

## 204. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 19, 1970, 1–2:20 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Hard Options on Laos

### PARTICIPATION

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Marshall Green

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

CIA

Richard Helms

Thomas H. Karamessines

JCS

General Earle Wheeler

NSC Staff

John Holdridge

Dr. Kissinger opened the discussion by asking if there were any B-52 targets in Laos which were presently identified. General Wheeler said that there were two known target areas North and East of the general Sam Thong–Long Tieng area containing troop concentrations, but nothing in the immediate vicinity or near Site 272. Mr. Helms suggested going back to the North Vietnamese lines of communication, and General Wheeler agreed that this could be done if reconnaissance was possible under the bad weather conditions now prevailing.

Dr. Kissinger asked if there were chokepoints which could be hit, noting that the North Vietnamese were complaining about the condition of the road. Ambassador Johnson picked this up by wondering whether the area of the passes into Laos offered tactical or B-52 targets. General Wheeler said in response that there were targets on both sides of the Barthelmy Pass which were suitable for tacair strikes if the weather permitted. He mentioned SAM and AAA sites.

Ambassador Green raised the question of strikes against Sam Neua, which was a politically sensitive area long exempt from aerial attack. General Wheeler stated that such attacks could be easily laid

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

on. Dr. Kissinger asked if this was a populated area; if so, we should not attack it. On B-52's, Dr. Kissinger wondered if we could give authority to Ambassador Godley and MACV to order B-52 strikes if targets were identified. Mr. Helms felt that this was the best way to go about ordering such strikes, and Ambassador Johnson agreed, saying that if we were going to take this action, the strikes should be made when targets were actually present. Ambassador Green suggested that as a preceding step, Ambassador Godley might be asked if lucrative targets were actually present. There was a wide area to consider, including chokepoints, roads, etc., and we in Washington would want to know if the targets might appear marginal. When asked how this procedure would differ from our present practice, Ambassador Johnson explained that Ambassador Godley and MACV presently come in to recommend a target, which is then approved or disapproved by Washington. Ambassador Green pointed out that Ambassador Godley has not yet suggested just what he has in mind. Dr. Kissinger expressed the belief that there ought, in fact, to be some restrictions in B-52 operations, e.g., the ground rules should rule out attacks on populated areas. He asked what General Wheeler thought about procedures. General Wheeler felt that Ambassador Godley and MACV should be given authority to go ahead. He did not believe that any specific time-period should be imposed on this authority, since prior reconnaissance and target scope photography would be required, which would take a minimum of 24-hours.

Ambassador Johnson said he was not necessarily recommending B-52 operations in bringing this option up, but rather cataloguing what we might do. He suggested that the paper on military options which had been prepared last year for the WSAG provided a useful catalogue in itself.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Helms interjected with the thought that AC-130s from South Laos might be helpful if diverted northward. General Wheeler agreed that such might be the case. He would ask his Air Force people.

Returning to the catalogue, Ambassador Johnson listed the possibility of increased use of tacair in Northern Laos. However, he took it that the system was already saturated, and there was no real room for any increase. Mr. Helms again suggested the use of gunships. These could be set up easily if General Wheeler were to give the order.

Again picking up the catalogue, Ambassador Johnson listed striking politically sensitive targets in North Laos such as Sam Neua and strikes along the North Vietnamese border within 10 nautical miles of it. Ambassador Green pointed out that we were already striking up to

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<sup>2</sup> A summary of this paper is in Document 138.

4 kilometers of the border, and that this option was about what we were doing now with the exception of attacking Sam Neua. Dr. Kissinger asked for a report on targets around Sam Neua which could be hit without civilian casualties by gunships or other types of aircraft.

The next catalogue item listed by Ambassador Johnson was increased Thai support, which included artillery support (already underway) and employment of the Thai air force. He mentioned that Thai pilots had previously been used to fly Lao T-28s, but that this new option included overt air assistance. Dr. Kissinger questioned this latter step, since as he understood it we were already giving about as much tactical air support in Laos as could be effectively used.

The next item listed by Ambassador Johnson was an improved US advisory system in Laos, which he thought would not be helpful at this time. Continuing, he mentioned the staging of ground attacks on Sam Neua, which was not feasible at this time because there was no capability. Ambassador Green observed that this option involved following up prior bombing attacks with ground operations. Ambassador Johnson described Sam Neua as a key central control point for both the North Vietnamese forces in Laos and the Pathet Lao, but reiterated that we did not now have the capability of striking it on the ground. Another catalogue item listed by Ambassador Johnson was mortar and rocket attacks against North Vietnamese supply points. This, he said, would require a long lead time, with problematical results.

Turning to political as opposed to military measures, Ambassador Johnson listed the possibility of an RLG appeal to the Geneva co-chairmen and to the members of the ICC. This move was in effect already under consideration. He then listed admitting US air operations openly, presumably as a signal to North Vietnam. Digressing for a moment, he reported that there was a ticker item in from Vientiane saying that there was already talk in the town about "mercenaries" being moved into the Long Tieng area. This item reported a figure of 300 mercenaries moving in, and stated that while there was no immediate identification of their origin, added that Thai officers had been working with Vang Pao. The Vientiane ticker item raised the question of what we should tell people on the Hill about the Thai role. Mr. Helms recalled that all the Symington Subcommittee had been told was that a Thai battalion had been in Laos last year, but had later been withdrawn. Ambassador Johnson felt that something should be said about the Sierra Romeo IX battery, but he was not sure as to who should be told or what should be said.

The next item on Ambassador Johnson's list was introducing Thai ground forces. From this, the discussion focussed upon the pros and cons of sending the Thai RCT to Long Tieng. Dr. Kissinger declared that he could see disadvantages in putting Thai forces into the combat

area but wondered whether there might be some merit in moving Thai forces to the border. He asked what would be involved in getting Thai forces into Laos. Ambassador Johnson explained that the process would involve going through the Lao and having Souvanna ask the Thai for help. Souvanna would probably be very slow in responding, as he would be reluctant to have Thai forces cross the river just to be there—he would want them to be involved militarily, if used at all. Dr. Kissinger questioned the cost to us if the Thai were to become involved. What would they want as a *quid pro quo*? Would they really need to be paid in some way to defend their own country? There was general agreement among the others present that the Thai at the minimum would want the US to pick up the support costs of any Thai forces involved, whether simply moving to the Thai border or going into Laos.

In Ambassador Green's opinion one of the things which the Thai would ask us would be whether we had activated the Taksin Plan.<sup>3</sup> They would also want to know what role we ourselves intended to play. Ambassador Johnson agreed, adding that in any move to the border or across the river the Thai would ask us if this meant activation of the Taksin Plan. However, there was no other feasible plan which he could see, and hence any action by the Thai would place us in an impossible dilemma and cause questions to arise as to whether the Taksin Plan was dead. Dr. Kissinger asked if we couldn't say they were doing it for deterrent purposes, and asked, too, if the deterrence were to fail, wouldn't the Thai ask us to activate the Taksin Plan anyway?

Ambassador Green brought up the possibility of sending the crack Thai forces now in South Vietnam. However, we would want to ask here whether we wanted these forces taken out of South Vietnam. Mr. Helms thought that Lao SGUs would probably be better than Thai forces in the immediate situation and Mr. Karamessines confirmed that three SGU battalions plus two companies of guerrillas were being moved into Long Tieng. Ambassador Johnson affirmed that this was the heart of the problem—the willingness and the capability of the Lao to defend their own country. There are a lot of Lao forces elsewhere in the country which were not engaged at all. Dr. Kissinger emphasized that the President wanted to demonstrate to the North Vietnamese that they would not be able to get a free show in Laos. Mr. Helms endorsed this view, observing that the North Vietnamese had violated the understanding under which the bombing halt had been undertaken in Vietnam, and that we could pass the word to the North Vietnamese that if they didn't stop now, we would strike in North Vietnam. We could easily hit the many supply depots in the southern part of North

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 7, Document 203.

Vietnam without hitting Hanoi. Ambassador Johnson said that we could also bomb both sides of the Barthelmy Pass. According to General Wheeler this could easily be done. Barthelmy Pass was not a chokepoint, but contained good targets. To a suggestion from Ambassador Johnson that if we were to act in this way we should not say anything, Mr. Helms said that it would be good to give a warning that we intended to follow through. Hanoi had been calling our hand again and again since March 1968, and we should take firm action. Ambassador Johnson asked if all this had not been in the context of Vietnam, to which Mr. Helms replied that he felt the message should be passed which would put the situation in its total context.

Ambassador Johnson reverted to his catalogue and listed the limited introduction of US ground forces into Laos in the Panhandle. General Wheeler remarked that we had already put small teams into the Panhandle—this was the Prairie Fire operation which had not created much of an effect.

Other catalogue items listed by Ambassador Johnson, which appeared overly drastic at this time, included a resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam, unlimited air and naval bombardment of North Vietnam without restraints, SEATO intervention, reconvening the Geneva Conference, repudiation of the Geneva Agreement and breaking off the Paris talks. From these Dr. Kissinger suggested that political measures might be considered, and wondered if Admiral McCain might not be asked to visit Bangkok. General Wheeler said that Admiral McCain was presently in Saigon, where he had attended the just-concluded SEACOORDS meeting, and could be easily sent to Bangkok. Dr. Kissinger raised the question of possibly sending Admiral McCain to Vientiane. Was there anything against such a move? Ambassador Green responded to the effect that this depended on what came out of the meeting in Vientiane between Admiral McCain and Ambassador Godley. The short-term effect could be to get the North Vietnamese to stay their hand, but over the long term the effect could be negative. He thought that the tactic of attempting to give signals through meetings of this sort was not too effective, since the Communists were on to it. They had possibly held off in earlier days, but might not do so now. A brief discussion followed of the advantages of having a meeting between Admiral McCain and Ambassadors Godley and Unger in Vientiane or somewhere else in the area, such as Udorn. Mr. Helms thought that Udorn would be a new twist, but Ambassador Green felt that we would not want the Communists to pick up the challenge which Admiral McCain's presence in the area would pose. Mr. Helms felt that this was a valid point, but on the other hand, we had no surcease from North Vietnamese pressures. How could we get any worse off?

Ambassador Johnson thought we would be certainly worse off if the North Vietnamese were to push all along the line, to which Mr.

Helms asked what they were doing now? Ambassador Johnson suggested that the North Vietnamese might now be operating within previously claimed territory, and would not go beyond it. He asked what Mr. Helms thought the North Vietnamese presently intended, and how far we should go to resist. Mr. Helms countered by pointing out that the Meo were the only effective fighting force in Laos; if they were eliminated, what then?

Dr. Kissinger asked if we would be much worse off if Admiral McCain went to Vientiane. Ambassador Green said that we would be worse off, because the other side would call our bluff. We had succeeded in bluffing them before, e.g. in 1962 when we sent in the Marines to Thailand, but couldn't do so now. Continuing, Ambassador Green noted the possibility of Congressional resolutions cutting off our funds in Vietnam, Laos and everywhere else, and said that the fundamental issue which we faced was how much of our prestige we were laying on the line. We would need, also, to consider the relationship of Cambodia to what was going on, and it seemed likely that the North Vietnamese estimate of our involvement in Cambodia was very high. Their situation was probably more difficult than it seemed to us at the moment. They were having difficulty moving up supplies, had been hurt by tactical air, and now would definitely be worried about the course of events in Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger asked that a list be made of what could be done now. Ambassador Green said that the proposal to bring in gunships, and the other moves which had been mentioned in the morning meeting such as moving in SGUs, falling back from Long Tieng, and B-52 strikes, were feasible and made sense. Dr. Kissinger agreed that we could count on the gunships. Mr. Helms suggested in addition that helicopter gunships—Cobras—be brought in from South Vietnam. The question of US pilots for the Cobras was then discussed, and it was agreed that this posed no problem. The Cobras would be based in Udorn, where we were in a better position anyway to provide support, and there was no difference between helicopter pilots over Laos and the other US pilots who were in action. There was not much difference between Vientiane and Udorn in proximity to the battlefield. It was also accepted that there would be some losses.

Dr. Kissinger again requested views on political moves. Ambassador Green explained that State's thinking was focussing upon the Indian cease-fire plan. The visible side of this from the US standpoint would be letters from the President to the Geneva signatories, and also to the Soviet Union citing its reply to the President's earlier letter and telling the Soviets that it was their duty to support the Geneva Agreement. Dr. Kissinger called upon Ambassador Green to get a tough letter or reply to the Soviets over to the White House by March 20, so that

this part of the exercise could be accomplished before the weekend. He suggested that the letter make plain that we would not accept the Soviets' contention that they had no responsibility and add, too, that their reaction would have a significant effect on US–USSR relationships. He would like to deliver this letter to Dobrynin March 20, or March 21 at the latest.<sup>4</sup> Ambassador Green noted that the letters to the other Geneva signatories would be specifically tailored to fit the circumstances of our relationship with each, i.e. what we said to the French would not be the same as what we said to the Chinese.<sup>5</sup>

General Wheeler went down a checklist of actions which he proposed to take on the basis of the present discussion. These included the use of C–130 gunships over the Plain of Jars; seeing if suitable targets could be found in the Sam Neua area; seeking out B–52 targets (Defense was already trying to locate such now, but needed reconnaissance to the southwest of Sam Thong and Long Tieng); striking supplies, SAM sites and AAA sites on both sides of the Barthelmy Pass; locating chokepoints for air strikes; and moving Cobras and gunships to Laos from Vietnam. Mr. Helms suggested that this list be augmented by the movement of ARDF assets to Laos from Vietnam.

Ambassador Johnson stated that there would be no problems from State on the Cobras and the gunships. However, with respect to B–52 strikes and bombing both sides of the Barthelmy Pass, State would appreciate an opportunity to comment. Dr. Kissinger assured Ambassador Johnson that this opportunity would be provided.

Dr. Kissinger asked for the views of those present on arranging a meeting between Admiral McCain and Ambassadors Godley and Unger. General Wheeler said that if such a meeting were not followed up, it would be counterproductive. On the other hand, if it were followed up with actions such as B–52 strikes and attacks on both sides

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<sup>4</sup> On March 21 Nixon sent Kosygin a letter stating that he did not share the Soviet leader's view, expressed in a letter of March 13 to Nixon, that consultation on Laos by the Geneva signatories was "unrealistic and would not be helpful." Nixon suggested that the Soviet position was "illogical and unconvincing" and asked Kosygin to reconsider it. The letter did not state that broader U.S.-Soviet relations could be affected by the Laos issue, but did confirm the "desire to base our relations on the principle of negotiation rather than confrontation." (Both letters are in the National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 LAOS)

<sup>5</sup> The letters to the signatories of the Geneva Convention of 1962 other than the Co-Chairmen, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, were eventually sent on April 7. Nixon expressed concern with the situation in Laos and called for consultations of the signatories under Article IV of the Declaration of Neutrality of Laos. Nixon informed the head of state of each signatory nation that the British were prepared to consult, but the Soviet Union was not. Nixon asked that each signatory support his call for consultations. (Letter from Nixon to Lon Nol, April 7; *ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 749, Presidential Correspondence, Cambodia, Lon Nol, Prime Minister (1970)) Other similar letters are *ibid.* under respective head of state folders.

of the Barthelmy Pass, it would be a useful step. Ambassador Green agreed, suggesting that Udorn be the meeting place and that it be followed up by air strikes using Cobras and C-130s. General Wheeler wondered if the visibility in Udorn would be adequate, to which Ambassador Green said this could be arranged. It depended on how we handled the press. Mr. Helms supported this position, saying that it made a good mix and that a meeting in Udorn was almost as good as one in Vientiane.

Mr. Nutter raised the question of whether the diversion of gunships to northern Laos would have an effect on the Panhandle. General Wheeler said that it would, but the main question was what issue was most important at any one time. Dr. Kissinger said he assumed that the diversion would not last for more than two weeks.

Dr. Kissinger said that he hoped to be able to tell General Wheeler by 3 o'clock or what moves would be approved. The McCain-Godley-Unger meeting should be arranged fairly quickly. B-52 reconnaissance could be carried out immediately, and would be picked up by the North Vietnamese. As to targets in Sam Neua, General Wheeler stated that he would need to look into what target data was on hand. Reconnaissance might be needed, since this had been an exempt area for years.

Dr. Kissinger asked if there were any other moves besides the letters from the President to Kosygin and the other Geneva signatories which we should consider. Ambassador Johnson responded that we could tell the Indians that we have no objections to their going ahead on the cease-fire move. Mr. Helms had not heard of this ploy, and after it was explained to him declared that the Panhandle was excluded from any cease-fire. General Wheeler took the same position. Ambassador Johnson said that such would be the case, as the Indians had already made plain. Nobody was under any illusions that we would accept limitations on our freedom of action in the Panhandle. Dr. Kissinger asked Mr. Helms if he saw any problem in the fact that under a cease-fire the North Vietnamese could stay on in the area now occupied during the rainy season. Mr. Helms replied in effect that since we had no assets anyway to drive the North Vietnamese away, and in fact had no assets to hold them south of Long Tieng if they wanted to go this way, he saw no practical grounds on which to object. To a remark by Dr. Kissinger that he had thought from the morning session that it might be possible to hold a line south of Long Tieng, Mr. Karamessines explained that a fall-back to Site 272 was possible, but that the area could not be held if a major effort were launched. The question was whether the enemy would want to go south, in view of his lack of familiarity with the ground and his supply difficulties. To this Dr. Kissinger asked if it thus could be concluded that the enemy had already effectively overthrown the military balance in Laos. Mr. Helms replied affirmatively, adding that the Meo were pretty well fin-



ished off for the present, and that our problem would be how to help stabilize the situation. General Wheeler agreed, commenting that he had no faith in the other Laotian troops at all. Ambassador Johnson had no argument, either. Dr. Kissinger wondered if anyone was worried about the junction of routes 7 and 13. Was there a threat to Vang Pao from this direction? Ambassador Johnson replied that he did not see a threat now, since the North Vietnamese lines would be greatly extended. Ambassador Green hoped that we could make them pay a price if they came from this direction.

Dr. Kissinger stated that he agreed with Mr. Helms on the score of the North Vietnamese challenging us on every possible occasion. Until we stopped backing away we would not get a settlement in either Laos or Vietnam. What we were attempting to do here was to show that we were meeting the challenge. He asked General Wheeler to provide B-52 targets quickly and to undertake reconnaissance immediately. He went on to support the McCain–Godley meeting, the move of C-130s and Cobras to cover North Laos, and the drafting of the two types of letters. All of these actions could be considered approved, and there was no need to wait for a further meeting.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kissinger outlined these actions in a March 19 memorandum to Nixon, who initialed it. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-072, WSAG Meeting, 3/19/70, p.m.) Kissinger then sent Rogers and Laird a March 19 memorandum directing them to take the actions Nixon approved. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 LAOS)

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

Washington, March 19, 1970.

SUBJECT

The Coup in Cambodia

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970. Secret. Sent for information. On the bottom of the first page Nixon wrote: "I want Helms to develop & implement a plan for maximum assistance to pro U.S. elements in Cambodia—*Don't* put this out to 303 or the Bureaucracy. Handle like our air strikes." Kissinger wrote at the top of the page: "I want to discuss with Helms Monday am." Holdridge sent the draft of this memorandum to Kissinger on March 18, suggesting that he send it to the President. (Ibid.)

Herewith our preliminary estimate as to what has happened in Cambodia:<sup>2</sup>

*What Has Happened.* The National Assembly “unanimously agreed to withdraw confidence from Prince Norodom Sihanouk. . . Prince Sihanouk shall cease his function as Chief of State. . . Mr. Cheng Heng, Chairman of the National Assembly, is entrusted with the function until the next election of a true Chief of State. . .” Aside from its doubtful Constitutionality, this declaration is fuzzy as to what has been changed (Cheng Heng has been Acting Chief of State since Sihanouk’s January departure from Cambodia), and there are various Constitutional processes for deciding who will be Chief of State. The only clear point is that there has been a no-confidence motion against Sihanouk.

Sihanouk is flying from Moscow to Peking, and has said that he will return. However, the airport in Phnom Penh has been closed, probably to forestall such a move.

*The Nature of Power in Cambodia.* The National Assembly itself has heretofore been a cipher, although it is elective (and a new election is scheduled this year). The same may be said of the interim Chief of State. The power elements in Cambodia have been

—Sihanouk, with his royal title, popularity, and tactical brilliance.

—Prime Minister Lon Nol, normally thought Sihanouk’s heir-apparent, with the Army backing him, and with control of much of the lucrative smuggling trade with the Communists.

—Sirik Matak, Deputy Prime Minister, a forceful personality without much organizational backing.

There are few other sources or organized political power. The Prince’s political party, the *Sangkum*, is not disciplined and will probably respond to whoever is in power, or disintegrate.

*The Nature of the Challenge.* Lon Nol and Sirik Matak have long struggled with Sihanouk for the right to administer the Government free of his personal and whimsical interventions. They have been in and out of office for years, having been put in most recently (by Sihanouk) last August to clean up the economic mess which was developing out of his inept handling of economic problems. He made a desultory challenge to their administration in December, but was overruled.

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<sup>2</sup> On March 18 the Department of State sent the White House its preliminary analysis of the situation in Cambodia. Holdridge sent it to Kissinger and noted that it was “substantially in line” with this memorandum to the President, “although it is heavier on description and lighter on speculation as to possible outcomes and implications.” Holdridge also summarized Japanese analysis, which held that the Lon Nol/Sirik Matak Government would be stable because of Lon Nol’s control over the Army and Sirik Matak’s new control over the police and bureaucracy. (Ibid.)

Lon Nol and Sirik Matak have not differed with Sihanouk on the broad outlines of policy, although they probably favor a freer economic climate and more positive efforts to deal with Cambodia's economic and bureaucratic problems. As the new Communiqué proclaims, they stand for Sihanouk's neutral policy.

Lon Nol has heretofore been content to be Number Two, but this appears to be a straight power challenge. In popular anger against Vietnamese Communist incursions, he has found a good issue to challenge Sihanouk (and the Army fanned up that anger), but Lon Nol's dealings with the Communists do not suggest that he is a fervent anti-Communist or anti-Vietnamese patriot.

*Future Choices.* This situation will probably move in one of three ways:

—A Lon Nol/Sirik Matak-dominated new Government supported by the Army, with little popular support and forced to buy popularity with anti-Vietnamese slogans and economic progress.

—A shaky compromise akin to the barons' truce with King John in 1215, permitting Sihanouk to come back as Chief of State but with much limited powers. This would be an unstable situation, as Sihanouk maneuvered, probably successfully, to outflank and eliminate his challengers.

—A Sihanouk victory, by turning the Army against Lon Nol.

*The Implications for Foreign Policy and for Us.*<sup>3</sup> Khmer nationalism has been aroused against the Vietnamese Communist occupation. Any future Government will probably have to be more circumspect and covert about its cooperation with the Vietnamese. Lon Nol has chosen this issue, and he will need to be able to demonstrate publicly that he is taking action against the Vietnamese occupation. Similarly, Sihanouk will not for some time open himself to the charge of being "soft on the Vietnamese."

This will create serious problems for the VC/NVA, which will have considerable reason to take a more hostile line toward Cambodia.

Lon Nol will have to keep his followers happy. Therefore, if he wins, we should not expect a sudden termination of smuggling to the Communists.

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<sup>3</sup> On March 18 at noon, Kissinger and Rogers discussed the overthrow of Sihanouk. Rogers suggested, "I think we should be very careful not to say anything until we know more about it." Kissinger responded, "All we are saying is that we respect their neutrality and not another word." Rogers stated that, "Mansfield said we are not involved in anyway. That's a good line to follow but I think it's unwise to say whether or not we have agents there." Rogers also thought the development could "be fortunate in some ways. If SVN and Cambodia can work together." Kissinger noted that, "It may compensate for Laos." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological Record)

Sihanouk could turn to the Vietnamese Communists for military support to neutralize Lon Nol's military strength, but he is probably too clever a politician to do so in any open way and thus invite the label of "Quisling."

A Lon Nol victory could result in a more pro-US and pro-Thai policy. Lon Nol would want US economic aid, and he would be less inclined to trust his ability to manipulate the Communists, which would encourage him to develop his relations with the more reliable Thai neighbors.

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

Washington, March 20, 1970.

SUBJECT

Recognition of the New Government in Cambodia

You raised a question over the telephone this afternoon as to the status of our recognition of Cambodia.

We have taken the line that the U.S. Government has not taken any action to alter the status of its diplomatic relations with Phnom Penh. We have not explicitly recognized the new regime contrary to some recent erroneous press reports. They claim to be the continuing legal Government of Cambodia, and we have simply not challenged that claim.

The Premier is of course the one appointed by Sihanouk last summer (Lon Nol), and the acting Chief of State (Cheng Heng) has been acting in that capacity since Sihanouk's departure for France in January.

If asked whether Sihanouk does not claim to be still the Chief of State, I suggest you say simply that this is a question which we assume the Cambodians will be working out, and that we have not taken a position on it.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970. Limited Official Use. Drafted by Kissinger, Haig, and Grant on March 20. A note on the memorandum indicates it went to the President on March 20.

## 207. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 23, 1970, 11:08 a.m.–12:37 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Laos

### PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Jonathan Moore

Marshall Green

Defense

David Packard

G. Warren Nutter

Lt Col. Gerald H. Britten

CIA

Richard Helms

Thomas H. Karamessines

[*name not declassified*] (for briefing only)

JCS

General Earle G. Wheeler

NSC Staff

B/Gen. Alexander M. Haig

John Holdridge

Keith Guthrie

### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

It was the consensus that the introduction of additional Thai troops would provide no assurance that Long Tieng could be held by friendly forces. CIA and the JCS generally favored the use of Thai troops as offering the only hope of avoiding enemy capture of Long Tieng and the destruction of the Meo as a fighting force. State Department and OSD were opposed because of the political consequences of Thai involvement and a possible Thai defeat. There was general agreement that the assembly of a Thai regimental combat team within Thailand would be useful, although the State Department was cautious about pressing the Thais to take such action.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Colonel Behr sent this record and the minutes of the next six WSAG meetings on Laos and Cambodia to Kissinger on March 31. A note on Behr's transmittal memorandum reads: "HAK has seen. 4/6." The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

The Defense Department will provide Mr. Kissinger briefing material on bombing targets in the vicinity of Barthelmy Pass. The State Department will submit to Dr. Kissinger by the afternoon of March 23 a draft reply to Thanat's letter.<sup>2</sup> Ambassadors Unger and Godley will be informed through the appropriate CIA station chiefs of recent developments with regard to Laos, including the Thanat–Kissinger letter. The President's second letter to Kosygin will be shown to Souvanna.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. [name not declassified] briefed on the military situation near Long Tieng, which he described as "up for grabs". The enemy was urgently moving troops toward the area. There were about 1,000 North Vietnamese troops in the immediate vicinity of Long Tieng, with 5,000 to 6,000 in the surrounding hills and many more further back. The North Vietnamese seemed to be hoping to forestall a successful defensive action by recently arrived RLG reinforcements, of which there were now about 2,000. It was not possible to estimate how well the reinforcements would fight. Enemy rocket attacks were not yet effective against the airstrip, but this might be only a matter of time.

Mr. Kissinger asked why the Meos were not being pulled in from the outposts, where they might get picked off. Mr. Karamessines said this was essentially a tactical judgment by Vang Pao, who thought that as guerrilla forces they could be more usefully deployed so as to harass the enemy.

Mr. Kissinger asked about artillery deployments. Mr. Karamessines said that latest information indicated four 155s and one 105 were in place. There was a brief discussion of an unconfirmed report that a 155 had been withdrawn either for maintenance or because its position was threatened. Mr. Kissinger asked if a rapid collapse were likely. Mr. Karamessines said that this was so and that in such event it was probable the 155 would be lost although present plans were to move it out by air if there was a remote chance of doing so.

Mr. [name not declassified] said Vang Pao wants to bring in Thai troops. He would then use the Meos to hit enemy supply lines from behind in the vicinity of Ban Ban and the Plaine des Jarres.

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<sup>2</sup> In a March 22 letter to Kissinger, Thanat informed him that the Lao Government had asked for combat units and Thailand was prepared to dispatch immediately to Long Tieng one infantry battalion (777 men) to be followed, if needed, by two additional battalions. Thailand was prepared to do this if the U.S. Government provided the necessary material and logistical support. (Letter attached to a memorandum from Kissinger to Packard and U. Alexis Johnson, March 23; *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 567, Country Files, Far East, Thailand, Thai Involvement in Laos) On the afternoon of March 22 Kissinger sent Thanat an interim reply stating that the United States had made three B-52 strikes in support of Long Tieng, was studying Thanat's proposal, and would respond "in the immediate future." (*Ibid.*, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, Sensitive/Souvanna Phouma/Long Tieng)

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 4, Document 204.

Mr. [name not declassified] added that the North Vietnamese have logistic problems. They have no supplies in the area, their supply routes have bogged down at certain places, and they are concerned about possible B-52 strikes and moves to cut their supply lines. Mr. Kissinger asked about the desirability of hitting the points where the enemy supply lines were clogged. General Wheeler replied that they were being hit; 100 tacair sorties were flown "yesterday".

Mr. Johnson asked how Vang Pao proposed to move his troops for the attacks on the supply lines. Mr. [name not declassified] said this would be done with helicopters as was customary.

Mr. Green asked if the recent heavy rains had not brought an improvement in the weather situation from our standpoint. Mr. [name not declassified] said that this was so, since visibility was better and it was more difficult for the North Vietnamese to get their supplies over the roads. General Wheeler said the clearer skies would greatly improve tacair effectiveness.

Mr. [name not declassified] concluded by noting that the enemy was apparently trying to eliminate all friendly posts within striking distance of the Plaine des Jarres and, in answer to Dr. Kissinger's question, said that he thought they would certainly succeed in doing so.

Mr. Packard displayed a map showing the 1962 cease-fire line and the successive yearly lines of the North Vietnamese advance since. He pointed out that the map showed that the North Vietnamese had not come much further this year than in every preceding year. Mr. Kissinger observed that the difference this year was that they were present in greater force.

Mr. Kissinger asked for a review on what had been done to carry out the decisions made last week. Mr. Packard said that C-130 gunships have been moved to Laos. However, Cobra (helicopter) gunships have not, since they would require establishing ground support forces in Laos. In answer to Mr. Johnson's question, General Wheeler said that General Abrams thought that Cobras would have to be located at Vientiane or perhaps beyond. General Abrams had deep reservations about their use in Laos because of the lack of a sophisticated command and control system. General Wheeler added that three C-130s had now been operating several days and could continue until April 6 without degrading our capability to take action against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He said that ARDF (to locate enemy radio terminals) was continuing at the rate of six operations per day. General Wheeler concluded by saying that there was no truth to Vang Pao's claims that air support had been decreased to 20 sorties per day. The recent tacair rate was 87 per day, and most times it was in excess of 100 which was about all the system would accept. Mr. Packard added that sorties during February totalled 1518 and that this rate could continue and perhaps be somewhat increased.

Mr. Kissinger asked if the North Vietnamese could launch an attack on Long Tieng at any time, and if so, could they capture it. General Wheeler said the answer to both questions was yes, assuming the enemy wished to pay the price in losses. The friendly forces in Long Tieng could make its capture expensive.

Mr. Kissinger asked about the composition and will to fight of the friendly forces. General Wheeler said that the principal forces were the special guerrilla forces brought from the South and that they would fight. Mr. Karamessines described the units in more detail and explained that they were organized in an inner and an outer defense perimeter.

Mr. Kissinger asked if the addition of three Thai battalions would affect the outcome. General Wheeler said this was a possibility but noted that Admiral McCain, Ambassador Unger, and Ambassador Godley were by no means confident about this when they met at Udorn.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Helms said that the most the introduction of Thai units would do would be to permit a holding action until the rains began in about two months. He added that there was really no other option except to try to delay. Mr. Packard said it might be a good idea to bring in the Thai if this would release Vang Pao to attack enemy supply lines. Mr. Helms said that even if this were done, our basic tactic would remain the same—trying to hold off the enemy for 60 more days.

Mr. Kissinger asked if the introduction of Thai forces would enable us to buy the necessary 60 days. Both Mr. Helms and General Wheeler stated that they did not know.

Mr. Johnson asked about the effectiveness of the Thai forces. General Wheeler said the Thai 13th Regimental Combat Team had a number of deficiencies—including lack of experience in battalion-size operations—but that it would be tenacious in a defensive operation. However, the Thai units were not assault troops like the North Vietnamese.

General Wheeler said Thai troops posed more than a purely military problem. The larger issue was whether to provide support for Thai operations in Laos in the face of the political furor this would raise in the United States, including allegations that Plan Taksin was being involved. If we were willing to face the political problem, we should

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<sup>4</sup> In telegram 3366 from Bangkok, March 21, Unger reported that he, Godley, and McCain concluded after meeting on March 20 in Udorn that even if two Thai battalions arrived immediately, they would “provide no guarantee that Long Tieng can be held through the next seventy day critical period until the rains are expected to ease the pressure, but it is our judgment that they improve the chances enough to justify the effort.” The three men also agreed that “it seems entirely unrealistic to contemplate keeping such a deployment covert.” (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 19 THAI-LAOS)



urge the Thais at least to move their forces forward within Thailand and should continue maximum possible bombing. We could alternatively go a step further by having the Thais move to Long Tieng and gambling that they would be able to hold the position there until the rains began. General Wheeler said he could not guarantee that the Thais could hold Long Tieng.

Mr. Johnson said the implication of the messages received from the field was that the use of Thai forces could be kept secret. This was simply not possible. Mr. Packard and Mr. Karamessines agreed.

Mr. Kissinger said there were both military and political problems. The military problem was where best to make a stand. Should the Thai troops be moved to Long Tieng, to some less advanced point in Laos (Site 272), or to the border?

General Wheeler said that it was difficult to judge at this distance from the scene whether the North Vietnamese would overrun Long Tieng before the Thais got there. The minimum time to get the first battalion combat team there was 72 hours, and 96 hours might be a more realistic estimate.

Mr. Kissinger asked if the North Vietnamese would go on to Vientiane after taking Long Tieng. General Wheeler said that because of the extremely rough terrain below Long Tieng, it was more likely they would proceed west along Route 7, then down Route 13 to Vientiane. Mr. Kissinger asked if it were not our judgment that the North Vietnamese would stop after taking Long Tieng. General Wheeler said that we really did not know, and Mr. Johnson added that it was more accurate to say that if they moved further, they would probably proceed along Route 7.

Mr. Kissinger asked about the possibility of making a stand at Site 272. General Wheeler said it might make a good defensive position, but there was no reason to put more troops there if there was no need to defend it. Mr. Kissinger concluded that Site 272 was therefore not really a fallback position. It was hard to get into and hard to get out of. General Wheeler said the JCS was not attracted by Site 272.

Mr. Packard suggested it would be better to use Thai troops to block an enemy advance along Route 13. Mr. Johnson agreed and said that we could defer a decision on Thai troops to see if a threat developed on Route 13.

Mr. Kissinger described the political problems posed by Thai troops. Their use would raise the question of whether we were triggering Plan Taksin. In addition, we would have to consider whether we might be stimulating a North Vietnamese attack by precipitate action to introduce Thai troops. The time had come to ask whether by gradually introducing Thai units and stepping up B-52 attacks, we were starting down the slippery slope. The President had said this morning

that he leaned toward introducing Thai troops. Mr. Kissinger concluded that we must have a broader concept of where our actions in Laos are leading us. We should not follow a course of taking a move, getting clobbered, taking another move, getting clobbered, and so on. Could we not develop three or four scenarios?

Mr. Johnson sketched one possibility. Introduction of Thai troops would cause the North Vietnamese to bring more force to bear. We would then have to decide whether to reinforce Long Tieng and introduce more Thais. At some point Long Tieng would take on the aspect of a Dienbienphu. Having taken one step, we would find ourselves under heavy pressure to take others. Another possibility was that if we introduced Thai troops and then pulled out, we would suffer a great psychological and political setback.

Mr. Kissinger asked about the implications for Thailand if Thai troops were used in Laos. Mr. Green said there were several aspects to be considered. The Thais wanted to draw us into the ground defense of Thailand by having us support Thai forces in Laos. Use of Thai troops in Laos might affect the Thai contribution in South Vietnam. Also, the Communists might try to stir up insurgencies in Thailand, as they have the capability to do.

Mr. Green asked about the Lao King's position on Thai troops. Mr. Karamessines said the best information indicates he is opposed. He also pointed out that there were a number of new intelligence items which indicated that a coup, [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] might be in the offing in Vientiane. Mr. Green and Mr. Johnson both commented on the possible adverse consequences in the United States and Thailand if the North Vietnamese were to inflict a humiliating defeat on Thai troops.

Mr. Kissinger said that every year the balance in Laos surges back and forth. The North Vietnamese probably hesitate to attempt a complete takeover because they fear the political and military consequences if they go too far. What reason will they have to worry in the future if we say we will not put forces in Laos and do not bring in Thai forces?

Mr. Packard suggested that we might have the Thais move forces to the border. Mr. Johnson said this would not get around the Taksin problem.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Kissinger pointed out that it was the Thais who had taken the initiative to raise the matter with us. Mr. Green said that the key point was whether the Thais would undertake this on their own. They wanted to involve us. If they took action by themselves, there would be no objection. Mr. Johnson agreed.

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote 7, Document 203.

Mr. Kissinger asked if it were not also true that if we refused to respond to the Thai request, they would conclude the United States was not committed to the defense of Thailand. Mr. Johnson said that Ambassador Unger had reported nothing that would indicate this. Mr. Kissinger asked how we should interpret the message from Thanat. Mr. Johnson responded that it did not seem to him to mean that the Thais would take a refusal as an indication of lack of US support for Thai defense. Mr. Kissinger asked what we should say to Thanat if we turned him down. Mr. Johnson suggested we base our refusal on military grounds and state that we thought the idea of moving Thai troops to Long Tieng was not militarily sound.

Mr. Helms said that short of committing more troops, we would not find it possible to hold Long Tieng until the onset of the rains. If Long Tieng falls, most of the adverse consequences already discussed will come to pass. The Thais will be worried; there will be turmoil in Vientiane. He did not know about the implications for Plan Taksin. Mr. Kissinger observed that one result of Taksin was that we could not take even a small action without worrying about triggering the Plan.

Mr. Packard said that a key issue was whether the loss of Long Tieng opened the road to the capital. Mr. Johnson said that in the narrow sense it did not. Mr. Kissinger agreed that it did not open a direct route to Vientiane. However, in a broad sense, by opening the way via Route 7/13 and destroying the Meo as an effective fighting force, it would remove all the obstacles to a North Vietnamese takeover.

Mr. Johnson said he agreed that over the years uncertainty about US intentions had restrained the communists. We had given signals—such as Taksin, B-52 bombing, and the landing of Marines in 1962. If we could get the Thais to move without ourselves getting involved, Thai action could be useful.

Mr. Kissinger asked if we could reply to Thanat that some movement seemed indicated but that the Thai forces should be held south of the Mekong. Mr. Johnson thought this might be feasible. Mr. Green cautioned that having Thai troops across the river from Vientiane might lend credence to rumors of Thai involvement in coup plotting. He wondered if we might tell Thanat that we were uncertain about Long Tieng and would not wish to put the Thais in a dangerous position. However, it would be up to them if they wished to make a move on their own.

Mr. Kissinger said that the Thais could not move troops without our help. Mr. Johnson countered that the Thais had some air transport capability, and General Wheeler agreed.

Mr. Helms said there seemed little point in just moving troops to the river. This would have no effect on the course of the war. Mr. Moore pointed out that it would have an effect on our involvement with the Thais.

Mr. Kissinger asked what would be left to Souvanna after the fall of Long Tieng and the destruction of the Meos. Our air support would be of little use if there was no opposition to the communists on the ground. Mr. Green interjected that Vang Pao's mood was always fluctuating and that he had often shown a capability to bounce back after a defeat.

General Wheeler reiterated that Thai battalions gave no assurance of holding Long Tieng. Unless we felt willing to meet the political costs, use of Thai troops constituted a chance hardly worth taking. If the Thais lost, we would have to commit more troops. Laos could not be defended from Laos. The only successful defense would be one which attacked the problem at its source in North Vietnam.

General Wheeler said there might be some value to assembling the scattered elements of one of the Thai RCT's for training purposes. This would have some military benefits, if, for instance, we decide later to make a defense of the Vientiane plain. Mr. Johnson asked about the cost to the Thai counterinsurgency program. General Wheeler and Mr. Packard said there would be some cost but not much. Mr. Johnson said he thought we should encourage the Thais to assemble a force.

Mr. Helms said that if the enemy believed we might bomb North Vietnam, something might be achieved. Mr. Kissinger asked how this message could be conveyed to North Vietnam. General Wheeler said it would be clear if we actually did some bombing. Mr. Johnson asked about bombing Barthelmy Pass. General Wheeler said that the Pass would not serve as a choke point, but that nearby supply facilities offered profitable targets. Mr. Packard said that Defense could provide briefing material on what was located at the Pass, and Mr. Kissinger asked him to do so. Mr. Johnson said he agreed that if we were going to bomb in North Vietnam, we should do so without any advance message. General Wheeler said we should also bomb Mu Gia and Na Pe Passes. Mr. Green asked if it would be better to bomb now or to wait until after the fall of Long Tieng. General Wheeler said we had already waited five years.

Mr. Kissinger pointed out that the North Vietnamese were cautious as long as Vang Pao was on their flank. With the Meo destroyed there was no force to keep the communists away from Vientiane. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Green said this had been true for many years.

Mr. Kissinger asked about the prospects for Vang Pao. Mr. Karamessines said it would be a miracle if a cohesive force was left after the fall of Long Tieng. We should consider whether we wanted our position in Laos to rest on this small chance. Mr. Johnson countered that the adverse effect would be even worse if the Thais were involved in a defeat at Long Tieng.

Mr. Helms said that if the State Department was against introducing Thai troops, how did it propose to play out the situation in

Laos. Mr. Johnson said we should do what we can to maintain the Meo forces but not make Long Tieng a Dienbienphu. Mr. Kissinger asked what happened if the Meos collapsed, and Mr. Johnson responded that we would then be faced with a decision on whether to urge the Thais on or implement Taksin. Mr. Kissinger asked about the impact on South Vietnam. General Wheeler wondered what would happen in Cambodia. Mr. Nutter asked what we would lose by bombing the Barthelmy Pass. Mr. Johnson responded that there still seemed to be a better than 50–50 chance that the communists would make no further move after taking Long Tieng. Mr. Kissinger said we must consider that the ball game might be over if Long Tieng were lost.

Mr. Helms pointed out that in previous years there had been no Vietnamization program in progress. If the communists succeeded in neutralizing Laos, they could undermine Vietnamization.

Mr. Green said that if we got involved in Laos, the communists would want to step up their attacks. The public furor that would be aroused in the United States would encourage them to go further.

Mr. Nutter asked what the Congressional reaction would be if we lost Laos. Mr. Johnson said we should handle the problem so that it is not *our* loss.

Mr. Kissinger said he agreed with Mr. Helms that the communists seemed to be trying to back us into a corner. They know that after a Vietnam settlement, they could take Laos for free.

Mr. Green asked if our estimate was that the communists wanted to seize all of Laos. Mr. Karamessines and Mr. Helms said we had no estimate.

Mr. Kissinger said that one could argue that Vietnamization worked because of our threat to retaliate against North Vietnam. He asked if in previous years there had always been some friendly force left in Laos at the end of the communist advance. Mr. Johnson said that there had, since Vang Pao always retreated into the hills. Mr. Kissinger observed that the mistake this year was to let the Meo stand and fight.

Mr. Packard said that if the communists took Laos, we would have to move in and implement the Nixon Doctrine in Thailand. He asked if there were no other steps we could take in Laos. General Wheeler said that with good troops and air support, an enemy advance along Route 7/13 could be impeded. Mr. Johnson said that if Thais were used, they should be used there.

Mr. Kissinger said that the principals must be given a chance to consider any proposal that Thai troops be moved. He said it was also essential to have an answer ready for Thanat by the end of the day.

Mr. Kissinger summarized the views on use of Thai troops at Long Tieng. CIA believed we would be no worse off with the Thais than without. The Joint Chiefs had the same view. The State Department

was opposed. Mr. Packard said that on balance he was against introducing Thai troops.

Mr. Kissinger asked about assembling a Thai regiment at Udorn. Mr. Packard said this was the least we could do. Mr. Helms had no strong views. Mr. Johnson suggested not pushing the Thais but letting them take the responsibility.

Mr. Kissinger raised the question of the impact of events in Laos on the Thais. Would they not believe that what was happening in Laos would happen to them next year? How should we explain the situation to them? Mr. Johnson and Mr. Packard said we should tell them that Long Tieng is not the place to put their forces. Mr. Kissinger asked Mr. Johnson to draft a reply to Thanat's letter.

Mr. Karamessines asked if the President's latest letter to Kosygin could be shown to Souvanna, and it was agreed this could be done. Mr. Johnson asked about bringing Ambassadors Godley and Unger up to date on recent developments including the Thanat-Kissinger letter. Mr. Kissinger cautioned that his channel to Thanat must be protected, since it was based on an assurance given Thanat by the President in Bangkok that he should feel free to communicate directly through Dr. Kissinger. It was agreed that briefing of the Ambassadors could best be handled through the appropriate CIA station chiefs.

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**208. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, March 23, 1970.

SUBJECT

Proposals to Sustain the Present Regime in Cambodia

1. On 22 March 1970, General Haig forwarded your request for a plan to sustain the present regime in Cambodia.<sup>2</sup> We have outlined below a series of recommendations which we believe would assist in this

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970. Secret; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1, Document 205.

objective. These are necessarily somewhat tentative in nature as our intelligence on the internal situation in Cambodia is not solid enough as yet to permit us firm judgments. We also make several suggestions for action by the Department of State since we understand your query has not been addressed to any other agency.

2. In essence we believe the core of any strategy devised to maintain the present government in power should consist of two elements:

a. Overtly, to the greatest extent possible, the present Cambodian Government should attempt to maintain a stance of neutrality. This is a course along which the present leadership is already embarked and is one to gain the maximum of international sympathy.

b. Covertly, we should work to support and sustain the present Cambodian Government by supporting its military effort against the Viet Cong in Cambodia and shoring up its position by the provision of covert economic and political support.

This course, if it could be successfully pursued, seems to us the most likely to preserve the present regime against what will almost surely be a determined effort by the North Vietnamese backed by Communist China and the USSR to unseat it.

3. We have some covert channels to the present government [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] which could be used to develop detailed plans for clandestine assistance. [Omitted here is discussion of CIA intelligence sources in Cambodia.] [*2½ lines of source text not declassified*]

4. Our current information on the exact balance of forces in Cambodia—information which would be essential to formulating realistic plans—is thin. We have in the past concentrated on attempting to detail North Vietnamese use of Cambodia as a channel for shipment of arms and other supplies to the Viet Cong. Considerable progress has been made in this collection effort particularly over the past year, but as a result we have not tasked our agents with reporting in depth on the Cambodian political scene.

5. As initial steps in determining the best way to support the current regime, we believe we should send a senior CIA official on a discreet trip to Cambodia to make clandestine contact with our better placed agents. This would yield not only immediate intelligence on the situation there but would also reassure the leaders of the present government that the U. S. intends to provide them with discreet assistance. We think at the same time, we should move forward with all speed to re-establish [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] reliable communications by means of which on a timely fashion, we can report intelligence and convey messages to our agents and the Cambodian Government.

6. The most immediate pressing need of the Cambodian Government will almost certainly be military assistance. We assume that the

Chinese and Soviets will suspend military aid until the present government makes drastic concessions or is overthrown by one more friendly to the Communists. In these circumstances the Cambodian leadership will need desperately an alternative supply of military weapons. There are Cambodian airfields to which deliveries could be made clandestinely by aircraft flying out of Thailand and South Vietnam. They will also almost certainly need some sort of economic assistance and some quiet political help. All three of these aspects could be explored with our contacts.

7. In summary, we recommend the following steps:

a. We send an experienced Agency officer as soon as possible to Phnom Penh on a trip to make contact with [*1½ lines of source text not declassified*] controlled agents within the Cambodian Government. This officer would collect information on the current situation and could convey such assurances as you wish to the new leadership.<sup>3</sup>

b. Establish [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] rapid and secure radio communications to replace the present commercial channels used by the Embassy.

c. Issue a United States Government statement supporting independence and neutrality of Cambodia and expressing sympathy with the Cambodian efforts to remove North Vietnamese intruding troops from their soil.

d. Develop a worldwide clandestine propaganda effort to support the present government and call attention to the flagrant violation of Cambodian territory by the North Vietnamese. Also seek to discredit Sihanouk's effort to create a government in exile.<sup>4</sup>

8. Providing Cambodia's response to our effort is positive, we recommend the following additional steps:

a. Develop a clandestine airlift to supply the Cambodian Army with necessary weapons.

b. Develop a clandestine combat control center to coordinate Cambodian military activities with the allied military effort.

c. Provide financial assistance to the new government.

d. Through diplomatic means stimulate international support for the new regime. Encourage Thailand to re-establish diplomatic relations with Cambodia. Persuade South Vietnam to issue a declaration recognizing Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Persuade governments which have not yet recognized the new regime to do so.

9. The above is a quick response to your request. If you believe these suggestions have merit we can flesh them out in more detail.

**Dick**

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<sup>3</sup> There is a check next to this paragraph.

<sup>4</sup> There is a check next to this paragraph.



## 209. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 24, 1970, 2:35–3:20 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Laos and Cambodia

### PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Jonathan Moore

Marshall Green

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

Lt. Col. Gerald H. Britten

CIA

Richard Helms

Thomas H. Karamessines

[*name not declassified*] (for briefing only)

JCS

Vice Admiral Nels C. Johnson

NSC Staff

Brig. Gen. A. M. Haig

Col. Richard Kennedy

Col. Robert M. Behr

John Holdridge

Keith Guthrie

### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

A WSAG Working Group will be established under the chairmanship of Col. Richard Kennedy of the NSC Staff and with representation from all WSAG members.<sup>2</sup> The WSAG Working Group will develop an integrated plan setting forth alternative courses of action in case Long Tieng falls and the North Vietnamese continue their advance in Laos. This plan should consider minimum and higher options.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Colonel Behr sent this record and the minutes of six other WSAG meetings on Laos and Cambodia to Kissinger on March 31. A note on Behr's transmittal memorandum reads: "HAK has seen. 4/6." The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> Haig made this proposal in a March 24 memorandum to Kissinger. (*Ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, Sensitive/Souvanna Phouma/Long Tieng)

(A minimum option to be considered is the occupation of enclaves in Laos along the border with Thailand.) The plan should primarily focus on possible military actions and should specifically deal with whether, when, and where Thai troops should be employed in the defense of Laos.

The existing Laos Working Group will prepare a series of contingency plans for Laos and Cambodia. Col. Kennedy of NSC Staff will coordinate closely with the Laos Working Group. Plans to be prepared by the Laos Working Group are:

- a) An overall plan covering alternative courses of action in the event of a Communist takeover in Laos which the United States decides to accept.
- b) Plans dealing with internal contingencies in Laos, for example:
  - 1) Rightists stage a coup against Souvanna.
  - 2) Souvanna capitulates to the Communists and requests the United States to halt all bombing in Laos.
- c) Plans covering possible problems in Cambodia, for example:
  - 1) Sihanouk, with North Vietnamese and Viet Cong support, attacks the Lon Nol/Matak Government.
  - 2) Lon Nol and Matak request U.S. assistance against subversion by Sihanouk and the Communists.
  - 3) How to obtain the release of the *Columbia Eagle*.<sup>3</sup>

CIA and DOD are to obtain and submit to Dr. Kissinger by the morning of March 25 accurate information on road conditions along the route from Long Tieng through Site 272 to Vientiane.<sup>4</sup> This should include information on any AID roadbuilding activity in the area.

It was the consensus of the WSAG that our reply to Souvanna's request for support for use of three Thai battalions in the defense of

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<sup>3</sup> On March 14 two armed men hijacked the SS *Columbia Eagle*, a Military Sea Transport System ship of U.S. registry traveling from Manila to Sattahip, Thailand, with a cargo of ammunition comprising 500–750 lbs. bombs, fuses, and igniters. The hijackers forced the captain to take the ship onto an island 5 miles from Sihanoukville well within Cambodian territorial waters. Twenty-four crew members left the *Columbia Eagle* in life boats because of a reported "bomb scare" and were picked up by another MSTs ship; fifteen remained on board. (Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, March 15; *ibid.*, Box 583, Cambodian Operations, Hijack and Detention of Columbia Eagle (Cambodia))

<sup>4</sup> This was done in a memorandum from Karamessines to Kissinger, et al., March 25. (*Ibid.*, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970)

Long Tieng<sup>5</sup> should be along the lines of Dr. Kissinger's reply<sup>6</sup> to a similar request from Thanat.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Kissinger will submit to the President for approval the draft reply to Souvanna already prepared by the State Department.<sup>8</sup>

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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<sup>5</sup> Souvanna requested that the United States provide logistical support for three Thai battalions. The text of the request, with Godley's strong endorsement, is in telegram 2080 from Vientiane, March 24. (Attached to a memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, March 24; *ibid.*, NSC Files, Box 567, Country Files, Far East, Thailand, Thai Involvement in Laos)

<sup>6</sup> Kissinger's March 23 reply to Thanat stated: "we are not convinced that the proposed deployment of Thai troops additional to those now serving in Laos with Sierra Romeo artillery battery would be effective at this time. It is our current assessment that the fate of Long Tieng is not likely to be decided by the introduction of such additional ground troops." Kissinger suggested that Thanat send a regimental combat team to an advanced base, possibly Udorn, for future contingencies. (Letter from Kissinger to Thanat, March 23, attached to a March 25 memorandum from Haig to Kissinger; *ibid.*, Box 546, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970)

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 2, Document 207.

<sup>8</sup> This draft letter informed Souvanna that, "It does not seem to me, however, that at this time the introduction of Thai ground forces to Long Tieng would best serve to counter North Vietnamese attack and lead to stabilization of the situation in Laos." The draft offered "airlift" of Thai troops should Laos and Thailand make their own arrangements, but warned it would not be possible to keep such a deployment secret. The draft suggested that a regimental combat team be positioned at an advanced base in Thailand ready for deployment. (Draft letter attached to a memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, March 24; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 567, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Thai Involvement in Laos) The draft letter was approved by Nixon and sent to Souvanna minus the caveat about publicity in telegram 43329 to Vientiane, March 25. Godley delivered it on March 25 to Souvanna who was "visibly disappointed." (Telegram 2092 from Vientiane, March 25, attached to a March 25 memorandum from Haig to Kissinger; *ibid.*, Box 546, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970) The letter as sent to Souvanna on March 25 is *ibid.*

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

Washington, March 24, 1970.

SUBJECT

Chinese Road Construction in Laos

A MACV assessment of Chinese Communist road construction in northern Laos makes the following key points:

—Peking is using a 1961 agreement with Souvanna Phouma to justify its present road construction. By the end of the current dry season in mid-May, a motorable road connecting southern China and Thailand should be completed via two routes: one completely by-passing North Vietnam and the other transiting North Vietnam.

—The Laos government has never exercised effective control over the areas through which either of the routes pass.

—There is evidence that the Chinese are consolidating their position along the road network and are determined to protect and expand their road system. While it is not yet clear if the Chinese and Pathet Lao are formally cooperating in the venture, it is certain that the Pathet Lao are trying to bring the road building area under Communist control.

—Chinese objectives appear to be both tactical and strategic in nature: in the short term, to demonstrate support for North Vietnam's war effort in Laos; and over the long haul, counter US and Soviet influence in Laos.

—In summation, the road construction represents a determined Chinese effort to consolidate and extend her influence in a traditional area of Chinese interest. (See map at Tab A)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; [code word not declassified]. On March 19 Kissinger sent Rogers and Laird a memorandum informing them that plans to use Lao guerrilla units, Lao T-28 aircraft, and U.S. tactical aircraft as necessary to disrupt and forestall Chinese road construction south of Muong Houn should be "held in abeyance" and the two cabinet officers should notify the President when they believed conditions had changed so as to justify taking such action. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 LAOS) In an undated memorandum to the President, which was not sent, Kissinger justified the decision on the grounds that the Lao Government seemed less concerned about the threat, Chinese road construction was not progressing rapidly, airlift resources were needed for the defense and possible evacuation of Long Tieng, and the public was much more aware of events in Laos. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970)

<sup>2</sup> Attached but not reproduced here.

## 211. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 25, 1970, 6:30–7:30 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Thai Troops in Laos

### PARTICIPATION

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Marshall Green

Defense

David Packard

CIA

General Cushman

Thomas Karamessines

William Nelson

JCS

General Earle Wheeler

NSC Staff

John Holdridge

Richard Kennedy

Dr. Kissinger said he had again been with the President,<sup>2</sup> who wasn't inclined to let Laos go down the drain and let the record show he had disregarded the appeals of the King of Laos, Souvanna and

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Colonel Behr sent this record and the minutes of six other WSAG meetings on Laos and Cambodia to Kissinger on March 31. A note on Behr's transmittal memorandum reads: "HAK has seen. 4/6." The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> Kissinger met with the President and Helms from 12:30 to 1:04 p.m., with the President and Haldeman from 1:05 to 1:31 p.m., and alone with the President from 4:23 to 4:29 p.m. on March 25. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, Daily Diary) In his meeting with the President and Kissinger, Helms stressed the need for Thai troops at Long Tieng, and covered the military situation, Souvanna's state of mind, the possibility of a rightist coup if Long Tieng fell, and warned that Thai battalions could only delay the fall. Helms continued: "Apologizing for my vulgarity, I told the President that I realized this was a 'shitty' decision to ask a President of the United States to make but in light of all the factors it seemed a desirable thing to do at this juncture. He [Nixon] commented that it had been necessary to do a number of unpleasant things recently and that this was one more that could be taken on as well." (Memorandum for the record by Helms, March 25; Central Intelligence Agency Files, DCI (Helms) Files, Job 80-B01285A, Helms Chron, 1 Jan–30 June 1970) Records of the other meetings have not been found.

Thanat.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Johnson noted that the group had just been discussing the alternatives and outlined them for Dr. Kissinger. First, acceding to the original Thai and Lao request, [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]; second, agreeing to move the Thai battalion in and providing pay and allowances, but as openly declared Thai forces in Thai uniforms (Mr. Packard remarked that this would make little difference in terms of US public opinion); third, making a firm commitment to induce the Thai RCT under certain conditions, namely, that they be declared as Thai in the same way as the Thai forces in Vietnam, and if Long Tieng is lost and the North Vietnam forces advance; fifth [fourth], stopping short of a firm commitment by assembling the RCT and beefing it up; and sixth [fifth], reaffirming the previous position we have taken in response to the Thai and Lao requests. In the last two alternatives, we would lay every emphasis on what we were doing in the air by way of showing that we were not standing idly by.

Dr. Kissinger asked what advantage there would be in declaring the Thai presence. Mr. Johnson replied that there would be an advantage in the U.S. showing that we were not continuing to fight a secret war, but rather that the Thais felt strongly enough to take a clear stand. To a question from Dr. Kissinger as to whether the Thai would be willing to declare their forces, Mr. Johnson said that this remained to be seen. With respect to Long Tieng, they were reluctant, but if the RCT crossed the border, he didn't see how they could be expected to act in any other way. However, they had not discussed this matter in connection with the RCT. General Wheeler noted that this raised the question of our SEATO commitments. The only excuse we could use to justify putting Thai troops into Laos was that they considered a threat existed to Thailand. Mr. Johnson added that the question would apply more realistically to the Taksin Plan. An important element in the RCT idea was that we could say we were not making a commitment of US ground forces. He hoped though that we could finesse the Taksin Plan being implemented.

Dr. Kissinger stated that he was interested in General Wheeler's question, and wondered if it were not important for the Thai forces to receive sheep-dipping. If they were to go in as regular forces, it would be difficult to avoid involving SEATO. On the other hand, we could claim that SEATO did not apply, and use this justification to handle Senatorial criticism.

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<sup>3</sup> The King of Laos told Godley that he "ardently hoped we (the U.S. Government) would be able to assist the Thais in assisting the Lao in a most discreet manner." (Backchannel message from Godley, enclosed in a memorandum from Karamessines to Kissinger, March 25; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970) Regarding Souvanna's request, see footnote 5, Document 214; for Thanat's request, see footnote 2, Document 207.

Mr. Green observed that the more covert the operation, the more suspect it would be, and the more press criticism would arise. He thought that if the operation were limited, we could get away with it, but if it were larger it wouldn't jell.

Dr. Kissinger asked how large a force was involved. Mr. Green spoke of a regimental sized unit; Mr. Karamessines explained that the total force would involve 770 infantry plus 100 support troops.

Dr. Kissinger noted that the SEATO commitment would be more severe if we waited until Long Tieng fell and the North Vietnamese started to advance afterwards. A brief discussion ensued on the state of the road (Route 52) between Long Tieng and Route 13, in which it was agreed that the road did not go all the way through. Dr. Kissinger hoped that AID had stopped construction on the road, and Mr. Green declared that Ambassador Godley could see to this point.

Reverting to the question of US public opinion, Mr. Johnson thought that we could get away with one Thai battalion in Long Tieng, but nothing more. General Wheeler agreed, saying that this was something under 1,000 men, but if additional battalions were to cross the river we couldn't get away with it. There was some talk about moving in two BCTs from the Black Panthers in Vietnam, which would bring headlines in every paper in the country.

Dr. Kissinger called for a discussion of the Long Tieng situation, and asked General Wheeler for a military judgment on what effect there would be if, for example, a Thai battalion were put in as of 9:00 A.M. the next day. General Wheeler replied that even with another 1,000 men he could not guarantee Long Tieng could be held against the forces which the North Vietnamese had available. These forces had been ordered to take the position. They had seized an outpost yesterday which Vang Pao had retaken. There was another North Vietnamese division along Route 7, the 312th Division, which had not been brought in at all. If Hanoi were willing to pay the price, the additional Thai men would be no guarantee. They would, however, add to the chances that Long Tieng could be held.

Dr. Kissinger wondered how long Long Tieng could be held, and how long it would take to move the 312th Division into the area. General Wheeler estimated that if the unit could be brought in within four days, they would be doing well. Mr. Nelson thought that four days would be very rapid and Mr. Karamessines estimated that a week would be more likely. The distance it would need to cover was about 40 miles.

Mr. Johnson asked General Wheeler if the North Vietnamese had the ability to close the airport. General Wheeler replied affirmatively. If the enemy seized the high ground, he could make it very unpleasant. General Cushman referred to the 122 mm rockets in the enemy's

possession. According to Mr. Johnson, this would make it difficult to move in supplies and evacuate personnel.

Dr. Kissinger asked if 1,000 men would be enough to stand up against what the enemy has near Long Tieng now less the additional Division. General Wheeler set the North Vietnamese forces at 2,000 to 2,400 men, to which Dr. Kissinger speculated whether the introduction of 1,000 men before the enemy could increase his forces would add up to a fair chance that the position could be held. Mr. Nelson set the Lao forces in the immediate vicinity of Long Tieng at 1,700 men in the inner perimeter, with another 1,800 in the outskirts.

Dr. Kissinger questioned whether we would know of the movement of the other North Vietnamese Division sufficiently far in advance so as to have time for an orderly retreat. General Cushman replied that for this we would need more ARDF. General Wheeler stated that the North Vietnamese were putting in a land line between the Plain of Jars and the Sam Thong/Long Tieng area, hence we might or might not know. Presumably the forces in Vang Pao's small outposts might be able to give us some warning.

Dr. Kissinger declared that there were two arguments in favor of moving the Thai forces: (1) we might be able to hold Long Tieng, and (2) we might prevent the disintegration of Vang Pao's army and give him a chance for an orderly retreat. By preventing a rout, we would keep his forces in the field. He wondered to what extent the Thai battalion would contribute. General Wheeler referred to the "shrill appeals" which we had received from virtually everyone in the field. The introduction of the Thai forces would serve as a considerable morale factor for Vang Pao and his troops. The arrival of Sierra Romeo IX had exerted a very favorable effect on the defenders. Putting 1,000 men in would not guarantee holding Long Tieng, but would have a value in terms of the morale factor which could allow Vang Pao to hang on longer. From a morale point of view, he was inclined to take the chance. This would raise the cost to the enemy. This was not the military decision, though, but a political one involving US public opinion and the heat which the President would face. Dr. Kissinger observed that it would be nothing like the heat we would face if we were to lose Vietnam.

Mr. Packard said that Secretary Laird was against the move. There was a chance that we would be able to get over the immediate problem posed by the Church Amendment satisfactorily,<sup>4</sup> but there might be restrictions on what we might do in other parts of the world.

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<sup>4</sup> The Senate voted on December 16 (73–17) to prohibit committing U.S. ground forces to Laos or Thailand in an amendment by Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) to the Defense Appropriations bill. It was included in the final bill as passed by the House and Senate on December 18 and approved by the President as an "endorsement" of his Asian policy. (*Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, Vol. XXV, 1969, pp. 454, 462–463, 998–999)



General Cushman supported putting the Thai battalion into Long Tieng, adding that he would be happier if we could send in 2,000 men. Vang Pao's forces needed a shot to their morale. If they didn't get it, they might fold up and not stop their retreat until they reached Sayaboury. He agreed with General Wheeler that the decision was essentially political and that militarily speaking the addition of one or two thousand men would not guarantee a defense if the other North Vietnamese Division came in. A lot depended on the weather, and the air sortie rate we could maintain. He anticipated that we could get an intelligence picture of the other division from our ARDF resources.

Dr. Kissinger asked how quickly the attack could come. General Cushman said that the enemy was probing now in a very methodical way, and had three months' time until the rains came.

Dr. Kissinger asked for Mr. Johnson's views. Mr. Johnson indicated that his previous objections still stood. On the military side, if the enemy got into a position where he could close the air field, we might face a real disaster there. Would the more people we brought in invite a bigger disaster? General Cushman acknowledged that the enemy could close the air field but said that we could use our air support against the enemy gun positions—the situation was not like that at Khesanh.

Mr. Nelson said that air drops could be affected.

Dr. Kissinger asked if gun ships had been brought in, and General Wheeler spoke of the addition of three AC-130 gun ships and 13 extra hours of ARDF.

Mr. Johnson said that he was still bearish about putting a battalion into Long Tieng but recognized the situation in both Thailand and Laos in the light of the new Souvanna appeal. He, therefore, proposed beefing up what we had said about putting the RCT in, and doing what was necessary to make it an effective force as quickly as possible. It was now scattered, and needed training. Rather than committing Thai troops now, he would rather see an effective Thai force built up.

Dr. Kissinger summed up the Long Tieng case, saying that if 1,000 men were moved in before the North Vietnamese launched a full-scale attack, this would increase the probability that it could be held. The result might be that the enemy would need to move in another Division, which would create delay. The Meo morale would also be stiffened, and to the extent that we attach importance to maintaining the Meo, would increase the chances of an organized retreat. Against, we might move into a Dienbienphu, with an enormous political headache which might multiply the political restrictions on our movements. Mr. Packard said that he wanted to amplify Dr. Kissinger's last statement to apply it to Vietnam. We would be restricted from doing things in South Vietnam. We were doing well there but needed more time; if we

lost this time we would lose the whole ball game. Dr. Kissinger said that there was a contrary argument—how was Hanoi going to interpret events if it launched an attack contrary to the 1962 Accords and we pulled out our troops in April as scheduled. Was there a psychological ball game? The President was weighing this, and the implications if the Vietnamization process were to get kicked over. Mr. Packard argued that until Long Tieng fell we had other responses. We could hit North Vietnam, and if we wanted to send a message this would be more direct than introducing a few Thai troops. Dr. Kissinger said that in talking to the President he would try to reflect the discussions here.

