissinger, instructed the Ambassador to South Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, to inform South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu about the September 26–27 meeting in Paris with the North Vietnamese.

(See Document 267.) Bunker was also to tell Thieu the reason for the upcoming visit to Saigon of the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, Major General Alexander M. Haig.

Regarding the meeting, Kissinger wrote: "There was no significant progress and no agreements of any kind were reached. We held firm on our basic program including political questions." Kissinger added: "DRV side did, however, table yet another proposal which will be transmitted in immediately following telegram. It should be provided to Thieu for his comments and study prior to Haig's arrival. Our preliminary assessment is that DRV offer represents no major shift but, in respect to political matters, there is modest though discernible trend toward diminishing scope and functions of proposed provisional government of national concord."

Kissinger concluded: "Looking to the immediate future, we see practically no possibility of a settlement between now and November unless Hanoi totally reverses its position. What we must look to now is how best to insure that we keep situation under control in this interval and best position ourselves for post-November strategy along lines I discussed personally with Thieu when last in Saigon. [See Documents 243 and 245.] You should tell Thieu that purpose of Haig's forthcoming trip is to pursue our discussion of this strategy and how we propose to handle continued private talks in this context." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord) China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972)

On September 27, Kissinger sent Bunker additional instructions in backchannel message WHS 2174, received in Saigon on September 28: "When you see Thieu you should brief him only on the basis of the highlights given you in our cable WHS2171. You should not repeat not draw upon or hand over the text of the DRV proposal which is being transmitted to you separately in our cable WHS 2173. You can indicate to Thieu that you expect to receive the new proposal soon and give it to him the next morning. We feel however it is better to give him just the highlights of the meeting in your first session with him rather than overloading the circuit with the proposal itself." (Ibid.)

On September 28, Kissinger sent further instructions to Bunker in backchannel message WHS 2212: "You should tell Thieu as soon as possible that at today's meeting [September 27] the other side pressed very softly on political issues and major concentration was on military and security arrangements. This means that the other side may surface a ceasefire proposal during these meetings [the forthcoming October talks]. While we certainly will not agree without further consultation, it is essential that Thieu instruct his commanders to move promptly and seize the maximum amount of critical territory." (Ibid.)

Bunker reported on September 29, in backchannel message 169, that he had met Thieu the previous day and informed him of the highlights of the September 26–27 talks in Paris. However, he had not been able to schedule a second meeting to give Thieu the full text of the North Vietnamese proposal. Therefore, he transmitted it to Thieu through his adviser, Hoang Duc Nha. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 48, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Peace Talks, Chronological File, 27–30 September 1972)

Meanwhile, Haig departed from Washington for Saigon. En route, on September 30, he made the following observation to Kissinger in Tohak 1: "There appears little doubt that they [the North Vietnamese] have structured their entire strategy to achieve de facto ceasefire in place at the end of October. My intensive review since departure of all current available intelligence on battlefield situation also confirms careful orchestration of battlefield situation to support Paris initiative."

Consequently, he continued: "From my perspective, the enemy will decide in connection with the next meeting [in Paris] whether or not to launch this offensive. If we are very forthcoming and they feel we are headed for agreement in principle, they will probably proceed. If not, they will probably continue to attempt to husband their dwindling resources. I believe this factor should be included in your assessment of next week's presentation [at Paris]. I also will impress upon Weyand the essentiality of carefully assessing the GVN's capability to react to a highpoint, the character of which will no longer be designed to destroy the ARVN but rather to optimize areas of control at the time of an overall agreement." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972)

273. Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) en Route to Saigon[1]

Washington, September 30, 1972.

Tohaig 10. 1. Spent three hours with Dobrynin, ostensibly to prepare for Gromyko's visit with the President, but actually mostly on Vietnam. Conversation further reconfirms our assessment of situation and latest DRV message,[2] namely, other side is prepared to settle on basis de facto situation as long as they can get cosmetics to ease the pain.

2. Dobrynin claimed to be speaking on personal basis, but length and detail made it obvious he was speaking for the other side which had given him their September 26 plan.[3] Dobrynin said that his understanding of their plan was that they are willing to confirm the status quo but their dilemma is that the Politburo cannot sign something that looks like surrender. He did not see why their September 26 plan should not give us a basis for a settlement since nothing could happen without GVN concurrence because of the unanimity principle. His main thrust was that we should pick up as much of their cosmetic formulations as possible to allow them to settle on basis which in reality keeps GVN structure intact.

3. In this context, I said that we were tentatively considering the idea of having a constituent assembly draft a new constitution. Dobrynin, again claiming he was speaking personally, thought that this would be a mistake from our own point of view since the DRV proposal leaves the drafting to the National Concord body. The DRV approach guarantees that no constitution could emerge, at least for many years, because of the principle of unanimity. By the same token, the

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1017, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's SEA Visit, September 29–October 3, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] According to an official Socialist Republic of Vietnam history, the heart of the September 30 message was: "The DRVN is of the view that the meetings in the three coming days are extremely important, that it is time to make a clear-cut decision on the trend of the negotiations. Either both parties will agree in the main on the questions that have been raised (only by so doing can we ensure the time limit we have fixed, i.e. to end the war and to sign the comprehensive agreement by the end of October 1972 or the earlier the better) or if no agreement is reached, the negotiations will be dead locked and the war will continue. The US will have to bear responsibility for such a situation." (Luu and Nguyen, *Le Duc Tho–Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*, p. 299) For Haig's analysis of the DRV message that same day, see Document 272.

[3] See Document 267.

constituent assembly would be harmless because it would have nothing to discuss.

4. I then raised the issue of Thieu's resignation, pointing out that this was a major difficulty for us. He said that a possible compromise was to let the constituent assembly elect the new chief executive as its first item of business, keeping the present provision in our Presidential election approach that Thieu would resign one month before the election of the constituent assembly. In this way, we would meet the North Vietnamese point that the President should not be elected by popular vote. When I asked whether Thieu would be eligible for re-election under this approach, Dobrynin said that since we were talking about face-saving formulas in any event and that the other side had not raised this specific question, we should not borrow trouble by raising it ourselves. This was a DRV problem, not ours.

5. This conversation suggests that we might wish to table a combination of the two plans you have with you, i.e., an approach whereby there would be elections for a constituent assembly and its first task would be to elect a new chief executive. In any event, this conversation opens up a new dimension and makes it even more necessary to have flexibility going into the next meetings. Thus, you should go ahead and present the two plans as they are but your emphasis should be on flexibility. We may be able to use various mixes and are not wed to any particular formula. What looks best here may not be best for the GVN, e.g., Thieu may prefer a Presidential election to a President elected by a constituent assembly. The main point is that we would like to have as many building blocks as possible for a flexible approach to the next meeting.

6. You should talk to Thieu in the spirit of cooperation, making these additional points. First, we have for the first time with the latest DRV plan a major break in the negotiations. It is silly to pretend otherwise. Secondly, the clock is now running against the other side. The enemy clearly wants to settle now. Third, the best outcome from your trip would be for Thieu to cooperate in giving us a series of flexible elements that we could use while maintaining the substantive essence of our position. Thus, we would like to have the alternative of the constituent assembly approach or the Presidential election approach or ideally an approach whereby the chief executive is elected by the constituent assembly, with Thieu resigning one month before but eligible for election. Thieu's personal safeguard would be that there would be no elections for anything, of course, until the electoral laws were agreed upon and the unanimity principle serves as protection in this regard. Almost any formula that keeps him in office on the day of settlement is therefore likely to keep him in office indefinitely.

7. As for your concern that there might be an enemy high point in October,[4] if a settlement seems near at the next meeting, I will make it absolutely conditional on there being no escalation in military activity.

8. You should also tell Thieu that if there is progress at the next meeting, I would be prepared to go straight from Paris to Saigon to brief him.

9. I am sending you a paper from George Carver which you should keep very much in mind in your discussions. It makes a Thieu resignation look less and less sensible.[5]

Warm regards.

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[4] See Document 272.

[5] The White House Situation Room transmitted this paper to Haig in Tohaig 9, September 30. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, August–September 1972)

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274. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) in Saigon[1]

Washington, October 1, 1972, 0530Z.

WHS2176/Tohaig 11. 1. Your Haigto 004 is based on an extraordinary misapprehension of the Dobrynin conversation.[2] Dobrynin was making his suggestions in this context: (A) the DRV is prepared to maintain the de facto situation if an acceptable face saving formula can be found. (B) How to preserve Thieu as long as possible, give him a chance at reelection and yet permit Hanoi to claim some achievement.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1017, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's SEA Visit, September 29–October 3, 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] In message Haigto 4–A from Saigon, October 1, Haig, responding to Kissinger's Tohaig 10 (Document 273), observed: "Dobrynin's discussions are interesting and further confirm fundamental character of shift in Hanoi's position. It is apparent that what Dobrynin and Hanoi have been telling us is that what they actually have in mind is not a constituent assembly election but the establishment of a parliamentary system through which the resulting National Assembly would choose a head of government." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 856, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Sensitive Camp David, Vol. XIX)

Indirect election for the Presidency is not rpt not a parliamentary system incidentally. But above all the situation is too serious for such nitpicks.

2. We have three objectives: (A) to get a settlement which preserves a non-Communist government in Saigon, (B) failing that to pull the teeth of the DRV proposal so that coupled with an offensive it cannot undermine our domestic position, (C) to delay the breakup of the talks if that proves unavoidable. These objectives are as much in Thieu's interest as in ours.

3. It is essential to keep eye on these objectives rather than getting side-tracked on fine points. The main problem is to come up with a plan that will preserve the GVN position if the other side accepts it or give us an unassailable record if the other side goes public and launches an offensive. Also it should be sufficiently complex so that it must go back to Hanoi for decision.

4. Thus your basic approach should remain just as we discussed and as reflected in your general and point by point talking papers. You should present our constituent assembly plan as the basic point of departure, and the one we consider most desirable. In any event all of its provisions outside of point 4 (A) are essential.

5. My cable Tohaig 10[3] was designed to underline the need for giving the other side cosmetic formulations for face saving reasons so they can accept a settlement that preserves the status quo. On Point 4 (A) the constituent assembly approach seems far preferable to us but on this point we are prepared to listen to GVN advice on what is best from their perspective. Thus the second plan you have, i.e. Presidential and National Assembly elections, and the variants in Tohaig 10 should be presented as possible permutations but only reluctantly. All of these variants are illustrations which should be looked at from two perspectives: (1) what happens if they are accepted and (2) how are we postured if the other side rejects them, goes public, and launches an offensive. In this latter case having accepted much of other side's proposal would make life much easier. Keep in mind that in the constituent assembly approach the Presidential selection is not a central feature and should not be hang up.

6. With reference to your 004 you will see from above that the idea of the assembly choosing the chief executive should be treated as one of the variations, not necessarily the ideal one as perhaps implied in my cable. The basic question is which process lends itself to handling so that it comes out the right way, not whether it meets all the fine points of nomenclature. Thus the question for Thieu in this instance is

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[3] Document 273.

not the title given the assembly but whether he can handle a process where the assembly chooses the chief executive.

7. Thieu should understand that he has many safeguards; the unanimity requirement for the operation of the CNR so that political scheme may never be implemented, his control of provincial machinery etc.

8. If Thieu chooses the constitutional assembly route—which we urge strongly—you should ascertain whether the constitution is to be drafted by it or the CNR where he is protected by unanimity rule. But keep in mind the main concept not the details.

9. In short, your operative talking points remain the same with the following amplifications which draw upon Tohaig 10 without reference to Dobrynin conversation:

—You should stress the major move in the other side's position. Though their plan is still unacceptable, its new elements and other signs we have indicate that the other side is prepared to settle on basis de facto situation as long as they can get cosmetics to ease the pain.

—You should make clear that point 4 (A) in the constituent assembly plan is illustrative though in our judgement the best solution. You should present other plan with you and variations in paragraphs 3 and 4 of Tohaig 10 as other possible but far less desirable permutations.

—You should ask Thieu's opinions on these various alternatives from the GVN point of view and seek his acquiescence in flexible building block approach for reasons outlined in Tohaig 10. If however he insists on one agreed approach you should stick with the constituent assembly approach.

—You should also of course seek his approval of all other constant points in our plan.

—Finally we must get his concurrence to an agreed strategy. If pushed we may have to go unilateral.

Warm regards.

275. 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, October 1, 1972, 0835Z.

170/Haigto 4–B. Spent period from 8:30 arrival until noon with Ambassador Bunker reviewing in detail proposed discussion with Thieu. He is in complete accord with strong preamble I propose to give with respect to Thieu's attitude and yours and President's view on essentiality of unity between us. I then proceeded to review in detail, as I will with Thieu tomorrow, the two proposals.[2] Bunker is in full accord with them and agrees with our assessment that the other side has made a major concession which far exceeds anything they have offered thus far.

I discussed with him the pros and cons of asking Thieu at some point in the process to agree secretly to step down contingent upon Thieu's own assessment of whether necessary security conditions had been met. Bunker feels this can be done at some point, although he agrees it would be too much for the traffic to bear on this trip. He is more sanguine than Carver on acceptability of this action to GVN body politic, insisting that Thieu has committed himself publicly to your course on two occasions. Since he has also done so with us privately last October, Bunker believes that if timed properly, such an announcement would not cause undue strain here. On the other hand, he recognizes that the package I will present tomorrow could very well develop into a serious blowup with Thieu. He is more concerned about the formal recognition of the NLF as a force in the statement of principles. Nevertheless, Bunker strongly believes we should proceed with the proposal with or without Thieu's endorsement. In the event we are forced to do this, he favors holding with the Presidential election and General [*National*] Assembly option. At the same time, he also favors our stressing the advantages of the constituent assembly option and moving as forcefully as possible to get Thieu to accept it.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1102, Jon Howe, Vietnam Chronology Files, 10/1/72. Top Secret; Sensitive; Immediate.

[2] According to the memorandum of conversation, October 2, Haig explained the proposals to Thieu as follows: "The first would envisage a political structure involving the election of a Constituent Assembly in Section 4 of the statement of principles. The second would involve a modification and amplification of the U.S.–GVN September 15 proposal which would still include a Presidential election followed by the election of a National Assembly, but which would encompass greatly expanded functions for the CNR." (Ibid., Box 1017, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Haig Trip to Vietnam, September 29–October 4, 1972)

I also discussed with Bunker the third option of a Presidential election and constituent assembly and fourth option of constituent assembly which would select the President. He believes the latter would probably cause the greatest gas pains for Thieu, in that it would prejudge the government's ultimate structure and would be interpreted as a means of weakening the overall strength of the Presidency. Nevertheless, Bunker would not oppose even this course should it be necessary to achieve a settlement breakthrough. He would hope, however, that we would not table this option in specific terms during my discussions with Thieu. Hopefully it would be held until later if it proves to be the only course open.

On balance, Bunker is very enthusiastic about the prospects though extremely guarded about Thieu's receptivity. With no instructions to the contrary from you, I will proceed tomorrow in accordance with Tohaig–10 and attempt to maintain flexibility within the general approaches of paragraph 5.

