Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970

1. Special National Intelligence Estimate[1]

SNIE 14–69 Washington, January 16, 1969.

THE PACIFICATION EFFORT IN VIETNAM

Conclusions

A. The pacification program as a whole has made a significant contribution to the prosecution of the war and strengthened the political position of the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) vis-à-vis the Communists. Thus far the GVN's principal success has been in expanding its presence into the countryside. Providing permanent security for these gains has been more difficult. Security conditions continue to fluctuate with the intensity of combat. Low level terrorism, political agitation, and propaganda efforts by the Viet Cong (VC) continue to hamper progress, particularly since no more than a promising start has been made in reducing the effectiveness of the VC infrastructure. A large part of the countryside is still contested and subject to the continuing control of neither side.

B. As for gaining the allegiance of the people, this is almost impossible to measure. The turnout in the 1967 elections and the failure of the Communists to gain popular support at Tet suggest progress. Apprehension over the settlement of the war and the firmness of the American commitment tends to reduce popular confidence. The most common attitude among the peasants, however, continues to be one of war-weariness and apathy.

C. Saigon now seems finally to have accepted the need for a vigorous pacification effort. However, progress may still be hampered by the political situation in Saigon, continuing inefficiency, corruption, and the parochial concerns of the GVN.

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[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, NIC Files, Job 74–R1012A, NIEs and SNIEs. Secret; Sensitive; Limdis; Controlled Dissem. Prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency and intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and Defense, and the National Security Agency. On January 16 Helms sent this SNIE to the United States Intelligence Board, which concurred with its release.

D. Another major uncertainty is how much time is left to make up past deficiencies and consolidate current gains. Over the next several months, further progress in pacification will almost certainly not make the GVN much more able to cope with the VC, given peacetime conditions, than it would be today; a significant advance in this respect would probably require at least a year.

E. Finally, there is the question of how the Communists will react to the growing pressures on them. Despite improvements in the overall security situation, gains in pacification are still vulnerable to adverse military developments. The chances are good that the Communists will attempt to make an intensified effort to counter the gains in pacification and they will probably have some success. Thus, consolidation of gains is likely to continue to be a very slow and uncertain process.[2]

[Omitted here is the 5-page Discussion section of the estimate.]

[2] In the Discussion section, the estimate concluded that "the overall situation in Vietnam is such that pacification was less vulnerable to Communist countereffortts than in 1967." In a footnote dissent, Thomas L. Hughes, Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, argued "that the estimate does not support the conclusion that the pacification situation is less vulnerable than it was in 1967, but rather that it is essentially as vulnerable now as it was then."

2. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, January 19, 1969, 5:30 p.m.

MEETING WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT NIXON
STATLER HILTON HOTEL

President-elect Nixon said that Lodge could assure the South Vietnamese of his strong support but that they should understand that American public opinion was in a highly critical condition.

They discussed the question of a cease-fire and the difficulty of explaining the dangers of a cease-fire to the public. Lodge suggested that it might be expedient for the US to preempt the field with a proposal whereby a cease-fire would be tied in with a withdrawal. Kissinger seemed to think this idea had merit.

[1] Source: Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 9. No classification marking. Drafted by Lodge.

Mr. Nixon said for Lodge not to be concerned about adverse press in the immediate future. He said he was willing to tolerate an adverse press rather than give up a matter of importance in the negotiations.

Mr. Nixon believed that some of the outgoing administration's statements with regard to the Vietnamese were unduly harsh, and in view of the high regard with which the South Vietnamese hold him, he wanted Lodge to make it clear to them on a personal basis that Mr. Nixon has great sympathy with them and will not let them down. Mr. Lodge should explain to them that public opinion in the United States with respect to the South Vietnamese was at a low point and that they should not be concerned.

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3. Memorandum of Conversation Between Secretary of State Rogers and the Former Head of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam (Harriman)[1]

Washington, January 21, 1969.

This morning I saw Rogers.[2] I had about a half-hour's talk with him. I was very frank, telling him the need for a decision as to whether they were going to follow Rusk's policy for all-out fight and talk, or mutual deescalation and disengagement through talks, in accordance with Clark Clifford's view. I said Cy [Vance] and I strongly advised the second course for two reasons: (1) we thought the talks for political settlement would go better, although we couldn't guarantee this, but

[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Harriman Papers, Box 562, Special Files of Public Service, Kennedy–Johnson Administration, Trips and Missions, 1968–1969, Paris Peace Talks, Memoranda of Conversation. No classification marking. Drafted by Harriman.

[2] On January 18 Habib wrote Harriman his impressions of the "new team" on the basis of two meetings with members of the Nixon administration and "a little browsing around." Habib believed the Nixon administration had not yet focused on Vietnam, but thought they planned to take a careful and deliberate look at the problem. After a long meeting on January 17 with Rogers, Lodge, Kissinger, Bundy, Richard Pedersen, Walsh, and Green, Habib had the feeling that the Nixon team was still open-minded and he encouraged Harriman "to make your views known at the top level as soon as possible." (Ibid., Box 12, Classified, H–Ham) On November 19 Harriman met with Lodge at Harriman's house on N Street in Georgetown. He encouraged Lodge to treat Walsh as a co-equal head of the delegation as he had done with Vance. The North Vietnamese were very protocol minded and this status would not be lost on them. Harriman also mentioned that the Russians in Paris had been helpful and urged Lodge to call on Zorin and Walsh to develop a close relationship with Oberemko. (Ibid., Box 562, Trips and Missions, 1968–1969, Paris Peace Talks, Memoranda of Conversation)

(2) it was essential to reduce American casualties and get some of our troops coming home in order to retain the support of the American people. He appeared to agree with the latter point.

I told him about the help that we had been given by the Soviet Embassy in Paris, and he asked whether Lodge could establish that relationship. I said I thought he could if he tried. Certainly Walsh could, with Oberemko. I told him that Zorin had indicated some question of whether Lodge would want to talk to him because of their disputes in the UN. I said I had told him Lodge was very grateful to him for his attacks had made it possible for him to answer him on national TV which had made Lodge's political career and gotten him the Vice Presidential nomination.

In answer to his question, I expressed a very high regard for Phil Habib. I considered his judgment was good, but as a loyal Foreign Service Officer he would carry out all policy directives effectively. I mentioned Ambassador Bill Sullivan and Ambassador Bill Porter as the two others I thought were sound on Viet-Nam. I expressed considerable concern over Bunker and Alex Johnson. We both agreed Lodge had adjusted his views.

W. Averell Harriman[3]

[3] Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

4. National Security Study Memorandum 1[1]

Washington, January 21, 1969.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Situation in Vietnam

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 365, Subject Files, NSSMs 1–42. Secret.

In an effort to develop an agreed evaluation of the situation in Vietnam as a basis for making policy decisions, the President has directed that each addressee of this memorandum, the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and MACV prepare a separate response to the attached questions. The answers should include a discussion of uncertainties and possible alternative interpretations of existing data.

The President wishes to receive, as well, the Secretary of State's comments on the Ambassador's response, and the comments of the Secretary of Defense on the responses of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and MACV.

All replies should be forwarded to the President by February 10, 1969.

Henry A. Kissinger

Attachment

VIETNAM QUESTIONS

Environment of Negotiations

1. Why is the DRV in Paris? What is the evidence?

(Among the hypotheses:
a. Out of weakness, to accept a face-saving formula for defeat.
b. To negotiate the withdrawal of U.S. (and NVA) forces, and/or a compromise political settlement, giving a chance for NLF victory in the South.
c. To give the U.S. a face-saving way to withdraw.
d. To undermine the GVN and U.S./GVN relations, and to relieve U.S. military pressure in both North and South Vietnam.
e. Out of desire to end the losses and costs of war on the best terms attainable.)

2. What is the nature of evidence, and how adequate is it, underlying competing views (as in the most recent NIE on this subject,[2] with its dissenting footnotes) of the impact of various outcomes in Vietnam within Southeast Asia?

3. How soundly-based is the common belief that Hanoi is under active pressure with respect to the Paris negotiations from Moscow (for) and Peking (against)? Is it clear that either Moscow or Peking believe they have, or are willing to use, significant leverage on Hanoi's

[2] Reference is to NIE 50–68, "Southeast Asia After Vietnam," November 14, 1968; see *Foreign Relations*, 1964–1968, vol. VII, Document 220.

policies? What is the nature of evidence, other than public or private official statements?

4. How sound is our knowledge of the existence and significance of stable "Moscow" and "Peking" factions within the Hanoi leadership, as distinct, for example, from shifting factions, all of whom recognize the need to balance off both allies? How much do we know, in general, of intraparty disputes and personalities within Hanoi?

NVA/VA

5. What is the evidence supporting various hypotheses, and the overall adequacy of evidence, relating to the following questions:

a. Why did NVA units leave South Vietnam last summer and fall?
b. Did the predicted "third-wave offensive" by the NVA/VC actually take place? If so, why did it not achieve greater success?
c. Why are VC guerrillas and local forces now relatively dormant?

(Among the hypotheses: 1) response to VC/NVA battle losses, forcing withdrawal or passivity; 2) to put diplomatic pressure on U.S. to move to substantive talks in Paris; 3) to prepare for future operations; and/or 4) pressure of U.S. and allied operations.)

6. What rate of NVA/VC attrition would outrun their ability to replenish by infiltration and recruitment, as currently calculated? Do present operations achieve this? If not, what force levels and other conditions would be necessary? Is there any evidence they are concerned about continuing heavy losses?

7. To what relative extent do the U.S./RVNAF and the NVA/VC share in the *control* and the rate of VC/NVA attrition; i.e., to what extent, in terms of our tactical experience, can heavy losses persistently be imposed on VC/NVA forces, despite their possible intention to limit casualties by avoiding contact?

(Among the hypotheses:
a. Contact is predominantly at VC tactical initiative, and we cannot reverse this; VC need suffer high casualties only so long as they are willing to accept them, in seeking contact; or
b. Current VC/NVA loss rates can be maintained by present forces—as increased X% by Y additional forces—whatever the DRV/VC choose to do, short of further major withdrawal.)

8. What controversies persist on the estimate of VC Order of Battle; in particular, on the various categories of guerrilla forces and infrastructure? On VC recruiting, and manpower pool? What is the evidence for different estimates, and what is the overall adequacy of evidence?

9. What are NVA/VC *capabilities* for launching a large-scale offensive, with "dramatic" results (even if taking high casualties and without holding objectives long), in the next six months? (e.g., an offensive against one or more cities, or against most newly "pacified" hamlets.) How adequate is the evidence?

10. What are the main channels for military supplies for the NVA/VC forces in SVN, (e.g., Cambodia and/or the Laotion panhandle)? What portion of these supplies come in through Sihanoukville?

RVNAF

10A. What differences of opinion exist concerning extent of RVNAF improvement, and what is evidence underlying different views? (e.g., compare recent CIA memo with MACV views.)[3] For example:

a. Which is the level of effective, mobile, offensive operations? What results are they achieving?
b. What is the actual level of "genuine" small-unit actions and night actions in ARVN, RF and PF: i.e., actions that would typically be classed as such within the U.S. Army, and in particular, offensive ambushes and patrols? How much has this changed?
c. How much has the officer selection and promotion system, and the quality of leadership, actually changed over the years (as distinct from changes in paper "programs")? How many junior officers hold commissions (in particular, battlefield commissions from NCO rank) despite lack of a high school diploma?
d. What known disciplinary action has resulted from ARVN looting of civilians in the past year (for example, the widespread looting that took place last spring)?
e. To what extent have past "anti-desertion" decrees and efforts lessened the rate of desertion; why has the rate recently been increasing to new highs?
f. What success are the RF and PF having in providing local security and reducing VC control and influence in rural populations?

11. To what extent could RVNAF—as it is now—handle the VC (Main Force, local forces, guerrillas), with or without U.S. combat support to fill RVNAF deficiencies, if all VNA units were withdrawn:

a. If VC still had Northern fillers.
b. If all Northerners (but not regroupees) were withdrawn.

12. To what extent could RVNAF—as it is now—also handle a sizeable level of NVA forces:

a. With U.S. air and artillery support.
b. With above and also U.S. ground forces in reserve.

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[3] Reference to "recent CIA memo" is apparently to Document 1. MACV's recent views are in COMUSMCV telegram 3247 to CINCPAC, January 16, in which COMUSMACV concluded that the accelerated pacification program "continues to show good progress as all levels of the GVN maintain interest and exert considerable pressure for results." At the end of December 1968, the Hamlet Evaluation System showed a rise of 3 percent in relatively secure population to 76.3 percent of the total GVN population. "More than any other factor," MACV concluded, the "low level of enemy opposition has allowed the campaign to proceed at an encouraging pace." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 62, Vietnam Subject Files, 1–B Revolutionary Development Program)

c. Without U.S. direct support, but with increased RVNAF artillery and air capacity?

13. What, in various views, are the required changes—in RVNAF command, organization, equipment, training and incentives, in political environment, in logistical support, in U.S. modes of influence—for making RVNAF *adequate* to the tasks cited in questions 9 and 10 above? How long would this take? What are the practical obstacles to these changes, and what new U.S. moves would be needed to overcome these?

Pacification

14. How much, and where, has the security situation and the balance of influence between the VC and GVN actually changed in the countryside over time, contrasting the present to such benchmarks as end-61, end-63, end-65, end-67? What are the best indicators of such change, or lack of it? What factors have been mainly responsible for such change as has occurred? Why has there not been more?

15. What are the reasons for expecting more change in the countryside in the next two years than in past intervals? What are the reasons for not expecting more? What changes in RVNAF, GVN, U.S., and *VC* practices and *adaptiveness* would be needed to increase favorable change in security and control? How likely are such changes, individually and together; what are the obstacles?

16. What proportion of the rural population must be regarded as "subject to significant VC presence and influence"? (How should hamlets rated as "C" in the Hamlet Evaluation System—the largest category—be regarded in this respect?) In particular, what proportion in the provinces surrounding Saigon? How much has this changed?

17. What number or verified numbers of the Communist political apparatus (i.e., People's Revolutionary Party members, the hard-core "infrastructure") have been arrested or killed in the past year? How many of these were cadre of higher than village level? What proportion do these represent of total PRP membership, and how much—and how long—had the apparatus been disrupted?

18. What are the reasons for believing that current and future efforts at "rooting out" hard-core infrastructure will be—or will not be—more successful than past efforts? For example, for believing that collaboration among the numerous Vietnamese intelligence agencies will be markedly more thorough than in the past? What are the side-effects, e.g., on Vietnamese opinion, of anti-infrastructure campaigns such as the current "accelerated effort," along with their lasting effect on hard-core apparatus?

19. How adequate is our information on the overall scale and incidence of damage to civilians by air and artillery, and looting and misbehavior by RVNAF?

20. To what extent do recent changes in command and administration affecting the country-side represent moves to improve competence, as distinct from replacement of one clique by another? What is the basis of judgment? What is the impact of the recent removal of minority-group province and district officials (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Montagnard) in their respective areas?

Politics

21. *How adequate is our information,* and what is it based upon, concerning:

a. Attitudes of Vietnamese elites not now closely aligned with the GVN (e.g., religious leaders, professors, youth leaders, professionals, union leaders, village notables) towards: Participation—if offered—in the GVN; the current legitimacy and acceptability of the GVN; likewise (given "peace") for the NLF or various "neutralist" coalitions; towards U.S. intent, as they interpret it (e.g., U.S. plans for ending the war, perceived U.S. alignments with particular individuals and forces within Vietnam, U.S. concern for various Vietnamese interests).

b. Patterns of existent political alignments within GVN/RVNAF and outside it—reflecting family ties, corruption, officers' class, secret organizations and parties, religious and regional background—as these bear upon behavior with respect to the war, the NLF, reform and broadening of the GVN, and responses to U.S. influence and intervention.

22. What is the evidence on the prospects—and on what changes in conditions and U.S. policies would increase or decrease them—for changes in the GVN toward: (a) broadening of the government to include participation of *all* significant non-Communist regional and religious groupings (at province and district levels, as well as cabinet); (b) stronger emphasis, in selection and promotion of officers and officials, on competence and performance (as in the Communist Vietnamese system) as distinct from considerations of family, corruption, and social (e.g., educational) background; and (c) *political* mobilization of non-Communist sympathies and energies in support of the GVN, as evidenced, e.g., by reduced desertion, by willing alignment of religious, provincial and other leaders with the GVN, by wide cooperation with anti-corruption and pro-efficiency drives.

23. How critical, in various views, is each of the changes in question 22 above to prospects of attaining—at current, reduced or increased levels of U.S. military effort—either "victory," or a strong non-Communist political role after a compromise settlement of hostilities? What are views of the risks attendant to making these changes, or attempting them; and, to the extent that U.S. influence is required, on U.S. practical ability to move prudently and effectively in this direction? What is the evidence?

U.S. Operations

24. How do military deployment and tactics today differ from those of 6–12 months ago? What are reasons for changes, and what has this impact been?

25. In what different ways (including innovations in organization) might U.S. force-levels be reduced to various levels, while minimizing impact on combat capability?

26. What is the evidence on the scale of effect of B–52 attacks in producing VC/NVA casualties? In disrupting VC/NVA operations? How valid are estimates of overall effect?

27. What effect is the Laotian interdiction bombing having:

a. In reducing the capacity of the enemy logistic system?
b. In destroying matériel in transit?

28. With regard to the bombing of North Vietnam:

a. What evidence was there on the significance of the principal strains imposed on the DRV (e.g., in economic disruption, extra manpower demands, transportation blockages, population morale)?
b. What was the level of logistical through-put through the Southern provinces of NVN just prior to the November bombing halt? To what extent did this level reflect the results of the U.S. bombing campaign?
c. To what extent did Chinese and Soviet aid relieve pressure on Hanoi?
d. What are current views on the proportion of war-essential imports that could come into NVN over the rail or road lines from China, even if all imports by sea were denied and a strong effort even made to interdict ground transport? What is the evidence?
e. What action has the DRV taken to reduce the vulnerability and importance of Hanoi as a population and economic center (e.g., through population evacuation and economic dispersal)?

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5. Editorial Note

On January 21, 1969, from 2 to 3:30 p.m., President Nixon met in the Cabinet Room of the White House with the National Security Council. (President's Daily Diary; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files) At this inaugural meeting, President Nixon asked Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms to prepare for the second National Security Council Meeting (see Document 10) "a good job on the situation in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, adding that he also wanted an overview from State and CIA on the views of

other Asian nations on the situation and stating that much of what we will do depends on the effect that these actions will have on the peoples of the area, not only on the leaders but on the people themselves." The Council then discussed events in East Asia, Nigeria, Peru, and procedural and administrative issues.

Toward the end of the meeting, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, stated that the Council would address at the next meeting the situation in Vietnam and "alternative courses of action open to us." At this point, the following discussion occurred:

". . . the President emphasized that while he did not believe in changing policy for change sake alone that he felt with respect to Vietnam that we must rethink all of our policy tracks by reviewing all past instructions and determining whether or not we are proceeding down the correct tracks. He stated we do not want the enemy to assume that we are locked on the same old tracks as the previous Administration, emphasizing that we will change if the situation dictates.

"Secretary of State emphasized that the U.S. has not really made any commitments in this regard, pointing out that Ambassador Harriman informed him that we really had no policy with respect to negotiating objectives.

"General Wheeler said that both Harriman and Vance had only been provided preliminary instructions to get the talks started in Paris but that they had not been provided any finite objectives from Washington.

"The President stated, 'I was very disturbed about this since it was obvious from the conduct of the negotiations.' He stated that he had discussed the problem with Lodge and Walsh, emphasizing that he did not want any coercive action with respect to the South Vietnamese, pointing out that while they may be difficult to deal with they are our allies and this was the basis for the selection of Lodge and one of his principal missions is to rebuild South Vietnam's confidence and trust in the U.S.

"Dr. Kissinger stated that they had been operating in Paris with a laundry list of objectives which served as probing vehicles with the other side.

"Secretary Rogers stated that this was the Administration's effort to get something started before the election.

"The President said he was very much aware of the domestic issues but that he would rather take the heat now and achieve a sound settlement subsequently. He emphasized that he does not want a lot of promising press pizazz which we may not be able to deliver on later. He told Lodge to avoid the type of over optimism which had characterized past press treatment. He stated that while it looks fairly rosy now, we may not be able to achieve acceptable agreements.

"The President added that he instructed Lodge not to be quite so friendly with the North Vietnamese and assured him that if he made the President look a little tougher, that was just fine.

"The President stated that we cannot panic by moving the wrong way.

"Mr. Kissinger stated that the most difficult problem on Vietnam can be traced to fundamental disagreements on facts and that is why we are inventorying the facts to insure that we have them in hand before considering our basic objectives, referring to the questions on Vietnam which are to be developed interdepartmentally with a short deadline."

The discussion then turned again to procedural matters. (Minutes of NSC Meeting, January 21; Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS–82, NSC, NSC Meetings, January–March 1969)

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6. Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency[1]

No. 0550/69 Washington, January 24, 1969.

SUBJECT

The Situation in Vietnam: Overview and Outlook

[Omitted here is table of contents.]

SUMMARY

The present time is particularly appropriate for a review of the situation in Vietnam since we are at the close of a phase that began with the Tet Offensive last January. With the change in American administrations, the opening of the substantive negotiations in Paris and the current reintensification of the fighting after an appreciable lull, a new phase is now beginning.

Since Tet 1968, military trends have been increasingly favorable for allied forces. The Communists have taken staggering casualties, their combat effectiveness has declined, and their overall strength has

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 63, Vietnam Subject Files, 2–C General Military Activity. Secret; Sensitive. Helms sent this memorandum to Kissinger under cover of a January 24 note in which he wrote: "Herewith are two copies of a study on Vietnam, which Bill Bundy requested some days ago. I wanted you to have these immediately since I think you will find this effort a useful updating of the situation. A copy has been sent to the Secretary of State."

been maintained only through huge inputs of North Vietnamese manpower. Hanoi recognizes its military shortcomings and has been seeking for several months to redress them. Many of the units withdrawn from combat last year are now returning after refitting and the level of infiltration has risen sharply since late November. The enemy has already begun to step up the level of his military action and we can expect more activity along the lines we have seen over the last few weeks. This may include at least terrorist and sapper attacks on major urban centers, including Saigon. Such attacks could come at anytime.

Politically, the Communists are engaged in a major effort to weaken the GVN and to create the appearance if not the substance, of an ongoing administrative apparatus "governing" as much of South Vietnam as possible. Their aim is to boost the prestige and image of the National Liberation Front and its claims of control over territory and people. These claims are wildly exaggerated. At the moment, the GVN's position is a strong one: the political surface in South Vietnam is reasonably calm, progress is being made toward the elusive goal of stability, and the pace and effectiveness of pacification has increased appreciably in the past few months. Events of the next few months, however, are certain to test South Vietnam's internal stability, the solidity of recent pacification gains, and particularly the GVN's ability to withstand the war of nerves the Communists patently intend to wage in Paris.

In the negotiations, the Communists have already proved to be tough and skillful bargainers. They obviously want to move into substantive issues, which they hope will prove explosive in Saigon and divisive in relations between the GVN and the United States. We believe, however, that they also view the Paris talks as a serious effort to explore the possibilities of a negotiated settlement.

We cannot predict the terms the Communists would eventually accept as a compromise settlement. Hanoi's minimum position, however, probably will include total American troop withdrawal in a clearly defined period, and a restructuring of the political order in South Vietnam which guarantees the Communists a role and a power base from which they can work to achieve their ultimate objective of domination.

Over the next few months the Communists will attempt to combine political action and military efforts in a mix that will enable Hanoi to cope with whatever policies are adopted by the new US administration. At the moment the Communists believe the war can be continued at acceptable costs long enough to convince the United States that a compromise political settlement is mandatory.

Over the near term, the critical variable in all major aspects of the Vietnamese struggle—decisions in Hanoi, negotiations in Paris, and the course of events in South Vietnam—will be the posture and policies of the new American administration.

[Omitted here are sections: I. "The Current Setting," II. "The Military Picture," III. "The Political Picture," IV. "Pacification," V. "The View From Hanoi," VI. "Communist Intentions: The Near Term" and VII. "Outlook" and three annexes entitled "The Vietnamese Protagonists," "Military Forces," and "Hanoi's Four Points and the Front's Five Points."

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7. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State[1]

Saigon, January 24, 1969, 0444Z.

1474. For the Secretary from Bunker.

1. Now that the new team is in harness in Washington and Paris, and as we are heading into the substantive phase of the negotiations, I would like to make some general observations on our basic posture in dealing with the enemy and with our Vietnamese allies. All of us here fully understand the great importance of making rapid progress in the negotiations, and I am quite aware of the pressures from American public and Congressional opinion. The question is how we best conduct ourselves to achieve this progress that is desired by all of us. What follows, therefore, is not intended to be critical in any sense but to offer some suggestions, in the light of a fairly comprehensive experience in negotiations covering some 18 years in government service and a much longer period in business, which I hope will be found constructive.

2. As I look over the record of the very difficult negotiations with the DRV between May and November, I am struck with the importance of patience.[2] It was only when we convinced them that they simply could not obtain from us an unconditional cessation of the bombing that they began to move. This took five difficult months. The last weeks

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27–14 VIET. Secret; Nodis.

[2] An unattributed memorandum, January 24, entitled "Ambassador Bunker's Suggestions for the U.S. Negotiation Posture" summarized for Nixon's daily briefing Bunker's observations as follows: "The main thrust of Bunker's message (Saigon 1474) is that we must be patient, not overeager, in dealing with the Vietnamese Communists. If we set any deadlines for ourselves, the other side will sense it and exploit it. The new team's posture, he says, should be one of deliberation and patience, of purposeful and responsible search for an end to conflict." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1, President's Daily Briefs)

of that negotiation are especially instructive, for as we approached agreement it became apparent that the enemy was willing to give up a great many unreasonable demands in order to get the substantive negotiations started. Then, however, came the period of our difficulties with our South Vietnamese allies, and Hanoi soon became aware of deadlines that we were imposing on ourselves and on the GVN. I think it is fair to say that our patent eagerness to get the procedural arrangements out of the way may have delayed agreement as the enemy found it possible and even profitable to sit tight and to exploit through propaganda the differences that were developing between Washington and Saigon.

3. My first conclusion is that pressure for speed and the practice of fixing deadlines are quite likely to result in slower, rather than faster, progress on the substantive issues. One of the last messages I received from the outgoing administration referred to "excessive and unrealistic public and Congressional expectations" as requiring us to push ahead as rapidly as possible. I think we should be clear in our minds that the negotiations will be arduous, complex, difficult and probably long (unless we want agreement at any price). I hope the new administration can find some ways to get that message across to our Congress and our public. Such an effort would in itself have a very salutary effect on the enemy. If, instead, we signal to him that we are in a hurry and working to deadlines, he will merely dig in, try to exact every possible concession from us, and thus prolong the negotiations. This is a matter of basic style, which as you know is so important in diplomacy. The coming weeks will establish the style of the new team. It should be one of deliberation and patience, of a purposeful and responsible search for an end to the conflict, without any undue time-pressure or expectation of quick results.

4. I now turn to our Vietnamese allies, who are negotiating partners in a double sense: We must first negotiate with them to keep in tandem whenever possible, and then we must work as a team with them in negotiating with the enemy. This is a difficult operation even under the best of circumstances, but all of us should recognize at the outset that the GVN simply does not have the organizational depth or the capacity to make decisions as rapidly as we. This is true not only of South Viet-Nam but of all the underdeveloped countries. We only risk frustrating ourselves and creating a sense of frustration also in the government we deal with if we expect them to operate with the efficiency and despatch of our own government. I think a good deal of our trouble with them in late October stemmed from the fact that they simply could not gear themselves up for action as quickly as we had thought (and as President Thieu, initially, had thought). When under the lash of time limits, they panic and become paralyzed.

5. We should also recognize, I think, that under the form of government that has been set up in Saigon two years ago (actually largely at our urging), Thieu and Ky no longer have the freedom of action that was enjoyed by the military dictatorships of former years. The moves of the GVN are now closely watched by an elected National Assembly and by a public opinion that has a surprising latitude for expression. They have to take these factors into consideration just as we do in our country. Thieu has felt it necessary to consult what he calls his expanded national security council (the key military and cabinet officers plus the leaders of the two houses) at every important step. We may regard this a sign of weakness and may feel that he should exert more leadership; but we are not likely to change the basic character of Thieu who by and large is the best and most widely accepted leader his country has had in ten years. Ky is decisive but impulsive and sometimes irresponsible. Thieu has none of these characteristics; he is cautious and methodical, and in any case he lacks the political power to move by fiat.

6. There is one still more important and still more basic factor in our posture vis-à-vis the GVN which has to do with the intangible of mutual confidence. As I mentioned in my seventy-fifth and last message to President Johnson,[3] at the root of many of the hesitations and delays in Saigon during the last two months lay a deep suspicion about our ultimate intentions. Were we getting ready to turn our backs on them? Was the outgoing administration perhaps so intent on results that it was ready to sacrifice vital interests of our allies? Unfair questions perhaps, but deeply troubling ones to many of South Viet-Nam's leaders. Whenever we try to push them beyond their capacity, it revives and increases their doubts about our commitment. If rightly or wrongly they come to feel that essential positions and commitments to them are being abandoned, we will be even less able to get them to do what we want, and the bargaining power of the communists would be enormously increased.

7. As I mentioned in my last message to President Johnson, I think a good deal of our troubles during the last few months could have been avoided if we had made haste more slowly. I am deeply convinced on the basis of my experience here and elsewhere that our enemy and our ally will both dig in if we try to drive ahead too quickly. I am quite aware, of course, that a time may come when we have to lower the boom on the GVN, but we cannot do this all the time and during recent weeks we have in fact reached a situation of rapidly diminishing returns because we tried to too often. In view of our strongly held common conviction that we must make progress in Paris as rapidly as pos-

[3] See *Foreign Relations,* 1964–1968, vol. VII, Document 285.

sible, I think agreement on a basic negotiating posture should figure high on our agenda.

8. You may wish to repeat this message to Cabot Lodge in Paris for his information and possible comment.[4]

Bunker

[4] In telegram 1195 from Paris, Delto 1245, January 27, Lodge wrote: "I think Saigon's 1474 is full of wisdom." Lodge suggested that the South Vietnamese could not be pushed too rapidly in negotiations, that they should be privately informed of U.S.-North Vietnamese private bilateral negotiations in Paris, and that there would be instances when they would disagree with U.S. strategy and tactics, but their concerns should be tolerated. Lodge concluded that there were times when North and South Vietnam needed "a hard push from the outside," but while this pressure "is sometimes indispensable, equally obviously, it cannot be done all the time." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1, President's Daily Briefs)

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

Washington, January 24, 1969.

SUBJECT

NSC Meeting of January 25 on Vietnam[2]

At Tab A are proposed talking points[3] for the NSC meeting on Saturday.

At Tab C is the paper on Vietnam Alternatives.[4] (You will recall that you saw and approved it for distribution while at Key Biscayne.) The members of the NSC have had the paper since Tuesday[5] and I understand that each has a number of comments.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 74, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, Memos to the President for NSC, 1969. Secret. Nixon wrote the following notes on the first page of the memorandum: "1. Helms should stay. 2. Police forces. 3. V. Nam training."

[2] See Document 10.

[3] Attached but not printed.

[4] Tab C was a 27-page undated paper consisting of two parts: I, a more detailed version of the summary provided in Tab B, and II, "Alternative Military Strategies," that contained three options with analysis: "A. Escalation, B. Current Military Posture, C. Substantial Reduction in U.S. Presence with RVNAF Assuming Increased Responsibility."

[5] January 21.

Since the paper was prepared by the NSC staff prior to January 20, it was not coordinated with the agencies. It is designed to be an initial cut at broad alternative objectives and courses of action. It will have served its purpose if it stimulates a discussion of basic issues. Following the discussion on Saturday[6] and next Wednesday,[7] it would probably be most useful to draft a completely new inter-agency paper which focuses more sharply on the real choices in objectives, negotiating strategy and U.S. troop levels and the major points of disagreement among your advisers.

You may wish to re-read the five-page summary paper at Tab B before the meeting.

Tab B

VIETNAM POLICY ALTERNATIVES

To choose among military and negotiating strategies for Vietnam, the U.S. needs to determine what its objectives are. In turn, the choice of objectives depends on an estimate of the costs and risks of alternative military strategies and the probabilities of their success.

This memorandum first describes alternative outcomes that the U.S. might seek, and then alternative military strategies. Third, combinations of military and negotiating strategies in pursuit of various outcomes are described and their implications evaluated.

I. Alternative Outcomes (Tab I)[8]

A. Assured GVN Control of All of South Vietnam

U.S. would seek to bring all of SVN under complete and assured GVN control. U.S. forces would remain until either the NVA had been withdrawn and the VC forces and structure eliminated, or until Hanoi had negotiated a settlement for such withdrawals including assured GVN control and perhaps international supervision and guarantees.

B. Mutual Withdrawal Without Political Accommodation

U.S. would seek the withdrawal of NVA forces from South Vietnam and the end of infiltration. In return, U.S. would phase out the withdrawal of its own forces with those of the NVA, tacitly or by agreement, even in the absence of political accommodation in SVN. (The U.S. will have to decide whether to insist upon a withdrawal of NVA forces from the Laotian panhandle and from Cambodia.) With U.S. military and economic assistance, the GVN could confront the indigenous

[6] January 25, at the NSC meeting.

[7] January 29.

[8] The tab cited here and under II below are the two parts of Tab C referred to in footnote 4 above.

communist forces; or agreement could be reached between the GVN and the groups opposing it during the withdrawal process on a political or territorial accommodation.

C. Political Accommodation (with Mutual Troop Withdrawal)

The U.S. would seek a political accommodation which would end the military conflict in South Vietnam in a manner acceptable to both sides. The U.S. could seek to participate in the negotiation of this accommodation or it could leave such negotiations to the South Vietnamese. U.S. forces would be withdrawn from SVN only after an agreement acceptable to the GVN and the NLF had been negotiated. International forces might play a role in the election arrangements or in support of a coalition government.

D. Territorial Accommodation

The U.S. would accept or even encourage a division of South Vietnam into several large Vietcong and GVN regions, and seek to terminate the war through a ceasefire, explicit or tacit. U.S. forces could be reduced or perhaps completely withdrawn as the threat from the NVA could be handled by RVNAF, or as the NVA withdrew.

II. Alternative Military Strategies (Tab II)

The two basic approaches in selecting a military strategy are:

(1) to continue pressures on Hanoi through the current strategy, threats of escalation, or actual escalation; or

(2) to reduce the U.S. presence in South Vietnam which, by making U.S. presence more sustainable, could be another form of pressure.

A. Escalation

(1) Expanded military operations, from resumption of bombing or ground operations into Cambodia, to limited or full invasion of North Vietnam and Laos.

(2) Alternatively we could *threaten* such escalation.

B. Current Military Posture

Continue current force levels and current military operations, i.e., emphasis on defense of Saigon and other cities, wide-spread intensive patrolling, sweeps, and operations into communist base areas. (A variant would involve restructuring of U.S. ARVN into small units, deployed throughout populated areas.)

C. Substantial Reduction in U.S. Presence with RVNAF Assuming Increasing Responsibility

To reduce costs and fatalities and to increase credibility of the U.S. remaining as long as necessary, a substantial number of U.S. forces

would be withdrawn in the first year and more in the second year, to reach a level that can be sustained. U.S. would continue programs to modernize RVNAF and expect South Vietnamese to carry an increasing share of the burden.

III. Negotiating and Military Strategies To Attain Alternative Outcomes

A. Assured GVN Control of All of South Vietnam

This objective could be obtained either through a "fade away" of all North Vietnamese forces (hence requiring only a *tacit* agreement by Hanoi), or through a more formal agreement. The latter might be harder to obtain since Hanoi would have to acknowledge defeat, but it could include international guarantees against renewed infiltration. (Yet, this has proven of little help in the past.)

Advocates of the *current military strategy* argue the NVA could be destroyed or driven out and the VC defeated (sufficiently for RVNAF to cope with them) within 1–2 years. Assuming this military outcome can be achieved, how can Hanoi then be induced to give up? Is it possible that with the VC eliminated, NVA attacks could be handled by an improved RVNAF and U.S. forces small enough to maintain indefinitely?

If not, or if the NVA cannot be driven out, *threats of escalation* or *actual escalation* might be used. However, it is possible that Hanoi might not give in because, (1) it withstood previous escalation and might believe it can withstand more, and (2) it might expect to receive aid from Russia and China which would at least offset the effects of U.S. escalation.

Arguments against seeking this objective are: (1) that U.S. objectives in South Vietnam could be achieved with other outcomes; and (2) that because of VC/NVA strength and limitations in GVN/RVNAF improvements, it would require prolonged fighting, unacceptable to U.S. public.

B. Mutual U.S.–NVA Withdrawal Without Political Accommodation

The objective would be the withdrawing of NVA forces, at the price of U.S. withdrawal, giving the GVN a fair chance of overcoming the VC insurgency. Should the GVN nonetheless be defeated eventually by the VC, it would be the result of a primarily indigenous conflict. Such a withdrawal by outside forces might lead quickly to agreement on political or territorial accommodation. Withdrawal might result from formal agreement or it might be tacitly coordinated. (The U.S. would continue economic and military aid to the GVN.)

The reason for not seeking an overall political accommodation as part of mutual withdrawal is that (1) the GVN would oppose it, (2) it would probably require protracted negotiations, and (3) might deeply involve the U.S. in a settlement that results in a Communist takeover.

The U.S. could seek to press Hanoi to agree to mutual withdrawal with the current military strategy or even through threats of escalation or actual escalation. By thus confronting Hanoi with a more complete defeat (perhaps leading to assured GVN control of all of the South), it might be easier to obtain a compromise settlement and Hanoi would be prevented from dragging out negotiations.

On the other hand, the U.S. could seek the mutual withdrawal outcome by reducing its own forces, so as to (1) avoid the risk of having a new military commitment fail, (2) make it less costly for the U.S. to engage in prolonged bargaining and hence convince Hanoi of its staying power, and (3) perhaps stimulate the GVN to better performance. (Indeed, if the GVN and RVNAF really improved, assured GVN control of all of South Vietnam might then still be possible.)

With mutual U.S.–NVA withdrawal, the GVN could keep the VC from over-running population centers and could probably extend its control in the countryside. (However, some believe that, under VC pressure, RVNAF might be forced to consolidate its strength and to abandon some districts to VC control.) If Hanoi refuses military withdrawal, the U.S. could keep its forces in Vietnam, while building up RVNAF. If NVA forces were reintroduced later, the U.S. could reintroduce troops or escalate in other ways.

C. Political Accommodation (and Mutual Withdrawal)

The argument is made that there is sufficient common interest among South Vietnamese to make possible an independent non-communist state even if the NLF participated in the political process. Alternatively, this could lead to the Communists coming to power by peaceful means, but the U.S. would still have fulfilled its commitments. And given the enemy's costs of continuing the war, he might accept the uncertainty of a political contest. Some argue that the NVA would withdraw only if there is first a political settlement.

Should the U.S. participate in negotiating a political settlement? An argument in favor is that it would lead to a more satisfactory and perhaps speedier agreement. An argument against is that it would make the U.S. more responsible for the outcome.

The pros and cons here of alternate military strategies are essentially the same as those for the mutual withdrawal outcome discussed above.

D. Territorial Accommodation

While there are few if any direct advocates of partition, some degree of territorial accommodation exists and any tacit de-escalation or stand-down during negotiations might further solidify it. The VC and GVN, in default of a political compromise, may evolve a greater acquiescence in a territorial status quo.

For this outcome to emerge by an evolutionary process, rather than by negotiated agreement, there probably has to be a progressive lessening of hostilities. A modified version of the present military posture is probably compatible with territorial accommodation. Some reduction of troops, a deliberate concentration of counter-insurgency in certain areas, and a reduction of offensive sweeps (except against large-unit enemy concentrations), would probably contribute to this outcome.

A substantial reduction of U.S. troops is compatible with such an accommodation, and would probably contribute to it if the VC wished such an accommodation. But substantial reduction undoubtedly would raise the VC temptation to enlarge its control and to demoralize the GVN, i.e. to upset the status quo; U.S. troop reduction probably increases GVN willingness to accept a territorial status quo.

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

Washington, January 24, 1969.

SUBJECT

Conversation with South Vietnamese Ambassador Bui Diem, January 24, 1969

I saw the Vietnamese Ambassador for a few minutes this evening and made the following points to him:

—The Nixon Administration believes it essential that the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) and the U.S. Government work closely together in the months to come.

—We have the impression that some of the difficulty between us over the past few months resulted from unnecessary arguments over language.

—We intend to be tough with the North Vietnamese on the issues, but will try to get maneuvering room by using soft language.

—South Vietnamese attitudes over recent months, we believe, were partly a result of distrust of the U.S. Perhaps the GVN was re-

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 136, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. I, Through 3/19/69. Secret. Nixon wrote "Excellent" on the memorandum. Kissinger sent an identical memorandum to Rogers dated January 28. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 1 US–VIET S)

luctant to concede anything because of uncertainties over what we might next ask.

—This Administration will deal honestly and frankly with the GVN. We will listen carefully and sympathetically to the GVN, although we may not always be able to do what is asked of us.

Bui Diem admitted that relations had deteriorated over the past months, and said that he personally believed unnecessary things had been said by both sides.

I told the Ambassador that he should feel free to call on me any time he wished. I emphasized that I would like him to tell me what the *real* Vietnamese concerns were, rather than to go over arguments largely put out for public consumption.

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10. Minutes of National Security Council Meeting[1]

Washington, January 25, 1969.

The National Security Council convened at 0930 hours, January 25, 1969, in the Cabinet Room of the White House. Attendees are at Tab A.[2]

Substance of Meeting

The first formal briefing was given by Mr. Helms, Director of CIA, the text of which is at Tab B.[3] The briefing included a summary of Hanoi's objectives in South Vietnam which included (1) unified country under Communist control, (2) elimination of dividing lines, (3) acceptance of the concept that North Vietnamese forces are not foreign troops and (4) the recent determination that they cannot win by military means and a decision that they can negotiate a settlement which will permit attainment of objectives.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–109, NSC Minutes, Originals, 1969. No classification marking. No drafting information appears on the minutes. There are many handwritten corrections on the text. Kissinger briefly summarizes this NSC meeting in *White House Years,* pp. 237–238, as follows: "the team was too new and career officers too demoralized. The briefings did not offer new and imaginative ideas to a new President eager for them, even from the military."

[2] Tab A was not found. According to the President's Daily Diary, the following attended this NSC meeting: William Rogers, Melvin Laird, General Wheeler, Richard Helms, Henry Kissinger, Elliot Richardson, U. Alexis Johnson, George A. Lincoln, Robert Murphy, Andrew Goodpaster, William Bundy, Philip Habib, Alexander Haig, and Bryce Harlow. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files)

[3] Tab B was not found, but Helms' briefing is summarized below.

The internal situation in South Vietnam was discussed. The Director concluded that under the present ground rules, assuming the withdrawal of our troops, South Vietnam would be able to go it alone in approximately one year. Director reviewed the probable negotiating position of the North Vietnamese government stating that while he believes they are serious about negotiations, they will insist on (1) total U.S. withdrawal and (2) a role in the South Vietnamese government which they believe will optimize their opportunities for ultimate takeover. Director turned next to Laos and made the following points:

—War started when the French withdrew.

—Majority of the fighting is done by North Vietnamese troops with the view towards protecting their logistic lines into South Vietnam.

—Up until now, there has been a reluctance on both sides to expand the war in Laos. At present, government represents a three-way coalition of neutralists, rightists and the Pathet Lao.

—Souvanna has recently shifted from a neutralist alignment to a rightist stance and generally supports the U.S. view, especially a compromise political settlement in South Vietnam.

Director turned next to Cambodia making the following points:

—Sihanouk has long expected a Communist win.

—Has recognized NLF.

—Protests U.S. incursions.

—Has recently developed second thoughts as the Communist foothold in his country has increased and has initiated tentative feelers to renew relations with the U.S.

—Cambodia realizes significant revenue through logistic support to NVA.

—The Communist organization in Cambodia controls the logistics framework for the war effort in South Vietnam which includes both land and water routing but CIA lacks hard intelligence with respect to the latter.

Director turned next to Thailand, making the following points:

—Thailand participates with 12,000 troops in support of South Vietnam, provides pilots and artillery elements in support of Royal Laotian government.

—Has made little progress in controlling insurgency in Northeast Thailand.

—Thailand extremely concerned about possible U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam.

The President interrupted and told the Director that he wished to have an in-depth analysis of Indonesia.

Director stated that in general the U.S. image in Southeast Asia was quite favorable and the primary concern in the area is that the U.S. might withdraw precipitously.

The President then inquired about Malaysia, Singapore and Burma.

Director stated that Ne Win, leader of Malaysia [*Burma*] has spoken out against the war in South Vietnam. At this point, Mr. William Bundy interrupted and stated that as early as 1966 Ne Win had shifted privately to support of the U.S. war effort and reaffirmed this in discussions with Mr. Bundy at that time. He added that in 1967 Ne Win again reaffirmed his support for the U.S. in discussions with Premier Sato of Japan, much to the surprise of the latter.

Concerning Burma [*Singapore*], the Director stated that Li Quon Hu [*Lee Kuan Yew*] generally supported the U.S. position but was pessimistic about the Thieu government in South Vietnam.

The President then asked how the other leaders feel about the Thieu government. Mr. Helms stated that the picture was generally mixed, adding that President Marcos of the Philippines supports the U.S. but has been preoccupied with internal problems. Japan appears to be the main center of the Communist echo in the area. Most of the leaders of the Southeast Asia countries believe the U.S. is willing to settle the war in good faith but are fearful of South Vietnamese delaying tactics. Mr. Helms listed Thailand, South Vietnam and South Korea as countries who were most fearful of the results of a U.S. withdrawal from the area.

The President then asked how the Indonesians felt. Mr. Helms replied that they strongly support the U.S. since the fall of the Sukarno regime, recognizing that the U.S. presence in South Vietnam actually assisted in his downfall. President Suharto has become increasingly willing to encourage a return of U.S. business to Indonesia. At this point, William Bundy emphasized that initial fears in Indonesia concerning U.S. persistence in South Vietnam seemed to be settling.

The President then asked the Director, CIA, to provide him with a review of the outlook of all the countries in Southeast Asia with respect to the options which have been laid out in the paper for consideration by the National Security Council.[4]

Mr. Helms' briefing was concluded.

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[4] On February 4 Helms sent the President a 22-page memorandum entitled "Probable Reactions of Non-Communist Asian Countries to Vietnam Policy Options," along with a 2-page summary of it. In that summary, Helms suggested that although most Asian countries preferred an early end to the war, they were concerned about a Vietnam settlement causing a gradual reduction of U.S. commitments in Asia. Helms also noted that the further an Asian country was from the Vietnam conflict—Japan or India were specifically mentioned—the more willing it was to accept a settlement that included compromise with Hanoi. Helms noted that Sihanouk's Cambodia was the exception to this rule. On the other hand, Thailand, Laos, Nationalist China, and South Korea favored a continued struggle to ensure that South Vietnam controlled all its territory. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 136, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. 1, Through 3/19/69)

The briefing by Lt. Colonel Thrush, member of the Joint Staff is at Tab C.[5] Colonel Thrush's briefing consisted of a series of charts which covered (1) infiltration statistics, (2) force projections (Note: The V.P. joined the Security Council meeting at 0934 hours), (3) enemy casualty statistics, (4) enemy logistics framework, (5) main enemy logistics routes, (6) enemy bases, (7) enemy bases in Cambodia, (8) location of supply centers in South Vietnam.

At this point, the President interrupted and asked why we are finding more and better enemy caches recently. General Wheeler replied that this was due to better intelligence, a greater number of defectors who are willing to talk. General Goodpaster added that this also resulted from increased operations in enemy gut areas, withdrawal of main force units from some of these areas.

Mr. Alexis Johnson then added: "I was informed while in Saigon that enemy PWs are now quite disillusioned, even angry and are willing to talk". The President retorted, "I think there is a tendency to get skeptical of these optimistic reports". Both Mr. Johnson and the Chairman reiterated that there is a positive and honest shift in the enemy's attitude in South Vietnam and in his willingness to surrender. General Goodpaster added that there has been a striking but not as yet significant increase in Chieu Hoi rates. Secretary of Defense Laird stated, "I have heard these briefings each year and each year they get more optimistic and, therefore, I hope that we will be very careful in digesting the material which is put forth."

Briefer continued showing chart no. 9 on food shortages. General Goodpaster pointed out that the logistic situation in each area of activity is quite different. In the I Corps area to the north, the enemy's logistics are weak and he is suffering. In the III Corps area which includes Saigon, the picture is quite different due to the extensive availability of food and supplies moving through Cambodia.

The briefer then turned to what the Joint Staff considered to be four main enemy options in their future operations which could be undertaken individually or in combination:

1. Attack across the DMZ.
2. Attack in North and South Vietnam, flanking the DMZ via Laos.
3. Attacking east and southeast across the Cambodian border towards Saigon.
4. Continue current operation of maintaining sporadic effort in all areas of South Vietnam, utilizing main force to attack U.S. forces and guerilla operations to disrupt pacification operations and to strengthen Communist political infrastructure.

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[5] Tab C has not been found.

The Chairman, General Wheeler, suggested that the last option appeared to be the one that the Communists would continue with for the time being. Briefer then displayed Chart on air operations and at this point, President interrupted and asked the Chairman whether or not the military were being restricted in their operations in South Vietnam. General Wheeler replied, "only by the decision of the President." The President asked if General Wheeler agreed with these restrictions. General Wheeler replied that if we need authority to do more, it will be requested. The President commented that he hoped these restrictions were reviewed and reexamined regularly.

Secretary of State Rogers asked whether or not U.S. drones go into China. Chairman replied that on several occasions over the last few years drones have strayed over China but generally over insular territory. President asked whether or not a drone aircraft was distinguishable from conventional aircraft. General Wheeler replied that I believe that Chinese radar operators can now distinguish between drone and conventional aircraft, certainly between drones and our SR–71 aircraft. General Wheeler noted that the North Vietnamese react very quickly to aircraft north of the 19th Parallel.

Briefer then reviewed type military operations conducted in the various Corps zones in South Vietnam. Under Secretary Richardson inquired, "do our forces involved in interdiction action just set astride enemy supply routes or infiltration routes?" The briefer replied, "yes, but with aggressive patrolling outward". Mr. Richardson then inquired, "does this involve much movement?" General Wheeler and General Goodpaster then described the style of U.S. operations with focus on the III Corps area, commenting that the three ARVN divisions in the III Corps area were their poorest units but that this situation has been resolved through the utilization of the ARVN strategic reserve which includes their airborne division plus their ranger and marine battalions. He also added that the recent redeployment of the 1st Air Mobile Division from the II Corps zone to the III Corps zone had added immeasurably to our capabilities in this area. General Goodpaster then explained the technique of "pile-on tactics" through which U.S. forces rapidly converge on enemy contacts with superior mobile force and firepower whenever the contact develops.

The President then asked, "is this what you described to me as 'wielding the force'?" General Goodpaster replied affirmatively. The President then asked about the caliber of the ARVN Generals in the Saigon area and what we are doing about their inferior quality. General Wheeler replied that General Abrams has been pressuring the South Vietnamese on both this issue and on the alarmingly high rate of South Vietnamese defections. Dr. Kissinger then asked for some statistics which would enable us to compare friendly and enemy casualties when

(a) actions were friendly initiated or (b) enemy initiated. General Goodpaster said he would judge that about 80 to 90% were the result of friendly initiated actions. He also added that U.S. and ARVN casualties inflicted on the enemy were running about equal. General Lincoln then asked why the enemy was willing to sacrifice approximately 2,000 casualties per week in what appeared to be a meat grinder. General Wheeler stated that the enemy must continue its military activities to maintain the most favorable negotiating stance, adding that furthermore if they were to slow down, pacification operations would pick up. General Wheeler stated that the 2,000 casualties per week figure is probably modest since it is based on body count and does not reflect the untold casualties inflicted by air nor include the numerous enemy wounded in action. Under Secretary Richardson again asked if this figure could be firm. General Wheeler reemphasized its modest content.

The President then asked what the reason was for the drop-off in enemy captured during the last quarter of 1968. General Goodpaster stated he was not sure but it might be due to statistical lag.

The President then inquired whether or not we felt the enemy had deescalated since the bombing halt and if they had whether or not it was forced by friendly effectiveness or was the result of a willful decision to do so. General Goodpaster stated they are continuing to attempt to achieve a success, especially in the III Corps areas and have not been holding back.

The President asked whether enemy initiatives had been increasing or dropping. General Goodpaster replied in the III Corps area they have definitely increased, especially in the III Corps areas, particularly the Tay Ninh and Michelin areas.

The President inquired if they were trying to keep up the pressure during the talks. General Goodpaster replied definitely but they have been restricted by our operations to their jungle sanctuaries.

The President then asked if we were ready for enemy activity during Tet, emphasizing that he wished to be updated on the military situation so that he could approve contingency actions which might be necessary. General Wheeler stated that General Abrams is ready to move quickly, adding that intelligence indicates that the enemy hopes to move in the Saigon area but has been frustrated by General Abrams' employment of B–52s, tactical air and artillery, together with the logistical attrition that the enemy has suffered.

The President then asked what would happen if the enemy moved massively across the DMZ. General Wheeler replied that he would immediately request authority to initiate bombing in and north of the zone. The President again asked if the military was able to do what they wanted in the conduct of the war. General Wheeler replied, "yes," with the exception of the bombing of the north and mentioned that if

Saigon were attacked, that a contingency plan is in existence which included strikes in North Vietnam to reflect our serious concern for a breach of understandings arrived at in Paris.

The President asked to see the plan.

Secretary of State Rogers then inquired, "how long General Wheeler thought the enemy could continue in the face of the present losses?" The Chairman replied that in his judgment about two years, pointing out that the conflict was not like World War II where at this point in time exploitation could be initiated and a decisive victory achieved. The Director of DIA interrupted and stated, "but at this point there are still 500,000 regulars that have not been used in North Vietnam." Secretary of Defense stated, "but attacks are dropping off". General Lincoln then asked whether or not the continuing losses of the enemy were a result of a failure of local units to get the word to fall off. General Wheeler said, "no, they are attacking on orders from Hanoi".

Dr. Kissinger then asked about casualty rates in the event we were to deescalate our operations. General Wheeler replied we would then suffer greater losses as a result of turning the initiative over to the enemy. General Goodpaster added, "we must keep pressure on the enemy or he will achieve local initiative, overrun exposed static U.S. units and, in general, add to the U.S. losses". Secretary Rogers then inquired about the possibility of mutual deescalation by agreement. General Wheeler replied, "I can see no viable agreement of that type in the wind". General Lincoln added, "such an agreement need not be explicit but could be tacit". Secretary Rogers said, "frankly I just cannot accept such a concept".

At this point, the JCS briefer continued covering air operations, B–52 operations and carrier operations, naval operations, to include Market Time, Game Warden and naval gunfire. Briefer then reviewed ground reconnaissance operations in Laos (Prairie Fire), Cambodia (Daniel Boone) and current restrictions and ground rules involved. Briefer turned next to modernization and improvement of Vietnamese forces under Phases I and II, stating that we were now in Phase II, programmed for completion in FY 72. A discussion on desertion rates followed and General Wheeler stated that he is convinced that the ARVN leadership is improving and should continue upward, adding that some of the deserters were statistical only in that they deserted one unit to go to another unit which had higher pay or better living conditions.

The President then asked whether or not our modernization program for the Vietnamese Armed Forces was adequate. Secretary Laird stated, "I think we are moving but started very late". General Wheeler stated, "I think we are going about as fast as both we can provide and the South Vietnamese can accept". General Goodpaster added, "we are paced about right with about two or three qualifications." These

include engineer artillery, transportation and medical equipment which we are planning to provide through selective reduction in U.S. units. The worst problem area is the development of the Vietnamese helicopter capability. We would like to deactivate some U.S. units but don't dare at this time.

The President then asked about the situation with respect to local ARVN forces, stating that in his view the AID people are totally unsuited to supervise the development of local security forces, stating it is like the blind leading the blind, adding AID is incompetent to handle this mission. General Goodpaster suggested that we receive a report from the field.

The President stated, "I know this operation is inadequate and recognize that a police force must be developed." The President then told General Wheeler to get a complete report on the whole program to include who is doing it, whether he is qualified, what system he is employing.

The briefer then continued showing some pacification statistics. At this point, Dr. Kissinger asked what are your criteria for the various categories of pacification (referring specifically to statistics which reflected that 73% of South Vietnam was pacified). General Wheeler replied, "that figure is probably vulnerable" adding that the pacification chart is significant primarily because it reflects trends and further noting that subsequent to Tet there was an initial drop but with a steady increase shortly thereafter.

Briefer showed a chart on Chieu Hoi which reflected statistics for the month of December 1968 which were the second highest to date. The briefer then showed a chart reflecting the roundup of Viet Cong infrastructure. The Director of DIA commented that President Thieu has finally moved out in this area. Dr. Kissinger asked, "why is there such a problem in getting the South Vietnamese to move against people who are bent on doing them in?" To which Mr. Bundy replied "it is primarily a problem of organization and leadership". The President asked who was our representative charged with this job to which Mr. Bundy replied, "this comes under the COORDS organization under Mr. Colby".

The President then asked "is he a specialist, does he have any idea of what he is doing?" Mr. Bundy replied "he was the Chief of Station in Saigon when you were Vice President."

JCS briefer then concluded.

Secretary of State Rogers introduced Mr. William Bundy at 1100 hours. The President stated we will listen to Mr. Bundy for 30 minutes, take a five minute break and then return for our discussion.

Mr. Bundy introduced his briefing, stating that he would comment on (1) pacification, (2) the economic situation in South Vietnam, (3) the

political situation in South Vietnam and (4) the situation in Southeast Asia in general.

Mr. Bundy made the following points:

—Agree that pacification trends are upwards but emphasized that this is extremely vulnerable.

—Pacification is mostly a GVN effort supported by the COORDS organization under Colby which includes some 5,000 military and 1,200 civilians, the latter being primarily AID with some foreign service officers.

—The economic situation indicates that inflation continues to be a serious problem.

—There has been progress in the countryside on rice production.

—Main problems center on requirement to control budget (U.S. must carefully gauge its input), post-Tet progress has been good, on a long-term basis South Vietnam has good economic recovery potential.

Discussing the political situation, the following points were made:

—Until June 1967, Ky appeared to have the helm in South Vietnam. Then Thieu took over an uneasy primary role, with Ky controlling cabinet appointments and providing a basically technician cabinet.

—Thieu began last May to reform cabinet and installed Huong and the power struggle resolved in favor of Thieu.

—During Fall, Thieu's stock raised and then fell back to its current low point.

—Huong is on Ky's bad list although he looks like a good man and a man of honor. The cabinet is of Thieu's and Huong's formulation and although it has weaknesses is better than previous models. The General Assembly has performed well as a sounding board, albeit hard lined.

—Until recently, Corps commanders wielded autonomous and considerable power which has been reduced since June.

—I Corps Commander still very strong. At the district and province level, Chiefs are now appointed from Saigon.

—Civil Service is of mixed quality.

Mr. Bundy then turned to political forces in South Vietnam, pointing out that it is a conglomerate of geographic, religious and ethnic divergency.

—The major problem is the confidence effectiveness index of the central government.

—Tet was their Pearl Harbor which crystallized their confidence. Confidence grew as a result of Tet, our presence and the retirement of President Johnson.

—It appears they can do the job assuming a third factor is properly added to the index, i.e., a sense of reality.

—Despite this, there is a great distance to go.

—Main problem is corruption.

At this point, Secretary of State interrupted and stated that he has spoken to Senator Kennedy about the recent Kennedy report on

corruption and has been assured by Kennedy that he will not release this report.[6]

—The second major problem is how the South Vietnamese can politically organize to permit participation by the NLF either through legitimization or a front solution. There has been little progress in this area. The Lin Minh party supported by Thieu has been floundering due to lack of positive leadership by Thieu who hangs back until he is convinced that success is assured.

—An effective coalition must be organized.

Mr. Bundy then turned to his view of Southeast Asian reactions to types of settlements referring to the November NIE[7] on this subject.

The President interrupted and stated that he wished to look at this NIE. Mr. Bundy made the following points:

—In general, the nations would be appalled by U.S. defeat, and defeat in their view has military overtones but in the final analysis will be measured by the ultimate results, i.e., if the Communists prevail in South Vietnam we are defeated.

—Nations are sure we have the power but are less certain of our will.

—In Laos, Souvanna would not survive. In Cambodia, Sihanouk would become a satellite. In Thailand, the situation would be knife-edge, especially with the obvious fall of Laos. In Malaysia, the situation would deteriorate. In Singapore, there is some pessimism about the future and hope that the U.S. will hang in. The Indonesians would like a peaceful solution and might be willing to play a role in Hanoi. They would definitely be shaken if the U.S. were to fail but would probably not collapse as a result. In the Philippines, failure would be a setback and might combine with the Huk problem to escalate difficulties.

The President then emphasized that he wished to read the NIE on this subject and asked how it was prepared. Mr. Bundy replied that it was an intelligence community document under the Chairmanship of CIA, approved by the U.S. Intelligence Board. Mr. Bundy concluded his presentation and was succeeded by Mr. Philip Habib, Member of U.S. Paris negotiating team.

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[6] Senator Edward Kennedy's report has not been identified, however, following his trip to Vietnam in January 1968 as Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees, he urged a "confrontation" with the Saigon government which he believed was "infested with corruption" and inefficiency. According to Kennedy, half of the $30 million a year in U.S. refugee aid for South Vietnam was pocketed by government officials and province chiefs. Appearing on the CBS–TV program "Face the Nation" on January 28, 1968, Kennedy said "I do not see how we can possibly tolerate the increased losses of American troops . . . and still see this cancer of corruption in all aspects of the Vietnamese government." (Stanley Millet, ed., *South Vietnam: U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 3, 1968, pp. 242–243)

[7] See footnote 2, Document 4.

Mr. Habib brought the group up to date on the Paris negotiations, making the following points:

—U.S. kicked off with a limited bombing pause.

—Hanoi insisted on total halt and was noncommital on what would follow.

—U.S. insisted that while we were willing to stop bombing we wanted assurance that serious negotiations would follow.

—Negotiations started slowly with typical propaganda theme. Hanoi would not engage in discussion of gut issues.

—Hanoi continued to demur until during private talks with Vance and Habib indicated they might be willing to do something.

—In two months, U.S. got a basic understanding which included (1) cessation of U.S. bombing and all acts involving the use of force against the Territory of North Vietnam. At this point, Mr. Habib implied that the North Vietnamese understood that we would continue reconnaissance operations over North Vietnam. In response to the above, North Vietnam assured us that (1) they would respect the DMZ by not moving through it or massing north of it, (2) discontinue indiscriminate attacks on major cities, such as Saigon, Da Nang and Hue. Attacks included not only ground attacks but shelling and mortaring.

—While the North Vietnamese never subscribed to the above agreement, they "understood that if it were broken, talks could not be conducted." While there was no written agreement to this understanding, the North Vietnamese understood what we expected.

—U.S. side believe the Soviets moved in and applied some modest pressure at this point and also felt that the approaching U.S. election also exerted pressure on the North Vietnamese.

—Initially, Hanoi did not want the GVN in the picture. This was the genesis of our side-your side formula which was to permit a four-sided solution. As talks became more specific GVN became increasingly fearful and it was obvious that Thieu was under pressure.

—Our side-your side formula confirmed NLF participation and raised GVN fears.

The President then asked what was the U.S. relationship with the GVN at this point. Habib replied, "the only South Vietnamese who really knew what was going on was Thieu and a handful of his advisers. As we approached agreement, he realized he did not have the political support needed to accept the package."

The President then asked what was his main concern then? Habib replied, "two areas. First the provisions of the non-agreement itself and second, the fact that he might not have the political support to accept such a package but mostly he did not know what the specific role of the NLF would be under the formula." General Goodpaster added that another problem was the timing of the non-agreement. Thieu needed more time to get the support of the generals and we were pushing very hard.

The President then asked, "am I right that the main problem was the role of the NLF"? Habib replied, "correct, they could see a three on one situation developing and our agreement was finally arrived at using the our side-your side formula."

—Next the procedural wrangle started, the time barrier being the President's inauguration and the feeling on the other side that a settlement should be reached before the new President was installed. It was at this point that the Russians played a key role, suggesting that conversations be conducted on a two-sided basis. Habib conjectured that the Soviets may have applied a little arm twisting. Mr. Habib then reviewed where we are pointing out that he expected:

—A renewed period of intense propaganda sessions followed shortly by secret talks with DRV. Habib emphasized that the DRV has already agreed to meet at any time at any level.

—The outlook is for a circus arena, followed by private sessions which will get down to brass tacks.

—Negotiating team views the future in Paris as a subtle balance between political and military negotiating tracks.

—The U.S. perhaps to pursue the military track, such as withdrawals, ceasefire and DMZ.

—The North Vietnamese to seek a political solution providing for participation by the NLF in the south, combined with U.S. withdrawal.

—Habib states all subjects can be raised at the meeting.

—U.S. probably should initiate pressing for restitution of DMZ and mutual withdrawal. The North Vietnamese will probably insist on U.S. withdrawal, plus political entre initially through the so-called "peace cabinet" which could negotiate with the NLF, Thieu ultimately seeking a coalition government.

—NLF will carry main thrust of Communist political objective.

Mr. Habib then stated to the President, "what we need from you Mr. President are answers to the following questions:

1. What are the issues on which we should negotiate in order to secure the objectives you have defined?

2. What is the objective of the negotiations? Should it be: (a) withdrawal, (b) neutrality, (c) use DMZ as separate and distinct early negotiating objective, (d) what will be the treatment of the internal political solution in Vietnam, (e) what should be the level of hostilities as related to negotiations, i.e., the relationship of deescalation to negotiation, (f) how should we treat inspection, verification, supervision and guarantees, (g) how should we treat the question of Laos and Cambodia?

The above is the balanced mixture of political and military issues which will concern us in the negotiations, not only in their substantive content but also as these issues relate to one another in the sense of time." Habib stated that the North Vietnamese are worried about keeping strength on the ground to provide leverage. This will influence their timing.

The President then asked what the South Vietnamese think. Habib replied, "they consider themselves the victims of aggression from the north. If that aggression would cease, they believe they could work bilaterally with the NLF or any other opposition groups."

—The south wants to talk primarily to the DRV but have reluctantly agreed to talk to the NLF if need be.

—The heart of their problem is withdrawal by all Vietnamese who came down across the DMZ plus all those in South Vietnam who will not lay down their arms.

—The South Vietnamese are not yet in tandem with us on this withdrawal issue.

—In June, we had talks between Vance and Lo and in these initial talks the North Vietnamese seemed easy on the DMZ issue and most difficult on the withdrawal issue, claiming as Vietnamese they had the right to fight anywhere in Vietnam. Initially, they insisted that the present government and constitution must go but their line continued to change.

—First, insisted on patriotic coalition.

—Second, insisted on coalition less Thieu and Ky.

—Third, insisted on "peace cabinet" alternative.

—Fourth, they dropped their requirement for a reunification.

—Fifth, as talks continued, they expressed great concern about U.S. escalation.

—The North Vietnamese felt that we abrogated initial understanding when we moved military assets involved in northern operations to participate in southern operations. North Vietnamese indicated that Cambodia and Laos are not acceptable for early discussion.

—On the issue of supervision and guarantees while appealing to the Geneva Accords, the north does not want to discuss or provide for them. Hanoi insists on recognition of "political realities."

At this point, Dr. Kissinger asked if the North Vietnamese had not asked what we actually meant by the Manila formula.[8] Habib replied, "under authority from Washington, we said withdrawal under Manila indicated mutual withdrawal but that we would not be completely out until six months after they were completely out". The U.S. also indicated that the level of violence did not mean a total cessation of violation but assuming complete North Vietnamese withdrawal, "residual violence" would not be included under Manila.

The President then stated that he anticipated that the thrust of future negotiations would be done in private and that there would be no public agreement. Habib stated that this was probably true and that initially the North Vietnamese would prefer to negotiate down both tracks—mutual withdrawal and political settlement. At this point, General Wheeler stated that the north had not abided by the understandings on the DMZ. Habib replied that their violations had been minor, such as patrolling and reconnaissance, pointing out that the north had really never agreed on the reconnaissance issue and emphasizing that

[8] Reference is to paragraph 29 of the Manila Communiqué negotiated at the Manila Summit Conference of seven nations (Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, United States, and South Vietnam) held in the Philippines on October 24–25, 1966, to consider the conflict in South Vietnam. For text of the communiqué, see *Public Papers: Johnson, 1966,* Book II, pp. 1256–1259. See *Foreign Relations,* 1964–1968, vol. IV, Document 284, for a Department of Defense response to the communiqué.

they have abided by the provisions of the no-attack on major cities. General Wheeler retorted "yesterday they fired five times on our reconnaissance aircraft".

The President asked what was the GVN attitude. Habib replied the GVN want international guarantees and supervised withdrawal similar to that in 1954. They will insist on guarantees but might accept the pragmatic withdrawal, provided some border guarantees are offered.

The President then surmised "then from Thieu's viewpoint withdrawal without political settlement may be good, is that right?" Habib replied affirmatively. The President asked "can we do this without formal agreement? Then if this happens the GVN might be able to do the job and, of course, the north knows this and will insist on the dual track."

At this point, the President interrupted the proceedings to tell General Lincoln to get moving on the tornado problem in Mississippi. He also asked where Ky's wife came from. Bundy stated she was a southerner and the President replied, "she is a dandy".

The President thanked Mr. Bundy and Mr. Habib and they departed at 12:40 p.m.

The President stated:

—Obviously the questions that have been circulated will provide us a factual basis for proceeding with our investigation and we need the answers soon. We want to approach this problem without inhibitions as to where we have been. I want you to think of the problem as a new one. Seek ways in which we can change the game. We must know what we want. The gain could take many turns. I visualize that it could take two years to settle this thing. Give me your ideas.

At this point, he turned the meeting over to Dr. Kissinger who made the following points:

—A paper for consideration was drafted in New York without access to government machinery.[9] It can be refined when we get the answers to the questions.[10]

—There are many topics not included in the paper such as what are the world-wide implications, the domestic implications.

—Three options are the easiest to choose but depth and problems associated with these options must be fleshed out and judged.

—There are four outcomes or objectives, with three military postures ranging from escalation to reduction.

—The time relationship is important in this regard. For example, some reduction might suggest to the other side greater staying power.

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[9] See the attachment to Document 8.

[10] NSSM 1, January 21, Document 4. For a summary of responses to the questions, see Document 44.

An escalation of force might suggest to the other side that our staying power has been compressed.

—It is obvious that assured GVN control is the desirable objective but what are the costs and will it take longer to achieve than we are willing?

—If we can't accept this, we then turn to the other formulas which include risks. We could press for mutual withdrawal, achieve a military settlement and leave the political side to the Vietnamese.

—This could be a good initial approach to give us time to work out the others, i.e., political, plus the military or the political alone.

—It is very difficult to translate negotiating language to reality. This might be a good start.

—Should we go the political withdrawal route and, if so, I believe we would have to press the GVN to broaden its base. This is a two-edge sword.

—In sum, we should study and determine what kind of a settlement we would accept short of assured GVN control and to go down the political withdrawal route without knowing this could be disastrous.

—The next question is should we go the laundry list route or concentrate on one or more objectives.

—Should we establish priorities?

—Will deescalation help or hinder the process?

—I believe we need an early decision on whether or not the maximum or lessening pressure would be preferable. The team in Paris must know this. Similar judgments must be made on ceasefire. Doesn't this issue imply some form of political settlement? These are some of our questions that must be answered. While we have listed in the paper territorial settlement, this is so fundamental that I believe it would require basic changes. Other questions involved should the scale of military operations be an object of the early negotiations in Paris are:

—Would unilateral US reductions help or hurt?

—Should the team in Paris go for a large menu or focus on a few or give priorities to some?

—Do we wish to continue priority development of South Vietnamese army and police?

Many of the above questions can be decided without prejudice to subsequent negotiations. Group convened for luncheon and reconvened at 1400 hours.

The President asked whether or not it would be appropriate to seek the reestablishment of relationships with Cambodia. Ambassador Murphy commented that he thinks this would be a wise move.

The President stated, "I remember him [Sihanouk] and think we can do business. Perhaps I should write a note to him."

The President then discussed his views on the ceasefire, pointing out that in his view a guerilla war does not lend itself to a ceasefire. Secretary Rogers added, "no one wants to advance this as a negotiating position but what are we going to do if the other side raises it? How will we proceed from there? The public will give us problems in the event we did not have an acceptable reply." It was agreed that his

reply should follow the lines that a ceasefire without a withdrawal of forces would not be feasible in a guerilla conflict.

The President stated that the ceasefire issue should be stricken from the U.S. negotiating menu. General Goodpaster added that some work was done on this subject in Saigon. A staff paper[11] was prepared which concluded that a ceasefire should be related to or linked with force withdrawal and should start with the DMZ where withdrawals might be effected early. Since the DMZ is already in the U.S. negotiating position, linking ceasefire with that piece of territory might prove the feasible course of action.

The President summed up the issue by saying that this might be a good initial position. General Goodpaster added that, in essence, a ceasefire in South Vietnam constitutes a political settlement unless the GVN have the freedom to move anywhere in South Vietnam.

The President directed that the US think through its reaction to a ceasefire proposal from the other side, especially if Hanoi decides to drag the negotiations on they may raise this issue. Secretary Rogers agreed that this could happen, adding if they propose it without proclaiming it, then what is our reaction?

The President then asked for a recap of what the North Vietnamese negotiating position will be. It was agreed that they will press for U.S. withdrawal, seek a political settlement in the south, initially through a peace cabinet and ultimately a coalition government. They will probably follow two tracks to insure complete flexibility but with accent on the political settlement issue. Their basic objective would be to use negotiations to break the back of the current regime in South Vietnam. Recent efforts to establish front groups in South Vietnam by the Viet Cong have failed. Secretary Rogers said our maximum objective in our negotiations would, of course, be option (a) but our minimum objective should be to give South Vietnam an opportunity for time to insure their ultimate control of the government. General Goodpaster added Hanoi will initially also target on the U.S. domestic problem, i.e., U.S. public opinion, stating he is sure that a short range target of the north is to erode U.S. patience and willingness to continue. Secretary of Defense stated it appears we should get a grip on our world-wide objectives. We should know why the Russians are pressing Hanoi.

The President stated that is exactly why I want so much to know exactly where the Soviets stand on this issue. We may be closer to a limited goal than we realize, primarily because of what the Soviets have

[11] Goodpaster is referring to an early version of the cease-fire paper which was under consideration during 1969. For a summary of cease-fire proposals, see Document 152.

done. For that reason, I believe our best course of action would be to hang on. On the other hand, we do have the internal problem in the U.S. and it will be very difficult to continue without some change. We do have this problem. We thus need much from Paris as it affects our public attitudes at home. It also means we may have to take more risks in a settlement than we would prefer. While I am optimistic that it can be done, I am worried about our ability to sell it to the American people. In summary, maybe our best course would be to focus on mutual withdrawal. Secretary of State Rogers added, "I think we can expect more from the American people, especially if we could at some point reduce our commitment by perhaps 50,000."

The President stated if you can do this perhaps maybe we can buy time and perhaps some support. Secretary Rogers mentioned the Bunker telegram outlining his proposed style for American negotiations with emphasis on the patient approach (Saigon 1474).[12]

The President stated that he wished that there be absolutely no public or private criticism of the GVN, that he is tired of seeing them kicked around.

Dr. Kissinger suggested that we should consider ways of insuring that the Soviets know that we are determined to settle this issue one way or the other.

The President asked why the Soviets pressured Hanoi. General Wheeler replied, "economics, strengthening U.S.–Soviet ties, perhaps an effort to move in the Middle East." Ambassador Murphy asked in a tactical sense might it not be better to let the Soviets take the initiative. Dr. Kissinger stated, "I think the Soviets are nervous about you, Mr. President".

The President stated I think we will need about six months of strong military action, combined with a good public stance which reflects our efforts to seek peace. I feel we must not lose our nerve on this one. We should buy time with negotiations and continue to punish the enemy.

Under Secretary of State Richardson stated, "could we not also seek a small reduction of U.S. forces along the route, perhaps three or four months from now"?

The President asked why Thieu agreed to some U.S. force reduction. The Chairman replied, "to insure U.S. support and maybe also to help his own domestic image in the sense that it suggests that the government is progressing and their forces are growing. What we visualize is the replacement of certain U.S. units with certain GVN units. Reductions must be balanced at any rate. We are now talking at the staff

[12] Document 7.

level in Saigon on this issue. It would also involve the turnover of U.S. equipment of certain types to the Vietnamese."

The President stated, "this might be the thing to do in four months or so, after the initial negotiations are underway. Maybe we had better cut out the bilateral staff talks and conduct this as a unilateral move in four months or so. It certainly should not be done in the context of the negotiating framework". General Goodpaster stated, "I would be most reluctant to commit [the] US on this at this time." The Viet Cong are concerned with progress in the pacification area. General Abrams may be able to push up some reductions earlier than May or June. If we can confirm this, we may be ready in a couple of months.

The President stated if we do this it must be held very closely until the time of execution. The President said our press line on the troop withdrawal issue is important. Dr. Kissinger stated you might say that this issue is under full factual review by the NSC but that we will never keep more troops in Vietnam than are necessary.

The President stated he might ask in return, "what is the most effective way to bring the war to a conclusion? Our interest now is to get peace and I shouldn't comment now on the troop withdrawal issue since our position has been stated clearly in Paris". The President then turned to the issue of the political settlement, stating that he saw little hope for such a settlement. We might end up with a settlement of some type without a formal agreement, a sort of mutual accommodation in which either side is not deprived of the hope of ultimate success. The south must know that we are with them. The north thinks they are going to win anyway. We must leave some hope on both sides. When you lose your nerve, you can lose the basket. The mix of actions should be something like this. We talk hard in private but with an obvious peaceful public stance, seeking to gain time, initially giving the South Vietnamese a chance to strengthen the regime and add to the pacification effort while punishing the Viet Cong. Within three or four months bring home a few troops unilaterally as a separate and distinct action from the Paris negotiations, and as a ploy for more time domestically, while we continue to press at the negotiating table for a military settlement.

Under Secretary of State Richardson asked, "yes, but can we hang on with heavy draft calls?" General Wheeler added that our draft calls in the next few months will be high.

The President then said, "yes and there is a question of our European troop levels, the 6 Division issue." General Wheeler commented "the Army is at the end of its two-year cycle. Consequently, draft calls will increase."

The President asked when the new pay bill would go into effect and General Wheeler replied about July 1st.

The President then said, "what about an all volunteer Army? I would like something on this".

The President then asked about the issue of prisoner exchange. Dr. Kissinger stated this is in the opening statement. The President then turned to Secretary Laird and stated, "I would like your views on the draft issue." Ambassador Murphy raised the issue of U.S. covert efforts to discredit the Hanoi leadership group.

The President directed that the 303 Committee look at this very carefully stating he was tired of permitting this kind of thing to go on and registering concern about groups in the U.S. who supported Hanoi.

The President asked again about the feasibility of sending a letter to Sihanouk with the view towards reopening diplomatic relations.

The President then asked where our contact with the Soviets is at present. Secretary Rogers said the Soviet Ambassador here in Washington but also the Soviet Ambassador in Paris. The President stated, "I would like to get some recommendations on getting to the Soviets. In a tactical sense, we need a solution to bridge the gap but we also need strategic help in making Hanoi change its policy, a sort of carrot and stick approach. These efforts should be centered here in Washington. Talking on the strategic arms issue is certainly the carrot. We should get planning started on this immediately."

Dr. Kissinger added actions can be undertaken which look threatening which worry the Soviets but actually may not occur. These also may help. General Goodpaster stated if we are to contact Sihanouk, we should discuss our concern about Sihanoukville and the movement of North Vietnamese arms through that port. Dr. Kissinger stated, "Sihanouk's main value is the fact that he mirrors the attitudes of the Asians. He is a sort of barometer. You can be sure he will never stick his neck out."

The President said, "another carrot with respect to the Soviets would *be* the Nonproliferation Treaty. As you know, we will go forward after discussing this here—first with the Soviets and then with our legislative leaders a week later. This will be a great symbol."

The President then stated that he had a press conference on Monday[13] and emphasized that he did not like to use the term "no comment".

The meeting concluded at 2:20 p.m.

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[13] On Monday, January 27, the President held his first press conference; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pp. 15–23.

resolved. Until it is, the survival of Laos as a sovereign and independent nation remains in peril.

2. The war is a vicious cycle. So long as it continues, the country must maintain a large military establishment. So long as the country must maintain a large military establishment, the budget will remain hopelessly out of balance and revenues will never suffice to permit economic independence or progressive development.

3. While this same military establishment is the prime instrument for defending the country and has done better than we expected, it has also built up institutionalized privilege, corruption, and law-evasion, which, in turn, alienate the villagers from the government which the military represent. Therefore, while intended to defend the central government and advance its interests, the military end by corrupting its rule and corroding its prestige. Thus the enemy, merely by posing a threat to the government, succeeds in weakening the authority of that government.

4. The Lao had genuinely hoped, when the Paris negotiations began, that peace would be restored in Southeast Asia before the current dry season. They felt grievously deceived when this hope was dashed and had little stomach for the fight this year. Hence, they gave up more terrain this season than was truly taken from them by force of arms. It remains to be seen how much more will be lost in the six or seven weeks which remain in the dry season.

5. But, no matter what situation we find when the rains come, I think we should be under no illusions as to the future. The Lao have suffered enormously under all these years of war. Among the Meo, for example, practically an entire generation of fighting men has been wiped out.[2] It is pitiful to see their units so heavily manned by young boys of 14 and 15 years of age.

6. In fact, it is, in my judgment, a miracle that the Lao have fought so sturdily for so long and that the fabric of their primitive society has not totally collapsed prior to this time. They have been held together by spit and straw, aid, encouragement, and hope.

7. But all this is drawing to a close. If the North Vietnamese push as heavily next dry season as they have this year, and if they abandon

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[2] CIA officers drew a similar picture in a weekly meeting of March 13 between representatives of EAP of State and DDP of CIA. According to a March 18 memorandum by Trueheart to Hughes: "CIA drew a rather bleak picture of the outlook for friendly forces during the remainder of the dry season and stressed that there is no possibility of further strengthening Laotian ground forces, conventional or guerrilla, from indigenous resources." While tactical air support had blunted and delayed the North Vietnamese offensive, CIA officers were convinced that only better and more ground troops could halt the advance. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, EAP General CA, Country Files, EA Weekly Meetings, 1969)

their political restraints, I doubt that Laos could successfully weather another offensive without losing some vital areas of its territory and without severe strain on the stability of the current political leadership. Therefore, in my view, the period between now and next November is critical.

8. There obviously are conclusions to be drawn from this evaluation. As I understand it, my new responsibilities in Washington will, in part, concern those conclusions. In view of that fact, I will refrain from stating any of them in this message. When I reach the clear, safe atmosphere on the Potomac, I will not wish to have my vision impaired by any myopic observations which I might have written from the miasma of the Mekong.

9. Ave atque vale.

Sullivan

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44. Summary of Interagency Responses to NSSM 1[1]

Washington, March 22, 1969.

THE VIETNAM SITUATION

The responses to the questions posed regarding Vietnam[2] show agreement on some matters as well as very substantial differences of opinion within the U.S. Government on many aspects of the Vietnam situation. While there are some divergencies on the facts, the sharpest differences arise in the interpretation of those facts, the relative weight to be given them, and the implications to be drawn. In addition, there remain certain areas where our information remains inadequate.

There is general agreement, assuming we follow our current strategy, on the following:

—(1) The GVN and allied position in Vietnam has been strengthened recently in many respects.

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[1] National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–122, NSSM Files, NSSM 1 Response. Top Secret. Davis sent copies of this summary to Agnew, Rogers, Laird, and Director of Emergency Preparedness Lincoln under cover of a March 22 memorandum. Copies were also sent to Richardson, General Wheeler, and Helms.

[2] See the attachment to Document 4.

—(2) The RVNAF alone cannot now, or in the foreseeable future, stand up to both the VC and sizable North Vietnamese forces.

—(3) The GVN has improved its political position in certain respects. It remains weakest, and the VC/NLF strongest, in rural areas. It is not clear whether the GVN and other non-communist groups would be able to survive a peaceful competition with the NLF for political power in South Vietnam.

—(4) The enemy have suffered some reverse but they have not changed their essential objectives and they have sufficient strength to pursue these objectives. We are not attriting enemy forces faster than they can recruit or infiltrate. Soviet and Chinese supplies have enabled the enemy to carry on despite our operations.

—(5) The enemy basically controls both sides' casualty rates. They can still launch major offensives, though not with 1968 Tet effectiveness or impact.

—(6) The enemy is in Paris for a variety of reasons, including a desire to pursue his objectives at lower costs. He is not there primarily out of weakness, but rather from a realization that a military victory is not attainable as long as U.S. forces remain in SVN, yet a victory in the political area is very possible.

—(7) Hanoi is attempting to chart a course basically independent of Moscow and Peking.

Within these parameters of agreement there are different overall perspectives. There is some shifting between agencies or shading of their positions depending on the issues, so it would be somewhat misleading to categorize them overall. Agency positions will be clear in the remainder of the paper.

A composite of more hopeful views would look as follows:

—an overall allied momentum on various fronts is in large part responsible for the enemy's presence at the negotiating table and lower profile on the battlefield.

—U.S. military operations have been increasingly effective and with less constraints could be even more so.

—there are more South Vietnamese fighting with better effectiveness.

—recent gains in pacification represent real advances against the VC and should hold up.

—the GVN is more stable than at any time since Diem and is making good political progress.

—one cannot forecast "victory," within current constraints, but our negotiators should know that the tides are favorable.

A composite of more skeptical views would shape up as follows:

—there have been recent improvements in the allied position but these have produced essentially a stalemate.

—enemy activities in Paris and Vietnam do not flow primarily from weakness.

—Allied military efforts—short of unacceptable risks of widening the war—cannot now or in the foreseeable future bring the enemy to his knees.

—great problems confront the larger, better equipped South Vietnamese forces.

—pacification gains are inflated and fragile.

—inadequate political progress is being made.

—while our negotiators are in a stronger position with regard to the military situation, a compromise settlement is the most likely outcome for Vietnam and our focus needs to be increasingly on political actions.

Thus there are U.S. Government disagreements on a number of questions including the following:

—In explaining reduced enemy military presence and activities, some give greater weight to allied military pressure, others to the enemy's political motives and tactics.

—The improvements in RVNAF are considered much more significant by some agencies than others.

—Some observers see no cutback in U.S. forces possible without a proportionate reduction in combat capability, while others see a certain amount of "fat" in current U.S. force levels.

—Some underline advancements in the pacification program, while others are extremely skeptical both of the evaluation system used to measure progress and of the solidity of recent advances.

—In looking at the political scene, some accent recent improvements while others highlight the necessities of continued and accelerated political actions by the GVN to overcome remaining obstacles if the GVN is to have a reasonable chance to compete with the VC/NLF/PRP [*PRG?*].

—Some respondents assign much greater effectiveness to past and current bombing in Vietnam and Laos than others.

—Some believe, and others totally disagree, that a vigorous interdiction campaign against land and sea supply routes in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia could choke off enough Soviet and Chinese supplies to make North Vietnam give up the struggle.

In addition to these differences, there are major intelligence community disagreements concerning:

—the enemy order of battle;

—the importance of Cambodia (in particular Sihanoukville) as a supply channel for the enemy;

—the impact of possible Vietnam outcomes on Southeast Asia.

Following is a summary of the major conclusions and disagreements about each of six broad areas with regard to Vietnam: the negotiating environment, enemy capabilities, RVNAF capabilities, pacification, South Vietnamese politics, and U.S. military operations.

1. Negotiating Environment
(Questions 1–4)

(Reasons for the enemy presence in Paris. Impact of Vietnam on Southeast Asia. Influence of Moscow and Peking on Hanoi. Possible factions in North Vietnamese leadership.)

There is general U.S. Government agreement that Hanoi is in Paris for a variety of motives, including a desire to pursue his objectives at lower costs, but he is not there primarily out of weakness; that Hanoi is charting a course independent of Moscow, which favors negotiations, and of Peking, which opposes them, despite the DRV reliance on its allies for supplies; and that our knowledge of possible political factions among North Vietnamese leaders is imprecise. There continues disagreement about the impact on Southeast Asia of various outcomes in Vietnam.

Why is the DRV in Paris?

Various possible North Vietnamese motives for negotiating are discussed, and there is agreement that the DRV is in Paris for mixed reasons. No U.S. agency responding to the questions believes that the primary reason the DRV is in Paris is weakness. All consider it unlikely that Hanoi came to Paris either to accept a face-saving formula for defeat or to give the U.S. a face-saving way to withdraw. There is agreement that Hanoi has been subject to heavy military pressure and that a desire to end the losses and costs of war was an element in Hanoi's decision. The consensus is that Hanoi believes that it can persist long enough to obtain a relatively favorable negotiated compromise. The respondents agree that the DRV is in Paris to negotiate withdrawal of U.S. forces, to undermine GVN–USG relations and to provide a better chance for VC victory in the South. State believes that Hanoi's increasing realization that it could not win the conflict by continued military and political pressure also played a major role. Hanoi's ultimate goal of a unified Vietnam under its control has not changed.

Vietnam Impact on Southeast Asia

There continues to be sharp debate between and within agencies about the effect of the outcome in Vietnam on other nations. The most recent NIE on this subject (NIE 50–68)[3] states that a settlement which

[3] See *Foreign Relations,* 1964–1968, vol. VII, Document 220.

would result in the communists taking control of the Government in South Vietnam, not immediately but within a year or two, would be likely to have adverse psychological effects throughout the area and bring Cambodia and Laos into Hanoi's orbit at a fairly early state, but that these developments would not necessarily unhinge the rest of Southeast Asia.

The NIE dissenters believe that an unfavorable settlement would stimulate the communists to become more active elsewhere and that it will be difficult to resist making some accommodation to the pressure then generated. They believe, in contrast to the Estimate, these adjustments would be relatively swift and insensitive to subsequent U.S. policy.

The assessments rest more on judgments and assumptions than on tangible and convincing evidence, and there are major disagreements within the same Departments. Within the Defense Department, OSD and DIA support the conclusions of the NIE, while Army, Navy and Air Force Intelligence dissent. Within State, the Bureau of Intelligence supports the NIE while the East Asian Bureau dissents. CIA supports the NIE conclusions while Embassy Saigon generally sides with the dissenters.

Factors entering into the judgments are estimates of (1) Hanoi's and Peking's behavior after the settlement; (2) U.S. posture and policy in the regions; (3) Asian leaders' estimates of future U.S. policy; (4) the reactions of the area's non-communist leaders to the outcome in Vietnam; (5) vulnerabilities of the various governments to insurgency or subversion; and (6) the strengths of opposition groups within each state.

All reject the view that an unfavorable settlement in Vietnam will inevitably be followed by communist takeovers outside Indo China and there is agreement that much will depend on what the countries do for themselves and the other factors mentioned.

Moscow and Peking Influence

There is general governmental agreement on this question. Peking opposes negotiations while Moscow prefers an early negotiated settlement on terms as favorable as possible to Hanoi. Neither Peking nor Moscow have exerted heavy pressure on Hanoi and for various reasons they are unlikely to do so, although their military and economic assistance give them important leverage. CIA notes that "in competing for influence Peking and Moscow tend to cancel out each other." For its own reasons, Hanoi's tendency in the last year has been in the Soviet direction. However, the Hanoi leadership is attempting to chart its own independent course, despite its reliance on its allies for supplies.

Hanoi Leadership Factions

There is agreement that knowledge of the existence and significance of possible factions within the Hanoi leadership is imprecise. There are differences of opinion within the leadership on tactics as opposed to ultimate objectives but there are not stable "Moscow" and "Peking" factions. The Hanoi leadership will form different alignments on different issues. The attempts by the agencies to ascertain the position of various North Vietnamese leaders on specific issues shows the imprecision of our information and analysis. For example, different agencies set forth sharply conflicting identifications of the position of individual leaders such as Giap on particular questions.

2. The Enemy
(Questions 5–10)

(Explanation of recent enemy military activities. Attrition of enemy forces. Enemy order of battle, offensive capabilities, supply channels.)

Analyses of various enemy tactics and capabilities reveal both significant agreements and sharp controversies within the Government. Among the major points of consensus:

—A combination of military pressures and political tactics explains recent enemy withdrawals and lower levels of activity.

—Under current rules of engagement, the enemy's manpower pool and infiltration capabilities can outlast allied attrition efforts indefinitely, although the quality of enemy personnel suffers.

—The enemy basically controls both sides' casualty rates.

—The enemy, if he is willing to take the risks, can still launch major offensives, although not at 1968 Tet levels or with dramatic effect.

Major controversies include:

—CIA, DIA and State assign much higher figures to the enemy Order of Battle than MACV. They also quantify additional categories that are not part of the Order of Battle but are judged to be significant in terms of the enemy's political/security capabilities.

—MACV/CINCPAC/JCS and Saigon consider Cambodia an important enemy supply channel. A joint CIA–DIA–State team acknowledges the importance of Cambodia as a source of food supplies but feels that the Laotian supply corridor is the primary channel for the movement of military supplies (arms and ammunition).

Recent Enemy Activities

Military pressures and political considerations are viewed as responsible for the withdrawal of some North Vietnamese units into Cambodian and Laotian sanctuaries during the summer and fall of

1968. Military factors included heavy enemy losses, effective allied tactics, material shortages, and bad weather. Political factors centered on enemy efforts to make a political virtue out of a military necessity in a talk-fight strategy to influence the Paris negotiations.

Although the question asked of agencies indicated some doubt, all respondents agreed that the enemy did undertake a third-wave offensive during the week of August 17. At a cost of 5,500 enemy KIA, the enemy tripled the number of his attacks to 100 per week and his attacks during the second half of August were about one half the level of his "second-wave" offensive in May. Prisoners and captured documents reported the goal of achieving a general uprising and overthrow of the GVN. The lack of greater success was attributed to: the enemy's economy-of-forces tactics; his desire to demonstrate initiative but at reduced risk; effective U.S. spoiling actions and increased intelligence; and the continuing deterioration of enemy Post-Tet capabilities in terms of quality of men and officers and lack of training.

In contrast to the implication of a question posed to the agencies, all evaluators except the Department of State and Embassy Saigon state that VC guerrillas and local forces are *not* relatively dormant and that levels of harassment and terror remain high. The Embassy notes "the current low level of guerrilla and local forces activity," and State agrees there has been a "relative decline." Both agree that among the reasons are the heavy casualty rates, manpower problems and loss of cadres. But according to Embassy evaluators, the main factor is that "the VC are husbanding their resources to give themselves the option of a 'climaxing' offensive." State notes that to support the VC counter-pacification campaign and their "Liberation Committees," "the Communists may feel that a demonstrably strong blow against the pacification program would have wide repercussions, particularly at a time of optimistic Allied claims about pacification successes."

NVN/VC Manpower

It is generally agreed that the NVN/VC manpower pool is sufficiently large to meet the enemy's replenishment needs over an extended period of time within the framework of current rules of engagement. According to the JCS, "The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong have access to sufficient manpower to meet their replenishment needs—even at the high 1968 loss rate of some 291,000—for at least the next several years. . . . Present operations are not outrunning the enemy's ability to replenish by recruitment or infiltration." Enemy losses of 291,000 in 1968 were roughly balanced by infiltration and recruitment of 298,000. North Vietnamese manpower assets include 1.8 million physically fit males aged 15–34 of whom 45% are in the regular forces (475,000) and paramilitary (400,000) forces; 120,000 physically fit males reach draft age each year and 200,000 military and labor

personnel have been freed by the bombing halt from defensive work. The potential manpower pool in SVN is estimated at half a million men and recruitment, while down, is running at approximately 3,500 per month. Enemy maintenance of the current commitment of 300,000 new men per year requires that the Allies inflict losses of 25,000 KIA per month, or 7,000 more than the current rate. MACV considers current Allied force levels adequate to inflict such casualties if the enemy chooses to engage.

The enemy's employment of economy of forces tactics since the fall of 1968 and intelligence evidence reflect the enemy's concern about his 1968 level of losses, which amounted to nearly 100% yearly attrition of his full-time fighters in the South and, if continued, could lead to nearly total North Vietnamization of main force units in South Vietnam. He is judged unlikely to undertake the heavy losses of a major offensive unless he believes he could thereby achieve a breakthrough in Allied will-power in Vietnam or Paris. Yet, without a VC/NVA offensive on the scale of Tet 1968, the JCS believe "it will be exceedingly difficult in 1969 for allied forces to attrite the enemy at 1968 levels."