Mr. Green wanted to bring up some additional cons. If the Thai put in 1,300 men, this would be a big commitment; if they were defeated and retreated, there would be a serious effect on Thai morale. As a related matter, the enemy was bringing up reserves, and would be tempted to give a good blow against the Thai to rile up the US scene. If the Thai forces retreated to Site 272 the North Vietnamese would be tempted to follow. Unger had reported in an earlier message that the RCT was not accustomed to functioning as a unit and would need two months to be upgraded.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Kissinger asked if Unger's position hadn't been reversed. It was his impression that in the Udorn meeting there was a unanimous recommendation that the battalion should go in.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Green acknowledged that there might have been a reversal. However, the message had not come from Unger but from Admiral McCain and reflected the consensus.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Kissinger requested the State representatives to query Unger as to his personal views and get a response by the following morning.<sup>8</sup> He was interested in how Unger would weigh the demoralizing factor of turning down two requests from the Thai and Lao against the other considerations.

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<sup>5</sup> Not found.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 4, Document 207.

<sup>7</sup> Regarding Unger's message, see footnote 6 above; McCain's consensus message has not been found. The Station Chief in Vientiane also attended the Udorn meeting. He reported that McCain, Rosson, Godley, Unger, and he and their staffs reached the conclusion at Udorn on March 20 that "only ground troops supported by heavy TACAIR and ARCLIGHT strikes could hold Long Tieng." A negative decision "would take the last bit of fight out" of Vang Pao. The fall of Long Tieng would cause Souvanna to negotiate from weakness in the projected talks with the Pathet Lao. (Text of a backchannel message from Vientiane, March 24, enclosed in a memorandum from Karamessines to Kissinger, March 25; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970)

<sup>8</sup> Unger sent Johnson a long backchannel message at 12:42Z, March 26, in which he answered a series of questions posed by Johnson. In summarizing the message for Kissinger, Haig stated, "I draw the conclusion that Unger favors the introduction of the Thai battalion if the situation on the ground so dictates it. He has politely cut through some of the specious Johnson arguments while not confronting them head on." (Memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, March 26, with backchannel message from Unger; *ibid.*)

Mr. Nelson submitted one additional pro—the coup problem in Laos, i.e. if there were a serious defeat, what the rightists might do against Souvanna for not having pulled it off. Dr. Kissinger proposed to leave this particular issue aside for the moment, and raised the problem of how to implement a move should the President decide to take action. General Wheeler and Mr. Karamessines agreed that airlift was on hand, and that the troops could be moved as ready. Dr. Kissinger asked if we needed to go to Souvanna and Thanat with a plan. Mr. Johnson replied that no detailed plan was needed, and that JUSMAG and the Thai could work out the operation on the ground. He did not know the time factor though, and would need a judgment from Bangkok. Dr. Kissinger asked for a detailed plan by 8:30 AM March 26.<sup>9</sup> He wondered also if a diplomatic scenario was required, and Mr. Johnson replied negatively since we had already talked to the Thai and the Lao.

Dr. Kissinger wondered what the next step would be if the decision was not to go in now. General Wheeler advocated assembling the Thai RCT in Udorn to get ready to move at a later time. His information on the RCT was that it needed a shake-down period to get supplied and for the troops to get used to one another. This would be doing something positive. Mr. Johnson agreed, spoke again on the possibility the Thai might want to pull the Black Panthers from Vietnam, and raised the question of the Thai asking us for more equipment now. General Wheeler stated that JUSMAG and the Thai could provide equipment from stocks now on hand.

Ambassador Johnson thought that for our commitment to have meaning, we would need to support the Thai forces in Laos on the same basis as their forces in Vietnam. If Long Tieng fell, and the North Vietnamese advanced, this would give substance to our commitment.

Dr. Kissinger wondered, as a practical matter, whether the North Vietnamese could get as far as Vientiane before the rains. Mr. Johnson thought not. They have the problems of extended LOCs, and Cambodia. This would be a contingency which we would not need to implement. General Wheeler demurred, saying that U.S. troops could get

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Haig also informed Kissinger that Sullivan prepared a memorandum on March 26 that Johnson sent to Kissinger in which Sullivan argued that the war in Military Region II had never been about territory. The Meo (Hmong) "have traditionally fought to keep their tribe alive, rather than to retain their real estate. They are essentially nomadic." Sullivan noted that the lowland Lao were far more interested in territory as a buffer against North Vietnam, and that Souvanna's plea was not new and the "lowland Lao military officers put him up to it." (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 LAOS)

<sup>9</sup> On March 26 an unattributed paper outlined an operational plan to move the Thai battalion from Udorn to Long Tieng. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, Sensitive/Souvanna Phouma/Long Tieng)

from Long Tieng to Vientiane before the rains. Mr. Packard said that the question was not so much as whether they could get to Vientiane but whether they would. General Cushman referred to the possibility of putting the one battalion in, and pulling the rest of the RCT together.

Dr. Kissinger raised the proposition of telling Souvanna that we had considered his request, made an analysis, and concluded that the most useful role for the Thai troops would be to assemble them as a RCT, offer support. We were also prepared to agree to immediate consultations with him and the Thai; after the fall of Long Tieng, we would move the troops to an agreed place, and support them on the same basis as in Vietnam. Was this rational? Mr. Packard said it was rational, but on political grounds was serious. Mr. Johnson agreed that this was a serious commitment, and hoped that we would not be called on to implement it. Mr. Kissinger noted that it was hard to play “chicken” if we were not prepared to play the game. Mr. Packard said that if Long Tieng fell, then the President had a better test of whether Laos was going to fall. Dr. Kissinger noted that the President had already rejected the lesser options which had been proposed.

The group discussed briefly the time required to move the battalion from Udorn into Laos. Dr. Kissinger suggested that General Cushman work this out together with Defense. General Cushman agreed. Mr. Johnson reaffirmed that he would get Unger’s assessment. Dr. Kissinger promised to get the pros and cons together by 8:30 AM March 26 and see where we stood. Dr. Kissinger said he recognized that participation of the Thai might increase the North Vietnamese intention to attack, but this might decrease if it got us involved. He outlined the pros and cons of the second case: *Pro*—It would avoid a Dienbienphu, keep the Thai from being overrun, show Thanat and Souvanna that we were responsive, deal with the domestic situation by showing that we had waited until enemy intentions were unambiguous and had exercised enormous restraint in the face of strong pleas. Moreover there was the chance we might not have to act. *Con*—The danger was that the action would not be enough to keep Souvanna from stampeding, and it would be harder to avoid involving SEATO and the Taksin Plan because it would bring the threat closer to the Thai border and our commitment would be larger. Was this a fair assessment?

A discussion ensued on the consequences of a Thai disaster at Long Tieng, as opposed to whether a worse one might ensue at Vang Vien two weeks from now if no attempt were made to defend Long Tieng. Also, would the injection of the Thai give the Meo an opportunity for an orderly retreat to Site 272?

The meeting concluded with a remark by General Wheeler that Laos could not be defended from Laos and that other actions were needed if our positions were to be held.

## 212. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 26, 1970, 8:53–9:22 a.m.

### SUBJECT

Laos

### PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Marshall Green

Defense

David Packard

CIA

General Cushman

Thomas H. Karamessines

William Nelson

JCS

General Earle Wheeler

NSC Staff

B/Gen. Haig

Col. Richard Kennedy

Col. Robert M. Behr

John H. Holdridge

Keith Guthrie

### Summary of Conclusions

State and OSD were opposed to moving a Thai battalion to Long Tieng. JCS considered that the movement was justified for military reasons, but that the issue involved questions that were primarily political. CIA favored the movement.

Kissinger: I want to go over the two options again and to list pros and cons as I see them. First, however, does anyone have any additional thoughts?

Wheeler: We could move a TSQ 96 radar control facility to Udorn. This has an effective range of 150 miles and would make possible accuracies of 600 feet with B-52 strikes.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Colonel Behr sent this record and the minutes of six other WSAG meetings on Laos and Cambodia to Kissinger on March 31. A note on Behr's transmittal memorandum reads: "HAK has seen. 4/6." The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

Johnson: By doing this, we would be able to tell Souvanna we were taking steps to improve air capabilities.

Kissinger: Have we heard from Unger?

Johnson: Not yet. I have a phone call in to him.

Kissinger: Did anyone have any second thoughts during the night?

Packard: We would prefer not to put Thai troops into Laos now.

Kissinger: Are we in a position to make a commitment to move Thai troops?

Cushman: We can move 24 hours after a commitment is made. The troops would be in place 36 hours after approval is received.

Kissinger: Option 1 is to airlift a Thai battalion of 600 men to Long Tieng. From what was just said here, I understand this can be done in less than 48 hours, as opposed to earlier estimates of 72 to 96 hours. The advantages would be:

1) If it is in position before an all-out North Vietnamese attack takes place, it would increase the possibility of holding Long Tieng against the enemy forces now deployed. But the Thai battalion would not give us assurance that Long Tieng could be held.

2) It would delay the fall of Long Tieng for the time required for the enemy to bring forward the division now held in reserve.

Wheeler: Let's not call it a division. It would be better described as "elements."

Packard: We can't be sure the Thai battalion would hold against presently deployed enemy forces.

Wheeler: We said it would "increase the possibility of"—not that it would assure holding Long Tieng.

Kissinger: To continue with the advantages:

3) It would permit stabilizing for the time being the situation with regard to friendly forces at Long Tieng.

4) It would improve the chances for an organized retreat from Long Tieng and, therefore, of preserving the Meo as a fighting force.

5) It would be a signal to the North Vietnamese that we did not intend to let a threat to Laotian sovereignty go unchallenged.

6) It would strengthen Souvanna against coup-minded rightist elements.

The disadvantages would be:

1) Long Tieng might fall anyway. The debacle would be more serious than if we had not introduced Thais.

2) It would raise a strong outcry in this country. This would increase inhibitions on US operations in the area, including air operations in Laos.

3) If the Thais were involved in a defeat, it would be a severe blow to their morale.

Is there anything else to add?

Johnson: The Dienbienphu factor, that is, building up Long Tieng as a turning point of the struggle in Laos.

Kissinger: The President's preference [for putting Thai troops in Laos]<sup>2</sup> has not abated.

Cushman: I doubt the Lao, Meo, and Thai could fight a Dienbienphu-type battle.

Kissinger: The President wants to know whether, if we move in a Thai battalion, the enemy could then isolate it.

Wheeler: Sure they could but it would be a difficult operation. I don't think the Meo and Thai would sit in Long Tieng for a long siege. They would just fade into the bush.

Johnson: I am still worried about building Long Tieng up as the key battle for control of Laos.

Kissinger: The President also has to weigh the deterrent effect of the Thai forces against the possibility that their presence will stimulate a North Vietnamese attack.

Green: That is a real possibility.

Wheeler: But just a possibility.

Green: Our Lao specialists feel it is an important consideration.

Kissinger: Option 2 would be to tell Souvanna and Thanat we are willing to prepare a full RCT of three battalions for introduction into Laos at a later date. We would give a firm commitment for this. We would propose arrangements for consulting on when and where to use the Thai troops.

The arguments in favor are:

1) It would avoid the danger of a disaster involving substantial Thai forces at Long Tieng (although there are [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] Thais there now).

2) It would permit a favorable response to Souvanna and Thanat.

3) Our domestic position would be better. We would not be taking action until North Vietnamese intentions became unambiguous. We would have shown restraint in the face of earlier earnest appeals.

4) Since it is not certain the North Vietnamese intend to go beyond Long Tieng, we might not have to move the Thais at all.

The arguments against are:

1) It would give Souvanna less than he has asked for. He might be led to seek a deal with the North Vietnamese.

2) If we wait, we may find ourselves in a worse position later. The North Vietnamese would have moved closer to the Thai border,

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<sup>2</sup> Brackets in the source text.

effectiveness of the Lao forces would be less and our commitment would be greater. Our commitment would then be greater.

3) It would be difficult to avoid linkage to SEATO and Plan Taksin.

Johnson: The importance of some of those latter points against would be affected by whether or not we hold Long Tieng.

Kissinger: If Long Tieng falls, [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*], we could still have another look about whether to make a formal commitment of Thai forces. Option 2 would commit us to the introduction of regular Thai units. If, under those circumstances, the Thais are overrun, we would face a real problem. One of the important policy decisions would be at what point to remove the Thais. Having [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] Thais in Long Tieng would be different from a formal commitment to move in a Thai regiment with U.S. assistance on the Vietnam model. If that were to fail, the Thais would really be dealt a blow. 800 [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] Thais, on the other hand, could be considered merely an extension of Sierra Romeo.

Green: There will still be a problem.

Kissinger: We have to consider whether to face it under existing conditions or with a formal commitment.

Packard: It would be better under existing conditions.

Kissinger: Option 2 gets us out of a decision on Long Tieng, but it gets us involved in a commitment.

Packard: We could avoid a firm commitment by telling Souvanna and Thanat we would “consult on appropriate steps”.

Johnson: My draft is along these lines. It says that commitment of Thai troops is subject to agreement of the three governments. The message to Souvanna says: “Should the North Vietnamese army advance beyond Long Tieng, the United States is prepared to support the introduction of Thai forces into Laos at a time and under conditions agreed by the three governments”.<sup>3</sup>

Kissinger: How naive is Souvanna?

Wheeler: Not particularly, according to our reports.

Johnson: Souvanna goes up and down. He has often cried wolf.

Kissinger: Since the other two governments already agree, we are the missing element. What we would be saying is “we will support if we will support”.

Green: It will be interesting to have Unger’s comments. The Thais are mortally afraid of making their involvement public. They fear what

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<sup>3</sup> A copy of the draft has not been found; for text of the message as sent to Souvanna, see Document 214.



will happen if Thai troops are defeated under such circumstances. [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]

Kissinger: If [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] forces are used, the Thais' need for our support may not eventuate.

Green: The Thais want to involve us. They consider that U.S. involvement is tantamount to victory.

Cushman: There already is a battalion of [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] Thai artillery at Long Tieng.

Kissinger: (to Johnson) Your idea is that the North Vietnamese won't go beyond Long Tieng and that the Thais won't accept open involvement of their forces?

Johnson: Generally that is not a bad statement.

Green: Our caveats will go down hard with the Thais.

Johnson: We have asked Unger's views on a whole range of questions concerned with Thai involvement. (Reads sections of outgoing cable to Bangkok.)<sup>4</sup>

Kissinger: As put in that cable, I can tell what Unger's answer will be. What we want is his assessment of the overall political impact in Thailand of our refusal to support introduction of Thai troops.

Johnson: That was the first question in the cable.

Kissinger: The President has asked why we should acknowledge publicly moving Thai troops if we do so. Why not say that we are continuing Sierra Romeo?

Packard: It would be better not to move Thai troops.

Kissinger: This suggests that Thai involvement would have to be public. This terrifies the Thais.

Johnson: I cabled Unger that it would be virtually impossible to cover up Thai involvement.

Kissinger: We can't go much further without hearing from Unger.

Johnson: (to Kissinger) I'd like you to look at the drafts of responses we prepared.

Kissinger: Let me review individual positions [on sending a Thai battalion to Long Tieng].<sup>5</sup> Defense is against primarily for domestic political reasons. (Packard agrees.) State is against for reasons we have discussed.

Wheeler: On purely military grounds we are more for than against. However, we think it is not primarily a military problem; it is a political problem.

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<sup>4</sup> For the response to this cable, see footnote 8, Document 211. The outgoing message to Unger has not been found.

<sup>5</sup> These and the remaining brackets are in the source text.

Cushman: We consider that since some Thais are already there, the problems posed by Thai involvement already exist to some degree.

Kissinger: The President wants to make a decision by noon. He is leaning toward doing it [introducing a Thai battalion at Long Tieng].

Cushman: Can we go ahead with our plan [for movement of Thai unit to Long Tieng]?

Kissinger: I am not going to be a field marshal. I am assuming that you know how to move a Thai battalion from Udorn to Long Tieng. Given the time differential, we probably can't start moving till late this afternoon. I will be in touch with you. (to Johnson) I will read to you over the telephone the statement of pros and cons.

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### 213. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, March 26, 1970, 2:34–3:06 p.m.

SUBJECT

Laos

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Alexis Johnson

Marshall Green

CIA

Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman, Jr.

Thomas H. Karamessines

William Nelson

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

Lt. Col. Gerald H. Britten

JCS

Gen. Earle G. Wheeler

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Colonel Behr sent this record and the minutes of six other WSAG meetings on Laos and Cambodia to Kissinger on March 31. A note on Behr's transmittal memorandum reads: "HAK has seen. 4/6." The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

NSC Staff  
Gen. Haig  
Col. Kennedy  
Col. Behr  
Mr. Holdridge  
Mr. Guthrie

### Summary of Conclusions

1. The WSAG was informed of the President's decision to move a Thai battalion, on an unacknowledged basis, to Long Tieng as soon as possible in response to the requests received from Thanat and Souvanna.<sup>2</sup>

2. CIA will have responsibility for making arrangements to move the Thai battalion to Long Tieng. In carrying out the operation, it should be understood clearly that an orderly retreat from Long Tieng, if necessary, is considered preferable to encirclement.

3. The State Department will prepare and submit to Dr. Kissinger draft messages to Thanat and Souvanna informing them of the President's decision.<sup>3</sup>

a. The message to Thanat will take the form of a letter from Mr. Kissinger and will be delivered to Thanat by Ambassador Unger. The letter should include a statement to the effect that we consider it would be a prudent measure that a regimental combat team be assembled. We will not make any U.S. commitment to provide support for this regimental combat team or for its employment.

b. The message to Souvanna will take the form of a letter from the President. It will note the need for Souvanna to make a formal request to the Thai Government for the battalion. However, preparations to move the battalion will not be delayed awaiting confirmation that a Lao request has been transmitted to the Thais.

4. Our public position, on an if-asked basis, will be the same as that already taken on Sierra Romeo, namely, that reports of movement of Thai troops to Laos are exaggerated and that the question is one for the Thai and Lao Governments, to whom inquiries should be directed. We will ask the Thai and Lao Governments to adopt a position of no comment in response to inquiries. We will urge the Thai and Lao Governments not to deny that additional Thai troops have been sent to Laos.

5. It was the consensus of the WSAG that the Administration should take the initiative in informing the Senate Foreign Relations

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<sup>2</sup> On March 28, 800 Thai troops were airlifted from Udorn to Long Tieng and took up positions in the Long Tieng defensive perimeter. (Memorandum from Karamessines to Kissinger, March 28; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, Sensitive, Souvanna Phouma/Long Tieng)

<sup>3</sup> See Document 214 and footnote 6 thereto.

Committee of the movement of the Thai battalion to Laos. The WSAG recommended that the Committee be told that in response to requests from the Governments of Thailand and Laos, we are assisting with the movement of a few hundred more Thai troops to Laos. The new movement should be explained as an extension of the Sierra Romeo program about which the Committee has already been informed. Mr. Kissinger will seek the views of Bryce Harlow and will ask the President's approval of the WSAG proposal.

6. All operational communications involving the movement of the Thai battalion are to be handled through CIA channels. Other communications are to be transmitted through the most secure channels. Knowledge of the movement is to be restricted within each agency.

7. The letters which the President has already approved to signatories of the Geneva Convention other than Great Britain and the Soviet Union are to be dispatched.<sup>4</sup>

8. The WSAG and Laos Working Groups will revise their contingency plans to take into account the President's decision to move a Thai battalion to Laos.<sup>5</sup>

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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<sup>4</sup> See footnote 5, Document 204.

<sup>5</sup> Kissinger talked on the telephone with Nixon who was in Key Biscayne, Florida, at 5:10 p.m. on March 26. The portion of the conversation dealing with Laos follows: "P: And the Thai battalion, are we going to get them in there? K: That's done also. P: And there's going to be no announcement. We are just going to do it. We don't have to explain it. The Thais are defending their own country. Hell, I would do that, wouldn't you Henry? K: I had a long talk with Alex Johnson and he feels the same way. P: He's a nice guy." (Memorandum of telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, March 26; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1007, Haig Special File, Vietnam Files, Vol. V [2 of 2])

**214. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, March 27, 1970, 0013Z.

044847. Eyes Only for Ambassador. Ref: State 44787.<sup>2</sup>

Following is text of letter for immediate delivery by Ambassador to Foreign Minister:

“Mr. Foreign Minister:

“I refer to my letter of March 23<sup>3</sup> in response to yours of March 22<sup>4</sup> concerning the proposal that Thai infantry forces be dispatched to Laos to assist in the defense of Long Tieng. Meanwhile President Nixon has received a second letter from Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma<sup>5</sup> urging this course of action and I assume that he has addressed a similar request to your Prime Minister.

“The President, after careful consideration, has decided to meet the request, it being understood that the Thai infantry forces involved will be a battalion of Thai troops, some 700 or 800 strong, now in Udorn.<sup>6</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 19 THAI–LAOS. Secret; Immediate; Nodis. Drafted and cleared by Johnson and approved by Eliot and Kissinger. In a private letter on March 26 Kissinger informed Thanat that as a “one time exception and because of the need to initiate coordination and local action promptly,” he was responding to the Thai offer of troops through Ambassador Unger. (Text of special channel message to Thanat, March 26; enclosed in a memorandum from Haig to Karamessines, March 26; *ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, Sensitive, Souvanna Phouma/Long Tieng)

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 6 below.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 6, Document 209.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 2, Document 207.

<sup>5</sup> Telegram 2130 from Vientiane, March 25, contained the text of a second letter, also dated March 25 to Nixon. In it Souvanna wrote: “Without any doubt the movement of Thai troops towards northern Thailand might, to a certain extent, aid us, but I fear that it would be too late to stop the enemy offensive which is becoming more and more powerful. In my opinion and that of my immediate advisers, our defensive base at Long Tieng is the key to the defense of all central Laos. If this base were to fall it would have a disastrous psychological effect and would open to the enemy a way to Vang Vieng and Vientiane. It is for the foregoing reasons, Mr. President, that I ask you to reconsider your decision in the light of current circumstances.” Godley commented that the Embassy had been discouraging talk of a rightist coup in Laos, but if Long Tieng fell, Souvanna would be in a “most difficult position.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 546, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. IV, 1 February 1970–31 March 1970)

<sup>6</sup> Telegram 44787 to Vientiane, March 27, transmitted the text of a letter from Nixon to Souvanna informing him that the United States would support the airlift of a Thai battalion into Long Tieng. (*Ibid.*, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, Sensitive, Souvanna Phouma/Long Tieng) In telegram 2179 from Vientiane, March 27, Godley reported he gave the President’s letter to Souvanna at 11 a.m. local time that day and Souvanna’s “face burst into a smile and he was obviously most relieved.” (*Ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, DEF 19 THAI–LAOS)

is further understood that these forces will be moved as soon as possible to Long Tieng to assist in its defense and that the United States will provide material and logistic support for these Thai forces on generally the same basis and through the same channels as it does for the Sierra Romeo IX unit now at Long Tieng. I also want you to know that we are taking immediate steps to improve the effectiveness of our air operations in support of your forces.

“You will recall that in my letter of March 23 I said that perhaps the best move that could be made at this time would be for you to assemble a RCT at an advance base like Udorn and that it be trained and readied against the contingency of further moves the North Vietnamese may make. I still believe this would be a prudent course although one battalion will now be moved to Long Tieng.

“The President trusts that our two Governments and that of Laos will maintain the closest contacts and cooperative relationships in the defense of Long Tieng and the President is hopeful that these measures can help to hold this important position.

“Ambassador Unger will be in close touch with you in regard to any questions you may have or issues that may arise.<sup>7</sup>

“With warm regards, Henry A. Kissinger.”

**Rogers**

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<sup>7</sup> In telegram 3639 from Bangkok, March 27, Unger reported that he delivered Kissinger's letter to Thanat who would forward it to Prime Minister Thanom. (Ibid.) In a private channel message to Kissinger, March 27, Thanat wrote that Thailand wished to convey to Nixon Thailand's deep appreciation and believed the decision would strengthen the defense of Laos and Thai security. Thanat stated his government took note of the understanding stated in the message transmitted from Unger and “We shall abide by it.” (Enclosed in memorandum from Karamessines to Kissinger, March 27; *ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 101, Vietnam Subject Files, Sensitive, Souvanna Phouma/Long Tieng)

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

Washington, March 27, 1970.

SUBJECT

B-52 Operations in Cambodia

In response to your request for an examination of the usefulness of B-52 strikes against base camps used by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in Cambodia,<sup>2</sup> Secretary Laird has provided a report (Tab A)<sup>3</sup> based on three assessments made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff since August 1969 when weekly B-52 strikes were commenced. In their evaluations the Joint Chiefs and MACV have strongly affirmed the value of the strikes and stated that B-52 raids in Cambodia:

—continue to produce extensive damage to enemy facilities and losses of enemy troops and matériel.

—have resulted in a decrease in North Vietnamese and Viet Cong activity levels in the immediate strike areas.

—are an essential and logical ingredient in the overall interdiction campaign applied against the enemy.

—have preempted and reduced enemy operations.

—have a direct bearing on the success of Vietnamization.

—may have played a significant role in the recent political changes in Cambodia.

—are sustainable in spite of operating costs and political risks.

Although mindful of some political risks involved, Secretary Laird concurs with the assessment of the Joint Chiefs and MACV that these operations are effective. He points out that during his recent trip to Vietnam both Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams told him that these raids have been “one of the most telling operations in the entire war.”

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 104, Vietnam Subject Files, Menu Strikes, November. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. Sent for information.

<sup>2</sup> On a February 18 routine briefing memorandum on results of B-52 strikes in Cambodia from Kissinger, Nixon wrote: “Do we need to examine the usefulness of continued strikes?” On March 3 Kissinger asked Laird for an analysis of the menu bombing and whether it should continue. (Both *ibid.*)

<sup>3</sup> Tab A, a March 24 memorandum from Laird to the President, is attached but not printed.

Secretary Laird expects to have a more detailed report in the not-too-distant future.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On March 27 Kissinger sent the President a report that COSVN reportedly had issued orders to place military forces on alert and evacuate ordnance, food, and medicine to Vietnam to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Cambodian military. Units were to remain stationary and avoid clashes with Cambodian troops. Also included was the fact that there was no evidence of wholesale movement of units from Cambodian sanctuaries into South Vietnam. In fact, the border area remained quiet. Nixon wrote the following note: "K. Step up menu series immediately (no appeal)." There is a note in an unknown handwriting that this was "Done." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 104, Vietnam Subject Files, Menu Strikes, November)

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

Washington, April 1, 1970.

### SUBJECT

Hanoi's Current Options in Cambodia

Recent North Vietnamese statements and actions on Cambodia still do not clearly indicate exactly how Hanoi now plans to proceed there. Hanoi has not yet closed any of its options and is apparently still attempting to assess developments before committing itself irrevocably to any course of action.

The North Vietnamese government has made one official statement on the Cambodian situation. That statement endorsed Prince Sihanouk's call for resistance to the new government, and it accused the new government of being a "servant of the United States." It also, however, contained elements of caution. Although it said that "the Vietnamese people wholeheartedly support the Khmer people in this just struggle until final victory," it repeatedly indicated that Hanoi saw this

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 145, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, April 1, 1970. Secret; Nodis; Sensitive. Sent for information. Haig signed for Kissinger. A note on the memorandum indicates that the President saw it on April 3. This memorandum was based on an analysis prepared by Holdridge on March 26 entitled, "What Hanoi Might Now Do About Cambodia." Kissinger wrote the following note on it: "Excellent job. HK." On March 31 Holdridge sent Kissinger this memorandum to the President with the recommendation that Kissinger sign it. (Ibid.)



primarily as a Cambodian struggle. It thus suggested that there were limits on Hanoi's overt involvement in the struggle, if not on its covert support.

*Hanoi Objectives:* Hanoi's ultimate objective in Cambodia is to have that country controlled by a government subservient or at least friendly to Hanoi. Its current short-run objective is more limited: to use Cambodia as a sanctuary and supply area for Communist forces in South Vietnam, either with the cooperation of the Phnom Penh government or in defiance of it.

*Now Complicated:* Prince Sihanouk's attitude while he was in power served short-run North Vietnamese purposes because it permitted them to use Cambodia as a sanctuary. Premier Lon Nol's call on the Communist forces to leave obviously complicates Hanoi's prospects in South Vietnam. Hanoi cannot win the war in South Vietnam under its current strategy without making use of Cambodia. Since Hanoi is still thoroughly committed to taking over South Vietnam, it must do something either to change the Cambodian government or its position.

*May See Opportunity:* Although Hanoi is probably unhappy about the course of events in Phnom Penh, which have complicated its ability to use the Cambodian sanctuary, it may also hope to use these events to advance its position, not only to safeguard the sanctuaries but also to accelerate the development of a Communist or pro-Communist government in Phnom Penh. (We do not know what Communist role in Cambodia was agreed in Peking between Prince Sihanouk and Hanoi Premier Pham Van Dong.)

*Hanoi Options:* To regain its sanctuaries as well as supply lines and perhaps to bring about a favorable change of government in Phnom Penh, Hanoi now has the following options:

*Option A: Rapid use of Communist military forces against Phnom Penh, reinstalling Sihanouk or some other government favorable to the Communists.*

*Advantages:* Such a course has a number of advantages. It could give Hanoi control of Cambodia, provide a secure rear for the war in South Vietnam, and forestall the Cambodian government's effort to consolidate its control.

*Disadvantages:* However, such an overt action might trigger a U.S. response in Cambodia or perhaps even against North Vietnam, and it might also trigger South Vietnamese military operations against Communist forces and bases in Cambodia. There has also been little preparatory political work for such a move, and Hanoi usually precedes its military moves by political efforts.

*Option B: Use of Communist forces and cadres to foment dissension and insurrection, leading to a "people's war" and providing a front for Communist military moves. Perhaps split Cambodia, as Laos is split.*

*Advantages:* This course preserves some advantage of speed, even if not quite as much as Option A. Unlike Option A, it provides a native screen for the Communist forces and makes it harder for the U.S. and the GVN to become involved.

*Disadvantages:* By relying on Cambodian political forces and native support, Hanoi delays gaining control of Phnom Penh and may give the government time to consolidate itself. Moreover, such a course places greater reliance on Sihanouk's backing, since his support is essential to its success, and he is a mercurial friend. It would probably not give Hanoi early access to the port of Sihanoukville.

*Option C: Classical "people's war," developing a Communist political infrastructure, developing contacts with local dissidents, forming a "liberation front" or "government in exile," and proceeding to win popular and military support.*

*Advantages:* This is the doctrinally proper course, which is important. It is least likely to provoke a U.S. and GVN reaction. It also gives the Communists more time to develop a complete infrastructure, leaving them in a stronger position later.

*Disadvantages:* This course takes a long time. It opens another front when Hanoi already has its hands full, and it does nothing to improve Communist fighting conditions in South Vietnam quickly. Moreover, it involves having Sihanouk for an ally over a long time, a prospect which Hanoi would not relish.

*Option D: To attempt to work with the present Cambodian government, pressing it to let the sanctuaries remain and to continue the flow of supplies.*

*Advantages:* This keeps the bulk of Communist resources concentrated on Vietnam, where they belong, and it does not materially increase the cost of the conflict. It also runs the least risk of provoking any reaction.

*Disadvantages:* It puts the Communists at the mercy of the Lon Nol government. It also has a number of internal contradictions.

*Current Tactics:* Recent Communist actions suggest that Hanoi is now following Option B, using its forces and supporters to move as fast as possible against the new government without actually pushing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces openly into battle against Cambodians. Hanoi is probably not yet certain whether these tactics will work. Much depends on the degree to which it can de-stabilize the government without incurring too much Cambodian reaction.

*Other Options Still Open:* Even while Hanoi is following these tactics, it appears to be weighing the situation carefully to see whether they will work or whether something else is needed. If Hanoi decides that it must follow Option A, using its own forces more overtly, and that it can do so without great risk of U.S./GVN retaliation, it still might choose that option. On the other hand, if it determines that the Cambodian government is now too strong and that the state of Communist political preparation and Sihanouk's popular support is inadequate, it

can still go back to Option C and settle down to another long “people’s war.” We also believe that Hanoi has not yet closed off all chances of dealing with Lon Nol and that at least one objective of its current pressure against the new government is to persuade Phnom Penh to agree to the re-establishment of the Communist supply lines and sanctuaries on favorable terms.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On April 1 Holdridge sent Kissinger a memorandum outlining possible U.S. moves in Cambodia and suggesting U.S.–GVN contingency planning if the North Vietnamese moved on Phnom Penh. Holdridge wrote: “This contingency plan of course raises all the problems of escalation and U.S. involvement. On the other side, however, is the spectre of a Communist-dominated Sihanouk government providing a secure sanctuary and logistics base for the VC/NVA.” (Ibid., Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970) Kissinger cites Holdridge’s second sentence quoted above as “our nightmare” in *White House Years*, p. 470. On April 2 Winston Lord prepared at Kissinger’s request a long paper on U.S. policy options in regard to sanctuaries in Cambodia. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 145, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, April 1, 1970)

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**217. Memorandum From the Senior Military Assistant (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 1, 1970.

SUBJECT

Meeting with Secretary of Defense Laird and the President, 3/31/70

Secretary Laird informed the President that the main purpose of his request to see him was to discuss the situation in Cambodia. However, before doing so he wished to report that enemy rocket attacks had been conducted against five U.S. military installations. He pointed out that these attacks had been predicted by CIA and our intelligence

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 224, Agency Files, Department of Defense, Vol. VI, February 1, 1970–April 20, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Kissinger was on vacation on March 31. Nixon met with Laird and Haig from 3:01 to 4:05 p.m. that day. (Ibid., White House Central Files, Daily Diary) Kissinger wrote the following note on the memorandum: “Al, Laird’s communications with Rogers are getting troublesome. We should discuss. HK.” Kissinger’s comments relating to specific portions of this memorandum are footnoted below. Haig prepared an extensive briefing paper for the President’s meeting with Laird. (Ibid., Box 1009, Haig Special Files, Haig’s Vietnam File, Vol. V, [1 of 2])

in the field<sup>2</sup> and stated that they had nothing to do with our action against the SAM sites in North Vietnam<sup>3</sup> but rather had been planned for some period. He also estimated that there would be more attacks in III and IV Corps areas within the next day or two.

The Secretary then turned to the Cambodian problem. He informed the President he was somewhat concerned by State's message to Bunker last weekend instructing Bunker to ask the GVN to turn off border operations against enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia.<sup>4</sup> He then recounted that he had personally set up these operations with Bunker, Thieu and Abrams when he had visited Vietnam in February and that our calling them off now was a discouragement to the ARVN rangers who he was attempting to Vietnamize through these operations. The President stated that the decision had been made before the Cambodian coup and that he wanted to watch the situation in Cambodia a little more carefully before proceeding. Secretary Laird then said that these were very low-level operations done in coordination with the Cambodians and that there have in fact been 15 of them since his visit in February. The President then stated that he did not think it was worth waiting much longer and authorized Secretary Laird to start the operations up again very quietly, providing they were purely ARVN and could be portrayed as protective reaction.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In TDCS-314/033444-70, March 31, the Station in Saigon predicted: "A surge of enemy activity is likely to begin in portions of all four Corps on the night of March 31/April 1. This surge, probably to be characterized by attacks by fire and limited ground probes, is probably a belated attempt to carry out plans delayed since February." (Ibid., Box 144, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, March 1970)

<sup>3</sup> On March 21 Nixon authorized U.S. retaliatory air strikes in the event U.S. aircraft in Laos or North Vietnam were engaged by North Vietnamese SAM/AAA sites. (Memorandum from Nixon to Laird, March 21; *ibid.*, Box 99, Vietnam Subject Files, Operating Authorities Over North Vietnam)

<sup>4</sup> Telegram 45730 to Saigon, March 27. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB) In telegram 4725 from Saigon, March 30, Bunker reported that Thieu agreed to suspend ARVN cross-border operations. (Ibid.) Haig also sent Bunker a backchannel message alerting him to telegram 45730 and suggesting that short-term benefits from cross-border operations would be outweighed by the risk posed to U.S. domestic support for Vietnam policy. (Telegram from Haig to Bunker, WHS0011, March 27; *ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970)

<sup>5</sup> On March 31 Haig sent Bunker backchannel message WH0012 informing him that the President had lifted the temporary moratorium on ARVN cross-border operations, but they had to be coordinated with Cambodian Armed Forces, should remain at previous levels, and be portrayed as ARVN operations taken under protective reactions criteria. Only Laird, McCain, and Abrams were also aware of this decision. (Ibid., Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970) In backchannel message 806 from Saigon, April 1, Bunker reported that he had informed Thieu of the decision; Thieu agreed. (Ibid.) Kissinger wrote the following note apparently referring to this issue: "When the hell did all this happen. Can we get report?"

The President then asked Secretary Laird where the larger plans for ARVN or U.S. and ARVN operations into the sanctuaries stood.<sup>6</sup> Secretary Laird said that the plans had arrived and they were reviewing them now. The U.S. military felt that the ARVN alone could conduct operations against Base Areas 704, 706 and 709,<sup>7</sup> but he felt that we should not go into the other base areas which had been worked over so heavily by our B-52's. The President confirmed that he might order these plans executed if Hanoi goes all out against the Cambodians. The President also stated that he wanted the Menu operations continued at a high level.

Secretary Laird remarked that he felt we could do more with respect to Cambodia and had sent Secretary Rogers a memorandum (Tab A)<sup>8</sup> suggesting a number of steps, including asking the Australians, who have good relations with the Cambodians, to do more. Secretary Laird then complained about the poor communications between Phnom Penh and Washington and noted that there was no CIA facility in Phnom Penh. The President directed General Haig to move immediately to upgrade our communications facilities in Phnom Penh, to do this as discreetly as possible, and to take the tack that these communications were needed to protect U.S. citizens. General Haig pointed out that State had already taken some measures to improve communications there by extending the operating hours of the station and doubling the capacity of the lines. The President stated that he still wished to have an improved capability there and that we should have CIA in there, although they would be under cover.

The President then turned to the air operations over North Vietnam and commented that he would like to consider further operations next Monday.<sup>9</sup> Secretary Laird stated that they had not completed the job on at least one of the SAM sites and should probably do so. The President said that such an operation is approved for next Monday if you do not hear differently before that time. The President instructed Secretary Laird in the meantime not to go looking for trouble but to react if the North Vietnamese attack any U.S. reconnaissance aircraft.

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<sup>6</sup> Kissinger wrote the following referring to this statement: "I think U.S. forces should participate if only to get out again. ARVN will never leave."

<sup>7</sup> Kissinger wrote the following referring to this statement: "I don't believe it."

<sup>8</sup> Tab A was a March 31 letter from Laird to Rogers in which Laird also suggested that South Vietnam should relinquish its claim to \$25 million in a blocked account in Paris in favor of Cambodia, initiate discussions on border and off-shore differences with Cambodia, and offer a general pledge to support Cambodia's sovereignty of territory. Laird also suggested Thailand should reduce its troops on the Cambodian border. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 15 CAMB) Rogers responded affirmatively to Laird's suggestions in an April 2 letter to him. (Ibid.)

<sup>9</sup> April 6.

The President then asked Secretary Laird why some of our casualties had been up in the past two weeks. The Secretary replied that our casualties would be down again this week and that they had generally been very small except for a lot of accidents. Then the President said, "you should never report an accident as a battle death," to which Laird responded, "we don't."

The President then stated that he had noted a lot of chatter in the newspapers about the next withdrawal announcement and suggested that next Thursday<sup>10</sup> the President, Mr. Kissinger and a small closehold group should look at the next increment. Secretary Laird stated that General Abrams wanted to hold up for 90 days and the JCS for about 60 days. The JCS would propose about 35,000 for August. Secretary Laird added that these divergent views did not create a problem and could be easily straightened out.<sup>11</sup> The President stated that prior to a decision he wanted absolutely no speculation on this issue.

The Secretary then turned to the problem of funding for Southeast Asia. He stated that the Senate was probably going to add to the prohibition against ground operations in Laos by including air operations. The President asked whether or not this meant they would put a limit on the use of our aircraft outside of Vietnam through the use of funds. Secretary Laird confirmed this. The President stated we would fight such a limitation to the death.

Secretary Laird then stated he also has the problem of having funded for a projected strength of 260,000 by July 1, 1971. This meant that between April 15 and July 1 he would have to get another \$150 million if there was any delay in the next withdrawal increment and would have to take it from some other activities of the services. The President stated he would spend all of next year's money rather than lose in Vietnam. Secretary Laird then pointed out that the pay increase of 6% which the President might approve for federal employees, in conjunction with the postal strike settlement, would cost \$850 million for the military portion and that this would cause an additional problem in a budget that is already stretched too tight. The Secretary added that the Defense Department's budget allocation was already way out of phase with the domestic side and the President nodded assent. Secretary Laird also stated that if the bombing continues after June 30 at the current level, he will need another billion dollars in the FY 71 Defense budget. The President responded that this means you must go all out now, that we cannot afford to let the dust settle, and added that

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<sup>10</sup> April 9.

<sup>11</sup> Kissinger wrote in the margin: "What a liar."

he will not permit us to skim on what is needed in Southeast Asia. The President also stated that he wanted Secretary Laird to:

- continue to look for B-52 targets in Northern Laos and to hit them;
- investigate the casualty lists and see if he can pick out accidental deaths from deaths actually caused by enemy action; and
- dust off the seven-day plan for attacks in North Vietnam.<sup>12</sup>

[Omitted here is a short discussion of the Anti-Ballistic Missile issue and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency's pamphlet comparing U.S. and Soviet Government expenditures.]

In concluding the meeting, the President congratulated Secretary Laird for the fine job the military had done with the Post Office strike and reiterated that he wanted the plan by Monday to hit the SAM sites, a continuation at a high-level of the Menu series, and also wished to find some targets for the B-52s in Northern Laos.

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<sup>12</sup> The President asked General Haig if the strikes on dikes in North Vietnam would cause civilian casualties. General Haig stated that when the dikes were full there would be some flooding and possibly loss of civilian lives, but well into the dry season this would not be a problem. [Footnote in the source text.]

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

Washington, undated.

### SUBJECT

Meeting with the North Vietnamese on April 4

### *Where We Are*

The North Vietnamese behavior in the last two meetings has been consistent with a serious desire to negotiate a settlement. It has also, however, been consistent with a fishing expedition.

If they are on a fishing expedition, they are not getting much. They are not gaining time. They have not succeeded in putting pressure on us or in gaining greater U.S. restraint.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. IV. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. The memorandum is undated, but it was sent to Nixon before Kissinger left for Paris on April 3.

Moreover, they are not in a position to make propaganda on the basis of our meetings. In fact, if the record were released the propaganda advantage would be on our side. It would be clear from the statements that it was we who had pressed for progress. We have given them a specific withdrawal calendar and reaffirmed our acceptance of the principle of total withdrawal, which they had said would lead to progress. Although the schedule we gave them actually covers a longer period of time than the period we have mentioned in the meetings at the Majestic, the significant facts on the record would be that we were specific for the first time and stated we were flexible on details. Although they have conceded more than we in this channel, their concessions have been more subtle and thus less susceptible to use for propaganda.

Although subtle, their concessions have been very real. In effect, they have scrapped the ten points, abandoned their refusal to discuss their own withdrawal—although they have not yet accepted reciprocity, and have agreed to discuss our proposals as well as theirs.

*What We Should Hope to Accomplish*

As I said in my memorandum reporting on our last meeting,<sup>2</sup> the next two meetings should tell the story with regard to their intentions. We have now reached the point where each side has made clear its position on procedures, and has stated the necessity for going into substance. We have already gone into substance in making our proposal on withdrawals.

At this next meeting, therefore, we should concentrate on seeking to clarify their intentions. We can accomplish this in two ways:

—First, I should insist that they speak first. This is largely cosmetic, but it has important implications with regard to their intent.

—I should also insist that they respond substantively to our proposal on withdrawals at the last meeting, and indicate agreement to the principle of reciprocity. This is vital on substantive grounds, and it also would be an essential indication of their intent to negotiate seriously.

If their actions at this meeting indicate serious intent, I should try to draw them out further on their ideas regarding withdrawal and should also make a general political statement designed to draw them out on this second basic issue.

*What I Propose to Do at this Meeting*

With these objectives in mind, I would propose to do the following:

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<sup>2</sup> Document 200.



—In my opening statement (Tab A)<sup>3</sup> I would firmly say that it is now time for them to speak first and to speak on substance, indicating that this is important if we are to make progress. We went into substance at the last meeting; now it is their turn. I would press them for a response to our withdrawal proposal.

—If they refuse to speak first, or if they say nothing new on their own withdrawal, I would make a statement to break off the meeting (Tab B).<sup>3</sup> I would tell them that we continue to desire progress in this channel, but that we do not believe that repetition of standard positions and failure to meet new proposals with counter-proposals justify continuing our discussions. I would say that I would hope to hear from them when they had something new to tell us.

—If they speak first, and say something new and interesting about their withdrawal, I would make a statement indicating that we will study their proposal, and would try to draw them out further with questions about what they have said (Tab C).<sup>3</sup>

—If they make a statement containing something new about withdrawals, I would then propose to make a statement about political issues. This would be appropriate because we cannot expect them to say something new about withdrawals and lead off with a new political statement at the same meeting.

—My statement on political issues (Tab D)<sup>3</sup> would be of a general and philosophical character, framing the issues as attractively as possible without giving anything away, in order to draw them out to the limit of their instructions on this subject and to encourage future proposals.

I would first state our understanding of the complexity and difficulties involved in finding a political process which fairly registers the relationship of political forces. I would then state a few basic principles. In summary, these are:

—We cannot accept their demand for the overthrow of the leaders of the GVN as part of the negotiating process, although after a settlement we would expect the control of power to be determined by the agreed political process;

—We support free elections, since the political process must reflect the will of the people. But they have questions about who would run them. We are willing to listen to proposals on alternative ways of determining the popular will; for example, there are many aspects to how a mixed electoral commission might work.

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<sup>3</sup> Attached but not printed.

—Examples of what they might wish to discuss in considering the relationship of free elections to how political power is shared might include whether elections for the executive should be direct, or indirect through elections for a parliamentary body; how electoral districts would be drawn to afford a fair and realistic expression of political forces; and how elections would affect the future safety of the political forces on both sides.

—It is possible that a way to start the process is to begin in the provinces and locally before solving problems in Saigon.

—The shape of a political outcome would be influenced by the character of military agreements, e.g. you cannot have elections in some areas without local ceasefires.

—It is proper and natural that they should take the responsibility for making specific proposals on political questions.

I would then press again for our setting some deadline for reaching agreement, particularly on political questions. I would argue that since the act of making political proposals can have political consequences, issues could be considered if there were promise of rapid settlement which could not be as a part of a longer negotiating process.

#### *Laos and Cambodia*

It may be desirable for me to say something about Laos and perhaps Cambodia, depending on developments there.<sup>4</sup> I doubt that they will want to talk about Laos very much, except in standard terms, but I think that we will want to make our position clear. I will seek your guidance on this at a time nearer the meeting.

*Recommendation:* That you approve the strategy outlined above and the statements developed in accordance with it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nixon wrote “yes” in the margin next to this sentence.

<sup>5</sup> Nixon initialed the “approve” option and wrote: “Put a time limit on it.”

219. Memorandum From the Senior Military Assistant (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 3, 1970.

SUBJECT

Ground Operations Against Base Camps in Cambodia

Attached is a memorandum from Secretary Laird forwarding a plan prepared by MACV for operations against enemy sanctuary areas in Cambodia.<sup>2</sup> The plan has not yet been evaluated by CINCPAC, JCS or Secretary Laird. It is presented in five parts:

- Part I. General Description
- Part II. Option 1—Plan for Attack on Base Area 352/353 (see map at Tab A)
- Part III. Option 2—Plan for Attack on Base Areas 704 and 367/706 (see map at Tab B)
- Part IV. Answers to Questions
- Part V. Supplementary Information

The Plan assesses two options:

—*Option 1* is an attack (utilizing elements of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division and the ARVN Airborne Division) into Base Areas 352/353 where large supply storage and headquarters areas are located. B-52 operations would be followed by initial ground attacks with two regiments. Three to four weeks are considered necessary to complete the operation.

—*Option 2* provides for simultaneous attacks against Base Area 704, a major storage area and transshipment point, and Base Area 367/706, an extensive logistics base and subregional headquarters area. Attacks against Base Area 704 would be accomplished by an ARVN armored brigade with U.S. riverine support and attacks on Base Area 367/706 would be conducted by three brigades of US/ARVN forces in an air mobile and ground operation. The operations would last about 14 days.

A brief summary sheet describing each option is at Tab C.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Spoke; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> The attached undated memorandum is not printed but a note on a covering memorandum from Laird reads: "(Cover for April 3, 1970 MACV message)." The MACV plan is dated March 30.

<sup>3</sup> Not attached.

The Base Area attacked under Option 1 is a potentially more lucrative target because of the major enemy headquarters located there. It has the significant additional advantage of a much smaller risk to noncombatants. Option 2 has the advantages of greater ARVN participation, shorter duration, more favorable terrain and the probability of fewer US/RVNAF casualties.

In describing these plans, MACV has made the following important points:

—The plan should be successful, although whether it would be sufficiently disruptive to stop an enemy attack on the Cambodian capital is highly dependent on political factors.

—Successful operations would probably:

—have a highly favorable effect on RVNAF morale and confidence which would enhance Vietnamization;

—result in destruction of enemy facilities which would significantly reduce the threat to III and IV CTZ;

—have a long-term impact which would more than offset the costs.

—Significant U.S. involvement is essential to insure success. Option 1 would require a preponderance of U.S. participation.

—A major risk of the operations is the possibility that they would trigger an all-out enemy effort against I CTZ. Because of this, U.S. troop withdrawals beyond those scheduled for April 15 should be delayed as long as execution of the Cambodian operations is considered possible.

—Military casualties would fall into the high-intensity category. Non-combatant casualties under Option 1 would be negligible but the possibility under Option 2 is high. This is one of the major risks of Option 2 and is likely to be emphasized in press coverage.

—Weather is an important factor. April is a favorable month but after that the situation deteriorates rapidly and operations would be more time-consuming and difficult.

—The concept of short duration, raid-type operations has been discarded since the impact would be limited and of doubtful remuneration.

—Because of the difficulties in concealing preparations of the operations themselves, the press should be briefed to minimize the risk of leaks just prior to the mission.

—MACV would require 72 hours from time of order to commencement of the mission.

MACV concludes that the risks involved in these operations are acceptable if U.S. force levels are not reduced beyond the level which will be reached on April 15. MACV recommends that Option 1 be ex-

ecuted as soon as possible and that further U.S. redeployments be held in abeyance over the next 75–90 days.

A number of problem areas with the plan will probably surface as the various military staffs make their assessments. Some problem areas and questions which should be raised are readily apparent:

—The plan is predicated on varying degrees of U.S. participation. It is not clear whether any successful operation could be carried out by the ARVN alone. However, the implication is that U.S. involvement is essential to the success of all of these operations. Attacks on Base Area 704 appear to require the least direct U.S. involvement. However, even in this operation, U.S. helicopter, naval and air support is considered essential.

—The predicted durations for accomplishment of the missions are partially based on the assumption that the operations must be sufficiently disruptive to cause a turnaround of enemy forces approaching Phnom Penh. Short thrusts have been discarded; however, MACV might find some value in these, at least from a purely military standpoint, if asked to re-examine such a possibility.

—A major political scenario and assessment of the political impact of these operations should be developed.

—The plan is written to beat the drum for no U.S. troop withdrawals beyond April 15 levels. Although the concern is legitimate, the problem appears to be over-played in the context of presenting this plan. Whether an all-out enemy attack on the I CTZ Area is the most likely and feasible enemy counteraction to these operations is an assumption which needs careful reappraisal.

—The plan indicates there will be little possibility of keeping these operations from the press. Therefore, the operations will pose a major public relations problem, particularly if not done in the context of a major enemy assault against the Cambodian Government.

—There does not appear to be sufficient provision for blocking forces to prevent enemy forces in the base areas from fading deeper into Cambodia if they choose not to fight. Therefore, the enemy may suffer few casualties and only yield territory temporarily, although these operations will probably have a devastating effect on the enemy supply problem as well as a number of psychological advantages.

—It would be helpful to have a casualty prediction in terms of numbers rather than the “high intensity” friendly casualty estimates.

—It should also be noted that in one place in the plan, MACV indicates a problem exists concerning the availability of sufficient air munitions.

*Recommendations:*<sup>4</sup>

A more careful assessment of the plan will be possible once the staff evaluations have been completed. In the interim, however, it would probably be advisable to:

—task MACV to develop alternate plans for attacking sanctuary areas where it is considered that an all-ARVN operation could be successful.

—Ask DOD to report on the problem raised by MACV concerning the availability of air munitions.

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<sup>4</sup> Kissinger initialed the approve option of both recommendations. On April 4 Kissinger and Holdridge drafted a memorandum to Laird asking MACV “to develop alternative plans for attacking sanctuary areas in Cambodia where the operations could be successfully concluded entirely by South Vietnamese armed forces.” Kissinger also asked for a report on the status of levels of air munitions to support these operations. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970) The memorandum was not sent until April 16, but Kissinger raised the issue in a breakfast meeting with Laird on April 7. (Memorandum from Howe to Haig, April 6; *ibid.*)

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## 220. Editorial Note

On March 25, 1970, Secretary of State William Rogers and Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin met to discuss Laos and Cambodia at the Secretary’s initiative. After discussing prospects for a coalition government in Laos, both men agreed that their countries had a mutual interest in maintaining a neutral Cambodia and preventing conflict from spreading there. Rogers assured Dobrynin that the United States had nothing to do with the overthrow of Sihanouk; Dobrynin indicated that if a right-wing group emerged in Cambodia there “would probably be trouble.” (Telegram 44214 to Moscow, March 26; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27–14 LAOS) On April 3 the Department of State instructed the Embassy in Moscow to make a formal *démarche* to the Soviet Government on Cambodia, stressing US–USSR mutual interest in Cambodian neutrality, reiterating that the United States was not involved in deposing Sihanouk or establishing Lon Nol, and expressing concern about North Vietnamese and Viet Cong encouragement of unrest and opposition to Cambodian control in border regions of Cambodia. (Telegram 49049 to Moscow, April 3; *ibid.*, POL 27 CAMB) On April 8 Ambassador Jacob Beam reported that when he made these points to Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Firyubin, he received “little more than stonewalling in over one-hour conversation.” (Telegram 1711 from Moscow, April 8; *ibid.*)

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

Washington, April 4, 1970.

## SUBJECT

Vietnam

This memorandum updates the Vietnam trip report that I submitted to you in February.<sup>2</sup> The following sections present an assessment of the current situation in Vietnam, the outlook there, and alternative courses of action we should consider.

In brief, the current military situation remains favorable, despite US redeployments and the current limited increases in enemy combat operations. Meanwhile, progress continues to be made in Vietnamization, although several problem areas remain. Most notable are the problems of inadequate leadership and political and economic instability. Events of the past weeks in Laos and Cambodia complicate the situation, introducing a number of imponderables but also offering the opportunity for new initiatives. I believe, on balance, we continue to make progress toward the US objective of self-determination for the South Vietnamese people.

In seeking this objective in South Vietnam, however, we should continue to do so, as you have outlined in your key messages, in a fashion which will:

- Maintain the support of the American people.
- Be within tolerable economic limits.
- Not destroy the political, economic, and social fabric of South Vietnam.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 145, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, April 1, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Haig sent this memorandum to Kissinger characterizing it as unclear of purpose and suggesting "several *very* alarming features." Haig indicated that (a) "The [Clark] Clifford thinking permeates the OSD staff," (b) Laird conceded for the "first time that Vietnamization is a farce," (c) Laird dramatized that financial impossibilities precluded continuation of the war and the only hope was a political solution, and (d) the United States "must draw down as rapidly as possible and to, above all, prevent further involvement in Southeast Asia." Haig added "I believe that it [Laird's memorandum] will cause the President to ask himself what in the hell Laird has been doing all these months." Haig also stated "the President will gag upon reading this rambling, purposeless softening effort." (Memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, April 4; *ibid.*, Box 1009, Haig Special Files, Haig's Vietnam File, Vol. V [2 of 2]) On April 10 Lynn informed Kissinger that he prepared a memorandum for the President reviewing Laird's trip and this April 4 Laird memorandum, but it is not clear that Lynn's analysis was sent forward. (*Ibid.*, Box 95, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, Troop Replacements, 1970)

<sup>2</sup> Document 187.

- Not disable us from honoring our other security and foreign policy obligations.
- Not result in the alienation of our friends and allies elsewhere in the world.
- Not precipitate a wider and even more costly conflict.

I should like to review the situation in the perspective of these criteria:

### *I. The Current Military Situation in Vietnam*

#### *A. Patterns of Activity*

The tempo of the war continues to be relatively slow, recent enemy activity notwithstanding. Until the March 31 flare-up, enemy attacks had been at about one-half the level for similar periods last year. Their consumption of mortar, artillery, and rocket munitions had been less than half that of a year ago, 11 tons per week, compared to 24 tons per week last year. There are occasional interruptions in the pattern, but the basic trend is that of declining combat activity.

One of the most telling indicators of this decline is combat deaths. Data available now for the first quarter of 1970 reveals deaths for all combatants well below those for comparable periods during the past two years.

	Combat Deaths				
	1st Qtr Totals				
	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970
NVA/VC	13,060	22,756	72,455	44,846	26,884
SVN	3,407	3,096	10,500	5,922	3,261
US	1,224	2,126	4,869	3,184	1,108

Fortunately for the United States, combat deaths dropped during the past three months to the lowest levels in the last five years. To some extent, this results from the lower overall US troop levels and, hence, reduced exposure. The lower US casualty levels is one of the strongest reasons, in addition to your firm leadership and guidance, for continuing public support for our program.

By mid-April we will have reduced US authorized strength in Vietnam by 115,000 troops, emphasizing pacification efforts rather than offensive action. During the same time, the enemy force level has declined by at least 40,000. While US and NVA/VC forces in South Vietnam have been reduced, the South Vietnamese have been increasing their military forces, particularly the Regional and Popular Forces. As a result, the ratio of total allied forces to NVA/VC forces has improved almost 20 percent since June 1969, from 5.6 to 1 to about 6.7 to 1.

We do not know the reasons behind the lower level of NVA/VC activity. It could be a positive reaction to our own policy of troop with-



drawals. It could also reflect a policy of waiting until the situation is more favorable to them following expected additional US redeployments. General Abrams reports the enemy continues to have the capacity to increase hostile activity significantly, but not to mount a sustained offensive. The March 31–April 1 “high point” is symptomatic of this capability.

The US effort continues to be large and costly. We still have over 430,000 troops in Vietnam, together with about 40,000 men in Thailand, 30,000 offshore, and another 90,000 in the Philippines, Guam and Okinawa. The level of US tactical air support is down 30 percent from the peak levels of 1968, but it remains at a high level, about 23,000 attack sorties per month. B-52 sorties are also reduced, from a peak level of 1,800 per month to the current level of 1,400 per month. However, this is about 75 percent higher than the level the US was flying as recently as January 1968. Although the cost of the war has declined as our force levels and support are being reduced, we still spent about \$17 billion for the war in 1969.

The burden of the war on the United States is reflected in more than just the lives lost and the resources expended. There is also a major “opportunity cost.” By using resources valued at \$10–20 billion per year during the past four years in Southeast Asia, we have foregone the opportunity to use the resources for other purposes, even in the Defense field. This has put us at a distinct, and increasingly aggravated, disadvantage vis à vis the Soviet Union. The following table tells the story:

*General Impact of SEA on USSR/US*  
((\$billion in 1967 prices))

	<i>USSR</i>				
	<i>1965</i>	<i>1966</i>	<i>1967</i>	<i>1968</i>	<i>1969</i>
Mil Budget	\$54.2	\$57.0	\$60.1	\$62.5	\$65.0
To NVN	0.3	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.4
Net for Other	<u>\$53.9</u>	<u>\$56.4</u>	<u>\$59.3</u>	<u>\$61.9</u>	<u>\$64.6</u>
	<i>US</i>				
	<i>1965</i>	<i>1966</i>	<i>1967</i>	<i>1968</i>	<i>1969</i>
Mil Budget	\$52.8	\$63.3	\$73.8	\$75.9	\$72.0
To NVN	2.1	10.2	17.5	20.2	17.6
Net for Other	<u>\$50.7</u>	<u>\$53.1</u>	<u>\$56.3</u>	<u>\$55.7</u>	<u>\$54.4</u>

The data reflected above are subject to errors in detail. The Soviet budget contains unspecified space and atomic energy elements, for example. Trying to make dollar comparisons of two dissimilar economies is, in addition, hazardous at best. Furthermore, our accounting for US incremental costs of the war represents approximations. But despite such vagaries, a clear central point remains. The Soviet Union, by

avoiding direct and substantial involvement in Southeast Asia, has been able to avail itself of other defense alternatives and resource uses our war involvement makes increasingly difficult for us. The gap in the respective USSR/US opportunities is, furthermore, widening as long as (a) USSR defense budgets stay level or increase, (b) USSR aid to North Vietnam stays relatively low, (c) US defense budgets decrease, and (d) US involvement in Southeast Asia stays relatively high.

North Vietnam receives, as noted, almost all of the war material it needs from the Soviet Union—and Red China. Manpower losses for North Vietnam have been heavy, an estimated 800,000 dead or permanently disabled since 1960. However, North Vietnam has enough manpower to sustain the current rate of losses almost indefinitely and to absorb heavier casualties, such as those suffered during 1968, for many years. Since the NVA/VC have great control over the level of combat in the South, and therefore the number of casualties they sustain, they could continue the present level of the conflict almost indefinitely. Given this situation and the intolerable costs and risks posed by a broadened general conflict, military victory in South Vietnam continues to be impossible.

#### *B. Enemy Infiltration and Logistics Flow*

In February I reported that, according to our best estimates, the enemy's force accessions through infiltration were expected over the next 4–5 months to average about 4,500 men per month. That estimate still looks reasonably valid, though the data are subject to error. What is agreed is that the enemy's force accessions are now, and are expected to continue, well below the level needed to maintain even a constant force level.

We have, during the past two years, made an extensive effort to slow down the flow of men and supplies moving through Laos into South Vietnam. During the past year, the number of attack sorties against the Ho Chi Minh Trail has almost doubled, from 5,700 per month in the 1967–1968 dry season to 10,000 per month. Currently we are expending about 40,000 tons of air ordnance per month in Laos and a total of over 110,000 tons per month in all of Southeast Asia.

Despite these efforts, the flow of supplies through Laos appears to be substantially higher this year than last. Unfortunately, we do not know how many supplies the NVA/VA actually have available to them in South Vietnam or how this may compare with previous supply positions. Our lack of an estimate stems from our uncertain knowledge of (a) the supplies needed to keep the logistic system going, (b) the status of the supply flow through Cambodia, or in by sea, and (c) the total amount of supplies we have destroyed in Laos and South Vietnam.

We do not know why the flow of supplies has increased while the levels of troops and combat activity have decreased. The enemy may be replacing his stocks, which probably were depleted during the last wet season. The supplies might be intended for a new campaign, but the continued low level of troop infiltration is evidence to the contrary. It is also possible that the enemy is simply stockpiling supplies as a hedge against future needs, for example, anticipation of difficulty in moving supplies through Cambodia.

### *C. Security and Pacification*

Security improved greatly in the rural areas last year. I am encouraged that this progress was made despite our redeployments. However, the VC infrastructure is still intact—although frequently of reduced quality—and many of the social and economic problems which create support for the insurgency are still unsolved. I do not believe that military forces can achieve much further progress in pacification. Further gains in pacification will require more effective police forces, land reform, refugee resettlement, and economic development, as well as the planned expansion in territorial forces. Training of the new territorial units continues ahead of schedule, an encouraging sign.

## *II. Major Problems Affecting South Vietnam*

Although our Vietnamization policy has been successful so far, its future success is tied, inter alia, to two primary factors. The first is NVA/VC actions. As indicated above, they can escalate the hostilities when they wish. The second is a set of basic South Vietnamese problems which could seriously affect their ability to take over the war.

### *A. Political Problems*

The political situation is still unstable. Although the war is becoming increasingly a political struggle, the South Vietnamese government is not well prepared to meet this challenge. While the South Vietnamese military forces are responding to the military equipment and advice we are providing, the government's programs for countering the political challenge are still weak. For example, the Phoenix program to destroy the VC infrastructure is making little progress. The upcoming election for the Senate and the 1971 elections for President could weaken the government as various factions compete for power. The government needs to increase its base of popular support. I receive persistent reports that the government does not effectively communicate its goals to the people, and that it likewise does not effectively respond to the needs of the people. While the recent Chau affair may not seriously have damaged President Thieu's popularity and effectiveness in South Vietnam, the affair is symptomatic of Thieu's insensitivity to issues that cause a bad reaction in the United States.

On the positive side, local government has been strengthened. Almost all hamlets and villages successfully carried out elections, and signs of greater local self-reliance and initiative are appearing.

#### *B. Economic Instability*

As my February trip report indicated, the Vietnamese economy is a major uncertainty and perhaps the weakest link in the Vietnamization program. Neither our mission in Saigon nor we in Washington have given the issue adequate attention.

We are facing a major test in the future. As US force levels and defense expenditures decline, strong inflationary pressures will develop in South Vietnam unless economic assistance levels—from whatever sources—are increased and South Vietnamese domestic production is increased.

After my return from Saigon, I initiated a series of steps to improve our grasp of the Vietnamese economic situation. First, I established a special defense study to review thoroughly the economic situation in Vietnam, including inflation, foreign exchange problems, development needs, and other key issues. I expect the report by the end of May. Based on the findings, I hope to be able to provide better visibility for effective Vietnamization in the economic field.

#### *C. Leadership*

I am advised the most serious problem of the South Vietnamese military forces continues to be lack of good leadership. The result is occasionally ineffective combat operations, a high desertion rate, and disciplinary problems. As I mentioned in my trip report, General Abrams believes there are about four key military positions where a change in leadership is urgently required. I stressed with President Thieu and other GVN leaders the need for positive action to appoint better men to key military positions and to devote more attention to leadership within the armed forces. President Thieu has asked General Abrams for his views and opinions. I will pursue the matter vigorously to insure that we do not let this opportunity languish.

#### *D. Cambodia and Laos*

The political climate remains obscure following the removal of Sihanouk. While the new Government has stated it intends to remain neutral, both its short and long term prospect for survival are unclear at this time.

I believe we should take a balanced approach at this time, supporting Cambodian neutrality and avoiding direct involvement. I see merit, though, in encouraging the type and level of cooperation between Cambodian and South Vietnamese units that has prevailed

over the past few weeks along the Cambodian/South Vietnamese border. I would not advocate a step-up in border operations beyond that which has seemed to work to good advantage in the past. I would also emphasize the necessity for close coordination and liaison between South Vietnamese and Cambodian units. US forces should not be involved. Guidance along these lines has been passed to General Abrams, who reported on April 4 “. . . this matter is well in hand at this time.”

Should the Lon Nol government request US military support, we should judge the request on its merits. However, any military activities we might consider should be limited and tightly controlled to avoid widening the Southeast Asia conflict and inciting US anti-war sentiment.

There have been no major changes in the political climate within Laos, and the military situation at least has not worsened in the past week. The possibility remains that the North Vietnamese may step up their dry-season campaign in the hope of (a) forcing Souvanna to request a US bombing halt in Laos and (b) increasing anti-war sentiment in the United States. It is significant to note that the Communists have not yet regained control of all areas they claimed in 1962.

### *III. US Planning Alternatives*

#### *A. Redeployments*

Unless the enemy significantly increases the tempo or alters the patterns of the war, I believe we should continue our redeployments. To maintain US support for Vietnamization, to provide proper incentives for the South Vietnamese to assume more responsibility for the war, and to keep the US burden within tolerable economic limits, I believe we must continue to reduce US forces in South Vietnam. For a number of military and political reasons it may be prudent to reduce our rate of redeployment temporarily from the current average of 12,500 per month. I am discussing the next redeployment increment with the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and I will send you specific recommendations in a few days.