I spent from noon until 3:00 p.m. with General Weyand covering all of the topics we discussed prior to my departure. No unforeseen problem areas arose and I found Weyand generally confident that the enemy is in deep trouble. He has asked for authority to utilize B–52s up to 19 degrees, 15 minutes.[3] This request is based on what appears to be a large logistical buildup emanating from the Vinh complex. This buildup is annual in character and coincides with the traditional October–December logistical push. Weyand said that thus far the enemy is far behind schedule on this additional effort which is essential for replenishing units in Southern II Corps, III and IV Corps. He added that within three weeks we should know whether or not the enemy will be able to replenish sufficiently to conduct offensive actions in these corps areas during the next dry season. He notes that the enemy is already way behind in the infiltration of manpower for III and IV Corps. This tends to further support Hanoi's strategy for early negotiated settlement. Weyand believes that within three weeks this logistical factor will be more finitely assessable.

I will save more detailed reporting on discussions with Weyand until later. In the interim, you should be aware that Bunker found no hookers in anything we propose on the negotiating side. It is significant that Thieu has scheduled a Security Council meeting for 9:00 a.m.

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[3] On October 1, 1625Z, Kissinger informed Haig that Weyand's request to hit airfields and logistic bases in southern North Vietnam was to be approved: "We shall give authority to hit these as well as logistic complexes. Weyand must understand that logistics are our first priority and must be struck soon to deprive Hanoi of hope of another offensive." (Backchannel message WHS 2179/Tohaig 13, October 1; ibid., Box 870, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, October 1972)

in the morning and has agreed to see me at 11:00. Bunker notes with concern that this is a pattern which Thieu follows only when he needs support for a strong course of action. It is Bunker's view that our customer will be very tough.

Warm regards.

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276. 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, October 2, 1972, 1010Z.

173/Haigto 008. I have just completed a two hour and forty minute meeting with President Thieu.[2] The first hour and one-half was conducted on a head-to-head basis. I agreed with Thieu to have Mr. Nha join the last hour and ten minutes during which the specific negotiating counter-proposals were discussed. Ambassador Bunker also joined for this portion of the meeting.

During the head-to-head, I covered in great detail our concerns about manifestations of growing South Vietnamese suspicion, reiterated the events of the past four years and noted the differences between the U.S. domestic climate in 1968 and today. I layed out in the strongest terms the consequences of South Vietnamese threats for public parting of the ways as well as the consequences of unreasonable intransigence. I made it clear that our concerns for a forthcoming negotiating stance were dictated by long term considerations which involved our ability to support the GVN in the long haul and were not driven by immediate election needs. This portion of the meeting was emotional and even tearful on Thieu's part. However, it concluded by what I consider to be the reestablishment of mutual confidence and respect on both sides. Thieu appeared to accept both my admonitions and warnings with sincerity and good will. Despite the toughness and threatening nature of portions of my presentation, he was both docile and cooperative from the outset.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 48, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Peace Talks, Chronological File, 1–4 October 1972. Top Secret; Flash; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] See footnote 2, Document 275.

Thieu explained in great detail his concern that whatever negotiating initiatives he agreed to must not seriously affect the morale of his fighting men when made public. He stated that the experiences of 1968 left deep scars in the body politic of South Viet-nam and that despite differences between now and then, the South Vietnamese people and their fighting men could not help but remain suspicious of U.S. motives.

After listening to Thieu's explanation, I concluded that he genuinely expected that my mission had been concocted for the purpose of asking him to step down. His rationale, which had obviously been prepared beforehand, focused on the risks associated with such a step. I strongly suspect that his meeting with the Security Council this morning had been convened for the purpose of addressing this issue and to obtain their backing in the event that his fears were realized. Thieu did reiterate his intention to step down if and when a true peace were in the offing. It is clear that he does not believe that we have arrived at this point at this time.

I stressed with Thieu that while we had held firm since the September 15 meeting,[3] both the President and you consider Hanoi's September 26 proposal[4] to represent a major concession and that while it is still unsatisfactory in many details, the September 26 proposal demanded a forthcoming response from Washington and Saigon. I told him of the tentative time schedule in Paris and the need to return hopefully armed with his concurrence to explore flexibly the numerous variations of the constituent assembly route. Barring this I insisted that we must have, as a minimum, his concurrence to table the modified version of our September 15 proposal.

In my own judgment, Thieu was greatly relieved that I had not come to ask for his resignation. Consequently, both he and Nha were cooperative and constructive in discussing all of the details of the two counter-proposals and their variations.[5] In hindsight, it was wise to have Nha present for the detailed discussion since he appeared to pick up all of the nuances while avoiding any semblance of the nitpicking which I had expected.

Thieu and Nha both seemed concerned about the short response time in providing an answer by Tuesday night.[6] Thieu asked whether or not it would be possible for me to hold here until noon Wednesday, pointing out that it was necessary for him to not only review care-

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[3] See Document 263.

[4] See Document 267.

[5] See footnote 2, Document 275.

[6] October 3.

fully the English text, but to formulate precisely how it would be presented in Vietnamese. He also asked that he be provided with the Vietnamese text of the September 26 Hanoi proposal so that he could say precisely how the term "unanimity" was articulated. From this question, I can only assume that he, too, recognizes the significance of Hanoi's concession.

On balance and considering the atmosphere which exists here, I believe the meeting to have been highly successful. It remains to be seen, however, whether his immediate relief resulting from my failure to ask for his resignation will subsequently be translated into a favorable position with respect to our initiatives. There is no question but that we have given Thieu a large bone to chew on with minimum time to respond. I think he understands precisely what the stakes are and what we hope to achieve from him. I have committed you to an immediate visit with him following the next Paris session if he endorses a flexible approach to the constituent assembly route.

At this point, I cannot predict what position he will take. In our head-to-head, he noted that the talks in Paris had progressed to the point where he could no longer fail to share their implications with his advisers. This may occasion additional difficulties and delays. However, I do believe that Thieu feels he must provide us with a substantive response before my departure. In view of his relief on the resignation concern, I believe he will approach the task with a constructive frame of mind. In hindsight, our wisest decision was to limit my presentation to the parameters we discussed prior to my departure and in your subsequent cables. While awaiting Thieu's reply, I will work with Weyand to get a firm grasp on the logistics situation. I will also discuss further with Weyand the logistic targeting which based on earlier discussions does not need much push. Discussions with Weyand and Vogt, however, confirm the insanity of current command relationships and the urgent need to clear them up effective November 8. I am now convinced that the problems associated with our air effort in the North are directly attributable to this wholly inadequate command structure.

I believe Ambassador Bunker, who has been of invaluable assistance as usual, is very pleased with the outcome of this morning's discussions.

Warm regards.

277. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Saigon, October 4, 1972, 9 a.m.–12:50 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Major General Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Ellsworth Bunker, American Ambassador to Saigon

President Nguyen Van Thieu
Vice President Tran Van Huong
Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem
Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam
Foreign Policy Assistant Huyhn Phu Duc
Special Assistant Hoang Duc Nha

At the outset of the meeting, President Thieu instructed Mr. Nha to brief General Haig and Ambassador Bunker. Initially President Thieu spoke only in Vietnamese. Mr. Nha, standing adjacent to a chalk board which contained hand written organizational comments in Vietnamese, pointed out that this discussion would cover the following four points:

(1) A presentation of the South Vietnamese Government's understanding of the Communist September 26 proposal for a peace settlement in Vietnam.
(2) The South Vietnamese Government's assessment of this proposal.
(3) The South Vietnamese Government's understanding of the proposed U.S. counterproposals.
(4) The South Vietnamese Government's assessment of the U.S. counterproposal.

Mr. Nha stated, reading from the Vietnamese chalk board, that the Communist September 26 proposal included the following: (1) a proposal for agreement between the United States and Hanoi on ten principles; (2) upon agreement on these ten principles the U.S. would stop bombing and mining actions against North Vietnam; (3) there would then be an overall agreement; (4) the overall agreement will be followed by the withdrawal of all U.S. and foreign troops, dismantling of bases, and the removal of technical advisors within 45 days. Simultaneously, an exchange of prisoners of war would occur; (5) the next step would be the institution of a ceasefire and the cessation of all aid; (6) point 4 of

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1018, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Additional Material Vietnam Trip, September 29–October 4, 1972 [1 of 4]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. The meeting took place at the Presidential Palace. All brackets are in the original.

the Communist proposal would require the following: (a) the resignation of President Thieu, (b) the materialization of democratic liberties through the abrogation of all current laws and regulations of the Government of South Vietnam, (c) the creation of a provisional Government of National Concord, whose tasks would be the organization of a general election to take place six months following the overall agreement, and the cessation of a Constituent Assembly to ratify the Constitution which would be drafted by the Government of National Concord.

The preceding steps would result in the creation of a new definitive government for South Vietnam, a new government consisting of three components. First, the PRG, second, representatives of the Saigon regime, and third, political forces which are obstensibly neutral. The governing body would consist of 12 men or a praesidium with rotating leadership. There would also be five committees which would be responsible for implementing the following: the ceasefire, the institution of democratic liberties, the drafting of a constitution, provisions for general elections, and the conduct of foreign affairs. This, in essence, would be the government of South Vietnam with regional sub-committees which would function down as far as the provinces, districts, and villages. They would be of the same composition as the national level government. Following President Thieu's resignation, the Saigon administration would continue to control the areas it now controls. There is specific provision for two governments, the GVN and the NLF, with language that states no party will dominate and a requirement for unanimity rule.

Mr. Nha then explained the U.S. counter proposal. He stated that at the outset that only the broad outlines would be covered. The first U.S. counter proposal would provide for a Constituent Assembly with five possible variants, involving the functions of the Assembly and the Committee for National Reconciliation. A Committee which would be tripartite, similar to the Communist proposal and guided by the principle of unanimity.

Procedurally, the U.S. visualizes an overall agreement, the withdrawal of all U.S. forces, including technical advisors, the redefinition of military assistance, and a simultaneous release of all prisoners of war, with the latter two measures being accomplished in 75 days versus 90 days in the earlier U.S. proposal.

The third event would be for the United States to reduce its assistance to the Indochinese countries.

The fourth event would be the establishment of a ceasefire with international supervision now including a cessation of the bombing and the clearance of U.S. mines from North Vietnamese waters. It would also include the cessation of all infiltration and a reestablishment of democratic liberties.

The fifth step would involve the political solution itself, the creation of a Committee of National Reconciliation which would organize elections for a Constituent Assembly. Although the composition of the Committee is not specified, it would have three components as in the Communist proposals. The above Committee would be assisted by regional sub-committees down to the municipality and provincial levels. All this [the establishment of sub-committees] would be accomplished 30 days after an overall agreement. There could be five variants to this overall solution.

First, the CNR would organize the election of the Constituent Assembly which would draft the constitution.

Second, there would be a Presidential election followed by the election of a Constituent Assembly which would draft the constitution.

Third, the Constituent Assembly would ratify the constitution drafted by the CNR.

Fourth, the Constituent Assembly would designate a President as its first item of business and then draft and ratify a constitution. Five, the Constituent Assembly would designate the President but merely ratify the constitution which had been drafted by the CNR.

President Thieu interrupted and said that this arrangement would formalize the existence of two governments.

Mr. Nha then turned to the second U.S. counter proposal which he stated was identical with the exception of point 4, which would be amended as follows: there would continue to be a CNR with two governments and President Thieu in power together with the NLF. The first order of business of the CNR would be a Presidential popular election followed by a National Assembly election. The Presidential election would occur five months after the overall settlement and the election would be organized by the CNR.

President Thieu stated that he would like to comment on the three proposals and then give a general assessment of all. He stated he would focus on point 4 of each proposal and avoid commenting on the details of the other points. He stated that with respect to the Communist September 26 proposal, he would only touch upon basic principles.

In the first instance, it was apparent that Hanoi hopes to establish the principle that only North Vietnam and the United States have the power to settle the political future of South Vietnam, and the Saigon Government can only implement what the two powers decide.

The second principle is that the Communists would still maintain the Provisional Government of National Concord.

The third principle is that the Communists would abolish every existing structure in South Vietnam and then start from scratch.

The fourth principle is that the Government of National Concord would operate under the unanimity concept but its membership would

arbitrarily have three elements, which would not be based on any discernible criteria.

In this latest proposal, the Communists are more vicious than ever, because they waited until now to surface their motivations on regional committees which would extend down into the villages. It is obvious that they wished to ambush Dr. Kissinger by bringing him along and then surfacing this provision at the last minute. This is a typical Communist tactic. They are broad in designing a principle, and arrogant and stubborn in delineating details.

President Thieu then turned to his assessment of the two U.S. counterproposals. He emphasized that he would not cover the 11 points but only the broad principles as he saw them.

The first principle suggests that the U.S. has rejected the term "government" but would substitute a Committee of National Reconciliation, but the U.S. would pursue the same spirit as the proposed Communist government with three arbitrary components representing three arbitrary factions.

The second principle in the U.S. counter proposal would be tantamount to installing a new Constituent Assembly, a new constitution, and a new government. Everything would disappear but there is no specific reference to what happens to President Thieu. He himself has no problem on whether he should remain since his government is wiped out. Saigon can only assume that everything will disappear, the President, the constitution, and the General Assembly, even the government itself.

In point 4 of the second U.S. proposal, the outcome is the same except there would be an election for a National Assembly. In the end, however, there would be four new elements: a new President, a new government, a new National Assembly, and a new constitution. Thus everything is really the same in the two U.S. proposals except in the second proposal there would be two elections, one for the President and one for the National Assembly. All other elements would be the same. Since Dr. Kissinger's visit to Saigon, worrisome things have occurred. In discussing with us the Communist August proposal,[2] he assured us that the Paris talks were secret and that their contents would be held that way by agreement between both sides. But then we saw on September 11 and 16 that Hanoi began to leak the contents of the Paris meetings. Dr. Kissinger had assured us this wouldn't happen, but it did. Lastly, Pham Van Dong in his speech indicated that there should be a Constituent Assembly, a new constitution, a new government, and confirmed that what Hanoi wanted was a parliamentary system, not a

[2] See Document 225.

democratic system. We also suspect that Hanoi is in collusion with the French on the three part government. President Pompidou in his September press conference stated that France must not insist on a coalition government or a government of national concord.

At this point Mr. Negroponte joined the group as official U.S. notetaker.

Thieu: We feel the Communists and the French have colluded to advocate a Government of National Concord with three components. We have further evidence in the fact of President Pompidou's press conference even though he said it was not for France to advocate any solution, he made two other statements which were ambiguous. Also Pompidou has been quoted as saying that the Americans are not discussing the principles of a solution with the North Vietnamese but the implementation of the principles. Moreover, Pompidou has affirmed that there are three political forces.

My fourth assessment relates now to the situation in Saigon. It is no longer a secret in the eyes of many politicians what the U.S. and GVN are now discussing. Such politicians as Tran Van Tuyen, Nguyen Gia Hien, Big Minh, and Nguyen Ngoc Huy have all been discussing what we are talking about. I cannot tell whether this is a maneuver of the Communists or the French.

I think the French here are very active. They play an active role here and we wish to propose that the United States be careful in its rapport with the French Government.

I have completed my assessment of the proposal. The Vice President now has a few words.

Vice President Huong: My first point is that the Communists have always wanted to make the U.S. accept their demands. In 1968 the Communists demanded unilateral cessation of bombing and they obtained it. Furthermore, they got from the United States the acceptance of the installation at the Paris talks of the NLF. What is the NLF? It is an unknown force in South Vietnam. No one even knows where its headquarters are located. As a result of what the United States has done, it [the NLF] has gained international recognition.