Control of NVA/VC Attrition

There is general agreement with the JCS statement, "The enemy, by the type action he adopts, has the predominant share in determining enemy attrition rates." Three fourths of the battles are at the enemy's choice of time, place, type and duration. CIA notes that less than three percent of about 1.7 million Allied small unit operations conducted in the last two years resulted in contact with the enemy and, when ARVN is surveyed, the percentage drops to one tenth of one per cent. There are inaccuracies and variations in service reporting but these figures indicate the general magnitude. With his safe havens in Laos and Cambodia and with carefully chosen tactics, the enemy has been able during the last four years to double his combat forces, double the level of infiltration and increase the scale and intensity of the main force war even while bearing heavy casualties. MACV/CINCPAC/JCS consider that a resumption of full scale hostilities with a relaxation of rules of engagement would result in depletion of the enemy's manpower and war-making resources, forcing him to recognize the futility of continuing the war or to face the inevitable destruction of his capability to continue the war.

VC/NVA Order of Battle

There is considerable disagreement concerning the estimates of Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Order of Battle. Both MACV/CINCPAC and CIA/DIA—the only two groups making independent estimates—include the same elements in their estimate of the military threat that is quantified in the Order of Battle. When these two estimates are made

comparable in terms of major units included or excluded, the CIA/DIA estimate of the elements making up the enemy's military threat is at least 35,000 and possibly 125,000 greater than the MACV/CINCPAC estimate.

There is no great controversy over the size of the Political Infrastructure. The somewhat larger CIA/DIA estimate (see the table) allows for the inclusion of certain supporting staffs excluded from the MACV/CINCPAC estimate.

The CIA/DIA estimates of enemy strength include an additional category made up of the Self Defense Forces and Assault Youth, estimated at 90,000 to 140,000 persons. They are not judged to be part of the military threat but are quantified because they are partially armed, perform military support functions, and are a principal target of the Allied pacification and security program. MACV/CINCPAC do not quantify these forces.

The Department of State, noting that the MACV estimates results from adding up so-called "hard" field intelligence figures for main force and local and guerrilla forces, believes CIA's extrapolation is developed more realistically from the totality of evidence. OSD presents both the MACV/CINCPAC and CIA/DIA estimates, pointing out that the differences in overall strength presented by the two are not sufficient to cause a change in overall strategy. CIA feels, however, that the difference could be significant if the true military threat is closer to the higher end of the range estimated by CIA/DIA. CIA also feels that the difference in estimates could have a significant bearing on peace terms and in judgments of the residual military capabilities of VC forces should the NVA forces be withdrawn. On the following page is a table laying out these different estimates.

Recruiting figures vary for reasons similar to the divergencies on strength. Monthly VC recruitment is estimated by CIA at 8,500 in 1966, 7,500 in 1967, double the 1967 rate during the first quarter of 1968 and dropping sharply after the Tet offensive to approximately 3,500 per month. CIA estimates a smaller drop than MACV. Saigon reports that the last six months reflect a reduced level of recruitment, citing as evidence GVN expansion, reduction in VC standards, VC attempts to improve existing cadre, increased use of NVA fillers in VC units, and GVN mobilization effectiveness.

NVA/VC Capabilities for a Large-Scale Offensive

All agree that (as recent events have borne out) the enemy has a capability for a large scale offensive against cities, bases and/or villages in the Accelerated Pacification Program if he wishes to bear the heavy casualties that would result. Allied countermeasures and preemptive capabilities make it highly unlikely that such an attack would

COMPARISON OF ESTIMATES OF MILITARY-POLITICAL STRENGTHS IN SOUTH VIETNAM[4]

Military Threat	*DIA/CIA*	*MACV/CINCPAC*
Combat forces		
NVA	105,000 to 125,000[a]	92,000[b]
VC	45,000 to 55,000	37,000
Subtotal	150,000 to 180,000	129,000
Administrative services		
NVA	10,000 to 20,000	
VC	45,000 to 55,000	
Subtotal	55,000 to 75,000	42,000
Guerrillas	60,000 to 100,000[c]	59,000
Total military threat	265,000 to 355,000	230,000
Infrastructure	80,000 to 100,000	83,000
Other irregular organizations	90,000 to 140,000[d]	N.A.[e]

[a] An estimated 20,000 to 25,000 of the NVA troops are serving in VC units. This estimate excludes an estimated 28,000 NVA troops deployed north of the DMZ. [Footnote in the source text.]

[b] This is a MACV/CINCPAC estimate of 106,000 NVA troops adjusted to exclude the same elements excluded from the CIA/DIA estimate because they are north of the DMZ. [Footnote in the source text.]

[c] DIA/CIA believe that the military threat represented by guerrilla forces is not on a parity with that of main and local forces because probably only about one-third of the guerrillas are well-armed, trained, and organized. [Footnote in the source text.]

[d] Includes self defense, secret self defense, and assault youth forces. [Footnote in the source text.]

[e] MACV and CINCPAC do not quantify these forces. [Footnote in the source text.]

[4] Secret.

have an impact on the scale of the Tet offensive of 1968. Further the enemy would weigh the effect of such an offensive on the Paris talks and on the risk of touching off a resumption of bombing in North Vietnam.

NVA/VC Supply Channels

There is general agreement that the main channels for military supplies reaching enemy forces in the northern areas of South Vietnam (I, and northern II Corps) are the Laos Panhandle and the DMZ. Disagreement exists as to the channel of supplies for III Corps and southern II Corps. MACV points to Cambodia, believing that no large shipments of ordnance are coming into III or IV Corps and southern II Corps via Laos and that Cambodia has during the last two years become a major source of supplies for these regions. MACV has estimated that some 10,000 tons of arms and ammunition have gone through Sihanoukville to the border between October 1967 and September 1968 for the use of the enemy in III, IV, and parts of II Corps. CIA and State disagree strongly with that estimate, and point out the lack of reliable information on the volume of munitions shipments entering Sihanoukville as well as the volume moved across the border. CIA also points out that the volume of Communist supplies flowing through Laos has been more than adequate to cover the external requirements of all Communist forces in South Vietnam. CIA, nevertheless, does not contest the MACV view that Communist forces in IV Corps also are supplied principally from Cambodia, but points out that a substantial part of the munitions supplies moved into this area do not move through Cambodian-controlled channels.

OSD summarizes without comment the national level CIA/DIA estimates for total enemy external daily supply requirements of 80 tons: 34 tons come from Laos, 14 tons across the DMZ, and 32 tons from Cambodia (of which 29 tons involve mainly food and other noncombatant goods).

3. The South Vietnamese Armed Forces (Questions 10A–13)

(Extent and types of RVNAF improvements. Present and future RVNAF capabilities against various threats, with and without U.S. support. Changes required of RVNAF.)

In general, points of disagreement among U.S. agencies on the RVNAF capabilities are more numerous than points of agreement. There is consensus that the RVNAF is getting larger, better equipped and somewhat more effective. All agree that it could not now, or in the foreseeable future, handle both the VC and sizable NVA forces without U.S. combat support. On other major points there are sharp differences. The military community gives much greater weight to

RVNAF statistical improvements while OSD highlights remaining obstacles and CIA points out that qualitative factors must also be considered in evaluating the RVNAF. Paradoxically, MACV/CINCPAC/JCS see RVNAF as being less capable against the VC alone than do CIA and State.

RVNAF Capabilities Against the Enemy

The Vietnamese Armed Forces (RVNAF) are being increased in size and re-equipped to improve their ground combat capability. The best measure of this improvement is the RVNAF's expected performance against a given enemy threat. However, there is a paradoxical divergence in agency views on the RVNAF ability to handle the internal VC threat without U.S. assistance. State (both EA and INR) and CIA—who generally rate RVNAF improvement and effectiveness lowest among the respondents, and who accept the highest estimates of overall VC strength—believe that, "Without any US support, . . . ARVN would at least be able to hold its own and make some progress against the VC unsupported by the NVA" (i.e. the VC without NVA fillers, though with regroupees and matériel support). CIA caveats this judgment, however, by noting that a critical factor, and one almost impossible to judge, would be the effect on the will of both the ARVN and VC of a pullout of North Vietnamese and U.S. forces.

In contrast is the view of MACV/CINCPAC/JCS, who rate RVNAF improvement and effectiveness highest and who accept the lowest estimates of VC armed strength. The military community, nevertheless, believes that without U.S. combat support, in opposing VC main and local forces without any NVA units or fillers, RVNAF "would have to reduce the number of offensive operations and adopt more of a defensive posture," resulting in "loss of control by the Government of Vietnam over substantial rural areas." Thus, MACV/CINCPAC/JCS believe that RVNAF would not be able to cope with purely indigenous VC forces without U.S. combat support until the completion of the modernization program in 1972.

OSD, however, believes RVNAF's capability against VC forces is closely associated with time. If most U.S. forces withdraw now, RVNAF's newly gained confidence may collapse; however, RVNAF capabilities should increase over time provided that a number of major reforms are made in addition to the current modernization program, if even this goal is to be met. "Without major reforms within the RVNAF command and selection system, however, it is unlikely that the RVNAF, as presently organized and led, will ever constitute an effective political or military counter to the Viet Cong." OSD also believes that some reduction of U.S. forces would give impetus to RVNAF to make the required changes.

All agencies agree that RVNAF could not, either now or even when fully modernized, handle both the VC and a sizable level of NVA forces without U.S. combat support in the form of air, helicopters, artillery, logistics and major ground forces.

RVNAF Improvements

There is consensus that RVNAF forces are now much larger (826,000) than in December 1967 (743,000) and will be further increased to 876,000, with the greatest increases in manpower given to the Popular and Regional Forces needed for local security. The RVNAF is also better equipped. All regular combat units have M16 rifles and are beginning to receive increases in their own artillery and helicopter support. Regional and Popular Forces (393,000 of the total RVNAF strength in December 1968) have 100,000 M16 rifles and are scheduled to receive 150,000 more in 1969. MACV has stepped up his training efforts by forming 353 mobile teams in 1968 to train and advise the militia.

Moreover, all agencies agree that overall RVNAF capabilities, number of operations and effectiveness increased during 1968. Data presents a mixed picture in some areas, but it is clear that the larger number of enemy killed by RVNAF resulted from better effectiveness (more kills per 1000 troops, along with higher kill ratios) as well as increased force size. In spite of these statistical improvements (which CIA in particular finds unreliable indicators), RVNAF is best thought of as a force which enlarged its contribution in 1968 within a total allied effort which also expanded. The modernization program, just beginning to have a high impact in the field, promises that results will continue to increase so long as RVNAF receives backbone in the form of a U.S. ground combat presence.

RVNAF Problems

All agree that RVNAF faces severe motivation, leadership and desertion problems. The differences lie in assessing the magnitude and impact these problems have on the prognosis for RVNAF's future. The continuing motivation problem involves loyalty to the government, getting RVNAF troops to fight and doing the right things to improve relations between soldiers and the Vietnamese people. The officer problem is mixed in politics and little has been done to correct it. Poor leadership and motivation contribute to regular ground combat forces deserting (net) at an annual rate of 34% of their strength (gross rate for 1/3 of the divisions is more than 50%). Total RVNAF desertions (net) are equivalent to losing one ARVN division per month.

Thus, OSD does not believe that current expansion and reequipment programs are sufficient to make RVNAF into an effective fighting force unless major political and military actions, which are not now emphasized, are taken. OSD considers essential action to recognize and

reward combat leadership and development of a favorable attitude by the military towards their own people which will result in acceptance and support of the government by its citizens.

JCS, CINCPAC, and MACV recognize leadership and motivational problems, and believe that substantial progress has been made in these areas since 1965, and with current remedial programs RVNAF is making reasonable progress toward development as a self-sufficient force able to hold its own against an internal VC threat. CIA feels that RVNAF is making limited progress, despite the fact that many of its weaknesses are uncorrected. OSD and State also see limited progress and note that many RVNAF weaknesses remain uncorrected. (Within State, INR is less hopeful than the East Asian Regional Bureau.)

4. Pacification
(Questions 14–20)

(Changes in the security situation in Vietnam. Future prospects. Strength of the Viet Cong and efforts against them.)

Two well-defined and divergent views emerged from the agencies on the pacification situation in South Vietnam. One view is held by MACV and Embassy Saigon and endorsed by CINCPAC and JCS. The other view is that of OSD, CIA and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) in State. (The East Asian bureau in State lies somewhere in between.) The two views are profoundly different in terms of factual interpretation and policy implications. Both views agree on the obstacles to improvement and complete success. What distinguishes one view from the other is each's assessment of the *magnitude* of the problem, and the assessment of the degree of improvement likely to take place in the near future.

The Two Views

The first group, consisting of MACV/JCS/Saigon, maintains that "at the present time, the security situation is better than any time during period in question," i.e., 1961–1968. MACV cites a "dramatic change in the security situation," and finds that the GVN controls three-fourths of the population. JCS suggests that the GVN will control 90% of the population in 1969. The second group, OSD/CIA and INR in State, on the other hand, is more cautious and pessimistic; their view is not inconsistent with another Tet-offensive-like shock in the countryside—for example, wiping out the much-touted gains of the 1968 Accelerated Pacification Program, or with more gradual erosion. Representing the second group's view, OSD arrives at the following conclusions:

(1) "The portions of the SVN rural population aligned with the VC and aligned with the GVN are apparently the same today as in 1962: 5,000,000 GVN aligned and nearly 3,000,000 VC aligned."

(2) "At the present, it appears that at least 50% of the total rural population is subject to significant VC presence and influence."

CIA agrees, and INR in State goes even further, saying:

"Our best estimate is that the VC have a significant effect on at least two-thirds of the rural population."

The Major Issues

The substance of the argument is evident in the chart on the next page.[5] Using HES data for 1967–1968, the chart shows that the first group's interpretation leaves only 26.7% of SVN's population to be pacified as of November 1968. The second group thinks 41.3% of the population was yet to be pacified. More importantly, the second view shows little pacification progress over the period except for the gains of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) program, and they are skeptical about these gains. State (INR), OSD, and CIA maintain that the October–December APC acquisition of 9.4% of the population for the GVN is a fragile claim because these gains were achieved by spreading our military and administrative resources thinly over contested areas. These agencies, therefore, argue that the APC gains have stood so far only because the VC/NLF have not challenged them, and they believe it is "quite likely" the gains will be contested in the coming months.

If the APC gains and those other gains secured in the wake of the fall NVN withdrawals are removed the substance of the long-term debate emerges clearly. The chart then shows that according to the second view, thus modified, pacification programs have registered no progress over 1967–68. The first view sees significant progress over the 1967–68 period. It is further seen that the second view placed the chart's relatively secure line much lower. For example, in August 1968, the first group says 65.8% of the population was under GVN control; the second group places only 49.9% in the GVN category.

The source of this difference is a derivative of a wider dispute over the value of the HES composite indicator which is really an average of eighteen indicators, indiscriminately mixing security factors with development factors and not assessing appropriate weighting for each indicator. The second group arrives at their estimate by allocating a portion of the first group's GVN controlled population to the contested category. They do this by breaking out the "grey area" population on the basis of military and political activity instead of the composite HES indicator. According to their view, in the fall of 1968 at least one-half of South Vietnam's rural population was subject to a significant VC/NLF presence; for the first group, this figure was approximately

[5] Not reproduced here.

one-third. The East Asian Bureau in State takes a middle position and believes that the "relatively secure" population figures derived from HES should not be accepted in toto.

By neither view can pacification be said to have progressed greatly in the last three years, at least, prior to the last few months. This conclusion is emphasized in the OSD view if consideration is given to the fact that about the same number of people have been brought under GVN control by population migration as have been by pacification gains. Nor does either view promise anything close to complete success within two to three years. MACV/JCS anticipates snowballing gains in the future, but other agencies note that stalemating of GVN pacification efforts could make the rural population more ready to accommodate with the NLF. The East Asian Bureau of State believes that the moment for pacification gains was not opportune until late 1967 and that we can anticipate further progress in the next two years.

It is noteworthy that the gap in views that does exist is largely one between the policy makers, the analysts, and the intelligence community on the one hand, and the civilian and military operators on the other.

The implications of the disagreement are very divergent. One view sees a high probability of GVN success and generally applauds the GVN's performance. It finds that the GVN has been ineffective at times, but that it has not been negligent, and overall progress has been most satisfactory.

The other view is greatly different. The GVN has yet to succeed in the countryside. The rural population situation has not changed significantly and certainly not at a rate which will free us of noticeable burdens within 2–5 years. We may even be over-extended in the rural areas and open to a damaging VC counterattack.

In CIA's view, progress has been slow but there has been progress. The real test of how solid recent gains in pacification have been will come when the VC initiate serious counter-pacification activity.

Changes Required

As to the changes required to increase favorable change in security and control, all agree that improvement in leadership, both civil and military, and at all levels, is a primary prerequisite. Other changes recommended are improvements in quality and quantity of small-unit operations in support of territorial security and pacification. A shopping list of recommended changes is provided by MACV/JCS, Embassy Saigon, and OSD. INR in State essentially states that "the basic deficiencies [of pacification][6] remain and give little reason to expect a

[6] Brackets in this and following paragraph are in the source text.

significant change in the situation in the countryside in the next two years." Additionally, OSD has provided gradations of changes which depend upon assessments of present progress and with the more radical changes calling for a reorientation of the advisory system and refocusing of pacification efforts.

Lesser Issues

In 1968, 15,776 members of the Viet Cong political and administrative Infrastructure (VCI) were neutralized, 87.1% of whom were easily replaceable functionaries. Anti-VCI operations showed major improvements, but all agree with the MACV statement "these [VCI] losses have not unduly disrupted the communist political apparatus." A precise estimate of VCI operations is complicated by the fact that current estimates of the size of the VCI differ by 25% or more. Moreover the criteria used to measure neutralizations are different from those used to estimate the infrastructure. Thus any direct comparison of the numbers neutralized and the numbers estimated to be in the VCI are misleading. Analysis of Phoenix and other anti-VCI activities also shows that there are major difficulties with the GVN's method of detainee disposition, and suggests the need for GVN judicial reforms.

All agencies agreed that the Phoenix program was long overdue and potentially very valuable. The respondents agreed that it is too early for a thorough assessment of the Phoenix program, and they predict it is unlikely to cause the NLF major problems in 1969. Embassy Saigon noted that Phoenix bears close watching with respect to the attitudes or rural population, attitudes toward the American sponsors, and a potentially deleterious effect on the possibilities for rural GVN–VC accommodations.

Every agency except MACV/JCS agrees that the available data on war damage to the civilian population is inadequate. CIA concluded the rural hamlets take a tremendous beating both from friendly and enemy forces. The responses received suggest that this is a very serious problem in need of further U.S. Government attention and analysis.

Recent GVN personnel changes were found by all agencies to have brought a significant upgrading in the averaging quality of GVN officials. Nonetheless, corruption, favoritism, and neglect of the populace's problems were still seen as major GVN shortcomings. There was no conclusive evidence that the 1968 personnel changes affected the GVN's relations with minority groups.

5. The Political Scene
(Questions 21–23)

(Current attitudes toward the GVN. Efforts to strengthen it. Noncommunist prospects in Vietnam.)

This section on the political situation can be boiled down to three fundamental questions: (1) How strong is the GVN today? (2) What is being done to strengthen it for the political struggle with the NLF? (3) What are the prospects for continued non-communist government in South Vietnam?

The essence of the replies from U.S. agencies is as follows: (1) The GVN is stronger recently than for many years but still very weak in certain areas and among various elites. (2) Some steps are being taken to strengthen the GVN politically but these are inadequate. (3) It is most difficult to predict the prospects for continued non-communist government, but they are chancy at best.

Within these broad thrusts of the responses there are decided differences of emphasis among the agencies. The implication of these different emphases could very well tip the political balance in South Vietnam over the next several years. Thus, MACV/JCS and Saigon, while acknowledging the problems, accent more the increasing stability of the Thieu regime and the overall political system; the significance of the moves being made by the GVN to bolster its strength; and the possibility of continued non-communist rule in South Vietnam given sufficient U.S. support. OSD on the other hand, while acknowledging certain progress, is decidedly more skeptical and pessimistic. CIA takes a cautiously optimistic view, acknowledging certain progress, but warning of weak spots which still must be overcome. OSD and CIA note recent political improvements and GVN measures but they tend to deflate their relative impact and highlight the remaining obstacles. State's position, while not so consistent or clear-cut, generally steers a middle course, being somewhat skeptical about the overall political situation and the GVN position and seeing prospects as mixed. State both accents recent stability and acknowledges inadequate GVN political actions.

The Present Situation

We have a great quantity of information on Vietnamese politics but the quality is suspect. It varies greatly by elite and level and is usually sounder for broad groups than factions or individuals. OSD remarks that we are dealing with a nascent constitutional system in which the elective process has yet to take hold and elections are viewed as a manipulatory process designed to confirm present leaders with their power positions.

Non-communist elements rally in times of common danger from the communist threat, but otherwise generally engage in a perpetual struggle for power. Most elites may be willing to participate in the GVN but their motives are often mixed. State observes that there generally is a greater commitment to the GVN and anti-communist struggle today and that active non-communist opposition has decreased. In their

view toward the military struggle, Northerners are most insistent on military victory, but the central and Southern Vietnamese indicate ambiguity and war-weariness. Firm support for the GVN, as long as it projects a strong anti-communist image, comes from most military elements, Catholics and portions of the bureaucratic and merchant classes. The major problem for the GVN remains in the rural villages where the VC are strongest. Opposition also comes from certain Buddhist, youth, union and professional elements. Various ethnic and religious minorities, while often anti-communist, are not strongly tied to the GVN. The Army could be a distinct threat to the continance of the GVN if it perceives a weakening of resolve by Thieu toward communists or if U.S. support for civilianization of the GVN or for Thieu is perceived as weakening.

In reading the Vietnamese political scene, one must keep in mind that pragmatism, expediency, war weariness, a desire to remain unaligned and end up on the winning side are all common features. So are family loyalty, corruption, social immobility and clandestine activities.

OSD points out (and a recent Saigon cable corroborates this view) that there has been a noticeable shift recently by many non-communists towards acceptance of the NLF in some capacity as part of an eventual political settlement. How much of this is political opportunism colored by the belief they can control the communists is unknown, but, in any case most elites would want to minimize the communist influence in the government. Most elites are now opposed to a forced coalition government which includes communists in significant positions of power. However, these elites may be highly vulnerable to manipulation by the NLF/PRP [*PRG*] given its organizational strength and political skills.

South Vietnamese attitudes toward the U.S. are varied and ambivalent. Our presence is seen as a necessary evil to forestall a communist take-over. Our involvement is viewed with a mixture of gratitude, shame, and suspicion. Essentially, recent events, especially the Paris talks, have made it apparent to the Vietnamese that the U.S. commitment is not open-ended and that some withdrawals are likely during 1969.

GVN Political Actions

All agencies agree that there has been substantial progress in broadening the government; all except OSD and State see significant movement against corruption; and all agree that political mobilization is both the most crucial and the weakest area. There is a certain ambivalence in agency views which maintain that U.S. pressure for reforms is needed but that we should not get too directly involved. OSD points out past U.S. failures at directing Vietnamese political life into desired channels.

Recent encouraging moves toward broadening the government include various elections, a national assembly with real deliberative powers, and greater Southern and civilian representation in the Cabinet. However, many groups are still not included or are under-represented. And the key problem of engaging the SVN population through GVN political organization from the top to the grass roots level has yet to be addressed by the GVN.

Recent dismissal of many unworthy officials and some increased emphasis on competence for promotion have not disspelled widespread corruption, reliance on personal loyalties and nepotism.

Events of the past year have sharpened the realization of the need for non-communist unity, but the GVN has made less progress on political mobilization than elsewhere. Its ability to gain support will depend primarily on the extent to which it can provide security, an alternative to the NLF, and social and economic progress. OSD has provided specific recommendations for U.S. actions to assist the GVN in attaining these ends.

Prospects

Political mobilization of non-communist elites is the most crucial factor, but it rests inter alia on broadening the government and advancement based on merit, and there are many other political steps needed. In general, all these factors will be increasingly important as the U.S. reduces its military effort. Such a reduction might stimulate political progress but it will also entail risks. As noted earlier, there is some ambiguity as well as differences of view about the proper U.S. role in SVN politics. State and Saigon caution against undue U.S. involvement and pressure. State adds that failure to act and U.S. actions elsewhere can also have impact. MACV/JCS place greater emphasis on the use of our leverage in effecting needed reforms. OSD argues for selective and less visible U.S. involvement in assisting the GVN politically while disengaging portions of the larger visible U.S. presence.

CIA notes that RVNAF will for some time remain the only national political force capable of matching the communists from the point of view of strength and organization. It does not appear realistic or prudent to expect that civilian groups alone can stand up to the communists within the next few years or that they should be given the practical burden of this effort at the expense of the military.

No agency clearly forecasts a "victory" over the communists, and all acknowledge the manifold problems facing the GVN as we withdraw. MACV/JCS stress the need for continued U.S. support. OSD and State believe that a compromise settlement is most likely and emphasize GVN self-reliance. The USIB state that progress in SVN has been sufficiently slow and fragile that substantial U.S. disengagement in the next few years could jeopardize all recent gains.

JCS and OSD each list their essential conditions for cessation of hostilities. While they agree on certain elements, the JCS look toward continued U.S. support to assure the sovereignty of the GVN while OSD requires only that the South Vietnamese be free to choose their political future without external influence.

6. U.S. Military Operations (Questions 24–28)

(Changes in U.S. deployments and tactics. Possibilities for U.S. force reductions. Effectiveness of B–52s, bombing in Laos and North Vietnam.)

The major points of agreement within the U.S. Government on these subjects are:

—the description of recent U.S. deployments and tactics;

—the difficulties of assessing the results of B–52 strikes, but their effectiveness against known troop concentrations and in close support operations;

—the fact that the Soviets and Chinese supply almost all war material to Hanoi and have enabled the North Vietnamese to carry on despite all our operations.

There are fundamental disagreements running throughout this section, including the following:

—OSD believes, and MACV/JCS deny, that there is a certain amount of "fat" in our current force levels that could be cut back without significant reduction in combat capability.

—MACV/JCS and, somewhat more cautiously, CIA and State ascribe much higher casualty estimates to our B–52 strikes than does OSD.

—MACV/JCS assign very much greater effectiveness to our past and current Laos and North Vietnam bombing campaigns than do OSD, State and CIA.

—MACV/JCS believe that a vigorous bombing and interdiction campaign could choke off enough supplies to Hanoi to make her stop fighting, while OSD and CIA feel that such a campaign could not reduce North Vietnam's capabilities to a level that would prevent it from continuing to support the struggle. CIA also is not convinced that the U.S. could sustain an unlimited interdiction and bombing program over a long period of time without losses reaching unacceptable levels.

U.S. Deployments and Tactics

In early 1968, MACV moved the equivalent of two divisions from II and III Corps to northern I Corps. This deployment was a defensive reaction to the threat of a major NVA seige of Khe Sanh and the coastal

lowlands. With the further enemy offensives in February and May, U.S. forces throughout the country (except for I Corps) were pulled back into screening positions around SVN's major cities and used to push the VC forces out. Since then, one of the two U.S. divisions redeployed to I Corps has been returned to III and IV Corps. MACV now gives top priority to the control of Saigon, the approaches to it in III and northern IV Corps, and the heavily populated upper Delta.

Until late 1968, allied (particularly U.S.) efforts were directed largely against enemy main forces through large (1,000 men or more) unit operations. With the recent withdrawal of NVA main force units from SVN, U.S. units have been able to operate in smaller units and with more emphasis on the enemy's infrastructure and support apparatus. U.S. field commanders estimate that nearly half of their operations are in support of pacification. The deployment of U.S. units in SVN's populated areas and the change in tactics has, MACV asserts, helped improve pacification progress.

U.S. Force Reductions

MACV/JCS and OSD agree that there is no way of reducing U.S. force levels in Vietnam without some reduction in combat capability. However, OSD argues that reducing some U.S. logistics headquarters, construction or tactical air personnel may not have any significant effect on U.S. combat capability or effectiveness. For instance, OSD concludes that because of the halt in bombing North Vietnam, the U.S. needs neither as many interdiction aircraft as we now have, nor our full force of three Navy carriers off North Vietnam, although reduction in any of these areas depends upon NVN's observance of the tacit conditions of the U.S. bombing halt. MACV/JCS feel that while some of the above elements would help to minimize loss of combat capability, in general significant reductions in our force levels will cause "at least equal" reductions in our combat capability.

OSD also thinks that U.S. forces could be reduced as the RVNAF improves and expands. By their estimates, the ongoing RVNAF improvement plan might free up to about 15–20 U.S. maneuver battalions and their support units (some 30–40,000 men) by mid-1969 without a decrease in total allied force capability. This projection assumes that RVNAF combat effectiveness increases along with their combat capability. Additionally, some U.S. forces could be reduced as they turn over equipment to selected RVNAF units. In their responses, MACV/JCS do not consider this question.

B–52 Effectiveness

All agencies acknowledge that sound analysis of the effectiveness of B–52 strikes is difficult. Consistent data bases are lacking. As a result there are sharp differences on casualty estimates. While JCS esti-

mates that about 41,000 enemy were killed in 1968 by the B–52s in all in-country strikes, OSD believes that perhaps as few as 7,100 were killed. The consensus is that some strikes are very effective, some clearly wasted, and a majority with indeterminate outcome.

There is agreement that B–52 strikes are very effective when directed against known enemy troop concentrations or in close support of tactical operations, and have served to disrupt VC/NVA operations. However, OSD and State, unlike MACV/JCS, find that B–52 strikes against suspected enemy infiltration routes, logistics or base camps/areas (50% of 1968's sorties) are probably much less effective than close support strikes. CIA cites a range of casualty estimates and considers it impossible to select one, but believes it is apparent that B–52 strikes have become a significant factor in the attrition of enemy forces.

The Laos and North Vietnam Interdiction Campaign

It is agreed that our bombing campaign both prior to and after November 1968 has reduced the enemy's throughput of supplies. However, State/CIA/OSD consider that this reduction has not materially affected the enemy's capability to supply his forces. MACV/JCS feel the bombing in Laos since 1 November 1968 has succeeded in reducing significantly enemy throughput capacity so that his minimum essential requirements in both Laos and SVN were not met during the period 1 November 1968 to 25 January 1969. State/CIA/OSD think it has failed to prevent the flow of supplies to SVN, though CIA feels it has cost the enemy heavily.

Post-November Campaign

Since early November, MACV has attempted to reduce the logistic capacity of the enemy by blocking the two key roads near the passes from NVN into Laos. MACV finds it has effectively blocked these roads 80% of the time and therefore caused less traffic to get through. OSD/CIA/State agree that enemy traffic on the roads attacked has been disrupted. However, they point out that the enemy uses less than 15% of the theoretical road capacity, that he is constantly expanding that capacity through new roads and bypasses, and that our air strikes do not eliminate, but only delay, traffic.

Besides blocking the roads, our bombing destroys material in transit on them. (In this connection, State notes the change in emphasis in Laotian bombing from the destruction of matériel, prior to mid-1968, to interdiction of the routes themselves.) JCS/MACV and OSD/CIA agree that we destroy 12% to 14% of the trucks sighted moving through Laos and 20% to 35% of the total flow of supplies in Laos. To MACV/JCS, the material destroyed forces the enemy to provide additional matériel to compensate for losses in order to maintain an acceptable level of support to the VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam. OSD

and CIA find that the enemy needs in SVN (10 to 15 trucks of supplies per day from the North) are so small compared with his logistics capacity that the enemy can replace his losses easily by increasing his traffic flows to offset attrition and get through to SVN as much supplies as he wants to despite the bombing.

Pre-November Campaign

Prior to November 1968, we bombed in southern North Vietnam as well as Laos. The MACV/JCS find that this campaign reduced the flow of supplies into Laos greatly and that this flow increased greatly after the bombing halt. The OSD/CIA agree that traffic followed this pattern, but argue that normal seasonal weather changes as well as the bombing affected the traffic pattern.

Alternative Campaign

All agencies agree that Chinese and Soviet aid has provided almost all the war material used by Hanoi. However, there is some disagreement on whether alternative military courses of action could reduce the flow enough to make a difference in South Vietnam. If all imports by sea were denied and land routes through Laos and Cambodia attacked vigorously, the MACV/JCS find that NVN could not obtain enough war supplies to continue. OSD and CIA question the effectiveness of a campaign to block the overland routes from China which alone could provide NVN enough material to carry on the war.

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

Washington, March 25, 1969.

SUBJECT

Quarantine of Cambodia

Secretary Laird has sent you a study prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at your request, on the feasibility and utility for quarantining Cambodia against the receipt of supplies and equipment to support the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces operating in and from Cam-

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. I, 8–69. Top Secret; Sensitive.

bodia. (Secretary Laird's memorandum and the Joint Chief's study are attached at Tab A.)[2]

The basic conclusions of the Joint Chiefs are:

(1) An air/sea blockade and other steps to quarantine Cambodia are both militarily feasible and of some utility in intensifying enemy supply problems in the III and IV Corps areas.

(2) Ground operations to deny the enemy use of the Laos Panhandle for support of enemy forces operating in and from Cambodia are not feasible within current force levels. However, present interdiction operations against enemy lines of communication in Laos should be continued to the maximum extent.

(3) While diplomatic exchanges between the U.S. and Cambodia may present an opportunity to gain Cambodian assistance in reducing enemy use of Cambodia as a sanctuary, the most effective method would be preemptive ground and air operations of limited depth and duration in Cambodia and in the tri-border area of Laos.

On the basis of these conclusions, the Joint Chiefs made four recommendations:

(1) Air/sea blockade or quarantine be retained as an option to be undertaken when appropriate against the receipt in Cambodia of supplies and equipment for the support of VC/NVA forces operating in and from Cambodia against South Vietnam.

(2) Interdiction operations against the enemy's lines of communication in Laos be continued to the maximum extent.

(3) Current political initiatives be used to gain Prince Sihanouk's support or acquiescence in allied military efforts to reduce the enemy's sanctuary and the flow of supplies to VC/NVA forces operating in and from Cambodia.

(4) In concert with other appropriate initiatives outlined above, short-term air and ground raids be authorized against clearly identified VC/NVA forces and supplies in sparsely populated areas of Cambodia along the SVN border, and in southern Laos.

Secretary Laird has recommended that the National Security Council review this issue before any new military actions are authorized because of the political implications of the Joint Chief's recommendations. These political implications are briefly the need to estimate Prince Sihanouk's level of tolerance for operations inside Cambodia, and the question of consulting with Prince Souvanna

[2] Tab A, a memorandum from Laird to Nixon, March 18, and Annex A, an undated JCS study of a quarantine of Cambodia, are not attached. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 VIET S)

Phouma on further operations in Laos, as we have done in the past with good results. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are also preparing a list of specific military actions in Cambodia which would not be subject to National Security Council review.

Recommendation:

That Secretary Laird and Secretary Rogers be requested to prepare a joint study on the military and political implications of preemptive operations against Cambodia and Laos for consideration by the National Security Council.[3]

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[3] Nixon initialed the disapprove option and wrote: "Let's not make any 'decisions' on this until we get another crack or two at Cambodia. Later—have the study made." In an April 8 memorandum to Laird, Kissinger informed him that the President had reviewed the study on quarantining Cambodia and that he "desires that this matter be held in abeyance for the time being." (Washington National Records Center, OSD/ISA Subject Decimal Files: FRC 330 72 A 6308, Box 7, Cambodia 1969 000.1)

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

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Negotiations Papers for the NSC[2]

Attached are the General Negotiating Strategy Paper and a paper on Mutual Withdrawal approved by the Review Group for discussion

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 82, NSC Meetings, Jan–Mar 1969. Top Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. On a copy of this memorandum in the Johnson Library, Halperin Papers, Box 4, Chronological File, March–July 1969, a note on the first page reads: "HAK discussed with RN and perhaps shown to him."

[2] On March 12 Kissinger sent Rogers, Laird, and Helms NSSM 29, which informed them that the President had directed preparation of two papers described as: "1. *Negotiating strategy paper.* This paper should discuss the strategy we would follow in private talks with Hanoi. It should also consider our strategy for dealing with the GVN in regard to private talks. 2. *Mutual withdrawal of forces.* This paper should consider our basic objectives with regard to mutual withdrawal. It should discuss major issues and alternative positions on these issues." These papers were to be submitted to the Review Group by March 17. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–140, NSSM Files, NSSM 29)

at the NSC meeting on March 28.[3] Summaries of each of these papers are included, as well as an issues for decision paper.[4] This memo summarizes the major points of difference which you may wish to have discussed at the NSC meeting, and contains my recommendations.

Also attached is a summary of the agency responses to the questions on Vietnam which we prepared prior to January 20.[5] The summary has been agreed to by the agencies.

I. Strategy Paper

A. De-Escalation

The issue is whether we should be prepared to negotiate de-escalatory steps in Paris. Some argue that the enemy will raise the issue and we must be prepared to talk about it because critics of the war will keep on this issue. It is also argued that mutual de-escalation would increase public support for the war and give us time to work out a settlement. While acknowledging the difficulties of developing proposals, Paris argues that the scope and pace of B–52 strikes, U.S. offensive operations, and U.S. harassment and interdiction fire could be curtailed.

The opposing position is that we should not ourselves raise the subject in Paris and, if the other side raises it, say we are prepared to discuss it in the context of mutual withdrawal. MACV and the JCS feel very strongly that we should not be prepared to negotiate de-escalation. MACV argues that the cut-down on combat sweeps would shift degree of initiative from us to the enemy, which he would exploit to rebuild his strength in populated areas. He also argues that this would result in a shift in the KIA ratios in a direction less favorable to the U.S. He argues that a cutback in artillery and air support including B–52's would result in further loss of American lives and would have "seriously adverse" results. Furthermore, tacit understandings on mutual de-escalation have already been proved illusory.

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[3] Neither attached; Bundy sent a revised draft of both papers to the Chairman of the NSC Review Group under two separate covering memoranda, both March 21. They were found attached to an uninitialed and undated draft of Kissinger's memorandum to Nixon. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous/Memcons, Vol. II) The approved papers, comprising NSDM 9, are ibid., NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–209, NSDM Files, NSDM 9. For the NSC meeting, see Document 49.

[4] Attached were two summary papers, both March 25, entitled, "A General Strategy and Plan of Action for the Vietnam Negotiations" and "US Position on Mutual Withdrawal" and an undated paper which is printed as an attachment.

[5] Document 44.

I believe that we should not feel obliged to talk about de-escalation simply because the enemy may want to do so. Attempts to negotiate a de-escalatory agreement would only bog talks down while adversely affecting the morale of our troops. I, thus, recommend that the second position be included in the Game Plan.

II. Mutual Withdrawal

A. Residual U.S. Forces

The Joint Chiefs and MACV argue that we should keep open the option of maintaining U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam after we complete our mutual withdrawal. They argue that we cannot be sure that the GVN will be able to handle the NLF alone and should be free to leave our own combat forces in South Vietnam.

State and Paris argue that we need to be clear in our own minds that we are prepared to take out all of our combat forces, while leaving behind civilians and MAAG personnel, in the improbable event that Hanoi fully satisfies the conditions we set for mutual withdrawal.

This is in large part a theoretical issue. If we adopt the State/Paris position, we would be committing ourselves in principle to withdraw all of our combat forces only if Hanoi met all of our conditions. These conditions would be (1) withdrawal of all North Vietnamese regulars, all North Vietnamese serving in VC units, and all other personnel infiltrated from North Vietnam into the South, (2) withdrawal must be to North Vietnam, not to Laos and Cambodia, and (3) there must be adequate verification. It is very doubtful that Hanoi would ever adequately perform on each of these conditions. We will always be in a position to assert that Hanoi has not lived up to its commitments and hence we are free to leave troops behind. If Hanoi did meet all of our conditions fully, it is doubtful that we would need to leave any combat troops in South Vietnam. Our decision whether to proceed with a complete withdrawal will be a political one not bound by what we have agreed to in principle if Hanoi met our conditions.

On the other hand, an effort on our part to exempt some combat forces would be taken by the Soviets and our public, as well as Hanoi, as a hardening of our position. Hanoi would very likely seize on this issue to attempt to stir public controversy in the U.S. Thus, I believe we should be prepared in principle to withdraw all of our combat forces if Hanoi meets our conditions.

B. Completion of Withdrawal Within Six Months

State feels that we should not repudiate the Manila Declaration commitment to be out six months after all North Vietnamese forces

have been withdrawn. The Manila Communiqué was negotiated with and accepted by the GVN and the Troop Contributing Nations. Any new position on a time limit would require a further round of negotiations with them. Harriman assured DRV, on instructions, that this was our position. We could also have problems in Congress if we repudiated the Manila Communiqué.

On the other hand, Secretary Laird believes that the Manila six-month time limit is far too rigid. He has in the past indicated that he would like to have up to two years to take all of our troops out. Saigon, without noting any MACV dissent, accepts the six-month deadline for personnel, but points out that additional time will be required for the removal of military supplies and equipment.

State points out that the six-month formula gives us considerable leeway since we can decide when all of Hanoi's forces have in fact been withdrawn from South Vietnam all the way to North Vietnam. Since it is almost certain that North Vietnam will in fact leave behind some forces, we will, in actual fact, have flexibility in implementing the six-month provision.

This issue is closely related to the residual combat troop issue. Again, if Hanoi did not meet our conditions we could complete our withdrawal at our own pace—if at all. The one added element is that we introduced this concept initially at Soviet urging since they said Hanoi did not believe that we would ever really withdraw. If we back off this pledge, we are likely to find it harder to get the Soviets involved constructively.

If we interpret the conditions which Hanoi must fulfill rigidly, then the six months deadline gives us flexibility. If we are not going to be rigid—and there will be strong pressures on you not to be—then it would be better to have a longer deadline. However, you should take account of the problems with our public and Congress, with our allies, and with the Soviets which would result if we changed the time limit. Thus, if we do not change the time limit, you will face problems down the road; if we do change, you will face problems now.

We need urgently to have a study of the details and modalities of mutual withdrawal including, in particular, the question of adequate verification.

Attachment

Paper Prepared for President Nixon[6]

Washington, undated.

VIETNAM NEGOTIATIONS ISSUES FOR DECISION

Following the NSC meeting:

You may wish to approve the Negotiating Strategy and the Mutual Withdrawal papers as guidance for the first phase of the negotiations. Recognizing that our views on the issues discussed in the paper may require revision as the negotiations proceed, it would be extremely useful to be sure that everyone starts out on the same track.

I, therefore, recommend that you do approve the two papers. We would then distribute them on a very selective basis.

I. Negotiating Strategy Paper

A. *Approval of this paper* means in essence:

1. Objectives:

a. Our general objective is to give the South Vietnamese the opportunity to determine their own political future without outside interference.

b. Our first priority objectives are agreed or tacit mutual withdrawal (with attendant reduction in hostilities), reestablishment of the DMZ, eventual total ceasefire, release of allied prisoners, relevant interim policing machinery, and restoration of 17th parallel as provisional boundary line. Other objectives down the line include status of the two Vietnams, relationships between them, follow-on inspection and supervision machinery, international guaranties, Laos, Cambodia, and economic questions.

c. We leave to the Vietnamese themselves questions concerning the political future of South Vietnam and minimize our negotiating involvement in these issues.

2. Game Plan

a. Our emphasis will be on private talks, between the DRV and ourselves on the one hand, and the GVN and NLF on the other.

b. Our posture will be one of sincere desire for progress, but not an over-eagerness that could mislead Hanoi.

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[6] Top Secret; Sensitive.

c. Our early negotiating emphasis will be on mutual withdrawals, the DMZ, and POWs (as it already is in Paris).

B. In approving the paper you will have to choose between two positions on *deescalation:*

1. Express an interest in communicating with the enemy about possible deescalatory moves and authorize our negotiators to discuss the subject.

2. Indicate that you do not wish to enter into negotiations in Paris on deescalatory moves except in the context of mutual withdrawal.

I recommend Option 2. It is hard to visualize concrete deescalatory proposals that would be truly reciprocal. Most suggestions would seem to favor the enemy militarily. We need not feel obliged to talk about deescalation simply because the enemy may raise the issue. Attempts to negotiate deescalatory agreements would only bog talks down while adversely affecting the morale of our troops. However, there is no reason why we cannot proceed with in-house studies of this problem.

II. Mutual Withdrawal Paper

A. *Approval of this paper* means in essence:

1. Our basic objectives are to achieve the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia back to North Vietnam and to get adequate assurance that such withdrawals have taken place.

2. We would insist on the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese regular forces, fillers in nominally VC units and other personnel infiltrated from the North, although we would be prepared to live with some inevitable ambiguity about the latter category.

3. We would be willing to withdraw U.S. allied forces contingent upon withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces and units.

4. We would begin our withdrawals as North Vietnam begins its withdrawals and ceases its flow of new manpower; we would not require subsidence of violence as a formal precondition to our withdrawals but would look at this factor in assessing the enemy's compliance with withdrawal agreements.

5. We would work toward a timetable that would include phasing of agreed withdrawals on each side, simultaneous initiation of withdrawals, and completion of enemy withdrawals before our own.

6. In carrying out our withdrawals, we would continually look at the total pattern of North Vietnamese actions to assess their good faith.

7. We would not link the issue of mutual withdrawals with the future internal political structure of South Vietnam, although we would not complete withdrawals if the total picture in Paris and Vietnam gave us ground for serious doubt concerning Hanoi's intentions.

8. We would press for North Vietnamese withdrawals from Laos and Cambodia, particularly, in the case of Laos, those troops which have been supporting operations in South Vietnam.

9. We would insist that agreed withdrawals and future compliance must be subject to adequate policing, although we cannot yet be clear on what specific types of arrangements will be necessary and appropriate.

10. Any unilateral allied withdrawals would be based on full consultation with the GVN and our assessment of the overall picture, including the impact of such withdrawals on our negotiating position.

B. There are two issues discussed in the paper on which there is disagreement: (1) residual U.S. forces and (2) six month deadline.

C. With regard to *residual U.S. forces,* the options are:

1. Be prepared to state that agreed and verified mutual withdrawals will, in principle, in the end include the withdrawal of all U.S. and allied combat and directly combat-related forces, if there is a full and verified withdrawal to North Vietnam of the North Vietnamese forces.

2. At least for a period of time, plan to leave some combat forces behind and avoid any commitment to pull them all out.

I recommend Option 2. To attempt to exempt some combat forces from our withdrawals would clearly be considered a hardening of our position by all concerned. We would set back the negotiations and stir great controversy in this country (and not just among dovish elements). If Hanoi does fulfill its withdrawal obligations, it is not clear that U.S. combat forces would be needed.

D. With regard to the *six-month deadline,* the options are:

1. Be prepared to specify at an appropriate time that the period between completion of a full and verified North Vietnamese withdrawal to North Vietnam and the completion of our own withdrawal would be not more than six months.

2. Simply say that withdrawal would be completed as soon as practicable, avoiding any time limits.

I recommend Option 1. To drop the six month target would also be considered a hardening of our position in relation to past private and public statements. We will have considerable flexibility in defining the starting date for our six month obligation, and we can insist upon strict compliance by Hanoi with whatever withdrawal agreements are negotiated.

III. Further Studies

You may wish to direct studies on:

A. Actual modalities of mutual withdrawal, including verification procedures.

B. Possible forms of political accommodation in South Vietnam.

C. Laos, in the context of the Vietnam settlement.

D. Possible forms of deescalation.

I recommend all four studies. I believe that it would be useful to study deescalation in part to make clear the great difficulty of developing any concrete proposals.

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

Washington, March, 27, 1969.

SUBJECT

Covert Support for the Lien Minh (National Alliance for Social Revolution)

On 25 March 1969, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker briefed the 303 Committee on the present status of President Thieu's efforts to build a broad coalition of forces into a political structure, the Lien Minh, which will be capable of competing successfully with the communist political machinery following a peace settlement.[2]

President Thieu first discussed his Lien Minh concept with Ambassador Bunker in the early part of 1968. Subsequently, in 303 Committee discussions, it was agreed that this was the most potentially promising effort seen thus far in South Vietnam to develop a broadly based political structure with mass appeal and support. Ambassador Bunker was authorized to provide [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] in covert CIA funds to President Thieu to give impetus to the effort. This amount was passed directly to President Thieu in increments during the period August 1968–March 1969.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 301, NSC Files, 303 Committee, 1969–1970. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for action. Initialed by Kissinger on March 29.

[2] This memorandum essentially repeats Bunker's briefing of the 303 Committee on March 25. In addition the 303 Committee was told at the meeting that on March 20 the President agreed that a CIA paramilitary operation in Cambodia against North Vietnamese regulars "would not be worth the expense." The Committee was also informed that the President authorized monitoring possible diplomatic and covert ways to reduce arms traffic from Cambodia to South Vietnam. (Minutes of 303 Committee, March 25; Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 303/40 Committee Meetings, 2/16/69–1/20/70)

President Thieu has moved slowly and cautiously but some progress has been made. Lien Minh is established and operating in Saigon/Cholon and running community projects in 9 of the 11 districts; some neighborhood money has been raised; 20 provincial committees have been formed and selection and training of provincial cadres is under way. Theoretically, its membership comprises some 40 or more groups, the principal ones being the National Salvation Front (NSF), Free Democratic Forces (FDF), and CVT, South Vietnam's largest labor federation, but not many cadres.

President Thieu, in his conversation with Ambassador Bunker last week, explained that he had been moving cautiously behind the scenes and not openly putting his full weight behind the Lien Minh as the time was not right.[3] Now that there is a rapidly growing awareness among the people and their leaders that a peace settlement is coming and that the fight against the communists will shift to the political field he is ready to move.

President Thieu is concentrating on development of middle-level working cadres and programs that will interest the masses and inspire them with hope. There are some 5,000 cadres now in Lien Minh in trade unions, some farmer groups, and in a few political, religious and other organizations. He plans to coalesce and expand these forces initially to something on the order of 16,000 and eventually to a 50,000 cadre organization. He will need money, training schools, indoctrination programs, and a range of activities to do this.

President Thieu has already begun talking with individual political leaders and plans to convene a national convention or "seminar" in April at which he expects to be elected leader of the new movement.

Ambassador Bunker strongly recommended that he be authorized to pass additional covert funds to President Thieu in the amount of [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] in increments during the next six months to support further development of the Lien Minh during this crucial period. He estimates the risks of disclosure are slight since President Thieu receives the funds directly. He also estimates that this contribution will be initially about 50% of the support of the Lien Minh, but as its financial base broadens the U.S. contribution will become proportionately less.

The 303 Committee endorsed Ambassador Bunker's recommendation on the understanding that he will provide monthly progress reports on Lien Minh developments and any indications of increased risk of exposure of U.S. support.

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[3] As reported in a March 21 memorandum of conversation between Thieu, Bunker, and Berger at the Embassy in Saigon. It is attached to the minutes of the March 25 303 Committee. (Ibid.)

I recommend that you approve the 303 Committee's endorsement of Ambassador Bunker's recommendation and authorize the passage of [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] in covert funds to President Thieu in increments during the ensuing six months.[4]

[4] Nixon initialed the approve option.

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

Washington, March 28, 1969.

SUBJECT

U.S. Relations with Cambodia

Secretary Rogers has recommended (Tab I),[2] the issuance of a border declaration on Cambodia *in two or three weeks,* following consultation with our allies. He has also recommended that you approve the draft letter (Tab B)[3] thanking Sihanouk for the release of four American airmen and acknowledging his letter of February 25.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. 1, 8–69. Secret; Exdis. Sent for action.

[2] Tab I, attached but not printed, is a memorandum from Rogers to Nixon, March 26, entitled "U.S. Relations with Cambodia," in which Rogers recommended that Nixon "approve the issuance of a declaration recognizing the territorial integrity of Cambodia within its present frontiers, as a further step toward resumption of diplomatic relations on satisfactory terms."

[3] The draft letter to Sihanouk and Sihanouk's February 25 letter to Nixon were attached to Rogers' March 26 memorandum. According to an April 2 memorandum from Moose to Walsh, the President approved the border declaration and transmission of the letter to Sihanouk through the Australians. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. 1, 8–69) The border declaration was delivered to Sihanouk by the Australian Ambassador on April 16. It read: "In conformity with the United Nations Charter, the U.S.A. recognizes and respects the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Cambodia within its present frontiers." (Telegram 55018 to Bonn and 10 other posts, April 10; ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 1 CAMB–US) Sihanouk called a press conference on April 18 to thank Nixon for the "gesture of equity and justice" and expressed the conviction that "inevitable border incidents" would not cause another rupture in U.S.-Cambodian relations. (Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, April 18; ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 5, President's Daily Briefs)

Rogers' recommendations are consistent with the course of action you approved in early February looking toward a resumption of diplomatic relations with Cambodia. After issuing the border declaration, Rogers plans to send a diplomatic officer to Phnom Penh to explore reopening our embassy there. These actions assume a continued favorable attitude toward resumption of relations on the part of Sihanouk. In his messages to you, in conversations with diplomats in Phnom Penh, and in public statements, Sihanouk has consistently encouraged a resumption of relations.

I agree with Secretary Rogers' recommendations, but would urge that we push for somewhat faster action on the border declaration if the consultations with our allies go well.

Recommendations

1. That you approve the issuance of a border declaration, with instructions to Secretary Rogers that we should aim for delivery in about 10 days.[4]

Alternatively, I prefer to stick to three-week time table

2. That you approve the draft letter at Tab B.

[4] Nixon initialed the approve option.

49. Minutes of National Security Council Meeting[1]

Washington, March 28, 1969.

The Meeting started at 10:00 a.m. The following were in attendance:

The President
The Vice President
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Director of Central Intelligence
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 82, NSC Meetings, Jan–Mar 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive. These minutes were based on notes taken by Haig that were typed by a White House secretary; Haig made corrections by hand to the typed transcript.

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker
General Andrew Goodpaster
Mr. Philip A. Habib
Mr. Richard Sneider
Colonel Alexander M. Haig

The President introduced the meeting stating there were three issues to be addressed:

1. De-escalation.
2. Mutual withdrawal and the related issues of residual troops in-country; and
3. The provision of the Manila Declaration, i.e., the interpretation of the six-month clause.

The President stated that discussion would be held on these three points, following a briefing by Ambassador Bunker.[2] Ambassador Bunker made the following points in explaining President Thieu's and the South Vietnamese Government's attitude on a negotiated peace settlement:

1. The present offensive has demonstrated South Vietnam's growing confidence and conversely has highlighted the growing weakness of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese in a military sense.

2. President Thieu now visualizes and accepts that there will be a transition from purely military operations into a struggle which will be conducted within a political framework. This transition in his own estimate of the situation is a further reflection of the growing strength of the Thieu Government. In Thieu's words, "A year ago, we could only talk in terms of military victory. Six months ago, we could talk in terms of a peace settlement. Today we can talk in terms of a political settlement".

3. The bombing halt of 31 March [1968] led to the realization on the part of the South Vietnamese that U.S. would not underwrite them indefinitely. This tended to crystallize South Vietnam's resolve and combined with the growing dynamism and forceful and sagacious leadership of President Thieu, great progress has been made (Ambassador

[2] On March 12 Nixon sent Kissinger a memorandum indicating he "would like to talk with Bunker within the next two or three weeks. I have been reading his cables and he seems much more concerned about attacks in South Vietnam than we are here. I have never met Bunker and I feel that because of the importance of his position I need to talk to him so that I can judge for myself what weight to give to his cables. Get him back here as soon as it is convenient so that it does not look like a crisis, but under no circumstances do I want his return delayed beyond three weeks." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 1, Memorandum for the President, RN Memos 68–12/69, Mar. 69) Nixon met Bunker in San Clemente on March 23 for an early Sunday morning meeting also attended by Rogers, Kissinger, and Goodpaster. (Ibid., White House Central Files, Daily Diary) No other record or time of this meeting has been found. The President, apparently accompanied by Bunker, Kissinger, Rogers, and Goodpaster, flew to Washington at 12:39 p.m. (Ibid.)

Bunker emphasized that he knew of no equal to President Thieu within the ranks of South Vietnamese leaders).

4. In the past two months, President Thieu has talked of a settlement in two terms:

a. A general election which would permit the NLF to function as a party but perhaps under a different name.

b. Acceptance by Thieu of private talks and also an acceptance of the possibility that the NLF would be included in such talks but with emphasis on conversations between the U.S. and Hanoi; but still recognizing the possible expansion of the talks to all four parties if required.

An alternate approach to the political settlement in Thieu's mind would include general elections with possible accompanying changes in the Constitution and the inclusion of international supervision of the election procedure.

5. Concerning 4 above, Ambassador Bunker stated that he had warned Thieu on the issue of the NLF's fear of reprisals from the South Vietnamese Government and confirmed that Thieu had agreed to discuss this as well as a political settlement. Thieu indicated that perhaps an international supervisory commission could oversee this situation.

6. Thieu has discussed the question of guarantees and has expressed strong concern that viable guarantees be provided to insure that the North would pay a heavy price for renewed attacks. At the same time, he recognized that South Vietnam's armed strength would be a major factor, together with outside guarantees in precluding the renewal of North Vietnamese attacks. In general, Thieu believes he could maintain his control of the government under the above circumstances because the NLF has been badly hurt in recent months and their infrastructure is in a bad state of repair.

7. The Government and the people of South Vietnam now recognize the need for peace. At this point, the President asked when this shift in South Vietnamese attitude occurred. Ambassador Bunker replied that Thieu has known this for some time. Secretary Rogers asked "but when did it occur?" Ambassador Bunker answered to the effect that this has been true for several months. In December, for example, Thieu agreed to accept a greater share of the burden of conducting the war. He has admitted over the past six months that the people must get ready for political warfare. At the same time, he has had to bring the government along at a pace which he felt personally was best suited to the circumstances. He has managed this extremely well. The evolution has occurred primarily due to the growing strength of the government in both political and psychological terms.

Secretary Rogers asked whether or not Bunker knew that Thieu was going to make his recent statement on private talks. Ambassador Bunker replied "no".

The President commented, "I think the main point here is that the error made by the previous Administration was in beating the South Vietnamese over the head publicly to be more forthcoming," commenting that he had informed a Congressional group last night that we had carefully avoided this approach in order to build the South Vietnamese's trust. The President asked Ambassador Bunker whether or not Thieu really trusts us. Bunker replied, "yes, and this is my main point. We have re-established trust since January and this, in turn, has been a major contributor to their willingness to come along with us on the peace issue. The principal factors in this phenomena have been your talk with Ky and our generally coordinated posture."

Secretary Rogers interjected, "Thieu saw my statement before the Foreign Relations Committee and gave us his OK overnight."[3]

The President turned the briefing over to Mr. Habib who reminded the Council that since his last appearance before him, the U.S. had received signals through the Russians that the North Vietnamese were anxious to move on private talks. He confirmed that the U.S. movement in Paris had been very deliberate and that as a result our relations with the GVN in Paris had improved greatly. Habib emphasized that the Plenary Sessions have not changed very much in tone and serve primarily as propaganda sessions and a forum for tentatively exploring new ideas. In these sessions, Habib emphasized, there continues to be a sharp contrast between the conduct and expertise of the NLF on the one hand and GRV on the other, the latter being far more skilled and polished.

Habib emphasized that the U.S. Delegation had accomplished much in the public forum in Paris through the maintenance of a businesslike stance, the avoidance of polemics, and the presentation of brief and specific proposals. Habib summarized that there had been two private meetings since January, the first primarily a protest meeting and the second dealing with substantive issues. Both private meetings were conducted with the full blessing of the GVN Delegation. During the second meeting, the U.S. concentrated on the issue of withdrawal. The North Vietnamese, on the other hand, came in with a Plenary Session type statement but in a private mood. Habib noted that much of that statement was used in yesterday's Plenary Session,

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[3] Apparent reference to Rogers' statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, March 27, in which he described the U.S. and South Vietnamese negotiating position and the essential elements in an ultimate settlement. His testimony is in Department of State *Bulletin,* April 14, 1969, pp. 306–307.

confirming that it was clearly just the opening round in the secret forum. Habib judged that the North's opening statement was not surprising, and it emphasized:

a. Complete withdrawal of U.S. forces,
b. Requirement that we deal with the NLF,
c. Charges of U.S. escalation, and
d. Confirmation that they are willing to continue the fight.

The North Vietnamese made no specific proposal rather reemphasizing the four and five points and emphasizing participation by the NLF. They did not exclude the possibility of the GVN's participation in the negotiation; made it quite clear that they wanted to continue secret talks; indicated the probability that the bilateral track was acceptable and, in general, continued to give hints of some anxiety. On balance, it appears that we have rattled them in recent weeks, Habib maintained.

The President then asked, "is this just wishful thinking on our part", to which Habib replied, "it might be but I think they want to talk and this is just the first of a series of secret sessions. In this regard, we left open the determination of the next meeting with the general language that "when either side has something to say", the next talk will occur. Habib emphasized that the North Vietnamese nodded as this statement was made and nodded again afterwards. The North also emphasized the importance of secrecy.

The President asked what the implications were of the North Vietnamese side's rejection of Thieu's offer to go into secret talks. Habib replied that this rejection was not as rigid as it appeared in the press and that they actually placed their main stress on refusal to meet with the GVN, leaving the door open somewhat. Habib added "when their spokesman was pressed, they hedged and didn't attack the secret meeting as much as they did the other parts of Thieu's statements."

The President then asked Ambassador Bunker whether or not the GVN would accept a role in four-sided talks which would place them in a position of tagging along with the U.S. Ambassador Bunker replied that when it comes to actual negotiations on the political side that the U.S. cannot do this in behalf of the South Vietnamese but that they will probably go along initially with a four-sided forum.

The President stated, "then it is very important how we proceed on this issue".

Secretary Rogers then emphasized his concern that we were overly sensitive about this point, remarking that first we were concerned whether or not they would accept secret talks at all, but then when we asked Thieu, he readily went along. The Secretary of State then stated he thought the only thing that was really important is that the U.S. does not meet only with the NLF.

The President asked Mr. Habib how long he thought the talks would go on, "18 months, two years? Do you see a Panmunjon situation developing here? Looking at this problem, how long are we going to be in negotiations with sub-threshold fighting continuing?"

Habib replied, "we think it will take some time but in very short order we will get to the heart of the thing in the discussions probably in a month or two." Ambassador Bunker stated that President Thieu sees this year as the critical one. Providing the North sees no flagging in our determination; with such determination, a settlement should probably occur this year.

Secretary Rogers said, "yes, but suppose we lose out, can we start to turn over the fighting to the South Vietnamese?"

General Goodpaster replied, "this depends—we can move in this direction but it depends on what the South Vietnamese themselves do." Secretary Rogers stated that we were told this years ago but we see no movement. "How can we convince the people after all of this failure?"

Habib stated, "the North reads this very carefully, based on how things are gong on the ground but also how they read U.S. domestic attitude. They are most sensitive to it. This is the basis for their current tactics. They are conducting a long, low-level attack and watching U.S. opinion concurrently."

The President then asked, "how do we de-Americanize this thing in such a way as to influence negotiations and have them move along quicker?"

Secretary Rogers said "certainly pacification is a poor explanation."

The President replied "in fairness I must say progress has been made, especially under Thieu. I can certainly defend it to that extent but I need some symbol."

Ambassador Bunker stated, "our problem has always been a case of over-optimism in over-stating the issues. It is time that we tell the American people it is going to be long and tough."

Secretary Laird remarked, "oh, we have been telling the people that. We told them there were going to be improvements in the South Vietnamese forces. There are only a couple of divisions that are worth anything. In several, there have been no improvement whatsoever."

General Goodpaster asked who said this a year ago. The Secretary of State said, "we have been saying this for over a year and a half. What do we say now?"

General Lincoln said, "I think South Vietnam has improved its forces but it is not being reported, especially back here."

General Goodpaster stated, "it is true that the 5th and 18th Divisions have been weak and continue to stay that way."

Mr. Helms said, "yes, we have heard this story before."

Secretary Rogers stated, "we have to de-Americanize the war to safeside a failure in the negotiations. We need discernible progress." The President stated that timing is a problem. "We must move in a deliberate way, not to show panic. We cannot be stampeded by the likes of Fulbright."

Secretary Rogers said, "but if we say we are going to be deliberate, the American people won't stand for it."

General Goodpaster said, "I think we must remember that the money for the improvement of the RVNAF did not come until after Tet and progress has been substantial since that time. We have moved from 750,000 to 855,000 troops and the caliber of the force has improved. There can be no question about their improvement. The RF and the PF have grown quantitatively and qualitatively. The overall improvement has been substantial and we are, in fact, closer to de-Americanizing the war but we are not at the decision point yet."

The President stated, "we need a plan. If we had no elections, it would be fine. Just like Great Britain in Malaysia, we cannot sustain this at current rates for two years. The reality is that we are working against a time clock. We are talking 6 to 8 months. We are going to play a strong public game but we must plan this. We must get a sense of urgency in the training of the South Vietnamese. We need improvement in terms of supplies and training."

Secretary of Defense Laird stated, "I agree, but not with your term de-Americanizing. What we need is a term Vietnamizing to put the emphasis on the right issue."

The President agreed.

The Secretary of Defense then stated that there are considerable problems on Phase II add-ons with respect to the Congress. They are not willing to pay for the sophisticated equipment, especially trucks. The Secretary had told General Westmoreland to visit the people on the Hill and explain to the people our problem.

General Goodpaster stated, "they must have mobility. The ARVN uses the road to a greater degree than we have to. For example, they are using cranes for all kinds of purposes."

The President asked if the Viet Cong had cranes.

General Goodpaster replied that we are now at a time when we can plan for the first increment for our withdrawal but only based on a decision in the light of conditions at the time. Our view this time will be July.

The President noted that U.S. casualties were down this week and asked if the offensive was over. General Goodpaster replied, "not yet. The enemy has some forces it has not committed, primarily because they have not been able to get them in position but also because they have been extremely conservative in this operation."

The President asked whether there would be another offensive in May or June. General Goodpaster replied that it took 6 months for the enemy to get sufficiently built up to launch this one and infiltration is now down somewhat. This will probably result in a smaller offensive this May.

The President then asked why it would be so difficult to make our decision if this offensive has been so poor, "why won't we be able to pull the forces out?" General Goodpaster replied, "we want to look at the status of pacification, the improvement of RVN and you can't pull out troops in the midst of an offensive. Also, they could come across the DMZ."

Habib stated "if we look at the record, we can see that over the year, the Viet Cong have carefully geared their military operation to the conduct of their negotiations. The enemy is willing to accept casualties for purely negotiating reasons. He will conduct his ground operations for political objectives in Paris."

The President re-emphasized that the South Vietnamese must do more.

Ambassador Bunker said, "we must also remember that negotiations are themselves influenced primarily by what happens on the ground. They took terrible losses during the lull. Defectors were up, KIAs were high, the infrastructure was rolled up. They are already this year running close to last year's losses. That is why they are in Paris. They are suffering on the ground."

The President asked the Director of CIA to give his views and to capsulize conditions in North Vietnam.

Mr. Helms stated that morale is now a factor in North Vietnam.

The President interrupted and said, "did you say this a year ago?"

Mr. Helms said, "no" and continued emphasizing that the morale problem developed since the bombing halt. Conversely, the offensive has generated some new discipline in the North since they have expected retaliation and are "policing-up" attitudes. There are differences in the leadership in Hanoi. Some agree with negotiating a solution; others disagree. On balance, CIA believes they can go the route if the Soviets and Chinese continue to support them at current levels. Also, they can continue for extended periods with reduced military operations. We believe they can carry on with their current manpower resources.

The President told Mr. Kissinger to discuss the de-escalation point. Mr. Kissinger stated there are two problems for discussion. The first is the game plan and the second, the issue of mutual withdrawal. Looking first at the game plan, a judgment is needed on how to move after one or two more private meetings. We can stress mutual withdrawal initially, plus the DMZ issue and then swing into the political issue. In the game plan proposed for consideration there is one main disagreement

and that involves the issue of de-escalation. Whether or not we should do it is one aspect of the consideration and the other is if we decide to do it in principle, should we then be willing to negotiate it. On the issue itself, the alternatives are:

To consider it only in the context of mutual withdrawal. If we were to decide to negotiate it, we might get into endless discussion. We have a problem of defining it. If we were to adopt a policy of de-escalation, the enemy would lose much of the incentive for negotiating a settlement and the very act of talking about it is a time waster.

On the other side is the argument that de-escalation reduces casualties, strengthens our staying power. Perhaps these two sides are overdrawn but these are the diversions in the game plan.

The President then asked, "by de-escalation, does that mean our unilateral withdrawal." Mr. Kissinger replied, "no."

The President replied, "then it should be understood that this is not what we are talking about when we use the term de-escalation."

Secretary of Defense stated, "I think General McConnell can talk to the Chief's position."

Secretary of State interrupted, "I agree with the first point that de-escalation is not good but we cannot say this in public."

The President stated, "I am afraid if we get into the issue of de-escalation, they will really go for our B–52. Then, we are in a jam."

Mr. Habib stated, "from their standpoint they have been very general in talking about de-escalation. We would not have to propose this in any specific way. Most of the conversation on de-escalation is accusatory. I think we can afford not to raise it initially. But if they begin to move, we should listen."

The President stated, "you wouldn't volunteer."

Secretary Rogers replied, "yes, but we should not be negative on this subject of de-escalation."

Habib stated, "I think we should hold off as Mr. Kissinger has said."

The President stated, "no more talking about this. We are not going to give on this issue. On the other hand, if they raise it, what do you have in mind?"

Secretary Rogers stated, "I think we are in accord on this one."

General McConnell then stated, "I agree with Position 2 with this caveat, if discussion of de-escalation does not include any limitations on weaponry or pacification."

General Goodpaster added, "or Commander's tactics."

Mr. Habib stated, "they have raised all of this but we have never answered."

The President stated, "on the withdrawal issue, I think the question is a moot one. Whether all U.S. forces are withdrawn or not is actually intertwined with what the other side does, especially if we are talking about bargaining and guarantees. We can take all of our forces out if they abide with the conditions. If they don't and we can't, that is fine, but if we can make the American people feel better on this issue, that is also fine."

Mr. Kissinger stated, "there are actually two issues involved: (1) residual forces and (2) our public and private negotiating position. Here, the alternatives are, should we negotiate a requirement for residual forces or should we opt to the listing of a series of conditions which we know won't be met, while speaking as though all forces will be withdrawn?"

The President asked Ambassador Bunker what the South Vietnamese reaction would be on this issue.

Ambassador Bunker replied, we would like to leave this issue open. Thieu has already agreed to the six months provisions of the Manila formula but the key issue would be the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces completely out of Laos and Cambodia and the provision of guarantees which are binding.

The President stated, in my view we should agree to total withdrawal of U.S. forces but include very strong conditions which we know may not be met.

The Secretary of State affirmed the President's position, commenting that if we insist on leaving U.S. forces there, we are going to run into difficulty. It would be much easier to provide a cover set of circumstances which would permit us to do it without claiming it as an objective at the outset.

The President said there is no doubt that U.S. forces will be in Vietnam for some time, something like a large military assistance group, but our public posture must be another thing. The type conditions that we should insist be met are: (1) verification, (2) supervision, (3) total withdrawal from Laos and Cambodia, (4) guarantees or assurances that the above have been done.

Mr. Kissinger then discussed two problems with respect to negotiations. The first is the time that forces would be in Vietnam after a settlement. The second is the issue of how we would treat the six months' provision of the Manila formula. Secretary of State interrupted and stated that he could see no reason why the U.S. Government should stick to the Manila formula. He stated we should have mutual withdrawal which would be total but with strong conditions. Habib added that we have said total withdrawal with conditions and we should not change now. We have told the Soviets this and the South Vietnamese have agreed to it. In terms of the six months' provision, we did say six months at Manila. The South Vietnamese were quite upset and the

North Vietnamese were especially angry and we took the position that it would take us more time (six months) to get our forces out because of the nature of our problem.

The President stated we will not change our position on this issue. We will not outwardly back away from the Manila formula. At the same time, we will keep in mind that we can depart from it in a de facto way.

The President again emphasized that the conditions of withdrawal were the operative portions of any agreement. The President stated it will take a long time to withdraw U.S. forces completely and, frankly, I don't think it can be done within six months.

Habib added it should be understood that under the Manila formula, the withdrawal is phased. When we talk about six months, it means six months after the withdrawal by the North Vietnamese. This is what they understand. This is a sensible position and should pose no problem.

General Lincoln affirmed that this should be feasible.

The President said while we will not depart publicly from the Manila formula, we should not refer to it, simply let it fade away.

Rogers asked if the President meant we should not make any reference to the six months' provision.

The President replied, I want us to be hard in our negotiations but soft in our public stance. Habib said we have not touched on the six months' provisions recently.

The President said that is right, don't get all involved on this issue. If Thieu sees that they meet the conditions that we have established, then we should have no problems with the South Vietnamese. Actually, our negotiated positions to date have been much tougher than was the Manila formula.

Ambassador Bunker said that Manila has been a source of great confusion in South Vietnam and until recently, they thought we would not move at all until six months after the North Vietnamese were entirely out of South Vietnam. Now they understand our position. They understand that the withdrawal would be mutual and simultaneous but that we would have six months longer to complete our total withdrawal.

Again, the President emphasized that we should not get hung up on this issue and that we should emphasize to the South Vietnamese the conditions we will insist upon.

Habib stated that the North Vietnamese will be the ones that will raise this issue. The President replied then tell them we will be out when you meet the conditions that we have established. In other words, after you are gone and the conditions are met, then we will meet our end of the bargain.

General Goodpaster stated that he had three points he wished to make. First, that U.S. forces would need at least three months to get

ready to start any withdrawals. Second, that U.S. forces would need at least six months to get the people and equipment out, emphasizing that people are needed to move equipment and, third, that after all combat forces have been withdrawn that they will need an additional three months to roll up equipment.

The President agreed. Habib stated we will need just such a plan, i.e., a withdrawal plan carefully phased to work with in Paris when we see some progress in the negotiations. Secretary Rogers said it is time that the military realized the kind of problems we have. Why do the military always talk about how much time it will take to withdraw, why do they always rattle the saber in public? This is what has caused our problem with the young people.

General Goodpaster asked that the group consider the facts. He pointed out that the U.S. was now in Phase II of the Vietnamization Program, a program designed to get the VNAF ready to handle the war alone. By mid-year, he stated, we will be nearly completed Phase II. By FY 70, our shortfalls will only exist in helicopters and special forces units. However, it takes until FY 72 for them to get the helicopters and for certain naval forces it will be as late as FY 73.

General Goodpaster emphasized that these problems must be recognized and agreed to furnish Paris with this information. He concluded by pointing out that Phase III which involved the logistics and self-sustaining capability of the South Vietnamese, was programmed for completion at the end of FY 72. In effect, we are talking about two years for the Vietnamese to be ready to take over. It is essential, he said, that we do not place ourselves at a tactical disadvantage at any one point in the process.

The President strongly endorsed General Goodpaster's position.

Dr. Kissinger again took over the conduct of the discussion and asked the group to consider the issue of verification, and the phased withdrawal plan, mentioning the possibility of withdrawal in a de facto sense without negotiations or withdrawal, dependent upon formal negotiations.

The President interrupted and stated he would like to make one more point with the individual involved. He asked Ambassador Bunker if there was anything he had heard here so far which would make his job impossible. Ambassador Bunker replied no.

The President then said that he doesn't like the old style used by the previous Administration of referring always to understandings. He stated that he wanted these things known and formally agreed to, not just indirectly understood. He wants this considered very carefully and when we talk about withdrawal of our forces, we should consider the location to which they will be withdrawn. Are we talking about Okinawa, Hawaii or Thailand or perhaps CONUS?

The President said we need the answers to these questions. They are both political and practical. He said we should meet again in one or two months after these studies are completed. Habib said we need an agreement with the South Vietnamese on the nature of a withdrawal pattern and we will get to work on the issues of phased withdrawal and verification.

Bundy said it is easy to handle the phased withdrawal issue but verification becomes a problem. Who is gong to do it? Do we ask foreign governments to do it? We can prepare a plan but being sure it is complied with is another question.

Habib says we will need these papers shortly. We can only afford to have about two more private meetings before we are ready to talk turkey on withdrawal.

The President then asked Mr. Habib what the Administration could do in Washington to strengthen the U.S. Paris negotiating position. Habib replied, first and foremost, is to keep quiet. Not talking is the best solution. On the issue of de-escalation, there should be no discussion in the public forum.

Rogers interrupted and stated we have got to know what to say publicly. We are constantly being put into the position of commenting. We should probably refer to de-escalation in terms of withdrawal and restoration of the DMZ.

General McConnell stated that he would like to emphasize that when we consider withdrawals and certainly the military wants out as much as anyone, we should not put U.S. forces at a tactical disadvantage and, further, that the U.S. forces must have time to get the equipment out and to get the South Vietnamese ready to handle the problem.

The President reaffirmed General McConnell's position.

General Goodpaster added it should be understood that in practical terms we cannot de-escalate on the ground. We must understand this here at this table.

Habib then added, we must be equally mum on the issue of secret talks. We cannot talk about them publicly in Washington.

The President emphasized to all that this would be done.

Bundy stated that we now need a paper on political settlement, the elements of it, a paper on verification of withdrawal. Finally, we need an answer for the South Vietnamese on what type of guarantees would be provided. The latter is a very thorny area.

Secretary of State affirmed that there would be no talk about abandoning Manila.

The President thanked Ambassador Bunker and Mr. Habib for their contributions and the meeting was adjourned.

50. Talking Points for President Nixon[1]

Washington, March 31, 1969.

TALKING POINTS FOR MEETING WITH
AMBASSADOR LODGE AND MR. HABIB
2:00 P.M., MARCH 31, 1969

1. Express your appreciation to Ambassador Lodge for returning to the U.S. at this time for an exchange of views on the progress of negotiations in Paris. Compliment Lodge on the conduct of the negotiations to date and make the point that you wanted him back at this time so that he would have the first-hand benefit of the results of last Friday's National Security Council meeting on Vietnam prior to proceeding with the private talks.

2. Review the game plan for the private talks:

a. Visualize separate discussions between the US/DRV and the GVN/NLF, private talks including all participants not excluded but the initial focus should be on the US/DRV route.

b. Our posture on the pace of the talks should be ready but not eager. We want to avoid giving Hanoi the impression we are acting from weakness or under pressures.

c. We should maintain public posture of seeking progress without revealing content of private talks.

d. During the early stages we would:

(1) Stress mutual withdrawals. This subject is the foundation of any agreement, of concern to both sides, and our major source of leverage.
(2) Secondary but significant emphasis on restoring the DMZ.
(3) Keep after the question of prisoners.
(4) *De-escalation.* There was a split position in the bureaucracy on this subject prior to the NSC meeting. Some believe we should present and discuss proposals; others disagree. As a result of the NSC meeting on Friday, you have decided:[2]

(a) There will be no de-escalation except as an outgrowth of mutual troop withdrawal.
(b) The U.S. side will not initiate any de-escalation proposals in the Paris negotiations.
(c) If the DRV raise the issue of de-escalation, the U.S. side will listen but only discuss it in the context of mutual withdrawal.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 181, Paris Talks/Meetings, Memos and Miscellaneous, March–May 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive. No drafting information appears on the paper, but it was likely prepared by the White House Staff. Nixon and Kissinger met with Lodge and Habib from 2:05 to 2:55 p.m. on March 31. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary)

[2] See Document 51.

e. In the broader phase of the negotiations, we would:

(1) Consider moving into a whole set of issues associated with the 62 and 54 Accords and try to get as many agreements as possible. Even in the early stages of talks, Laos, Cambodia and the withdrawal of NVN troops to the DRV must be emphasized. On the definition of U.S. forces subject to withdrawal and as a result of Friday's NSC meeting, you have decided that we should be prepared to state publicly that the U.S. would withdraw all combat forces from South Vietnam if Hanoi meets rigid conditions of a mutual withdrawal agreement. These conditions should include provisions for:

(a) Verification and supervision of withdrawal.
(b) The withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from Laos and Cambodia.
(c) Guarantees to maintain the agreement.

(2) On the issue of a timetable for completion of U.S. withdrawal, you have decided that there will be no public repudiation of the former U.S. position that we would complete our withdrawal within 6 months of the completion of Hanoi's withdrawal (Manila formula). This position, however, will be adopted with the recognition that, in practice, the U.S. will be in a position to control the timing of the completion of our withdrawal, since we can determine if Hanoi has fully met the conditions of the mutual withdrawal agreement. The key point will not be the timetable but rather getting Hanoi to comply with the conditions of the withdrawal.

(3) Concerning the political structure of the South, we should push forward South Vietnamese discussions of the internal political structure. At the same time, we should minimize our involvement in these questions, closely coordinate with the GVN, and urge them to develop negotiating positions.

(4) Concerning GVN, Allied and Soviet roles, we should strive at all times to keep our position fully coordinated with the GVN. We should give the Soviets every opportunity to exert influence in the direction of progress. We do not now envisage a major French role.

3. Inform Lodge that you recognize that the North Vietnamese have been quite successful in conducting their military operations in South Vietnam in such a way as to exert maximum influence on the Paris negotiations. At the same time, you believe we should avoid the de-escalation route at this time in order to preclude a Panmunjom stalemate at the outset. Indicate that you are willing for a time to "take the heat" on this issue.

4. Inform Lodge that you have instructed Ambassador Bunker and General Goodpaster to continue on a priority basis to improve the efficiency and capabilities of the South Vietnamese armed forces and that you anticipate some unilateral U.S. troop withdrawals commencing as early as July, providing there is no drastic change in the situation on the ground.

5. Ask Lodge to provide his appraisal of how the negotiations are proceeding.

51. National Security Decision Memorandum 9[1]

Washington, April 1, 1969.

TO

The Vice President
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence
The Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness

SUBJECT

Vietnam

As a result of the National Security Council meeting on March 28, 1969,[2] I have made the following decisions on the issues listed below:

The Issue of De-escalation

1. There will be no de-escalation except as an outgrowth of mutual troop withdrawal.

2. The U.S. side will not initiate any de-escalation proposals in the Paris negotiations.

3. If the DRV raise the issue of de-escalation, the U.S. side will listen but only discuss it in the context of mutual withdrawal.

The Issue of U.S. Forces Subject to Withdrawal

On the definition of U.S. Forces subject to withdrawal, I have decided that we should be prepared to withdraw all combat forces from South Vietnam if Hanoi meets specific conditions of a mutual withdrawal agreement. These conditions should include provisions for:

1. Verification and supervision of withdrawal.
2. The withdrawal of North Vietnamese Forces from Laos and Cambodia, as well as from South Vietnam.
3. Guarantees to maintain the agreement.

The Issue of a Timetable for Completion of U.S. Withdrawal

There will be no public repudiation of the former U.S. position that we would complete our withdrawal within six months of the completion of Hanoi's withdrawal. This position will be adopted with the recognition that, in practice, the U.S. will be in a position to control

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 363, Subject Files, NSDM. Top Secret; Sensitive. General Wheeler also received a copy. Nixon's initials appear at the end of the memorandum.

[2] See Document 49.

the timing of the completion of our withdrawal, since we can determine if Hanoi has fully met the conditions of the mutual withdrawal agreement. The key point will not be the timetable but rather getting Hanoi to comply with the conditions for withdrawal.

The draft papers considered by the National Security Council on March 28, 1969, are approved with modifications reflecting the above decisions.[3]

I have also directed that the following studies be undertaken for which appropriate NSSMs will be forthcoming:

1. Specific plan timetable for Vietnamizing the war.
2. Phased withdrawal under conditions of:

    a. Mutual withdrawal, or
    b. Vietnamizing the war.

3. Verification for mutual withdrawal.
4. Detailed political settlement for SVN.
5. International guarantees for above.

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[3] See footnote 3, Document 47.

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

Washington, April 3, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Problem

I. The Problem in Paris

In trying to settle the Vietnam war, we can follow two routes: (1) through the Paris talks, (2) through some extraordinary procedures. The Paris route is certainly the more convenient and presents fewer administration problems. However, to be successful, the following conditions must be met by the Paris route:

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1319, Unfiled Material, 1969, Box 3 of 19. Top Secret; Sensitive.

1. We must convince the American public that we are eager to settle the war, and Hanoi that we are not so anxious that it can afford to outwait us.

2. We must continue military pressures of a scope sufficient to deter Hanoi from turning the negotiations into another Panmunjom.

3. Our Government must be sufficiently disciplined so that all of its elements speak with the same voice.

4. Relations with the GVN must be maintained at a level of intimacy to deprive Hanoi of the expectation that they can use the negotiations to break the Saigon Government.

If we can meet all these conditions, we might wind the war up by next Spring. However, the prospects for meeting these conditions do not seem to me too bright for the following reasons:

1. The dominant view in the State Department favors measures whose practical consequences will be to relieve the pressures on Hanoi and thus encourage Hanoi to prolong the negotiations.

2. The Paris delegation is profoundly divided and at least its junior members are quite undisciplined. We will thus be under constant pressure of leaks from Paris. (I am attaching a report from a Colonel who has been in the Paris delegations for your information.)[2]

3. The split between the military command in Saigon and the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department is so great that it will be very hard to present a coherent approach in Paris to avoid constant oscillation between extremes.

4. As our negotiators get more impatient and as public pressures start building up, there will be an increasing temptation to squeeze Saigon and to maneuver it into the position of being the chief obstacle to a settlement. If you compare our negotiating position a year ago with what it is today, this process of gradual chipping away becomes obvious. I would suspect that our minimum position today will be much stronger than our maximum position a year from now.

5. The tendency to make foreign policy by press-leaks or only partially considered statements deprives our policy of flexibility and coherence. To obtain discipline, on the other hand, might produce a bloody fight which would impair our diplomacy.

II. A Possible Solution

For all these reasons, I have concluded that our best course would be a bold move of trying to settle everything at once. Such a move should:

1. Attempt to involve the Soviet Union;

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[2] Not attached, but Nixon attached an extract of this report to an April 10 memorandum to Rogers; see Document 57.

2. Attempt to negotiate a package settlement in order to avoid endless delay.

3. Present a credible threat of serious consequence if no settlement is reached.

Soviet involvement is crucial; however, the Soviet problem is complicated. They cannot be eager to run major risks for Hanoi because a victory for Hanoi does not benefit the Soviet Union geopolitically and might hurt it ideologically by proving the validity of the Chinese interpretation of international affairs. But a humiliation for Hanoi is also not acceptable because it stakes Moscow's claim to leadership of the world communist movement. In these circumstances, Moscow tends to procrastinate; it does just enough to keep its claims as a major communist power but below the threshold of military confrontation with us. It helps tactically in Paris, but so far has not made a strategic move to end the war.

Moscow is likely to move off this course only on the basis of its own requirements, not of our needs. Secondly, it will require some event to galvanize Moscow into action or to give it an excuse for it.

This leads me to propose a program with the following components.

1. An approach to Dobrynin by me along these lines:

a. The President has reviewed the Vietnam situation carefully.

b. He will not be the first American President to lose a war, and he is not prepared to give in to public pressures which would have that practical consequence.

c. The President has therefore decided that he will make one more effort to achieve a reasonable settlement. If it fails, other measures will be invoked.

d. These measures could not help but involve wider risks. U.S.-Soviet relations are therefore at a crossroads.

e. The President is eager to move into an era of conciliation with the Soviet Union on a broad front. As a sign of this, he is willing to send a high-level delegation to Moscow to agree with the Soviet Union on principles of strategic arms limitations. He is also willing to consider other meetings at even higher levels.

f. The head of the delegation to discuss strategic arms limitations would be Cyrus Vance.[3] He would be empowered, while in Moscow,

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[3] Kissinger talked with Vance on March 18 to explore his willingness to undertake a mission to Moscow to link the opening of the SALT talks with an overall proposal for a settlement on Vietnam. Vance would meet secretly with a senior North Vietnamese representative in the Soviet capital, and be empowered to negotiate both issues. (*White House Years*, p. 266)

to meet with a North Vietnamese negotiator and agree with him on a military as well as a political settlement. Our offer to Hanoi will be generous and forthcoming in keeping with the sacrifices Hanoi has made and the courage with which it has fought.

g. The President will give this effort in Moscow 6 weeks to succeed.

h. The President will ask nothing of the Soviet Union inconsistent with its position as a senior communist power. He expects that nothing will be asked of the U.S. inconsistent with its worldwide obligations.

i. If this negotiation is successful, the President will conclude that the major danger to war is being removed and he would expect progress in many areas.

j. The President is prepared to repeat this proposition to a Soviet Ambassador personally if there is any interest in the Kremlin.

2. If Dobrynin agrees, a mission should be sent to Moscow headed by Vance for the purpose of discussing principles of strategic arms limitations. Vance should be empowered to discuss North Vietnamese issues.

3. The object of the Vietnam negotiations would be as follows:

a. *Definition of Objective:* To reach prompt agreement with the North Vietnamese on the general shape of a political-military settlement, specifically:

(1) *Military*—Agreement that there will be mutual withdrawal of all external forces, and a ceasefire based on a mutual withdrawal.

(2) *Political*—(i) Agreement that guarantees the NLF freedom from reprisals and the right to participate fully in the political and social life of the country in exchange for agreement by NLF and DRV to forego further attempts to achieve their political objectives by force and violence. (ii) Agreement that there will be a separate and independent SVN for at least 5 years.

(3) *Mechanism for supervising and verifying the carrying out of the settlement.* The agreement with the DRV should not attempt to spell out the manner in which the general principles agreed to will be implemented. That should be left for Paris.

4. If Vance can get an agreement in principle, the negotiations would shift back to Paris for final implementation. The whole process should be completed before the end of August.

III. Pros and Cons

This procedure would have the following advantages:

1. It would give the Soviet Union an excuse and a method for involving itself in the process.

2. It would prevent a Panmunjom of protracted negotiations while casualties mount.

3. It would give you control over the negotiations.

4. It is the only way to end the war quickly and the best way to conclude it honorably.

5. If it becomes known, it will be considered as an imaginative peace move.

6. The beginning of SALT negotiations will give you a little more maneuvering room domestically. Focusing the initial talks on "principles" keeps you from being pressured all the time.

The course outlined here has the following disadvantages:

1. It will get no cooperation from the bureaucracy and may even be sabotaged if they find out about it.

2. It may be used by Hanoi to undermine our position in Saigon. I think this risk would be minimal. Hanoi's fear of Peking will make it reluctant to publicize the talks.

3. It will be difficult to give Vance the dual negotiating role without the other members of the SALT delegation knowing about it.[4]

4. A related question is whether a high DRV official can come to Moscow at the same time the SALT talks are going on without suspicions being aroused.

5. Another question is whether the DRV can negotiate in Moscow in light of the current tensions between Moscow and Peking.

6. All these difficulties are surmountable. The real problem is that the approach outlined here should not be implemented unless you are prepared to take tough escalatory steps if Moscow rejects the overture (mining Haiphong, bombing Cambodia, etc.). To fail to do so would be to risk your credibility.

With this proviso, I believe the pros outweigh the cons. If you agree, I shall work out a more detailed scenario.[5]

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[4] This was a concern Vance raised to Kissinger. (Ibid.)

[5] Kissinger spoke to Nixon at Key Biscayne and the President was "dubious about the 'Vance ploy,' as he called it," but Nixon agreed to make a diplomatic approach to the Soviet Union. (Ibid., pp. 267–268) See Document 55.

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

Washington, April 3, 1969.

SUBJECT

Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, April 3, 1969

Dobrynin called me about 3:30 p.m. to ask whether he might come by for fifteen minutes this afternoon. I received him at 4:30 p.m. and he stayed for an hour.

[Omitted here is information unrelated to Vietnam.]

However, it soon became clear that the note was just a pretext. Dobrynin turned the conversation to Vietnam and asked me what I thought of developments. I said we were very relaxed, we knew what we were doing and would not be deflected by public protest. Dobrynin asked me whether we had "any intention of expanding the war." I replied that I had always told him that the President was determined to end the war one way or the other. He could be sure that I did not speak idly and that I hoped Hanoi kept Moscow fully informed of everything that was going on. Dobrynin said: "You know we do not have any advisers at the headquarters in South Vietnam." I replied: "Well, I hope they keep you informed of everything that goes on."

Dobrynin then asked how I visualized the relationship between a military and political settlement. I decided to play fairly tough and said that we would probably want to discuss military issues first. (I did this to preserve the option of the Vance mission and to have our willingness to discuss political matters within that framework serve as a concession.) I added that we could understand it, however, if after the military issues were settled, Hanoi would make their application dependent on progress towards a political settlement. Dobrynin pretended that this was a major concession and said it put a new complexion on things. He said we had to understand that the NLF was reluctant to risk itself in a forum with the GVN since it considered the GVN determined to destroy it. Dobrynin asked whether I saw any chance of replacing Thieu and Ky. I said no, but we were willing to consider safeguards for the NLF after a settlement. Dobrynin said this

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin–Kissinger, 1969, [Part 2]. Secret; Nodis. The memorandum was not initialed by Kissinger, but Document 55 makes it clear that Kissinger sent it to the President.

was all terribly complicated. The NLF did not insist on a coalition government. It would settle for a peace cabinet (without Thieu and Ky) which would safeguard its members.

Dobrynin then returned to the problem of escalation. I told him it would be too bad if we were driven in this direction because it was hard to think of a place where a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States made less sense. I added that it seemed to me our interests in Vietnam were quite compatible. Dobrynin replied: "Our interests in Vietnam are practically identical. We might want a slightly more neutral South Vietnam than you, but it is not an issue of consequence."

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Comment:

Dobrynin seemed very insecure when speaking about Vietnam. All of this suggests to me that maybe the Vance mission is our best hope.

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54. Editorial Note

South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky attended the State Funeral of former President Dwight D. Eisenhower in Washington on March 30, 1969. Ky and Ambassador Bui Diem met with President Nixon, Ambassador Bunker, and Presidential Assistant Henry Kissinger from 2:05 to 2:34 p.m. on April 1. This meeting was one of many President Nixon had that day with foreign leaders attending the funeral. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) No other record of the discussion between Ky and Nixon has been found. Ky also met with Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson on April 1 and Secretary of State William Rogers on April 3 at 12:30 p.m. Records of these discussions are in memoranda of conversation of those dates (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 7 VIET S) Ky also met with Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird on April 2 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. (Memorandum of conversation, April 4; Washington National Records Center, OSD/ISA Files: FRC 330 72 A 6308, Vietnam #2, 1969, 000.1) Telegram 54546 to Saigon, April 9, provides an overall assessment of Ky's trip. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 7 VIET S)

On April 4 Ky met with Kissinger at the Vietnamese Chancery in Washington at 9:40 a.m. Ky assured Kissinger that relations between the Nixon administration and the South Vietnamese Government had improved greatly. Kissinger invited Ambassador Bui Diem, who was attending the meeting, to come and see him if he was confused about

the President's Vietnam policy. Kissinger told Ky to disregard a public statement by Laird about a possible coalition government with the National Liberation Front and assured Ky that the President would make Vietnam policy. Asked about the war effort, Ky stated that although the North Vietnamese were getting weaker, he realized that a political statement was "the only practical solution." Ky assured Kissinger that South Vietnam could live with a settlement as long as North Vietnamese troops withdrew from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. When Kissinger raised the issue of elections, Ky assured him that his government could win elections at the local level and would accept supervision. Ky reported optimistically on "Vietnamizing the conflict." Kissinger concluded the discussion with promises of close cooperation, a special channel to Bui Diem if serious problems arose, and another assurance that only the President and the White House mattered on Vietnam policy. (Ibid.)

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55. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

April 5, 1969, 9:45 a.m.

[Omitted here is discussion of Peru and the International Petroleum Corporate dispute.]

P: I was wondering, in view of the rather patent attempt of the North Vietnamese to try to indicate that there is no progress being made in the talks—and then also the statement that the Administration had attempted to reduce its casualties and they wouldn't let that happen[2]—I'm inclined to think that even without a reason, we ought to go ahead and crack them pretty hard on the North.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 359, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking. Nixon was in Key Biscayne, Florida; Kissinger was in Washington.

[2] On April 3 North Vietnamese delegation officials in Paris denied that "secret talks" had started and that "some progress" was being made. On April 1 the NLF news agency stated that Abrams' defensive strategy of "avoiding losses and reducing expenses" had proved to be a "fiasco" by their post-Tet military offense. (Quoted from Stanley Millet, ed., *South Vietnam: U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia,* Vol. 4, 1969, pp. 35 and 40)

HAK: I know what you mean. I don't know whether you've had a chance to see a conversation I had with Dobrynin—it's in a package sent to you yesterday.[3] He came in with a pretext on European matters, but it was terribly transparent—he launched into a long talk on Vietnam. He said "we don't have any military observers with the Communist party in the south." I said "I hope they tell you what's going on." He kept coming back to this problem.