#### *B. Financial Planning*

The defense budgets for FY 70 and FY 71 have been predicated on substantial reductions in our forces in Southeast Asia. The JCS and General Abrams believe our plans should be revised to maintain in FY 71 the present levels of tactical air and B-52 support. This would cost \$1.4 billion more than has been planned for in the budget. Substantial cuts in other important defense programs would have to be made to fund this additional air support. The JCS are now reconsidering their proposal and will submit their views to me on April 30.

While I believe that the budget is adequate for the planned Vietnamization program, the budget will not allow much flexibility for increasing the level of combat. I believe our chances of obtaining additional funds from Congress for Southeast Asia are small. In fact, we must expect additional cuts. We could try to obtain additional funds by cutting support for non-SEA forces and slowing modernization programs. However, we are already following this course to a considerable extent. I believe further such diversions would impact with serious effect on our overall military capabilities. Alternatively, we could reallocate funds within the defense budget by reducing our non-SEA forces, such as those in the United States or in Europe. This, of course, would be a longer-term proposition and one which could not be expected to free funds immediately.

I therefore believe that if we should have to find more resources for the war than we have planned in the budget, we could not do so without serious military, political, or economic ramifications.

### *C. Political Initiatives and Negotiations*

With US military options constrained, Vietnamization faced with continuing problems, instability spreading throughout Indo-China, and options available to Hanoi to expand the fighting, there will be those who contend the prospects are dim for achieving our objectives in South Vietnam. I do not share that view. I believe alternatives are available to maintain the momentum towards stability and self-determination for the South Vietnamese. The alternatives lie in the political field.

During 1969, US policy was to eschew US cease-fire initiatives. NSDM-9 provided that the US not initiate a cease-fire proposal "at an early stage."<sup>3</sup> NSDM-24 provided that the US should not pressure the South Vietnamese on cease-fire matters<sup>4</sup> and NSDM-36 announced your decision not to link holiday cease-fires to a permanent negotiated cease-fire.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing that you expect me to look at all alternatives, I have directed that a number of possible initiatives be evaluated. I believe it is important that we, and not the North Vietnamese, take the initiative on these matters—particularly in view of indications they may be prepared to take steps toward a cease-fire. The leaders in Hanoi may be laying the ground work for a wide range of possible initiatives by North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front. We are not fully

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<sup>3</sup> Document 51.

<sup>4</sup> Document 123.

<sup>5</sup> Document 154.

prepared, in my judgment, to meet such initiatives. The first order of business is to insure such preparation.

As a first step to becoming better prepared, we should expeditiously resolve some conflicting points of view within our own Government. I have suggested to Dr. Kissinger that we address within the NSC at an early date the basic issues involved in our present positions, delineate possible Hanoi initiatives, outline possible responses by "our side," and postulate initiatives we might take.

At Paris, one US option is to appoint a new ambassador. You have taken noteworthy steps to highlight Ambassador Habib's stature and qualifications. Others of us have tried to do the same. The other side, having made an issue of Ambassador Habib's status, will nonetheless probably not cooperate until he is replaced with someone of greater international stature. We, on the other hand, have said we will not replace him until some movement by the other side warrants such action. We might break this deadlock by appointing a new negotiator, but announcing that he will not assume his duties in Paris until there is a responsible reaction by the other side. This would give Hanoi a face-saving device to reopen private talks or make new proposals.

Another option is to propose some major new substantive initiatives to enhance our image of flexibility and to probe the intentions of the other side. As a first step, we could support the French proposal to explore the possibilities of a conference on Indo-China. Our support of the concept would serve to demonstrate to all parties concerned our interest in a political settlement and would simultaneously involve additional parties in the political process. The existence of a broader political forum could serve as a barrier to expanded military action by Hanoi.

As a lesser option, we might make a major new proposal to deal with the situation in Laos. If this is done, however, it will be necessary for us to look carefully at the provisions for bombing in the Panhandle because North Vietnam will almost certainly demand this as the price of a settlement in North Laos. A settlement could conceivably be worth this price if we can ensure that the bombing halt would not endanger our forces in South Vietnam or undercut the Vietnamization effort. It is noteworthy that Hanoi has abided, with only limited exceptions, by the basic military provisions of the November 1968 bombing halt "understandings." We reached that point by taking action on the "assumption" Hanoi would (a) stop the shelling of population centers, (b) not violate the DMZ, and (c) allow reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam. The spirit of the understanding has prevailed. Perhaps this precedent could provide a direction for further de-escalation of the war, or at a minimum, pose barriers to Hanoi's expansion of the war.

*D. Troop Contributing Countries*

Additional barriers to Hanoi's expansion of the military conflict could be established by continued—and expanded—participation in South Vietnam by other Asian nations. In keeping with the Nixon Doctrine, I believe that the Troop Contributing Countries (TCC), as well as other Asian countries not now making a significant contribution in Vietnam, should maintain the maximum presence there commensurate with their capabilities. The record is disappointing. Vietnam remains primarily a US effort. Other countries, if anything, are doing less rather than more.

I would hope that we could find a variety of ways in which the TCC and other Asian countries could increase their involvement with the South Vietnamese people. In all discussions and planning with the TCC and other Asian nations, we should seek ways in which their total efforts may be increased. Their contributions could be centered, if necessary, into the areas of training, logistics, and economic intercourse. The point is that the wider the front of nations involved in SVN, the more credible the barrier to expanded NVN military action.

*E. Prisoners of War*

It is essential to keep pressing the enemy hard on the prisoner of war issue. We have made some limited progress in getting confirmation on more names and increasing the flow of mail. More emphasis should now be placed on securing impartial inspection of camps and the release of all prisoners. As I previously informed you, President Thieu originally agreed generally with my suggestion that South Vietnam offer to release 500 or more prisoners to the North. We had been pressing the South Vietnamese to make this offer at the March 26 meeting in Paris. Unfortunately, Thieu decided to proceed only with about 323 sick and wounded prisoners, on the theory that his people would not understand releasing able-bodied prisoners who could fight again. The other side has rejected the offer, at least initially.

I believe we should press the South Vietnamese to make successively larger release offers. We might announce a schedule for releasing several thousand North Vietnamese prisoners over the next six months. We should consider making releases at least partially contingent upon enemy performance in this area. The principal goal would be to build momentum into the notion of prisoner release, so that the enemy would find it impossible to resist worldwide calls for reciprocity. Meanwhile, we should consider the need to define more precisely the relationship between the prisoner issue and US troop withdrawals. We should at the same time hit hard on impartial inspection, in the hope that the enemy might come to view release as the lesser of two evils.



#### *IV. Summary*

In brief, progress is being made towards our objectives in South Vietnam. But the situation shows few, if any, signs of decreasing in complexity. In particular:

- Vietnamization is proceeding satisfactorily.
- The US efforts, however, continue to be large and costly.
- The war is decelerating in South Vietnam, with the concomitant dividends of fewer US casualties, maintenance of US support, and more opportunities for application of our energies and resources for other foreign policy and domestic efforts.
  - Serious problems confront our continuing efforts, viz,
    - Gaps in the GVN leadership, both political and military.
    - Economic instability in SVN.
    - Options available to Hanoi to reverse the military patterns in SVN and to expand the conflict in Laos and Cambodia.
  - Positive alternatives are still available to the US, viz,
    - Political initiatives in Paris.
    - Prospects for other political forums, such as the French concept for an Indo-China conference.
    - Solicitation of expanded efforts by other Asian nations in SVN.

I would be remiss if I did not convey to you the full support of the Defense establishment for your policies and programs in Southeast Asia. While it is our responsibility, in our view, to apprise you, as this memorandum attempts to do, of our assessments and analyses, there is complete dedication to your decisions. In particular, the military leadership, from the Chiefs and General Abrams to our other leaders in the field, are doing everything within their capabilities to accomplish their assigned tasks with maximum safety and security.

**Melvin Laird**

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

Paris, April 4, 1970, 9:30 a.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Le Duc Tho, Adviser to the North Vietnamese Delegation  
Xuan Thuy, Chief of Delegation  
Mai van Bo, North Vietnamese Delegate General in Paris  
North Vietnamese Interpreter  
Two Other North Vietnamese Officials  
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Major General Vernon Walters, Defense Attaché  
W. Richard Smyser, NSC Staff  
W.A.K. Lake, NSC Staff

(The meeting began with some opening pleasantries.)

Mr. Kissinger: I have one technical point, and then look forward to hearing your views. It is a minor technical point on the figures I gave you at the last meeting.<sup>2</sup>

The figure for the number of U.S. troops now in Vietnam is 12,000 higher than the figure I gave you, that is the total figure is 434,000, not 422,000. You should therefore change the figures I gave you last time as follows: In the fourth month, rather than 27,000 men we would withdraw 35,000. And in the fifth month we would withdraw 39,000 rather than 35,000.

These figures do not make any substantive difference, but I wanted to be exactly accurate.

And, as I have said, there are elements of flexibility in our proposal with respect to timing.

At the last meeting, Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy said you would carefully study our position on military issues and make a counter-proposal. I wonder if you are ready to do so now? Of course, we recognize this question will be dependent on the settlement of political issues, which we are also willing to discuss today.

Xuan Thuy: You have finished?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Xuan Thuy: We said that you have made a proposal on military questions and we shall make our remarks on this proposal and put for-

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

<sup>2</sup> Document 201.

ward our own proposal. But last time I also said both sides should put forward their views on military and political questions, and you have not finished. We shall do the same, we shall put forward our position on both.

Last time you spoke only on military questions. I therefore propose you put forward your position on political problems.

Mr. Kissinger: I also pointed out two things last time. It is not admissible that we always speak first and put forward our position. You are then in the position of a critic commenting on our proposals.

There is nothing in your position which says you can't speak now on military questions, and then we speak first on political questions.

Xuan Thuy: Last time, I said who speaks first or last is not an important point. It should not be raised as a procedural question. I also said that each side should present its stand on political and military problems at one time.

Mr. Kissinger: But I am sure the Minister will agree there should not be a procedure in which one side makes a proposal and then quotes itself as truth. This is an elemental way of proceeding. All the essential elements of our proposal on military issues are not on the table.

If procedure isn't important, then the Minister should have no hesitation in commenting now.

Xuan Thuy: I wish to say this: the reason for my requesting this procedure is that previously you intended to settle only military questions. We said political and military questions are linked. Therefore if you speak only of military questions, it might make me believe you retain your original scheme of only discussing military questions.

Mr. Kissinger: I have told the Special Adviser that we will discuss military and political questions. We understand you will not agree to one without the other. We recognize that military and political questions are closely linked. I know the Special Adviser and Minister are capable of protecting your essential position, which is that military and political questions must be resolved simultaneously.

Xuan Thuy: You refuse to present your views on political problems; this is done intentionally by your side.

Mr. Kissinger: The Minister can assume that everything I do is intentional.

Xuan Thuy: However, I am prepared to express our views on military and political problems at one time.

At our last meeting on March 16 Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and myself have given preliminary remarks on the views expressed by Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger and on the schedule for troop withdrawal.

Afterwards, we have carefully studied your views and schedule for troop withdrawal.

Today, I would like to reaffirm the views we expressed the other day and would like to make ampler comments on it.

(Xuan Thuy now began to read from notes, and continued to use them throughout the remainder of this particular statement. He was occasionally corrected in a word by Le Duc Tho.)

First, we have expounded our view that the United States has insisted on demanding mutual troop withdrawal. We have also said that the U.S. has brought U.S. and other foreign troops allied to the U.S. one-half the way around the world for aggression in Vietnam. Therefore, the U.S. must completely withdraw all U.S. and allied troops from Vietnam without imposing conditions on the Vietnamese people.

As to the Vietnamese people who are fighting on their own soil, it is the legitimate self-defense right of any nation.

Therefore, the question of mutual withdrawal does not arise.

But in the views you expounded last time, you said the non-South Vietnamese forces cannot be put on the same legal, moral and historical basis as U.S. troops. It is only a technical problem.

But in practice your proposal is tantamount to a demand for mutual withdrawal. Therefore we cannot accept this principle.

Point two: As to the time period for troop withdrawal, previously the U.S. did not mention any time period. But in President Nixon's November 3, 1969,<sup>3</sup> speech he demanded mutual withdrawal in twelve months, and this was later repeated many times at Kleber Street.

But now at our private meetings, where we have agreed we should go directly into the heart of the central matter, and solve matters practically, you have put forward a higher price—sixteen months and not twelve as before. And for this sixteen month troop withdrawal, the greater part of U.S. forces will be withdrawn at the end of the period.

This shows that you still want to prolong your war of aggression, to prolong troop withdrawal so as not to withdraw all of your troops.

Point three: You also said that only when we came to agreement here would you appoint a new head of delegation at Kleber Street. This shows you want to prolong discussion and still want to downgrade the Paris talks on Vietnam, and want to use the appointment of a head of delegation as a condition for us.

Point four: While you have acted at the Paris Conference as I have just stated, you have also escalated the war in South Vietnam and Laos and you organized a coup d'état in Cambodia in attempting to use these two places to put pressure on the resistance fight of the Vietnamese people and to threaten the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

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<sup>3</sup> See Document 144.

The last time, you said we should not use military pressure on the negotiations. But in practice the U.S. has used military pressure. You want to compel the Vietnamese people to accept your terms.

All this makes us doubt your serious intent and your desire to make a settlement as has been affirmed many times by Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger.

And today you refused to expound your views on political problems following doing so on military problems. I have said many times that political problems should be linked to military problems.

But anyhow I will present our stand on military as well as political problems. As a matter of fact, we have presented the great lines of both our positions on military and political problems. Now, may I go into greater detail on both.

First, this military problem: we propose that U.S. and other troops of the U.S. camp should be withdrawn from South Vietnam in a period of six months. That expresses our support of Minister Madame Nguyen thi Binh's proposal.

In this six month period we propose that all U.S. combat troops—infantry, Marine, Air Force, Naval forces, motorized forces—should be withdrawn first, and then all remaining forces be withdrawn in the same period.

The other foreign troops of the U.S. camp should be withdrawn with U.S. troops.

At the same time with the withdrawal of U.S. troops and other troops of the U.S. camp, all U.S. bases should be dismantled or evacuated in six months.

As to the political problem, we propose that the U.S. respect the fundamental national rights of the Vietnamese people: independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, and to recognize that South Vietnam be independent and neutral.

Another point—the form of government in South Vietnam and the organization of general elections will be implemented in three steps:

The first step—the present Saigon administration we recognize as a reality. But the leaders of the present Saigon administration—that is Thieu-Ky-Khiem—they are very warlike oppressing peace and neutrality. They terrorize the opposition forces in South Vietnam who are for peace in South Vietnam. Therefore they constitute an obstacle to a peaceful solution. Therefore the leaders of the Saigon administration—Thieu-Ky-Khiem—should be changed and a new Saigon administration should be formed which really stands for peace. It should send representatives to Paris for serious negotiations.

The second step is to form the provisional coalition government in South Vietnam including three components: the representatives of

the Provisional Revolutionary Government, the representatives of the Saigon Administration without Thieu–Ky–Khiem, and the representatives of all other political forces whether in South Vietnam or abroad for political reasons. But all three components are standing for peace, independence and freedom of South Vietnam.

We think such a government is reasonable, and not the monopoly of any force.

The third step: after the withdrawal of U.S. troops and other foreign countries of the U.S. camp, then free and democratic elections will be organized in South Vietnam. Through these elections a national assembly will be established and a constitution drawn up. And then a definitive coalition government in South Vietnam will be formed.

As to the question of Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam: after agreement is reached on these military and political problems, we are prepared to discuss them.

As to the Paris conference on Vietnam, I once again request that the U.S. appoint a new chief of delegation.

These are our remarks and also our proposals.

Mr. Kissinger: I appreciate the remarks of the Minister. I would suggest we proceed as follows.

I will make comments on political questions which I have prepared and brought with me, and then make some comments on what Minister Xuan Thuy has said.

I recognize that the political issue is the most difficult problem that we face in these negotiations. It is at the heart of the problem as far as the Vietnamese are concerned. It is what the war has been about for over thirty years.

I pointed out at previous meetings that it is the view of my government that there should be created a process to register the existing relationship of political forces. This, we recognize, is not an easy matter to accomplish. It requires two things: that we agree on the existing relationship of political forces and secondly that we agree on a political process to express this relationship.

These are problems which people who operate in the same political and philosophical framework have difficulty in resolving. Given our philosophical differences, this is especially difficult.

I have had enough philosophical exchanges with Special Adviser Le Duc Tho and Minister Xuan Thuy on the meaning of Leninism to know that sharing of power is not an evident conclusion one can draw from Lenin's theories.

I know that as Leninists you will agree with the proposition that there is no such thing as a static political situation. Our challenge, therefore, is to create a process which does not foreclose any outcome and

gives every party a chance to participate and an adequate opportunity to contest the political issues.

What we are trying to do is to bring about a situation where the contest in Vietnam is political and no longer military. We are trying to separate the military from the political struggle.

Let me put it another way. We will not accept a military imposed solution. We will accept an outcome that reflects the popular will as reflected in a process that you and we have agreed on here in Paris.

I repeat: we recognize that this is difficult to do, but this is our objective. If we both could agree on this objective, we shall have taken a major step forward.

Our objection to your proposals is not their objective. But their practical result is to eliminate the possibility of a fair process. They would predetermine the political outcome by selecting those you define as peace-loving and by smashing the political forces of those who are opposed to you.

Let me make one more general observation. There is a big difference between discussing political and military issues. On military questions, we can make very precise proposals because they can make a change in the situation only if they are accepted. On the political field, however, the mere act of discussing political proposals changes political realities, as you understand better than I.

Le Duc Tho: What do you mean that the mere fact of discussing may change political realities? It is difficult to understand your philosophy, which is a little tortuous. It is different from Marxist philosophy, which is very realistic and practical. Bourgeois philosophy is very murky. I find nothing concrete.

Mr. Kissinger: When the war is over, I will invite Special Adviser Le Duc Tho to the United States to lecture on Marxist philosophy.

Le Duc Tho: If this would be good, I am prepared to do it any time.

Mr. Kissinger: I have noted that when the Secretary General of the Soviet Communist Party speaks, it is never for less than four hours. Mr. Le Duc Tho should be grateful I never speak more than one half hour.

Le Duc Tho: But since you came here for these meetings, sometimes you speak over thirty minutes, but say nothing concrete. Last time you said Harvard professors never speak more than 45 minutes.

Mr. Kissinger: Never less.

Le Duc Tho: Never more than thirty minutes.

Xuan Thuy: Please continue. If not less, take some hours.

Mr. Kissinger: It is very difficult to please my colleagues from Hanoi. When I say something general, they accuse me of not being a Leninist. When I say something specific, they don't like it.

If I may tell the Special Adviser one joke, I will then continue my remarks. Someone asked Anatole France if he had read Kant. France said no; he had read nine volumes, but the verb was in the tenth.

Le Duc Tho: I am waiting for the last part of your speech.

Mr. Kissinger: I will now respond to the Special Adviser's question. He interrupted me just as I was going to make my point.

Le Duc Tho: Please continue.

Mr. Kissinger: Let me give an example of where a political proposal could change reality: If I told you Madame Binh was an obstacle to progress and should be replaced, and you agreed, and she found out, I think you will agree that her morale would suffer. And therefore the degree of precision which is possible in making proposals depends necessarily on the imminence of a settlement at that time.

Let me therefore state a few basic general principles of our approach to the political problem, which I hope you will find concrete enough.

It is unreasonable for either side to believe it can select the personnel with which it will deal on the other side. You have demanded the replacement of certain leaders of the Government of Vietnam as a prelude to the negotiating process. We cannot accept this demand any more than we ask you to renounce the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

On the other hand, after a settlement and once there is a political process on which we have agreed, we would expect that the control of power would be determined by that process and not by outside forces—neither we nor others.

Le Duc Tho: No interference by outside forces?

Mr. Kissinger: Correct. That is an important point.

We both seem to agree that the political process must reflect the will of the people. This is why we both have free elections as part of our political proposals.

We admit that understanding Vietnamese politics involves procedures which differ from ours and involves a culture and set of traditions very different from ours.

We recognize that you have a question about elections, as you believe who organizes them affects the results. We are willing to explore with you various methods of organizing the determination of the popular will or of determining the popular will. We believe, for example, that there are many creative possibilities in the mixed electoral commission we have proposed, possibilities which go far toward meeting your reasonable requirements.

Le Duc Tho: This is not a move at all. It does not go far, this mixed commission; it stands still.



Mr. Kissinger: The Special Adviser always interrupts just before the crucial sentence.

Le Duc Tho: I am always waiting for the crucial sentence.

Mr. Kissinger: His Leninist powers of prediction fail him.

Le Duc Tho: I have powers of prediction. This is just like Kleber. Nothing new.

Mr. Kissinger: I was going to say: And we are willing to entertain other proposals to achieve these objectives.

You also should understand that we are prepared to discuss the relationship between free elections and how political power is shared. For example, the following types of questions could be discussed:

- whether elections for the executive should be direct or indirect through elections for a parliament;
- how electoral districts can be drawn to give a realistic expression to the real political forces in the country;
- the relationship between executive and legislative power and between the provinces and Saigon; and
- how elections would affect the future safety and vitality of political forces on both sides.

It may also be possible that the most realistic way to begin the process would be in the provinces and locally before resolving problems in Saigon.

Finally, the shape of an outcome will be influenced by the character of military questions. For example, you cannot have elections in some areas without local ceasefires. In any case, we recognize there is a linkage between military and political issues.

These are the general principles which I wanted to put before you today.

But let me sum up the proposals we have made.

—We have agreed, as you have requested, to the principle of total withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces.

—Second, we have given you a precise schedule for this withdrawal and have told you the timing of this schedule is flexible and will not be an obstacle to a solution.

—Third, we have told you we are not committed to the maintenance of any political force in power once a settlement is achieved.

—We have told you the methods which we think are appropriate to consult the will of the people but we have said that we are willing to entertain proposals you wish to put forward.

—We have told you we are prepared not only to discuss free elections in the abstract, but also the relation of elections to various elements of the distribution of political power.

Le Duc Tho: Please clarify this.

Mr. Kissinger: I am referring to such questions as the relationship of the executive to the legislative power, the protection of minorities, the relationship between the provinces and Saigon, etc.

—We have indicated that we are prepared to discuss the relationship of military to political issues.

—We have indicated our willingness to link military and political issues, both in general and specifically in discussing ceasefires.

—We have indicated our willingness to set a target date for our deliberations.

Le Duc Tho: What do you mean by a target date?

Mr. Kissinger: When we began our discussions, I suggested we fix a date, a deadline, by which time we would have finished our work. The Special Adviser refused.

In short, we have shown good will and serious intentions, and we will not be responsible before history for any failure of these negotiations.

Now I would like to make a few very brief remarks about what Minister Xuan Thuy said.

Many of my remarks were included in the comments I just made.

I have not found in three sessions anything new in what you said, anything which you have not already said at Avenue Kleber.

Let me make a few points on withdrawals.

The Special Adviser and the Minister are simply making debating points concerning the sixteen month deadline. I have already said that we are ready to be flexible, if we come to agreement on other points. Although the six month demand is out of the question for technical and other reasons.

Secondly, a word about Laos and Cambodia.

(NVN discuss among themselves.) I am always hoping I can get you gentlemen to argue among yourselves.

About Laos and Cambodia: I am always very frank, and can therefore never tell whether what you say is what you think or for the record.

I participate in all the highest deliberations of our government. I know we have no intention of using Laos to put pressure on you in North Vietnam.

I know that we would have been prepared to settle for the status quo in Laos. I offered on two occasions, on behalf of the President, that we would reduce our military operations in Northern Laos if you will agree to cease your offensive operations.

We are prepared today to make an arrangement with you which guarantees the neutrality of Laos and guarantees also your security from anything which might happen from Laos.

As for Cambodia, we have no intention of using Cambodia to bring pressure on Vietnam and we have not used Cambodia to bring pressure on you.

We are prepared to make arrangements to guarantee the neutrality and inviolability of the neutrality of Cambodia.

The objective consequences of our proposal on the withdrawal of forces are sufficiently clear for us not to want to create other military situations in Southeast Asia.

I told you last time it is inconsistent with the purpose of our meetings to bring additional military pressure on the other side in Vietnam or in related countries. We apply this principle to ourselves as well as you.

To us it looks as if you continued your offensive actions in Laos all during our discussions.

You started new offensive operations in South Vietnam four days before I came here to Paris to talk in good faith.

This is why I believe we should return to the principles with which we started, to try to overcome the distrust which exists between us, and to make a major effort to settle this problem. You will find us willing to meet you.

As for the question of representation, we have expressed our point of view. We are well represented for the present negotiations, and we will adjust our representation to objective reality.

I would like to say again that I have come across the ocean four times, at my initiative, to see you gentlemen. I am prepared to negotiate in good faith, and hope we can someday look back on these negotiations as a turning point.

Thank you for your patience.

Xuan Thuy: I would like to propose a break for a few minutes. Then I will state some of my thoughts.

Mr. Kissinger: One more question: You said you would discuss the withdrawal of your forces after other questions were settled. You would discuss this with whom?

Xuan Thuy: I said, when we settle both questions, military and political, then the question of Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam will be mentioned.

Mr. Kissinger: With whom?

Xuan Thuy: We shall see.

Le Duc Tho: Principles are not clear yet.

Mr. Kissinger: I think that the Minister is more difficult than I.

Xuan Thuy: Since meeting with you, I have become more difficult.

Mr. Kissinger: You were always tough. Speaking for the Nixon Administration, we inherited you as opponents—we didn't pick you. We will pick easier opponents.

(There was then a ten minute break. Tho and Xuan Thuy consulted upstairs. The meeting resumed with pleasantries during tea.)

Le Duc Tho: (to Xuan Thuy in Vietnamese): Ask.

Xuan Thuy: May I ask some questions for clarification?

Mr. Kissinger: I would rather tell stories, but please go ahead.

Xuan Thuy: It is quite right that you don't like to answer, but I am forced to ask you to answer—although sometimes your answers don't answer the questions.

Mr. Kissinger: Intentionally. I learned from reading the record of what Minister Xuan Thuy said at Kleber.

Xuan Thuy: The first question is that you spoke about general elections, when they will be organized, whether they will be organized when U.S. and allied troops are still in South Vietnam or after complete withdrawal.

Second, you spoke about organizing elections in the provinces before going upwards. What is your intention in saying this? Why do you put it this way?

Third, you spoke of the distribution of power among political forces; please clarify this. I am not clear about that.

Mr. Kissinger: With regard to the withdrawal of troops, we would do it either way. If your side prefers to defer elections until all forces are withdrawn, that would be acceptable. If the election is deferred until the withdrawal of U.S. troops, it should be in the framework we have given, that is to say that all non-South Vietnamese forces should be withdrawn. Including your own.

Second, concerning the question of local elections. Let me be frank with you. Understanding the political process in Vietnam is not the easiest matter for Americans. I put forward an hypothesis and not a condition. I was going to say that if it turns out easier to start with local elections and local sharing of power, we are prepared to envision this possibility. It simply seemed to us it may be easier in some respects, but we don't insist on it.

On the third point, I indicated certain aspects of the apportionment of power which it might be possible to discuss. I did this because when one speaks about free elections in the abstract, it has a quality of winner-take-all. Therefore, we are willing to discuss precise provisions which would apply whoever wins the elections and how he would exercise this power.

Xuan Thuy: Now, I would like to make a few remarks on your exposé and your views.

First, on what you said about our not saying anything different from at Kleber. I disagree with you in this view.

In the past few sessions, we have been listening to you expound your general views and specific views. The exposé of your views was rather long. I therefore had to listen to your views and I listened to you very carefully. And if some point was unclear I asked you to clarify it. This shows our great attention.

I said I listened to you with great attention because Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger is a University professor, you have been following the Vietnam question for a long time, you have many views on Vietnam problems and you represent President Nixon to negotiate with us. We therefore listen very carefully, as there is some significance in your coming here.

In the military field, previously we demanded the U.S. withdraw rapidly and totally troops from South Vietnam. Madame Nguyen thi Binh has proposed six months. We support her demand. Today I presented in detail how this withdrawal should be carried out.

You said this proposal of six months is unreasonable and impossible for technical reasons. But in this regard we have high respect for the U.S. technical capacity and means of transport and its desire to enter Vietnam quickly. Therefore your withdrawal should also be quick.

As for political points, we have also said something new. Previously we just proposed a provisional coalition government. Today, we have proposed steps to be taken.

My second remark concerns your remarks. I remarked there are points which remained at their original place, others which made steps backward.

Mr. Kissinger: I always like to receive encouragement. For a second I thought the Minister would say some went forward. I thought we were making progress.

Xuan Thuy: But I must point out weak points before encouraging you.

Mr. Kissinger: I will say that I am never over-confident when dealing with the Minister and Special Adviser. Excuse my interrupting.

Xuan Thuy: The points at the same place are:

- Your continued demand for mutual withdrawal;
- Your insistence on the maintenance of Thieu–Ky–Khiem;
- Your downgrading still of the conference in Paris.

You said that we only agree with those who stand for peace, and discard those who stand for war. This is right—we like peace-lovers. Therefore Thieu–Ky–Kliem must be changed.

And what points make a step backwards?

For instance, this period for withdrawal. It was previously twelve months; it is now sixteen months, and the greater part is left for the end. In the first period it is withdrawal by dribbles.

I just point out these points in hoping your future proposal becomes more positive and progressive than this one.

The third remark is about the deadline. You put forward a deadline of the first of July. We do not oppose this deadline for negotiations.

On the contrary. But the success of the negotiations depends on the U.S. If you come here with serious intent, success will come—and the sooner the better. It may be before July 1. If you do not come here with serious intent, then maybe later than the first of July.

Finally, I have to state that there are two ways open to us. First, the peaceful settlement of the problem. Second, the war can be extended.

We prefer the peaceful settlement of the problem, and the sooner the better. Therefore we welcome Special Adviser Kissinger to come here. And therefore we maintain the Paris Conference, although I do not attend after Ambassador Cabot Lodge left, but I stay in Paris.

I have been glad to talk to you at the last few sessions and will be glad to continue to talk with you. I wish to continue to talk with you and wish you to come to agree on big questions and reach agreement.

I know you represent President Nixon and have many views. I do wish we can settle the problem through the talks and therefore I appreciate your coming here.

I don't know about the future, but so far your plan is not leading to a peaceful settlement.

And what you have said about the U.S. having nothing to do concerning Laos and Cambodia, and the U.S. showing good will on these questions, I think just the contrary.

You said four days before your departure for Paris there was an offensive launched in South Vietnam. But hostilities in South Vietnam have been going on—sometimes they are up, sometimes they are down, sometimes they are standing still.

So long as U.S. troops and other forces continue to be in Vietnam, hostilities will go on. And I as well as Special Adviser Le Duc Tho said last time that so long as we do not come to an agreement, then hostilities will go on in South Vietnam.

The last time we have laid stress on events in Laos and Cambodia and you returned to the U.S. A few days later, a coup broke out in the U.S. [*Cambodia*].

Mr. Kissinger: That is next, after I return this time.

Xuan Thuy: . . . in Cambodia and we have come to the conclusion in the statement by our government which said it is precisely the U.S. which wanted to wipe out the peace and neutrality policies of Cambodia, to turn Cambodia into a neo-colony, to use Cambodia to put pressure on the resistance fight of the Vietnamese people.

You also said the U.S. would reduce its air activities in Northern Laos if the other side would stop its activities. It is not a matter of reducing the bombing, it is one of ceasing it.

I must point out that during the nine year resistance war against French colonialism, the French colonialists used the same methods by

seizing the government of Emperor Bao Dai, and using the royal governments of Cambodia and Laos to put pressure on the Vietnamese, to use these so-called “legal” governments to gain international standing, and to use these so-called “legal” governments to put pressure on the Vietnamese struggle. But the French were defeated.

Therefore, in conclusion, we should settle the problem. A settlement will be reached the sooner the better—a real settlement.

Now I give word to Le Duc Tho.

Le Duc Tho: Minister Xuan Thuy has expounded our point of view on political and military problems, and expressed our remarks on your remarks, and you have replied.

I would now like to add a few remarks on your views. I would like to speak very frankly and straightforwardly.

First, I would like to speak about the situation in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia—in the peninsula of Indo-China as a whole, and in what framework we are holding our talks now.

We should determine who has the desire of prolonging and extending the war. Who wants to make military pressure on the other side. And who has good will and serious intent in settling the problem.

In this connection, our views differ very greatly. Because if we don't clarify these views, it will not be clear whether you want peace or war. Because our assessment differs from yours. This is the first question I would like to deal with.

The second point is I would like to make some remarks of mine on military and political questions and Laos and Cambodia.

In the last two sessions, you said you wanted a peaceful settlement. You said you didn't want to make military pressure or negotiate from a position of strength. Whether your statement made us believe what you said, your practical deeds make us doubt the truth of what you have been saying.

Recent events in Vietnam and particularly in Laos and Cambodia make us think you do not want yet to settle the problem. They make us believe you still want to continue Vietnamization of the war, want to continue to expand the war to Laos and Cambodia.

Let us review events in Laos. For the last few years—2 to 3 years ago—we may say the hostilities were not so great. Hostilities were going on, but a normal level.

But who occupied first the Plain of Jars? The U.S. helped the reactionary forces occupy the Plain of Jars.

Therefore the Lao people had to strike back and reoccupy it. Therefore the consequences are from your actions. Now you have introduced Thai troops and carried out fierce bombing of the Plain of Jars. The quantity of bombs used for such a small area as the Plain

of Jars equals the quantity of bombs used against Germany in World War II.

And what is the situation in Cambodia? Although there were hostilities in Laos and Vietnam, the Cambodian people for tens of years have been living in peace, independence, and neutrality. Who has caused the coup d'état to wipe out the neutrality, independence and peace policies of Cambodia? Who has brought to power this reactionary group in Cambodia? It was the U.S. and no one else. We charged you with that. Many people in U.S. political circles, the U.S. press and public opinion, many people said there was the hand of the CIA in this coup d'état.

Your intention is to extend the war to the whole of Indo-China and to use mighty military forces in support of your policy to bring Vietnamization to the success and negotiate from a position of strength.

In Laos, you said you didn't want to use Laos to bring pressure. On Cambodia, you said the U.S. had nothing to do with events. This does not conform with reality.

The Vietnamese have a saying that you can't use a basket to cover a lion or an elephant.

Mr. Kissinger: I like that.

Le Duc Tho: It is quite true.

Your actions are decidedly tantamount to a prolongation and an extension of the war. It seems you consider events in Laos and Cambodia have no relation to the Vietnam problem. But they are parts of your whole strategy. You want to use forces in Laos and Cambodia to make pressure on the resistance war in Vietnam. The events in Laos and the recent coup d'état in Cambodia show clearly your intention of prolonging and extending the war. With such an action, how can you ask us to overcome mistrust, how can you ask us to believe you.

Through this coup d'état in Cambodia, it is clear your intention is to turn Cambodia into a U.S. neo-colony, as Minister Xuan Thuy just pointed out. You wanted to combine the reactionary forces in Cambodia with South Vietnamese and U.S. forces to annihilate the new forces in Cambodia. This to you is President Nixon's policy of having Asians fight Asians.

It is evident now it is your policy to use the military forces to settle the Vietnam problem—as well as Laos and Cambodia, on the basis of a position of strength, a position of power. In our view, it is only an illusion. I must tell you frankly. No militant power can subdue our people and the Lao and Khmer people.

The lessons of the failures of the French colonialists after a nine-year war and of your failures of the last few years have not made you renounce your ambitions.



You think military power can make our people submit. I think you are mistaken. Your defeat in Vietnam—where does it lie? Your defeat mainly lies in your wrong assessment of the political forces of our people in standing up against you. You have not fully foreseen developments. You rely mainly on your mighty military forces.

It is a fact that in South Vietnam our forces consist only of infantry. No planes, no helicopters, no tanks, no high speed machines. What is the cause of our success? It is precisely the union of our people, the political force of our people which helps us enhance our weapons, which are only infantry weapons.

Hence the strength of our whole people in fighting foreign aggression is in the union of our whole people.

Therefore the principal error of yours in Vietnam and Laos is precisely the point I have just made. But you have not drawn from your experience.

You thought you could use a group of military reactionaries to overthrow Norodom Sihanouk and it would be all over. It is too simple thinking. It is precisely your actions there which make the whole people of Cambodia fight against the agents of the U.S. They have responded to the appeal of Prince Sihanouk and the National Front of Cambodia. The Khmer people have stood up with all their strength to defend freedom and neutrality.

This situation has developed rather quickly. You are a researcher, and read a great deal of newspapers. You have seen probably that the Khmer people have united themselves in a very vigorous way. It is a strong blow against your design and your agents. This is the strength of the whole people.

It is a sign of your failure and your agents' failure. It is a sign of your inevitable failure and that of your agents.

While you are suffering defeat in Laos and Vietnam, how can you fight in Cambodia?

You have sowed the wind, and you must reap the whirlwind.

You are sowing national hatred between Vietnam and Cambodia. But the three peoples of Indo-China—the Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer people—have had traditional unity in the fight against colonialism. This cannot be broken by you. Now, faced with the extension of the war to Cambodia by the U.S., the three peoples will continue to fight to have victory, no matter how great the sacrifices may be.

Therefore, whether a peaceful settlement for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia can be reached does not depend on us only. It depends on you precisely. Just as Minister Xuan Thuy said, when you withdrew Ambassador Cabot Lodge and downgraded the talks, Minister Xuan Thuy stayed here. I am here too, we have talks with you. We wanted

to go into substance to settle the problem. This is evidence of our good will and serious intent. But in the meantime, you caused the coup d'état in Cambodia. It shows you don't want to settle the problem, you want to extend the conflict. You thought you could force us to submit. But you were mistaken. If you want to talk with weapons and guns, we must reply with weapons and guns. With all our determination and courage.

The fighting in Laos and the last few days in South Vietnam are only legitimate self-defense against your prolongation of the war and extension of the war.

You said that for the last four days, when you were coming to talk, we launched attacks. But while you are extending and prolonging the war, how can we refrain from striking back in self-defense? If you continue fighting, we will continue the struggle.

When you stop making military pressure, when you give up your intention of negotiating from a position of strength, when you are prepared for real negotiations, then we are prepared to really negotiate with you and to really settle the Vietnam problem. I think the door is wide open for a peaceful settlement.

Since President Nixon came to power, he has missed many opportunities to settle the problem peacefully. He doesn't want to; he still nurtures great ambitions. But if he persists in doing so, he will sink deeper into the quagmire.

I hope that being a professor who has made a long study of international problems, you will help to settle the problem. I hope you will maintain a clear-sighted view, and look into the real problem, so we can achieve a settlement. Then peace will be restored in the Indo-China peninsula. This is a fact which I would like to put forward frankly to you.

Only by putting facts straight forward can one clearly see the serious intent of the other side for a settlement. If one side wants peace, and the other war, then no settlement can be reached.

Minister Xuan Thuy has said, and I have said many times, that we do want peace. But with the situation you have created in Indo-China, how can a peaceful settlement be achieved? The war has not been limited—it was extended.

Now I would like to make some remarks on what you said about Laos and Cambodia.

It is true that you have come 10,000 miles to the talks. And we persevere, we stay here while you are downgrading the Paris Conference.

But we hope you will make some new proposals. If I am not mistaken, you have not moved an inch in comparison with Kleber, mainly speaking. Although you have made some specific points, they are stepping backwards.

Militarily speaking, you are always speaking on the basis of mutual withdrawal. Concerning political questions, you always speak of a mixed electoral commission, which was put forward by the Thieu Administration.

In these conditions, how can we put forward something new? Although these proposals are called by you going into substance, you are always prolonging the war.

Now I wish to clarify a few points in our position.

Today, you have spoken on political problems. You said that the political process should reflect the relationship between political forces in South Vietnam and the popular will in South Vietnam. But the conception of the relationship of political forces in South Vietnam and of the aspiration of the people of South Vietnam differs from our point of view and yours. We consider a settlement must be based on reality and the relation of political forces in South Vietnam. But what is the relationship of forces in South Vietnam?

If the Thieu–Ky–Khiem Administration can survive until today, it is thanks to your weapons. They have no force at all. The Thieu–Ky–Khiem Administration tried to assemble four or five groups to unite with them. But these groups refused. Thieu–Ky–Khiem are isolated.

The great majority of the South Vietnamese people want peace, independence, and neutrality. Many of them are not communists, not members of the NLF.

So what is our conception of this relationship of political forces? If you speak of the political forces of Thieu–Ky–Khiem, you can count them on your fingertips. If you speak of the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people, they want peace, independence, and neutrality. This is a clear expression of their aspirations.

As to the aspirations of a handful of people in South Vietnam, military agents, people like Thieu, Ky, Khiem—they want war.

I agree with your words that a settlement must be based on the relationship of political forces and on the aspirations of the people. But we have a different understanding of the words in practice.

We want a lasting settlement, national concord. We do not want to carry out reprisals against anyone after the war.

But national concord cannot be achieved with Thieu–Ky–Khiem because they are frenziedly opposed to the PRG and NLF and opposed to all those who are for peace and neutrality. How can national concord be carried out with these people?

If you continue to maintain Thieu–Ky–Khiem, then no settlement can be achieved and no national concord is possible. Because they do not want peace. If you maintain Thieu–Ky–Khiem, it shows that you want to maintain them to continue the war.

We do want to realize national concord. We want to realize a broad union of political forces. But the forces must all agree on peace, independence, and neutrality. How can it be with those who are for war? That is the reason why we have put forward the three steps.

Therefore when Thieu–Ky–Khiem are changed, then the Provisional Coalition Government reflecting national concord provisionally, including all political forces, will be formed. Then we come to national elections to form a definitive coalition government. General elections must really be free. There should be no military pressures from any side.

Therefore our proposals are realistic, they reflect reality, they conform to the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people. Only such methods will reflect correctly the political relationship in South Vietnam and register it in a political process.

Accepting such a settlement will be accepting really the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people.

This is what I have to say on your proposals on political problems.

May I speak now a few additional remarks on Laos and Cambodia. We support the 5 points put forward by the Pathet Lao to find a peaceful settlement of the Laotian problem on the basis of the 1962 Geneva Agreements.<sup>4</sup> But if you refuse to settle the Laotian problem in this direction, then the war will go on in Laos.

Concerning Cambodia, we have many times stated our respect for the agreement of 1954 and the independence and territorial integrity of Cambodia. We do not recognize the Lon Nol–Matak government. We support the 5 points of Norodom Sihanouk.<sup>5</sup> We are convinced that so long as the Lon Nol–Matak government remains in Cambodia, then the Cambodian question cannot be settled. This policy of yours will fail. Our position on Laos and Cambodia is clear.

Therefore, if we now review the few sessions we have had, our points of view are still very different. I hope you will look into the real situation in Laos and really negotiate with sincerity not only on Vietnam but also on the Laos and Cambodia situations.

If you do not seriously negotiate with good will, then the situation will continue to be serious, and the disadvantage will be with your side.

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<sup>4</sup> See Document 197.

<sup>5</sup> Apparent reference to Sihanouk's five aims articulated subsequently at a Summit Conference of Indo-Chinese Peoples, April 24–25. The five aims were independence, peace, neutrality, the prohibition of all presence of foreign troops or foreign military bases on Cambodian soil, and the prohibition of the use of Cambodian territories by foreign countries for aggression against other countries. (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 1969–1970, p. 24030)

And being a professor, philosopher, and statesman, I think Mr. Special Adviser Kissinger should have a clear view of this reality.

I speak my mind very frankly, I say what I am thinking. You said you wonder whether what we said is for the record. I speak for the record and what I think. Last time you said you wondered whether we speak for psychological effect or say what we are thinking. I am not used to psychological warfare, as you have been doing. We are Marxists, we speak realistically and straight into a problem.

Naturally, you disagree with some of what I have said. I ask you to think over what I have said, this is the only way to settle.

As Xuan Thuy said, we are prepared to settle if you are.

Mr. Kissinger: I can now recommend Mr. Special Adviser Le Duc Tho for the faculty at Harvard. He spoke for 55 minutes, exactly.

Le Duc Tho: What is important is the content.

Mr. Kissinger: I will of course study the remarks of Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho with great care. At an appropriate moment, I will give a detailed reply.

I would just like to make a few observations now, and then ask a question about where we go from here.

At the end of my presentation, I listed six new proposals and suggestions we have made. If I understood Minister Xuan Thuy, he listed as a new proposal he made the order of the withdrawal of our troops under Madame Nguyen thi Binh's schedule. As I have had occasion to point out to Minister Xuan Thuy before, a new proposal which interests us is what you will do, not what we will do. Spelling out the modalities of an unreasonable demand we have already rejected is not a negotiating proposal.

I therefore still await with interest some proposal on what you are willing to do when we do something.

As for Special Adviser Le Duc Tho's remarks, let me make some relatively brief remarks.

The Special Adviser said we are carrying out a policy of making Asians fight Asians as if we wanted Asians to fight Asians. As I have had occasion to point out to the Special Adviser last time, we don't want anyone to fight anyone in Southeast Asia. I don't think we should return to the Nixon Doctrine in this context if there is another meeting.

As to Laos, there is one reasonable, simple test to see who is expanding the war; to see who is advancing.

Having participated in all discussions in our activities, I would like the Special Adviser to report to his colleagues in Hanoi that they are completely mistaken about our intention and actions in Laos.

I agree with him it would be useful if we can agree on an analysis of the situation, because if we can't, then we cannot make much

progress. We are prepared to discuss immediately a ceasefire in Northern Laos. This would put an end to military activities once and for all.

As for Cambodia, I despair of convincing the Special Adviser that we had nothing to do with what happened in Phnom Penh, although I am flattered of the high opinion he has of our intelligence services. If they knew I was here, I would tell them of this high opinion.

Again, there is a simple test. Who has troops in Cambodia? Not the U.S. I am impressed again with the linguistic ability of the people of the Indo-Chinese peninsula. We discovered that the Pathet Lao speak Vietnamese, and now we find the same phenomenon in Cambodia.

We have shown great resistance vis-à-vis the bases you maintain in Cambodia and which you use in attacking our forces in Vietnam.

I do not want to discuss the history of Cambodia except to reaffirm that we support the neutrality of Cambodia and have no intention or interest in using Cambodia to put military pressure on Vietnam.

We are prepared to discuss immediately concrete and specific measures to guarantee the neutrality of Cambodia and to make absolutely certain it does not become a pawn in any international conflict. We are willing to do this bilaterally with you or in an international framework.

What is not admissible is for you to define what government should be in power and for you to use Vietnamese troops to change the government of Cambodia.

I repeat: we shall not be the ones to expand the war to Cambodia; we shall not be the ones to threaten the neutrality of Cambodia; we shall not threaten you from Cambodia; and we shall not extend our activities in Cambodia.

We shall be prepared to entertain reasonable propositions to guarantee that Laos and Cambodia—especially Cambodia, as it is a new problem—remain neutral.

What events in Cambodia prove to me is that the war in Vietnam sets in train events which cannot be controlled by any of the participants. The Special Adviser said that he did not know whether President Nixon wanted to end the war or extend it. You of course will make your own judgments. I can assure you—and no one is in a better position to know this than I—that he sincerely wants to end the war and will go to considerable lengths to find an honorable end to the war.

Now a word about the political problem. I will not debate with the Special Adviser his assessment of political conditions in South Vietnam. He and I disagree.

If he is right, I do not understand why he does not accept our proposals. We have said we will not intervene in political changes that occur in Vietnam as a result of free political processes.

The Special Adviser would like to exclude Messrs. Thieu, Ky, and Khiem before the political process even begins. We have indicated publicly, and I now reaffirm to you all in solemnity privately, that we are ready to respect the results of the political process even if it leads to the rejection of the political forces to whom you object.

Therefore the only thing we should need to discuss is how to arrive at a free political process not subject to pressure.

I have also listened with great attention to what Minister Xuan Thuy said about our withdrawal and the seemingly heavy emphasis on departures at the end. I do not follow the tactics of your side which professes never to be satisfied with any proposal, and the best we can do is to get back to the point of departure. There is some merit in the argument by Minister Xuan Thuy and I shall have to discuss with our technical people what adjustments are possible. I will use my influence in the direction of more emphasis on the first few months.

But the two key points that remain to us and where I do not see where we can go, are:

—First, with whom you propose to discuss the withdrawal of your forces and how to establish a relationship between the two processes; and

—Second, how we proceed to define a political process which does not prejudge the outcome in advance. And I repeat, we do not insist on a particular outcome for ourselves.

We have two choices. We can proceed and hide behind the complexities of the problem. Both sides are sufficiently intelligent, and particularly your side so well prepared in dialectics, that we can keep this up forever. It would be an academic exercise leading nowhere, and it would have to be done without my participation.

Or we can attempt, in the spirit of Minister Xuan Thuy's remarks—and I was moved by his final remarks—to approach again these two questions in a new spirit to arrive at a solution, and to put an end to the war during this year.

Our two countries are not natural enemies. There is nothing either can want from the other.

The President sincerely wants peace. History will not judge us by how well we conducted our debates but only from the facts we have created.

I would therefore like to ask whether you see any point in continuing and, if so, how.

Xuan Thuy: You are finished?

Mr. Kissinger: Yes.

Xuan Thuy: I have said that we prefer to settle the problem peacefully. War is something reluctant to us. If the U.S. prolongs, extends,

and continues the war, then the Vietnamese and other Indo-Chinese people will have to continue the struggle.

I may frankly tell you that all your explanations concerning Laos and Cambodia have not convinced us you are telling the truth.

We are prepared to negotiate with you. As to your proposal, we have remarked that there is nothing new. Indeed, they showed some setbacks.

Therefore, we shall continue the negotiations. We should think over each other's views, and we shall put forward new ideas.

Le Duc Tho: May I make a few remarks on what was said.

Mr. Kissinger: Please.

Le Duc Tho: It is natural that each has his own assessment of the situation. But my assessment, I can say, is not prompted by a subjective assessment of wishful thinking. Objective events lead to our assessment.

I think if Mr. Nixon really does not want to extend the war, if he really wants a settlement, there should be practical acts to show his intentions. I expressed my assessment on the basis of recent events.

As you said, the U.S. does not want to see Asians fighting Asians. But what is the fact? Does not Vietnamization intend to see Vietnamese fight Vietnamese. Was not the introduction of Thai troops to Laos, Asians fighting Asians? Now civil war may break out in Cambodia—what is this? You stand behind the scenes to support the reactionary forces. Therefore I say that President Nixon's policy is Asians fighting Asians. You say you would sometime like to discuss the Nixon Doctrine. I am prepared to do so. But not now, at an appropriate time.

You say there are linguistic attainments in Laos and Cambodia. But I must say we are an oppressed people who have suffered aggression. We have no intention of carrying out aggression against any other country. What is the origin of the situation in Laos and Cambodia? Not we.

Mr. Kissinger: Actually, yes.

Le Duc Tho: It is U.S. aggression. You say there is North Vietnamese aggression against South Vietnam. Is it reasonable to say that we aggress against our people? It is U.S. aggression against South Vietnam.

U.S. aggression is the deep root of the problem in Cambodia. You say we are advancing in Laos. But the present circumstances were created by the U.S. there too. It is obvious, as I explained, about the Plain of Jars situation.

We have stated our standpoint on Laos. The 5 points by Prince Souphanouvong and the Pathet Lao are now awaiting answer by the other side. We understand that the two sides sit down and discuss it in Vientiane; this is our desire.



I would not want to debate Cambodia as the problem is obvious. Our concepts of Cambodian neutrality differ. These are problems to be settled. How to settle the Cambodian problem? We have stated our stand.

You have stated some views on Vietnam. May I make some comments. You say we have put forward the same proposals as before, which you have rejected. But your proposals are not different from your previous proposals which we have rejected.

It is not true that we force you or oblige you to do something before we. These are negotiations. If you put forward something reasonable and logical, we will put forward something reasonable and logical.

We cannot accept your military and political proposals.

Your political proposal is not acceptable because we differ in our political assessments. We both agree there must be free general elections in South Vietnam. But in this political process, there should be a provisional coalition government. The reasons for this Minister Xuan Thuy and I have said. Because if at the end of the war, there are two governments existing, they cannot avoid a resumption of hostilities at some time. Therefore, we proposed a provisional coalition government to realize national concord and to prepare for free elections. And only by the formation of a provisional coalition government can peace be achieved.

These are my remarks on the political problem and a few additional remarks.

As to negotiations here, in a word, briefly, each side must make an effort to make progress. We are prepared to negotiate with you, as Minister Xuan Thuy said. So far, our positions are far apart. This is the difficulty.

Mr. Kissinger: What do you propose?

Le Duc Tho: We think your proposals need some further study from our side. But under present circumstances, in our assessment, it is difficult to settle the matter.

Because the intensification and extension of the war, as I have analyzed, does not show your good will. And your proposals do not move an inch. This is our analysis. So what do we do now?

Mr. Kissinger: Well, I have outlined six important respects in which we believe we have made important proposals in this channel. We believe, for example, that the electoral commission which you dismiss too easily could create an area of negotiation which could bring about a degree of interim control, at least over electoral processes about which you are concerned.

If you do not believe that further study of our proposals and further reflection will permit you to continue these discussions, then

perhaps we should have an interruption in the negotiations. We know how to get in touch.

On the other hand, if you are prepared to study these proposals and meet in an effort to bring our positions closer together, I am prepared to make one more effort.

Xuan Thuy: We think if you believe your proposal should stand now, even if we make new proposals, then we should interrupt.

If you think your proposal is just an opening proposal put forward for bargaining, and we shall make further study, and you believe you need further study of our proposal, then we could each study and meet again.

Mr. Kissinger: All right. I propose we attempt one more meeting.

Le Duc Tho: We are prepared to meet once again. But I think that if you feel at the next meeting your proposal should stay where it is now and there is nothing new, then we should stop here. If you have new proposals, we shall meet again.

Mr. Kissinger: I have explained to Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Adviser Le Duc Tho that it is inadmissible that we always make new proposals, while all you do is tell us the sequence in which we should withdraw our troops. If this is what you believe, the war will run its course. We have a different assessment. For you have your evaluation and we have ours.

There must be reciprocity in this channel. If you think this channel is a place for us to accept your proposals, then there is no point in continuing. I am prepared to look at our position again. I don't know the results. But there is no hope of success in these meetings unless you review your own position and unless we have an assurance that for the first time in these meetings we will have a real negotiation.

Le Duc Tho: Because you have requested to meet us, therefore we want to see something new in your position. It is not something we demand from you.

Therefore we would like to see something new in your position. Only in this way can we settle the problem. Otherside [otherwise?] we will be in contact later to settle the matter.

Xuan Thuy: In a word, you have not accepted our position today. We have not accepted your position. In addition to expounding these positions, each expounded views. We should study them, and whenever either side wishes it can get in contact with the other.

Mr. Kissinger: This is the right way to proceed.

Le Duc Tho: We stay in relations.

(The meeting ended at 2:30 p.m.)

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

Washington, April 6, 1970.

SUBJECT

My Meeting with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy, April 4, 1970

I met again with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy for about five hours on April 4.<sup>2</sup> I took a strong line as you had instructed, stressing that there was no sense in another meeting unless they were prepared to say something new. Though they were obviously prepared to meet again, without precondition, they were not prepared to promise this. Therefore, we agreed not to set another date now but to get in touch when either side was ready to meet next.

Because of the importance of this meeting, my report is longer than usual.

*I. What Was Significant:*

—When I refused to open, they spoke first, which they have not done before in any private talks in any administration.

—They indicated a readiness to discuss the withdrawal of their forces linked to ours, though they were ambiguous about with whom to do it and though they evidently want to negotiate our schedule first.

—They went somewhat further than before in indicating their readiness to recognize the GVN, calling it an “objective reality.” They asked for the removal of Thieu, Khiem, and Ky but not the abandonment of the GVN. (We shall review their earlier statements to determine the precise nature of this modification.)

—They have thus made two significant concessions, which they would not have done if they had wanted to break the channel. At the same time, these concessions are so subtle that they cannot easily be exploited in propaganda with our doves.

—They did not state that the “Provisional Coalition Government” would run the elections.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 852, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. IV. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information. Handwritten notes at the top of the page read: “8:25 am, April 7” and “Camp David File.”

<sup>2</sup> Document 222.

—They made a change in the composition of the “Provisional Coalition Government” from their previous proposals, especially recognizing the GVN as a participating entity.

—They agreed to our point that a settlement had to express the balance of political forces.

—They did not reject our proposal for a deadline out of hand.

—They were extremely concerned about the Thai troops and the bombing in Laos, abandoning the cocky confidence of three weeks ago for a somewhat plaintive and bellicose defensiveness.

—They seemed deeply disturbed by events in Cambodia, and uncertain how to reconcile this new problem with their previous plans and assumptions. They were so confused about it that when I offered to discuss strengthened neutrality and guarantees, they said neutrality meant something different to them and to us.

—They did not mention our air attacks on the Barthelemy Pass, probably because it might have obliged them to break off the contact.

—They refused to entertain any discussion of cease-fire, either in Laos or Vietnam, saying that fighting could not stop until all our forces were withdrawn.

—They established a clear link between the conflicts in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, though they did not indicate any readiness to negotiate with us on Laos or Cambodia at this time.

—We have established a good public record. We have offered everything except unilateral withdrawal and replacement of the leaders of the GVN *before* the political process begins—though we made clear we would accept their replacements as a result of the political process.

—The general tone of the meeting was harder than in the past two.

## *II. Reasons for the Failure to Set Another Date:*

—They are now so obsessed with the Cambodian situation that they cannot say much more until they can see the prospects there more clearly.

—They have to consider that what happened in Cambodia was done by us.

—They have gone to the limit of their present instructions.

—The fact that our meetings are interrupted may be more helpful for the future than if they had kept going. We have got across to them that these meetings are not the place for pointless exchanges and they therefore have to develop a concrete position.

—Nonetheless, they did not want to break off or interrupt the meetings.

- If they had wanted to do this, they would not have made the concessions which they made in this meeting.
- They had several chances to break off the talks, but they would have been ready to meet without preconditions if we had suggested another meeting.

### *III. What We Have Achieved in These Meetings So Far:*

Since we are obviously at the end of a phase (and perhaps at the end of the meetings), it may be useful to sum up their results.

—We have gained some significant concessions. They have abandoned the ten points, indicated their readiness to talk about their own withdrawal, and softened their position on political settlement somewhat. This is still far from enough to bridge the gap between us, but it is more than we have given them in terms of basic positions.

—We have established a good public record because their concessions are more subtle than ours and because our moves all appear very reasonable. We went as far as the liberals can ask, without giving away anything.

—We have interrupted the discussion on the basis of two issues on which we have a good position with public opinion: (1) we have given a detailed, short schedule of our withdrawal, and they have refused to be specific about theirs; and (2) we have indicated that we are not wedded to any government, only to a free political process. We have a good record: (1) vis-à-vis public opinion, and (2) if we have to go hard as is very likely.

—We have a good basis for not replacing Ambassador Lodge.

—When Le Duc Tho returns to Hanoi—as I expect he will—they will have some difficult problems to sort out. This may add to the current confusion on their side, and help prevent them from taking extreme steps.

—It is probably just as well that there is not another meeting soon, since we would have been hard put to develop further proposals at this time.

### *IV. What Happened:*

—After I insisted that they should speak first, there was a somewhat protracted fencing which ended with Xuan Thuy making a speech in which he said that my withdrawal proposal of last week amounted to a mutual withdrawal and said that they “cannot accept this principle.” He also presented their political proposal in somewhat fuller terms than in the past and with some change in substance.

—Thuy said that they recognize the GVN as a “reality,” and that a political settlement should take place in three phases. First, Thieu, Ky, and Khiem should be changed, and a new Saigon administration

formed; second, a “Provisional Coalition Government” should be formed, consisting of the PRG, the Saigon administration without Thieu, Ky, and Khiem, and representatives of all other political favors; third, there should be elections, after U.S. withdrawal, to elect a national assembly.

—At the end, Thuy said that they were prepared to discuss their withdrawal after political and military issues had been agreed to, but he did not say with whom they would discuss it, though he strongly implied that it would be this forum. He repeated Mme. Binh’s proposal for U.S. withdrawal in six months, and proposed the sequence in which U.S. forces should withdraw. He also said that we should replace Ambassador Lodge.

—I then presented our political proposal. In response to Xuan Thuy’s statement, I said that we could not accept their demand for the replacement of leaders of the GVN, though we could accept that the control of power after a settlement would be determined by the process agreed in the settlement. I also stated that the Electoral Commission could be given important functions. I said that we were now well represented in Paris for the current discussion, and repeated that we would be prepared to appoint a successor to Ambassador Lodge when it was appropriate.

—I then listed the six proposals we had made in these talks: (1) we have agreed to the principle of total U.S. withdrawal; (2) we have presented a flexible schedule for a short time; (3) we have said that we are not committed to the maintenance in power of any political force after a settlement; (4) we have presented methods for determining the popular will; (5) we have said that we are prepared to discuss precise terms for the distribution of power; and (6) we have said that we are prepared to link military and political issues, both in general and in connection with a cease-fire.

—I again proposed a deadline. They did not agree to one, though they did not reject the concept as they had done before.

—I then stated our position on Laos and Cambodia, repeating that we were prepared to reduce our military operations in Northern Laos if they would stop offensive operations. (I later said that we would be prepared to negotiate a cease-fire in Northern Laos.) I then said that we were prepared to work out arrangements to guarantee the neutrality and inviolability of Cambodia.

—I pointed out to them that they had started new military operations in South Vietnam just four days before this meeting.

—In reply to a question by Xuan Thuy, I said that we would be prepared to hold elections before or after withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese factors.

—Xuan Thuy made a speech in which he said that he and Le Duc Tho had good will, and that he wished to continue to talk with me. He denied that the timing of the offensive in South Vietnam had any significance in terms of our discussions, saying that wars go up and down.

—Le Duc Tho then made a very long and tough speech in which he said that our views of the situation in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia differ greatly from theirs. He said that we had escalated the hostilities in Laos by taking the Plain of Jars last year and by bombing, and he charged us with the coup in Cambodia. He said that the people of Indo-China were united against us and would fight until victory.

—Tho also said that they agree with our statement that the settlement of the political problem must be based on the relation of political forces but that so long as we maintain Thieu, Ky, and Khiem, it shows that we want to keep up the war.

—I replied to his statements on Laos by pointing out that Hanoi's troops were doing the advancing. I said there was a simple way of solving the problem: negotiate an immediate cease-fire in Northern Laos.

—I replied to his remarks on Cambodia by indicating our readiness to discuss measures to guarantee the neutrality of Cambodia. I indicated that we would not be the ones to expand the war to Cambodia, to threaten Cambodian neutrality, to augment our actions there, or to threaten them from Cambodia. But I said it was not admissible that they should define what government should be in power there and that they should use Vietnamese troops to make changes in that government.

—I said the key points which divide us are: (1) with whom they are prepared to discuss withdrawal of their forces, and how to establish a relationship between their withdrawal and ours; and (2) how to define a political process which does not prejudice the outcome in advance.

—We then went into the exchanges resulting in the decision to leave the request for another meeting to either party. They said they would be in touch with General Walters.

**224. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Saigon, April 8, 1970, 0526Z.

933. To the White House Eyes Only Henry A. Kissinger.

1. General Abrams and I have been working on an overall assessment of the inter-relationship between recent events in Laos, Cambodia and Viet-Nam and on recommendations for courses of action particularly with respect to Cambodia. We have decided to send in the assessment portion alone through State Department channels (Saigon 5182)<sup>2</sup> and to provide the recommendations separately through this channel because of their sensitivity. Following are those recommendations, to be read as the concluding portion of the ref message.

2. We think some selected and judicious help should be given to Cambodia for reasons set forth in the concluding two paragraphs of our assessment.<sup>3</sup> Here are our views on the forms that such cooperation might take:

3. One important area where early help will be needed is in the economic field. We should engage in quiet discussions with Japan, Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia as to how we might help. One possibility might be a special fund attached to the ADB.

4. We recognize the cross-border operations and other forms of cross-border cooperation are a very delicate business. As indicated in our assessment the Cambodian Government cannot request or wel-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> Telegram 5182 from Saigon, April 7, is *ibid.*, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 ASIA SE. NSC staff member David McManis summarized the telegram for Kissinger and sent it through Haig, who characterized Bunker's assessment as "a hard line view!" (*Ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 145, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, April 1, 1970)

<sup>3</sup> The last two paragraphs of telegram 5182 from Saigon read: "As seen from Saigon, it is in our interest to keep the Lon Nol Government in being because it will cooperate less with the VC/NVA than any likely successor government. We think this is true even if Lon Nol came to a limited accommodation with the enemy. The most likely alternative government to Lon Nol would be a government completely subservient to the Communists if not controlled by them.

"In the military field, we should so conduct ourselves as to induce uncertainty and worry in the enemy that we may take advantage of his exposed position if he commits himself too deeply into Cambodia in action against the Cambodian forces." Bunker concluded that there were courses that could achieve this end while also reassuring and encouraging the Cambodians. He agreed with the Embassy in Phnom Penh, that assistance to Cambodia should depend on evidence that the Cambodians were doing all they could themselves.



come them openly—indeed they might request them secretly and criticize them publicly—and we also understand that such operations create problems in the U.S. whether conducted by GVN or U.S. forces. We expect such operations would create especially intractable problems if conducted in thickly inhabited areas of Cambodia. The VC/NVA are often established in or near Cambodian villages, and air attack against such positions for instance would create an outcry that we must be careful to avoid. We are also quite aware from recent experience that most cross-border operations cannot be concealed.

5. The purpose of cross-border operations, as we have stated, should be to induce uncertainty and worry in the enemy that we may take advantage of his exposed position if he commits himself too deeply into Cambodia in actions against the Cambodian forces. A subsidiary purpose, which can be served at the same time, is to restrain the South Vietnamese forces from ill-considered actions across the border which could be dangerous or unprofitable and would result in friction between them and us. We can only exercise control if we sit down with the South Vietnamese and plan jointly for cross-border operations and contingencies. We regard this as exceedingly important.

6. There are some cross-border operations which could be undertaken with military profit. These would be in unpopulated areas where we could strike selected bases, headquarters, communications centers and supply lines. On the ground reliance should be on Vietnamese forces. The main U.S. effort should be in air and artillery support and operational planning. We have in mind targets where there is virtually no population other than enemy military personnel.

7. There may also develop military opportunities and/or political and psychological requirements which call for penetrations across the border. For example in certain tactical contingencies we might help the Cambodian forces by allowing ARVN units to engage in shallow penetrations of the border, to a degree just sufficient to prevent the enemy from discounting the threat to his rear.

8. It seems from here that what we need now are preparations and where necessary the initiation of selected and limited actions to meet three ends:

A. To signal to the enemy that we are not prepared to stand idle if they pursue a policy of military or insurrectionary pressure against the Lon Nol government;

B. To avoid serious strains in our relations with the GVN that are bound to develop if we try to clamp total restraints on them; and

C. To give encouragement to the Lon Nol government at a time when they are most in need of it.

## 225. Memorandum for the Record<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 10, 1970.

### SUBJECT

Minutes of the Meeting of the 40 Committee, 10 April 1970

### PRESENT

Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Elliot Richardson, Mr. Packard, and Mr. Helms

Messrs. Thomas Karamessines, William Nelson, and Marshall Green and General Haig were also present.