The North Vietnamese have made a number of unilateral demands of the United States. They demand the U.S. withdrawal, that the U.S. dismantle its bases, that it withdraw military advisors, technical personnel and so forth. I have a question, have the North Vietnamese done even any little thing to reciprocate? Now, since the cessation of the bombing, the United States has carried out the unconditional withdrawal of its forces while the North Vietnamese have done nothing. Their position is even more evident in that they call themselves "Vietnam" and not "North Vietnam." They do not make provision for the fact that, even though the country is just temporarily divided, there is

legitimate provision for two separate sets of authorities to operate in each part of the country. This is coupled with the fact that the United States does everything and the DRV does nothing in return. This to them is just a confirmation that the United States is the aggressor. What do the North Vietnamese want? What they want to do in place of the United States is to act as the big brother and settle the question of Vietnam between the GVN and the NLF. They want to be free to settle the problem in any way they wish.

President Thieu: As I said earlier, the Communists hold the position that they and the United States should agree on ten principles including a political solution and after that they will direct the GVN and NLF to implement the signed agreements.

Vice President Huong: I have a third point. Can we really believe what the Communists say? In 1968 the United States stopped the bombing unilaterally. Has the DRV done anything in return? Then the United States started to withdraw unilaterally with no concession on the part of the North Vietnamese. Since 1968 they have done nothing in Paris either. It shows that the United States should not believe so much in the North Vietnamese.

Another point. With regard to the Committee of National Reconciliation or the Government of National Concord proposed by the United States and the Communists [respectively], we should not pay so much attention to the principle of unanimity. Can the United States give us any example of a three-tier government in which the Nationalists prevail? Look, for example, at Czechoslovakia and the example of Mazaryk and Benes. They were in a coalition with the Communists and eventually were killed or had to commit suicide and everything went into the hands of the Communists. I, myself, have had personal experience. I have many friends who lived in North Vietnam for five, six, or seven years. I am well placed to understand the situation. Those friends came back from North Vietnam. I was also a leader of the Resistance Movement in Tay Ninh in the 1940s and I was elected to the National Assembly in Hanoi, but I did not go. I understand the Communists.

General Haig: Mr. President, I am honored to have heard the views of your close personal advisors and key members of your government as well as yourself. Let me speak briefly about the concept and objectives governing our conduct in Paris. As you know, there has been a slow evolution of the DRV position in the most recent round of talks. Our purpose has always been and remains not to put ourselves in a position where our opponents can accuse us of refusing to make an effort to find a peaceful solution.

There is a dilemma on the United States' side. We have a problem of popular support. Just the other day we had a close legislative vote and just this week we overcame a resolution which would have stripped us of the ability to fund the war at the very time when

President Nixon's popularity is very high and we won by just two votes.

In all our discussions in Paris we have been guided by two conceptions. First, to continue the talks so our opponents cannot immobilize us from continued support for the war but also by the conception that a solution must provide for the continued existence of the GVN to be sure that there will be no gimmick which will strip the GVN from its ability to control the army, the police, and reflect the realities of power in South Vietnam after a settlement. Up to now Hanoi has played into our hands because they have demanded the dismantlement of the GVN and the resignation of President Thieu and, had the content of our talks been made public, we could have said that they wanted us to impose a Communist solution on South Vietnam.

We have two fundamental objectives. First, the continuation of your government after a settlement with the power to govern effectively. Second, to insure that President Thieu cannot be victimized as long as we do not have a situation of true peace. Frankly, we think that for President Thieu to step down now would be the worst possible thing for South Vietnam.

Now on September 26 the North Vietnamese substantially moved from their earlier demands that your government be dissolved out-of-hand. If we rejected this new offer without a counterproposal to show United States opinion that we conscientiously tried to find a solution, not because of our election, not for the sake of President Nixon, but for the long-term prospects, in a situation where Hanoi had made a clear shift, if we had refused to discuss this constructively, we would then be in a very difficult position even though this new North Vietnamese proposal is still unacceptable. Moreover, if we do not explore this constructively, then we run the serious risk that Hanoi will go public.

Frankly, we were rather pleased by President Pompidou's statement and the fact that he moved away from a coalition government solution. He also brought members of his own government under firmer control and, as you know, some of them held rather strong views on the Vietnam issue.

So, looking at the situation over the long-run, the first question is, are we going to be able to handle the negotiations in such a way that we can continue to provide assistance, continue to bomb and mine North Vietnam, should its peace proposal merely prove to be a subterfuge; are we going to be able to do this until they come forth with a proposal with which we can be reasonably confident that your government will prevail? These are our motives. Now, if I return to the United States and tell President Nixon that we cannot work out a counterproposal to the North Vietnamese which will protect the Republic of Vietnam, we will be posed with a major crisis with a disastrous effect for your government and our government. The Communists make

a great deal about the realities of power and not the form, and in a counterproposal we want to be sure that we keep the reality of your government's power. We think that our proposal, if accepted, would provide and preserve your power. I don't think we will reach that point. There are still many differences with the North Vietnamese position. We are not trying to settle behind your back or impose a solution on South Vietnam from Hanoi and Washington. We are not trying to impose conditions on you and we know that it is you who will have to abide by the outcome. We are trying to reach some principles. We doubt that we can reach agreement with Hanoi but it is conceivable. Why? Because they are in trouble. We want these principles to insure that President Thieu has real power to control the destiny of his country after the principles have been agreed. We want a vague political formula that insures the reality of power for you.

We reject the Government of National Concord because it is psychologically unacceptable for your people that such an entity be called a government. The other side says they are prepared to apply the principle of unanimity. We have to see if this is so, and if it is, any member could veto the operation of the Committee. This is different from Laos or Czechoslovakia. It means that your government can stay in power. If agreement is reached in principle, then we insure the retention of your power and our ability to sustain your economy.

You would control the situation until the details would be worked out with you and if you were not satisfied, then there would be no settlement. We have proposed a formula for your continuation in power until political changes are agreed upon which are satisfactory to you.

I hope I can return to Washington with a proposal. I recognize that your country and your people have lost more in this war than we. It is presumptuous for me to tell you what solution should be reached but we very frankly want to be able to continue to support this conflict with the funds, the firepower and the bombing. We could be stripped of this if, because of intransigence here, we failed to get a counterproposal. I want your views. For example, I gave you some illustrative variants yesterday regarding a counterproposal.[3] We have reflected on some of the variants that I suggested such as the ones wherein the Constitutional Assembly would select the President. We have thought about this and decided that it would be wrong to allow the Constitutional Assembly to choose the President but we think we must go with the Constitutional Assembly approach along the lines that I gave you in writing yesterday and you should tell us whether

[3] Haig is presumably referring to his October 2 meeting with Thieu; see footnote 2, Document 275 and Document 276.

you want the Committee of National Reconciliation to draft the Constitution or whether the Assembly itself should draft the Constitution. We want to abide by your solution. We need your advice.

With regard to the subject of establishing committees down to the village and hamlet level, we know that this is a Communist subterfuge so we want to establish provincial and municipal committees where your control is the strongest. Moreover, we don't intend to surface our proposal for provincial and municipal committees at the next meeting but I want to go back to the President with a counterproposal which will force the North Vietnamese in Paris to go back to Hanoi for further instructions. Then, Dr. Kissinger can come here to consult with you. In the meantime, we will keep down our opponents in the United States who criticize this as an endless war without any prospect for solution.

I obviously cannot describe for you the attitude of the South Vietnamese people, but it would seem to me that they too must have confidence that you are making an effort for a just peace. It doesn't destroy their morale; it gives them hope that the sacrifices they have made have been worth it. If we leave our peoples with no hope for a solution, we have deprived them of a fundamental need.

I think the Committee of National Reconciliation is nothing more than a form. It has no substance. It has no ability to influence events in the South. We are not trying to impose a solution on you. What we want is to get agreement on principles and then you will work out the details so that you determine the future events. I don't think a large majority of the DRV proposals will prove acceptable in any event. President Nixon doesn't think so and Dr. Kissinger doesn't think so.

Hanoi is in bad shape. They are uncertain of their rear area. The very fiber of their existence has been affected by the war. At some point there may be a change in Hanoi. It is important that we avoid giving anything to them that can result in our being accused of wanting nothing short of total surrender. There must be some risks that we can take. President Nixon has supported President Thieu for the past four years in Cambodia, in Laos, in your own Presidential elections in 1971 and on May 8th[4] he laid it on the line for South Vietnam. Don't misread what we are trying to do. We want an intelligent counterproposal that prevents Hanoi from breaking off the talks and going public. And above all, we want to enable the United States to be able to go through next winter and next spring and continue to provide the essential support to you.

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[4] See Document 136.

Tell us your specific comments so we can go back with a counterproposal. We are not here to ram this down your throats. Work with us so we can have a counterproposal that holds up.

President Thieu: As you know, on September 13 I sent to you a memorandum in which we outlined some suggestions concerning your proposal. In our September 13th memorandum we covered all the ten points.[5] On September 15th we learned that Dr. Kissinger had not tabled a proposal which contained our suggestions.[6] We do not know what happened to our suggestions.

General Haig: Let me explain the circumstances surrounding September 15. Earlier we had come to you and asked for your comments on a suggested counterproposal. We waited a long time for an answer and then Dr. Kissinger went to Moscow. We received your reply only 72 hours before the scheduled meeting in Paris. In our judgment—in the judgment of President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger—if we had not tabled our proposed counterproposal, it would have resulted in a breakoff of the talks.[7] The President did not want to take this risk. But as you know, we threw away the procedural proposals as you had asked us to and we changed the language of the Committee of National Reconciliation to make it vaguer and less precise. Had we not done what we did, there would already have been turmoil in the United States. This was the proposition that President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger were faced with. I recognize and understand that we are faced with a growth of suspicion here just as in 1968. But President Nixon is not being driven by election considerations. In fact, it is just the opposite. He is way ahead. He wants to use the United States position of strength to get more concessions from Hanoi.

If I go back and say that you are holding to your September 13 memorandum, then we will have a major problem with President Nixon.

President Thieu: I would like to be frank. I would like to ask a direct question. You referred earlier to our September 13 memorandum and the proposals it embodied. You say that if the United States had not presented its proposal to the Communists, that they would have gone public. I do not understand why our proposal would break up the talks. Why? Is it because the proposal was not forthcoming enough or is it because it was contrary to something agreed between the United States and the DRV?

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[5] Bunker reported his September 11 meeting with Thieu and the September 13 memorandum in backchannel messages 155 and 156, both September 13. See Document 258.

[6] See Document 266.

[7] See Document 259. For a record of the September 15 U.S.–DRV meeting, see Document 263.

General Haig: It was not forthcoming enough and after we tabled our proposal on September 15, we held to it until the other side made a new concession which allows the Government of the Republic of Vietnam to exist and proposes a Government of National Concord which is essentially an advisory group. Of course we won't accept the word "Government."

We have proposed some counterproposals including a Constituent Assembly and some variants. You tell us which approach you prefer. Do you want the Committee of National Reconciliation to draft the constitution or the Constituent Assembly to draft it? In theory, I don't think it will happen and you will emerge with even greater strength. Let's throw out the various variants and the subcommittees. The essential need is for the continuation of President Thieu in power and the continued existence of the GVN and to work on the conditions for improved security. The latter questions are the vital ones. Where does the NVA go? What happens in Laos and Cambodia? If we table this kind of political counterproposal, it gives us greater leverage on the security issues. Give me some changes but don't tell me to go back to President Nixon with nothing.

Mr. Duc: In our memorandum of September 13 we proposed that our position be conveyed to the North Vietnamese as not being on a take it or leave it basis. Now why do you think our position would have broken up the talks?

General Haig: Hanoi itself is involved in a very difficult decision. They have the option to go back to protracted warfare. Our view is that we should take advantage of a number of factors, such as their isolation from China and the Soviet Union. That could change tomorrow. President Nixon's popularity is attributable to the fact that he bombed and mined North Vietnam and was still able to go to hold the Moscow summit and seek peace. If that delicate balance breaks down, then Congress will pass resolutions to get out of Vietnam in six months or less. For these reasons, we tabled our proposal on September 15, and also, because we had been holding discussions in Moscow. And Moscow for its own reasons—and I don't say that their motives are pure—wants this war settled. All of these factors went into our judgment. If the talks broke off, then there would have been a chain reaction. Also, we want to exploit whatever opportunity exists for Hanoi to make concessions. Do you not agree that there are some concessions in this proposal? It is obviously not good enough; but don't you agree that there has been some movement?

President Thieu: Before you come to the first variant, I want to make a very frank statement. Dr. Kissinger does not deign to consider what we propose. He just goes his own way. Our August 26 memorandum was flatly rejected 24 hours later. That is my feeling; that is my impression.

General Haig: It is quite obvious there has been a breakdown in mutual confidence. We have really been driven by mutually agreed policies in the past four years. It worries me because I have just realized what a breakdown there has been. I wish I had known it sooner. We are headed for some sorry days ahead if we cannot have confidence. The driving motivation of Dr. Kissinger is to insure the objectives that I have described, to insure that President Thieu remains in power. Any other alternative would be a disaster. If we moved too precipatately on September 15, I must accept the burden. Until September 13, I had no reason to suspect we were not working closely. It is essential to re-establish mutual confidence. I will impress this on Dr. Kissinger and he will talk to you.

President Thieu: Another serious problem is that you only give us 24 to 36 hours to work on these proposals. As far as the talks are concerned, I recognize that Dr. Kissinger is entitled to set the date and the schedule for his talks with the North Vietnamese but I want to make a point and that is that prior to the meetings and after the meetings you give us very short notice, sometimes 12 hours, sometimes 24 hours. In the case of these counterproposals, you only give us 36 hours. Moreover, these proposals have a Top Secret/Sensitive character and you insist that I must limit the discussion within my National Security Council so I can't even get other people's ideas.

Dr. Kissinger has a large staff. He knows what is ahead. He has ample time to analyze what the North Vietnamese are saying. Our staff and our time is limited. Our assessment that we have given you today is on basic principles. We can't possibly decide the details in the time you have given us.

Before going into any solution, I want to ask General Haig to tell President Nixon once and for all and for the last time that President Nixon should devote his policy to the 17½ million people of Vietnam and not to President Nguyen Van Thieu.

On this point 4 of your counter-proposal, I don't want to pose any problems about my staying in power two or three months. The question of my staying in office is not what is important. It is only in this way that President Nixon and I can work toward a reasonable solution. I do not want the people of the United States to accuse me of being the only obstacle to peace. I don't want any drastic measures to be taken because of me. If President Nixon takes any drastic measures, it should be because of South Vietnam alone.

Returning to the second counterproposal, in order to work we recall what we told you in various memoranda, namely, those of September 13 and August 26, that is to say a Presidential election followed by the formation of a government whose composition would be chosen according to the proportion of the number of votes received in that

election. Alternatively, we propose that the Committee of National Reconciliation be chosen by referendum and that that Committee organize the Presidential election. Under our proposal, for proportional representation in the Government, we would, in effect, have an elected national coalition government. A government represented according to the proportion of the votes. And we also agreed to a review of the constitution. In what respect is this not forthcoming? What do you propose?