P: They don't have private talks next week?

HAK: No, it would be a good week for doing it. I've become convinced—and Dobrynin's conversation made it stronger—that we try the other route we have been discussing. The Soviets are getting edgy. I think if we gave them some way of getting themselves into it they might be ready to do it now.

I think domestically, and in Thieu government, it's going to be hard to hold it together. You have Laird's statements, for example—what he said about B–52's and private talks, etc.

P: Everybody has to get out and make it appear things are going well—they aren't used to playing a big game.

HAK: That's the problem.

P: They can't just stand there and (wait?), which is what you have to do.

HAK: Spend your assets at once, rather than piddle them away.

P: I agree we're going to have to change it. I'm not sure that will work. We may have to do something even more strong. I'm not sure the Vance ploy will work.

HAK: We don't have to tie ourselves to the Vance thing.

P: I'm concerned at the present time we're sort of piddling around and Walsh is jittering(?) around in Paris. The tone of the private talks has changed. I'm not so sure that they don't read what we're doing and that they're going to wait us out. It will worry them a little—that was the purpose of the other one, wasn't it?

HAK: That was the purpose, and we learned from it. We learned Hanoi was pretty eager, because they never would have come to private talks.

P: Let's assume the other side won't. We hit them again. I suppose they could then squeal that what we were doing—they might want to use this as a pretext.

HAK: They still have to get Sihanouk. They have no status for complaining. We have to play it cool.

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[3] See Document 53.

P: Particularly in that corner.

HAK: It's even more inaccessible where we hit it.

P: The Laotians are now asking for help.

HAK: I think if we could come to a decision on whether to shift the framework that then we ought to adhere to that, and then do it the week before we shift the framework so that word can get back to Moscow. One problem is Hanoi might not know how to translate it. Paris is cumbersome procedure even if you wanted to move fast.

P: Shifting of the framework poses a problem of what you do with Rogers, of course.

HAK: I think if we do it carefully, Rogers has to be brought along. It would take us about 3 weeks to set up, in my view. This is not something the Soviets would really have to think about.

P: My inclination is to crack this one, and crack another one—plenty of places to hit.

HAK: Say we crack them next week. Week after, we approach Dobrynin. But it would take him about two weeks to set up. When it is set up, we've got to bring Rogers in. By that time the talks in Paris might be stalemated and he might be eager to have a way out. The way everyone is talking in this country Hanoi is going to try to wait.

P: If they see everybody talking, that's going to make them wait. I can rectify it to an extent, by what I say next week at the press conference—that will hold the line.

HAK: Next week would be bad for a press conference, with NATO in town and a major speech. At any rate, whenever you have a p.c., you can rectify it. The NATO speech is on Thursday. Bill is going to have a p.c. on Monday[4]—he hasn't had one yet.

P: We may have to hit them one while we're here. The necessity for the North Vietnamese to know that there's still a lot of snap left in the old boys is very important. And I don't know any other way to do it.

HAK: I think that's needed. But also what is needed is a forum so they have a way out if they need it. I'd be in favor of doing it next week anyhow, even if we don't have change of venue, but if they could tie the two together—that's what made the other one so confusing to them.

P: OK, we'll see what happens. When do they expect the next private talk?

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[4] April 7; the text of Rogers' press conference is in Department of State *Bulletin,* April 28, 1969, pp. 357–363.

HAK: They will ask for it when Bunker is back in Saigon. In about a week.

P: I think we better get geared up to do this other one. So they're ready to hit that area. I won't tell anything to the Pentagon.

HAK: I'll hold it until Monday.

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

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

The War in Laos and the Significance of the Fall of Na Khang

The war in Laos took a serious turn a month ago with the fall of the Na Khang guerrilla base in Northeastern Laos.

I attach a CIA study done at our request which concludes that the loss of Na Khang does not drastically alter the tactical situation, nor necessarily signal an intensification of the Communists' dry-season offensive.[2] The psychological damage to shake Government morale may be the most significant aspect of the event.

The study assumes that the RLG is likely to react to the fall of Na Khang with panicky withdrawals if other Government positions come under attack. In recent weeks, Souvanna Phouma has shown himself very seriously worried, but the Government forces have not panicked. They have made a series of probes to throw the Communists' timetable off. At Souvanna's request we have supplied the Lao troops with 4000 automatic rifles, widened the area of our air strikes and struck at Communist material supplies in the Plain of Jars. These actions have perhaps slowed the enemy, but it is still an open question whether he will

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, February–April 1969. Top Secret. Drafted by Grant on April 8. Richard L. Sneider sent this memorandum to Kissinger under cover of an April 9 memorandum indicating that he had "recast" the study on Laos as a memorandum for the President at Kissinger's request. A handwritten note on the first page reads: "retd from P[resident], 4/15/69."

[2] Not attached; reference is to CIA's Intelligence Memorandum No. 0566/69, April 8, 1969, "The Current Communist Threat in Laos." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 545, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 1, to 31 July 1969)

have advanced far enough fundamentally to affect the balance of forces in Laos, before the rains come in a few weeks and bring a halt to his advances.

The Two Struggles: There are two levels of conflict in Laos—the more limited conflict between the RLG and the Communists and the larger conflict relating to the Vietnam War. The smaller conflict is being fought in the shadow of the larger. The RLG would collapse without U.S. aid and FEOF. The Pathet Lao is dependent upon North Vietnam, which could take over Laos very quickly if it wished. The shaky equilibrium which has survived since 1962 has been at the sufferance of the outside powers, who have chosen to contain the Laos conflict rather than to attempt a fundamental shift in the balance of power within Laos.

The Communist Strategy: North Vietnam has been willing to tolerate the present balance because

—Its control of the "Ho Chi Minh trail" has not been threatened and it has been able to maintain generally effective control of the hill areas bordering North Vietnam.

—It has calculated that a move which put Communists in control of the Mekong plain or toppled the RLG would probably remove the restraints upon a more massive U.S. effort to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail.

—It has probably calculated that, after a Communist victory in South Vietnam, Communist control of Laos could be brought about easily, and primarily through political means.

—To communize Laos would lose much third world sympathy for North Vietnam, would unalterably demonstrate that the Communists had chosen to tear up the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962, and might encounter resistance from the USSR, which probably favors the present situation as offering more leverage than it would have with a Communist Government in power.

The North Vietnam calculation may have shifted somewhat in recent months, since the balance of incentives and disincentives has been changed. Since the bombing halt in North Vietnam, the U.S. has spent much more effort on harassing the Ho Chi Minh trail, which may affect the Communist view of the usefulness of the present arrangement. At the same time, the Communists probably believe that the U.S. is less likely to escalate the war by massive intervention against the trail. Finally, North Vietnam may wish to institutionalize some arrangement which would give it continuing access to South Vietnam through Southern Laos in the event of an agreement in Paris.

The Communists, with Soviet help, seem presently to be orchestrating a major effort to restore the balance in their favor by forcing a halt in the U.S. bombing of Laos. Their point of pressure will be upon Souvanna Phouma, to whom they presumably have offered or will offer a combination of inducements (Communist participation in a revitalized

Government of National Union) and threats (Communist encroachments upon RLG-controlled territory) to persuade him to call for a halt in the bombing.

The Soviet and Chinese interests conflict, as usual. The Soviets probably have more leverage with Souvanna Phouma than they would with a Communist-dominated Government of Laos. The Chinese seek the establishment of a Communist Government responsive to the North Vietnamese and themselves. In this circumstance, we have a certain overlap of interest with the Soviets in maintaining the Souvanna administration.

The U.S. Strategy: We have tolerated the Laos equilibrium for these reasons:

—Control over the Mekong Valley, with its access to Thailand, has remained in friendly hands.

—We have been able, with Souvanna Phouma's agreement and support, to monitor movements along the Ho Chi Minh trail and to harass it by air and, to a lesser extent, on the ground.

—Most important, an effort to tip the Laos balance in our favor would require a major expansion of our war effort.

The "Little War": The internal balance has been remarkably stable since 1962–63 when the RLG effectively absorbed most of the Neutralists, and the Communists absorbed the remainder. We have defused threats from the Right by making clear that our support is for Souvanna Phouma, and he seems to face no immediate challenge for control of the RLG.

The two sides have tended to consolidate and expand their control in their own zones. However, Communist control of the uplands has been resisted by pro-RLG Meo guerrillas, which number some 40,000, which receive extensive CIA support, and which have also helped to man our roadwatch operations along the Ho Chi Minh trail. These guerrillas operate in Pathet Lao areas, and in some places have actually succeeded in winning and holding territory for the RLG.

On the other hand, the Communists have—within the strategic balance pictured above—regularly nibbled at RLG areas of control outside the Mekong plain. First, they took the Plain of Jars. In 1967–68 they took the Nam Bac Valley in Luang Prabang province and wiped out guerrilla bases in most of Houa Phan (Sam Neua) province in the Northeast. These gains have been achieved in dry-season skirmishes rather than a sustained campaign.

The Fall of Na Khang in the Strategic Perspectives: This incident is not vital to either level of conflict, but it may relate to both.

It certainly relates to the intra-Laotian struggle. The fall of the base and airstrip effectively seals off Sam Neua province (the Laotian "bulge" into North Vietnam) from all government operations. The commander of the guerrilla forces in the area, Vang Pao, is probably the ablest Laotian general. His Meo tribal forces have done more than

their part in preventing the Communists from consolidating control of this hill area, but they have suffered severe manpower attrition. The Government is talking of removing their dependents to the plains, which would remove the last incentive for them to fight in the hills. Vang Pao himself has had to recognize that he does not have the power to do more than harass the enemy and perhaps to hold off further offensives until the wet season stops the Communists.

A threat may now be more easily posed to the major "Neutralist" (friendly) base of Moung Soui. These forces are not distinguished fighters; and if they are dispersed, the Government's position will become shakier.

The RLG has suffered a psychological setback of serious proportions. The Pathet Lao hand will be strengthened if the Communists should elect to call for negotiations to reconstitute the three-way coalition envisaged by the Geneva Accords of 1962—a decision which would be a tactic to weaken and eventually destroy Souvanna rather than to help him.

The situation has become serious enough for Souvanna Phouma to have asked our Embassy that it extend our bombing to the Plain of Jars, and then to include the Communist administrative centers, a change of the ground rules which could lead to retaliation against Vientiane or other Communist responses. Our Embassy has complied, and a series of air strikes entitled "Operation Rain Dance" is being carried out to slow the enemy's momentum until the rainy season.

The incident could relate to the larger picture, and be part of the threat to Souvanna that he will lose more territory if he does not accede to pressures to call a halt to the American bombing.

Laos in the Paris Negotiations: The two levels of action point to the two principal problems which Laos will pose for us in the Paris negotiations. First will be the provision of adequate guarantees that lines of communication not be left open through Laos for the North Vietnamese to support continuing insurrection in the South, and for the Chinese and North Vietnamese to support the Communists in Thailand. Second, and related to this, will be the problem of arriving at some new balance in Laos itself which will protect Laos from being very quickly overrun by the North Vietnamese Communists with a facade of Pathet Lao participation. This will require international inspection and control of much greater weight and strength than the International Control Commission as structured in the 1962 Accords. Or it will require external forces to beef up the Laotians, or some threat of retaliation against stepped-up Vietnamese pressures sufficiently credible to persuade Hanoi to desist. None of these deterrents would be easily created.

57. Memorandum From President Nixon to Secretary of State Rogers[1]

Washington, April 10, 1969.

SUBJECT

Paris Negotiations

I have recently been given a very disturbing report by a member of the staff of our negotiating team in Paris, which came to me on a personal basis.

The report, an extract of which is attached, indicates that our negotiating team is fundamentally split on the issue of the conduct of U.S. negotiations and that there are members of the team who are actively involved in a disloyal campaign "to save the President from himself." Activities include the conduct of correspondence with elements in the United States who favor termination of the war under any conditions, informal and frequent discussions with the press and friendly and unfriendly embassies to which opinions and views contrary to official policy are expressed.

Allegedly this activity has been conducted for some time without the cognizance of the head of our negotiating team and in flagrant violation of my previously stated policy on the conduct of our negotiations.

As I have emphasized on several occasions, I expect and encourage the free exchange of conflicting views on any policy issue up until the time a decision is made. Following decision, however, viewpoints in conflict with stated policy should be silenced. I expect a complete adherence to this policy throughout the Department of State and our embassies abroad. Should deviations come to your attention, the individuals involved should be promptly replaced.

RN

Attachment

EXTRACT[2]

He told me in the strictest confidence that he wished to convey some views which, under ordinary circumstances, he would never voice but, in the light of his serious concern for conditions in Paris, he

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Richardson Papers, Under Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, Box CL 3. Secret; Personal; Eyes Only.

[2] Confidential; Eyes Only.

felt must be conveyed. With that introduction, he stated that he viewed the Paris negotiating team as in a complete state of disarray. It was split wide open on the issue of the U.S. conduct of negotiations and members of the negotiating team were actively involved in a disloyal campaign to "save the President from himself" by indulging in a "poison pen campaign" with elements in the United States who favor the termination of the war under "any" conditions. He stated that he was aware that correspondence was being carried on by members of the staff with elements in the United States which had already come out in direct opposition to President Nixon's policies. He also stated that many in the negotiating team were devoid of loyalty or discipline and that members of the staff were indulging in frequent and direct conversations with other embassies, with the other side, and with the press, and that these contacts were being conducted without the cognizance of the head of the U.S. negotiating team.

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58. National Security Study Memorandum 36[1]

Washington, April 10, 1969.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Vietnamizing the War

The President has directed the preparation of a specific timetable for Vietnamizing the war. He has asked that the Secretary of Defense be responsible for the overall planning and implementation of this process, in coordination with the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence.

The plan should cover all aspects of US military, para-military, and civilian involvement in Vietnam, including combat and combat support forces, advisory personnel, and all forms of equipment. The plan can draw on current studies, including those for T-Day planning and

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 365, Subject Files, NSSMs. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Initialed by Haig. A copy was sent to General Wheeler.

RVNAF modernization and improvement. However, this timetable will be directed toward the progressive transfer to the South Vietnamese of the fighting effort with the US and other TCCs increasingly in support roles, assuming that the war continues and that North Vietnamese as well as Vietcong forces are in South Vietnam.

Assumptions for this timetable will include:

—a starting date of July 1, 1969;
—current North Vietnamese and Vietcong force levels, (i.e., we are not able to achieve mutual withdrawals); these levels should be continually adjusted in future months to ongoing intelligence estimates;
—current projections of RVNAF force levels;
—no deescalation in allied military efforts, except that resulting from phased withdrawals of US and other TCC forces which are not fully compensated for by the South Vietnamese;
—the highest national priorities for the equipping and training of South Vietnamese forces.

Based on these assumptions, timetables should be drawn up for the transfer of the combat role to the GVN and restriction of the US role to combat support and advisory missions only, with alternative completion dates of December 31, 1970, June 30, 1971, December 31, 1971, and December 31, 1972. For each alternative schedule the plan should identify the degradation in combat capability, if any, which would result, and the implications for the per cent of population under relatively secure GVN control. Each schedule should also estimate the budget and BOP implications.

Continual study, refinement and reevaluation of these problems will be necessary as the Vietnamization process proceeds. The President has requested by June 1 an initial overall report outline, as well as specific recommendations, with alternatives, for the first six months (July 1 to December 31, 1969), and a complete report by September 1. Further studies, recommendations, and progress reports will be requested subsequently.

Henry A. Kissinger

59. National Security Study Memorandum 37[1]

Washington, April 10, 1969.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Vietnam

As indicated in NSDM 9 of April 1, 1969,[2] the President has directed the preparation of certain studies on Vietnam. He has asked that the following papers be prepared by the interdepartmental Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam and submitted to the NSC Review Group by the dates indicated.

Phased Withdrawals

a. *Mutual Withdrawal*

This paper should examine the modalities of mutual withdrawal, whether agreed to publicly or privately by both sides, tacit, or de facto. It should cover timetables, phasing, types of personnel, regroupment, local cease fires and any other relevant subjects. Military, logistic, territorial and political factors and implications should be considered. (May 16, 1969)

b. *Vietnamizing the War*

This paper should examine the modalities of US withdrawals under conditions of our progressively turning over combat efforts to the South Vietnamese in the absence of reciprocal enemy withdrawals. It should cover timetables, phasing, types of personnel, regroupment, and substitution of South Vietnamese forces. Military, logistic, territorial, and political factors and implications should be considered.

This study should reflect the findings of the preliminary report of the Secretary of Defense on a specific timetable for Vietnamizing the war. (June 13, 1969) (See NSSM 36)[3]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–142, NSSM Files, NSSM 37. Top Secret; Sensitive. A copy was sent to General Wheeler.

[2] Document 51.

[3] Document 58.

Verification for Mutual Withdrawal

This paper should examine various means and mechanisms for verifying the process and completion of mutual withdrawals, whether agreed to publicly or privately by both sides, tacit, or de facto.[4] It should set forth the advantages and disadvantages of various types of verification machinery including joint belligerent commissions, reactivation of the ICC, and creation of new international groups (such as an Asian body). The paper should include a discussion of our unilateral capability to verify withdrawals drawing on all sources of information. It should consider how agreed arrangements can usefully supplement our unilateral capabilities. (May 16, 1969)

Political Settlement for South Vietnam

This study should explore various types of political settlement within South Vietnam and the possible US role concerning these questions. The paper should examine all feasible options, including elections at all levels, sharing of governmental power before and/or after elections, constitutional considerations, agreed or de facto territorial accommodations, decentralization of government power. The study should discuss the feasibility of each alternative and the likely attitudes of the GVN, the various segments of the South Vietnamese populace, the NLF, and Hanoi. It should evaluate the likely evolution within South Vietnam under alternative arrangements. Finally, the possible US role—in Vietnam as well as in the negotiations—in achieving a political settlement should be covered. (May 16, 1969)

International Guarantees

The paper should explore the subject of international guarantees for

—mutual withdrawal
—political settlement in South Vietnam
—the DMZ
—any other appropriate aspects of an overall Vietnam settlement.

In so doing, the study should be consistent with the separate papers on mutual withdrawal, verification for mutual withdrawal, political settlement for SVN, and our policy on the DMZ. This paper should

[4] In a May 1 memorandum to Rogers, Laird, and Helms, Kissinger amended NSSM 37 to read: "the specification for a paper on 'Verification for Mutual Withdrawal' should be amended by adding the following sentences after the first sentence: 'In addition, the paper should examine the requirements for verifying that there is no resumption of infiltration in the future, in a post-withdrawal situation. For both purposes, the means and mechanisms for verifying should include a careful discussion of manpower and logistic requirements. The paper should set forth. . .' " (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–142, NSSM Files, NSSM 37)

discuss the advantages and disadvantages of attempting to achieve international guarantees, and ways to negotiate them—e.g., at Paris, in a follow-on international conference, etc. (June 13, 1969)

Henry A. Kissinger

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

Washington, April 15, 1969.

SUBJECT

Memorandum of Conversation with Dobrynin April 14, 1969

After an exchange of pleasantries and a somewhat lengthy discussion of the Middle East (reported separately),[2] the discussion turned to Vietnam. I asked Dobrynin whether he had had any reaction from Moscow to our last conversation. He said he had not, but that he was aware of a conversation Zorin had had with Lodge.

I then said that the President had wished me to convey his thoughts on Vietnam to Moscow. We had followed the discussions in Paris with great interest and considerable patience. As Lodge had already pointed out to Zorin, it was very difficult to negotiate when the other side constantly accused us of insincerity, when every private meeting so far had been initiated by us, and when every proposition was put forward on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. The President had therefore decided to make one more direct approach on the highest level before drawing the conclusion that the war could only be ended by unilateral means. The President's personal word should be a guarantee of sincerity. After showing Dobrynin the talking points and the President's initials, I read them to him. He took copious notes, stopping every once in awhile to ask for an explanation. When I said we wanted to have the negotiations concluded within two months, Dobrynin said that if this proposal was feasible at all, we would be able to tell after the first week of negotiations whether they would lead anywhere. When I got through, Dobrynin asked whether I was saying that unless

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK, 1969 [part 2]. Secret; Nodis. A handwritten note on the memorandum reads: "Back from President, 4/16/69."

[2] Attached but not printed.

the Vietnam war was settled, we would not continue our discussions on the Middle East and not enter the talks on strategic arms. I replied that we were prepared to continue talking but that we would take measures which might create a complicated situation.

Dobrynin said that whatever happens in Vietnam, the Soviet leaders were eager to continue talking. He then asked whether these new measures might involve Soviet ships. I replied that many measures were under intensive study. In dealing with the President, it was well to remember that he always did more than he threatened and that he never threatened idly.

Dobrynin then said he hoped we understand the limitations of Soviet influence in Hanoi. We had to understand that while the Soviet Union might recommend certain steps, it would never threaten to cut off supplies. He could tell me that the Soviet Union had been instrumental in helping to get the talks started. Moreover, Communist China was constantly accusing the Soviet Union of betraying Hanoi. The Soviet Union could not afford to appear at a Communist meeting and find itself accused of having undermined a fellow Socialist country. On the other hand, the Soviet Union had no strategic interest in Southeast Asia. The chief reasons for its support of North Vietnam have been the appeals of a fellow Socialist country. I could be sure that the President's proposal would be transmitted to Hanoi within 24 hours. Dobrynin added that often Soviet messages were never answered by Hanoi so he could not guarantee what the reply would be or indeed if there would be a reply.

Dobrynin then said that the North Vietnamese were using the following agreement with Moscow and he stressed that Moscow did not necessarily agree with it: The Saigon Government was composed of individuals committed to the destruction of the NLF. The NLF would not enter a political confrontation in which the administrative apparatus was in the hands of people who sought to destroy them. The NLF would not insist on participating in the Government but it would insist that the Government be broadened and that Thieu and Ky be removed. Dobrynin repeated that he was simply stating Hanoi's arguments, not endorsing them.

I replied that I was familiar with Hanoi's arguments since they were being made to us as well. Nevertheless, the best policy for the NLF would be to work out guarantees for its political participation *after* a settlement of the war. They would certainly find us forthcoming.

Dobrynin reiterated Moscow's desire to stay in negotiations with us whatever happened in Vietnam. He told me many anecdotes of Stalin as well as of Molotov. He added that the Soviet Union had intended to send Marshall Zhukov to Eisenhower's funeral but Zhukov had recently had two strokes and was partially paralyzed. He then

asked whether we understood that Communist China was attempting to produce a clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. If the war in Vietnam escalates, it would only service Communist China's interest. I replied that this was the precise point the President had tried to make to Kuznetsov on the occasion of the Eisenhower funeral. It was, therefore, incumbent on the Soviet Union to help us remove this danger. We felt that in this period, the great nuclear powers still have the possibility of making peace.

As he was preparing to leave, Dobrynin asked me whether he could read over the talking points once more. I handed them to him and he read them slowly and carefully. He departed saying "this has been a very important conversation."

Attachment

TALKING POINTS ON VIETNAM FOR DISCUSSION WITH SOVIET AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN

1. I plan to utilize the following points in discussing efforts to resolve the Vietnam conflict:

a. The President has just completed a thorough going review of the Vietnam situation in its fullest world-wide context.

b. He will not be the first American President to lose a war, and he is not prepared to give in to public pressures which would have that practical consequence.[3]

c. The President is convinced that it is in no one's interest to have an outcome that would encourage Mainland China's aggressive drive.

d. The President has therefore decided that he will make one more[4] effort to achieve a reasonable settlement. If it fails, other measures will be invoked.[5]

e. These measures could not help but involve wider risks. U.S.-Soviet relations are therefore at a crossroad.[6]

f. The President views this point in history with the utmost gravity, especially since he is eager to move into an era of conciliation with the Soviet Union on a broad front. He is willing to begin talks on strategic arms limitations. He has agreed not to threaten the status quo in Europe. He is willing to consider meetings at the highest levels.

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[3] Kissinger bracketed this paragraph.

[4] Kissinger bracketed the phrase "one more" and wrote above it "a major."

[5] Kissinger bracketed the final sentence of 1. d.

[6] Kissinger bracketed this paragraph.

g. However, the President believes that an acceptable settlement to the Vietnamese conflict is the key to everything. Therefore, concurrently, the President proposes to designate a high-level representative to meet with a North Vietnamese negotiator at any location, including Moscow, designated by the Soviet Union to seek agreement with a designated North Vietnamese negotiator on a military as well as a political settlement. The President visualizes that this negotiation would be conducted distinct from the existing Paris framework in order to avoid the sluggish and heretofore cumbersome mechanisms that have evolved in Paris.

h. The President will give this peace effort just six weeks to succeed.[7]

i. The President will ask nothing of the Soviet Union inconsistent with its position as a senior communist power. He expects that nothing will be asked of the U.S. inconsistent with its world-wide obligations.

j. If this negotiation is successful, the President will conclude that the major danger to war is being removed and he would expect progress in many areas.

k. The President is prepared to repeat this proposition to the Soviet Ambassador personally if there is any interest in the Kremlin.

1. Our proposal to Hanoi will be conciliatory embracing both political and military measures.[8]

2. The object of the Vietnam negotiations would be as follows:

a. *Definition of Objective:* To reach prompt agreement with the North Vietnamese on the general shape of a political-military settlement, specifically:

(1) *Military*—Agreement that there will be mutual withdrawal of all external forces, and a ceasefire based on a mutual withdrawal.

(2) *Political*—(a) Agreement that guarantees the NLF freedom from reprisals and the right to participate fully in the political and social life of the country in exchange for agreement by NLF and DRV to forego further attempts to achieve their political objectives by force and violence, and[9] (b) agreement that there will be a separate and independent SVN for at least five years.

(3) *Mechanism for supervising and verifying the carrying out of the settlement.* The agreement with the DRV should not attempt to spell out the manner in which the general principles agreed to will be implemented. That should be left for Paris.

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[7] Nixon added the following sentence by hand at this point: "perhaps 2 months is more realistic."

[8] Kissinger added the following phrase by hand at this point: "for ending hostilities."

[9] Nixon added the following phrase by hand at this point: "a date for new elections."

3. If the special U.S. and North Vietnamese negotiators can achieve an agreement in principle, the negotiations would shift back to Paris for final implementation. The whole process should be completed before the end of August. If the special talks prove unsuccessful, it is difficult to visualize the progress which we both seek and the outlook for improved U.S.-Soviet relations would be seriously jeopardized.

4. The President realizes that this proposal represents a most complex and difficult choice for all parties concerned, but because we are at a most significant crossroad, he is convinced that extraordinary measures are called for. Because they are extraordinary, he would anticipate that Ambassador Dobrynin would wish to discuss them in detail with his government[10] and is prepared to withhold critical decisions on future actions with respect to Vietnam until he receives the Soviet government's reply to this proposal.[11]

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[10] Kissinger bracketed the final phrase of point 4 beginning here.

[11] Nixon initialed the approve option. Attached was a half sheet of paper comprising three additional points. It reads: "1. The President wishes to reiterate his conviction that a just peace is achievable. 2. The President is willing to explore avenues other than the existing negotiating framework. For example, it might be desirable for American and North Vietnamese negotiators to meet separately from the Paris framework to discuss general principles of a settlement. If the special US and DRV negotiators can achieve an agreement in principle, the final technical negotiations can shift back to Paris. 3. The USG is convinced that all parties are at a crossroads and that extraordinary measures are called for to reverse the tide of war." Nixon prints these three points in *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon,* p. 391. He also states that Kissinger showed these three points to Dobrynin.

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

Washington, April 15, 1969.

SUBJECT

CIA Analysis of Hanoi's Outlook on Paris Negotiations

At my request, Dick Helms has had his people prepare an analysis of Hanoi's outlook on the Paris negotiations which I am forwarding to you as a matter of interest. The analysis concludes that Hanoi wishes to seriously explore the possibilities for a settlement, but is not yet prepared to accept one which does not, at a minimum, provide for withdrawal of all U.S. forces and guarantee the VC a fairly clear shot at political control in SVN. Other principal points in the analysis are as follows:

1. The determinants of Hanoi's negotiating position are its calculation of its military position in SVN, the GVN political situation there, and Hanoi's estimate of the political climate in the U.S.

2. Hanoi is probably satisfied that its forces are demonstrating an ability to maintain military pressure in South Vietnam over an extended period. It believes Communist military and political pressure can prevent the GVN from significantly improving its position in the near future.

3. It also calculates that the U.S. will soon be under mounting domestic pressure to get the Paris talks moving. Until there is some basic change in this assessment, Hanoi is not likely to be very forthcoming in Paris.

4. Signs of allied eagerness or haste in the negotiations will be read as indications that the political heat is mounting in Washington.[2]

5. Most distasteful to Hanoi would be signs that the U.S. was politically prepared for a long haul military and diplomatic involvement in Vietnam.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous/Memcons, Vol. III, 4/5–69. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Sneider forwarded this memorandum to Kissinger on April 14 noting that it was "per your request" and recommending that he sign it. A note on the memorandum reads: "Pres has seen." Attached was an April 4 CIA memorandum entitled "Factors Influencing Hanoi's Behaviors at Paris Peace Negotiations." Helms sent it to Kissinger under a covering note of April 7, which states the paper was done at Kissinger's request and notes that, "we come down on the belief that Hanoi is influenced by strong positions on the United States side."

[2] Nixon highlighted paragraphs 3 and 4 and wrote: "H.K.—This shows urgency of getting out our peace plan—".

6. The DRV is nervous about any indication that the U.S. might be able to reduce its role in the war without cutting overall allied effectiveness. If the U.S. could do this successfully, Hanoi would probably feel impelled to work out a minimal settlement in Paris before the negotiations become irrelevant.

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

Washington, April 22, 1969.

SUBJECT

B–52 Strikes Against Targets in Cambodia

At Tab A is the Joint Chiefs of Staff plan providing for the Cambodian B–52 strikes with specific targets in the Fish Hook area previously struck and two additional targets in the Tri-Border area with Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia.[2] The plan would provide:

1. *Breakfast Bravo* 48 sorties against targets in the Fish Hook area with 12 cover sorties on South Vietnam. Time over target (TOT) between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 24 Saigon time (1:00 p.m. Wednesday local time).
2. *Breakfast COCO* Restrike of Fish Hook with 20 sorties plus 4 cover sorties. TOT between 8:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., Thursday night, April 24 Saigon time (7:00 a.m.–8:30 a.m. Thursday April 24 local time).
3. *Operation Lunch* 32 sorties against targets in the Tri-Border area and 4 cover sorties. TOT between 2:00 a.m. and 4:15 a.m. Friday morning April 25 Saigon time (1:00 p.m. and 3:15 p.m. Thursday afternoon local time).

At Tab B is a summary of the intelligence on the target area which indicates that military considerations favor the Fish Hook target complex at being the higher priority.[3]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. 1, 8–69. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Haig on April 22. The memorandum is not initialed, but handwritten notes on the first page indicate it was hand carried to the President and approved on April 22.

[2] Tab A, CM–4130-69, is a memorandum from Wheeler to Laird, entitled "B–52 Strikes Against Targets in Cambodia," April 21; attached but not printed.

[3] Tab B, CM–4101-69, is a memorandum from Wheeler to Laird, entitled "Authority for B–52 Strikes Against Targets in Cambodia," April 11; attached but not printed.

1. Post-strike analysis of the Fish Hook target area (COSVN) following the earlier strike indicates that there is a large North Vietnamese force in the area which has not moved.

2. Intelligence indicates that the two target complexes in the Tri-Border area contain elements of a major North Vietnamese logistics complex.

General Wheeler advises that the countermand order for authorizing all strikes should precede TOTs by eight hours; thus countermand for the operation should be prior to 5:00 a.m. Wednesday morning local time.

At Tab C is a draft instruction on the public affairs treatment of the plan.[4]

Pros and Cons of Plan

Pros	*Cons*
1. Strong military blow as manifestation of U.S. resolve to end conflict.	Could result in public outcry if strikes "blow."
2. Signals to Soviets and North Vietnam that EC–121 incident did not divert U.S. attention from Vietnam conflict.	Could prove counter-productive to on-going actions leading toward re-establishment of relations with Cambodia.
3. Timely and effective followup to Kissinger/Dobrynin conversation.	
4. Could complement Presidents' Peace Plan.	Could result in more North Vietnamese intransigence in Paris and even walkout.

On balance, I favor strike primarily because it represents a forceful U.S. action in wake of EC–121 incident and the message it conveys to the Soviets. It is probable that Laird and Wheeler will support plan on military grounds and that Rogers will oppose on political grounds.

[4] Tab C is an undated telegram from Wheeler to Abrams, McCain, and Holloway; attached but not printed.

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

Washington, April 25, 1969.

SUBJECT

History of Vietnam Negotiations

We have now completed a history of the Vietnam negotiations leading to the bombing halt (attached at Tab A).[2] We have also completed a special study on U.S.-Soviet negotiations relating to the bombing halt (attached at Tab B). We have underway a history of U.S.-North Vietnamese negotiations after November 1, 1968. These studies are not really what you are after since motives do not show up. However, this is the best we can do after an exhaustive review of all of the documents available.

Another possible study would deal with the internal U.S. Government consideration of the bombing halt decision. Such an internal history raises serious problems since it would probably require interviewing the key personalities involved and reopening the serious differences within the bureaucracy on the bombing halt decision. There is also a good chance that one or more of the personalities involved would leak to the press that your Administration was conducting this study.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 98, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam/U.S. Bombing Halt Understanding. Secret. Sent for action. A stamped note indicates the President saw the memorandum. Sneider sent this history to Kissinger on April 10, with two covering memoranda. In the first Sneider states: "Dean Moor has done an exhaustive history of the Vietnam negotiations leading to the bombing halt. . . . You requested an internal history of U.S. dealings after November 1, 1968. . . . I think you ought to seriously reconsider the request for the internal history. . . . It would raise immediate questions within the bureaucracy, which would get quickly to the press that the Administration is preparing a critical attack on LBJ's Vietnam policies. My judgment is that we have enough problems without this additional one." Kissinger indicated his desire for this internal history of U.S. and NVN dealings after November 1, 1968, by signing his initials next to the "approve" option. In the second covering memorandum, Sneider informed Kissinger that the attached draft narrative history covered "the bilateral talks between Washington and Hanoi, the US discussions with the GVN on the bombing halt, and the US discussions with the Soviet Union. . . . The draft makes use of all material presently available to the National Security Council staff." (Ibid.)

[2] Tabs A and B are attached but not printed.

Recommendation

That we not undertake an internal history of U.S. Government views.[3]

[3] Nixon initialed the approve option and wrote: "*But* I want all we trust who have recollections—(Wheeler, Goodpaster, Kissinger, etc.) to give me a memo (e.g., the anatomy of Clifford's turn around would be interesting—Frank Lenida's *plus* Wheeler's memos.) Also, Haldeman and Harlane should provide a memo of all we heard during campaign about bombing halt plans." Butterfield added the following note: "Henry: I have taken action on this request. Alex."

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

Washington, May 1, 1969.

SUBJECT

State Department Memorandum on Vietnam

The Department of State believes that Hanoi has adopted a more moderate tone in the recent plenary sessions in Paris. Following are some of the shifts which State detects:

1. The DRV spokesmen are dealing more readily with the actual issues raised by the U.S. and GVN.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous/Memcons, Vol. III, 4/5–69. Secret. Sent for information. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. Attached but not printed was a retyped and undated INR Intelligence Note entitled, "Hanoi Adopts Moderate Tone in Paris." In an April 30 memorandum to Kissinger, Sneider informed him that Lodge wished to make a proposal using the DRV's Four Points of April 8, 1965, at the next private session in Paris as a means of getting a dialogue going. (Ibid., Box 181, Paris Talks/Meetings, Private Meetings, March–December 1969) In a second memorandum of the same date Kissinger informed the President that at the Paris Plenary session of April 30, despite a "comprehensive attack on U.S. policy in Vietnam," the DRV clearly wanted the United States to explore the NLF's offer made on March 20 to talk with "other parties," to address the DRV's Four Points, and hinted that they might be willing to work within the GVN's constitution if it was revised. Nixon saw this memorandum. (Ibid., Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous/Memcons, Vol. III, 4/5–69)

2. The DRV has had less to say about the necessity of a "peace cabinet" in South Vietnam in recent sessions. State concludes that they are beginning to recognize that they may eventually have to deal with the GVN in private negotiations.

3. In recent sessions, the DRV has focused on its four point position,[2] dwelling particularly on point three which asserts that the internal affairs in SVN must be settled in accordance with the NLF program. By elaborating on this point, State believes the DRV has been attempting to project a tone of moderation since it has been stressing the allegedly democratic, neutral, and peaceful nature of its proposition.

State concludes that the display of moderation has at least three purposes:

1. To make a favorable impression on U.S. public and political opinion.

2. To influence the South Vietnamese body politic, making sure that Thieu's recent statements do not go unchallenged.

3. To attempt to encourage U.S. political concessions during the current military "lull" in South Vietnam.

[2] For text of the DRV's Four Points, outlined by DRV Premier Pham Van Dong on April 8, 1965, see *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1965,* pp. 852–853.

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

Washington, May 1, 1969.

SUBJECT

Captured Document on Vietnamese Communist Strategy

At Tab A is a captured document[2] which you may find interesting. It appears to be a COSVN-level paper which assesses the successes

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 137, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. IV, 4/24/69–5/18/69. Confidential. Sent for information. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Attached was an undated and retyped captured document entitled, "Success of Spring Offensive."

of the recent Communist offensive and their goals in the upcoming summer campaign in a most candid and objective fashion. Following are some of the highlights from the document:

The Spring Offensive

—Communist military efforts in the cities and suburban areas were "not very successful." The guerrilla movement and the buildup of Communist manpower was poor and slow. More Americans were killed than in Tet 1968, however. (True)

—The most significant effect of the offensive, especially the death of U.S. troops, was to boost the anti-war movement in the U.S. Since the Communists did not conduct any offensive phase from September to February, President Nixon thought they had lost the initiative and that he could take a firm stance at the negotiations. The February offensive upset that plan.

—The internal situation of the U.S. is now critical and the Communists must seek victories through further campaigns to turn things decisively their way.[3]

The Summer Offensive

—The Communists must put a lot of subjective effort into the summer campaign and must avoid any tendency to relax or become demoralized.

[3] Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote the following note: "H.K. note—we may have to hit Breakfast on a regular basis."

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

Washington, May 3, 1969.

SUBJECT

Statement by Prince Sihanouk on U.S. Border Declaration

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. I, 8–69. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

Prince Sihanouk, at an April 30 press conference, has taken exception to the U.S. border declaration[2] as useless, valueless and deceptive, on the basis of interpretations of this declaration in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.[3] Secretary Rogers has sent you the attached memorandum (Tab A)[4] based on early versions of the Sihanouk statement. Later versions and a report from the Australian Ambassador in Phnom Penh (Tab B) would indicate that Sihanouk rejected our border declaration at the press conference.[5]

Sihanouk's basic complaint is that we have not accepted Cambodia's borders as defined by it in our border declaration. However, in explaining the U.S. border declaration to Sihanouk, the Australian Ambassador made clear that this was not our intention. Sihanouk has accepted border declarations by other countries on this basis.

The French Ambassador in Phnom Penh has also informed the Australian Ambassador that Sihanouk rejected the idea of resuming relations with the U.S. at the press conference. The French Ambassador, considered a shrewd judge of Sihanouk, has concluded that Sihanouk is using the border declaration as a pretext for not resuming diplomatic relations. He thinks that Sihanouk may have been influenced to change his mind on relations with the U.S. after seeing the extent of North Vietnamese control in the Northeast, in Ratanakiri[6] (see map at Tab C).[7] Sihanouk may have concluded that he was powerless to prevent North Vietnamese infiltration and the only course open to him was to seek

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[2] See footnote 3, Document 48.

[3] In a May 6 letter to Mansfield, Rogers informed him that Sihanouk was referring to an April 15 *New York Times* editorial that stated: "the message does not specify what frontiers are being recognized, and, therefore, does not depart from the long-standing United States policy of remaining noncommittal on Cambodia's border quarrels with South Vietnam and Thailand." Rogers also told Mansfield that Sihanouk had incorrectly cited *The Washington Post* for an offending editorial and that the correct source was an April 13 article in *The Evening Star* that reported on State Department Spokesperson Carl E. Bartch's press briefing given on April 12. The article reported: "U.S. officials insisted that this message does not in any way mean the United States is taking a position on the recurring boundary disputes, which Cambodia has with both Laos and South Vietnam. The message, they say, is essentially the same as Sihanouk has received from 40 other governments—but previously rejected from the United States." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 32 CAMB)

[4] Tab A was an April 30 memorandum from Rogers to Nixon, attached but not printed.

[5] Attached but not printed.

[6] Nixon underlined this word and wrote: "Can we hit this area?"

[7] Attached but not printed.

an understanding with the Vietnamese Communists. Sihanouk had just returned on April 30 from a week's visit to the Northeast.[8]

[8] Nixon highlighted the last two sentences and wrote: "H.K. very significant" and "(pass to Mansfield?)". Kissinger called Mansfield to tell him he was sending the exchange of letters with Sihanouk and assured the Senator that "the President has gone out of his way to establish close relations." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) In a May 5 memorandum to Nixon, Rogers recommended no comments, explanation, or further action until Sihanouk's plans and motives became clear. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. I, 8–69) After further representations and considerations, Sihanouk accepted a revised U.S. statement that the United States would "respect Cambodia's independence and sovereignty with the present territorial boundaries." Diplomatic relations were restored on July 2. For additional information see ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 17 CAMB–US.

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

Washington, May 10, 1969.

SUBJECT

Analysis of the NLF's Ten Points

Attached at Tab A[2] is an excellent CIA analysis of the general implications and possible significance of the NLF 10-Point statement (text at Tab B).[3] This memorandum contains a point-by-point analysis and then lists the positive elements, the negative elements and the elements subject to negotiation.

The Ten Points

Point 1, calling for the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam, is standard NLF language and is acceptable to us.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 175, Paris Peace Talks, NLF 10-Points, May 1969, Folder 5. Secret; Sensitive. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Tab A, May 9, entitled "The Liberation Front's New Peace Proposal," is attached but not printed.

[3] Not attached. On May 8 at the session of the Paris Peace Talks, Tran Buu Kiem of the NLF put forward a 10-point peace plan for ending the war in Vietnam. The text of the proposal is printed in Council on Foreign Relations, Stebbins and Adam (eds.), *Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1968–1969,* pp. 249–252.

Point 2 calls for U.S. withdrawal, including all military personnel. This is standard and acceptable, except that we would, of course, insist upon the withdrawal as well of North Vietnamese forces.

Point 3 is new and states that "the Vietnamese people's right to defend their fatherland is inalienable. The problems of the Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam will be settled by the Vietnamese sides." The first sentence is a standard assertion to justify the right of the North Vietnamese forces to be in the south. The second sentence implies that the withdrawal should be settled among the Vietnamese including a South Vietnamese Government. If this government is meant to be an NLF-dominated coalition, this is, of course, totally unacceptable. If it is the GVN, it is a step forward in accepting negotiations on the North Vietnamese withdrawal with the US/GVN side. However, to ask the GVN to negotiate alone with Hanoi on withdrawals would put all the pressures on them and is unacceptable. We would not object to the GVN participating with us in negotiations about the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces.

Point 4 presents a plan for a political settlement involving elections, a constitutional assembly, a new constitution and then a coalition government. It needs to be read in conjunction with Point 5 which calls for an interim coalition government prior to the elections. With regard to Point 4, itself, if the point means that a coalition government must result from the elections, this is, of course, unacceptable. If it means that one possible result of an election is a coalition government, we would not object. We have not yet addressed the question of whether we are prepared to accept the need for a new constitution.

Point 5 deals with a period prior to an election. In stating that "no side is to force the South Vietnamese people to accept its political regime," it appears to imply that there is an interim period during which the GVN, the NLF and other groups in the south would negotiate about the setting up of a caretaker government. Hanoi's description of those who could participate in such a government appears to rule out the GVN, although the statement omits the NLF's usual assertion that the U.S. must remove the GVN government. Thus, the words, themselves, could permit GVN participation. They also could be read to exclude the NLF from the caretaker government, although this is almost certainly not the NLF's intention. Whatever arrangements are made, the actual political evolution in the south will depend on the actual balance of forces. The prevention of the NLF takeover will require an effective and functioning non-Communist political group.

Point 6 is a standard call for good relations with Laos and Cambodia and diplomatic relations with other countries. The only new point is the reference to the need to establish diplomatic and economic relations with the United States and the assertion that South Vietnam must be able to accept economic and technical assistance from any country. This point is acceptable to us.

Point 7 calls for a step-by-step move toward reunification on the basis of negotiation between the two zones and for normal relations between the zones in the interim. It accepts the military demarcation line but notes that it is only provisional in character and not a political border. Finally, it states that the two zones will decide on the status of the demilitarized zone and the measures for crossing the provisional demarcation line. Most of this language is standard and acceptable to us. The final sentence seems to call for a new agreement between the two zones about the DMZ. This is acceptable if it means negotiations between the GVN and Hanoi and if it leads to reestablishment of an effective demilitarized area.

Point 8 provides that prior to reunification, North and South Vietnam will not enter into military alliance and will not accept any foreign military personnel on their territory. This is standard language. We have not decided that we are prepared to agree to keeping no advisors in South Vietnam or to accept renunciation of the SEATO protocol by South Vietnam.

Point 9 deals with return of prisoners of war in more explicit terms than in the past. However, it also calls for reparations by the U.S. to both North and South Vietnam and implies a possible linkage between prisoner release and reparations. Reparations in either circumstance would be unacceptable to us.

Point 10 calls for all parties to agree on international supervision of the U.S. withdrawals. This is the first time Hanoi has proposed any international supervision. It could provide an opening for a discussion of international supervision for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces as well.

Positive Elements

1. Acceptance by implication of the presence of North Vietnamese forces in the south and indication that this is negotiable even if only by the Vietnamese sides.

2. Presentation of a detailed plan for a political settlement with some new and potentially acceptable elements and without insisting explicitly that this government be in accordance with the program of the Front.

3. Implication that the GVN might participate in negotiations about a caretaker government and the absence of an explicit statement that the U.S. must remove the GVN.

4. Statement that there should be no retaliation against those who cooperated with either side.

5. Recognition of the DMZ as a provisional boundary and willingness to negotiate about it if only with the GVN.

6. Explicit reference to release of prisoners (although possibly linked to reparations).

7. Initial reference to international supervision, if only related to withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Negative Elements

1. Absence of an explicit statement of withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces.

2. Call for both an interim and permanent coalition government with refusal to accept the present constitutional structure of the GVN.

3. Language which implies that coalition government should be restricted to Communist or sympathetic elements.

4. Demand for U.S. reparations.

5. International supervision limited to U.S. withdrawals.

Elements Subject to Negotiation

1. Procedures for negotiating withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces and the relationship of this withdrawal to the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

2. Election procedures in South Vietnam.

3. Political arrangements prior to an election.

4. Status of the demilitarized zone.

5. Application of international supervision to North Vietnamese withdrawal.

If Hanoi and the NLF are now ready for serious, detailed discussion, there are many elements in the 10-Point Program which we could probe, perhaps finding the basis for agreement. If Hanoi has presented this on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, it is very far from being satisfactory.

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68. Editorial Note

On May 14, 1969, President Nixon made a television and radio address in which he outlined a major proposal for mutual withdrawal in Vietnam over a 12-month period. The text of the speech is printed in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pages 369–375. On April 24 Henry Kissinger sent Nixon a draft outline of the speech and a scenario of actions to be undertaken in relation to it. Nixon read and made notes on the proposal on May 8. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 285, Memoranda to the President, April 1969, Folder 2) Kissinger later recalled that on April 25, he urged the President to elaborate a clear cut position on a peace plan by mentioning North Vietnamese negotiator Xuan Thuy's remark that, "If the Nixon Administration has a great

peace program, as it makes believe, why doesn't it make it public." According to Kissinger's recollections, Nixon hesitated because he wanted to see the results of his proposal to the Soviet Union and because he was concerned about opposition to the peace plan from Secretary of State William Rogers and the Department of State. Nixon feared the Department of State would leak the plan and add so many concessions that the President would be viewed as a "hard-liner" if he turned them down. Kissinger states in his memoirs that Nixon waited until Rogers left for Vietnam on May 12 before asking Kissinger to prepare a major speech within the next 48 hours. (Kissinger, *White House Years,* page 270) Kissinger did send Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird a draft of the speech in a May 10 memorandum. (National Archives, RG 59, William P. Rogers Official Files and Papers: Lot 73 D 443, no folder title) Rogers telephoned Kissinger at 4 p.m. on May 12 on a non-secure telephone from Los Angeles (en route to Vietnam) to register "his very serious reservations." Kissinger promised to present Rogers' views to the President in detail. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) Laird responded to the draft in a May 11 memorandum to Nixon noting that his major concern was that the speech did not emphasize the previously cited three points for measuring progress in the war and U.S. troop withdrawals: 1) mutual withdrawals, 2) improvement in the military situation, and 3) improvement in South Vietnamese capabilities. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 76, Vietnam Subject Files, Speech Planning and Miscellaneous) Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge sent his comments on the speech in a background message from Paris, May 11, which stated "broadly speaking this is an excellent speech," but suggested multiple language changes. (Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 9) Bunker sent backchannel message 417 from Saigon, May 12, stating that a general cease-fire would be undesirable since it would be interpreted by the enemy and by U.S. friends alike as "throwing in the towel" and would favor the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong militarily. From a political point of view, a cease-fire in place implied a readiness to partition South Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel)

In a telephone call to the President on May 13, at 7:30 p.m., Kissinger told the President that he had revised the speech on Laird's recommendation and "it was pretty tight now." The President stated that "Mel [Laird] thinks we are dong the right thing. What really pleases me is that Rogers thinks it is fine." Nixon asked why Rogers changed his mind and Kissinger responded that he had been given a role in the speech. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

The next day, May 15, from 10:08 to 11:44 a.m., President Nixon held a joint meeting of the National Security Council and Cabinet to brief his administration's leaders on the significance of the speech. According to the memorandum of meeting the briefing went as follows:

"[Kissinger] called it 'the most comprehensive statement made by an American President about Vietnam.' Kissinger said the principles, measures and details in the President's presentation could be summarized in two broad, basic principles. One: We will not collapse our effort; and two: We will be extremely flexible in trying to make a settlement.

"Discussing the new elements in the speech, Kissinger called it 'as forthcoming and comprehensive a proposition as the President could possibly have developed' and said that it went 'as far as we believe it was possible to go in testing the willingness of the other side to have serious negotiations.' Remarking on just one new element, Kissinger pointed out that 'we no longer will expect the North Vietnamese to admit that their troops are there so long as they stop being there.'

"One of the most significant points about the speech, the President remarked, was that the South Vietnamese government had agreed to its content. He said that no one would have predicted six months ago that President Thieu would approve the substance of that speech. The cooperation of the South Vietnamese is extremely important, the President added, because while 'some say it will be impossible to make a peace *with* them, it will surely be impossible to make a peace *without* them.'

"Commenting on the attitude of other nations in the area, the President pointed out that the reaction of Thailand is highly important. 'They are like rice in the wind,' the President said. 'If they think we are going to lose, they will go the other way.' And this suggests, the President added, that while some people scoff at the domino theory, the dominoes make it a reality because they seem to accept it as fact.

"Before the speech was in final form, it was necessary to get agreement among the various areas of the U.S. government that were involved as well as the agreement of the South Vietnamese. 'And if any of you think that writing your speeches is hard,' the President said with a grin, 'you should try to write one involving State, Defense and Henry Kissinger.'

"Under Secretary of State Elliot L. Richardson suggested that South Vietnam's President Thieu be added to the 'list of speech writers' since he was consulted, and made suggestions that were included. Richardson reported that the State Department had transmitted the basic elements of the speech through our Ambassadors to the governments of Australia, Thailand, New Zealand, South Korea and the Philippines. Such advance notice, he said, was most important in 'keeping our friends with us.'

"Defense Secretary Laird stressed the importance of the fact that 'there is nothing inconsistent in the mutual withdrawal plan in this speech and the Vietnamization of the war.' He noted that there was in the speech a veiled reference to reduction of U.S. forces. The question whether some of our forces will soon be withdrawn, said Laird, will be discussed when Secretary of State Rogers returns from Vietnam. To clarify the situation with regard to prospective withdrawal of some U.S. forces—the President explained that 'apart from any progress in Paris, we are considering withdrawals based upon the strengthening of the Vietnam forces.'"

The President asked Director of Central Intelligence Helms to gauge North Vietnamese reaction to the speech. Helms suggested it put them on notice that "we don't chicken out." Helms stated that Hanoi's strategy was based on the theory that U.S. domestic dissent would force a U.S. withdrawal. Helms concluded: "this speech tells them that we will stick to our principles and will not run out." Ambassador Lodge recalled that a week before the President's speech the North Vietnamese at Paris introduced a new package based on ten points without their usual rhetoric. Lodge saw the Nixon speech as a comprehensive answer to this proposal. He described the speech as "like manna from Heaven for me."

The briefing concluded with a summation by the President. He stated that the speech "provided the enemy a way out," but cautioned that North Vietnam was bent on conquest of the South so, "We need to threaten that if they don't talk they will suffer." The President then listed four principal factors in the U.S. position which he described as follows:

"One, we are for peace—we are reasonable. Two, we aim to convince the enemy that if there is no settlement, we have an option which is military action not only at the present level but at an expanded level. Three, we want to make clear that they can't win by sitting us out. Four, we want to convince them that they aren't going to get what they want by erosion of the will of the U.S. So, said the President, we have offered them a way out. We have tried to indicate that we will not tolerate a continuation of their fight-talk strategy. We have tried to convince them that the time is coming when South Vietnam will be strong enough to handle a major part of the load. Beyond all this, said the President, it was necessary to give the impression to the enemy that the people of the U.S. are going to support a sound peace proposal and not accept peace at any price. Then and only then will the enemy realize that the war must be ended.

"The President expressed the hope that Members of the Cabinet in their speeches and appearances will explain that the Administration has presented a sound, reasonable, coordinated plan for peace. How

the war will end, the President said, is not clear. It may not be by formal agreement, it may simply be by negotiations leading to gradual understanding.

"'What is on the line is more than South Vietnam,' the President said. 'It's a question of what happens to the balance of Asia and to the rest of the world. If we fail to end the war in a way that will not be an American defeat, and in a way that will deny the aggressor his goal, the hawks in Communist nations will push for even more and broader aggression. What concerns me more than anything else is what happens to the U.S. If a great power fails to meet its aims, it ceases to be a great power. When a great power looks inward, when it fails to live up to its commitment, then the greatness fades away. The road to peace will be difficult but we aim to get there.'

"When the Cabinet applauded his remarks, he said, 'I really didn't mean to make a speech to the Cabinet.'" (Memorandum of a meeting by Jim Keogh, May 15; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, President's Office Files, Box 1, Memos for the President's File, 1969–1970, Beginning May 11, 1969)

The President called Kissinger at 10:50 p.m. on May 14 to ask him how he thought the speech had been received. Kissinger was very encouraged with the response. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 359, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) In a May 16 memorandum to the President, Kissinger sent a rundown of how the speech had been received internationally. Kissinger stated: "Throughout the Free World, your speech has been warmly praised as moderate, statesmanlike and a very constructive step toward peace." While there was no official reaction from the DRV or NLF, some of their spokespersons' initial comments on it were negative. Kissinger continued, "The response from the Soviet Bloc, although negative, has been relatively moderate and quite measured." Nixon saw this assessment. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 75, Vietnam Subject Files, Cables, Concerning Reactions to the Speech, All Posts) According to *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the White House*, page 58, the initial euphoria of the speech and its aftermath wore off as Nixon read the U.S. Sunday papers on May 18 and found that their response, unlike the foreign press, was either neutral or negative. Nixon told Haldeman that if John F. Kennedy had made the speech, the press would have been ecstatic.

69. Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State[1]

Paris, May 18, 1969, 1535Z.

7234. Delto 1741.[2]

1. Now that we have introduced the President's proposal for peace formally into the plenary session, the negotiations between the two sides in Paris can be pursued in a rational way. In this cable, we outline our suggestions for the next moves designed to bring the other side to serious negotiations on the basic issues.

2. The 10 points introduced by the other side and our own proposals provide the logical framework for negotiation. The two sets of proposals provide issues which are subject to negotiation. A preliminary listing of these issues would contain at least the following:

A. Force withdrawal;
B. Political settlement?
C. DMZ;
D. Prisoners of war?
E. Respect for essential elements of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962;
F. Reunification;
G. International supervision and verification (in connection with force withdrawal, elections, ceasefire and other agreed purposes); and
H. Issues in the aftermath of the war—guarantees, bases, foreign military presence, alliances, neutrality, relations between North and South Viet-Nam, regional cooperation.

3. To define clearly the framework for negotiation—and to demonstrate again the reasonable and flexible nature of the President's proposals—we suggest that at the next plenary session we present a point-by-point review of the issues and positions taken on each side. We are submitting in a separate cable a draft statement along these lines—pointing up the extent of common ground—for the May 22 meeting.[2]

4. It would be helpful, at that point, if the GVN made clear its position, consistent with our own but with particular attention to the question of a political settlement, notable their willingness that free elections be held. This would complement our proposal and fill a gap. The GVN statement should be as large in scope as that of the NLF, and demonstrate willingness to negotiate. It need not give away negotiat-

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 176, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Meetings, May 6—State, Saigon, and Paris. Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus.

[2] Not found.

ing positions, but it should be fully consistent with the general principles guilding self-determination set forth in the President's May 14 speech. We believe Embassy Saigon should be urging on the GVN the clear need for such a statement as soon as possible. In the event the GVN does not produce a new statement of sufficient scope, we should move on the basis of the President's proposals alone.

5. We would seek to engage the other side in negotiation in depth. We suggest that this is best done in private. But we must recognize that there are also ways to further this process in plenary sessions. There are a number of possible arrangements for us to consider. We suggest we keep an open mind, but with a preference toward privacy.

6. Thus we can consider a negotiation format that could include any of the following, or some combination of them:

A. Plenary sessions on an agreed restricted basis. There would be no public disclosure of the details of statements made on either side. The fact of the meetings and a mutually agreed description of their contents would be made public.

B. Plenary sessions would continue as they are, but restricted subcommittee meetings will be held to Lodge deal with specific issues. Rules of disclosure for subcommittees would be agreed as in (A) above.

C. Plenary sessions would continue as they are, but fully private, secret meetings would be held. These could be in any agreed combination of the parties present, only excluding the case where the US would meet with the NLF without the GVN present. We are inclined to believe that private meetings of all four reps will be necessary, but even if this is the case, we foresee holding supplementary bilateral US-DRV meetings as desired.

7. Before proceeding to one or a combination of the above arrangements, we believe it is necessary and desirable to resume our bilateral meetings with the DRV. These would have two immediate purposes: (a) to elaborate and debate our substantive position on specific issues in a more informal atmosphere; (b) to exchange views with the DRV on the best way to proceed in the negotiations, taking as an outline of possible arrangements the alternatives listed in para 6 above. For our purposes, it would be well to work out some mutually acceptable working arrangements for the future.

8. Immediately following the May 22 plenary meeting, we propose, therefore, to seek a private meeting with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy. We will submit to the Dept, within the next few days, a suggested draft of our opening remarks at such a meeting.

9. If our plan of action is approved, it will require discussion with the GVN in Saigon and Paris. It is now becoming increasingly urgent for the GVN to be thinking more specifically of the negotiating position they will be taking in private sessions of one sort or the other.

From our experience to date, the GVN del in Paris does not have sufficient instructions to carry on the type of negotiations we envisage. In fact, Lam and Phong have embarrassedly pointed out to us that over the past week they have been suffering from a scarcity of guidance from Saigon. The thought expressed by Bui Diem to Green (State 79000)[3] that we have 4 to 6 weeks for GVN to formulate its position strikes us as much too long a time. We should be prepared to be in full-scale, detailed negotiations with the other side before then.

10. In such negotiations, we believe that it will be necessary to discuss military and political questions in tandem, if we are to seek a full understanding of what we can achieve. This will require a degree of GVN preparation beyond what we have had to date, with the burden of negotiation on political matters falling on them.

11. We would welcome comments and guidance.[4]

Lodge

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[3] Telegram 79000 to Saigon, May 17, contains an account of the discussion between Bui Diem and Green on reaction to Nixon's speech of May 14 and the future of the negotiations. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 176, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Meetings, May 6—State, Saigon, and Paris)

[4] In telegram 9878 from Saigon, May 20, Bunker stated: "While I completely support the objective of getting into serious negotiations . . . I feel I should sound a note of caution about trying to force the pace." Bunker noted that the Government of Vietnam had made progress in thinking about a political settlement, but they needed time to come to accept it. Furthermore, Bunker cautioned against seeming too eager for another private meeting. (Ibid.)

70. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 21, 1969, 0933Z.

616. Ref: Saigon 605.[2]

1. I have given further thought to the President's consideration of desirability of announcing initial troop reduction after the Midway meeting, together with his expressed willingness to wait a few weeks longer. I have also discussed the message with General Abrams. As viewed from here my conclusion is that the more prudent course would be to wait, for the following reasons:

A. First, Thieu has set a date of June 30 for various goals. These goals include designated hamlets to be pacified, another round of village and hamlet elections in June, and the deployment of 68 newly trained regional force companies by June 30.

B. Despite the February and May attacks, steady and continued progress is being made in extending government control over the countryside. The high level of defectors under the Chieu Hoi program is being maintained in the 900–1100 range per week. The Phoenix program to eliminate the VC infrastructure is producing higher weekly returns despite the more stringent criteria—around 400 a week. Enemy killed are running between 3500 and 5000 a week.

C. In early July Thieu will have a good story to tell of progress made and goals achieved during the first half of this year. The evidence for this is not merely in the statistics but can be found in the increasing sense of confidence and recognition of progress among his military, civil and political leaders from the national level down to the village level, and among the people themselves in wider and wider areas of the country.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] In backchannel message 605 from Saigon, May 20, Bunker provided Kissinger with an interim response to backchannel message WH90677, May 19, in which Kissinger informed Bunker that the President was considering making an initial troop withdrawal announcement at the end of the Midway Conference. Nixon thought that the announcement might give Thieu the initiative on the issue, but based on Bunker's advice he would be willing to postpone for several weeks if Bunker considered it necessary. Bunker wrote: "With regard to suggestion concerning desirability of making initial troop withdrawal announcement at conclusion of Midway Meeting, I can see both advantages and problems. Consequently, I should like to give the matter further thought and would prefer to delay my reply until tomorrow. I hope this will be satisfactory to you and the President." (Ibid.) Telegram 616 is Bunker's considered reply.

D. In this atmosphere, an announcement of a reduction of US forces sometime after July 1 could be taken in stride.

E. More important than the above, however, is the military situation. There are many indications that two more attack waves are brewing, with one possible in June and another in July. We expect these will follow the pattern of enemy's tactics this year, i.e. of short duration, with emphasis on indirect fire and limited ground attacks to economize losses, and aimed at US installations to increase US casualties. We have every confidence that these will be knocked back with heavy losses to the enemy. However, since General Abrams was in Washington there has been some increase in enemy deployments that could threaten I Corps, and General Abrams wishes to reserve on the order of withdrawal of the two increments until he can better assess the situation.

2. I think, and General Abrams concurs, that June 30 would be a good cut-off date for assessing situation, with the conclusions to be available in the second week in July, that is about one month after the Midway meeting. By then we would have the June record of enemy action in hand, and a clearer picture of their July and subsequent intentions. Unless there is a massive increase in the infiltration pipeline during May or June, for which we have no evidence as yet, the recent reduction in North Vietnamese infiltration groups moving South, along with the 2–3 months lag in arrivals in the South, suggest that the enemy offensive attacks will peak the first half of July.

3. This suggests that the announcement of the first troop reduction could be made sometime in July if our reading of the situation is correct. At Midway the communiqué might be able to say that sufficient progress is being made in pacification and the improved fighting capability of the military and para-military forces to warrant an initial reduction in US combat forces levels in the foreseeable future.

4. Since troop reductions will be on the agenda at Midway, I thought it desirable to obtain Thieu's view about an announcement at that time. When I saw him this morning (on various matters before my departure for Bangkok), without indicating my views I asked him if it would be desirable to announce the initial reduction, or replacement as Secretary Rogers preferred to call it, at Midway or wait a little longer, say until early July. There were advantages and disadvantages of an announcement on June 8. In any event the announcement would be in terms of his (Thieu's) initiative. I said he would probably want to think about it, but I would welcome his views at this time.

5. Thieu said a reduction in the US forces has now been a subject of open discussion for six months, the South Vietnamese people are accustomed to the idea, and it would not be a surprise if an announcement was made. It is accepted here that something like a reduction of

50,000 this year would be the figure, and both "the principle and a number of this size" would be understood here. A figure of 100,000 would not be understood. Essentially this problem was an American problem and if the President feels it is necessary in US terms, then there would be no objection to having an announcement of some kind made at Midway.

6. However, he went on, any announcement would have to be tied to one of the three conditions which the President has laid down, and this would probably be the improvement in the Vietnamese capacity to take over a greater share. He said "The timing and form of the announcement will need to be discussed and worked out, but the substance is understood and accepted here."

7. I interpret this to mean that he is prepared to agree to some reference at Midway to troop reductions, perhaps even some specific reference to numbers and dates.

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71. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, May 21, 1969, 2146Z.

WH90690. Reference your Saigon 616, DTG 210800Z, May 1969,[2] President believes we could meet Thieu's views by making announcement at conclusion of Midway meeting to the effect President Thieu has informed U.S. Government that the first ARVN division is ready to replace the Third U.S. Marine Division and that therefore the President has ordered the withdrawal of the Third Marine Division from South Vietnam commencing during the month of July.[3] President

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel. Top Secret; Sensitive.

[2] Document 70.

[3] Kissinger also informed Rogers, who was in Bangkok at the SEATO meeting, of this decision in WH90693, May 22. Kissinger wrote: "Thought you might like to know President is thinking of announcing withdrawal of third U.S. Marine division at conclusion of Midway Meeting June 9 (1st ARVN division would replace third U.S. Marine division (22,000 men) commencing in July). Bunker currently exploring this proposal with Thieu and has been cautioned on its extremely close nature. President considers it desirable that public speculation prior to meeting focus on U.S.–GVN efforts to coordinate respective positions on President's speech and associated Paris negotiating positions. From here your trip looks like great success. Best regards, Henry A. Kissinger." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel)

considers such an announcement would: (1) dampen growing speculation on troop withdrawals which if it continues much longer will deprive us of impact of troop withdrawal decision; (2) would greatly strengthen Thieu's image here (doves appear to be building case that Thieu and GVN are preparing to commence bickering campaign over political conditions for settlement with a view toward delaying progress); (3) would break the stride of those elements here who have been pressing for large and immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces.

In order to achieve maximum benefit from this tactic, President believes it essential that there be absolutely no leakage or discussion of troop withdrawal issue as a result of speculation which will surround preparation for meeting. Public attention on preparatory work in Saigon and Washington should be channeled toward preparations to: (1) finalize respective U.S.-GVN positions on negotiating strategy in Paris; (2) the formulation of details related to President's speech proposals.

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72. Memorandum From Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 22, 1969.

SUBJECT

Assessment of the 22 May Plenary Session on Vietnam

The Communist presentations at today's meeting in Paris appeared to represent a serious effort by the other side to engage in a substantive discourse on elements of the President's peace proposal. Although they uttered many of the routine propaganda bromides of the past weeks, the Communists had interesting and detailed things to say on the two central issues: withdrawal and a political settlement. They clearly appear to be interested and to be pressing for further elaborations or modifications of the U.S. stand.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous, Vol. III, 4/5–69. Secret; Nodis; Paris Negotiations; Plus. Sent for information. Sent through Sneider. Haig wrote on this memorandum: "HAK said good job." Kissinger had this memorandum reworked slightly and sent to the President, May 23. (Ibid.)

The DRV focused on the withdrawal question, while the NLF carried the main burden on a political solution. Following are the highlights:

Withdrawal: Xuan Thuy began by setting up the standard Communist argument for the necessity of an unconditional pullout of all U.S. troops. He pointedly tried to rule out the possibility that Hanoi might be interested in some formal, reciprocal arrangement involving a linking of the NLF Point 3 (the question of Vietnamese forces) and Point 10 (overseeing the withdrawal of U.S. forces).

However, his presentation was couched in a manner suggesting that Hanoi might be willing to undertake a tacit response to a U.S. pullout. Thuy did this in part by asserting that President Nixon's plan was the same as former President Johnson's in that the latter had called for reciprocal withdrawal before stopping the bombing. The implication was that another similar "understanding" might be possible.

The impression of DRV interest in President Nixon's proposal on withdrawal was strengthened by Thuy's remarks on the 12-month timetable. Thuy noted that this had been applied to only a partial and not to a complete U.S. withdrawal. He appeared to be asking by implication for the U.S. to set a time limit for a full-scale withdrawal. It seems possible that once such a timetable were set, the Communists might be willing to give us more assurances about the removal of NVA forces under point three of the NLF plan.

Ambassador Lodge picked up the interesting DRV comment on our 12-month time limit and, in the rebuttal period of the meeting, clarified our position. He noted that we were willing to discuss setting a time period for a full mutual withdrawal, if the other side would indicate its interest in negotiations on this subject.

A Political Settlement: The NLF handled this issue by a rather warped comparison of the President's proposal for general elections and its own proposition on elections and a coalition. Although expectedly one-sided, it at least amounted to a substantive discourse which definitely depicted interest in the U.S. proposal.

According to Tran Buu Kiem, the important question was how "political power is to be solved" in South Vietnam pending general elections. Kiem noted that the President had not spoken of this, but that it was clear he meant for the GVN to be paramount. This was unacceptable, he said. Kiem went on to explain what the Communists had in mind by their proposal that "neither party shall impose its political regime" during this period. This meant the formation of a "provisional administration" he said.

He then offered the NLF formula for the "peace-loving" forces in SVN to get together and set up a coalition. It was clear from his manner of presentation, however, that the Communists are definitely prepared to bargain on the details of the "provisional administration."

Interesting in this connection was Kiem's condemnation of the Saigon regime for wishing to "monopolize power" during this period—a kind of admission that the NLF is seeking only a share of the authority.

Kiem then introduced a new twist in the Communist strategy which could mark the beginning of a new campaign to undermine Saigon. He said that the NLF is now "ready to conduct talks with persons of goodwill who favor peace, independence and neutrality." This goes a little further than the standard NLF position that it is prepared to conduct talks with a "peace cabinet" which presumably has replaced the Saigon regime. Although Kiem called once again for the formation of a peace cabinet, he seemed to be suggesting that the Front is encouraging dissident groups to begin consultations with the NLF regardless of their political status and authority within South Vietnam. This could set the stage for a revival of the alliance.

POW's: Ambassador Lodge's demarche on the question of a POW list drew a completely negative response from the DRV. It seems clear that they are not prepared to give us any satisfaction on this score at this point, even though their hardline stand may cost them some propaganda points if carefully exploited by the U.S.

General Comment: We may be seeing an attempt by the Communists to sidestep private negotiations and to conduct an exploratory, probing type of negotiation at the plenary meetings. In any case, there would appear to be considerable room for the U.S. to tailor a response at the next plenary meeting to the specific points made today by the Communists in an effort to advance the process of movement by the other side.[2]

[2] At the end of the memorandum Sneider wrote: "I was also struck by the Thuy response to the 'essential elements' of the 10 pts—indicating greater flexibility."

73. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 25, 1969.

SUBJECT

The Possible Quarantine of North Vietnam

1. Per our conversation on Wednesday, 21 May, attached is a memorandum analyzing the impact that a quarantine of North Vietnam would have on that country's economy and logistic support capabilities.[2] This memorandum also outlines the probable reactions of various interested parties to the imposition of such a quarantine.

2. For reasons outlined in considerable detail in the attached memorandum, we are convinced that unless a quarantine of North Vietnam's seaborne commerce was accompanied by an interdiction of the land lines of communication (rail and road) to Communist China, the North Vietnamese could solve the problems such a quarantine would pose; i.e., Hanoi could make enough adjustments or alternate arrangements to ensure continuation of the level of external support necessary to permit Hanoi to continue present levels of North Vietnamese support to the Communist military campaign in South Vietnam.

Dick

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 207, Agency Files, CIA, Vol. I, January 1969–31 December 1969. Secret; Sensitive. According to an attached June 11 memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, Kissinger planned to discuss this memorandum with Helms that day.

[2] This 14-page paper with comments by Kissinger in the margins is attached but not printed.

74. Memorandum From Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 28, 1969.

SUBJECT

Status of the Phoenix and PRU Programs in Vietnam and the Thai Border Police

Currently, changes in management control are underway in all three forces. These changes will substantially reduce the CIA role. To a large extent, the shift will be to the U.S. military in Vietnam and to the U.S. operations mission in Thailand. In my judgment, the shifts are reasonably sound in concept and should not necessarily result in a drop in the effectiveness of the concerned forces. Following is the present status and the nature of the shifts proposed for each group:

The Phoenix Program[2]

This is the basic anti-VC infrastructure (VCI) program in Vietnam. It functions through a country-wide system of committees and centers down to the district level which supply the intelligence and direct anti-infrastructure operations by the police, the regional forces, the PRU, and the military security service. The TO and E of the Phoenix organization is around 6,000 with approximately 500 additional U.S. advisors.

In 1968, the Phoenix program accounted for between 10 and 20 percent of the VCI "neutralized". The bulk of the rest were accounted for in the course of regular military operations. The concept of the Phoenix program is considered sound, but its operation still leaves much to be desired. Problems are Vietnamese manpower shortages, lack of qualified Vietnamese, etc.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 69, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, The Phoenix Program. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information.

[2] Kissinger wrote the following note at the top of the first page: "Why the change?" and in the margin next to the Phoenix Program description: "What do they do? How do they neutralize them?" Moor answered these questions in a June 4 memorandum to Kissinger. Moor stated that CIA considered its role in starting up the programs was done and wanted to use its limited manpower in more productive work. He described how the anti-Viet Cong infrastructure program worked in Vietnam, and stated that the Phoenix committees tabulated what percentage of Viet Cong were killed or captured as a result of operations based on their intelligence (10 to 20 percent in 1968). The bulk of the Viet Cong killed or captured, however, were done so through regular military sweeps. (Ibid.)

Coming Changes in Phoenix

The CIA is currently in the course of withdrawing from the field management of the Phoenix program. The Agency considers its principal role fulfilled by the organization and start-up of the operation and believes its officers can be used more profitably elsewhere. MACV will take up the slack and the management role will be put under regular army personnel. MACV is slotting 450 personnel for this task. The switchover is already underway and will be largely completed by 1 July 1969. The top CORDS/Phoenix slot will continue to be held by a CIA man in Saigon.

Present Status of the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU)

This is a covert program in which teams (companies) of 2 to 20 Vietnamese operate in the field to collect intelligence and as a quick reaction force to kill or capture specifically targeted VCI. Total force strength is over 5,000. The PRU is organized under joint MACV/GVN sponsorship [*1 line of source text not declassified*]. CIA province officers direct and supervise the targeting of the PRU. There is normally a U.S. NCO with each PRU element.

The PRUs have been effective in eliminating VCI. Each month, they account for about 10 to 20 percent of VCI neutralized. Since the VCI are individually targeted, they are often key enemy personnel.

Coming Changes in the PRU

The CIA is also divorcing itself of the management of the PRU and turning it over to the military, while urging the Vietnamese to increase their management cadre and directive role. In so far as the U.S. military are concerned, this will be largely a paper change, since the bulk of the advisory personnel are already military, while detailed to the CIA. The Vietnamese have agreed to take over more of the management duties, but this awaits the proper training of personnel. The Agency is pushing this now. Completion of the CIA/MACV switchover is set for 1 July 1969.

Status of the Thai Border Police

This is a 7,100 man force whose regular mission is border security, but which has also participated actively in the suppression of the Thai insurgents. Until about two years ago, its role in their latter operation was fairly extensive. Then, however, the Thai regular army moved in and the BPP role was considerably reduced.

The CIA at one time contributed over a million dollars a year to the BPP and was heavily involved in training and advising the force. Its contribution has been cut back during the past several years to the neighborhood of some $200,000 a year. The additional funds are largely still going to the BPP, but are funded through other elements of the

U.S. operations mission in Thailand. The Agency would like to further reduce its financial input as this is largely now the provision of equipment. The Agency believes that other U.S. elements can provide this. It is seeking to retain its present relatively small role in the training of elements of the BPP, mainly its para-military arm, the PARU. [*1½ lines of source text not declassified*]

So far as I can ascertain, the decisions on the CIA role with the BPP are not as fully set as are those in connection with the PRU and the Phoenix programs.

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75. Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State[1]

Paris, June 1, 1969, 1620Z.

8138. Delto 1800.

1. The May 31 private meeting with Le Duc Tho was the most significant meeting we have had with the DRV since my arrival here in January.[2] It provided the first serious indication from them of what issues particularly interest them and of how they want to proceed.

2. Herewith we submit our views on the highlights of Tho's statement at the May 31 meeting and the alternative courses of action open to us.

Part 1—The May 31 Meeting

3. During the May 31 meeting we made clear to the DRV that our side was ready to negotiate in the "dual track" format, in a quadrilateral format or in some combination of the two approaches, but that the GVN had to participate in the discussions involving the internal affairs of South Vietnam. Tho countered by rejecting secret negotiations involving the GVN at least at this time, in either dual track or quadliteral formats. He appeared very firm.

4. Tho changed the DRV's earlier position that the US had to deal directly with the NLF. Now he was saying: the DRV will talk about

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 177, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Meetings, May–June 1969, State Nodis Cables/Habib Calls. Secret; Priority; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. Repeated to Saigon.

[2] The full report of the private meeting of May 31 is in telegram 8112 from Paris/Delto 1793, May 31. (Ibid.)

any issue at any time with the USG. Tho made no bones about the fact that the DRV would negotiate on behalf of the NLF on all matters, including matters relating to the South.

5. Tho emphasized that he wanted not only to discuss military matters but all matters covered by the 10 points. He agreed that in such discussions either party could raise any matter it desired. The DRV thus wants to discuss with us all aspects of a settlement including the political future of South Viet-Nam. By this Tho does not necessarily mean that he wants to resolve all substantive issues with us but that he wants us to agree that certain matters, such as withdrawals of North Vietnamese forces and political settlement, should be resolved by the Vietnamese parties as envisioned in the NLF's ten points.

6. Tho also referred to the fact that the settlement of some questions involved two parties, some involved three parties, and others involved four parties. By this he recognizes that there are matters that concern the GVN and that some time later the GVN will have to be brought in to the discussions. But Tho said he means a reconstituted GVN and not the individuals presently holding high office in Saigon, whom he wishes us to remove.

7. During the meeting Tho in general restated the DRV's standard substantive positions in the framework of the 10 points. But he spoke of a cease-fire in what to me was a new way, saying that an agreement on a cease-fire would be signed after a paper had been signed on the matters covered in the 10 points.

8. Evidently the DRV strategy aims to isolate the present GVN and destroy it. For this reason, Hanoi and the NLF are refusing at this time to meet with the GVN in any form other than the existing meetings at the Majestic. They hope to force us into an unpalatable choice—either negotiating with the DRV and then imposing the resulting settlement on the GVN; or trying to change the nature and composition of the GVN in a manner satisfactory to them so that it becomes a "peace government". In any case, the DRV strategy seems designed to create U.S./GVN frictions and to increase Thieu's internal political problems. It also appears to be designed to appeal to U.S. public opinion and to bring growing domestic pressure on the USG.

9. Tho asked us a number of questions during the meeting, some of them rhetorical. They indicate clearly the direction of DRV will be taking in the future. He asked these questions: (a) Who would organize the elections? (he asked this several times); (b) Does the U.S. agree to the sequence that Tho had outlined, in which in reality the U.S. and the DRV work out a settlement of all problems mentioned in the 10 point program, an agreement is signed, and then an agreement is made for a cease-fire? (*Comment:* we do not think we should respond to Tho's suggestion regarding the form of eventual agreements until we have a

better idea of what the substance is likely to be); (c) Does the U.S. agree to get rid of the present GVN?

Part 2—Alternative Courses of Action

10. Herewith are some alternative courses of action:

11. First, we could reject the proposal made by the DRV in the May 31 meeting and delay any further initiative for private meetings for an indefinite period in an effort to induce them to change their position. We and the GVN could use the plenary meetings to begin laying out the details of our positions and to attempt to draw out the other side on its positions.

12. *Comment:* I oppose this alternative. I believe that productive negotiations with the other side can only occur in private sessions. I see nothing on the horizon which would make the DRV change its position for at least several months. We would, accordingly, simply be postponing coming to grips with the issues, thus making progress more difficult.

13. Second, we could continue private U.S./DRV bilaterals with the sole objective of trying to persuade the DRV to accept GVN participation in private talks. The private meetings would thus be solely procedural. We would sit tight and wait for the other side to change its position.

14. *Comment:* I see no advantage in this. I would rather discuss both matters of substance and matters of procedure. I believe we would thus have a better chance of bringing about a changed attitude towards the GVN.

15. Third, we could tell the DRV at the outset that we are willing to discuss privately with it all subjects of mutual concern but that we cannot discuss political matters in the absence of the GVN since these are questions for the South Vietnamese to decide. On that basis we could then start discussing with the DRV matters we consider to be of mutual interest: Principally mutual withdrawals, but also such matters as the DMZ, POW's international supervision, etc. The DRV, in turn, could be expected to continue to seek to engage us in a discussion of political questions and to persuade us to accept their manner of proceeding in the private U.S./DRV bilaterals.

16. *Comment:* By following this course of action, we will continue to be faced with the same problem that confronts us now. In our judgment, the DRV would not at this time engage in meaningful substantive discussions of military matters with us if we tried to restrict the scope of bilateral discussions at the outset. We would consequently delay productive negotiations for a considerable time.

17. This brings us to the fourth alternative. We could, without accepting Tho's proposal, simply continue to hold bilateral U.S./DRV discussions. We would not seek to impose any prior conditions on the subjects to be discussed. Either side could raise anything it wishes.

They will want to discuss their 10 points, and we will want to discuss President Nixon's proposals. In the private talks themselves, we would take no initiative to raise political matters. When the DRV raises such matters, we would respond initially at least with our position that the political settlement is for the South Vietnamese to work out.

18. *Comment:* This course of action would not close out the possibility of GVN participation in private talks later.

We would, of course, have to maintain the closest consultation with the GVN both before and after each U.S./DRV meeting: and the positions we take in each meeting would have to be coordinated beforehand with the GVN. We would report to the GVN what the DRV said about political settlement in any particular meeting, and the U.S. and GVN together could then decide on a case by case basis what response, if any, other than the standard one, would be desirable. By consulting with the GVN on our responses to the DRV, we would always have the choice of giving the DRV a joint response at the next private meeting or not replying to Hanoi at all on a given point. If Hanoi pushes us on a political point, we could, if Thieu agrees, always fall back on the statement, "We have informed the GVN". This is the course of action which we believe opens up the most possibilities at this time for early substantive discussions. Admittedly this proposes a change in procedure which could change the handling of the "political solution."

19. Fifth, we could accept Tho's proposal and engage in bilateral discussion of all substantive questions involved in a settlement, including political matters.

20. *Comment:* This course of action seems to us unjustifiable both in terms of sound negotiating tactics and in terms of our relations with the GVN.

Part 3—Analysis

21. The position which the other side has now taken, and the proposal the DRV put to us in the May 31 meeting, will undoubtedly create difficulties for the GVN. The GVN will see, as we have suggested above, that the DRV tactic is designed to isolate the GVN and to destroy it. And the GVN will be very sensitive to the suggestion that the U.S. should negotiate on its behalf, particularly on matters involving internal political settlement which we have agreed are primarily for the GVN to negotiate. In this connection, we recall Ambassador Lam's statement to us of his understanding of the GVN position, namely, that there were no matters which did not concern the GVN and that the U.S. should not negotiate any matters without GVN presence. (Paris 8012)[3]

[3] Dated May 30. (Ibid.)

22. At the same time, we also have the problem of how to move ahead with negotiations and with smoking out the other side's positions on the substantive questions. We believe this objective of getting on with early productive talks can be achieved in a way that protects the basic position of the GVN. We think that the fourth course of action outlined above offers the best opportunity for doing this.

23. Under the fourth alternative, our approach to the negotiations would be to place the principal emphasis on the question of mutual withdrawals. We would seek serious indications that the DRV was willing to move ahead on the question of withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese troops.

24. In following the fourth course of action, we would continue in the plenaries and in public statements to criticize the communist refusal to accept Thieu's March 25 offer to talk bilaterally with the NLF. We would continue our warm support of Thieu's offer, both publicly and privately, hoping thereby to bring pressure on the other side eventually to accept it. Once the GVN is talking bilaterally, trilaterally or quadrilaterally with the other side, Saigon would, of course, play the principal role in these discussions of internal South Vietnamese matters.

25. Finally, we should not refuse in advance to hear what the DRV has to say. Not only is it in our interests to hear them, but our refusal to do so would surely become known and we would be in an incomprehensible position.

Part 4—Conclusion

26. The next step should be concentrated consultations with the GVN. Before GVN/U.S. discussions take place, however, the U.S. Government should determine which course of action we prefer to follow. Our preference should then be explained to the GVN. Meanwhile, we do not believe we should request another private meeting with the DRV until after Midway. Our response to the DRV's May 31 proposals depends on what we and the GVN decide to do. We would, of course, agree to attend a private meeting if the DRV asks for one.

27. Since he will have already been briefed on what happened at the May 31 meeting, the question of where we go from here on negotiations will probably be on Thieu's mind when he comes to Midway.

Lodge

76. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, June 1, 1969, 1844Z.

WH90761. Exclusively Eyes Only for the Ambassador (hold for arrival in Saigon).

The President has asked that you convey to Thieu the importance that he places upon the forthcoming Midway meeting. He is aware that press speculation here has probably aroused some concern on the coalition government issue, and wishes Thieu to be assured that we are determined to hold the line on this. I gave this message to Bui Diem yesterday. However, it is essential that we retain tactical flexibility. Our major problem here is to gain time and to enable us to combat the growing public pressures. This is why troop withdrawal announcement is so crucial.

Press is speculating that Midway meeting was convened to remedy a growing divergence between Saigon and Washington. Therefore, it is most important that troop withdrawal announcement be made in context of Thieu initiative in order to maintain his image here. It will strengthen our ability to help him on political front.

At Midway, we currently visualize that President and Thieu will meet privately from 11:30 until 1:00 p.m., and then issue a very brief joint announcement on troop withdrawal along lines of my earlier message.[2] This will produce a maximum impact especially if it is unexpected. Following lunch, the entire group will meet, then at 5:00 p.m., a formal joint statement will be made on other matters dealt with at the conference.

Because of the psychological implications of the troop withdrawal statement, it is absolutely essential that there be no leaks beforehand that announcement is to be made. For this reason, this matter has been held strictly to the President, myself, and Secretaries Rogers and Laird. It is equally important that similar restrictions be retained on this information at your end. You will note that some references have been made to troop withdrawal and Vietnamization in regular State traffic concerned with the formal joint statement at the conclusion of the meeting and preparatory coordination of respective positions. These references have been made by drafters unaware of the decision to proceed

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] See Document 70.

with a separate announcement at Midway and serve as an additional cover to maintain the necessary security.

Request your views on foregoing, as soon as possible.[3]

[3] In backchannel message 802 from Saigon, June 2, Bunker reported that he did not expect problems with Thieu on troop withdrawals and Thieu would be reassured by Nixon's assurances on a coalition government. Bunker also reported that Abrams hoped to maintain flexibility in withdrawals. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel)

77. Memorandum of a Joint Cabinet and National Security Council Meeting[1]

Washington, June 3, 1969.

SUBJECT

Cabinet Meeting, June 3, 1969

This was a joint meeting of the Cabinet and the National Security Council called to hear Secretary of State William Rogers' report on his around-the-world trip.[2]

The first point of interest naturally was Vietnam. Secretary Rogers said he had listened to the President's address on Vietnam while at the American Embassy in Saigon. "Contrary to what you might have read in the papers," the Secretary told other Cabinet Members, "there are no differences between the U.S. and South Vietnam about what the President said." South Vietnam's President Thieu went over the speech

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 1, Memos for the President's File, 1969–1970, Beginning June 1, 1969. No classification marking. Drafted by Special Assistant to the President James Keogh. In attendance were members of the National Security Council, the Cabinet, and 26 sub-Cabinet and White House officials. The meeting lasted from 9:07 to 11:28 a.m. (Ibid., President's Daily Diary)

[2] Rogers departed Washington on May 12 and arrived in Saigon on May 14 for a 4-day visit. Rogers met with Foreign Minister Tran Chanh Thanh on May 15 and they discussed the general situation in South Vietnam, the upcoming Seven Nation Troop Contributing and SEATO meetings, and Nixon's speech of May 14. Memoranda of conversation of these discussions, treated as separate discussions, are ibid., NSC Files, Box 137, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. IV, 4/29/69–5/18/69. Telegraphic accounts of these meetings are in telegrams Secto 49 to 51/Bangkok 6494–6496, May 21; ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, ORG 7 S. Rogers also talked with Vietnamese Prime Minister Tran Van Huong. A brief account of their meeting is in telegram Secto 18/9444 from Saigon, May 15. (Ibid., POL 27–14 VIET) A fuller account of their discussion is in telegram Secto 44/6489 from Bangkok, May 21. (Ibid., ORG 7 S)

in advance, made some suggestions that were accepted, and approved the final draft, Rogers said.[3] Here the President interjected, "As a matter of fact you were there when he made some changes."

Rogers found Thieu to be mature and intelligent and the one man in the Saigon government who has potential for national leadership. The Secretary said that the South Vietnamese are ready to take over a major part of the burden of the war, although they are fearful that if their casualty rate increases substantially, they may be in difficulty. They fully realize the problems that the war is creating for the U.S., he said.

One thing that the South Vietnamese do not understand, said the Secretary, is freedom of the press. "They lock people up for printing something they don't want printed and then later think perhaps they made a mistake." This caused Postmaster General Blount to comment: "Maybe they've got a good idea there."

The American press, said Rogers, was quite wrong in its speculation that the President's trip was arranged in a hurry for a meeting demanded by Thieu. Rogers said the meeting was suggested by President Nixon and that he, Rogers, was the one who proposed the timing. Relations between the U.S. and South Vietnam are very good, the Secretary reported, although South Vietnamese leaders "had some questions" about the U.S. position on elections. They found it hard to understand that all the U.S. was suggesting was an election that would permit all of the people of South Vietnam to express their view. They agree that there should be such an election but are uncertain about how it should be conducted.

Rogers called U.S. Ambassador Bunker and Military Commander Abrams both superb men for their positions. In travelling through some combat areas with Abrams, he found that the General "knew all about the military and also had a lot of humanitarian instincts."

The critical political problem in South Vietnam, said Rogers, is that there is no cohesiveness, no real national interest even in such things as national sports or national radio programs. He thought it would be a good idea to have a couple of men in the U.S. Embassy who are ex-

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[3] Rogers met privately with President Nguyen Van Thieu and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky on May 16. Thieu told Rogers he would like to hold elections after the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam and after receiving guarantees from the Viet Cong about freedom of the electoral process. Thieu was prepared to accept establishment of a mixed electoral commission to run the elections and would amend the GVN constitution if necessary for an agreement. Thieu was confident he could use the military and civil servants to expand the Government's political support and successfully contest the elections. Ky told Rogers that South Vietnam would be ready for elections by May 1970. (Telegram 9541 from Saigon, May 16; ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 7, President's Daily Briefs) Rogers discussed other issues with Thieu on May 16, including land reform as reported in telegram Secto 63/6559 from Saigon, May 16. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, ORG 7 S) Rogers also met with Thieu's cabinet on May 16; an account of that discussion is in telegram 9723 from Saigon, May 19. (Ibid., POL 27 VIET S) Additional documentation on Rogers' visit to Vietnam is ibid., Conference Files, 1966–1972, CF 356–364.

perienced in politics and who would help Thieu to build a national image. President Nixon asked whether "Thieu would accept political advice from us." Rogers' reply: "He would if we didn't label the people involved as political advisors and if we could just attach them to the Embassy without publicity."

The President commented that criticism of South Vietnam with regard to the condition of its democracy has become terribly distorted. Complaints that the South Vietnamese have defective elections and a partially controlled press are made without regard to the fact that North Vietnam has *no* elections and a completely controlled press. Two very basic questions involved in the South Vietnamese situation, the President continued, are whether a country like South Vietnam is really ready for a democratic system, and whether it is possible to have freedom of the press in a country at full-scale war. "Look back to our own society," the President said. "Lincoln didn't allow much freedom of the press in the Civil War. And in both World War I and World War II, we had a very tight press situation."

Vice President Agnew raised the question whether statements in the U.S. attacking this country's role in Vietnam—such as those made by Senator Edward Kennedy—have an effect on the South Vietnamese. Rogers said there was no doubt that all such statements were followed closely and studied for their possible effects on U.S. policy.

Moving on to other countries he visited, the Secretary of State said that at a meeting of the SEATO alliance partners he found that representatives of the countries which are contributing troops to the Vietnamese war thought the U.S. should reduce its forces there and all indicated that their countries would not reduce their own troop strength if the U.S. did so.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam and Southeast Asia.]

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

Washington, June 4, 1969.

SUBJECT

US Negotiating Team in Paris

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 183, Paris Talks/Meetings, Memos and Miscellaneous, Vol. XIV, 1969. Secret; Nodis.

Attached is a memorandum handed to me by Mel Laird which offers some additional insights into the problems within our Paris negotiating team. This memorandum was prepared by a high ranking officer detailed to Paris (but not the source of the previous statements).

Attachment

Paper Given by Secretary of Defense Laird to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[2]

Washington, May 27, 1969.

SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING OUR PARIS PEACE TALKS DELEGATION

1. General Frederick Weyand and Col. Paul Gorman (and possibly Herbert Kaplan, the press spokesman) seem to be the only realists on the delegation. The State Department people, especially Richard Holbrooke and Carl Salans, are taking positions and attempting to formulate policies and démarches that are not in keeping with—and in fact contrary to—the President's publicly-stated commitment on Vietnam. (Witness the "Lodge-authored" suggested démarche for 31 May, re our withdrawal of troops on the basis of "understanding" rather than concrete conditions.[3] Also the earlier message (para 16) re our withdrawal if North Vietnam "is going to withdraw." Sullivan apparently concurred in the Lodge cable.)[4]

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[2] Secret; Nodis; Background Use Only.

[3] In telegram 7755 from Paris, May 26, Lodge suggested that he meet alone with Tho at the end of the meeting and state: "I quite understand that public discussion of such subjects as troop withdrawal might create problems. Such problems can be avoided. We could try to establish the circumstances in which troop withdrawal takes place. This could be done by prior understanding rather than by prior conditions. Is there some de facto way in which troops could be withdrawn from South Vietnam which would not appear to be a result of negotiations between us—something which would just apparently happen as part of the normal course of events." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 181, Paris Talks/Meetings, Private Paris Meetings, Memos/Codeword) In telegram 10617 from Saigon, May 28, Bunker expressed misgivings about such a statement and suggested substituting "perhaps this could be done by prior understanding" for "prior understanding rather than prior conditions." (Ibid.) Lodge was instructed to follow Nixon's statement in his speech of May 14: "If North Viet-Nam wants to insist that it has no forces in South Viet-Nam, we will no longer debate the point—provided that its forces cease to be there, and that we have reliable assurances that they will not return." (Memorandum from Sneider to Kissinger, May 27; ibid.)

[4] Not further identified.

2. Ambassador (Judge) Walsh seemed totally out of it, not at all forceful, and with no firm views. He is not kept informed by junior members of the staff.

3. Ambassador Lodge appeared to be an old man who had been encapsulated by the bright young State Department boys.[5] His staff meetings are unfocussed, disorganized, and with no central direction. Of the regulars, General Weyand seems to be the only realist in attendance.

4. The GVN delegation, especially Ambassador Lam and Colonel Nguyen-Hui-Loi, evince doubts regarding the firmness of our commitment, mainly based, it seems, on the analyses they read in the US press. The South Vietnamese have little or no contact with the US delegation, aside from General Weyand's military component.

5. A matter of first priority should be to establish White House control over the delegation.[5] A statement of policy should be imposed on the delegation, and the machinery should be regularized. There are too many cut-outs (e.g., General Weyand did not see the Lodge cable before Phil Habib hand-carried it to Washington).