### *Cambodian Request for Military Assistance*

a. The Chairman [Kissinger] stated that he had convened a special urgent meeting of the 40 Committee at the request of higher authority to consider the message received the previous day from Chargé Rives (Phnom Penh 485).<sup>2</sup>

b. Immediate cognizance was taken of the fact that the request conveyed in the message for arms for Cambodia was not only vague and apparently exaggerated but also unofficial. It was not clear that it had the official backing of the Cambodian Government, even though the intermediary was Prime Minister Lon Nol's brother.

c. A considerable discussion ensued during which the following decisions were taken:

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, 303/40 Committee Minutes, 1970. Secret; Eyes Only. Copies were sent to Mitchell, Packard, Johnson, and Helms. Chapin sent this memorandum to Kissinger under cover of an April 13 memorandum for his approval and Kissinger initialed it. Holdridge prepared a briefing paper for Kissinger for this meeting in which he attempted to "sketch out the issues" and provide recommendations about such major questions as how much interest the United States had in the Lon Nol regime, and whether the Lon Nol government was solid enough to warrant support, as well as a number of other related issues. (Memorandum from Holdridge to Kissinger, April 10; National Security Council, Subject Files, Cambodia, 1970)

<sup>2</sup> In telegram 485 from Phnom Penh, April 9, Rives reported that an Embassy official met on April 9 with Commander of the Phnom Penh Gendarmerie, Lon Non (Lon Nol's younger brother), "in what was obviously to be first semi-official probe here for US arms aid." Rives instructed the Embassy official to listen and explain that the United States needed assurances, at least from Sirik Matak, that these were authorized requests. According to Lon Non, the "immediate need is for 100,000 to 150,000 weapons to supply expanding army. Ultimate need will be from 200 to 250,000 weapons and arms." Lon Non made it clear he was speaking for his brother. Although Rives considered the quantities of the request exaggerated, he concluded: "I believe we must do something to help the Cambodians help themselves since their present efforts are to our benefit; no troops and only limited aid given indirectly." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, DEF 19 US-CAMB) Kissinger refers to this telegram in *White House Years*, p. 470.

(1) Since Chargé Rives is expected to see Prime Minister Lon Nol imminently, the State Department will dispatch a message immediately instructing him to ascertain from the Prime Minister if the arms request is indeed official, and if so, ask the Prime Minister to designate someone in whom he has confidence with whom the U.S. can work on the problem.

(2) Following designation of the Prime Minister's intermediary, we should ascertain precisely what the Cambodians think their arms requirements are. It was recognized that there probably would be both real and psychological elements in their requirements.

(3) Mr. Packard undertook to determine what stocks of arms and ammunition of communist origin exist in the U.S. and in South Vietnam which would be available to fill the Cambodian needs. He stated he would have a paper prepared on this by 13 April.<sup>3</sup>

(4) Mr. Green's proposal that a telegram he had prepared be sent to Paris was approved with a modification suggested by the Chairman.<sup>4</sup> The thrust of this message was to encourage the French to provide military assistance to the Cambodian Government.

(5) Various methods of delivering the arms and ammunition to the Cambodians without the U.S. hand showing were discussed. It was the consensus that if sufficient captured communist arms are available in South Vietnam, the quickest, cheapest, easiest and most secure delivery could be accomplished from there, assuming the GVN would cooperate. It was agreed that further consideration of making arms deliveries with the assistance of the Indonesians or the Thais would be held in abeyance for the time being. The CIA undertook to explore the possibilities of the Cambodians making open purchases from Belgian arms dealers with covert U.S. funds provided for this purpose.

d. The Chairman stated that following receipt of Mr. Packard's paper and a report from Chargé Rives on his meeting with Prime Minister Lon Nol, he would convene a meeting next week to discuss this subject further.

**Frank M. Chapin**

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<sup>3</sup> Nutter made an oral report on this issue to the Washington Special Actions Group at its meeting on April 14 (Document 230). The WSAG rather than the 40 Committee became the forum for further decision of covert aid to Cambodia.

<sup>4</sup> Sent as telegram 053784 to Paris, April 11. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, 4/14/70, Cambodia and Laos)

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

Washington, April 9, 1970.

SUBJECT

Cambodia

Attached is an interesting commentary on the situation in Cambodia which was written on March 23 by Brigadier F.P. Serong, a retired Australian army officer who has specialized in studying insurgency and spent a great deal of time in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> Brigadier Serong makes the following points:

—Sihanouk colluded with right wing elements to run a pseudo-coup during his trip abroad, and planned to return to “re-establish” the situation. However, he was betrayed.

—Sihanouk will try to establish a government-in-exile.

—Cambodian border province chiefs are deeply involved with Hanoi, the NLF and Peking.

—With NVA/VC military support, Sihanouk probably could get the allegiance of the four northern province chiefs and topple the Phnom Penh government in a few months. Ultimately, he would hand Cambodia over to Hanoi.

—Ninety percent of the income of the southeast Cambodian province chiefs comes from supplying the enemy through Sihanoukville. As it becomes clear that the new government cannot control the traffic, the province chiefs, who are presently quiescent, will get back in the supply business.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970. Confidential. Sent for information.

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

<sup>3</sup> Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote: “K, we’d better see what Helms can do to pay them off.” On April 15 Kissinger sent Helms a memorandum asking if it was true that 90 percent of the income of the southeastern province chiefs of Cambodia came from allowing supplies to pass to the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese through Sihanoukville. Kissinger asked if this traffic would resume once it became clear that the Lon Nol Government could not control it. Kissinger then asked for CIA’s views on these assumptions and “whether or not it would be possible through discreet use of funds to prevail upon these province chiefs to refrain from their trafficking in supplies to the enemy.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. II, September 1969–9 April 1970)

—The Cambodian government needs strengthening. We must take positive action and can do so by proxy through the GVN, who will probably act if the U.S. approves.

The GVN should:

—Announce support for Phnom Penh and invite Thailand to do so.

—Help Phnom Penh secure Sihanoukville; some 3,000 Khmer Serai in the Delta could be offered.

—Make combat liaison arrangements in Northeast Cambodia with the Royal Khmer Army. This could produce a most uncomfortable situation for the NVA.

—Phnom Penh must assert control in the Capital and in Sihanoukville and also maintain pressure in the Northeast. This could produce cooperation from the border province chiefs and logistical strangulation of enemy efforts in the South.

—The present Deputy Prime Minister Sirik Matak is capable of replacing Sihanouk as a national father figure.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> At the end of the memorandum Nixon wrote: "K, These may be way out ideas. But they do show some imagination. I want Helms & State & Defense & your staff to give me some options other than just 'letting the dust settle.'"

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

Washington, April 11, 1970.

### SUBJECT

The Prospects for Cambodia and Vietnamese Attitudes

We have received the views of Secretary Laird on the Communist capabilities in Cambodia and Embassy Saigon's views on these capabilities and on the prospects there, particularly as they

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Holdridge sent this memorandum to Kissinger on April 8 with a recommendation that he sign it.

affect Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> Their views are parallel in many respects. Following are some of the main points:

*I. Assessment*

—Both the Secretary and the Embassy point out that Communist forces in the border area are stronger than the Cambodian forces, although their superiority is not overwhelming. Secretary Laird estimates about 19,000 NVA/VC combat forces in the border areas opposite Phnom Penh and further south to the sea. He estimates that there are only about 2,000 to 4,000 Cambodian troops in that area to contain the Communists, with another 4,000 in Phnom Penh. (We consider that estimate very low, since the Cambodians have been calling up reserves and redeploying their forces.) The Embassy gives an estimate of about 17,000 VC/NVA combat forces in the entire border area (not just opposite Phnom Penh), and also estimates that there are about 3,700 Communist Cambodian forces available to Hanoi.

—Both the Secretary and the Embassy believe that the Communist forces would be able to defeat the Cambodian forces, but would not be able to overwhelm them quickly.

*II. Prospects*

—The Embassy and the Secretary agree that Hanoi cannot tolerate the loss of its Cambodian sanctuaries, and must do something to remove the Lon Nol government or force a change in Phnom Penh's policies.

—The Embassy and the Secretary believe that the current outlook is for intensified Communist guerrilla warfare, using some mix of local and Vietnamese Communist forces to make Lon Nol change his policies or else to topple the Lon Nol government by bringing "people's war" to Cambodia. This would be accompanied by a threat to take Phnom Penh.

—The Embassy further points out that the loss of Cambodian sanctuaries and supply lines, even if temporary, will force the Communists to rely more heavily on Laos. The Embassy thinks that the upsurge in infiltration of supplies through Laos last winter already reflected Communist fears that Cambodia was no longer a reliable funnel. It thinks

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<sup>2</sup> Attached is a copy of telegram 5182 from Saigon, April 7; see footnotes 2 and 3, Document 224. Also attached, but not printed, is an April 3 memorandum from Laird to Kissinger, which enclosed a JCS assessment of the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong capability to attack, seize, and maintain control over Phnom Penh. The assessment was prepared by DIA and coordinated with CIA. It concluded that with reinforcements from other border areas and sufficient time and preparation, the VC/NVN could take and hold Phnom Penh in the absence of South Vietnamese intervention. Without time and reinforcements, prospects for an early seizure of the capital were "marginal." Wheeler sent it to Laird under cover of memorandum CM-5011-70, April 2.

that Hanoi will now attempt even harder than before to try to force a stop to U.S. bombing of the Laos trails.

### *III. The U.S. and South Vietnamese Role*

—The Embassy believes that a principal restraint on the Communist forces in Cambodia is their concern about what U.S. and South Vietnamese forces might do if Communist forces leave their base areas. The Embassy believes that it is to our advantage to leave the Communists in the greatest possible doubt about this, giving them no assurances that they can act freely in Cambodia without provoking our involvement. It believes we should conduct ourselves to induce uncertainty and worry in the enemy.

—The Embassy also believes that we should not restrain the South Vietnamese from cross-border operations too long if the Cambodian government requests help. Such a suspension, in the Embassy's words, "could not be maintained for too long without an outcry in Vietnam against the U.S. and Thieu, especially if the VC/NVA start hurting the Cambodian armed forces seriously." If Thieu were to veto cross-border operations in case the Cambodian army is badly hurt, the Embassy expects serious criticism to build up.

—The Embassy also believes that we should expect secret and even open Cambodian overtures for U.S. and South Vietnamese assistance if the new government's position becomes increasingly threatened.

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

Washington, April 13, 1970.

### SUBJECT

Interdepartmental Meeting on Fourth Redeployment Increment from South Vietnam, 5:00 p.m., April 13<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 95, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, Troop Replacements, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> The President's meeting with Rogers, Laird, Wheeler, and Kissinger lasted from 5:08 to 6:05 p.m.; Kissinger arrived at 5:05 and remained alone with the President until 6:17 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) No other record of this meeting has been found.

*Purpose of the Meeting*

The Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and I are scheduled to meet with you this afternoon to discuss the fourth redeployment increment from South Vietnam. The following is pertinent:

—You have decided to announce the withdrawal of 150,000 additional U.S. forces over the next year or so. You have also decided to keep this decision from the members of the Cabinet and the bureaucracy, as well as the troop contributing countries, exclusive of Thieu and Ambassador Bunker.

—At today's meeting you will convey the impression that you are leaning towards approving the withdrawal of between 35,000 and 40,000 additional U.S. forces between April 15 and August 15 of this year. In the interim we will consult with the troop contributing countries on the basis of this decision and only at the last moment modify this simulated decision to correspond to the facts.

—Therefore, the best approach at this afternoon's meeting will be to discuss your decision in the context of proceeding with a fourth incremental redeployment between April 15 and August 15. You should concentrate on the magnitude of the withdrawal increment and its implications in light of what has developed into a substantial disagreement between General Abrams and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on one hand and the Secretary of Defense on the other.

*Likely Positions*

Laird: Withdraw 40,000 troops by August 15.

Wheeler: Postpone any decision until June 15.

Rogers: Unknown, but likely to favor continued withdrawals at least at Laird's recommended pace.

We have sent back channel messages to Bunker to obtain his and General Abrams' views and to start consultations with Thieu on a strictly close-hold basis, discussing the year-long bite of 150,000 in conceptual terms.<sup>3</sup> *Bunker* and *Abrams* prefer the year-long 150,000 with-

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<sup>3</sup> In backchannel message WHS0016, April 6, Kissinger informed Bunker of the President's thinking about the 150,000 troops to be withdrawn within the next year, but with only token withdrawals over the next few months to permit the military situation to dictate the rate of withdrawal and allow Abrams flexibility. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970) In backchannel message WHS0019, April 8, Kissinger asked for Bunker's "definitive views on whether he preferred the 150,000 plan discussed in backchannel message 0016 or Laird's plan to withdraw 40,000 troops between April 15 and August 15." (Ibid.) In backchannel message 949 from Saigon, April 8, Bunker informed Kissinger that he and Abrams preferred the former. (Ibid.) In backchannel message WHS0022, April 11, Kissinger informed Bunker that the President "was leaning toward the larger bite" and asked Bunker to discuss it with Thieu on



drawal to the option of 40,000 the next three months. They cite the military advantages of holding the bulk of these withdrawals to the first half of 1971 and believe *Thieu* will accept this route. Bunker's cable is at Tab A.<sup>4</sup>

### *Current Situation*

As we have approached the fourth increment withdrawal decision, differences of view have surfaced within the Defense Department structure:

—On March 13 *General Abrams* forwarded an analysis of the situation to the Secretary of Defense. He recommended that the uncertainties in the enemy's activities and the current state of ARVN and local force improvement favored a temporary hiatus in further redeployments from South Vietnam. General Abrams specifically recommended that you withhold any decision on further withdrawals for ninety days, at which time you should reassess the situation. (His position is at Tab B.)<sup>5</sup>

—In view of General Abrams' March 13 proposal, Secretary Laird requested the views of the *Joint Chiefs of Staff* regarding the fourth redeployment increment. In a memorandum to the Secretary they recommended that a decision and announcement on further troop redeployments be deferred to June 15, 1970, i.e., 60 days. (The JCS position is at Tab C.)<sup>6</sup>

—*In sum*, General Abrams and the Joint Chiefs see the coming months as critical in maintaining Vietnamese confidence. They are concerned:

- that the enemy logistic build-up in South Vietnam and Laos, the shifting of five regiments from III Corps to IV Corps, and the presence of substantial caches in II and III Corps suggest a possible increase in VC/NVA offensive activity during the spring and early summer of 1970;
- that additional redeployments will exceed the South Vietnamese ability to take over new areas of tactical responsibility and maintain adequate general reserves;
- that continued, uninterrupted U.S. redeployments could upset further progress in pacification;
- about the uncertainties in Laos and Cambodia.

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a conceptual basis without precise figures. (Ibid.) In backchannel message 00030 from Saigon, April 13, Bunker informed Kissinger that he told *Thieu* of the plan to withdraw 150,000 troops and *Thieu* agreed with that plan. (Ibid.)

<sup>4</sup> Tab A, a retyped copy of backchannel message 948 from Saigon, April 12, is attached but not printed. The original copy is *ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Tab B, MACV telegram 3303, March 13, Abrams to CINCPAC and Wheeler, is attached but not printed.

<sup>6</sup> Tab C, JCSM-150-70, April 3 memorandum from JCS to Laird, is attached but not printed.

—The military's views closely parallel those of the *members of my staff* as the result of their visit to Vietnam in late January and early February.

- Dr. Lynn, who looked at pacification, was concerned that the rate of U.S. withdrawal could have a serious impact on this program which had progressed substantially but which was still spotty and leveling off, if not regressing, in certain critical areas.

- General Haig, who concentrated on the military situation, concluded that the first three withdrawal increments had deprived General Abrams of the necessary flexibility to meet a step-up in enemy activity over the late spring and summer. He judged that the improvement of the ARVN forces under the Vietnamization program has not yet provided the necessary capability to fill the gap. Haig was especially concerned about Southern I Corps and II Corps, which have already been seriously depleted and which would be further depleted during the fourth withdrawal phase. Haig's view was that the chances of success for the Vietnamization program would be improved measurably if we could keep the bulk of our remaining combat forces in place until the fall rainy season.

—On April 7, *Secretary Laird* forwarded to you a memorandum (Tab D)<sup>7</sup> which discussed the military's concerns, but which nevertheless concluded that there are strong arguments for continuing our redeployments. Secretary Laird presented the following arguments:

- It is true that there have been large movements of supplies from Laos towards South Vietnam. However, it could be that this has occurred in the past and that improved intelligence has merely pinpointed the fact this year.

- Although the enemy's logistic activity may foreshadow an offensive, there are equally plausible interpretations. Recent improvements in South Vietnamese security may be forcing the enemy to rely more heavily on external sources of supply. Sihanouk's partial embargo last fall on supplies moving through Sihanoukville may have caused Hanoi to increase shipments from Laos in anticipation of trouble in Cambodia. Finally, the enemy may be attempting to preposition stockpiles to maintain his flexibility so that he can take advantage of any tactical or political target of opportunity in South Vietnam.

- Laird notes that the logistic build-up has not been matched by a corresponding build-up in personnel. Enemy strength is at least 40,000 below June 1969 levels.

- The movement of five enemy regiments from III to IV Corps has not increased the net enemy force.

- Recent events in Cambodia complicate the enemy's problems.

—Secretary Laird has offered three basic *options*.

(1) Delay further redeployment until 15 June pending further reassessment by the JCS.

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<sup>7</sup> Tab D is attached but not printed.

(2) Redeploy about 40,000 troops between April 15 and August 15 at a reduced rate of 10,000 per month compared to the 12,500 per month we have been maintaining up to now.

(3) Redeploy about 50,000 between April 15 and August 15, maintaining the present 12,500 per month average.

—Secretary Laird recommends Option (2), which would bring us from an authorized troop ceiling of 434,000 on April 15 to a new authorized ceiling of 394,000 on August 15.

### *Talking Points*

In order to keep the discussion focused on the small bite course of action and to give the military an opportunity to fully express its views, I recommend that you attempt to center today's discussion on the military situation as seen from the perspective of General Abrams and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In doing so, you should also permit Secretary Laird to discuss fully the political/military considerations that have influenced him to overrule the recommendation of the JCS with respect to the fourth tranche. Finally, your discussion should include some of the steps which should be taken immediately with our allies to prepare for your announcement on Thursday, April 16.<sup>8</sup>

In order to do this, you should suggest at the conclusion of the discussion that you are leaning towards proceeding with the withdrawal of between 35,000 and 40,000 additional U.S. troops between April 15 and August 15. This decision will likely prove to be a great disappointment to the military and will set the stage for your actual subsequent decision, which will not be made known until just before your announcement.

—Ask Mr. Kissinger to summarize the current situation and the respective views of General Abrams, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense.

—Following the brief résumé by Mr. Kissinger, ask General Wheeler to outline the views of General Abrams and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

—Ask Secretary Laird to summarize his views in the light of General Wheeler's presentation.

—Ask Secretary Rogers to present his views, in the light of earlier arguments.

—Emphasize that you are fully sympathetic with the risks which have been outlined by General Wheeler and General Abrams, while pointing out that there are a host of political as well as military considerations which must be taken into account. These include a

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<sup>8</sup> The announcement was postponed until April 20; see footnote 2, Document 236.

resurgence of Congressional opposition to the war, which has been intensified by recent developments in Laos and Cambodia and which could be manifested by imposed fiscal constraints on our activities in Laos.

—Emphasize that you consider the situation in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam to be one ball of wax and that our actions in each area could have a major impact on Hanoi's calculations with respect to a negotiated settlement.

—In your view, some of the most pertinent considerations with respect to the next withdrawal decision are:

(1) The overall patterns of combat activity continue to trend downwards.

(2) The reduction of U.S. forces has constituted the principal incentive to the GVN to maintain the momentum of Vietnamization.

(3) The reduction of U.S. forces is a major factor contributing to public and Congressional support for Vietnamization.

(4) The economics of additional delays in withdrawals will place severe burdens on other Defense expenditures.

—In view of the foregoing you are leaning towards proceeding with an announcement next Thursday to withdraw additional forces of between 35,000 and 40,000 by August 15.

—Ask Dr. Kissinger to coordinate with State and Defense in preparing the required scenario for necessary consultation and notification to the troop contributing countries and other appropriate allies.

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

Washington, April 14, 1970.

SUBJECT

Actions in Cambodia

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1002, Haig Special Files, Staff Memos, 11/30/69–7/23/70. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

Attached is an interim progress report from Director Helms<sup>2</sup> on two actions taken in Cambodia to sustain the present regime. The report states that:

—A senior CIA officer has been sent to Phnom Penh and is now in contact with our best placed agent in the Cambodian government. He is expected to return to Washington during the middle of next week with a full report on the current situation there.<sup>3</sup>

—A world-wide propaganda effort is well under way to call attention to the flagrant violation of Cambodian territory by the North Vietnamese, to seek to discredit Sihanouk's efforts to create an exile government, and to emphasize the value of a genuinely neutral Cambodia.

Director Helms also reports that other measures are being considered which might provide support for the current regime. At the present time actions such as black radio broadcasts stressing the Chinese and North Vietnamese threat appear to be counter-productive. However, two proposals are recommended:

—Jamming for the next month or so broadcasts from Hanoi and Peking supporting Sihanouk and directed towards Cambodia.

—Increasing Voice of America broadcasts to two hours a day.

Director Helms believes these efforts to counteract the Chinese and North Vietnamese propaganda campaign on Sihanouk's behalf might be very useful in the current situation. They would also provide a clear but discreet signal to Cambodia that we are willing to help in ways that would not impair their neutrality. State and USIA have apparently rejected these proposals. However, I believe they have merit.

*Recommendation:*<sup>4</sup>

That you approve my working with State, Defense and USIA to institute selective jamming of broadcasts to Cambodia from Hanoi and Peking and to increase Voice of America broadcasts to Cambodia.

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<sup>2</sup> The progress report was an attached April 10 memorandum from Helms to Kissinger. Helms wrote a note next to the paragraph about this action reminding Kissinger: "You alone know this [the dispatch of a CIA senior officer to Phnom Penh]."

<sup>3</sup> On April 15 Kissinger sent Nixon a summary of the senior officer's conversation with the agent. The agent stated that Lon Nol did not want to ask the United States for aid unless absolutely necessary and then it should be given "quietly." Kissinger noted that the agent was unaware of Cambodian approaches to the U.S. for military aid and that the Cambodian search for arms from other nations was not yielding much. Finally, the agent described the internal situation in Cambodia as quiet, the army as loyal, and reported that the Lon Nol government is sending propaganda teams to the countryside seeking to win over the people. The agent predicted that a republic would be established by popular referendum within 3 months. (Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, April 15; *ibid.*, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970, [1 of 2])

<sup>4</sup> Nixon initialed the "approve" option.

## 230. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 14, 1970, 2:47–4:10 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Cambodia and Laos

### PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

CIA

Thomas H. Karamessines

William Nelson

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

Lt. Col. Gerald H. Britten

JCS

Admiral Nels C. Johnson

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Marshall Green

NSC Staff

John Holdridge

Col. Richard Kennedy

D. Keith Guthrie

### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

#### *Cambodia*

The WSAG considered possible types and quantities of US assistance to Cambodia. All WSAG members agreed that the key issue was to determine the level of assistance that would reassure and help stabilize the Lon Nol Government and at the same time avoid stimulating the North Vietnamese to mount an all-out attack. The WSAG members agreed that more information was needed on Cambodian arms requirements.

The WSAG decided that Chargé Rives should be instructed to tell Matak at their meeting on April 15 that the United States can supply immediately 1,500 AK-47's from South Vietnam and can provide 1,500 more shortly. He will state that we plan to arrange for delivery through the South Vietnamese Government to a point which the Cambodian Government designates. However, our offer will not be conditional on

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

Cambodian acceptance of the use of the South Vietnamese as intermediaries. Chargé Rives will also inform Matak that we are prepared to give the Cambodians medical supplies either overtly or covertly, as the Cambodians prefer. He will seek more information on Cambodian requirements for arms and ammunition. The telegram of instructions to Chargé Rives is to be prepared by the State Department and cleared with Dr. Kissinger.<sup>2</sup>

The WSAG also decided that Embassy Djakarta should be instructed to ask the Indonesian Government whether it would be willing to sell AK-47 rifles and ammunition to Cambodia.<sup>3</sup>

The WSAG members agreed that it was desirable to encourage other countries to help the Lon Nol regime. In this connection, Dr. Kissinger will consult with Secretary Laird about urging Australian aid to Cambodia during the Australian Defense Minister's current visit to Washington.

The WSAG members agreed that an immediate Presidential decision should be sought regarding Souvanna's request for a second Thai battalion. Dr. Kissinger will prepare and clear with the State Department a memorandum to the President setting forth the advantages and disadvantages and requesting a decision.<sup>4</sup>

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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<sup>2</sup> Flash telegram 055340 to Phnom Penh, April 15. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, DEF 19 US-CAMB)

<sup>3</sup> Flash telegram 055342 to Djakarta, April 15. (Ibid., POL 27 CAMB)

<sup>4</sup> For the memorandum as sent, see Document 231.

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

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Additional Thai Forces for Laos

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 567, Country Files, Far East, Thailand, Thai Involvement in Laos. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Sent for action. Holdridge and Kennedy sent this memorandum to Kissinger on April 14 recommending that he sign it and indicating U. Alexis Johnson had cleared it.

Souvanna has asked for another Thai infantry battalion.<sup>2</sup> There is a battalion at Udorn which could be readied quickly although we may need to provide some weapons and other equipment.

The pros and cons of putting in the second battalion are not very different from those we considered in coming to the decision to agree to the first unit.

*The Pros*

—The first battalion was put in place without any significant notice—there have been no kick-backs so far. The risk of public attention focusing on the second may not be great. Thai forces already on the ground are credited with having bucked up the morale of Vang Pao's forces and contributing to the stand-off they have been able to maintain. The situation remains tenuous and we have several weeks yet to go before the rains take their toll on the North Vietnamese advance. The second battalion with its artillery support could do much to strengthen the defenses and give Vang Pao another useful shot in the arm. Moreover, it could free some Lao forces to bolster the defense of the strong point at Bouam Long which thus far has tied down much of the North Vietnamese reserve that otherwise could have been brought to bear against Long Tieng. The additional strength also may deter a North Vietnamese advance along routes 7 and 13 toward Vang Vien or Vientiane by increasing the threat on their flank.

*The Cons*

—On the other hand there is still no assurance that Long Tieng can be held. While a second Thai battalion would aid in that effort it would provide no guarantee. We still run some risk that the introduction of these forces would become known and result in a domestic outcry which might inhibit our future air operations in Laos. The problem of affecting an orderly withdrawal and preventing a serious loss of Thai forces would be more complicated (but not insurmountably so). These additional Thai forces might give the North Vietnamese an incentive to intensify their attacks. Moreover, the use of Thai forces will detract from their counterinsurgency activities in Thailand. We cannot be sure that this will be the last such request—it may be only the second in an escalating series. The Chinese might also react by stepping up their support of the insurgency in Northern Thailand.

We do not know whether Souvanna has directly approached the Thai with this request. Nor are we sure that the plans for employment

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<sup>2</sup> Souvanna's request of April 11 is attached to a memorandum from Helms to Kissinger and others, April 11. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 567, Country Files, Far East, Thailand, Thai Involvement in Laos)



of the unit have been agreed between them. We will need to confirm both of these points before we act.

*Recommendation:*<sup>3</sup>

That you approve our indication of willingness to agree to the introduction of a second Thai battalion subject to confirmation of a Lao request to the Thai and Lao-Thai agreement as to the concept for its employment.

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

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**232. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 15, 1970.

SUBJECT

Delivery of Arms and Ammunition to the Cambodian Government

1. This memorandum responds to a request from General Haig for a plan for the delivery of arms and ammunition to the Cambodian Government. In the light of decisions taken at the WSAG Meeting of 14 April<sup>2</sup> to supply captured AK-47 weapons, we are outlining below alternative plans which might be implemented if the captured AK-47 route proves not adequate or feasible.

2. *The Cambodian Army and its Weapons Supply:*

The Cambodian Army (FARK) has a troop strength of 50,000 men including 10,000 reservists who were recalled to active duty in March 1970. The Army is organized into 55 infantry and commando battalions with the average strength of 380 men in each battalion. The Army has in addition nine one-half brigades (Demi-Brigade) of various sizes.

3. This regular Army is supplemented by an estimated 50,000 militia which includes 30,000 home guards, 15,000 provincial guards, 6,000

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Secret; Eyes Only.

<sup>2</sup> See Document 230.

police and 5,000 members of the National Youth Movement. This militia is under the command control of the Cambodian Army.

4. The Cambodian Army has been supplied military aid by both Communist and non-Communist countries. In recent years it has attempted to equip the standard Cambodian infantry battalion with the 7.62mm Communist-manufactured family of weapons. This round is not compatible with the 7.62mm bullet used in NATO equipment. Moreover, the ammunition clip is not interchangeable. The basic weapon of each battalion is the AK-47 assault rifle. The battalion generally has 150 rifles. In addition, each battalion has 40 pistols, 120 carbines, 18 light machine-guns, 3 heavy machine-guns, 5 mortars, 3 recoilless rifles and 7 rocket launchers.

5. We have sensitive documentary intelligence listing the inventory of Communist-supplied weapons currently held in Cambodian warehouses under FARK control. (See Attachment A)<sup>3</sup> This currently stored equipment could equip almost 43 Cambodian Army infantry battalions. The Cambodians have also received weapons and ammunition from the Free World. This equipment was supplied by the United States until 1963 and by the French who have continued a military assistance program. Attachment B<sup>4</sup> lists such matériel currently in Cambodian warehouses. We have, however, no idea of its condition. If in good condition, this matériel would equip up to 30 Cambodian Army battalions. A major problem facing the Cambodians is the continued supply of ammunition for either of its family of weapons. Cambodia has no capability to manufacture ammunition. On the basis of our current information, however, it would seem that the Cambodian Army is capable of considerable expansion simply by the use of stocks of weapons held in their warehouses.

6. *Alternative Means of Covertly Supplying Weapons to the Cambodian Army:*

If the United States wishes to supply covertly weapons and ammunition to the Cambodians in addition to what can be provided by use of captured Communist weapons, there appear to be two immediate options open to us. These are to work out an arrangement with the Indonesian Government to supply the Communist family of weapons drawn from Indonesian stocks *or* to provide direct covert support from Free World weapons drawn from American stockpiles.

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<sup>3</sup> Attachment A, entitled "Cambodia: Inventory of Communist-Supplied Weapons and Ammunition, 1969," is attached but not printed.

<sup>4</sup> Attachment B, entitled "Cambodia: Inventory of Selected Free World-Supplied Weapons and Ammunition," is attached but not printed.

7. We believe the Indonesian Government currently has 10 to 15,000 AK-47's. We do not know the condition of this equipment or whether there is available a continuing supply of ammunition and clips. The Indonesian Government is thinking of assisting the Cambodians.<sup>5</sup> The Cambodian Government has asked for arms assistance from Indonesia. The Indonesians would like to see the Cambodian Government maintain its public neutral stance and would want to supply arms to Cambodia covertly. The Indonesians have sufficient civil and military airlift to make an initial delivery of weapons to Cambodia. Subsequent weapons deliveries could be made by ship. [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] feels that the Indonesian Government would like to undertake this assistance program to Cambodia but in all probability would expect the United States to replace these arms probably with NATO-type weapons. CIA could undertake immediately to negotiate with the Indonesian Government on a covert basis for delivery of such weapons to Cambodia.

8. The most promising alternative to the Indonesian proposal is the covert supply of weapons to Cambodia through CIA facilities. Such weaponry is now being made available to the Laotian Government. If our storage facilities [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] were used, CIA could stage the weapons delivery without enlarging current facilities. The Agency has 1,000 man weapons-pack in which the basic weapon is the U.S. M-2 carbine. We can make 10 such weapons packs available within the next three weeks and transport them [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] if given sufficient airlift priority. Each pack could equip three Cambodian battalions. [*1½ lines of source text not declassified*] We also believe CIA could move the equipment covertly to Cambodia using CIA-controlled aircraft. A continuing supply of ammunition and clips is insured with this equipment.

9. Before either of these alternatives is considered we recommend that further talks be held with the Cambodians to determine the extent to which they really need military aid. We believe they should be encouraged to survey the equipment now available to them in storage. If desired, however, we stand ready to move ahead with either or both of the alternatives outlined above.

Dick

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<sup>5</sup> In telegrams 2631 and 2645 from Djakarta, both April 15, the Embassy reported that Suharto indicated readiness to assist Cambodia with small arms if the United States would replenish Cambodia's stocks. (Both are in the National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB)

**233. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 15, 1970, 5:22–6:06 p.m.

SUBJECT

Cambodia

PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Marshall Green

Jonathan Moore

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

Lt. Col. Gerald H. Britten

CIA

Thomas H. Karamessines

William Nelson

JCS

Admiral Nels C. Johnson

NSC Staff

Gen. Alexander M. Haig

John Holdridge

Laurence Lynn

Col. Richard Kennedy

Capt. Richard L. Sansom

D. Keith Guthrie

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

A WSAG working group is to be established to provide a systematic factual basis for considering what assistance the US might provide to Cambodia. The working group will be chaired by Dr. Lynn of the NSC staff or by an NSC staff member designated by him and will include one member designated by each of the WSAG principals. The working group (1) will prepare an analysis of the military shopping list given us by the Cambodians and (2) will assess what would be a reasonable objective for the Cambodians to aim at in trying to improve their military capabilities. The working group will consider the second question from two standpoints: (1) if the Cambodians were to aim at conducting a holding operation against North Vietnamese forces and

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

(2) if the Cambodians wished to develop the capability to withstand a frontal attack from the communists. The working group will submit its report by April 20.

The WSAG decided that the State Department should immediately request the views of Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams on how to deliver the AK-47's already offered to the Cambodians, and particularly on delivery across the border using the South Vietnamese Government as an intermediary.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, CIA will go forward with planning for covert delivery by air. The WSAG will meet April 16 to consider the reply expected from Ambassador Bunker.

[Omitted here are the minutes of the meeting.]

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<sup>2</sup> In responding to telegram 056264 to Saigon, April 15, Bunker reported in telegram 5801 from Saigon, April 16, and in backchannel message 80 from Saigon, also April 16, that he had consulted with Abrams and there was no question about GVN's cooperation, but that cross-border ground delivery became more difficult and risky daily in view of VC/NVA occupation of a 10 kilometer strip of Cambodian territory along the border. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27-7 VIET S, and *ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970)

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## 234. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 16, 1970, 5:50–5:58 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Laos

### PARTICIPATION

Chairman—Henry A. Kissinger

State

Marshall Green

Jonathan Moore

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

Lt. Col. Gerald H. Britten

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room. Robert Behr sent these minutes plus those of the April 14 and 15 meetings (Documents 230 and 233) to Kissinger on April 21. Kissinger initialed and wrote, "OK" on Behr's memorandum.

JCS  
Admiral Nels C. Johnson  
CIA  
Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman  
Thomas H. Karamessines  
William Nelson  
NSC Staff  
Gen. Alexander M. Haig  
John Holdridge  
Col. Richard Kennedy  
Col. Robert M. Behr  
D. Keith Guthrie

### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The WSAG was informed of the President's decision to go forward with moving a second Thai battalion to Laos in response to the request received from Prime Minister Souvanna. The movement will be arranged on the same basis and according to the same procedures as were set forth at the WSAG meeting of March 26, 1970<sup>2</sup> to govern movement of the first Thai battalion. Press guidance will remain the same as for the previous movement. A contingency plan for orderly withdrawal of the Thai battalion will be prepared.

Kissinger: The memorandum which Alex Johnson cleared regarding the second Thai battalion for Laos was sent to the President.<sup>3</sup> He has decided to go ahead with moving the battalion. I suppose the arrangements should be the same as for the previous battalion. What diplomatic moves are needed?

Green: We should have formal requests from the Lao and Thai Governments. The guidelines for our diplomatic approaches will be the same as last time. We will ask the Lao and Thai Governments to take a position of no comment in response to inquiries. We will emphasize that our assistance with movement of the Thai battalion implies no further or broader commitment on our part.

Kissinger: Do we say anything more than we did last time?

Green: We will refer to our previous understandings [regarding the first Thai battalion].<sup>4</sup> Of course, we still do not have a formal request for the second battalion.

Kissinger: Can we generate one?

Moore: Yes.

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<sup>2</sup> See Document 212.

<sup>3</sup> Document 231.

<sup>4</sup> All brackets in the source text.

Kissinger: How quickly can we move?

Nelson: We are ready to go. It should be possible to move faster than last time.

Kissinger: [to Moore and Green] You should take care of informing Embassies Vientiane and Bangkok.<sup>5</sup> The scenario will be the same as last time, with the same qualifications. Our press position will also be the same.

Nelson: Last time we moved without having received a formal note from the Thais and Lao. Should we wait this time?

Kissinger: No, proceed just as we did last time. Will we have to provide any additional equipment for the battalion?

Holdridge: Two more howitzers will be required as well as some fire control equipment.

Nelson: We have enough already in Thailand to take care of these needs.

Kissinger: Planning should also be the same as last time. A contingency plan will be prepared for an orderly retreat.

Green: It is more likely that this time the Thais will come to us with a request that we equip a battalion to replace the one being sent to Laos.

Kissinger: On Cambodia, we will hold off an analysis of possible assistance until we receive our study of Cambodian needs.

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<sup>5</sup> Ambassadors Unger and Godley were informed of the decision in telegram 057059 to Vientiane and Bangkok, April 17, and told to obtain a formal request from Laos to Thailand formally concurred by Thailand. If the two governments did not wish to confirm the presence of Thai troops in Laos, they should adopt a "public posture of 'no comment.'" The Embassies should initiate plans for an orderly retreat of the Thai forces in case of defeat by the North Vietnamese. The U.S. commitment was only to the support of the additional Thai battalion and "carried no implication of any decision to commit U.S. ground forces either to Laos or Thailand." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. V, 1 April 1970–11 August 1970) In telegram 2708 from Vientiane, April 17, Godley reported that when he informed Souvanna of the decision, the Prime Minister "was visibly relieved." Souvanna and Godley noted that the original Lao request of May 24 for a "regiment of combat forces" covered more than one battalion. Both agreed that there was no need for another letter to the Thais. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 LAOS) When Unger informed Thanat of the decision, the Thai Foreign Minister stated that Thailand was "operating on the basis of a formal request from the RLG." (Telegram 4620 from Bangkok, April 17; *ibid.*, DEF 19 THAI-LAOS)

**235. Memorandum From the Senior Military Assistant (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 16, 1970.

I just wanted to leave you with a list of actions which I interpreted as directives from today's meeting with the President, yourself, Helms and Cushman.<sup>2</sup>

[1 heading and 4 paragraphs (10 lines of source text) not declassified]

*Laos*

Concerning Laos, the President decided the following:

1. He wants maximum B-52 and tactical air strikes in support of the Royal Laotian forces. (Laird has been told this on countless occasions and I thinking he is so doing. In any case, the directive concerning the level of B-52 and tactical air support in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia in general [see Vietnam item #3]<sup>3</sup> should ensure that the overall wind down does not cripple these operations.)

2. He ordered the movement of the second Thai battalion into Laos and the readying of a third battalion, if required.

*Cambodia*

1. The President indicated that he wanted not only the AK-47's but the 1,000-man packs without being specific as to numbers provided to the Cambodian Government.

2. He favored covert airlift under CIA.

3. He wanted CIA to actively search out additional initiatives which could be taken in the covert field to support the Cambodians.

4. He wanted CIA to get the word out abroad, if not here at home, that the US was prepared to intervene militarily in the event Hanoi initiates direct attacks against Phnom Penh.

5. The President raised the problem of the blockade of Sihanoukville. I think Mel Laird should be asked to prepare a formal

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Not initialed by Haig. A note on the first page reads: "John Howe; OBE."

<sup>2</sup> Nixon, Kissinger, Helms, Cushman, and Haig met from 3:40 to 5:10 p.m. in the President's office in the Executive Office Building. Kissinger remained alone with the President until 5:35 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files, Daily Diary)

<sup>3</sup> Brackets in the source text.



plan in the event the President decides to implement such a contingency. This should be easy since they have been around the horn on it several times, but we should have a formal plan here.

*Vietnam*

1. The President mentioned that he had ordered attacks against SAM targets in North Vietnam. (As you know, Laird is moving as slowly on this as he can short of refusing to obey the President's instructions. I recommend that you call Laird directly and then have Jon Howe or Winston get Capt. Robinson to check out whatever answers are provided by Secretary Laird.)

2. The President indicated that a level of 200 casualties per week in Vietnam would constitute a basis for direct air action against North Vietnam.

3. The President instructed you to prepare a directive immediately to Secretary Laird which would require that he maintain the current level of tactical and B-52 air activity in support of operations in Southeast Asia for the next four months. As you know, this is a tricky question and if we give Laird any leeway he will reduce sortie levels regardless of the instructions that he is given. For this reason, I think you should not only provide him the instructions in writing but face him eyeball to eyeball on this issue. You should also provide the Chairman, JCS with a copy of your written instructions to Laird so that we will have some kind of a check on his future actions. Winston is drafting a directive which I think you should also discuss with Larry Lynn without telling Larry that you did not use his memoranda on this subject to get the President's approval for the action being taken. Incidentally, Larry is still working on his financial memorandum which I think could prove to be the most important single paper in the NSC at the moment.

*CIA Activities World-wide*

1. The President told Helms that he wanted a major step-up in CIA covert activities world-wide and further that Helms should focus on stirring up problems for the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. CIA action programs should be imaginative and include broadcasts and other covert actions.

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

Washington, April 16, 1970.

SUBJECT

Problems on Vietnamization

As you prepare for your statement on Vietnam,<sup>2</sup> I wanted to bring to your attention once more certain problems related to Vietnamization. Some of these problems were treated in the recent reports of General Abrams and the Joint Chiefs of Staff which I highlighted and enclosed as part of your briefing material for your April 13 meeting.<sup>3</sup>

As you know, I have been concerned for some time about the progress of the Vietnamization program. The recent enemy attacks on various outposts and installations, though not dealing serious military blows, confirm that they continue to maintain a substantial infrastructure and are able to conduct widespread operations. In this connection, civilian and military members of my staff and outside observers like Joe Alsop who have visited Vietnam have pinpointed the problems of our withdrawal rate and the ability of the South Vietnamese to assume increasing responsibilities.

*Military Views*

General Abrams' assessment (Tab A)<sup>4</sup> noted both progress and developing problems in such areas as enemy and allied capabilities, air and logistic support, and RVNAF effectiveness. He argued for a pause in any further troop withdrawal decisions until June 15, citing the following:

—Enemy logistical and tactical signs suggest increased VC/NVA offensive activity during the spring and early summer;

—US withdrawals to date have stretched the South Vietnamese ability to take over new areas of tactical responsibility and maintain adequate general reserves;

—South Vietnamese confidence must be maintained if the momentum of Vietnamization and pacification is to be carried forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 145, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, April 1, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. The date is handwritten.

<sup>2</sup> On April 20 Nixon announced that he was withdrawing 150,000 troops "to be completed during the spring of next year." The text of the statement is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 373–377.

<sup>3</sup> See Document 228.

<sup>4</sup> Tab A is not attached, but see footnote 5, Document 228.

The JCS analysis (Tab B)<sup>5</sup> generally parallels that of General Abrams, and they also recommended a troop withdrawal pause until June 15. They cite favorable trends in the military and civil aspects of Vietnamization but believe that gains to this point are fragile and the next few months crucial. They maintain that allied forces are stretched nearly to the limit of their capability and point to enemy capabilities, the fragility of pacification, and the implication of events in Laos and Cambodia.

You have to date announced three successive withdrawal increments totalling reductions of 115,500 men below the authorized ceiling since you took office. Your projected reduction of an additional 150,000 troops over the next year or so (the bulk in early 1971) will result in an authorized force of 284,000 Americans by late spring of next year.

#### *Air Support and the Budget*

Beyond the question of the impact of troop withdrawals on the ground situation is the factor of declining air support which General Abrams highlights in his assessment. Budgetary restraints imposed by Secretary Laird and resulting redeployments of aircraft out of Thailand will have a great impact on B-52 and tactical air support. Imposed budget reductions since July 1 cut by about 22 percent B-52 and Tac Air sorties available to General Abrams. Furthermore, he has been advised of additional budget cuts in FY 71 which will reduce U.S. air forces in Thailand to the degree that B-52 sorties will be cut by another 14 percent and tactical sorties by an additional 20 percent from present levels.

We are in effect asking the South Vietnamese forces to take over some of our past responsibilities while at the same time expecting them to do so with less air support than we have enjoyed to date.

When these reductions are considered in the light of the situation in Laos, the potential situation in Cambodia and your expressed objective of being able to initiate air operations against North Vietnam, the prospects become all the more serious.

I should add that there was a delay in receiving the views of General Abrams which he cabled on March 13. On March 30, Secretary Laird asked for JCS views on the next troop redeployments and on April 7 he forwarded his views (Tab C)<sup>6</sup> to you on this subject, incorporating the sense of MACV and JCS judgments. He sent me the full reports of the military on the same date.

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<sup>5</sup> Tab B is not attached, but see footnote 6, Document 228.

<sup>6</sup> Tab C is not attached, but see footnote 7, Document 228.

*Conclusion*

My overall impression from reviewing the reports of the military, Secretary Laird, as well as my own staff, is that we are making budget and troop withdrawal decisions today without fully examining the implications of these decisions for the future. We may not know we are in trouble until it is too late to do anything about it. Moreover, if and when we get into trouble, we may have no budget flexibility to cope with the situation.

For this reason, I am now reviewing in detail the current and FY 71 budget situation relating to our programs in Vietnam. When this is completed within a few days, I will forward recommendations to you concerning these issues. In the interim, I think you should direct Secretary Laird now to hold in abeyance any limitations on levels of tactical air and B-52 support to our forces in Vietnam and to maintain existing air forces—land-based and sea-based—in place despite the financial adjustments this action might require.

*Recommendation:*<sup>7</sup>

That you authorize me to inform Secretary Laird to this effect.

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<sup>7</sup> Nixon initialed the approve option.

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

Washington, April 17, 1970, 11:32 a.m.

P: On two things that are quite clear on briefings here. The line of our enemies and many of our people here are playing that Lon Nol may not make it and Sihanouk is our best bet.

K: Right.

P: The Japanese think so. Contact somebody—this is an order—can you contact your opposite number? Call in the Ambassador and tell him that we consider Lon Nol's prospects excellent and we would find it difficult in our relations with them if they supported the other

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 362, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

side. And convey to Sato that we would be upset if Japan doesn't support him. Get the CIA jerks working on Cambodia—I don't see this about two sides. Are we getting across the story that this is a fictitious thing?

K: Helms said yesterday after my conversation with you that they would throw it into high gear.<sup>2</sup>

P: Lon Nol is it and I would urge wide-spread demonstrations against Sihanouk.

K: They have already.

P: Get Helms' radio to broadcast in there that Sihanouk is coming in with NVN liberators. I want a report on my desk today at 4:00 with his ideas. I don't want—I want everyone in this government to know we are supporting the government in power. They are to [omission in the source text] up that hill and anyone who does not follow this will be fired. Tell Marshall Green that if anyone disagrees I want his resignation on my desk by noon.

K: I have to get Laird to do what you said. They must follow your strategy.

P: Do it with Green or on the Johnson level. Tell him that you may have other views but the President feels this way and we are going to do that. There is no possibility of our supporting Sihanouk and we are supporting Lon Nol. Tell Helms to have printed one million leaflets with NVN and a picture of Sihanouk, saying "liberate Cambodia." Get my point?

K: Absolutely.

P: Get a program and have a report on my desk at 4:00 on how they carried it out.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Helms and Kissinger talked on the telephone at 12:15 p.m. on April 16 about sending a CIA communicator and one officer to Phnom Penh. Helms stated that Green and Rogers had not yet agreed to the move, explaining it was a "problem of real estate and room." Kissinger asked Helms to write him a brief formal status report on the problem and assured the DCI there would be "no further negotiation" on the issue. (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Helms, April 16; *ibid.*) Kissinger discusses this problem in *White House Years*, pp. 466–467.

<sup>3</sup> Kissinger was not able to contact Rogers or Green because both were out of town, so he talked with Jonathan Moore on April 18 informing him of the President's insistence that CIA send a communicator to Phnom Penh. Moore replied that he would consider the telephone call a Presidential directive. (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Moore, April 18; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 862, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

**238. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 18, 1970.

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Kissinger  
John H. Holdridge, NSC Senior Staff Member  
William Nelson, CIA  
*[name not declassified]*

SUBJECT

Dr. Kissinger's Conversation with CIA Officer Recently in Phnom Penh

*[less than 1 line of source text not declassified]*, explained that he had been sent to Phnom Penh on the QT to contact the Agency's number one agent in Cambodia and to get from him a better feel for the realities of the situation. (This agent *[less than 1 line of source text not declassified]* has been working for CIA for quite some time and has simply worked his way up through the bureaucracy.) *[1 line of source text not declassified]*, going to Phnom Penh in the course of a swing through Europe so as to avoid running into people who might recognize him. *[1 line of source text not declassified]*

*[1 line of source text not declassified]*, extremely euphoric over the political change in Cambodia. *[name not declassified]* was a dedicated man who hated Sihanouk and all he stood for and he now felt there was a good chance for Cambodia to make some progress.

Dr. Kissinger asked how the coup had come off. He had heard Sihanouk had staged the anti-Hanoi and anti-PRG demonstrations, and that these had gotten out of control. Was this possible? *[name not declassified]* replied that they, meaning General Lon Nol and Vice Premier Sirik Matak, had done it. Mr. Nelson said that Lon Nol and Matak had been put into power last summer by Sihanouk to improve the economy, and were still working with him when he left for Europe although they were very disturbed at the increasing NVA/VC use of the country. There was some question as to whether the demonstrations against the Hanoi and PRG Embassies were spontaneous, but the feeling against the Communists in Cambodia was widespread, particularly in the cities, and emboldened Lon Nol and Matak to go farther than they had originally intended. However, they had sent an emissary to

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Holdridge sent this memorandum to Kissinger on April 21 and Kissinger initialed his approval. (Covering memorandum from Holdridge to Kissinger, April 21; *ibid.*)

Sihanouk to ask him to join them, but Sihanouk had refused to see him. Sihanouk must have been badly advised. Perhaps he felt that he could handle the situation, and that it was not really so serious. There was no indication that Sihanouk was behind the demonstrations.

Returning to the subject of [*name not declassified*] euphoria, [*name not declassified*] said that this euphoria did not seem to be accompanied by a realization of the practical requirements. [*name not declassified*] had not focussed on such questions as weapons and the VC encampments in Cambodia, and he, [*name not declassified*], felt that here was another small Southeast Asian country where nobody knew what was going on. The country was not too badly off financially, though—all the assets which Cambodia had possessed under Sihanouk had come into the hands of the Lon Nol Government, plus the “palace funds” which had been socked away by Sihanouk.

Dr. Kissinger mentioned he had heard that Lon Nol had been involved in supplying the VC, and wondered why Lon Nol had changed. Mr. Nelson confirmed that a Hong Kong Chinese had handled the financing of the supply arrangements for the VC through Cambodia, and that this Chinese had made pay-offs to Lon Nol and Sirik Matak with the understanding and the blessing of Sihanouk. He personally could not account for the shift on Lon Nol's part. Mr. Holdridge commented that since Lon Nol had been in effect operating under orders, he may have concluded that he might as well enjoy some of the benefits. This would not, however, necessarily mean that he approved of what Sihanouk was doing and he could have welcomed the opportunity to move against the Communists.

[*name not declassified*] observed that the Cambodians figure the next thirty days are critical. They believe that the people are on their side, and have come to realize that the many silly things that Sihanouk had done had hurt the country. The army was in bad shape, and arms were needed for the students and the civil service. As of April 10, the Cambodians didn't know what arms were actually needed. They did not seem worried about Sihanouk's broadcasts from Peking, and said that they wanted the people to hear him. This would publicize Sihanouk's zig-zags and foolishness, as well as the fact that he was a tool of the Chinese. As to foreign assistance, they were asking the small countries for help and hadn't asked the US yet (again this was as of April 10). They would first try the Indonesians and Filipinos.

To a question from Dr. Kissinger as to whether Sihanouk could have kept the Communists out of Cambodia, [*name not declassified*] replied that it was not a strong country. Dr. Kissinger observed that it could be argued that Sihanouk had been making the best deal he could for the country. He, Dr. Kissinger, always thought Sihanouk was a political genius. Was he mistaken? Mr. Nelson replied that Sihanouk was

fast on his feet and adroit, but was up and down. He was with you one day and against you the next.

[*name not declassified*] had been in Phnom Penh before this most recent trip, and had seen the masses marching for Sihanouk. They had seemed sullen, in contrast to the demonstrations in favor of the new government. Still, the VC could come right up and take Phnom Penh. In moving about the city, he had seen how the army was functioning in setting up its protective posts, and had the impression that the troops were lackadaisical. In setting up his appointments [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] he had traveled around considerably in pedicabs, and had seen no patrols. They had thought he was a newsman, of whom there were plenty in the city. He noted in passing that [*name not declassified*] had been delighted to get this visit, since it amounted to a concrete expression of US support.

Dr. Kissinger asked if the Cambodians would cave to the Communists. [*name not declassified*] replied it was now clear that they were scared and worried, but he didn't really know whether they would cave. Dr. Kissinger wanted to know if Sihanoukville had been closed, and how the Communists would supply their base areas. Would they need to rely entirely on the Ho Chi Minh Trail? Mr. Nelson declared that they could rely on their stockpiles for a while, but there were no more incoming shipments. Before, Chinese ships had come to Sihanoukville every six weeks to two months, and the supplies off-loaded from these ships were then taken to a Cambodian arsenal in Kampong Speu from which they were diverted and shipped to the border by the Hak Ly trucking company. The Hak Ly trucks have now all been commandeered by the Cambodian army.

On the subject of the Cambodians possibly crumbling, [*name not declassified*] observed that after they found they had greater problems with the NVA/VC than they had anticipated, and that the French (with whom they had been rather close) were not doing anything, they had come to the conclusion that somebody had to help them, and that this somebody was the US. With more fighting on their hands, their morale needed bucking up, the only way at the moment to give this bucking up was to give the AK-47 package and provide a Swiss bank account. If we wanted to keep this kind of Cambodia alive, a material gesture had to be made very soon. They were beginning to sound frantic. [*name not declassified*] thought that Lon Nol and Sirik Matak would certainly appreciate guns and bullets. [*2½ lines of source text not declassified*] Sirik Matak, who had pulled out a crumpled piece of paper and scrawled down a TO&E for a light Cambodian battalion and had drawn out of his hat the total of 200,000 Cambodian troops. This was the origin of the shopping list which had been passed along to us in terms of equipment, medicines, and clothing.



Dr. Kissinger again asked if the Cambodians would collapse if the Communists moved out of their sanctuaries against them. [*name not declassified*] thought that they would, but Mr. Nelson felt that they would fight. In his opinion, the Communists hadn't yet decided what to do and wanted elbow room and to move the Cambodian troops back from the border. They were rolling up the smaller Cambodian posts to get freedom of movement. But there was nothing to indicate that they would or would not move out. He personally believed that they would think twice about opening up another front. This would be a major operation requiring many battalions, and the Communists had shortages of rice and ammunition on their side. They might still hope to wiggle around and make a deal with Lon Nol. In the meantime, they had pulled several of their battalions out of South Laos into Cambodia, for what purpose he did not know. They had a major logistical problem in moving supplies South due to the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Mr. Nelson was certain that there was lots of worry in Hanoi.

Dr. Kissinger asked [*name not declassified*] if he could get back into Phnom Penh easily. [*name not declassified*] replied negatively, saying that he was too conspicuous, and there were too many newsmen in the city. Mr. Nelson, [*2 lines of source text not declassified*] He had hoped that a decision could have been made by now, and was still waiting for one. Dr. Kissinger remarked that they would have had this decision except that all the top people in State were out of town and he did not wish to put the matter before Mr. Samuels, who was Acting Secretary. He felt sure that the word would be passed by Monday or Tuesday.<sup>2</sup> [*2½ lines of source text not declassified*]

In conclusion, Mr. Nelson mentioned that two C-141s were [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] ready to go. One contained AK-47s and the other was loaded with one 1000 man battalion package of US arms and equipment. He hoped that the arms would move that evening. He noted, too, that the Thai battalion was all set to move into Laos.

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<sup>2</sup> April 20 or 21.

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## 239. Editorial Note

While in Hawaii to welcome back the astronauts from the Apollo 13 moon mission, President Nixon met on April 19, 1970, from 7:30 to 9:10 a.m. with Commander in Chief, Pacific, Admiral John McCain and

other military advisers in the Governor's suite of the Kahala Hilton Hotel for a military briefing on the Pacific Command. (President's Daily Diary, April 19; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) According to an April 20 memorandum from General James D. Hughes, the President's Military Aide, to Kissinger, the briefing by McCain included the following discussion on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia:

"Admiral McCain stated the B52s are doing a great job overall. He discussed certain missions and the President showed great interest in this. In particular, the missions flown were on SAM sites numbers 387–751 which were covered. The results were good (you probably already have received the word). The President was greatly interested.

"Admiral McCain felt that the border areas in Cambodia were definitely controlled by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese and felt that their principal effort was to isolate Phnom Penh. He expressed four possible solutions for Cambodia.

"a. Go back to military aid to bolster the weak Army.

"b. Covert financing to assist them with their financial difficulties.

"c. Let the ARVN cross the border and fight. Admiral McCain mentioned that General Lew Walt in a recent visit to President Thieu said that Thieu was violently in favor of this.

"d. Proceed as we have in Laos—Air strikes and artillery support.

"Admiral McCain felt that the ARVN could provide air and artillery support in Cambodia if we would take up the slack in South Vietnam.

"The President asked about the forces required to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail. CINCPAC stated that the cut would require 2–3 divisions in the III and IV corps areas and approximately 5 divisions in the I and II corps areas. Further CINCPAC felt that it was not practical to do this with conventional forces but air strikes and irregular forces were more effective. The President expressed high interest in this, particularly in the development of contingency plans to accomplish this mission.

"During the discussion of Vietnam, the President showed much interest in the Chieu Hoi program. CINCPAC was most optimistic about the program and claimed that it was definitely on the upswing. A comparison of the first quarter of calendar year 1970 with first quarter calendar year 1969 shows a slight reduction but CINCPAC felt that this will be overcome this Spring.

"1969 First three months—10,612

"1970 First three months—8,983

"The President was very interested in the SAM sites and asked if our reconnaissance efforts were productive. He was anxious that CINCPAC have plans to strike new strikes and re-strike old ones.

“CINCPAC mentioned the importance of the POL pipeline beginning at the port of Vinh.

“The President expressed interest in this and said that we should keep this information coming in so these lines can be hit. Strikes against POL pipelines would be difficult to hit because of ground cover. The CINCPAC mentioned that the best area was approximately 12 miles in Laos, however, he felt that the port of Vinh had to be closed. The President pressed the point and CINCPAC said the best way was to take the docks and pumping stations. He urged CINCPAC to submit plans on these and other lucrative targets for considerations. The President reiterated that he considered the oil sites a high priority target and again urged that the CINCPAC propose plans to target these sites.” (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 559, Country Files, Far East, Southeast Asia, Vol. II, General)

At Nixon’s request, McCain traveled to San Clemente, California, to give Kissinger the same briefing the next day, April 20. Kissinger and Nixon met with McCain from 2:15 to 2:30 p.m. in the den at San Clemente. (President’s Daily Diary; *ibid.*, White House Central Files) In reporting his discussion with the President and Kissinger to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Wheeler, McCain stated that the President had asked what would be the best mix of GVN and U.S. forces to use if cross-border operations were mounted. Nixon also asked if only South Vietnamese forces should be used with the United States providing air and artillery support from within South Vietnam. McCain assured the President that plans were being prepared and would be submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on an urgent basis. The President informed McCain that Lon Nol should be helped to establish communication with Saigon and that he had approved financial support for the Lon Nol government as well as transfer of Soviet bloc weapons captured by South Vietnam’s armed forces for Cambodia’s armed forces. The theme of the meetings, McCain told Wheeler, was “the need for speed in view of the ‘precarious situation’ in Cambodia.” (Telegram 220437Z from CINCPAC to CJS, April 22; OCJCS File 091, Cambodia, 14–21 May 1970, as quoted in the Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, JCS, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1969–1970*, pages 247–248.)

After the meeting the President called Kissinger and informed him that “Cambodia is important and we will have to do it fast. I need to know how soon the VN can get going over there.” Nixon also wanted to be sure that Cambodia formally requested South Vietnamese assistance. The President stressed that, “Aiding Cambodia with arms is useless—they cannot use them. Get the Money to Lon Nol.” When Kissinger informed the President that he had doubled the CIA initial figure of \$5 million, Nixon replied, “that will give him [Lon Nol] some

assurance. Don't limit the psychology thing." Finally Nixon suggested to Kissinger that he wanted to make clear to McCain that while he was not ordering U.S. troops to take part in the operation, "I don't want SVN to get in there and then get the hell kicked out." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, December 20, 2:40 p.m.; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 362, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

Kissinger recalls that McCain, "brought home to Nixon the danger to Laos and Cambodia" and "gave focus to his inchoate anxieties about Cambodia." According to Kissinger, McCain also reinforced Nixon's conviction that the withdrawal schedule for U.S. troops should be flexible. Kissinger admits that he had come to the same conclusion as the President and McCain: the United States could not stand by and watch Cambodia collapse and ultimately cause the collapse of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. (Kissinger, *White House Years*, pages 480, 487)

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**240. Telegram From the Staff Secretary of the National Security Council Staff Secretariat (Watts) to Winston Lord of the National Security Council Staff<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 20, 1970, 1832Z.

WH00519. Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger. From John Holdridge. Subject: Situation in Cambodia.

The following telegram from Rives covering a conversation with the Cambodian Chief of Staff depicts a serious political and military deterioration in Cambodia. The NVA/VC forces are not only widening their hold on the strategic areas along the Vietnamese border, but are pushing more deeply inland and have cut key communication lines, including the railroad to Sihanoukville. The Cambodian army does not seem to be able to do anything about the situation (although an offensive is being planned), and morale of the population and the troops is steadily diminishing. The Cambodians are having difficulty in obtaining arms aid and are very short of ammunition; aid from the U.S. appears to them as their main hope. The President will be receiving a formal request from Lon Nol which will ask for help in arming 430,000

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Top Secret; Nodis. Kissinger was in San Clemente on April 20; see Document 239.

men, and for the dispatch of Cambodian troops in Thailand and Vietnam into Cambodia to help relieve the military pressure. No ARVN help along the lines of that given lately is desired.

In the light of the pressing military situation, the kind of aid from the U.S. which the Cambodians envisage appears completely unrealistic. Arms and ammunition on a priority basis may contribute importantly to staving off a Cambodian military collapse, but the training and arming of a force of the size contemplated will take a significant amount of time—probably more time than the Cambodians can afford. The problem would appear to be more of keeping the NVA/VC forces sufficiently distracted along the Vietnamese border to preclude their being able to strike inland—in short, the kind of ARVN operation which the Cambodians now say they do not want. Cambodians in Thailand and Vietnam (the Khmer Serei and Khmer Krom) are neither numerous enough or well enough trained and led to do the job.

Refs: State 056117<sup>2</sup> and 057061.<sup>3</sup>

I have just had meeting with Fonmin and Mindefense Chief of Staff General Srey Saman.

1. Re delivery of 1500 AK-47 rifles, Cambodians request that this be made directly to Phnom Penh soonest. This decision due to fact that other areas such as Svay Rieng and even Sihanoukville, which I had suggested as possible landing zones, are no longer secure for road transport.

In view of USC insistence on continued security and confidential nature of entire operation, Chief of Staff suggested that plane or planes could land at night and be directed immediately to military terminal which is on opposite side of field from civilian one.

Action request: please inform soonest whether above acceptable, what type of aircraft will be used, what aircraft will be carrying, and flight data.

2. Chief of Staff also asked if equipment like mortars and ammunition could be urgently delivered at same time. Also 105 mm shells.

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<sup>2</sup> Not found.

<sup>3</sup> In telegram 057061 to Phnom Penh, April 17, Rives was instructed to tell Sirik Matak that the United States had located 1,500 AK-47 rifles available for delivery within 2 to 3 days and 4,000 to 5,500 available for delivery within 2 to 3 weeks. The United States needed to know whether the most feasible means of transfer from Cambodia was delivery via land across the Cambodia-South Vietnam border or air delivery to a Cambodian base. Rives was to assure Matak that the United States would "provide feasible assistance in a timely manner," but Cambodia should not have "inflated expectations" of U.S. military aid on which there were important restrictions. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970)

3. Re AK-47 ammo, I inquired whether Indonesians had been approached. In reply Chief of Staff indicated it was part of request to Indonesia and would be pressed again. Will let me know if Cambodia needs assist vis-à-vis Indonesia.

4. In reply to query re medical supplies, Chief of Staff said urgency was for weapons and that medical needs being met temporarily by six tons of medical supplies brought in earlier for VC and seized.

5. I shall be informed today of officer who will discuss with Acting DATT the specific and accurate estimate of what Cambodian military now has in use and in stock. This will be transmitted as soon as ready.

6. As reported earlier, the only countries who have been given specific shopping lists are USG, Australia, Japan and Indonesia.

7. FonMin informed me that as result our conversation last week, Lon Nol sending series of letters to sea countries such as Burma, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, urging them make declarations regarding their anxiety over Cambodian situation and opposition to foreign interference.

8. Chief of Staff then informed me that he and FonMin crafting letter to President Nixon from General Lon Nol which will be ready in day or two. He read me draft. Crux of message is that situation becoming desperate, Cambodia needs arms and hopes that President will supply same in accordance with Nixon Doctrine. Cambodia does not want foreign troops, including South Vietnamese who have recently intruded into Cambodian territory. According to letter, the government requires total of 430,000 men under arms. He requests that Cambodian troops in Vietnam and Thailand be sent to Cambodia where they will be made part of army with ranks presently held.<sup>4</sup>

9. Chief of Staff then drew out map which he have me showing latest situation in various zones. According to latest indications, VC now extend roughly from Kep inland to slightly north of Tani, then east to frontier; within this area Cambodian military have had to evacuate Kirivom and Tuk Meas has been taken by VC. This means railroad to Sihanoukville is cut. General indications are that infiltrators proceeding ahead of this drive in small groups have already passed beyond Kompong Speu.

10. To east of this zone situation described earlier remains relatively stable. Here within next few days Cambodian military will make determined attack which they feel is essential to raise morale of population and troops which is steadily diminishing.

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<sup>4</sup> The text of the letter, April 21, is in telegram 593 from Phnom Penh, April 21. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB)

11. Cambodian military staff requests that if possible attacks be made behind two areas given above by Kampuchea Krom from Vietnam.

12. Turning to map again, Chief of Staff indicated that Route No. 7 from west of Krek to Snuol is completely cut and area virtually isolated by NVNA/VCM every indication is that NVNA/VC attack to be made towards Kratie from Snuol area. Therefore General Lon Nol requests attack by special forces, if available, from within SVN towards Snuol.

13. Road from Snuol to Sen Monorom also cut and here General Lon Nol requests attack by special forces, if available, from Bu Prang in SVN toward Dak Dam and Sen Monram.

14. Finally, General Lon Nol and Cambodian military wonder if it would be possible to assign to Embassy staff from Vietnam a Colonel Ly Vong Sar, whom they understand is in the American army but is a Cambodian. He would act as liaison between Embassy and Cambodians.

15. Discussion centered for some time on possible future NVNA/VC moves and their objectives. It is obvious that Cambodians have views relatively similar to ours regarding either the conquest of Cambodia, with a puppet, Sihanouk or another installed, or attendance at a new Geneva conference during which a division of Cambodia might be attempted and lead eventually to a Vietnamese or Lao situation.

*Comment:* Atmosphere of meeting not very gay. More than once, General stressed deterioration of civilian and military morale.