Gen. Haig: We propose going—we have already gone beyond this. We are not meeting Hanoi's tripartite formula. They have moved ahead of us because they have proposed a government of national concord or a committee with the veto power given to any member. If we ignore this, we are faced with a high risk of a break in the talks, and all you come back with is substantially less than what we propose. Why does a tripartite committee with a veto which would make it as ineffectual as the United Nations—I don't understand your objections. Your proposal has been overtaken by events due to the other side's September 26 proposal.[8]

Pres. Thieu: Your answer is that in light of the DRV September 26 proposal we must make another counterproposal. This is a divergence of views between the U.S. and the Republic of Vietnam. We do not consider their proposal a concession. Where will this lead to? If each time we have to be forthcoming because we consider them forthcoming. Where does this lead? Speaking about the forthcomingness of proposals we have come quite a long way since 1968. First there was the bombing halt, then in March of 1969 we agreed to talk to the other side, then I made my political proposal and then there was the proposal of January 25. We have gone the extra mile. If you say the Communists are more forthcoming, we think they are more stubborn and vicious than ever. We think any proposal should be logical.

In my letter to President Nixon of September 16th, I set forth my views clearly on how forthcoming our proposals were.[9] I made clear that any proposals he made should be justifiable to the internal opinion of the South Vietnamese people and National Assembly, and must meet the basic objectives of self-determination and should reflect the existing political structure. Otherwise, there would be three risks: first, instability; second, loss of morale on the part of our troops; and third, a loss of confidence on the people in the U.S. and the GVN.

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[8] See Document 267.

[9] According to Kissinger, the letter also agreed with all of Nixon's general points and "warned that no further concessions should be made" to Hanoi. (*White House Years*, p. 1334)

That is why we cannot accept a three-tier arrangement. It does not affect the existing political arrangement in South Vietnam. But why three tiers? Why not ten or why not 85? I only give these as examples. It is not logical. We cannot justify this to our opinion and I can't explain it. Furthermore, we have not yet gone public, but if we go public the National Assembly will see that we made unreasonable and illogical proposals. If our proposals are discredited we will no longer have the prestige to search for peace.

Gen. Haig: I know that the President has been in the forefront of this search for peace and has made many responsible initiatives. I agree that on occasion he has been ahead of the United States Government. It is precisely because of this that we find ourselves where we are today. It is precisely because of this that we have been able to continue our support since 1969. It has been the leadership of President Thieu and President Nixon, and their courage that has enabled us to go ahead. That is the reality of what we face today.

I understand the problem of theory. People must be logical; people must understand our proposals. I think we are reaching a point in our talks when a decisive change may come about. At least a change in the character of the war. I don't think it is unreasonable to say that there are three broad political groupings in Vietnam. First, there are the Communists, and then there are those who owe their allegiance neither to you nor to the Communists, and then there is a third group—the overwhelming majority—which supports your government. Now it's true that in the Committee the others will be disproportionately represented. You will choose one-half of the Committee, they will choose one-half. But when you take away its functions, this becomes a far less significant fact. I am convinced we can keep pressure on Hanoi and above all we must have in any settlement adequate security arrangements if we are going to accept something that reflects the status quo. I have difficulty understanding your problem in regard to the Committee.

Pres. Thieu: I have run out of ideas. (there was then a brief break)

Prime Minister Khiem: In regard to the tripartite Committee of National Reconciliation and your question as to why we don't accept it, I can explain to you that we have had experience with coalition arrangements. Take for example the history of Vietnam from 1945– 46–47, we had experience with the Communists. Some of our people here have had experience including the Vice President. That is why we reject the tripartite arrangement.

There is one more point which shows why the Committee of National Reconciliation is not justifiable. I recall the experience of 1963 at the time of the coup against Diem. There were rumors of his intention to talk to the Communists and for that reason the Army was fright-

ened and overthrew him. Then later, in 1964, there was a counter-coup against General Minh. The reason for that was that Big Minh followed the neutralist line of General DeGaulle. So for these reasons, I doubt that conditions of stability could be materialized under this formula. It would create instability in Vietnam.

[At this point in the conversation President Thieu was visibly crying.]

Foreign Minister Lam: On the point of the Committee of National Reconciliation which General Haig talked about and says that the government, President Thieu, the Army and police would be retained—that government would lose its authority, its prestige and its credit and it would have to coexist with another government. It is another government which is nothing. That other government is just like a poor man who has won the sweepstakes.

If our government were not disbanded under such an arrangement, it would die by itself. Such a government would be non-existent. There would be political chaos in South Vietnam.

Throughout the past years the Communists have accused us of being puppets and Nguyen Van Thieu is the United States' man in Saigon and it is U.S. responsibility to replace the government in Saigon. If we accept this counterproposal, it will be wrong. We Vietnamese found the President's May 8th proposal very logical and this is what we have wanted all along.

Pres. Thieu: If Dr. Kissinger still plays the role of middle man and keeps talking to the Communists on the political aspects, he will confirm the Communist theory that we are puppets even on the technical aspects (sic) of the fact that Kissinger is talking with the other side—there will be an endless deadlock in those talks. The Communists use these talks to place all responsibility for a settlement on the United States. This is a road without end. If once and for all the United States would say that the U.S. and the DRV will only solve the military questions regarding Indochina while the political questions will only be settled if North Vietnam and South Vietnam talk to each other about relations between the two countries and the GVN and NLF will talk to each other about the internal problems, then the problems can be solved.

Mr. Duc: I have two questions, why does the U.S. think that North Vietnam has the competence to discuss political matters affecting South Vietnam? Secondly, in August, Dr. Kissinger presented a communist proposal and the U.S. counter-proposal.[10] And he said he would ask no more concessions from us. Since then, there have been two more counter-proposals. In view of the successive Communist counter-

[10] See Documents 243 and 245.

proposals, I would like to ask whether the United States has developed a concept of final settlement or do we simply react to their proposals, each time trying to embody as much of their language as possible.

General Haig: I will answer your second question first. As to whether there is a concept of an outcome which would visualize a settlement, frankly I have not, but we do feel that there are a number of pressures on Hanoi now which are not permanent in character and which could put them in a position—to bring them to change the character of the conflict they could change their tactics, not their intentions, their tactics. We have an obligation to explore each Hanoi initiative in an honest and constructive way. First, because there might be an outside chance of settling. Secondly, we must establish a negotiating record of having been as reasonable and forthcoming as possible. I don't think any man at this table is naive enough to think that the realities of power are not the determining factor in the outcome of this conflict. We will explore every opportunity for peace. We have an obligation to do so. What we want is first of all to keep the support of the United States people behind President Nixon's action on behalf of South Vietnam. Secondly, should Hanoi be sufficiently hurt to scale down its activities—it won't change its objectives—it will modify its tactics.

If Hanoi modifies its tactics, we have an obligation to explore these opportunities. We would never accept a Communist takeover here. No formula is acceptable that prejudges the outcome. I must know what you think of our suggested counter-proposals that I can take back to President Nixon. If you feel that all I should give him is a memo and the personal letter which you will prepare for him, and that's all, well that's fine.

President Thieu: We agree that any political solution should be based on the right of self-determination and political reality. The U.S. has the right to explore a political solution between the GVN and the NLF and serve as the go between. But a political solution must, in the final analysis, be between the GVN and the NLF and between the GVN and Hanoi, and the U.S. should use its pressure to influence Hanoi. You should not be caught in the dilemma of acting on our behalf. Whatever plans are made and whatever policies are followed should be for the survival of the whole Vietnamese nation and not for the sake of President Nguyen Van Thieu. In the proposal you have suggested, our Government will continue to exist. But it is only an agonizing solution and sooner or later the Government will crumble and Nguyen Van Thieu will have to commit suicide somewhere along the line. I will send a letter to President Nixon.

Mr. Duc: You have not answered one of my earlier questions. What right does the DRV have to talk about a political solution in South Vietnam?

General Haig: Assuming they are in trouble, there must be a point where they can gracefully move out of the conflict. If we insist on total surrender or humiliation, we are inviting protracted conflict. At some point, if it appears to the U.S. people that there is no hope of ending this war or progress in negotiations, the U.S. people may lose their will to continue to sustain the effort. We don't know if Hanoi is looking for a face saving device or just to push us prior to the election. I don't think we know, we can't prejudge it. We want to go on with the talks, at least in the short term, to see how far they are willing to go. If Hanoi does not go far enough, then we can ask the U.S. people to continue to provide support. Believe me, President Nixon's intent is very close to yours. We cannot ignore forthcoming proposals even though they are still unacceptable. There is no way we could accept it. But it may be the first sign of a fundamental shift which we cannot ignore. There is nothing trickey in this; we are not looking for gimmicks. We are looking, hopefully, for a breakthrough. The pressures on Hanoi may never be greater than they are now, and that is what we are joining you in looking for.

President Thieu: We have not decided on a time to make public what we have done together to answer the Communists. But we are not afraid of revealing what the Communists have advanced since August 1st and revealing our own proposals, and we are not afraid of our position. It is very forthcoming and defendable. Now we shouldn't have an erroneous concept about saving face for the DRV because the North Vietnamese are the aggressors. All we ask is that they withdraw from South Vietnam. This would not be a humiliation for the DRV. In 1968 you said we shouldn't humiliate the DRV. We accepted to have the NLF in our political system.

In 1967 when I was asked by Ambassador Lodge how to absorb the NLF, I said we were a sick man, please don't give us another spoon of microbes. It will kill us. We must get better first. Now we are prepared to take the risk, a great risk, in fact, and let the NLF participate in the future government, and in the Committee of National Reconciliation. We have answered the question as to how to absorb the NLF. It is certain that the NLF will be represented in a Presidential election and after that they will be represented proportionally in the future government. It will be an elected coalition government. Furthermore, with our proposal for proportional representation, we have answered former Ambassador Harriman's question about how do we reach a coalition government. This will, in essence, be an elected national coalition government.

I can assure you that on the day we make this offer public, we will have more internal political difficulties in South Vietnam than we experienced in July of 1969 or in January of 1972.

I am sorry I don't know whether President Nixon has enough time, perhaps three or four hours in the last few weeks of his campaigning to hear me.

General Haig: I am grateful to you and your principal advisors that you have had this time to explore this subject. I think we have explored it as much as we can. And, it appears that we are on a divergent course. I want to be sure you understand what I said about saving Hanoi's face. There is no inclination to do this in Washington. We would like nothing better than the collapse of the North. You must understand my point. What we want to know is are they serious or is it just a tactic. Don't misunderstand me by thinking that we are looking for a face saving solution for Hanoi. We have had a good exchange, I have not yet seen your written memo. [President Thieu hands the memo at Tab A to General Haig][11] I will take it back and discuss it with President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger. There is no question in my mind where you stand. It is clear to me. It means we are going to have to reappraise our negotiating procedures because we have gone beyond this point already. I can't prejudge that. It is up to President Nixon. We will be in touch through Ambassador Bunker.

President Thieu: In my last letter to President Nixon, I said that we have already encouraged the Communists enough. If we go beyond that in South Vietnam—if the U.S. really still intends to defend Southeast Asia, then any solution should be used as a stand-down (sic) solution. With the situation resolved in Vietnam and only a few divisions in Laos and Cambodia.

Since 1962 the political solution on Laos and these three recent proposals of the Communists and our concession to them in 1968, it all comes back to what they want in Indochina. It is, whatever you call it, it is a Laos solution, disguised or not, it is a Laos solution. This is a very important point. In my position as President of Vietnam—if you were in my position as President of Vietnam—I don't know how you would explain this to the Vietnamese people. We are on the edge of catastrophe, on the brink of an abyss.

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[11] Attached but not printed at Tab A is an unsigned and undated memorandum prepared by the GVN. From Saigon, Haig sent the text of the memorandum to Kissinger in message Haigto 13, October 4. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1018, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Wire Traffic, September 29–October 4, 1972) In another message to Kissinger, Haig reported on the October 4 meeting and wrote the following about the memorandum at Tab A: "Finally, I would caution you that the GVN memorandum sent separately does not in any way capture the real thrust of Thieu's arguments. The memo is offensive and laced with Duc's language. Thieu's arguments were respectful and largely devoid of polemic. He is unquestionably frightened and apprehensive about what lies ahead." (Message Haigto 12, October 4; ibid., Box 1017, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's Vietnam Trip Haigto/Tohaig, September 30–October 4, 1972 [2 of 2])

After I finish—after I make a concession—how many more last miles will there be? Very frankly, and very sadly, we have a big friend in the U.S. and it is a big power. On the other side, Hanoi has a big friend and boss. No one tells Pham Van Dong or Thong Duc Thang or Nguyen Huu Tho to step down. That would be a humiliation for them. I have endured that humiliation for two years and I am ready to sacrifice my position.

If President Nixon has any drastic measures to take against South Vietnam, he should go ahead. As a soldier I am not afraid to say such words.

General Haig: We are not driven by motives to keep you in power. We also think in terms of supporting the best interest of the Vietnamese people. I know you are prepared to make a political sacrifice. You told me that in September of last year when you said you were prepared to step down if there was a true peace. I don't think a true peace is around the corner. I will convey the outcome of our discussions to Dr. Kissinger and President Nixon.

The meeting ended at 12:50 p.m.

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278. Editorial Note

As Major General Alexander M. Haig, the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, departed Saigon, having met twice with President Nguyen Van Thieu and his advisers regarding the next round of negotiations in Paris, he sent an initial report on the second meeting (see Document 277) to Henry A. Kissinger, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs. Unlike his upbeat assessment of the first encounter (see Document 276), Haig came away from this meeting subdued. To Kissinger he wrote:

"I recognize that this report will result in great disappointment there. The task at hand is to consider most carefully where we go from here. Undoubtedly, we can proceed unilaterally with either of the counter proposals and I believe the justification has been made for us to do so. However, the outcome of such action must be most carefully considered. In my view it will or could well bring about the collapse of Thieu's government. I did not anticipate the degree of suspicion generated during the months of August and September. Our actions on 15 September appear to have caused a collapse in confidence, which prevented any rational analysis of the counter proposals I carried with me. There is no doubt that we must now first decide how to proceed at the next Paris session and move accordingly to readjust promptly our over-

all relationships with Thieu. We move decisively, to either withdraw support from him or to rebuild breach both through our actions in Paris and a subsequent communication from the President to Thieu. At this point I tend to favor the latter course." (Message Haigto 12, October 4; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1017, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's Vietnam Trip Haigto/Tohaig, September 30–October 4, 1972 [2 of 2])

Kissinger's responded: "I do not see how we can follow your advice of attempting to regain Thieu's confidence. We simply do not have time. My inclination is to go ahead with our proposals with strengthened security features. If the package is accepted, we would have a new situation. If it is rejected, we would have a better base on which to stand. We do not have a basis for simply stonewalling at our next meeting.

"I would appreciate your thinking about this and your initial reactions, together with any other assessments which you might have soonest. Am sending as next following message a cable sent to Bunker. Would appreciate your reactions to it soonest." (Message Tohaig 45, October 4; ibid.)

Before Haig replied he first sent to Kissinger a memorandum prepared by National Security Council staffer, John D. Negroponte, on the United States position in the negotiations. In the memorandum, Negroponte wrote: "It appears we may conceivably be moving towards framework of settlement which will enable us to disengage militarily, get our prisoners back and leave the Vietnamese to slug it out between themselves in a context of reduced main force violence but continued political struggle of intensive brutality.