6. In short, the State Department members of the delegation seem bound and determined to fly in the face of historical experience and, if left to their own devices, to secure a peace at almost any price.[5]

7. Another extremely disturbing factor is whether or not the "advocates" have thought through the ramifications—*out-of-country* as well as within Vietnam—of the proposed démarche. It would be interesting to task them (if such was possible) with preparing a contingency paper gaming out a post-Vietnam Southeast Asia as they see it. If honestly played, the game would be a nightmare, both for US credibility and for future US initiatives (given the assumable domestic public opinion that would obtain).

[5] Nixon underlined this sentence.

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

Washington, June 4, 1969.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with President Thieu at Midway, June 8

I. Arrangements for the Midway Meeting

You will arrive at Midway at 11:00 a.m. President Thieu arrives at 11:30 a.m. After an official welcome and military honors (draft statement attached at Tab A),[2] you will meet privately with President Thieu for about an hour and a half. The remaining members of both delegations will meet in a separate conference room during this period. (Delegation lists are at Tab E.)

After a brief break, there will be a business luncheon attended by members of both delegations. (Points for a toast are at Tab B.) Secretary Laird departs after this luncheon.

Your final meeting with Thieu will begin at 3:15 p.m. after a half-hour break. Secretary Rogers and other senior advisors will sit in on this meeting at which you and President Thieu will review the draft joint statement. (Current draft is at Tab C.) At 5:00 p.m. there is to be a joint press conference at which time the joint statement will be issued. President Thieu is scheduled to leave about 5:45 p.m. (A draft departure statement is at Tab D.) You are scheduled to leave shortly thereafter.

II. The Setting for the Midway Meeting

The Midway meeting with President Thieu comes at a crucial time. It has been preceded by months of concerted and effective efforts on the part of your administration to dissipate misunderstanding between us and the South Vietnamese Government and to place our relations on a solid basis of both full consultation and mutual confidence. The meeting, furthermore, follows the enunciation of your peace program in the May 14 speech and the issuance of the NLF's ten points, providing a potential basis for negotiations at Paris. Finally, in recent months, Thieu has taken key actions reflecting his greater sense of self-confidence, his recognition of the political problems facing you at

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 71, Vietnam Subject Files, Midway Meeting with President Thieu, 6/8/69, Briefing Book, Vol. I. Secret. Sent for information.

[2] All Tabs are attached but not printed.

home, and his sense that the Vietnam war is probably entering the decisive negotiating stage. These actions include:

1. His full support for improvement and modernization of the Vietnamese forces.
2. His agreement to a withdrawal of some U.S. military units during 1969.
3. His March 25 statement of the six-point GVN peace program and other public indications of some flexibility on a political settlement.
4. His even greater flexibility, privately, on political arrangements affording the NLF a guaranteed post-war political role.
5. His formation of a political coalition of supporters, whatever its deficiencies, on May 25.

III. Thieu's main purposes in his talks with you will be

—To establish a personal relationship with you which will serve both as a bridge for future consultation and as a focal point for strengthening his leadership position in South Vietnam.

—To reassure himself that the United States will remain committed to South Vietnam both during and after the war; from Thieu's viewpoint the key areas of reassurance (which relate in part to the eight-point plan in your speech) will be:

(1) Withdrawal of U.S. forces, whether unilateral or mutual, will *not* be at a rate likely to increase the vulnerability of the GVN to Communist military action.
(2) The Vietnam settlement will include guarantees against a renewal of the North Vietnamese military intervention in South Vietnam.
(3) The U.S. plan, particularly those aspects dealing with disengagement and local ceasefires, would *not* result in a de facto partition for South Vietnam.
(4) The U.S. is not seeking to impose a provisional coalition government or scrapping of the present constitution in the pre-election period.

—To establish for public consumption a close identity of purpose and action with you, while establishing for his Saigon audience his stature as an equal.

IV. Your main purposes in the talks with Thieu will be

—To establish a personal relationship with Thieu which provides him with both a necessary sense of confidence in your commitments to South Vietnam and reinforces his own sense of self-confidence.

—To reassure Thieu on two fundamentals:

(1) We will not be a party to an agreement imposing either a coalition government in the pre- or post-election periods, or any other political arrangement against the will of the South Vietnamese.
(2) Withdrawal of U.S. forces, whether unilateral or mutual, will *not* be undertaken at the risk of the military security of either South Vietnam forces or the remaining U.S. forces.

—To encourage a sense of urgency, vigor and joint U.S.-GVN purpose in the Vietnamization program.[3]

—To prod Thieu gently to articulate in more specific terms a political program for discussion at the Paris negotiations which affords the Communists sufficient guarantees of free political completion without conceding to their demands for a coalition government.[4]

(Thieu has privately suggested this might be done through a combination of international supervision, mixed electorate commissions, and amendment—rather than scrapping—of the constitution.)

—To encourage Thieu to continue his efforts to unify the nationalists on the political front and to strengthen the local governmental apparatus, while hinting judiciously about the utility of dealing gently with opposition non-Communist forces.[5]

(*Note:* The political situation in South Vietnam is more fluid than appears on the surface; Thieu and his principal non-Communist rivals are already maneuvering for position in the post-war political structure, and each in all probability also has some lines out to elements in the NLF. Thieu, therefore, could be tempted or prodded by his supporters to bear down hard on his non-Communist rivals.)

—To assure Thieu that you will not accept any settlement that does not provide assurances of North Vietnamese withdrawal to North Vietnam and against their future military intervention in South Vietnam.

—To establish publicly an image of unity with the GVN and a joint determination to seek a very early settlement of the Vietnam conflict which does not compromise basic principles.

V. Danger Signals

While it will be important for you to encourage forward motion on Thieu's part both with respect to Vietnamization and the formulation of a political program, there are risks in pushing Thieu too far, too fast. Thieu has been bolder in charting future policy on both withdrawal of U.S. forces and a political settlement than his supporters or his political rivals. He faces the constant necessity of bringing these elements along to his more flexible posture. Therefore, it will be neither to his nor to your interest for Thieu to get too far out ahead of other nationalists in Saigon or to appear to be acting on Vietnamization and a political settlement strictly at our behest.[6] Thieu's pre-Midway visits

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[3] Nixon highlighted this sentence.

[4] Nixon highlighted this sentence.

[5] Nixon underlined the phrase: "utility of dealing gently with opposition non-Communist forces" in this sentence.

[6] Nixon underlined this sentence.

to Seoul and Taipei, in any event, will probably strengthen his determination to resist any appearance of American pressure.

VI. Specific Issues Likely to Arise (Talking Points at Tab F)

A. Thieu is likely to raise, or should be encouraged to raise:

1. His views on a program for a political settlement.
2. Progress in organizing political support among the non-Communists.
3. Modernization of the GVN forces.
4. Progress on the pacification front.
5. Land reform.

B. Issues you should raise:[7]

1. U.S. plans for a reduction of U.S. forces.
2. Reassurance on the U.S. position opposing either partition or the imposition of unsatisfactory provisional arrangements before the elections.
3. Our view on the current status and the prospects of the Paris negotiations.
4. Your overview on Asia, including the importance of a steadfast U.S. commitment to the non-Communist countries in the region.

VII. Thieu Personality

Thieu is a career military officer who has proved his political astuteness both by surviving successive coups and by demonstrating growing qualities of leadership since taking over as President in 1967. Cast in the traditional Vietnamese mold, Thieu is reserved in manner, moves cautiously, and keeps his own counsel. However, as he has gained greater self-confidence, he has increasingly shown himself to be more perceptive and sensitive to the needs of his country—and more flexible—than his potential rivals. He has worked in close harmony with Ambassador Bunker and has developed a real sensitivity toward the domestic problems faced in the United States. He accepts our advice, but at every crucial instance has made it clear that he is his own master. Unostentatious in manner, he is devoted to his wife and family. His single known "vice" is a passion for fishing.

VIII.

The State and Defense Departments have prepared a number of background papers, in the attached briefing book. A scope paper is attached at Tab G.

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[7] Nixon underlined issues 1 and 2.

80. Editorial Note

On June 7, 1969, President Nixon arrived in Honolulu in preparation for his meeting with President Thieu on Midway Island the next day. According to the President's Daily Diary, Nixon met with Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, Assistant to the President Kissinger, Generals Wheeler and Abrams, Admiral McCain, and Ambassador Bunker. The meeting was held in the conference room of the Kuala Hilton Hotel in Honolulu from approximately 2:15 to 6:15 p.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Although not listed as a participant in the diary, Ambassador Lodge also attended. Kissinger's recollection of this meeting stresses that the military participants accepted the decision to withdraw 25,000 U.S. troops "with a heavy heart," but with resignation. (*White House Years,* pages 272–273) When Laird described this Hawaii gathering at his staff meeting on June 16, he called it a "really significant meeting," but provided no details. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files, FRC 330 76–0028, Laird Chronological File, June–August 1969) Laird prepared a June 7 briefing for the President on Vietnamization. (Ibid., ISA Task Force Files, FRC 75–0013, Chron Action, Ltc Williams, June 6) Lodge was asked to brief the group on events in Paris. According to notes he made, Lodge gave an account of the May 31 private meeting with Le Duc Tho as follows:

"1. I was asked to report on the situation in Paris.

"2. I said that Le Duc Tho, on May 31, had made this proposal:

"a) The DRV would talk with us on all matters and on behalf of the NLF. In essence, he also advanced these ideas:

"b) Remove the present personnel of the GVN and destroy them;

"c) Seek a US–DRV agreement within the framework of the 10 points of the NLF, and another agreement on a cease-fire. In other words, the cease-fire was put at the very bottom of the list.

"3. I said that I did not think we could refuse to talk with the DRV. If political questions were brought up, we should be authorized to refer them to Thieu. I suggested that the President should seek to achieve such an understanding with Thieu at the Midway conference the next day." (Notes on the Midway Meetings by Lodge, Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 25)

On June 8 Nixon and the same group flew from Honolulu to Midway, from 7 to 10 a.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) According to H.R. Haldeman there were "Meetings all the way." No record of these discussions on the aircraft have been found. (*Haldeman Diaries,* page 64)

81. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Midway Island, June 8, 1969.

PRESENT

President Nixon
President Thieu
Henry Kissinger
Nguyen Phu Duc

President Nixon began the meeting by stressing that he preferred to have private talks. He assured President Thieu that what he would say would be in confidence. They could agree on that.

President Thieu said that speculation as to differences between them is untrue; that he was very glad to have this opportunity to talk with the President.

President Nixon stated that the press is trying to drive a wedge between the two Presidents with respect to reports about American pressure. Unless President Thieu heard something from him directly, he should disregard it. There is currently a lot of speculation regarding American pressures for a coalition government and it is entirely unfounded. (The President called on Henry Kissinger to confirm that fact.) The President gave a general appraisal of the situation, stating that the war in Vietnam concerns not only Vietnam but the entire Pacific. The people of South Vietnam, however, have the greatest stake. If the peace is inadequate, there will be repercussions all over Asia. There can be no reward for those engaged in aggression. At the same time, self-determination is not only in the Vietnamese interest, but in the American interest as well. It would improve the prospects of peace throughout the Pacific.

The President mentioned that we have a difficult political problem in the U.S. and that he appreciated Saigon's understanding for his domestic problems. At the same time, he understood President Thieu's problems. It is not our wish for President Thieu to get too far ahead and wind up with no country to lead. President Nixon described the Congressional situation and the importance of the 1970 elections. The U.S. domestic situation is a weapon in the war. (At this point the President asked Henry Kissinger to explain the Cambodian strikes.)

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 1, Memos for the President's Files, 1969–1970, Beginning June 8, 1969. Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Drafted on June 13. Kissinger prepared brief individual scenarios for Nixon meetings with Thieu in the morning and afternoon. (Memoranda from Kissinger to Nixon, June 4; NSC Files, Box 71, Vietnam Subject Files, Midway Meeting with President Thieu, 6/8/69, Briefing Book, Vol. I)

President Thieu felt that the intentions of the enemy are crucial; the issue is the spread of Communism. Any false peace will affect all of Asia. Both the Vietnamese people and the world need peace. He recognized the U.S. desire for peace. He knew that the U.S. had no desire to occupy Vietnam but that its sole objective was to achieve peace. The Vietnamese should be reasonable and must consider not only Vietnamese opinions but those of the U.S. as well. The war in Vietnam is not a military one and neither side can win militarily. Therefore, there must be a reasonable compromise. President Thieu understood the difficulties of the President with a large army abroad incurring constant casualties. He felt that his country must make progress in order to help us to withdraw.

Thieu stated that Hanoi deliberately creates a deadlock in Paris and attacks the GVN as the chief obstacle to peace. The Communists are weaker, but Hanoi can continue the war at a reduced rate of casualties for many years. Hence, a negotiated peace is essential. Thieu said he was trying to make progress in winning the political war. Even if Hanoi continues the war, the GVN will win the population.

The President next turned to the subject of troop replacements. Thieu stated that troop replacements, if not handled carefully, could be misunderstood by the North Vietnamese and their allies. He pointed out that we have kept saying the war is going better. We must now prove it; it is important for both U.S. and Vietnamese opinion. Even though the war is going on, we must use the troop replacement to fight Communist propaganda.

By July 15, Thieu said, it should be possible to phase out one-third of the Third Marine Division and six battalions from the Delta. At the same time, he wanted to emphasize a difference of opinion with General Abrams. His aim was to extend administrative control over 100% of the population next year. Therefore, the regional and popular forces are crucial. As they improve, they can replace mobile U.S. forces and ARVN combat divisions. The regional and popular forces can free regular forces to fight a mobile war. This was better than building up new combat divisions.

President Nixon said that we have confused the press by not denying any conflict between us. It would be obvious after today that no conflict existed. The two Presidents then discussed plans for the communiqué.

Turning to the negotiations, President Nixon asked how we should respond to Le Duc Tho's proposal for bilateral talks.

President Thieu misunderstood the President's question about the Tho proposal and said the GVN would object to any U.S. attempt to talk to the NLF. After Mr. Kissinger clarified the issue, President Thieu said that he agrees to bilateral talks unless the U.S. tries to settle directly with

the NLF. The United States should introduce the military subject and listen to the political projections of the other side. Before replying, the GVN would have to be fully consulted.

President Nixon asked several questions regarding Vietnamese political institutions, commenting that Thieu knew his people and required timing. He emphasized that there was no wedge between the U.S. and GVN nor between Thieu and his people.

Break for Lunch

Thieu asked about how we should respond to Communist strategy in Paris. President Nixon replied that we should not seem overanxious.

Thieu asked about military operations. President Nixon said he thought the Communists were suffering badly and intelligence indicated there was very little in the pipeline to the South from Hanoi. Thieu felt that the reason for the latest attacks was to maintain an impression of strength for the Communist world conference and to bring pressure on U.S. public opinion. The Communists faced a dilemma: they wanted to economize their human resources but also wished to maintain U.S. casualties. Thus they continue the tactics of pressure. The Communists pretend that the current deadlock is our fault. The only way to overcome this strategy is to set a deadline. Hanoi knows that delay is to their advantage. Thieu suggested we make our most conciliatory proposal and then establish a deadline for a response, so that time does not work for the other side.

President Nixon asked whether Thieu planned to go on in his political program from his March 25 speech.[2] Thieu replied that we must not be put into the position of always making new proposals. At some early point, we must state (a) that the U.S. and Saigon agree, and (b) that our proposals are as far as we can go. President Thieu stated that he did not want to be pushed from one position to another—as was the case with the shape-of-the-table issue. If he could have the assurance that we would back some set of Saigon proposals, he was certain that we could work out a common position. But he did not want to have an escalation of proposals. Hanoi tended to take 15 small concessions and parlay them into one major concession.

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[2] On March 25 President Thieu announced a six-point peace plan that he later reiterated on April 7 at a joint session of the two Houses of the South Vietnamese National Assembly. The points were: "1. North Vietnam must give up attempts to conquer South Vietnam by force, 2. all Communist forces must be withdrawn from South Vietnam, 3. Laos and Cambodia could not be used as bases for attacks on South Vietnam, 4. South Vietnam would adopt a policy of national reconciliation, 5. unification must be decided through a democratic process, and 6. international controls and guarantees against Communist aggression must be adopted." (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1969–1970,* p. 23554)

Thieu asked for assurances that we would not use every concession by the GVN as a signal for new demands. There must be an end to it. Mr. Kissinger asked, "But how do you play the political game?" Thieu replied that if there were a withdrawal of forces and an end of terrorism, the GVN could consider the NLF as another party in elections. If the NLF wants guarantees, the GVN was ready to discuss it with them in generous terms. Thieu said he was ready to accept an international body. It could not interfere in the GVN's area of sovereignty but it could organize and supervise elections. The GVN was willing to accept as many as 10,000 international inspectors and frontier guards. He was prepared to implement free choice and self-determination; in other words, a free vote and free candidature. Thieu felt that everyone was aware that political competition was inevitable.

President Nixon urged Thieu to do everything possible and asked if it would be any help to him if we provided a political organizer. The U.S. had done this with Magsaysay and it had been helpful. It is up to President Thieu if he wants this kind of assistance. Thieu responded that more support for cadres was necessary.

President Nixon mentioned that Hanoi has never had real elections and is thus employing a double standard. Thieu pointed out that 56% of those "elected" in North Vietnam were women. This shows the magnitude of their manpower problem. He reiterated that there would be elections after the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces. Thieu was prepared for good international supervision—even without troops.

President Nixon wondered whether the GVN could siphon off the political forces in the center to weaken the Viet Cong. Thieu responded that when we have a common position on our side, we can have a united front. What made the middle ground in Saigon so uncertain was the fear that the U.S. would withdraw support. Hence, many politicians were holding themselves available for a coalition government with the NLF.

President Nixon asked why not a united front now; the GVN is going to win and that is a great asset. Thieu stated very frankly that there was a sagging of spirit in Saigon. Many still believe that the Viet Cong can have political concessions. The intellectuals are waiting for political concessions imposed on Saigon by the U.S. They were encouraged in this by loose statements from U.S. cabinet members. Mr. Duc interjected that the Saigon population was very worried.

President Thieu asked what had been meant by local elections in the early drafts of the President's May 14 speech. The President replied that he meant that elections could be held in provinces where ceasefires had been arranged. Thieu said that this was an interesting possibility.

President Nixon said that the fact that the people in Saigon were jittery worried him. Thieu returned to his view that territorial forces had to be strengthened. General Abrams wants to train divisions. Thieu wants to train 130,000 Regional Forces and Popular Forces. Abrams doubts the manpower resources are available. Thieu thinks it easier to form RF and PF than regular forces. If the GVN has more RF and PF, it can phase out combat divisions. Thieu wants the U.S. to reconsider his plan regarding the RF and PF, and for someone to talk to General Abrams.

President Nixon mentioned the stories in the press about the poor performance of the 5th and 18th Divisions. Thieu said it is a question of leadership. President Nixon recalled the story of when General Pershing's desire to attack was thwarted by a classmate who said the morale of his divisions was shot. Pershing replied, your morale is shot and fired him. There are no tired divisions, only tired commanders.[3]

[3] After their meeting on June 8, Nixon and Thieu released a previously agreed upon joint statement; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pp. 445–557.

82. Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Sullivan) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, June 10, 1969.

SUBJECT

Laos

[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 LAOS. Secret; Exdis. In a June 10 covering memorandum to Walsh, Sullivan stated that Kissinger asked for this memorandum "on a private basis." Sullivan told Walsh that his recommendations reflected his opposition to CINCPAC's and other military commanders' urgings for a major increase in U.S. military activity on Laos. Sullivan discerned from Nixon and Kissinger that the military hoped to assign a U.S. major general as military commander for all activities in Laos and take over at least part of the role that the U.S. Ambassador to Laos currently fulfilled. Sullivan stated that he had shown this memorandum to Godley and suggested that Rogers, Richardson, Johnson, and Green receive copies.

You asked for my opinion concerning the utility of additional United States military action in Laos.[2] As I told you previously, and as I told the President during the trip back from Midway to Honolulu, I consider that there is very little more we can do than we are currently doing. I also consider that the net result of additional effort would be marginal.

In reaching this assessment, I start from the premise that Laos, as a landlocked nation of less than three million people, can never be a military match for North Viet-Nam, a nation of nearly twenty million. I also assume that it is not in the United States interest to commit our own forces to a ground war in Laos. Therefore, the limits of perfectibility in the defense of Laos must be defined by the capabilities of Lao ground forces, aided by United States training and equipment, and augmented by United States air support. Additional United States assistance is given in the form of intelligence and clandestine operations.

Currently, we train and equip regular Lao armed forces of about 60,000 men. Additionally we train, pay and direct a tribal guerrilla force of about 40,000 men. We have furnished a small tactical air force of T–28 aircraft, which we attempt to keep at air operating level of 48 aircraft, with Lao pilots. Due to a shortage of Lao pilots, we pay for the services of about a dozen Thai "volunteer" pilots. Moreover, by contract with two U.S. operated companies (Air America and Continental Air Services) we provide airlift support for the Lao military and our own guerrilla forces.

About 60 USAF sorties per day are flown from Thailand in direct support of Lao military activity. U.S. Forward Air Controllers (about 10) also operate from Thailand and from strips in Laos. Communications are handled by U.S. military and civilian personnel to assure the efficiency of these operations.

To run the foregoing effort, there are less than 200 U.S. personnel in Laos who are "in violation" of the 1962 agreements. It has always been my policy to hold this number to a minimum and to position them in such a manner that they could be immediately extracted if political considerations dictated. It is important to note that the United

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[2] Kissinger sent a copy of this memorandum to Nixon on June 16, stating in the covering memorandum it was in response to Nixon's request "to look into the possibility of doing more to improve the military situation in Laos." Kissinger summarized Sullivan's view that there was little more that the United States could do, but added: "I believe the key factor in Laos is the enemy's ability to concentrate its forces there and overrun the remainder of the country at any time it would appear advantageous to do so. Additional U.S. assistance to Lao forces could not alter this fact, although it could make a difference in the current situation." Kissinger recommended that the Under Secretaries Committee look into the issue and Nixon approved on April 18. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 286, Memoranda to the President, June 1969, Folder 2)

States has accepted *no* commitments whatsoever in association with these military operations and that they could, in principle, be terminated unilaterally by us at any time.

In addition to these arrangements, but in no sense as a quid pro quo, the Lao government permits the U.S. to carry out bombing operations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, an area of Laos that has very little strategic interest to the Lao government itself, but which is directly related to our interests in South Viet-Nam. We fly about 400 tactical air sorties a day and about 20 or 30 B–52 sorties per day in this area. The only conditions attached to this permission are (a) that we should not publicly admit our bombing, and (b) that we avoid killing Lao civilians who may be haplessly in the same area as the North Vietnamese infiltrators who are targets of our bombing raids.

Without the permission of the Lao government, and in the light of Souvanna's advice to me that he would refuse such permission if we asked for it, we also conduct cross-border raids from South Viet-Nam into the Lao panhandle. These raids are run by platoon-sized units of South Vietnamese irregulars, encadred by U.S. Special Forces men.

This combination of effort has kept the military situation in Laos more or less stabilized for the past five years. The Lao have suffered relatively heavy casualties and have had nearly one quarter of their population displaced as refugees. But there has been *no* significant loss of terrain, and indeed, a net gain, over the situation which obtained in 1964.

When one is asked what more can be done, it is first necessary to consider what the objective is, where and how it is to be done, and who will do it. Let us start with the least desirable proposal—the introduction of U.S. ground forces overtly into the enemy sanctuary area in the Panhandle. These sanctuaries contain from a regiment to a division of enemy forces, depending on current deployments. Therefore, an operation against them would have to involve regiments or divisions.

Not only would such a venture be of dubious military success (it would probably at best be a second Khe Sanh), but it would raise major political considerations. If we asked the Lao for official permission, they could reasonably be expected to accede only if we made some explicit commitments to them. It is doubtful that we wish to extend our commitments at this time. If, on the other hand, we did it against the specific wishes of the Lao, we would face an uproar internationally and domestically. We do not wish that sort of reaction.

Assuming, then, that broader ground action is out of the question, we might consider additional air action. Again, the question is where and by whom. The air operation in the Panhandle is frankly already saturated. There is little more that can be done there except against populated areas. We could probably get Lao agreement to such attacks

if we agree to give the population adequate warning to leave the towns before we attack. Such warning would also result in the evacuation of military objectives and, hence, the value of the proposed attacks would be nil.

Similar considerations prevail for most other direct U.S. military efforts which might be proposed elsewhere in Laos. The only exception to this statement might be the possibility of augmenting the daily USAF effort allotted to direct support of Lao troops. This suggestion would have to be measured against the limited communications, forward air control, and targeting capabilities available to the Lao.

Hence, my only suggestions for augmenting our effort in Laos come down to a few proposals associated with improving the inherent capabilities of the Lao forces. These are as follows:

(a) Provide the Lao army with more M–16 rifles. (They currently have less than 6,000 and most of their opponents have AK–47 weapons. I would increase this total up to 20,000 rifles.)

(b) Provide the Lao air force with more AC–47 aircraft. (These planes, with side-firing guns, are excellent for the defense of small outposts. I believe there is now a program to convert four of the C–47 inventory to this configuration. I would convert others or supply new ones up to a total of ten—two to each military region.)

(c) Finally, I would provide the Lao air force with T–41 trainer aircraft to improve their pilot training program.

All of these proposals have either been made, or are being made, by our Country Team in Laos. If there is an indication from you that the President favors these rather modest suggestions, it would make a long story much shorter.

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

Washington, June 11, 1969.

SUBJECT

Paris Private Talks

At the May 31, private meeting with Ambassador Lodge, the Hanoi representative, Le Duc Tho, took a new tact proposing to negotiate bilaterally with us on all questions, political as well as military. Hanoi no longer insisted that we negotiate with the NLF, but refused flatly to talk privately to the GVN.

Tho also raised three questions of major substance:

1. Does the United States agree that it and the DRV should work out a settlement of all problems mentioned in the 10-points, that agreements should be signed, followed by an agreement for a ceasefire?
2. Does the United States agree to have the present GVN leadership replaced by a peace cabinet willing to conduct serious talks with the NLF?
3. Who is to organize elections after the restoration of peace?

Two principal issues are raised by Tho's proposals:

1. How do we proceed with the private talks?
2. If we move ahead with another round of private talks, how do we respond to Tho's three questions?

Ambassadors Lodge and Bunker, in commenting on our possible response to Tho, agree that the basic objective of Hanoi's strategy is to isolate the Thieu Government and produce strains between us and the GVN—as might result if we and the DRV negotiated seriously on a political settlement. Lodge, however, believes that Tho's approach merits further probing to determine if there is a basis for serious negotiation.[2]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1319, Unfiled Material, 3 of 19. Secret; Nodis. Sent for action. Originally dated June 7, then redated by hand June 11. Sneider sent this memorandum to Kissinger on June 2 with the recommendation that he sign and send it to the President. The second page was redone, apparently at Kissinger's request. A note on the first page presumably by Sneider reads: "President was shown this by HAK on trip to Honolulu, RS." This note is apparently in response to an attached note by Haig, June 11, that reads: "Dick Sneider, Dick—Pres did not see this [.] it's now OBE in some respects—should we update and refloat? Al."

[2] Lodge's comment and recommendations are in telegram 8366 from Paris/Delto 1805, June 4. (Ibid., Box 177, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Meetings, May–June 1969, State Nodis Cables/Habib Calls)

Bunker is essentially less optimistic.[3] Nevertheless, Bunker has not disputed Lodge's proposal that we request a further private meeting after Midway on a basis which would neither accept nor reject Tho's proposal for talks on political, as well as military, issues. Lodge would not initiate any discussion of political issues and would respond initially to the DRV that these should be discussed with the GVN. Bunker would prefer to take the offensive in the next round of private talks and is concerned about the GVN reaction if we are drawn into extended political talks with the DRV. Lodge shares this concern but thinks we can avoid this trap.

With respect to Tho's three questions, Lodge and Bunker are not far apart:

1. Both would rebuff, for the present, Tho's suggestion for discussing a draft agreement, and emphasize our interest in substance and not form.
2. Both would reject Tho's proposal to replace the GVN with a peace cabinet, but Bunker would take a tougher line.
3. Both would respond to the question on organizing the elections, by suggesting that elections can be organized without changing the GVN or jeopardizing the NLF and that the GVN and NLF work the problems out.
4. Finally, both would try to focus the discussions with the DRV on mutual withdrawal.

My own view is closer to Bunker's appreciation of the situation. I would go ahead with another round of private talks but with greater care to avoid any misunderstanding with the GVN about our undertaking political talks with the DRV. I believe Lodge will agree and intend to discuss this with Lodge and Bunker.

Lodge and Bunker have also suggested that you might review this problem of further private talks with Thieu during your morning meeting. You may prefer to leave those details to Bunker, and instead discuss the private talks in general terms with Thieu indicating our intention to probe the DRV position although we see as yet little ground for optimism.

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[3] Bunker's comments and recommendations are in telegram 11261 from Saigon, June 5. (Ibid., RG 59, Winston Lord Files: Lot 77 D 112, Box 338, Vietnam Private Talks)

84. Editorial Note

On June 11, 1969, Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin met with Henry Kissinger prior to returning to Moscow for consultations. The discussion on Vietnam follows:

"Dobrynin then turned to Vietnam. I told him that we were following a very careful policy. We had our moves for the next few months fully worked out. I reminded him of what the President had said when we gave him an advance copy of the Vietnam speech. He should not be confused by the many statements that he heard. We were not interfering with much that was being said. But the President reserved the final decision on essential items. Dobrynin replied that he had noticed that we moved on about the schedule we had given him a month ago.

"Dobrynin then asked about our ideas for settling the war in Vietnam. He inquired especially on our views on a coalition government. I said that he and I were both realists. He knew very well that in order to bring about a coalition government we would have to smash the present structure of the Saigon Government while the NLF remained intact. This would guarantee an NLF victory sooner or later. We would never accept that. We would agree to a fair political contest—not to what the President had called a disguised defeat.

"Dobrynin made no efforts to defend Hanoi's position. He replied that Hanoi was very difficult. He said I could be sure that the Soviet Union had transmitted our discussion of April and added a recommendation. However, Hanoi believed that they knew their own requirements better than the Soviet Union. I said, on the other hand, the Soviet Union supplied 85% of the military equipment. Dobrynin asked whether we wanted the Soviet Union to give Hanoi an ultimatum. I said it was not for me to tell the Soviet Union how to conduct its relations with its allies. I said that we were determined to have the war ended one way or another. Hanoi was attempting to break down the President's public support. It was too much to ask us to hold still for that. I added that what we needed was some strategic help, not just negotiating devices for settling particular problems as has been the case until now. Dobrynin, who was very subdued, said I could be sure that they are looking into the question.

"Dobrynin then asked me about US-Soviet relations in general. I said that while some gradual progress was possible even during the Vietnam war, a really massive change depended on the settlement of the Vietnam war. Dobrynin said we always seem to link things. I replied that as a student of Marxism he must believe in the importance of objective factors. It was an objective fact that Hanoi was trying to undermine the President. It was an objective fact that we had to look to every avenue for a solution. Dobrynin then said supposing the war were settled, how would you go about improving relations."

The end of the conversation follows:

"Dobrynin returned to the theme of US-Soviet relations and asked what he could tell his principals when he returned. I said that everything depended on the war in Vietnam. If the war were ended, he could say that there was no limit to what might be accomplished. You would like to be remembered as a President who ensured a permanent peace and a qualitative change in international relations." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK, 1969 [Part 1]) The full record of this conversation, which Nixon saw, is in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XII, Soviet Union, 1969–October 1970.

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85. Intelligence Memorandum[1]

No. 05730/69 Washington, June 12, 1969.

STRESSES IN NORTH VIETNAM

As the leaders of North Vietnam enter the eleventh year of their attempt to seize control of the South by force, they face a rising level of war-weariness among their people. In addition, as a result of the cessation of the bombing last year, the regime is having to combat a relaxation on the part of the North Vietnamese generally. Once the bombing stopped, many North Vietnamese, even in the armed services and in the vital areas of transportation, appear to have suffered an emotional letdown in[2] the belief that the war was over as far as they were concerned. Now, the regime is having difficulty convincing the people that they must continue to endure deprivations and that many must continue to go South to fight what by now must seem to them to

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 137, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. VI, 5/26/69–6/17/69. Secret; Spoke; No Foreign Dissem. Prepared in the Office of Current Intelligence of the Central Intelligence Agency and coordinated with the Office of Economic Research, the Office of National Estimates, and the Director's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. Nixon wrote on the title page: "K—What can we do to accelerate the morale decline?"

[2] Nixon underlined the previous portion of the sentence and drew an arrow to his handwritten comment: "K—what will effect on this morale be of our anticipated action?"

be an interminable war. Although these problems do not appear to be so grave as to impair significantly the regime's ability to prosecute the war, they are causing the politburo concern, and it is reacting.

[Omitted here is the 7-page body of the paper.]

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

Washington, June 13, 1969.

SUBJECT

Study on Laos

You raised the question whether a full-scale study of Laos is not required, in view of newspaper reports of a deteriorating military situation.

State has been working for some time on a paper on Laos in the context of a Southeast Asian settlement. The study is nearing completion, and will be forwarded to the Review Group when completed. I think that this will meet our requirements.

The military situation in Laos is indeed cause for real concern, although major shifts in the strategic balance seem unlikely before next autumn.

As I stated in a memorandum in April,[2] the Communists have the military power on the scene to take Laos when they want. They refrain because of uncertainty about our reaction, and because Laos is only a part of larger concerns in the area.

The Communists' winter offensive created a very serious crisis of confidence in the RLG, though it did not take in so much new territory as the Communist gains of the year before. It slowed up in April,

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 545, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. I, to 31 July 1969. Secret. Drafted by Lindsey Grant and sent by Sneider to Kissinger under a June 10 covering memorandum in which Sneider recommended that Kissinger sign it and send it to the President. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Document 56.

probably in part because of our aerial reaction in "Operation Rain Dance," a spoiling operation. The Meo guerrillas counterattacked with considerable success, even occupying the Communist administrative center of Xieng Khouangville for a time.

The rains have come. If experience is a guide, pro-Government guerrillas will re-establish themselves in some contested areas during the rainy season. The enemy will attack again in the autumn dry season. Because of the attrition in forces and morale on the Government side over the years, this next dry season offensive may be dangerous to RLG stability.

The Communists are engaged in leisurely negotiations with Souvanna Phouma, and are probably dangling before him the prospect of a Laos political settlement and a reduction of military pressures, in exchange for some arrangement which will limit U.S. bombing and provide the Communists with continued access to South Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand through Laos.

These negotiations are not likely to progress far this summer, since Souvanna still plans to leave for Europe on June 20, returning only in August.

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

Washington, June 23, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnamizing the War (NSSM 36)

Secretary Laird has forwarded to you the outline plan (Tab A) prepared by the Joint Chiefs for Vietnamizing the war.[2] This plan has been

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–142, NSSM Files, NSSM 36. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. Sneider sent this memorandum to Kissinger under an attached June 19 covering memorandum recommending that Kissinger sign it and send it to the President.

[2] Tab A, attached but not printed, was an undated 57-page JCS report entitled, "Plans For Vietnamizing the War."

coordinated with the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency. The plan covers two areas:

1. Alternatives for U.S. force reductions during the period July 1, 1969–December 31, 1969;
2. An outline for the final report on longer-term Vietnamization which you are requested to approve.

Five options for 1969 redeployments are offered in NSSM 36, ranging from withdrawals of 50 to 100,000. The first increment has already been decided at Midway and Secretary Laird recommends in his report an additional increment, with a total up to 50,000 for 1969 depending upon evaluation of the reaction to the first withdrawal. In a separate memorandum, the Secretary of State expresses a preference for an alternative involving a total of 85,000, but again depending upon further consideration after the initial withdrawal.[3]

The longer-term plans on Vietnamization provide a series of alternatives for U.S. troop reductions with varying timetables from 18 months to 42 months, and varying ceilings for the residual American troops in South Vietnam ranging from 260,000 to 306,000. Secretary Laird feels that even a 42 month timetable with withdrawals up to 290,000 forces would probably result in interruption of pacification progress. A much faster withdrawal could result in more serious problems for pacification and allied military capabilities, as well as possible adverse effects on the GVN, in the absence of reciprocal North Vietnamese withdrawals.

The problem now facing us is a decision on procedures for consideration of Secretary Laird's report. There are two principal options open:

1. Circulating the paper as a normal NSC document for regular NSC consideration (which has not yet been done); this would involve increased risks of leakage.[4]
2. Treating the paper in a meeting of NSC principals only; in this case my staff would prepare an issues paper for consideration of the principals *only.*

Secretary Laird would prefer the paper be handled on a tight-hold basis and, therefore, would probably prefer the second option. I would concur.[5]

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[3] Attached but not printed was a June 2 memorandum from Under Secretary of State Richardson to Laird in which Richardson stated that Rogers favored this figure "for reasons of political impact in this country, in North Vietnam, and on the negotiations in Paris."

[4] Nixon wrote "No" next to this paragraph.

[5] Nixon wrote "Yes" next to this paragraph.

Recommendation:[6]

That NSSM 36 be considered at a meeting of NSC principals only

That NSSM 36 be circulated as a normal NSC document for regular NSC consideration

Other

Attachment

Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon

Washington, June 2, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnamizing the War (NSSM 36)

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have prepared an outline plan (enclosure 1)[7] for Vietnamizing the War, with specific recommendations and alternatives for the remainder of 1969. This plan has been coordinated with the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency. As I shall indicate below, I believe we can plan *tentatively* to withdraw 50,000 men in 1969, with the first increment of 20,000–25,000 men to start redeployment in July. For reasons I shall outline, I believe we must keep our planning *flexible* and not commit now beyond the 20,000–25,000. The State Department believes the withdrawal package for 1969 should consist of 85,000 men (Alternative C below).

I indicated in my report following my trip to South Vietnam that I was disappointed in the progress made by the South Vietnamese in assuming more of the burden of the war. Nonetheless, they are improving and with the right kind of help from us, continuing improvement can be expected. There are a number of unknowns, however, affecting the rate and absolute level of improvement in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). These unknowns include, inter alia, the quality of leadership, the motivation of the armed forces, the psychological reaction of the South Vietnamese to US redeployments, and the ability of the South Vietnamese to find a stronger organizational structure. These unknowns, collectively, can be at least

[6] None of the options is checked.

[7] See footnote 2 above.

as important to the over-all situation in South Vietnam as the more tangible and measurable elements. With such unknowns, we must recognize the possibility that even with additional training, improved equipment, and increased combat support, the RVNAF will not be able soon to stand alone against the current North Vietnamese and Viet Cong force levels. Our timetable for withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam should take such conditions into account. We should strive for a sensitive balance between too much, too soon and too little, too late.

I believe this is best done by making an early announcement of the withdrawal of a modest number of troops (20,000–25,000) and then carefully weighing the situation, to include various reactions (NVN, SVN, US), before making the next move. If this announcement is made in early June, withdrawal of this initial increment could begin in July and be completed in August.

The reaction to such a move could be favorable to us in several ways:

—The North Vietnamese would be very hard pressed to counter it. Our military position would still be strong. Together with our allies, we would have high confidence of being able to put down an enemy offensive. Such a posture should produce a most desirable and widespread psychological impact.

—The South Vietnamese would have further opportunity to understand that we are indeed serious about Vietnamizing the war. At the same time, they would not be likely to feel that we were rejecting our commitment. A successful defense against an enemy offensive could help to condition them for succeeding incremental withdrawals.

—Those Americans who have been most vocal against the war probably would not be silenced by this action, but important elements of the US public would be encouraged.

If this assessment of initial reactions proves to be correct, you could then decide to withdraw a second increment later in the year. A decision in early August would permit redeployment to begin in September and, depending on size and composition, be completed in October or November. If conditions were favorable, a decision on a third increment could be made in October or November for additional withdrawals to begin before the end of the year and be completed in early 1970.

1969 Redeployments

There are several alternatives as to the over-all size and composition of the forces which might be withdrawn from South Vietnam this year. Five of the alternative packages that I consider feasible for implementation in 1969 are:

1969 REDEPLOYMENT ALTERNATIVES—SVN[a]
(Strength 000)

	Element	
Alternative A		
50,000 troops mainly combat	1 Marine Division, Aviation Units & Support	26.8
	1 Army Division and Support	19.6
2 divisions	Air Force Elements	1.3
	Navy Elements	2.3
		50.0
Alternative B		
50,000 troops	1 Marine Division, Aviation Units & Support	26.8
1 Div plus support slice	Support Elements, All Services	23.2
		50.0
Alternative B[1b]		
50,000 troops	Combat forces (2 Regiments/ Brigade from I Corps and 2 Brigades from III/IV Corps)	22.0
4 Rgmt/Brgd plus support	Support Elements, All Services	28.0
		50.0
Alternative C (Revised)		
85,000 troops	1 Marine Division	22.5
2 Divisions	1 US Army Division	18.7
plus support	Division Support Trains	25.0[c]
	1 Marine Air Group	1.5
	Hq & Logistics & Other Support Forces not Associated with Divisional Support	17.3
		85.0
Alternative D		
100,000 troops	1 Marine Division, Aviation Units & Support	27.7
2 Divisions	1 Army Division and Support	19.6[c]
and Support	Support Elements, All Services	52.7
		100.0

[a] Alternatives A, B and D correspond to those in the JCS plan. Alternative C (3⅓ Division) of the JCS plan is not recommended; a revised C has been substituted. Within each alternative the actual mix of units may vary somewhat in final implementation. [Footnote in the source text.]

[b] Alternative B[1] is in Appendix C of the JCS plan. [Footnote in the source text.]

[c] Support spaces have been removed from each Army support slice to provide support to RVNAF. [Footnote in the source text.]

The South Vietnamese are prepared for A, B, or B[1]. Alternative C (Revised) probably would be acceptable if adequately explained, although both it and D exceed their expectations in terms of quantitative reductions in US strength this year.

In the United States, Alternative D, closely followed C (Revised) probably would best mitigate pressures to curtail our involvement in the war. Alternatives A, B, or B[1] are probably about what the US public expect. It should be recognized that an enemy offensive which caused heavy American casualties during implementation of any alternative—particularly C or D—could result in seriously adverse public reaction.

Alternatives B, B[1], C (Revised) and D withdraw mixed packages of combat and support personnel. The JCS consider the support units should remain in Vietnam to support RVNAF and the subsequent withdrawal of additional US forces. However, in these more balanced packages, the support forces to be withdrawn will be carefully selected from among those which will have minimum impact on RVNAF effectiveness.

Longer Term Plans

The outline plan of enclosure 1 considers tentative timetables to Vietnamize the War during the period 1970–1972. They redeploy US forces over alternative periods of time and leave residual American troops in South Vietnam ranging from 260,000 to 306,000. Although it appears feasible mechanically to withdraw up to 290,000 US forces from South Vietnam by the end of 1972, even this 42 month timetable would probably result in an interruption in pacification progress. The interruption might range from only temporary reductions to a long-term degradation. To withdraw much faster (such as by the end of 1970), in the absence of some North Vietnamese withdrawals, could result in serious setbacks to the pacification program, a significant decline in allied military capability, and the possibility of a GVN collapse.

Recommendations

I believe we should stay as flexible as possible in our planning. I do not believe it is advisable to adopt a *firm* plan now to redeploy beyond the first increment of 20,000–25,000. Rather, I believe we should take the initial step [to] assess the situation fully, and then decide on the size and timing of the next step. In the meantime, and in concert with other agencies of the government, we will exert a major effort to expand, train, and modernize the RVNAF, and do whatever else may be required to transfer progressively to the South Vietnamese greatly increased responsibility for all aspects of the war. In summary:

—A first increment of about 20,000 to 25,000 troops should be withdrawn, starting in July 1969.

—The composition of the first increment should be determined by

the JCS in coordination with CINCPAC, MACV, the US Mission, and the GVN.

—The size, composition, and timing of a second increment in 1969 should be based on a careful evaluation of the reaction to the withdrawal of the first increment.

—Current planning should be based on not more than 50,000 troops being withdrawn in 1969, as recommended by the JCS, unless an early agreement is reached with North Vietnam on mutual withdrawals.

—Planning should stay as flexible as possible, so that rapid and appropriate additional responses can be made to further RVNAF improvement, the negotiations situation in Paris, and the military situation in Southeast Asia.

Melvin R. Laird

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88. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, June 25, 1969, 7–8:20 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Bui Diem, Republic of Vietnam
Henry A. Kissinger
William A.K. Lake

Ambassador Diem called on Mr. Kissinger at the former's request. The major subjects discussed included the substance of the forthcoming proposal by the GVN on a political settlement in South Vietnam,[2] the timing of that proposal, our strategy for the period after the proposal is made, and the desire of the South Vietnamese for close consultation

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 268, Memoranda of Conversation, 1969 January–July. Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The meeting was held in Kissinger's office. According to an attached July 2 memorandum, Kissinger sent this memorandum to Nixon for information. Also attached was a 2-page outline summary of the Kissinger–Diem discussion.

[2] On July 11 Thieu proposed that the NLF could take part in elections in South Vietnam to be held under international supervision. Thieu outlined the following principles: all political parties and groups could participate as long as they renounced violence and pledged to agree by the results of the elections; an electoral commission made up of all groups participating would conduct the elections and ensure that they were fair; there would be international supervision; the GVN would be willing to discuss the timetable and modalities for the election with the NLF; no reprisals or discrimination would follow the elections; and the GVN would abide by the results and it challenged "the other side" to declare the same. (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives,* 1969–1970, p. 23657)

with us on those subjects. The effect of the Midway meeting and Diem's personal feelings about the future course of events in Vietnam were also mentioned.

GVN Proposal

Ambassador Diem noted the necessity for President Thieu's achieving the greatest degree of unity possible among Vietnamese nationalists in support of his proposal. Mr. Kissinger expressed his appreciation of this fact. Ambassador Diem then discussed a number of different ideas which President Thieu and the GVN are considering with regard to the substance of the proposal. Their premises in considering these ideas are that the proposal would have to challenge the other side to participate in the elections, that it would have to be demonstrably realistic and forthcoming, and yet that it must not prejudice the basic interests of the Vietnamese people.

The Ambassador said that after careful consideration, "the people at home" were inclined to judge that there are more cons than pros with regard to amending the constitution in order to remove the obstacles posed by Article 4.[3] They therefore are studying ways of proposing elections that would get around this problem.

For example, a referendum might be held on the constitution (including Article 4) as a whole. Such a referendum would, however, pose real dangers, as some nationalists might vote against the constitution on grounds not directly concerned with the struggle against the Communists. DeGaulle's experience with his recent referendum provided a warning.[4] Mr. Kissinger expressed personal doubt about the value of a referendum on the whole constitution, rather than on Article 4. Ambassador Diem agreed, stating that such a referendum would not be practical.

Of the many other alternatives being studied, Diem said, one of the boldest proposals is that general elections be held for the Presidency, the Vice Presidency, Senate and lower House. Any general elections proposal would have to include the Presidency, or it would appear that Thieu wanted others in the GVN to take more risks than he. Thieu would therefore be willing to run against the Communists. Mr. Kissinger agreed that this would be the most spectacular proposal, especially if Thieu resigned before the election. He suggested that this offer could be made conditional—Thieu would not resign unless the

[3] Article 4 of the GVN Constitution prohibited citizens from being Communists or promoting communism.

[4] In April 1969 the French people rejected President Charles de Gaulle's referendum on regional autonomy and he resigned.

other side agreed to the elections. Ambassador Diem noted that a drawback of the idea of proposing general elections is that it could lead to a period of confusion. They were considering ways to avoid this problem.

Ambassador Diem noted that this was simply one of the ideas under consideration, and stated it should be part of a package including the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces. Nor would it need include Thieu's resignation. Mr. Kissinger agreed that his resignation was not the key element.

Mr. Kissinger asked who would run these general elections. The Ambassador replied that the GVN could give all sorts of safeguards and agree to some sort of joint control over them.

In response to Mr. Kissinger's question, the Ambassador said he personally thought people in the countryside would vote for Thieu rather than NLF leader Tho. They would prefer the "grey" to the "black" choice.

Mr. Kissinger returned to the question of the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces. Ambassador Dim said the presence of North Vietnamese troops in the south is the GVN's greatest concern. If the elections were held while they were still there, they could influence the voting and there would be a risk that they would never be withdrawn. Mr. Kissinger stated that we would still be there. Ambassador Diem said that if there were assurances of that, the possibility of elections while the North Vietnamese (and the U.S.) maintained forces in the country "could be debated." Mr. Kissinger confirmed that the Ambassador was saying that if we were to assure the GVN that we would not withdraw our forces until the North Vietnamese had withdrawn theirs, the GVN might be willing to hold general elections. Mr. Kissinger said that he would have to take this up with the President. We might be able to give such an assurance.

The Ambassador and Mr. Kissinger agreed that all the ideas they had discussed should be very closely held, and that it should be clear that they were only ideas.

Timing of the Proposal

Ambassador Diem said that Ambassador Bunker had suggested July 1 as a target date for announcement of the GVN proposal. Mr. Kissinger agreed with the Ambassador's remark that there is no reason why there must be one specific date. The Ambassador said that Secretary Rogers and Deputy Assistant Secretary Sullivan had suggested a target of July 10 because of the Paris meeting at that time and the Apollo flight soon thereafter. The latter would take public attention away from the proposal if they took place concurrently. Mr. Kissinger agreed that these were important factors. The proposal would

receive maximum publicity if it were announced before the 16th. If it were announced concurrently with the Apollo mission, it should be during the flight, rather than on the days of the take-off, moon landing, or splashdown. We would support the GVN's efforts to publicize it in every way possible. We would like then to make a catalog of concessions by the U.S. and the GVN, and use it in a publicity campaign calling on the other side to follow suit.

Mr. Kissinger stated that we would not wish, however, to give a deadline to the GVN. It would be better that they make a positive proposal that they had examined carefully and could believe in rather than something less meaningful. He asked what Ambassador Diem personally thought would be a realistic date. The Ambassador replied that, speaking personally, he wished there were more time to achieve a political regrouping—nationalist unity. This would take at least a month. How, the Ambassador asked, could they best line up political support for a proposal by July 10–16? The ideal would be to have gained the support of all nationalists. At the least, they should have prepared them for the proposal. They could then work on gaining their support after the proposal was made.

Mr. Kissinger asked if U.S. support for the proposal would help in this regard. Ambassador Diem said that he doubted it. Saigon politicians are not anti-American but they have lingering doubts about the U.S. which are difficult to define. They know that the U.S. will not withdraw completely. They recognize that 25,000 troops is a small withdrawal and they would accept even 75,000 to 100,000. However, there are rumors and a general feeling in Saigon that the U.S. has a fixed plan for maneuvering Thieu into a political settlement. Much could be done to dispel these rumors in the next three weeks.

Ambassador Diem had told Ambassador Bunker that the U.S. could help dispel these rumors if our people in Saigon could get in touch with the main political factions and discreetly spread the word that while the South Vietnamese should help themselves, they needn't worry about "black designs" by the U.S. Mr. Kissinger said that he would look into how we could offer such assistance discreetly, particularly if it were to lead to a next stage. We would have to consider how well such assistance might succeed.

Mr. Kissinger reiterated his statement that the announcement would have the best effect if it were made sooner rather than later, but that we understood their problems and were not putting pressure on them. It is a GVN decision.

Nor, Mr. Kissinger said, is it our intention to wreck the whole political system. President Nixon wants President Thieu to succeed. But we have to show U.S. public opinion that we are forthcoming.

Mr. Kissinger said that President Thieu had impressed President

Nixon when he said that every GVN concession should not lead to a further concession by the U.S. In the abstract, Mr. Kissinger said, there will be some point at which the GVN can with justice say that it has made all the concessions possible. Mr. Kissinger's personal view was that if the GVN proposed general elections and a mixed commission, it could not be asked to go farther. He would check this point with the President. Ambassador Diem then noted that the idea of general elections is only a tentative plan.

Strategy for Period After the Proposal

Ambassador Diem said that President Thieu is concerned about what we should do after he had made his proposal, which could represent the maximum possible concession. The proposal would have a good effect on public opinion, and the other side would be on the defensive. They would probably refuse the proposal, however, at least for a few months. What would be the attitude of the U.S. in that case? The GVN did not have specific recommendations for the U.S., the Ambassador continued, or ask too much. The South Vietnamese would fight on for their own survival. They would assume more of a burden through the Vietnamization program. But they would still need American help, if at reduced levels and different in kind. These are the lines along which Thieu is working.

In reply, Mr. Kissinger recalled the President's statement of May 14 that he was determined not to allow an endless negotiation and not to lose the war. What exactly we would do needn't be discussed now. He noted that if the GVN were to make a forthcoming, unconditional proposal, it would show that we had made all the concessions possible. This would make it easier to reappraise the situation in three months.

Consultations

Ambassador Diem said that President Thieu had asked him to stress Thieu's desire for coordinating our strategy both with regard to his forthcoming proposal and for the following period. We need better communication between us. Mr. Kissinger agreed, and supported the idea of close consultation between Ambassador Diem and Deputy Assistant Secretary Sullivan. He would also always be available himself should Ambassador Diem wish to discuss sensitive problems or messages from President Thieu to President Nixon. If Ambassador Diem ever felt that things were getting out of hand, Mr. Kissinger would always do what he could to help. Ambassador Diem said that Mr. Kissinger was a special friend, and that he had been instructed by President Thieu to discuss all possibilities fully with Mr. Kissinger. President Thieu had been impressed with Mr. Kissinger at Midway as being a serious and systematic man.

Effect of Midway Meeting

Mr. Kissinger asked for Ambassador Diem's personal appraisal of the effect of the Midway meeting. The Ambassador said that he frankly thought it was very useful, particularly as it helped Thieu to knock down rumors in Saigon about U.S. intentions. Mr. Kissinger recalled the President's statement at Midway that the GVN should believe only what the U.S. Government tells them, not what the press says. Ambassador Diem stated that the suspicions of Thieu himself were allayed by the Midway meeting. The Ambassador only regretted that the meeting was too short.

Ambassador Diem's Views on the Future

Speaking personally, the Ambassador expressed the opinion that international and U.S. public opinion might not allow enough time for the GVN to succeed in doing all it would have to do. He noted that the GVN had failed to accomplish some of the things that one might have hoped it would, but that it faced real problems also. He had realized the other day, standing on a beach at Nha Trang, how much would be lost if they failed to win the struggle. Without concurring in the Ambassador's implied pessimism, Mr. Kissinger emphasized his understanding for the problems the GVN faces, and his great sympathy for Ambassador Diem's emotions at Nha Trang. He regretted that the U.S. may sometimes unintentionally do things which might hurt the GVN. He had no patience with those Americans who proposed political actions by the GVN without regard for the complexities of the situation. We should not presume to tell the GVN what to do.

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89. Memorandum From Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, June 25, 1969.

SUBJECT

CIA Memorandum on GVN Manpower Shortages

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 138, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. VII, 6/17/69–6/30/69. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Sent through Sneider. A note on the first page of the memorandum reads: "HAK saw."

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

Washington, January 29, 1969, 9:35 a.m.

SUBJECT

Actions Resulting from National Security Council Meeting of January 25, 1969[2]

Attached is a list of the actions indicated during the National Security Council meeting on Saturday, January 25, 1969 dealing with Vietnam. The list has been coordinated on an eyes only basis with the principals and has been agreed to by them.

With your approval, I will prepare appropriate implementing instructions where required.[3]

Attachment

LIST OF ACTIONS RESULTING FROM MEETING OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL ON JANUARY 25, 1969

Vietnam in General

The President directed that CIA prepare an analysis of how each of the nations in S.E. Asia would view the Vietnam options outlined in the NSC paper considered on the January 25 NSC agenda.

The President asked to see the November NIE which contains an analysis of S.E. Asian reactions to various settlement options in Vietnam.

The Assistant to the President asked for an analysis of recent casualty statistics to reflect comparisons between friendly and enemy casualties, resulting from (a) friendly initiated actions and (b) enemy initiated actions.

The President requested an updating on the military situation in Vietnam focused on possible enemy initiatives during Tet so that he will be prepared to respond quickly to recommendations for appropriate U.S. responses.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–109, NSC Minutes, Originals, 1969. Secret.

[2] See Document 10.

[3] Nixon checked and initialed the approve option.

Associated with review of U.S. contingency actions in the event of an enemy Tet offensive, the President wishes to see the contingency plan which has already been prepared outlining the proposed U.S. response to an enemy attack on Saigon and/or other major South Vietnamese population centers.

The President requested that the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff provide him with a report on current plans and programs for the improvement of South Vietnam's internal security capabilities with emphasis on the development of indigenous police forces. The report should include information on the current U.S. organization for accomplishing this task, to include an analysis of the qualifications of our responsible officials at each level in the U.S. organization.

The President emphasized that he wants absolutely no public or private criticism of the GVN by U.S. officials.

The President registered his concern for insuring that the U.S. Government continue to apply pressure on the GVN to replace incompetent ARVN leadership, especially in the III Corps area of SVN.

Paris Negotiations

The President emphasized that he did not want the U.S. to initiate any discussions on ceasefire in the Paris negotiations. It was agreed, however, that a U.S. position on the issue must be developed should it be raised by the other side.

The President wishes that unilateral (U.S.) troop withdrawals not be proposed by the U.S. side in the Paris negotiations. The President approved continuation of U.S.–GVN discussions currently underway in Saigon involving possible selected U.S. troop reductions in conjunction with increasing GVN military capabilities but emphasized that they be held on a strictly close-hold basis. For the present, public discussion of U.S. withdrawals or troop reductions in Vietnam should be limited to mutual withdrawals in the context of Paris negotiations.

The President wishes the issue of de-escalation not be included on the list of U.S. negotiating items in Paris.

The President approved the inclusion of Prisoner Exchange in the initial U.S. Paris negotiating position.

World-Wide Issues

The President requested recommendations as to whether or not the U.S. should seek to reestablish relations with Cambodia to include whether or not the President might take such an initiative through a note to Sihanouk.

The President wishes to be advised at an early date on the possibility of a transition to an all volunteer Army.

The President requested that the Secretary of Defense provide him with his views on the Draft issue.

[Omitted here is a short paragraph on future contacts with the Soviet Union.]

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12. Memorandum of Meeting Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Secretary of Defense Laird, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler)[1]

Washington, January 30, 1969, 3 p.m.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

The discussion turned to contingency plans for Vietnam. The Special Assistant asked what could be done in South Vietnam which could convey to the North that there is a new firm hand at the helm, adding we should investigate what lower level, in-country activities could be devised to signal this change.[2] General Wheeler replied that we have plans for operations in the DMZ and we have plans for offensive air action in the North. He stated that prior to November 1, U.S. forces were authorized to operate freely in the southern portion of the DMZ, and noted further that the North has violated the Northern portion of the DMZ by patrol action, stockpiling of supplies and by fire. On the other hand, the U.S. has abided by its word within the Southern portion. The Chairman suggested some offensive action in the Southern portion of the DMZ as a signal of change in U.S. leadership. General

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 955, Haig Chronological Files, February 1–15, 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive. Haig also attended this meeting, which was held in the Secretary of Defense's conference room at the Pentagon. Haig sent a copy of this memorandum to Kissinger on February 6, and to a February 6 covering memorandum, Haig attached a list of the specific actions agreed to at the meeting and a letter from Kissinger to Laird. This letter enclosed a copy of the above list for Laird's use in preparation for a meeting with Nixon on February 11. (Ibid.)

[2] On February 5 Haig sent Kissinger a February 3 memorandum from the Chairman of the JCS to Laird, CM–3903–69, outlining options for military responses to attacks on population centers in South Vietnam. In his covering memorandum, Haig suggested that although "flexible to the target selection, type of strike and duration of strike, they do not constitute an adequate response to what I believe you and the President are seeking." Haig believed contingency plans should constitute "a menu of actions within South Vietnam which could signal the U.S. intent to escalate while avoiding the type of public noise in the United States and in Paris which a strike north of the DMZ would generate." (Ibid., Box 136, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. I, Through 3/19/69)

Wheeler emphasized that U.S. forces in South Vietnam were fully committed and he could foresee no real hope of a significant step-up within the confines of South Vietnam proper. Secretary Laird pointed out that the pressures in the U.S. since the Paris negotiations were for deescalation. He added perhaps we could complain a little more about the enemy's DMZ violations at Paris. General Wheeler added we have had mortar attacks on two occasions from the DMZ on Marine units South of the DMZ, suggesting that we should start reporting these violations.

Dr. Kissinger inquired as to our capability of stepping up B–52 strikes. General Wheeler replied that we have been running at a rate of 60 sorties per day. If we were to go beyond that level, it would result in a loss of efficiency due to force fatigue. General Wheeler suggested that some operations in Laos might achieve the desired results.

The group then discussed the possibility of reconnaissance over China and Dr. Kissinger said that the 303 should recommend the reinitiation of reconnaissance by SR–71s and drones. The Chairman stated that he was dubious that the U–2 flights manned by ChiNats could be cranked up again due to their earlier loss rates. Mention was then made of the upcoming talks with the ChiComs in Warsaw. It was speculated that these talks would probably last about one day.

Dr. Kissinger stated that the Defense Department should prepare a menu of reconnaissance operations over China, based on actual requirements but initiated primarily for political objectives.

Dr. Kissinger then asked whether or not there was some type of planning activities that could be initiated which would signal to the North that we might be considering a step-up or escalation of operations.

The group suggested the following possibilities:

—Assembly of amphibious shipping at some Southern port.
—Increased aerial reconnaissance.
—Movement of carriers and naval fire support back to Yankee Station.
—The convening of high level commanders to planning conferences in Saigon.
—A possible high level visit to Taiwan.

General Wheeler again emphasized that perhaps some additional offensive operations in Laos or Cambodia would be appropriate. For example, we might deploy CS gas along the Laotian supply routes at specific choke points, pointing out that in the past this had proven quite effective and stating that since September the use of CS has been restricted outside of Vietnam except in aircraft rescue operations.

General Wheeler also suggested that a foray by ground forces into North Vietnamese base areas, sanctuaries or logistics installations might prove very effective. He said that a plan had been developed

recommending the authorization of hot pursuit into Cambodia which would include attack on base areas and last approximately 3 to 5 days. General Wheeler also suggested a U.S. attack across the Fish Hook west of Tay Ninh and Zone C, stating that he estimated such an attack could be completed in approximately one day. Secretary Laird cautioned that increased activity in Cambodia would represent a difficult political problem.

Dr. Kissinger then asked what will we do in the event of a major attack on Saigon? General Wheeler referred to the contingency plan which provided for 48-hour air and naval attacks between the 17th and 19th parallels, emphasizing that this plan might not be executed instantaneously after a violation but at a time when weather conditions were most appropriate. Dr. Kissinger emphasized that he would raise this point with the President to be sure that he understood that our reaction time in implementing this plan would be dependent upon the weather.

Discussions were then held on the possibility of covert attacks within Cambodia or the harassment of vessels enroute to Sihanoukville. Dr. Kissinger stated he would discuss stepped up Asian activity in Cambodia, specifically Sihanoukville, with the Director, CIA.

General Wheeler suggested that we step up our reconnaissance activities along the Cambodian roadnets. Discussion was then held on how a menu of pressure tactics could be presented to the President. It was agreed that when the options were developed, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman and Dr. Kissinger would arrange for an appointment with the President to discuss the menu. Concurrently, the group agreed that the SIOP briefing scheduled for the following Wednesday at the Council meeting should be cancelled since most of the principals will have heard it individually.

First, a general picture of Saigon's defenses should be presented. Secondly, the menu of in-country actions should be presented and, finally, actions against the North.

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

13. Memorandum From the Former Head of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam (Harriman) to Secretary of State Rogers[1]

Washington, January 31, 1969.

SUBJECT

Viet-Nam Negotiations

It seems to me it's time to renew private talks with Le Duc Tho et al. Subject to Cy Vance's concurrence, I recommend that Lodge be authorized to get in touch with the North Vietnamese for a bilateral private talk of the type they agreed to. Of course, he would take Cy and Walsh with him.

The principal subject for discussion would be how to get serious talks for settlement going. I believe our side should explore ways and means to mutually deescalate the violence—military and terrorist. In our last talk with Le Duc Tho, he made it plain that if we attempted military action "to negotiate from strength," little progress would be made.[2]

In my judgment, we are in a better military position than we have ever been. We should accept this situation and get on with the negotiation for a peaceful settlement. Otherwise, my guess is there will be mutual escalation of the violence and no progress.

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Files of Richard Pedersen: Lot 75 D 229, Miscellaneous & Hold File–RFP. Personal and Secret. Harriman sent a copy of this memorandum to Kissinger under cover of a January 31 note. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 74, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam (General Files), January–August 1969)

[2] As reported in telegram 976 from Paris/Delto 1194, January 19. (Ibid., RG 59, Winston Lord Files: Lot 77 D 112, Box 338, Vietnam Private Talks)

14. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to Secretary of State Rogers[1]

Washington, January 31, 1969.

SUBJECT

Communication with Hanoi Prior to January 20

Prior to the inauguration, President Nixon was in communication with the North Vietnamese through a contact who is personally known to the top leaders in Hanoi.[2] The messages were sent by me to the contact who delivered them to Mai Van Bo (DRV representative to the Government of France) and vice versa.

The President initiated the exchange with his message of December 20 (Tab A), which told the North Vietnamese that his Administration was prepared to undertake serious talks. On December 31, Hanoi sent its reply (Tab B), which emphasizes that its point of primary concern is U.S. willingness to withdraw troops. The ball was kept in play by the President's response of January 2 (Tab C), which states inter alia that his Administration is ready to withdraw U.S. forces from South Vietnam as part of an honorable settlement which includes mutual troop withdrawal. The North Vietnamese replied on January 13 to the President's message (Tab D). The President has not replied to this latest message.

The President has asked that this be very closely held.

Tab A

Message From President-elect Nixon to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam[3]

Washington, December 20, 1968.

Message to the North Vietnamese

"1. The Nixon Administration is prepared to undertake serious talks.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 861, For the President's File, Vietnam Negotiations, Camp David Memoranda, 1969–1970. Secret; Nodis; Eyes Only. The memorandum is an uninitialed copy.

[2] Frenchman Jean Sainteny, former French Government official with extensive official experience in Indochina. Nixon describes and quotes from these messages in *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, pp. 349–350.

[3] Secret; Nodis.

"2. These talks are to be based on the self respect and sense of honor of all parties.

"3. The Nixon Administration is prepared for an honorable settlement but for nothing less.

"4. If Hanoi wants, the Nixon Administration would be willing to discuss ultimate objectives first.

"5. If Hanoi wishes to communicate some of their general ideas prior to January 20, they will be examined with a constructive attitude and in strictest confidence."

Tab B

Message From the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to President-elect Nixon[4]

December 31, 1968.

1. We have on several occasions clearly declared that we came to Paris with a serious attitude and full of goodwill. If the US sincerely desires to resolve the problem and reach an honorable solution, as it has often said, it also must have a serious attitude and goodwill.

2. In order to arrive at a peaceful solution to the problem of Vietnam our position is very clear. It is founded on the Four Points of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which were reaffirmed on November 2, 1968. We also approve the Five Points for a political solution of the problem of South Vietnam put forward by the National Liberation Front on November 3, 1968.

3. At the present time, if the conference of the four in Paris has not yet begun, it is because the Saigon Administration uses procedural issues to delay its opening, and because the representatives of the US support the absurd demands of the Saigon Administration. It is only after the opening of the conference that one will be able to discuss the deeper questions relating to a peaceful solution to the problem. However, if the US wishes, it may communicate its general ideas, and its

[4] Secret; Nodis. The text indicates it is an unofficial translation. On January 2 Kissinger sent the President-elect a memorandum suggesting that "the tone of the message [of December 31] is more conciliatory by far than is customary; there is the usual effort to drive a wedge between Saigon and Washington; [and] Hanoi, which always drafts very carefully, emphasizes that its point of primary concern is US willingness to withdraw troops (no reference to a ceasefire, de-escalation, etc.)." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 2, HAK Administrative and Staff Files, Memoranda to the President-Elect)

specific ideas for making more precise points that are already known, for our serious examination.

Mai Van Bo commentary: At the beginning, I believe that the question is to know if the US wants peace, if it really wishes to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, or if it only talks of this to make it possible to do nothing. For the rest, evidence indicates that the Saigon Administration does not want peace. Instead it wishes that the US remain in Vietnam so that it can continue to make a living from the war. As the US already leans on that Administration, we seriously doubt its attitude. To be quite honest, as long as the Thieu–Ky–Huang clique remains at the head of that Administration, it will be difficult to settle any of these problems.

Tab C

Message From President-elect Nixon to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam[5]

January 2, 1969.

Message to the North Vietnamese

"We have noted with interest Mai Van Bo's communication.

"In reply to his question, the Nixon Administration is willing to negotiate seriously and in good faith.

"The Nixon Administration solemnly affirms its readiness to withdraw U.S. forces from South Vietnam as part of an honorable settlement, which includes mutual troop withdrawal.

"It is our belief that progress depends on concrete proposals to achieve an honorable peace.

"We reaffirm our readiness to examine Hanoi's ideas carefully, with goodwill and in strictest confidence."

[5] Secret; Nodis.

Tab D

Message From the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to President-elect Nixon[6]

Paris, January 13, 1969, 2100.

1. The Conference of Four comprising the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the US, and the Saigon Administration, of which the purpose is to search for a peaceful solution to the Vietnamese problem should have started on November 6, 1968; however as of today it has not opened. It is precisely because the Government of the US and the Saigon Administration deliberately seek to delay the opening of this conference. The appointment of certain American figures who have been deeply involved in the war of aggression in Vietnam to responsible posts in the negotiations casts greater doubt upon the attitude of the US.

2. The policy of aggression of President Lyndon Baines Johnson against Vietnam, based upon an erroneous evaluation of the determination of the Vietnamese people to fight against aggression, has failed.

The Vietnamese people ardently desire peace but it has to be a peace with independence and liberty! If the US wants to settle the Vietnamese problem, the Vietnamese people are ready to engage in serious conversations with them. If they pursue the war of aggression, the Vietnamese people have no other choice than to continue the resistance in order to recover, whatever it costs, independence, liberty, and a true peace.

3. If the US really desires to settle the Vietnamese problem it must end the war of aggression in Vietnam, withdraw in the shortest possible period all American and satellite troops from South Vietnam and leave the South Vietnamese population to settle itself its own affairs without foreign interference. The US must as soon as possible start without delay the Conference of Four to discuss these profound questions.

4. The general and concrete ideas concerning the peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese problem will be examined with care by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

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[6] No classification marking. The message is a: "Rough/Unofficial translation."

15. Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 1, 1969.

In reading the January 31 news report on the Paris negotiations, it seems vitally important to me at this time that we increase as much as we possibly can the military pressure on the enemy in South Vietnam. Will you convey this view to Wheeler and tell him I believe it is absolutely urgent if we are to make any kind of headway in Vietnam that we find new ways to increase the pressure militarily without going to the point that we break off negotiations. I do not like the suggestions that I see in virtually every news report that we anticipate a "Communist initiative in South Vietnam." I believe that if any initiative occurs it would be on our part and not theirs.[2]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 64, Vietnam Subject Files, 8F Reappraisal of Vietnam Commitment, Vol. I. No classification marking. The memorandum is unsigned.

[2] Kissinger sent this memorandum to Laird who responded to Kissinger in a memorandum of February 11 that, "I hope the President will be assured that everything possible is being done with our present military resources to apply military pressure on the enemy." Laird noted that U.S. killed in Vietnam had increased to 200 per week recently due to largely unsuccessful U.S. efforts to "gain contact with major enemy units." Laird suggested "we must be sensitive to the incremental and total costs involved in our operations as well as marginal benefits." Laird suggested that United States forces could not prevent large scale attacks in Vietnam, at best they could be ready to repulse them at large cost to the enemy. Laird concluded that maximum military pressure in Vietnam would not result in a change in the military situation over the short run. (Ibid.)

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16. Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 1, 1969.

In reading the news summaries, particularly the television coverage, the line is already developing that the negotiations in Paris are deadlocked. The next step we can anticipate is that the commentators

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Vol. I, 1–69, Memos and Miscellaneous. No classification marking. A note at the top of the page by Eagleburger reads: "Note to Ken Cole: HAK called Lodge 2/4/69. LSE." The memorandum is unsigned.

will begin to demand that we change our position in order to make headway. I think it is important that you keep in close touch with Lodge—probably by telephone—so that (1) he does not become discouraged by this type of coverage, and (2) in his backgrounders and other press statements he can knock down the idea that we should expect any kind of progress at this early date. In fact, I think it would be helpful if he indicated that several months usually are required before parties on such basic substantive disagreements begin to make progress, but use your judgment as to how to handle it. Incidentally, our observers here said that, "Lodge comes across so well on TV, it might not be a bad idea to encourage him to do more of it. He just looks like a model negotiator and certainly inspires more hope as a personality than Harriman did. His appearance counts for much and it may."

You might read this to Lodge when you talk to him on the phone and indicate to him that he should find every opportunity to say something on TV which reaches the United States—forget what the Europeans, particularly Parisians, may see or write. He should aim everything he says toward the United States indicating that the going is hard and that he does not hold out any false optimism, but that he is convinced that the negotiations will succeed, and that he is getting every possible encouragement from RN.

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17. Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, February 1, 1969.

I received the New German Ambassador[2] and he seems to be personally friendly as we might expect, but beyond that you might check his background and see if he might be a pretty good one to keep in contact with here in Washington. I knew him when he was the second man in the Embassy from 1956 to 1960, and I considered him to be reliable at that time.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 341, HAK/Presidential Memorandums, 1969–1970. No classification marking. The memorandum is unsigned.

[2] The President met with German Ambassador Rolf Friedmann Pauls to accept his credentials on January 31 from 3:46 to 5:53 p.m. Just prior to this brief meeting, Nixon accepted the credentials of the Singaporean Ambassador Ernest Steven Montiero. They met from 3:38 to 3:45 p.m. (President's Daily Diary; ibid., White House Central Files)

I also received the Ambassador from Singapore. He is an M.D.—Lee Kuan Yew's personal doctor. He had met me and Mrs. Nixon when we were in Singapore in 1953 and had been greatly impressed by the way Mrs. Nixon had visited hospitals and other charitable institutions, and the way that we both went out to meet people in the slum areas.

What is more important is that he has been Ambassador to Cambodia for four years and a close and intimate friend of Sihanouk. He said that Sihanouk had a very "warm feeling" toward RN based on the two times he had met him in 1953; once when he visited me as Vice President, and again when I made a state visit to Cambodia. He said that Sihanouk based a great number of his policies on purely personal attitudes. I asked him to convey to Sihanouk the next time he wrote him (which I can imagine would be almost immediately!) my warm regards and the hope that at some time in the future we would be able to communicate again.

I give you this background having in mind the fact that this might be the opportunity for me to write a note to Sihanouk. The State Department country desk man was there at the meeting. Check it out and give me a recommendation—preferably a personal letter to Sihanouk—if that does not cross wires with something else.

In the same connection, the Saudi Arabian, Jordanian, Moroccan, Libyan, Tunisian, and other Mid-East Ambassadors were exceedingly cordial at the Diplomatic Reception. It is quite obvious that we start with a lot of good will in this group. We should exploit it to the full at this time.

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18. Memorandum From Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon[1]

Washington, February 5, 1969.

SUBJECT

Diplomatic Course of Action with Respect to Cambodia

[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, 1969, February to April. Top Secret. Kissinger's staff prepared a summary of Rogers' recommendations and arguments which Kissinger sent to Nixon on February 12. Kissinger advised that the President approve Rogers' recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. That you authorize a diplomatic course of action that would envisage proceeding gradually—and with full control and possibility of reversal at all stages—to a resumption of diplomatic relations with Cambodia.

2. I see three possible means of initiating this course of action.[2]

(a) You personally could outline in a letter our willingness to issue a "border declaration" (described below) and to go further from there.

(b) We could say the same thing in a message from the U.S. Government to the Cambodian Government, delivered by the Australian Ambassador, representing U.S. interests in Cambodia. This way your personal intervention could be held in reserve.

(c) The third course, which I recommend, is that you send a *general* personal letter to Sihanouk (Tab A), to be followed shortly thereafter by a message through the Australians dealing specifically with a border declaration (Tab B).

Discussion

As Mr. Helms noted in the NSC briefing on Viet-Nam,[3] Sihanouk's behavior since mid-1963 has rested on a judgment that we would eventually lose in South Viet-Nam. A series of incidents and harassments in 1964 culminated in the suspension of diplomatic relations in May of 1965. Special missions by Ambassador Bonsal in December 1964, Ambassador Bowles in January, 1968, and Eugene Black last September have led to some improvement in understanding, but the basic question remains of what to do about our relations.

In the past few months, Sihanouk has, in our judgment, given a number of signals of a new desire for better relations with the U.S. As always, these have been interspersed with contrary indications and harsh public denunciations. However, we think they add up to something significant. The indications have included:

1. Approaches to the French, Australians, Indonesians, and, most recently, President Marcos of the Philippines, to express interest in better U.S.-Cambodian relations.

2. Release of the 12 American soldiers detained in Cambodia; although their release was long overdue, Sihanouk undoubtedly thought of it as a gracious gesture on his part.

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[2] According to a February 13 memorandum from Moose to Walsh, the President approved this recommendation. (Ibid.) In telegram 24758 to Bangkok, Saigon, and Vientiane, February 15, the Department informed these posts of the President's decision. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 1 CAMB–US) The text of the letter from Sihanouk to Nixon was transmitted in telegram 24759 to Bangkok, Saigon, and Vientiane, also February 15. (Ibid.)

[3] See Document 10.

3. Remarks in a press conference about the usefulness of a continuing U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, counterbalancing Chinese ambitions.

4. Dispatch of a Cambodian foreign service officer to Washington to work under the aegis of the French Embassy here as "custodian" of the Cambodian embassy building.

5. A noticeably more moderate reaction to recent border incidents, including a serious and embarrassing one in which a U.S. reconnaissance patrol destroyed a truck, killed eight Cambodian civilians, and captured a ninth.

6. Application for membership in the IMF and IBRD, and reactivation of Cambodian membership in the Asian Development Bank.

7. Expressions of desire for private foreign investment, with the governor of the Cambodian central bank visiting New York to promote investment by U.S. firms.

8. Grant of landing rights to Pan American Airways, after several years of sporadic negotiations.

On the other side of the coin, NVA/VC use of Cambodian territory has increased. Recent evidence suggests strongly that Cambodia is indeed a major source of military supplies for VC/NVA forces in South Viet-Nam and that the supply route has a high degree of cooperation and connivance at high levels in the Cambodian Government. We cannot ignore these facts but we believe that they reflect essentially Sihanouk's lack of power to control the situation and his constant need to appease Hanoi (and the NLF) as best he can.

On balance, we by no means read the indicators as suggesting that he has now decided we are going to win in SVN. However, he does seem to have concluded that it is time he trimmed ship and hedged his bets.

Basic Options on Diplomatic Courses of Action

A basic question right at the outset is whether it is to our net advantage visibly to improve relations with Cambodia and to move in the direction of a possible resumption of relations. It is my conclusion that—subject to our ironing out as many problems as we can—an eventual resumption of relations, and easing of the atmosphere in the meantime, is to our advantage.

To put the matter in terms of a resumption of relations, the major advantages and disadvantages are as follows:

Advantages

1. A resumption of relations, and to some extent any improvement of our relations, will be construed in the area as a clear sign that Sihanouk thinks we will come out on top. This could have significant

favorable consequences in view of his previous position, and is in my judgment the foremost advantage of moving in this direction.

2. Some form of diplomatic relations or U.S. representation would enable us to communicate more effectively than we can now do through the Australians (who represent our interests in Cambodia) or on occasion the French (who are helpful, but to whose skirts we would not wish to be attached).

3. Even a small U.S. representation would give us some intelligence and information gains. If it progressed to the point where we had good military attachés there, with freedom to travel, we might in the end learn a great deal more—while the fact that we were watching might operate to tone down the supply activities now taking place through Cambodia.

4. What I do *not* put forward as a significant advantage is any early hope that even the fullest resumption of diplomatic relations would basically change the military situation or Sihanouk's degree of complicity in the supply line. Nor do I believe that it would cause him, for example, to get behind an enlarged and effective International Control Commission in the face of Hanoi's clear and implacable opposition. These are bridges that he will cross only if he moves significantly farther in his estimate of the outcome in Viet-Nam, although the fact that we have resumed relations could at the eventual stage be a helpful additional factor. But I do not wish to claim that any diplomatic course of action can do much to change the military problem.

Disadvantages

1. Our visible pursuit of a diplomatic course of action directed at easing our relations must, to a significant degree, inhibit any *expansion* in the authority our forces now have to act along the borders. The views of the Department of Defense on such a course of action are attached (Tab C). They conclude that the full range of courses of action should be evaluated prior to any decision to undertake diplomatic action.

I have read the OSD/Joint Staff comments.[4] I do not think that a study of the full range of courses of action is necessary, because the

[4] Those comments were attached in an undated memorandum to the President from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA and the Director of the Joint Staff of the JCS; not printed. In Kissinger's February 12 memorandum to the President, the OSD/ISA/Joint Staff objections were described as follows: "the Department of Defense and Joint Chiefs argue that before we take any diplomatic action, we should review all other possible actions—including increased military operations. (At the present time, U.S. forces are authorized to conduct only limited reconnaissance missions into Cambodia and—in emergency situations—to take necessary counteractions in the exercise of the right of self-defense. The Joint Chiefs are now studying additional possible military operations directed against North Vietnamese sanctuary in Cambodia.)"

proposed diplomatic course of action inhibits only major new military actions of a kind which I do not think we should take in any case. The suggestion in the OSD/Joint Staff memo for neutralization of the Cambodia/South Viet-Nam border is fraught with enormous practical difficulties which rule it out as a solution to the immediate problem even in the unlikely event that agreement of the many parties involved could be obtained.

2. Under almost any circumstances, U.S. diplomatic representatives in Cambodia will experience some indignities. The Prince is bound to denounce us from time to time, and might in fact do this a bit more as a smokescreen for practical moves in our direction. We will need steady nerves, and will have to be prepared to live with some degree of embarrassment.

3. Much more serious is the possibility of physical violence or a renewed break by Sihanouk. Despite the relatively calm view he has taken of several recent incidents, we simply cannot be sure that we can avoid some really major incident to which he would feel tempted to react. I believe we can partially guard against this possibility by quiet talks before we reach a decision on the resumption of relations. Sihanouk has already told the French Ambassador that he would not treat our representatives as "hostages," and would take a more understanding view of border incidents which might occur after a U.S. border declaration. But an element of risk in this direction would remain in any circumstances.

Net Judgment

From the foregoing, I conclude that it is to our net advantage to move in this direction and it *could* be to our advantage to go all the way to a full resumption of relations, if we have prepared the way properly.

If this basic judgment is accepted, it leads to the question of pace and timing. To move rapidly or impetuously is obviously unwise. To sit tight and do nothing is in my judgment a neglect of opportunity.

Thus, the option worth following seems to me to be a careful and step-by-step sequence of moves, keeping us in a good public position at all times and designed to lead eventually to a resumption of relations—but without early commitment and with the clear chance to review and change the course of action if it is not doing what we hope for.

Specific Mechanics

The first step would be a declaration of respect and recognition of the sovereignty, independence, neutrality and territorial integrity of Cambodia *within its present frontiers.* Sihanouk has repeatedly stated that such a statement, along lines issued by more than 40 countries, is the only pre-condition to improvement and resumption of relations.

This border declaration adds only the four underlined words to what we have consistently said. It commits us to nothing more than is already in the United Nations Charter. In particular, it does not commit us for or against any position in the minor disputes that exist vis-à-vis Thailand, South Viet-Nam, and Laos concerning the present location or basis of Cambodia's frontiers.

We could indicate our willingness to make a border declaration either by a letter from you or through diplomatic channels.

1. A letter from you, as compared to a message through diplomatic channels, has the following advantages:

(a) Sihanouk in recent months has many times made it clear that he attaches special value to communications from the President. In the case of the release of the LCU crew, the message from President Johnson undoubtedly helped the atmosphere immensely.

(b) At the outset of your Administration, it is in any event appropriate for you to lay down fundamental points of your policy toward Cambodia. You alone can convey these with no possibility that Sihanouk would think, as he has tended to do, that he is hearing from the State Department but that the Defense Department and the U.S. military in Viet-Nam have a different policy.

As with all else, there are arguments to the contrary. Sihanouk is notorious for making everything he gets public. If our judgment is wrong or the particular events of the moment are unfavorable, he will take it out on you personally—although I must say that he will do this sooner or later in any event if he is in the mood.

2. A second possibility is a sounding carried out by the Australians on our behalf. This would have less immediate impact than a letter from you, but it would have the advantage of reserving such a letter for use at some future stage when its value might be greater. It would not involve you personally in a course of action that could prove fruitless, and it would defer to a later stage any inhibitions on military operating authorities. Moreover, the conversations which the Australian Ambassador would have with Sihanouk at our instance might offer an opportunity to probe, a little more specifically than is possible in a correspondence between heads of state, on such points as his reaction to future border incidents occurring after the issue of a declaration.

3. I recommend a course which combines the advantages and avoids most of the disadvantages of both these tactics. It would begin with a letter from you in general terms, merely expressing polite regards and avoiding discussion of specific problems (Tab A). Such a letter would gratify Sihanouk and would improve the prospects for, without involving you in the specific mechanics of, a move toward resumption of relations. This would be followed by an approach by the Australian Ambassador along the lines of Tab B, which allows an extra degree of explicitness.

However, simultaneously with the despatch of your general letter and before we proceed with the specific approach through the Australians, we must put South Viet-Nam, Thailand, and Laos on clear notice of what we are doing. We would assure them privately that a border declaration does not commit us to any position on specific disputes over border demarcation. On issuing the declaration, we would say publicly only that it speaks for itself, and that we would make similar declarations with respect to Laos, Thailand, and the Republic of Viet-Nam if they so requested. (Any further public comment might lead Sihanouk to charge that we were hedging on our declaration.)

A year ago, such notice to Cambodia's neighbors might have been exceedingly difficult. However, the latest indications—even from Thai Foreign Minister Thanat—are that they will understand and accept what we are trying to do. I believe you have already established a basic posture of firmness in our Viet-Nam commitment, in Paris, and in relation to Southeast Asia generally—so that there is little chance that this move would be construed as "soft." But I think we have to go through the exercise carefully and hold our fire until we have the returns in hand.

Beyond these opening moves, I am much more tentative at this point. If Sihanouk responds that of course he is ready for a border declaration, then we would go ahead and issue it. It does not commit us to make any change in our present procedures, and would have a few positive advantages beyond improving US-Cambodian relations; for instance, it would bring us back into line with most of our allies, and might help lessen Sihanouk's extreme sensitivity about his frontiers. In issuing a declaration and in all contacts in whatever channel we would make clear that we had a lot to discuss before we ever came to the point of actually resuming relations, and that we would proceed carefully and slowly. For example, we might send in our first representatives attached to the embassy of our protecting power—as we are now doing in many of the Arab countries. We can test the water at every step, but I simply cannot now forecast the precise sequence of moves that would be indicated.

If of course the Prince ridicules your letter or otherwise displays a negative stance, then we stop in our tracks. I think our losses would be minor, and counterbalanced in many quarters by the visible evidence that we had tried.

William P. Rogers

19. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson)[1]

Saigon, February 7, 1969.

3940. Following are Ambassador Bunker's comments for Under Secretary Johnson as requested ref:[2]

1. Since its establishment in July 1968, National Alliance for Social Revolution (Lien Minh) has made gradual progress establishing itself as part of political landscape of Vietnam: It has set up headquarters and staffs; has acquired and trained cadre for operations in Saigon/Cholon; and achieved some success in social welfare projects in the capital. Thus far, however, has failed to command attention of public, let alone any widespread popular participation.

2. Prior creating Lien Minh, President Thieu outlined to me in series of conversations his ideas on how to achieve much needed unification of various political and social factions of South Vietnam. Defining his goal as political one, Thieu said he hoped draw leaders from most of significant elements of Vietnamese body politic into broadly based alliance capable of working with and for people to help them prepare for political struggle ahead. Cadres needed, Thieu said, to indoctrinate population concerning efforts which GVN must make to undermine and neutralize Communists' infrastructure. Thieu thought most of existing South Vietnamese political parties and leaders had lost respect of people; Lien Minh could overcome this popular suspicion and through good works and sincere concern for welfare of people, win back their confidence. Thus he envisaged Lien Minh helping nation achieve national unity, while assisting people in achievement their proper aspirations. To accomplish this Thieu hoped utilize cadres of other parties and groups which retain their identities while working together in Lien Minh on programs of common interest. Thieu stressed Lien Minh's mission be political one, and its good works programs would not compete with existing GVN activities such as revolutionary development. There was much in Thieu's outline which paralleled or echoed our thinking here and in Washington. In view of overriding need for GVN moves towards political unity, and in absence of available alternatives, I reacted sympathetically and told Thieu we stood ready to furnish support he said required.

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[1] Source: Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 303/40 Committee Files, 303 Meetings, 2/16/68–1/20/70. Secret; Eyes Only. No time of transmission appears on the message.

[2] The reference is not identified.

3. Lien Minh has no counterpart in United States. It is not political party, but rather alliance of political forces—a front of fronts. This alliance composed of two political groups, National Salvation Front and Free Democratic Forces, plus Vietnam's largest labor federation, the CVT. National Salvation Front as Free Democratic Forces are without much political influence except what they derive respectively from their creators, Vice President Ky, and President Thieu. Third pillar, the CVT, is considerably stronger than other two—being mass organization with membership of some 300,000. Must be said, however, that while top leaders of CVT have contributed substantially to Lien Minh, mass membership of organization remains yet be involved. In addition these three groups, Lien Minh's avowed goal has been and is to attract other political groups under its umbrella in large coalition which would serve as effective counterforce to VC in political confrontation that lies ahead.

4. Thus far we have subsidized Lien Minh in amount of [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*]. In early December, following complete Embassy reassessment of Lien Minh, I discussed organization with President Thieu, giving him our analysis of organization's strengths and weaknesses and our conclusion that balance came out on positive side. I stressed, however, that Lien Minh needed greater expression of presidential interest if it to become powerful popular movement required to challenge NLF/VC apparatus in countryside. With due respect to Thieu's judgement that he avoid over identification with Lien Minh, I felt need for discreet but unmistakable Presidential moves which would stimulate all echelons of GVN into lending appropriate encouragement to Lien Minh, and which would encourage as well further support from private sector. At that time Thieu agreed with my view and explained had moved slowly supporting Lien Minh only to permit it more natural and genuine growth.

5. In relatively brief life span, Lien Minh achieved some measure of success. Its program, consisting largely of community development self-help social projects, enjoying some measure success in Saigon/Cholon where now has active projects in virtually all districts. Operations in provinces behind schedule; but Lien Minh committees thus far established in twenty provinces. Training Lien Minh's first batch of cadres for provinces turned out require more time than anticipated. As matters now stand, training of cadres from twenty provinces will begin late February at Can Tho, Vung Tau, Qui Nhon, and Danang.

6. Since writing Saigon 44649 (Exdis) on 11 December,[3] have not been able take up Lien Minh with President Thieu. Expect to do so

[3] Telegram 44649 from Saigon, December 11, 1968 (Saigon time), contained an account of Bunker's discussion that day with Thieu on the Lien Minh. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 1968)

however within two or three days. At this meeting intend to review Lien Minh's progress thus far and also offer recommendations regarding its future. Specifically plan to note on plus side some modest but apparently genuine popular participation achieved through self-help projects particularly financed by money raised in neighborhoods concerned. Among Lien Minh's weaknesses and problems I intend to cite following:

A. Lien Minh's political base weak and narrow. National Salvation Front has no mass following. Free democratic force has cadre in various provinces, but cannot be heavily weighted as political force in country, urban or rural. CVT has made available few key officials and training facilities; but CVT as such not been activated behalf of Lien Minh.

B. There is endless bickering among three major organizations comprising Lien Minh—bickering over allocation of funds, and channels of command. Both National Salvation Front and CVT constantly on the verge of withdrawing.

C. These weaknesses linked to Lien Minh command structure, and especially to role played by President Thieu's Secretary-General, Nguyen Van Huong. Huong admittedly worked hard serve his President in this venture; but his efforts to run Lien Minh from behind scenes caused considerable friction, resulting in alienation many senior Lien Minh officials.

D. No political or religious leader joined or publicly endorsed Lien Minh since formation last July.

E. Lien Minh remains virtually unknown to public at large. Plans for aggressive publicity and intensive promotional campaign exist, but not yet executed.

F. Financing irregular and some December salaries still unpaid. Too many cadre on payroll and greater emphasis on volunteers appears necessary. Attempts solicit financial contributions from Vietnamese business community must be intensified.

G. Above all, uncertainty persists many quarters both in and outside GVN regarding Thieu's support of Lien Minh.

7. Regarding above points, I consider crux of matter Thieu's attitude toward Lien Minh: Does he truly endorse organization, and is he prepared give it personal leadership and attention? Or is he merely being polite in avowing support of Lien Minh because believes this is what we wish to hear? Consider therefore our first requirement be clarification of Thieu's attitude. All subsequent issues subordinate. President must decide once and for all whether he believes Lien Minh capable of contributing substantially to political challenge posed by VC, or whether sees other more promising alternatives. If Thieu continues endorse Lien Minh as his chosen instrument for countering VC and

organizing private political sector, he must exert personal and political leadership and pressure if it to have any hope of success.

8. If Thieu gives convincing evidence of intending put some presidential muscle behind this organization, I recommend continuation our financial support. However, feel time has come for President Thieu make contribution out of GVN funds, and intend to point out our subsidy, cannot be expected to cover total needs.

9. Recently Thieu has given some positive indications of increased interest by receiving on 28 January at palace some 40 Lien Minh provincial officials attending Lien Minh seminar in Saigon. This reception well publicized including TV coverage. While not completely identifying with Lien Minh, President spent hour with representatives and in his address consistently used word "we" talking about Lien Minh goals. I understand Thieu also contributed that day two million from own sources to Lien Minh to help tide it over present financial difficulties.

10. In view of above, until I meet with Thieu and have opportunity determine his attitude and intentions, am reluctant to arrive at final judgement and recommendation concerning our own posture. If results my talk clearly affirmative and Thieu's actions demonstrate genuine presidential commitment, I favor continuation our support. If Thieu should react negatively, plan to advise him we intend discontinue our assistance. If he remains ambivalent or is positive but fails follow through, plan to advise by end of March we plan discontinue financial help to Lien Minh but to remain open minded concerning other initiatives to same ends which we together may consider more productive.[4]

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[4] On February 11 the 303 Committee discussed this message and the program supporting the Lien Minh: "Mr. Nelson provided additional details in the course of the briefing. Mr. Packard expressed the view that this was a marginal activity with uncertain benefits to be derived therefrom and wondered if the risks of disclosure were worth it. Mr. Kissinger questioned if anyone in the United States really knows what a viable political structure in South Vietnam is. Messrs. Johnson and Helms had similar reservations but pointed out that development of a political structure is a long term process and that after two years or more of seeking for some kind of political structure in South Vietnam, President Thieu's Lien Minh proposal seemed the best bet. There was general agreement with Ambassador Bunker's analysis that President Thieu must actively support the Lien Minh in order for it to succeed." The Committee agreed to review the issue again after Bunker discussed it further with Thieu and asked Bunker for an assessment of the risks of disclosure. At Kissinger's request, the Committee also discussed covert harassment of large concentrations of North Vietnamese troops in their Cambodian sanctuaries along the border with South Vietnam. Nelson outlined long existing Operation Daniel Boone, but Helms noted that such a small scale operation would have little impact. Packard suggested that B–52 bombing would be the most effective means of attacking the concentration. Kissinger asked CIA to prepare a study of what could be done covertly. Nelson also briefed the Committee on the situation in Laos where U.S.-supported paramilitary forces were about to face "traditional dry season communist offensive." (Ibid., 303/40 Committee Meetings Files, 303 Meetings, 2/16/69–1/20/70)

20. Letter From the Head of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam (Lodge) to President Nixon[1]

Paris, February 12, 1969.

Dear Mr. President:

This is in reply to Henry Kissinger's instruction to me yesterday raising certain questions in connection with your visit to the US Delegation to the Paris Talks on Sunday, March 2.

I suggest that we meet in the plexiglass "tank" here which is believed to be completely secure, and that those present be: The President, the Secretary of State, Henry, myself, Ambassador Walsh, Ambassador Green, and Mr. Habib.[2]

I suggest that Mr. Habib present the current situation here as regards the talks; that I then list the points of special interest to you, notably the decisions confronting you; and that then Ambassador Walsh and Ambassador Green be called on for comments. Undoubtedly you, the Secretary, and Henry will wish to ask questions. As you leave the "tank" I would like to present the other members of the Delegation, beginning with General Weyand, who has just arrived.