Despite my insistence that RKG must not allow itself to become over hopeful of American aid, it was evident that this is what virtually all hopes are based on. Australia has replied it is considering Cambodian request, Japan apparently has not replied and neither apparently has Indonesia. General stated that a small Cambodian mission departs for Paris evening of April 21 to make further request for aid. He asked if I felt that contact with American Embassy Paris would help. I advised against this as possible irritant to French.<sup>5</sup>

**Rives**

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<sup>5</sup> In telegram 058788 to Phnom Penh, April 20, 2351Z, the Department instructed Rives to contact Lon Nol and assure him that "we are behind his government, that we are interested in providing support, and we are studying what more we can do to help." (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970) This telegram was sent in reaction to telegram 579 from Phnom Penh, April 20, and it was hoped that Rives' approach and assurances to Lon Nol would "help boost GOC morale and give leaders a more positive outlook." (Ibid.)

**241. Editorial Note**

On April 21, 1970, at 10:35 a.m. Secretary of State William Rogers and Assistant to the President Henry Kissinger spoke on the telephone. Kissinger told Rogers: "The President got up at 6:30 this morning to everyone's dismay." Kissinger then informed the Secretary that the \$10 million was being sent secretly to Lon Nol. Rogers worried: "I think he [Nixon] is making decisions off the drop of a hat. We can make a good case for helping them [the Cambodians] but we should do it openly. We can make a good case that this might not be a good time—this government might not last." Kissinger replied: "He [Nixon] feels to put in a lot of aid is self defeating. What he thinks is to do things to help their morale but not their huge requests. That's why he is doing this." Rogers stated that: "We should think carefully what we are doing while he is bucking up their morale. Even if they don't survive they will keep the VC at bay. But if they go down the drain and it becomes known—and I think in this day and age it will be known—and if it's known we are sending money through black bags we have paid a high price—we emphasize feelings about government some people have. We may have to pay a price." Kissinger and Rogers discussed the issue further and then Kissinger asked the Secretary: "Do you think there's a prayer for Vietnamization if Cambodia is taken over?" Rogers answered, "Yes," although he admitted it would be a "psychological set back." Kissinger said: "You're entitled to your opinion." The two men then discussed whether the North Vietnamese take-over of Cambodia was possible and whether it would impede U.S. aims in Vietnam. Kissinger suggested it would, while Rogers was more dubious about the effect or even the North Vietnamese ability to take over Cambodia. Kissinger admitted: "It is absurd that 100 NVN 18 miles from Phnom Penh should throw our people into a panic. What can you do with a government that can be taken over with 5 thousand?" Kissinger told Rogers, "he [Nixon] is so determined on this [the money]—we should raise your crucial question of what we want to do. Not one problem at a time and slipping into something we don't understand." Rogers responded, "What worries me is how little other governments want to get involved." Kissinger suggested that "they may be watching in a paralyzed way hoping somebody else will do something." Rogers replied that Nixon "should not be making the decision all by himself . . . he can't operate like that." Kissinger agreed that "he must hear his senior advisers on these things and I will try, but failing that, I will follow his instructions." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Rogers and Kissinger, April 21; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)



At 12:05 p.m. on April 21 Kissinger called Army Chief of Staff General William Westmoreland and asked him: "What is your assessment? Could we take a Cambodian defeat—if Sihanouk came back?" Westmoreland responded: "That's more political but it seems Sihanouk has taken a considerable loss of face. My impression is that Lon Nol is capable of holding the country together. The 15 battalions that they have mobilized shows that this administration [Lon Nol's] has popular support. They need arms and provisions but they should be effective." "Do you think the VN can move in and handle it without us, except for artillery and air support?" Kissinger asked. Westmoreland replied affirmatively, "They have some very fine troops. But we have the rainy season coming up next month which will complicate things. The dry season would facilitate it, but with our support on the borders and helicopter and tactical air they can be effective but I don't think they can clear them out." "Can we?" Kissinger then asked. Westmoreland replied: "We would be hard pressed in the rainy season but it could be done. If Gen. Abrams wants to we could do it." Kissinger asked: "Would it be worth it?" Westmoreland responded: "If we could destroy COSVN headquarters this would indeed. We would have an apparent idea where it is. It's about 10,000 troops. Troops would have to move into the area and stay some time. It would be costly with respect to casualties because there are no doubt mines, booby traps, bunkers, etc. But we could do it. The weather period is an unhappy coincidence and would inhibit our operations flexibility. The VN would be less effective but with the proper support they could be effective and would be desirable." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Westmoreland, April 21; *ibid.*)

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**242. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 21, 1970.

SUBJECT

Conveying the Word to Hanoi

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Kissinger summarized this memorandum for Nixon on April 22, but that memorandum was not initialed and there is no indication it was sent to the President. (*ibid.*)

1. At the President's request, we have taken several steps to give the North Vietnamese leadership clear reason to believe that if Vietnamese Communist forces in Cambodia attack Phnom Penh, United States forces will hit them from the rear by mounting sharp attacks on Vietnamese Communist sanctuaries.<sup>2</sup>

2. To get this word across, we have arranged for one basic story to be pipelined into several channels that should get it back quickly, and credibly, to Hanoi.<sup>3</sup> The basic theme planted with all our sources used runs as follows, though there have been suitable variations in each specific instance:

The US and the GVN have long felt that Vietnam internal security problems can never be really solved so long as the Communists have sanctuaries in nearby Cambodia. Hence, the US and the GVN have long itched to attack these sanctuaries and the Communist troops resting or refitting in them. Recent events in Cambodia have considerably whetted American and South Vietnamese appetites, but the US (particularly) has felt the Vietnamese Communist muscle flexing in neutral Cambodia was giving Hanoi such a propaganda black eye worldwide—particularly within the US itself—that the United States Government was reluctant to see the waters muddied by allied military involvement in the Cambodian-VC/NVA fight. However, if the VC/NVA forces make further military moves against Phnom Penh, the US is set to take prompt advantage of world opinion focus on Cambodia's plight in the face of North Vietnamese invasion and clear up the sanctuary problem by attacking VC/NVA forces from the rear.

3. [17 lines of source text not declassified]

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<sup>2</sup> On April 24 Helms sent a memorandum to Kissinger reporting that NLF official [text not declassified] was given a convincing written report indicating that the GVN and U.S. intended to invade Cambodia. According to the Helms memorandum, "[name not declassified] became very nervous, shaking his legs and feet nervously" when he heard the report. "[name not declassified] remained in an agitated condition throughout the meeting. [name not declassified] stated that the National Liberation Front 'expected United States intervention in Cambodia but not so soon.'" When queried about NLF and North Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, [text not declassified] acknowledged their presence, but stated "it would be political suicide for us to admit it." (Ibid., Box 207, Agency Files, CIA, Vol. II, 1 January 1970 to 30 June 1970)

<sup>3</sup> The message was passed to Mai Van Bo in Paris on April 29. Bo was "deeply interested, probed extensively for additional details, and during the meeting revealed that the DRV apparently had not felt the US would send its own forces into Cambodia for fear of adverse reaction from the 'Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Congress, public opinion and eventually the electorate at the polls.'" (Memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, May 1; ibid., Box 579, Cambodia Operations (1970), Actions in Cambodia, Vol. 1)

4. In line with the above considerations, the following moves are now in train:

5. [Omitted here is detailed discussion.]

6. In both tone and content, the President's 20 April speech<sup>4</sup> will make this message more credible to Hanoi. From a strictly operational perspective, the best possible support for this story's (and our sources') credibility would be the movement of selected US troops to the immediate vicinity of the Cambodian Frontier of South Vietnam.

Dick

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<sup>4</sup> Reference is to the President's Address to the Nation broadcast at 6 p.m. on April 20 from San Clemente, California, in which Nixon reported "no progress" on the negotiation front and announced his intention of withdrawing from Vietnam an additional 150,000 forces over the next year. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 373–377)

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**243. Memorandum From Jonathan Howe of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 21, 1970.

SUBJECT

Plan for All-South Vietnamese Operations Against Enemy Sanctuaries in Cambodia

Attached at Tab A is a report from MACV on the initial planning conference held today to consider an all-ARVN operation against enemy base camps in Cambodia.<sup>2</sup> (FYI: Your memorandum requesting such a plan was sent to Secretary Laird last Friday morning. Tab B)<sup>3</sup> The MACV report indicates that:

—The concept of an all-South Vietnamese operation is acceptable to the South Vietnamese armed forces.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1324, Unfiled Material, 1970, 3 of 11. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information.

<sup>2</sup> Tab A was MACV telegram 5307, April 21, 1141Z, from Abrams to McCain and for information to Wheeler; attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> Tab B was an April 16 memorandum from Kissinger to Laird noting that MACV plans for ground operations against Cambodian sanctuaries involved considerable U.S. participation and asking for a plan for successfully attacking them using only South Vietnamese forces "in order to provide maximum flexibility in our planning." Attached but not printed. For a summary of MACV planning using U.S. forces, see Document 219.

—The South Vietnamese apparently do not want to attack targets deep in Cambodia (this parallels the request from Lon Nol received this morning that the U.S. intervene to keep the South Vietnamese from operating “deep into” Cambodian territory. Tab C<sup>4</sup>)

—The South Vietnamese favor hitting base areas which pose the most direct threat to their country and are unenthusiastic about any operations along the Mekong.

—Present planning is centered on base areas 706/367 and the Crow’s Nest area. These areas are in the Parrot’s Beak in the Svay Rieng Province. (See map at Tab D)<sup>5</sup> Penetration into this area has been restricted to 7 to 8 kilometers at the request of the province chief.

—The South Vietnamese staff will need time to develop plans and effect coordination. The plan will be forwarded as soon as possible.

The covering memorandum from Secretary Laird’s office<sup>6</sup> emphasizes that coordination with the RVNAF leadership is the time-consuming factor at the present time.

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<sup>4</sup> Reference is to an attached telegram from Phnom Penh containing a letter from Lon Nol to Nixon; see footnote 4, Document 240.

<sup>5</sup> Attached but not printed.

<sup>6</sup> The April 21 memorandum from Pursley to Kissinger is attached but not printed.

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#### **244. Memorandum From the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Westmoreland) to Secretary of Defense Laird<sup>1</sup>**

CM–5063–70

Washington, April 21, 1970.

SUBJECT

Courses of Action With Regard To Cambodia<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Top Secret. Pursley sent this memorandum to Kissinger under an attached April 22 covering memorandum that indicated Westmoreland gave it to Laird the morning of April 22.

<sup>2</sup> On April 22 Kissinger telephoned Westmoreland to request his or Moorer’s support at the NSC principals meeting at 3 p.m.; see Document 248. Kissinger asked: “Can you see that whoever comes stands firm?” Kissinger told Westmoreland that the President “can understand the political people thinking of reasons why we shouldn’t, but the

1. Following our discussions this afternoon, and in response to your request that I provide recommendations on immediate courses of action with regard to the Cambodian situation, I reviewed developments within Cambodia, and submit the following comments and recommendations.

2. The latest intelligence concerning the situation in Cambodia, while fragmentary, strongly suggests that the enemy is moving to isolate Phnom Penh by the systematic interdiction of all the major roads and waterways leading into the city. Because of Phnom Penh's dependence on oil for power, this can have serious repercussions for the future. Small, but effective, enemy forces are astride virtually all of the other main roads leading into Phnom Penh, with the possible exception of some roads to the west, and are maintaining blocking positions on the navigable river routes. The enemy objective may well be to isolate the city of Phnom Penh, bring military pressure to bear on it from all sides, and perhaps, ultimately, to bring Sihanouk back to regain political control at the appropriate time.

3. There is evidence that the FARK is marginally effective against these military moves by the VC/NVA. They are apparently untrained for operations above platoon or company level, and apparently have not been able to stop advances of even relatively small enemy forces. In addition to poor training, they suffer from a severe shortage of arms and equipment. While we can, and must, do everything possible to provide appropriate equipment, I suspect that this, by itself, will no longer be enough to stem the enemy advance. As you know, we have begun the air shipment of captured AK-47s, with the first 1500 guns and a supply of munitions, presumably moving out of Saigon this evening, by VNAF aircraft to Phnom Penh. While we will probably be able to ship an additional four or five thousand such weapons in the

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military usually stands with its Commander-in-Chief and he wants to do something." Westmoreland promised his support and that he would "get the message to Moorer." Westmoreland also cautioned Kissinger that he may have overemphasized the importance of the monsoon season in his previous conversation. There was a month of good weather remaining. Kissinger explained he was thinking of three operations: current small level GVN cross border operations, something larger but not an investiture of all the sanctuaries, and all-out investiture of the sanctuaries. Westmoreland favored the second. Kissinger asked if this "makes sense," suggesting that Westmoreland knew better than anyone "the trouble field marshals in Washington can make." "To do the job right would require a division size force of 10,000 troops," Westmoreland answered. In response to Kissinger's question, he replied that Abrams could put two or three GVN divisions into Cambodia in different areas if the U.S. provided transportation, logistics, artillery, helicopter gun ships, and tactical air support at the border. Kissinger ended the conversation with a quip: "I hope you need a political analyst in the army. I'll never be able to go back to Harvard." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Westmoreland, April 22; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

next several days, as I indicated above, this probably will fall far short of altering the military situation. I recommend that serious consideration be given to providing U.S. M-1s to the Cambodians. We are currently supplying these to the South Vietnamese People's Self Defense Forces. A large proportion of these weapons can be diverted to help equip the some 85,000-man force in Cambodia.

4. In my view, we must move well beyond the measures outlined above if we are to stem the deterioration within Cambodia. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong have taken a calculated risk in moving out of their base areas. Their logistic situation is becoming more strained. I believe we should now move quickly to exploit their vulnerabilities. I would recommend, therefore, that, as a matter of urgency, plans be developed for attacks by division-size RVNAF forces on vulnerable enemy positions. Targets selected for attack, in order of priority, should be headquarters and communications facilities, caches and supply depots, and troop areas and concentrations. Such attacks should commence within the next several days. In about a month, monsoon rains will complicate such operations. As you are aware, MACV is currently undertaking such planning with the JGS, and, hopefully, we will have some details within the next 24-hours for your consideration. I am informed that the JGS and the RVNAF III and IV Corps Commanders are meeting today to prepare these plans, and they will go to President Thieu for approval following this meeting. MACV is doing everything possible to speed up the process.

5. I would recommend that we also rescind some of the current restraints placed on U.S. forces. Specifically, we should place U.S. forces on the border to provide logistic and artillery support for the RVNAF forces engaged in operations within Cambodia. I believe we can exploit the developing situation without the necessity of actually crossing the border with U.S. forces. We have asked General Abrams to provide his views on how such U.S. support can be optimized.

6. I believe it would be prudent for us to also develop a plan for employment of the Khmer in the CIDG. My initial thought is that they can best be utilized in raids across the border from strategically-located base areas which can be logistically supported by U.S. forces and, in which we can provide appropriate Vietnamese or U.S. Special Forces Advisors. However, we must leave to General Abrams, specific recommendations with regard to their employment.<sup>3</sup> I would

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<sup>3</sup> In telegram MAC 5164 from Abrams to Wheeler, April 18, Abrams reported that there were 3,500 Khmer Serei serving in CIDG camps in South Vietnam adjacent to the Cambodian border and most would respond to a request from Cambodia for assistance. Abrams suggested that the South Vietnamese might oppose Khmer Serei leaving the camps. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970)

recommend, however, that we be authorized, now, to plan for their employment and support, generally, along the lines I have indicated above.

7. In summary, while all assistance of a material nature should be provided to the Cambodians on an expedited basis, I believe we have gone beyond the point where this, alone, can arrest the deterioration. We must move quickly against the vulnerable enemy base areas in Cambodia with RVNAF forces. This should relieve the pressure on the Cambodians. If we react quickly enough, we may be able to exploit the situation to our overall advantage without any substantial involvement by United States forces on the ground.

W.C. Westmoreland<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

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#### 245. Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 22, 1970.

I think we need a bold move in Cambodia, assuming that I feel the way today (it is five AM, April 22) at our meeting<sup>2</sup> as I feel this morning to show that we stand with Lon Nol. I do not believe he is going to survive. There is, however, some chance that he might and in any event we must do something symbolic to help him survive. We have really dropped the ball on this one due to the fact that we were taken in with the line that by helping him we would destroy his “neutrality” and give the North Vietnamese an excuse to come in. Over and over again we fail to learn that the Communists never need an excuse to come in. They didn’t need one in Hungary in 1956 when the same argument was made by the career State people and when Dulles bought it because he was tired and it was during the campaign. They didn’t

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President’s Personal File, Box 2, Memorandum for the President, January–December 1970, April 1970. Confidential. The memorandum is unsigned. The classification was changed by hand to Top Secret. Also printed in Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1484.

<sup>2</sup> The NSC meeting of April 22; see Document 248.

need one in Czechoslovakia when the same argument was made by the State people, and they didn't need one in Laos where we lost a precious day by failing to make the strike that might have blunted the whole offensive before it got started, and in Cambodia where we have taken a completely hands-off attitude by protesting to the Senate that we have only a "delegation of seven State Department jerks" in the Embassy and would not provide any aid of any kind because we were fearful that if we did so it would give them a "provocation" to come in. They are romping in there and the only government in Cambodia in the last 25 years that had the guts to take a pro-Western and pro-American stand is ready to fall. I am thinking of someone like Bob Murphy<sup>3</sup> who would be sent there on a trip to report back to me and who would go in and reassure Lon Nol. This, of course, would be parallel to your activities which will be undertaken immediately after the NSC meeting, in the event that I decide to go on this course, with some of the lily-livered Ambassadors from our so-called friends in the world. We are going to find out who our friends are now, because if we decide to stand up here some of the rest of them had better come along fast.<sup>4</sup>

I will talk to you about this after the NSC meeting.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Murphy, career Ambassador and former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs during the Eisenhower administration.

<sup>4</sup> Nixon sent Kissinger another memorandum on the morning of April 22 which reads: "In the event we make the decision to go along with the present Cambodian government I want you to call in the major Ambassadors who could be of help to us and lay it on the line with them that we are going to back this government [Lon Nol] and will expect them to go along with us. The Japanese, the French, the British and I am sure two or three others come to mind in this respect. Have a check made as to how many the list should include. I think just getting the word out at the Washington level will seep back pretty fast to the foreign offices and could change the climate substantially." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1969–1970)



**246. Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 22, 1970.

It is quite clear from reading Sihanouk's letter to Mansfield<sup>2</sup> that Sihanouk has become a captive, perhaps a willing one, of the Communists, lock, stock and barrel. Be sure that a copy of this letter is, in confidence, given to Rogers and to Helms, but if you will re-read the letter carefully you will find that it parrots the Communist line in virtually every respect. My guess is that the Chinese would never let him get it out unless it had been a letter along these lines, but it is also very possible that this reflects his own personal views. Perhaps you can think of a way, or Helms can, that the substance of his communication, without revealing the Mansfield source, gets around in places where it would hurt him.

**Attachment****Letter From Norodom Sihanouk to Senator Mike Mansfield**

Beijing, April 21, 1970.

In this so dark and so painful period in the life of the Cambodian people and of mine, your voice, Senator, was raised again in defense of truth and justice. If your government and so many others had listened to the voice of wisdom and human liberalism which was always yours, the peoples of Indochina and Indochina herself would have recovered peace in independence a long time ago. Unfortunately, wisdom and good sense have never prevailed since the end of the Indochinese war and the Vietnamese people first, then the Laotian people, finally the Cambodian people, have in spite of themselves soon fallen into a second war of Indochina, longer and more murderous yet than the preceding one.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, Subject Files, HAK/President Memos, 1969–1970. Confidential. The memorandum is unsigned. Kissinger summarizes this message in *White House Years*, pp. 489–490.

<sup>2</sup> Although the letter was not attached, an unofficial translation is printed as an attachment. (Ibid, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970)

As far as my people and myself are concerned—and taking into account the egoism of certain great powers—an egoism that has allowed the installation in Phnom-Penh of an illegal, dictatorial, bellicist and racist government, practising genocide without precedent in modern history, with the exception of the monstrous crimes of the Hitlerian regime, we have no other recourse than an armed fight for national liberation and the triumph of justice, even if we have to obtain them at the price of an ideological change in Cambodia.

The most severe ideology—as long as it is based on social justice—is infinitely preferable to a regime composed of greatly corrupted people and anti-popular reactionaries who impose themselves upon the nation with guns and bayonets; through bluff and demagogy, through the odious and anachronistic awakening of a racism which had been asleep for many centuries, through the mass assassination of a national opposition, a mass genocide of a foreign and unarmed population and by lighting up of the fires of a war that the “vis-à-vis” (opposite number) has neither wanted nor provoked against our nation.

I do not know what our future will be but what I want to tell you here is that the Khmer people and myself will never forget what Senator Mansfield has done for us and for peace and justice in the world.

Pray, Senator, accept the assurance of my eternal gratefulness, of my very high consideration and of my everlasting friendship.

**N. Sihanouk of Cambodia**

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**247. Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 22, 1970.

I want you to call on the Soviet Chargé after our Security Council meeting and give him a flat warning that in the event the Communists do move on Phnom Penh we shall react—that we do not want this to

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal File, Box 2, Memorandum for the President, January–December 1970, April 1970. Confidential. The memorandum is unsigned. The classification was changed by hand to Top Secret. Confidential. Kissinger summarizes this message in *White House Years*, p. 490.

impair our relations on SALT and in other areas, but that the President has made a command decision that this involves our interest in Vietnam and that we shall not stand by.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In his memoirs, Kissinger recalls: "The pace of events gave me no opportunity to carry out these instructions [this memorandum and the previous three from Nixon]. In a meeting later in the morning of April 22 I advised against sending Murphy (or Dean Rusk, his [Nixon's] later suggestion) to Cambodia because it would just trigger an enormous debate and would probably be overtaken by events at the NSC. The President said: 'Well, whatever, I want to make sure that Cambodia does not go down the drain without doing something.' He went on: 'Everybody always comes into my office with suggestions on how to lose. No one comes in with suggestions on how to win.' The President ordered a replacement for our chargé, Lloyd Rives, in Phnom Penh, and US support for shallow cross-border operations. As with many Nixon orders to fire people, it was intended to show his displeasure; it was not meant to be carried out; it never was at lower levels." (*White House Years*, p. 490)

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#### 248. Editorial Note

On April 22, 1970, from 3:04 to 4:42 p.m., President Nixon met with the members of the National Security Council. The participants, in addition to the President, were Vice President Spiro Agnew, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Secretary of State William Rogers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Earle Wheeler (who resumed his duties in time to attend the meeting), Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, Presidential Assistant Henry Kissinger, and the Director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness, General George A. Lincoln. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) According to an April 21 memorandum from Dwight Chapin to Kissinger, President Nixon restricted the meeting to these individuals and did not want any of the Under Secretaries present. The President also insisted that "there should be no note taker." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-028, NSC Meetings, 4/22/70) No contemporary record of this meeting has been found and apparently none was made.

In his memoirs Kissinger provides a relatively full account of the meeting recalling that the National Security Council was faced with three options: current shallow operations (preferred by Laird and Rogers), attacking the sanctuaries with GVN troops with U.S. tactical and logistical support but no ground troops (Kissinger's preference), or all out U.S. and GVN attack on the sanctuaries (the choice of Bunker, Abrams, and the Joint Chiefs). Kissinger recounts that Nixon's National Security Council meetings had a stylized nature to them. Issues had

been so analyzed by lower-level officials and the principals tended to perform their roles "like actors in a well-rehearsed play." There was always the suspicion that more was going on than each of the participants knew, as well as the general ambivalence between supporting the President's position and fear of domestic reaction to escalation of the war. Kissinger recalls that the domestic reaction to action in Cambodia loomed heavily during the meeting. According to Kissinger, Rogers opposed major cross-border operations but not bombing if Lon Nol was overthrown; Laird opposed all out destruction of the sanctuaries, which both Helms and Agnew supported. At this meeting Nixon broke his usual habit of not announcing his position until after the deliberations by announcing his support of GVN operations with U.S. support but not U.S. ground troops. Wheeler recommended that the South Vietnamese attack the Parrot's Beak and then the discussion turned to what to do about the other sanctuaries with Laird and Rogers trying to limit the U.S. role. At this point, Kissinger recalls that Agnew stated that either the sanctuaries were worth attacking or were not. He did not understand "all the pussyfooting about." He favored an attack on the Parrot's Beak and the Fishhook including the use of U.S. troops. Kissinger suggests that Nixon resented being shown to be "less tough" than Agnew. Kissinger recalls that the President complained to him about not being forewarned of Agnew's view and Kissinger believes that Agnew's stance accelerated Nixon's decision to go for the maximum option. (*White House Years*, pages 490–492)

On April 22 at 6:20 p.m., Rogers and Kissinger spoke on the telephone. Kissinger told Rogers that he had talked an hour before to the President who was thinking about authorizing an attack on the Parrot's Beak. Rogers hoped that it would not include U.S. air support ahead of time. Rogers also hoped that the operation would have a definite time limit. Kissinger agreed to recommend that view to the President. Rogers feared that this action might cause the fall of the Lon Nol government, stating that when the Cambodians "hear guns, they run." Kissinger agreed with Rogers' view probably expressed at the NSC meeting of April 22 that "it would be nice to have an ally who could fight." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Rogers and Kissinger, April 21; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

249. National Security Council Decision Memorandum 56<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 22, 1970.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Actions in Support of the Cambodian Government

Based on the NSC meeting of April 22,<sup>2</sup> I direct that the following steps be taken:

—Immediate step-up of U.S. military assistance—wherever possible through third country channels.

—Maximum diplomatic effort to enlist assistance by other interested countries.

—Authorization for specified shallow cross-border attacks against North Vietnamese/VC sanctuaries in Cambodia, to be conducted by GVN forces in division size with cross-border U.S. artillery support. U.S. tactical air support should be planned but made available only on the basis of demonstrated necessity.

—Air movement of ethnic Cambodian forces now in CIDG units in South Vietnam with their equipment to Phnom Penh as soon as possible. Arrangements should be made for their subsequent logistical support through South Vietnam.

—Congressional liaison, when appropriate, will be handled by the White House.

The Washington Special Actions Group is designated as the implementing authority for these actions.

**Richard Nixon**

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 4/23/70, a.m. and p.m. Top Secret; Sensitive; Principals Only. A copy was sent to Wheeler.

<sup>2</sup> Document 248.

**250. Memorandum From Roger Morris, Winston Lord, and Anthony Lake of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 22, 1970.

SUBJECT

Cambodia

We believe that the situation in Cambodia demands action by the U.S., but that the nature of our action is constrained by the facts of the situation. Failure to act within the limits of possibility could destroy the chances for salvaging what we can.

*I. False Issues*

We must recognize that there is no attainable perfect solution in Cambodia. It is clear now that the government of Lon Nol cannot rally support in the countryside and, more important, that the Cambodian Army is extremely weak both in competence and in spirit. Short of sending in U.S. divisions and/or of deep and long-term ARVN penetrations of Cambodia, it does not seem possible to achieve the "best solution": an anti-Communist Cambodian government in control of its country and preventing VC/NVN use of its territory against South Vietnam.

We do not have the time required to build up the Cambodian Army to the degree of effectiveness required by the situation—if this were ever possible. To try to find this "best solution" is unrealistic.

Another false issue is the question of sending in U.S. divisions or of supporting deep and long-term ARVN penetration. This would probably be militarily ineffective in the long run unless we were willing to become bogged down as a garrison force in another country. The Cambodian government could not accept deep and long-term ARVN penetration without destroying any pretensions to political legitimacy, and the military value of such penetration would, again, be extremely

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Secret; Eyes Only. Kissinger discusses this memorandum and his meetings with these NSC staffers on this memorandum in *White House Years*, pp. 493–494 and 497. Lake and Morris resigned from the NSC staff over Cambodia. (Letter from Morris and Lake to Kissinger, April 29; *ibid.*, Box 1048, Staff Files, Lake Chronological File, 6/69–5/70) William Watts also resigned, an account of which is in William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia*, p. 145.

doubtful. These steps would also raise a political storm here, as it would be the most shocking spur to fears of widening involvement in U.S. ground combat in Southeast Asia.

Deep ARVN raids on a short-term basis or “one-time” use of U.S. forces on a large scale could ease military pressure, but only in the short run. It could *not* alter the basic balance. Lon Nol himself is against deep ARVN penetration, long or short term. With the Cambodians slaughtering Vietnamese, the GVN will have political problems coming to their aid on a massive scale.

This does not by any means rule out all U.S. actions, however. We need not fear giving the North Vietnamese excuses for their own activities. They do not need public excuses. They act on interest, as we should.

## II. U.S. Objectives

Given this framework, our objectives should be:

—*To avoid the return of Sihanouk.* If he returned, it would be the result of a Communist decision to allow this, which implies meaningful assurances that he would do their bidding. His return would have a military effect on the war in Vietnam, as the Communists would no longer be bound by the restraints of discretion imposed by the unspoken nature of Sihanouk’s earlier accommodation with them. More importantly, Sihanouk’s return as a Communist stooge would have a serious psychological effect in Vietnam and Laos, and would at least provide an issue for Thieu’s opponents against him, especially and dangerously among hard-liners in the Army.

—*To avoid public U.S. involvement in the pursuit of an unattainable objective.* We should not therefore by word or deed publicly commit ourselves to the existence of the Lon Nol regime, although we should continue to support Cambodian neutrality. Any public U.S. military involvement (whether troops or direct military assistance) in Cambodia could have the effect of tying us to Lon Nol. It would have four very serious consequences:

- It would heighten the adverse psychological effect in Vietnam, Laos and elsewhere of the regime’s dissolution through more specific involvement of U.S. prestige;
- It would limit our own options if the situation deteriorates further and could involve us later in a serious crisis and commitment to military action which we would not now desire;
- It would reduce flexibility in the diplomatic situation and the possibility of achieving the objective listed immediately below; and
- U.S. troops in Cambodia would have a strong and damaging political effect in the U.S. which would both hurt the President’s Vietnam policies and divide the country further. Fears of widened U.S. involvement in the ground war in Southeast Asia are evident.

—The *best objective* we believe realistically attainable would be a return to the status quo ante without Sihanouk—i.e., *a neutral Cambodian government under current or other non-Sihanouk leadership which has reached a private understanding with the Communists that they may use the border areas in the same fashion as earlier.* This would mean that the Cambodian government would look the other way but not publicly acquiesce. This would imply the possibility of continuing Menu and defensive cross-border operations by the GVN—without active Cambodian opposition to military activity by either of the Vietnamese forces in the limited border area. Although not a good situation, this would be better than a Sihanouk government which actively opposed the GVN and would publicly oppose Menu, etc.

—There should be at least some good chance for the Cambodian Government to reach such an accommodation, if it seeks one seriously and if we do enough in the short run to make it clear to the Communists that they cannot easily reimpose Sihanouk. The situation would not be essentially different from that in which the Communists were willing to live pre-coup, and there may be some question from their point of view about how one gets reliable assurances of puppetdom from a man like Sihanouk. Their sensitivity to the Cambodian situation has been amply demonstrated. One may presume there is a good chance that they would like to see it resolved in a way which would allow them to make use of the border areas for their struggle in the main theater.

—We should give assistance to Lon Nol in the short run which would help achieve such a diplomatic solution. This implies indirect U.S. military assistance and other supporting moves.

### *III. Implications for Decisions on U.S. Actions*

With these thoughts in mind, we believe we should:

—Take actions to improve the possibilities of an accommodation between the Cambodian Government and the Communists. We should approach Lon Nol and advise him of the assistance which we feel we can give, but also advise him that we believe it would be in his interest to seek a solution directly with the Communists. We should not suggest to him exactly what this solution should be, except by implication. He would be better at it than we.

This would obviously severely damage his morale, and his approach to the Communists could be interpreted by them as a sign of weakness. But damage to his morale would move him in the direction of accommodation, and his approach to the Communists would be private to avoid hurting the morale of his supporters. Although his approach would be a sign of weakness, no one knows better than the Communists how weak he is anyway.



It is not certain by any means that they will stop short of installing a puppet whatever we do. But the elements of uncertainty in their calculations noted above, and the actions outlined below, give the status quo ante without Sihanouk a certain attraction to them.

—Continue to rally diplomatic support for Cambodian neutrality, but not for Lon Nol himself.

—Take actions which would help put pressure on the Communists to reach accommodation and which would buy time for such a move. These would include:

- Military assistance to the RKG through covert GVN assistance (e.g., the AK-47's and other weapons) and through the Indonesians, Australians and perhaps the Thais;
- Continued psychological operations against Sihanouk;
- Strong U.S. military actions within current guidelines in Southern Laos and within South Vietnam against Communist troops along the Cambodian border; and
- Continued agreement to shallow border actions by GVN forces with Cambodian concurrence.

—There should be the following firm conditions to acquiescence in shallow GVN attacks into Cambodia:

- The Cambodian Government must officially request this type of assistance, and be willing to make this request public.
- These operations should be strictly ARVN, with no direct U.S. role; i.e., no U.S. troops, advisors or tactical air support. If this limits the extent of ARVN operations, they should be so limited. (Note General Westmoreland's conclusion that "if we react quickly enough, we may be able to exploit the situation to our overall advantage without any *substantial* involvement by United States forces on the ground.")
- Since the North Vietnamese can up the ante, we should make clear in advance that we will not send our forces into Cambodia to bail out the South Vietnamese if they get into trouble.

—There should be no U.S. direct military involvement in Cambodia. We must assume that any use of U.S. forces in Cambodia, e.g., U.S. tactical air, gunships, military advisers, or participation in cross-border actions with GVN forces, will become public very quickly. These actions, as argued earlier, would increase our involvement and prestige in a losing cause, limit diplomatic flexibility, and have severe political consequences in the U.S. And it could bog us down in another war in the long run.

—These factors all apply still more strongly against significant air attacks on North Vietnam. As you know, we oppose bombing North Vietnam also on the grounds that it gains us much less in damage against North Vietnam than it loses us here in its effect on our society and abroad in our relations with friendly nations and our negotiations

with opponents at the SALT and Warsaw talks, etc. These negative arguments grow in strength the greater the level of bombing considered—e.g., bombing the city of Hanoi or the dikes.

If we do decide on direct U.S. involvement in Cambodia, we believe it should be (a) public and (b) in a multilateral context. It would be particularly damaging if we intervened directly and tried at first to fuzz it with U.S. public opinion. And the Nixon Doctrine has little meaning if other countries more directly affected than we refuse to help.

#### *IV. Geneva Conference*

The above package of U.S. actions might not be sufficient to gain our least bad alternative of a Cambodian Government *modus vivendi* with the Communist forces and a return to the status quo ante without Sihanouk. We are already doing or plan to do everything suggested above except the approach to Lon Nol recommending that he seek accommodation with the Communists.

Thus, our above moves with relation to Cambodia should be coupled with an all-out U.S. campaign in favor of a new Geneva Conference. Our basic pitch would be that:

—Due to various Communist pressures, events in Indochina are apt to get out of hand.

—We are trying to avoid the spreading of the military struggle in Southeast Asia and prefer a diplomatic solution.

—We obviously cannot go to a conference if the Communists start marching on Phnom Penh.

—Many countries have expressed an interest in a new Geneva Conference.

—Such a conference would supplement, not supplant, other negotiations under way or contemplated, such as the Paris Talks, internal discussions among the various Laotian factions, and a possible dialogue between the Lon Nol government and the Communists.

There are several arguments in favor of our taking the initiative on a Geneva Conference:

—Given the present fragile situation in Indochina, and particularly Cambodia, a bold move is obviously required. Our present half-measures of cautious diplomacy and very limited military assistance clearly won't stabilize the situation. For reasons cited above, our bold moves should *not* be military ones.

—Such an initiative by us would certainly receive very strong and widespread approval around the world. Among the countries that count, the British, French, Soviets and various Asian nations have all, to one degree or another, favored such a conference. Malik's initiative,

however subsequently fudged, clearly shows that the Soviets would probably go along with a conference, and that perhaps some elements in the Hanoi leadership would also. Faced with the international pressures caused by our initiative, it would be very difficult for these countries to block such a conference. This, in turn, would isolate the Chinese who by themselves could hardly prevent a conference.

—There would be strong public support in this country for such an initiative.

—This international and domestic support for our trying to find a diplomatic, and not a military, solution would place the President in a very strong position if the Communists blocked the convening of a conference or marched on Phnom Penh. We would be in a better position to take stronger military measures once we had demonstrated our willingness to go the diplomatic route and the Communists' preference for continued military struggle. The advantage would be only tactical, however, and we believe the same arguments as outlined above would counsel against strong U.S. military action in any case.

—With regard to Cambodia, even with all the problems that such a conference would pose, the odds would seem somewhat better than our present ones. The broad umbrella of a conference, *coupled* with a dialogue between Lon Nol and the Communists, should give us a greater chance to prevent Sihanouk's return and establish a *modus vivendi* on the pattern of the status quo ante.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

We thus believe that the U.S. should not commit its prestige through its diplomatic position or its actions to an objective which we believe is unrealistic—a Cambodian Government under Lon Nol or anyone else which is anti-Communist and in control of the whole country. The next best solution is a return to the status quo ante without Sihanouk, including an accommodation between the Cambodian Government and the Communists which would allow Menu and limited defensive cross-border operations by the GVN. Direct U.S. military involvement in Cambodia would damage rather than enhance the prospects for such a solution. A strong move for a Geneva Conference would be essential.

In the end, however, we believe the U.S. must face squarely the basically untenable situation in Cambodia—and that no remedy in proportion to our interests may be available.

**251. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 22, 1970, 1330Z.

169. Ref: WHS-0028.<sup>2</sup>

Consequences of Sihanouk's Return.

1. Consequences of Sihanouk's return, or another Communist victory, though they would depend somewhat on way in which this came about, would be profound not only in South Viet-Nam but also throughout all of Southeast Asia.

2. Sihanouk would return a Communist captive, shorn of any ability to play a neutralist role in Southeast Asian struggle. Lon Nol government and its principal supporters would presumably be liquidated or otherwise neutralized. Cambodia would become even more useful for Communist purposes and provide a base which North Vietnamese could exploit with even greater freedom to prosecute their objectives in South Viet-Nam.

3. There would be a longer or shorter period of confusion and turmoil in Cambodia following the takeover. The economic problems there would be increased, and demands would be put on Hanoi, China, and the Soviets for economic and military aid. This would put a premium on Sihanoukville as a port of entry.

4. We would assume VC/NVA would find it easier than in the past to recruit or impress manpower from the Vietnamese minority.

5. The restoration of Sihanouk or another Communist victory would give an enormous fillip to VC/NVN morale and propaganda. It would be treated as an American defeat.

6. It would have great impact in Laos, which would then have three Communist powers on its borders. Concern in Thailand would grow, and in Indonesia there would be increased pessimism about the future of the area.

7. With a Sihanouk restoration or Communist victory, the VC/NVA would be in a stronger position to carry on protracted warfare and they

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Received at the White House Situation Room at 9:41 a.m. Washington time.

<sup>2</sup> In White House telegram WHS0028, April 21, Kissinger requested, on behalf of the President for the NSC meeting on April 22, Bunker's and Abrams' candid views on the "military/political/psychological consequences of a Sihanouk return or another Communist victory in Cambodia." (Ibid.)

would be even less disposed than now to negotiate in Paris. Getting the VC/NVA out of Cambodia as part of a peace settlement would be more difficult.

8. A hostile Cambodia would force a reexamination of the speed of the Vietnamization process by both the GVN and the US, and might counsel extending the period of American involvement in South Viet-Nam.

9. While Thieu has the impression that the return of Sihanouk would be viewed by Vietnamese as a restoration of the status quo, we doubt that the consequences would be that simple. Not to be ruled out is the possibility that a development in Cambodia so unfavorable to Vietnamese prospects could create discouragement in South Viet-Nam political and military circles and there could be a serious let down in South Viet-Nam. While most Vietnamese military leaders have not wanted to probe too deeply, too widely, or commit too many forces in cross border operations, people like Ky can be expected to criticize the US and possibly Thieu for failure to take advantage of what Ky called "a golden opportunity." In such an event, and coming on heels of the 150,000 redeployment target, US–GVN relations might be put under some stress. Just as the loss of Laos would produce shock waves in South Viet-Nam, there would be even greater shock waves if Cambodia fell to Communist control or to a Sihanouk who was their captive.

10. One of the major likely consequences would be a prolongation and, over time, a possible intensification of the war, especially in the southern part of Viet-Nam. Whether this prospect would be met with renewed GVN determination would depend in part on the ability of South Vietnamese political and military leadership to damp down the criticism of the US and possibly of Thieu.

11. We do not believe that the development of a larger threat across the border would increase the interest of the GVN in seeking negotiated solutions through wider concessions, but rather would harden their insistence on a continued and indefinite US presence. At the same time it might encourage more of the dissident political elements within South Viet-Nam to advocate concessions and compromises, increasing political strains in the South.

12. Thus I would conclude that the return of Sihanouk or a Communist victory in Cambodia would be a serious setback. It would add to our problems and those of the GVN; it would complicate obtaining a reasonable political settlement for Viet-Nam; it would make more difficult obtaining agreement on mutual withdrawal from Viet-Nam, Cambodia, and Laos; and it might force US into a long term and costly large-scale presence in Viet-Nam. Every prudent step should be taken to reduce its possibility.

13. The following measures are submitted for consideration:

A. Increase worldwide psychological warfare campaign through overt and covert assets to call attention to North Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia. Attention should be called to the Communist interdiction of Mekong River as international waterway. This campaign should emphasize that Hanoi's hostile actions in Cambodia threaten the conflict in Southeast Asia.

B. Undertake diplomatic effort through the UN, ICC, and any other grouping of nations which can be used to help stabilize the situation in Cambodia. In recommending this course of action we are not unmindful of previous attempts to harness this approach which have been less than productive.

C. Implement presently agreed upon indirect arms assistance efforts to the Cambodians with maximum speed, realizing that this gesture in the short term is of more psychological than military value.

D. Encourage and actively guide as appropriate the current efforts of the GVN to establish direct contact between Saigon and the Lon Nol government.

E. Expand military assistance to the Lon Nol government through indirect channels to include communications equipment, heavy weapons, aircraft spare parts and limited number of T-38 [T-28] aircraft.

F. Airlift three battalions of Khmer Serei and one battalion of KKK oriented CIDG troops into Phnom Penh after conducting appropriate coordination with the Lon Nol government. These four battalions are combat-ready units. Their movement to Phnom Penh could be carried out by GVN aircraft. These troops are equipped however with M-16's and other American equipment, thus their deployment poses some follow-on logistics problems, none of which are insurmountable. We have indications these troops would be willing to go to Cambodia. There are also 3,000 recruits of Cambodian descent in the CIDG training pipeline. Thieu told me and informed General Vien that Cambodians should be released if they want to go. There are reports that Lon Nol would be willing to receive and integrate this type of manpower into his own forces.

G. Increase the number of short term ARVN cross border operations in shallow penetrations designed to increase VC/NVA concern about the security of their base and logistics areas.

H. Maintain military pressure on North Vietnamese forces in northern and southern Laos and encourage the Thai government to send infantry battalions to the Sam Tong/Long Tieng salient.

I. Provide US gunship, artillery and TACAIR support to ARVN forces operating in Cambodia against significant VC/NVA targets.

J. Mount selective and carefully targeted combined US/GVN military operations against high payoff targets in Cambodia. One of these might be against COSVN headquarters.

K. Mount naval operations with GVN resources to open the Mekong River as an international waterway if VC/NVA forces continue to interdict the river. This should be undertaken only after the appropriate psychological warfare stage setting has been achieved via actions outlined in recommendation A.

L. Update and prepare for prompt implementation, a scenario and a contingency plan which would utilize US/GVN naval resources to quarantine the port of Sihanoukville immediately after our intent to impose such a quarantine was appropriately signalled to interested nations.

M. Apply appropriate military force against carefully selected targets of tactical or strategic importance located in the southern and western portions of North Viet-Nam along the Lao/North Vietnamese border.

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## 252. Memorandum for the Record<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 23, 1970, 7:20 p.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Amb. U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Col. Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

SUBJECT

Meeting of WSAG Principals on Cambodia<sup>2</sup>

1. The execute order is out. Air authorization to MACV.

—Issue: Should advisors for ground air controllers go in and go in with helos?

2. Air Advisors.

—Issue: They should be able to use tac air without prior authority from Washington.

All believe that Dr. Kissinger will put it to the President per his agreement with the Secretary of State.

Kissinger: Can we keep the correspondents out?

Packard: It may focus more attention than otherwise on the activity.

All reviewed the draft of a cable to Abrams prepared by Johnson.<sup>3</sup>

All agree that Moorer will call Abrams and discuss the public relations aspects.

It was agreed to meet again at 3:00 p.m. the next day.

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<sup>2</sup>No minutes of the morning meeting of April 23 have been found, but an April 23 briefing memorandum from Kennedy to Kissinger for the evening WSAG meeting provides a partial account of what took place. At the morning meeting Kissinger asked for confirmation of U.S. military moves along the Cambodian border and stated that no U.S. personnel were to go into Cambodia, although he said he would raise the issue of U.S. forward air controllers with the President. Packard agreed to limit press coverage in the operational area; Johnson was to prepare a “diplomatic scenario;” Unger was to ask the Thais to assure Lon Nol that they would secure the Thai border; and Thieu should ensure Lon Nol that South Vietnam had no intention of occupying Cambodia. Kissinger agreed to send an additional 1,000-man pack to Cambodia and informed the WSAG of the President’s desire for “maximum diplomatic encouragement of third country assistance to Cambodia.” (Ibid., Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 4/23/70, a.m. and p.m.)

<sup>3</sup>Not further identified.



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

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Cambodia Options

*The Situation*

Cambodia's President Lon Nol has written asking immediate U.S. aid in arming Cambodian forces to a total of 410,000 (Tab A).<sup>2</sup>

North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces are nearing Phnom Penh. They have moved with surprising ease against the poorly organized, ill-equipped and ill-trained Cambodian forces. It is not certain that they intend to take over the country but they may soon be in a position to do so. The Cambodian forces of 35,000 Army and 40,000 Paramilitary is being expanded rapidly—addition of 30,000 is now underway, but it will take time for them to become effective. Fuller background was covered in my memorandum of April 22.<sup>3</sup>

Our Chargé in Phnom Penh, though perhaps excessively alarmist, reflects the concern of other foreign embassies in recommending we be prepared to evacuate American personnel from the city.<sup>4</sup>

*The Consequences of Cambodia's Fall to the Communists*

Cambodia's fall to the Communists would have the following seriously adverse consequences:

—In the immediate aftermath of a Communist takeover in Cambodia there would be a profound psychological shock in South Vietnam.

—Over the longer run, South Vietnam would be completely surrounded by hostile territory.

—The heretofore limited covert operations of Communist forces from Cambodia into Vietnam will become overt and much larger.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive.

<sup>2</sup> Tab A was a retyped copy of telegram 593 from Phnom Penh, April 21; see footnote 4, Document 240.

<sup>3</sup> Not printed. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970)

<sup>4</sup> Telegram 582 from Phnom Penh, April 21. (Ibid., NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, April 21, 1970)

—The Communists could send in North Vietnamese units and units formed of Vietnamese residents of Cambodia. They could also form a Guerrilla movement of Cambodian ethnics in South Vietnam. The new situation might not have immediate military consequences, but would certainly begin to tell in six months or a year.

—Communist forces in South Vietnam, particularly in the Delta area, could count on obtaining all the food and military supplies they need, whereas now they suffer some shortages.

—Vietnamization would be impossible to carry out. The South Vietnamese government and army could not preserve itself against pressure from all sides without a very large continuing presence of U.S. forces.<sup>5</sup>

—Our negotiating position would be complicated.

—In the rest of Asia, there would be a feeling that Communism was on the march and we were powerless to stop it. Thailand in particular would be subject to greater pressure.

#### *What We Are Doing*

The following measures have been undertaken or are planned:

—The ARVN has undertaken several ground operations against Communist forces in Cambodia since the change of Government. Those have been fairly extensive, and have included South Vietnamese air support. One such operation which was just completed involved 2,500 men and lasted for two days. Penetration was 3 or 4 kilometers.

—An operation on a larger scale is pending, however. This will involve a multi-division effort in Svay Rieng with full air and artillery support. The initial thrust will be 7–8 kilometers, but will be joined by other forces moving to cut off the entire Parrot's Beak. It is hoped that this particular operation will cause the Communists to draw off the combat units which they are now employing against Phnom Penh in order to defend their base camps. The operation has received general approval from both the ARVN and MACV drafters, but still needs final approval from the ARVN joint general staff.

—U.S. operations have been essentially B-52 strikes. (Tactical air operations on a small scale have been permitted for some time in the extraction of special forces teams from missions in Cambodia.) Strikes have been conducted at a rate of one or more per week against Communist base camps just opposite the Vietnamese border, mainly in III and IV Corps.

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<sup>5</sup> Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote the following note: "K. put this in speech if I have to make one."

—This week strikes are planned for targets opposite the Central Highlands in II Corps, the Angel's Wing area of III Corps, and in the zone between III Corps and IV Corps southwest of the Parrot's Beak.

—These raids have been effective in destroying supplies and dislocating troop concentrations, but have not seriously interfered with Communist military plans. If continued during the major ARVN operation mentioned above, or during similar operations of this scale, the disruptive effectives could be much greater.

—One U.S. tactical air operation is now planned: Operation Patio, which will cover an area 20 miles deep into Cambodia from the Vietnamese border, about 60 miles south of the tri-border area. It will consist of tactical aircraft and forward air controllers for artillery fire, and will be backed up with teams on the ground.

—U.S. arms shipments to Cambodia have consisted of 1,500 AK-47s, which were airlifted into Phnom Penh as of 12 noon Washington time April 22. 1,300 more will be sent in the same way tomorrow. A 1,000-man pack of U.S. arms and equipment will also go into Cambodia shortly.

—Several thousand more AK-47s will be readied and shipped over the next week.

#### *Our Immediate Options*

The Lon Nol government is better than any alternative at this point. Given the likely consequences of its fall, it is in our interest to give it the moral support it needs by evidencing willingness to help and to help its struggle by giving what material assistance we can.

—*Military Assistance* The Cambodians have asked for quantities of equipment far in excess of what they could use effectively or what could be delivered in time to be of help in the present situation. They now primarily need light weapons, ammunition and radios.

—Delivery of even small quantities quickly will have an important psychological effect and bolster Cambodian morale though they will not necessarily change the unfavorable military balance.

—There are *two ways* we can help:

—Open delivery—this would enable us to move large quantities in quickly. But the risks are not worth it.

—Use CIA 1000-man packs—These are available now and each fully equips a unit. They could be moved rapidly to equip three new regiments the Cambodians are forming and be delivered without directly showing our hand. If it is disclosed we would have the excuse that we had wanted to limit our commitment.

I recommend that for now we stick to the CIA packs.<sup>6</sup> It will not meet all of the Cambodian's requests but will do enough to have some military impact in the Phnom Penh area and give a morale boost.

Approve CIA Packs

Prefer Open Delivery

*Military Operations in the Border Region*

Attacks against North Vietnamese/VC sanctuaries near the South Vietnam border will tie down enemy forces needed for their protection, disrupt his logistics support and take some pressure off the Cambodians. Attacks can be made by cross-border operations, tactical air, or B-52s or a combination of these.

*Cross-border operations*—There are three levels.

—Shallow—2–3 miles in depth of the type now conducted by ARVN forces of brigade size supported by their own artillery and tactical area. These attacks harass the enemy and tie down some of his forces but have been insufficient to limit his offensive operations in Cambodia.

—Deeper Penetrations—These would extend up to ten miles into Cambodia and would require forces numbering up to a division supported by tactical air and artillery. They would attack bases and headquarters now beyond reach disrupting enemy logistical support and sowing confusion which would take some pressure off Cambodia. Such attacks limited in depth or duration would be responsive to Lon Nol's desire that they go no deeper.

—Massive operations—of multi-divisional size supported by artillery, tactical air and B-52s seeking to permanently deny the sanctuaries to the enemy. This would seriously disrupt enemy logistical support and capability to operate either in Cambodia or against South Vietnam. Lon Nol would at least publicly criticize such attacks, however, and international repercussions could be serious. It would involve greater U.S. involvement and could provoke North Vietnamese reaction against Phnom Penh.

—*Air Attacks*—either by tactical air or B-52's could damage enemy bases and concentrations which could not otherwise be reached. They could be independent of or in support of cross-border operations. They would have disruptive effects on enemy operations in Cambodia and Vietnam but would have their maximum effort in conjunction with ground operations. They risk disclosure, however, with potential adverse international and domestic reaction.

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<sup>6</sup> At the end of the memorandum, Nixon wrote: "OK, all plans."

I recommend, in the present situation, deeper penetrations of division size but not permanent investiture of the sanctuaries. The penetrations would be conducted by ARVN divisions supported by their own artillery and tactical air and by U.S. cross-border artillery, tactical and B-52 strikes on specific targets. To further assist the ARVN forces, I recommend U.S. forces be deployed in the border area to relieve ARVN forces needed for these attacks.

I recommend you approve deeper ARVN penetrations with U.S. cross-border artillery support, tactical air and B-52 strikes.

*Khmer Krom and Khmer Serai Deployment*—There are 3,500 Cambodian ethnics forces now in South Vietnam equipped and trained. They are part of the Special Forces. Lon Nol asked for them and Ambassador Bunker recommends that four battalions of them be airlifted to Phnom Penh with their equipment. They would strengthen Cambodian forces at Phnom Penh and have an important desirable psychological effect in Cambodia. They lack logistical support, however, and we will have to arrange to provide it. This can be done through the South Vietnamese.

I recommend we approve airlift of the Cambodian Forces to Phnom Penh as soon as possible.

I have enclosed summaries of the recommendations of Ambassador Bunker (Tab B)<sup>7</sup> and the JCS (Tab C).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tab B was a retyped copy of Document 251 and a summation of the recommendations it contained.

<sup>8</sup> In Tab C the JCS recommended providing M-1's to equip Cambodia's 85,000 person army, developing plans for attacks by division-size RVNAF forces on enemy positions in the sanctuaries, rescinding the current restrictions on U.S. forces on the border to provide logistic and artillery support for RVNAF forces engaged in Cambodia, and developing plans for employing Cambodian "ethnics" in the Special Forces. These recommendations were taken from a copy of Document 244, which was also attached at Tab C.

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## 254. Editorial Note

At 7:20 a.m. on April 24, 1970, President Nixon met with Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas Moorer, Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Lieutenant General Robert Cushman, and Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger until 8:15 a.m. Kissinger remained with the President until 9:02 a.m. (National

Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Kissinger recalls that the President explicitly excluded Secretary of State Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird from the meeting on the pretext that this was only a military briefing, but in reality it was because of the President's "extreme irritation at the bureaucratic foot dragging" of both their agencies on the question of U.S. air support for the South Vietnamese Parrot's Beak operation. According to Kissinger's recollection, the President wanted to discuss the feasibility of a combined U.S.–ARVN attack against the Fishhook sanctuary to complement the South Vietnamese attack on the Parrot's Beak. Kissinger recounts that Moorer and Helms were strongly in favor of the combined operations, believing that they would relieve the North Vietnamese pressure on Phnom Penh and destroy enemy supplies and gain time for Vietnamization to work. After the meeting Kissinger recalls that he telephoned Laird to inform him of the discussion at the meeting. Laird suggested that it would be wise not to make any decision before Rogers testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 27 so that the Secretary of State could answer truthfully that no American forces would be going into Cambodia. Laird also suggested that Moorer and Abrams were opposed to the joint U.S.–ARVN operation against the Fishhook. Kissinger then telephoned Moorer who in no uncertain terms rejected the Secretary of Defense's contention. (Kissinger, *White House Years*, pages 495–496) At 2:25 p.m. on April 24 Kissinger telephoned Wheeler to ask if he and Abrams were recommending on military grounds "this COMUS thing." Wheeler answered that they were and they supported it on military grounds. Kissinger recommended that Abrams act on the assumption that the operation might be ordered. (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Wheeler, April 24; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

On April 24 at 7:20 p.m. Kissinger called Helms to ask him what he thought in his "private capacity of the course of action" discussed at the meeting that morning. Helms stated: "It seemed to me that if he [Nixon] is prepared for the fallout, then it is the thing to do. He obviously was." Kissinger asked Helms if he thought "it is worth it?" Helms thought it was. Kissinger then asked Helms if he thought there should be two operations, suggesting that there would be as much flak for one as for two. Helms agreed. Kissinger then told Helms: "It is my judgment and strong recommendation that any decision must be discussed with Cabinet Members—even if the decision has already been made and an order is in the desk drawer. You can't ram it down their throats without them having a chance to give their views." Helms agreed that "you have to bring the other fellow in." Kissinger added, "And give them the opportunity to discuss the wisdom of it." Helms suggested

that even so, “it is just not right to start monkeying around with something like this at the last minute. I think the state of mind I saw this morning was just right—keep it and not monkey with it.” (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Helms, April 24; *ibid.*)

The next day Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Earle Wheeler, who reassumed his duties after a brief stay in the hospital, informed Commander in Vietnam General Creighton Abrams that the President was concerned that he would be subject to the same kind of criticism that President Kennedy endured after the abortive Bay of Pigs Operation in April 1961 if the Cambodian operations failed. The President wanted ARVN and U.S. commanders to “have an aggressive frame of mind and a determination to achieve success.” (JCS telegram 5711, April 25, Wheeler to Abrams, JCS Files, OCJCS File 091 Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 25 March–27 April 1970, as cited in JCS Historical Division, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1969–1970*, pages 252–253)

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

Washington, April 24, 1970, 10:40 a.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
 David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
 Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
 U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
 Richard Helms, Director, CIA  
 Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
 Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff  
 Brig. Gen. John A. Vogt, Jr., USAF, Joint Staff, Director for Operations

### SUBJECT

WSAG Meeting (Principals)

Dr. Kissinger: I have spoken with the President. There must be no leaks. All the departments will be held responsible. There should be a list of people who get Nodis cables on this subject.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

The decision memo reflects the President's views.<sup>2</sup> If Cambodia becomes a Communist base, Vietnamization becomes impossible. The psychological blow will be terrific. We require implementation of the NSDM quickly.

Helms: [gives a briefing.]<sup>3</sup> There is no attack in the city but they are trying to surround it, terrorize it, and then send in a delegation to negotiate. There is a report that VC terrorists are in the city. Encircling is a more effective tactic in terrorizing than taking the city.

The Cambodian Army took back Saang.

I can show you the location of the sanctuaries. The big ones are near Takeo and Loc Ninh.

Packard: Pour heat into the sanctuaries.

Moorer: We have a plan to execute the Parrot's Beak operation. It's a division-plus size operation on two sites. Next is the plan for the COSVN area. We started the cross-border operations last night. We have no U.S. tac air now in Cambodia. The VNAF does it except for part.

Abrams has an order to look at all possible operations and plan them.

Kissinger: Have we moved troops to the border since the President ordered them?

Moorer: Some elements of the 25th have moved, but not in the last 24 hours.

Kissinger: The President ordered it. It must be done. He wants specific units moved to the border in the vicinity of the base areas. He wants a written statement by the close of business stating what units have been moved to the base areas.

What is opposite COSVN?

Moorer: Primarily U.S. forces—the 1st Cavalry. They can be moved closer. We will move them immediately and notify you by close of business.

We also will cover the areas which the South Vietnamese cover.

The NVA may move their forces but they can't move the caches.

Johnson: What do they have in there?

Moorer: A small force—one regiment in the Parrot's Beak.

Johnson: Why is the first operation in the Parrot's Beak?

Moorer: Because the South Vietnamese can handle it and succeed.

Johnson: What does that include?

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<sup>2</sup> See Document 249.

<sup>3</sup> All brackets in the source text.



Moorer: South Vietnamese tac air and artillery. They'll have U.S. artillery and tac air support—if needed. There is no constraint on U.S. tac air. The recce we'll leave to MACV.

Kissinger: If MACV requests it, we approve.

Johnson: Do we tell Lon Nol?

Kissinger: Yes, but about the time we launch it.

Green: Lon Nol should request it. If we put to him he might agree.

Kissinger: Tell him shortly before.

Johnson: We will have the messages ready.

Moorer: We'll go from both sides.

Kissinger: Will the VC turn around—will it force them back?

Helms: North Vietnam calculated we wouldn't do this; it will jolt them.

Johnson: The problem is we don't want to push them deeper into Cambodia.

Moorer: If we get at the caches, they have a logistics problem.

Helms: One report is that they have enough supplies in the bases to keep the war going a long time.

Kissinger: Can we keep this going next week?

Moorer: We can keep this one going but not another major operation.

Packard: It's a feint against COSVN and then they attack Parrot's Beak.

Helms: It's near Saigon; thus it's a good move for the rear in South Vietnam. It will have a psychological effect.

Green: Is there any U.S. involvement?

Kissinger: No Americans go into Cambodia.

You will have plans for U.S. tac air—but request from Washington.

You will have plans for the other operation. The one against the COSVN headquarters is a feint.

Moorer: Yes.

Kissinger: Can't we stop the press from going in the area?

Packard: We can stop them for a while—they will see what we can do.

Kissinger: I want the press policy of MACV to close it off and let it leak out. If this is worth doing, we want the message to get to the other side.

Packard: We must act as though we're serious.

Johnson: MACV handled it as an operational announcement.

Kissinger: We must take the responsibility to impress Hanoi.

Johnson: In the approach to Lon Nol, we have a scenario for what he says.

Kissinger: You prepare a scenario for the diplomatic and public relations aspects: what do we say, where we say it.

Packard: We should approach the Thai to assure Lon Nol they will protect the borders.

Johnson: We should do this. We will notify Unger.<sup>4</sup>

Moorer: What about Thieu? He should be on board.

Johnson: We will want Thieu to assure Lon Nol they have no intention to occupy Cambodia. We'll give Moorer a paragraph for a cable to Abrams.<sup>5</sup>

Kissinger: Can we let Lon Nol know help is on the way?

Johnson: He has been told that the rest of the AK-47s will be delivered this week. We have a draft letter for a response to the Lon Nol letter.

Kissinger: Get it today. Make it as forthcoming as possible.

Helms: Lowenstein and Moose are going to Cambodia Tuesday.<sup>6</sup>

Johnson: We will get instructions to Rives. We also will beef up Rives—he will get additional officers.

Helms: I will see Mansfield today at 4:00, per your instruction.

Kissinger: I will see Fulbright this afternoon.<sup>7</sup>

Green: Should we press on UN actions?

Kissinger: No.

We will meet at 4:00 to discuss the military, political scenario and public relations scenario. We need a Presidential statement.

The President wants a major diplomatic effort to get others to do something—Japanese, Indonesia. The President will promise to replace

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<sup>4</sup> This was apparently already done; see footnote 2, Document 252.

<sup>5</sup> Not found.

<sup>6</sup> April 28. Richard Moose and James Lowenstein were staff investigators for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

<sup>7</sup> No record of Helms' meeting with Mansfield on April 24 has been found. Helms met with Mansfield at 2:45 p.m. on April 23. In an April 23 memorandum to Rogers with a copy to Kissinger, Helms stated that he "informed him [Mansfield] that [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] was being sent to Cambodia. I briefed him along the lines the President and you indicated to me. Senator Mansfield's reaction was, 'I can have no objection [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]. In fact, it is legitimate, desirable, and should be done.'" (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970) No record of Kissinger's discussion with Fulbright has been found, although Kissinger recounts that at the President's request he met with Chairman of the Armed Services Committee Senator John Stennis; see Document 256.

the stocks if they need it. He wants a proposal within 24 hours for the maximum encouragement to other countries.

Green: Regarding Indonesia: Malik wants to hold back military assistance until after a diplomatic conference. The others in the government want to go ahead with military assistance. How do we do this without alienating Malik?

The Australian is too pallid. We bucked him up. We sent another message to the Japanese.<sup>8</sup>

Kissinger: Let's do a memo to the President—what we have done, what we can do for each country.<sup>9</sup>

Johnson: The UK is a lost cause.

Green: He will delay his trip to Europe.

Kissinger: The 3,500 Khmer—are they moving?

Moorer: Abrams was contacted. He's working up a plan now. Some are already across the border. 1,100. We plan to use South Vietnamese aircraft for the rest.

Johnson: What about relations between Song Ngoc Trang and Lon Nol?

Moorer: There's close cooperation politically on the reception in Phnom Penh.

Johnson: We should work out the clearance in Phnom Penh as soon as we can know the arrival time.

Do we continue to pay them?

Kissinger: Yes.

Johnson: We should get a South Vietnamese mission into Phnom Penh soon. We're working on it.

Moorer: We will get all the information available before the 7:00 o'clock meeting.

Kissinger: Military assistance takes a long time to be effective. Can we handle the 1,000-man packs through the GVN?

Helms: Yes. We will work it out. We would agree to turn it over to the GVN now for this purpose.

Kissinger: The Chiefs want to send M-1s from the self-defense forces.

Moorer: Yes. We have them and ammo and the Cambodians already have some.

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<sup>8</sup> Not found.

<sup>9</sup> Reference is to an April 25 memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, the first in a series of daily briefings for the President on actions in Cambodia. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 570, Cambodian Operations (1970), Actions on Cambodia, Vol. I)

Helms: It would be helpful if a man could go in to help them for a few days with the packs.

Kissinger: I see no problem. I will raise this with the President.

Packard: How about communications equipment? They need it. We should include some with delivery of the packs.

Packard: How about Intelligence? Should we go deeper with COMINT?

Moorer: I'll take a reading on this.

Kissinger: How many M-1's can we give them? I want a recommendation on this this evening.

Johnson: I like the packs as a first step.

Helms: We will have details on the packs tonight.

Moorer: I will look to see that the Attaché group is adequate to handle the incoming shipments.

Johnson: Shouldn't we beef up the Attaché group?

Moorer: I agree. We'll get it underway.

Packard: How about the waterway? We need protection there. It's an international waterway.

Moorer: We would use South Vietnamese boats to escort them. We have developed plans.

Packard: We can use the river to get a third day's supplies of oil, etc.

Kissinger: Should we have air delivery of all things?

[All agree.]

Packard: We have 14,000 M-1s and M-14's that could be delivered within 14 days.

Kissinger: Let's have a plan by this evening to deliver the weapons and radios. We need an estimate.

Johnson: How much can they use effectively?

Helms: We need some people in to help them organize. We'll have this for later.

Johnson: The question is, are we going the Lao route?

Helms: These are the basic questions.

Kissinger: Compared to the Cambodian Government, Laos looks good.

Packard: We have a package for a 30,000-man force with ammo for the operation—it'll cost \$30 million. It's too early to decide. We have some radios that could be available in one to fourteen days.

Kissinger: We will confirm that the arms were delivered by South Vietnam. It was not an answer to the arms request. It was done with our knowledge and approval.

[At 11:50, General Vogt briefed on the plan.]

Vogt: As early as Sunday night EST, with elements of two divisions, 10,000 men. They'll be there ten days. They face 5,800 enemy troops. The Task Group of the US 25th Division will apply pressure on the border area around Parrot's Beak. The 1st Cavalry will move up against the border in the north near COSVN headquarters. We'll give tac air, gunship and medical evacuation, and aerial resupply and evacuation assistance as required.

Kissinger: That is to be approved here.

Vogt: We want advisors along for control of the US tac air and gunships in case they are needed. We could helo in but we'd prefer to go along.

Kissinger: I will take it up with the President.

Vogt: They will withdraw at the end of the operation.

Johnson: We tell Lon Nol they will withdraw.

[All agree, but with a caveat.]

Moorer: I will explain to Abrams the problem of Cambodian civilians in the area.<sup>10</sup> I suggest a letter to Thieu that we are aware of the operation, we are supporting it, and we want to be sure Cambodian casualties are kept to a minimum.

Kissinger: We want to be sure.

Moorer: We will put out the execute order now.

Kissinger: I approve the letter.

[The meeting ended.]