"Hanoi is blatantly eager to reach agreement in principle before our election; or at least commit us to negotiating course which will preclude any dramatic shifts on our part in the postelection period. In effect, Hanoi will be confined to a protracted warfare strategy in the next year or so and there is nothing inconsistent between the pursuit of such a strategy and an agreement to a main force ceasefire."

Negroponte concluded that: "Despite the initially disappointing aspects of Al's meeting with Thieu, I don't think this development changes the fundamental assessment that Hanoi may be moving towards a separation of political from military questions. If they are really serious, then they will not be deterred from peeling off even more of their political demands and perhaps finally agreeing to simply setting the political questions aside. Face will not be the overriding consideration. As for how to deal with Saigon's current position, my own initial reaction is that we have no choice but to abide by general outlines of GVN wishes and once and for all confront Hanoi with the proposition that they simply aren't going to make any money with us

on political questions. To be sure, there is a risk they'll go public. But that in itself probably requires another Politburo decision and therefore buys us some time. Equally or more likely in my view is that they will agonize about whether to settle on a military basis alone and the chances may be better than even that they will do so. At this point they must be more concerned about saving their skins than in scoring what they must by now know would be futile propaganda points." (Message Haigto 14, October 4; ibid., Box 1018, Alexander M. Haig Special File, Wire Traffic, September 29–October 4, 1972)

Haig was willing to give Thieu more leeway than Kissinger and argued that time was as much on their side, if not more so, than on North Vietnam's: "By way of general observation, I do not think that things may be as grim as they appear. We should not underestimate our bargaining leverage with Hanoi or our ability to cope with any public noise they choose to make. If they are in such a hurry, it must mean we have some things going for us. Above all, I honestly believe we must decelerate the negotiating pace a bit. I think we can do some of this without risking a break-up.

"Should we consider postponing your meeting for one week and telling Hanoi we need some time to consider our position? This may give us some more time to work over alternatives with Saigon; to get Thieu's letter; and to game out our approach a bit more systematically. It would also have reassuring effect on Saigon and maybe enhance our chances of their better understanding our position. I know that the chances of this are slim but Thieu certainly had a point yesterday when he said that we were only giving him 24–36 hours to consider our counter proposal and because of its sensitivity he was confined to examining it with only a handful of people.

"Another point. Is there a way of framing our political offer in a way that places greater emphasis on the security issues? Hanoi wants a political solution which, although it theoretically provides for continued GVN existence, could have the practical consequence of ungluing the GVN. Under unanimity principle, Thieu and the GVN will be held accountable by our press and Congress for not implementing the agreed political provisions, no matter how much the Communists are to blame. Military aid will be cut off even though there is no final political settlement and we have nothing resembling adequate safeguards on withdrawals or the Indochina-wide aspects. This is what really disturbs Thieu, perhaps if we could get more security assurances his attitude could be changed.

"In short what I am suggesting is why don't we tell Hanoi that we can't buy their political approach until we have got a better idea of what is in store on the military side. We would take the line that it doesn't mean we aren't prepared to be flexible on the political issue

but at this point there are so many unacceptable military elements we just wouldn't know what we are buying.

"Finally, I have already alluded to the timing of a break with Thieu. If we go that route, and God knows I fervently believe it should not come to that, but if it does, then I think we must reflect on when we should bite that bullet and how it would reflect on everything we have struggled so hard for if it appeared as an act of political expediency on our part as opposed to a deliberate, well-considered post-election decision. Further, if we decide to ignore Thieu and really put the squeeze on him, I believe this is best done after the elections when he will be convinced we mean business and recognize his own leverage is nil.

"One last thought is the timing of McGovern's plan. It makes me rather suspicious and I wonder how closely it will resemble the DRV's. If we postponed our meeting a week, perhaps we could find a way to turn whatever McGovern puts out to our advantage.

"There are no easy answers on this and I recognize what an agonizing problem this will be for all of us." (Tohaig 15, October 4; ibid., Box 1017, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's Vietnam Trip Haigto/Tohaig, September 30–October 4, 1972 [2 of 2])

The immediate result of this exchange was a message from Kissinger directing Bunker to see Thieu as soon as possible to convey Nixon's disappointment in Thieu's reaction to the United States proposals and strategy at the next Paris meeting, and to get Thieu back on board regarding the proposals and strategy. (Backchannel message WHS 2209, October 4; ibid., Box 870, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, October 1972) Kissinger also sent Haig a copy and asked him to comment on the message. While en route to Washington, Haig informed Kissinger that:

"Your instructions and the rationale contained therein are precisely the line I took privately with Thieu and the [South Vietnamese] NSC collectively yesterday. It is of course essential that Bunker see Thieu in the wake of yesterday's meeting. The instructions further underscore the President's concern that part of your message covering what will occur at the meeting in Paris appears to provide the necessary flexibility for a more refined decision based on careful consideration of some of the thoughts outlined above. I would, however, ask you to consider once more the feasibility of seeking delay of the Paris meeting so that you will have more time to know the outcome we are seeking." (Message Haigto 15, October 5; ibid., Box 1017, Alexander M. Haig Special File, General Haig's Vietnam Trip Haigto/Tohaig, September 30–October 4, 1972 [2 of 2])

279. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

October 4, 1972, 10:20 a.m.

P: Hello.

K: Hello Mr. President.

P: Hi Henry.

K: A number of things I wanted to mention to you. One, I've heard from Haig and we have a major crisis with Thieu.[2]

P: That's what I expected.

K: Well, it's not just that he rejects, he rejects every proposal we've made, every last one of them. And won't comment on any part of our paper, even the ones he's previously agreed upon. And he confronted Haig with the whole National Security Council. So now we have a rather crucial decision to make, which way to go.

P: Right, right, right. Well I suppose that Haig has now talked to Bunker about it?

K: Right, well Haig is on the way back.

P: Oh he's left?

K: Yeah. I'm not sure he should have done that under these circumstances.

P: Oh, I thought he should have stayed there. I mean, he's on his way back?

K: Yeah, under these conditions I don't think he should have left.

P: Well he's put us in a spot to know what the hell to present.

K: That's exactly right.

P: Well you can't turn him around can you? I mean I can't see . . . It doesn't make any sense for him just to come back.

K: Yeah, I was astonished. He sent me this from the airplane so I . . . I mean the plan was that he came back after the meeting, but the plan wasn't that . . .

P: Yeah, under these circumstances he shouldn't certainly go to Paris.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 253, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Trips, Haig, Alexander M., October 1972. No classification marking. According to the President's Daily Diary, Nixon was at Camp David when he placed the call, and Kissinger was in Washington. The call began at 10:21 and ended at 11:05 a.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

[2] See Document 278.

K: No, under no circumstances can he go to Paris. No, no, that is out.

P: At any rate, coming back to this, only thing I can think of is to . . . we can't reopen the Bunker channel.

K: Yes, we've got to do that but we've also got to, I mean we've got to do that. And we also have to . . . I mean for the first time this could leave us in a position where if they go public we've got nothing. And I don't think we can survive that.

P: Right, right.

K: But you're a better judge of that than I. But in our whole strategy, even after November 7, we need a platform in the name of which we're going to continue the war.

P: Right, right, right.

K: I'm not thinking of the election now because I am clear about another thing. We can't have a huge bust-up with Saigon before the election.

P: Afraid not. Well of course Thieu knows that.

K: One possibility, if we're going to be cold-blooded about it is to settle it with the North Vietnamese and hold it until after the election in return for their being quiet during this period.

P: Yeah, settle it on the basis of . . .

K: One of the variations we've worked out.

P: . . . whatever we think is a . . .

K: Whatever we think can honestly preserve a non-communist government in Saigon. And then put it to these guys after the election.

P: Well I would immediately get something off to Bunker and he's got to go in and have another cold turkey talk with Thieu.

K: Yeah, that's what I think.

P: That's the only thing I can think of at the moment with Haig gone. I mean, I don't quite understand the purpose of his going just to go down and, I mean . . . well anyway, that's that now. I'd get Bunker . . .

K: I was hoping he would . . . Well, it's done.

P: That's right.

K: He was following his instructions; the instructions didn't provide for the contingency of a total impasse.

P: Right. I would get ahold of Bunker and say, look here now, I am determined that we cannot be in that position and that he's to go in and tell Thieu that and say now what are you going to agree to.

K: Yeah.

P: Right.

K: Absolutely, I agree.

P: Well let's start with that at least; get that off immediately.[3] He should see him on a very top basis, and do it on the basis too that we're expecting them to come out with their own proposal, you know. Throw in a little of the domestic stuff, okay?

K: Right. The Chinese wanted to brief us primarily on the Japanese negotiations which they did, I must say, more fully than our allies in Japan did. And they did say they thought this was an opportune . . . this was the time to end the war but . . . I almost think so too, but this presents a new situation. I expressed my concern yesterday to Bob Haldeman about a press conference tomorrow.[4] I think it's going to be very tough to speak about Vietnam or not to speak about Vietnam.

P: I'm just not going to speak about it. That's the thing to do there, just not comment on it.

K: My concern about that is that it will raise expectations then.

P: No, we can do it in a way that we won't raise any expectations. I'll just handle it. I think we can handle it on the basis of . . . that we've had an understanding we're not going to comment on it. Period. Just leave it there.

K: And what if they ask about a tripartite government for example?

P: I say I'm not going to comment on anything. Period. No, no problem on that, no problem. I intend to say exactly that, on the Vietnam thing. But be sure to get into Buchanan[5] anything else that comes up in the foreign policy field. I just intend to say I'm not going to comment on Vietnam at all, which is no problem at all, no problem at all. And there will be no story; it will be just what we said previously. Just follow the lines that we've been taking.

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[3] See footnote 2, Document 280.

[4] On the President's press conference, Haldeman related the following on October 4: "We had a big flap with Henry last night and carrying on today. He's in a complete tantrum that the P should not have a press conference, because he's sure to give the wrong answers on Vietnam and blow the whole negotiation right as Henry is about to go into the crucial final stage. Henry actually believes still, even though Thieu has completely refused to go along with anything Haig has proposed, Henry believes that we still have a 50–50 chance of pulling something off with the North Vietnamese this weekend and he's scared to death that the P will louse it up. Actually, I think he'll use anything that comes up as an excuse if the thing blows up, so it works out pretty well for him. The P doesn't feel that there's any chance of settling, and that probably it's not desirable anyway, because any possible interpretation of a sellout would hurt us more than it helps us." The next day, Haldeman wrote: "Press conference this morning went extremely well. One of the best he's done in the office." (*Haldeman Diaries: Multimedia Edition,* October 4 and October 5) For a transcript of the press conference, see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1972,* pp. 952–962.

[5] Patrick Buchanan, Special Assistant to the President, worked in the White House speechwriting unit.

K: Right. Anything more than that would really get us into major trouble now. With Saigon, Hanoi and everyone else twitching like crazy.

P: Right. We'll leave it exactly like it is, just no comment at all. "No comment" doesn't get us into any trouble; it doesn't raise any expectations because that's what we've been saying.

K: Right, well you can judge whether McGovern will then say you're hiding again behind saying nothing.

P: Of course he will, of course he will, but we've been doing that for years. So that's that.

K: Right, well, if you can absolutely refuse to say anything . . .

P: That's right. We'll refuse to say anything. You don't have to prepare any line on that at all, just cover the other issues. I know what I want to say on that.

K: Okay, fine, Mr. President. I've gotten all my questions and answers . . .

P: The other questions are just probably . . . they know they're not going to get anything on Vietnam because of what's going on. Well it puts us in a spot as to your trip, that's the main thing.

K: Well if I cancel the trip we're going to have an enormous break with Hanoi.

P: I understand that; I understand that. I'm not suggesting cancelling it I'm suggesting it puts us in a problem as to what the hell you're going to say.

K: Exactly. Oh no, we have a massive problem now.

P: Right. Well I think the best thing, Henry, is to get on with Bunker right away and say that he's got . . .

K: From what I read of this there's no hope that way. I'll do it and I think it's the only thing to do . . .

P: Have to try it don't you?

K: And in fact it's a serious question whether these guys will blow publicly if we bring too much pressure, but it's our only play right now. But we've got a couple of hours to do anything cause it's the middle of the night there now.

P: Yeah, what is the situation on . . . you meet with them Sunday, right?

K: Sunday, yeah. It's set aside for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.[6]

P: Well under the circumstances at least at this point I wouldn't have such a long meeting. You know, I'd . . . it's going to put you in a hell of a spot but . . .

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[6] October 8, 9, and 10.

K: Well the fact of the matter is Mr. President . . .

P: And we're just going to have to break it off with him after the election, I can see that. You know, if he's going to be this unreasonable, I mean the tail can't wag the dog here.

K: Yeah, but the problem is what they're going to do to us in the interim . . .

P: Which one?

K: Well both of these maniacal Vietnamese. If I break . . . I mean I've given them every reason to believe, and so have you through Gromyko, that we're going to make a significant offer this Sunday. Now if I just go there and stonewall, I can do it. You don't have to decide it this minute. But it's not a minor thing because if we do that we lose a lot of credibility with the Russians, we lose a lot of credibility with the Chinese and we're gonna force a showdown with them. Now we can be a little tougher and see how ready they are to cave to give us credibility.

P: Well, but Thieu agreed to nothing so it puts us in a spot.

K: Well Thieu cannot not agree to anything, I mean that's just impossible.

P: What is his line?

K: Well his line is that, and he's got a good point, well first of all his line is that he's the government of South Vietnam, that the North Vietnamese are the aggressors and they've got to leave and that everything else should be said, they have no rights in South Vietnam, he won't agree to any government, any committees of national concord or anything else like this. It's a great line; he's doing it with our Air Force and our prisoners.

P: Yep that's sure true.

K: And it leaves us totally naked. How can . . . We can't defend that for 30 minutes in this country.

P: That's right.

K: I mean I'm not concerned about the election. I think he can do us more damage in the election by fighting us than by anything else. I'm concerned of where we will be six months after the election if we bomb the bejesus out of them and we have to say up to now we've always been in the position that we've had a very reasonable counterproposal. We could always go to the American public and say these sons of bitches want to destroy the government. Now we could still structure these discussions on Sunday.[7]

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[7] There is an apparent omission in the text. Staff in Kissinger's office produced the transcript printed here from a tape recording or from a stenographer's notes, or both. Neither record, nor any other record of this conversation, has been found.

K: And I'm sure if we peel that onion we are going to get a lot of proposals from them that we can't live with and if it breaks off on that, then we have a basis. But if we say a government . . . a committee that has no power except advisory power, and if Saigon has a veto which preserves Saigon's policies, that that means a Communist takeover, it's a little hard to defend.

P: Right.

K: If we can get all the other things settled. So my present inclination, quite honestly, is . . .

P: . . . to present it.

K: . . . is to present it—to tell them we are having a massive problem. Now if they want to play it tough and go public, fine. I mean, I'm talking about Hanoi now.

P: Right, right.

K: And then just go back to Thieu if we get an agreement and say this is the agreement for which we cannot ask the American people to keep fighting more. And if he then goes public, I don't know whether you'd necessarily lose in public opinion.

P: That's right.

K: If it's a reasonable agreement.

P: Well, actually, you are going to have the more likely thing which seems to me is that once you present that, the North Vietnamese aren't going to accept it. They are going to be our hole card in the damned thing.

K: The North isn't going to accept this.