The decisions confronting you are, as I see them, as follows:

1. That I be authorized to request private talks with the other side. Private talks are the only way to move ahead. The public talks which we have had so far are used by the other side entirely for propaganda for the world press. Incidentally, I think your guidance here has been good and that we have done quite well in public. But I see no possibility that the other side will engage in substantive negotiations in public.

If the private talks are to achieve their purpose and lead to substantive negotiations, we must improve our negotiating posture.

I therefore further recommend:

2. That the President instruct General Wheeler and General Abrams to find ways drastically to reduce US military deaths in Viet-Nam as an essential measure to get the US into a strong negotiating position. We must assume that if, by about next August, US military deaths in Viet-Nam are still at the present figure of about 200 per week, public opinion may well become quite wild and erratic. At the least, there will be a strong demand to hurry. Undoubtedly the North Vietnamese think this too and are prepared to wait us out. To be in a

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[1] Source; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Vol. II, 2/3–69, Memos and Miscellaneous. Top Secret.

[2] See Document 27.

hurry when your opponent is not puts one in a very weak negotiating position.

Clearly this recommendation may, militarily speaking, entail a slowing of the pace and a lessening of the goals.

Drastic reduction in the number of US deaths is thus the first of two recommendations aimed at getting the US into a good negotiating position.

3. My other recommendation to improve our negotiating posture is that, in the negotiations, we follow a policy of great activity and be ready to make fresh proposals and contribute new ideas, initially in private meetings. Otherwise, the initiative will tend to pass to the other side here and, eventually, to the domestic critics at home. If the other side negotiates with us in good faith, so much the better. But if they turn everything down and make it clear that they have come here to win a victory rather than to negotiate, we will have strengthened our negotiating position and, by what we say in public, will have recreated justification for our presence in Viet-Nam.

Your tactics in the first three meetings in Paris have been a good beginning. We have been concrete and terse, and they have been abusive and verbose. The newspapermen think that we are ahead as far as the psychological battle is concerned. But this cannot last.

I think the North Vietnamese have twin hopes: That about next August our will will crumble because of American deaths and because the American public will see no justification for our being in Viet-Nam. They hope that the collapse of our will will bring about a corresponding collapse in the willpower of the South Vietnamese. Then we will be in really big trouble.

If you bring about a sweeping reduction in the American military deaths and provide evidence by your tactics here that we have the constructive ideas and that they are merely trying to use the talks to achieve victory, the entire situation here would change and would start moving in our favor.

4. The President will have to make a decision on withdrawal of troops, the Manila formula,[3] unilateral and mutual withdrawals, etc.

5. As we hold secret talks, we will face the problems of withdrawal of troops on the one hand and a political arrangement in Saigon on the other. The two would be linked, and there is no harm in linking them if the conditions are right.

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[3] Announced at the end of the Manila Conference on Vietnam, October 25, 1966, was the so-called "Manila Formula" whereby the United States and allied troops pledged to leave Vietnam 6 months after North Vietnamese troops withdrew, infiltration ceased, and the level of violence in South Vietnam subsided. (Text in *Public Papers: Johnson, 1966,* pp. 1262–1263.)

The President may thus eventually become involved in the question of how far our side will have to go in order to bring the Viet Cong into the political life of South Viet-Nam. You have already wisely stated that we would not try to impose a so-called "coalition government" on South Viet-Nam and that idea seems to be quite dead. There is a wide range of other ideas, some involving the eligibility of erstwhile members of the Viet Cong to vote and hold office, others involving arrangements whereby the present government would continue with some changes. Some proposals are all right; some are very dangerous.

6. The President should also authorize us to conduct negotiations with Hanoi on the exchange of prisoners of war.

This ends the list of decisions facing the President.

Other matters which could emerge during the negotiations in March and April would be:

—Discussion of an inspection and verification force. Having such a force coming entirely from Asia has interesting possibilities which I plan to discuss when you are here.

—An attractive possibility, to be used much later on in the negotiations, would be a treaty between North Viet-Nam and South Viet-Nam whereby the North Vietnamese would receive an assured amount of the rice produced in the Mekong Delta. Henry has a paper from me on this.[4] There are, of course, other interesting economic ideas.

—The apparent Soviet trend to be more openly in harmony with us in East Asia is worth following carefully.

I told Henry that I thought you should receive Vice President Ky if he is here and, if he is not here, that you should briefly receive Ambassador Lam, the head of the South Vietnamese Delegation.

I also advised that you should assume that your living quarters here will contain microphones and would not be a suitable place for your conversations. The offices which we have here are, I believe, secure and you will be well advised to have your conversations concerning Viet-Nam here.

With high and warm regards,

Respectfully yours,

Cabot L.

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[4] Not found.

21. Editorial Note

In accordance with his reorganization of the National Security Council as outlined in NSDM 2, January 2, 1969, (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 363, Subject Files, NSDMs 1–50) President Nixon directed the formulation of an interdepartmental Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam. The role of the Ad Hoc Group was formally outlined in NSSM 21, February 13. (Ibid., Box 365, NSSMs 1–42) The group was to be chaired by a representative of the Secretary of State, Ambassador William Sullivan, and included representatives of the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Director of Central Intelligence. The group's stated functions were to prepare policy and contingency papers for consideration of the National Security Council and its Review Group. In addition the Ad Hoc Group was given authority to discuss and decide interdepartmental issues as deemed appropriate, such as coordination and planning of public information on Vietnam. In recommending the idea to the President in a February 13 memorandum, Kissinger stated that the "creation of the Ad Hoc Group should have an immediate beneficial impact in pulling together our political military contingency planning for U.S. reactions to a major new Communist offensive in South Vietnam." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–136, NSSM Files, NSSM 21) All documents cited above are in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, Volume II, Organization and Management of Foreign Policy, 1969–1972.

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

Washington, February 19, 1969.

SUBJECT

Consideration of B–52 Options Against COSVN Headquarters

Background:

1. On February 9, 1969, COMUSMACV (General Abrams) recommended approval of a proposal to conduct B–52 raids against the re-

[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 12, Geopolitical File, Cambodia Bombings, 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive.

ported location of COSVN Headquarters within Cambodian territory (map, Tab A),[2] the attack to be a contingency response in the event the enemy initiates a major attack in South Vietnam in the near future (Tab B).[3]

2. On February 12, 1969, Ambassador Bunker, in a message to Secretary of State, referred to the Abrams' message and concurred in the proposal to conduct the strike (Tab C).[4]

3. On February 14, 1969, at our request, Secretary of State advised Ambassador Bunker that the matter should be dropped in view of Presidential trip to Europe (Tab D).[5] Concurrently, a back channel, eyes only, message was sent to General Abrams advising him to continue planning for the strike strictly within military channels and to dispatch a briefing team to Washington cognizant of the details of the proposed operation.[6]

4. On February 18, 1969, Mr. H.A. Kissinger, Secretary of Defense Laird, Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Wheeler, and Colonels Pursley and Haig met in the Secretary of Defense's conference room and were briefed by a two-officer team from Saigon on the conduct of the proposed Arc Light strike against the reported location of COSVN Headquarters.[7] The intelligence on the target area appeared to be very accurate and the strike plans sound. There is every reason to believe there would be no Cambodians in the target area. More complete strike data is at Tab E.[8]

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[2] The map at Tab A was not attached.

[3] Tab B was apparently MACV telegram 1782 to Chairman of the JCS, February 9. It was not found attached, but is in JCS Files, OCJCS File Operation Breakfast, as cited in Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1969–1970,* p. 221. See also *Hearings, Bombing in Cambodia,* Senate Committee on Armed Services, 93d Cong, 1st Sess., pp. 131–132.

[4] In telegram 2830 from Saigon, February 12 (Tab C), Bunker informed Rogers that he had seen a message from Abrams to Wheeler (Tab B) that showed the location of COSVN headquarters as just over the Cambodian border and which requested authority to use B–52's to attack it without hitting the nearby Cambodian villages or army outposts. Bunker added, "I realize fully the political implications of such a strike on Cambodian soil, but notwithstanding I support General Abrams in his request for authority to mount a strike. If Sihanouk complains, our rejoinder must be that COSVN is located on his territory and has been for years. He has done nothing about it although his forces in the area are fully aware of COSVN's presence. Preparations are being made for new attacks on South Vietnam and Saigon and we cannot permit these attacks to be planned and mounted from Cambodia; and finally that virtually no Cambodians live in immediate area." Tab C is attached but not printed.

[5] Tab D, telegram 023875 to Saigon, February 14, is attached but not printed.

[6] The backchannel message has not been found.

[7] No other record of this meeting has been found.

[8] Tab E has not been found.

Discussion:

Two attack options, with associated alternatives were discussed:

a. Option 1: An overtly deliberate strike.
b. Option 2: A covert strike officially categorized as a mistake.

Under both of these attack options, three alternatives were discussed:

a. An attack without provocation.
b. An attack in response to a strategic provocation—a large scale enemy attack against a major South Vietnamese population center not near the area of COSVN Headquarters.
c. An attack in response to a tactical provocation within the III Corps Tactical Zone in the vicinity of the Cambodian border.

The pros and cons of each attack option and their alternatives were discussed and a consensus arrived at with respect to each. The results of this consensus are summarized below:

Option 1, Alternative 1 (an overt deliberate strike initiated without provocation):

Pros

1. Complete honesty throughout the bureaucracy and with public, with no risk of creating credibility gap.
2. A strong indicator of the new Administration's willingness to escalate military operations to achieve a settlement.
3. Ease of planning and execution.

Cons

1. Major risks of exposing President to war expansion charges domestically and abroad.
2. Blatant overt escalation risks forcing Soviets to react strongly.
3. Major provocation against Sihanouk which could not be ignored by Cambodian Government, despite nature of target.

Option 1, Alternative 2 (an overt deliberate strike initiated in response to a strategic provocation):

Pros

1. Direct manifestation to Hanoi of new Administration's determination to retaliate sharply against violations of U.S.-NorthVietnamese understanding.

Cons

1. Risk of exposing President to war expansion charges, domestically and abroad.
2. Lacks precision and credible justification in that retaliation is focused on a third party rather than North Vietnam.

2. Strong signal to the Soviets of new Administration's determination to settle war, despite cost.
3. Direct demonstration to world at large of new Administration's determination.

3. Blatant overt escalation risks forcing Soviets to react strongly, but to a lesser degree than Alternative #1.
4. Major provocation against Sihanouk which could not be ignored by Cambodian Government, despite nature of target.

Option 1, Alternative 3 (an overt deliberate strike initiated in response to a local enemy attack):

Pros

1. Direct manifestation of new Administration's determination to retaliate against violations of U.S.-North Vietnamese understanding.
2. Strong signal to the Soviets of new Administration's determination to settle war, despite cost.
3. Could be justified as a measure taken to protect U.S. forces in immediate danger and be attributed to enemy initiative and utilization of Cambodian sanctuary.

Cons

1. Risk of exposing President to war expansion charges, domestically and abroad.
2. Lacks precision in that retaliation is focused on a third party rather than North Vietnam but to a lesser degree than Alternative 2, Option 1.
3. Blatant overt escalation risks forcing Soviets to react strongly, but to a lesser degree than Alternative 1.

Option 2, Alternative 1 (a covert strike officially categorized as a mistake and initiated without provocation):

Pros

1. Could minimize Soviet reaction by providing Soviets option of accepting U.S. explanation publicly.
2. Should lessen Cambodian and international unfavorable reaction.
3. Offers most reasonable and credible circumstances internationally for acceptance of U.S. cover story.

Cons

1. In view of exchange of messages between Ambassador Bunker and Secretary of State, creates high risk that State personnel will claim deception, thereby creating early credibility gap for new Administration.
2. High likelihood of reduced U.S. confidence in professional reliability of Strategic Air Forces.

3. Create demands for punishment of military scapegoat.
4. Major risk of interdepartmental loss of confidence with some long-term overtone and possible Congressional investigation.

Option 2, Alternative 2 (covert strike officially categorized as a mistake in retaliation for a large scale enemy attack against a major South Vietnam population center):

Pros

1. Could minimize Soviet reaction by providing Soviets option of accepting U.S. explanation publicly.
2. Would lessen Cambodian unfavorable action.
3. Improves likelihood that both Soviets and Cambodians will interpret action as indication of U.S. unwillingness to accept violations of Paris agreement or continued utilization of Cambodian sanctuary.
4. Could reduce somewhat Soviet reaction in that U.S. attack could be better justified as a retaliation against a North Vietnamese violation of U.S.-North Vietnamese understanding.

Cons

1. In view of exchange of messages between Ambassador Bunker and Secretary of State, creates some risk that State personnel will claim deception, thereby creating early credibility gap for new Administration (in view of local provocation this risk should be reduced in direct measure to the seriousness of the provocation).
2. High likelihood of reduced U.S. confidence in professional reliability of Strategic Air Forces.
3. Create demands for punishment of military scapegoat.
4. Major risk of interdepartmental loss of confidence with some long-term overtones and possible Congressional investigation.
5. Interdepartmental resentment should be ameliorated by the knowledge that attack was justified by enemy's violation of U.S.-North Vietnamese understanding.
6. Due to obvious enemy provocation, U.S. cover story would lose large measure of its credibility, both

domestically and abroad, thus intensifying claims at home that the new Administration has used a pretext to escalate and enlarge war in Vietnam.

Option 2, Alternative 3 (covert strike officially categorized as a mistake in retaliation for a tactical provocation):

Pros

1. Could minimize Soviet reaction by providing Soviets option of accepting U.S. explanation publicly.
2. Would lessen Cambodian and international unfavorable reaction.
3. Offers most reasonable and credible circumstances internationally for acceptance of U.S. cover story.
4. Improves likelihood that both Soviets and Cambodians will interpret action as indication of U.S. unwillingness to accept violations of Paris agreement or continued utilization of Cambodian sanctuary.

Cons

1. In view of exchange of messages between Ambassador Bunker and Secretary of State, creates high risk that State personnel will claim deception, thereby creating credibility gap.
2. Likelihood of reduced U.S. confidence in professional reliability of Strategic Air Forces.
3. Create demands for punishment of military scapegoat.
4. Major risk of interdepartmental loss of confidence with some long-term overterm overtones and possible Congressional investigation.

Conclusions:

1. The Bunker–Rogers exchange has deprived us of undertaking a covert "accidental" strike during the next few weeks without unacceptable risk of compromise.

2. A covert attack on COSVN Headquarters is not an acceptable course of action in retaliation for a large scale enemy attack against a major population center since it would risk charges of "unjustified escalation" against a third party not involved in the provocation. An overt attack against COSVN without provocation would be even more unacceptable.

3. A covert "accidental" strike against COSVN Headquarters has the advantage of showing the Soviets that we are serious about the war, without forcing them to take a public stance against our attack.

Recommendations:

1. In order to set the stage for a possible covert attack, and clear the books on this matter within the Bureaucracy, we should send a message to General Abrams authorizing him to bomb right up to the Cambodian border in the Fish-hook area of III Corps Tactical Zone.

2. General Abrams be authorized to continue planning for execution of the strike on a contingency basis.

3. If a suitable local action develops in the III Corps Tactical Zone in the vicinity of the Fish-hook, that with your approval at the time we use it as a pretext to strike COSVN Headquarters.

4. If no suitable local action develops, that we again consider the proposal toward the end of March.[9]

[9] Nixon initialed the approve option.

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

Washington, February 22, 1969.

SUBJECT

COSVN Matter

The President has approved my memorandum of February 19 outlining the proposed course of action associated with a contingency B–52 strike against COSVN Headquarters in Cambodia.[2] Attached for your eyes only is an excerpt copy of the recommendations in this memorandum which has been approved by the President.[3] You will note that the scenario provides for two immediate steps:

1. The immediate dispatch of a message to General Abrams authorizing him to conduct B–52 strikes right up to the Cambodian border on the South Vietnamese side in the Fish-hook area of III Corps tactical zone.

[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 12, Geopolitical File, Cambodia Bombings, 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. This memorandum was not initialed.

[2] Document 22.

[3] Attached but not printed; see Document 22.

2. Concurrently, a strictly military back channel, eyes only message for General Abrams should be dispatched advising General Abrams to continue planning for execution of the strike on a contingency basis. Specifically, General Abrams should be advised to maintain a continual appraisal of the tactical situation in the III Corps tactical zone with the view towards advising us as soon as the military situation might arise which would justify the contingency strike in accordance with paragraph 3 of the attached recommendations.

I contemplate that should a sizable enemy attack develop in the III Corps areas in the vicinity of the Fish-hook that highest authority will approve the COSVN strike based upon the recommendations of General Abrams and an overall assessment of the military situation elsewhere in Vietnam. In order to set the stage for this contingency, it is essential that you stand ready during the President's trip to Europe to execute this attack option with minimum prior notice.

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24. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam[1]

Washington, February 22, 1969, 2151Z.

28314. Todel 2196. For Ambassador and Gen Abrams. Ref: Saigon 3402.[2]

1. We have considered reftel carefully here and appreciate its timely analysis and recommendations. Contingency plans have been under urgent discussion here, and have laid out a wide variety of possible actions. These have taken account of the various comments from

[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 VIET S. Secret; Immediate; Nodis. Drafted by Bundy, cleared by Moor, and approved for transmission by Richardson. Repeated to Paris for Vietnam Mission and CINCPAC for POLAD.

[2] In telegram 3402, February 22, Bunker and Abrams informed the Department of State that MACV had concluded at 1025Z on February 21 and the CIA reached the same conclusion that evening that "widespread Communist attacks are expected to take place on February 22 or 23." Bunker and Abrams stated that "the main purpose of these attacks is to try to produce another shock in the US as took place last year at Tet." The enemy's motivation, according to Bunker and Abrams, was "to show how tough, determined and capable they are," to inflict heavy US casualties, and to alienate American support for the war. A second objective was to disrupt South Vietnam's pacification program, and to time the offensive during President Nixon's trip in the hopes that he would be too preoccupied to order retaliation. Bunker and Abrams asked for "decisions to be readied to retaliate." (Ibid.)

both Paris and Saigon on the DRV and GVN interpretations of the pre-October communications. However, because of the great difficulty in identifying any possible situation with precision, we cannot at this time specify exactly what we might do if there is offensive action.

2. This planning includes the question of any statement or statements to the American public. Insofar as there is a need to alert the public to the current indications, we believe this has been met by wise backgrounding which is resulting in stories here that stop short of crying wolf but make clear we are very much on the alert. In the event of attack, on whatever scale, we would need to consult urgently on how to characterize it. However, our experience last year in the Tet offensive leaves us in considerable doubt that it would be wise at the outset to proclaim that what was taking place was or was sure to be a Communist defeat. We are inclined to think statements to this effect, before the real outcome was apparent, did us little good last year, and that it is on the whole preferable to await events speaking for themselves.

3. This leaves the question of an urgent message to the Soviet Union. By telecon, we have instructed Paris to see Zorin, or if he is not available, Oberemko, as soon as possible to convey the following:

a. We are concerned on the basis of cumulative indications that a substantial step-up in offensive action may be under way on orders from Hanoi;

b. If this occurs it could affect the understanding which made possible our bombing halt. We believe the North Vietnamese clearly understand that indiscriminate attacks on major population centers such as Saigon, Danang, and Hue, would create a situation which could affect the continuation of serious negotiations and the maintenance of the bombing cessation. Thus, if there were to be such attacks, we could only conclude that Hanoi was acting deliberately and had decided to ignore the consequences.[3]

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[3] On February 23 the Director of Central Intelligence's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, George A. Carver, Jr., sent Rogers a memorandum stating that "at approximately 0100 hours on Sunday, February 23 (Vietnam local time), the Communist initiated an obviously coordinated series of over 160 attacks against province capitals, district towns, allied military bases and lines of communication throughout South Vietnam." Carver estimated that "the Communist effort will almost certainly continue over the next 48 to 72 hours," but warned that "the full range of Communist objectives cannot be discerned until we see the full scope of their intended offensive." (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 63, Vietnam Subject Files, 2–C, General Military Activity) In telegram MAC 2372 to Wheeler and McCain, February 23, Abrams wrote: "I consider it imperative that we launch convincing attacks on the enemy in NVN." He added, "a failure to reply positively merely invites further provocation as enemy probes to ascertain what the traffic will bear." Abrams specifically requested permission to launch a 96-hour air and naval bombardment campaign between the DMZ and 19th parallel and Arc Light strikes against the DMZ and 17 degrees, 10 minutes, north latitude. (Ibid.)

c. We are communicating this to Ambassador Zorin because he and his government were helpful in bringing about the negotiations and bombing halt understanding in the first place.

We have chosen deliver this message in Paris in order to relate any attacks, in the most direct possible way, to the Paris talks. In addition, however, Secretary spoke to Dobrynin at about noon today, pointing out potentially serious consequences of indiscriminate attacks on the cities. Dobrynin said he would inform his government immediately.

Rogers

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25. Message From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon[1]

Washington, February 25, 1969.

I have been informed by Henry Kissinger and his staff that you have approved the course of action associated with enemy positions in the vicinity of the Fish-hook in the III Corps Tactical Zone.[2] Planning for B–52 strikes is proceeding. I have discussed the matter in detail with General Wheeler, and, following those discussions, I have some observations to make.

Military Execution. There is no doubt in my mind, nor in General Wheeler's mind, that the proposed strikes can be executed effectively. In accordance with the instructions provided to me by Henry Kissinger, I have asked General Wheeler to put the operational machinery in motion that is necessary if the mission is to be carried out on the currently outlined schedule. This operational planning carries minimal security risks. The order can be countermanded at any time up to 1200 GMT, Thursday, 27 February.

Political Considerations. There are some facets of the matter which continue to bother me, however. This is that a number of people in other departments and agencies are aware of the possibility of this mission, simply by virtue of Ambassador Bunker's February 12 message

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 12, Geopolitical File, Cambodia Bombings, 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive. Laird's handwritten signature appears as the "releaser" and apparently he was also the "drafter." This message was apparently sent to Nixon who was in London.

[2] Reference is to Nixon's decision on February 23 (en route from Washington to Brussels) to bomb Cambodian sanctuaries; see Kissinger, *White House Years,* p. 243.

(Saigon 2830).[3] It is reasonable to assume some of the people who saw the Bunker message would not look with favor upon this mission. It is also reasonable to believe they would then create, or attempt to create, difficulty for you and for all of us through contacts in the Congress and in the press who would likewise look with disfavor on this proposed action. By virtue of the presumed widespread knowledge of this possible mission, it would be difficult to claim, and make credible, an operational error. Equally difficult, in view of the moderate scale thus far and the currently diminishing level of enemy activity, would be the forthright approach of admitting an attack against an alleged enemy headquarters in a neutral nation.

Alternative. As you can see, I have reservations about conducting the mission under current circumstances. General Wheeler shares my concern. I believe it would be better to hold this attack for a period in which the scope, intensity, and duration of enemy-initiated activity are at more pronounced levels.[4] If the enemy were to commit his main force units in major ground attacks in III Corps, that might present the backdrop behind which we could execute the mission and not be confronted with such marked risks vis-à-vis Congress and the press. While I submit this alternative for your consideration, I want to assure you we are proceeding as instructed previously and will continue to do so through execution unless informed otherwise.

All best wishes.

Melvin R. Laird

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[3] See footnote 4, Document 22.

[4] Nixon cancelled the order and postponed the operation; see Kissinger, *White House Years,* p. 244.

26. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom[1]

Washington, February 25, 1969, 0324Z.

28475/Tosec 32. For Secretary from Acting Secretary. Deliver earliest in morning after normal waking hour.

Ref: A. Saigon 3429;[2] B. Saigon 3508.[3]

Subject: Actions in Response to Current Enemy Offensive.

1. We appreciate factors which led to Saigon's recommendation contained ref A that we take military action in NVN in response to the current coordinated attacks throughout South Viet-Nam. There are, however, obvious considerations which lead us to defer consideration any such response for the time being. A US military response would, in our view, have to be based on a degree of seriousness of the enemy attacks on population centers such as to require the conclusion that the understandings which preceded the October 31 bombing halt should be invoked. Any such military response would have to be defended on this basis before public opinion both here and abroad. Events thus far have not produced unequivocal evidence we would need.[4]

2. Since military action seems inadvisable at the present moment, it is all the more important that we make some diplomatic response

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 VIET S. Secret; Immediate; Nodis. Repeated Immediate to Paris for Lodge. Drafted by John R. Burke (EA/VN) February 24, cleared by Archibald Calhoun (EA) and Bundy, and approved by Richardson. Rogers and Nixon were in London for meetings with British Prime Minister Wilson.

[2] In telegram 3429 from Saigon, February 23, Bunker informed Rogers that, "I have just concurred in Gen. Abrams' request for authority to mount a 96-hour retaliatory air and naval strike against the north between the DMZ and the 19th parallel." Bunker suggested that, "the Communists are probing to see whether we retaliate or not. If we fail to do so promptly, they will be emboldened to continue these attacks, some of which are clear violations of the understanding with Hanoi." Bunker then suggested that, "I think it highly important to get the message to Hanoi that while we are ready to reach reasonable agreements in Paris, there should be no doubt that we will react firmly and speedily to this kind of attack." (Ibid.)

[3] In telegram 3508 from Saigon, February 24, Bunker responded to a request from Acting Secretary Richardson for additional information on the attacks so that Rogers and Nixon, en route to Brussels on Air Force One, could make a decision about retaliation. (Ibid.) The request from Richardson was transmitted in telegram 28343 to Saigon, February 23. (Ibid.)

[4] In telegram 2732 from Paris/Delto 1382, February 25, Lodge agreed with the conclusions in paragraph 1. As for the diplomatic protest, Lodge preferred not to make it. He considered that the U.S. position had already been made clear to the DRV, it was more important to remain flexible, and Lau would reject the protest anyway on the grounds that the NLF was the proper interlocutor. (Ibid., POL 27–14 VIET)

beyond what we have already done with the Soviets. We did, after all, protest the Hue attack to the DRV delegation on February 5. Present attacks are so much more important and destructive, failure on our part to protest privately to Lau in Paris might well suggest to Hanoi that our threshold of pain is considerably higher than even they estimated. I recommend therefore that we authorize Walsh to seek an early appointment with Lau (certainly before Thursday),[5] in order to clearly warn DRV that present shellings are, in our view, indiscriminate and that their continuation would call into question DRV's sincere desire to seek peace through the Paris talks. We should of course inform GVN both in Saigon and Paris that we are taking this action. We should also keep open whether we should publicize this démarche prior to Thursday meeting in Paris.

3. We should also follow up démarche to Lau with an opening statement at Thursday's plenary session protesting these new attacks, laying emphasis on the heavy civilian casualties they have already caused. (We should by that time have a fairly accurate record of the number of dead and wounded civilians these attacks have caused as well as a rough over-all figure of the damage to civilian property.)

4. Our failure to do at least this much at this stage could accelerate incipient doubts within GVN and Vietnamese public regarding the strength of our commitment. One of the goals of the present series of attacks seems to be to drive an entering wedge between ourselves and the Vietnamese. Hanoi may be bent on sustaining these attacks at a level which is low enough to inhibit the execution of a military retaliation or stronger diplomatic response but high enough to cause the Vietnamese serious suffering and thus to generate US/GVN misunderstandings.

5. If you agree with foregoing action, we will instruct Paris and Saigon accordingly. It seems to me that there is a significant timing factor involved, and that we should make every effort to act Wednesday. If we hold back on raising this issue until Thursday's meeting, we run a major risk that the other side will immediately take the position that the NLF is the true party in interest—and the setting at the Majestic will make it very difficult for us to get away from a degree of appearance that we accept this. If, however, the majestic meeting takes place against the backdrop of our having seen the DRV separately—and perhaps letting this be known publicly—then we stand a much better chance of maintaining our position of DRV responsibility and of avoiding any step that could cause concern in the GVN.[6]

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[5] February 27.

[6] Printed from an unsigned copy.

27. Notes by President Nixon of a Meeting[1]

Paris, March 2, 1969.

1. Same tough talk in return.

Habib:

1. 6 meetings
2. N.V.Nam addresses remarks to US
3. Major themes:

   a. Political & military matters must be settled together
   b. 5 points [of NLF?]

1.) U.S. get out unconditional
2.) G.V.N. must go
3.) Support Geneva Accords

Vicious language—Make clear—Prevent talk NL Front—"other side handful of traitors."

1. De-escalation theme.

G.V.N.

1. Restrained language
2. "You denigrate the image of Vnamese"
3. N.V. Nam—image = better & better than N.L.F.—completely under the thumb of N.V.N.—

Delegation (except for Ky under thumb of Saigon) GVN-maturity on bombing halt.

Very reasonable—

Some heavy going ahead:

Vance (Lao)

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal File, Box 57, Security Classified (3), Speech File, February–March 1969, RN Notes–European Trip. No classification marking. These are handwritten notes by Nixon apparently on the meeting with the U.S. Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. At 8:38 a.m. on March 2 the President met privately with Lodge for 15 minutes at the American Embassy in Paris. They were then joined by Rogers, Kissinger, Walsh, Green, and Habib. The meeting with the U.S. Delegation was followed by a 15-minute private meeting with Ky and then a longer meeting with Ky and the Chief Republic of Vietnam negotiator, Pham Dang Lam, as well as most of the U.S. officials from the earlier meeting. The four sessions lasted until 12:39 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files, Daily Diary) An account of the meeting with Ky is in Document 28. According to Marshall Green, the initial meeting between Nixon and the U.S. Delegation lasted for 2½ hours and was held in the Embassy's special security room. (Marshall Green, *Indonesia: Crisis and Transformation, 1965–1968* (Compass Press: Washington, 1990), p. 144)

What are our objectives?
U.S. must deal with N.L.F.
Take 5 points of N.L.F. & negotiate changes

Russ[ians] tell us:

1. Ed Walsh-Oberemko—as bombing
2. Zorin called on Lodge—Wednesday

Also asks what is RN's position[?] He says—"We have been of help in the past—we are in constant touch with other side."

Believe Preamble Phase is open [over?]

Walsh:

1. We have no illusion we can get them to [negotiate?]
2. Must convince them & American people we have an earnest desire to end the war—

a. Must not give impression we go through a sham—Filibuster during private talks—

Private Talks:

1. Gives an added momentum—
2. May take weeks to get talks with N.L.F.—

Reaching Conclusion in June & July. Delayed?

Don't need refined instruction—

1. because so many balls in the air—we can go one direction—rather than the other—

Must keep moving—(not static)

Talks:

Can improve [lines?] of [communication?].
Can better insights.

1. Harriman at ready to jump on us.
2. The other side is skilled at such attack.

1. V.C. are hurting (because B–52's hurting [them])
2. N.L.F. said [raid?] cities
3. Deepen concern over deAmericanization

a. Builds up ARVN
b. Gives continuity to them—

People waiting for RN's visit—Build a record of conviction

[?]

1. Difference in opinion in Hanoi on whether
2. Be business like & discuss peace
3. Question of Style—don't look too eager

They think we may be delaying because of military pressure—Vitriol get worse as you get closer to settlement,—

Russ useful on guarantees

If they [North Vietnam] attack cities—

1. This puts us on the spot—

a. Do we start bombing North—
b. Cause problem with G.V.N. if we *don't*—& with American public if we *do*

Habib—

3 deadlines—Dem convention—election—Inauguration
They work against us—They know when we have one. Before election Russ trying to help Humphrey. Ky tried to delay [?] this. But on Jan. 20 helped because Russ wanted to get in before RN got in

Lodge Instructions:

1. Must give us some authority

a. Bill [Rogers?]—"Don't need blueprint completely worked out."
b. RN keep S V Nam built up—

1. Redefine military policy for best background for our statement

1.) Will. March straight [strength?]
2.) If casualties fall—it would impress them
3.) They would prefer a helter skelter withdrawal—

Most effective use of military for other side is to convince the "we" can hold out—

(Lincoln appointed Grant and Sherman (in early 40's))
We need a man of this war—(Abrams and Westmoreland = WWII)

Walsh: Reduction of force—essential for U.S.

Westmoreland failed to understand—Divisional

French=1. Peace cabinet—to overthrow gov't No—add to it—maybe

If we deal alone with V.C. we lose war immediately.

28. Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State[1]

Paris, March 2, 1969, 1550Z.

3027/Delto 1412. Following is an uncleared memorandum of conversation subject to review by the President and the Secretary. When cleared, we suggest it be repeated to AmEmbassy Saigon.

1. Meeting in Lodge's office with the following present: The President, Vice President Ky, Ambassador Lam, the Secretary of State, Ambassador Lodge, Ambassador Walsh and Dr. Kissinger.

2. The conversation was cordial. The President drew out Vice President Ky as to the relationships between the Government of Viet-Nam and the United States in connection with the Viet-Nam negotiations, and also requested his evaluation as to the training and supplying of the South Vietnamese armed forces by the US, South Vietnamese morale, North Vietnamese morale, and the impact of the recent Tet offensive as it compared with the 1968 Tet offensive.

3. Vice President Ky responded that the GVN had confidence in the US approach to the Vietnamese negotiations. He also thought there was a greater comprehension by each government of the aims and plans of the other.

4. He also felt that the people of South Viet-Nam, as a result of the improved relationships, had a greater confidence not only in the United States but in the Government of Viet-Nam as well. The calm response to the Tet offensive increased this confidence.

5. With respect to the training and equipping of the ARVN so that it would ultimately take over full responsibility for the protection of South Viet-Nam, he felt that the United States had been slow in providing this training and equipment.

For example, it was only last year that the ARVN was given M–16 rifles. He felt there was still a great deal to be accomplished in this regard. As an illustration, he said that the GVN had authorized an increase in its air force from 11,000 to 40,000, but that it would be many months and even years before it could raise the money and train the necessary personnel.

6. As to North Vietnamese morale, he felt that although Ho Chi Minh claimed that they would be able to fight for 20 years, that he felt

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, EAP/ACA Files: Lot 70 D 47. Secret; Immediate; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. A stamped notation reads: "Mr. Bundy has seen"; a handwritten note reads: "3/4 W[illiam]PB[undy] had repeated to Saigon with revision in septel."

they really were being hurt badly and that they could not absorb this degree of punishment indefinitely. He said that they were not only out-matched as to fire power, but that the GVN could now out-match them as regards mobility.

7. In comparing the Tet offensive of 1969 to that of 1968, he felt that both sides were better prepared this year. Because of the enemy's better preparation, his casualties were considerably less than in 1968, but that, on the other hand, due to the better preparation of the GVN and its allies, the actual ground attacks on the cities did not occur. He felt that in the case of both Tet offensives, it was the GVN and allies who scored clear military victories, but that the enemy did score a psychological victory in 1968 because it so surprised the GVN and the friendly forces, and he indicated it may have even scored another psychological victory this year outside of South Viet-Nam.

8. After [garble] minutes, Kissinger made the move to go so that the President and Ky could talk alone, with Lodge taking the notes. The conversation was as follows:

9. The President said that the negotiations would be long and hard, and that there must be mutual trust between the Americans and the South Vietnamese. He asked Ky to tell Thieu that Thieu could trust the President. The Vietnamese should realize that American public opinion is very difficult and that many did not understand the war. The President said, however, that he was one who knew why we had gone to war in Viet-Nam, that he admired the great sacrifices which had been made and that he understood why there could not be a so-called "coalition."

10. "The Ambassador and I think alike," the President said. He added that he hoped Ky could convince his colleagues that we can be trusted. "We are not," he said, "going to double-cross you."

11. The President then said he wished to bring up another subject: He said he thought it would be "very clever" if Ky could make an offer to talk to the Viet Cong. "We Americans," he said, "must never talk with them except in the presence of the South Vietnamese. But if you make the offer and they say no, we score a point." And, he added, "if they were to say yes," Ky would know how to talk and what to say. The President asked Lodge for his opinion and Lodge said this would be the most positive single step which our side can take at this time. The President said it would be really a "smart move."

12. In reply, Ky said, "I have twice said that I am ready. I have sent private people as recently as during last week, but in view of the President's expression of interest, I will try again."

13. The President said there must be no doubt that Ky had made the move. Ky estimated that the Viet Cong would refuse to talk to the GVN.

14. In reply to a query from the President, Lodge and Ky explained that the Viet Cong constantly talk to the French, believing that they can reach the Americans by talking to the French and then have the French talk to the Americans. This was one reason. Undoubtedly there were others. As long as they think such things, they will not feel like talking with the South Vietnamese. Finally, the President urged Vice President Ky to make his move "in a clear-cut way."

15. The President then asked Ky for his views on military strategy. Ky said that our side must continue our military pressure, and that the Americans can reduce the number of troops without there being a big change. He said we could pull out some United States troops and replace them by Vietnamese and all would be the same. It was, he thought, important to continue the present military pressure.

16. The President asked why Ky thought about the argument[2] that we must convince them that we want to de-escalate. Ky thought this was not necessary.

17. When the time came to go, the President spoke of his "deep affection" for the Vietnamese people. He added, "we honestly are your friends." He added that we must bring this war to an end, and that he didn't want the United States, as regards Viet-Nam, to go the way of the French.

18. Ky stressed the need for a "lasting settlement"—not a cease-fire in which "the killing will continue." "The enemy," he said, "are convinced they cannot win. They are ready to negotiate, but a delay of five to six to eight months is possible."

19. While the President met Vice President Ky alone (see above), Ambassador Lam asked Secretary Rogers whether General de Gaulle has passed on any private message for the US from the other side. The Secretary said that he knew of no such message but that if one came to us this way, we would certainly inform the GVN. The Secretary added that the French believed that the US and the NLF should have bilateral meetings. The Secretary assured Ambassador Lam that the USG would never meet with the NLF without the GVN being present. Ambassador Lam said that the Secretary's responses satisfied and reassured him.

Lodge

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[2] At this point in the sentence, the following handwritten addition was added: "made by some that negotiations would move along faster if we". The revised sentence as sent to Saigon reads: "The President asked what Ky thought about the argument made by some that negotiations would move along faster if we convince them that we want to de-escalate."

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

Washington, March 6, 1969.

INTELLIGENCE ITEMS

—*Vietnamese Developments Yesterday:* Ambassador Bunker has provided a very interesting analysis of Hanoi's current and probable future military and political strategy.

Bunker believes the Communists have concluded that time is now working against them on the military side in South Vietnam. They are thus counting almost exclusively on American disenchantment with the war and with the U.S. casualty rates to produce a strong domestic anti-war reaction sometime before the end of 1970.

The enemy anticipates, in Bunker's view, that we will so tire of the war by that time that we will bring increasing pressure on the Thieu government to make more and more concessions to the Communists so that the U.S. can disengage. This pressure in turn will weaken the GVN and open the way to its dissolution and the subsequent formation of a "peace cabinet" or coalition.

Bunker believes we will see a lot more interest by the Communists in Paris in starting substantive negotiations on both military and political issues. This, he thinks, is not mainly an indication of softness in their position, but of a desire to get a process started which they believe will greatly increase friction between the U.S. and South Vietnam.

Bunker looks for the Communists to try and maintain an intensified level of fighting over a long period in South Vietnam to back up their negotiating stance. He expects this to be sprinkled with occasional "dramatic military demonstrations." All of it will be designed to impress the U.S. and South Vietnamese public with continuing Communist strength while avoiding crippling casualties for enemy forces.

Bunker recommends that we redouble our efforts to show our solidarity with the GVN and that we push to get GVN–NLF contacts going. At the same time we should be prepared to move ahead with discussions on both military and political issues at the talks in order to increase the chances and decrease the time needed to arrange a settlement which the Communists will accept.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 3, President's Daily Briefs. Top Secret; Sensitive.

All in all, I find Ambassador Bunker's views on enemy strategy well in accord with my own. (Tab A)[2]

[Omitted here are Kissinger's response that an estimated 11 rounds of 122 mm rocket hit Saigon the previous evening, evidence that the Vietnamese Communists planned new attacks during Laird's visit to South Vietnam to demonstrate their "authority," and additional information unrelated to Vietnam.]

[2] Tab A was telegram 4166 from Saigon, March 5. (Ibid., RG 59, EAP/ACA Files: Lot 70 D 47, EA–WPB)

30. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam[1]

Washington, March 7, 1969.

35449/Todel 2289. For Bunker and Lodge from the Secretary.

1. We have reviewed with great care the thoughtful and well argued recommendations in Saigon 4320 and Paris 3229.[2] We agree, of course, that the latest rocketings make the problem significantly more acute.

2. At the same time, we have concluded that we should not authorize a retaliatory strike against the North at this time.[3] We recognize the arguments for such action in terms of the danger of adverse South Vietnamese reactions if we do not strike back at some point, and

[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, East Asia Bureau, Office of Asian Communist Affairs Files: Lot 70 D 47. Secret; Immediate; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. Also sent to Paris. Drafted by Bundy on March 6, cleared by Kissinger and Walsh, and approved by Rogers.

[2] Both dated March 6. (Ibid., EAP/ACA Files: Lot 70 D 28, March 1–6, 1969)

[3] In MACV telegram 2836 from Abrams to Wheeler, March 6, Abrams recommended a "1–2 punch" against North Vietnam to signal U.S. resolve to stand on the understandings of the bombing halt, but to strike a strategic blow against the North. The first phase of the retaliation included resumption of air and naval gunfire up to the 19th parallel against the ports, key passes, and storage areas, and other strategic areas. The second phase consisted of air and artillery attacks against Cambodian and Lao sanctuaries followed by pursuit of the enemy forces in Cambodia and Laos. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 67, Vietnam Subject Files, Retaliation for Attacks on Saigon) In a memorandum to Kissinger, March 6, Sneider of the Operations Staff of the NSC argued against retaliation on the grounds that it would have little effect on North Vietnam.

in terms of bringing home to the North that the understandings must be observed and that there are limits to what we will tolerate. Plainly, we shall need to have the most careful and continuing readings of the South Vietnamese temperature.

3. At the same time, the negative factors seem to us for the time being to have greater weight. Specifically:

a. US public reactions are simply not at the point where we could strike back without a significant agitating effect that might tend to shorten the period of full public support of the whole war effort. At least to this point—and even in the face of the latest action—we may be gaining somewhat by our moderation, in these terms, and we believe that an immediate response would throw large and significant segments of public and congressional opinion into a critical and impatient posture that would make our whole play of the hand, both militarily and in Paris, more difficult. On the other hand, if we appear to be going "the last mile," we would hope to gain additional support in US public opinion for whatever action is eventually deemed to be required.

b. We believe we must accept that any retaliatory action, at any time, stands only a fair chance of operating to deter at least further rockets, on the scale of these last three occurrences, against Saigon or the other key cities. We of course agree that any retaliation should be against a military target, and we accept that its actual military importance is secondary to the demonstrative effect. What we must weigh carefully is the possibility that the other side would simply continue some form of rocketing—even though its capabilities may not extend to any substantial increase in number or scale—and that we would move into the position of a sterile set of exchanges which to many here would appear to be significant escalation and in any event to be unproductive.

c. Although we would not have in mind that we or the GVN should pull out of the Paris talks as we conducted retaliatory action, we must weigh the possibility that the other side might suspend the talks and appear to many elements here and abroad to have some justification for doing so.

4. Nonetheless, we fully recognize the force of both Saigon's and Paris' arguments that if action of this type continues we shall have to weigh a military response at some point, and the weight of the factors could then have shifted. Moreover, we are entirely persuaded by the argument that we should now make a direct and private approach to the DRV in Paris—and indeed should supplement this by my having another firm discussion with Dobrynin. We believe that a Lodge/Xuan Thuy meeting should be sought by Paris at once, aiming at tomorrow night Paris time. This would give us the opportunity for Bunker to see

Thieu on March 7 Saigon time and to inform him that we are taking these two steps—getting such advice as he may wish to add to what we might say. I leave it to Bunker how far he should go in explaining to Thieu, at the same time, our present views on the wisdom of actually conducting a retaliatory strike. It does seem to me clear that we should acknowledge to him that the making of a direct private protest to the DRV does carry us one notch further toward a military reply if there is another action—even though of course the President's very firm remarks of Tuesday[4] night have already laid out our position clearly, and to a large extent done this in a public sense.

5. We believe that Lodge's conversation with Xuan Thuy should be verbal, since any written message of the type contained in paragraph 3 of Paris 3229 both commits us categorically, and will be most likely to be made public. As to the elements of our oral presentation, we believe that it should include the following:

a. Since this is Lodge's first personal meeting, it should start with a careful review of the exact exchanges that preceded the stopping of the bombing. Material for this purpose is well summarized in State 16522,[5] and Paris has more detailed files on which it can draw as desired to prepare a talking paper.

b. Lodge must be totally firm in insisting on North Vietnamese responsibility, and in rejecting any argument that this is the business of the NLF or that we should discuss it with the NLF.

c. Lodge should review public statements we have made, leading up to the key point that these actions are in clear violation of our stated understanding, and that any continuation of them must call forth appropriate response of which the President has spoken. As we have repeatedly said, such consequences will be entirely the responsibility of the DRV.

d. Lodge should of course be prepared to meet the argument that these actions are a justified response to our own military pressures in recent months, and perhaps—it would be argued—particularly since January 20. Here the line should be to state frankly that what we cannot accept, and made clear in October that we would not accept, are violations of the DMZ and indiscriminate attacks against the major cities. And there can be no question that the attacks now at issue have

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[4] Reference is to comments made by the President on March 4 at the White House where he discussed, among other subjects, the overall situation regarding the Vietnam war, the recent Communist offensive in Vietnam, probable U.S. responses to the offensive, possible new approaches to the Vietnam conflict, and the withdrawal of American troops. (*Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pp. 179–194)

[5] Telegram 16522 to Paris, January 31, summarized what the United States had previously told North Vietnam about the consequences of major attacks on South Vietnamese cities. (National Archives, RG 59, A/IM Files: Lot 93 D 82, Paris Meetings, Outgoing, Jan. 1969)

been precisely the kind of attacks which we discussed with the DRV at great length in the period from July through October.

e. In addition, Lodge might say frankly that Xuan Thuy must be aware that a continuation of the shelling will make it very difficult to consider private talks.

f. As suggested in paragraph 5 of Paris 3268,[6] the reaction of American public opinion should certainly be brought to bear as fully as possible in support of the key element in the message.

g. Finally, Lodge should make clear that we do not intend to make the fact of the meeting public, nor do we intend to characterize the message that we have given.

6. Based on these guidelines, we would appreciate a full script from Paris as soon as possible tomorrow, for final review here. If any of the above presents difficulty, please let us know frankly and fully.

7. For purposes of Bunker's talk with Thieu, he may indicate that we are well aware of the possibility Thieu has raised in paragraph 2.B. of Saigon 4328[7]—that the other side may be seeking to exact a new quid pro quo from our side. You may assure him that we have no intention of moving in this direction. You may make clear that we fully appreciate the statesmanship with which Thieu has been approaching this whole issue. You should continue to present the matter in such a way as to discourage any official GVN request that would force our hand. Bunker should of course share this cable fully with Secretary Laird, and we would welcome additional comments.[8]

Rogers

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[6] In paragraph 5 of telegram 3268 from Paris, March 6, Lodge suggested that a private meeting with Xuan Thuy "might also give me the chance to explain that American public opinion, though anxious for peace, is outraged by these indiscriminate shellings of population centers in defiance of the understanding which brought about the total cessation of bombing of the North." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 187, Paris Cables, Vol. III, Paris Meetings/Nodis and Nodis/Plus, April–May 1969)

[7] Not found.

[8] In a telephone conversation on March 8 at 10:10 a.m., Kissinger told Haldeman that "Packard went thru the roof" when he learned that morning that retaliation had been cancelled. Kissinger told Haldeman that "Packard feels very strongly that we are making Laird the fall guy; that we are looking terribly weak; that it is not such a big thing to do; that after the next attack it will be too little." Although "the Pres has heard all the arguments," Kissinger admitted that the President should know how Packard felt. He asked Haldeman to tell Nixon. Haldeman asked Kissinger, "Does the President know how the sides are drawn? In other words, the only opposition is Rogers—the rest of you are in agreement to go ahead?" Kissinger stated: "I can see some merit in Rogers' argument," but what was really important was "would the war be wound up in 15 months?" Kissinger concluded by stating that "My feeling is we ought to consider where we will be a year from now, rather than next week. In terms of immediate reaction, there is no question that Rogers is right, but we can let it slip for a week." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 359, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

31. Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State[1]

Paris, March 8, 1969, 1920Z.

3381/Delto 1449. *Saigon:* Deliver at opening of business.

Subject: Summary Report—Meeting with Xuan Thuy, March 8.[2]

1. Accompanied by Ambassador Walsh, I met for two hours afternoon March 8 with Xuan Thuy at DRV house in Choisy. With Thuy were Lau, Vy and three staffers. Habib, Negroponte and Engel were also present.

2. I opened by reading the prepared statement as revised in accordance with Department's instructions.[3] Thuy began his response with a brief description of the origins of the war in Vietnam in accordance with usual DRV line, going back to the 1954 Accords, US support of Diem, expansion of US military presence in South Vietnam, and US responsibility for aggression.

3. He said that following total cessation of bombing of North Vietnam, US moved to try to settle the Vietnam problem from a position of strength. It wanted to de-Americanize the war, it strengthened the South Vietnamese Army, increased the number of US and Allied troops, it expanded its sweeps in Vietnam, and used B–52's to bomb indiscriminately in South Vietnam.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 187, Paris Cables, Vol. III. Secret; Flash; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. Repeated to Saigon.

[2] In a March 8 memorandum to Kissinger, Haig summarized the Lodge–Thuy meeting and relayed the following observation by Lodge: "1. The meeting had been extremely useful in that the NVN did accept the U.S. protest. 2. At the end, Lodge spoke informally to Thuy using language, which reflected his concern that the war was continuing, and that it applied punishment on the Vietnamese people. Lodge stated Thuy nodded in full agreement. 3. Lodge believes that we should wait and see whether we are to get a reply to our complaint, whether it be with words or rockets over the weekend, or if there will be no reaction." (Ibid., Box 182, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous, Vol. II, 2/3–69)

[3] In telegram 3300 from Paris, March 7, Lodge outlined his plan to review with Xuan Thuy previous discussions from June of 1968 to the present between North Vietnamese and U.S. representatives in Paris on requirements for serious and productive negotiations for a peaceful settlement and the maintenance of the cessation of the bombing. In telegram 036359 to Paris, March 8, the Department and White House concurred with Lodge's proposed presentation with revisions. (Both ibid., President's Trip Files, Box 489, Dobrynin/HAK 1969 [Part 2]) An undated memorandum entitled, "Background on Lodge/Thuy Meeting of March 8" characterized the revisions as "centered on State's desire to commit us *now* to private talks and to make other major changes in our negotiating strategy." According to the memorandum, the White House wished "to enter into private talks by stating that private talks cannot take place if the shellings continue. Other changes were suggested both by the White House and State to make clear we were not prepared for early open-ended private talks, particularly on political issues and mutual de-escalation." (Ibid.)

4. He then said the US also continued to infringe on the sovereignty and security of the DRV after the cessation of bombing. He mentioned reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam, bombing in North Vietnam, and shelling by warships.

5. He referred to US statements about tacit understandings on the cessation of bombing and repeated, in standard terms, DRV position that cessation of bombing was unconditional, citing official statements by Hanoi spokesmen in November and his own statements since then. He claimed that US had violated its own pledges on the cessation of bombing by its actions in the North.

6. Thuy then, in general terms, referred to statements that he had made at the plenary sessions. He spoke in derogatory terms of what he called the "warlike Saigon administration" which he said stood in the way of a peaceful settlement. He said that the way to settle the Vietnamese problem had been laid out in the DRV's four points[4] and the NLF's five points.[5] He wished today to emphasize three points: a) the US must withdraw unconditionally from South Vietnam; b) the US should cease sustaining the present administration of Saigon, because no settlement will be possible as long as that administration was in power; c) if the US is really interested in settling the Vietnam problem, it would have to speak seriously with the NLF, without which there could not be a solution in Vietnam.

7. Thuy summed up by referring again to his general statements in the plenary sessions and said that he wanted to repeat that the DRV had goodwill and serious intent. They really want to come to a peaceful settlement, but peace must be associated with Vietnamese independence and freedom. He closed with a usual peroration about the importance of goodwill and serious intent on both sides.

8. In rebuttal I said that I did not accept his views of the past history and origins of the war. Our views on the question of aggression and on the question of the legality of the Government of Vietnam were well known. They are a matter of record, and I had not come today for

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[4] On April 8, 1965, Pham Van Dong, Premier of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, addressed the United National Assembly in Hanoi and stated the readiness of the North Vietnamese to negotiate a Vietnam settlement based on the recognition of four points. For these points, see *Foreign Relations,* 1964–1968, vol. II, Document 245; or *American Foreign Policy, Current Documents, 1965,* pp. 852–853.

[5] On March 22 the Chairman of the Central Committee of the NLF (Nguyen Huu Tho) issued at a news conference a 5-point statement dedicating the NLF to driving the United States out of Vietnam as a preliminary to the liberation of the South and reunification of the country. (Ibid., p. 852) The NLF called for the U.S. to: 1) cease their aggression; 2) withdraw from South Vietnam; 3) stop their attacks against the DRV; 4) respect and implement the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam; and 5) allow the Vietnamese people to solve their own problems without any foreign intervention. (*United States-Vietnam Relations 1945–1967 (Pentagon Papers),* Book 12 of 12, p. 101)

that purpose. I then commented on some of the specific points that he had raised by reading each of the rebuttal statements which had been prepared in advance. They were all applicable.

9. I repeated our views on the necessity for observing the understandings with respect to the DMZ and the indiscriminate shelling of cities. I requested that Thuy consider my remarks carefully and report them to his government. I closed by suggesting, in accordance with my instructions, that the fact and content of these meetings not be made public.

10. Thuy made a brief statement, repeating basically what he had said previously. Thuy agreed to consider my statements and report them to his government and asked me to do the same with his remarks. He agreed that this meeting would not be made known publicly.

11. We adjourned and had a cup of tea, during which conversation was totally non-substantive.

12. I would characterize this first meeting with Thuy as businesslike with a correct atmosphere. It was apparent that Thuy wished to use this occasion for a brief but nevertheless comprehensive exposition of standard DRV positions on the negotiations. He clearly left the door open for further meetings between us.

13. Full report follows.[6]

Lodge

[6] The full report of this meeting is in telegram 3384 from Paris, March 9. (National Archives, RG 59, East Asia Bureau, Office of Asian Communist Affairs Files: Lot 70 D 47, Incoming from Paris and Saigon, March 1–31, 1969)

32. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, March 8, 1969, 10 a.m.

SUBJECT

Viet Nam

PARTICIPANTS

Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador
The Secretary
Malcom Toon, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary

[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27–14 VIET S. Secret; Nodis. Drafted by Toon. This memorandum is part II of IV.

The Secretary told Dobrynin that we hope soon to resume private talks with the Soviets on Viet Nam. Meanwhile, he felt Dobrynin should know that the continued rocket bombardment of cities in South Viet Nam was creating serious problems for us. Indiscriminate attacks on the population centers in South Viet Nam had deeply angered our public opinion and it was felt that these attacks represented a violation of the understanding which had been reached by the previous Administration with the North Vietnamese in connection with cessation of bombing of North Viet Nam.

Dobrynin said that the North Vietnamese have indicated both privately to the Soviets and in their public statements that their rocket attacks are in retaliation for increased military action in South Viet Nam. In the first place, the North Vietnamese maintain that B–52 raids have resulted in considerable civilian casualties. Secondly, they point out that general military activity in South Viet Nam has increased. Beyond this, the North Vietnamese are dissatisfied with our posture in Paris. They have informed the Soviets that we completely ignore the National Liberation Front in Paris and that we insist on discussing only military questions with the North Vietnamese, maintaining that political questions are to be decided by the South Vietnamese only.

The Secretary pointed out that B–52 raids may result in some civilian casualties but it is clear that the raids are aimed at purely military targets. The rocket attacks, on the other hand, are deliberately aimed at population centers. There is no justification for equating the two. Dobrynin demurred, pointing out that rocket attacks are probably directed at specific military targets. The Secretary said there was no evidence of this, and our information was that the attacks were aimed at heavily populated centers.

The Secretary reiterated his concern at the continuation of these attacks and wished Dobrynin to know that the North Vietnamese were miscalculating if they felt that this would soften the American position. The result would be just the opposite. With regard to the talks in Paris, the Secretary saw no reason why all questions could not be discussed by the four participating parties in private sessions. The NLF, of course, insists on talking privately with the United States, but this is something we are not prepared to do.

Dobrynin asked if we had made this position clear in Paris. His understanding was that until now we had insisted on discussing only military questions with the North Vietnamese and taken the position that political matters were the proper subject of discussion with the South Vietnamese and not the U.S.

The Secretary made clear that our only reservation was with private talks between ourselves and the NLF. He saw no reason why all issues, political and military, could not be discussed by all participants at some appropriate time.

Dobrynin said that he felt this represented an important change in the U.S. position and that he would report this immediately to Moscow.

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33. Editorial Note

On March 8, 1969, at 7:10 p.m., Henry Kissinger spoke on the telephone with President Nixon, who was in Key Biscayne, Florida, about recent developments relating to Vietnam including the decision not to retaliate for North Vietnamese attacks on South Vietnamese cities, the option of engaging in private talks with the North Vietnamese, and Secretary of State William Rogers' discussion with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. (See Document 32.) Kissinger reported that Packard was very disturbed about Secretary of State "Rogers' action of today." The President stated that, "We cannot have this thing running in every direction!" Kissinger suggested it was a "question of judgment. I don't believe we are not making progress because the other side doubts our sincerity." Nixon stated that he thought he made that clear when he spoke with Lodge and Habib in Paris in early March. The discussion then switched to U.S.-Soviet relations, but the President returned to the issue of private talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris. Kissinger suggested that, "If you hit Cambodia [Menu bombing] after the private talks start it can break them, and you will be accused of insincerity." Kissinger advised: "Hit them and then ask for private talks." The President asked if Packard agreed with that advice. Kissinger responded that he did, "but doesn't feel confident about it. Rogers feels it would be bad for negotiations." Kissinger and the President then discussed Rogers' volunteering four-party talks to Dobrynin. Kissinger stated, "We weren't saying we didn't want to discuss political questions. I think, myself, we would have wound up, in this first testing period, in a weak position in a tough sequence of events. My concern is they will now feel free to press us along in these private talks." Nixon responded, "We can't be boxed in where we are at the mercy of the fact that we can't hit the north and we can't have private talks. We will have no bargaining position." Kissinger stated that after 4 weeks of pressing publicly for military and political talks, the North Vietnamese had achieved that and "they can go to private talks and string them out." Nixon suggested that Kissinger "can cut that down by making clear to the Soviets and I will say so in my press conference, there will be no compromise on this coalition government." Kissinger suggested that, "I don't believe it will be easy for you to attack Cambodia while

private talks are going on and not much is being done in South Vietnam." Nixon replied that, "My point is if, while the private talks are going on and they are kicking us, we are going to do something." Nixon and Kissinger returned to the Rogers–Dobrynin conversation. Nixon stated that, "There is not going to be any de-escalation. State has nothing to do with that. We are just going to keep giving word to Wheeler to knock hell out of them." Kissinger suggested that, "If they hit us again, we must refuse to have private talks for another week." The President stated: "We cannot tolerate one more of these without hitting back. We have already warned them. Presumably they have stopped. If they hit us again, we hit them with no warning. That is the way we are going to do it. I can't tolerate argument from Rogers on this. You warn once. However, if they don't hit us, we are screwed." Kissinger again suggested waiting at least a week before initiating private talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris "to see how they behave." The President concluded the conversation by stating: "In the future, we will have to keep more close control. I think that Bill [Rogers] did not realize the tremendous significance of tying political with military matters. We have to start talking about Viet Nam outside of the NSC—just among the President, Kissinger, Rogers and Laird—to bring up such things as this political matter to educate people. If Bill had been to Vietnam, he would not have done this." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 359, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

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

Washington, March 8, 1969.

SUBJECT

Reflections on De-escalation

It has become obvious that once private talks start, de-escalation will be high on the agenda. Zorin referred to a "promise" made by

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 956, Haig Chronological Files, March 1969 [2 of 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive. This memorandum was not initialed, but an attached March 11 memorandum from Haig to Sneider indicates the President saw it.

Harriman which I believe to be true. Hanoi has been putting it out in newspapers—see, for example, Joe Kraft's column.[2]

The question then becomes: what is being de-escalated? What will be the impact?

De-escalation can come about in one of two ways: tacit or formal; that is to say, it can occur de facto or by agreement. However it might take place, it would bring about a major change in the situation and thus requires careful assessment.

De-escalation must be seen in the light of our overall strategy. The component of the Communist forces which gave the war its distinguishing characteristic has been the guerrilla forces. These have enabled Hanoi and the VC to prevent the consolidation of governmental authority, to move large forces unobserved and to create a general climate of insecurity.

When American forces appeared in the war, they were used mainly to fight North Vietnamese main force units. I have always considered this to be a strategic error, though the choice was not entirely up to us. Hanoi was determined to use its forces the way a bullfighter uses his cape: to keep us lunging in strategically unproductive areas and to prevent us from grinding down the guerrilla forces.

In recent months, many main force units have been withdrawn into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam—either because they were forced or because they wish to preserve these forces for the post-war period. This has enabled us to devote—for the first time in the war—substantial forces to anti-guerrilla action. If we now de-escalate, Hanoi will get for nothing what it has had to pay heavy, perhaps excessive casualties to obtain: the effective neutralization of U.S. forces with respect to the Communist infrastructure.

Our military effort leaves a great deal to be desired, but it remains one of our few bargaining weapons.

The impact of de-escalation on the two sides would be highly asymmetrical. The guerrillas operate by terror or assassination; our side requires massive military effort. The opponent can achieve a major impact by occasional actions well below the threshold of violation; no corresponding actions are available to us.

You will be told that we can always start military operations again. In fact, the recent Communist offensive has shown that obtaining clear criteria as to what constitutes a violation is very complicated. Every difficulty we have had in deciding whether the bombing halt "understanding" had been violated will be compounded in the case of

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[2] Reference is to Joseph Kraft's syndicated column of March 6 entitled, "Unless Nixon Acts on Talks, He May Miss Chance for Peace."

de-escalation. How is one to construe the murder, kidnapping or intimidation of selected South Vietnamese officials? Will we even know who did it?

Violation criteria would probably be assessed in terms of major military operations of the type U.S. and Allied forces are now conducting in South Vietnam. These operations have been designed to provide a military shield for the GVN which enables them, with our assistance, to progress in the pacification area through the establishment of law and order and security for the populace. Conversely, it appears that the enemy has concluded that major military confrontations are no longer to their advantage. Their best hope for success rests with increased emphasis on terror and assassination, while preserving their main force elements as a psychological threat and for direct action after U.S. withdrawal. Thus, de-escalation would amount to a self-imposed defusing of our most important asset and the simultaneous enhancement of this most important asset—terrorism. We would, in effect, be tying the hands of our forces in Vietnam.

The related problems associated with maintaining a force level of 500,000-plus combat troops lacking an active combat mission could also prove troublesome. Unquestionably, pressures would build to bring our troops home. It would be very difficult to counter these demands if the level of military activity in Vietnam did not require their presence. An additional problem area would be the constructive employment of our forces in Vietnam during a period when military activity had dropped off substantially or completely. A rash of incidents with the South Vietnamese populations might occur which paralleled our experiences in Europe after World War II when an unbusy occupation Army soon found itself in uneasy economic and social competition with the populace with whom they were stationed.

All this suggests that we should not agree to de-escalate now—all the more so if you plan to withdraw some forces in a few months. Such a measure will be politically meaningful *only* if it is taken as the result of a choice—not as the inevitable corollary of under-utilized forces.

All this, of course, must be considered as part of an overall "game-plan" on which I am now working.

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

Washington, March 10, 1969.

SUBJECT

Dobrynin–Rogers Conversation on the Paris Negotiations

Secretary Rogers has suggested to Ambassador Dobrynin that we are now prepared to enter into private talks with North Vietnam on military issues and into private four-party talks on political issues.[2] This proposal, if implemented, would represent a major change in U.S. policy with serious consequences both for our posture at the Paris peace negotiations and our relations with South Vietnam.

Since January 20, we have undertaken a basic shift in our policy. We have stated that the political future of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese themselves. We have urged direct contacts between Saigon and the NLF—most notably in your talks with Ky when you assured him that we would not talk with the NLF.[3] We have worked to reestablish confidence in our relations with Saigon and assured them that we would take no steps without consulting.

We have combined heavy military pressure with a deliberate pace in Paris. We have specifically refrained from taking the initiative on opening private talks and have made clear that when such talks were possible we would talk only to the NVN and only about mutual withdrawal.

This policy was designed to avoid an impression of undo anxiety which might tempt Hanoi to draw out the negotiations in the belief that we could be outlasted and would later make concessions because of domestic political pressures. Our intention was first to discuss the issue of mutual withdrawal on which our bargaining position was the strongest. We hoped to delay talking about political issues relating to South Vietnam since such discussions could only lead to acrimony with the South—a basic objective of Hanoi. Saigon in any talks on political matters is likely to appear to be obstinate and we will be under great pressure to force the GVN not to prevent successful negotiations.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK 1969 [Part 2]. Top Secret. The memorandum is not initialed. Kissinger elaborates on his concerns about Rogers' initiative and Nixon's "philosophical" reaction to it in *White House Years,* pp. 263–264. Haldeman also recounts Kissinger's distress. (Haldeman Diary, *Multimedia Edition,* March 9, 1969)

[2] See Document 32.

[3] See Document 28.

There are signs that this strategy is evolving successfully. Hanoi has indicated a willingness to engage in private discussions which would at least include military questions. This was reflected in a Vance/Lao conversation[4] and in several recent conversations with Soviet officials. The GVN has inaugurated private contacts with the NVN and the NLF. Our relations with Saigon have greatly improved and we are just beginning to establish full mutual confidence as reflected in your conversation with Ky and their failure to press hard for retaliation after the Saigon shelling.

We have adhered to this strategy in responding to the rocketing of Saigon. Our instructions to Ambassador Lodge left open the possibility of a military response, but made clear that we should not offer private talks and, if Hanoi proposed them, reply that we would not consider private talks if the rocketing continued.

Hanoi's strategy was to get us: (1) to engage in talks about political subjects, (2) to talk with the NLF, and (3) get us into talks on de-escalation.

Secretary Rogers, in his discussion with Ambassador Dobrynin on March 8, gave Hanoi the first 2 of its 3 objectives, did not rebut the third and did so without getting anything in return. This discussion thus seriously cut across our strategy by:

(1) proposing private talks *now,*
(2) proposing *political* talks including *four powers,*
(3) proposing the *U.S. talk to the NLF,*
(4) not insisting on an end to shelling as a precondition for private talks,
(5) not consulting first with the GVN.

A major consequence of the Rogers/Dobrynin conversation is therefore to make it difficult to resist early private talks with the NVN. By lobbing a few shells into Saigon, Hanoi has induced us to change our position on the same day that Lodge was putting our original position to Thuy. If the GVN learns of the conversation, it will seriously undercut our reasonably successful effort to establish a relationship of confidence with the GVN.

If we went ahead with the Rogers proposal, the consequences will be even more serious. Our efforts to persuade the GVN to enter four power talks runs the risk of provoking a major confrontation with Saigon and could lead to a breakdown of the Paris talks. Four-power talks would add to the NLF's prestige and could undercut the feasibility of bilateral GVN/NLF talks. We would be directly involved in

[4] It is not clear to which Vance–Lau conversation Kissinger is referring.

negotiating a political settlement and could find ourselves in the unenviable position of having to put pressure on the GVN for political concession in four-party meetings.

I therefore propose the following remedial steps:

A. We should not repeat the offer to engage in four-power private talks on political and military matters.

B. After a suitable interval, if the shelling ceased, we would move into bilateral private talks on military withdrawal.

C. Because both sides have traditionally confirmed private messages with public statements, we could with great effect, in this case, do the reverse:

1. At the next Paris session, Lodge's presentation should be devoted entirely to spelling out our desire to discuss mutual withdrawal and to reiterating our belief that the political future of the South is best left to the South Vietnamese.

2. The President or a high ranking State Department official should repeat the same message at a press conference or in a speech.

D. If the Dobrynin communication follows the standard pattern, Moscow will talk to Hanoi. Then the Soviets will come back to us indicating that if we put this proposal to Hanoi, progress will result.

E. When the Soviets come back, we cannot completely withdraw from the position we have taken but we can tell the Soviets the following:

1. Private talks cannot occur unless we have some confidence that indiscriminate attacks on cities will cease.

2. If Hanoi is interested in private talks on a two- or four-participant basis, it should approach the U.S. directly.

3. With regard to discussions on political issues in which the four participants will be present, we envisage that their success will be contingent upon preliminary bilateral talks on mutual withdrawal between Hanoi and ourselves, and discussions among the South Vietnamese on political matters. Paris would take this same position if the issue is raised by Hanoi.

F. We should not now inform Saigon of this episode.

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

Washington, March 12, 1969.

SUBJECT

Instructions for Private Talks at the Paris Negotiations on Vietnam

Following his meeting with you in Paris, Ambassador Lodge has submitted a proposal setting forth the views of the negotiating team on the timing and content of private talks with the North Vietnamese (Tab A).[2]

Lodge suggests that we try to schedule a meeting with the DRV as soon as we are convinced the circumstances are right. The meetings should be bilateral, but if the DRV is absolutely adamant on dragging in the NLF, we should try to get the GVN to agree to private four-party meetings.

Lodge would make discussions on mutual withdrawal the central subject of the private sessions, while insisting that the question of political settlement be handled by the GVN and the NLF. Lodge proposes full consultation with the GVN prior to any meetings and emphasizes that we must try to get both the GVN and the DRV to keep the meetings secret. The purpose of the first sessions would be to get a dialogue started with the DRV. We would move slowly on scheduling subsequent meetings, carefully studying Hanoi's reaction at each point.

The State Department instructions cover the key questions requiring consultation with Thieu at this time. Some modifications in the State draft are suggested for your approval, however, partly to soften Bunker's instructions in raising the possibility of discussing four-party talks with Thieu. The major changes suggested are noted in the attached draft.[3] Briefly, they are as follows:

1. In para 2(b) we have deleted any reference in discussions with Thieu to our willingness to enter into quadrilateral private talks at this time.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Kissinger Papers, Box TS–64, Memoranda to the President, 1969 February–April. Top Secret. A handwritten notation on the memorandum reads: "Pres ok'd 3/14/69".

[2] Attached at Tab A was telegram 3388 to Paris/Delto 1451, March 10.

[3] The attached draft with the revisions was sent as telegram 38736 to Saigon, February 13. (National Archives, RG 59, EAP/ACA Files: Lot 70 D 47, Outgoing to Paris and Saigon, 1–31 March 1969)

2. In para 2(d) we have suggested, and Secretary Rogers concurs, that the request for private meetings come in about seven days rather than as soon as possible.

3. Also in para 2(d) we have added a proviso for a warning to the DRV that further private sessions would be difficult if the shellings of major cities continue. We have also noted that we are considering how we should respond in this context to the rocketing of Hue.

4. In para 4, we have elaborated on the instructions, underscoring that we wish a measured pace in the talks, over the next few months which will not reflect any anxiety on our part.

5. In para 5 we have modified the judgment that Hanoi is clearly ready for bilateral discussions, indicating we think there is only about a 50/50 chance of this at present. This is particularly true in the light of my talk with Dobrynin this evening.[4]

6. In para 6 we have deleted mention of a full statement of position on withdrawal, since that will probably not be hammered out in time. We are scheduling an NSC discussion on our withdrawal position.[5]

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[4] Kissinger is apparently referring to his discussion with Dobrynin, the evening of March 11. On March 19 Kissinger sent Nixon a memorandum summarizing that discussion, which was held at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. (Ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK, 1969, [Part 2])

[5] On March 14 at 6:40 p.m., Kissinger and Rogers discussed private talks in Paris. According to notes of the discussion, Kissinger stated: "President has talked to K a number of times this week about negotiating procedures. . . . His basic concern is that we start on a bilateral basis and not a quadrilateral basis. Then if the GVN asks for them that would be an ideal way to broaden them. K said he had not shown President Lodge cable [see footnote 2 above] because he did not want to get him upset. R said he is very anxious to get started on these talks—he has difficulty in seeing why we should waste more time in way we get started. K said his impression that we were going to start next week—is he wrong?. . . R said he does not see how we can logically take the position we will not talk in private with the same group and with the same arrangements that we do in public. K said he thinks there would be concern about giving away ahead of time before they even asked for it." After more discussion, much of it reiterating these basic viewpoints, Rogers agreed to try to get the private talks started bilaterally, but if that proved impossible he would go to four-party discussions. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 359, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) Nixon and Kissinger's discussions about the issue of bilateral or quadrilateral private talks are in notes of a telephone conversation, March 11, approximately 10 p.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin–HAK, 1969, [Part 2])

37. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler) to Secretary of Defense Laird[1]

CM–4001–69 Washington, March 12, 1969.

SUBJECT

Observations and Recommendations Concerning the Military Situation in Southeast Asia

1. This memorandum is designed to set forth in summary fashion my impression of the current situation in South Vietnam, to include the effect of the enemy attacks launched in recent days, and the military problems posed General Abrams by the continuing enemy buildup in the DMZ area, Laos and Cambodia. Also presented are my views concerning military actions which we should take. Since this report is deliberately in summary form, I will not attempt documentation from operational and intelligence sources; such supporting detail is readily available.

2. The current series of enemy attacks has, to date, achieved no results of military significance. Contrary to effects of the Tet offensive of 1968, the enemy has gained little or nothing psychologically. Indeed, I was surprised at the calmness displayed by President Thieu, Prime Minister Huong and General Vien, Chief of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff, regarding the attacks by fire (ABF) launched by the enemy against Saigon and DaNang and, most recently, against Hue. Nevertheless, I think it clear that, if rocket attacks (even in the small numbers employed to date) continue against major population centers, an appropriate reaction must be undertaken. I make this judgment based on two factors: first, the GVN will be under great pressure to retaliate in kind; and, second, beyond a certain point U.S. restraint will be interpreted as confirming North Vietnamese contentions that our bombing halt was "unconditional," and that the U.S. lied to the GVN regarding the circumstances leading to the cessation of acts of force against North Vietnam. I understand that the Joint Chiefs of Staff have forwarded a package of appropriate retaliatory actions to Mr. Packard. (Apropos of retaliatory actions, you will recall Vice President Ky's assertion that the Vietnamese Air Force could retaliate with attacks

[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, OASD/ISA Files, FRC 330 75–0013, Vietnam Task Force, Joint Staff Memos. Top Secret; Sensitive. Laird sent this memorandum to Nixon on March 13, indicating that it contained Wheeler's observations and recommendations of the trip he and Laird made to Vietnam, March 5–12. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 70, Vietnam Subject Files, Secretary Laird's Trip to S. Vietnam, March 5–12, 1969) See Document 38 for Laird's impressions.

against Hanoi. This is nonsense. However, at my request General George Brown, Commander, Seventh Air Force, drew up a plan for an attack against military facilities in the vicinity of Dong Hoi. Under this concept the South Vietnamese forces would provide the strike aircraft; U.S. forces would provide support in the areas of MIG cap, Sam and flak suppression, ECM, photo reconnaissance, etc. I consider that this plan has a certain political and military attractiveness.)

3. All sources, U.S. and Vietnamese, confirm that the pacification effort has been very little affected by current enemy actions. Indeed, there is evidence that, spurred by President Thieu's personal interest, progress continues in this key program. The Phoenix attacks on the VC infrastructure continue successfully. The Hoi Chanhs (enemy defectors) are on the rise. The RVNAF, including RF & PF, is steadily improving in effectiveness; they can be expected over time to assume more of the burden.

4. Free World forces continue to hold the initiative *within* SVN. The enemy continues to have the capability to mount offensive "surges" periodically. However, he can do so only at the expense of heavy personnel losses when he debouches from his sanctuaries, weeks and months of preparation of the battle area, and the expenditure of laboriously assembled logistic resources. Moreover, his tactical concepts require that he preposition supplies along his routes of advance to the battle, thus exposing them to capture or destruction. As General Abrams expresses it, the VC/NVA do not base their operations on a logistic "tail" as do other armies but on a logistic "nose."

5. The most striking and dangerous situations are comprised of the enemy troop and logistic build-ups in the DMZ area, in the panhandle of Laos and in Cambodia.

a. Ten (10) NVA regiments are deployed just north of, within and south of the DMZ. Moreover, intelligence now indicates that an additional NVA division may well be deployed in this same area. Moreover, the enemy has, since 1 November 1968, established an ample logistic base contiguous to the DMZ with which to support forces of the above magnitude in offensive operations. Also, there is quite convincing evidence that the enemy is infiltrating through the DMZ.

b. The enemy has been urgently stocking his base areas in the panhandle of Laos in order to be logistically prepared for the onset of the rainy season in that area. Normally, the monsoon will switch about four to six weeks hence. The immense quantities of material and supplies seized or destroyed during the recent operation in the A Shau valley are, I think, ample proof that enemy base areas situated deeper and further to the north in Laos represent lucrative targets for pre-emptive action by our ground and air forces. As an illustration, using 1968 rates of enemy ammunition expenditure and friendly casualties the caches

found in the A Shau valley would have provided the enemy the capability of inflicting 7,658 friendly KIA and 24,471 friendly WIA.

c. By now, I think that all of us recognize the importance to the enemy and the threat to our forces posed by the Cambodian sanctuary base areas. In actuality, it is those base areas from which the threat to Saigon originates and is sustained. They, and their counterparts in Laos and contiguous to the DMZ, are also the prime cause of U.S. casualties.

6. I have reached the following conclusions and, accordingly, submit the recommendations which follow:

a. Enemy base areas provide the human and material means to inflict casualties on U.S. forces and those of our allies. If these base areas are destroyed or neutralized, friendly casualties will automatically decrease.

b. The next rocket attack(s) on Saigon, Hue or Da Nang must be followed by an appropriate response by us. Preferably our response should take the form of naval and/or air attacks against targets in North Vietnam.

c. General Abrams should be authorized immediately to operate offensively in the southern DMZ in order to preempt enemy build-up in and use of that area.

d. General Abrams should be tasked for plans to attack and destroy, by air and ground action (raids in force) critical enemy base areas in Laos in order to deplete enemy logistic resources during the rainy season in Laos.

e. General Abrams should be tasked for plans to destroy by air and ground action (raids in force) enemy Cambodian sanctuary base areas.

Earle G. Wheeler

38. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon[1]

Washington, March 13, 1969.

SUBJECT

Trip to Vietnam and CINCPAC, March 5–12, 1969

At your direction, I have now spent five days reviewing, with General Wheeler, the military situation in Vietnam. Two of these days were spent in consultations with Ambassador Bunker, Generals Abrams and Goodpaster and their colleagues, and South Vietnamese leaders, including President Thieu, Vice President Ky and Prime Minister Huong. Two other days in South Vietnam were spent in the field. I was able to visit I Corps, III Corps and IV Corps, the areas where the major part of the current military activity is taking place. In the field I saw elements of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. Finally, I spent a day-and-a-half at CINCPAC headquarters in Hawaii, discussing with Admiral McCain and his staff their views on the current status of affairs in Southeast Asia.

General Wheeler and Assistant Secretary Froehlke were in Thailand for one day and will submit separately their observations about the situation there. General Wheeler has also prepared a report for you on his views on certain key Vietnam issues.[2]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 70, Vietnam Subject Files, Secretary Laird's Trip to S. Vietnam, March 5–12, 1969. Secret; Sensitive. Laird and Wheeler arrived in Saigon on March 6 to assess the Vietnam situation. According to a February 20 telegram from Laird to Bunker and W. Abrams, Laird and Wheeler were to hold frank discussions on the state of enemy capabilities, intentions, and strategies; sanctuary issues in Cambodia and Laos; the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces modernization and expansion program; the pacification program; and the ramifications and impact of U.S. force reductions. Laird also proposed a day and a half of field visits to I Corps, and to major U.S. and GVN units in III and IV Corps. (Washington National Records Center, Secretary Laird Files: FRC 330 70 D 0142, Box 2, Folder #13) On March 8 Laird, Wheeler, Bunker, and Berger met with Thieu, Ky, and other Vietnamese officials. (Memorandum of conversation, March 8; ibid.) In a March 29 memorandum to Laird, Kissinger wrote: "the President has reviewed both your and General Wheeler's reports resulting from your recent trip to South Vietnam. The reports were extremely valuable in preparing the President for the National Security Council meeting on March 28th, and will be retained here for further use in relations to ongoing plans associated with Vietnam." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 70, Vietnam Subject Files, Secretary Laird's Trip to S. Vietnam, March 5–12, 1969)

[2] Document 37.

In this report I will make, first, some general observations. Thereafter, I will review in somewhat more detail:

- The current military assessment, including the issue of retaliation for the recent military attacks and the shellings of major population centers.
- The status of our forces, specifically, whether General Abrams has everything that he needs in men and equipment to insure the maximum safety and security of our personnel.
- The present readiness and progress of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF).
- The plans for withdrawal of American forces.
- Termination Day ("T" Day) Planning.

Finally, I shall draw some conclusions and make some recommendations.

General Observations

The trip I just completed to South Vietnam constituted the initial opportunity anyone from the new Administration has had to look firsthand at the military situation there. The trip was, therefore, in many respects a beginning. Both practically and symbolically, it was the beginning of a concerted and dedicated attempt by your Defense leadership to come to grips with the complexities and practicalities of the Southeast Asia conflict. The essential purpose of this aspect of the trip was to determine how we could achieve our objectives in Southeast Asia, consistent with our vital national interests.

But my presence in South Vietnam constituted a beginning, too, for our military leadership there. Just as it was their duty to provide for me the picture of what is happening in Southeast Asia, it was my duty to provide for them the realities of the situation in the United States. Hopefully, each of us accomplished our task.

In attempting to make the determination about how we could achieve our objectives, I used four basic assumptions:

1. No breakthrough in Paris is likely in the near future which will achieve a political resolution of the conflict.
2. We will not escalate beyond the limited objective of attempting to insure for the South Vietnamese people the right to determine their own political and economic institutions.
3. Self-determination requires a capability for sustained self-defense and self-reliance.
4. The North Vietnamese will not voluntarily abandon their aim to secure political control of South Vietnam.

The uniform view of U.S. civilian and military leaders in Vietnam, of the CINCPAC staff, and of the GVN leadership is that we now have and can retain sufficient military strength to preclude the enemy from achieving any kind of military verdict in South Vietnam. At the same

time, considering the restrictions with which we are compelled to operate in seeking our limited objectives, none of these men forecasts a military victory for U.S. and allied forces within the foreseeable future.

That, in essence, is what our military leaders in South Vietnam told me. I believe of equal importance is what I conveyed to them. In the sense that beginnings constitute breaks with the past, I emphasized that the American people expect the new Administration to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion. The people will not be satisfied with less. A satisfactory conclusion, I emphasized, means to most Americans the eventual disengagement of American men from combat.

Again, in the context of beginnings and breaking with the past, I told our people your Administration is not being held responsible for past decisions. The decisions which committed more than half-a-million troops, nearly $100 billion of resources, and more than 33,000 American lives are behind us. They represent "sunk" costs.

The decisions and the costs the American people and the new Administration are interested in, I stressed, are those in the future. Accordingly, I told our leaders in South Vietnam the key factor in sustaining the support of the American people is to find the means by which the burden of combat may promptly, and methodically, be shifted to the South Vietnamese. This must be done while continuing to insure the safety and security of our own and allied forces and while working towards the objective of self-determination for the South Vietnamese. These aims, I pointed out, are not in conflict. They can, and must, be attained as a package. That is the challenge posed for and by the new Administration.

The Current Military Assessment

Since the last week in February, the enemy forces have been engaged in a new offensive in South Vietnam. This has consisted primarily of attacks by fire against American and Allied military bases. In addition, there has been a troubling frequency of attacks on the civilian population, including rocket attacks on Saigon, Danang and Hue. These attacks are clearly inconsistent with the understandings that provided the reported basis on which the bombing of North Vietnamese territory was stopped.

From the military standpoint, the current offensive appears to be destined for failure. Ambassador Bunker, General Abrams, our commanders in the field, and the leaders of the Government of Vietnam are in unanimous accord that the enemy's efforts will gain no territory, nor will they bring about any permanent reduction in the level of pacification. The recently initiated enemy action has had little impact on the morale of the South Vietnamese people and their support for their Government. At the same time, this escalation of activity has increased

substantially the rate of U.S. and South Vietnamese casualties, and has brought into public question the validity of the assumptions which led to the elimination of the bombing of North Vietnam.

It would appear that the enemy's objectives are not primarily military, but rather are political and psychological. Perhaps most important is the enemy's desire to demonstrate that he retains the ability to control the level of the combat in South Vietnam. By so doing he probably hopes both to achieve greater negotiating strength in Paris and to increase the amount of disaffection within the United States. The enemy's goal appears to be that of producing pressure which will lead to an early and disorderly withdrawal of American forces. In the view of President Thieu, Hanoi also feels compelled to attempt to show its own military personnel and civilian population that the NVA/VC are in control of the situation in South Vietnam and have not entered into understandings with the U.S. in relation to the bombing halt. The MACV staff informed me that enemy attacks, since initiation of the current enemy offensive have been below the level of those of the Tet and May offensives in 1968, as have been the casualties on both sides.

Our military leaders in South Vietnam assured me that this offensive can and will be contained, but they also conceded the enemy's ability to conduct similar offensives in the future, at least on an intermittent basis. This continued capability on the part of the enemy derives from certain intractable factors in the Vietnamese situation. The forces of Hanoi and the NLF continue to be supplied with sophisticated equipment and weapons, such as 122 mm rockets, from Soviet and Communist China resources. In addition, the enemy forces are able to take refuge and sanctuary across the borders of Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. The Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries are of great importance in the enemy's ability to withstand our overwhelming superiority in mobility and fire power. Moreover, Cambodia has become increasingly important in the infiltration of supplies and men, and in the command and control of the enemy forces.

Consideration should be given to border area operations that will at least temporarily diminish the advantage to the enemy of our self-imposed geographical restrictions. Unless we are willing to expand greatly the geographic confines of the conflict, however, the availability of sanctuary areas for the enemy will continue to contribute to the impossibility of a final military solution.

Insofar as U.S. and allied military efforts are concerned, steady progress is uniformly reported. For example, in I Corps both General Cushman and General Stilwell cited significant advances in eliminating enemy influence, including the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI). General Cushman, however, informed me that an additional two years would be required before he could see the situation as being completely

in hand. Insofar as the VCI is concerned, Ambassador Colby, the Deputy for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), estimates that the anti-VCI program, the so-called "Phoenix" campaign, has eliminated perhaps 16 thousand of the 83 thousand estimated VCI. At the same time, he recognizes that these VCI losses have probably been replaced. A successful anti-infrastructure effort will thus require a substantially higher rate of attrition than has yet been realized.

Militarily, the situation in III Corps is coming more and more under control. General Abrams' tactics and precautions have virtually foreclosed the risks of significant enemy incursion into the capital city of Saigon. The mortar and rocket attacks have been infrequent and unimpressive in number. In IV Corps, as well, the military situation is steadily moving in a direction favorable to the Government of South Vietnam and the United States. But Major General Eckhardt, the senior U.S. Military Advisor in IV Corps, recognizes that the pacification effort is proceeding slowly in this traditional VC stronghold.

Similarly, the pacification effort has reached the point where more than 79 per cent of the South Vietnamese population is credited to the "relatively secure" category. This category includes so-called "A", "B", and "C" hamlets. The "C" category, which includes about 30 per cent of the population, is pivotal and subject to ready reversion to the "contested" classification. "A" hamlets remain relatively rare. There is none, for example, in the strategic area of III Corps immediately north of Saigon which I visited. Thus some appreciable VC influence continues to exist for the major share of South Vietnam's people.

The basic problem remains that of achieving permanent South Vietnamese governmental control over the country. Although Ambassador Bunker gives persuasive documentation of steady political growth by the Government of Vietnam, this progress is difficult to translate into nationwide security. Even greater national exertion will be necessary to bring GVN administrative and political structures into the villages and hamlets of South Vietnam. This would be a difficult task under peaceful circumstances. It is herculean while hostilities continue at the present level.

Substantial de-Americanization of the war is an indispensable precondition, it appears, to the healthy growth of indigenous political institutions. This thesis was highlighted in a comment made to me by the Senior Province Advisor assigned to Go Cong Province in the Delta. This advisor remarked that he sees his job as being "to put myself out of business as quickly as possible." We should all regard that as our job in Vietnam. This would be consistent with the attainment of U.S. objectives in this area.

In short, General Abrams has made remarkable progress in achieving a measure of military superiority throughout South Vietnam. The

pacification program, which must depend primarily and increasingly on South Vietnamese efforts, is also proceeding, though at a slower rate. But none of our officials, either military or civilian, is under any illusion that the battle in South Vietnam can be brought to a military conclusion within six months, a year or even several years. Options, over which we have little or no control, are available to the enemy for continuing the war almost indefinitely, although perhaps at a reduced intensity. Under these circumstances, and unless some change can be made in the relative contributions of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, we are faced with an American killed-in-action rate which could run in excess of 100 a week, and at the enemy's initiative could be increased to multiples of that rate.

A matter that requires the closest scrutiny is the question of retaliation for the NVA/VC violations of the Paris understandings. Whatever the deliberate ambiguity of these misunderstandings, there can be no doubt that the rocket attacks on Saigon, Danang and Hue are completely inconsistent with the assumptions which underlie the bombing halt. We are, therefore, faced with the question of appropriate response to these indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population. Obviously, the question of retaliation, as well as its nature and extent, should be considered in the context of bringing us closer to our objectives in Southeast Asia and protecting our credibility. We should not be interested in merely "getting even," but rather in advancing vital U.S. interests.

These indiscriminate enemy attacks are not militarily significant. As of the preparation of this report, the attacks had not added in any substantially new way to the jeopardy of U.S. forces. The attacks, furthermore, have as yet done little to affect adversely the morale of the South Vietnamese public. In the view of President Thieu, they are designed primarily to improve the morale of the North Vietnamese by demonstrating a residual ability to control the level of the conflict in the south.

The last rocketing of Saigon occurred on the morning of Thursday, March 6. Since then, enemy rockets have been launched against the city of Hue. In my opinion, any further significant shelling or rocketing of Saigon, Danang, or Hue should bring about an appropriate response on our part. This leaves, of course, the key question as to what kind of response would be appropriate. In my conversation with President Thieu, he stated that it should be a wise and measured one, not disproportionate to the level of the enemy attacks. He also suggested that the response might be political or diplomatic, rather than military. As I see it, a response which would entail any extensive bombing of North Vietnam would yield as little militarily. Though it might demonstrate to the South Vietnamese our continued commitment to their cause, it

would serve to equate justifiable military activity on our part with unjustifiable and indiscriminate attacks on the enemy's part. It would lead to a renewal of the criticism from many factions within both the United States and the world community, and would tend to put us into the position vis-à-vis world and U.S. opinion in which the previous administration found itself just about a year ago.

As I indicated in a separate message to you on March 9,[3] I believe we stand to lose, on balance, if we are encouraged to actions which serve to equate military action on our part to indiscriminate terrorism on the enemy's part. I believe it would be reasonable to confine ourselves to consideration of political and diplomatic alternatives to the indiscriminate shellings. A temporary suspension of attendance at the plenary Paris sessions might be effective. If the North Vietnamese are eager for U.S. withdrawal and resolution of the conflict in SVN, such a temporary recess might be more of a burden on them than a military response. North Vietnam would be cast in the role of impeding progress to peace and would take the brunt of adverse world opinion.

To the extent further military action may be indicated against the enemy's current offensive, we should look for a response which would work to our advantage, either by securing some immediate military gain or by bringing us closer to genuine substantive discussions in Paris. A well-considered and effective operation against some enemy military target in the border areas might provide both an appropriate signal and some military benefit. I will be prepared to discuss this issue further with you privately and with the National Security Council.

Status of U.S. Forces—Men and Equipment

Under the superior leadership of General Abrams, our commanders and our men in the field exhibit the most heartening qualities of dedication and performance. They are confident of their ability to counter and throw back any enemy attack anywhere in South Vietnam. Our men are not only well led, but they are also well equipped and provided for. Not the least among the factors contributing to high morale among our forces is the realization that the most prompt and modern medical care is available. I had the opportunity personally to see how this medical care is being provided in one of the many American hospitals which exist throughout the country. I was assured by General Abrams that he needs nothing further in the way of men, equipment or facilities to insure the maximum safety and security for U.S. forces.

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[3] Reference is to a message from Laird to Nixon transmitted in MACV telegram 3049, March 9. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 68, Vietnam Subject Files, Communist Offensive, 22 February 1969)

A striking illustration of the complete adequacy of our military support can be seen in the comparative figures on air ordnance expenditures. In World War II, air ordnance utilized by the U.S. in the European and Mediterranean theaters amounted to 1.5 million tons. The Pacific theater accounted for 0.5 million tons. In the Korean War, the total expended by U.S. elements was 0.6 million tons. World War II and the Korean War together thus accounted for 2.6 million tons. By way of comparison, during the years 1966 through 1968, 2.8 million tons have already been expended in Southeast Asia.

Readiness and Progress of RVNAF

I recognize that the RVNAF modernization program had been designed to create an RVNAF capable of coping with insurgency that could remain if US/NVA forces withdrew. I was disappointed, though, by the relatively low rate of progress evidenced toward raising the RVNAF capability to assume more of the burden of the war.

In total, the regular, irregular, and police forces of South Vietnam now include over one million men. The arms and equipment furnished by the United States have increased in quantity and quality. I am recommending that we advance our plans and furnish additional items needed to achieve full modernization for these indigenous forces. I am doing so, however, solely on the basis that this will permit us immediately to begin the process of replacing American forces in South Vietnam with better trained, better led, and better armed South Vietnamese military and para-military personnel.

I regret to report that I see no indication that we presently have a program adequate to bring about a significant reduction in the U.S. military contribution in South Vietnam. The development of such a program should receive our first priority. For example, despite a strong recommendation made, I understand, last summer that the promotion policy of ARVN should be adjusted so as to rectify the substantial shortages in officers in the ranks of captain through colonel, substantial shortages still exist. Progress has been slow. The need for a drastic change in promotion policies apparently has been accepted in principle and potentially adequate corrective programs have been initiated but progress continues to be slow.

Similarly, although our military leaders have recommended the adoption of the accelerated Phase II modernization program, I was given no indication that its completion would enable us to effect any substantial reduction in American forces in South Vietnam. As mentioned earlier, the present RVNAF modernization program was designed only to build up the South Vietnamese forces so that they could cope with VC insurgents. Our military authorities believe neither the South Vietnamese manpower base nor any possible modernization program would enable the RVNAF to cope alone with a threat comparable to the present level

of aggression. This has been the assumption from the inception of the RVNAF improvement program. However, I do not believe we can accept the proposition that U.S. forces must remain in substantial numbers indefinitely to contain the North Vietnamese threat, if political settlement proves unobtainable. The heavy expense of RVNAF modernization cannot be justified as a measure merely to permit the GVN to cope with local insurgency.

The presentation given to me by the MACV staff was based on the premise that no reduction in U.S. personnel would be possible in the absence of total withdrawal of South Vietnamese troops. I do not believe that our national interests, in the light of our military commitments worldwide, permit us to indulge in this assumption. Nor do I feel that true pacification and GVN control over its own population can ever be achieved while our own forces continue such a pervasive presence in South Vietnam.

Our orientation seems to be more on operations than on assisting the South Vietnamese to acquire the means to defend themselves. Thus, for example, we have continued to tolerate notoriously incompetent Commanders in the Fifth and Eighteenth ARVN Divisions in the key III Corps region. I sense, too, a tendency on the part of both our own people and the GVN to discount somewhat the seriousness of the high RVNAF desertion rate. The emphasis can and must now be shifted to measures through which South Vietnam can achieve a self-defense capability that will strengthen our joint hand in Paris and prevent ultimate military defeat if political settlement proves impossible.

Planning for Withdrawal of U.S. Forces

The question that arises is not whether we should do more in South Vietnam, but rather whether we should do less. No one now suggests the necessity for sending more U.S. troops to Southeast Asia. But at the same time, no one has furnished me with any detailed analysis of the necessity for the continued presence of over 549 thousand Americans in South Vietnam and Thailand.

We are presently able to contain the enemy militarily and to maintain mass military pressure on him. With an appropriate improvement in the performance of the Armed Forces of South Vietnam, we should be able to retain this posture with a simultaneous diminution in the U.S. share of the total military effort. This will require full study of the best way to effect the maximum replacement of U.S. combat forces with those of South Vietnam. With your approval, I will direct that such a study be undertaken immediately.