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<sup>10</sup> In telegram 6347 from Saigon, April 26, 0832Z, Bunker reported that he fully discussed the problem of avoiding casualties among Cambodian civilians, and Thieu himself was aware of the importance. Bunker reported: "Vietnamese forces have been and are under very strict instructions in regard to treatment of Cambodian population and avoidance of civilian casualties." (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL CAMB/KHMER) The letter was therefore apparently not needed.

**256. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon, his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee (Stennis)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 24, 1970, 4:06 p.m.

P: Where did I find you?

K: In my office—I am going into one of those WSAG meetings shortly.<sup>2</sup> I have talked to Senator Stennis—in fact, he is sitting here now. I would like to report to you his conclusions in his presence. I presented the general problem of the situation.

P: You told him I asked you to talk to him?

K: Yes; that this was at your special request. I was very open with him. I explained the consequences of a collapse of Cambodia, the large aid request (which has grown larger), your reluctance to get involved in a war in Cambodia, and your conviction that the aid program, as such, is going to not be effective for about a year or so, and would get us into a situation analogous to others. I showed him the map of these base areas which are really part of the war in Vietnam—the forces there are operating against our forces.

P: The Senator knows about Menu?

K: Yes; I summed up those Menu results again—the enormous stores there. And the Senator then came to this conclusion. I asked him to sit here while I reported it. He said, of course his first preference is air action. Second, wherever possible, his preference is South Vietnamese ground forces. If necessary and if helpful to the war effort in South Vietnam, he could see the utility of a raid of several weeks' duration that included American ground forces, as long as it sped up the end of the war in South Vietnam. [Mr. Kissinger turned to the Senator and asked if that had been a fair statement of his conclusions.]<sup>3</sup>

P: I will talk to the Senator in a minute, but first, let me tell you one thing. First, I am concerned about one thing. Get hold of Helms and have him get in touch with Saigon and have a couple of his guys fly into Phnom Penh to install that signal equipment. There is no need for that guy to wait 45 minutes. Tell him we want that signal—we are

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking. According to Kissinger's memoirs, *White House Years*, Kissinger and Nixon pre-arranged this call to impress Stennis. (p. 496)

<sup>2</sup> See Document 257.

<sup>3</sup> All brackets in the source text.

at a critical time where we need the back-channel immediately. Don't you think so?

K: That is an excellent idea.

P: Not uniformed, military men, but Helms' men to install the equipment. This will help on our consideration. You might explain to the Senator about that equipment. Another thing I would like to know on COSVN is: If we thought we would have to hit COSVN in event they took Phnom Penh—whether or not they take Phnom Penh 30 days from now, will the rains be too great?

K: Almost certainly I know the answer. Westmoreland said it can't be done in any effective way.

P: If we take COSVN, we have to do it now?

K: Yes, but without air support if it is done now. [In response to the President's query], the rain situation changes in October.

P: Not till then? Check that further. I want a clear answer to how long our option lasts—whether it lasts one month, one week or something else. I am basing it on the assumption that it lasts two weeks.

K: The rainy season lasts for three months after it starts.

P: As I understand it, we have only three weeks to exercise this option. Assuming we are trying to find a way to take the shorter road, I think we have to recognize we may not find another opportunity.

K: That is right.

P: These guys have been talking about a protracted war. That is why last night, I had come to the conclusion you have to seize the opportunity when it is there, considering the weather, etc.

P: I will talk to the Senator.

K: It may take an hour to get an answer to those two things.

P: You don't have to call me back—anytime after two hours. I am going out for an hour.

Stennis: Mr. President.

P: I want to thank you for talking to Henry. I will sum up what my views are: (1) I don't want us to get into a quagmire of military aid to Cambodia. Or else we will get into another situation. On that request, we are not going to give a lot—a few rifles doesn't bother you does it? You tell your colleagues we are not going to get into a big aid program for Cambodia. We will provide minimum rifles because they did opt for us. With regard to these areas (1) as far as American activity is concerned, the first choice is air action including the B-52's which *only* you and Senator Russell know about. It's the best-kept secret of the war. (2) We will also consider the possibility of tactical air to follow. But that is all air action on the borders—not inside. It's within the 2-5 mile area. As far as any ground action: there will be no ground

action with relation to Cambodia. They have to save themselves. Any ground action will relate only to our troops in South Vietnam and our Vietnamization program. If ground action takes place, we will have the South Vietnamese do it—we trained that army. (3) Our other option, we will not exercise unless we have to—that of having Americans helping South Vietnamese only if we consider that that will, in the long run, help reduce our casualties in Vietnam. How does that sound to you?

S: It sounds good—I will be with you on the nailhead.

P: We are not going to get involved in a war in Cambodia. We are not going to occupy Cambodia. We do want basically to win in South Vietnam.

S: We have to.

P: In order to do that, we have to hit those sanctuaries in Cambodia.

S: This is part of your necessary steps in handling the war in South Vietnam.

P: As you remember, in my speech Monday I warned that if their actions in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam endangered our troops in South Vietnam, we are not going to sit and take it.

S: I am with you all the way. I did express some concern. I didn't think you were planning it—I had to see.

P: We are not going to fly anybody in to save Phnom Penh—or Cambodia. We are going to do what is necessary to help save our men in South Vietnam. They can't have those sanctuaries there.

S: I will be with you—I commend you for what you are doing.

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

Washington, April 24, 1970, 4:20 p.m.

### SUBJECT

WSAG Principals Meeting

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.



## PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
 Richard Helms, Director, Central Intelligence Agency  
 David Packard, Under Secretary of Defense  
 General Earle Wheeler, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
 Admiral Thomas Moorer  
 U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
 Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
 Richard Kennedy, NSC Staff

Kissinger: What is the monsoon situation?

Wheeler: It will begin to switch in mid-May; by June the area will be impassable in the Parrot's Beak area except on roads. It will last five months. The NVA put supplies on platforms with stilts.

Kissinger: Are there any issues remaining?

Johnson: 2,500 more AK-47s (above the 1,300) will be ready 1800 Saigon time tomorrow. Saigon and Phnom Penh are working it out between them.<sup>2</sup> We may have to use SAC C-123s.

[All agree.]<sup>3</sup>

Johnson: We have a new message from Lon Nol about the Khmer.<sup>4</sup>

Kissinger: Tell Lon Nol what we have done and tell him we agree to the movement of the Khmer Serai. 1,000 have already moved. Alex [Johnson] will get word to Lon Nol today, if necessary, telling him only that we agree and are making plans.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In telegram 062631 to Saigon and Phnom Penh, April 25, 1910Z, the Department asked Bunker to resolve a problem that arose over the second shipment of AK-47s from South Vietnam to Cambodia. Thieu was reportedly concerned about public acknowledgement of the shipments and Cambodian violence against South Vietnamese in Cambodia. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER) In telegram 6395 from Saigon, April 27, Bunker reported that he saw Thieu who agreed immediately to the shipment even though Cambodia had made no formal request. As Thieu put it, "if a neighbor's house is burning, you don't wait to be asked to provide help." Thieu insisted on the following conditions for future assistance: "indiscriminate killing of Vietnamese stop, voluntary repatriation of Vietnamese be allowed and facilitated, and there be no publicity about the shipment." (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> All brackets in the source text.

<sup>4</sup> In an April 24 letter to Nixon, Lon Nol reported that the situation in Cambodia was deteriorating rapidly. He wrote: "I have the honor to beg your excellency and the USG to be kind enough to examine the possibility of sending Special Forces composed of Khmer Kroms (Cambodians of South Vietnam) and Montagnards of Mondulhiri to Snuol (Kratie), to Mimot (Machai Mea), to Svay Rieng, to Kandal, to Takeo and to Kampot." This was the only way, Lon Nol continued, Cambodia could hold on until it could rearm its forces with U.S. assistance. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER) On April 23 journalist William Beecher of *The New York Times* reported that the United States was providing secretly to Cambodia AK-47 rifles captured in South Vietnam. Kissinger recounts the President's reaction to this leak in *White House Years*, pp. 494-495.

<sup>5</sup> Transmitted in telegram 062423 to Phnom Penh, April 25, 0021Z. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

The President is prepared to send M–1s.

Wheeler: MACV can get 15,000 M–1 carbines from RVNAF. We can get them moving about 1,000 per day beginning 29 April. Ammo accompanies it. M–1 rifles could be substituted but that would take longer.

Johnson: Tell Lon Nol now we are working with the GVN to get the 15,000 carbines and ammo.<sup>6</sup>

Kissinger: Do we want to go ahead with the 1,000-man packs?

Helms: It's better to wait until the Defense Attaché office is beefed up.

Wheeler: We'll get attachés there from Thailand now.

Kissinger: I will tell the President we'll hold them up until the attachés are ready to receive it.

Johnson: Laos has a request for assistance from Lon Nol.<sup>7</sup>

Kissinger: Now Laos is giving military assistance? [Laughter]

He has a message from Souvanna.

Johnson: We should instruct Godley.

Kissinger: We should give him the message that the U.S. is behind Lon Nol which he can repeat to Lon Nol.

Green: We could stop rice shipments from Southern Laos.

Kissinger: Galbraith can't see Suharto till later?

Green: Right. We really can't expect Indonesia to help until the Pan-Asian meeting.

Kissinger: How about the COMINT?

Moorer: The COMINT is adequate.

Kissinger: Thieu has been approached?

Moorer: We sent a message to Abrams.<sup>8</sup>

Wheeler: Abrams briefed Bunker and Berger. Then he saw Thieu with Ambassador Bunker and briefed Thieu. He has not reported the reaction.

Johnson: A joint cable called for urging Thieu to do all possible to protect civilians in the area. The Secretary of State wants further ex-

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<sup>6</sup> Transmitted in telegram 062422 to Phnom Penh, April 25, 0019Z. (Ibid.)

<sup>7</sup> Reference is to a request from Lon Nol to Souvanna for a light battalion of 600 men, as reported in telegram 2893 from Vientiane, April 24, 1128Z. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, Cambodia, 4/23/70, a.m. and p.m.)

<sup>8</sup> JCS telegram 5689 from Moorer to Abrams, April 24. (JCS Files, OCJCS File 091, Cambodia, Ground Strikes Against Base Areas in Cambodia, 27 Mar–27 Apr 70, as cited in Historical Division, JCS, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1969–1970*, p. 253)

hortation on this. [All agree.] A message will go to Bunker through the military channel.<sup>9</sup>

We have a letter from Gorton.<sup>10</sup> We'll send a message filling the Australians in on what assistance we are giving.

Kissinger: How about the press in South Vietnam?

Moorer: Abrams has been asked to see how we can keep exposure to a minimum.

Wheeler: The ARVN keeps them away.

Kissinger: Can the ARVN hack it?

Wheeler and Packard: Yes, with support.

Kissinger: Did Unger get any reply?

Helms: Thanat thinks it's fine.

Green: Rives thought it was a good idea.

Johnson: Thanat says he's telling Lon Nol not to worry.<sup>11</sup>

Kissinger: How far in will they be after 24 hours?

Wheeler: Just a few miles. It's a pincer movement.

Kissinger: Then it's still shallow then.

When will the press know it's a large operation?

Wheeler/Packard: The first day, maybe the second day.

Wheeler: There may be lag of 24–48 hours after the northern press begins before the southern move begins.

Kissinger: When will we begin to get flak?

All: Tuesday.<sup>12</sup>

Johnson: Fulbright will be angry that the Secretary didn't tell him.<sup>13</sup>

Packard: Let's go back to the tac air question. You asked how extensive tac have we been doing in Patio. Abrams says he can extend Patio activity to cover areas of high enemy density: 350, 331, 201, 202, 609, 740. He can't do it in the South. Abrams wants to do it when he can. The question is whether it's advisable to open up tac air at the same time.

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<sup>9</sup> For Bunker's response, see footnote 10, Document 255.

<sup>10</sup> Not found.

<sup>11</sup> Apparent reference to telegram 4977 from Bangkok, April 24, 1135Z, in which Unger reported that Thanat assured him that Cambodia could withdraw its forces from the western border with Thailand without anxiety and that he had passed the word to Cambodia that Thailand "wished to be of help." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

<sup>12</sup> April 28.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers was scheduled to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 27.

Kissinger: The President is eager to do it.

Wheeler: The sorties are limited. We can't do it.

Packard: Transfer some out of Steel Tiger for a time.

Wheeler: OK, but leave it to him.

If we move a CVA from the Sea of Japan, we could put in another 100 sorties a day.

Packard: We should do as much as we can now.

Johnson: OK.

Moorer: So we recommend a CVA and tac air starting Sunday night.

Johnson: I'm worried about taking a CVA away from Korea. We have removed the 106's and told Park of the force cut.

Moorer: Just during the month of May.

Green: We could explain to Park later if we need to.

Kissinger: I will check with the President on the CVA and tac air.

Johnson: Should we tell the TCC countries and Japan after the operation starts? How do we handle the TCC's in Saigon? Can they be briefed there? I planned to do it in the capitals.

Kissinger: Shouldn't the GVN do it?

Packard: I think the GVN should do it.

Kissinger: I agree.

Wheeler: The GVN could call in the Ambassadors in Saigon and tell them. Abrams wouldn't normally cut them in on a GVN/US operation.

Kissinger: Brief them only after it begins to surface.

Johnson: Please raise with the President the Lowenstein-Moose question. The Secretary is concerned.

[At 5:05 Dr. Kissinger leaves to see the President. At 5:17 he returns.]

Kissinger: The President approves the carrier and tac air.

Wheeler: We should let Abrams pick the time to start it for the maximum impact. It may be best to do it all at once.

Kissinger: O.K.

Wheeler: The order of priority now is: (1) South Vietnam, (2) Steel Tiger, (3) Barrel Roll. It will now be: (1) Cambodia, (2) South Vietnam, (3) Barrell Roll and (4) Steel Tiger.

[All agree.]

Johnson: Should we tell Lon Nol?

Wheeler/Packard: No.

Johnson: The helicopters never came up?

Wheeler: It never comes out and never from South Vietnam, Cambodia or North Vietnam.

Johnson: What about Lowenstein and Moose?

Helms: Is it better that they go sooner than later?

Johnson: They'll be going all over.

Packard: They won't be in Phnom Penh until the operation is well underway. It's from 4 June–11 June.

Green: What do we show them?

Kissinger: Do they ask for classified information?

All: Yes.

Green: We can give the same instructions as we gave for Pincus and Paul.<sup>14</sup>

Johnson: It's probably as good a time as any.

Kissinger: When does the operation go?

Moorer: At the earliest, on the 27th.

Kissinger: Alex, you do a draft on a press statement for White House approval. Just the operative paragraph. [The meeting ended.]

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Pincus and Roland Paul, chief staff investigators for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

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

April 24, 1970, 5:06 p.m.

P: Are you still in your meeting?<sup>2</sup>

K: We are on the verge of winding it up. [In response to the President's query],<sup>3</sup> I am in my office.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Records, 1969–1976, Telephone Conversations, Chronological Files, 19–26 April 1970. No classification marking. The President arrived at 4 p.m. at Camp David with his friend Bebe Rebozo; Kissinger was in Washington.

<sup>2</sup> The WSAG meeting; see Document 257.

<sup>3</sup> Brackets in the source text.

P: I want a report because I have to take off. We were very lucky—the weather was miserable all the way up. We broke through the clouds here, and the weather is beautiful. How's the meeting going? Are the boys in good spirits?

K: There's nothing like a spanking to make them behave.

P: Do they see it's a big deal?

K: Wheeler said he never thought he'd live to see the day he could do one of these operations.

P: He's even pleased with COSVN! This one is a hell of a thing—this pincer thing. It's a small version of the Bulge—and Calais(?). You must have been there.

K: Yes, I was . . .

P: How about getting the guy to set up the communications equipment?

K: I talked to Helms, and it's on the way. With regard to the monsoon, it begins on May 15 and by June 1, everything is inundated.

P: Then our last day of ordering it would be May 5?

K: That is pretty late. I would say May 1.

P: Then we have one week.

K: My own judgment is to follow as closely as possible . . . [The President interrupted to say he understood.]<sup>4</sup>

K: From May 1 to 3, you can handle it. They have a proposal from Abrams along the lines of your thinking to start tac air all along the Cambodian frontier which would include COSVN Headquarters, but not pay particular attention to it. It would hit every base area.

P: He thought of it independently? Do it! Do it! And Laird is to follow this up. Tell Wheeler, no crap now. I don't want to order tac air unless it is done. Damn it, they don't do these things. You are in charge. If it isn't done, it's your ass. (to which K laughed)

P: Wheeler does understand? Do you have someone over there? You have the Admiral who could keep you informed. Pass a message to Abrams back-channel that I have ordered it. When will tac air begin?

K: We will leave it up to Abrams, but no later than when the operation in the Parrot's Beak occurs.

P: The point is it will divert them—bombardment before invasion.

K: And to keep them pinned down. These guys want to move the carrier down from Korea.

P: Do that.

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<sup>4</sup> Brackets in the source text.

K: I think it's a good idea.

P: We have moved the mining crew in. On November 3, [1969] we said all that and didn't do anything. This time they won't be expecting [it.]

K: They are passing some messages in the clear.

P: They are. We will look at it on Sunday.<sup>5</sup>

K: Do you want me to set the meeting definitely?

P: No, but you think about it. The problem is the left-wing is setting us up for a real fall here on the ground that poor little Cambodia—4,000,000 of them—asked for our help. We didn't give them help and they went Communist. They will forget that Kennedy lost Cuba by the Bay of Pigs. The other side is, if we don't do it now, we may have to do it later. If they take Phnom Penh later, we could move on COSVN. The third point that worries me is I don't think we will have a real shot at North Vietnam.

K: I agree with all these things.

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<sup>5</sup> April 26.

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

Washington, April 26, 1970.

### SUBJECT

Meeting on Cambodia, Sunday, April 26, 1970 at 4:30 p.m. in the President's EOB Office<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal File, Box 58, Speech File, NSC, Ground Operations in Cambodia. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Sent for information.

<sup>2</sup> No record of this meeting is in the National Security Council Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Kissinger calls it an NSC meeting in his memoirs and recalls that: "From the outset, the meeting took an odd turn. Helms gave an intelligence assessment that Hanoi was expanding its base areas, linking them together and trying to create so much insecurity in Phnom Penh that the government would collapse. Wheeler described the proposed operation against the Fishhook complex and the possibility of expanding it to include other base areas. Nixon tried to avoid confrontation with his Secretaries of State and Defense by pretending that we were merely listening to a briefing. He would follow with a directive later. To my astonishment, both Rogers and Laird—who after all

## PARTICIPANTS

Secretary Rogers  
Secretary Laird  
The Attorney General  
Director Helms  
General Earle Wheeler  
Henry A. Kissinger

*Purpose of Meeting*

The purpose of today's meeting should be to consider the ramifications of authorizing the combined U.S.–ARVN operation into Base Area 352/353 (Fish Hook area of Cambodia containing COSVN Headquarters). Conceptually, this operation would constitute a second punch when combined with the already approved ARVN operation into the Parrot's Beak scheduled for the early morning hours of April 28th Saigon time. The combined U.S.–ARVN operation into Base Area 352/353 has been under preparation by MACV for several weeks but up until now, Secretary Laird has not been aware of the likelihood of its being approved and opposition can be anticipated from him as well as from the Secretary of State. The Joint Staff and MACV, however, have been proceeding with the view towards early implementation of the plan in the event you decided in favor of it. Care should be exercised at today's meeting not to surface the fact that General Wheeler has been conducting intensified planning to implement the attacks on Base Area 352/353 without the full knowledge of the Secretary of Defense.

*General Outlines of Plan for Attack on Base Area 352/353*

—The immediate military objective of the plan would be to destroy a main enemy headquarters area (COSVN) and troop and logistics facilities.

—The area contains the headquarters, as well as a large complex of troop logistics facilities, ammunition storage areas, hospitals, POW camps and Command and Control Headquarters for one division and six regiments. It is a primary staging area for enemy units operating in South Vietnam. The estimated enemy strength is approximately 4,000 men, with a reserve of up to 8,000 others who could be sent to the area in the event of attack. Intelligence indicates that enemy forces have been directed to defend this base area in the event of attack.

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were familiar with their illusive chief's methods by now—fell in with the charade it was all a planning exercise and did not take a position. They avoided the question of why Nixon would call his advisers together on a Sunday night to hear a contingency briefing." Kissinger then recounts that Nixon was "immensely relieved. He construed silence as assent; at any rate he had avoided controversy." He and Kissinger went to the White House's family quarters to draft Document 260. (Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 499)



—General Wheeler will be prepared to brief the broad outlines of the plans which would involve elements of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division and a brigade of the ARVN Airborne Division, together with elements of the U.S. 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. Total forces would consist of approximately 16,000 U.S. and 2,000 to 3,000 ARVN. It is estimated that the operation will require three to four weeks to complete and can be executed within 72 hours of receipt of orders to do so.

—*Timing.* It would appear important to execute this operation in coordination with the ARVN operation in the Parrot's Beak. Assuming the ARVN operation kicks off as scheduled on the morning of the 28th, we can anticipate that knowledge of the operation will surface within two days or as early as Wednesday or Thursday Washington time. In order to obtain maximum psychological impact on the enemy and minimize the period of domestic turbulence, it would appear desirable to kick off the combined U.S.–ARVN operation as early as Wednesday or Thursday of this week. Furthermore, the rainy season normally commences in this part of Southeast Asia by approximately mid-May. Therefore, if you decide to approve this operation, a decision should be made to do so not later than Monday afternoon Washington time. This would enable us to get maximum benefit of the one-two punch, reduce the heat through conducting both operations simultaneously and achieve the maximum span of favorable weather.

—*Ancillary Operation.* All factors considered—troop reductions, approaching rainy season, the critical situation in Cambodia, continuing intransigence in Hanoi—this one-two punch may constitute a major watershed in the outcome of events in Southeast Asia. For this reason, you may also wish to consider extending blanket authorization to General Abrams to conduct ground operations into the entire complex of identified enemy base areas along the Cambodian border. This authority would constitute prima facie evidence of your determination to take whatever steps are necessary to protect U.S. forces in South Vietnam as Vietnamization proceeds. It would also constitute a major threat to the continuation of enemy offensive operations against Phnom Penh. In addition to this broad authority, you may also wish to authorize additional military strikes against selected targets in North Vietnam which are directly linked to the current enemy offensive in Cambodia. These might include tactical air strikes against supplies and logistics installations adjacent to the Laotian border in North Vietnam (Ban Karai, Mu Gia and Nape Pass complexes). These actions, and those you have previously approved, when combined with a strong public announcement by you, would constitute positive evidence of your determination to take whatever steps are necessary to achieve a prompt settlement of events in Southeast Asia or at least serve to seriously disrupt the enemy's campaign against Phnom Penh.

*Conduct of the Meeting*

—Inform the group that you had some time ago asked Secretary Laird to prepare a plan for combined U.S.–ARVN operations into Base Area 352/353 which contains COSVN Headquarters and other substantial North Vietnamese/Viet Cong facilities and that you have convened the meeting today to consider the possibility of implementing this plan in conjunction with the already authorized ARVN operation into the Parrot's Beak.

—Ask Director Helms to review the situation in Cambodia and to assess the importance of Base Area 352/353 to the enemy.

—Ask General Wheeler to brief the group on the concept of the MACV plan asked for earlier and to present his views on the military benefits, risks and overall implications of the plan.

—Ask General Wheeler to comment specifically on the timing of the plan, with the view towards obtaining maximum psychological impact.

—Following General Wheeler's presentation, you may wish to ask each of the participants, in turn, to present their views from the perspective of their overall responsibility, starting with the Secretary of State and then the Secretary of Defense.

—Following discussion of the combined U.S.–ARVN operation into Base Area 352/353, you should then discuss with the group the desirability of authorizing blanket authority to the U.S. Commander to conduct ground operations against all Cambodian sanctuaries and also to conduct concurrent air strikes into North Vietnam along the Laotian border against supplies and facilities which are contributing to the current NVA/VC offensive in Cambodia. Specifically, you should ask General Wheeler which areas should be hit and what benefits might be gained from additional ground operations in Cambodia and air strikes in North Vietnam along the Laotian border.

—At the conclusion of the meeting, you should inform the group that you will distribute a Decision Memorandum to each of the participants on an exclusively eyes only basis and that this memorandum should be in their hands by the start of business tomorrow morning.

260. National Security Council Decision Memorandum 57<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 26, 1970.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Actions to Protect U.S. Forces in South Vietnam

Based on the National Security Council meeting of April 26, 1970,<sup>2</sup> I direct that the following steps be taken to protect U.S. forces operating in South Vietnam:

—Authorization for the conduct of ground operations by U.S. forces or by US/GVN forces into identified North Vietnamese/Viet Cong sanctuaries in Cambodia up to a depth of 30 kilometers. With the exception of the operation against Base Area 352/353, U.S. or combined US/ARVN operations against specific base areas will be submitted to me for approval on a case-by-case basis.

—Authorization for the provision of U.S. tactical air/helicopter and artillery up to a depth of 30 kilometers in all base areas north of and including 352/353.

The Washington Special Actions Group is designated as the implementing authority for these steps.

**Richard Nixon**

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 4/27/70. Top Secret; Sensitive; Principals Only. A copy was sent to Wheeler.

<sup>2</sup> See Document 259 and footnote 2 thereto.

## 261. Notes of a Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 27, 1970.

*Mtg—Rogers—Laird—K[issinger]—[Nixon and Haldeman]—in EOB*

—called because Rogers complained didn't know decision re COSVN was being made yesterday<sup>2</sup> & that Laird shared his view.

—Rogers case in mtg based on decision taken w/o consultation—clearly tried to hang K for inadequate info to P[resident] re consequences. Feels COSVN operation will cost great US casualties w[ith] very little gained. COSVN not permanent location, not a supply base, knockout would not be crippling blow.

—Laird's case: not opp[osed] to COSVN—but very upset re NSDM<sup>3</sup> saying WSAG responsible for implementation—holds Sec Def must have that responsibility—under Constitution. Did try to say Abrams opposed to COSVN—but waffled several times as K answered back with other info.

—Became clear on questioning by P that Rogers' real problem was his testimony this afternoon on the Hill. He doesn't want to have to say we're sending in US troops to Cambodia—but he can't say otherwise w[ith] NSDM already out w/o lying, which he won't do. (P agreed.) Rogers used various arguments—mainly along line of prob[lem] of taking massive US casualties.

—K mainly laid low—did inject factual pts re Abrams' views to correct Laird—each time w[ith] Laird's subsequent agreement.

—P raised q[uestion] of alternatives. Made it clear that Parrot's Beak not adequate action alone—must combine with another operation. Willing to consider another area if all agree—incl[uding] Abrams—that COSVN is undesirable. Problem of alternatives is that all would also require US troops & objective would be much less than COSVN—so pay the same price but get less (actually pay somewhat less because lower casualties).

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, Staff Members Office Files, E.R. Haldeman, Haldeman Notes, April–June 1970. No classification marking. Kissinger recounts this meeting in *White House Years*, pp. 500–501 and Nixon in *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 450. These notes are reprinted in slightly less cryptic form in H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, pp. 155–156, where 11 to 11:53 a.m. is given as the time. The President's Daily Diary gives the time of the meeting as 10:45 to 11:49 a.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

<sup>2</sup> See Document 259.

<sup>3</sup> Document 260.

—R and L reiterated their various arguments several times. R saying if decision made he'll of course support it—but feels all these decisions are made w/o adequate consultation & he doesn't like it.

After meeting—P told K to suspend order for 24 hours—cable Abrams & get his true views and recs [recommendations]—convene mtg of group tonite to review again.<sup>4</sup> Said he's committed to *two* operations, will consider an alternative to COSVN—if Abrams recommends.

P made clear he understood basis of both R & L positions in mtg. R playing against move in reaction to Sen[ate], estab[lishment] press, etc. L trying to figure P's position & be with it w/o his prerogatives cut. K pushing too hard to hold control.

K said afterwards Helms warned him *he'd* have to run the gov't if we did this because R wld [would] *not* back it. K takes whole deal as test of P's authority—and I think would go ahead even if plan is wrong—just to prove P can't be challenged. P recognizes maybe need another look—& that if we change plan—but still do two—his authority is maintained but we show we're willing to listen.

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<sup>4</sup> The meeting was held on the morning of April 28; see Document 267.

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## 262. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 27, 1970, 10:10 a.m.

### MEETING OF WSAG PRINCIPALS

#### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Gen. Earle Wheeler, Chairman JCS  
U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

#### SUBJECT

Cambodia

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

Johnson: We want a telegram to get the word on Parrot's Beak to Lon Nol. The enemy already knows.

Kissinger: How much warning will this be?

Wheeler: I think they'll start tonight.

Kissinger: Okay, send it. The best thing for Lon Nol to say is that he regrets it but he sees the necessity (Option D). We'll say it begins the 28th or 29th.

Johnson: I will send if all approve.<sup>2</sup>

[Dr. Kissinger left the meeting at 10:15, and returned at 10:40.]<sup>3</sup>

Johnson: Bunker saw Thieu. The AK-47s will move tonight. They want radios for internal communication.

Wheeler: We are working on this.

Kissinger: Has Lon Nol given assurances on the Vietnamese?

Johnson: No, but he has agreed to a delegation. Thieu said OK.

Kissinger: We need to get assurances.

Johnson: They are working on this. Two GVN people arrived; the rest tomorrow. This is proceeding.

Kissinger: Are the carbines the same ones or additional?

Wheeler: In lieu of. Abrams will send these over from Saigon. Thieu might not agree to send others from his own stocks.

Johnson: He agreed to this. It's better politically the other way, but this will be OK.

Kissinger: These are the same 15,000 and will be delivered by the GVN?

Wheeler: Yes.

Kissinger: What is Indonesia doing?

Johnson: The Malik initiative is moving forward.<sup>4</sup>

Wheeler: Abrams has plans to move UH-47's to safe areas, but we need direct coordination with Cambodian authorities.

Kissinger: The President's understanding is that from 352 north, whether or not there is a ground operation, the time of execution is to be ordered to be phased into other things.

Wheeler: Do we hold off on the other areas than Parrot's Beak?

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<sup>2</sup> Not found.

<sup>3</sup> Brackets in the source text.

<sup>4</sup> Indonesian Foreign Minister Malik was organizing a conference of Asian states to support Cambodian neutrality.

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

Washington, April 27, 1970.

## SUBJECT

NSDM 57—Actions to Protect US Forces in South Vietnam

*Issues*

I am concerned about two aspects of NSDM 57<sup>2</sup> and respectfully request clarification or modification of the NSDM, as appropriate.

First, the NSDM, in the last sentence, says “The Washington Special Actions Group is designated as the implementing authority for these steps.” It was not clear to me what that provision meant. I understand there was no intent to alter the in-being operational channels, viz, from you to me, and thence to the field commands. I further understand the sentence will be rescinded,<sup>3</sup> and I am appreciative of that change.

The second aspect of the NSDM which concerns me involves the points incident to our meeting this morning.<sup>4</sup> The first point was that I had not properly fulfilled my role in describing, evaluating, and making recommendations on the two original options in General Abrams’ March 30<sup>5</sup> submission on possible actions against base areas in Cambodia. The second point was that I was not prepared this morning to

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 145, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, April 1, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. On April 27 at 10:25 a.m., Laird telephoned Kissinger to complain about the WSAG being the implementing agency for NSDM 57. Kissinger suggested “coordinating” was a better word. Laird also told Kissinger that “regardless of what Wheeler tells you casualties will run at least as high as the iron triangle.” Laird did not want the President to blame him when they reached 800. Kissinger stated that the President said this was the price he would have to pay and he felt “we are on a slow bleeding course now.” At 1 p.m. on April 24, Kissinger called Laird to tell him the operations were being delayed for 24 hours. Laird admitted that he was not prepared for the meeting with the President on April 27 (see Document 261) and was surprised that the President was authorizing an attack against COSVN and the Parrot’s Beak as well as base 704. Kissinger replied, “I am getting restive that people are implying the President isn’t getting all the information.” (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Laird, April 24; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

<sup>2</sup> Document 260.

<sup>3</sup> See NSDM 58, Document 270.

<sup>4</sup> See Document 261.

<sup>5</sup> See the summaries in Documents 219 and 264.

discuss these options adequately. The reasons I was less than adequately prepared were (a) the materials I had been using for discussion purposes were prepared on the premise that either the Parrot's Beak or the Base Area 352/353 operation would be considered, but not both; (b) that the Parrot's Beak operation was the one to receive most active consideration; and (c) that, in any event, the decision on the operations had already been made by the time of our meeting this morning.

In view of our discussion, and developments since our meeting, I believe I should provide additional comments. In particular, I believe an operation against Base Area 352/353, using US or combined US/RVN Forces, would involve higher risks and costs than potential benefits. Assuming operations against Base Areas 367/706 in the Parrot's Beak will proceed on schedule, I believe ancillary operations in Base Area 704 are much to be preferred to operations in Base Area 352/353.

#### *Background*

There are underway at this time a number of military operations designed to protect US forces in South Vietnam, to provide the background in which Vietnamization and RVN self-determination can be effected, and to exert pressure on the NVA/VC to negotiate for a political settlement. These operations include:

- RVNAF cross-border operations in conjunction with Cambodian units.
- MENU strikes.
- Tactical air operations in Cambodia along more than 50 percent of the Cambodian/SVN border.
- Surveillance of shipping into Cambodia.
- Arms shipments to Cambodian forces.
- Facilitating the introduction of Khmer and tribal forces into Cambodia for use against NVA/VC units there.

The impact of this impressive array of military actions is not entirely clear. The actions are sufficient, in my judgment, to constitute a major plus. General Abrams reported on April 21:

"It cannot be determined at present the tactical effect of ARVN [cross-border] operations; however, if ARVN claims of enemy killed in action, and food and munitions caches captured are valid, the immediate VC/NVA situation within those areas penetrated is considerably less tenable."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Brackets in the source text. The origin of this telegram extract has not been identified.



Again on April 27, General Abrams reported on RVNAF cross-border operations for the period 18–26 April. Among the results were:

265	enemy killed in action
19	enemy detained
1013	individual weapons captured
46	crew-served weapons captured
70	tons (estimated) munitions captured or destroyed

The MENU operations against six NVA/VC Base Areas in Cambodia are continuing. This week MENU strikes are scheduled every night. More than 3,000 tons of ordnance will be dropped during the operations this week. More than 100,000 tons of ordnance have been expended on the six Base Areas during the past year. General Abrams has consistently made the points that MENU strikes:

- Produce outstanding operational results.
- Pre-empt and reduce enemy operations.
- Disburse and disrupt enemy supply, training and rehabilitation activities.
- Have a direct bearing on the success of Vietnamization.

The above recap highlights the two most significant categories of operations against the enemy in Cambodia. Combined with the other operations listed, it illustrates the substantial pressure being exerted against the NVA/VC forces there.

#### *Prospective Additional Operations*

The joint RVNAF/US operation against Base Areas 367/607 in the Parrot's Beak will be initiated on April 28, Washington time. This is part of Option 2 to which General Abrams referred, and which he outlined in detail, in his messages, MAC 4158 and MAC 4159, of March 30, 1970. I provided you a copy of those messages.<sup>7</sup> Included in Option 2, also, was an attack by ARVN forces on Base Area 704. Option 1 in General Abrams' planning message was an attack, principally by US forces, on Base Areas 352/353.

I had assumed, perhaps mistakenly, that Option 1 and Option 2, as outlined by COMUSMACV, were just that—options to be considered on an either-or basis, if the decision were made to proceed with sizeable cross-border operations involving US support or involvement. I had not contemplated nor assumed the two options, or any portions of the two options, would be conducted simultaneously. General Abrams' March 30 messages, as you may recall, treated the options, at

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<sup>7</sup> Attached to Document 219.

least implicitly, in a mutually exclusive manner. He consistently compared the options, providing advantages and disadvantages of each, and inferring they were being made available for selection between the two.

As more serious consideration centered on operations in the Parrot's Beak Base Areas 367/706, therefore, I assumed at least a portion of Option 2 was the focal point for discussion. I realized that some messages had been exchanged in military channels on the implications of Option 1, i.e., operations against Base Area 352/353. But in the absence of National Security Council deliberations on Option 1, I concluded that the attention to the Parrot's Beak operation obviated Option 1. For those reasons I did not see the necessity for, or utility in, providing my views on any prospective ground operation in Base Area 352/353. I was surprised, as a result, by the tentative decision to move against those Base Areas, in accordance with the Option 1 plan, as well as against Base Areas 367/706.

In contemplating the introduction of US units into Cambodia, especially in sizeable force, it is impossible to postulate some near-term potential military and political advantages. The operations would further disrupt the supply, command and control, training, and rehabilitation areas of enemy forces. Some impact could be made on the combat strength levels of the enemy forces in Cambodia. The pressure might constitute some incentive for the other side to negotiate.

I do not believe the sum total of potential benefits of the contemplated US and US/RVNAF ground actions can be expected, even if the operations go according to plan, to be decisive in the conflict in Southeast Asia. The other side has shown the requisite flexibility in the past to adjust his base areas in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia against strikes by our side. Hanoi still retains the capability to replace combat losses, both in men and material. The requisite pressure to induce meaningful negotiations is an unknown. But given the overall uncertainties currently extant throughout Indochina, it is not reasonable to expect the projected operations to be sufficient to cause Hanoi to believe that now is the appropriate time to negotiate seriously.

In fact, Hanoi might use the projected actions, especially if the US is heavily involved on the ground, to arrive at an opposite conclusion. On the premise that added US ground involvement may arouse strong US popular and Congressional disapproval, Hanoi might retrench from any negotiating plans that otherwise would have been contemplated. The actions against Base Areas 352/353, which would place US military personnel on the ground in Cambodia, carry the following risks and costs:

- Put at risk the support of the American people for our operations in Southeast Asia.

- Constitute the beginning of operational patterns which, if continued, go beyond our budgeted resources.
- Provide the operational setting in which US combat deaths can, and probably will, exceed by significant amounts those of the past weeks and months. (The leakage of plans to the enemy, the lack of familiarity with the terrain, the size of the operations, and the stated enemy objective of protecting base areas point to such a conclusion.)

### *Alternatives*

There are three alternatives readily available, as companion-pieces to the scheduled Parrot's Beak operations:

1. Initiate the ground attacks in Base Areas 352/353, as outlined by General Abrams in his original Option 1.
2. Initiate ground attacks in Base Area 704, as outlined by General Abrams as a component part of his original Option 2.
3. Initiate no further large-scale US or US/RVNAF ground operations at this time.

The principle advantages and disadvantages of each alternative, in my judgment, are as follows:

#### *Alternative 1: Base Areas 352/353*

##### *Advantages:*

- a. Potential for destruction, or disruption, of the major enemy command and control headquarters.
- b. Simultaneous pressure on the enemy across a broad front.

##### *Disadvantages:*

- a. Substantial US ground presence required, far higher than that involved in any other alternative. US forces are involved in all contemplated options; but the degree of US involvement in this alternative, especially on Cambodian soil, is so much greater in this case as to constitute a difference in kind.
- b. High US combat deaths to be expected. General Abrams, considering a scale of high, medium, and low intensity combat, concluded that both the Parrot's Beak and 352/353 operations "would fall into the High Intensity category." Given the relative US ground involvement in the latter operation, we would have to expect high US casualties.
- c. Explaining in a credible way the type and degree of US involvement would be inordinately more difficult than for other alternatives involving a lower US profile, especially on the ground.

#### *Alternative 2: Base Area 704*

##### *Advantages:*

- a. Provides added simultaneous pressure against the NVA/VC forces in Cambodia.
- b. Is essentially an ARVN operation, especially on the ground.

- c. Would involve fewer US casualties.
- d. Has consistently been part of the Option 2 planning and therefore should constitute little difficulty in implementation.

*Disadvantages:*

a. Lessens opportunity for direct attack on COSVN. (It should be noted, however, we have the opportunity, and have been using that opportunity, to use MENU strikes against Base Areas 352/353. Because of the civilian Cambodian population involved, that option does not exist for Base Area 704.)

b. Increases the danger of non-combatant casualties, because of the relatively more populated area involved. (This can be ameliorated to some extent through coordination with the Cambodian government.)

*Alternative 3: Do Nothing More Than Parrot's Beak*

*Advantages:*

- a. Lessens overall US involvement.
- b. Simplifies planning and coordination.

*Disadvantages:*

a. Loses opportunity to make major impact on NVA/VC base areas, especially since the die will have been cast in principle in the Parrot's Beak operation.

*Summary and Recommendations*

Overall, I believe the level and type of effort we and the South Vietnamese, in conjunction with Cambodian forces, have been putting on the enemy have been productive towards achieving US goals. The prospective Parrot's Beak operation, with its relatively low US profile, should add to that pressure.

If we are to proceed with other sizeable ground attacks against enemy base areas in Cambodia, I recommend you authorize the operation against Base Area 704, i.e., Alternative 2 above. I believe the lower US profile involved, the prospects for lower US combat deaths, and the alternatives using air assets against Base Areas 352/353, make preferable the Base Area 704 operation. The increment of potential value to be achieved by operations involving large US forces on the ground in Cambodia would not, in my judgment, justify the added risks and costs ancillary to such operations. In addition, you should know that General Abrams has been having difficulty getting agreement from the South Vietnamese for their share of participation in any 352/353 operation. Such South Vietnamese reluctance would make it even more a US operation.

I believe we should continue with operations as planned, plus an ARVN attack on Base Area 704, and withhold involvement of sizeable US ground forces on Cambodian soil. The totality of our current and

prospective military operations is significant. It seems prudent to me to defer involving US personnel on Cambodian soil, at least until the overall military and political picture in Southeast Asia is clearer, the potential US benefits from such involvement are greater, or the risks and costs attendant to such US actions are less.

Melvin R. Laird

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

Washington, April 27, 1970.

SUBJECT

Ground Attacks on Base Camps in Cambodia

Attached at Tab A<sup>2</sup> is a brief summary of the two options for ground attacks on enemy base camps in Cambodia submitted by General Abrams on March 30. In developing plans for potential operations against enemy base areas, General Abrams was asked to consider two possibilities:

—An attack against targets of high military priority which could involve the use of US forces if necessary.

—Any other operation which would reduce the necessity of the involvement of US forces.

With respect to military priority, MACV considered an attack on Base Area 352/353 (COSVN Hq) to be the most lucrative. He made the following significant points about this base area:

—In addition to the main enemy headquarters (COSVN), the area contains a large complex of troop and logistics facilities, ammunition storage areas, hospitals, prisoner of war camps and command/control headquarters for one division and six regiments.

—To insure success under Option 1, a preponderance of US participation would be required.

—There is minimal risk to noncombatants in attacking this base area. There are also no known Cambodian units in this area.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal File, Box 58, Speech File, NSC, Ground Operations in Cambodia. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Sent for information.

<sup>2</sup> Tabs A–D are attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> The President underlined the phrases: "minimal risk to combatants in attacking" and "no known Cambodian units in this area."

—The plan would take three to four weeks to conduct.

—The enemy is well-entrenched with an estimated strength of 4,000 men and a reserve of approximately 8,000 others who could be sent to the area in event of attack. Casualties to US/ARVN units would probably be of high intensity.

In considering operations which would emphasize ARVN participation, MACV felt that attacks on the Parrot's Beak and Base Area 704 would be preferable. MACV pointed out the following considerations concerning operations in these areas:

—Compared with the option of attacking COSVN (Base Area 352/353), these operations have the advantages of shorter duration, more favorable terrain and the probability of fewer US/ARVN casualties.

—Some US involvement would be required in both cases. However, US participation in attacks on Base Area 704 would be limited primarily to air and naval support. US ground forces were considered necessary for attacks on the Parrot's Beak.

—Attacks in the Parrot's Beak area involve substantial risk of non-combatant casualties because of the density of the civilian population. In Base Area 704 noncombatant civilian population is light.

—Base Area 704 contains troop cantonments, medical and logistics facilities and headquarters elements. Enemy strength is estimated to be 1,000.

—The Parrot's Beak area contains base camps and training sites, storage areas, prisoner of war compounds, hospital dispensaries, and triangular strong-points. Estimated total enemy strength is 5,830.

MACV concluded that from a military viewpoint the probability of success would justify execution of either option under the plan and recommended that the operation be carried out in April due to weather considerations.

It is important to remember that under the original MACV plan, the second option calls for combined US/ARVN operations in the Parrot's Beak and ARVN ground units alone in Base Area 704. US ground forces have not been operating in IV Corps where Base Area 704 is located and MACV did not suggest employing units in this swampy area. Under the currently approved plan for operations in the Parrot's Beak Area scheduled to commence early on the 29th, only ARVN ground units are involved. Therefore, if it is decided to attack Base Area 704 also it will probably be necessary to replace some ARVN units currently slated for the Parrot's Beak Area with US forces and use the ARVN units in the attack on Base Area 704.

The full MACV plan submitted on March 30 is at Tab B, and a map showing options 1 and 2 is at Tab C. A brief precis of the currently approved plan for an all-ARVN operation in the Parrot's Beak is at Tab D.

**265. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 27, 1970, 1806Z.

WHS0033. Greatly regret necessity for inconvenience this message must entail for you and General Abrams. However, President has instructed that I obtain, on a most urgent basis, your combined views on the proposed operation in Base Area 352/353. (I recognize that it will be necessary for you to contact General Abrams immediately at this inconvenient hour in order to have a response here in Washington by the close of business today Washington time.)

Please furnish your combined answers to the following questions. General Abrams will, of course, be best able to respond to those of a purely military nature.

1. With respect to overall desirability, do you and General Abrams recommend implementation of the combined US/ARVN attack in Base Area 352/353 on its merits in relation to:

A. Other base areas?

B. Other comparable military efforts which could be made elsewhere in South Vietnam?

In other words the President is anxious to learn whether or not you both favor an attack on COSVN headquarters as a first choice among the base areas available or, whether you favor any attack by U.S. forces on Cambodian sanctuaries in light of the effect such an attack would have on your overall security posture in South Vietnam.

2. With respect to timing, would you prefer to withhold implementation of the operation until the ARVN operation in the Parrot's Beak has been completed or to launch it now given all of circumstances, including difficulties imposed by simultaneous operations, impending rainy season, the overall military and psychological impact achieved by near simultaneous operations?

3. What are your respective views on what this operation can be expected to accomplish militarily and politically?

4. In light of General Abrams' message of March 30th and in light of the operation against the Parrot's Beak, would General Abrams

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 84, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files—Far East, Cambodia (covert). Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

prefer, if he had the choice, to conduct the operation against Base Area 704 rather than Base Area 352/353?

You should know question has been raised here whether General Abrams really wants to conduct this operation on its merits or whether he favors it only because he assumes it represents the President's wishes. The President, therefore, wants yours and General Abrams' unvarnished views on the foregoing questions and will be heavily guided by them. Please show this message to General Abrams.

5. What is your best estimate of friendly casualties to be expected from operation in Base Area 352/353 based on current intelligence?

Best regards.

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**266. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to President Nixon<sup>1</sup>**

Saigon, April 27, 1970, 2222Z.

251. Eyes Only Henry A. Kissinger. Ref: WHS-0033.<sup>2</sup>

1. General Abrams and I have considered carefully questions raised in reftel. Answers follow:

1A. General Abrams feels that combined US/ARVN attack in Base Areas 352/353 is most desirable in relation to any other base area.

1B. General Abrams also feels that attack on Base Areas 352/353 is relatively of greater value than other military efforts which could be made elsewhere at this time.

We both agree that attack on this area should have maximum unsettling effect on the enemy who has considered until now his sanctuaries immune to ground attack. Conversely it should have beneficial effect on both our own and ARVN forces who have long felt handicapped by this restriction. The political effect in Viet-Nam should be a distinct plus. As General Abrams points out, Base Area 352/353 has consistently been an area of maximum enemy activity and we both feel that hitting him there will have the maximum effect both militarily and psychologically.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 410, Backchannel Messages, Southeast Asia, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only; Flash. Received at 2308Z in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> Document 265.



We do not feel attack on any other base area would have as great an effect on the overall security posture of our forces in South Viet-Nam. We believe that the attacks on the Cambodian sanctuaries as now planned will improve the security posture of our own and Vietnamese forces.

With regard to timing, General Abrams' view is that the closer the operations in the Parrot's Beak or on Base Area 352/353 can be coordinated, the greater will be the impact on the enemy. Forces and resources available are adequate to support simultaneous operations. There is not much time remaining before the beginning of the rainy season, consequently the operation should be initiated as soon as practicable.

3. The Parrot's Beak has been the base for enemy operations directed at Saigon and the Upper Delta over the past two years. The Base Area 352/353, as stated above, has been a focus on enemy operational, logistical, administrative, and command and control activities for a long time. General Abrams and I feel therefore that the attacks on the Parrot's Beak and Base Area 352/353 would have greater significance militarily and politically than attacks on any other areas.

4. In our estimation 704 does not rank in importance with Base Areas 352/353 or the Parrot's Beak.

From Abrams:

It is my independent view that these attacks into the enemy's sanctuaries in Cambodia are the military move to make at this time in support of our mission in South Viet-Nam both in terms of security of our own forces and for advancement of the Vietnamization program.

5. With respect to friendly casualties in 352/353, both our own and Vietnamese, every effort will be made to keep these to an absolute minimum. The pre-attack preparations will be as heavy as we can make them, all in the interest of holding casualties in the attack to the minimum.

6. Best regards.

## 267. Memorandum of Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 28, 1970.

PRESENT

The President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Attorney General

SUBJECT

Cambodia/South Vietnam

The subject meeting was held in the Oval Office of The President on Tuesday, April 28, 1970, commencing at 10:20 a.m. and lasting for approximately twenty minutes.

The President stated that the purpose of the meeting was to advise those present of the decisions he had reached with respect to the developing situation in South Vietnam and Cambodia. The President further stated that he had had the subject under constant consideration for the past ten days and had taken into consideration all of the information provided by the Director of Central Intelligence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Admiral McCain and his staff at the briefing in Hawaii. The President further stated that, in arriving at his decision, he had taken into consideration the positions taken by the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense in opposition to the use of U.S. Forces in Cambodia and the fact that Dr. Kissinger was leaning against the recommendation of such use.

The President further stated that the previous day he had made certain inquiries of Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams. The Pres-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 3, Memorandum for the President, Beginning April 26, 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Kissinger describes this meeting in *White House Years*, p. 502, and prints it on p. 1485. On April 27 at 5:34 p.m., Kissinger told the President that it was Mitchell's view that Laird and Rogers had to know that the President was considering the attack on COSVN, noting that Laird waylaid Mitchell and warned against it. Nixon asked if Kissinger had talked to anyone besides Mitchell. Kissinger replied he had talked to Helms and Wheeler who would support the move into the Parrot's Beak. The President then stated that Rogers briefed him on his testimony before Fulbright: "One thing certainly happened: Rogers is selling the Parrot's Beak to the Senators since we moved into the COSVN thing." Kissinger agreed with the President that they would "take heat" for the decision. The President responded: "You take the heat if you don't do anything. You take it for the Parrot's Beak, COSVN. Rogers and Mansfield will attack us for COSVN. If we lose the whole thing, what will they say?" Kissinger replied that "Vietnamization is a failure." Nixon replied: "We are not going to lose that way." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 27; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

ident read his communication to Ambassador Bunker and the Ambassador's reply received late Monday evening.<sup>2</sup>

The President further stated that, based upon his review of the general Cambodian situation, he had decided not to change the current U.S. position with respect to military assistance to Cambodia or his authorization for the ARVN operation in the Parrot's Beak. The President further stated that he had decided to confirm the authorization for a combined U.S./GVN operation against COSVN headquarters in Fish Hook in order to protect U.S. Forces in South Vietnam. The President expressed the opinion that the COSVN operation was necessary in order to sustain the continuation of the Vietnamization Program and would possibly help in, but not detract from, U.S. efforts to negotiate peace.

The President further stated that he had taken into consideration, in arriving at his decisions, the probable adverse reaction in some Congressional circles and some segments of the public. The President further stated that, in order to establish the record of the events leading to his decisions and the advice he had received concerning the subject matter thereof, the previous evening he had dictated a tape which included the contrary recommendations of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.<sup>3</sup>

At the close of the President's statements he left the Oval Office to attend another meeting in the Cabinet Room. There was no discussion of the subject matter of the meeting by the others in attendance during the presence of the President.

**JN Mitchell**

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<sup>2</sup> Documents 265 and 266.

<sup>3</sup> Not found.

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

Washington, April 28, 1970.

SUBJECT

ONE Estimate of Hanoi's Strategy in Cambodia

In response to my request the Office of National Estimates has prepared an assessment of Hanoi's strategy in Cambodia.<sup>2</sup> The paper has not yet been cleared by Mr. Helms. The paper discusses the following topics:

*I. Cambodia's Role in the War*

ONE states that Cambodia's role in the war is vital to Hanoi for the following reasons:

—If Hanoi could not use Cambodia for sanctuary, infiltration, and supplies, it would have to reassess its ability to continue the war in South Vietnam along present lines.

—Hanoi's immediate concern would be the loss of sanctuary areas, particularly opposite III Corps and IV Corps.

—Hanoi also needs the base areas, which "provide the foundation upon which rest Communist expectations of maintaining an effective military/political apparatus in southern South Vietnam while the U.S. withdrawal proceeds." The southern base areas have grown rapidly in the last two years.

—The base structure also supports infiltration, handling an estimated 65,000 NVA personnel in 1969 (about 60 percent of total NVA infiltration that year).

—Cambodia has long been an important source of supply, mainly rice. These supplies could probably be replaced.

—The port of Sihanoukville is also important to Hanoi, enabling it to ship ordnance to its forces in South Vietnam. An estimated 2,000 tons of ordnance passed through Sihanoukville between October 1968 and January 1970, amounting to about one half of the Communist supply requirements during this period in II Corps, III Corps, and IV

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 507, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IV, 24 April 1970–7 May 1970. Secret. Sent for information. Kissinger initialed this memorandum, and a stamped note reads: "HAK has seen."

<sup>2</sup> Not found.

Corps. However, the loss of Sihanoukville would not be critical so long as overland trails are available.

## *II. Hanoi's Assumptions*

ONE believes that Hanoi now makes the following assumptions:

—That there is little likelihood of renewed arms shipments through Sihanoukville.

—That the U.S. will bomb the sanctuaries, bases, and routes in sparsely populated northeast Cambodia.

—Most seriously, Hanoi fears allied plans regarding the frontier. A loss of effective control of the bases and the territory surrounding them would be a setback of critical proportions. It would have great psychological impact as well as military impact. It must appear imperative for Hanoi to hold the key bases in Cambodia and assure their security.

—Hanoi probably assumes that the southern bases will be increasingly subject to allied encroachments, harassments, and limited air attacks. Hanoi does not fear Cambodia actions against those bases as much as ARVN attacks. It will be determined to show its readiness to try to hold key bases.

## *III. Anticipated Hanoi Actions*

On the basis of this assessment, ONE believes Hanoi will take the following action:

—To establish Communist controls along the border and further west to a depth consistent with military needs.<sup>3</sup>

—To protect the bases against attacks, but not to drop them except as a result of major allied efforts.

—If allied efforts are not sustained, to re-establish the bases and to change the entire character of the Cambodian sanctuary with new bases being developed in areas less accessible to the allies.

—One cannot exclude the possibility of a more aggressive course such as a move against Phnom Penh, but it is uncertain that Hanoi would want to undertake such a risky and costly campaign. The thrust of Hanoi's policy since mid-1968 has been to limit risks and conserve resources to concentrate on getting the U.S. out.

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<sup>3</sup> On April 28 Holdridge sent Kissinger a second memorandum reviewing and listing North Vietnamese attacks in Cambodia beginning on April 13 and extending through April 24. Holdridge prefaced his annotated list with: "We are painfully aware of the difficulties in following the fighting in Cambodia because of inconsistent and fragmentary reporting." The memorandum indicates Kissinger saw it. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 507, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IV, 24 April 1970–7 May 1970)

—It is also possible that Hanoi will still try to make a deal with Lon Nol.

—There may be a reduction in VC/NVA activities in Vietnam, particularly in the Delta, but there might be stepped up activity in I and II Corps when Communist capabilities are not likely to be affected and where Hanoi might want to draw our forces.

—It is unlikely that Hanoi will move toward early negotiations.

#### *IV. Conclusion*

ONE's conclusion is that current developments in Cambodia will bring at least temporary advantage to the non-Communist cause but that over the longer run the Communists will probably cope with the degradation of their sanctuary by reorganizing their supply lines, relocating their bases, and adjusting their combat tactics. In the meantime, Cambodia will have suffered a debilitating internal struggle, with large areas lost to Communists and "the seeds of eventual Communist control spread widely elsewhere in the country."

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### **269. Notes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 28, 1970.

#### WSAG PARTICIPANTS

Kissinger, Packard, Wheeler, Karamessines, Johnson, Green, [Ziegler]

HAK—President wants absolutely the minimum of publicity. Statements to be adhered to. No backgrounders—all other questions—no comment. Any further explanations to be referred to the President's speech in which he will report on situation in Cambodia. Emphasized. All reviewed draft statements and approved. Scenario—

Johnson: will get cable to Saigon—Bunker—texts of approved statements being sent to MACV.

—he can use texts of statements to judge Thieu's statement. We want Thieu's statement not to emphasize US involvement

—we want text of Thieu's statement—want to issue as soon as possible

—no further comment or discussion by anyone.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Principals, 4/28/70. No classification marking. The notes were apparently handwritten by Kennedy of the NSC staff.

All agree. (Ziegler present)—Let Henkin play by ear—if necessary statement but not until after Thieu and not until necessary. [illegible—Rpts?] to be held until after Washington.

HAK: When arty [artillery] and air?

W[heeler]: arty probably right away; air may be held off. Air controllers in now.

HAK: Radios.

W: Still checking in. Probably won't take US people but is checking.

J[ohnson]: AK-47s delivered!

W: Getting some AK-47 ammo—Army has contract 1 million rounds per month.

All agreed to send to Cambodia via GVN.

Green will msg [message] Rives—working on radios and ammo.

HAK: Do we tell Lon Nol that 10,000 carbines on way?

W: Rather wait till we're sure where we stand.

J: What is follow on to carbines?

W: 1,000-man packs.

K[aramessines]: Have 1 in Saigon, 9 more ready, can be in Saigon in 3 or 4 days.

J: Should alert Rives & attachés to this & get estimate whether need.

W: Will do.

HAK: Raises ammo needs for US weapons (Phnom Penh 597).<sup>2</sup>

W: Will follow up and advises what we can do & report tomorrow.

*Re 352/353*

W: Begins Thursday between 7–9 pm.

HAK: Emphasize security.

W: Briefs plan.

HAK: Who commands?

W: CG 1st Cav.

HAK: Public affairs.

—President speaks at 1000 pm

—backgrounder at WH about 4 pm.

Pack[ard]: At what point how much detail can we give on operations? Probably want to give details—press will know quickly.

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<sup>2</sup> Telegram 597 from Phnom Penh, April 21, contained a list of U.S. origin weapons, munitions, and equipment which FANK needed and which were either in critically short supply or non-existent. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 506, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. III, 10 April 1970–23 April 1970)

HAK: Pres wants to give the maximum possible credit to SVN. Wants pictures of weapons, caches, captured plans, etc. Will tie all together.

Pack: Wants to get over story how serious this has been [illegible—to our?] Vietnamization program.

J: Secy [Rogers] was asked what has changed in Cambodia?

Pack: Threat all time but reluctant to move over Cambodia.

HAK: Willing to pay price as long as enemy stayed in bases in Cambodia, but now he has gone beyond. Alex [Johnson] & Green to draft paragraphs. President wants to tie as much as possible to Vietnam.

J: May want to postpone Bunker return.

Note: 1625—HAK leaves—[to see] President.

W & K: Believe we should say we are going in for limited objective & will withdraw.

Pack: Vietnamization was [making] good progress but now the enemy has mounted strong effort against it—we have to get bases out of the way to continue to make progress.

We are [illegible, reminding?] them they cannot expand their control or bases throughout Cambodia. It's a concept at [illegible] if not stopped it can expand operations against SVN at will.

Pack: Should be careful not to look like taking on commitment.

K: Should President use maps for presentation. What should President say about Paris Peace talks?

J: Shouldn't suggest we can make progress soon.

G[reen]: Poats suggests an approach to Indonesia to buy Cambodian rice [illegible] and also to provide [illegible] to Cambodia. A telegram going out to see [if] this might work.

Return 1645 HAK: President feels he has to do this raid—convey to Hanoi we are prepared take more steps—they've got to [illegible] even. This should characterize what we should say to others. A stiff note through Habib?

1650 President comes in; 1655 President leaves.

HAK: Consultations when?

J: Best if it could be before [illegible].

HAK: By Thursday am can give you the word. Green to provide quote.

J: Will send over to WH circular telegram.

HAK: Will give the group maximum info on speech. Who needs to be informed? J[ohnson] to provide scenario on consultation & outline of what will be said. What about speech at UN by Secretary?

Ziegler [?] W and K: [illegible] good idea—does it stir up debate?



J: Will think over and comment tomorrow.

G[?]: [illegible] can take line which shows NVN we are exasperated which may lead to negotiations.

HAK: [illegible, I?] will talk to large group of Congress.

Meet—tomorrow 1010 AM.

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## 270. National Security Decision Memorandum 58<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 28, 1970.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Actions to Protect U.S. Forces in South Vietnam

I hereby rescind National Security Decision Memorandum 57<sup>2</sup> and substitute therefor the following instruction which I am promulgating to protect U.S. forces operating in South Vietnam:

—Authorization for attacks on identified North Vietnamese/Viet Cong base areas in Cambodia up to a depth of 30 kilometers. Primary responsibility for these attacks, whenever possible, should be with GVN forces with U.S. support where necessary. Combined U.S./GVN operations are also authorized. Under this specific authorization, combined U.S./GVN operations, with the exception of the already approved operation against base area 352/353, will be submitted to me for approval on a case-by-case basis.

—Authorization for the provision of U.S. tactical air/helicopter and artillery up to a depth of 30 kilometers in all base areas north of and including 352/353.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Principals, 4/28/70. Top Secret; Sensitive; Principals Only. A copy was sent to Wheeler.

<sup>2</sup> Document 260.

—This directive does not affect GVN operations inside of Cambodian territory which have been previously authorized.<sup>3</sup>

The Washington Special Actions Group is charged with coordinating these activities.

**Richard Nixon**

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<sup>3</sup> In telegram 5812 to McCain and Abrams, April 28, Wheeler informed them that the President had approved “certain military actions to protect U.S. forces operating in South Vietnam,” and repeated the authorizations as outlined in NSDM 58. Wheeler noted that his message was “an execute directive” and that the operation should commence not later than early on Friday, May 1, Saigon time. Wheeler also asked McCain and Abrams to advise when coordination with the JGS of ARVN had been completed. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 590, Cambodian Operations, Chronology, Vol. III, Nodis/Khmer, HAK)

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## **271. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 29, 1970, 10:35 a.m.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary for Defense  
Gen. Earle Wheeler, Chairman, JCS  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Thomas Karamessines, Central Intelligence Agency  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Pacific Affairs

### **SUBJECT**

Cambodia

Wheeler: The Parrot’s Beak operation got off on time. It’s been excellent for the ARVN. They have used US gunships. Resistance is light so far. The main problem has been maintaining radio contact with the advance units.

Johnson: We have a cable from Phnom Penh. The attaché is asking about the attack.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> Not found.

Kissinger: Are there any pressures in the Departments about the Vietnamese announcement?

Johnson & Packard: None yet.

Packard: DOD is holding off.

Wheeler: On the actions that were to be done:

—1000-man packs. We sent details of the contents to the attachés and request them to advise immediately. State sent parallel messages.<sup>2</sup>

—The carbines: 3000 M-2 and ammo are ready to deliver in VNAF aircraft. State has notified Phnom Penh.<sup>3</sup>

[All agreed to send the execute message.]<sup>4</sup>

Wheeler: It was recommended to buy AK-47 ammo. We can get it by August. State told Rives we are investigating.

—The Khmer: Abrams informs us the South Vietnamese are ready to transport 2100 Khmer. State has informed Phnom Penh. We are preferring to move them in VNAF aircraft.

[It was agreed to send the execute message to move them to Phnom Penh.]

Wheeler: 2000 more AK-47's will move tonight.

Johnson & Green: Galbraith thinks Malik and Suharto are receptive but they are not clear on what the Indonesians do know.

Johnson: With respect to the President's speech,<sup>5</sup> we should get to Malik fast to head off a reaction because of a conference.<sup>6</sup> Hopefully before he gets on.

Kissinger: We would like your suggestions on the topics of the speech and the language. It'll be a 15 minute speech. If we could have it by 5:00 p.m. I will have more word on the thrust of the speech by noon tomorrow. It'll be hard. We've done everything we can.

Green: We'll give you quotes from COSVN on inflicting casualties on allied forces.

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<sup>3</sup> In telegram 064225 to Phnom Penh, April 29, 1430Z, the Department informed the Embassy about the 3,000 carbines and stated that the Embassy was authorized to discuss with Cambodia arrangements for the Khmer Krom irregulars to be airlifted by the GVN to Cambodia. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

<sup>4</sup> All brackets in the source text.

<sup>5</sup> The President's speech of April 30 is printed in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 405-410.

<sup>6</sup> In telegram 064560 to Djakarta, April 29, 0044Z, Green asked Galbraith to assure Malik that the Cambodian operations in no way meant that the United States did not welcome Indonesia's initiative for an Asian conference on Cambodian neutrality. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

Wheeler: On the list of ammo and communications, this is what can be done:

—Radios. It would take \$18 million. We can't identify all of it and we don't have all of it anyway. It's a problem of technical capability.

Johnson: Can we send a signal officer from Bangkok or Saigon? We don't want to put a mission in to operate.

Packard: Commercial equipment might be found.

[All agree we should send someone in.]

Wheeler: We will work with CIA to see what equipment is available and we'll send a signal officer.

Johnson: We will work out the scenario for informing. Most of it would be done by telegram.

Kissinger: We will have something fairly firm by 7:00 p.m.

The President wants a firm line with the French.

He has decided not to send Habib to see the North Vietnamese. I have reported the unanimous view to the President that the UN is not a good idea.

When will Lon Nol be informed?

Johnson: I will put it in the scenario. It'll be fairly shortly before the operation.

Kissinger: We'll meet tomorrow morning.

Johnson: We will get over some ideas on the speeches and scenario this afternoon.

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## 272. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 30, 1970, 2:55 p.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director, Central Intelligence Agency  
Thomas Karamessines, Central Intelligence Agency  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
General Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
General John A. Vogt, USAF  
Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Brigadier General, Alexander Haig, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Colonel Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

SUBJECT

Cambodia

[The meeting began with General Haig in the chair.]<sup>2</sup>

[All agree on the need to put the traffic on the existing operations in front channels. Wheeler is sending a message implementing.]

Helms: It is okay to go with one 1,000-man pack. We will see how this goes and what they can do with them. A man will go along to work with the Defense Attaché. It will be ordered today. Johnson will alert Phnom Penh.

Johnson: We should bring Bunker and Habib back. This should be well publicized. They are scheduled to arrive Washington on the 6th.

Packard: I agree.

Green: I suggest he might come back a day early.

[All agree we can wait and see how to play this.]

Haig: About the speech.<sup>3</sup> The speech will be at 9:00. There will be a briefing for Congressional leadership and Cabinet at 8:00 p.m. with the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State and General Wheeler. Dr. Kissinger will brief the press. Concurrently, there will be a briefing on the Hill at 8:30 by Packard and Richardson.

Have there been any reactions from the others?

Helms: TASS raised hell about escalation of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Johnson: The Chinese said that the Indochinese war entered a new phase, but the rhetoric was not strong. The British made a good statement. Lon Nol made a good statement. The Indonesian reaction was good. Malik understands our actions. He probably will ship equipment after the conference and will go ahead with the conference on the 15th and 16th of May.

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<sup>2</sup> All brackets in the source text.

<sup>3</sup> Nixon's Address to the Nation on Southeast Asia, April 30; for text, see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 405–410.