P: Exactly. But on the other hand, you will be in a fairly reasonable position and I think now that it's a very, very fine line, but I think what has to happen, Henry, probably is you've got to present as forthcoming an offer as you can. But present it in a way that isn't as much as they can accept. Right? Having in mind the fact that we then immediately after the election, present it and the hell with Thieu. You see my point. After the election, we damn well will do it and if he decides to . . . that he won't take . . . They aren't going to go down then.

K: Well, they may have a lot of other things wrapped in. We cannot present this and let them keep their army in Laos and Cambodia and South Vietnam.

P: That's right.

K: But if we could get them to withdraw their army from Laos, Cambodia and a good part of their army from South Vietnam in return for some of these political cosmetics, it would be a tremendous victory. If we can settle this war on a basis that keeps Thieu in office, the American public will feel we've . . .

P: Right. Also, it isn't whether the American public will feel all right too, but it's a question too of whether if we present something we feel the South Vietnamese can live with, even though Thieu is unreasonable, then the thing to do is to do it because that's our goal. Our goal is not the temporary effect public-relations-wise of all this thing. Our goal is whether it really works and whether we can live with it in the end.

K: That's right.

P: And we can. My own view is that you have another thing coming. Do we have any time as to when McGovern is going to make his proposal.

K: No, but the idea . . .

P: You've got a pretty good . . . you've got another card there that to break off talks—after you have made a reasonable proposal—to break off talks and say that they've . . . just break them off until after the election.

K: My gut instinct is, Mr. President, that we have a 50–50 chance that they'll accept it.

P: Really? Accept the kind of a proposal that you're going to make—that you thought you could make?

K: Yeah. 50–50. And it's the best one we are ever going to get from them. Assuming that we can get them to get their army out of Laos, Cambodia, . . . if we can't get that; I mean, if the end is that they keep their entire army in the South and we pull all our army out of . . .

P: No, no, no. We won't agree to that.

K: Then, of course—and put in all these committees, then I think Thieu is right. So what Thieu's intransigence does for us is to give us a little more flex . . . It can be a little tougher, you know.

P: Yes. I see it as just one of these things . . . we've had a lot of these hard places in this . . . the hardest one coming at a bad time. But on the other hand, I think our choice is to now . . . we just can't go there with Thieu totally having a veto over everything.

K: If we go there and stonewall and they go public . . .

P: Yeah, he can't have a veto, that's not my point.

K: I'm not saying it would lose the elections, probably nothing can lose the election, or even affect it much.

P: Yeah, affect it some.

K: But that I can't judge, but I'm talking about November 7 when you then step up military operations in the name of what are you going to do it?

P: Cripe! Yep, particularly if they accept a proposition such as you're going to present. See that's the point. So I'm not . . . You make

this kind of proposition, we'll look it over, we'll spend some time on it Friday or Thursday. Well you think about it today and tomorrow . . .

K: Well I'm working on one that is . . .

P: And then let's make one that . . . let's just sit down and think, let's forget Thieu—I mean let's forget his personal feelings—but what we think South Vietnam could live with, what we think is best for us to live with and is a good public position but is not a cave-in and is not a sell-out and all that sort of thing and let's do that. And then my view is that we just have to go forward and present it.

K: Of course Thieu may start a public confrontation with us anyway but I am going to send Bunker in and tell him if there is a public confrontation [*less than 1 line not declassified*].

P: That's right. I think the message to Bunker Henry . . . I wouldn't be too pessimistic about what the old man can do in this case. He's worked on it before. But he's . . . in other words let's let him try. He comes in there, Thieu has got to know that after all I'm his friend, second that McGovern is gonna make a major proposal and he's going to have a great deal of support, let him appear . . . ; third that we have to be in a good public position.

K: The beauty is now of the situation they have offered us a better deal than McGovern is going to offer.[8] McGovern will ask for a coalition government in some form; they have already conceded that Thieu can stay and that in the coalition aspect . . . not that Thieu can stay but that the Saigon administration can stay . . . but that in the coalition aspect there'll be unanimity.

P: Right. And all that had no effect on Thieu?

K: Well Thieu is beside himself because on September 15 we tabled . . . we had . . . after I was there in August they made about 20 suggestions; we accepted 18 of them; there was one we couldn't accept which had to do with the composition of the electoral commission. And we put that in as tri-partite, in other words that the communists were represented on that.

P: Right. And that drove Thieu up the wall.

K: That drove Thieu up the wall, but the communists have heaped scathing scorn on it saying there was nothing new in it, if we hadn't done this the talks would have broken down in September which we couldn't have. The communists hadn't gotten within a hundred miles of accepting that; it isn't that that was a sell-out proposal. All it said was . . .

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[8] McGovern intended to deliver a speech on October 10 detailing his plan to end the war.

P: I know the . . . I see what happened with Thieu. He saw the press, the American press made a big thing out of that.

K: No, no they don't even know we proposed it.

P: No, well the tri-partite thing as you know was in the . . .

K: Yeah, but not as our proposal; the press doesn't know we accepted it. What he's seen in the press a lot of speculation about a coalition government.

P: Well but be that as it may he's seen some things which . . . the story that came out that the North Vietnamese are elated about this or that or the other thing.

K: No, but that's baloney.

P: I know it's baloney too, but you know how it is.

K: Mr. President that wasn't a story; this is something that was fed to Lovestone[9] and that Lovestone gave to Colson. And it was fed to Lovestone by the South Vietnamese; the North Vietnamese weren't elated . . .

P: I see; I guess it's just a question of their being suspicious as hell, that's all.

K: He is playing '68 all over again.

P: Yeah, we'll he's '68 but he hasn't got a candidate, that's his problem.

K: Well that's right, but he figures if he can survive now till the 7th and just dig in then we'll have to yield.

P: Yeah well, I would certainly hit that with Bunker with him, wouldn't you. Say the President's very disappointed in terms of his reaction speaking in a personal sense . . . In other words, tell him to put it in a very personal sense and that we have to get me in a position to get through this election period and he's to be reasonable. And after that we can be unreasonable. Hold that up for him too. And then we'll do what we god-damn please after the election, but I would hold that up to Bunker. Say we're not interested in doing anything that hurts him but we have to be in a position to have a good position between now and November the 7th and after that we can deal effectively with them. How about that? A little of that, that it comes directly from me, that that kind of a thing we should say.

K: Yeah, it won't change him but we'll do it.

P: If it won't change him don't do it then.

K: No, no, it will keep the record. Let me think about whether if we go too hard . . . Let me draft something and then.

P: Oh yes, you can think about it; we're not . . .

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[9] Jay Lovestone, Director, International Affairs Department, AFL–CIO.

K: What I'm trying to avoid is to have him think you're so determined to go that he has to go public.

P: That's right.

K: And I'd rather fool him a bit and tell him we'll . . .

P: I agree. Also, you can talk to the North Vietnamese in terms of keeping everything quiet till after the election.

K: First we've got to get an agreement.

P: I know.

K: If we don't get an agreement it's better not to get them into the act. If we got an agreement on the basis of what we've worked on—this is the best we're ever going to get. We can't improve that by another year of bombing in my view.

P: I agree; I think that's probably true. Incidentally with regard to these other foreign policy questions, I don't see much in the foreign field coming up do you?

K: No, in the foreign field at the press conference you're in good shape.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

The toughest ones are going to be Vietnam and under these conditions, Mr. President . . .

P: Well Vietnam, we just don't say anything.

K: Yeah, but I wouldn't even say anything about the military situation.

P: Of course not, no. No, we have no comment on it at all. There's nothing to say on the military situation; there's nothing new, is there?

K: No.

P: Isn't it about the same?

K: That's exactly right. My understanding incidentally of McGovern was that the original plan was for him to go on television, or to make that speech on the 10th. Now if that were the case he'd be making it right in the middle of my negotiations.

P: But as you know, always have in mind in terms of our game plan the fact that we're going to use him as the reason for our breaking off.

K: Well exactly.

P: On the other hand you've got to be in a pretty good position. . . . Oh, the only thing I see on Vietnam that requires some comment might be the POW thing, in terms of how it's happened, you know, that we've played politics with it and so forth.

K: That I think you should hit hard.

P: If you would prepare something on that. Now here's the way I plan to handle Vietnam: They're going to say "What is the status of ne-

gotiation? Are you hopeful?" I say "Gentlemen, we have an understanding that there will be no comments on any discussions and I'm not going to have any comment. When meetings are held they will be announced as they are held; this has been the previous case." "Are you hopeful?" "I'm not going to comment." "Are you not hopeful?" "I'm not going to comment."

K: "What do you think of a tri-partite government?"

P: "I'm not going to comment on any matters, anything like that.

K: Then they'll say "Are you still opposed to it?" Say, "Yes, but just don't draw any conclusions."

P: What?

K: I would just say "Don't draw any conclusions; I'm not going into any of this."

P: That's right, that's right. I'll just say I'm not going to be drawn into any comments about this. But wait a minute, you say the question will be a tri-partite government?

K: Yeah, I'd say we are against imposing any particular . . . But then that immediately gets you into trouble with Hanoi before I get there, that's the problem.

P: Well, let's figure a way out of that.

K: See that's my worry.

P: Well, we're for a tri-partite *commission,* but not a government.

K: Yeah, but no one even knows that.

P: Yeah I know. Well we don't even want to say that. And also as I told you we can't have that word coalition ever used. We can't leave that hanging there, probably because of the Thieu problem too, isn't it?

K: Exactly, that's why I'm so worried. But on the other hand if you absolutely totally reject it they may feel that they have to dig in before I get there.

P: Yeah, well I'll figure a way to dance around it.

K: But if you leave the slightest crack you'll have Thieu all over us. I mean you can say our basic position has been that we will not impose any particular government, that we want the future to be determined by the people of South Vietnam and now I'm not going to go . . . and we will not be party to imposing any particular government.

P: What's that going to do to Hanoi?

K: Well, they won't like it. But I'd rather have them a little concerned because they're going to get our proposal anyway and we're not offering them a government.

P: Why don't you just write that one thing down. That's not bad and then just . . . Or the other thing would be just to say, which presents the problem to Thieu, simply when I get the first question on

Vietnam which I will get is say I'm not going to comment on anything on Vietnam, and that covers all questions. "What about tripartite government" and so forth and so on? "I've already indicated that I don't care what the question is and you should not read it one way or the other; I'm simply not going to comment."

K: Yeah well the trouble is when you say you shouldn't read it one way or the other that already leaves it open a little bit.

P: It does? Which is about what we have to do, isn't it?

K: Yeah, but not in Saigon. I think you can stick with the not imposed . . .

P: You don't think that goes too far with Hanoi?

K: Well it goes pretty far but . . . and it gets another bloody uproar here.

P: Well I think the idea we're not going to impose a government on the people of South Vietnam. Is that what we want to say?

K: Yeah, yeah. Something like that.

P: We're not going to impose a government; that's a matter for the people of South Vietnam to determine. Is that what we want to say?

K: Right, that's what we want to say.

P: That isn't too bad. Basically you could then say to Hanoi . . .

K: But that's just about the only question I would answer.

P: The others are no problem.

K: Yeah, ceasefire, won't comment.

P: Why would I get into that Henry?

K: Well they'll ask you are you hopeful for a ceasefire.

P: Well I'm going to say I'm not going to comment on anything.

K: "Under what conditions will you end the bombing?" I wouldn't get into that.

P: Just say I'm not going to comment on that, I'm not going to comment on that.

K: "Well, how effective is the mining?"

P: "I'm not going to comment on that."

K: Exactly, well that's fine then. So the only one you'd answer is the government.

P: Well, that's right, as far as the Vietnamese situation "How effective is the mining?" I'll say that's been covered by the Secretary of Defense.

K: Right.

P: I think we just turn it over to say that he's covered it you know; isn't that a good idea?

K: Right. Or I just would say . . . well I've drafted actually an answer which you could give them.

P: I don't want to indicate that the mining has not been effective.

K: No I've given an answer to that . . . That doesn't bother me too much.

P: Could throw it over to Laird, that's what I was thinking of.

K: Well you can either throw it to Laird or you can say it's achieved its objective.

P: Yeah, the invasion has been stopped.

K: Right, exactly, that's what I drafted.

P: That's what I usually have said, that the invasion has been stopped. That's what it was intended to do. You've drafted the other one, on the government. I don't know how we can dance . . . I guess you just have to say you're not going to impose . . . you'd have to say that in any event wouldn't you.

K: Well let me draft an answer for you and get it up to you by early this afternoon.

P: Not impose a government. And I'm not concerned at all incidentally about no commenting as far as American opinion is concerned about any of these matters; there's no problem. I'll just stonewall them all. The only problem is whether on the government one that causes problems either in Hanoi or Saigon.

K: And my present thought, Mr. President, on strategy is I think we should present our best proposal. We do have the clock running on them. If they turn it down we're in good shape.

P: In other words, present the one that we know Thieu can live with.

K: That we, in our best beliefs think Thieu can live with. Because it may after all be that they want to be raped. I'd hate to be the guy who brings it to him but I guess I have to be the guy. I may not survive it.

P: You never know, I may have to.

K: No, under no conditions can you be in a position, Mr. President . . .

P: No, no, no, no, no. I'm not referring to now but I mean in the final analysis if he's unreasonable we've just got to . . .

K: I think we can use his intransigence to help us with Hanoi.

P: Right. We got them over to our proposal?

K: Exactly.

P: I am not concerned about offering a reasonable proposal.

K: If it should blow, if we can honestly stand before the American people, not as a gimmick, if we can really say to ourselves it is a fair proposal—

P: Well, the main thing about whatever you propose—there is one codeword that has got to be out. It must not be a Coalition Government. It cannot be.

K: No, that cannot be. That is in the proposal. Absolutely.

P: Now a Coalition Commission—as I understand, an Electoral Commission.

K: It has no power.

P: We have always said that there would be an internationally supervised election with the Communists participating—right?

K: And we have said since 1969 there would be an electoral commission in which all parties participate.

P: All parties participate—and we have also said that there would be an election in which the Communists would participate in the government and the fact that . . . Get to Thieu and just say keep . . .

K: Well, I . . .

P: He's got to trust the President. He's never let him down yet.

K: I won't get anything to Thieu now. I think . . .

P: Think about it for a night.

K: Supposing we don't get to an agreement we are in good shape as far as Thieu is concerned. If we do get to an agreement I will just have to go out and . . .

P: And cram it down his throat.

K: And cram it down his throat and say this is it. And if he won't settle on this basis we will have to withdraw our support. We can't fight a war beyond a certain point.

P: Right. Right. Right. My own hunch at the present time—It's not what they will do but what we prefer. It's for you to bring out a very forthcoming agreement and for them to reject it. After the election we will have a free hand to do whatever the hell we want.

K: That's true but that guy is putting us through a hell of a lot . . . First we make a very forthcoming proposal and they reject it which is an easy position to be in.

P: That's the best position for us because . . .

K: Because then if McGovern . . . Then if they go public . . .

P: Make it as confusing as possible the forthcoming proposal, too.

K: Oh, yeah.

P: Good, Henry.

K: Well, the trouble right now is that unless McGovern has inside information he will present a proposal that gives the North Vietnamese more than they have asked for.

P: Yeah. He has inside information? That's the problem?

K: That's what we can't tell.

P: He might have it from our own people, do you think?

K: Well, our own people don't even know it. Although I made the mistake—I gave the State Department two international guarantee clauses of their proposal . . .