In the meantime, I believe it is essential that we decide now to initiate the removal from Southeast Asia of some U.S. military personnel. The qualitative and quantitative improvement of the RVNAF to date, although perhaps less than desired, should permit us to redeploy from

Southeast Asia between 50 to 70 thousand troops during the remainder of this calendar year. I am convinced that this will in no way jeopardize the security of the remaining U.S. and Allied forces and that such a move is necessary to retain U.S. public support for our continued efforts in South Vietnam. Embassy officials in Saigon suggested to me that any reduction on our part would trigger proportionate reductions in other Allied forces. Given the present highly disproportionate contribution of South Vietnam's Asian neighbors, as compared with our own, such reduction on their part would be unwarranted. But even if they were made, withdrawal of Korean, Thai, Australian and New Zealand troops in an equal percentage would not significantly affect the total military strength confronting the enemy. Moreover, it is clear that South Vietnam's leaders expect and are entirely ready for a reduction of this size. President Thieu has indicated this repeatedly in public pronouncements. He expressed this opinion forthrightly in our private discussion on March 8.[4] At the same time, I feel very strongly that we, rather than the GVN or the possible reaction of other troop-contributing countries, should determine when and how many American soldiers should be withdrawn from the conflict in SEA.

Termination ("T" Day) Planning

The foregoing discussion assumes no termination of the war in South Vietnam, but rather the orderly replacement of United States Forces as the armed forces of South Vietnam take over a steadily increasing share of the war effort. I have discussed with Admiral McCain and General Abrams the status of their plans for the more rapid turnover and removal of American military equipment that would be required in the event a political settlement brings the conflict to a termination.

Under such circumstances, we would want to leave the South Vietnamese forces with the equipment necessary for them to cope with the residual insurgency and to help deter any renewal of aggression by North Vietnam. At the same time, we should not feel that the forces of South Vietnam must be turned into a replica in miniature of the United States military establishment. As in the case of the Republic of Korea, we should anticipate that the more sophisticated elements of the needed defensive strength could continue to be derived from United States resources.

For planning purposes we should define "T" Day as that date on which agreement is reached to cease hostilities in South Vietnam and the

[4] A memorandum of this conversation between Laird and Thieu and other U.S. and South Vietnamese officials was attached.

North Vietnamese are returning their forces to North Vietnam. Our Paris delegation continues to refer to the terms of the 1966 Manila Conference communiqué. I, personally, have had serious questions about those terms and believe that they were rendered obsolete by initiation of the Paris negotiations. Under the Manila communiqué terms, the allied forces would begin their withdrawal concurrently with the gradual withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops. Withdrawal of U.S. and Free World forces would continue only while North Vietnam moves toward total withdrawal and ceases all infiltration. The provision of the Manila communiqué to the effect that U.S. and other allied forces will be withdrawn not later than six months after these conditions have been fulfilled must be interpreted, if it is to apply at all, as referring to those residual forces that would be on hand at the time when all North Vietnamese forces have returned to their own country.

The Manila communiqué may not, of course, form the basis of any settlement that may be reached in Paris. The Manila communiqué was designed on the assumption of a de facto termination to hostilities, rather than negotiations. The Paris talks may yield a withdrawal formula which is either more gradual or more precipitate than that contemplated at Manila. In any event, our planning should proceed on a basis that will permit us to effect an orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops and an efficient turnover of United States equipment to the South Vietnamese, beginning as soon as hostilities have ceased.

I found T-Day planning has advanced to the stage where plans are either under development, or the plans have been published and are under review by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Abrams' staff has been able during the past few weeks to define more accurately the size of the problem confronting us in withdrawing personnel and equipment. For example, whereas in October 1968 MACV estimated that some 10 million short tons of matériel and supplies would require removal from Southeast Asia, the current estimate is that the amount is more like 5.5 million short tons. The ongoing MACV staff work includes attempts to improve inventory control and to reduce inventories in certain supply categories.

I believe, however, that we need to address more expeditiously the "T" Day problems of orderly and systematic withdrawal of men and equipment. Even short of cessation of hostilities, such planning can have considerable utility in making our phase-down and the transfer of effort to the RVNAF more efficient.

As in the case of RVNAF modernization, there appears to be considerable reluctance to recognize the inevitability of an early reduction in the American effort in South Vietnam. In the event that a political solution cannot be found in Paris, I am convinced that achievement of our objectives requires immediate initiation of efforts to diminish our

share of the total military effort. Accordingly, our entire defense organization must be alerted to the need to develop and implement promptly the measures that will facilitate an efficient and orderly reduction in the current United States involvement in Vietnam.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Our fighting men in Southeast Asia, under the superb leadership of General Abrams, are fully supported and have the resources in men, material, and facilities to accomplish their assigned tasks with maximum possible safety and security.

2. Steady progress is being made in the application of military pressure on the enemy. But there is consensus among our civilian and military leaders in South Vietnam that a military victory within 6, 12, 18, or 24 months, or even longer, is not feasible under prevailing constraints.

3. The enemy's increased use of border sanctuaries as safe havens for logistics, training, and command and control support is a matter of increasing danger to our forces. Consideration should be given to the modification of our rules of engagement to permit more effective actions against this threat, short of lasting extension of the geographic area of the war.

4. The RVNAF continues to show improvement, but we must explore ways to accelerate equipment delivery and increase combat effectiveness. There may be certain areas such as pilot and technical training which will be difficult to accelerate. In any event, we shall need to provide additional funding for RVNAF modernization purposes.

5. The precondition for this additional assistance on an accelerated basis must be that it will permit the expedited replacement of U.S. forces.

6. This replacement process should begin and be pursued on a systematic basis designed to assure sustained pressure on the enemy and sustained support of the war by the American public.

7. The leadership of the Republic of Vietnam is prepared to participate in such a replacement program and expresses the belief that, as our forces are replaced, the RVN's independent ability to meet the enemy's aggression will be strengthened.

8. We must make sure that our entire Defense establishment understands the need to refine our concept of T-Day planning and to develop a detailed program for transferring and redeploying men and matériel as hostilities diminish and finally terminate.

9. To enhance the vital interests of our country (particularly in recognition of our worldwide military requirements), to stimulate increased self-defense effectiveness and self-reliance by the Government

of RVN, and to sustain the support of the American public for our stated objectives, plans should be drawn for the redeployment of 50–70 thousand U.S. troops from South Vietnam this year. These plans should also be developed to provide for continuing substantial replacement of U.S. with South Vietnamese forces in the following years.[5]

Melvin R. Laird

[5] A memorandum of a March 8 conversation between Laird and Prime Minister Tran Van Hoang was attached.

39. Memorandum for the Record[1]

Washington, March 15, 1969.

SUBJECT

March 16 Rocket Attack on Saigon

The following directives were issued by the President at 1545, March 15, as a result of the most recent rocket attack on Saigon:

1. The President ordered the immediate implementation of the Breakfast Plan. (TOT—Tuesday morning, Saigon time; Monday afternoon, Washington time.)[2]

2. The Department of State (and Ambassadors Lodge and Bunker) to be notified only after the point of no return in the implementation of the Plan.

3. Appropriate Government agencies and their field representatives are to be instructed that they will make no comment on the recent rocket attack on Saigon. (The President wishes to personally sign such a directive.)

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 136, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. 1, Through 3/19/69. Top Secret.

[2] Prior to issuing this directive Kissinger received three telephone calls from President Nixon at 3:35, 3:44, and 3:45 p.m. on March 15, ordering these actions. The language in the first three directives is almost verbatim from the President's brusque orders. The transcript notes of the last telephone call of 3:45 p.m. read: "President said everything that will fly is to get over to North Vietnam. President said there will be no appeal from that either. He will let them know who is boss around here." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 368, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

4. The President directed the following additional military measures:

a. Maximum possible aerial reconnaissance over North Vietnam.
b. Increased Naval activity in international waters adjacent to North Vietnam.

Richard Nixon

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

Washington, March 16, 1969.

SUBJECT

Breakfast Plan

I. Major Political/Psychological Reasons for Action

A. Failure to take action in response to Saigon/Hue shellings—especially after repeated Presidential warnings—would appear to Hanoi as a demonstration of weakness.

B. Failure to act would encourage Hanoi to use shellings and other military pressures in an effort to force major concessions at the Paris negotiations.

C. The GVN will be more willing to agree to private talks, and less suspicious about our statements on the conditions for a bombing halt. Indeed, the Thieu/Bunker conversation is likely to be sticky if we respond to the latest shelling of Saigon with a request to initiate private talks.

D. Retaliatory action, if combined with a proposal for private talks, will serve as a signal to the Soviets of the Administration's determination to end the war. It would be a signal that things may get out of hand.

II. Arguments Against

A. Domestic critics of the Vietnam war could seize on this to renew attacks on war and pressure for quick U.S. withdrawal.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 89, Vietnam Subject Files, Breakfast Plan. Top Secret; Sensitive.

B. Hanoi could try to buttress domestic critics with attacks aimed at gaining large U.S. casualties.

C. Could start escalatory cycle.

III. Some Possible Consequences of Breakfast Plan

A. *Minimum Possible Consequences*

1. Pro-forma Cambodian protest.

B. *Larger Possible Consequences*

1. If attack on COSVN is formally announced as "appropriate response" major protest by Cambodia is probable, cutting off prospect of resuming diplomatic relations for the present. (NVN will probably try to pressure Sihanouk on this point.)

2. Soviets could feel compelled, probably under Hanoi pressure, to register strong protest which might affect our other talks with them.

3. Hanoi will feel compelled to retaliate, should our public statements indicate action is retaliatory.

IV. Scenario

A. *Basic Plan of Action*

1. NVN military concentrations in the DMZ will be attacked 12 hours prior to Breakfast Plan. This attack, in response to currently well publicized NVN buildup in the DMZ, will be acknowledged as the "appropriate response" to the shelling of Saigon and Hue. This would have the following advantages: (a) it would indicate a response; (b) it would divert public attention; (c) it would therefore enable Cambodia to play down the Breakfast Plan and; (d) it would still show restraint.

2. Breakfast Plan will be treated as a routine military operation within the framework of our current military actions in Cambodian territory and not publicly or in any messages identified as a retaliatory action against the shelling of Saigon and Hue. Hanoi is likely to recognize the action as our response, without a public statement. Any public statement identifying it as a retaliatory action, on the other hand, would be more likely to induce retaliatory actions by Hanoi, a major protest by Cambodia, a Soviet protest, and major domestic criticism in the press.

3. The military action will be combined with an effort in Paris to initiate private talks.

B. *Press Scenario*

1. The attacks on the DMZ will be publicly announced with no additional comment. If the press asks whether these attacks are the "appropriate response" mentioned by the President, the spokesman will state that the press can draw its own conclusions.

2. Breakfast Plan would be announced routinely by Saigon as a normal B–52 operation against targets along the Cambodian border. The targets would not be specifically identified.

3. Press briefing and backgrounders would in no way directly identify the action as the "appropriate response" to the Saigon/Hue shellings.

4. All press queries should be referred to the Saigon spokesman who will neither affirm nor deny reports of attacks on Cambodia but state that this is under investigation. With respect to any attacks against Cambodia, we will take the same public position of "no comment" as in the case of bombing attacks on Laos, with the additional statement that reports of such attacks are under investigation.

5. If the Cambodians protest publicly, we will state publicly that we are investigating the Cambodian protest.

6. At no point will attacks against Cambodia be officially denied. *When* we reply to a Cambodian protest, we will state that we have apologized and have offered compensation.

C. *Diplomatic Scenario*

1. On March 18, Ambassador Bunker will inform President Thieu privately about DMZ strike and Breakfast Plan and seek Thieu's immediate agreement to the initiation of private talks on this basis.

2. On March 18, following Thieu's agreement, Ambassador Lodge will be authorized to initiate a request immediately for private talks with the North Vietnamese.

3. If Cambodia makes it normal routine protest, we will agree to investigate and subsequently confirm that the raid took place in Cambodian territory, apologize, and offer compensation.

4. If Cambodia makes a major protest, we will acknowledge responsibility, offer compensation, explain that incidents along the Cambodian border occur due to the extensive VC use of military exploitation of Cambodian territory in this area, and request an ICC investigation of the area.

5. If the Soviet Union privately makes a major protest against our action, we will point out the military reasons for the action, the fact that both Saigon and Hue were shelled after full warning, that more provocative options were available but not undertaken, and that we would now like to get down to serious negotiations and have initiated a request for private talks as suggested by them.

41. Editorial Note

Although there is no record of the meeting in the President's Daily Diary, merely a reference that President Nixon went to the Oval Office on Saturday, March 16, 1969, at 4:30 p.m. and returned to the residence at 6:51 p.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files), both Henry Kissinger and President Nixon describe in their memoirs an afternoon meeting lasting 2 hours on March 16 in the Oval Office among the President, Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Wheeler and Kissinger. (Kissinger, *White House Years,* pages 246–247 and Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon,* page 381)

Kissinger's account stresses that the decision to bomb the Cambodian sanctuaries had already been made. (See Document 39.) Kissinger states that the President "felt it necessary to pretend that the decision was still open. This led to hours of the very discussion that he found so distasteful and reinforced his tendency to exclude the recalcitrants from further deliberations." According to Kissinger, the discussion "followed predictable lines. Laird and Wheeler strongly advocated attacks and Rogers objected not on foreign policy but on domestic grounds." Kissinger recalls that Nixon "permitted himself to be persuaded by Laird and Wheeler to do what he had already ordered." Nixon's own recollections stress his decision to bomb Cambodian sanctuaries. Nixon recalls that he said: "The state of play in Paris is completely sterile. I am convinced that the only way to move the negotiations off dead center is to do something on the military front. That is something they will understand." No other record of this meeting has been found.

The day before the meeting, Kissinger called Secretary of Defense Laird at 5:40 p.m., and according to the transcript notes of March 15, Kissinger told Laird that "he just talked to the President and he would like to order this thing. L said fine. K said when he had talked to Buzz [Wheeler] earlier there were two possibilities: one, only a breakfast plan [B–52 bombing of Cambodian sanctuaries] and the other one to split forces for target [and also bomb North Vietnamese troop concentrations in the DMZ]. K said to lay on both and we will decide tomorrow which to execute. L said they could do it. K said the President may want to have a meeting between L, K, and Bill [Rogers] and the President is counting on L to be firm at that meeting. L said he does not have to worry about that, he will be firm." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 369, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) Laird and Kissinger discussed the meeting in two telephone conversations at 9 and 9:30 [apparently p.m.] on March 16. In the first conversation, Kissinger told Laird that the President had

approved the Cambodian bombing, "something he cannot ever avow" and was willing to do the other attack, but asked Laird's political advice. Laird responded that in view of Rogers' opposition, presumably at the meeting on March 16, "it would be better to do what we agreed upon. Laird didn't see enough advantage in pushing what Bill doesn't want. It is important to maintain a good relationship. HAK agreed. HAK said he was concerned from the domestic political viewpoint." During the second conversation, Kissinger told Laird that the President agreed with his recommendation especially in view of Rogers' opposition. Kissinger told Laird that Nixon knew that "Laird has the best interests of the Administration at heart and it was better to keep the team together." (Ibid.)

On March 17 at 1:20 p.m. the President called Kissinger to ask when the breakfast bombings would begin and Kissinger responded they would commence in 1 hour. The transcript notes indicate that: "President said what pleases him is that he is glad the fellow [Thieu on March 17] agreed to private talks right away. President thinks the two are closely related. K agreed. Pres said this was token our intent and they think we really mean business. Otherwise, they were about to conclude that we were being pressured and starting again on the same cycle that we had gone through before. K said we were getting ready for some arm twisting and it was not necessary at all. Pres said good deal—pretty hard for them not to talk." (Ibid.)

On March 18 at 8 p.m. Kissinger and Wheeler discussed the results of the breakfast bombing. Wheeler was enthusiastic about the results—"secondaries [secondary explosions] were about 4 to 7 times the normal bomb burst, this was significant." Kissinger suggested that "if they [the North Vietnamese] retaliate without any diplomatic screaming, we are in the driver's seat. Psychologically the impact must have been something." Wheeler mentioned that North Vietnamese MiGs were recalled to China, "and they are in a high state of alarm." Kissinger responded that now they have to go back to the drawing board since they didn't expect it to happen. Kissinger congratulated Wheeler on the idea and told him the President thought he had done a good job. Wheeler responded it was mostly Abrams' idea. (Ibid.)

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

Washington, March 17, 1969.

SUBJECT

Possible CIA Courses of Action in Cambodia

You asked that I explore in the 303 Committee two possible CIA courses of action with respect to Cambodia:

(a) CIA potential for creating covert paramilitary harassing operations directed against North Vietnamese Regular Forces in the sanctuary areas just over the Cambodian border

(b) CIA capability for eliminating or reducing the arms traffic through Cambodia to communist forces in South Vietnam.

CIA can develop the operations described in (a) above at some sacrifice to high priority operations now directed against the Viet Cong infrastructure in South Vietnam. CIA recommends against initiating such operations on the grounds of high cost versus expected low effectiveness against the large concentrations of regular NVN forces there.[2] The Committee members endorsed the CIA recommendation.

With respect to (b) above, CIA has identified a number of Cambodian army officers who are actively involved in supporting the movement of arms and ammunition through Cambodia to communist forces in South Vietnam. CIA does not now have direct, secure and controlled access to any of these officers but is continuing to explore vigorously opportunities in this direction. CIA is skeptical that any of the officers involved in the arms traffic would be now susceptible to bribery both because of the profits accruing to them from such operations as well as the personal political risks entailed in a relationship involving the United States.[3]

CIA has pointed out that if recent U.S. diplomatic approaches to Cambodia result in the formal resumption of full diplomatic relations, CIA will gain an operating base for improved intelligence collection and covert action in support of U.S. diplomatic measures aimed at at-

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 301, NSC File, 303 Committee, 1969–1970. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for action.

[2] In a memorandum to the 303 Committee, February 13. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 1969–1970)

[3] This summarizes an attached but not printed CIA memorandum of March 14 entitled, "Possibilities for Bribing Cambodian Officials to Reduce Arms Flow to the Viet Cong."

tempting to convince Prince Sihanouk that it is in his best interest to make an honest effort to reduce or halt the arms traffic.[4]

I recommend that:[5]

(a) you approve the 303 Committee's judgment that the probable effectiveness of mounting a CIA paramilitary effort against the NVN regulars in Cambodia would not be worth the expense, and

(b) that as diplomatic relationships develop with Cambodia, I monitor those diplomatic and CIA steps which can be taken in an effort to eliminate or reduce the arms traffic from Cambodia to the communist forces in South Vietnam.

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[4] In a memorandum of February 26 entitled, "CIA's Potential for Covert Support to Possible United States Government Diplomatic Efforts to Reduce the Movement of Arms and Ammunition Through Cambodia to Communist Forces in South Vietnam." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. I, 8–69)

[5] There is no indication on the memorandum of a Nixon decision. At its March 13 meeting, the 303 Committee agreed to recommend to the President that CIA should not undertake covert harassment missions against North Vietnam in Cambodia because of high costs versus low returns. The Chairman of the Committee, Kissinger, passed on a request from Nixon that Helms and CIA explore methods—either through bribery or corruption of the right people in Cambodia—to prevent arms and supplies passing through Cambodia to the enemy in South Vietnam. Helms responded that CIA had already studied the question and determined that gaining access to the right people was a major problem and that arms traffickers were making so much profit that U.S. bribery attempts would be inadequate. (Minutes of the March 11th 303 Committee, March 13; Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 303/40 Committee Meetings, 2/16/68–1/20/70, March 13, 1969) For the President's decision, see footnote 2, Document 47.

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43. Telegram From the Embassy in Laos to the Department of State[1]

Vientiane, March 18, 1969, 0605Z.

1714. 1. As I leave Laos, I wish I could say that I am leaving it in much better condition than I found it in 1964. Unfortunately, that is far from true. There have been some improvements—in political stability, in the spread of economic benefits, and in the provision of social services. But the fundamental, overriding problem of the war has not been

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 3, President's Daily Briefs. Secret. Repeated to Bangkok, Moscow, Saigon, and Paris for Lodge.

resolved. Until it is, the survival of Laos as a sovereign and independent nation remains in peril.

2. The war is a vicious cycle. So long as it continues, the country must maintain a large military establishment. So long as the country must maintain a large military establishment, the budget will remain hopelessly out of balance and revenues will never suffice to permit economic independence or progressive development.

3. While this same military establishment is the prime instrument for defending the country and has done better than we expected, it has also built up institutionalized privilege, corruption, and law-evasion, which, in turn, alienate the villagers from the government which the military represent. Therefore, while intended to defend the central government and advance its interests, the military end by corrupting its rule and corroding its prestige. Thus the enemy, merely by posing a threat to the government, succeeds in weakening the authority of that government.

4. The Lao had genuinely hoped, when the Paris negotiations began, that peace would be restored in Southeast Asia before the current dry season. They felt grievously deceived when this hope was dashed and had little stomach for the fight this year. Hence, they gave up more terrain this season than was truly taken from them by force of arms. It remains to be seen how much more will be lost in the six or seven weeks which remain in the dry season.

5. But, no matter what situation we find when the rains come, I think we should be under no illusions as to the future. The Lao have suffered enormously under all these years of war. Among the Meo, for example, practically an entire generation of fighting men has been wiped out.[2] It is pitiful to see their units so heavily manned by young boys of 14 and 15 years of age.

6. In fact, it is, in my judgment, a miracle that the Lao have fought so sturdily for so long and that the fabric of their primitive society has not totally collapsed prior to this time. They have been held together by spit and straw, aid, encouragement, and hope.

7. But all this is drawing to a close. If the North Vietnamese push as heavily next dry season as they have this year, and if they abandon

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[2] CIA officers drew a similar picture in a weekly meeting of March 13 between representatives of EAP of State and DDP of CIA. According to a March 18 memorandum by Trueheart to Hughes: "CIA drew a rather bleak picture of the outlook for friendly forces during the remainder of the dry season and stressed that there is no possibility of further strengthening Laotian ground forces, conventional or guerrilla, from indigenous resources." While tactical air support had blunted and delayed the North Vietnamese offensive, CIA officers were convinced that only better and more ground troops could halt the advance. (Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, EAP General CA, Country Files, EA Weekly Meetings, 1969)

their political restraints, I doubt that Laos could successfully weather another offensive without losing some vital areas of its territory and without severe strain on the stability of the current political leadership. Therefore, in my view, the period between now and next November is critical.

8. There obviously are conclusions to be drawn from this evaluation. As I understand it, my new responsibilities in Washington will, in part, concern those conclusions. In view of that fact, I will refrain from stating any of them in this message. When I reach the clear, safe atmosphere on the Potomac, I will not wish to have my vision impaired by any myopic observations which I might have written from the miasma of the Mekong.

9. Ave atque vale.

Sullivan

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44. Summary of Interagency Responses to NSSM 1[1]

Washington, March 22, 1969.

THE VIETNAM SITUATION

The responses to the questions posed regarding Vietnam[2] show agreement on some matters as well as very substantial differences of opinion within the U.S. Government on many aspects of the Vietnam situation. While there are some divergencies on the facts, the sharpest differences arise in the interpretation of those facts, the relative weight to be given them, and the implications to be drawn. In addition, there remain certain areas where our information remains inadequate.

There is general agreement, assuming we follow our current strategy, on the following:

—(1) The GVN and allied position in Vietnam has been strengthened recently in many respects.

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[1] National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–122, NSSM Files, NSSM 1 Response. Top Secret. Davis sent copies of this summary to Agnew, Rogers, Laird, and Director of Emergency Preparedness Lincoln under cover of a March 22 memorandum. Copies were also sent to Richardson, General Wheeler, and Helms.

[2] See the attachment to Document 4.

—(2) The RVNAF alone cannot now, or in the foreseeable future, stand up to both the VC and sizable North Vietnamese forces.

—(3) The GVN has improved its political position in certain respects. It remains weakest, and the VC/NLF strongest, in rural areas. It is not clear whether the GVN and other non-communist groups would be able to survive a peaceful competition with the NLF for political power in South Vietnam.

—(4) The enemy have suffered some reverse but they have not changed their essential objectives and they have sufficient strength to pursue these objectives. We are not attriting enemy forces faster than they can recruit or infiltrate. Soviet and Chinese supplies have enabled the enemy to carry on despite our operations.

—(5) The enemy basically controls both sides' casualty rates. They can still launch major offensives, though not with 1968 Tet effectiveness or impact.

—(6) The enemy is in Paris for a variety of reasons, including a desire to pursue his objectives at lower costs. He is not there primarily out of weakness, but rather from a realization that a military victory is not attainable as long as U.S. forces remain in SVN, yet a victory in the political area is very possible.

—(7) Hanoi is attempting to chart a course basically independent of Moscow and Peking.

Within these parameters of agreement there are different overall perspectives. There is some shifting between agencies or shading of their positions depending on the issues, so it would be somewhat misleading to categorize them overall. Agency positions will be clear in the remainder of the paper.

A composite of more hopeful views would look as follows:

—an overall allied momentum on various fronts is in large part responsible for the enemy's presence at the negotiating table and lower profile on the battlefield.

—U.S. military operations have been increasingly effective and with less constraints could be even more so.

—there are more South Vietnamese fighting with better effectiveness.

—recent gains in pacification represent real advances against the VC and should hold up.

—the GVN is more stable than at any time since Diem and is making good political progress.

—one cannot forecast "victory," within current constraints, but our negotiators should know that the tides are favorable.

A composite of more skeptical views would shape up as follows:

—there have been recent improvements in the allied position but these have produced essentially a stalemate.

—enemy activities in Paris and Vietnam do not flow primarily from weakness.

—Allied military efforts—short of unacceptable risks of widening the war—cannot now or in the foreseeable future bring the enemy to his knees.

—great problems confront the larger, better equipped South Vietnamese forces.

—pacification gains are inflated and fragile.

—inadequate political progress is being made.

—while our negotiators are in a stronger position with regard to the military situation, a compromise settlement is the most likely outcome for Vietnam and our focus needs to be increasingly on political actions.

Thus there are U.S. Government disagreements on a number of questions including the following:

—In explaining reduced enemy military presence and activities, some give greater weight to allied military pressure, others to the enemy's political motives and tactics.

—The improvements in RVNAF are considered much more significant by some agencies than others.

—Some observers see no cutback in U.S. forces possible without a proportionate reduction in combat capability, while others see a certain amount of "fat" in current U.S. force levels.

—Some underline advancements in the pacification program, while others are extremely skeptical both of the evaluation system used to measure progress and of the solidity of recent advances.

—In looking at the political scene, some accent recent improvements while others highlight the necessities of continued and accelerated political actions by the GVN to overcome remaining obstacles if the GVN is to have a reasonable chance to compete with the VC/NLF/PRP [*PRG?*].

—Some respondents assign much greater effectiveness to past and current bombing in Vietnam and Laos than others.

—Some believe, and others totally disagree, that a vigorous interdiction campaign against land and sea supply routes in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia could choke off enough Soviet and Chinese supplies to make North Vietnam give up the struggle.

In addition to these differences, there are major intelligence community disagreements concerning:

—the enemy order of battle;

—the importance of Cambodia (in particular Sihanoukville) as a supply channel for the enemy;

—the impact of possible Vietnam outcomes on Southeast Asia.

Following is a summary of the major conclusions and disagreements about each of six broad areas with regard to Vietnam: the negotiating environment, enemy capabilities, RVNAF capabilities, pacification, South Vietnamese politics, and U.S. military operations.

1. Negotiating Environment
(Questions 1–4)

(Reasons for the enemy presence in Paris. Impact of Vietnam on Southeast Asia. Influence of Moscow and Peking on Hanoi. Possible factions in North Vietnamese leadership.)

There is general U.S. Government agreement that Hanoi is in Paris for a variety of motives, including a desire to pursue his objectives at lower costs, but he is not there primarily out of weakness; that Hanoi is charting a course independent of Moscow, which favors negotiations, and of Peking, which opposes them, despite the DRV reliance on its allies for supplies; and that our knowledge of possible political factions among North Vietnamese leaders is imprecise. There continues disagreement about the impact on Southeast Asia of various outcomes in Vietnam.

Why is the DRV in Paris?

Various possible North Vietnamese motives for negotiating are discussed, and there is agreement that the DRV is in Paris for mixed reasons. No U.S. agency responding to the questions believes that the primary reason the DRV is in Paris is weakness. All consider it unlikely that Hanoi came to Paris either to accept a face-saving formula for defeat or to give the U.S. a face-saving way to withdraw. There is agreement that Hanoi has been subject to heavy military pressure and that a desire to end the losses and costs of war was an element in Hanoi's decision. The consensus is that Hanoi believes that it can persist long enough to obtain a relatively favorable negotiated compromise. The respondents agree that the DRV is in Paris to negotiate withdrawal of U.S. forces, to undermine GVN–USG relations and to provide a better chance for VC victory in the South. State believes that Hanoi's increasing realization that it could not win the conflict by continued military and political pressure also played a major role. Hanoi's ultimate goal of a unified Vietnam under its control has not changed.

Vietnam Impact on Southeast Asia

There continues to be sharp debate between and within agencies about the effect of the outcome in Vietnam on other nations. The most recent NIE on this subject (NIE 50–68)[3] states that a settlement which

[3] See *Foreign Relations,* 1964–1968, vol. VII, Document 220.

would result in the communists taking control of the Government in South Vietnam, not immediately but within a year or two, would be likely to have adverse psychological effects throughout the area and bring Cambodia and Laos into Hanoi's orbit at a fairly early state, but that these developments would not necessarily unhinge the rest of Southeast Asia.

The NIE dissenters believe that an unfavorable settlement would stimulate the communists to become more active elsewhere and that it will be difficult to resist making some accommodation to the pressure then generated. They believe, in contrast to the Estimate, these adjustments would be relatively swift and insensitive to subsequent U.S. policy.

The assessments rest more on judgments and assumptions than on tangible and convincing evidence, and there are major disagreements within the same Departments. Within the Defense Department, OSD and DIA support the conclusions of the NIE, while Army, Navy and Air Force Intelligence dissent. Within State, the Bureau of Intelligence supports the NIE while the East Asian Bureau dissents. CIA supports the NIE conclusions while Embassy Saigon generally sides with the dissenters.

Factors entering into the judgments are estimates of (1) Hanoi's and Peking's behavior after the settlement; (2) U.S. posture and policy in the regions; (3) Asian leaders' estimates of future U.S. policy; (4) the reactions of the area's non-communist leaders to the outcome in Vietnam; (5) vulnerabilities of the various governments to insurgency or subversion; and (6) the strengths of opposition groups within each state.

All reject the view that an unfavorable settlement in Vietnam will inevitably be followed by communist takeovers outside Indo China and there is agreement that much will depend on what the countries do for themselves and the other factors mentioned.

Moscow and Peking Influence

There is general governmental agreement on this question. Peking opposes negotiations while Moscow prefers an early negotiated settlement on terms as favorable as possible to Hanoi. Neither Peking nor Moscow have exerted heavy pressure on Hanoi and for various reasons they are unlikely to do so, although their military and economic assistance give them important leverage. CIA notes that "in competing for influence Peking and Moscow tend to cancel out each other." For its own reasons, Hanoi's tendency in the last year has been in the Soviet direction. However, the Hanoi leadership is attempting to chart its own independent course, despite its reliance on its allies for supplies.

Hanoi Leadership Factions

There is agreement that knowledge of the existence and significance of possible factions within the Hanoi leadership is imprecise. There are differences of opinion within the leadership on tactics as opposed to ultimate objectives but there are not stable "Moscow" and "Peking" factions. The Hanoi leadership will form different alignments on different issues. The attempts by the agencies to ascertain the position of various North Vietnamese leaders on specific issues shows the imprecision of our information and analysis. For example, different agencies set forth sharply conflicting identifications of the position of individual leaders such as Giap on particular questions.

2. The Enemy
(Questions 5–10)

(Explanation of recent enemy military activities. Attrition of enemy forces. Enemy order of battle, offensive capabilities, supply channels.)

Analyses of various enemy tactics and capabilities reveal both significant agreements and sharp controversies within the Government. Among the major points of consensus:

—A combination of military pressures and political tactics explains recent enemy withdrawals and lower levels of activity.

—Under current rules of engagement, the enemy's manpower pool and infiltration capabilities can outlast allied attrition efforts indefinitely, although the quality of enemy personnel suffers.

—The enemy basically controls both sides' casualty rates.

—The enemy, if he is willing to take the risks, can still launch major offensives, although not at 1968 Tet levels or with dramatic effect.

Major controversies include:

—CIA, DIA and State assign much higher figures to the enemy Order of Battle than MACV. They also quantify additional categories that are not part of the Order of Battle but are judged to be significant in terms of the enemy's political/security capabilities.

—MACV/CINCPAC/JCS and Saigon consider Cambodia an important enemy supply channel. A joint CIA–DIA–State team acknowledges the importance of Cambodia as a source of food supplies but feels that the Laotian supply corridor is the primary channel for the movement of military supplies (arms and ammunition).

Recent Enemy Activities

Military pressures and political considerations are viewed as responsible for the withdrawal of some North Vietnamese units into Cambodian and Laotian sanctuaries during the summer and fall of

1968. Military factors included heavy enemy losses, effective allied tactics, material shortages, and bad weather. Political factors centered on enemy efforts to make a political virtue out of a military necessity in a talk-fight strategy to influence the Paris negotiations.

Although the question asked of agencies indicated some doubt, all respondents agreed that the enemy did undertake a third-wave offensive during the week of August 17. At a cost of 5,500 enemy KIA, the enemy tripled the number of his attacks to 100 per week and his attacks during the second half of August were about one half the level of his "second-wave" offensive in May. Prisoners and captured documents reported the goal of achieving a general uprising and overthrow of the GVN. The lack of greater success was attributed to: the enemy's economy-of-forces tactics; his desire to demonstrate initiative but at reduced risk; effective U.S. spoiling actions and increased intelligence; and the continuing deterioration of enemy Post-Tet capabilities in terms of quality of men and officers and lack of training.

In contrast to the implication of a question posed to the agencies, all evaluators except the Department of State and Embassy Saigon state that VC guerrillas and local forces are *not* relatively dormant and that levels of harassment and terror remain high. The Embassy notes "the current low level of guerrilla and local forces activity," and State agrees there has been a "relative decline." Both agree that among the reasons are the heavy casualty rates, manpower problems and loss of cadres. But according to Embassy evaluators, the main factor is that "the VC are husbanding their resources to give themselves the option of a 'climaxing' offensive." State notes that to support the VC counter-pacification campaign and their "Liberation Committees," "the Communists may feel that a demonstrably strong blow against the pacification program would have wide repercussions, particularly at a time of optimistic Allied claims about pacification successes."

NVN/VC Manpower

It is generally agreed that the NVN/VC manpower pool is sufficiently large to meet the enemy's replenishment needs over an extended period of time within the framework of current rules of engagement. According to the JCS, "The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong have access to sufficient manpower to meet their replenishment needs—even at the high 1968 loss rate of some 291,000—for at least the next several years. . . . Present operations are not outrunning the enemy's ability to replenish by recruitment or infiltration." Enemy losses of 291,000 in 1968 were roughly balanced by infiltration and recruitment of 298,000. North Vietnamese manpower assets include 1.8 million physically fit males aged 15–34 of whom 45% are in the regular forces (475,000) and paramilitary (400,000) forces; 120,000 physically fit males reach draft age each year and 200,000 military and labor

personnel have been freed by the bombing halt from defensive work. The potential manpower pool in SVN is estimated at half a million men and recruitment, while down, is running at approximately 3,500 per month. Enemy maintenance of the current commitment of 300,000 new men per year requires that the Allies inflict losses of 25,000 KIA per month, or 7,000 more than the current rate. MACV considers current Allied force levels adequate to inflict such casualties if the enemy chooses to engage.

The enemy's employment of economy of forces tactics since the fall of 1968 and intelligence evidence reflect the enemy's concern about his 1968 level of losses, which amounted to nearly 100% yearly attrition of his full-time fighters in the South and, if continued, could lead to nearly total North Vietnamization of main force units in South Vietnam. He is judged unlikely to undertake the heavy losses of a major offensive unless he believes he could thereby achieve a breakthrough in Allied will-power in Vietnam or Paris. Yet, without a VC/NVA offensive on the scale of Tet 1968, the JCS believe "it will be exceedingly difficult in 1969 for allied forces to attrite the enemy at 1968 levels."

Control of NVA/VC Attrition

There is general agreement with the JCS statement, "The enemy, by the type action he adopts, has the predominant share in determining enemy attrition rates." Three fourths of the battles are at the enemy's choice of time, place, type and duration. CIA notes that less than three percent of about 1.7 million Allied small unit operations conducted in the last two years resulted in contact with the enemy and, when ARVN is surveyed, the percentage drops to one tenth of one per cent. There are inaccuracies and variations in service reporting but these figures indicate the general magnitude. With his safe havens in Laos and Cambodia and with carefully chosen tactics, the enemy has been able during the last four years to double his combat forces, double the level of infiltration and increase the scale and intensity of the main force war even while bearing heavy casualties. MACV/CINCPAC/JCS consider that a resumption of full scale hostilities with a relaxation of rules of engagement would result in depletion of the enemy's manpower and war-making resources, forcing him to recognize the futility of continuing the war or to face the inevitable destruction of his capability to continue the war.

VC/NVA Order of Battle

There is considerable disagreement concerning the estimates of Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Order of Battle. Both MACV/CINCPAC and CIA/DIA—the only two groups making independent estimates—include the same elements in their estimate of the military threat that is quantified in the Order of Battle. When these two estimates are made

comparable in terms of major units included or excluded, the CIA/DIA estimate of the elements making up the enemy's military threat is at least 35,000 and possibly 125,000 greater than the MACV/CINCPAC estimate.

There is no great controversy over the size of the Political Infrastructure. The somewhat larger CIA/DIA estimate (see the table) allows for the inclusion of certain supporting staffs excluded from the MACV/CINCPAC estimate.

The CIA/DIA estimates of enemy strength include an additional category made up of the Self Defense Forces and Assault Youth, estimated at 90,000 to 140,000 persons. They are not judged to be part of the military threat but are quantified because they are partially armed, perform military support functions, and are a principal target of the Allied pacification and security program. MACV/CINCPAC do not quantify these forces.

The Department of State, noting that the MACV estimates results from adding up so-called "hard" field intelligence figures for main force and local and guerrilla forces, believes CIA's extrapolation is developed more realistically from the totality of evidence. OSD presents both the MACV/CINCPAC and CIA/DIA estimates, pointing out that the differences in overall strength presented by the two are not sufficient to cause a change in overall strategy. CIA feels, however, that the difference could be significant if the true military threat is closer to the higher end of the range estimated by CIA/DIA. CIA also feels that the difference in estimates could have a significant bearing on peace terms and in judgments of the residual military capabilities of VC forces should the NVA forces be withdrawn. On the following page is a table laying out these different estimates.

Recruiting figures vary for reasons similar to the divergencies on strength. Monthly VC recruitment is estimated by CIA at 8,500 in 1966, 7,500 in 1967, double the 1967 rate during the first quarter of 1968 and dropping sharply after the Tet offensive to approximately 3,500 per month. CIA estimates a smaller drop than MACV. Saigon reports that the last six months reflect a reduced level of recruitment, citing as evidence GVN expansion, reduction in VC standards, VC attempts to improve existing cadre, increased use of NVA fillers in VC units, and GVN mobilization effectiveness.

NVA/VC Capabilities for a Large-Scale Offensive

All agree that (as recent events have borne out) the enemy has a capability for a large scale offensive against cities, bases and/or villages in the Accelerated Pacification Program if he wishes to bear the heavy casualties that would result. Allied countermeasures and preemptive capabilities make it highly unlikely that such an attack would

COMPARISON OF ESTIMATES OF MILITARY-POLITICAL STRENGTHS IN SOUTH VIETNAM[4]

Military Threat	*DIA/CIA*	*MACV/CINCPAC*
Combat forces		
NVA	105,000 to 125,000[a]	92,000[b]
VC	45,000 to 55,000	37,000
Subtotal	150,000 to 180,000	129,000
Administrative services		
NVA	10,000 to 20,000	
VC	45,000 to 55,000	
Subtotal	55,000 to 75,000	42,000
Guerrillas	60,000 to 100,000[c]	59,000
Total military threat	265,000 to 355,000	230,000
Infrastructure	80,000 to 100,000	83,000
Other irregular organizations	90,000 to 140,000[d]	N.A.[e]

[a] An estimated 20,000 to 25,000 of the NVA troops are serving in VC units. This estimate excludes an estimated 28,000 NVA troops deployed north of the DMZ. [Footnote in the source text.]

[b] This is a MACV/CINCPAC estimate of 106,000 NVA troops adjusted to exclude the same elements excluded from the CIA/DIA estimate because they are north of the DMZ. [Footnote in the source text.]

[c] DIA/CIA believe that the military threat represented by guerrilla forces is not on a parity with that of main and local forces because probably only about one-third of the guerrillas are well-armed, trained, and organized. [Footnote in the source text.]

[d] Includes self defense, secret self defense, and assault youth forces. [Footnote in the source text.]

[e] MACV and CINCPAC do not quantify these forces. [Footnote in the source text.]

[4] Secret.

have an impact on the scale of the Tet offensive of 1968. Further the enemy would weigh the effect of such an offensive on the Paris talks and on the risk of touching off a resumption of bombing in North Vietnam.

NVA/VC Supply Channels

There is general agreement that the main channels for military supplies reaching enemy forces in the northern areas of South Vietnam (I, and northern II Corps) are the Laos Panhandle and the DMZ. Disagreement exists as to the channel of supplies for III Corps and southern II Corps. MACV points to Cambodia, believing that no large shipments of ordnance are coming into III or IV Corps and southern II Corps via Laos and that Cambodia has during the last two years become a major source of supplies for these regions. MACV has estimated that some 10,000 tons of arms and ammunition have gone through Sihanoukville to the border between October 1967 and September 1968 for the use of the enemy in III, IV, and parts of II Corps. CIA and State disagree strongly with that estimate, and point out the lack of reliable information on the volume of munitions shipments entering Sihanoukville as well as the volume moved across the border. CIA also points out that the volume of Communist supplies flowing through Laos has been more than adequate to cover the external requirements of all Communist forces in South Vietnam. CIA, nevertheless, does not contest the MACV view that Communist forces in IV Corps also are supplied principally from Cambodia, but points out that a substantial part of the munitions supplies moved into this area do not move through Cambodian-controlled channels.

OSD summarizes without comment the national level CIA/DIA estimates for total enemy external daily supply requirements of 80 tons: 34 tons come from Laos, 14 tons across the DMZ, and 32 tons from Cambodia (of which 29 tons involve mainly food and other noncombatant goods).

3. The South Vietnamese Armed Forces (Questions 10A–13)

(Extent and types of RVNAF improvements. Present and future RVNAF capabilities against various threats, with and without U.S. support. Changes required of RVNAF.)

In general, points of disagreement among U.S. agencies on the RVNAF capabilities are more numerous than points of agreement. There is consensus that the RVNAF is getting larger, better equipped and somewhat more effective. All agree that it could not now, or in the foreseeable future, handle both the VC and sizable NVA forces without U.S. combat support. On other major points there are sharp differences. The military community gives much greater weight to

RVNAF statistical improvements while OSD highlights remaining obstacles and CIA points out that qualitative factors must also be considered in evaluating the RVNAF. Paradoxically, MACV/CINCPAC/JCS see RVNAF as being less capable against the VC alone than do CIA and State.

RVNAF Capabilities Against the Enemy

The Vietnamese Armed Forces (RVNAF) are being increased in size and re-equipped to improve their ground combat capability. The best measure of this improvement is the RVNAF's expected performance against a given enemy threat. However, there is a paradoxical divergence in agency views on the RVNAF ability to handle the internal VC threat without U.S. assistance. State (both EA and INR) and CIA—who generally rate RVNAF improvement and effectiveness lowest among the respondents, and who accept the highest estimates of overall VC strength—believe that, "Without any US support, . . . ARVN would at least be able to hold its own and make some progress against the VC unsupported by the NVA" (i.e. the VC without NVA fillers, though with regroupees and matériel support). CIA caveats this judgment, however, by noting that a critical factor, and one almost impossible to judge, would be the effect on the will of both the ARVN and VC of a pullout of North Vietnamese and U.S. forces.

In contrast is the view of MACV/CINCPAC/JCS, who rate RVNAF improvement and effectiveness highest and who accept the lowest estimates of VC armed strength. The military community, nevertheless, believes that without U.S. combat support, in opposing VC main and local forces without any NVA units or fillers, RVNAF "would have to reduce the number of offensive operations and adopt more of a defensive posture," resulting in "loss of control by the Government of Vietnam over substantial rural areas." Thus, MACV/CINCPAC/JCS believe that RVNAF would not be able to cope with purely indigenous VC forces without U.S. combat support until the completion of the modernization program in 1972.

OSD, however, believes RVNAF's capability against VC forces is closely associated with time. If most U.S. forces withdraw now, RVNAF's newly gained confidence may collapse; however, RVNAF capabilities should increase over time provided that a number of major reforms are made in addition to the current modernization program, if even this goal is to be met. "Without major reforms within the RVNAF command and selection system, however, it is unlikely that the RVNAF, as presently organized and led, will ever constitute an effective political or military counter to the Viet Cong." OSD also believes that some reduction of U.S. forces would give impetus to RVNAF to make the required changes.

All agencies agree that RVNAF could not, either now or even when fully modernized, handle both the VC and a sizable level of NVA forces without U.S. combat support in the form of air, helicopters, artillery, logistics and major ground forces.

RVNAF Improvements

There is consensus that RVNAF forces are now much larger (826,000) than in December 1967 (743,000) and will be further increased to 876,000, with the greatest increases in manpower given to the Popular and Regional Forces needed for local security. The RVNAF is also better equipped. All regular combat units have M16 rifles and are beginning to receive increases in their own artillery and helicopter support. Regional and Popular Forces (393,000 of the total RVNAF strength in December 1968) have 100,000 M16 rifles and are scheduled to receive 150,000 more in 1969. MACV has stepped up his training efforts by forming 353 mobile teams in 1968 to train and advise the militia.

Moreover, all agencies agree that overall RVNAF capabilities, number of operations and effectiveness increased during 1968. Data presents a mixed picture in some areas, but it is clear that the larger number of enemy killed by RVNAF resulted from better effectiveness (more kills per 1000 troops, along with higher kill ratios) as well as increased force size. In spite of these statistical improvements (which CIA in particular finds unreliable indicators), RVNAF is best thought of as a force which enlarged its contribution in 1968 within a total allied effort which also expanded. The modernization program, just beginning to have a high impact in the field, promises that results will continue to increase so long as RVNAF receives backbone in the form of a U.S. ground combat presence.

RVNAF Problems

All agree that RVNAF faces severe motivation, leadership and desertion problems. The differences lie in assessing the magnitude and impact these problems have on the prognosis for RVNAF's future. The continuing motivation problem involves loyalty to the government, getting RVNAF troops to fight and doing the right things to improve relations between soldiers and the Vietnamese people. The officer problem is mixed in politics and little has been done to correct it. Poor leadership and motivation contribute to regular ground combat forces deserting (net) at an annual rate of 34% of their strength (gross rate for 1/3 of the divisions is more than 50%). Total RVNAF desertions (net) are equivalent to losing one ARVN division per month.

Thus, OSD does not believe that current expansion and reequipment programs are sufficient to make RVNAF into an effective fighting force unless major political and military actions, which are not now emphasized, are taken. OSD considers essential action to recognize and

reward combat leadership and development of a favorable attitude by the military towards their own people which will result in acceptance and support of the government by its citizens.

JCS, CINCPAC, and MACV recognize leadership and motivational problems, and believe that substantial progress has been made in these areas since 1965, and with current remedial programs RVNAF is making reasonable progress toward development as a self-sufficient force able to hold its own against an internal VC threat. CIA feels that RVNAF is making limited progress, despite the fact that many of its weaknesses are uncorrected. OSD and State also see limited progress and note that many RVNAF weaknesses remain uncorrected. (Within State, INR is less hopeful than the East Asian Regional Bureau.)

4. Pacification
(Questions 14–20)

(Changes in the security situation in Vietnam. Future prospects. Strength of the Viet Cong and efforts against them.)

Two well-defined and divergent views emerged from the agencies on the pacification situation in South Vietnam. One view is held by MACV and Embassy Saigon and endorsed by CINCPAC and JCS. The other view is that of OSD, CIA and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) in State. (The East Asian bureau in State lies somewhere in between.) The two views are profoundly different in terms of factual interpretation and policy implications. Both views agree on the obstacles to improvement and complete success. What distinguishes one view from the other is each's assessment of the *magnitude* of the problem, and the assessment of the degree of improvement likely to take place in the near future.

The Two Views

The first group, consisting of MACV/JCS/Saigon, maintains that "at the present time, the security situation is better than any time during period in question," i.e., 1961–1968. MACV cites a "dramatic change in the security situation," and finds that the GVN controls three-fourths of the population. JCS suggests that the GVN will control 90% of the population in 1969. The second group, OSD/CIA and INR in State, on the other hand, is more cautious and pessimistic; their view is not inconsistent with another Tet-offensive-like shock in the countryside—for example, wiping out the much-touted gains of the 1968 Accelerated Pacification Program, or with more gradual erosion. Representing the second group's view, OSD arrives at the following conclusions:

(1) "The portions of the SVN rural population aligned with the VC and aligned with the GVN are apparently the same today as in 1962: 5,000,000 GVN aligned and nearly 3,000,000 VC aligned."

(2) "At the present, it appears that at least 50% of the total rural population is subject to significant VC presence and influence."

CIA agrees, and INR in State goes even further, saying:

"Our best estimate is that the VC have a significant effect on at least two-thirds of the rural population."

The Major Issues

The substance of the argument is evident in the chart on the next page.[5] Using HES data for 1967–1968, the chart shows that the first group's interpretation leaves only 26.7% of SVN's population to be pacified as of November 1968. The second group thinks 41.3% of the population was yet to be pacified. More importantly, the second view shows little pacification progress over the period except for the gains of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC) program, and they are skeptical about these gains. State (INR), OSD, and CIA maintain that the October–December APC acquisition of 9.4% of the population for the GVN is a fragile claim because these gains were achieved by spreading our military and administrative resources thinly over contested areas. These agencies, therefore, argue that the APC gains have stood so far only because the VC/NLF have not challenged them, and they believe it is "quite likely" the gains will be contested in the coming months.

If the APC gains and those other gains secured in the wake of the fall NVN withdrawals are removed the substance of the long-term debate emerges clearly. The chart then shows that according to the second view, thus modified, pacification programs have registered no progress over 1967–68. The first view sees significant progress over the 1967–68 period. It is further seen that the second view placed the chart's relatively secure line much lower. For example, in August 1968, the first group says 65.8% of the population was under GVN control; the second group places only 49.9% in the GVN category.

The source of this difference is a derivative of a wider dispute over the value of the HES composite indicator which is really an average of eighteen indicators, indiscriminately mixing security factors with development factors and not assessing appropriate weighting for each indicator. The second group arrives at their estimate by allocating a portion of the first group's GVN controlled population to the contested category. They do this by breaking out the "grey area" population on the basis of military and political activity instead of the composite HES indicator. According to their view, in the fall of 1968 at least one-half of South Vietnam's rural population was subject to a significant VC/NLF presence; for the first group, this figure was approximately

[5] Not reproduced here.

one-third. The East Asian Bureau in State takes a middle position and believes that the "relatively secure" population figures derived from HES should not be accepted in toto.

By neither view can pacification be said to have progressed greatly in the last three years, at least, prior to the last few months. This conclusion is emphasized in the OSD view if consideration is given to the fact that about the same number of people have been brought under GVN control by population migration as have been by pacification gains. Nor does either view promise anything close to complete success within two to three years. MACV/JCS anticipates snowballing gains in the future, but other agencies note that stalemating of GVN pacification efforts could make the rural population more ready to accommodate with the NLF. The East Asian Bureau of State believes that the moment for pacification gains was not opportune until late 1967 and that we can anticipate further progress in the next two years.

It is noteworthy that the gap in views that does exist is largely one between the policy makers, the analysts, and the intelligence community on the one hand, and the civilian and military operators on the other.

The implications of the disagreement are very divergent. One view sees a high probability of GVN success and generally applauds the GVN's performance. It finds that the GVN has been ineffective at times, but that it has not been negligent, and overall progress has been most satisfactory.

The other view is greatly different. The GVN has yet to succeed in the countryside. The rural population situation has not changed significantly and certainly not at a rate which will free us of noticeable burdens within 2–5 years. We may even be over-extended in the rural areas and open to a damaging VC counterattack.

In CIA's view, progress has been slow but there has been progress. The real test of how solid recent gains in pacification have been will come when the VC initiate serious counter-pacification activity.

Changes Required

As to the changes required to increase favorable change in security and control, all agree that improvement in leadership, both civil and military, and at all levels, is a primary prerequisite. Other changes recommended are improvements in quality and quantity of small-unit operations in support of territorial security and pacification. A shopping list of recommended changes is provided by MACV/JCS, Embassy Saigon, and OSD. INR in State essentially states that "the basic deficiencies [of pacification][6] remain and give little reason to expect a

[6] Brackets in this and following paragraph are in the source text.

significant change in the situation in the countryside in the next two years." Additionally, OSD has provided gradations of changes which depend upon assessments of present progress and with the more radical changes calling for a reorientation of the advisory system and refocusing of pacification efforts.

Lesser Issues

In 1968, 15,776 members of the Viet Cong political and administrative Infrastructure (VCI) were neutralized, 87.1% of whom were easily replaceable functionaries. Anti-VCI operations showed major improvements, but all agree with the MACV statement "these [VCI] losses have not unduly disrupted the communist political apparatus." A precise estimate of VCI operations is complicated by the fact that current estimates of the size of the VCI differ by 25% or more. Moreover the criteria used to measure neutralizations are different from those used to estimate the infrastructure. Thus any direct comparison of the numbers neutralized and the numbers estimated to be in the VCI are misleading. Analysis of Phoenix and other anti-VCI activities also shows that there are major difficulties with the GVN's method of detainee disposition, and suggests the need for GVN judicial reforms.

All agencies agreed that the Phoenix program was long overdue and potentially very valuable. The respondents agreed that it is too early for a thorough assessment of the Phoenix program, and they predict it is unlikely to cause the NLF major problems in 1969. Embassy Saigon noted that Phoenix bears close watching with respect to the attitudes or rural population, attitudes toward the American sponsors, and a potentially deleterious effect on the possibilities for rural GVN–VC accommodations.

Every agency except MACV/JCS agrees that the available data on war damage to the civilian population is inadequate. CIA concluded the rural hamlets take a tremendous beating both from friendly and enemy forces. The responses received suggest that this is a very serious problem in need of further U.S. Government attention and analysis.

Recent GVN personnel changes were found by all agencies to have brought a significant upgrading in the averaging quality of GVN officials. Nonetheless, corruption, favoritism, and neglect of the populace's problems were still seen as major GVN shortcomings. There was no conclusive evidence that the 1968 personnel changes affected the GVN's relations with minority groups.

5. The Political Scene
(Questions 21–23)

(Current attitudes toward the GVN. Efforts to strengthen it. Noncommunist prospects in Vietnam.)

This section on the political situation can be boiled down to three fundamental questions: (1) How strong is the GVN today? (2) What is being done to strengthen it for the political struggle with the NLF? (3) What are the prospects for continued non-communist government in South Vietnam?

The essence of the replies from U.S. agencies is as follows: (1) The GVN is stronger recently than for many years but still very weak in certain areas and among various elites. (2) Some steps are being taken to strengthen the GVN politically but these are inadequate. (3) It is most difficult to predict the prospects for continued non-communist government, but they are chancy at best.

Within these broad thrusts of the responses there are decided differences of emphasis among the agencies. The implication of these different emphases could very well tip the political balance in South Vietnam over the next several years. Thus, MACV/JCS and Saigon, while acknowledging the problems, accent more the increasing stability of the Thieu regime and the overall political system; the significance of the moves being made by the GVN to bolster its strength; and the possibility of continued non-communist rule in South Vietnam given sufficient U.S. support. OSD on the other hand, while acknowledging certain progress, is decidedly more skeptical and pessimistic. CIA takes a cautiously optimistic view, acknowledging certain progress, but warning of weak spots which still must be overcome. OSD and CIA note recent political improvements and GVN measures but they tend to deflate their relative impact and highlight the remaining obstacles. State's position, while not so consistent or clear-cut, generally steers a middle course, being somewhat skeptical about the overall political situation and the GVN position and seeing prospects as mixed. State both accents recent stability and acknowledges inadequate GVN political actions.

The Present Situation

We have a great quantity of information on Vietnamese politics but the quality is suspect. It varies greatly by elite and level and is usually sounder for broad groups than factions or individuals. OSD remarks that we are dealing with a nascent constitutional system in which the elective process has yet to take hold and elections are viewed as a manipulatory process designed to confirm present leaders with their power positions.

Non-communist elements rally in times of common danger from the communist threat, but otherwise generally engage in a perpetual struggle for power. Most elites may be willing to participate in the GVN but their motives are often mixed. State observes that there generally is a greater commitment to the GVN and anti-communist struggle today and that active non-communist opposition has decreased. In their

view toward the military struggle, Northerners are most insistent on military victory, but the central and Southern Vietnamese indicate ambiguity and war-weariness. Firm support for the GVN, as long as it projects a strong anti-communist image, comes from most military elements, Catholics and portions of the bureaucratic and merchant classes. The major problem for the GVN remains in the rural villages where the VC are strongest. Opposition also comes from certain Buddhist, youth, union and professional elements. Various ethnic and religious minorities, while often anti-communist, are not strongly tied to the GVN. The Army could be a distinct threat to the continance of the GVN if it perceives a weakening of resolve by Thieu toward communists or if U.S. support for civilianization of the GVN or for Thieu is perceived as weakening.

In reading the Vietnamese political scene, one must keep in mind that pragmatism, expediency, war weariness, a desire to remain unaligned and end up on the winning side are all common features. So are family loyalty, corruption, social immobility and clandestine activities.

OSD points out (and a recent Saigon cable corroborates this view) that there has been a noticeable shift recently by many non-communists towards acceptance of the NLF in some capacity as part of an eventual political settlement. How much of this is political opportunism colored by the belief they can control the communists is unknown, but, in any case most elites would want to minimize the communist influence in the government. Most elites are now opposed to a forced coalition government which includes communists in significant positions of power. However, these elites may be highly vulnerable to manipulation by the NLF/PRP [*PRG*] given its organizational strength and political skills.

South Vietnamese attitudes toward the U.S. are varied and ambivalent. Our presence is seen as a necessary evil to forestall a communist take-over. Our involvement is viewed with a mixture of gratitude, shame, and suspicion. Essentially, recent events, especially the Paris talks, have made it apparent to the Vietnamese that the U.S. commitment is not open-ended and that some withdrawals are likely during 1969.

GVN Political Actions

All agencies agree that there has been substantial progress in broadening the government; all except OSD and State see significant movement against corruption; and all agree that political mobilization is both the most crucial and the weakest area. There is a certain ambivalence in agency views which maintain that U.S. pressure for reforms is needed but that we should not get too directly involved. OSD points out past U.S. failures at directing Vietnamese political life into desired channels.

Recent encouraging moves toward broadening the government include various elections, a national assembly with real deliberative powers, and greater Southern and civilian representation in the Cabinet. However, many groups are still not included or are under-represented. And the key problem of engaging the SVN population through GVN political organization from the top to the grass roots level has yet to be addressed by the GVN.

Recent dismissal of many unworthy officials and some increased emphasis on competence for promotion have not disspelled widespread corruption, reliance on personal loyalties and nepotism.

Events of the past year have sharpened the realization of the need for non-communist unity, but the GVN has made less progress on political mobilization than elsewhere. Its ability to gain support will depend primarily on the extent to which it can provide security, an alternative to the NLF, and social and economic progress. OSD has provided specific recommendations for U.S. actions to assist the GVN in attaining these ends.

Prospects

Political mobilization of non-communist elites is the most crucial factor, but it rests inter alia on broadening the government and advancement based on merit, and there are many other political steps needed. In general, all these factors will be increasingly important as the U.S. reduces its military effort. Such a reduction might stimulate political progress but it will also entail risks. As noted earlier, there is some ambiguity as well as differences of view about the proper U.S. role in SVN politics. State and Saigon caution against undue U.S. involvement and pressure. State adds that failure to act and U.S. actions elsewhere can also have impact. MACV/JCS place greater emphasis on the use of our leverage in effecting needed reforms. OSD argues for selective and less visible U.S. involvement in assisting the GVN politically while disengaging portions of the larger visible U.S. presence.

CIA notes that RVNAF will for some time remain the only national political force capable of matching the communists from the point of view of strength and organization. It does not appear realistic or prudent to expect that civilian groups alone can stand up to the communists within the next few years or that they should be given the practical burden of this effort at the expense of the military.

No agency clearly forecasts a "victory" over the communists, and all acknowledge the manifold problems facing the GVN as we withdraw. MACV/JCS stress the need for continued U.S. support. OSD and State believe that a compromise settlement is most likely and emphasize GVN self-reliance. The USIB state that progress in SVN has been sufficiently slow and fragile that substantial U.S. disengagement in the next few years could jeopardize all recent gains.

JCS and OSD each list their essential conditions for cessation of hostilities. While they agree on certain elements, the JCS look toward continued U.S. support to assure the sovereignty of the GVN while OSD requires only that the South Vietnamese be free to choose their political future without external influence.

6. U.S. Military Operations (Questions 24–28)

(Changes in U.S. deployments and tactics. Possibilities for U.S. force reductions. Effectiveness of B–52s, bombing in Laos and North Vietnam.)

The major points of agreement within the U.S. Government on these subjects are:

—the description of recent U.S. deployments and tactics;

—the difficulties of assessing the results of B–52 strikes, but their effectiveness against known troop concentrations and in close support operations;

—the fact that the Soviets and Chinese supply almost all war material to Hanoi and have enabled the North Vietnamese to carry on despite all our operations.

There are fundamental disagreements running throughout this section, including the following:

—OSD believes, and MACV/JCS deny, that there is a certain amount of "fat" in our current force levels that could be cut back without significant reduction in combat capability.

—MACV/JCS and, somewhat more cautiously, CIA and State ascribe much higher casualty estimates to our B–52 strikes than does OSD.

—MACV/JCS assign very much greater effectiveness to our past and current Laos and North Vietnam bombing campaigns than do OSD, State and CIA.

—MACV/JCS believe that a vigorous bombing and interdiction campaign could choke off enough supplies to Hanoi to make her stop fighting, while OSD and CIA feel that such a campaign could not reduce North Vietnam's capabilities to a level that would prevent it from continuing to support the struggle. CIA also is not convinced that the U.S. could sustain an unlimited interdiction and bombing program over a long period of time without losses reaching unacceptable levels.

U.S. Deployments and Tactics

In early 1968, MACV moved the equivalent of two divisions from II and III Corps to northern I Corps. This deployment was a defensive reaction to the threat of a major NVA seige of Khe Sanh and the coastal

lowlands. With the further enemy offensives in February and May, U.S. forces throughout the country (except for I Corps) were pulled back into screening positions around SVN's major cities and used to push the VC forces out. Since then, one of the two U.S. divisions redeployed to I Corps has been returned to III and IV Corps. MACV now gives top priority to the control of Saigon, the approaches to it in III and northern IV Corps, and the heavily populated upper Delta.

Until late 1968, allied (particularly U.S.) efforts were directed largely against enemy main forces through large (1,000 men or more) unit operations. With the recent withdrawal of NVA main force units from SVN, U.S. units have been able to operate in smaller units and with more emphasis on the enemy's infrastructure and support apparatus. U.S. field commanders estimate that nearly half of their operations are in support of pacification. The deployment of U.S. units in SVN's populated areas and the change in tactics has, MACV asserts, helped improve pacification progress.

U.S. Force Reductions

MACV/JCS and OSD agree that there is no way of reducing U.S. force levels in Vietnam without some reduction in combat capability. However, OSD argues that reducing some U.S. logistics headquarters, construction or tactical air personnel may not have any significant effect on U.S. combat capability or effectiveness. For instance, OSD concludes that because of the halt in bombing North Vietnam, the U.S. needs neither as many interdiction aircraft as we now have, nor our full force of three Navy carriers off North Vietnam, although reduction in any of these areas depends upon NVN's observance of the tacit conditions of the U.S. bombing halt. MACV/JCS feel that while some of the above elements would help to minimize loss of combat capability, in general significant reductions in our force levels will cause "at least equal" reductions in our combat capability.

OSD also thinks that U.S. forces could be reduced as the RVNAF improves and expands. By their estimates, the ongoing RVNAF improvement plan might free up to about 15–20 U.S. maneuver battalions and their support units (some 30–40,000 men) by mid-1969 without a decrease in total allied force capability. This projection assumes that RVNAF combat effectiveness increases along with their combat capability. Additionally, some U.S. forces could be reduced as they turn over equipment to selected RVNAF units. In their responses, MACV/JCS do not consider this question.

B–52 Effectiveness

All agencies acknowledge that sound analysis of the effectiveness of B–52 strikes is difficult. Consistent data bases are lacking. As a result there are sharp differences on casualty estimates. While JCS esti-

mates that about 41,000 enemy were killed in 1968 by the B–52s in all in-country strikes, OSD believes that perhaps as few as 7,100 were killed. The consensus is that some strikes are very effective, some clearly wasted, and a majority with indeterminate outcome.

There is agreement that B–52 strikes are very effective when directed against known enemy troop concentrations or in close support of tactical operations, and have served to disrupt VC/NVA operations. However, OSD and State, unlike MACV/JCS, find that B–52 strikes against suspected enemy infiltration routes, logistics or base camps/areas (50% of 1968's sorties) are probably much less effective than close support strikes. CIA cites a range of casualty estimates and considers it impossible to select one, but believes it is apparent that B–52 strikes have become a significant factor in the attrition of enemy forces.

The Laos and North Vietnam Interdiction Campaign

It is agreed that our bombing campaign both prior to and after November 1968 has reduced the enemy's throughput of supplies. However, State/CIA/OSD consider that this reduction has not materially affected the enemy's capability to supply his forces. MACV/JCS feel the bombing in Laos since 1 November 1968 has succeeded in reducing significantly enemy throughput capacity so that his minimum essential requirements in both Laos and SVN were not met during the period 1 November 1968 to 25 January 1969. State/CIA/OSD think it has failed to prevent the flow of supplies to SVN, though CIA feels it has cost the enemy heavily.

Post-November Campaign

Since early November, MACV has attempted to reduce the logistic capacity of the enemy by blocking the two key roads near the passes from NVN into Laos. MACV finds it has effectively blocked these roads 80% of the time and therefore caused less traffic to get through. OSD/CIA/State agree that enemy traffic on the roads attacked has been disrupted. However, they point out that the enemy uses less than 15% of the theoretical road capacity, that he is constantly expanding that capacity through new roads and bypasses, and that our air strikes do not eliminate, but only delay, traffic.

Besides blocking the roads, our bombing destroys material in transit on them. (In this connection, State notes the change in emphasis in Laotian bombing from the destruction of matériel, prior to mid-1968, to interdiction of the routes themselves.) JCS/MACV and OSD/CIA agree that we destroy 12% to 14% of the trucks sighted moving through Laos and 20% to 35% of the total flow of supplies in Laos. To MACV/JCS, the material destroyed forces the enemy to provide additional matériel to compensate for losses in order to maintain an acceptable level of support to the VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam. OSD

and CIA find that the enemy needs in SVN (10 to 15 trucks of supplies per day from the North) are so small compared with his logistics capacity that the enemy can replace his losses easily by increasing his traffic flows to offset attrition and get through to SVN as much supplies as he wants to despite the bombing.

Pre-November Campaign

Prior to November 1968, we bombed in southern North Vietnam as well as Laos. The MACV/JCS find that this campaign reduced the flow of supplies into Laos greatly and that this flow increased greatly after the bombing halt. The OSD/CIA agree that traffic followed this pattern, but argue that normal seasonal weather changes as well as the bombing affected the traffic pattern.

Alternative Campaign

All agencies agree that Chinese and Soviet aid has provided almost all the war material used by Hanoi. However, there is some disagreement on whether alternative military courses of action could reduce the flow enough to make a difference in South Vietnam. If all imports by sea were denied and land routes through Laos and Cambodia attacked vigorously, the MACV/JCS find that NVN could not obtain enough war supplies to continue. OSD and CIA question the effectiveness of a campaign to block the overland routes from China which alone could provide NVN enough material to carry on the war.

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

Washington, March 25, 1969.

SUBJECT

Quarantine of Cambodia

Secretary Laird has sent you a study prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at your request, on the feasibility and utility for quarantining Cambodia against the receipt of supplies and equipment to support the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces operating in and from Cam-

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. I, 8–69. Top Secret; Sensitive.

bodia. (Secretary Laird's memorandum and the Joint Chief's study are attached at Tab A.)[2]

The basic conclusions of the Joint Chiefs are:

(1) An air/sea blockade and other steps to quarantine Cambodia are both militarily feasible and of some utility in intensifying enemy supply problems in the III and IV Corps areas.

(2) Ground operations to deny the enemy use of the Laos Panhandle for support of enemy forces operating in and from Cambodia are not feasible within current force levels. However, present interdiction operations against enemy lines of communication in Laos should be continued to the maximum extent.

(3) While diplomatic exchanges between the U.S. and Cambodia may present an opportunity to gain Cambodian assistance in reducing enemy use of Cambodia as a sanctuary, the most effective method would be preemptive ground and air operations of limited depth and duration in Cambodia and in the tri-border area of Laos.

On the basis of these conclusions, the Joint Chiefs made four recommendations:

(1) Air/sea blockade or quarantine be retained as an option to be undertaken when appropriate against the receipt in Cambodia of supplies and equipment for the support of VC/NVA forces operating in and from Cambodia against South Vietnam.

(2) Interdiction operations against the enemy's lines of communication in Laos be continued to the maximum extent.

(3) Current political initiatives be used to gain Prince Sihanouk's support or acquiescence in allied military efforts to reduce the enemy's sanctuary and the flow of supplies to VC/NVA forces operating in and from Cambodia.

(4) In concert with other appropriate initiatives outlined above, short-term air and ground raids be authorized against clearly identified VC/NVA forces and supplies in sparsely populated areas of Cambodia along the SVN border, and in southern Laos.

Secretary Laird has recommended that the National Security Council review this issue before any new military actions are authorized because of the political implications of the Joint Chief's recommendations. These political implications are briefly the need to estimate Prince Sihanouk's level of tolerance for operations inside Cambodia, and the question of consulting with Prince Souvanna

[2] Tab A, a memorandum from Laird to Nixon, March 18, and Annex A, an undated JCS study of a quarantine of Cambodia, are not attached. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 VIET S)

Phouma on further operations in Laos, as we have done in the past with good results. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are also preparing a list of specific military actions in Cambodia which would not be subject to National Security Council review.

Recommendation:

That Secretary Laird and Secretary Rogers be requested to prepare a joint study on the military and political implications of preemptive operations against Cambodia and Laos for consideration by the National Security Council.[3]

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[3] Nixon initialed the disapprove option and wrote: "Let's not make any 'decisions' on this until we get another crack or two at Cambodia. Later—have the study made." In an April 8 memorandum to Laird, Kissinger informed him that the President had reviewed the study on quarantining Cambodia and that he "desires that this matter be held in abeyance for the time being." (Washington National Records Center, OSD/ISA Subject Decimal Files: FRC 330 72 A 6308, Box 7, Cambodia 1969 000.1)

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

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Negotiations Papers for the NSC[2]

Attached are the General Negotiating Strategy Paper and a paper on Mutual Withdrawal approved by the Review Group for discussion

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 82, NSC Meetings, Jan–Mar 1969. Top Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. On a copy of this memorandum in the Johnson Library, Halperin Papers, Box 4, Chronological File, March–July 1969, a note on the first page reads: "HAK discussed with RN and perhaps shown to him."

[2] On March 12 Kissinger sent Rogers, Laird, and Helms NSSM 29, which informed them that the President had directed preparation of two papers described as: "1. *Negotiating strategy paper.* This paper should discuss the strategy we would follow in private talks with Hanoi. It should also consider our strategy for dealing with the GVN in regard to private talks. 2. *Mutual withdrawal of forces.* This paper should consider our basic objectives with regard to mutual withdrawal. It should discuss major issues and alternative positions on these issues." These papers were to be submitted to the Review Group by March 17. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–140, NSSM Files, NSSM 29)

at the NSC meeting on March 28.[3] Summaries of each of these papers are included, as well as an issues for decision paper.[4] This memo summarizes the major points of difference which you may wish to have discussed at the NSC meeting, and contains my recommendations.

Also attached is a summary of the agency responses to the questions on Vietnam which we prepared prior to January 20.[5] The summary has been agreed to by the agencies.

I. Strategy Paper

A. De-Escalation

The issue is whether we should be prepared to negotiate de-escalatory steps in Paris. Some argue that the enemy will raise the issue and we must be prepared to talk about it because critics of the war will keep on this issue. It is also argued that mutual de-escalation would increase public support for the war and give us time to work out a settlement. While acknowledging the difficulties of developing proposals, Paris argues that the scope and pace of B–52 strikes, U.S. offensive operations, and U.S. harassment and interdiction fire could be curtailed.

The opposing position is that we should not ourselves raise the subject in Paris and, if the other side raises it, say we are prepared to discuss it in the context of mutual withdrawal. MACV and the JCS feel very strongly that we should not be prepared to negotiate de-escalation. MACV argues that the cut-down on combat sweeps would shift degree of initiative from us to the enemy, which he would exploit to rebuild his strength in populated areas. He also argues that this would result in a shift in the KIA ratios in a direction less favorable to the U.S. He argues that a cutback in artillery and air support including B–52's would result in further loss of American lives and would have "seriously adverse" results. Furthermore, tacit understandings on mutual de-escalation have already been proved illusory.

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[3] Neither attached; Bundy sent a revised draft of both papers to the Chairman of the NSC Review Group under two separate covering memoranda, both March 21. They were found attached to an uninitialed and undated draft of Kissinger's memorandum to Nixon. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous/Memcons, Vol. II) The approved papers, comprising NSDM 9, are ibid., NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–209, NSDM Files, NSDM 9. For the NSC meeting, see Document 49.

[4] Attached were two summary papers, both March 25, entitled, "A General Strategy and Plan of Action for the Vietnam Negotiations" and "US Position on Mutual Withdrawal" and an undated paper which is printed as an attachment.

[5] Document 44.

I believe that we should not feel obliged to talk about de-escalation simply because the enemy may want to do so. Attempts to negotiate a de-escalatory agreement would only bog talks down while adversely affecting the morale of our troops. I, thus, recommend that the second position be included in the Game Plan.

II. Mutual Withdrawal

A. Residual U.S. Forces

The Joint Chiefs and MACV argue that we should keep open the option of maintaining U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam after we complete our mutual withdrawal. They argue that we cannot be sure that the GVN will be able to handle the NLF alone and should be free to leave our own combat forces in South Vietnam.

State and Paris argue that we need to be clear in our own minds that we are prepared to take out all of our combat forces, while leaving behind civilians and MAAG personnel, in the improbable event that Hanoi fully satisfies the conditions we set for mutual withdrawal.

This is in large part a theoretical issue. If we adopt the State/Paris position, we would be committing ourselves in principle to withdraw all of our combat forces only if Hanoi met all of our conditions. These conditions would be (1) withdrawal of all North Vietnamese regulars, all North Vietnamese serving in VC units, and all other personnel infiltrated from North Vietnam into the South, (2) withdrawal must be to North Vietnam, not to Laos and Cambodia, and (3) there must be adequate verification. It is very doubtful that Hanoi would ever adequately perform on each of these conditions. We will always be in a position to assert that Hanoi has not lived up to its commitments and hence we are free to leave troops behind. If Hanoi did meet all of our conditions fully, it is doubtful that we would need to leave any combat troops in South Vietnam. Our decision whether to proceed with a complete withdrawal will be a political one not bound by what we have agreed to in principle if Hanoi met our conditions.

On the other hand, an effort on our part to exempt some combat forces would be taken by the Soviets and our public, as well as Hanoi, as a hardening of our position. Hanoi would very likely seize on this issue to attempt to stir public controversy in the U.S. Thus, I believe we should be prepared in principle to withdraw all of our combat forces if Hanoi meets our conditions.

B. Completion of Withdrawal Within Six Months

State feels that we should not repudiate the Manila Declaration commitment to be out six months after all North Vietnamese forces

have been withdrawn. The Manila Communiqué was negotiated with and accepted by the GVN and the Troop Contributing Nations. Any new position on a time limit would require a further round of negotiations with them. Harriman assured DRV, on instructions, that this was our position. We could also have problems in Congress if we repudiated the Manila Communiqué.

On the other hand, Secretary Laird believes that the Manila six-month time limit is far too rigid. He has in the past indicated that he would like to have up to two years to take all of our troops out. Saigon, without noting any MACV dissent, accepts the six-month deadline for personnel, but points out that additional time will be required for the removal of military supplies and equipment.

State points out that the six-month formula gives us considerable leeway since we can decide when all of Hanoi's forces have in fact been withdrawn from South Vietnam all the way to North Vietnam. Since it is almost certain that North Vietnam will in fact leave behind some forces, we will, in actual fact, have flexibility in implementing the six-month provision.

This issue is closely related to the residual combat troop issue. Again, if Hanoi did not meet our conditions we could complete our withdrawal at our own pace—if at all. The one added element is that we introduced this concept initially at Soviet urging since they said Hanoi did not believe that we would ever really withdraw. If we back off this pledge, we are likely to find it harder to get the Soviets involved constructively.

If we interpret the conditions which Hanoi must fulfill rigidly, then the six months deadline gives us flexibility. If we are not going to be rigid—and there will be strong pressures on you not to be—then it would be better to have a longer deadline. However, you should take account of the problems with our public and Congress, with our allies, and with the Soviets which would result if we changed the time limit. Thus, if we do not change the time limit, you will face problems down the road; if we do change, you will face problems now.

We need urgently to have a study of the details and modalities of mutual withdrawal including, in particular, the question of adequate verification.

Attachment

Paper Prepared for President Nixon[6]

Washington, undated.

VIETNAM NEGOTIATIONS ISSUES FOR DECISION

Following the NSC meeting:

You may wish to approve the Negotiating Strategy and the Mutual Withdrawal papers as guidance for the first phase of the negotiations. Recognizing that our views on the issues discussed in the paper may require revision as the negotiations proceed, it would be extremely useful to be sure that everyone starts out on the same track.

I, therefore, recommend that you do approve the two papers. We would then distribute them on a very selective basis.

I. Negotiating Strategy Paper

A. *Approval of this paper* means in essence:

1. Objectives:

a. Our general objective is to give the South Vietnamese the opportunity to determine their own political future without outside interference.

b. Our first priority objectives are agreed or tacit mutual withdrawal (with attendant reduction in hostilities), reestablishment of the DMZ, eventual total ceasefire, release of allied prisoners, relevant interim policing machinery, and restoration of 17th parallel as provisional boundary line. Other objectives down the line include status of the two Vietnams, relationships between them, follow-on inspection and supervision machinery, international guaranties, Laos, Cambodia, and economic questions.

c. We leave to the Vietnamese themselves questions concerning the political future of South Vietnam and minimize our negotiating involvement in these issues.

2. Game Plan

a. Our emphasis will be on private talks, between the DRV and ourselves on the one hand, and the GVN and NLF on the other.

b. Our posture will be one of sincere desire for progress, but not an over-eagerness that could mislead Hanoi.

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[6] Top Secret; Sensitive.

c. Our early negotiating emphasis will be on mutual withdrawals, the DMZ, and POWs (as it already is in Paris).

B. In approving the paper you will have to choose between two positions on *deescalation:*

1. Express an interest in communicating with the enemy about possible deescalatory moves and authorize our negotiators to discuss the subject.

2. Indicate that you do not wish to enter into negotiations in Paris on deescalatory moves except in the context of mutual withdrawal.

I recommend Option 2. It is hard to visualize concrete deescalatory proposals that would be truly reciprocal. Most suggestions would seem to favor the enemy militarily. We need not feel obliged to talk about deescalation simply because the enemy may raise the issue. Attempts to negotiate deescalatory agreements would only bog talks down while adversely affecting the morale of our troops. However, there is no reason why we cannot proceed with in-house studies of this problem.

II. Mutual Withdrawal Paper

A. *Approval of this paper* means in essence:

1. Our basic objectives are to achieve the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia back to North Vietnam and to get adequate assurance that such withdrawals have taken place.

2. We would insist on the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese regular forces, fillers in nominally VC units and other personnel infiltrated from the North, although we would be prepared to live with some inevitable ambiguity about the latter category.

3. We would be willing to withdraw U.S. allied forces contingent upon withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces and units.

4. We would begin our withdrawals as North Vietnam begins its withdrawals and ceases its flow of new manpower; we would not require subsidence of violence as a formal precondition to our withdrawals but would look at this factor in assessing the enemy's compliance with withdrawal agreements.

5. We would work toward a timetable that would include phasing of agreed withdrawals on each side, simultaneous initiation of withdrawals, and completion of enemy withdrawals before our own.

6. In carrying out our withdrawals, we would continually look at the total pattern of North Vietnamese actions to assess their good faith.

7. We would not link the issue of mutual withdrawals with the future internal political structure of South Vietnam, although we would not complete withdrawals if the total picture in Paris and Vietnam gave us ground for serious doubt concerning Hanoi's intentions.

8. We would press for North Vietnamese withdrawals from Laos and Cambodia, particularly, in the case of Laos, those troops which have been supporting operations in South Vietnam.

9. We would insist that agreed withdrawals and future compliance must be subject to adequate policing, although we cannot yet be clear on what specific types of arrangements will be necessary and appropriate.

10. Any unilateral allied withdrawals would be based on full consultation with the GVN and our assessment of the overall picture, including the impact of such withdrawals on our negotiating position.

B. There are two issues discussed in the paper on which there is disagreement: (1) residual U.S. forces and (2) six month deadline.

C. With regard to *residual U.S. forces,* the options are:

1. Be prepared to state that agreed and verified mutual withdrawals will, in principle, in the end include the withdrawal of all U.S. and allied combat and directly combat-related forces, if there is a full and verified withdrawal to North Vietnam of the North Vietnamese forces.

2. At least for a period of time, plan to leave some combat forces behind and avoid any commitment to pull them all out.

I recommend Option 2. To attempt to exempt some combat forces from our withdrawals would clearly be considered a hardening of our position by all concerned. We would set back the negotiations and stir great controversy in this country (and not just among dovish elements). If Hanoi does fulfill its withdrawal obligations, it is not clear that U.S. combat forces would be needed.

D. With regard to the *six-month deadline,* the options are:

1. Be prepared to specify at an appropriate time that the period between completion of a full and verified North Vietnamese withdrawal to North Vietnam and the completion of our own withdrawal would be not more than six months.

2. Simply say that withdrawal would be completed as soon as practicable, avoiding any time limits.

I recommend Option 1. To drop the six month target would also be considered a hardening of our position in relation to past private and public statements. We will have considerable flexibility in defining the starting date for our six month obligation, and we can insist upon strict compliance by Hanoi with whatever withdrawal agreements are negotiated.

III. Further Studies

You may wish to direct studies on:

A. Actual modalities of mutual withdrawal, including verification procedures.

B. Possible forms of political accommodation in South Vietnam.

C. Laos, in the context of the Vietnam settlement.

D. Possible forms of deescalation.

I recommend all four studies. I believe that it would be useful to study deescalation in part to make clear the great difficulty of developing any concrete proposals.

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

Washington, March, 27, 1969.

SUBJECT

Covert Support for the Lien Minh (National Alliance for Social Revolution)

On 25 March 1969, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker briefed the 303 Committee on the present status of President Thieu's efforts to build a broad coalition of forces into a political structure, the Lien Minh, which will be capable of competing successfully with the communist political machinery following a peace settlement.[2]

President Thieu first discussed his Lien Minh concept with Ambassador Bunker in the early part of 1968. Subsequently, in 303 Committee discussions, it was agreed that this was the most potentially promising effort seen thus far in South Vietnam to develop a broadly based political structure with mass appeal and support. Ambassador Bunker was authorized to provide [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] in covert CIA funds to President Thieu to give impetus to the effort. This amount was passed directly to President Thieu in increments during the period August 1968–March 1969.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 301, NSC Files, 303 Committee, 1969–1970. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for action. Initialed by Kissinger on March 29.

[2] This memorandum essentially repeats Bunker's briefing of the 303 Committee on March 25. In addition the 303 Committee was told at the meeting that on March 20 the President agreed that a CIA paramilitary operation in Cambodia against North Vietnamese regulars "would not be worth the expense." The Committee was also informed that the President authorized monitoring possible diplomatic and covert ways to reduce arms traffic from Cambodia to South Vietnam. (Minutes of 303 Committee, March 25; Department of State, INR/IL Historical Files, 303/40 Committee Meetings, 2/16/69–1/20/70)

President Thieu has moved slowly and cautiously but some progress has been made. Lien Minh is established and operating in Saigon/Cholon and running community projects in 9 of the 11 districts; some neighborhood money has been raised; 20 provincial committees have been formed and selection and training of provincial cadres is under way. Theoretically, its membership comprises some 40 or more groups, the principal ones being the National Salvation Front (NSF), Free Democratic Forces (FDF), and CVT, South Vietnam's largest labor federation, but not many cadres.

President Thieu, in his conversation with Ambassador Bunker last week, explained that he had been moving cautiously behind the scenes and not openly putting his full weight behind the Lien Minh as the time was not right.[3] Now that there is a rapidly growing awareness among the people and their leaders that a peace settlement is coming and that the fight against the communists will shift to the political field he is ready to move.

President Thieu is concentrating on development of middle-level working cadres and programs that will interest the masses and inspire them with hope. There are some 5,000 cadres now in Lien Minh in trade unions, some farmer groups, and in a few political, religious and other organizations. He plans to coalesce and expand these forces initially to something on the order of 16,000 and eventually to a 50,000 cadre organization. He will need money, training schools, indoctrination programs, and a range of activities to do this.

President Thieu has already begun talking with individual political leaders and plans to convene a national convention or "seminar" in April at which he expects to be elected leader of the new movement.

Ambassador Bunker strongly recommended that he be authorized to pass additional covert funds to President Thieu in the amount of [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] in increments during the next six months to support further development of the Lien Minh during this crucial period. He estimates the risks of disclosure are slight since President Thieu receives the funds directly. He also estimates that this contribution will be initially about 50% of the support of the Lien Minh, but as its financial base broadens the U.S. contribution will become proportionately less.

The 303 Committee endorsed Ambassador Bunker's recommendation on the understanding that he will provide monthly progress reports on Lien Minh developments and any indications of increased risk of exposure of U.S. support.

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[3] As reported in a March 21 memorandum of conversation between Thieu, Bunker, and Berger at the Embassy in Saigon. It is attached to the minutes of the March 25 303 Committee. (Ibid.)

I recommend that you approve the 303 Committee's endorsement of Ambassador Bunker's recommendation and authorize the passage of [*less than 1 line of source text not declassified*] in covert funds to President Thieu in increments during the ensuing six months.[4]

[4] Nixon initialed the approve option.

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

Washington, March 28, 1969.

SUBJECT

U.S. Relations with Cambodia

Secretary Rogers has recommended (Tab I),[2] the issuance of a border declaration on Cambodia *in two or three weeks,* following consultation with our allies. He has also recommended that you approve the draft letter (Tab B)[3] thanking Sihanouk for the release of four American airmen and acknowledging his letter of February 25.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. 1, 8–69. Secret; Exdis. Sent for action.

[2] Tab I, attached but not printed, is a memorandum from Rogers to Nixon, March 26, entitled "U.S. Relations with Cambodia," in which Rogers recommended that Nixon "approve the issuance of a declaration recognizing the territorial integrity of Cambodia within its present frontiers, as a further step toward resumption of diplomatic relations on satisfactory terms."

[3] The draft letter to Sihanouk and Sihanouk's February 25 letter to Nixon were attached to Rogers' March 26 memorandum. According to an April 2 memorandum from Moose to Walsh, the President approved the border declaration and transmission of the letter to Sihanouk through the Australians. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. 1, 8–69) The border declaration was delivered to Sihanouk by the Australian Ambassador on April 16. It read: "In conformity with the United Nations Charter, the U.S.A. recognizes and respects the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Cambodia within its present frontiers." (Telegram 55018 to Bonn and 10 other posts, April 10; ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 1 CAMB–US) Sihanouk called a press conference on April 18 to thank Nixon for the "gesture of equity and justice" and expressed the conviction that "inevitable border incidents" would not cause another rupture in U.S.-Cambodian relations. (Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, April 18; ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 5, President's Daily Briefs)

Rogers' recommendations are consistent with the course of action you approved in early February looking toward a resumption of diplomatic relations with Cambodia. After issuing the border declaration, Rogers plans to send a diplomatic officer to Phnom Penh to explore reopening our embassy there. These actions assume a continued favorable attitude toward resumption of relations on the part of Sihanouk. In his messages to you, in conversations with diplomats in Phnom Penh, and in public statements, Sihanouk has consistently encouraged a resumption of relations.

I agree with Secretary Rogers' recommendations, but would urge that we push for somewhat faster action on the border declaration if the consultations with our allies go well.

Recommendations

1. That you approve the issuance of a border declaration, with instructions to Secretary Rogers that we should aim for delivery in about 10 days.[4]

Alternatively, I prefer to stick to three-week time table

2. That you approve the draft letter at Tab B.

[4] Nixon initialed the approve option.

49. Minutes of National Security Council Meeting[1]

Washington, March 28, 1969.

The Meeting started at 10:00 a.m. The following were in attendance:

The President
The Vice President
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Director of Central Intelligence
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 82, NSC Meetings, Jan–Mar 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive. These minutes were based on notes taken by Haig that were typed by a White House secretary; Haig made corrections by hand to the typed transcript.

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker
General Andrew Goodpaster
Mr. Philip A. Habib
Mr. Richard Sneider
Colonel Alexander M. Haig

The President introduced the meeting stating there were three issues to be addressed:

1. De-escalation.
2. Mutual withdrawal and the related issues of residual troops in-country; and
3. The provision of the Manila Declaration, i.e., the interpretation of the six-month clause.

The President stated that discussion would be held on these three points, following a briefing by Ambassador Bunker.[2] Ambassador Bunker made the following points in explaining President Thieu's and the South Vietnamese Government's attitude on a negotiated peace settlement:

1. The present offensive has demonstrated South Vietnam's growing confidence and conversely has highlighted the growing weakness of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese in a military sense.

2. President Thieu now visualizes and accepts that there will be a transition from purely military operations into a struggle which will be conducted within a political framework. This transition in his own estimate of the situation is a further reflection of the growing strength of the Thieu Government. In Thieu's words, "A year ago, we could only talk in terms of military victory. Six months ago, we could talk in terms of a peace settlement. Today we can talk in terms of a political settlement".

3. The bombing halt of 31 March [1968] led to the realization on the part of the South Vietnamese that U.S. would not underwrite them indefinitely. This tended to crystallize South Vietnam's resolve and combined with the growing dynamism and forceful and sagacious leadership of President Thieu, great progress has been made (Ambassador

[2] On March 12 Nixon sent Kissinger a memorandum indicating he "would like to talk with Bunker within the next two or three weeks. I have been reading his cables and he seems much more concerned about attacks in South Vietnam than we are here. I have never met Bunker and I feel that because of the importance of his position I need to talk to him so that I can judge for myself what weight to give to his cables. Get him back here as soon as it is convenient so that it does not look like a crisis, but under no circumstances do I want his return delayed beyond three weeks." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, Box 1, Memorandum for the President, RN Memos 68–12/69, Mar. 69) Nixon met Bunker in San Clemente on March 23 for an early Sunday morning meeting also attended by Rogers, Kissinger, and Goodpaster. (Ibid., White House Central Files, Daily Diary) No other record or time of this meeting has been found. The President, apparently accompanied by Bunker, Kissinger, Rogers, and Goodpaster, flew to Washington at 12:39 p.m. (Ibid.)

Bunker emphasized that he knew of no equal to President Thieu within the ranks of South Vietnamese leaders).

4. In the past two months, President Thieu has talked of a settlement in two terms:

a. A general election which would permit the NLF to function as a party but perhaps under a different name.

b. Acceptance by Thieu of private talks and also an acceptance of the possibility that the NLF would be included in such talks but with emphasis on conversations between the U.S. and Hanoi; but still recognizing the possible expansion of the talks to all four parties if required.

An alternate approach to the political settlement in Thieu's mind would include general elections with possible accompanying changes in the Constitution and the inclusion of international supervision of the election procedure.

5. Concerning 4 above, Ambassador Bunker stated that he had warned Thieu on the issue of the NLF's fear of reprisals from the South Vietnamese Government and confirmed that Thieu had agreed to discuss this as well as a political settlement. Thieu indicated that perhaps an international supervisory commission could oversee this situation.

6. Thieu has discussed the question of guarantees and has expressed strong concern that viable guarantees be provided to insure that the North would pay a heavy price for renewed attacks. At the same time, he recognized that South Vietnam's armed strength would be a major factor, together with outside guarantees in precluding the renewal of North Vietnamese attacks. In general, Thieu believes he could maintain his control of the government under the above circumstances because the NLF has been badly hurt in recent months and their infrastructure is in a bad state of repair.

7. The Government and the people of South Vietnam now recognize the need for peace. At this point, the President asked when this shift in South Vietnamese attitude occurred. Ambassador Bunker replied that Thieu has known this for some time. Secretary Rogers asked "but when did it occur?" Ambassador Bunker answered to the effect that this has been true for several months. In December, for example, Thieu agreed to accept a greater share of the burden of conducting the war. He has admitted over the past six months that the people must get ready for political warfare. At the same time, he has had to bring the government along at a pace which he felt personally was best suited to the circumstances. He has managed this extremely well. The evolution has occurred primarily due to the growing strength of the government in both political and psychological terms.

Secretary Rogers asked whether or not Bunker knew that Thieu was going to make his recent statement on private talks. Ambassador Bunker replied "no".

The President commented, "I think the main point here is that the error made by the previous Administration was in beating the South Vietnamese over the head publicly to be more forthcoming," commenting that he had informed a Congressional group last night that we had carefully avoided this approach in order to build the South Vietnamese's trust. The President asked Ambassador Bunker whether or not Thieu really trusts us. Bunker replied, "yes, and this is my main point. We have re-established trust since January and this, in turn, has been a major contributor to their willingness to come along with us on the peace issue. The principal factors in this phenomena have been your talk with Ky and our generally coordinated posture."

Secretary Rogers interjected, "Thieu saw my statement before the Foreign Relations Committee and gave us his OK overnight."[3]

The President turned the briefing over to Mr. Habib who reminded the Council that since his last appearance before him, the U.S. had received signals through the Russians that the North Vietnamese were anxious to move on private talks. He confirmed that the U.S. movement in Paris had been very deliberate and that as a result our relations with the GVN in Paris had improved greatly. Habib emphasized that the Plenary Sessions have not changed very much in tone and serve primarily as propaganda sessions and a forum for tentatively exploring new ideas. In these sessions, Habib emphasized, there continues to be a sharp contrast between the conduct and expertise of the NLF on the one hand and GRV on the other, the latter being far more skilled and polished.

Habib emphasized that the U.S. Delegation had accomplished much in the public forum in Paris through the maintenance of a businesslike stance, the avoidance of polemics, and the presentation of brief and specific proposals. Habib summarized that there had been two private meetings since January, the first primarily a protest meeting and the second dealing with substantive issues. Both private meetings were conducted with the full blessing of the GVN Delegation. During the second meeting, the U.S. concentrated on the issue of withdrawal. The North Vietnamese, on the other hand, came in with a Plenary Session type statement but in a private mood. Habib noted that much of that statement was used in yesterday's Plenary Session,

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[3] Apparent reference to Rogers' statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, March 27, in which he described the U.S. and South Vietnamese negotiating position and the essential elements in an ultimate settlement. His testimony is in Department of State *Bulletin,* April 14, 1969, pp. 306–307.

confirming that it was clearly just the opening round in the secret forum. Habib judged that the North's opening statement was not surprising, and it emphasized:

a. Complete withdrawal of U.S. forces,
b. Requirement that we deal with the NLF,
c. Charges of U.S. escalation, and
d. Confirmation that they are willing to continue the fight.