<sup>4</sup> The Soviet Chargé handed Kissinger a protest note on April 29 stating in part: "Moscow would like President Nixon to be clear about our definitely negative attitude towards United States interference into the internal affairs of Cambodia." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 507, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IV, 24 April 1970–7 May 1970)

Packard: We are shipping about as much as they can handle.

Wheeler: We are sending a signal officer to Phnom Penh to survey communications requirements. Ambassador Johnson will advise Rives.

Haig: Dr. Kissinger and the President are concerned that statements not cast aspersions on South Vietnam. Also he wants information out quickly.

Packard: We have pictures. What about the scenario?

Haig: We will get a scenario to Ziegler and recommend that Ziegler, Henkin, and McCloskey have a meeting.

Johnson: We want a transcript of Henry's briefing and a summary of the speech to get to the posts quickly. It should have the key points. We will do special letters to Schuman and Stewart from the Secretary.

Haig: How about Thant?

Johnson: Treat him like the other posts. Yost will see him hopefully before the speech.

Haig: Lon Nol?

Johnson: He needs to be given the general lines of the speech.

Haig: We will get a summary of the speech to all of you.

[At 1530, Mr. Ziegler arrives. He reviews Packard's game plan. He will contact Henkin and McCloskey.]

Wheeler: We need a psy war operation to get the Viet Cong defectors.

[All agree.]

Helms: Should we think about a senior negotiator? To give them the idea we are willing to talk?

Johnson: I don't think it is time. If they evidence any interest, then we can consider it.

Packard: I agree with Alex.

Johnson: We will send Habib back with instructions to take a firm line. Then see what their reaction is.

[Dr. Kissinger arrived at 1545.]

Kissinger: This is the speech. We are going into Vietnamese occupied territory in Cambodia for purpose of protecting American lives. Their concentration of main force units is in the base areas while their guerrillas are operating in South Vietnam. We are committed to Cambodian neutrality.

The speech describes the sanctuaries and points out what is in them. He says that recently they have taken guerrilla actions and their concentration is in the base areas. There is one contiguous base area which could be supplied from the sea.

We had three choices: One is to do nothing. This is an unacceptable risk after the next troop withdrawal. The second choice is massive

military assistance. That would be too late to do any good. We shall do our best in concert with others. The third option was to clean out the major sanctuaries.

Therefore, in cooperation with South Vietnam, attacks are being launched to clean out the major base areas. We are going into Parrot's Beak. In the other areas it's a joint operation. We have no intention of staying in these areas.

He will say he has warned Hanoi. He has done everything—cut forces, reduced air attacks—and has warned them. This situation is intolerable. We are willing to negotiate. All our offers stand and the channels are open. He warns again.

There will be no more briefing after the speech for 24 hours.

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**273. Telegram From the Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (McCain), and the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Abrams)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, May 1, 1970, 2239Z.

C6037. Subj: Attack of Additional Base Areas in Cambodia.

1. The President met with the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff this morning to outline his objectives for the next 30 days.<sup>2</sup> It is his desire to employ maximum feasible military strength against the remaining base areas in Cambodia which you consider important to enemy operations and which can be attacked with available US and RVNAF forces. He desires that this program be carried out

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 590, Cambodian Operations, Chronology, Vol. III, Nodis/Khmer, HAK. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. Drafted by Paul Kearney, Administrative Assistant to the Chairman of the JCS.

<sup>2</sup> Nixon, accompanied by Kissinger and Ziegler, met with the Joint Chiefs, Laird, Packard, and other JCS and Department of Defense officials from 8:41 to 10:25 a.m. at the Pentagon. (Ibid., White House Central Files, Daily Diary) After leaving the meeting, Nixon engaged in an informal conversation with Pentagon employees which was taped by a reporter. The President said: "You see those kids out there [troops in Vietnam]. I say 'kids.' I have seen them. They are the greatest. You see bums, you know, blowing up the campuses. Listen, the boys on the college campuses today are the luckiest people in the world, going to great universities, and here they are burning books, I mean storming around this issue—I mean you name it—get rid of war; there will be another one. Out there [Vietnam] we've got kids who are just doing their duty. I have seen them. They stand tall . . ." (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, p. 417)

through a bold and aggressive approach. The objective is to hit the enemy the hardest blow possible and to destroy as much of the enemy's base areas in Cambodia as is militarily feasible.

2. While he desires the operations to be conducted initially within 30 kilometers of the border, he will consider further extensions if you consider this necessary or desirable. He considers these Cambodian base area operations to be the number one priority now for our operations in Southeast Asia. You are authorized to prepare the plans without restrictions on the use of U.S. or ARVN forces, including air assets, for this purpose. You are requested to use your judgment in allocating resources and to advise higher authority if our forces in South Vietnam are jeopardized in any way by this guidance.

3. In order to maintain the initiative, higher authority desires an outline plan for attack of an additional base area as soon as you can submit it, but, hopefully, no later than 2400 Z, 2 May. I am aware that you have done additional planning with the RVNAF, and that other operations have been planned. You are requested to complete arrangements for an attack into one additional base area, either with RVNAF forces, or with combined forces, to begin the earliest possible time next week. Please advise when this planning has been completed and submit your proposed date for initiation of operations.

4. In accordance with the desire of higher authority to attack effectively as many base areas as is militarily feasible within the next 30 days, you are further requested to provide a plan ASAP for operations into additional base areas of your choice. This plan should provide for as much of the destruction of the remaining enemy base structure as is possible within your resources and capabilities. Again, in your planning for these operations you are to consider all resources available to you. This outline plan for remaining operations is desired ASAP, but in any case in time to insure that there is no major break in operations following the next operation scheduled in accordance with paragraph 3 above.

5. As I have indicated above, higher authority desires a hard hitting campaign to be carried out using imagination and boldness. The enemy should receive the hardest blow we are capable of inflicting in his Cambodian sanctuary areas. If you need increased air assets for the next 30 days, let me know immediately. Warm regards.



## 274. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, May 1, 1970, 11:35 a.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
Thomas Karamessines, Central Intelligence Agency  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Acting Chairman, JCS  
General Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman, JCS  
General John A. Vogt, USAF  
Amb. U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Colonel Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

### SUBJECT

Laos; Cambodia

Kissinger: Is there press pressure for more information?

Johnson: The question is: are we delivering American arms? Rives has asked. I suggest we say yes, we are giving some Americans small arms and they are going into South Vietnam. We should ask Saigon first.

Packard: Small arms in limited quantities.

Green: Is this ARVN arms?

[All Agree. We should ask Saigon. Johnson will do it.]<sup>2</sup>

Helms: We have been asked to raise a third Thai battalion for Laos to allow them to move Laos troops back to Southern Laos. Vang Pao has asked.<sup>3</sup> The Ambassador has not endorsed this. Souvanna has not asked.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, Principals, 5/1/70. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> This and all substantive brackets are in the source text.

<sup>3</sup> Vang Pao made this request to the Chief of Station who was visiting Long Tieng on April 29. Vang Pao suggested the Thais could replace Meo (Hmong) irregulars manning the defensive line northeast of Sam Thong and northwest of Tha Tam Bleung, thus freeing the Hmong to dislodge the North Vietnamese from Ban Na area and denying the enemy a forward logistics base. (Telegram 066623 to Vientiane and Bangkok, May 1; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 LAOS)

Kissinger: Is a third battalion ready?

Karamessines: Yes.

Kissinger: Let's get a sensible assessment from Unger and Godley.

Johnson: I will do it.<sup>4</sup>

Packard: The intelligence assessment is that the NVA have enough to mount on attack after the rainy season begins. This is contrary to our earlier assessment. We need a new assessment.

Helms: I will get an assessment.<sup>5</sup>

Kissinger: I will tell the President we are looking into this and will hold for 24 hours.

[Dr. Kissinger leaves at 11:45.]

Johnson: Let me raise the subject of the Khmer Krom. We need to clarify our status vis-à-vis the GVN and the Cambodians. We have said that basic logistics are the responsibility of Cambodia except for "peculiar support." I refer to Phnom Penh 692.<sup>6</sup> Who is going to pay them?

Packard: It'll be good if we can.

Johnson: I agree, but the problem is "mercenaries." It's a political problem.

Green: The mission is now different—to protect Cambodia.

Johnson: Could we pay? It would be good for morale.

Helms/Packard: DOD pays it now.

Packard: We can't get to them in Cambodia.

Johnson: Put all supply actions into regular channels rather than Nodis/Khmer. I have a draft cable. It's consistent with the Defense guidance.

Helms: The question of small arms delivery. In the future, they should submit the questions in regular channels.

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<sup>4</sup> In telegram 3113 from Vientiane, Godley reported he was informed of Vang Pao's request. Godley reviewed the military situation and then agreed that a third Thai battalion was needed in Long Tieng. (Ibid.) In telegram 5342 from Bangkok, May 2, Unger reported that he expected the Thai Government would be prepared to send a third battalion because they had initially offered a regimental combat team. (Ibid., POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

<sup>5</sup> According to a May 2 memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, Johnson, Packard, and Wheeler, the Station Chief in Laos did not believe that the North Vietnamese would be able to launch a major offensive in MR II after the first week in July. The North Vietnamese were currently fighting a three-front war—South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—and northeast Laos was the lowest priority front. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 146, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, May 1, 1970)

<sup>6</sup> In telegram 692 from Phnom Penh, May 1, the Embassy reported that Cambodian authorities asked if the United States intended to continue to pay Khmer Krom troops and, if so, for how long? (Ibid., Box 589, Cambodian Operations (1970), Cambodia, Nodis/Khmer (Vol. I))

Packard: Dick [Helms] has a point. It avoids flagging the issue. We can protect it long enough to do what is needed.

Helms: Straight Nodis would do.

Packard: Okay.

[All agree to a cable.]

Johnson: The Secretary doesn't want to expedite Bunker's return. He says we should let him come on the 6th as planned. Also we did *not* send a special message to Paris. We decided it was best to let the French think about it. We did send one to Stewart.

Moorer: I want to arrange a Market Time operation along the Cambodian coast. We will tell Lon Nol to work it out.

Johnson: Could we get a draft?

Packard: How about reconnaissance in north Laos? We have a proposal.

Johnson: I want a reading on what we know.

Packard: We need to know what is going on. The question will be what is the impact on China?

Johnson: I will be in touch on that.

Packard: [3 lines of source text not declassified]

Johnson: It's a necessary evil.

Helms: We don't have a mechanism in Cambodia to pass the pay to them.

Packard: Could we turn over the money to the Cambodians?

Johnson: Would it ever get to the Khmer Krom?

Vogt: Use the Battalion Commander to pay them and make him responsible. We have supply arrangements—we use one airplane every two nights. We could pass the pay this way.

Green/Packard: The pay could be on the same basis as now vis-à-vis the South Vietnamese Army.

Johnson: Can we find out specifically what they are paid, by whom, etc.?

Helms: I'll check.<sup>7</sup>

Johnson: The cable doesn't say we need to. It just asks whether we do.

Helms: The Cambodians are broke.

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<sup>7</sup>In a May 2 memorandum from Helms to Kissinger, Johnson, Packard, and Wheeler, Helms reported that the MACV was handling payment of the Khmer Krom since they were part of the U.S. Special Forces CIDG troop complement, but that once they went to Cambodia they were the responsibility of the Lon Nol government. (Ibid., Box 507, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IV, 4/24/70–5/7/70)

Vogt: We have to pay them if they are to be effective.

[All agree.]

Johnson: What public posture should we take? If there are direct questions, we should say yes, they are ethnic Cambodians who wanted to return to fight for their country and South Vietnam let them go.

[All agree to going to Saigon/Phnom Penh with this line.]

Green: How do we supply logistic support?

Vogt: By GVN aircraft to Phnom Penh—maybe drops. There will be no U.S. advisors.

Green: Go out with suggested press guidance to Phnom Penh and Saigon.

[All agree.]

Packard: It makes a sonic boom. They'll know something is going on. It doesn't seem provocative.

Johnson: Let it go on.

Packard: Our drones are improving. We may have a capability soon.

Johnson: In the Far East we had no problems in the official reactions. Malik deplored it. He changed it to regret—but he told us he would. The Russians—we've heard nothing since. The Chinese made another blast. Lon Nol said he had no advance warning, but he was clearly not angry. He had harsh words for the VC.

Packard: Can't we get him to use North Vietnamese instead of VC?

Green: We should try to do this.

Johnson: We will get a message out to Rives.

Helms: They'll get 100,000 rounds on 3rd, and the pack within a day or two.

[At 12:30 the President comes in with Dr. Kissinger.]

[At 12:45 the President leaves.] Dr. Kissinger then reviewed the foregoing discussion with the principals. The following was agreed:

—Okay to Market Time.

—Okay on the SR-71.

—Dr. Kissinger will let all know tomorrow the reactions on the third Thai battalion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions, May 1, the following decisions were noted: "1. A Market Time operation along the Cambodian coast was approved. 2. A SR-71 flight over Laos was approved. 3. We should get an assessment by tomorrow of the need for raising a third Thai battalion for Laos to allow them to move Laotian troops back to South Laos." (Ibid., NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Principals, 5/1/70)

## 275. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, May 4, 1970, 11:15 a.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
Thomas Karamessines, Central Intelligence Agency  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
General John A. Vogt, USAF  
Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Colonel Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

### SUBJECT

Cambodia

Johnson: The Secretary wants to know how we carry 1,500 KIA when only light contact has been made.

Packard: Much of it is from the air.

Johnson: How solid are these figures?

Packard: I don't know.

Karamessines: One hundred and thirty-three were seen killed. There must be some contact. We aren't stressing KIA. The primary objective is supplies.

Packard: Our casualties have been very low.

Karamessines: The prisoner total is high.

Johnson: [Reviewed the COMINT summary.]<sup>2</sup>

Vogt: That suggests much confusion and serious disruption. COSVN's effectiveness has been cut. They can't control their units. The enemy is making some effort today to regroup.

Johnson: Is there any evidence we are taking pressure off the Cambodians?

Vogt: We have taken the pressures off Svay Rieng.

Green: How far west of Svay Rieng will they go?

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970, 5/4/70. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> All brackets in the source text.

Vogt: They are staying there.

Kissinger: Alex, how about the foreign reactions?

Johnson and Green: Malik is going ahead with the meeting. Ten have accepted. They will come up with resolutions supporting Cambodia's neutrality, calling for a reactivation of the ICC, some UN presence for Cambodia, and he invited the other Asians.

Johnson: I would like information to the posts on air action in the North.

Packard: Defense is making a statement today.

Kissinger: This phase is terminated but we want to keep our options open.

Packard: A statement has been carefully avoided. We've called it "reinforced protective reaction."

Moorer: They were effective strikes. We caught them by surprise.

Packard: We have lost two U.S. planes.

Kissinger: Dave, be sure the statement is given to State.

Johnson: McCloskey will be in touch with Henkin.

Kissinger: How about Rives (Phnom Penh 717) cable?<sup>3</sup>

Johnson: What does this mean?

Vogt: There are many enemy fire bases in the area of Takeo.

Kissinger: Just behind 704?

Vogt: Abrams isn't pushing but he wants to move against 704. He would need air controllers on the ground for the air. Probably some Americans would be needed. They could get VNAF controllers, but they are scarce.

Johnson: If we could mount an attack on 704 by sun-up, it would be better.

Vogt: It would include also a Riverine operation. The operation would have some Americans but mostly ARVN.

Johnson: It is appropriate to go to Phnom Penh and say we recognize the problem and are working at ways to help.

Green: It's appropriate to keep up their spirits but we don't want them to rest on their oars.

Vogt: We will send the execute on 702 this morning.

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<sup>3</sup> In telegram 717 from Phnom Penh, May 3, the Embassy passed on a request from the Cambodian military for U.S.-ARVN air strikes on North Vietnamese positions around Takeo and U.S. air lift of Khmer Krom from South Vietnam to the Takeo area. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, May 4-8, 1970)

Kissinger: How long will 702 take?

Vogt: Seven–ten days.

Kissinger: Nothing is authorized yet but 702.

Johnson: Shouldn't we authorize 704, Riverine and the other as soon as possible?

Kissinger: Can't we get ARVN to take a positive attitude, not condescending?

Green: Go to Rives. Say we are working out ways to be helpful.

Johnson: They were asking for American action, thus Rives' views seems right.

Kissinger: No, that is right, but we have to keep their spirits up. The general strategy is to relieve pressure by actions against the bases.

Johnson: We are not going to get U.S. helicopters in there. We should tell them so and tell them they should move Khmer Krom.

Kissinger: I agree, but let's keep our answers to specific requests.

Packard: We tell them it's important for the Cambodians to keep their forces pressing inside Cambodia.

[At 11:45 Dr. Kissinger left.]

Nutter: We have some of these T-28 parts.

Green: Can't we put an Air Attaché on this in Phnom Penh?

Johnson: Can't we authorize the Air Attaché to find out where this stands and if it's not in train, ask Udorn to ship them down? We should go back out to Rives and (1) verify his needs, and (2) see if the stuff is not coming and to authorize the Air Attaché to get it from whatever sources available.

Packard: We will send one to the Attaché also.

Johnson: On Khmer Krom pay: I would like to hold the pay in escrow, making payments—family allowances—where needed.

Packard: Do we have contact with their families?

Johnson: I don't know, but we need to find out if it's feasible.

Leave it up to the Cambodians to pay a subsistence allowance. We take the posture that they are off our payroll if they are Cambodians.

Helms: We need to find out who commands them.

[At 11:55 Dr. Kissinger returns.]

Johnson: No one knew they were under direct U.S. command. All of us were under the same impression that they were nominally under the South Vietnamese.

If we pay them direct, we will have mercenaries and we can't say there are no U.S. forces in Cambodia.

Kissinger: How do they get paid in Cambodia?

Johnson: The Cambodians pay subsistence.

Nutter: Congress will ask how they are normally paid.

Johnson: We will have to say they were paid by U.S. Special Forces but we are not paying them in Cambodia.

Helms: If they don't get paid, they will sour. I don't know whether Cambodia can pay.

Packard: We are still subject to criticism if we put it in escrow.

Johnson: Can't we shift their pay to South Vietnam?

Packard: This is better.

Kissinger: We could say that when they went over, they transferred to the South Vietnamese.

Let's send messages to Bunker and Abrams. I suggest our first choice is to transfer them to South Vietnam—we compensate them about \$150,000 a month—and our second choice is the escrow idea.<sup>4</sup>

How about the T-28/A-1?

Packard: I will check and report tomorrow.

What about A-2 liaison?

Vogt: It seemed impractical because of the confused situation on the ground.

Packard: Okay. I agree not to send it.

Johnson: We want to be sure to get out to Lon Nol to inform him ahead of time before the operations begin. We will inform him promptly on 702.<sup>5</sup>

Packard: We will set up a procedure to inform State in advance.

Kissinger: What is the press guidance on 702? Does MACV announce this routinely?

Moorer: We will announce it routinely in Saigon.

Helms: Can we delay this announcement for a day or so?

Kissinger: Let's get guidance. Can MACV restrain themselves for a few days? We want to get guidance—we can call attention to the SecDef's statement and this is a continuation. We will say nothing until asked, and then low key.

Packard: We will coordinate this.

Johnson: We would like five hours notice.

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<sup>4</sup> Done in telegram 67434 to Saigon, May 4. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

<sup>5</sup> Done in telegram 67369 to Phnom Penh, May 4. (Ibid.)



Packard: Moorer will set this up to include a description of the operation which is meaningful to Lon Nol.

Kissinger: It would be helpful if we can get an operation concluded and we could announce it. I don't want to press this, but if we could show limited operations, this would help us stay longer in COSVN. Maybe even announce that some have been withdrawn when they are.

Moorer: On the Riverine operation, I have asked Abrams for a time schedule. We will try to put all three out at roughly the same time.

Kissinger: I will tell the President there can be no tac air strikes because we would have to put controllers on the ground. I am not in favor of helicopter lift.

Let's discuss Thai Bien.

Johnson: Is it clear this is a temporary operation during the dry season, with the forces to be withdrawn in wet season?

Packard: We can't tell.

Moorer: The North Vietnamese may have stocked for operations in the rainy season.

Helms: There is no talk yet about withdrawing.

Johnson: Unger raises the question of equipping and training additional Thai forces. They will push for increased training and/or equipment or withdraw their forces from South Vietnam. If this is an indefinite deployment, we should begin to determine our position on more training/equipment and withdrawal from South Vietnam. We have a whole RCT we thought of as a reserve. Do we need to move the SGU battalions back south?

Helms: We are training three new units of SGU in the south but they won't be ready until June, July, August. The assessment is the NVA won't attack in the north during the rainy season.

The units won't stay in the north anyway. They don't like it there.

Kissinger: What is the view of this group about a third battalion?

Johnson: The Chinese can give us a time if they beefed up their forces along the road they are building. It's a logical move for them to make.

Packard: That is the biggest danger of all.

Johnson: They can't say this was triggered by this battalion.

Packard: They have alerted their intelligence but haven't found anything yet.

Johnson: A move like this would scare the Thai and would scare the United States.

Helms: The fall of Laos would be a headache for us. I think the battalion is needed.

Packard: We should advise the President we might have to do more for the Thais.

Green: Should the CIA give an estimate on the Chinese?

Kissinger: We will get word this afternoon.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions, May 4, the following decisions were noted: "1. The execute on 702 would be sent this morning. 2. U.S. helicopters should not go into Cambodia. The South Vietnamese should be told this and that they should move the Khmer Krom. We should keep our answers to specific requests. 3. Messages should be sent to Bunker and Abrams indicating that our first choice was to have the South Vietnamese pay the Khmer Krom for which we would compensate them about \$150,000 a month. Our second choice was to hold the pay escrow making payments (family allowances) where needed. 4. There could be no tac air strikes because we would have to put controllers on the ground." (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meetings, May 4-8, 1970)

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## 276. Editorial Note

On April 27, 1970, and with revisions on May 3, Senior Military Adviser Brigadier General Haig sent Vernon Walters two messages through their special channel requesting that he contact the North Vietnamese in Paris on Monday, May 4, and pass to them an oral message. The revised message reads:

"My government has reviewed fully the implications of our last meeting and considers that these discussions as well as recent events underline the need for new approaches which might favor a continuing constructive dialogue in this forum. Guided by this attitude and the desire to bring an early end to the conflict on a just basis, my government proposes another meeting between Dr. Kissinger and Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Advisor Le Duc Tho. Dr. Kissinger stands ready to be in Paris for such a meeting any weekend from May 16 onward to suit the convenience of Minister Xuan Thuy and Special Advisor Le Duc Tho." (Telegrams from Haig to Walters, April 27 and May 3; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 853, For the President's File—Vietnam Negotiations, Sensitive, Camp David, Vol. V)

On May 8 Walters sent Haig a letter describing his meeting with Mai Van Bo. Walters stated that, "While delivering the letter to my friend, he was extremely cordial and though I had delivered the message he insisted that I remain for tea which he had ordered." Walters reported that Bo was "completely non-committal as to the message saying he would deliver it to the Minister [Xuan Thuy]. (Letter from Walters to Haig, May 8, also sent via telegram WH00593, May 15; both *ibid.*)

On May 25 Walters received a telephone call from Mai Van Bo who asked to meet him on May 26 at the usual place, the North Vietnamese villa on Rue Jules Lagaisse in Vitray, a Paris suburb. Walters met Bo who told him that he would be leaving Paris soon and introduced him to Tran Viet Dung, Counselor of the Delegation General of the DRV in France. Bo told Walter that if Dung had any message for Walters, he would contact him using Bo's code name, André. Bo stated that he would be in Hanoi for several weeks and wished to be sure that the contact was maintained through Dung. Bo made no mention of Walters' message on May 4. (Memorandum by Walters, May 26; *ibid.*) In sending a copy of this memorandum to Kissinger, Richard Smyser of the National Security Council staff noted that, "What is most striking about this message is that it does not turn off the channel despite other developments. In fact it goes to great lengths to make sure that our contact's departure from Paris is not misinterpreted by us." (Memorandum from Smyser to Kissinger, May 26; *ibid.*)

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## 277. Editorial Note

On May 4, 1970, at approximately 4:45 p.m., the President told Kissinger: "At Kent State there were 4 or 5 killed today. But that place has been bad for quite some time—it has been rather violent." Kissinger suggested that the Nixon administration would be blamed for the killings and he noted that thirty-three university presidents were appealing to the President to leave Vietnam. The President asked about the student strike, observing: "If it's peaceful it doesn't bother me." Still, Nixon worried if the students were "out of classes they'll be able to raise hell." Kissinger thought they would hold teach-ins and possibly march on Washington. Nixon hoped "we can get some people of our own to speak out." Kissinger stated that "The university presidents are a disgrace," to which Nixon replied: "They still get an inordinate amount of publicity, like the students. We have to stand hard as a rock. Everybody's been through this—de Gaulle, Marcos . . . If countries begin to be run by children, God help us." Kissinger suggested that "of course, student disorders hurt us politically." The President responded: "They don't if it doesn't appear we caused them." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, May 4; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

The reaction at American colleges and universities to Cambodia and the killings at Kent State continued to grow over the next few days.

The effects of anti-war demonstrations are not often cited in official documents, but as Chief of Staff Haldeman makes clear in *The Haldeman Diaries*, they had a profound impact on the state of mind of the President and his advisers. (pages 158–164) On May 6 Kissinger met from 3 to 4:15 p.m. with eleven students and five faculty members of Stanford University in the White House Situation Room. The students and faculty members attempted to convince Kissinger that U.S. policy in Southeast Asia was not legitimate, especially the attack on the Cambodian sanctuaries. Kissinger attempted to explain the rationale for the decision. Neither made much progress with the other. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 340, Subject Files, Stanford University, May 1970) Kissinger recalls in *White House Years* (page 510) that he met with ten student groups about Cambodia during May 1970 alone. The bulk of the memoranda of conversation of these meetings are in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, CL 268, Memoranda of Conversation, 1968–1977, December 1968–November 1970.

On May 6 from 10:41 to 11:36 a.m., President Nixon met with six Kent State students who were against the war in Vietnam. In addition, William Stanton, Congressman from Ohio, and Thomas Ball of the Kent State University Alumni Association of Washington, D.C., attended. Press Secretary Ziegler, Chief of Staff Haldeman, and Assistant to the President Ehrlichman accompanied the President. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) On May 7 the President met with eight university presidents who were members of the Association of University Presidents to discuss the demonstrations and violence on American campuses. The college presidents were William C. Friday of the University of North Carolina; Fred H. Harrington of the University of Wisconsin; G. Alexander Heard, Chancellor of Vanderbilt University; Charles C. Hitch of the University of California (Berkeley); Edward Levi of the University of Chicago; Malcolm Moos of the University of Minnesota; Nathan M. Pusey of Harvard University; and W. Allen Wallis of the University of Rochester. (Ibid., White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 81, Memoranda for the President, May 1970) Kissinger's discussion with the Stanford students and professors and Nixon's discussions with the university presidents are published in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, volume I, Documents 65 and 66.

On May 7 Secretary of State Rogers and Kissinger discussed student demonstrations, with Rogers stating: "These student protests are greater than any of us anticipated. 136 universities are now closed. If one could talk individually with them, we could change their minds." Kissinger responded: "I have been talking to student groups, but when the faculties are present, it is impossible." Rogers stated: "I had some students and faculty members from Grinnell in. The faculty had all the

credentials of erudition and thoughtfulness, but they are more emotional than the youngsters. Most of it is psychological—it's all mixed up with what Agnew said, the President's unfortunate statement about bums, their worry that they will be drafted." Kissinger responded that the Provost of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology called him to say that "he wishes he could find it in his heart to say we caused it, but we gave the pretext. MIT was ready to blow anyway." Rogers agreed that "It (the Cambodian incursion) was just the spark—it was present anyway." After Rogers suggested that "we will have to stick behind him [the President]," Kissinger suggested that "After another week or two when the troops come out, it will be better." (Transcript of telephone conversation between Kissinger and Rogers, May 7; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

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

Washington, May 5, 1970, 11:50 a.m.

### WSAG MEETING

#### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
 Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
 Thomas Karamessines, CIA  
 David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
 Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
 Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
 General Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
 General John A. Vogt, USAF  
 Amb. U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
 Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
 B/General Alexander Haig, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
 Col. Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

#### SUBJECT

Cambodia

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970, 5/5/70. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

Kissinger: [Briefed the group on the meeting of the President with the Armed Services Committees this morning.]<sup>2</sup>

We will get a sheet showing a summary of the results to date to the Secretary of State today at 1300.

Can we complete the Parrot's Beak operation by the middle of next week?

Wheeler: I will ask Abrams.

Kissinger: How about 704?

Wheeler: That will begin on 9 May.

Kissinger: Has it affected any other operations?

Wheeler: No.

Johnson: Will the 704 be done by ARVN?

Wheeler: Mostly ARVN.

Johnson: The Riverine?

Wheeler: Mostly ARVN.

Kissinger: Johnson to be informed five hours in advance.

Vogt: The procedure is all arranged.

Kissinger: How about the Khmer? [He reads the Saigon cable.]<sup>3</sup>

Johnson: I think we should turn over the pay problem to Helms. We take the position that they are off our payroll—they resigned and we paid off—and the Cambodians are now responsible.

Helms: O.K. We need the funds to be transferred from DOD.

Packard: We will work it out.

Helms: We will work out the arrangements.

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<sup>2</sup> All brackets in the source text. The President and his staff briefed the House and Senate Armed Services Committees during breakfast and then the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at 5 p.m. According to *The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 160, these briefings covered military progress and emphasized the material captured. ("P. really pushing to get this out.") Haldeman wrote that Nixon answered questions, many of them hostile, and while he did not change many minds, "at least he told his story."

<sup>3</sup> Reference is to telegram 6853 from Saigon, May 5, received 6:28 a.m. Washington time. In it Berger and Abrams stated that their guiding principle was that Khmer troops in Vietnam would join the Cambodian Army and would no longer be supported by MACV (except for ammunition, weapons, and some spare parts). As volunteers they were free to leave the CIDG program any time and South Vietnam would not accept them into ARVN. All Khmers leaving South Vietnam for Cambodia were paid off in full plus bonuses prior to their departure. Their dependent families were either melting into South Vietnam or returning to Cambodia, so funding of dependents was impossible. Berger and Abrams realized that Cambodia was short of money, but if they did not pay the Khmer troops they would not fight. Abrams and Berger suggested paying the Khmer Krom troops by reallocating CIDG funds as directed by the OSD. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

Johnson: About Phnom Penh 750,<sup>4</sup> I suggest we have a MACV officer in civilian clothes to Phnom Penh to get with the Attachés and Cambodians to brief them on what we are doing and find out what they are doing. They'll be there to establish operational liaison, but not as advisors.

Kissinger: If all agree, we'll do as quickly as possible.

[All agree.]

Wheeler: We will get out the message.

Green: We must remember the French advisors and the position of our own military attaché.

Helms: Another aspect of the problem is: we send things but nothing happens. There is no organization in the Cambodian government. They keep asking for more. How are we going to handle this? Lon Nol seems to have no idea of what's going on and what he needs. Someone who knows what is needed should be sent to get to Lon Nol and help them.

Wheeler: An officer?

Kissinger: How about an Ambassador?

Johnson: We can't do it overnight. We need to give clear guidance to Rives and the attachés what we are and are not willing to do.

Kissinger: General Wheeler, can you get the name of an officer?

Wheeler: Yes. I will call this afternoon.

Kissinger: It would help if we had someone there who could tell them that the requests don't make military sense.

Johnson: Yes, but the Embassy needs guidance.

Helms: We should determine that here.

Johnson: We will draft a general guidance message.

[All agree this is a good idea—we will consider it tomorrow.]

Johnson: We haven't heard from Saigon or the UN yet. Phnom Penh is O.K.

Kissinger: The Indonesian Ambassador asked yesterday whether we still support neutral buffer states. We agreed yes, Suharto will not embarrass us. We will provide the Memcon to Johnson.

Wheeler: Can Johnson query Rives? What is Lon Nol doing with the Khmer and the equipment?

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<sup>4</sup> In telegram 750 from Phnom Penh, May 5, Rives passed on a suggestion from the Cambodian military that MACV send an officer to Cambodia to coordinate military policy in the Parrot's Beak and Fish Hook operations. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 146, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, May 1, 1970.)

Johnson: The man from MACV can get information and have a dialogue.

Kissinger: The cable should reflect the dialogue idea, and don't send a man until Moose and Lowenstein leave.

Johnson: The Thai battalion—Souvanna has been told. Godley says they probably have to stay indefinitely. This points up Unger's view that the Thai may come to us for more training and equipment.

Kissinger: Do we need to take any action about the Moose–Lowenstein report?

Johnson and Packard: It's not too bad a report.

[All agree no action is needed.]

Kissinger: How about A-1s and T-28s?

Vogt: They're not available.

Packard: Could we divert them from VNAF? We have 120—they only need 10 for Cambodia. T-28s are not available.

Kissinger: How about 10 A-1s?

Wheeler: We will have to short the Vietnamese.

Vogt: There is some doubt they could use them or maintain them.

Wheeler: We'll ask Phnom Penh Attaché to look into it.

Kissinger: Uniforms. Can we do this, and how many?

Packard: Probably we could divert them from Saigon.

Kissinger: Let's find out from Rives what he has in mind.

Johnson: We'll ask Rives. Caution him against any figure like 200,000.

Wheeler: A 1000-man pack will have uniforms.

Packard: We will determine what we can do.<sup>5</sup>

Kissinger: We'll meet again tomorrow.

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<sup>5</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions, May 5, the following decisions were noted: "1. A summary of the results to date would be delivered to the Secretary of State by 1300 today. 2. The 704 operation conducted primarily by ARVN would begin 9 May. Johnson was to be informed five hours in advance. 3. The funds to pay the Khmer Krom should be transferred from DOD to CIA. 4. In executing Phnom Penh 750, a MACV officer in civilian clothes would brief the attachés and Cambodians in Phnom Penh. They [attachés?] would act as operational liaison, not as advisers. 5. A general guidance message indicating what we were and were not willing to do should be sent to Rives and attachés. A draft message will be considered tomorrow. 6. No action was needed on the Moose–Lowenstein report." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, May 4–8, 1970)



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

Washington, May 5, 1970.

### SUBJECT

Proposal for Attacks on Additional Base Areas in Cambodia

In order to destroy other areas which provide logistic support essential to enemy attacks in South Vietnam, MACV has proposed six additional operations against enemy base camps in Cambodia (Tab C).<sup>2</sup> The plan exploits the momentum generated by operations now underway in the Parrot's Beak and Fish Hook areas and the operation which began in Base Area 702 at 10:00 p.m. (Washington time) on May 4. MACV has proposed the following additional operations over the next 30 days.<sup>3</sup>

<i>Base Area</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date Commences</i>	<i>Forces</i>	<i>Duration</i>
350	III Corps	6 May	Combined	5–7 days
354	III Corps	8 May	Combined	7–10 days
351	III Corps	8 May	Combined	Until weather forces termination
Mekong River	IV Corps	10 May*	Combined	Throughout period
704 & Nui O Mountain	IV Corps	12 May*	ARVN (US support)	7–10 days
701	II Corps	Timing as forces become available		

\*May be one to three days earlier. [Footnote in the source text.]

<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 507, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. IV, 4/24/70–5/7/70. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. A notation on the memorandum reads: "The President has seen."

<sup>2</sup> Tab C is a retyped copy of MACV telegram MAC 5996, May 4, Abrams to Wheeler and McCain, attached but not printed.

<sup>3</sup> In a May 5 memorandum to Kissinger, Haig reported that he had spoken to Wheeler who informed him that Abrams had authorized the first three of these operations (against bases 350, 351, and 354) under authority already granted previously. Wheeler was concerned because there was no formal approval and it was too late to stop the operations. Henceforth, Wheeler asked Abrams to obtain approval for future operations.

A brief precis of each of these operations is at Tab A. A map indicating the locations of the base areas is at Tab B.<sup>4</sup>

In proposing these operations, General Abrams commented that:

—maximum pressure on the enemy in South Vietnam will be maintained throughout the campaign. Since security of the areas in South Vietnam vacated by forces operating in Cambodia will be decreased, some compensatory adjustments will be necessary and greater responsibilities given to territorial forces. This, however, is an acceptable calculated short-term risk.

—the principal risk attached to the plan is a possible major enemy attack in I Corps which could require the curtailment of operations.

—weather is a crucial factor bearing on the success of the plan and has figured heavily in the selection of areas to attack. Weather may well force termination of operations before attacks on all base areas selected can be completed.

—the South Vietnamese general staff concurs in the plan and detailed planning is proceeding on an urgent basis.

General Abrams also requested:

—authority for overflight of Cambodia, including Thai-based aircraft, in order to insure optimum use of available aircraft.

—selected release of some war readiness matériel, especially ground and air munitions, for use if necessary, and the maintaining of a capability to provide 81 additional transport aircraft in order to insure maximum logistics supporting capability and flexibility.

Operations in the Parrot's Beak and Fish Hook will continue until base areas in these regions are destroyed. MACV estimates that on about 20 May certain units assigned to these operations will be available for re-deployment into some of the base areas listed below. The operation against Base Area 702 is scheduled to commence at 10:00 p.m. (Washington time) on May 4. The following details pertain to that operation:

—*Base Area Description.* Base Area 702 is a major logistical and troop staging area for enemy units operating in South Vietnam. It is contiguous to Kontum Province in II Corps. The headquarters of the 24th NVN Regiment is believed to be in this area, as well as an enemy reconnaissance battalion. Total estimated enemy strength in the area is 600 to 900.

—*Concept.* Ground attacks would be preceded by B-52 and tactical air strikes.

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<sup>4</sup> The map was attached but is not reproduced. The base areas cited in this map correspond to those in the map in Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 248.

—*Friendly Forces*. The US 4th Infantry Division and one ARVN infantry regiment will be utilized.

—*Duration*. The estimated duration for the operation is 7 to 10 days.

The following information pertains to operations proposed by MACV.

#### I. Base Area 350.

—*Description of Base Area*. This area, which is located in III Corps, serves as a logistics storage area and sanctuary for enemy troops. Trafficability is marginal during the next 30 days in the higher elevations and may become impassable if heavy rains occur in mid-May. Troop movement will be extremely difficult except along established trails due to the dense undergrowth. The northern portion of the area is mostly multiple canopy forest; the southwestern portion of the area has some open areas. It is believed that elements of the 7th NVA Division and Rear Service Group 70 are located in this area. Total estimated enemy strength is 1500 to 1700.

—*Time of Commencement*. 6 May.

—*Concept*. A combined attack will be led by the US 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, augmented by ARVN units. The direction of attack will be along the axis of Base Area 352, north along Route 7, east along Route 13 and into Base Area 350.

—*Friendly Forces*. The US 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and ARVN units which have not yet been designated will be involved in this combined operation under the command of the Commanding General of II Field Forces Vietnam.

—*Duration*. Estimated duration is 5 to 7 days.

#### II. Base Area 354.

—*Description of Base Area*. This area, which is located in III Corps, is a training center, personnel infiltration point and sanctuary. The northern two-thirds of the area is covered with dense undergrowth which would hinder the movement of tracked vehicles. The southern area is mainly under cultivation and the rice fields are currently passable. Civilian population in the area is relatively light. It is believed that units of the Headquarters 9th VC Division and the 95C NVA Regiment are located in this area. Estimated enemy strength is 1200.

—*Time of Commencement*. About 8 May.

—*Concept*. The base will be entered from the east by elements of the US 25th Infantry Division and ARVN units.

—*Friendly Forces*. Units of the US 25th Infantry Division and ARVN units yet to be designated will participate under the command of the Commanding General of the 25th Infantry Division.

—*Duration*. Estimated duration is 7 to 10 days.

III. Base Area 351.

—*Description of Base Area.* This base area, which is in III Corps, is a supply complex which provides logistical support and personnel infiltration to War Zone D and supports operations of the 5th VC Division in northern Phuoc Long Province. Large-scale munitions shipments have been noted in the area, which is characterized by dense vegetation and steep slopes which will impede traffic considerably. Thundershowers could cause flooding over much of this area within the next 30 days. It is believed that the following enemy units are in the area: Rear Service Group 86; the 174th Regiment of the 5th VC Division; and a number of units of enemy Military Region 10. Total estimated enemy strength is 2500.

—*Time of commencement.* About 8 May.

—*Concept.* A combined attack will be initiated into the base area and the region to the northeast with elements of the US First Cavalry Division and ARVN units.

—*Friendly Forces.* Elements of the 1st Cavalry Division and ARVN units still to be designated will participate under the command of the Commanding General II Field Forces Vietnam.

—*Duration.* This operation will last until the weather forces termination.

IV. Mekong River Operation.

—*Objective.* The Riverine force is to interdict enemy use of the Mekong River; seize a suspected enemy transshipment point at the junction at Highway 1 and the Mekong River, provide transportation for refugees, protect Cambodian merchant shipping, and assist in keeping Route 1 open.

—*Concept.* The Riverine Force, consisting of a South Vietnamese amphibious force and supported by several US vessels and helicopters will proceed up the Mekong River from South Vietnam to an area in the vicinity of a ferry at the juncture of Highway 1 and the Mekong River.

—*Time of Commencement.* About May 10. (MACV is trying to move this date up from one to three days.)

—*Friendly Forces.* The Riverine Force will consist of South Vietnamese Amphibious Task Force 211, one South Vietnamese Marine Corps brigade and one Ranger battalion; and five US vessels, all under the command of Commander Task Group 94 (a US Naval officer).

—*Duration.* Throughout the campaign.

V. Base Area 704 and Nui O Mountain.

—*Description of Base Area.* Within Base Area 704 are 12 base camps, or training sites, 4 hospitals or dispensaries, 6 storage areas, one pris-

oner of war compound, 2 triangular strongpoints, and 11 other unidentified installations. The area, which is characterized by swamps, open areas and rice paddies, is generally unfit for vehicular traffic by mid-May and subject to inundation in June/July. The following enemy units are estimated to be within the base area: the 511th and 512D Local Force Battalion, elements of Military Region 2, and the 295 Main Force Infantry Battalion. Total strength is estimated to be 700 to 1000.

*Nui O Mountain.* This area is a secondary sanctuary and storage area for units operating in the Seven Mountains and possibly for units of Military Region 3. It is surrounded by low, flat areas subject to inundation. The following units are believed to be located in the general area: elements of the 95th North Vietnamese Regiment and the 1st North Vietnamese Division, and the 196th Transportation Battalion. Estimated enemy strength is 1000.

—*Date of Commencement.* On about 12 May. (MACV is trying to move this date up from one to three days.)

—*Concept.* Four South Vietnamese Cavalry squadrons will attack from the western part of Base Area 704 southwest to the Nui O Mountain area.

—*Friendly Forces.* The four South Vietnamese Cavalry squadrons will be supported by US Air Cavalry, air mobile support for troop insertions and troop support for supplies and artillery.

—*Duration.* Seven to ten days.

#### VI. Base Area 701.

—*Description of Base Area.* This area, which is located in II Corps, is a major logistic and troop staging site with excellent lines of communication into South Vietnam. Enemy activity has always been at a relatively high level. The jungle canopy provides concealment for the enemy base camps and storage areas. It is believed that the following enemy forces are in the area: units of the Hq 66 NVA Regiment; Hq of the 250th Transportation Regiment; the Binh Tran South (B-3 Front), and the K 1st North Vietnamese Infantry Battalion of the 95B Infantry Regiment. Total estimated enemy strength is 2450.

—*Commencement Date.* The operation will commence when forces become available.

—*Concept.* A combined attack will be initiated into Base Area 701 as a follow-on to the attack on Base Area 702. The base area will be entered generally from the north and the east.

—*Friendly Forces.* The Commanding General of the 1 Field Forces Vietnam and the Commanding General of II Corps will be in command. Specific units have not yet been designated.

—*Duration.* To be determined.

**280. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)**

Washington, May 6, 1970.

[Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. V, 1 April 1970–11 August 1970. Top Secret; Umbra. 3 pages of source text not declassified.]

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**281. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, May 6, 1970, 11:33 a.m.

WSAG PRINCIPALS

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
General Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman, JCS  
General John A. Vogt, USAF  
Amb. U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Col. Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

SUBJECT

Cambodia

Kissinger: Bus [Wheeler],<sup>2</sup> can you provide a comparison of the results of the operations to date with previous clearing operations?

Wheeler: I will. Abe [Abrams] asked for authority to conduct tactical air photo reconnaissance up to 60 miles. I gave him the okay but it had to be unarmed beyond the 30 kilometers presently authorized depth and not over Phnom Penh.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, May 4–8, 1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> All brackets in the source text.

Packard: We've noticed river traffic from Laos. That's another reason for reconnaissance.

Kissinger: I agree we should do it.

Wheeler: The river area won't be covered by the 60 miles. We will submit a separate request.

Johnson: Should we notify Lon Nol? Should we share our information with him?

Kissinger: We can tell him we will do it. We can decide what we give him.

Helms: We don't want to scare him.

Kissinger: We control the information we give.

Johnson: We will express it in broad terms to Lon Nol. We'll tell him just eastern Cambodia.

[All agree.]

Johnson: Should we do overflights by tacair from Ubon?

Packard: How important is this?

Kissinger: We don't want to give Lon Nol the idea we are using Cambodia for our purposes.

Wheeler: Let's go out and ask Abrams how important this is. We are reluctant to open the Cambodian operation more than it is now.

Packard: He might consider a transfer of assets from Thailand for needs in South Vietnam.

Johnson: Market Time. We'll add a sentence to say it's aimed solely at NVA/VC seaborne traffic.<sup>3</sup> To make clear we are not after third country traffic. We would go only to Kompot—a little over 30 kilometers—and directly related to the sanctuaries. Could we limit it to South Vietnamese? Shouldn't we note that we will withdraw Americans from the operation when we complete the base area operation?

Packard: It would be almost entirely South Vietnamese.

Johnson: They'd better have American commanders in the early stages.

[At 1146 Mr. Nutter arrives.]

Johnson: If we announce the Market Time operations at the same time as the riverine and other operations in the South, it would be smothered.

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<sup>3</sup> The telegram asking the Embassy to discuss with the Lon Nol government the plan to extend Market Time operations to prevent seaborne Viet Cong and North Vietnamese infiltration into Cambodian waters was 068509 to Phnom Penh, May 6. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB)

Kissinger: Any objection?

Helms: Let's do it while the heat is already on.

[All agree. No objection.]

Johnson: There are two international law principles that could possibly apply here. One is customs; the other is blockade. This is neither one. The rationale is and would have to be "self-defense."

Kissinger: If we are not stopping Chinese and Soviet equipment, what do you stop?

Wheeler: Only small ships. Market Time has chased the Soviet and Chicom trawlers away from South Vietnam.

Johnson: We don't want to get involved in intercepting third country traffic.

Vogt: It's limited to stopping trawler-type activity—junk, etc. transfer. The harbors in the areas to be covered won't take ocean-going ships on shallow draft.

Packard: Shouldn't we make sure it doesn't reach third country and fishing fleets?

Kissinger: We should get precise rules of engagement. I want them for the WSAG tomorrow. We can go ahead with the general approach.

Do we have a legal opinion?

Johnson: It's not a very legal opinion. It's a self-defense thesis, for defense.<sup>4</sup>

Packard: We should keep it under U.S. control in the early stages.

Helms: We made a mistake yesterday. There were no uniforms in the packs.

Green: We had sent a cable saying they were in.

Johnson: We will go out and clarify it on the 10 packs. We want a judgment on the nine packs after they see the first.

Kissinger: Don't we have additional AK-47 arms now, from captured stocks?

Wheeler: We should send this instruction to Abrams.

Kissinger: Particularly on ammunition.

Helms: It costs \$176,000 a month for the pay of four Khmer battalions.

Kissinger: How about uniforms?

Wheeler: We have asked Abrams and Rives—no reply yet.

Helms: They are trying to work out a way to handle it.

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<sup>4</sup> Reference is to a memorandum from Eliot to Kissinger, May 4, "Legal Aspects of our Action in Cambodia." (Ibid.)



Johnson: We have not told Lon Nol yet whether they will be paid. We need to inform Rives of what we do. Thieu is going to make a statement.

We need to advise him.

Helms: We will advise him as quickly as possible.

Kissinger: Is there any answer from the Air Attaché yet on the A-1s?

Wheeler: No answer yet.

Johnson: Rives welcomes a MACV liaison man. Let's call MACV and Phnom Penh to work out the arrival after Lowenstein and Moose leave.

Wheeler: We will make sure he is French-speaking and we'll make sure it is for recurring liaison, not TDY.

Kissinger: I asked the President about sending a military man to Embassy Phnom Penh. The President thinks it's a good idea.

Johnson: What status would he have?

Wheeler: I assume he'll be CIA, available to make recommendations and to advise.

Johnson: In relation to the Attaché and MACV liaison?

Kissinger: To give competent advice to Embassy and Cambodians.

Helms: As special advisor to the chargé with credentials from a cabinet officer?

Wheeler: We want to try to avoid "involvement," or misleading the Cambodians.

Johnson: Advice brings responsibility.

Helms: He has to have credentials. He can be sent by the Secretary of Defense to see how they are doing with our assistance.

Green: We might wait until we see how the liaison goes.

Johnson: Can we have somebody working for them?

Packard and Wheeler: We will look into the legal status of a retired officer and report tomorrow.

Helms: We know where there are 18 T-28s on the market. We will advise Packard. We'll report tomorrow on this.

Johnson: We have Phnom Penh 764,<sup>5</sup> liaison arrangements with South Vietnam and a request for a South Vietnamese armored column and clearing area. Lon Nol is attacking with Khmer. Have we anything from Saigon?

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<sup>5</sup> Dated May 6. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 589, Cambodian Operations (1970), Cambodia, Nodis/Khmer (Vol. I))

Wheeler: Nothing from Abrams. Probably he will be reluctant to launch an armored column. His operation against 704 and the riverine begins 9 May into the same area.

Kissinger: Why not tell Lon Nol we are considering his request?

Johnson: We can inform him.

Kissinger: This is a good example of why we need someone there.

Wheeler: We could ask Abrams' comments. We will do it. I assume the South Vietnamese II Corps commander met with the Cambodians. What about IV Corps liaison? [He refers to a cable.]

I didn't know about it but I see no problem.

Johnson: Another reason to have a man there.

We should not give a negative to any combined operation with the Cambodians.

[All agree.]

Kissinger: Where do we stand on the Thai battalion?

Wheeler: It's all in train.<sup>6</sup>

Johnson: We will have a broad guidance telegram tomorrow.

Kissinger: Let's discuss Thai air support for Laos tomorrow.

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<sup>6</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions, May 6, the following decisions were noted: "1. We should inform Lon Nol that we would conduct photo reconnaissance by air over eastern Cambodia. 2. The Market Time operations should be announced while the enemy was already pressed by the riverine and other operations in the South. We should not give a negative response to any combined operations with the Cambodians." (Ibid., NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, May 4–8, 1970)

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

Washington, May 7, 1970, 2:30 p.m.

### WSAG MEETING

#### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman, Jr., Deputy Director, CIA  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman, JCS  
Gen. John A. Vogt, USAF  
Amb. U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Col. Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

SUBJECT

Cambodia

Wheeler: We have a cable from Abrams saying the ARVN has shown a good performance and plans.<sup>2</sup>

Are we operating on a 21 mile limit or 30 kilometers?

Kissinger: 21 miles.

The operations should be good for ARVN morale.

Wheeler: Yes.

Packard: There may be trouble in Saigon—some infiltration.

Johnson: There's a spate of stories on the riverine operation from Saigon. They referred to a river operation to Phnom Penh.

Kissinger: We told Ziegler to say we don't comment on operations that aren't taking place, and the rules of engagement and depth rules still apply.

Wheeler: This is the plan for the river operations on 9 May: They would go up to the ferry sight which is 20 nautical miles from the closest point on the South Vietnamese border. Only four American ships and 75 ARVN ships—with 75 US advisors on the boats—with 12 choppers supporting, under U.S. command.

Johnson: Did Abrams recommend using more Khmer?

Wheeler: Abrams recommends using Khmer with US and GVN advisors until 30 June in Parrot's Beak. There are about 2,000 Khmer now in the program. They would turn it over to the Cambodian Army on 30 June and withdraw all advisors then.

[All agree this is a good idea.]<sup>3</sup>

Kissinger: Can't we get the Khmer out of Phnom Penh?

Wheeler: They were sent out as an assault force.

Kissinger: How about overflights of Cambodia?

Wheeler: Abrams does not see a need for it at this time. If he needs it he'll ask again.

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<sup>2</sup> Not found.

<sup>3</sup> All brackets in the source text.

Kissinger: How about rules of engagement for Market Time?

Vogt: We are working on these. They have been oriented entirely to infiltration. We will have them tomorrow. We'll clear them with Johnson.

Johnson: What's the PR plan for the river operation?

Wheeler: MACV will make a low-key announcement, that it's predominantly ARVN after the operation begins.

Kissinger: We should wrap Market Time into the same announcement.

What about American civilians in Cambodia?

Johnson: I saw that cable.<sup>4</sup>

Kissinger: I don't think we should have them.

[All agree.]

Kissinger: How about the Thieu statement on the Khmer?

[All agree to a message to Thieu on the Khmer. Johnson will send.]

Johnson: About the press conference. What do we say about Paris? Should the President say we are going back?

Kissinger: Yes. Please send over some Q's and A's for press conference.<sup>5</sup>

What about the uniforms?

Wheeler: We have no reply from Rives yet.

Kissinger: The aircraft maintenance problem?

Vogt: Abrams is putting a parts package together. They will fly from Saigon to Phnom Penh. The air attaché believes they can support and maintain a squadron of 20 airplanes, T-28 and A-1.

Kissinger: Can we get a fix on the best mix?

Packard: It is illegal to give them. We can get planes. We would take some T-28s from Navy and try to replace. We want to get together with Alex Johnson to see how we can do it.

Johnson: We will be in touch. I will put people on it.

Helms: The third Thai battalion will be in place on line on 10 May.

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<sup>4</sup> In telegram 582 from Phnom Penh, April 21, Rives recommended consideration of evacuation of the Embassy staff or reduction of staff and dependents in light of the fear that the capital would fall. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 4/24/70) Johnson is either referring to this cable or a subsequent one in which Rives recommended evacuation of U.S. civilians.

<sup>5</sup> Nixon's press conference of May 8, in which he responded to a question about pursuing the Paris Peace Talks with as equal fervor as the Cambodia operation, see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, p. 421. The full text of the conference is *ibid.*, pp. 413–423.

Johnson: What about the message on Laos? There are possibilities of Chinese intervention.

Kissinger: How about a retired officer?

Packard: We can't do it legally, but we could have him work for a contractor.

Johnson: But this might be disclosed if we paid any part of the cost.

Kissinger: Why not as an advisor to Rives?

Johnson: We said we weren't going to have advisors and take on responsibilities.

Green: Can't we try the MACV Liaison Officer route for a while? [All agree this should be tried.]

Kissinger: Thai battalion support. Should we discuss this today.

Green: We are drafting a reply.<sup>6</sup>

Kissinger: Then let's discuss it tomorrow.

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<sup>6</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions, May 6, the following decisions were noted: "1. It would be a good idea to turn the Parrot's Beak operation over to the Cambodian Army on June 30 and withdraw all US and GVN advisers at that time. 2. We should not have American civilians in Cambodia. 3. A message should be sent to Thieu regarding Khmer participation. 4. The President should say we are going back to Paris. 5. We should send a MACV liaison Officer to Phnom Penh to advise our Embassy and the Cambodians." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, May 4-8, 1970)

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### 283. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between Secretary of State Rogers and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>

Washington, May 8, 1970, 12:55 p.m.

R: Two things I wanted to mention. One, a couple of projected plans they have I think would be dangerous from a public relations view. One is the incursion into Takeo by South Vietnamese forces at the request of Lon Nol. I am afraid it would be quite contrary to what the public understands.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking.

K: No Americans are going beyond the line the President gave.

R: If we do anything at the moment to respond to the request by Lon Nol it would be inconsistent to what we said. Takeo has been so clearly defined in the public mind with Cambodia. Another thing is the amphibious landings.

K: I called Mel. I had never heard of the thing and nothing could be done without the President's approval.

R: They have it on their desks. I told Mel don't do anything that is inconsistent with what we said we were going to do. Just that simple.

K: I am not even aware of these plans. It is an impossible situation for the military to organize pressures on the White House of proposals that haven't even reached the White House.

R: I expressed my view to him.

K: I talked to the President this morning. No American will go beyond the limit he set—20 miles [21 miles/30 kilometers] or whatever it is. Secondly, no operation can be started without Presidential approval.

R: Good. The other is pretty well except for this riverine thing, pretty well underway. This is the last one. Another one that they haven't projected. Near the border a hill area in a sanctuary. I don't see anything wrong with that. But Takeo and the amphibious landing I think would be very serious mistakes. I am not being bureaucratic. I want to touch every base so it doesn't fall between the chairs.

K: It isn't that the White House has cooked up something you haven't heard about.

R: I am worried about when the President goes over and he tells the military something and they take it and run with the ball and they tell Mel that's what the President indicated.<sup>2</sup> I want to be sure the damn thing is directed by one person and that is the President.

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<sup>2</sup> On May 7 at 7:45 a.m., Laird called Kissinger and stated: "you know that the President has really come over here and given the military the greatest license they have ever had and I am going to step in on a few things because if we let this get out of hand, they will use all American troops. We have got to keep the pressure on them to use South Vietnamese troops. The next thing they will be doing is requesting more Americans in South Vietnam. McCain would like to put the Marines back. We can't do that." Kissinger agreed. Laird continued: "They have the idea that they have *carte blanche* and I have got to be a son-of-a-bitch to keep some pressure on them." Kissinger responded: "There is no argument here. There is no question on principle in putting in new troops into Vietnam. There is no question at all." Laird suggested that "If we are to keep maintaining the President's credibility, we must insure withdrawal." Kissinger again assured him there "was no thought of authorizing more troops." Laird stated that the military "have the idea that the President will probably allow it if they really need it." Kissinger asked "what do you want them not to do?" Laird answered, "What I want to do is keep the pressure on to use South Vietnamese forces and it is going in the other direction now and I am trying to turn it the other way." (Ibid.)

K: I will make sure nothing of this sort happens without all the Cabinet being consulted.

R: I think once we finish the riverine we should clean up and get out as soon as we can in consideration of the safety.

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

Washington, May 8, 1970, 11:45 a.m.

### WSAG MEETING

#### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman, Jr., USMC, Deputy Director, Central Intelligence Agency  
Thomas Karamessines, CIA  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
General John A. Vogt, USAF  
Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Col. Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

#### SUBJECT

Cambodia

[The meeting began in the absence of Dr. Kissinger who was with the President.]<sup>2</sup>

Johnson: We have to have guidance on the Market Time extension. I suggest we not refer to Market Time. It's not really an extension; it is just similar to it.

This is supporting the move on the sanctuaries.

[All agree that there should not be an announcement. We should have guidance for use *only* if asked.]

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> All brackets in the source text.

Vogt: Secretaries Laird and Rogers agreed to this of having no announcement, at their meeting this morning. The execute message will go out.

[At 11:50, Dr. Kissinger arrives.]

Vogt: The “city complex” is confirmed. We found very large caches.

Packard: Rocket and mortar attacks have averaged 6½ rounds per operation over the past five weeks. We have captured enough rocket and mortar ammo for 719 such attacks.

Kissinger: Johnny [Vogt], reduce this type of data to the average enemy expenditure. How many weeks of enemy attack does this represent?

Nutter: Can we equate these figures to American deaths saved?

Vogt: Will do. We can say that as of this morning there are more Vietnamese than US forces involved in the operation.

Johnson: Henry, the rules of engagement have been agreed. We all agree that there should be no announcement. We came up with this guidance for answers to questions—that it’s in support of the move against the sanctuaries and not an extension of it. This is only if asked.

Kissinger: I agree. Where do we stand on the uniforms?

Packard: Yes, we have a reply from Abrams. We can provide 12,000 uniforms, boots and packs in small sizes.

Johnson: We will let Rives know of this.

Kissinger: What is the legal position on the airplanes?

Nutter: We must have a Presidential Determination for Sales and MAP and notify the Congress.

Johnson: Just what we did for Trinidad. Saying they are eligible for sales is one thing; for MAP another. Can’t we sell for cash—bill them and not press for collection?

Packard: That is against policy. We can charge it possibly. Some people in Congress who would object to anything would object to this.

Green: Cambodia has claims against us—maybe we can use it as an offset?

Johnson: But earlier we said it would take congressional action to pay the claims.

Packard: [outlines the availability of aircraft.]

Johnson: We could transfer them from Thailand.

Nutter: There’s a third-country MAP transfer problem.

Johnson: Can the Thai loan them and replace them from planes now in Cambodia and fix them later?



Kissinger: Let's look into this.<sup>3</sup> Can we have all the options on Monday?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions, May 8, the following decisions were noted: "There should be no announcement on the Market Time extension. If asked, we should indicate that the operation provides support for the move into the sanctuaries. The 'city complex' was confirmed. Very large caches of rocket and mortar ammunition were found. We could provide 12,000 uniforms, boots and packs in small sizes. The question of providing airplanes to Cambodia was discussed, but no conclusions were reached." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-073, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, May 4–8, 1970)

<sup>4</sup> May 11; see Document 286.

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## 285. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Cambodia<sup>1</sup>

Washington, May 9, 1970, 1945Z.

070781. Ref: State 055340.<sup>2</sup>

1. For the guidance of yourself and such key members of your staff as you may desire, the purpose of this message is to give you in somewhat more detail the thinking here with respect to our objectives and role in Cambodia. As stated in our first message on this general subject (ref: Notal), we have seen our problem as essentially one of navigating between providing enough support and reassurance to the GOC so that it will have the morale and determination, as well as enhance its capability, to cope with the enemy; while at the same time not leaving the GOC with any misleading or false expectations as to the amounts and types of assistance that we are likely to provide. We entirely approve the way in which you have navigated between these shoals in your relations with the GOC, and you will have seen that we have sought to apply the same principles in our actions here.

2. We continue to draw the distinction set forth in the President's April 30 address between expanding the war into Cambodia and the

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER. Top Secret; Nodis; Khmer; Priority. Repeated to Saigon, MACV, and CINCPAC. Drafted on May 8 by Green and Johnson; cleared with Kissinger, in draft with Rogers, and in substance with Laird; and approved by Johnson.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 2, Document 230.

actions we are taking to clean out the major VC/NVA sanctuaries in the Cambodian-Vietnamese border in defense of Americans in Viet-Nam and the Vietnamization program in SVN, even though it continues to be our hope that these actions will help relieve VC/NVA pressures on the Cambodian forces and thus indirectly support the GOC. The President has announced his intention to withdraw American forces as quickly as the operations against the sanctuary areas have achieved their objectives, which is primarily the destruction of supplies and facilities. As you know, the Congress has been assured that these operations will not extend deeper into Cambodia than sanctuary areas or up to about 21 miles and that it is expected that all of the forces will have been withdrawn to SVN in about six to eight weeks, or roughly by July 1. While these limits apply to a lesser degree to GVN forces, we would not like to see the GVN in a deep, substantial or prolonged extension of hostilities into Cambodia and would find it difficult to support if it did.

3. We will continue to supply small arms, ammunition and similar equipment to the GOC. We are looking into ways in which we can be helpful with T-28/A-1 aircraft and uniforms which Cambodia needs. We have enabled the Khmer Krom to come to Phnom Penh to assist the FANK. We are taking steps to facilitate the exchange of information between ourselves and the FANK. Additionally, we are working hard behind the scenes to urge other Asian countries to render material assistance to Cambodia, and it is our expectation that some will be prepared to act in limited ways quite promptly after the Djakarta conference.

4. In all these actions we want carefully to avoid getting ourselves into any "advisory" role vis-à-vis the FANK or the GOC with the responsibilities that would flow therefrom. It is also important to keep down the size of the mission to avoid the impression that we are "taking over" and committing our prestige within Cambodia in a major way. We do not wish to form anything in nature of a MAAG or AID office and wish to handle assistance and liaison needs within existing framework of mission with minimum increases in staff and with help of TDY personnel or liaison visits when necessary.

5. Within the foregoing guidelines, we want to continue to do all possible to maintain the morale and determination of the GOC. At the same time we believe it will be in the best interests of the GOC and the U.S. to discourage unrealistic expectations or requests. In addition to material assistance coming from ourselves and the GVN, we feel that the GOC should not underestimate the value of the initiative being taken by the Indonesians for the Djakarta conference. Moral pressure cannot be ignored, even by the other side, and Cambodia has a powerful moral case.

6. We will welcome any thoughts or comments that you may have with respect to the foregoing.

**Rogers**

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

Washington, May 11, 1970, 3:15 p.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Thomas Karamessines, Central Intelligence Agency  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Colonel Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

### SUBJECT

Meeting of WSAG Principals on Cambodia

Johnson: I want to call your attention to these cables: Phnom Penh 837<sup>2</sup>—the Market Time extension to 103. Also Saigon 7132<sup>3</sup> on captured Cambodians. Then, Phnom Penh 842 and DAO 127<sup>4</sup>—the request for T-28 munitions. And Phnom Penh 855<sup>5</sup>—Abrams says he cannot execute the message.

[At 3:25 Dr. Kissinger arrives.]<sup>6</sup>

Kissinger: The problem is the ARVN operations. We need to establish the ground rules.

Moorer: Phase I of the Cuu Long operation goes like this. It begins Saturday night and ends on 31 May. It goes into Base Area 704,

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> Not found.

<sup>3</sup> In telegram 7132 from Saigon, May 9, the Embassy suggested that the Department would want to explore with the Department of Defense the question of legal and political issues related to the capture of Cambodians during U.S.–GVN operations against the sanctuaries. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-074, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 5/14/70)

<sup>4</sup> Telegram 842 from Phnom Penh, May 10, recommended that the Department of State give attention and recommended supplying some of the requirements listed in USDAO 127 from Phnom Penh. (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 589, Cambodian Operations (1970), Cambodia Nodis/Khmer (Vol. II), through 25 May 1970) USDAO 127 has not been found.

<sup>5</sup> In telegram 855 from Phnom Penh, May 11, Rives reported that Cambodian General Pok Sam An had requested that US/ARVN forces near Kompong Cham attack besieging VC/NVN forces to aid in the defense of the town. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER)

<sup>6</sup> All brackets in the source text.

the Uni Al base area, and relieves the vicinity of Takeo and Kampot. The Takeo/Kampot portion is tied together with the Market Time operation.

Kissinger: How can we block it out for only a month? We have two types of operations—the one with ARVN with U.S. advisors must be approved by the President. And the other is ARVN operations without U.S. advisors.

Johnson: Can we defend this as a sanctuary operation?

Moorer: Yes, as an effort to destroy the LOC from Laos to the sea.

Johnson: The Secretary has some doubts.

Packard: There are strong reasons for doing it.

Green: Will they find caches?

Moorer: They will in the base areas and possibly elsewhere.

Kissinger: We will want the views of the Secretaries.

Moorer: Abrams told Thieu no on the move to Kampong Cham.

We have an operation against 701, to begin on Wednesday.

Kissinger: 701 is not an issue.

[All agree that 701 is going ahead.]

Moorer: There is a strike against the Sekong River at the Cambodia/Laos border.

Packard: We have approved this. Abrams will give 12 hours notice before the strike.

Kissinger: Do all of you agree?

[All do agree.]

Moorer: All U.S. forces from 702 are withdrawing on the 16th.

[All agree that we don't announce this until they are actually out.]

Moorer: We have an Abrams message on Lowenstein and Moose. They are pressing on the Khmer Krom.

Johnson: A telegram says that General Minh of the JCS of South Vietnam says the South Vietnamese delivery of AK-47s was all nonsense. It didn't happen. Johnson has had Ted Elliott call Carl Marcy [of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee] to straighten it out and also sent a cable to Sam Berger.