P: Yeah.

K: To work on and now Rogers claims he sees a great breakthrough that he can engineer with them. I picked them because they were so nothing.

P: I know. You don't need to be concerned about what I am going to say because I—our tactics election-wise now require absolute sphinx-like attitude on everything, on everything in Vietnam, until we have something because that's why I said that, my only concern is raising expectations. Don't raise any expectations; we don't need to say there's going to be a breakthrough; we don't need to say that we're being reasonable, not a damned thing. Just, I think right now there's one thing that's very surprising, there's a hell of a hawkish sentiment. We just had a . . . for reasons that had nothing to do with us but they polled Massachusetts of all states. For Christ's sakes in Massachusetts with Cambridge and all the rest up there, it's two to one against everything McGovern is for, three to one against amnesty. Two and a half to one against the imposition of a communist government, in Massachusetts! So you see Henry we're in a position now where we don't have to appear to be reasonable. That's why I'm not going to . . . We don't have to defend our policy. The press will get . . . let them say well is the mining effective and do you think you made a mistake and all that. The only thing I want a good answer on is the POWs to put them on a spot. But on the mining and all the rest I'll say well, the results speak for themselves, that's all. And this one, I can say no comment unless that poses more of a problem than saying something. I can say anything.

K: I think you should say no comment on everything except the tri-partite government. There's nothing you can say on anything that will not do damage except on that government and then only to keep Thieu from blowing.

P: That's right, that's right. On the government well you just prepare anything that you, don't tilt it too much toward Thieu. Just sort of make it a little ambivalent, huh?

K: No, on the government, any ambivalence is . . .

P: He'll see it. The other point is that we can say that and then you can go to the North Vietnamese and say that's our public position but privately we're willing to negotiate.

K: Right, well on the government we're not willing to negotiate.

P: Well, you know damn well that they think of that as the government; we're thinking of it.

K: They won't accept the word "committee" in my view.

P: Well that's my point.

K: Because that's where we're going to come out rather well.

P: Right, right, right.

K: I think we're going to come out the way you want. I think we're going to come out with a great public record and no settlement and a free hand after the elections.

P: Well I'll tell you one thing though Henry, we're not going to forget that Thieu misbehaved right now. From a personal standpoint he's done wrong. The only problem we have is that god-dammit he's the best man they're got.

K: He's the best man they've got and if the whole thing goes to pieces . . .

P: Then we have a terrible thing on our hands.

K: Right, exactly. But we've been in tight spots before Mr. President and I think if we have . . .

P: On sure, sure. And after all, the reason we've come through is that we've been damned honorable and decent to everybody.

K: That's right, and that we've done . . .

P: Including him, God.

K: . . . and that we've done what you think is right.

P: All the time, all the time.

K: Without regard for any . . .

P: When you stop to think what we've done for him on Cambodia, what we've done on Laos, what we've done on May 8—Jesus Christ, he owes us one now and he owes it damn fast. He owes it to give us trust, some confidence, and we're not going to sell him down the river, but we have to have a strong position before this election.

K: Well and we have to have a strong position above all after the election Mr. President because I recognize you're in a good position now, partly you're in a good position on Vietnam . . . My own personal analysis, which may not be worth a god-damn, is that McGovern turns people off so much as a person that anything he's for they're against.

P: Let me tell you what I'm saying before the election—that's what we want him to think. After the election we'll do what we god-damn well please. Our position then will be right down their throat. Because if we know it's in their best interest, he's got to be told. But I think we've got to mislead them a little Henry, you see my point? Just as you mislead the . . . we've got to . . . Hanoi and let them think well play

along with us now and maybe it'll be better later. But with Thieu, he's . . .

K: No, Hanoi has to think it will be worse later.

P: And Thieu has got to think it'll be better.

K: I won't tip my hand to Hanoi at all; if there is no settlement then they won't have to know that we disagreed with Saigon. If by the end of the second or third day we have agreed, then I have to tell them okay gentlemen now we got this problem, now to manage it. And you better hold still and you've got to let me handle this. But if they're going to turn it down, no sense telling them Saigon didn't agree with us.

P: I agree.

K: And then we're in the best possible position. Then we can go back to Thieu and say that's it now, we don't need any more, we're in a good posture.

P: Right. When does Haig get back?

K: About midnight tonight, he'll be available tomorrow.

P: Well there's really nothing to talk to him about is there?

K: No. No, I'll be working with him tomorrow.

P: You can talk to him. I'll talk to him, of course but I mean the point is there's nothing that's going to affect anything we do, is there?

K: Well, he may change our minds, but . . .

P: Who? Haig? No.

K: Well he thinks, in his preliminary reaction, he thinks we ought to restore Thieu's confidence. We haven't got that much time; I mean we have a deadline of Monday, of Sunday. You can't cancel this meeting without a catastrophe.

P: Oh, yeah.

K: And also the meeting plays in beautifully into our considerations. No matter what McGovern does now, even if he gives his speech tomorrow, it would be washed out by the meeting in Paris.

P: I don't know what he could put in his speech, but we'll see.

K: He can put nothing in his speech . . .

P: I just hope he puts it in in a very very dovish way, that's all I hope.

K: Well, the one thing we can be sure of is unless he's had coaching, his speech will be more forthcoming than the North Vietnamese ever offered. And once we got him in that position [*less than 1 line not declassified*]. If he offers the enemy more than the enemy is asking for.

P: Right, right. Just don't spend too much time on these, cause I just intend to finesse most of them anyway.

K: Yeah, well on Vietnam really what chances we have for the thing to get unstuck, you get to the no comment line we can manage it.

P: Oh yes, we can except for on the one point and the POWs.

K: Right.

P: Okay, good luck.

K: Right, Mr. President.

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280. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, October 5, 1972, 1350Z.

180. Ref: WHS 2209.[2]

1. On receipt of referenced message this morning, I immediately asked for appointment with Thieu through Nha and confirmed request by note. He had called in all corps commanders for day long meeting and I was not able to reach him until 1730 this afternoon.

2. I began by saying that I wanted to have a very frank talk with him, that as allies and friends it was imperative that we work out our problems together and that clearly we were at a difficult point. The fact is that his reaction to our negotiating problems has been extremely disappointing to President Nixon. The position which he and the other members of his government have taken in opposition to these proposals has made immensely more difficult our joint effort to move in a way that would ensure a non-Communist structure in South Viet-Nam.

3. As General Haig had mentioned, we have had two objectives in these negotiations: A) to assure that any solution will provide for a continuance of the GVN and that it will be in control of the realities of power; and B) to be in a position to conduct the talks. We are convinced that our counter-proposals will assure that the realities of power will remain in the hands of the GVN and ensure its survival.

4. I said that as Thieu knew, we had scheduled a private meeting to begin on Sunday, October 8, and we have no alternative but to

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1135, Jon Howe, Trip Files, John Negroponte Negotiations File, 1972–73, Vol. II. Top Secret; Sensitive; Immediate; Exclusively Eyes Only. A copy was sent to Haig, Howe, and Lord.

[2] In backchannel message WHS 2209, October 5, Kissinger directed Bunker to immediately seek an appointment with Thieu to convey the President's view of Thieu's reaction to the United States proposal and the danger to the Paris negotiations of a public confrontation between the two allies. (Ibid., Box 870, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, October 1972)

proceed with it. We will, however, make a major effort to concentrate on those elements of the proposal that are not in dispute between us, i.e., the security aspects. [garble—We?] will deal very specifically with the military provisions to see whether we can obtain reciprocal assurance of withdrawals from Laos, Cambodia, and South Viet-Nam. Since we do not expect the meeting to succeed, we hope thus to have a basis for continuing on our course. I said that if the results of the meeting are sufficient to justify your coming to Saigon, you will do so, but that in any case you will send an immediate report to me for transmittal to him.

5. I then said that the President wished me to make clear the consequences of a public confrontation between us. In his view this would lead to complete disaster. Our only option in this event would be a unilateral disengagement. The President also wished me to reiterate what you had said in explaining our strategy when you were here in August,[3] that our concern is not with the effects on our election, but with building a platform—creating a position—which will enable us to take the kind of action we want in the post-election period. Should there be a public confrontation with us now, it will be absolutely impossible even to maintain the present level of our military action after the election, much less to step it up. Such a development could only result in negating ten years of effort and the lives of thousands which have been devoted to securing the future we have both sought.

6. I said that it is essential that we now seek ways in which to harmonize our views if we are to be in position in the future to carry on the war. The risks which President Nixon has taken to assure support for his Viet-Nam policy, including bombing and mining, have been very great. It has taken both courage and great skill on his part to accomplish this. As General Haig emphasized, the fact is that support for President Nixon is derived not from the fact that Americans have changed their mind about the war, but that in spite of it he was able to go to Peking and Moscow, which has persuaded the great majority of the American people that he can bring about a more peaceful world.

7. Thieu took notes as I proceeded and then said that he agreed that there must be no public confrontation between us and that for his part he would not permit a public disagreement to occur. He expressed some concern that we had not gone more deeply into the military questions and wondered why we had not done so. I replied that I thought the political problems were more complex and that once these were settled, the settlement of the military questions would follow more logically.

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[3] See Documents 243 and 245.

8. He then asked whether you had explained the GVN proposal of September 13,[4] for he considered this to be a very considerable advance over previous proposals, providing as it does for a Committee of National Reconciliation, a new government in which all political forces will be represented in proportion to the number of popular votes, the right of all political forces to participate in all aspects of the political process and to be eligible for appointment or election to positions in government. If proposals are to be made public, he believed that public opinion outside of Viet-Nam would consider it a forthcoming proposal and wondered why we had been reluctant to propose it.

9. I replied that as I had explained to him previously, we did not believe it to be sufficiently forthcoming to achieve the results we both wanted nor to put the other side on the defensive. Furthermore, as a matter of tactics we had tried to use the framework of the other side's proposal without adopting its substance.

10. Thieu asked me whether I thought the other side would make public their proposal before our election. I said that I assumed they would not do so unless there were mutual agreements since there had been a definite understanding to maintain the privacy of the talks.

11. Thieu then said that he alone had taken the decisions on all of our previous proposals, but he felt that developments now made it imperative for him to take soundings among government leaders. Until now, he had not had the time to do this.

12. I said that I thought it essential that we should concentrate now on working out our differences, that it was simply impossible to let them get to the point of any public confrontation and that he and I should work together closely on this objective. Thieu agreed that we must do so.

13. Assessment requested is in immediately following message.

14. Warm regards.

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[4] The proposal was in a memorandum handed to Bunker on September 13; see Document 258.

281. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Saigon, October 5, 1972, 1351Z.

181. Ref: WHS2209.[2] Subject: Assessment of situation concerning negotiations.

1. I think a number of factors have contributed to the present attitude of Thieu and the GVN concerning negotiations, and more specifically concerning our proposals, as outlined in their various memoranda and Thieu's letter of September 16 to the President.[3] These are:

1) Tripartite formula. In and of itself, whether as CNR or GNR, Thieu believes it will undermine the morale of both the military and the populace; that it will have an adverse effect on political stability, on the willingness of the troops to fight, and on the confidence of the people in the U.S. It will make people apprehensive of the kind of settlement which may evolve and hence more hesitant to provide outright support to the government—they will be inclined to hedge their bets.

2) Speed. I think it is clear that we have moved too rapidly for them. This has made them apprehensive that we are so anxious for a settlement that we will concede too much. In fact I sense that they feel we have already conceded too much. Also, they lack the organization and facilities to move as rapidly as we. For example, they must translate English into Vietnamese and vice versa and [verify?] that Vietnamese and English words have the same connotation.

3) Thieu's suspicious nature—a characteristic of all Vietnamese, but developed to a high degree in Thieu. It probably accounts for his survival and in part for his present dominating position. He can't completely rid himself of this characteristic even when he considers relations with the U.S. For example, he mentioned to General Haig that he "has the impression that Dr. Kissinger doesn't deign to accept GVN views, but goes his own way." Again in a statement to General Haig, he said that some opposition elements have been discussing among themselves and with the French the principles of a GNR, inferring that they were working against the interests of the GVN.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 48, Geopolitical File, Vietnam, Peace Talks, Chronological File, 5–14 October 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Immediate; Exclusively Eyes Only. A copy was sent to Haig, Howe, Lord, and Negroponte.

[2] See footnote 2, Document 280.

[3] See footnote 9, Document 277.

4) Mistrust of the Communists. This obviously is deeply ingrained by the recollection of the events of 1968, which bring it clearly to mind today. As Vice President Huong said in our meeting October 4, "we should ask ourselves whether we can still believe what the Communists say. They have done nothing in return for cessation of the bombing in 1968. In getting the U.S. to agree to accept the NLF as a participant in the negotiations, the latter has gained recognition as a political entity and has subsequently gained widespread recognition and stature."

5) Face. In the Asian concept and the Mandarinal structure of society, this assumes importance. For example, Thieu remarked to General Haig that if Dr. Kissinger plays the role of middleman, we will be confirming that the GVN is a lackey of the U.S.

2. I think the first thing we should do, if it can be done in consonance with our strategy between now and the election, is to slow the pace, to give the GVN more time in which to consider our proposals and to give us more time for persuasion and argument. We clearly cannot be in a position of permitting them to call the tune; we must be firm, but at the same time not let them get the impression that we are attempting to force the pace. We must also not let them paint themselves into a corner as they did in 1968. I think what will be needed is more painstaking explanation and persuasion, while at the same time letting them know we have our own imperatives which we intend to follow and which indeed are essential if they expect our support.

3. I am afraid this is not very helpful, but I shall be giving the matter more thought and communicating with you. I want to say that Al Haig did a masterful job in his presentation to Thieu and the GVN in the two meetings we held with them.

4. Warm personal regards.

282. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, October 6, 1972, 0155Z.

WHS2210. Please request another appointment with Thieu at the earliest possible moment and convey to him the following personal message from the President:

(1) I have discussed with General Haig the outcome of his meetings with you and your associates in Saigon. There is no doubt that there are serious disagreements between us, but it should be clearly understood that these disagreements are tactical in character and involve no basic difference as to the objectives we both seek—the preservation of a non-Communist structure in South Vietnam which we have so patiently built together and which your heroic leadership has preserved against the most difficult of trials. Therefore, I give you my firm assurance that there will be no settlement arrived at, the provisions of which have not been discussed personally with you well beforehand. This applies specifically to the next round of talks in Paris. In these talks, Dr. Kissinger will explore what concrete security guarantees the other side is willing to give us as the basis for further discussions on the political point which might be undertaken following consultations with you. In this context, I would urge you to take every measure to avoid the development of an atmosphere which could lead to events similar to those which we abhorred in 1963 and which I personally opposed so vehemently in 1968. For this same reason, I would hope that you would also avoid taking precautionary measures against developments arising from these talks which, I assure you, would never arise without full, timely and complete consultation between us.

At the same time, however, we cannot be sure at any point in the process that the enemy will not for propaganda or other reasons make public the details of the secret talks. U.S. tactics thus far have been designed to take account of this contingency. General Haig informed me that you would be writing to me in the near future. I look forward to

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, October 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

receiving this communication and hope that you will have had an opportunity to consider the foregoing before completing that message.[2]

President Richard M. Nixon

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[2] Bunker delivered President Nixon's message to Thieu later in the afternoon. In reporting the delivery to Kissinger, Bunker wrote: "I think the President's message came at a most opportune moment; it clearly had a reassuring and steadying effect on Thieu." (Backchannel message 182 from Saigon, October 6; ibid., Box 1135, Jon Howe, Trip Files, John Negroponte Negotiations File, 1972–73, Vol. II)

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283. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to South Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, October 6, 1972, 1725Z.