The North Vietnamese made no specific proposal rather reemphasizing the four and five points and emphasizing participation by the NLF. They did not exclude the possibility of the GVN's participation in the negotiation; made it quite clear that they wanted to continue secret talks; indicated the probability that the bilateral track was acceptable and, in general, continued to give hints of some anxiety. On balance, it appears that we have rattled them in recent weeks, Habib maintained.

The President then asked, "is this just wishful thinking on our part", to which Habib replied, "it might be but I think they want to talk and this is just the first of a series of secret sessions. In this regard, we left open the determination of the next meeting with the general language that "when either side has something to say", the next talk will occur. Habib emphasized that the North Vietnamese nodded as this statement was made and nodded again afterwards. The North also emphasized the importance of secrecy.

The President asked what the implications were of the North Vietnamese side's rejection of Thieu's offer to go into secret talks. Habib replied that this rejection was not as rigid as it appeared in the press and that they actually placed their main stress on refusal to meet with the GVN, leaving the door open somewhat. Habib added "when their spokesman was pressed, they hedged and didn't attack the secret meeting as much as they did the other parts of Thieu's statements."

The President then asked Ambassador Bunker whether or not the GVN would accept a role in four-sided talks which would place them in a position of tagging along with the U.S. Ambassador Bunker replied that when it comes to actual negotiations on the political side that the U.S. cannot do this in behalf of the South Vietnamese but that they will probably go along initially with a four-sided forum.

The President stated, "then it is very important how we proceed on this issue".

Secretary Rogers then emphasized his concern that we were overly sensitive about this point, remarking that first we were concerned whether or not they would accept secret talks at all, but then when we asked Thieu, he readily went along. The Secretary of State then stated he thought the only thing that was really important is that the U.S. does not meet only with the NLF.

The President asked Mr. Habib how long he thought the talks would go on, "18 months, two years? Do you see a Panmunjon situation developing here? Looking at this problem, how long are we going to be in negotiations with sub-threshold fighting continuing?"

Habib replied, "we think it will take some time but in very short order we will get to the heart of the thing in the discussions probably in a month or two." Ambassador Bunker stated that President Thieu sees this year as the critical one. Providing the North sees no flagging in our determination; with such determination, a settlement should probably occur this year.

Secretary Rogers said, "yes, but suppose we lose out, can we start to turn over the fighting to the South Vietnamese?"

General Goodpaster replied, "this depends—we can move in this direction but it depends on what the South Vietnamese themselves do." Secretary Rogers stated that we were told this years ago but we see no movement. "How can we convince the people after all of this failure?"

Habib stated, "the North reads this very carefully, based on how things are gong on the ground but also how they read U.S. domestic attitude. They are most sensitive to it. This is the basis for their current tactics. They are conducting a long, low-level attack and watching U.S. opinion concurrently."

The President then asked, "how do we de-Americanize this thing in such a way as to influence negotiations and have them move along quicker?"

Secretary Rogers said "certainly pacification is a poor explanation."

The President replied "in fairness I must say progress has been made, especially under Thieu. I can certainly defend it to that extent but I need some symbol."

Ambassador Bunker stated, "our problem has always been a case of over-optimism in over-stating the issues. It is time that we tell the American people it is going to be long and tough."

Secretary Laird remarked, "oh, we have been telling the people that. We told them there were going to be improvements in the South Vietnamese forces. There are only a couple of divisions that are worth anything. In several, there have been no improvement whatsoever."

General Goodpaster asked who said this a year ago. The Secretary of State said, "we have been saying this for over a year and a half. What do we say now?"

General Lincoln said, "I think South Vietnam has improved its forces but it is not being reported, especially back here."

General Goodpaster stated, "it is true that the 5th and 18th Divisions have been weak and continue to stay that way."

Mr. Helms said, "yes, we have heard this story before."

Secretary Rogers stated, "we have to de-Americanize the war to safeside a failure in the negotiations. We need discernible progress." The President stated that timing is a problem. "We must move in a deliberate way, not to show panic. We cannot be stampeded by the likes of Fulbright."

Secretary Rogers said, "but if we say we are going to be deliberate, the American people won't stand for it."

General Goodpaster said, "I think we must remember that the money for the improvement of the RVNAF did not come until after Tet and progress has been substantial since that time. We have moved from 750,000 to 855,000 troops and the caliber of the force has improved. There can be no question about their improvement. The RF and the PF have grown quantitatively and qualitatively. The overall improvement has been substantial and we are, in fact, closer to de-Americanizing the war but we are not at the decision point yet."

The President stated, "we need a plan. If we had no elections, it would be fine. Just like Great Britain in Malaysia, we cannot sustain this at current rates for two years. The reality is that we are working against a time clock. We are talking 6 to 8 months. We are going to play a strong public game but we must plan this. We must get a sense of urgency in the training of the South Vietnamese. We need improvement in terms of supplies and training."

Secretary of Defense Laird stated, "I agree, but not with your term de-Americanizing. What we need is a term Vietnamizing to put the emphasis on the right issue."

The President agreed.

The Secretary of Defense then stated that there are considerable problems on Phase II add-ons with respect to the Congress. They are not willing to pay for the sophisticated equipment, especially trucks. The Secretary had told General Westmoreland to visit the people on the Hill and explain to the people our problem.

General Goodpaster stated, "they must have mobility. The ARVN uses the road to a greater degree than we have to. For example, they are using cranes for all kinds of purposes."

The President asked if the Viet Cong had cranes.

General Goodpaster replied that we are now at a time when we can plan for the first increment for our withdrawal but only based on a decision in the light of conditions at the time. Our view this time will be July.

The President noted that U.S. casualties were down this week and asked if the offensive was over. General Goodpaster replied, "not yet. The enemy has some forces it has not committed, primarily because they have not been able to get them in position but also because they have been extremely conservative in this operation."

The President asked whether there would be another offensive in May or June. General Goodpaster replied that it took 6 months for the enemy to get sufficiently built up to launch this one and infiltration is now down somewhat. This will probably result in a smaller offensive this May.

The President then asked why it would be so difficult to make our decision if this offensive has been so poor, "why won't we be able to pull the forces out?" General Goodpaster replied, "we want to look at the status of pacification, the improvement of RVN and you can't pull out troops in the midst of an offensive. Also, they could come across the DMZ."

Habib stated "if we look at the record, we can see that over the year, the Viet Cong have carefully geared their military operation to the conduct of their negotiations. The enemy is willing to accept casualties for purely negotiating reasons. He will conduct his ground operations for political objectives in Paris."

The President re-emphasized that the South Vietnamese must do more.

Ambassador Bunker said, "we must also remember that negotiations are themselves influenced primarily by what happens on the ground. They took terrible losses during the lull. Defectors were up, KIAs were high, the infrastructure was rolled up. They are already this year running close to last year's losses. That is why they are in Paris. They are suffering on the ground."

The President asked the Director of CIA to give his views and to capsulize conditions in North Vietnam.

Mr. Helms stated that morale is now a factor in North Vietnam.

The President interrupted and said, "did you say this a year ago?"

Mr. Helms said, "no" and continued emphasizing that the morale problem developed since the bombing halt. Conversely, the offensive has generated some new discipline in the North since they have expected retaliation and are "policing-up" attitudes. There are differences in the leadership in Hanoi. Some agree with negotiating a solution; others disagree. On balance, CIA believes they can go the route if the Soviets and Chinese continue to support them at current levels. Also, they can continue for extended periods with reduced military operations. We believe they can carry on with their current manpower resources.

The President told Mr. Kissinger to discuss the de-escalation point. Mr. Kissinger stated there are two problems for discussion. The first is the game plan and the second, the issue of mutual withdrawal. Looking first at the game plan, a judgment is needed on how to move after one or two more private meetings. We can stress mutual withdrawal initially, plus the DMZ issue and then swing into the political issue. In the game plan proposed for consideration there is one main disagreement

and that involves the issue of de-escalation. Whether or not we should do it is one aspect of the consideration and the other is if we decide to do it in principle, should we then be willing to negotiate it. On the issue itself, the alternatives are:

To consider it only in the context of mutual withdrawal. If we were to decide to negotiate it, we might get into endless discussion. We have a problem of defining it. If we were to adopt a policy of de-escalation, the enemy would lose much of the incentive for negotiating a settlement and the very act of talking about it is a time waster.

On the other side is the argument that de-escalation reduces casualties, strengthens our staying power. Perhaps these two sides are overdrawn but these are the diversions in the game plan.

The President then asked, "by de-escalation, does that mean our unilateral withdrawal." Mr. Kissinger replied, "no."

The President replied, "then it should be understood that this is not what we are talking about when we use the term de-escalation."

Secretary of Defense stated, "I think General McConnell can talk to the Chief's position."

Secretary of State interrupted, "I agree with the first point that de-escalation is not good but we cannot say this in public."

The President stated, "I am afraid if we get into the issue of de-escalation, they will really go for our B–52. Then, we are in a jam."

Mr. Habib stated, "from their standpoint they have been very general in talking about de-escalation. We would not have to propose this in any specific way. Most of the conversation on de-escalation is accusatory. I think we can afford not to raise it initially. But if they begin to move, we should listen."

The President stated, "you wouldn't volunteer."

Secretary Rogers replied, "yes, but we should not be negative on this subject of de-escalation."

Habib stated, "I think we should hold off as Mr. Kissinger has said."

The President stated, "no more talking about this. We are not going to give on this issue. On the other hand, if they raise it, what do you have in mind?"

Secretary Rogers stated, "I think we are in accord on this one."

General McConnell then stated, "I agree with Position 2 with this caveat, if discussion of de-escalation does not include any limitations on weaponry or pacification."

General Goodpaster added, "or Commander's tactics."

Mr. Habib stated, "they have raised all of this but we have never answered."

The President stated, "on the withdrawal issue, I think the question is a moot one. Whether all U.S. forces are withdrawn or not is actually intertwined with what the other side does, especially if we are talking about bargaining and guarantees. We can take all of our forces out if they abide with the conditions. If they don't and we can't, that is fine, but if we can make the American people feel better on this issue, that is also fine."

Mr. Kissinger stated, "there are actually two issues involved: (1) residual forces and (2) our public and private negotiating position. Here, the alternatives are, should we negotiate a requirement for residual forces or should we opt to the listing of a series of conditions which we know won't be met, while speaking as though all forces will be withdrawn?"

The President asked Ambassador Bunker what the South Vietnamese reaction would be on this issue.

Ambassador Bunker replied, we would like to leave this issue open. Thieu has already agreed to the six months provisions of the Manila formula but the key issue would be the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces completely out of Laos and Cambodia and the provision of guarantees which are binding.

The President stated, in my view we should agree to total withdrawal of U.S. forces but include very strong conditions which we know may not be met.

The Secretary of State affirmed the President's position, commenting that if we insist on leaving U.S. forces there, we are going to run into difficulty. It would be much easier to provide a cover set of circumstances which would permit us to do it without claiming it as an objective at the outset.

The President said there is no doubt that U.S. forces will be in Vietnam for some time, something like a large military assistance group, but our public posture must be another thing. The type conditions that we should insist be met are: (1) verification, (2) supervision, (3) total withdrawal from Laos and Cambodia, (4) guarantees or assurances that the above have been done.

Mr. Kissinger then discussed two problems with respect to negotiations. The first is the time that forces would be in Vietnam after a settlement. The second is the issue of how we would treat the six months' provision of the Manila formula. Secretary of State interrupted and stated that he could see no reason why the U.S. Government should stick to the Manila formula. He stated we should have mutual withdrawal which would be total but with strong conditions. Habib added that we have said total withdrawal with conditions and we should not change now. We have told the Soviets this and the South Vietnamese have agreed to it. In terms of the six months' provision, we did say six months at Manila. The South Vietnamese were quite upset and the

North Vietnamese were especially angry and we took the position that it would take us more time (six months) to get our forces out because of the nature of our problem.

The President stated we will not change our position on this issue. We will not outwardly back away from the Manila formula. At the same time, we will keep in mind that we can depart from it in a de facto way.

The President again emphasized that the conditions of withdrawal were the operative portions of any agreement. The President stated it will take a long time to withdraw U.S. forces completely and, frankly, I don't think it can be done within six months.

Habib added it should be understood that under the Manila formula, the withdrawal is phased. When we talk about six months, it means six months after the withdrawal by the North Vietnamese. This is what they understand. This is a sensible position and should pose no problem.

General Lincoln affirmed that this should be feasible.

The President said while we will not depart publicly from the Manila formula, we should not refer to it, simply let it fade away.

Rogers asked if the President meant we should not make any reference to the six months' provision.

The President replied, I want us to be hard in our negotiations but soft in our public stance. Habib said we have not touched on the six months' provisions recently.

The President said that is right, don't get all involved on this issue. If Thieu sees that they meet the conditions that we have established, then we should have no problems with the South Vietnamese. Actually, our negotiated positions to date have been much tougher than was the Manila formula.

Ambassador Bunker said that Manila has been a source of great confusion in South Vietnam and until recently, they thought we would not move at all until six months after the North Vietnamese were entirely out of South Vietnam. Now they understand our position. They understand that the withdrawal would be mutual and simultaneous but that we would have six months longer to complete our total withdrawal.

Again, the President emphasized that we should not get hung up on this issue and that we should emphasize to the South Vietnamese the conditions we will insist upon.

Habib stated that the North Vietnamese will be the ones that will raise this issue. The President replied then tell them we will be out when you meet the conditions that we have established. In other words, after you are gone and the conditions are met, then we will meet our end of the bargain.

General Goodpaster stated that he had three points he wished to make. First, that U.S. forces would need at least three months to get

ready to start any withdrawals. Second, that U.S. forces would need at least six months to get the people and equipment out, emphasizing that people are needed to move equipment and, third, that after all combat forces have been withdrawn that they will need an additional three months to roll up equipment.

The President agreed. Habib stated we will need just such a plan, i.e., a withdrawal plan carefully phased to work with in Paris when we see some progress in the negotiations. Secretary Rogers said it is time that the military realized the kind of problems we have. Why do the military always talk about how much time it will take to withdraw, why do they always rattle the saber in public? This is what has caused our problem with the young people.

General Goodpaster asked that the group consider the facts. He pointed out that the U.S. was now in Phase II of the Vietnamization Program, a program designed to get the VNAF ready to handle the war alone. By mid-year, he stated, we will be nearly completed Phase II. By FY 70, our shortfalls will only exist in helicopters and special forces units. However, it takes until FY 72 for them to get the helicopters and for certain naval forces it will be as late as FY 73.

General Goodpaster emphasized that these problems must be recognized and agreed to furnish Paris with this information. He concluded by pointing out that Phase III which involved the logistics and self-sustaining capability of the South Vietnamese, was programmed for completion at the end of FY 72. In effect, we are talking about two years for the Vietnamese to be ready to take over. It is essential, he said, that we do not place ourselves at a tactical disadvantage at any one point in the process.

The President strongly endorsed General Goodpaster's position.

Dr. Kissinger again took over the conduct of the discussion and asked the group to consider the issue of verification, and the phased withdrawal plan, mentioning the possibility of withdrawal in a de facto sense without negotiations or withdrawal, dependent upon formal negotiations.

The President interrupted and stated he would like to make one more point with the individual involved. He asked Ambassador Bunker if there was anything he had heard here so far which would make his job impossible. Ambassador Bunker replied no.

The President then said that he doesn't like the old style used by the previous Administration of referring always to understandings. He stated that he wanted these things known and formally agreed to, not just indirectly understood. He wants this considered very carefully and when we talk about withdrawal of our forces, we should consider the location to which they will be withdrawn. Are we talking about Okinawa, Hawaii or Thailand or perhaps CONUS?

The President said we need the answers to these questions. They are both political and practical. He said we should meet again in one or two months after these studies are completed. Habib said we need an agreement with the South Vietnamese on the nature of a withdrawal pattern and we will get to work on the issues of phased withdrawal and verification.

Bundy said it is easy to handle the phased withdrawal issue but verification becomes a problem. Who is gong to do it? Do we ask foreign governments to do it? We can prepare a plan but being sure it is complied with is another question.

Habib says we will need these papers shortly. We can only afford to have about two more private meetings before we are ready to talk turkey on withdrawal.

The President then asked Mr. Habib what the Administration could do in Washington to strengthen the U.S. Paris negotiating position. Habib replied, first and foremost, is to keep quiet. Not talking is the best solution. On the issue of de-escalation, there should be no discussion in the public forum.

Rogers interrupted and stated we have got to know what to say publicly. We are constantly being put into the position of commenting. We should probably refer to de-escalation in terms of withdrawal and restoration of the DMZ.

General McConnell stated that he would like to emphasize that when we consider withdrawals and certainly the military wants out as much as anyone, we should not put U.S. forces at a tactical disadvantage and, further, that the U.S. forces must have time to get the equipment out and to get the South Vietnamese ready to handle the problem.

The President reaffirmed General McConnell's position.

General Goodpaster added it should be understood that in practical terms we cannot de-escalate on the ground. We must understand this here at this table.

Habib then added, we must be equally mum on the issue of secret talks. We cannot talk about them publicly in Washington.

The President emphasized to all that this would be done.

Bundy stated that we now need a paper on political settlement, the elements of it, a paper on verification of withdrawal. Finally, we need an answer for the South Vietnamese on what type of guarantees would be provided. The latter is a very thorny area.

Secretary of State affirmed that there would be no talk about abandoning Manila.

The President thanked Ambassador Bunker and Mr. Habib for their contributions and the meeting was adjourned.

50. Talking Points for President Nixon[1]

Washington, March 31, 1969.

TALKING POINTS FOR MEETING WITH
AMBASSADOR LODGE AND MR. HABIB
2:00 P.M., MARCH 31, 1969

1. Express your appreciation to Ambassador Lodge for returning to the U.S. at this time for an exchange of views on the progress of negotiations in Paris. Compliment Lodge on the conduct of the negotiations to date and make the point that you wanted him back at this time so that he would have the first-hand benefit of the results of last Friday's National Security Council meeting on Vietnam prior to proceeding with the private talks.

2. Review the game plan for the private talks:

a. Visualize separate discussions between the US/DRV and the GVN/NLF, private talks including all participants not excluded but the initial focus should be on the US/DRV route.

b. Our posture on the pace of the talks should be ready but not eager. We want to avoid giving Hanoi the impression we are acting from weakness or under pressures.

c. We should maintain public posture of seeking progress without revealing content of private talks.

d. During the early stages we would:

(1) Stress mutual withdrawals. This subject is the foundation of any agreement, of concern to both sides, and our major source of leverage.
(2) Secondary but significant emphasis on restoring the DMZ.
(3) Keep after the question of prisoners.
(4) *De-escalation.* There was a split position in the bureaucracy on this subject prior to the NSC meeting. Some believe we should present and discuss proposals; others disagree. As a result of the NSC meeting on Friday, you have decided:[2]

(a) There will be no de-escalation except as an outgrowth of mutual troop withdrawal.
(b) The U.S. side will not initiate any de-escalation proposals in the Paris negotiations.
(c) If the DRV raise the issue of de-escalation, the U.S. side will listen but only discuss it in the context of mutual withdrawal.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 181, Paris Talks/Meetings, Memos and Miscellaneous, March–May 1969. Top Secret; Sensitive. No drafting information appears on the paper, but it was likely prepared by the White House Staff. Nixon and Kissinger met with Lodge and Habib from 2:05 to 2:55 p.m. on March 31. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary)

[2] See Document 51.

e. In the broader phase of the negotiations, we would:

(1) Consider moving into a whole set of issues associated with the 62 and 54 Accords and try to get as many agreements as possible. Even in the early stages of talks, Laos, Cambodia and the withdrawal of NVN troops to the DRV must be emphasized. On the definition of U.S. forces subject to withdrawal and as a result of Friday's NSC meeting, you have decided that we should be prepared to state publicly that the U.S. would withdraw all combat forces from South Vietnam if Hanoi meets rigid conditions of a mutual withdrawal agreement. These conditions should include provisions for:

(a) Verification and supervision of withdrawal.
(b) The withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from Laos and Cambodia.
(c) Guarantees to maintain the agreement.

(2) On the issue of a timetable for completion of U.S. withdrawal, you have decided that there will be no public repudiation of the former U.S. position that we would complete our withdrawal within 6 months of the completion of Hanoi's withdrawal (Manila formula). This position, however, will be adopted with the recognition that, in practice, the U.S. will be in a position to control the timing of the completion of our withdrawal, since we can determine if Hanoi has fully met the conditions of the mutual withdrawal agreement. The key point will not be the timetable but rather getting Hanoi to comply with the conditions of the withdrawal.

(3) Concerning the political structure of the South, we should push forward South Vietnamese discussions of the internal political structure. At the same time, we should minimize our involvement in these questions, closely coordinate with the GVN, and urge them to develop negotiating positions.

(4) Concerning GVN, Allied and Soviet roles, we should strive at all times to keep our position fully coordinated with the GVN. We should give the Soviets every opportunity to exert influence in the direction of progress. We do not now envisage a major French role.

3. Inform Lodge that you recognize that the North Vietnamese have been quite successful in conducting their military operations in South Vietnam in such a way as to exert maximum influence on the Paris negotiations. At the same time, you believe we should avoid the de-escalation route at this time in order to preclude a Panmunjom stalemate at the outset. Indicate that you are willing for a time to "take the heat" on this issue.

4. Inform Lodge that you have instructed Ambassador Bunker and General Goodpaster to continue on a priority basis to improve the efficiency and capabilities of the South Vietnamese armed forces and that you anticipate some unilateral U.S. troop withdrawals commencing as early as July, providing there is no drastic change in the situation on the ground.

5. Ask Lodge to provide his appraisal of how the negotiations are proceeding.

51. National Security Decision Memorandum 9[1]

Washington, April 1, 1969.

TO

The Vice President
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence
The Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness

SUBJECT

Vietnam

As a result of the National Security Council meeting on March 28, 1969,[2] I have made the following decisions on the issues listed below:

The Issue of De-escalation

1. There will be no de-escalation except as an outgrowth of mutual troop withdrawal.

2. The U.S. side will not initiate any de-escalation proposals in the Paris negotiations.

3. If the DRV raise the issue of de-escalation, the U.S. side will listen but only discuss it in the context of mutual withdrawal.

The Issue of U.S. Forces Subject to Withdrawal

On the definition of U.S. Forces subject to withdrawal, I have decided that we should be prepared to withdraw all combat forces from South Vietnam if Hanoi meets specific conditions of a mutual withdrawal agreement. These conditions should include provisions for:

1. Verification and supervision of withdrawal.
2. The withdrawal of North Vietnamese Forces from Laos and Cambodia, as well as from South Vietnam.
3. Guarantees to maintain the agreement.

The Issue of a Timetable for Completion of U.S. Withdrawal

There will be no public repudiation of the former U.S. position that we would complete our withdrawal within six months of the completion of Hanoi's withdrawal. This position will be adopted with the recognition that, in practice, the U.S. will be in a position to control

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 363, Subject Files, NSDM. Top Secret; Sensitive. General Wheeler also received a copy. Nixon's initials appear at the end of the memorandum.

[2] See Document 49.

the timing of the completion of our withdrawal, since we can determine if Hanoi has fully met the conditions of the mutual withdrawal agreement. The key point will not be the timetable but rather getting Hanoi to comply with the conditions for withdrawal.

The draft papers considered by the National Security Council on March 28, 1969, are approved with modifications reflecting the above decisions.[3]

I have also directed that the following studies be undertaken for which appropriate NSSMs will be forthcoming:

1. Specific plan timetable for Vietnamizing the war.
2. Phased withdrawal under conditions of:

    a. Mutual withdrawal, or
    b. Vietnamizing the war.

3. Verification for mutual withdrawal.
4. Detailed political settlement for SVN.
5. International guarantees for above.

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[3] See footnote 3, Document 47.

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

Washington, April 3, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Problem

I. The Problem in Paris

In trying to settle the Vietnam war, we can follow two routes: (1) through the Paris talks, (2) through some extraordinary procedures. The Paris route is certainly the more convenient and presents fewer administration problems. However, to be successful, the following conditions must be met by the Paris route:

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1319, Unfiled Material, 1969, Box 3 of 19. Top Secret; Sensitive.

1. We must convince the American public that we are eager to settle the war, and Hanoi that we are not so anxious that it can afford to outwait us.

2. We must continue military pressures of a scope sufficient to deter Hanoi from turning the negotiations into another Panmunjom.

3. Our Government must be sufficiently disciplined so that all of its elements speak with the same voice.

4. Relations with the GVN must be maintained at a level of intimacy to deprive Hanoi of the expectation that they can use the negotiations to break the Saigon Government.

If we can meet all these conditions, we might wind the war up by next Spring. However, the prospects for meeting these conditions do not seem to me too bright for the following reasons:

1. The dominant view in the State Department favors measures whose practical consequences will be to relieve the pressures on Hanoi and thus encourage Hanoi to prolong the negotiations.

2. The Paris delegation is profoundly divided and at least its junior members are quite undisciplined. We will thus be under constant pressure of leaks from Paris. (I am attaching a report from a Colonel who has been in the Paris delegations for your information.)[2]

3. The split between the military command in Saigon and the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department is so great that it will be very hard to present a coherent approach in Paris to avoid constant oscillation between extremes.

4. As our negotiators get more impatient and as public pressures start building up, there will be an increasing temptation to squeeze Saigon and to maneuver it into the position of being the chief obstacle to a settlement. If you compare our negotiating position a year ago with what it is today, this process of gradual chipping away becomes obvious. I would suspect that our minimum position today will be much stronger than our maximum position a year from now.

5. The tendency to make foreign policy by press-leaks or only partially considered statements deprives our policy of flexibility and coherence. To obtain discipline, on the other hand, might produce a bloody fight which would impair our diplomacy.

II. A Possible Solution

For all these reasons, I have concluded that our best course would be a bold move of trying to settle everything at once. Such a move should:

1. Attempt to involve the Soviet Union;

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[2] Not attached, but Nixon attached an extract of this report to an April 10 memorandum to Rogers; see Document 57.

2. Attempt to negotiate a package settlement in order to avoid endless delay.

3. Present a credible threat of serious consequence if no settlement is reached.

Soviet involvement is crucial; however, the Soviet problem is complicated. They cannot be eager to run major risks for Hanoi because a victory for Hanoi does not benefit the Soviet Union geopolitically and might hurt it ideologically by proving the validity of the Chinese interpretation of international affairs. But a humiliation for Hanoi is also not acceptable because it stakes Moscow's claim to leadership of the world communist movement. In these circumstances, Moscow tends to procrastinate; it does just enough to keep its claims as a major communist power but below the threshold of military confrontation with us. It helps tactically in Paris, but so far has not made a strategic move to end the war.

Moscow is likely to move off this course only on the basis of its own requirements, not of our needs. Secondly, it will require some event to galvanize Moscow into action or to give it an excuse for it.

This leads me to propose a program with the following components.

1. An approach to Dobrynin by me along these lines:

a. The President has reviewed the Vietnam situation carefully.

b. He will not be the first American President to lose a war, and he is not prepared to give in to public pressures which would have that practical consequence.

c. The President has therefore decided that he will make one more effort to achieve a reasonable settlement. If it fails, other measures will be invoked.

d. These measures could not help but involve wider risks. U.S.-Soviet relations are therefore at a crossroads.

e. The President is eager to move into an era of conciliation with the Soviet Union on a broad front. As a sign of this, he is willing to send a high-level delegation to Moscow to agree with the Soviet Union on principles of strategic arms limitations. He is also willing to consider other meetings at even higher levels.

f. The head of the delegation to discuss strategic arms limitations would be Cyrus Vance.[3] He would be empowered, while in Moscow,

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[3] Kissinger talked with Vance on March 18 to explore his willingness to undertake a mission to Moscow to link the opening of the SALT talks with an overall proposal for a settlement on Vietnam. Vance would meet secretly with a senior North Vietnamese representative in the Soviet capital, and be empowered to negotiate both issues. (*White House Years*, p. 266)

to meet with a North Vietnamese negotiator and agree with him on a military as well as a political settlement. Our offer to Hanoi will be generous and forthcoming in keeping with the sacrifices Hanoi has made and the courage with which it has fought.

g. The President will give this effort in Moscow 6 weeks to succeed.

h. The President will ask nothing of the Soviet Union inconsistent with its position as a senior communist power. He expects that nothing will be asked of the U.S. inconsistent with its worldwide obligations.

i. If this negotiation is successful, the President will conclude that the major danger to war is being removed and he would expect progress in many areas.

j. The President is prepared to repeat this proposition to a Soviet Ambassador personally if there is any interest in the Kremlin.

2. If Dobrynin agrees, a mission should be sent to Moscow headed by Vance for the purpose of discussing principles of strategic arms limitations. Vance should be empowered to discuss North Vietnamese issues.

3. The object of the Vietnam negotiations would be as follows:

a. *Definition of Objective:* To reach prompt agreement with the North Vietnamese on the general shape of a political-military settlement, specifically:

(1) *Military*—Agreement that there will be mutual withdrawal of all external forces, and a ceasefire based on a mutual withdrawal.

(2) *Political*—(i) Agreement that guarantees the NLF freedom from reprisals and the right to participate fully in the political and social life of the country in exchange for agreement by NLF and DRV to forego further attempts to achieve their political objectives by force and violence. (ii) Agreement that there will be a separate and independent SVN for at least 5 years.

(3) *Mechanism for supervising and verifying the carrying out of the settlement.* The agreement with the DRV should not attempt to spell out the manner in which the general principles agreed to will be implemented. That should be left for Paris.

4. If Vance can get an agreement in principle, the negotiations would shift back to Paris for final implementation. The whole process should be completed before the end of August.

III. Pros and Cons

This procedure would have the following advantages:

1. It would give the Soviet Union an excuse and a method for involving itself in the process.

2. It would prevent a Panmunjom of protracted negotiations while casualties mount.

3. It would give you control over the negotiations.

4. It is the only way to end the war quickly and the best way to conclude it honorably.

5. If it becomes known, it will be considered as an imaginative peace move.

6. The beginning of SALT negotiations will give you a little more maneuvering room domestically. Focusing the initial talks on "principles" keeps you from being pressured all the time.

The course outlined here has the following disadvantages:

1. It will get no cooperation from the bureaucracy and may even be sabotaged if they find out about it.

2. It may be used by Hanoi to undermine our position in Saigon. I think this risk would be minimal. Hanoi's fear of Peking will make it reluctant to publicize the talks.

3. It will be difficult to give Vance the dual negotiating role without the other members of the SALT delegation knowing about it.[4]

4. A related question is whether a high DRV official can come to Moscow at the same time the SALT talks are going on without suspicions being aroused.

5. Another question is whether the DRV can negotiate in Moscow in light of the current tensions between Moscow and Peking.

6. All these difficulties are surmountable. The real problem is that the approach outlined here should not be implemented unless you are prepared to take tough escalatory steps if Moscow rejects the overture (mining Haiphong, bombing Cambodia, etc.). To fail to do so would be to risk your credibility.

With this proviso, I believe the pros outweigh the cons. If you agree, I shall work out a more detailed scenario.[5]

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[4] This was a concern Vance raised to Kissinger. (Ibid.)

[5] Kissinger spoke to Nixon at Key Biscayne and the President was "dubious about the 'Vance ploy,' as he called it," but Nixon agreed to make a diplomatic approach to the Soviet Union. (Ibid., pp. 267–268) See Document 55.

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

Washington, April 3, 1969.

SUBJECT

Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, April 3, 1969

Dobrynin called me about 3:30 p.m. to ask whether he might come by for fifteen minutes this afternoon. I received him at 4:30 p.m. and he stayed for an hour.

[Omitted here is information unrelated to Vietnam.]

However, it soon became clear that the note was just a pretext. Dobrynin turned the conversation to Vietnam and asked me what I thought of developments. I said we were very relaxed, we knew what we were doing and would not be deflected by public protest. Dobrynin asked me whether we had "any intention of expanding the war." I replied that I had always told him that the President was determined to end the war one way or the other. He could be sure that I did not speak idly and that I hoped Hanoi kept Moscow fully informed of everything that was going on. Dobrynin said: "You know we do not have any advisers at the headquarters in South Vietnam." I replied: "Well, I hope they keep you informed of everything that goes on."

Dobrynin then asked how I visualized the relationship between a military and political settlement. I decided to play fairly tough and said that we would probably want to discuss military issues first. (I did this to preserve the option of the Vance mission and to have our willingness to discuss political matters within that framework serve as a concession.) I added that we could understand it, however, if after the military issues were settled, Hanoi would make their application dependent on progress towards a political settlement. Dobrynin pretended that this was a major concession and said it put a new complexion on things. He said we had to understand that the NLF was reluctant to risk itself in a forum with the GVN since it considered the GVN determined to destroy it. Dobrynin asked whether I saw any chance of replacing Thieu and Ky. I said no, but we were willing to consider safeguards for the NLF after a settlement. Dobrynin said this

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin–Kissinger, 1969, [Part 2]. Secret; Nodis. The memorandum was not initialed by Kissinger, but Document 55 makes it clear that Kissinger sent it to the President.

was all terribly complicated. The NLF did not insist on a coalition government. It would settle for a peace cabinet (without Thieu and Ky) which would safeguard its members.

Dobrynin then returned to the problem of escalation. I told him it would be too bad if we were driven in this direction because it was hard to think of a place where a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States made less sense. I added that it seemed to me our interests in Vietnam were quite compatible. Dobrynin replied: "Our interests in Vietnam are practically identical. We might want a slightly more neutral South Vietnam than you, but it is not an issue of consequence."

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

Comment:

Dobrynin seemed very insecure when speaking about Vietnam. All of this suggests to me that maybe the Vance mission is our best hope.

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54. Editorial Note

South Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky attended the State Funeral of former President Dwight D. Eisenhower in Washington on March 30, 1969. Ky and Ambassador Bui Diem met with President Nixon, Ambassador Bunker, and Presidential Assistant Henry Kissinger from 2:05 to 2:34 p.m. on April 1. This meeting was one of many President Nixon had that day with foreign leaders attending the funeral. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) No other record of the discussion between Ky and Nixon has been found. Ky also met with Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson on April 1 and Secretary of State William Rogers on April 3 at 12:30 p.m. Records of these discussions are in memoranda of conversation of those dates (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 7 VIET S) Ky also met with Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird on April 2 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. (Memorandum of conversation, April 4; Washington National Records Center, OSD/ISA Files: FRC 330 72 A 6308, Vietnam #2, 1969, 000.1) Telegram 54546 to Saigon, April 9, provides an overall assessment of Ky's trip. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 7 VIET S)

On April 4 Ky met with Kissinger at the Vietnamese Chancery in Washington at 9:40 a.m. Ky assured Kissinger that relations between the Nixon administration and the South Vietnamese Government had improved greatly. Kissinger invited Ambassador Bui Diem, who was attending the meeting, to come and see him if he was confused about

the President's Vietnam policy. Kissinger told Ky to disregard a public statement by Laird about a possible coalition government with the National Liberation Front and assured Ky that the President would make Vietnam policy. Asked about the war effort, Ky stated that although the North Vietnamese were getting weaker, he realized that a political statement was "the only practical solution." Ky assured Kissinger that South Vietnam could live with a settlement as long as North Vietnamese troops withdrew from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. When Kissinger raised the issue of elections, Ky assured him that his government could win elections at the local level and would accept supervision. Ky reported optimistically on "Vietnamizing the conflict." Kissinger concluded the discussion with promises of close cooperation, a special channel to Bui Diem if serious problems arose, and another assurance that only the President and the White House mattered on Vietnam policy. (Ibid.)

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55. Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

April 5, 1969, 9:45 a.m.

[Omitted here is discussion of Peru and the International Petroleum Corporate dispute.]

P: I was wondering, in view of the rather patent attempt of the North Vietnamese to try to indicate that there is no progress being made in the talks—and then also the statement that the Administration had attempted to reduce its casualties and they wouldn't let that happen[2]—I'm inclined to think that even without a reason, we ought to go ahead and crack them pretty hard on the North.

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 359, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File. No classification marking. Nixon was in Key Biscayne, Florida; Kissinger was in Washington.

[2] On April 3 North Vietnamese delegation officials in Paris denied that "secret talks" had started and that "some progress" was being made. On April 1 the NLF news agency stated that Abrams' defensive strategy of "avoiding losses and reducing expenses" had proved to be a "fiasco" by their post-Tet military offense. (Quoted from Stanley Millet, ed., *South Vietnam: U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia,* Vol. 4, 1969, pp. 35 and 40)

HAK: I know what you mean. I don't know whether you've had a chance to see a conversation I had with Dobrynin—it's in a package sent to you yesterday.[3] He came in with a pretext on European matters, but it was terribly transparent—he launched into a long talk on Vietnam. He said "we don't have any military observers with the Communist party in the south." I said "I hope they tell you what's going on." He kept coming back to this problem.

P: They don't have private talks next week?

HAK: No, it would be a good week for doing it. I've become convinced—and Dobrynin's conversation made it stronger—that we try the other route we have been discussing. The Soviets are getting edgy. I think if we gave them some way of getting themselves into it they might be ready to do it now.

I think domestically, and in Thieu government, it's going to be hard to hold it together. You have Laird's statements, for example—what he said about B–52's and private talks, etc.

P: Everybody has to get out and make it appear things are going well—they aren't used to playing a big game.

HAK: That's the problem.

P: They can't just stand there and (wait?), which is what you have to do.

HAK: Spend your assets at once, rather than piddle them away.

P: I agree we're going to have to change it. I'm not sure that will work. We may have to do something even more strong. I'm not sure the Vance ploy will work.

HAK: We don't have to tie ourselves to the Vance thing.

P: I'm concerned at the present time we're sort of piddling around and Walsh is jittering(?) around in Paris. The tone of the private talks has changed. I'm not so sure that they don't read what we're doing and that they're going to wait us out. It will worry them a little—that was the purpose of the other one, wasn't it?

HAK: That was the purpose, and we learned from it. We learned Hanoi was pretty eager, because they never would have come to private talks.

P: Let's assume the other side won't. We hit them again. I suppose they could then squeal that what we were doing—they might want to use this as a pretext.

HAK: They still have to get Sihanouk. They have no status for complaining. We have to play it cool.

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[3] See Document 53.

P: Particularly in that corner.

HAK: It's even more inaccessible where we hit it.

P: The Laotians are now asking for help.

HAK: I think if we could come to a decision on whether to shift the framework that then we ought to adhere to that, and then do it the week before we shift the framework so that word can get back to Moscow. One problem is Hanoi might not know how to translate it. Paris is cumbersome procedure even if you wanted to move fast.

P: Shifting of the framework poses a problem of what you do with Rogers, of course.

HAK: I think if we do it carefully, Rogers has to be brought along. It would take us about 3 weeks to set up, in my view. This is not something the Soviets would really have to think about.

P: My inclination is to crack this one, and crack another one—plenty of places to hit.

HAK: Say we crack them next week. Week after, we approach Dobrynin. But it would take him about two weeks to set up. When it is set up, we've got to bring Rogers in. By that time the talks in Paris might be stalemated and he might be eager to have a way out. The way everyone is talking in this country Hanoi is going to try to wait.

P: If they see everybody talking, that's going to make them wait. I can rectify it to an extent, by what I say next week at the press conference—that will hold the line.

HAK: Next week would be bad for a press conference, with NATO in town and a major speech. At any rate, whenever you have a p.c., you can rectify it. The NATO speech is on Thursday. Bill is going to have a p.c. on Monday[4]—he hasn't had one yet.

P: We may have to hit them one while we're here. The necessity for the North Vietnamese to know that there's still a lot of snap left in the old boys is very important. And I don't know any other way to do it.

HAK: I think that's needed. But also what is needed is a forum so they have a way out if they need it. I'd be in favor of doing it next week anyhow, even if we don't have change of venue, but if they could tie the two together—that's what made the other one so confusing to them.

P: OK, we'll see what happens. When do they expect the next private talk?

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[4] April 7; the text of Rogers' press conference is in Department of State *Bulletin,* April 28, 1969, pp. 357–363.

HAK: They will ask for it when Bunker is back in Saigon. In about a week.

P: I think we better get geared up to do this other one. So they're ready to hit that area. I won't tell anything to the Pentagon.

HAK: I'll hold it until Monday.

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

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

The War in Laos and the Significance of the Fall of Na Khang

The war in Laos took a serious turn a month ago with the fall of the Na Khang guerrilla base in Northeastern Laos.

I attach a CIA study done at our request which concludes that the loss of Na Khang does not drastically alter the tactical situation, nor necessarily signal an intensification of the Communists' dry-season offensive.[2] The psychological damage to shake Government morale may be the most significant aspect of the event.

The study assumes that the RLG is likely to react to the fall of Na Khang with panicky withdrawals if other Government positions come under attack. In recent weeks, Souvanna Phouma has shown himself very seriously worried, but the Government forces have not panicked. They have made a series of probes to throw the Communists' timetable off. At Souvanna's request we have supplied the Lao troops with 4000 automatic rifles, widened the area of our air strikes and struck at Communist material supplies in the Plain of Jars. These actions have perhaps slowed the enemy, but it is still an open question whether he will

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box TS 64, Memoranda to the President, February–April 1969. Top Secret. Drafted by Grant on April 8. Richard L. Sneider sent this memorandum to Kissinger under cover of an April 9 memorandum indicating that he had "recast" the study on Laos as a memorandum for the President at Kissinger's request. A handwritten note on the first page reads: "retd from P[resident], 4/15/69."

[2] Not attached; reference is to CIA's Intelligence Memorandum No. 0566/69, April 8, 1969, "The Current Communist Threat in Laos." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 545, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. 1, to 31 July 1969)

have advanced far enough fundamentally to affect the balance of forces in Laos, before the rains come in a few weeks and bring a halt to his advances.

The Two Struggles: There are two levels of conflict in Laos—the more limited conflict between the RLG and the Communists and the larger conflict relating to the Vietnam War. The smaller conflict is being fought in the shadow of the larger. The RLG would collapse without U.S. aid and FEOF. The Pathet Lao is dependent upon North Vietnam, which could take over Laos very quickly if it wished. The shaky equilibrium which has survived since 1962 has been at the sufferance of the outside powers, who have chosen to contain the Laos conflict rather than to attempt a fundamental shift in the balance of power within Laos.

The Communist Strategy: North Vietnam has been willing to tolerate the present balance because

—Its control of the "Ho Chi Minh trail" has not been threatened and it has been able to maintain generally effective control of the hill areas bordering North Vietnam.

—It has calculated that a move which put Communists in control of the Mekong plain or toppled the RLG would probably remove the restraints upon a more massive U.S. effort to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail.

—It has probably calculated that, after a Communist victory in South Vietnam, Communist control of Laos could be brought about easily, and primarily through political means.

—To communize Laos would lose much third world sympathy for North Vietnam, would unalterably demonstrate that the Communists had chosen to tear up the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962, and might encounter resistance from the USSR, which probably favors the present situation as offering more leverage than it would have with a Communist Government in power.

The North Vietnam calculation may have shifted somewhat in recent months, since the balance of incentives and disincentives has been changed. Since the bombing halt in North Vietnam, the U.S. has spent much more effort on harassing the Ho Chi Minh trail, which may affect the Communist view of the usefulness of the present arrangement. At the same time, the Communists probably believe that the U.S. is less likely to escalate the war by massive intervention against the trail. Finally, North Vietnam may wish to institutionalize some arrangement which would give it continuing access to South Vietnam through Southern Laos in the event of an agreement in Paris.

The Communists, with Soviet help, seem presently to be orchestrating a major effort to restore the balance in their favor by forcing a halt in the U.S. bombing of Laos. Their point of pressure will be upon Souvanna Phouma, to whom they presumably have offered or will offer a combination of inducements (Communist participation in a revitalized

Government of National Union) and threats (Communist encroachments upon RLG-controlled territory) to persuade him to call for a halt in the bombing.

The Soviet and Chinese interests conflict, as usual. The Soviets probably have more leverage with Souvanna Phouma than they would with a Communist-dominated Government of Laos. The Chinese seek the establishment of a Communist Government responsive to the North Vietnamese and themselves. In this circumstance, we have a certain overlap of interest with the Soviets in maintaining the Souvanna administration.

The U.S. Strategy: We have tolerated the Laos equilibrium for these reasons:

—Control over the Mekong Valley, with its access to Thailand, has remained in friendly hands.

—We have been able, with Souvanna Phouma's agreement and support, to monitor movements along the Ho Chi Minh trail and to harass it by air and, to a lesser extent, on the ground.

—Most important, an effort to tip the Laos balance in our favor would require a major expansion of our war effort.

The "Little War": The internal balance has been remarkably stable since 1962–63 when the RLG effectively absorbed most of the Neutralists, and the Communists absorbed the remainder. We have defused threats from the Right by making clear that our support is for Souvanna Phouma, and he seems to face no immediate challenge for control of the RLG.

The two sides have tended to consolidate and expand their control in their own zones. However, Communist control of the uplands has been resisted by pro-RLG Meo guerrillas, which number some 40,000, which receive extensive CIA support, and which have also helped to man our roadwatch operations along the Ho Chi Minh trail. These guerrillas operate in Pathet Lao areas, and in some places have actually succeeded in winning and holding territory for the RLG.

On the other hand, the Communists have—within the strategic balance pictured above—regularly nibbled at RLG areas of control outside the Mekong plain. First, they took the Plain of Jars. In 1967–68 they took the Nam Bac Valley in Luang Prabang province and wiped out guerrilla bases in most of Houa Phan (Sam Neua) province in the Northeast. These gains have been achieved in dry-season skirmishes rather than a sustained campaign.

The Fall of Na Khang in the Strategic Perspectives: This incident is not vital to either level of conflict, but it may relate to both.

It certainly relates to the intra-Laotian struggle. The fall of the base and airstrip effectively seals off Sam Neua province (the Laotian "bulge" into North Vietnam) from all government operations. The commander of the guerrilla forces in the area, Vang Pao, is probably the ablest Laotian general. His Meo tribal forces have done more than

their part in preventing the Communists from consolidating control of this hill area, but they have suffered severe manpower attrition. The Government is talking of removing their dependents to the plains, which would remove the last incentive for them to fight in the hills. Vang Pao himself has had to recognize that he does not have the power to do more than harass the enemy and perhaps to hold off further offensives until the wet season stops the Communists.

A threat may now be more easily posed to the major "Neutralist" (friendly) base of Moung Soui. These forces are not distinguished fighters; and if they are dispersed, the Government's position will become shakier.

The RLG has suffered a psychological setback of serious proportions. The Pathet Lao hand will be strengthened if the Communists should elect to call for negotiations to reconstitute the three-way coalition envisaged by the Geneva Accords of 1962—a decision which would be a tactic to weaken and eventually destroy Souvanna rather than to help him.

The situation has become serious enough for Souvanna Phouma to have asked our Embassy that it extend our bombing to the Plain of Jars, and then to include the Communist administrative centers, a change of the ground rules which could lead to retaliation against Vientiane or other Communist responses. Our Embassy has complied, and a series of air strikes entitled "Operation Rain Dance" is being carried out to slow the enemy's momentum until the rainy season.

The incident could relate to the larger picture, and be part of the threat to Souvanna that he will lose more territory if he does not accede to pressures to call a halt to the American bombing.

Laos in the Paris Negotiations: The two levels of action point to the two principal problems which Laos will pose for us in the Paris negotiations. First will be the provision of adequate guarantees that lines of communication not be left open through Laos for the North Vietnamese to support continuing insurrection in the South, and for the Chinese and North Vietnamese to support the Communists in Thailand. Second, and related to this, will be the problem of arriving at some new balance in Laos itself which will protect Laos from being very quickly overrun by the North Vietnamese Communists with a facade of Pathet Lao participation. This will require international inspection and control of much greater weight and strength than the International Control Commission as structured in the 1962 Accords. Or it will require external forces to beef up the Laotians, or some threat of retaliation against stepped-up Vietnamese pressures sufficiently credible to persuade Hanoi to desist. None of these deterrents would be easily created.

57. Memorandum From President Nixon to Secretary of State Rogers[1]

Washington, April 10, 1969.

SUBJECT

Paris Negotiations

I have recently been given a very disturbing report by a member of the staff of our negotiating team in Paris, which came to me on a personal basis.

The report, an extract of which is attached, indicates that our negotiating team is fundamentally split on the issue of the conduct of U.S. negotiations and that there are members of the team who are actively involved in a disloyal campaign "to save the President from himself." Activities include the conduct of correspondence with elements in the United States who favor termination of the war under any conditions, informal and frequent discussions with the press and friendly and unfriendly embassies to which opinions and views contrary to official policy are expressed.

Allegedly this activity has been conducted for some time without the cognizance of the head of our negotiating team and in flagrant violation of my previously stated policy on the conduct of our negotiations.

As I have emphasized on several occasions, I expect and encourage the free exchange of conflicting views on any policy issue up until the time a decision is made. Following decision, however, viewpoints in conflict with stated policy should be silenced. I expect a complete adherence to this policy throughout the Department of State and our embassies abroad. Should deviations come to your attention, the individuals involved should be promptly replaced.

RN

Attachment

EXTRACT[2]

He told me in the strictest confidence that he wished to convey some views which, under ordinary circumstances, he would never voice but, in the light of his serious concern for conditions in Paris, he

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Richardson Papers, Under Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, Box CL 3. Secret; Personal; Eyes Only.

[2] Confidential; Eyes Only.

felt must be conveyed. With that introduction, he stated that he viewed the Paris negotiating team as in a complete state of disarray. It was split wide open on the issue of the U.S. conduct of negotiations and members of the negotiating team were actively involved in a disloyal campaign to "save the President from himself" by indulging in a "poison pen campaign" with elements in the United States who favor the termination of the war under "any" conditions. He stated that he was aware that correspondence was being carried on by members of the staff with elements in the United States which had already come out in direct opposition to President Nixon's policies. He also stated that many in the negotiating team were devoid of loyalty or discipline and that members of the staff were indulging in frequent and direct conversations with other embassies, with the other side, and with the press, and that these contacts were being conducted without the cognizance of the head of the U.S. negotiating team.

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58. National Security Study Memorandum 36[1]

Washington, April 10, 1969.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Vietnamizing the War

The President has directed the preparation of a specific timetable for Vietnamizing the war. He has asked that the Secretary of Defense be responsible for the overall planning and implementation of this process, in coordination with the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence.

The plan should cover all aspects of US military, para-military, and civilian involvement in Vietnam, including combat and combat support forces, advisory personnel, and all forms of equipment. The plan can draw on current studies, including those for T-Day planning and

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 365, Subject Files, NSSMs. Top Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Initialed by Haig. A copy was sent to General Wheeler.

RVNAF modernization and improvement. However, this timetable will be directed toward the progressive transfer to the South Vietnamese of the fighting effort with the US and other TCCs increasingly in support roles, assuming that the war continues and that North Vietnamese as well as Vietcong forces are in South Vietnam.

Assumptions for this timetable will include:

—a starting date of July 1, 1969;
—current North Vietnamese and Vietcong force levels, (i.e., we are not able to achieve mutual withdrawals); these levels should be continually adjusted in future months to ongoing intelligence estimates;
—current projections of RVNAF force levels;
—no deescalation in allied military efforts, except that resulting from phased withdrawals of US and other TCC forces which are not fully compensated for by the South Vietnamese;
—the highest national priorities for the equipping and training of South Vietnamese forces.

Based on these assumptions, timetables should be drawn up for the transfer of the combat role to the GVN and restriction of the US role to combat support and advisory missions only, with alternative completion dates of December 31, 1970, June 30, 1971, December 31, 1971, and December 31, 1972. For each alternative schedule the plan should identify the degradation in combat capability, if any, which would result, and the implications for the per cent of population under relatively secure GVN control. Each schedule should also estimate the budget and BOP implications.

Continual study, refinement and reevaluation of these problems will be necessary as the Vietnamization process proceeds. The President has requested by June 1 an initial overall report outline, as well as specific recommendations, with alternatives, for the first six months (July 1 to December 31, 1969), and a complete report by September 1. Further studies, recommendations, and progress reports will be requested subsequently.

Henry A. Kissinger

59. National Security Study Memorandum 37[1]

Washington, April 10, 1969.

TO

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

SUBJECT

Vietnam

As indicated in NSDM 9 of April 1, 1969,[2] the President has directed the preparation of certain studies on Vietnam. He has asked that the following papers be prepared by the interdepartmental Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam and submitted to the NSC Review Group by the dates indicated.

Phased Withdrawals

a. *Mutual Withdrawal*

This paper should examine the modalities of mutual withdrawal, whether agreed to publicly or privately by both sides, tacit, or de facto. It should cover timetables, phasing, types of personnel, regroupment, local cease fires and any other relevant subjects. Military, logistic, territorial and political factors and implications should be considered. (May 16, 1969)

b. *Vietnamizing the War*

This paper should examine the modalities of US withdrawals under conditions of our progressively turning over combat efforts to the South Vietnamese in the absence of reciprocal enemy withdrawals. It should cover timetables, phasing, types of personnel, regroupment, and substitution of South Vietnamese forces. Military, logistic, territorial, and political factors and implications should be considered.

This study should reflect the findings of the preliminary report of the Secretary of Defense on a specific timetable for Vietnamizing the war. (June 13, 1969) (See NSSM 36)[3]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–142, NSSM Files, NSSM 37. Top Secret; Sensitive. A copy was sent to General Wheeler.

[2] Document 51.

[3] Document 58.

Verification for Mutual Withdrawal

This paper should examine various means and mechanisms for verifying the process and completion of mutual withdrawals, whether agreed to publicly or privately by both sides, tacit, or de facto.[4] It should set forth the advantages and disadvantages of various types of verification machinery including joint belligerent commissions, reactivation of the ICC, and creation of new international groups (such as an Asian body). The paper should include a discussion of our unilateral capability to verify withdrawals drawing on all sources of information. It should consider how agreed arrangements can usefully supplement our unilateral capabilities. (May 16, 1969)

Political Settlement for South Vietnam

This study should explore various types of political settlement within South Vietnam and the possible US role concerning these questions. The paper should examine all feasible options, including elections at all levels, sharing of governmental power before and/or after elections, constitutional considerations, agreed or de facto territorial accommodations, decentralization of government power. The study should discuss the feasibility of each alternative and the likely attitudes of the GVN, the various segments of the South Vietnamese populace, the NLF, and Hanoi. It should evaluate the likely evolution within South Vietnam under alternative arrangements. Finally, the possible US role—in Vietnam as well as in the negotiations—in achieving a political settlement should be covered. (May 16, 1969)

International Guarantees

The paper should explore the subject of international guarantees for

—mutual withdrawal
—political settlement in South Vietnam
—the DMZ
—any other appropriate aspects of an overall Vietnam settlement.

In so doing, the study should be consistent with the separate papers on mutual withdrawal, verification for mutual withdrawal, political settlement for SVN, and our policy on the DMZ. This paper should

[4] In a May 1 memorandum to Rogers, Laird, and Helms, Kissinger amended NSSM 37 to read: "the specification for a paper on 'Verification for Mutual Withdrawal' should be amended by adding the following sentences after the first sentence: 'In addition, the paper should examine the requirements for verifying that there is no resumption of infiltration in the future, in a post-withdrawal situation. For both purposes, the means and mechanisms for verifying should include a careful discussion of manpower and logistic requirements. The paper should set forth. . .' " (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–142, NSSM Files, NSSM 37)

discuss the advantages and disadvantages of attempting to achieve international guarantees, and ways to negotiate them—e.g., at Paris, in a follow-on international conference, etc. (June 13, 1969)

Henry A. Kissinger

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

Washington, April 15, 1969.

SUBJECT

Memorandum of Conversation with Dobrynin April 14, 1969

After an exchange of pleasantries and a somewhat lengthy discussion of the Middle East (reported separately),[2] the discussion turned to Vietnam. I asked Dobrynin whether he had had any reaction from Moscow to our last conversation. He said he had not, but that he was aware of a conversation Zorin had had with Lodge.

I then said that the President had wished me to convey his thoughts on Vietnam to Moscow. We had followed the discussions in Paris with great interest and considerable patience. As Lodge had already pointed out to Zorin, it was very difficult to negotiate when the other side constantly accused us of insincerity, when every private meeting so far had been initiated by us, and when every proposition was put forward on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. The President had therefore decided to make one more direct approach on the highest level before drawing the conclusion that the war could only be ended by unilateral means. The President's personal word should be a guarantee of sincerity. After showing Dobrynin the talking points and the President's initials, I read them to him. He took copious notes, stopping every once in awhile to ask for an explanation. When I said we wanted to have the negotiations concluded within two months, Dobrynin said that if this proposal was feasible at all, we would be able to tell after the first week of negotiations whether they would lead anywhere. When I got through, Dobrynin asked whether I was saying that unless

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK, 1969 [part 2]. Secret; Nodis. A handwritten note on the memorandum reads: "Back from President, 4/16/69."

[2] Attached but not printed.

the Vietnam war was settled, we would not continue our discussions on the Middle East and not enter the talks on strategic arms. I replied that we were prepared to continue talking but that we would take measures which might create a complicated situation.

Dobrynin said that whatever happens in Vietnam, the Soviet leaders were eager to continue talking. He then asked whether these new measures might involve Soviet ships. I replied that many measures were under intensive study. In dealing with the President, it was well to remember that he always did more than he threatened and that he never threatened idly.

Dobrynin then said he hoped we understand the limitations of Soviet influence in Hanoi. We had to understand that while the Soviet Union might recommend certain steps, it would never threaten to cut off supplies. He could tell me that the Soviet Union had been instrumental in helping to get the talks started. Moreover, Communist China was constantly accusing the Soviet Union of betraying Hanoi. The Soviet Union could not afford to appear at a Communist meeting and find itself accused of having undermined a fellow Socialist country. On the other hand, the Soviet Union had no strategic interest in Southeast Asia. The chief reasons for its support of North Vietnam have been the appeals of a fellow Socialist country. I could be sure that the President's proposal would be transmitted to Hanoi within 24 hours. Dobrynin added that often Soviet messages were never answered by Hanoi so he could not guarantee what the reply would be or indeed if there would be a reply.

Dobrynin then said that the North Vietnamese were using the following agreement with Moscow and he stressed that Moscow did not necessarily agree with it: The Saigon Government was composed of individuals committed to the destruction of the NLF. The NLF would not enter a political confrontation in which the administrative apparatus was in the hands of people who sought to destroy them. The NLF would not insist on participating in the Government but it would insist that the Government be broadened and that Thieu and Ky be removed. Dobrynin repeated that he was simply stating Hanoi's arguments, not endorsing them.

I replied that I was familiar with Hanoi's arguments since they were being made to us as well. Nevertheless, the best policy for the NLF would be to work out guarantees for its political participation *after* a settlement of the war. They would certainly find us forthcoming.

Dobrynin reiterated Moscow's desire to stay in negotiations with us whatever happened in Vietnam. He told me many anecdotes of Stalin as well as of Molotov. He added that the Soviet Union had intended to send Marshall Zhukov to Eisenhower's funeral but Zhukov had recently had two strokes and was partially paralyzed. He then

asked whether we understood that Communist China was attempting to produce a clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. If the war in Vietnam escalates, it would only service Communist China's interest. I replied that this was the precise point the President had tried to make to Kuznetsov on the occasion of the Eisenhower funeral. It was, therefore, incumbent on the Soviet Union to help us remove this danger. We felt that in this period, the great nuclear powers still have the possibility of making peace.

As he was preparing to leave, Dobrynin asked me whether he could read over the talking points once more. I handed them to him and he read them slowly and carefully. He departed saying "this has been a very important conversation."

Attachment

TALKING POINTS ON VIETNAM FOR DISCUSSION WITH SOVIET AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN

1. I plan to utilize the following points in discussing efforts to resolve the Vietnam conflict:

a. The President has just completed a thorough going review of the Vietnam situation in its fullest world-wide context.

b. He will not be the first American President to lose a war, and he is not prepared to give in to public pressures which would have that practical consequence.[3]

c. The President is convinced that it is in no one's interest to have an outcome that would encourage Mainland China's aggressive drive.

d. The President has therefore decided that he will make one more[4] effort to achieve a reasonable settlement. If it fails, other measures will be invoked.[5]

e. These measures could not help but involve wider risks. U.S.-Soviet relations are therefore at a crossroad.[6]

f. The President views this point in history with the utmost gravity, especially since he is eager to move into an era of conciliation with the Soviet Union on a broad front. He is willing to begin talks on strategic arms limitations. He has agreed not to threaten the status quo in Europe. He is willing to consider meetings at the highest levels.

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[3] Kissinger bracketed this paragraph.

[4] Kissinger bracketed the phrase "one more" and wrote above it "a major."

[5] Kissinger bracketed the final sentence of 1. d.

[6] Kissinger bracketed this paragraph.

g. However, the President believes that an acceptable settlement to the Vietnamese conflict is the key to everything. Therefore, concurrently, the President proposes to designate a high-level representative to meet with a North Vietnamese negotiator at any location, including Moscow, designated by the Soviet Union to seek agreement with a designated North Vietnamese negotiator on a military as well as a political settlement. The President visualizes that this negotiation would be conducted distinct from the existing Paris framework in order to avoid the sluggish and heretofore cumbersome mechanisms that have evolved in Paris.

h. The President will give this peace effort just six weeks to succeed.[7]

i. The President will ask nothing of the Soviet Union inconsistent with its position as a senior communist power. He expects that nothing will be asked of the U.S. inconsistent with its world-wide obligations.

j. If this negotiation is successful, the President will conclude that the major danger to war is being removed and he would expect progress in many areas.

k. The President is prepared to repeat this proposition to the Soviet Ambassador personally if there is any interest in the Kremlin.

1. Our proposal to Hanoi will be conciliatory embracing both political and military measures.[8]

2. The object of the Vietnam negotiations would be as follows:

a. *Definition of Objective:* To reach prompt agreement with the North Vietnamese on the general shape of a political-military settlement, specifically:

(1) *Military*—Agreement that there will be mutual withdrawal of all external forces, and a ceasefire based on a mutual withdrawal.

(2) *Political*—(a) Agreement that guarantees the NLF freedom from reprisals and the right to participate fully in the political and social life of the country in exchange for agreement by NLF and DRV to forego further attempts to achieve their political objectives by force and violence, and[9] (b) agreement that there will be a separate and independent SVN for at least five years.

(3) *Mechanism for supervising and verifying the carrying out of the settlement.* The agreement with the DRV should not attempt to spell out the manner in which the general principles agreed to will be implemented. That should be left for Paris.

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[7] Nixon added the following sentence by hand at this point: "perhaps 2 months is more realistic."

[8] Kissinger added the following phrase by hand at this point: "for ending hostilities."

[9] Nixon added the following phrase by hand at this point: "a date for new elections."

3. If the special U.S. and North Vietnamese negotiators can achieve an agreement in principle, the negotiations would shift back to Paris for final implementation. The whole process should be completed before the end of August. If the special talks prove unsuccessful, it is difficult to visualize the progress which we both seek and the outlook for improved U.S.-Soviet relations would be seriously jeopardized.

4. The President realizes that this proposal represents a most complex and difficult choice for all parties concerned, but because we are at a most significant crossroad, he is convinced that extraordinary measures are called for. Because they are extraordinary, he would anticipate that Ambassador Dobrynin would wish to discuss them in detail with his government[10] and is prepared to withhold critical decisions on future actions with respect to Vietnam until he receives the Soviet government's reply to this proposal.[11]

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[10] Kissinger bracketed the final phrase of point 4 beginning here.

[11] Nixon initialed the approve option. Attached was a half sheet of paper comprising three additional points. It reads: "1. The President wishes to reiterate his conviction that a just peace is achievable. 2. The President is willing to explore avenues other than the existing negotiating framework. For example, it might be desirable for American and North Vietnamese negotiators to meet separately from the Paris framework to discuss general principles of a settlement. If the special US and DRV negotiators can achieve an agreement in principle, the final technical negotiations can shift back to Paris. 3. The USG is convinced that all parties are at a crossroads and that extraordinary measures are called for to reverse the tide of war." Nixon prints these three points in *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon,* p. 391. He also states that Kissinger showed these three points to Dobrynin.

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

Washington, April 15, 1969.

SUBJECT

CIA Analysis of Hanoi's Outlook on Paris Negotiations

At my request, Dick Helms has had his people prepare an analysis of Hanoi's outlook on the Paris negotiations which I am forwarding to you as a matter of interest. The analysis concludes that Hanoi wishes to seriously explore the possibilities for a settlement, but is not yet prepared to accept one which does not, at a minimum, provide for withdrawal of all U.S. forces and guarantee the VC a fairly clear shot at political control in SVN. Other principal points in the analysis are as follows:

1. The determinants of Hanoi's negotiating position are its calculation of its military position in SVN, the GVN political situation there, and Hanoi's estimate of the political climate in the U.S.

2. Hanoi is probably satisfied that its forces are demonstrating an ability to maintain military pressure in South Vietnam over an extended period. It believes Communist military and political pressure can prevent the GVN from significantly improving its position in the near future.

3. It also calculates that the U.S. will soon be under mounting domestic pressure to get the Paris talks moving. Until there is some basic change in this assessment, Hanoi is not likely to be very forthcoming in Paris.

4. Signs of allied eagerness or haste in the negotiations will be read as indications that the political heat is mounting in Washington.[2]

5. Most distasteful to Hanoi would be signs that the U.S. was politically prepared for a long haul military and diplomatic involvement in Vietnam.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous/Memcons, Vol. III, 4/5–69. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Sneider forwarded this memorandum to Kissinger on April 14 noting that it was "per your request" and recommending that he sign it. A note on the memorandum reads: "Pres has seen." Attached was an April 4 CIA memorandum entitled "Factors Influencing Hanoi's Behaviors at Paris Peace Negotiations." Helms sent it to Kissinger under a covering note of April 7, which states the paper was done at Kissinger's request and notes that, "we come down on the belief that Hanoi is influenced by strong positions on the United States side."

[2] Nixon highlighted paragraphs 3 and 4 and wrote: "H.K.—This shows urgency of getting out our peace plan—".

6. The DRV is nervous about any indication that the U.S. might be able to reduce its role in the war without cutting overall allied effectiveness. If the U.S. could do this successfully, Hanoi would probably feel impelled to work out a minimal settlement in Paris before the negotiations become irrelevant.

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

Washington, April 22, 1969.

SUBJECT

B–52 Strikes Against Targets in Cambodia

At Tab A is the Joint Chiefs of Staff plan providing for the Cambodian B–52 strikes with specific targets in the Fish Hook area previously struck and two additional targets in the Tri-Border area with Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia.[2] The plan would provide:

1. *Breakfast Bravo* 48 sorties against targets in the Fish Hook area with 12 cover sorties on South Vietnam. Time over target (TOT) between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 24 Saigon time (1:00 p.m. Wednesday local time).
2. *Breakfast COCO* Restrike of Fish Hook with 20 sorties plus 4 cover sorties. TOT between 8:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., Thursday night, April 24 Saigon time (7:00 a.m.–8:30 a.m. Thursday April 24 local time).
3. *Operation Lunch* 32 sorties against targets in the Tri-Border area and 4 cover sorties. TOT between 2:00 a.m. and 4:15 a.m. Friday morning April 25 Saigon time (1:00 p.m. and 3:15 p.m. Thursday afternoon local time).

At Tab B is a summary of the intelligence on the target area which indicates that military considerations favor the Fish Hook target complex at being the higher priority.[3]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. 1, 8–69. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Haig on April 22. The memorandum is not initialed, but handwritten notes on the first page indicate it was hand carried to the President and approved on April 22.

[2] Tab A, CM–4130-69, is a memorandum from Wheeler to Laird, entitled "B–52 Strikes Against Targets in Cambodia," April 21; attached but not printed.

[3] Tab B, CM–4101-69, is a memorandum from Wheeler to Laird, entitled "Authority for B–52 Strikes Against Targets in Cambodia," April 11; attached but not printed.

1. Post-strike analysis of the Fish Hook target area (COSVN) following the earlier strike indicates that there is a large North Vietnamese force in the area which has not moved.

2. Intelligence indicates that the two target complexes in the Tri-Border area contain elements of a major North Vietnamese logistics complex.

General Wheeler advises that the countermand order for authorizing all strikes should precede TOTs by eight hours; thus countermand for the operation should be prior to 5:00 a.m. Wednesday morning local time.

At Tab C is a draft instruction on the public affairs treatment of the plan.[4]

Pros and Cons of Plan

Pros	*Cons*
1. Strong military blow as manifestation of U.S. resolve to end conflict.	Could result in public outcry if strikes "blow."
2. Signals to Soviets and North Vietnam that EC–121 incident did not divert U.S. attention from Vietnam conflict.	Could prove counter-productive to on-going actions leading toward re-establishment of relations with Cambodia.
3. Timely and effective followup to Kissinger/Dobrynin conversation.	
4. Could complement Presidents' Peace Plan.	Could result in more North Vietnamese intransigence in Paris and even walkout.

On balance, I favor strike primarily because it represents a forceful U.S. action in wake of EC–121 incident and the message it conveys to the Soviets. It is probable that Laird and Wheeler will support plan on military grounds and that Rogers will oppose on political grounds.

[4] Tab C is an undated telegram from Wheeler to Abrams, McCain, and Holloway; attached but not printed.

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

Washington, April 25, 1969.

SUBJECT

History of Vietnam Negotiations

We have now completed a history of the Vietnam negotiations leading to the bombing halt (attached at Tab A).[2] We have also completed a special study on U.S.-Soviet negotiations relating to the bombing halt (attached at Tab B). We have underway a history of U.S.-North Vietnamese negotiations after November 1, 1968. These studies are not really what you are after since motives do not show up. However, this is the best we can do after an exhaustive review of all of the documents available.

Another possible study would deal with the internal U.S. Government consideration of the bombing halt decision. Such an internal history raises serious problems since it would probably require interviewing the key personalities involved and reopening the serious differences within the bureaucracy on the bombing halt decision. There is also a good chance that one or more of the personalities involved would leak to the press that your Administration was conducting this study.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 98, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam/U.S. Bombing Halt Understanding. Secret. Sent for action. A stamped note indicates the President saw the memorandum. Sneider sent this history to Kissinger on April 10, with two covering memoranda. In the first Sneider states: "Dean Moor has done an exhaustive history of the Vietnam negotiations leading to the bombing halt. . . . You requested an internal history of U.S. dealings after November 1, 1968. . . . I think you ought to seriously reconsider the request for the internal history. . . . It would raise immediate questions within the bureaucracy, which would get quickly to the press that the Administration is preparing a critical attack on LBJ's Vietnam policies. My judgment is that we have enough problems without this additional one." Kissinger indicated his desire for this internal history of U.S. and NVN dealings after November 1, 1968, by signing his initials next to the "approve" option. In the second covering memorandum, Sneider informed Kissinger that the attached draft narrative history covered "the bilateral talks between Washington and Hanoi, the US discussions with the GVN on the bombing halt, and the US discussions with the Soviet Union. . . . The draft makes use of all material presently available to the National Security Council staff." (Ibid.)

[2] Tabs A and B are attached but not printed.

Recommendation

That we not undertake an internal history of U.S. Government views.[3]

[3] Nixon initialed the approve option and wrote: "*But* I want all we trust who have recollections—(Wheeler, Goodpaster, Kissinger, etc.) to give me a memo (e.g., the anatomy of Clifford's turn around would be interesting—Frank Lenida's *plus* Wheeler's memos.) Also, Haldeman and Harlane should provide a memo of all we heard during campaign about bombing halt plans." Butterfield added the following note: "Henry: I have taken action on this request. Alex."

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

Washington, May 1, 1969.

SUBJECT

State Department Memorandum on Vietnam

The Department of State believes that Hanoi has adopted a more moderate tone in the recent plenary sessions in Paris. Following are some of the shifts which State detects:

1. The DRV spokesmen are dealing more readily with the actual issues raised by the U.S. and GVN.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous/Memcons, Vol. III, 4/5–69. Secret. Sent for information. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. Attached but not printed was a retyped and undated INR Intelligence Note entitled, "Hanoi Adopts Moderate Tone in Paris." In an April 30 memorandum to Kissinger, Sneider informed him that Lodge wished to make a proposal using the DRV's Four Points of April 8, 1965, at the next private session in Paris as a means of getting a dialogue going. (Ibid., Box 181, Paris Talks/Meetings, Private Meetings, March–December 1969) In a second memorandum of the same date Kissinger informed the President that at the Paris Plenary session of April 30, despite a "comprehensive attack on U.S. policy in Vietnam," the DRV clearly wanted the United States to explore the NLF's offer made on March 20 to talk with "other parties," to address the DRV's Four Points, and hinted that they might be willing to work within the GVN's constitution if it was revised. Nixon saw this memorandum. (Ibid., Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous/Memcons, Vol. III, 4/5–69)

2. The DRV has had less to say about the necessity of a "peace cabinet" in South Vietnam in recent sessions. State concludes that they are beginning to recognize that they may eventually have to deal with the GVN in private negotiations.

3. In recent sessions, the DRV has focused on its four point position,[2] dwelling particularly on point three which asserts that the internal affairs in SVN must be settled in accordance with the NLF program. By elaborating on this point, State believes the DRV has been attempting to project a tone of moderation since it has been stressing the allegedly democratic, neutral, and peaceful nature of its proposition.

State concludes that the display of moderation has at least three purposes:

1. To make a favorable impression on U.S. public and political opinion.

2. To influence the South Vietnamese body politic, making sure that Thieu's recent statements do not go unchallenged.

3. To attempt to encourage U.S. political concessions during the current military "lull" in South Vietnam.

[2] For text of the DRV's Four Points, outlined by DRV Premier Pham Van Dong on April 8, 1965, see *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1965,* pp. 852–853.

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

Washington, May 1, 1969.

SUBJECT

Captured Document on Vietnamese Communist Strategy

At Tab A is a captured document[2] which you may find interesting. It appears to be a COSVN-level paper which assesses the successes

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 137, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. IV, 4/24/69–5/18/69. Confidential. Sent for information. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Attached was an undated and retyped captured document entitled, "Success of Spring Offensive."

of the recent Communist offensive and their goals in the upcoming summer campaign in a most candid and objective fashion. Following are some of the highlights from the document:

The Spring Offensive

—Communist military efforts in the cities and suburban areas were "not very successful." The guerrilla movement and the buildup of Communist manpower was poor and slow. More Americans were killed than in Tet 1968, however. (True)

—The most significant effect of the offensive, especially the death of U.S. troops, was to boost the anti-war movement in the U.S. Since the Communists did not conduct any offensive phase from September to February, President Nixon thought they had lost the initiative and that he could take a firm stance at the negotiations. The February offensive upset that plan.

—The internal situation of the U.S. is now critical and the Communists must seek victories through further campaigns to turn things decisively their way.[3]

The Summer Offensive

—The Communists must put a lot of subjective effort into the summer campaign and must avoid any tendency to relax or become demoralized.

[3] Nixon highlighted this paragraph and wrote the following note: "H.K. note—we may have to hit Breakfast on a regular basis."

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

Washington, May 3, 1969.

SUBJECT

Statement by Prince Sihanouk on U.S. Border Declaration

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. I, 8–69. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

Prince Sihanouk, at an April 30 press conference, has taken exception to the U.S. border declaration[2] as useless, valueless and deceptive, on the basis of interpretations of this declaration in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.[3] Secretary Rogers has sent you the attached memorandum (Tab A)[4] based on early versions of the Sihanouk statement. Later versions and a report from the Australian Ambassador in Phnom Penh (Tab B) would indicate that Sihanouk rejected our border declaration at the press conference.[5]

Sihanouk's basic complaint is that we have not accepted Cambodia's borders as defined by it in our border declaration. However, in explaining the U.S. border declaration to Sihanouk, the Australian Ambassador made clear that this was not our intention. Sihanouk has accepted border declarations by other countries on this basis.

The French Ambassador in Phnom Penh has also informed the Australian Ambassador that Sihanouk rejected the idea of resuming relations with the U.S. at the press conference. The French Ambassador, considered a shrewd judge of Sihanouk, has concluded that Sihanouk is using the border declaration as a pretext for not resuming diplomatic relations. He thinks that Sihanouk may have been influenced to change his mind on relations with the U.S. after seeing the extent of North Vietnamese control in the Northeast, in Ratanakiri[6] (see map at Tab C).[7] Sihanouk may have concluded that he was powerless to prevent North Vietnamese infiltration and the only course open to him was to seek

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[2] See footnote 3, Document 48.

[3] In a May 6 letter to Mansfield, Rogers informed him that Sihanouk was referring to an April 15 *New York Times* editorial that stated: "the message does not specify what frontiers are being recognized, and, therefore, does not depart from the long-standing United States policy of remaining noncommittal on Cambodia's border quarrels with South Vietnam and Thailand." Rogers also told Mansfield that Sihanouk had incorrectly cited *The Washington Post* for an offending editorial and that the correct source was an April 13 article in *The Evening Star* that reported on State Department Spokesperson Carl E. Bartch's press briefing given on April 12. The article reported: "U.S. officials insisted that this message does not in any way mean the United States is taking a position on the recurring boundary disputes, which Cambodia has with both Laos and South Vietnam. The message, they say, is essentially the same as Sihanouk has received from 40 other governments—but previously rejected from the United States." (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 32 CAMB)

[4] Tab A was an April 30 memorandum from Rogers to Nixon, attached but not printed.

[5] Attached but not printed.

[6] Nixon underlined this word and wrote: "Can we hit this area?"

[7] Attached but not printed.

an understanding with the Vietnamese Communists. Sihanouk had just returned on April 30 from a week's visit to the Northeast.[8]

[8] Nixon highlighted the last two sentences and wrote: "H.K. very significant" and "(pass to Mansfield?)". Kissinger called Mansfield to tell him he was sending the exchange of letters with Sihanouk and assured the Senator that "the President has gone out of his way to establish close relations." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) In a May 5 memorandum to Nixon, Rogers recommended no comments, explanation, or further action until Sihanouk's plans and motives became clear. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 505, Country Files, Far East, Cambodia, Vol. I, 8–69) After further representations and considerations, Sihanouk accepted a revised U.S. statement that the United States would "respect Cambodia's independence and sovereignty with the present territorial boundaries." Diplomatic relations were restored on July 2. For additional information see ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 17 CAMB–US.

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

Washington, May 10, 1969.

SUBJECT

Analysis of the NLF's Ten Points

Attached at Tab A[2] is an excellent CIA analysis of the general implications and possible significance of the NLF 10-Point statement (text at Tab B).[3] This memorandum contains a point-by-point analysis and then lists the positive elements, the negative elements and the elements subject to negotiation.

The Ten Points

Point 1, calling for the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam, is standard NLF language and is acceptable to us.

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 175, Paris Peace Talks, NLF 10-Points, May 1969, Folder 5. Secret; Sensitive. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Tab A, May 9, entitled "The Liberation Front's New Peace Proposal," is attached but not printed.

[3] Not attached. On May 8 at the session of the Paris Peace Talks, Tran Buu Kiem of the NLF put forward a 10-point peace plan for ending the war in Vietnam. The text of the proposal is printed in Council on Foreign Relations, Stebbins and Adam (eds.), *Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1968–1969,* pp. 249–252.

Point 2 calls for U.S. withdrawal, including all military personnel. This is standard and acceptable, except that we would, of course, insist upon the withdrawal as well of North Vietnamese forces.

Point 3 is new and states that "the Vietnamese people's right to defend their fatherland is inalienable. The problems of the Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam will be settled by the Vietnamese sides." The first sentence is a standard assertion to justify the right of the North Vietnamese forces to be in the south. The second sentence implies that the withdrawal should be settled among the Vietnamese including a South Vietnamese Government. If this government is meant to be an NLF-dominated coalition, this is, of course, totally unacceptable. If it is the GVN, it is a step forward in accepting negotiations on the North Vietnamese withdrawal with the US/GVN side. However, to ask the GVN to negotiate alone with Hanoi on withdrawals would put all the pressures on them and is unacceptable. We would not object to the GVN participating with us in negotiations about the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces.

Point 4 presents a plan for a political settlement involving elections, a constitutional assembly, a new constitution and then a coalition government. It needs to be read in conjunction with Point 5 which calls for an interim coalition government prior to the elections. With regard to Point 4, itself, if the point means that a coalition government must result from the elections, this is, of course, unacceptable. If it means that one possible result of an election is a coalition government, we would not object. We have not yet addressed the question of whether we are prepared to accept the need for a new constitution.

Point 5 deals with a period prior to an election. In stating that "no side is to force the South Vietnamese people to accept its political regime," it appears to imply that there is an interim period during which the GVN, the NLF and other groups in the south would negotiate about the setting up of a caretaker government. Hanoi's description of those who could participate in such a government appears to rule out the GVN, although the statement omits the NLF's usual assertion that the U.S. must remove the GVN government. Thus, the words, themselves, could permit GVN participation. They also could be read to exclude the NLF from the caretaker government, although this is almost certainly not the NLF's intention. Whatever arrangements are made, the actual political evolution in the south will depend on the actual balance of forces. The prevention of the NLF takeover will require an effective and functioning non-Communist political group.

Point 6 is a standard call for good relations with Laos and Cambodia and diplomatic relations with other countries. The only new point is the reference to the need to establish diplomatic and economic relations with the United States and the assertion that South Vietnam must be able to accept economic and technical assistance from any country. This point is acceptable to us.

Point 7 calls for a step-by-step move toward reunification on the basis of negotiation between the two zones and for normal relations between the zones in the interim. It accepts the military demarcation line but notes that it is only provisional in character and not a political border. Finally, it states that the two zones will decide on the status of the demilitarized zone and the measures for crossing the provisional demarcation line. Most of this language is standard and acceptable to us. The final sentence seems to call for a new agreement between the two zones about the DMZ. This is acceptable if it means negotiations between the GVN and Hanoi and if it leads to reestablishment of an effective demilitarized area.

Point 8 provides that prior to reunification, North and South Vietnam will not enter into military alliance and will not accept any foreign military personnel on their territory. This is standard language. We have not decided that we are prepared to agree to keeping no advisors in South Vietnam or to accept renunciation of the SEATO protocol by South Vietnam.

Point 9 deals with return of prisoners of war in more explicit terms than in the past. However, it also calls for reparations by the U.S. to both North and South Vietnam and implies a possible linkage between prisoner release and reparations. Reparations in either circumstance would be unacceptable to us.

Point 10 calls for all parties to agree on international supervision of the U.S. withdrawals. This is the first time Hanoi has proposed any international supervision. It could provide an opening for a discussion of international supervision for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces as well.

Positive Elements

1. Acceptance by implication of the presence of North Vietnamese forces in the south and indication that this is negotiable even if only by the Vietnamese sides.

2. Presentation of a detailed plan for a political settlement with some new and potentially acceptable elements and without insisting explicitly that this government be in accordance with the program of the Front.

3. Implication that the GVN might participate in negotiations about a caretaker government and the absence of an explicit statement that the U.S. must remove the GVN.

4. Statement that there should be no retaliation against those who cooperated with either side.

5. Recognition of the DMZ as a provisional boundary and willingness to negotiate about it if only with the GVN.

6. Explicit reference to release of prisoners (although possibly linked to reparations).

7. Initial reference to international supervision, if only related to withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Negative Elements

1. Absence of an explicit statement of withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces.

2. Call for both an interim and permanent coalition government with refusal to accept the present constitutional structure of the GVN.

3. Language which implies that coalition government should be restricted to Communist or sympathetic elements.

4. Demand for U.S. reparations.

5. International supervision limited to U.S. withdrawals.

Elements Subject to Negotiation

1. Procedures for negotiating withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces and the relationship of this withdrawal to the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

2. Election procedures in South Vietnam.

3. Political arrangements prior to an election.

4. Status of the demilitarized zone.

5. Application of international supervision to North Vietnamese withdrawal.

If Hanoi and the NLF are now ready for serious, detailed discussion, there are many elements in the 10-Point Program which we could probe, perhaps finding the basis for agreement. If Hanoi has presented this on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, it is very far from being satisfactory.

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68. Editorial Note

On May 14, 1969, President Nixon made a television and radio address in which he outlined a major proposal for mutual withdrawal in Vietnam over a 12-month period. The text of the speech is printed in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pages 369–375. On April 24 Henry Kissinger sent Nixon a draft outline of the speech and a scenario of actions to be undertaken in relation to it. Nixon read and made notes on the proposal on May 8. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 285, Memoranda to the President, April 1969, Folder 2) Kissinger later recalled that on April 25, he urged the President to elaborate a clear cut position on a peace plan by mentioning North Vietnamese negotiator Xuan Thuy's remark that, "If the Nixon Administration has a great

peace program, as it makes believe, why doesn't it make it public." According to Kissinger's recollections, Nixon hesitated because he wanted to see the results of his proposal to the Soviet Union and because he was concerned about opposition to the peace plan from Secretary of State William Rogers and the Department of State. Nixon feared the Department of State would leak the plan and add so many concessions that the President would be viewed as a "hard-liner" if he turned them down. Kissinger states in his memoirs that Nixon waited until Rogers left for Vietnam on May 12 before asking Kissinger to prepare a major speech within the next 48 hours. (Kissinger, *White House Years,* page 270) Kissinger did send Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird a draft of the speech in a May 10 memorandum. (National Archives, RG 59, William P. Rogers Official Files and Papers: Lot 73 D 443, no folder title) Rogers telephoned Kissinger at 4 p.m. on May 12 on a non-secure telephone from Los Angeles (en route to Vietnam) to register "his very serious reservations." Kissinger promised to present Rogers' views to the President in detail. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) Laird responded to the draft in a May 11 memorandum to Nixon noting that his major concern was that the speech did not emphasize the previously cited three points for measuring progress in the war and U.S. troop withdrawals: 1) mutual withdrawals, 2) improvement in the military situation, and 3) improvement in South Vietnamese capabilities. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 76, Vietnam Subject Files, Speech Planning and Miscellaneous) Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge sent his comments on the speech in a background message from Paris, May 11, which stated "broadly speaking this is an excellent speech," but suggested multiple language changes. (Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 9) Bunker sent backchannel message 417 from Saigon, May 12, stating that a general cease-fire would be undesirable since it would be interpreted by the enemy and by U.S. friends alike as "throwing in the towel" and would favor the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong militarily. From a political point of view, a cease-fire in place implied a readiness to partition South Vietnam. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel)

In a telephone call to the President on May 13, at 7:30 p.m., Kissinger told the President that he had revised the speech on Laird's recommendation and "it was pretty tight now." The President stated that "Mel [Laird] thinks we are dong the right thing. What really pleases me is that Rogers thinks it is fine." Nixon asked why Rogers changed his mind and Kissinger responded that he had been given a role in the speech. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File)

The next day, May 15, from 10:08 to 11:44 a.m., President Nixon held a joint meeting of the National Security Council and Cabinet to brief his administration's leaders on the significance of the speech. According to the memorandum of meeting the briefing went as follows:

"[Kissinger] called it 'the most comprehensive statement made by an American President about Vietnam.' Kissinger said the principles, measures and details in the President's presentation could be summarized in two broad, basic principles. One: We will not collapse our effort; and two: We will be extremely flexible in trying to make a settlement.

"Discussing the new elements in the speech, Kissinger called it 'as forthcoming and comprehensive a proposition as the President could possibly have developed' and said that it went 'as far as we believe it was possible to go in testing the willingness of the other side to have serious negotiations.' Remarking on just one new element, Kissinger pointed out that 'we no longer will expect the North Vietnamese to admit that their troops are there so long as they stop being there.'

"One of the most significant points about the speech, the President remarked, was that the South Vietnamese government had agreed to its content. He said that no one would have predicted six months ago that President Thieu would approve the substance of that speech. The cooperation of the South Vietnamese is extremely important, the President added, because while 'some say it will be impossible to make a peace *with* them, it will surely be impossible to make a peace *without* them.'

"Commenting on the attitude of other nations in the area, the President pointed out that the reaction of Thailand is highly important. 'They are like rice in the wind,' the President said. 'If they think we are going to lose, they will go the other way.' And this suggests, the President added, that while some people scoff at the domino theory, the dominoes make it a reality because they seem to accept it as fact.

"Before the speech was in final form, it was necessary to get agreement among the various areas of the U.S. government that were involved as well as the agreement of the South Vietnamese. 'And if any of you think that writing your speeches is hard,' the President said with a grin, 'you should try to write one involving State, Defense and Henry Kissinger.'

"Under Secretary of State Elliot L. Richardson suggested that South Vietnam's President Thieu be added to the 'list of speech writers' since he was consulted, and made suggestions that were included. Richardson reported that the State Department had transmitted the basic elements of the speech through our Ambassadors to the governments of Australia, Thailand, New Zealand, South Korea and the Philippines. Such advance notice, he said, was most important in 'keeping our friends with us.'

"Defense Secretary Laird stressed the importance of the fact that 'there is nothing inconsistent in the mutual withdrawal plan in this speech and the Vietnamization of the war.' He noted that there was in the speech a veiled reference to reduction of U.S. forces. The question whether some of our forces will soon be withdrawn, said Laird, will be discussed when Secretary of State Rogers returns from Vietnam. To clarify the situation with regard to prospective withdrawal of some U.S. forces—the President explained that 'apart from any progress in Paris, we are considering withdrawals based upon the strengthening of the Vietnam forces.'"

The President asked Director of Central Intelligence Helms to gauge North Vietnamese reaction to the speech. Helms suggested it put them on notice that "we don't chicken out." Helms stated that Hanoi's strategy was based on the theory that U.S. domestic dissent would force a U.S. withdrawal. Helms concluded: "this speech tells them that we will stick to our principles and will not run out." Ambassador Lodge recalled that a week before the President's speech the North Vietnamese at Paris introduced a new package based on ten points without their usual rhetoric. Lodge saw the Nixon speech as a comprehensive answer to this proposal. He described the speech as "like manna from Heaven for me."

The briefing concluded with a summation by the President. He stated that the speech "provided the enemy a way out," but cautioned that North Vietnam was bent on conquest of the South so, "We need to threaten that if they don't talk they will suffer." The President then listed four principal factors in the U.S. position which he described as follows:

"One, we are for peace—we are reasonable. Two, we aim to convince the enemy that if there is no settlement, we have an option which is military action not only at the present level but at an expanded level. Three, we want to make clear that they can't win by sitting us out. Four, we want to convince them that they aren't going to get what they want by erosion of the will of the U.S. So, said the President, we have offered them a way out. We have tried to indicate that we will not tolerate a continuation of their fight-talk strategy. We have tried to convince them that the time is coming when South Vietnam will be strong enough to handle a major part of the load. Beyond all this, said the President, it was necessary to give the impression to the enemy that the people of the U.S. are going to support a sound peace proposal and not accept peace at any price. Then and only then will the enemy realize that the war must be ended.

"The President expressed the hope that Members of the Cabinet in their speeches and appearances will explain that the Administration has presented a sound, reasonable, coordinated plan for peace. How

the war will end, the President said, is not clear. It may not be by formal agreement, it may simply be by negotiations leading to gradual understanding.

"'What is on the line is more than South Vietnam,' the President said. 'It's a question of what happens to the balance of Asia and to the rest of the world. If we fail to end the war in a way that will not be an American defeat, and in a way that will deny the aggressor his goal, the hawks in Communist nations will push for even more and broader aggression. What concerns me more than anything else is what happens to the U.S. If a great power fails to meet its aims, it ceases to be a great power. When a great power looks inward, when it fails to live up to its commitment, then the greatness fades away. The road to peace will be difficult but we aim to get there.'

"When the Cabinet applauded his remarks, he said, 'I really didn't mean to make a speech to the Cabinet.'" (Memorandum of a meeting by Jim Keogh, May 15; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, President's Office Files, Box 1, Memos for the President's File, 1969–1970, Beginning May 11, 1969)

The President called Kissinger at 10:50 p.m. on May 14 to ask him how he thought the speech had been received. Kissinger was very encouraged with the response. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box 359, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) In a May 16 memorandum to the President, Kissinger sent a rundown of how the speech had been received internationally. Kissinger stated: "Throughout the Free World, your speech has been warmly praised as moderate, statesmanlike and a very constructive step toward peace." While there was no official reaction from the DRV or NLF, some of their spokespersons' initial comments on it were negative. Kissinger continued, "The response from the Soviet Bloc, although negative, has been relatively moderate and quite measured." Nixon saw this assessment. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 75, Vietnam Subject Files, Cables, Concerning Reactions to the Speech, All Posts) According to *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the White House*, page 58, the initial euphoria of the speech and its aftermath wore off as Nixon read the U.S. Sunday papers on May 18 and found that their response, unlike the foreign press, was either neutral or negative. Nixon told Haldeman that if John F. Kennedy had made the speech, the press would have been ecstatic.

69. Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State[1]

Paris, May 18, 1969, 1535Z.

7234. Delto 1741.[2]

1. Now that we have introduced the President's proposal for peace formally into the plenary session, the negotiations between the two sides in Paris can be pursued in a rational way. In this cable, we outline our suggestions for the next moves designed to bring the other side to serious negotiations on the basic issues.

2. The 10 points introduced by the other side and our own proposals provide the logical framework for negotiation. The two sets of proposals provide issues which are subject to negotiation. A preliminary listing of these issues would contain at least the following:

A. Force withdrawal;
B. Political settlement?
C. DMZ;
D. Prisoners of war?
E. Respect for essential elements of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962;
F. Reunification;
G. International supervision and verification (in connection with force withdrawal, elections, ceasefire and other agreed purposes); and
H. Issues in the aftermath of the war—guarantees, bases, foreign military presence, alliances, neutrality, relations between North and South Viet-Nam, regional cooperation.

3. To define clearly the framework for negotiation—and to demonstrate again the reasonable and flexible nature of the President's proposals—we suggest that at the next plenary session we present a point-by-point review of the issues and positions taken on each side. We are submitting in a separate cable a draft statement along these lines—pointing up the extent of common ground—for the May 22 meeting.[2]

4. It would be helpful, at that point, if the GVN made clear its position, consistent with our own but with particular attention to the question of a political settlement, notable their willingness that free elections be held. This would complement our proposal and fill a gap. The GVN statement should be as large in scope as that of the NLF, and demonstrate willingness to negotiate. It need not give away negotiat-

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 176, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Meetings, May 6—State, Saigon, and Paris. Secret; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus.

[2] Not found.

ing positions, but it should be fully consistent with the general principles guilding self-determination set forth in the President's May 14 speech. We believe Embassy Saigon should be urging on the GVN the clear need for such a statement as soon as possible. In the event the GVN does not produce a new statement of sufficient scope, we should move on the basis of the President's proposals alone.

5. We would seek to engage the other side in negotiation in depth. We suggest that this is best done in private. But we must recognize that there are also ways to further this process in plenary sessions. There are a number of possible arrangements for us to consider. We suggest we keep an open mind, but with a preference toward privacy.

6. Thus we can consider a negotiation format that could include any of the following, or some combination of them:

A. Plenary sessions on an agreed restricted basis. There would be no public disclosure of the details of statements made on either side. The fact of the meetings and a mutually agreed description of their contents would be made public.

B. Plenary sessions would continue as they are, but restricted subcommittee meetings will be held to Lodge deal with specific issues. Rules of disclosure for subcommittees would be agreed as in (A) above.

C. Plenary sessions would continue as they are, but fully private, secret meetings would be held. These could be in any agreed combination of the parties present, only excluding the case where the US would meet with the NLF without the GVN present. We are inclined to believe that private meetings of all four reps will be necessary, but even if this is the case, we foresee holding supplementary bilateral US-DRV meetings as desired.

7. Before proceeding to one or a combination of the above arrangements, we believe it is necessary and desirable to resume our bilateral meetings with the DRV. These would have two immediate purposes: (a) to elaborate and debate our substantive position on specific issues in a more informal atmosphere; (b) to exchange views with the DRV on the best way to proceed in the negotiations, taking as an outline of possible arrangements the alternatives listed in para 6 above. For our purposes, it would be well to work out some mutually acceptable working arrangements for the future.

8. Immediately following the May 22 plenary meeting, we propose, therefore, to seek a private meeting with Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy. We will submit to the Dept, within the next few days, a suggested draft of our opening remarks at such a meeting.

9. If our plan of action is approved, it will require discussion with the GVN in Saigon and Paris. It is now becoming increasingly urgent for the GVN to be thinking more specifically of the negotiating position they will be taking in private sessions of one sort or the other.

From our experience to date, the GVN del in Paris does not have sufficient instructions to carry on the type of negotiations we envisage. In fact, Lam and Phong have embarrassedly pointed out to us that over the past week they have been suffering from a scarcity of guidance from Saigon. The thought expressed by Bui Diem to Green (State 79000)[3] that we have 4 to 6 weeks for GVN to formulate its position strikes us as much too long a time. We should be prepared to be in full-scale, detailed negotiations with the other side before then.

10. In such negotiations, we believe that it will be necessary to discuss military and political questions in tandem, if we are to seek a full understanding of what we can achieve. This will require a degree of GVN preparation beyond what we have had to date, with the burden of negotiation on political matters falling on them.