We have to have freedom of action to let others help without losing our aid. We have to have freedom of action for the Vietnamese to move farther than our limits. And we need freedom to continue to give them small arms.

Kissinger: When does this come up in the House?

Johnson: I don't know. The committee is in executive session today.

Packard: I don't know whether we can work out language we can live with.

[All agree we should try.]

Moorer: Abrams is ready to deliver the uniform items.

[All agree to execute.]

Kissinger: What is the legal situation on the T-28s?

Packard: We must have a Presidential Determination and notify the Congress.

Kissinger: Can we wait to decide or notify them later after the Congress?

Packard: We could decide later. But what about Cambodia's financial situation? We have to give support. I doubt we can.

Kissinger: What about the Green plan—the claim on the rubber plantations?

Green: It won't work. The Congress would sniff it out.

Kissinger: Can they use Thai and replace them?

Nutter: We can't exchange without a determination.

Packard: This is about the best approach.

Nutter: We can't permit the Thais to give them.

Kissinger: Even for trade?

Nutter: Yes.

Green: What about a repair team?

Nutter: It will take six months at least.

Moorer: That is why it is better to exchange.

Nutter: But the Thai won't be happy.

Green: Can Lon Nol buy it?

Nutter: Only if we have a determination.

Packard: My concern is that Congress might tie down the Presidential Determination authority. The Senate is talking about removing the President's Determination authority.

Nutter: It's a \$25–30 million annual operating cost.

Green: There is \$25 million in Paris tied up in an argument between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians. This is not applicable. But I doubt we could use these funds.

Packard: The most effective would be GVN air support. We could back them up in South Vietnam.

Karamessines: Has the President precluded U.S. tac air after June 30?

Kissinger: No.

Packard: Is it better to let the GVN do tac air than try to get into aircraft supply?

Green: We should ask Rives. The Cambodians are suspicious.

Packard: The Cambodians want planes.

Green: Can they buy them commercially?

Karamessines: Time is against this.

Green: Can the South Vietnamese air force come in and repair and help them?

Packard: The South Vietnamese have fair maintenance capability.

Kissinger: Ask Harlow what problems a determination would cause.

Moorer: We have to do it quickly if it's to be any use.

Kissinger: Let's see what South Vietnamese air support could do. Also what they do for maintenance.

Karamessines: What about the Thai Khmer? Support would cost \$1 million per month for 3,000 of them.

Packard: We would have a problem with funds. We will have to ask MACTHAI whether there are funds available.

Kissinger: What about South Vietnamese extension of the operations without U.S. advisors? I think we should disagree.

Green: I agree we should discourage it.

Kissinger: The President's views are this. We should keep in that posture as a deterrent to, not as a pretext for, North Vietnamese operations against Phnom Penh. They should have general instructions that we don't rule it out but we should keep it as a deterrent. I think we should discourage them from taking off on operations on their own. They should not run off all over Cambodia. The idea is to keep it as a threat, but hold back.

[All agree.]

[Green will draft a message.]<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions, May 11, the following decisions were noted: "1. The operation against 701 would begin Wednesday. 2. There would be a strike against the Sekong River at the Cambodia/Laos border. Abrams would give 12 hours notice before the strike. 3. No announcement would be made regarding U.S. troop withdrawal from 702 on the 16th until the U.S. forces were actually out. 4. We should try to work out language acceptable to us and to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in order that (a) others could help without losing their aid; (b) the Vietnamese could move farther than out limits; (c) we could continue to give them [Cambodia] small arms. 5. Abrams should deliver the uniform items. The President's views were relayed to the group. We should discourage the South Vietnamese from extending operations without U.S. advisors. We should keep them in that posture as a deterrent to, not as a pretext for, North Vietnamese operations against Phnom Penh. The South Vietnamese should not run all over Cambodia. The idea was to keep it as a threat, but hold back. A message would be drafted to that effect." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-074, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 5/11/70)

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

Washington, May 11, 1970, 5:40 p.m.

Pres: Isn't that Reagan something. He said the truth though.<sup>2</sup> All of this miserable mouthing about listening and communicating . . .

HAK: You did a superb job.<sup>3</sup>

Pres: We have just got to go to TV to get anything across. That is the only way.

HAK: I am convinced that we are facing something deeper than a public relations issue. There is a deliberate attempt to load the dice and I talked to Packard and Moorer about the Saigon problem and they showed me the stuff they have handed out. They are doing essentially what we wanted them to do, comparing the figures. All of this stuff which one never sees in the papers. If it was Kennedy, they would have it all over.

Pres: The press, including news magazines, are trying desperately to make it appear that this thing . . . they are talking about the elusive enemy. I don't think we should be defensive about it. They are failing to play this up. I am going to do the same thing as before. On the 15th of June I will go on TV.

HAK: If the enemy stood and fought then they would really be screaming. We are not after the men.

Pres: What are the men going to do if we get all their guns. Of course we are not after the men.

HAK: I had a cable from Reeves saying there is a definite sign of slackening of pressure in many places in the last 36 hours.

Pres: Also, they must have a fear that we are moving around there and that we may move in on them. We are in their rear.

HAK: There are two more operations that would wind it up that are planned for the South that are within the 30 kilometer limit. They are not all on bases but they are in the limit. They would start Saturday if you approve them.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 363, Telephone Conversations, 1969–1976, Chronological File, May 10–20, 1970. No classification marking.

<sup>2</sup> Apparent reference to remarks by Governor Ronald Reagan of California in support of the operation in Cambodia and against student demonstrations in opposition to it.

<sup>3</sup> Kissinger is apparently referring to the President's news conference of May 8 broadcast live on television. The text is in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 413–423.

Pres: Hell, yes. Are they ARVN?

HAK: All ARVN. No advisers.

Pres: Good, I approve.

HAK: We are starting one tomorrow night, 701. Two in the South which would relieve Takeo and that would be the end of it.

Pres: I don't think that this whole university thing has reached as many people as they think. We see the hysterical people. It was refreshing to hear Reagan.

HAK: I talked to some student radicals over the weekend and they were very disappointed because they thought the turnout wasn't much. There is no doubt that the economic community is deeply disturbed.

Pres: Let them take responsibility for keeping their campuses in order. Reagan of course sees everything in conspiratorial terms. But he may be right.

HAK: Yes, there are some things which I don't want to discuss with you over the phone which are pretty interesting.

Pres: Here in the government or outside?

HAK: Could I come up to see you?

Pres: Come on up to the Lincoln Room.

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## 288. Memorandum for the Record<sup>1</sup>

Washington, May 12, 1970, 12:10 p.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
Thomas Karamessines, Central Intelligence Agency  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Lt. General John W. Vogt, Jr., USAF, Director for Operations, Joint Staff  
Amb. U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Dennis J. Doolin, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International  
Security Affairs (East Asia and Pacific Affairs)  
Col. Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.



SUBJECT

WSAG Principals on Cambodia

Johnson: When do we go ahead with the additional 1,000-man pack?

Karamessines: There is no decision. We were to await recommendations from the field. We can ship one or more whenever we are ready.

Kissinger [to Helms]:<sup>2</sup> Do you need any formal approval to increase the river interdiction in southern Laos [referring to a memo from Helms]?<sup>3</sup>

Helms: No, we are doing it anyway—just increase level of effort.

Kissinger: Can we get an appraisal of the enemy situation in Cambodia?

Helms: No, we can't get anything solid. The Cambodians are mixed up. We have no hard information. We are working hard now to get good information.

Kissinger: What is the enemy using for supplies?

Vogt: He is capturing it and buying it.

Kissinger: We don't want to see them going into Phnom Penh.

Helms: That concerns me.

Karamessines: It's fair to say right now we haven't observed any real move toward Phnom Penh.

Vogt: They have mostly moved up to the northeast, and come to the south and southeast. Those in the south are in trouble. Market Time will make it harder for them.

Helms: I don't think it is probable that the NVA will launch a frontal attack on Phnom Penh.

Kissinger: Most of the population is in the south.

Johnson: Yes.

Karamessines: Sihanouk's plans for coming down were delayed. The situation is not right.

Johnson: Kosygin blesses him but doesn't recognize him.

Kissinger: Can we find out what the Cambodian Army is doing?

Vogt: The Khmers are doing the most. The others are not effective.

Kissinger: We approved more Khmers for introduction in the Parrot's Beak earlier. Has this been done?

Karamessines: We still haven't worked out DOD financing for the pay of the Khmer.

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<sup>2</sup> All brackets in the source text.

<sup>3</sup> Helms' memorandum as described here has not been found.

Vogt: We will get out a message.

Johnson: The Church amendment will be a problem.<sup>4</sup>

Helms: It will be tough.

Nutter: We are working to see what we need to do to make that what we've already done is legal.

Johnson: State has drafted a memo.<sup>5</sup> We'll have it today to get to the President. Then we have to find the money.

Helms: What about the 1,000-man packs?

Johnson: Should we send more of them now? How many? We don't have specific recommendations from CIA now.

Helms: I think we should send in a few more but not so much that they don't use it or lose it!

Johnson: Should we send two more now?

All agree.

Johnson: I will notify Rives.

Vogt: We will forward them from Okinawa immediately.

Johnson: Did we send maps and air charts?

Nutter: We sent out a cable on the maps.

Vogt: I will check on the air charts.

Johnson: What about munitions for the T-28s?

Vogt: I will check on what is available.

Johnson: The Helsinki AK-47 ammunition.

Doolin: We have put on pressure for air delivery in August.

Kissinger: Market Time?

Vogt: We are not in it until the Vietnamese agree to our rules of engagement.

Johnson: Anything on the T-28s? Presidential determination.

Nutter: We were to explore VNAF support.

Vogt: I am clearing a message with Secretary Laird to ask Abrams.

Kissinger: Yesterday I thought the public relations and legal problems were serious. The public relations problem may be the worst.

Johnson: We need Presidential Determination—that it is important to the security of the US.

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<sup>4</sup> The Cooper–Church amendment under debate in the Senate prohibited the use of funds to retain U.S. forces in Cambodia, pay for U.S. advisers there, or provide air combat support for Cambodian armed forces unless specifically authorized by Congress. The amendment was adopted on June 30, the date announced by the President for withdrawal of U.S. forces from Cambodia. (Congressional Quarterly, *Congress and the Nation*, Vol. III, 1969–1972, p. 911)

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 4, Document 281.

Kissinger: Then where do we get T-28s and money?

Nutter: Paying out of MAP is a problem.

Johnson: We have two choices—FMS cash sale—and don't worry about when we get paid. We could lose the bills.

Nutter: The Congressional reaction is a problem. They are trying to home in on what we have already given.

Kissinger: How can we get a judgment on whether it makes military sense to give them at all?

Vogt: I will get an assessment.

Kissinger: We want to make a decision on this tomorrow.

Johnson: We should decide whether we want to do it, then figure out how to do it.

Kissinger: The 701 operation has been approved by the President. How about Phase II—Takeo?

Johnson: I am briefing the Secretary of State today on Takeo.

Vogt: A memo to Secretary Laird has gone up.

Kissinger: We will discuss it tomorrow.

Johnson: We have a draft on GVN extended operations. We have this dilemma. We don't want the ARVN too deeply involved and get us involved, but liaison between Cambodia and the ARVN is going well. They can do a lot on their own without us which would be helpful. The problem is coordination, consultation and maybe support.

Kissinger: We don't want them involved in a situation we have to bail them out of or let them suffer a defeat, but they have the threat.

Helms: Can we convey the idea to Bunker verbally?

All agree it should be in writing.

Johnson: I will try a redraft. I don't want to discourage too much.

Vogt: We want to be kept fully informed by the GVN.

Johnson: I will redraft it.

Nutter: We will make suggestions.

Kissinger: Have we found out whether MACTHAI support the Khmer?

Karamessines: We expect the information soon.

Kissinger: We will meet again tomorrow.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions, May 12, the following decisions were noted: "1. We should send in two more 1,000-man packs. 2. A redraft on GVN extended operations should be done. We had a dilemma. We did not want the ARVN involved in the situation where we would have to bail them out or let them suffer a defeat, but they had [to remain] the [a] threat. The problem was coordination, consultation and maybe support." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-074, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 5/12/70)

**289. Memorandum by Director of Central Intelligence Helms<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, May 12, 1970.

MEMORANDUM FOR

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

The Honorable U. Alexis Johnson  
Under Secretary for Political Affairs

The Honorable David Packard  
Deputy Secretary of Defense

General Earle G. Wheeler  
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT

Appraisal of the Cambodian Situation

1. Our Station Chief in Saigon submits the following appraisal of the Cambodian situation as of 11 May 1970.

2. In mid-April 1970 the immediate Communist military objectives appeared to be confined to the protection of their base areas and lines of communications in areas immediately adjacent to the Cambodian/Vietnamese border. Since then they have expanded the scope of their operations. They have moved west toward Phnom Penh, cutting lines of communications, occupying strategic towns, and isolating Phnom Penh from major portions of Military Regions One, Two, Five and Six. The Vietnamese Communist/North Vietnamese Army (VC/NVA) have used their main force units selectively to date, and the participation of elements of the 5th Division in attacks on Kratie has been the exception to the general rule that most attacks on Cambodian targets have been by small VC/NVA units. Most large VC/NVA units are dispersed within Cambodia or are otherwise protecting themselves from Allied advances on their base areas. Nevertheless, so far the VC/NVA, no matter how they are used tactically, have been more than a match for the Cambodian National Army (FANK). The Communists are probably motivated to expand their activities westward into Cambodia by a definite decision that the Lon Nol Government is to be replaced with a more cooperative institution which will permit the Communists to freely use Cambodia as a base area. The speed of the Communist movement may be a direct result of the ease with which they are overcoming FANK resistance and, in the past week, of the pressure they may

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 508, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. V, 8 May 1970–22 May 1970. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

feel from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and the American advances, which are much deeper and more intense than they could have expected. However, despite the apparent enemy capability to mount a military assault on Phnom Penh, there are no indications that the enemy is now moving units needed for such an attack or otherwise preparing an imminent knockout blow against Lon Nol. Instead, his intention seems to be to maintain military, economic, psychological and political pressure on the Lon Nol Government while building his own Cambodian power base with which to cloak his eventual attempt to take over the country. The cloak may be Sihanouk's government in exile, the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK), with or without Sihanouk himself. This tactic will spare the Communists both the expenditure of military effort needed to overthrow Lon Nol and the international opprobrium which open Vietnamese Communist (VC) aggression against the neutral capital presumably would bring. Of course, if the Lon Nol Government falls prematurely under its own weight or as a result of Communist pressure, the enemy would undoubtedly move to exploit the situation.

3. At the same time the Communist control of surface access routes in Cambodia's Northern Military Region I has isolated Northeastern Cambodia. Communist control of this area, coupled with the recent actions in Southern Laos, particularly the fall of Attopeu, appears to increase the potential Communist logistical access to South Vietnam's II and III Corps from the Laotian Panhandle. It appears Hanoi wants to use the Sekong River during the 1970 rainy season for water transport of material from Southern Laos to Eastern Cambodia. Heavy use of this river route could decrease the total impact of Allied interdiction capabilities in both Southern Laos and Eastern Cambodia and might in part offset Hanoi's loss of access to Sihanoukville (Kompong Som).

4. The VC/NVA might be stimulated to move against Phnom Penh more precipitously than the tactics described in paragraph two seem to call for if Allied operations into his base areas seriously threaten his ability to exist as a military force in Cambodia or drive him to seek supplies in Phnom Penh or beyond. However, while it is too early to attempt to judge the final effect of Allied incursions into the base areas, the enemy probably is not yet driven to desperation moves. Allied operations are disrupting his total support structure, but his fighting units remain essentially intact, and the type of operations he is carrying on in Cambodia do not require elaborate logistic support. So far the following appears to be the net results of Allied actions in Cambodia:

- a. For the time being the Communist sanctuaries have been pushed farther from their Vietnam target areas.
- b. Communist logistical activities have been disrupted both materially and administratively.
- c. Nevertheless, the Communist command and control structure

over its fighting forces inside South Vietnam has not been significantly disrupted.

d. Communist capability to mount a major offensive in South Vietnam at the end of the 1970 rainy season has been appreciably reduced.

e. The Communists now can regard no area in Cambodia as their sanctuary and must devote more of their available resources to providing security for their base areas.

f. Only the 271st and 141st Regiments and three main force battalions have resisted Allied advances sufficiently to suffer serious casualties which have had an impact of reducing their unit integrity and ability to function as an effective combat force.

5. In the present situation the VC/NVA have several options; one of which would be to attempt a diversionary action within South Vietnam to ease the pressure on its base areas. However, significant potential for this exists only in Northern I Corps where he can, with little notice, launch division-size attacks across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) or from the western base areas across the lowlands against the population centers. The enemy is not now in an apparent posture to do this. Elsewhere he has little capability for any activity which would require a significant response by Free World military forces. The VC/NVA are capable of brief spurts of activity, characterized by widespread artillery attacks and limited sapper and ground probes. The enemy already has alerted his local forces in South Vietnam to attack exposed hamlets left unprotected by the dispatch of Allied forces into Cambodia. In addition, the VC/NVA have a limited capacity for publicity-grabbing terrorist and rocket attacks on Saigon and other major population centers. There are numerous reports that such attacks are already planned in connection with the current spring-summer campaign.

6. The effectiveness of Communist tactics in Cambodia, and to a large extent of Allied attacks on their base areas, will depend in part on the viability of the Lon Nol Government. Despite a boost in morale which was obtained from Allied support and attacks on Communist base areas, there is no doubt that the Lon Nol Government has grown weaker in the past two weeks and popular support has slowly eroded in the face of economic problems, governmental inefficiency, growing resistance to the draft and continued insecurity in large portions of the country. The Lon Nol Government continues to be dependent on foreign aid for economic and military wherewithal to exist. Its desperate needs from outside sources include money, communications equipment, and perhaps most importantly, ammunition. On the other hand there are no signs yet of dissension within the government and the army, while inept, still apparently is loyal to Lon Nol and remains the power base on which the government rests. As long as Lon Nol continues to retain this loyalty, and FANK does not disintegrate, it is unlikely the Communist could restore Sihanouk or any other government without continuing military effort.

7. On the diplomatic front, the Lon Nol Government is fast losing any mantle of neutrality it may once have worn. It has done much of this itself through the avidity with which it has sought and welcomed Western aid. The Communists have helped to push the Cambodians into a non-neutral stance. The formation of FUNK and the subsequent rupture of relations between Cambodia and Communist China, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and North Korea will pose problems for the Soviet Union, France and other governments which heretofore have finessed the recognition problem. The effect could be further international isolation of the Lon Nol Government. Furthermore, the formation of FUNK and its consequences eliminate Communist China as a potential middleman in negotiations between the Cambodians and the VC and, for all practical purposes, appears to rule out the possibility of any negotiated settlement involving the Lon Nol Government and DRV or the Provisional Revolutionary Government. The FUNK and the Indochinese People's Front also provide a cloak of legitimacy which the enemy can spread over the presence of Communist Vietnamese forces in Cambodia.

8. As a consequence, the upcoming Indonesian-sponsored conference on Indochina assumes a major importance for Lon Nol. A successful conference which supports the position of his government could provide a needed international boost. A conference made up primarily of strongly declared anti-Communist nations, or the failure of the conference to express significant support for the Lon Nol Government would severely affect the morale in FANK and in the civilian population, reduce the chances of the government getting much-needed international economic assistance and thereby decrease the government's chances of success.

9. The prospects of the Lon Nol Government surviving are really no better now than they were two weeks ago. In fact, Lon Nol's problems are becoming more complex with the passage of each day, for he has not gotten the badly needed economic and military equipment or the political support which he has asked of his Asian neighbors. This has weakened Lon Nol's confidence and the spread of war has started an erosion of his popular support. Prospects for Lon Nol's future are bleak, particularly if the VC/NVA continue to keep the current level of military pressure on his government.

10. [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] commenting on the above information believes that the viability of the Lon Nol Government depends on what the Communists choose to do to it. He does not believe that the government is weaker now than it was two weeks ago, but remains the same. There does not appear to be any resistance to the draft and the vast majority of the populace in Phnom Penh are supporting the Lon Nol Government in its efforts to solve the problem of Communist military activity. Those who may not support it appear

to be standing down and giving it a chance to solve the deteriorating military situation. However, if Phnom Penh should come under attack, he believes the government would then be in serious trouble. The populace and possibly some high-ranking army officers then would become less charitable toward Lon Nol.

Dick

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

Washington, May 12, 1970, 12:10 p.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
Thomas Karamessines, Central Intelligence Agency  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
General John A. Vogt, USAF  
Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Dennis J. Doolin, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (East Asia and Pacific Affairs)  
Colonel Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

### SUBJECT

Meeting of WSAG Principals on Cambodia

Johnson: I was asked by House members this morning whether a select committee to visit Saigon and Cambodia would be okay. They have in mind a group of 10–12 members.

[All agree this is a good idea.]<sup>2</sup>

Kissinger: Are U.S. forces participating?

Moorer: No, but we have advisors on the South Vietnamese boats.

Johnson: What about the rules of engagement?

Packard: The GVN has agreed to our rules.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

<sup>2</sup> All brackets in the source text.



Johnson: To 103/49 or just to 104?

Moorer: Only to 104.

Johnson: Is MACV changing its announcement?

Moorer: I will check on this.

Johnson: Has the execute message gone?

Moorer: It is in the Secretary of Defense's office.

Johnson: I discussed this on the Hill this morning. There were many questions.

Packard: The plan says there should be *no* U.S. ships in Cambodian waters. U.S. ships will be only in international waters. South Vietnamese ships only will be in Cambodian waters, but they will have U.S. advisors.

Johnson: We have to stop Ky's statements on a blockade.

Kissinger: We have to assume that decisions agreed at the WSAG must be carried out. If anyone objects, I will take it to the President.

What about the Takeo plan? Do we have a proposal with a recommendation?

Nutter: It's with the Secretary of Defense now.

Moorer: It was sent to the Secretary on the 12th.

Kissinger [to Packard]: Can you get this over today?

Packard: The Secretary of Defense wants to know the Secretary of State's view.

Johnson: The Secretary [of State] has been briefed. He says okay but it must relate to the sanctuaries in Public Relations. It is *not* to support Cambodian forces.

Kissinger: Dave [Packard] and Alex [Johnson], you should produce a carefully worded PR statement. We will get a formal proposal?

Packard and Johnson: Yes.

Kissinger: When will we have the guidance cable on ARVN?

Johnson: We haven't finished it.

Helms: We told Bunker he should get his views in.

Johnson: I answered on the Hill today that cooperation between Thailand and Cambodia and between Cambodia and South Vietnam is growing and helpful. No one on the Hill thought this was a bad idea. Did the President say to the Armed Services Committees that South Vietnamese forces would be coming out?

Kissinger: I did not hear him say this. He wants more flexibility for the South Vietnamese than for us in Cambodia; certainly he is in favor of shallow penetrations by the South Vietnamese and to keep the South Vietnamese poised as a deterrent to an attack on Phnom Penh.

Green: Are the Market Times actions in Cambodia or in international waters?

Moorer: Only surveillance is in international waters.

Green: We won't stop to board third-country shipping?

Moorer: No, we will not.

Johnson: I want a copy of the rules of engagement.

Moorer: I will provide it.

Kissinger: The Khmer in Thailand.

[There was a long discussion of Khmer characteristics.]

Karamessines: There is a new development. The Cambodians and Thai have met. There is full approval of the plan, but it must be a joint Thai, Cambodian and U.S. operation. There should be two regiments, but not known as Khmer Serei. One regiment would be pure Cambodian, from Cambodia. One regiment would be purely Thai—some Khmer but not all. Training would be in Thailand. The operation would be covert. The Thai regiment is to be paid by the U.S. as in Laos. The Cambodian regiment is to be paid by the U.S. while training but by the Cambodian Army after their training.

Kissinger: The difference is on the Thai regiment. They want us to pay in Cambodia.

Johnson: This is out of the question.

Kissinger: I agree.

Packard: The training and equipment are service funded.

Kissinger: Is there no way to pay in Cambodia?

Karamessines: Have worked out with DOD payment for the Khmer Krom.

Packard: Can the Khmer Krom proposal be kept covert?

Helms: Yes.

Packard: Can we have the Thai units paid in the same way through the Cambodians?

Karamessines: The Thai won't agree.

Packard: This is the only way.

Green: Why can't the Thai pay themselves once?

Helms: Why don't we go back to the Thai and get them to finance some?

Johnson: I agree we should.

Kissinger: We should say we go along with the first regiment if they do the second. We will give them the equipment.

Johnson: What arguments do we use as to why it is not the same as Laos? Will they ask us to pay directly to them and then they pass it on? Don't use the U.S. political problem argument. Don't we have to keep this consistent with the pay of the Khmer Krom in Cambodia? I fully support the idea of equipment and training but they should pay their regiment.

Helms: We can handle the pay of the second regiment the same as for the Khmer Krom.

[All agree that we will go back to the Thai and tell them to pay for their own regiments. We will pay for the training.]

Karamessines: Two 1,000-man packs will move to Saigon today. They will deliver one to Phnom Penh on the 15th and one on the 16th.

Kissinger: How about the T-28 munitions?

Moorer: We can provide that from our stocks.

Johnson: Will they still use GVN aircraft?

Nutter: That will cost \$2.3 million.

Johnson: We don't have to deliver it all at once.

Moorer: Send it as they need it.

Johnson: Lon Nol is asking for refuge for his family.

Vogt: There is a report that he is concerned about assassination groups.

Johnson: We will deliver the arms as needed.

Moorer: The problem of the T-28s is maintenance. The best way to solve it is contract maintenance rather than more planes.

Johnson: Can we get Thai maintenance help to Phnom Penh?

Nutter: Or take the planes to Thailand?

Kissinger: Thai maintenance people could help quickly.

Johnson: We should go out with messages to get the Thai involved.

Moorer: We will draft it and send it over to State.

[All agree this is the best move now.]

Kissinger: How about giving or selling them more aircraft?

Moorer: It is better not to do it now.

[All agree we should concentrate now on maintenance and not give more planes now.]

Vogt: There is nothing yet on VNAF support.

Kissinger: What about the uniforms?

Nutter: They are all set to go but the legal problem should be resolved.

Kissinger: Let's do it now.

Thai air support for Laos. I see no pressure now.

[All agree. Green has a telegram draft, working with DOD.]

Johnson: On the legal issue, we need someone from here to work with State legal people today.

Packard: Shouldn't we move on the excess stocks now?

Johnson: Yes, the excess program will be finished by the Fulbright amendments.

Nutter: We will do everything we can to cover what has been done out of excess.

Moorer: The strike on Cambodia and the Laos border goes tonight.

Johnson: We will tell Lon Nol at the same time we tell him about the 701 operation tonight.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>In a separate summary of conclusions the following decisions were noted: "1. House members' suggestion that a select committee of 10–12 members visit Saigon and Cambodia would be a good idea. 2. The President's views were summarized. He wanted more flexibility for South Vietnamese than for us in Cambodia. He was in favor of shallow penetrations by the South Vietnamese poised as a deterrent to an attack on Phnom Penh. 3. We would tell the Thai to pay for their own regiments. We would pay for the training. 4. We should concentrate on maintenance of the T28s in Phnom Penh rather than send more planes. We should draft a message requesting Thai maintenance help." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-074, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 5/13/70)

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

Washington, May 13, 1970.

### SUBJECT

Your Meeting with Secretary Laird, Admiral Moorer and Dr. Kissinger at 9:00 AM, May 14, 1970<sup>2</sup>

### *Purpose:*

You have requested a meeting with Secretary Laird and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the purpose of expressing your appreciation to the Secretary of Defense for his responsive performance over recent days and to provide him with the benefit of your views on conduct of future U.S./ARVN military operations in Southeast Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 507, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. V, 8 May 1970–22 May 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for briefing.

<sup>2</sup> The President and Haldeman met with Laird and Wheeler from 9:06 to 10:01 a.m. on May 14. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) According to Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, p. 166, Kissinger also attended this meeting. No other record of the meeting has been found.

*Situation:*

Since your decision to authorize ARVN and U.S. operations into Cambodian sanctuaries, we have conducted 8 operations against 11 enemy base areas.

It is probable that upon the completion of the operations in Cambodia the enemy's capabilities to conduct operations against US/ARVN forces in the III and IV Corps areas in South Vietnam will be considerably reduced.

To insure this, we should not over-pressure General Abrams to withdraw his forces from Cambodia prematurely but permit him to regulate his own schedule and insure the maximum destruction or disposition of captured material between now and July 1.

*Talking Points:*

—Compliment Secretary Laird for the outstanding manner in which his Department and the military have conducted the myriad of complex and difficult tasks associated with your Cambodian decision. Specifically:

(1) Mention the prompt and efficient implementation of your decisions for operations in Cambodia.

(2) Cite the high degree of security and discipline reflected throughout the defense structure thus far.

(3) Compliment Secretary Laird for the military success achieved thus far.

—Emphasize that we have already largely paid the price domestically and abroad for the decision to attack the sanctuaries and for the strikes against North Vietnam. Therefore:

(1) We must continue moving boldly to inflict maximum damage on the enemy between now and 1 July but with minimum U.S. casualties.

(2) We must continually bear in mind that the wisdom of the decision to strike in Cambodia will be judged not in terms of the immediate problems it has generated in the U.S. but rather in terms of the overall long term success it achieves.

—In the days ahead, it is essential that detailed planning be undertaken in the following areas:

(1) A plan for the timely and successful withdrawal of U.S. forces from Cambodian territory. The plan should also include recommendations for future ARVN operations in Cambodia. Within the limitations of weather, it should guarantee maximum damage to enemy supplies and facilities in Cambodia during the period between now and July 1.

(2) A detailed plan for the effective disposition or destruction of the vast supplies discovered during these operations.

(3) A detailed campaign plan for operations in South Vietnam to

commence immediately following the withdrawal of our forces from Cambodia.

—The plan should consider the most effective military steps required to maintain pressure on the enemy and to exploit the success achieved by the Cambodian operations.

—It should consider the respective roles of U.S. and ARVN forces.

—It should be prepared in the light of various possible outcomes of the situation within Cambodia.

(4) In order to inflict heavy damage on the weakened enemy force structure in South Vietnam, especially in III and IV Corps, U.S. troop withdrawal rates between now and next fall should be held down to the absolute minimum. Also, General Abrams will have to be in a posture in the weeks ahead to respond to strong enemy retaliatory attacks, especially in I or II Corps. Therefore, you would like to have the recommendations of General Abrams, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary Laird on the specific schedule for the withdrawal of 60,000 troops from Vietnam between now and the end of calendar year 1970.

—To maintain maximum pressure on the enemy during the remaining period of operations in Cambodia and during the period immediately following their conclusion, Secretary Laird should be prepared to conduct a higher level of air sorties against North Vietnamese supply routes in Laos and Cambodia. (This will require continuation of higher sortie rates than were programmed before the Cambodian situation developed.)

—Because the enemy may at any time escalate to an unacceptable level in South Vietnam, we must be prepared to conduct, on short notice, an intensified air offensive against North Vietnam and air assets must be retained in theater to insure this capability is retained for the immediate future.

Secretary Laird may also raise the proposed plan for the second phase of the operation against enemy base area 704 (Tab A)<sup>3</sup> which is scheduled to commence on Saturday. The objectives are to destroy the western portion of the Base Area 704, seize key road junctions in the area, destroy another enemy base area in the vicinity of Nui O Mountain (which is southeast of base area 704), and relieve pressure on the Cambodian cities of Kampot and Takeo. Briefly, the plan provides for:

—A coordinated air mobile, armored and infantry assault across the Cambodian border from its southern-most point to the Mekong River.

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<sup>3</sup> Attached but not printed at Tab A was a May 13 memorandum from Laird to the President enclosing CM-5317-70, the outline plan for the phase II attack on base area 704.

—Conduct of the operation by the ARVN (with U.S. support) and South Vietnamese Regional Force units.

—Blocking with South Vietnamese naval units enemy escape from the Coast by sea.

Secretary Laird has raised two questions about the plan and has recommended that reassurance on these points be obtained from General Abrams prior to final approval:

—How many regional force troops will be involved in Cambodia?

—What will be the effect on pacification and IV Corps security of the proposed operations?

You should instruct Secretary Laird to proceed on schedule barring any additional unforeseen risks.

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## 292. Memorandum for the Record<sup>1</sup>

Washington, May 14, 1970, 10:23 a.m.

### PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman, Jr., USMC, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence  
Thomas Karamessines, Central Intelligence Agency  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs  
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Acting Chairman, JCS  
Lt. General John W. Vogt, Jr., USAF, Director for Operations, Joint Staff  
Amb. U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs  
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Dennis J. Doolin, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (East Asia and Pacific Affairs)  
Col. Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff

### SUBJECT

Meeting of WSAG Principals on Cambodia

Kissinger: We need press guidance on the new operation.

Packard: It is just another base area operation.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

Kissinger: Leave out any reference to land and sea routes of transport.

All agree.

Packard: Secretary Laird is concerned about the number of ARVN involved. It cuts their ability to maintain control and pacification in IV Corps.

Moorer: Abrams has said this is not a problem.

Kissinger: It was mentioned to the President, who did not see a concern after the message from Abrams.

Market time—where do we stand?

Vogt: It is at 104°. US ships are *not* participating in Cambodian territorial waters, only advisors on Cambodia ships. US forces are outside territorial waters.

Kissinger: Are the public statements in line?

Vogt: We have sent an execute message limiting it to 104°. It was sent last night.

Johnson: There are no more public statements.

Kissinger: If any are called for, they have to be consistent. I agree we don't want to volunteer more.

Johnson: Let's find out what MACV has said.

Packard: I will double check.

Johnson: Then we can see what clarification might be needed.

Kissinger: Did we try to tone down Ky?

Johnson: We will work it into the guidance telegram.

Kissinger: The Takeo operation. Can we consider it approved? [Packard agrees.]<sup>2</sup> The President said we shouldn't be as restrictive on the ARVN as on ourselves. They should be free to move on the sanctuaries in cross-border shallow operations. After June 30, they should also be in a position to be a deterrent against an NVA attack on Phnom Penh. He also feels they should make a major effort in South Vietnam after July 1.

Packard: We think ARVN should work hard on Vietnamization and in South Vietnam even before 1 July.

Johnson: The Cambodians have a dilemma. They need the South Vietnamese but are suspicious. They probably will be asking for help and will be working to some extent with the Vietnamese.

Green: The South Vietnamese and Thais are contemptuous of the Cambodians.

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<sup>2</sup> Brackets in the source text.



Karamessines: [*1½ lines of source text not declassified*]

Kissinger: The President is concerned that we put the South Vietnamese's maximum effort on cleaning up the guerrillas in South Vietnam.

I thought we approved recruiting the Khmers for the Parrot's Beak area.

Moorer: Abrams wants to get 1800. He would put them under the Cambodians not later than 30 June. We had approved the concept. Now he wants approval of the plan.

[All agree to approve this plan.]<sup>3</sup>

Kissinger: Where do we stand on the Khmer in Thailand?

Karamessines: We have put two packs in already—two days early. [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] The Thai accept the decision and the proposal for financing—that they pay for the second regiment in Cambodia. [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] Unger will discuss it with the Prime Minister. There is a cable coming in.

Green: How long for training?

Karamessines: [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*], two and one-half months for the Cambodians.

Kissinger: T-28 ammunition?

Moorer: We have two means to provide it—by US stocks in Thailand or in South Vietnam. We can ship them on the river or by air. We are still working on this.

Vogt: We have an interim response only so far on Thai maintenance. Maybe we can make it a Thai project. We are working to this end.

Karamessines: We should wait to see what Unger reports from his meeting with the Thai Prime Minister.

Kissinger: Where are we on uniforms?

Moorer: They are on the way.

Kissinger: On the Presidential Determination?

Johnson: We will have it ready today.

Kissinger: What about the timing of the submission?

Johnson: We should get the Determination as soon as possible but report later. There is a concern over the money.

Nutter: We may have enough in MAP to carry us through 30 June.

Johnson: We have to be sure we have money available to cover the amount of the Determination.

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<sup>3</sup> Brackets in the source text.

Packard: We should assess the need and see how best to handle it.

Kissinger: On prisoners?

Green: We sent a draft to DOD. We will look into it.

Kissinger: What is the policy going to be?

Johnson: It involves both prisoners and refugees.

Kissinger: I don't think we should keep Cambodian POW's.

[All agree.]<sup>4</sup>

Johnson: I will check into this.

Kissinger: The President wants to use the rice to feed the refugees.

Vogt: They are doing this.

Green: How many refugees are there?

Vogt: Several thousand.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Brackets in the source text.

<sup>5</sup> In a separate summary of conclusions the following decisions were noted: "1. Press guidance on the new operation should omit reference to land and sea transport routes. 2. The Takeo operation was approved. 3. The President's views were summarized. We should not be as restrictive on the ARVN as ourselves. They should be free to move on sanctuaries in cross border shallow operations. After June 30, they should also be in a position to be a deterrent against an NVA attack on Phnom Penh. They should make a major effort in South Vietnam after July 1. The South Vietnamese's maximum effort should be cleaning up guerrillas in South Vietnam. 4. A plan to recruit 1800 Khmers in the Parrot's Beak was approved. 5. We should not keep Cambodian POW's." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-074, WSAG Meeting, Cambodia, 5/14/70)

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### 293. Telegram From the Embassy in Cambodia to the Department of State<sup>1</sup>

Phnom Penh, May 15, 1970, 1100Z.

925. 1. At his request, I spent an hour May 15 with General Lon Nol at his residence. For first time, we were completely alone.

2. Lon Nol began conversation by asking me what I thought of present situation. In reply, I said that I assumed that GOC was encountering some economic difficulties, that I had found its diplomatic

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 27 CAMB/KHMER. Top Secret; Nodis; Khmer; Priority.

actions most able, but that the main problem appeared be immediate military threat.

3. PriMin immediately jumped on last point and in large part repeated what he has said previously regarding desires of GOC to be able to equip sizable force for regaining control of Cambodian territory and defense of Cambodia in future.

4. He dwelt at some length on reorganization of FARK presently taking place under which brigades and divisions being formed. He stressed that these formations required more than light weapons presently being supplied by GVN and USG and asked again for artillery, tanks and aircraft. He insisted that, aside from needs of military, such weapons, especially the aircraft, would do much for the "morale" of the population in NVNA/VC occupied territory when it would see its own aircraft attacking the enemy.

5. In reply, I told Lon Nol that I intended to speak more frankly than I ever had before in order to dispell any doubts about USG policies and how far I felt that USG could go in assisting Cambodia. I informed him that President's decision regarding intrusion into Cambodia as a temporary and limited exercise was firm and that he should not expect further US troop involvement in Cambodian affairs. I told him that the President's declaration in his speech of April 30 regarding limited aid to Cambodia was also a serious one and not done merely for political reasons. While not wishing to discourage him, I wished to make quite clear that he should not expect tanks, heavy artillery, aircraft from US sources. I did reassure him that President Nixon's promise to help was sincere and that USG would provide assistance. Meanwhile, it was also to be hoped that other friendly powers would step in and help Cambodia, especially once the Djakarta Conference was over.

6. Not unexpectedly, Lon Nol's reaction was a little startled and had a somewhat annoyed tone. He indicated that now that Cambodia had chosen its position vis-à-vis communism, he felt it had right to expect more than token assistance from the US. If such assistance not forthcoming, he did not see the use in continuing the struggle which involved Cambodian lives and property and would make very clear to the Cambodian people and others why Cambodia were forced to give in, if it does so.

7. PriMin continued by saying that GOC needed help and advice in planning what it should do regarding the formation and equipment of its troops. If the US were not to provide all appropriate equipment for new forces then perhaps it could advise Cambodia where to turn to obtain immediate equipment, either as a gift or through purchase. For instance, if so advised, Cambodia would turn to Indonesia or some other country in order to purchase helicopters and other aircraft.

(*Comment:* I did not ask where funds for purchases were to come from but suspect he foresaw some sort of indirect US assistance.)

8. I again reiterated to Lon Nol the intent of the USG to help but that he should not expect too much or that he would be disappointed. My suggestion that Cambodia would probably be receiving some of equipment captured during present operations, he brushed aside as a temporary measure since he could not in future count on an assured source of resupply. I also mentioned possibility of replacing some of his Cambodian grounded aircraft on loan basis while others being put into condition but was again repulsed by statement to effect that T-28s and A-1s were “too small” and that Cambodia wished to possess more important type of aircraft.

9. In the course of our discussion, I made particular point to re-emphasize to the PriMin that negotiation for a peaceful settlement in Vietnam and throughout area continues to be the President’s primary hope and that it not our intent or desire to see war prolonged longer than necessary.

10. At the conclusion of our talk, I assured PriMin that I would pass on his feelings to my government and looked forward to further discussion.

11. *Comment:* From foregoing it is obvious that we are in for a less warm period in our relations with the Lon Nol government unless we can persuade other nations to play a role in the supply of equipment for the Cambodian armed forces. Nevertheless, I believe that our frankest discussion thus far did some good in bringing Lon Nol closer to earth as regards his expectations re US assistance and grandiose plans for Cambodian armed forces. One thing which I believe may be of assistance will be forthcoming visits of MACV officers who will be able discuss Cambodian military organization and perhaps offer some suggestions. In this, however, we shall have to be careful that USG does not become overly involved.<sup>2</sup>

**Rives**

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<sup>2</sup> Rives made this point in more detail in telegram 909 from Phnom Penh, May 14, stating that “I have the increasing feeling that US/ARVN effort in Cambodia risks getting out of hand despite its very real success to date. At times I feel Saigon and COMUSMACV losing control, though this is probably due my lack of full details plans and operations.” Rives wondered what would happen to Cambodia after the ARVN and U.S. left, noting that the sanctuaries would undoubtedly revert to NVM/VC control because of Cambodia’s inability to reassert authority. Rives also feared that Cambodia was becoming dependent on U.S. support and the United States was entering into a commitment without much prior thought. (*Ibid.*, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 589, Cambodian Operations, Chronology, Vol. II, Nodis/Khmer, through 25 May 1970)

**294. Memorandum From the Senior Military Assistant (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, undated.

Attached is Phnom Penh 925 which summarizes a conversation between Rives and Lon Nol on May 15.<sup>2</sup> While it is easy to understand the dilemma in which Rives has found himself, I am nevertheless concerned that he has conveyed U.S. policy to Lon Nol in stark black and white terms which cannot but have the effect of discouraging the Cambodian regime excessively. It is inconceivable to me that Rives did not draw Lon Nol's attention to the massive effort being made by U.S. and ARVN forces in the sanctuary areas and the impact this has had on enemy forces. There are, of course, other hints that could have been made with respect to future ARVN operations and possible US VNAF air action.

In fairness to Rives, however, it should be understood that he has a very poor feel for the President's real thinking on the subject and cannot therefore be expected to be much more encouraging when dealing with Lon Nol. All of this underlines the necessity to develop an updated policy position with respect to the future of Cambodia within the broad parameters already enunciated. It also underlines the need to have an individual on the ground in Phnom Penh who is fully abreast of the President's thinking and who would hopefully manifest a higher level of diplomatic skill than has Rives thus far. You have with you a CIA paper which deals at length with future policies and operations in Cambodia and Southeast Asia.<sup>3</sup> It is not a polished document but does outline a number of possible options. Dick Kennedy and I have reviewed the document and Dick is preparing a careful analysis of it.

In the meantime it is becoming increasingly evident that we are rapidly approaching a point where a finite Cambodian policy must be hammered out. This process is likely to be a painful one given all that has gone before. Despite this, however, we cannot expect the departments

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 589, Cambodian Operations, Chronology, Vol. II, Nodis/Khmer, through 25 May 1970. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. May 15 is handwritten on the memorandum.

<sup>2</sup> Document 293.

<sup>3</sup> This 12-page memorandum from Karamessines to Kissinger, May 14, provides "recommendations for a coordinated diplomatic, political, propaganda and military scenario to promote major American objectives in Indochina." Kissinger read it and made notes on it. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 530, Country Files, Far East, Indochina, Vol. I, 1970–71)

and our representatives in the field to perform adequately without the benefit of definitive guidelines from here. In this regard Alex Johnson is sending to us this afternoon a policy message on ARVN operations in Cambodia which we will forward to you with our comments as soon as it is received. This is unquestionably the key policy issue in the entire Cambodian package and should be most carefully considered by you and the President before it is dispatched.

I have spoken to Alex Johnson per your instructions and will also move through CIA channels.

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

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Your Appointment with Ambassador Bunker

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker will call on you at noon on May 19, just before returning to Saigon. He has been in the United States to receive the Sylvanus Thayer Award at West Point and has conferred with State and Defense and saw you on May 9.<sup>2</sup>

Ambassador Bunker will probably want to discuss the following topics:

*Political Developments in South Vietnam*

*Background:* The political atmosphere in Saigon has been heating up for some months, with indications of potentially increasing tension. The following particular problems have arisen:

—President Thieu has been accused of becoming more isolated from prevailing political currents and more dependent on a small group

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 146, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, May 1, 1970. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Bunker met with the President and Kissinger from 12:20 to 12:56 p.m. on May 19. (Ibid., White House Central Files, Daily Diary) No memorandum of conversation of their meeting has been found.

<sup>2</sup> The President's Diary has no record of Nixon meeting Bunker May 9–12. (Ibid.) A similar uninitialed May 8 memorandum from Kissinger to the President indicates that Nixon was scheduled to meet with Bunker on May 11 or 12 "depending on your precise schedule." (Ibid., NSC Files, Box 146, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, May 1, 1970)

of controversial advisers. He has taken a number of steps which have led to charges of dictatorship, such as the imprisonment of opposition deputy Tran Ngoc Chau, the use of the law on political parties to stifle the formation of new political groupings, as well as inconsistent and undemocratic handling of student and religious opposition elements.

—The growing economic problem has contributed to the sense of political uncertainty and has led to a restive mood among the civil servants and in the army. There are some signs that President Thieu considers us partly responsible for some of these problems because we have not responded as quickly as he hoped to his appeals for help. This may lead to political tensions between ourselves and Saigon.

—The elections for the Senate which will be held in August or September may lead to charges that the GVN is attempting to suppress the opposition and rig elections.

*I suggest you:*

—Ask the Ambassador for his views on the political situation, on Thieu's prospects for weathering the storm, and on the GVN prospects in the Senate elections.

—Discuss with the Ambassador the interaction between GVN political methods and U.S. domestic criticism of the regime.

#### *The South Vietnamese Economy*

*Background:* Growing economic problems constitute a severe challenge to the GVN. There are two specific problems:

—The economy, which has been booming for many years under highly artificial conditions created by the large American presence, is now running at an unacceptable inflationary rate of about 30 percent or more a year.

—At the same time, paradoxically, the beginning of U.S. withdrawals has led to recessionary influences, which will become much more severe as more of our forces withdraw and many of the artificial financial devices by which their presence has boosted the economy diminish. The immediate problem is to keep inflation in bounds and then to stabilize the recession which could well develop during the remainder of the Vietnamization period.

The GVN has asked us for help, and its request is now being staffed through the bureaucracy. But we have been holding back on any commitment of aid to the GVN until it takes some further steps to put its own house in order. The GVN's ability to do this is limited by disputes over the relative powers of the legislature and President Thieu in this field and by memories of the bitter political controversy and economic dislocations produced by President Thieu's unilateral proclamation of austerity taxes last fall (at our suggestion).

*I suggest you:*

—Ask the Ambassador for his views and recommendations on the economic situation and how he believes we should play our cards to

press Thieu into needed reforms without creating intolerable political risks for the GVN.

—Indicate that we want to be helpful and will try to provide whatever assistance is needed if we can be assured that it will be properly used.

—Ask the Ambassador his views on the desirability of augmenting our Embassy staff at the Deputy level with a highly qualified and well-known economist who can cut through the issues and deal at the highest levels with the Thieu regime.

#### *Cambodia*

*Background:* The GVN has been cementing relations with the Lon Nol regime. The ARVN has performed well against the Communist border sanctuaries. Thieu and Ky have indicated that they don't feel that future operations by the ARVN in Cambodia need be constrained by the same limits we have placed on U.S. actions.

#### *I suggest you:*

—Ask the Ambassador what he believes the GVN can and will do for Cambodia and whether he thinks it will be tempted to act independently of our actions.

—Ask the Ambassador's views on the risks that traditional Vietnamese-Khmer rivalry may pose to GVN–GOC cooperation.

#### *Vietnamization and Pacification*

*Background:* At present these appear to be less urgent problems than the political and economic issues. Pacification and Vietnamization are both going relatively well, despite questions about the future pace of Vietnamization, doubts about the solidity of our progress in some areas, and concern about the slackening of the rate of pacification. The land reform bill may help provide further peasant support for the government.

#### *I suggest you:*

—Express satisfaction at the passage of the Land Reform bill and ask the Ambassador's views on the program's implementation.

—Ask the Ambassador for his recommendations on whether we should boost pacification forward again at an accelerated pace or should continue consolidation for some time.

—Ask the Ambassador for his recommendations on the pace of U.S. troop withdrawals.

#### *Negotiations*

*Background:* The prospects in Paris remain bleak, although Hanoi's one-week postponement was a relatively mild reaction to our Cambo-



dian operations. Your April 20 remarks<sup>3</sup> about the principles of a political settlement generated some doubts within the GVN below the level of President Thieu.

*I suggest* that you ask the Ambassador's views on how we can best influence Hanoi to move toward a settlement and for his assessment of the Saigon attitude toward Paris.

#### *Corruption*

*Background:* This subject has come up again because a South Vietnamese Senator has accused several leading generals of corruption.

*I suggest* that you ask Bunker for a report on this problem and emphasize our desire for progress against corruption.

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<sup>3</sup> Reference is to the President's Address to the Nation on "Progress Toward Peace in Vietnam"; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1970*, pp. 373–377.

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### **296. Telegram From the Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam (Abrams) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer)<sup>1</sup>**

Saigon, May 18, 1970, 1631Z.

MAC 6774. Subject: COSVN Headquarters. Reference: CINCPAC msg 170312Z May 70.<sup>2</sup>

1. Reference requested views on problem of precisely locating COSVN, the feasibility of targeting or capturing elements of COSVN, and the results which might be anticipated.

2. Highest priority ARDF and special emphasis ground collection efforts on all terminals associated with COSVN headquarters have been employed during the planning phase and continually since the initiation of U.S. operations into Cambodia. The problem in precisely locating COSVN is dependent on the length of time he remains in an area before relocation and the time required to obtain ARDF fixes.

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 509, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. V, 8 May 1970–22 May 1970. Top Secret; Eyes Only; Immediate; Spoke.

<sup>2</sup> This CINCPAC message to COMUSMACV, May 17, is summarized in MAC 6774.

Relocation, coupled with the use of multiple transmitters, requires time to redevelop the disposition of COSVN's facilities for targeting. Essentially, the problem is a trade-off between waiting to acquire targeting data versus the probability he will move if we wait.

3. Of the five major elements of COSVN (political headquarters, military intelligence bureau, strategic intelligence bureau, ministry of public security, and headquarters South Vietnam) the three most lucrative targets are the political headquarters, headquarters South Vietnam, and the Strategic Intelligence Bureau. Neutralization of the political headquarters, including the capture of documents and medium-level personnel, probably would provide invaluable information for targeting the VC infrastructure and disrupting its activities over the next one to two years. Capture of headquarters South Vietnam would result in short-term disruptions of centrally coordinated military activity in the area it controls, with substantial recovery expected within thirty days. The capture of personnel and documents of the strategic intelligence bureau, which controls strategic espionage operations in RVN, could seriously affect espionage and penetration operations at the highest levels.

4. With regard to feasibility of targeting or capturing elements of COSVN, targeting of transmitters of different elements is feasible but constrained as indicated in paragraph 2 above. In addition to problems associated with achieving precise locations of targeting for B-52 strikes, target location may require further modification to avoid known civilian habitation.

A. 35 sorties on 11 May and 11 sorties on 17 May were targeted against suspected terminal locations of COSVN elements. Documents captured in area of 11 May strike indicate that the finance-economy section and the education-training section were among COSVN elements in the area. Hoi Chanh who rallied as result of 11 May strike was mail clerk for COSVN signal element and stated "heavy" casualties were taken in raid in addition to damage of bunker complexes and equipment.

B. As a consequence of U.S. operations, some results have been achieved against COSVN elements. There has been some disruption of communications from COSVN elements after B-52 strikes and various types and amounts of material have been captured during ground follow-up.

C. Best available information, as of 180111Z May, indicates that major COSVN elements are dispersed over approximately 110 square kilometers of jungle. As of this time indications are that transmitters of COSVN political headquarters are on the move. Although any opportunity of capturing COSVN will be exploited, the feasibility of capturing major elements appears remote at this time.

5. All major elements of COSVN are now near or beyond 30 kilometers of RVN border. Should intelligence develop which would give us reasonable assurance of striking effectively at these headquarters I will urgently request authority to take action beyond the 30 kilometer constraint.

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## 297. Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, May 19, 1970, 2 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Laos and Cambodia

### PARTICIPANTS

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State

U. Alexis Johnson

Marshall Green

Tom Pickering

Defense

G. Warren Nutter

Dennis Doolin

CIA

Richard Helms

Thomas Karamessines

NSC Staff

John H. Holdridge

Colonel Richard Kennedy

JCS

Admiral Moorer

The meeting opened with a discussion of the impending operations against Base Area 740, which Admiral Moorer described as being primarily an ARVN affair. Dr. Kissinger asked if when the plan came over and the President decided what to do, this would complete the base area operations. Admiral Moorer notes that attack in Base Area 609 in the tri-border area had not been considered yet. Dr. Kissinger

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969–1970, 5/19/70. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

said and all agreed that Base Area 609 was not included among those which were to be considered. Admiral Moorer said that then Base Area 704 would complete the program.

Dr. Kissinger turned to the question of the Presidential Directive on military assistance to Cambodia, and asked what its status was. Colonel Kennedy stated that it was with the Bureau of the Budget. He noted that the date of the first arms shipment was April 22, and that the date of the Cambodian request for assistance was April 14. Mr. Nutter thought that this first shipment was difficult to consider as U.S. aid because it involved AK-47s. Dr. Kissinger asked if it was the judgment of the group that the Presidential Decision should be transmitted to State as soon as possible after the President had signed it, so that Congress could be informed promptly. Ambassador Johnson said that there was no advantage in delaying the action, and that the deadline in fact was May 22. After asking again if there was any disagreement, Dr. Kissinger said that he would have Colonel Kennedy check with Bryce Harlow, and that subject to any different view on Harlow's part, the action would be taken as recommended. Admiral Moorer mentioned that Senator Fulbright had made clear during Secretary Laird's testimony that this issue had bothered him. Secretary Laird had indicated that the Presidential Determination would be coming forward.

Dr. Kissinger brought up the draft cable on guidance for ARVN operations in Cambodia.<sup>2</sup> Ambassador Johnson stated that he had received the NSC redraft and had sent suggestions back. He had also received a call from Mr. Packard saying that much more emphasis should be given to the South Vietnam aspects. Accordingly, he had tried to retain the same language as the redraft but had shifted the South Vietnam wording into an earlier part of the draft. What he had presented now represented the NSC draft plus changes. Dr. Kissinger declared that he had had the benefit of extensive Presidential directives, so he was clear in his mind as to what the President intended. We should stop the debate, and do what the President says. He wondered whether what was called for in paragraph 3 could actually be done. How could we stop doing things in Cambodia and still accomplish what the President wanted done? He referred again to the repeated Presidential directives, which the President had reiterated in his conversation earlier this same day with Ambassador Bunker.<sup>3</sup> What the President wanted was (1) more ARVN flexibility in operating in the base areas and in establishing a better posture to re-enter them, (2) use of the ARVN as a

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<sup>2</sup> The cable as approved and sent is Document 301.

<sup>3</sup> See Document 295.

deterrent force against North Vietnamese pressures on Cambodia and (3) for ARVN to be in a position after July 1 to deter the NVA from re-entering the base areas. The base areas had to be cleaned up, and if the ARVN needed to go back it should be permitted to do so. It should also have the capability of putting pressure on the North Vietnamese. There would be difficulties if the draft said that this should not diminish capability to operate in Vietnam.

Ambassador Johnson asked if the President didn't agree with the concept that the thrust should be to take advantage of the gains made? Dr. Kissinger replied that if this point was put positively, and if it was stated that the major thrust of the next phase should be pacification in South Vietnam, there would be no problems. Nor would there be disagreement on the concerns in Defense over the question of the ARVN running around in Cambodia indefinitely. Nevertheless the three basic objectives remained:

1. Cleaning up the base areas.
2. Deterring North Vietnamese attacks on Phnom Penh.
3. Maintaining pressures along the South Vietnam–Cambodia borders so that the enemy would not come back into the base areas.

Mr. Nutter said that Secretary Laird was concerned over the second point, since we had not been preparing Congress. He would need to go back if Defense's view was wanted.

(At this point, Dr. Kissinger was called from the room. He returned to say that Secretary Laird was issuing the execute order on the Base Area 740 operation. Ambassador Johnson asked if this had the President's approval, and Dr. Kissinger replied affirmatively. Admiral Moorer said that the operation would begin the night of May 20.)

Dr. Kissinger remarked that he did not believe it would be satisfactory to turn the WSAG members into drafters, to which the others agreed. Dr. Kissinger said that two drafts could be produced from which the President could make his choice, or another effort could be made to draw up an agreed draft. Vietnamization should be given high priority, but the present version was too sweeping in this respect. Ambassador Johnson wondered whether, as a fair proposition, rephrasing paragraph 2 in positive terms might provide a solution. Dr. Kissinger observed that there would be problems in paragraph 7 as well—we would want to give the Cambodians a chance to accomplish their own defense. He asked if the underlined parts in the draft were new, and Ambassador Johnson reiterated that the draft was basically the one which had been drawn up by the NSC with additions underlined and deletions lined through. Ambassador Green endorsed the thought that expressing paragraph 2 in positive terms would solve the problem. Admiral Moorer cautioned against quantifying ARVN operations in such a way as to stop its activities. Ambassador Green offered as an

acceptable concept the thought that “the major thrust in South Vietnam remains Vietnamization.”

Mr. Nutter again said that he would need to check back. Secretary Laird was very strong on including language to the effect that what the ARVN did in Cambodia should not detract from progress in South Vietnam. Dr. Kissinger said that if Defense wanted such language, he would show it to the President. The matter was not for his, Dr. Kissinger’s, decision.

Mr. Helms brought up a point which he felt was related: the area in Southern Laos touching on Northeast Cambodia was pretty much under VC control and was rapidly becoming a no-man’s land. The Agency had road watch teams there, but did not really know what was going on. He wanted to draw attention to the fact that Northeastern Cambodia was now hitching up with Southern Laos. He did not know how to address the problem.

Dr. Kissinger suggested a paper setting forth the situation and the possibilities for dealing with it, such as bombing. Mr. Helms agreed.<sup>4</sup> Admiral Moorer mentioned that we had carried out thirty-two bombing missions in Southern Laos along the Se Kong River which had knocked out docks and staging areas. Ambassador Johnson suggested the possibility of bombing Northeastern Cambodia, to which Dr. Kissinger remarked that the President has desired, as a number of people present had heard, to hit targets in Cambodia beyond the 30 kilometer limit. A written directive would be needed, which they would have in the next day or two. Ambassador Johnson thought that Northeastern Cambodia could be dealt with in the same way as Laos. Admiral Moorer pointed out that we would need to identify suitable targets. In reply to a question from Dr. Kissinger on the whereabouts of the 40,000 NVA troops, Admiral Moorer expressed that we have a pretty good plot.

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<sup>4</sup> On May 20, the Chief of the CIA’s Far East Division, Directorate of Plans, William Nelson, submitted to Helms a paper on South Laos and northeastern Cambodia in response to this request. Nelson suggested that there were at least three options. The first was to maintain the status quo of using current Lao forces to control the Mekong Valley and using the U.S. Air Force to interdict infiltration. The second was to augment CIA irregular forces on the Bolovens Plateau with a Thai regimental combat team and artillery responsible for defense of the plateau and harassment of the Sekong River, while continuing air interdiction, road-watching, and small scale harassment of North Vietnamese supply lines. The third option would be to add to the second option 5,000 Thai to be formed into 10 Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) responsible for defense of the Bolovens and interdiction of the Sekong River. (Central Intelligence Agency, DDO/ISS/IP Files, Job 75–424, 1 of 4, [file name not declassified] Incoming, Memos, Operations & Intelligence, Vol. 1, #2)

Dr. Kissinger stated that the President thought he had authorized air operations of the type discussed, but there evidently was a difference between his position and that of others. We would need to formalize this difference. Ambassador Johnson said that the guidelines we were operating under for air operations were that we did not contemplate using U.S. tactical air inside Cambodia in support of Cambodian forces. Dr. Kissinger stressed that the President wanted rules of engagement taken up for Northeastern Cambodia similar to those in Laos which would permit the defense of our forces while in Cambodia and anti-infiltration activities. The President had the idea, too, that if these operations ease the pressures on Cambodia this would be desirable. Ambassador Johnson pointed out that our forces would be in Cambodia only until July 1. What about aerial operations afterward? Dr. Kissinger declared that it was not in the President's mind to stop them. For the present, though, he had noticed, as in the case of Takeo, that the enemy might withdraw beyond the 21 mile (30 kilometer) limit and just sit.

If this was true, then we should hit. Mr. Helms remarked that COSVN had been acting in the same way. Dr. Kissinger said that he had been telling the bureaucracy daily to hit at enemy concentrations of this nature—what would he have to do to get this done? He asked Mr. Nutter to get back to him or telephone him if Defense had any problems.

Mr. Nutter mentioned that one question under review in Defense was the extent of Steel Tiger. A brief exchange between Ambassador Johnson and Admiral Moorer brought out that what was involved was the possibility of extending Steel Tiger into Cambodia, although it was difficult to identify targets. Admiral Moorer believed that it would be desirable to put people into Cambodia on the ground. These would not be U.S. forces but indigenous forces, as in Laos. Mr. Helms noted that this was an unpopulated area, a no-man's land; Ambassador Johnson suggested the use of Montagnards. Dr. Kissinger thought there would be no problem in using indigenous forces as road watch teams, and asked Mr. Helms to make a recommendation. Mr. Helms agreed to make an "all-purpose" recommendation on this issue.

Mr. Nutter asked if the RVNAF might help out? Admiral Moorer said that it was being used in Cambodia, but only against sanctuaries on the basis of hard intelligence, and south of the Mekong. It was very important to deny this area to the enemy. We were using U.S. air to the north and east of the Mekong. Mr. Helms said that whatever was used should be accurate, and this argued for the USAF as opposed to the RVNAF.

Mr. Nutter and Admiral Moorer discussed the nature of the targets which existed in this region, which Admiral Moorer felt would

more likely be moving targets than fixed troop concentrations. Ambassador Johnson referred to the possibility of making aerial photographs; in fact, we had told Lon Nol we would do so.

Mr. Nutter said that he would have no problem in extending Steel Tiger into Cambodia, and Dr. Kissinger proposed issuing a directive on this now. Ambassador Green argued that this would “raise a ruckus.” He felt that we could do better by using Montagnards than we could by launching air operations in the rough area of the Annamite chain, which would be very difficult. If Montagnards could be gotten in to disrupt communications, we would be much more effective, and there would be no ruckus on the Hill. Ambassador Johnson agreed, saying that U.S. tacair operations after July 1 would certainly raise a ruckus. Admiral Moorer remarked that Secretary Laird had said several times in his testimony the previous day that he might recommend tacair operations, and had not been pinned down. Mr. Nutter spoke of the problem of populated areas, to which Dr. Kissinger made it clear that populated areas should not be hit.

Ambassador Green brought up the possibility of using SGUs against the Se Kong River. This area was exposed, they should be able to get in.

Mr. Nutter observed that another problem was the location of the 40,000 NVA troops. Ambassador Green reiterated that in Northeast Cambodia, we would be more effective by moving on the ground rather than in the air. Dr. Kissinger thought we might do both, and Mr. Helms urged that we put in everything that we could. Ambassador Green stressed that the Montagnards traveled back and forth in this region, had resources which people in the lowlands lacked, and would serve us better than highly visible air operations.

Mr. Doolin raised the possibility of establishing choke points, and Dr. Kissinger asked him if there was a proposal to do this. Admiral Moorer cautioned against oversimplifying the problems in establishing choke points. Dr. Kissinger declared that until July 1 there would be no objections to doing so; after July 1, if the President wanted to take the heat of conducting such operations, this would be his problem. Ambassador Green pointed out that there were no villages and the region was very wild; airdrops would be needed for the Montagnards. Once targets were located, aerial operations would be acceptable, but we needed to be very selective.

Dr. Kissinger said that he had no ideas of his own nor information on the maximum effectiveness of air power. However, he did have his instructions, which had to be carried out by all. It was his job to see that this was done. Any valid objections on the part of anyone concerned would be shown to the President. What was involved was the anti-infiltration campaign in Northeastern Cambodia and tactical tar-



gets beyond the 21 mile limit. Tactical targets of course had to be identified, but it was not the job of those present to decide what made a tactical target. Any mix of ground operations, road watch teams, and air operations would be acceptable. In addition to all this, the President would reach out for anything which could help the Cambodians. The President had taken enough heat in the previous three weeks to last him three months, and the only thing which would be a pay-off for him was results.

Dr. Kissinger turned to the question of repairs for the Cambodian T-28s. Was it correct that the Thais were not enthusiastic? General Vogt reported that our military in Thailand were working directly with the Thai Air Force on this question, to include the possibility of Thai teams going into Phnom Penh to look into the situation. Admiral Moorer confirmed that the Thai were not enthusiastic on providing maintenance. General Vogt said that things nevertheless were now being worked out through Air Marshal Dawee, even though the Thai claimed that they didn't have enough capability to take care of their own needs. The big problem would be in moving damaged aircraft. He was expecting a message in from MACV on this subject. Ambassador Johnson commented that we would also have a problem just in keeping the five operable Cambodian T-28s going.

Dr. Kissinger brought up the subject of training Khmer forces in Thailand. Ambassador Johnson digressed by mentioning parenthetically that Ambassador Unger had sent in a cable concerning a Thai desire to use some of the Black Panthers in Cambodia, to which he had reacted negatively.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Kissinger agreed. Dr. Kissinger then said that he had a 3:15 appointment and could not go into this particular issue any further at the present session. He proposed putting off the discussion until the following day. It was agreed that the group would reconvene on May 20 at 4:30 p.m.

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<sup>5</sup> Not found.

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

Washington, May 19, 1970.

SUBJECT

Clandestine Psychological Campaign on Cambodia

Director Helms has given two progress reports on actions taken so far in the clandestine psychological campaign to muster support for the new Cambodian Government and to thwart efforts by Sihanouk and the Communists to upset the regime or to erode its posture of neutrality.<sup>2</sup>

*[1 heading and 4 paragraphs (17½ lines of source text) not declassified]*

—Success has been greatest in the Far East where the Cambodia issue is live *[less than 1 line of source text not declassified]*. In other areas the effort focuses on the relevance anywhere in the world of the plight of a small nation subjected to outside Communist force—non-U.S. involvement in the overthrow of Sihanouk is emphasized.

Director Helms is watching closely the responses to Cambodia's calls for help and plans to focus attention on the concept of "Free Asian Aid" for a neighboring victim of Communist aggression. He is providing background information to field regularly to keep up the momentum of this campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Material, NSC Files, Box 588, Cambodian Operations, Clandestine Psychological Campaign on Cambodia. Secret; Sensitive. Kennedy sent this memorandum to Kissinger on May 15 with a recommendation that he initial it and send it to the President. A note on the first page of the memorandum to the President reads: "The President has seen, May 21, 1970."

<sup>2</sup> Apparent reference to Helms' last two progress reports to Kissinger, May 11 and 18. (Both *ibid.*)