WHS2211. Thank you for your Saigon 0182.[2] Please advise Thieu that at the next meeting I will stay generally within the broad outlines of the September 15 political proposal[3] and attempt to obtain assurances in the military and security areas which might provide a basis for further discussions on the political point.

Dr. Kissinger will not table the constituent assembly proposal brought by General Haig. If there is sufficient progress in the security area to warrant further discussions of the political point, Dr. Kissinger or General Haig will travel to Saigon to discuss the future negotiating strategy before another meeting is held with the other side. In the interim, you should urge President Thieu to consider carefully the political proposals left by Haig so that he will be prepared to comment on them and offer alternative proposals. It is important that he consider this issue now so that he cannot complain that he has not had sufficient time to consider the various aspects of these proposals should it be necessary to do so.

Warm regards.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 869, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)—China Trip/Vietnam, Camp David Cables, October 1972. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

[2] See footnote 2, Document 282.

[3] See Document 263 and footnote 2 thereto.

284. Editorial Note

On October 7, 1972, President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry A. Kissinger flew to Paris to meet with Le Duc Tho. By that time, Kissinger believed his earlier meetings with Le to have been preludes to the most serious negotiations yet, those scheduled for October 8–10. He later wrote: "we were approaching a crucial point. We had in principle settled all military issues: cease-fire, infiltration, withdrawals, release of prisoners, international supervision, Laos. We lacked agreement on Cambodia. Le Duc Tho was still pushing political formulas designed to undermine Saigon. But his eagerness for a three-day meeting . . . left no doubt that we had not yet heard the last word. That might prove unacceptable and when we came to drafting what had been agreed *in principle* [emphasis added] the whole process might evaporate. But we had come a long way. The next meeting would bring either a breakthrough or a commitment to another military test." (*White House Years,* pages 1337–1338)

As the United States and North Vietnam came closer to common ground in these negotiations, however, it became even clearer that serious differences over objectives, strategy, and tactics existed between the United States and its ally South Vietnam. As Major General Alexander M. Haig later recalled, he did his best to reassure Thieu that an agreement would not bring about, as Thieu feared it would, the disappearance of South Vietnam, but Thieu was "beyond reassurance." (*Inner Circles,* page 294)

Thus, in the run-up to October 8, the most insistent challenge the Nixon administration faced was that posed by President Thieu. "We had to prevent Thieu from making our dispute public," Kissinger wrote in his memoirs, "which could undermine both our negotiating positions with Hanoi and our domestic position with Nixon's constituency on the right. But we had also to put him on notice that the evolving negotiations might force us to return to some of the political proposals that Haig had discussed with him." (*White House Years,* page 1340) More starkly, shortly before Kissinger departed for Paris, Nixon told him that should North Vietnam accept the September 15 proposal, the United States would have to, despite Thieu's objection, "cram it down his throat," and Kissinger agreed. (See Document 279)

In the upcoming round of negotiations the Communists also had to reconsider their approach. The Easter Offensive had faltered in June and stalled in early July. Despite the fact that North Vietnamese troops had won and now occupied a good deal of territory in northern and western South Vietnam, they had not won the day. In consequence, the senior leadership in Hanoi had to craft a new plan of campaign regarding how best to achieve the long-term goals of defeating South

Vietnam and uniting the two Vietnams. The necessity for accommodation became obvious to the leadership and to key advisers after the South Vietnamese retook Quang Tri City in mid-September. The situation seemed, therefore, to dictate a return to the negotiating table to make short-term concessions to achieve long-term goals.

How Hanoi came to that conclusion is related in the writing of one of the participants, Doan Huyen, a seasoned mid-level functionary and policy analyst/adviser in the Politburo Sub-Committee CP50. The subcommittee analyzed topics relevant to the peace talks and advised the Politburo on how to handle the negotiations. Doan Huyen reported to Nguyen Co Thach, Deputy Foreign Minister and Central Committee member who reported to the Politburo. Later Doan wrote about the conclusions his section reached and the advice they gave in mid and late September 1972:

"After weighing the current battlefield posture of both our side and the enemy in Quang Tri, considering the fact that we had been forced to switch to a purely defensive posture following the loss of the Citadel, after reviewing the primary issues of greatest contention between the two sides in the negotiations (these issues were the political issue in South Vietnam and the issue of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam), and after considering the fact that the negotiations were now being conducted during the final phase of the U.S. Presidential election, we recommended to Comrade Nguyen Co Thach that he ask the Politburo to make decisions on the direction we should take on dealing with these two issues and that the Politburo provide guidance to our delegation in Paris on whether we should stick firmly to or loosen up on these two key issues. . . .

"We also recommended that we lower our demands, to some extent at least, on the South Vietnamese political issue. This was an issue of great contention between our side and Kissinger and involved the government structure in South Vietnam: Should it be a tri-partite coalition government, a government of national reconciliation, or a Committee For the Peaceful Reconciliation of the Nation?

"Comrade Nguyen Co Thach agreed with the way I and the other CP50 specialists had presented the problem. He briefed Comrade Nguyen Duy Trinh and recommended that the Politburo meet to provide its thinking on this matter.

"On the day of the meeting, after participating in the Politburo discussion, Thach returned and briefed us on the thinking of the Politburo and the decision it had made. Without providing any additional analysis of the situation, he told of the conclusion that Brother Ba (Comrade Le Duan) had reached. Le Duan had said: 'If we want to speed up the negotiations in Paris and sign an agreement before November 1972 (meaning before the U.S. Presidential election), we must concen-

trate our efforts on doing whatever it takes to resolve our first objective, which is *to fight to force the Americans to withdraw.* [Italicized words indicate Le Duan was quoting from a document, possibly from the Politburo meeting.] The achievement of our first objective will create the conditions necessary for us to subsequently attain our second objective, *to fight to make the puppets collapse.'* [Italicized words are the second phrase in a famous wartime saying of Ho Chi Minh: *Fight to make the Americans get out, fight to make the puppets collapse.*]

"For that reason, Thach said, during the upcoming round of negotiations we had to firmly grasp the two requirements that we had to meet in order to attain our first objective:

"1. Completely and permanently end all U.S. military involvement in South Vietnam; end the American war in South Vietnam; achieve the complete withdrawal of all American and satellite [allied] troops from South Vietnam; and end the bombing and mining of North Vietnam.

"2. Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam would be frozen in the positions they currently held. Under no circumstances would North Vietnamese troops be withdrawn from anywhere, and under no circumstances would there be any regrouping and withdrawal of troops similar to what had been done under the terms of the 1954 Geneva Agreement.

"The achievement of these two requirements would lead to the recognition that, in practical terms, there were in fact two governments, two armies, and two zones of control. This would create a new balance of forces that would be extremely favorable to our side and these favorable conditions would allow us to continue the struggle to achieve our second objective." (Doan, "Defeating the Americans," in *The Diplomatic Front During the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam,* pages 138–140)

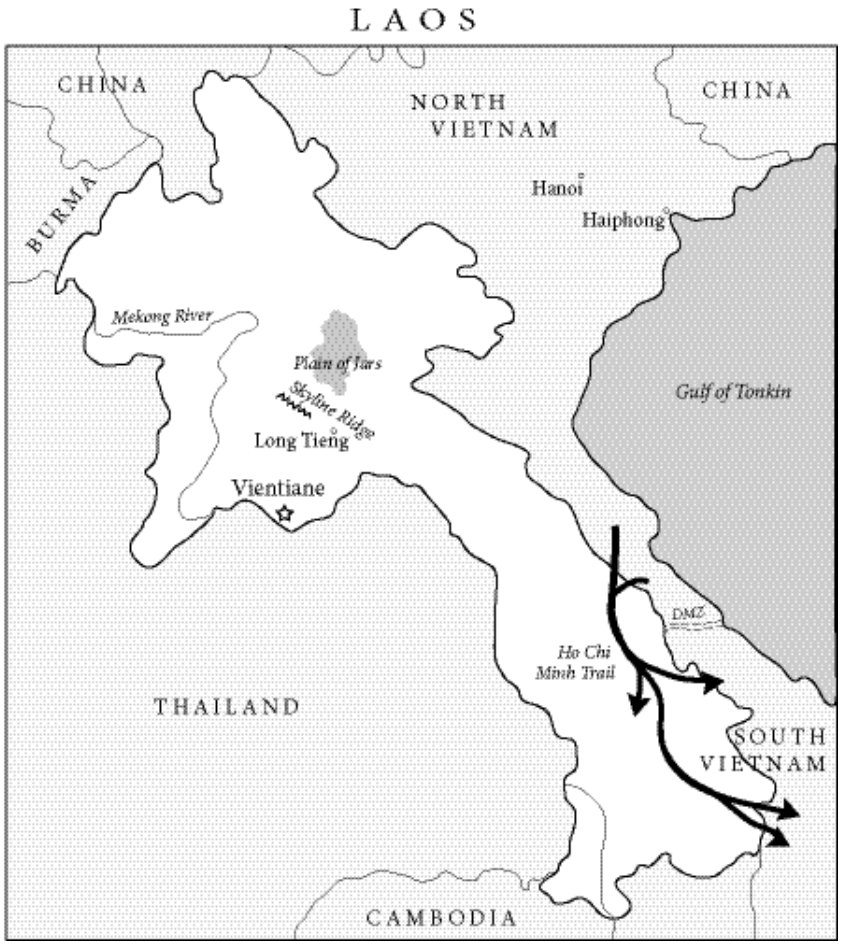
Based on the work of Sub-Committee CP50, Nguyen Co Thach recommended concessions ("loosening up" the CP50 called it) on the issue of the future structure of the government in the South. He and the specialists in the Sub-Committee believed that this was the best way to get the Americans out of Vietnam. Therefore, as Doan later observed, "we do not need to demand that the Saigon government be eliminated or that Thieu be forced to resign. All we needed, he [Thach] said, was some kind of governmental structure involving national reconciliation and concord, in accordance with our lowest-level requirement." (Ibid., page 140) The Politburo accepted the recommendations presented by Nguyen Co Thach and together they became the approach Le Duc Tho was to follow in Paris.

Hanoi also believed that it was important to get agreement as soon as possible. Therefore, on October 4 it sent instructions to Le Duc Tho in Paris that read in part: "We must strive to end the war before the U.S. Presidential election (7 November 1972) and defeat the American plot to prolong the negotiations in order to get past the elections. We

need to pressure the U.S. to officially sign the treaty, implement a ceasefire, and withdraw U.S. and satellite troops from South Vietnam. In order to accomplish this, we must take the initiative on the requirements of a solution, the content of this agreement, the timing, the type of negotiations conducted, the method for signing the agreement, and how to conduct the struggle during the meetings to be held in the coming days." (Ibid., page 141)

By October 7, the Politburo and its advisers had devised a sophisticated and complex approach to the upcoming round of negotiations, one that in critical ways meshed with that of the United States. Realizing that the United States was the single most important obstacle to defeating South Vietnam, the Politburo had instructed Le Duc Tho to offer the precise concessions often insisted on by the Americans—Thieu no longer had to resign, the South Vietnamese government no longer had to be dismantled, and the Communist coalition government proposal would be watered down to an election commission, the purpose of which was to effect a political settlement between the Vietnamese—that would secure their departure. If these concessions, viewed now as tactical by Hanoi, were offered to and accepted by the United States, agreement on the terms of American military withdrawal, Hanoi's great strategic objective, could be quickly had. After all, these terms, including the return of prisoners of war, were fundamentally those the United States had advocated since mid-1971. Furthermore, Hanoi's proposal as structured reflected to a substantial degree Nixon and Kissinger's longstanding desire to separate the military and political issues in the negotiations. By separating the issues, the American leaders believed that the military ones could be agreed to quickly with relative ease and, in the wake of such agreement, the United States could honorably depart, leaving the political issues to be settled by the Vietnamese parties in further negotiations.

Appendix



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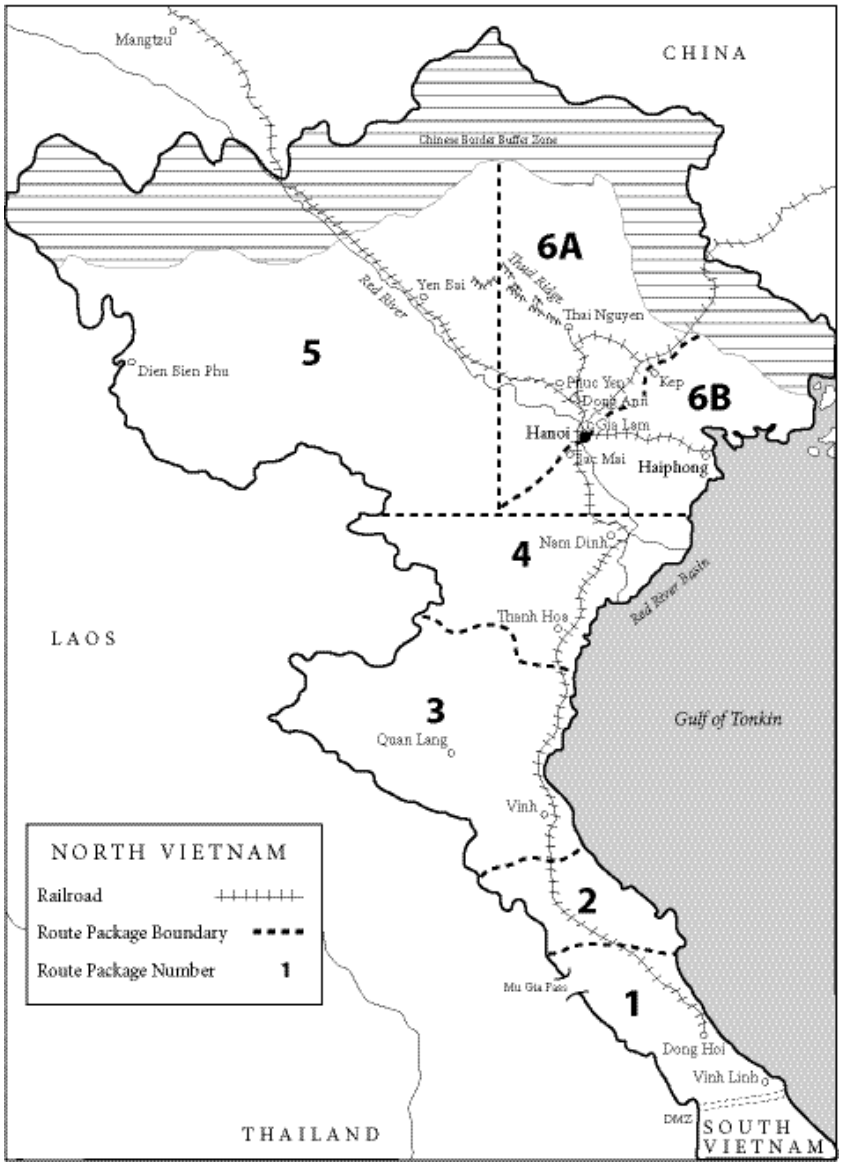

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