11. We would welcome comments and guidance.[4]

Lodge

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[3] Telegram 79000 to Saigon, May 17, contains an account of the discussion between Bui Diem and Green on reaction to Nixon's speech of May 14 and the future of the negotiations. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 176, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Meetings, May 6—State, Saigon, and Paris)

[4] In telegram 9878 from Saigon, May 20, Bunker stated: "While I completely support the objective of getting into serious negotiations . . . I feel I should sound a note of caution about trying to force the pace." Bunker noted that the Government of Vietnam had made progress in thinking about a political settlement, but they needed time to come to accept it. Furthermore, Bunker cautioned against seeming too eager for another private meeting. (Ibid.)

70. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 21, 1969, 0933Z.

616. Ref: Saigon 605.[2]

1. I have given further thought to the President's consideration of desirability of announcing initial troop reduction after the Midway meeting, together with his expressed willingness to wait a few weeks longer. I have also discussed the message with General Abrams. As viewed from here my conclusion is that the more prudent course would be to wait, for the following reasons:

A. First, Thieu has set a date of June 30 for various goals. These goals include designated hamlets to be pacified, another round of village and hamlet elections in June, and the deployment of 68 newly trained regional force companies by June 30.

B. Despite the February and May attacks, steady and continued progress is being made in extending government control over the countryside. The high level of defectors under the Chieu Hoi program is being maintained in the 900–1100 range per week. The Phoenix program to eliminate the VC infrastructure is producing higher weekly returns despite the more stringent criteria—around 400 a week. Enemy killed are running between 3500 and 5000 a week.

C. In early July Thieu will have a good story to tell of progress made and goals achieved during the first half of this year. The evidence for this is not merely in the statistics but can be found in the increasing sense of confidence and recognition of progress among his military, civil and political leaders from the national level down to the village level, and among the people themselves in wider and wider areas of the country.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel. Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] In backchannel message 605 from Saigon, May 20, Bunker provided Kissinger with an interim response to backchannel message WH90677, May 19, in which Kissinger informed Bunker that the President was considering making an initial troop withdrawal announcement at the end of the Midway Conference. Nixon thought that the announcement might give Thieu the initiative on the issue, but based on Bunker's advice he would be willing to postpone for several weeks if Bunker considered it necessary. Bunker wrote: "With regard to suggestion concerning desirability of making initial troop withdrawal announcement at conclusion of Midway Meeting, I can see both advantages and problems. Consequently, I should like to give the matter further thought and would prefer to delay my reply until tomorrow. I hope this will be satisfactory to you and the President." (Ibid.) Telegram 616 is Bunker's considered reply.

D. In this atmosphere, an announcement of a reduction of US forces sometime after July 1 could be taken in stride.

E. More important than the above, however, is the military situation. There are many indications that two more attack waves are brewing, with one possible in June and another in July. We expect these will follow the pattern of enemy's tactics this year, i.e. of short duration, with emphasis on indirect fire and limited ground attacks to economize losses, and aimed at US installations to increase US casualties. We have every confidence that these will be knocked back with heavy losses to the enemy. However, since General Abrams was in Washington there has been some increase in enemy deployments that could threaten I Corps, and General Abrams wishes to reserve on the order of withdrawal of the two increments until he can better assess the situation.

2. I think, and General Abrams concurs, that June 30 would be a good cut-off date for assessing situation, with the conclusions to be available in the second week in July, that is about one month after the Midway meeting. By then we would have the June record of enemy action in hand, and a clearer picture of their July and subsequent intentions. Unless there is a massive increase in the infiltration pipeline during May or June, for which we have no evidence as yet, the recent reduction in North Vietnamese infiltration groups moving South, along with the 2–3 months lag in arrivals in the South, suggest that the enemy offensive attacks will peak the first half of July.

3. This suggests that the announcement of the first troop reduction could be made sometime in July if our reading of the situation is correct. At Midway the communiqué might be able to say that sufficient progress is being made in pacification and the improved fighting capability of the military and para-military forces to warrant an initial reduction in US combat forces levels in the foreseeable future.

4. Since troop reductions will be on the agenda at Midway, I thought it desirable to obtain Thieu's view about an announcement at that time. When I saw him this morning (on various matters before my departure for Bangkok), without indicating my views I asked him if it would be desirable to announce the initial reduction, or replacement as Secretary Rogers preferred to call it, at Midway or wait a little longer, say until early July. There were advantages and disadvantages of an announcement on June 8. In any event the announcement would be in terms of his (Thieu's) initiative. I said he would probably want to think about it, but I would welcome his views at this time.

5. Thieu said a reduction in the US forces has now been a subject of open discussion for six months, the South Vietnamese people are accustomed to the idea, and it would not be a surprise if an announcement was made. It is accepted here that something like a reduction of

50,000 this year would be the figure, and both "the principle and a number of this size" would be understood here. A figure of 100,000 would not be understood. Essentially this problem was an American problem and if the President feels it is necessary in US terms, then there would be no objection to having an announcement of some kind made at Midway.

6. However, he went on, any announcement would have to be tied to one of the three conditions which the President has laid down, and this would probably be the improvement in the Vietnamese capacity to take over a greater share. He said "The timing and form of the announcement will need to be discussed and worked out, but the substance is understood and accepted here."

7. I interpret this to mean that he is prepared to agree to some reference at Midway to troop reductions, perhaps even some specific reference to numbers and dates.

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71. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, May 21, 1969, 2146Z.

WH90690. Reference your Saigon 616, DTG 210800Z, May 1969,[2] President believes we could meet Thieu's views by making announcement at conclusion of Midway meeting to the effect President Thieu has informed U.S. Government that the first ARVN division is ready to replace the Third U.S. Marine Division and that therefore the President has ordered the withdrawal of the Third Marine Division from South Vietnam commencing during the month of July.[3] President

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel. Top Secret; Sensitive.

[2] Document 70.

[3] Kissinger also informed Rogers, who was in Bangkok at the SEATO meeting, of this decision in WH90693, May 22. Kissinger wrote: "Thought you might like to know President is thinking of announcing withdrawal of third U.S. Marine division at conclusion of Midway Meeting June 9 (1st ARVN division would replace third U.S. Marine division (22,000 men) commencing in July). Bunker currently exploring this proposal with Thieu and has been cautioned on its extremely close nature. President considers it desirable that public speculation prior to meeting focus on U.S.–GVN efforts to coordinate respective positions on President's speech and associated Paris negotiating positions. From here your trip looks like great success. Best regards, Henry A. Kissinger." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel)

considers such an announcement would: (1) dampen growing speculation on troop withdrawals which if it continues much longer will deprive us of impact of troop withdrawal decision; (2) would greatly strengthen Thieu's image here (doves appear to be building case that Thieu and GVN are preparing to commence bickering campaign over political conditions for settlement with a view toward delaying progress); (3) would break the stride of those elements here who have been pressing for large and immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces.

In order to achieve maximum benefit from this tactic, President believes it essential that there be absolutely no leakage or discussion of troop withdrawal issue as a result of speculation which will surround preparation for meeting. Public attention on preparatory work in Saigon and Washington should be channeled toward preparations to: (1) finalize respective U.S.-GVN positions on negotiating strategy in Paris; (2) the formulation of details related to President's speech proposals.

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72. Memorandum From Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 22, 1969.

SUBJECT

Assessment of the 22 May Plenary Session on Vietnam

The Communist presentations at today's meeting in Paris appeared to represent a serious effort by the other side to engage in a substantive discourse on elements of the President's peace proposal. Although they uttered many of the routine propaganda bromides of the past weeks, the Communists had interesting and detailed things to say on the two central issues: withdrawal and a political settlement. They clearly appear to be interested and to be pressing for further elaborations or modifications of the U.S. stand.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 182, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous, Vol. III, 4/5–69. Secret; Nodis; Paris Negotiations; Plus. Sent for information. Sent through Sneider. Haig wrote on this memorandum: "HAK said good job." Kissinger had this memorandum reworked slightly and sent to the President, May 23. (Ibid.)

The DRV focused on the withdrawal question, while the NLF carried the main burden on a political solution. Following are the highlights:

Withdrawal: Xuan Thuy began by setting up the standard Communist argument for the necessity of an unconditional pullout of all U.S. troops. He pointedly tried to rule out the possibility that Hanoi might be interested in some formal, reciprocal arrangement involving a linking of the NLF Point 3 (the question of Vietnamese forces) and Point 10 (overseeing the withdrawal of U.S. forces).

However, his presentation was couched in a manner suggesting that Hanoi might be willing to undertake a tacit response to a U.S. pullout. Thuy did this in part by asserting that President Nixon's plan was the same as former President Johnson's in that the latter had called for reciprocal withdrawal before stopping the bombing. The implication was that another similar "understanding" might be possible.

The impression of DRV interest in President Nixon's proposal on withdrawal was strengthened by Thuy's remarks on the 12-month timetable. Thuy noted that this had been applied to only a partial and not to a complete U.S. withdrawal. He appeared to be asking by implication for the U.S. to set a time limit for a full-scale withdrawal. It seems possible that once such a timetable were set, the Communists might be willing to give us more assurances about the removal of NVA forces under point three of the NLF plan.

Ambassador Lodge picked up the interesting DRV comment on our 12-month time limit and, in the rebuttal period of the meeting, clarified our position. He noted that we were willing to discuss setting a time period for a full mutual withdrawal, if the other side would indicate its interest in negotiations on this subject.

A Political Settlement: The NLF handled this issue by a rather warped comparison of the President's proposal for general elections and its own proposition on elections and a coalition. Although expectedly one-sided, it at least amounted to a substantive discourse which definitely depicted interest in the U.S. proposal.

According to Tran Buu Kiem, the important question was how "political power is to be solved" in South Vietnam pending general elections. Kiem noted that the President had not spoken of this, but that it was clear he meant for the GVN to be paramount. This was unacceptable, he said. Kiem went on to explain what the Communists had in mind by their proposal that "neither party shall impose its political regime" during this period. This meant the formation of a "provisional administration" he said.

He then offered the NLF formula for the "peace-loving" forces in SVN to get together and set up a coalition. It was clear from his manner of presentation, however, that the Communists are definitely prepared to bargain on the details of the "provisional administration."

Interesting in this connection was Kiem's condemnation of the Saigon regime for wishing to "monopolize power" during this period—a kind of admission that the NLF is seeking only a share of the authority.

Kiem then introduced a new twist in the Communist strategy which could mark the beginning of a new campaign to undermine Saigon. He said that the NLF is now "ready to conduct talks with persons of goodwill who favor peace, independence and neutrality." This goes a little further than the standard NLF position that it is prepared to conduct talks with a "peace cabinet" which presumably has replaced the Saigon regime. Although Kiem called once again for the formation of a peace cabinet, he seemed to be suggesting that the Front is encouraging dissident groups to begin consultations with the NLF regardless of their political status and authority within South Vietnam. This could set the stage for a revival of the alliance.

POW's: Ambassador Lodge's demarche on the question of a POW list drew a completely negative response from the DRV. It seems clear that they are not prepared to give us any satisfaction on this score at this point, even though their hardline stand may cost them some propaganda points if carefully exploited by the U.S.

General Comment: We may be seeing an attempt by the Communists to sidestep private negotiations and to conduct an exploratory, probing type of negotiation at the plenary meetings. In any case, there would appear to be considerable room for the U.S. to tailor a response at the next plenary meeting to the specific points made today by the Communists in an effort to advance the process of movement by the other side.[2]

[2] At the end of the memorandum Sneider wrote: "I was also struck by the Thuy response to the 'essential elements' of the 10 pts—indicating greater flexibility."

73. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 25, 1969.

SUBJECT

The Possible Quarantine of North Vietnam

1. Per our conversation on Wednesday, 21 May, attached is a memorandum analyzing the impact that a quarantine of North Vietnam would have on that country's economy and logistic support capabilities.[2] This memorandum also outlines the probable reactions of various interested parties to the imposition of such a quarantine.

2. For reasons outlined in considerable detail in the attached memorandum, we are convinced that unless a quarantine of North Vietnam's seaborne commerce was accompanied by an interdiction of the land lines of communication (rail and road) to Communist China, the North Vietnamese could solve the problems such a quarantine would pose; i.e., Hanoi could make enough adjustments or alternate arrangements to ensure continuation of the level of external support necessary to permit Hanoi to continue present levels of North Vietnamese support to the Communist military campaign in South Vietnam.

Dick

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 207, Agency Files, CIA, Vol. I, January 1969–31 December 1969. Secret; Sensitive. According to an attached June 11 memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, Kissinger planned to discuss this memorandum with Helms that day.

[2] This 14-page paper with comments by Kissinger in the margins is attached but not printed.

74. Memorandum From Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, May 28, 1969.

SUBJECT

Status of the Phoenix and PRU Programs in Vietnam and the Thai Border Police

Currently, changes in management control are underway in all three forces. These changes will substantially reduce the CIA role. To a large extent, the shift will be to the U.S. military in Vietnam and to the U.S. operations mission in Thailand. In my judgment, the shifts are reasonably sound in concept and should not necessarily result in a drop in the effectiveness of the concerned forces. Following is the present status and the nature of the shifts proposed for each group:

The Phoenix Program[2]

This is the basic anti-VC infrastructure (VCI) program in Vietnam. It functions through a country-wide system of committees and centers down to the district level which supply the intelligence and direct anti-infrastructure operations by the police, the regional forces, the PRU, and the military security service. The TO and E of the Phoenix organization is around 6,000 with approximately 500 additional U.S. advisors.

In 1968, the Phoenix program accounted for between 10 and 20 percent of the VCI "neutralized". The bulk of the rest were accounted for in the course of regular military operations. The concept of the Phoenix program is considered sound, but its operation still leaves much to be desired. Problems are Vietnamese manpower shortages, lack of qualified Vietnamese, etc.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 69, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, The Phoenix Program. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information.

[2] Kissinger wrote the following note at the top of the first page: "Why the change?" and in the margin next to the Phoenix Program description: "What do they do? How do they neutralize them?" Moor answered these questions in a June 4 memorandum to Kissinger. Moor stated that CIA considered its role in starting up the programs was done and wanted to use its limited manpower in more productive work. He described how the anti-Viet Cong infrastructure program worked in Vietnam, and stated that the Phoenix committees tabulated what percentage of Viet Cong were killed or captured as a result of operations based on their intelligence (10 to 20 percent in 1968). The bulk of the Viet Cong killed or captured, however, were done so through regular military sweeps. (Ibid.)

Coming Changes in Phoenix

The CIA is currently in the course of withdrawing from the field management of the Phoenix program. The Agency considers its principal role fulfilled by the organization and start-up of the operation and believes its officers can be used more profitably elsewhere. MACV will take up the slack and the management role will be put under regular army personnel. MACV is slotting 450 personnel for this task. The switchover is already underway and will be largely completed by 1 July 1969. The top CORDS/Phoenix slot will continue to be held by a CIA man in Saigon.

Present Status of the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU)

This is a covert program in which teams (companies) of 2 to 20 Vietnamese operate in the field to collect intelligence and as a quick reaction force to kill or capture specifically targeted VCI. Total force strength is over 5,000. The PRU is organized under joint MACV/GVN sponsorship [*1 line of source text not declassified*]. CIA province officers direct and supervise the targeting of the PRU. There is normally a U.S. NCO with each PRU element.

The PRUs have been effective in eliminating VCI. Each month, they account for about 10 to 20 percent of VCI neutralized. Since the VCI are individually targeted, they are often key enemy personnel.

Coming Changes in the PRU

The CIA is also divorcing itself of the management of the PRU and turning it over to the military, while urging the Vietnamese to increase their management cadre and directive role. In so far as the U.S. military are concerned, this will be largely a paper change, since the bulk of the advisory personnel are already military, while detailed to the CIA. The Vietnamese have agreed to take over more of the management duties, but this awaits the proper training of personnel. The Agency is pushing this now. Completion of the CIA/MACV switchover is set for 1 July 1969.

Status of the Thai Border Police

This is a 7,100 man force whose regular mission is border security, but which has also participated actively in the suppression of the Thai insurgents. Until about two years ago, its role in their latter operation was fairly extensive. Then, however, the Thai regular army moved in and the BPP role was considerably reduced.

The CIA at one time contributed over a million dollars a year to the BPP and was heavily involved in training and advising the force. Its contribution has been cut back during the past several years to the neighborhood of some $200,000 a year. The additional funds are largely still going to the BPP, but are funded through other elements of the

U.S. operations mission in Thailand. The Agency would like to further reduce its financial input as this is largely now the provision of equipment. The Agency believes that other U.S. elements can provide this. It is seeking to retain its present relatively small role in the training of elements of the BPP, mainly its para-military arm, the PARU. [*1½ lines of source text not declassified*]

So far as I can ascertain, the decisions on the CIA role with the BPP are not as fully set as are those in connection with the PRU and the Phoenix programs.

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75. Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State[1]

Paris, June 1, 1969, 1620Z.

8138. Delto 1800.

1. The May 31 private meeting with Le Duc Tho was the most significant meeting we have had with the DRV since my arrival here in January.[2] It provided the first serious indication from them of what issues particularly interest them and of how they want to proceed.

2. Herewith we submit our views on the highlights of Tho's statement at the May 31 meeting and the alternative courses of action open to us.

Part 1—The May 31 Meeting

3. During the May 31 meeting we made clear to the DRV that our side was ready to negotiate in the "dual track" format, in a quadrilateral format or in some combination of the two approaches, but that the GVN had to participate in the discussions involving the internal affairs of South Vietnam. Tho countered by rejecting secret negotiations involving the GVN at least at this time, in either dual track or quadliteral formats. He appeared very firm.

4. Tho changed the DRV's earlier position that the US had to deal directly with the NLF. Now he was saying: the DRV will talk about

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 177, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Meetings, May–June 1969, State Nodis Cables/Habib Calls. Secret; Priority; Nodis; Paris Meetings; Plus. Repeated to Saigon.

[2] The full report of the private meeting of May 31 is in telegram 8112 from Paris/Delto 1793, May 31. (Ibid.)

any issue at any time with the USG. Tho made no bones about the fact that the DRV would negotiate on behalf of the NLF on all matters, including matters relating to the South.

5. Tho emphasized that he wanted not only to discuss military matters but all matters covered by the 10 points. He agreed that in such discussions either party could raise any matter it desired. The DRV thus wants to discuss with us all aspects of a settlement including the political future of South Viet-Nam. By this Tho does not necessarily mean that he wants to resolve all substantive issues with us but that he wants us to agree that certain matters, such as withdrawals of North Vietnamese forces and political settlement, should be resolved by the Vietnamese parties as envisioned in the NLF's ten points.

6. Tho also referred to the fact that the settlement of some questions involved two parties, some involved three parties, and others involved four parties. By this he recognizes that there are matters that concern the GVN and that some time later the GVN will have to be brought in to the discussions. But Tho said he means a reconstituted GVN and not the individuals presently holding high office in Saigon, whom he wishes us to remove.

7. During the meeting Tho in general restated the DRV's standard substantive positions in the framework of the 10 points. But he spoke of a cease-fire in what to me was a new way, saying that an agreement on a cease-fire would be signed after a paper had been signed on the matters covered in the 10 points.

8. Evidently the DRV strategy aims to isolate the present GVN and destroy it. For this reason, Hanoi and the NLF are refusing at this time to meet with the GVN in any form other than the existing meetings at the Majestic. They hope to force us into an unpalatable choice—either negotiating with the DRV and then imposing the resulting settlement on the GVN; or trying to change the nature and composition of the GVN in a manner satisfactory to them so that it becomes a "peace government". In any case, the DRV strategy seems designed to create U.S./GVN frictions and to increase Thieu's internal political problems. It also appears to be designed to appeal to U.S. public opinion and to bring growing domestic pressure on the USG.

9. Tho asked us a number of questions during the meeting, some of them rhetorical. They indicate clearly the direction of DRV will be taking in the future. He asked these questions: (a) Who would organize the elections? (he asked this several times); (b) Does the U.S. agree to the sequence that Tho had outlined, in which in reality the U.S. and the DRV work out a settlement of all problems mentioned in the 10 point program, an agreement is signed, and then an agreement is made for a cease-fire? (*Comment:* we do not think we should respond to Tho's suggestion regarding the form of eventual agreements until we have a

better idea of what the substance is likely to be); (c) Does the U.S. agree to get rid of the present GVN?

Part 2—Alternative Courses of Action

10. Herewith are some alternative courses of action:

11. First, we could reject the proposal made by the DRV in the May 31 meeting and delay any further initiative for private meetings for an indefinite period in an effort to induce them to change their position. We and the GVN could use the plenary meetings to begin laying out the details of our positions and to attempt to draw out the other side on its positions.

12. *Comment:* I oppose this alternative. I believe that productive negotiations with the other side can only occur in private sessions. I see nothing on the horizon which would make the DRV change its position for at least several months. We would, accordingly, simply be postponing coming to grips with the issues, thus making progress more difficult.

13. Second, we could continue private U.S./DRV bilaterals with the sole objective of trying to persuade the DRV to accept GVN participation in private talks. The private meetings would thus be solely procedural. We would sit tight and wait for the other side to change its position.

14. *Comment:* I see no advantage in this. I would rather discuss both matters of substance and matters of procedure. I believe we would thus have a better chance of bringing about a changed attitude towards the GVN.

15. Third, we could tell the DRV at the outset that we are willing to discuss privately with it all subjects of mutual concern but that we cannot discuss political matters in the absence of the GVN since these are questions for the South Vietnamese to decide. On that basis we could then start discussing with the DRV matters we consider to be of mutual interest: Principally mutual withdrawals, but also such matters as the DMZ, POW's international supervision, etc. The DRV, in turn, could be expected to continue to seek to engage us in a discussion of political questions and to persuade us to accept their manner of proceeding in the private U.S./DRV bilaterals.

16. *Comment:* By following this course of action, we will continue to be faced with the same problem that confronts us now. In our judgment, the DRV would not at this time engage in meaningful substantive discussions of military matters with us if we tried to restrict the scope of bilateral discussions at the outset. We would consequently delay productive negotiations for a considerable time.

17. This brings us to the fourth alternative. We could, without accepting Tho's proposal, simply continue to hold bilateral U.S./DRV discussions. We would not seek to impose any prior conditions on the subjects to be discussed. Either side could raise anything it wishes.

They will want to discuss their 10 points, and we will want to discuss President Nixon's proposals. In the private talks themselves, we would take no initiative to raise political matters. When the DRV raises such matters, we would respond initially at least with our position that the political settlement is for the South Vietnamese to work out.

18. *Comment:* This course of action would not close out the possibility of GVN participation in private talks later.

We would, of course, have to maintain the closest consultation with the GVN both before and after each U.S./DRV meeting: and the positions we take in each meeting would have to be coordinated beforehand with the GVN. We would report to the GVN what the DRV said about political settlement in any particular meeting, and the U.S. and GVN together could then decide on a case by case basis what response, if any, other than the standard one, would be desirable. By consulting with the GVN on our responses to the DRV, we would always have the choice of giving the DRV a joint response at the next private meeting or not replying to Hanoi at all on a given point. If Hanoi pushes us on a political point, we could, if Thieu agrees, always fall back on the statement, "We have informed the GVN". This is the course of action which we believe opens up the most possibilities at this time for early substantive discussions. Admittedly this proposes a change in procedure which could change the handling of the "political solution."

19. Fifth, we could accept Tho's proposal and engage in bilateral discussion of all substantive questions involved in a settlement, including political matters.

20. *Comment:* This course of action seems to us unjustifiable both in terms of sound negotiating tactics and in terms of our relations with the GVN.

Part 3—Analysis

21. The position which the other side has now taken, and the proposal the DRV put to us in the May 31 meeting, will undoubtedly create difficulties for the GVN. The GVN will see, as we have suggested above, that the DRV tactic is designed to isolate the GVN and to destroy it. And the GVN will be very sensitive to the suggestion that the U.S. should negotiate on its behalf, particularly on matters involving internal political settlement which we have agreed are primarily for the GVN to negotiate. In this connection, we recall Ambassador Lam's statement to us of his understanding of the GVN position, namely, that there were no matters which did not concern the GVN and that the U.S. should not negotiate any matters without GVN presence. (Paris 8012)[3]

[3] Dated May 30. (Ibid.)

22. At the same time, we also have the problem of how to move ahead with negotiations and with smoking out the other side's positions on the substantive questions. We believe this objective of getting on with early productive talks can be achieved in a way that protects the basic position of the GVN. We think that the fourth course of action outlined above offers the best opportunity for doing this.

23. Under the fourth alternative, our approach to the negotiations would be to place the principal emphasis on the question of mutual withdrawals. We would seek serious indications that the DRV was willing to move ahead on the question of withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese troops.

24. In following the fourth course of action, we would continue in the plenaries and in public statements to criticize the communist refusal to accept Thieu's March 25 offer to talk bilaterally with the NLF. We would continue our warm support of Thieu's offer, both publicly and privately, hoping thereby to bring pressure on the other side eventually to accept it. Once the GVN is talking bilaterally, trilaterally or quadrilaterally with the other side, Saigon would, of course, play the principal role in these discussions of internal South Vietnamese matters.

25. Finally, we should not refuse in advance to hear what the DRV has to say. Not only is it in our interests to hear them, but our refusal to do so would surely become known and we would be in an incomprehensible position.

Part 4—Conclusion

26. The next step should be concentrated consultations with the GVN. Before GVN/U.S. discussions take place, however, the U.S. Government should determine which course of action we prefer to follow. Our preference should then be explained to the GVN. Meanwhile, we do not believe we should request another private meeting with the DRV until after Midway. Our response to the DRV's May 31 proposals depends on what we and the GVN decide to do. We would, of course, agree to attend a private meeting if the DRV asks for one.

27. Since he will have already been briefed on what happened at the May 31 meeting, the question of where we go from here on negotiations will probably be on Thieu's mind when he comes to Midway.

Lodge

76. Backchannel Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Vietnam (Bunker)[1]

Washington, June 1, 1969, 1844Z.

WH90761. Exclusively Eyes Only for the Ambassador (hold for arrival in Saigon).

The President has asked that you convey to Thieu the importance that he places upon the forthcoming Midway meeting. He is aware that press speculation here has probably aroused some concern on the coalition government issue, and wishes Thieu to be assured that we are determined to hold the line on this. I gave this message to Bui Diem yesterday. However, it is essential that we retain tactical flexibility. Our major problem here is to gain time and to enable us to combat the growing public pressures. This is why troop withdrawal announcement is so crucial.

Press is speculating that Midway meeting was convened to remedy a growing divergence between Saigon and Washington. Therefore, it is most important that troop withdrawal announcement be made in context of Thieu initiative in order to maintain his image here. It will strengthen our ability to help him on political front.

At Midway, we currently visualize that President and Thieu will meet privately from 11:30 until 1:00 p.m., and then issue a very brief joint announcement on troop withdrawal along lines of my earlier message.[2] This will produce a maximum impact especially if it is unexpected. Following lunch, the entire group will meet, then at 5:00 p.m., a formal joint statement will be made on other matters dealt with at the conference.

Because of the psychological implications of the troop withdrawal statement, it is absolutely essential that there be no leaks beforehand that announcement is to be made. For this reason, this matter has been held strictly to the President, myself, and Secretaries Rogers and Laird. It is equally important that similar restrictions be retained on this information at your end. You will note that some references have been made to troop withdrawal and Vietnamization in regular State traffic concerned with the formal joint statement at the conclusion of the meeting and preparatory coordination of respective positions. These references have been made by drafters unaware of the decision to proceed

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[2] See Document 70.

with a separate announcement at Midway and serve as an additional cover to maintain the necessary security.

Request your views on foregoing, as soon as possible.[3]

[3] In backchannel message 802 from Saigon, June 2, Bunker reported that he did not expect problems with Thieu on troop withdrawals and Thieu would be reassured by Nixon's assurances on a coalition government. Bunker also reported that Abrams hoped to maintain flexibility in withdrawals. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 65, Vietnam Subject Files, 8–A, All Backchannel)

77. Memorandum of a Joint Cabinet and National Security Council Meeting[1]

Washington, June 3, 1969.

SUBJECT

Cabinet Meeting, June 3, 1969

This was a joint meeting of the Cabinet and the National Security Council called to hear Secretary of State William Rogers' report on his around-the-world trip.[2]

The first point of interest naturally was Vietnam. Secretary Rogers said he had listened to the President's address on Vietnam while at the American Embassy in Saigon. "Contrary to what you might have read in the papers," the Secretary told other Cabinet Members, "there are no differences between the U.S. and South Vietnam about what the President said." South Vietnam's President Thieu went over the speech

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 1, Memos for the President's File, 1969–1970, Beginning June 1, 1969. No classification marking. Drafted by Special Assistant to the President James Keogh. In attendance were members of the National Security Council, the Cabinet, and 26 sub-Cabinet and White House officials. The meeting lasted from 9:07 to 11:28 a.m. (Ibid., President's Daily Diary)

[2] Rogers departed Washington on May 12 and arrived in Saigon on May 14 for a 4-day visit. Rogers met with Foreign Minister Tran Chanh Thanh on May 15 and they discussed the general situation in South Vietnam, the upcoming Seven Nation Troop Contributing and SEATO meetings, and Nixon's speech of May 14. Memoranda of conversation of these discussions, treated as separate discussions, are ibid., NSC Files, Box 137, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. IV, 4/29/69–5/18/69. Telegraphic accounts of these meetings are in telegrams Secto 49 to 51/Bangkok 6494–6496, May 21; ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, ORG 7 S. Rogers also talked with Vietnamese Prime Minister Tran Van Huong. A brief account of their meeting is in telegram Secto 18/9444 from Saigon, May 15. (Ibid., POL 27–14 VIET) A fuller account of their discussion is in telegram Secto 44/6489 from Bangkok, May 21. (Ibid., ORG 7 S)

in advance, made some suggestions that were accepted, and approved the final draft, Rogers said.[3] Here the President interjected, "As a matter of fact you were there when he made some changes."

Rogers found Thieu to be mature and intelligent and the one man in the Saigon government who has potential for national leadership. The Secretary said that the South Vietnamese are ready to take over a major part of the burden of the war, although they are fearful that if their casualty rate increases substantially, they may be in difficulty. They fully realize the problems that the war is creating for the U.S., he said.

One thing that the South Vietnamese do not understand, said the Secretary, is freedom of the press. "They lock people up for printing something they don't want printed and then later think perhaps they made a mistake." This caused Postmaster General Blount to comment: "Maybe they've got a good idea there."

The American press, said Rogers, was quite wrong in its speculation that the President's trip was arranged in a hurry for a meeting demanded by Thieu. Rogers said the meeting was suggested by President Nixon and that he, Rogers, was the one who proposed the timing. Relations between the U.S. and South Vietnam are very good, the Secretary reported, although South Vietnamese leaders "had some questions" about the U.S. position on elections. They found it hard to understand that all the U.S. was suggesting was an election that would permit all of the people of South Vietnam to express their view. They agree that there should be such an election but are uncertain about how it should be conducted.

Rogers called U.S. Ambassador Bunker and Military Commander Abrams both superb men for their positions. In travelling through some combat areas with Abrams, he found that the General "knew all about the military and also had a lot of humanitarian instincts."

The critical political problem in South Vietnam, said Rogers, is that there is no cohesiveness, no real national interest even in such things as national sports or national radio programs. He thought it would be a good idea to have a couple of men in the U.S. Embassy who are ex-

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[3] Rogers met privately with President Nguyen Van Thieu and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky on May 16. Thieu told Rogers he would like to hold elections after the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam and after receiving guarantees from the Viet Cong about freedom of the electoral process. Thieu was prepared to accept establishment of a mixed electoral commission to run the elections and would amend the GVN constitution if necessary for an agreement. Thieu was confident he could use the military and civil servants to expand the Government's political support and successfully contest the elections. Ky told Rogers that South Vietnam would be ready for elections by May 1970. (Telegram 9541 from Saigon, May 16; ibid., Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 7, President's Daily Briefs) Rogers discussed other issues with Thieu on May 16, including land reform as reported in telegram Secto 63/6559 from Saigon, May 16. (Ibid., RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, ORG 7 S) Rogers also met with Thieu's cabinet on May 16; an account of that discussion is in telegram 9723 from Saigon, May 19. (Ibid., POL 27 VIET S) Additional documentation on Rogers' visit to Vietnam is ibid., Conference Files, 1966–1972, CF 356–364.

perienced in politics and who would help Thieu to build a national image. President Nixon asked whether "Thieu would accept political advice from us." Rogers' reply: "He would if we didn't label the people involved as political advisors and if we could just attach them to the Embassy without publicity."

The President commented that criticism of South Vietnam with regard to the condition of its democracy has become terribly distorted. Complaints that the South Vietnamese have defective elections and a partially controlled press are made without regard to the fact that North Vietnam has *no* elections and a completely controlled press. Two very basic questions involved in the South Vietnamese situation, the President continued, are whether a country like South Vietnam is really ready for a democratic system, and whether it is possible to have freedom of the press in a country at full-scale war. "Look back to our own society," the President said. "Lincoln didn't allow much freedom of the press in the Civil War. And in both World War I and World War II, we had a very tight press situation."

Vice President Agnew raised the question whether statements in the U.S. attacking this country's role in Vietnam—such as those made by Senator Edward Kennedy—have an effect on the South Vietnamese. Rogers said there was no doubt that all such statements were followed closely and studied for their possible effects on U.S. policy.

Moving on to other countries he visited, the Secretary of State said that at a meeting of the SEATO alliance partners he found that representatives of the countries which are contributing troops to the Vietnamese war thought the U.S. should reduce its forces there and all indicated that their countries would not reduce their own troop strength if the U.S. did so.

[Omitted here is material unrelated to Vietnam and Southeast Asia.]

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

Washington, June 4, 1969.

SUBJECT

US Negotiating Team in Paris

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 183, Paris Talks/Meetings, Memos and Miscellaneous, Vol. XIV, 1969. Secret; Nodis.

Attached is a memorandum handed to me by Mel Laird which offers some additional insights into the problems within our Paris negotiating team. This memorandum was prepared by a high ranking officer detailed to Paris (but not the source of the previous statements).

Attachment

Paper Given by Secretary of Defense Laird to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[2]

Washington, May 27, 1969.

SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING OUR PARIS PEACE TALKS DELEGATION

1. General Frederick Weyand and Col. Paul Gorman (and possibly Herbert Kaplan, the press spokesman) seem to be the only realists on the delegation. The State Department people, especially Richard Holbrooke and Carl Salans, are taking positions and attempting to formulate policies and démarches that are not in keeping with—and in fact contrary to—the President's publicly-stated commitment on Vietnam. (Witness the "Lodge-authored" suggested démarche for 31 May, re our withdrawal of troops on the basis of "understanding" rather than concrete conditions.[3] Also the earlier message (para 16) re our withdrawal if North Vietnam "is going to withdraw." Sullivan apparently concurred in the Lodge cable.)[4]

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[2] Secret; Nodis; Background Use Only.

[3] In telegram 7755 from Paris, May 26, Lodge suggested that he meet alone with Tho at the end of the meeting and state: "I quite understand that public discussion of such subjects as troop withdrawal might create problems. Such problems can be avoided. We could try to establish the circumstances in which troop withdrawal takes place. This could be done by prior understanding rather than by prior conditions. Is there some de facto way in which troops could be withdrawn from South Vietnam which would not appear to be a result of negotiations between us—something which would just apparently happen as part of the normal course of events." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 181, Paris Talks/Meetings, Private Paris Meetings, Memos/Codeword) In telegram 10617 from Saigon, May 28, Bunker expressed misgivings about such a statement and suggested substituting "perhaps this could be done by prior understanding" for "prior understanding rather than prior conditions." (Ibid.) Lodge was instructed to follow Nixon's statement in his speech of May 14: "If North Viet-Nam wants to insist that it has no forces in South Viet-Nam, we will no longer debate the point—provided that its forces cease to be there, and that we have reliable assurances that they will not return." (Memorandum from Sneider to Kissinger, May 27; ibid.)

[4] Not further identified.

2. Ambassador (Judge) Walsh seemed totally out of it, not at all forceful, and with no firm views. He is not kept informed by junior members of the staff.

3. Ambassador Lodge appeared to be an old man who had been encapsulated by the bright young State Department boys.[5] His staff meetings are unfocussed, disorganized, and with no central direction. Of the regulars, General Weyand seems to be the only realist in attendance.

4. The GVN delegation, especially Ambassador Lam and Colonel Nguyen-Hui-Loi, evince doubts regarding the firmness of our commitment, mainly based, it seems, on the analyses they read in the US press. The South Vietnamese have little or no contact with the US delegation, aside from General Weyand's military component.

5. A matter of first priority should be to establish White House control over the delegation.[5] A statement of policy should be imposed on the delegation, and the machinery should be regularized. There are too many cut-outs (e.g., General Weyand did not see the Lodge cable before Phil Habib hand-carried it to Washington).

6. In short, the State Department members of the delegation seem bound and determined to fly in the face of historical experience and, if left to their own devices, to secure a peace at almost any price.[5]

7. Another extremely disturbing factor is whether or not the "advocates" have thought through the ramifications—*out-of-country* as well as within Vietnam—of the proposed démarche. It would be interesting to task them (if such was possible) with preparing a contingency paper gaming out a post-Vietnam Southeast Asia as they see it. If honestly played, the game would be a nightmare, both for US credibility and for future US initiatives (given the assumable domestic public opinion that would obtain).

[5] Nixon underlined this sentence.

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

Washington, June 4, 1969.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with President Thieu at Midway, June 8

I. Arrangements for the Midway Meeting

You will arrive at Midway at 11:00 a.m. President Thieu arrives at 11:30 a.m. After an official welcome and military honors (draft statement attached at Tab A),[2] you will meet privately with President Thieu for about an hour and a half. The remaining members of both delegations will meet in a separate conference room during this period. (Delegation lists are at Tab E.)

After a brief break, there will be a business luncheon attended by members of both delegations. (Points for a toast are at Tab B.) Secretary Laird departs after this luncheon.

Your final meeting with Thieu will begin at 3:15 p.m. after a half-hour break. Secretary Rogers and other senior advisors will sit in on this meeting at which you and President Thieu will review the draft joint statement. (Current draft is at Tab C.) At 5:00 p.m. there is to be a joint press conference at which time the joint statement will be issued. President Thieu is scheduled to leave about 5:45 p.m. (A draft departure statement is at Tab D.) You are scheduled to leave shortly thereafter.

II. The Setting for the Midway Meeting

The Midway meeting with President Thieu comes at a crucial time. It has been preceded by months of concerted and effective efforts on the part of your administration to dissipate misunderstanding between us and the South Vietnamese Government and to place our relations on a solid basis of both full consultation and mutual confidence. The meeting, furthermore, follows the enunciation of your peace program in the May 14 speech and the issuance of the NLF's ten points, providing a potential basis for negotiations at Paris. Finally, in recent months, Thieu has taken key actions reflecting his greater sense of self-confidence, his recognition of the political problems facing you at

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 71, Vietnam Subject Files, Midway Meeting with President Thieu, 6/8/69, Briefing Book, Vol. I. Secret. Sent for information.

[2] All Tabs are attached but not printed.

home, and his sense that the Vietnam war is probably entering the decisive negotiating stage. These actions include:

1. His full support for improvement and modernization of the Vietnamese forces.
2. His agreement to a withdrawal of some U.S. military units during 1969.
3. His March 25 statement of the six-point GVN peace program and other public indications of some flexibility on a political settlement.
4. His even greater flexibility, privately, on political arrangements affording the NLF a guaranteed post-war political role.
5. His formation of a political coalition of supporters, whatever its deficiencies, on May 25.

III. Thieu's main purposes in his talks with you will be

—To establish a personal relationship with you which will serve both as a bridge for future consultation and as a focal point for strengthening his leadership position in South Vietnam.

—To reassure himself that the United States will remain committed to South Vietnam both during and after the war; from Thieu's viewpoint the key areas of reassurance (which relate in part to the eight-point plan in your speech) will be:

(1) Withdrawal of U.S. forces, whether unilateral or mutual, will *not* be at a rate likely to increase the vulnerability of the GVN to Communist military action.
(2) The Vietnam settlement will include guarantees against a renewal of the North Vietnamese military intervention in South Vietnam.
(3) The U.S. plan, particularly those aspects dealing with disengagement and local ceasefires, would *not* result in a de facto partition for South Vietnam.
(4) The U.S. is not seeking to impose a provisional coalition government or scrapping of the present constitution in the pre-election period.

—To establish for public consumption a close identity of purpose and action with you, while establishing for his Saigon audience his stature as an equal.

IV. Your main purposes in the talks with Thieu will be

—To establish a personal relationship with Thieu which provides him with both a necessary sense of confidence in your commitments to South Vietnam and reinforces his own sense of self-confidence.

—To reassure Thieu on two fundamentals:

(1) We will not be a party to an agreement imposing either a coalition government in the pre- or post-election periods, or any other political arrangement against the will of the South Vietnamese.
(2) Withdrawal of U.S. forces, whether unilateral or mutual, will *not* be undertaken at the risk of the military security of either South Vietnam forces or the remaining U.S. forces.

—To encourage a sense of urgency, vigor and joint U.S.-GVN purpose in the Vietnamization program.[3]

—To prod Thieu gently to articulate in more specific terms a political program for discussion at the Paris negotiations which affords the Communists sufficient guarantees of free political completion without conceding to their demands for a coalition government.[4]

(Thieu has privately suggested this might be done through a combination of international supervision, mixed electorate commissions, and amendment—rather than scrapping—of the constitution.)

—To encourage Thieu to continue his efforts to unify the nationalists on the political front and to strengthen the local governmental apparatus, while hinting judiciously about the utility of dealing gently with opposition non-Communist forces.[5]

(*Note:* The political situation in South Vietnam is more fluid than appears on the surface; Thieu and his principal non-Communist rivals are already maneuvering for position in the post-war political structure, and each in all probability also has some lines out to elements in the NLF. Thieu, therefore, could be tempted or prodded by his supporters to bear down hard on his non-Communist rivals.)

—To assure Thieu that you will not accept any settlement that does not provide assurances of North Vietnamese withdrawal to North Vietnam and against their future military intervention in South Vietnam.

—To establish publicly an image of unity with the GVN and a joint determination to seek a very early settlement of the Vietnam conflict which does not compromise basic principles.

V. Danger Signals

While it will be important for you to encourage forward motion on Thieu's part both with respect to Vietnamization and the formulation of a political program, there are risks in pushing Thieu too far, too fast. Thieu has been bolder in charting future policy on both withdrawal of U.S. forces and a political settlement than his supporters or his political rivals. He faces the constant necessity of bringing these elements along to his more flexible posture. Therefore, it will be neither to his nor to your interest for Thieu to get too far out ahead of other nationalists in Saigon or to appear to be acting on Vietnamization and a political settlement strictly at our behest.[6] Thieu's pre-Midway visits

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[3] Nixon highlighted this sentence.

[4] Nixon highlighted this sentence.

[5] Nixon underlined the phrase: "utility of dealing gently with opposition non-Communist forces" in this sentence.

[6] Nixon underlined this sentence.

to Seoul and Taipei, in any event, will probably strengthen his determination to resist any appearance of American pressure.

VI. Specific Issues Likely to Arise (Talking Points at Tab F)

A. Thieu is likely to raise, or should be encouraged to raise:

1. His views on a program for a political settlement.
2. Progress in organizing political support among the non-Communists.
3. Modernization of the GVN forces.
4. Progress on the pacification front.
5. Land reform.

B. Issues you should raise:[7]

1. U.S. plans for a reduction of U.S. forces.
2. Reassurance on the U.S. position opposing either partition or the imposition of unsatisfactory provisional arrangements before the elections.
3. Our view on the current status and the prospects of the Paris negotiations.
4. Your overview on Asia, including the importance of a steadfast U.S. commitment to the non-Communist countries in the region.

VII. Thieu Personality

Thieu is a career military officer who has proved his political astuteness both by surviving successive coups and by demonstrating growing qualities of leadership since taking over as President in 1967. Cast in the traditional Vietnamese mold, Thieu is reserved in manner, moves cautiously, and keeps his own counsel. However, as he has gained greater self-confidence, he has increasingly shown himself to be more perceptive and sensitive to the needs of his country—and more flexible—than his potential rivals. He has worked in close harmony with Ambassador Bunker and has developed a real sensitivity toward the domestic problems faced in the United States. He accepts our advice, but at every crucial instance has made it clear that he is his own master. Unostentatious in manner, he is devoted to his wife and family. His single known "vice" is a passion for fishing.

VIII.

The State and Defense Departments have prepared a number of background papers, in the attached briefing book. A scope paper is attached at Tab G.

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[7] Nixon underlined issues 1 and 2.

80. Editorial Note

On June 7, 1969, President Nixon arrived in Honolulu in preparation for his meeting with President Thieu on Midway Island the next day. According to the President's Daily Diary, Nixon met with Secretary of State Rogers, Secretary of Defense Laird, Assistant to the President Kissinger, Generals Wheeler and Abrams, Admiral McCain, and Ambassador Bunker. The meeting was held in the conference room of the Kuala Hilton Hotel in Honolulu from approximately 2:15 to 6:15 p.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) Although not listed as a participant in the diary, Ambassador Lodge also attended. Kissinger's recollection of this meeting stresses that the military participants accepted the decision to withdraw 25,000 U.S. troops "with a heavy heart," but with resignation. (*White House Years,* pages 272–273) When Laird described this Hawaii gathering at his staff meeting on June 16, he called it a "really significant meeting," but provided no details. (Washington National Records Center, OSD Files, FRC 330 76–0028, Laird Chronological File, June–August 1969) Laird prepared a June 7 briefing for the President on Vietnamization. (Ibid., ISA Task Force Files, FRC 75–0013, Chron Action, Ltc Williams, June 6) Lodge was asked to brief the group on events in Paris. According to notes he made, Lodge gave an account of the May 31 private meeting with Le Duc Tho as follows:

"1. I was asked to report on the situation in Paris.

"2. I said that Le Duc Tho, on May 31, had made this proposal:

"a) The DRV would talk with us on all matters and on behalf of the NLF. In essence, he also advanced these ideas:

"b) Remove the present personnel of the GVN and destroy them;

"c) Seek a US–DRV agreement within the framework of the 10 points of the NLF, and another agreement on a cease-fire. In other words, the cease-fire was put at the very bottom of the list.

"3. I said that I did not think we could refuse to talk with the DRV. If political questions were brought up, we should be authorized to refer them to Thieu. I suggested that the President should seek to achieve such an understanding with Thieu at the Midway conference the next day." (Notes on the Midway Meetings by Lodge, Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 25)

On June 8 Nixon and the same group flew from Honolulu to Midway, from 7 to 10 a.m. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) According to H.R. Haldeman there were "Meetings all the way." No record of these discussions on the aircraft have been found. (*Haldeman Diaries,* page 64)

81. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Midway Island, June 8, 1969.

PRESENT

President Nixon
President Thieu
Henry Kissinger
Nguyen Phu Duc

President Nixon began the meeting by stressing that he preferred to have private talks. He assured President Thieu that what he would say would be in confidence. They could agree on that.

President Thieu said that speculation as to differences between them is untrue; that he was very glad to have this opportunity to talk with the President.

President Nixon stated that the press is trying to drive a wedge between the two Presidents with respect to reports about American pressure. Unless President Thieu heard something from him directly, he should disregard it. There is currently a lot of speculation regarding American pressures for a coalition government and it is entirely unfounded. (The President called on Henry Kissinger to confirm that fact.) The President gave a general appraisal of the situation, stating that the war in Vietnam concerns not only Vietnam but the entire Pacific. The people of South Vietnam, however, have the greatest stake. If the peace is inadequate, there will be repercussions all over Asia. There can be no reward for those engaged in aggression. At the same time, self-determination is not only in the Vietnamese interest, but in the American interest as well. It would improve the prospects of peace throughout the Pacific.

The President mentioned that we have a difficult political problem in the U.S. and that he appreciated Saigon's understanding for his domestic problems. At the same time, he understood President Thieu's problems. It is not our wish for President Thieu to get too far ahead and wind up with no country to lead. President Nixon described the Congressional situation and the importance of the 1970 elections. The U.S. domestic situation is a weapon in the war. (At this point the President asked Henry Kissinger to explain the Cambodian strikes.)

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Office Files, Box 1, Memos for the President's Files, 1969–1970, Beginning June 8, 1969. Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. Drafted on June 13. Kissinger prepared brief individual scenarios for Nixon meetings with Thieu in the morning and afternoon. (Memoranda from Kissinger to Nixon, June 4; NSC Files, Box 71, Vietnam Subject Files, Midway Meeting with President Thieu, 6/8/69, Briefing Book, Vol. I)

President Thieu felt that the intentions of the enemy are crucial; the issue is the spread of Communism. Any false peace will affect all of Asia. Both the Vietnamese people and the world need peace. He recognized the U.S. desire for peace. He knew that the U.S. had no desire to occupy Vietnam but that its sole objective was to achieve peace. The Vietnamese should be reasonable and must consider not only Vietnamese opinions but those of the U.S. as well. The war in Vietnam is not a military one and neither side can win militarily. Therefore, there must be a reasonable compromise. President Thieu understood the difficulties of the President with a large army abroad incurring constant casualties. He felt that his country must make progress in order to help us to withdraw.

Thieu stated that Hanoi deliberately creates a deadlock in Paris and attacks the GVN as the chief obstacle to peace. The Communists are weaker, but Hanoi can continue the war at a reduced rate of casualties for many years. Hence, a negotiated peace is essential. Thieu said he was trying to make progress in winning the political war. Even if Hanoi continues the war, the GVN will win the population.

The President next turned to the subject of troop replacements. Thieu stated that troop replacements, if not handled carefully, could be misunderstood by the North Vietnamese and their allies. He pointed out that we have kept saying the war is going better. We must now prove it; it is important for both U.S. and Vietnamese opinion. Even though the war is going on, we must use the troop replacement to fight Communist propaganda.

By July 15, Thieu said, it should be possible to phase out one-third of the Third Marine Division and six battalions from the Delta. At the same time, he wanted to emphasize a difference of opinion with General Abrams. His aim was to extend administrative control over 100% of the population next year. Therefore, the regional and popular forces are crucial. As they improve, they can replace mobile U.S. forces and ARVN combat divisions. The regional and popular forces can free regular forces to fight a mobile war. This was better than building up new combat divisions.

President Nixon said that we have confused the press by not denying any conflict between us. It would be obvious after today that no conflict existed. The two Presidents then discussed plans for the communiqué.

Turning to the negotiations, President Nixon asked how we should respond to Le Duc Tho's proposal for bilateral talks.

President Thieu misunderstood the President's question about the Tho proposal and said the GVN would object to any U.S. attempt to talk to the NLF. After Mr. Kissinger clarified the issue, President Thieu said that he agrees to bilateral talks unless the U.S. tries to settle directly with

the NLF. The United States should introduce the military subject and listen to the political projections of the other side. Before replying, the GVN would have to be fully consulted.

President Nixon asked several questions regarding Vietnamese political institutions, commenting that Thieu knew his people and required timing. He emphasized that there was no wedge between the U.S. and GVN nor between Thieu and his people.

Break for Lunch

Thieu asked about how we should respond to Communist strategy in Paris. President Nixon replied that we should not seem overanxious.

Thieu asked about military operations. President Nixon said he thought the Communists were suffering badly and intelligence indicated there was very little in the pipeline to the South from Hanoi. Thieu felt that the reason for the latest attacks was to maintain an impression of strength for the Communist world conference and to bring pressure on U.S. public opinion. The Communists faced a dilemma: they wanted to economize their human resources but also wished to maintain U.S. casualties. Thus they continue the tactics of pressure. The Communists pretend that the current deadlock is our fault. The only way to overcome this strategy is to set a deadline. Hanoi knows that delay is to their advantage. Thieu suggested we make our most conciliatory proposal and then establish a deadline for a response, so that time does not work for the other side.

President Nixon asked whether Thieu planned to go on in his political program from his March 25 speech.[2] Thieu replied that we must not be put into the position of always making new proposals. At some early point, we must state (a) that the U.S. and Saigon agree, and (b) that our proposals are as far as we can go. President Thieu stated that he did not want to be pushed from one position to another—as was the case with the shape-of-the-table issue. If he could have the assurance that we would back some set of Saigon proposals, he was certain that we could work out a common position. But he did not want to have an escalation of proposals. Hanoi tended to take 15 small concessions and parlay them into one major concession.

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[2] On March 25 President Thieu announced a six-point peace plan that he later reiterated on April 7 at a joint session of the two Houses of the South Vietnamese National Assembly. The points were: "1. North Vietnam must give up attempts to conquer South Vietnam by force, 2. all Communist forces must be withdrawn from South Vietnam, 3. Laos and Cambodia could not be used as bases for attacks on South Vietnam, 4. South Vietnam would adopt a policy of national reconciliation, 5. unification must be decided through a democratic process, and 6. international controls and guarantees against Communist aggression must be adopted." (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1969–1970,* p. 23554)

Thieu asked for assurances that we would not use every concession by the GVN as a signal for new demands. There must be an end to it. Mr. Kissinger asked, "But how do you play the political game?" Thieu replied that if there were a withdrawal of forces and an end of terrorism, the GVN could consider the NLF as another party in elections. If the NLF wants guarantees, the GVN was ready to discuss it with them in generous terms. Thieu said he was ready to accept an international body. It could not interfere in the GVN's area of sovereignty but it could organize and supervise elections. The GVN was willing to accept as many as 10,000 international inspectors and frontier guards. He was prepared to implement free choice and self-determination; in other words, a free vote and free candidature. Thieu felt that everyone was aware that political competition was inevitable.

President Nixon urged Thieu to do everything possible and asked if it would be any help to him if we provided a political organizer. The U.S. had done this with Magsaysay and it had been helpful. It is up to President Thieu if he wants this kind of assistance. Thieu responded that more support for cadres was necessary.

President Nixon mentioned that Hanoi has never had real elections and is thus employing a double standard. Thieu pointed out that 56% of those "elected" in North Vietnam were women. This shows the magnitude of their manpower problem. He reiterated that there would be elections after the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces. Thieu was prepared for good international supervision—even without troops.

President Nixon wondered whether the GVN could siphon off the political forces in the center to weaken the Viet Cong. Thieu responded that when we have a common position on our side, we can have a united front. What made the middle ground in Saigon so uncertain was the fear that the U.S. would withdraw support. Hence, many politicians were holding themselves available for a coalition government with the NLF.

President Nixon asked why not a united front now; the GVN is going to win and that is a great asset. Thieu stated very frankly that there was a sagging of spirit in Saigon. Many still believe that the Viet Cong can have political concessions. The intellectuals are waiting for political concessions imposed on Saigon by the U.S. They were encouraged in this by loose statements from U.S. cabinet members. Mr. Duc interjected that the Saigon population was very worried.

President Thieu asked what had been meant by local elections in the early drafts of the President's May 14 speech. The President replied that he meant that elections could be held in provinces where ceasefires had been arranged. Thieu said that this was an interesting possibility.

President Nixon said that the fact that the people in Saigon were jittery worried him. Thieu returned to his view that territorial forces had to be strengthened. General Abrams wants to train divisions. Thieu wants to train 130,000 Regional Forces and Popular Forces. Abrams doubts the manpower resources are available. Thieu thinks it easier to form RF and PF than regular forces. If the GVN has more RF and PF, it can phase out combat divisions. Thieu wants the U.S. to reconsider his plan regarding the RF and PF, and for someone to talk to General Abrams.

President Nixon mentioned the stories in the press about the poor performance of the 5th and 18th Divisions. Thieu said it is a question of leadership. President Nixon recalled the story of when General Pershing's desire to attack was thwarted by a classmate who said the morale of his divisions was shot. Pershing replied, your morale is shot and fired him. There are no tired divisions, only tired commanders.[3]

[3] After their meeting on June 8, Nixon and Thieu released a previously agreed upon joint statement; see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pp. 445–557.

82. Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Sullivan) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, June 10, 1969.

SUBJECT

Laos

[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 LAOS. Secret; Exdis. In a June 10 covering memorandum to Walsh, Sullivan stated that Kissinger asked for this memorandum "on a private basis." Sullivan told Walsh that his recommendations reflected his opposition to CINCPAC's and other military commanders' urgings for a major increase in U.S. military activity on Laos. Sullivan discerned from Nixon and Kissinger that the military hoped to assign a U.S. major general as military commander for all activities in Laos and take over at least part of the role that the U.S. Ambassador to Laos currently fulfilled. Sullivan stated that he had shown this memorandum to Godley and suggested that Rogers, Richardson, Johnson, and Green receive copies.

You asked for my opinion concerning the utility of additional United States military action in Laos.[2] As I told you previously, and as I told the President during the trip back from Midway to Honolulu, I consider that there is very little more we can do than we are currently doing. I also consider that the net result of additional effort would be marginal.

In reaching this assessment, I start from the premise that Laos, as a landlocked nation of less than three million people, can never be a military match for North Viet-Nam, a nation of nearly twenty million. I also assume that it is not in the United States interest to commit our own forces to a ground war in Laos. Therefore, the limits of perfectibility in the defense of Laos must be defined by the capabilities of Lao ground forces, aided by United States training and equipment, and augmented by United States air support. Additional United States assistance is given in the form of intelligence and clandestine operations.

Currently, we train and equip regular Lao armed forces of about 60,000 men. Additionally we train, pay and direct a tribal guerrilla force of about 40,000 men. We have furnished a small tactical air force of T–28 aircraft, which we attempt to keep at air operating level of 48 aircraft, with Lao pilots. Due to a shortage of Lao pilots, we pay for the services of about a dozen Thai "volunteer" pilots. Moreover, by contract with two U.S. operated companies (Air America and Continental Air Services) we provide airlift support for the Lao military and our own guerrilla forces.

About 60 USAF sorties per day are flown from Thailand in direct support of Lao military activity. U.S. Forward Air Controllers (about 10) also operate from Thailand and from strips in Laos. Communications are handled by U.S. military and civilian personnel to assure the efficiency of these operations.

To run the foregoing effort, there are less than 200 U.S. personnel in Laos who are "in violation" of the 1962 agreements. It has always been my policy to hold this number to a minimum and to position them in such a manner that they could be immediately extracted if political considerations dictated. It is important to note that the United

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[2] Kissinger sent a copy of this memorandum to Nixon on June 16, stating in the covering memorandum it was in response to Nixon's request "to look into the possibility of doing more to improve the military situation in Laos." Kissinger summarized Sullivan's view that there was little more that the United States could do, but added: "I believe the key factor in Laos is the enemy's ability to concentrate its forces there and overrun the remainder of the country at any time it would appear advantageous to do so. Additional U.S. assistance to Lao forces could not alter this fact, although it could make a difference in the current situation." Kissinger recommended that the Under Secretaries Committee look into the issue and Nixon approved on April 18. (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 286, Memoranda to the President, June 1969, Folder 2)

States has accepted *no* commitments whatsoever in association with these military operations and that they could, in principle, be terminated unilaterally by us at any time.

In addition to these arrangements, but in no sense as a quid pro quo, the Lao government permits the U.S. to carry out bombing operations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, an area of Laos that has very little strategic interest to the Lao government itself, but which is directly related to our interests in South Viet-Nam. We fly about 400 tactical air sorties a day and about 20 or 30 B–52 sorties per day in this area. The only conditions attached to this permission are (a) that we should not publicly admit our bombing, and (b) that we avoid killing Lao civilians who may be haplessly in the same area as the North Vietnamese infiltrators who are targets of our bombing raids.

Without the permission of the Lao government, and in the light of Souvanna's advice to me that he would refuse such permission if we asked for it, we also conduct cross-border raids from South Viet-Nam into the Lao panhandle. These raids are run by platoon-sized units of South Vietnamese irregulars, encadred by U.S. Special Forces men.

This combination of effort has kept the military situation in Laos more or less stabilized for the past five years. The Lao have suffered relatively heavy casualties and have had nearly one quarter of their population displaced as refugees. But there has been *no* significant loss of terrain, and indeed, a net gain, over the situation which obtained in 1964.

When one is asked what more can be done, it is first necessary to consider what the objective is, where and how it is to be done, and who will do it. Let us start with the least desirable proposal—the introduction of U.S. ground forces overtly into the enemy sanctuary area in the Panhandle. These sanctuaries contain from a regiment to a division of enemy forces, depending on current deployments. Therefore, an operation against them would have to involve regiments or divisions.

Not only would such a venture be of dubious military success (it would probably at best be a second Khe Sanh), but it would raise major political considerations. If we asked the Lao for official permission, they could reasonably be expected to accede only if we made some explicit commitments to them. It is doubtful that we wish to extend our commitments at this time. If, on the other hand, we did it against the specific wishes of the Lao, we would face an uproar internationally and domestically. We do not wish that sort of reaction.

Assuming, then, that broader ground action is out of the question, we might consider additional air action. Again, the question is where and by whom. The air operation in the Panhandle is frankly already saturated. There is little more that can be done there except against populated areas. We could probably get Lao agreement to such attacks

if we agree to give the population adequate warning to leave the towns before we attack. Such warning would also result in the evacuation of military objectives and, hence, the value of the proposed attacks would be nil.

Similar considerations prevail for most other direct U.S. military efforts which might be proposed elsewhere in Laos. The only exception to this statement might be the possibility of augmenting the daily USAF effort allotted to direct support of Lao troops. This suggestion would have to be measured against the limited communications, forward air control, and targeting capabilities available to the Lao.

Hence, my only suggestions for augmenting our effort in Laos come down to a few proposals associated with improving the inherent capabilities of the Lao forces. These are as follows:

(a) Provide the Lao army with more M–16 rifles. (They currently have less than 6,000 and most of their opponents have AK–47 weapons. I would increase this total up to 20,000 rifles.)

(b) Provide the Lao air force with more AC–47 aircraft. (These planes, with side-firing guns, are excellent for the defense of small outposts. I believe there is now a program to convert four of the C–47 inventory to this configuration. I would convert others or supply new ones up to a total of ten—two to each military region.)

(c) Finally, I would provide the Lao air force with T–41 trainer aircraft to improve their pilot training program.

All of these proposals have either been made, or are being made, by our Country Team in Laos. If there is an indication from you that the President favors these rather modest suggestions, it would make a long story much shorter.

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

Washington, June 11, 1969.

SUBJECT

Paris Private Talks

At the May 31, private meeting with Ambassador Lodge, the Hanoi representative, Le Duc Tho, took a new tact proposing to negotiate bilaterally with us on all questions, political as well as military. Hanoi no longer insisted that we negotiate with the NLF, but refused flatly to talk privately to the GVN.

Tho also raised three questions of major substance:

1. Does the United States agree that it and the DRV should work out a settlement of all problems mentioned in the 10-points, that agreements should be signed, followed by an agreement for a ceasefire?
2. Does the United States agree to have the present GVN leadership replaced by a peace cabinet willing to conduct serious talks with the NLF?
3. Who is to organize elections after the restoration of peace?

Two principal issues are raised by Tho's proposals:

1. How do we proceed with the private talks?
2. If we move ahead with another round of private talks, how do we respond to Tho's three questions?

Ambassadors Lodge and Bunker, in commenting on our possible response to Tho, agree that the basic objective of Hanoi's strategy is to isolate the Thieu Government and produce strains between us and the GVN—as might result if we and the DRV negotiated seriously on a political settlement. Lodge, however, believes that Tho's approach merits further probing to determine if there is a basis for serious negotiation.[2]

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1319, Unfiled Material, 3 of 19. Secret; Nodis. Sent for action. Originally dated June 7, then redated by hand June 11. Sneider sent this memorandum to Kissinger on June 2 with the recommendation that he sign and send it to the President. The second page was redone, apparently at Kissinger's request. A note on the first page presumably by Sneider reads: "President was shown this by HAK on trip to Honolulu, RS." This note is apparently in response to an attached note by Haig, June 11, that reads: "Dick Sneider, Dick—Pres did not see this [.] it's now OBE in some respects—should we update and refloat? Al."

[2] Lodge's comment and recommendations are in telegram 8366 from Paris/Delto 1805, June 4. (Ibid., Box 177, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Meetings, May–June 1969, State Nodis Cables/Habib Calls)

Bunker is essentially less optimistic.[3] Nevertheless, Bunker has not disputed Lodge's proposal that we request a further private meeting after Midway on a basis which would neither accept nor reject Tho's proposal for talks on political, as well as military, issues. Lodge would not initiate any discussion of political issues and would respond initially to the DRV that these should be discussed with the GVN. Bunker would prefer to take the offensive in the next round of private talks and is concerned about the GVN reaction if we are drawn into extended political talks with the DRV. Lodge shares this concern but thinks we can avoid this trap.

With respect to Tho's three questions, Lodge and Bunker are not far apart:

1. Both would rebuff, for the present, Tho's suggestion for discussing a draft agreement, and emphasize our interest in substance and not form.
2. Both would reject Tho's proposal to replace the GVN with a peace cabinet, but Bunker would take a tougher line.
3. Both would respond to the question on organizing the elections, by suggesting that elections can be organized without changing the GVN or jeopardizing the NLF and that the GVN and NLF work the problems out.
4. Finally, both would try to focus the discussions with the DRV on mutual withdrawal.

My own view is closer to Bunker's appreciation of the situation. I would go ahead with another round of private talks but with greater care to avoid any misunderstanding with the GVN about our undertaking political talks with the DRV. I believe Lodge will agree and intend to discuss this with Lodge and Bunker.

Lodge and Bunker have also suggested that you might review this problem of further private talks with Thieu during your morning meeting. You may prefer to leave those details to Bunker, and instead discuss the private talks in general terms with Thieu indicating our intention to probe the DRV position although we see as yet little ground for optimism.

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[3] Bunker's comments and recommendations are in telegram 11261 from Saigon, June 5. (Ibid., RG 59, Winston Lord Files: Lot 77 D 112, Box 338, Vietnam Private Talks)

84. Editorial Note

On June 11, 1969, Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin met with Henry Kissinger prior to returning to Moscow for consultations. The discussion on Vietnam follows:

"Dobrynin then turned to Vietnam. I told him that we were following a very careful policy. We had our moves for the next few months fully worked out. I reminded him of what the President had said when we gave him an advance copy of the Vietnam speech. He should not be confused by the many statements that he heard. We were not interfering with much that was being said. But the President reserved the final decision on essential items. Dobrynin replied that he had noticed that we moved on about the schedule we had given him a month ago.

"Dobrynin then asked about our ideas for settling the war in Vietnam. He inquired especially on our views on a coalition government. I said that he and I were both realists. He knew very well that in order to bring about a coalition government we would have to smash the present structure of the Saigon Government while the NLF remained intact. This would guarantee an NLF victory sooner or later. We would never accept that. We would agree to a fair political contest—not to what the President had called a disguised defeat.

"Dobrynin made no efforts to defend Hanoi's position. He replied that Hanoi was very difficult. He said I could be sure that the Soviet Union had transmitted our discussion of April and added a recommendation. However, Hanoi believed that they knew their own requirements better than the Soviet Union. I said, on the other hand, the Soviet Union supplied 85% of the military equipment. Dobrynin asked whether we wanted the Soviet Union to give Hanoi an ultimatum. I said it was not for me to tell the Soviet Union how to conduct its relations with its allies. I said that we were determined to have the war ended one way or another. Hanoi was attempting to break down the President's public support. It was too much to ask us to hold still for that. I added that what we needed was some strategic help, not just negotiating devices for settling particular problems as has been the case until now. Dobrynin, who was very subdued, said I could be sure that they are looking into the question.

"Dobrynin then asked me about US-Soviet relations in general. I said that while some gradual progress was possible even during the Vietnam war, a really massive change depended on the settlement of the Vietnam war. Dobrynin said we always seem to link things. I replied that as a student of Marxism he must believe in the importance of objective factors. It was an objective fact that Hanoi was trying to undermine the President. It was an objective fact that we had to look to every avenue for a solution. Dobrynin then said supposing the war were settled, how would you go about improving relations."

The end of the conversation follows:

"Dobrynin returned to the theme of US-Soviet relations and asked what he could tell his principals when he returned. I said that everything depended on the war in Vietnam. If the war were ended, he could say that there was no limit to what might be accomplished. You would like to be remembered as a President who ensured a permanent peace and a qualitative change in international relations." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/HAK, 1969 [Part 1]) The full record of this conversation, which Nixon saw, is in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume XII, Soviet Union, 1969–October 1970.

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85. Intelligence Memorandum[1]

No. 05730/69 Washington, June 12, 1969.

STRESSES IN NORTH VIETNAM

As the leaders of North Vietnam enter the eleventh year of their attempt to seize control of the South by force, they face a rising level of war-weariness among their people. In addition, as a result of the cessation of the bombing last year, the regime is having to combat a relaxation on the part of the North Vietnamese generally. Once the bombing stopped, many North Vietnamese, even in the armed services and in the vital areas of transportation, appear to have suffered an emotional letdown in[2] the belief that the war was over as far as they were concerned. Now, the regime is having difficulty convincing the people that they must continue to endure deprivations and that many must continue to go South to fight what by now must seem to them to

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 137, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. VI, 5/26/69–6/17/69. Secret; Spoke; No Foreign Dissem. Prepared in the Office of Current Intelligence of the Central Intelligence Agency and coordinated with the Office of Economic Research, the Office of National Estimates, and the Director's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it. Nixon wrote on the title page: "K—What can we do to accelerate the morale decline?"

[2] Nixon underlined the previous portion of the sentence and drew an arrow to his handwritten comment: "K—what will effect on this morale be of our anticipated action?"

be an interminable war. Although these problems do not appear to be so grave as to impair significantly the regime's ability to prosecute the war, they are causing the politburo concern, and it is reacting.

[Omitted here is the 7-page body of the paper.]

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

Washington, June 13, 1969.

SUBJECT

Study on Laos

You raised the question whether a full-scale study of Laos is not required, in view of newspaper reports of a deteriorating military situation.

State has been working for some time on a paper on Laos in the context of a Southeast Asian settlement. The study is nearing completion, and will be forwarded to the Review Group when completed. I think that this will meet our requirements.

The military situation in Laos is indeed cause for real concern, although major shifts in the strategic balance seem unlikely before next autumn.

As I stated in a memorandum in April,[2] the Communists have the military power on the scene to take Laos when they want. They refrain because of uncertainty about our reaction, and because Laos is only a part of larger concerns in the area.

The Communists' winter offensive created a very serious crisis of confidence in the RLG, though it did not take in so much new territory as the Communist gains of the year before. It slowed up in April,

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 545, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. I, to 31 July 1969. Secret. Drafted by Lindsey Grant and sent by Sneider to Kissinger under a June 10 covering memorandum in which Sneider recommended that Kissinger sign it and send it to the President. A stamped note on the memorandum indicates the President saw it.

[2] Document 56.

probably in part because of our aerial reaction in "Operation Rain Dance," a spoiling operation. The Meo guerrillas counterattacked with considerable success, even occupying the Communist administrative center of Xieng Khouangville for a time.

The rains have come. If experience is a guide, pro-Government guerrillas will re-establish themselves in some contested areas during the rainy season. The enemy will attack again in the autumn dry season. Because of the attrition in forces and morale on the Government side over the years, this next dry season offensive may be dangerous to RLG stability.

The Communists are engaged in leisurely negotiations with Souvanna Phouma, and are probably dangling before him the prospect of a Laos political settlement and a reduction of military pressures, in exchange for some arrangement which will limit U.S. bombing and provide the Communists with continued access to South Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand through Laos.

These negotiations are not likely to progress far this summer, since Souvanna still plans to leave for Europe on June 20, returning only in August.

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

Washington, June 23, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnamizing the War (NSSM 36)

Secretary Laird has forwarded to you the outline plan (Tab A) prepared by the Joint Chiefs for Vietnamizing the war.[2] This plan has been

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–142, NSSM Files, NSSM 36. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. Sneider sent this memorandum to Kissinger under an attached June 19 covering memorandum recommending that Kissinger sign it and send it to the President.

[2] Tab A, attached but not printed, was an undated 57-page JCS report entitled, "Plans For Vietnamizing the War."

coordinated with the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency. The plan covers two areas:

1. Alternatives for U.S. force reductions during the period July 1, 1969–December 31, 1969;
2. An outline for the final report on longer-term Vietnamization which you are requested to approve.

Five options for 1969 redeployments are offered in NSSM 36, ranging from withdrawals of 50 to 100,000. The first increment has already been decided at Midway and Secretary Laird recommends in his report an additional increment, with a total up to 50,000 for 1969 depending upon evaluation of the reaction to the first withdrawal. In a separate memorandum, the Secretary of State expresses a preference for an alternative involving a total of 85,000, but again depending upon further consideration after the initial withdrawal.[3]

The longer-term plans on Vietnamization provide a series of alternatives for U.S. troop reductions with varying timetables from 18 months to 42 months, and varying ceilings for the residual American troops in South Vietnam ranging from 260,000 to 306,000. Secretary Laird feels that even a 42 month timetable with withdrawals up to 290,000 forces would probably result in interruption of pacification progress. A much faster withdrawal could result in more serious problems for pacification and allied military capabilities, as well as possible adverse effects on the GVN, in the absence of reciprocal North Vietnamese withdrawals.

The problem now facing us is a decision on procedures for consideration of Secretary Laird's report. There are two principal options open:

1. Circulating the paper as a normal NSC document for regular NSC consideration (which has not yet been done); this would involve increased risks of leakage.[4]
2. Treating the paper in a meeting of NSC principals only; in this case my staff would prepare an issues paper for consideration of the principals *only.*

Secretary Laird would prefer the paper be handled on a tight-hold basis and, therefore, would probably prefer the second option. I would concur.[5]

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[3] Attached but not printed was a June 2 memorandum from Under Secretary of State Richardson to Laird in which Richardson stated that Rogers favored this figure "for reasons of political impact in this country, in North Vietnam, and on the negotiations in Paris."

[4] Nixon wrote "No" next to this paragraph.

[5] Nixon wrote "Yes" next to this paragraph.

Recommendation:[6]

That NSSM 36 be considered at a meeting of NSC principals only

That NSSM 36 be circulated as a normal NSC document for regular NSC consideration

Other

Attachment

Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon

Washington, June 2, 1969.

SUBJECT

Vietnamizing the War (NSSM 36)

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have prepared an outline plan (enclosure 1)[7] for Vietnamizing the War, with specific recommendations and alternatives for the remainder of 1969. This plan has been coordinated with the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency. As I shall indicate below, I believe we can plan *tentatively* to withdraw 50,000 men in 1969, with the first increment of 20,000–25,000 men to start redeployment in July. For reasons I shall outline, I believe we must keep our planning *flexible* and not commit now beyond the 20,000–25,000. The State Department believes the withdrawal package for 1969 should consist of 85,000 men (Alternative C below).

I indicated in my report following my trip to South Vietnam that I was disappointed in the progress made by the South Vietnamese in assuming more of the burden of the war. Nonetheless, they are improving and with the right kind of help from us, continuing improvement can be expected. There are a number of unknowns, however, affecting the rate and absolute level of improvement in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). These unknowns include, inter alia, the quality of leadership, the motivation of the armed forces, the psychological reaction of the South Vietnamese to US redeployments, and the ability of the South Vietnamese to find a stronger organizational structure. These unknowns, collectively, can be at least

[6] None of the options is checked.

[7] See footnote 2 above.

as important to the over-all situation in South Vietnam as the more tangible and measurable elements. With such unknowns, we must recognize the possibility that even with additional training, improved equipment, and increased combat support, the RVNAF will not be able soon to stand alone against the current North Vietnamese and Viet Cong force levels. Our timetable for withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam should take such conditions into account. We should strive for a sensitive balance between too much, too soon and too little, too late.

I believe this is best done by making an early announcement of the withdrawal of a modest number of troops (20,000–25,000) and then carefully weighing the situation, to include various reactions (NVN, SVN, US), before making the next move. If this announcement is made in early June, withdrawal of this initial increment could begin in July and be completed in August.

The reaction to such a move could be favorable to us in several ways:

—The North Vietnamese would be very hard pressed to counter it. Our military position would still be strong. Together with our allies, we would have high confidence of being able to put down an enemy offensive. Such a posture should produce a most desirable and widespread psychological impact.

—The South Vietnamese would have further opportunity to understand that we are indeed serious about Vietnamizing the war. At the same time, they would not be likely to feel that we were rejecting our commitment. A successful defense against an enemy offensive could help to condition them for succeeding incremental withdrawals.

—Those Americans who have been most vocal against the war probably would not be silenced by this action, but important elements of the US public would be encouraged.

If this assessment of initial reactions proves to be correct, you could then decide to withdraw a second increment later in the year. A decision in early August would permit redeployment to begin in September and, depending on size and composition, be completed in October or November. If conditions were favorable, a decision on a third increment could be made in October or November for additional withdrawals to begin before the end of the year and be completed in early 1970.

1969 Redeployments

There are several alternatives as to the over-all size and composition of the forces which might be withdrawn from South Vietnam this year. Five of the alternative packages that I consider feasible for implementation in 1969 are:

1969 REDEPLOYMENT ALTERNATIVES—SVN[a]
(Strength 000)

	Element	
Alternative A		
50,000 troops mainly combat	1 Marine Division, Aviation Units & Support	26.8
	1 Army Division and Support	19.6
2 divisions	Air Force Elements	1.3
	Navy Elements	2.3
		50.0
Alternative B		
50,000 troops	1 Marine Division, Aviation Units & Support	26.8
1 Div plus support slice	Support Elements, All Services	23.2
		50.0
Alternative B[1b]		
50,000 troops	Combat forces (2 Regiments/ Brigade from I Corps and 2 Brigades from III/IV Corps)	22.0
4 Rgmt/Brgd plus support	Support Elements, All Services	28.0
		50.0
Alternative C (Revised)		
85,000 troops	1 Marine Division	22.5
2 Divisions	1 US Army Division	18.7
plus support	Division Support Trains	25.0[c]
	1 Marine Air Group	1.5
	Hq & Logistics & Other Support Forces not Associated with Divisional Support	17.3
		85.0
Alternative D		
100,000 troops	1 Marine Division, Aviation Units & Support	27.7
2 Divisions	1 Army Division and Support	19.6[c]
and Support	Support Elements, All Services	52.7
		100.0

[a] Alternatives A, B and D correspond to those in the JCS plan. Alternative C (3⅓ Division) of the JCS plan is not recommended; a revised C has been substituted. Within each alternative the actual mix of units may vary somewhat in final implementation. [Footnote in the source text.]

[b] Alternative B[1] is in Appendix C of the JCS plan. [Footnote in the source text.]

[c] Support spaces have been removed from each Army support slice to provide support to RVNAF. [Footnote in the source text.]

The South Vietnamese are prepared for A, B, or B[1]. Alternative C (Revised) probably would be acceptable if adequately explained, although both it and D exceed their expectations in terms of quantitative reductions in US strength this year.

In the United States, Alternative D, closely followed C (Revised) probably would best mitigate pressures to curtail our involvement in the war. Alternatives A, B, or B[1] are probably about what the US public expect. It should be recognized that an enemy offensive which caused heavy American casualties during implementation of any alternative—particularly C or D—could result in seriously adverse public reaction.

Alternatives B, B[1], C (Revised) and D withdraw mixed packages of combat and support personnel. The JCS consider the support units should remain in Vietnam to support RVNAF and the subsequent withdrawal of additional US forces. However, in these more balanced packages, the support forces to be withdrawn will be carefully selected from among those which will have minimum impact on RVNAF effectiveness.

Longer Term Plans

The outline plan of enclosure 1 considers tentative timetables to Vietnamize the War during the period 1970–1972. They redeploy US forces over alternative periods of time and leave residual American troops in South Vietnam ranging from 260,000 to 306,000. Although it appears feasible mechanically to withdraw up to 290,000 US forces from South Vietnam by the end of 1972, even this 42 month timetable would probably result in an interruption in pacification progress. The interruption might range from only temporary reductions to a long-term degradation. To withdraw much faster (such as by the end of 1970), in the absence of some North Vietnamese withdrawals, could result in serious setbacks to the pacification program, a significant decline in allied military capability, and the possibility of a GVN collapse.

Recommendations

I believe we should stay as flexible as possible in our planning. I do not believe it is advisable to adopt a *firm* plan now to redeploy beyond the first increment of 20,000–25,000. Rather, I believe we should take the initial step [to] assess the situation fully, and then decide on the size and timing of the next step. In the meantime, and in concert with other agencies of the government, we will exert a major effort to expand, train, and modernize the RVNAF, and do whatever else may be required to transfer progressively to the South Vietnamese greatly increased responsibility for all aspects of the war. In summary:

—A first increment of about 20,000 to 25,000 troops should be withdrawn, starting in July 1969.

—The composition of the first increment should be determined by

the JCS in coordination with CINCPAC, MACV, the US Mission, and the GVN.

—The size, composition, and timing of a second increment in 1969 should be based on a careful evaluation of the reaction to the withdrawal of the first increment.

—Current planning should be based on not more than 50,000 troops being withdrawn in 1969, as recommended by the JCS, unless an early agreement is reached with North Vietnam on mutual withdrawals.

—Planning should stay as flexible as possible, so that rapid and appropriate additional responses can be made to further RVNAF improvement, the negotiations situation in Paris, and the military situation in Southeast Asia.

Melvin R. Laird

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88. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Washington, June 25, 1969, 7–8:20 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Ambassador Bui Diem, Republic of Vietnam
Henry A. Kissinger
William A.K. Lake

Ambassador Diem called on Mr. Kissinger at the former's request. The major subjects discussed included the substance of the forthcoming proposal by the GVN on a political settlement in South Vietnam,[2] the timing of that proposal, our strategy for the period after the proposal is made, and the desire of the South Vietnamese for close consultation

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[1] Source: Library of Congress, Kissinger Papers, Box CL 268, Memoranda of Conversation, 1969 January–July. Secret; Sensitive; Nodis. The meeting was held in Kissinger's office. According to an attached July 2 memorandum, Kissinger sent this memorandum to Nixon for information. Also attached was a 2-page outline summary of the Kissinger–Diem discussion.

[2] On July 11 Thieu proposed that the NLF could take part in elections in South Vietnam to be held under international supervision. Thieu outlined the following principles: all political parties and groups could participate as long as they renounced violence and pledged to agree by the results of the elections; an electoral commission made up of all groups participating would conduct the elections and ensure that they were fair; there would be international supervision; the GVN would be willing to discuss the timetable and modalities for the election with the NLF; no reprisals or discrimination would follow the elections; and the GVN would abide by the results and it challenged "the other side" to declare the same. (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives,* 1969–1970, p. 23657)

with us on those subjects. The effect of the Midway meeting and Diem's personal feelings about the future course of events in Vietnam were also mentioned.

GVN Proposal

Ambassador Diem noted the necessity for President Thieu's achieving the greatest degree of unity possible among Vietnamese nationalists in support of his proposal. Mr. Kissinger expressed his appreciation of this fact. Ambassador Diem then discussed a number of different ideas which President Thieu and the GVN are considering with regard to the substance of the proposal. Their premises in considering these ideas are that the proposal would have to challenge the other side to participate in the elections, that it would have to be demonstrably realistic and forthcoming, and yet that it must not prejudice the basic interests of the Vietnamese people.

The Ambassador said that after careful consideration, "the people at home" were inclined to judge that there are more cons than pros with regard to amending the constitution in order to remove the obstacles posed by Article 4.[3] They therefore are studying ways of proposing elections that would get around this problem.

For example, a referendum might be held on the constitution (including Article 4) as a whole. Such a referendum would, however, pose real dangers, as some nationalists might vote against the constitution on grounds not directly concerned with the struggle against the Communists. DeGaulle's experience with his recent referendum provided a warning.[4] Mr. Kissinger expressed personal doubt about the value of a referendum on the whole constitution, rather than on Article 4. Ambassador Diem agreed, stating that such a referendum would not be practical.

Of the many other alternatives being studied, Diem said, one of the boldest proposals is that general elections be held for the Presidency, the Vice Presidency, Senate and lower House. Any general elections proposal would have to include the Presidency, or it would appear that Thieu wanted others in the GVN to take more risks than he. Thieu would therefore be willing to run against the Communists. Mr. Kissinger agreed that this would be the most spectacular proposal, especially if Thieu resigned before the election. He suggested that this offer could be made conditional—Thieu would not resign unless the

[3] Article 4 of the GVN Constitution prohibited citizens from being Communists or promoting communism.

[4] In April 1969 the French people rejected President Charles de Gaulle's referendum on regional autonomy and he resigned.

other side agreed to the elections. Ambassador Diem noted that a drawback of the idea of proposing general elections is that it could lead to a period of confusion. They were considering ways to avoid this problem.

Ambassador Diem noted that this was simply one of the ideas under consideration, and stated it should be part of a package including the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces. Nor would it need include Thieu's resignation. Mr. Kissinger agreed that his resignation was not the key element.

Mr. Kissinger asked who would run these general elections. The Ambassador replied that the GVN could give all sorts of safeguards and agree to some sort of joint control over them.

In response to Mr. Kissinger's question, the Ambassador said he personally thought people in the countryside would vote for Thieu rather than NLF leader Tho. They would prefer the "grey" to the "black" choice.

Mr. Kissinger returned to the question of the withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces. Ambassador Dim said the presence of North Vietnamese troops in the south is the GVN's greatest concern. If the elections were held while they were still there, they could influence the voting and there would be a risk that they would never be withdrawn. Mr. Kissinger stated that we would still be there. Ambassador Diem said that if there were assurances of that, the possibility of elections while the North Vietnamese (and the U.S.) maintained forces in the country "could be debated." Mr. Kissinger confirmed that the Ambassador was saying that if we were to assure the GVN that we would not withdraw our forces until the North Vietnamese had withdrawn theirs, the GVN might be willing to hold general elections. Mr. Kissinger said that he would have to take this up with the President. We might be able to give such an assurance.

The Ambassador and Mr. Kissinger agreed that all the ideas they had discussed should be very closely held, and that it should be clear that they were only ideas.

Timing of the Proposal

Ambassador Diem said that Ambassador Bunker had suggested July 1 as a target date for announcement of the GVN proposal. Mr. Kissinger agreed with the Ambassador's remark that there is no reason why there must be one specific date. The Ambassador said that Secretary Rogers and Deputy Assistant Secretary Sullivan had suggested a target of July 10 because of the Paris meeting at that time and the Apollo flight soon thereafter. The latter would take public attention away from the proposal if they took place concurrently. Mr. Kissinger agreed that these were important factors. The proposal would

receive maximum publicity if it were announced before the 16th. If it were announced concurrently with the Apollo mission, it should be during the flight, rather than on the days of the take-off, moon landing, or splashdown. We would support the GVN's efforts to publicize it in every way possible. We would like then to make a catalog of concessions by the U.S. and the GVN, and use it in a publicity campaign calling on the other side to follow suit.

Mr. Kissinger stated that we would not wish, however, to give a deadline to the GVN. It would be better that they make a positive proposal that they had examined carefully and could believe in rather than something less meaningful. He asked what Ambassador Diem personally thought would be a realistic date. The Ambassador replied that, speaking personally, he wished there were more time to achieve a political regrouping—nationalist unity. This would take at least a month. How, the Ambassador asked, could they best line up political support for a proposal by July 10–16? The ideal would be to have gained the support of all nationalists. At the least, they should have prepared them for the proposal. They could then work on gaining their support after the proposal was made.

Mr. Kissinger asked if U.S. support for the proposal would help in this regard. Ambassador Diem said that he doubted it. Saigon politicians are not anti-American but they have lingering doubts about the U.S. which are difficult to define. They know that the U.S. will not withdraw completely. They recognize that 25,000 troops is a small withdrawal and they would accept even 75,000 to 100,000. However, there are rumors and a general feeling in Saigon that the U.S. has a fixed plan for maneuvering Thieu into a political settlement. Much could be done to dispel these rumors in the next three weeks.

Ambassador Diem had told Ambassador Bunker that the U.S. could help dispel these rumors if our people in Saigon could get in touch with the main political factions and discreetly spread the word that while the South Vietnamese should help themselves, they needn't worry about "black designs" by the U.S. Mr. Kissinger said that he would look into how we could offer such assistance discreetly, particularly if it were to lead to a next stage. We would have to consider how well such assistance might succeed.

Mr. Kissinger reiterated his statement that the announcement would have the best effect if it were made sooner rather than later, but that we understood their problems and were not putting pressure on them. It is a GVN decision.

Nor, Mr. Kissinger said, is it our intention to wreck the whole political system. President Nixon wants President Thieu to succeed. But we have to show U.S. public opinion that we are forthcoming.

Mr. Kissinger said that President Thieu had impressed President

Nixon when he said that every GVN concession should not lead to a further concession by the U.S. In the abstract, Mr. Kissinger said, there will be some point at which the GVN can with justice say that it has made all the concessions possible. Mr. Kissinger's personal view was that if the GVN proposed general elections and a mixed commission, it could not be asked to go farther. He would check this point with the President. Ambassador Diem then noted that the idea of general elections is only a tentative plan.

Strategy for Period After the Proposal

Ambassador Diem said that President Thieu is concerned about what we should do after he had made his proposal, which could represent the maximum possible concession. The proposal would have a good effect on public opinion, and the other side would be on the defensive. They would probably refuse the proposal, however, at least for a few months. What would be the attitude of the U.S. in that case? The GVN did not have specific recommendations for the U.S., the Ambassador continued, or ask too much. The South Vietnamese would fight on for their own survival. They would assume more of a burden through the Vietnamization program. But they would still need American help, if at reduced levels and different in kind. These are the lines along which Thieu is working.

In reply, Mr. Kissinger recalled the President's statement of May 14 that he was determined not to allow an endless negotiation and not to lose the war. What exactly we would do needn't be discussed now. He noted that if the GVN were to make a forthcoming, unconditional proposal, it would show that we had made all the concessions possible. This would make it easier to reappraise the situation in three months.

Consultations

Ambassador Diem said that President Thieu had asked him to stress Thieu's desire for coordinating our strategy both with regard to his forthcoming proposal and for the following period. We need better communication between us. Mr. Kissinger agreed, and supported the idea of close consultation between Ambassador Diem and Deputy Assistant Secretary Sullivan. He would also always be available himself should Ambassador Diem wish to discuss sensitive problems or messages from President Thieu to President Nixon. If Ambassador Diem ever felt that things were getting out of hand, Mr. Kissinger would always do what he could to help. Ambassador Diem said that Mr. Kissinger was a special friend, and that he had been instructed by President Thieu to discuss all possibilities fully with Mr. Kissinger. President Thieu had been impressed with Mr. Kissinger at Midway as being a serious and systematic man.

Effect of Midway Meeting

Mr. Kissinger asked for Ambassador Diem's personal appraisal of the effect of the Midway meeting. The Ambassador said that he frankly thought it was very useful, particularly as it helped Thieu to knock down rumors in Saigon about U.S. intentions. Mr. Kissinger recalled the President's statement at Midway that the GVN should believe only what the U.S. Government tells them, not what the press says. Ambassador Diem stated that the suspicions of Thieu himself were allayed by the Midway meeting. The Ambassador only regretted that the meeting was too short.

Ambassador Diem's Views on the Future

Speaking personally, the Ambassador expressed the opinion that international and U.S. public opinion might not allow enough time for the GVN to succeed in doing all it would have to do. He noted that the GVN had failed to accomplish some of the things that one might have hoped it would, but that it faced real problems also. He had realized the other day, standing on a beach at Nha Trang, how much would be lost if they failed to win the struggle. Without concurring in the Ambassador's implied pessimism, Mr. Kissinger emphasized his understanding for the problems the GVN faces, and his great sympathy for Ambassador Diem's emotions at Nha Trang. He regretted that the U.S. may sometimes unintentionally do things which might hurt the GVN. He had no patience with those Americans who proposed political actions by the GVN without regard for the complexities of the situation. We should not presume to tell the GVN what to do.

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89. Memorandum From Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, June 25, 1969.

SUBJECT

CIA Memorandum on GVN Manpower Shortages

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 138, Vietnam Country Files, Vietnam, Vol. VII, 6/17/69–6/30/69. Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Sent through Sneider. A note on the first page of the memorandum reads: "HAK saw."

CIA has prepared a detailed assessment of the RVNAF ability to obtain the manpower necessary to fill gaps and expand its armed forces in the near future (Tab A).[2] It concludes that, at present rates of loss both through casualties and desertions, Saigon will not be able to do the job with the available personnel. Its only alternative would be to raise the draft age to a level which would significantly impair the quality of the manpower. Among the factual highlights of the memorandum are:

—In 1968, losses from all causes amounted to about two-thirds of total accretions in manpower.

—Desertions, after dropping somewhat in late 1968, have remained above the 1968 average during 1969.

—Desertions from regular units are running at an annual rate of about one-third the strength of those units.

—Given the available manpower pool, it appears that Saigon will be 50,000 men short of filling its needs during 1969.

—As the combat role of the RVNAF increases, the manpower problems are likely to worsen rather than improve.

[2] Tab A, Intelligence Memorandum ER IM 69–86, June 1969, "South Vietnam: Growing Manpower Squeeze" is attached but not printed.

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

Washington, June 26, 1969.

SUBJECT

Appointment with Ambassador Lodge[2]

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 78, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, Memos to President/HAK on Lodge. Secret. Sent for information. A note on the memorandum reads: "The President has seen." Haig also prepared talking points for Kissinger for this meeting and sent it to him in a June 24 memorandum. (Ibid., Box 183, Paris Talks/Meetings, Paris Talks, Memos and Miscellaneous, Vol. XIV, 1969)

[2] According to the President's Daily Diary, Nixon met with Lodge from 3:20 to 4:07 p.m. on June 24. Kissinger also attended and Byrce Harlow, Assistant for Congressional Affairs, joined the meeting for the last 3 minutes. (Ibid., White House Central Files) No memoranda of conversation of this discussion has been found, although Lodge made notes of what were apparently peripheral issues: statements by combat officers which could be misinterpreted by journalists, Lodge's desire to change guidelines for MACV, and some light discussion between Lodge and Nixon about Lodge's next assignment "once this is over." (Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 25)

Ambassador Lodge will call on you at 3:15 p.m., Tuesday, June 24. He is currently on leave from his post in Paris. He will return this week.

Ambassador Lodge will wish to review the status of the Paris negotiations with you and will be seeking your guidance on strategy to be followed after his return.

Status of the Talks: At Midway you and Thieu agreed to new bilateral talks with the North Vietnamese. We would raise only military issues in these talks but would be willing to listen to proposals on political issues concerning South Vietnam. We would not, however, reply to political proposals concerning South Vietnam without consulting the GVN. You also promised Thieu that there would be no private meeting before July 1. You might review this for Lodge.

Following the Midway meeting, you agreed that we should seek another private session with the North Vietnamese early in July in order to probe their intentions. Instructions for that meeting are in the process of preparation.

Lodge's View: Ambassador Lodge believes we should begin an active round of private meetings now with the North Vietnamese. We would avoid taking any verbal stand on our willingness to discuss "all" the questions, but would not hesitate to respond to any North Vietnamese probes on political issues. We would, if the opportunity offered, seek to probe the DRV reaction to some of the ideas which we have discussed with Saigon for a political agreement, i.e., mixed electoral commissions, etc.

Talking Points:

I recommend that:

1. You authorize Lodge to seek another private session with the North Vietnamese to explore their position, but that you make no commitment at this point on further meetings and their agenda. It would be worthwhile to stress that we must consult the GVN before making substantive comments on internal South Vietnamese political questions.

2. You emphasize your desire that Lodge stress as his main theme the fact that we have made a number of concessions now, and it is time for the other side to respond.[3] We have:

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[3] In a June 27 letter to Nixon, Lodge stated he had to comment on "the suggestion made in our presence last Tuesday [June 24] about breaking off the peace talks." Lodge stated that on further reflection, "this would be a very bad idea and would put us hopelessly in the wrong as far as public opinion is concerned." Lodge suggested instead that he absent himself—perhaps return for consultations to Washington—and have Habib attend the plenary sessions in his place. Lodge admitted: "that this remark was made solely in your presence and mine, and that it did not represent at all a settled opinion, but merely an idea which was tossed up." Still, Lodge considered that he had to present his views opposing the idea. (Massachusetts Historical Society, Henry Cabot Lodge II Papers, Reel 9)

—stopped the bombing of North Vietnam;
—withdrawn 25,000 combat troops;
—expressed our willingness to submit the conflict to internationally supervised free elections; and
—expressed our willingness to mutually withdraw all forces from South Vietnam within a year.

The interview with Le Duc Tho indicates that we must play a harder line in Paris for the present.[4]

[4] On June 19 Le Duc Tho told journalists in Paris that no settlement in Vietnam was possible as long as the Thieu–Ky–Houng administration is in power because the Provisional Revolutionary Government would never accept them. (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives,* 1969–1970, p. 236657)

91. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Group on Vietnam (Sullivan) to the Chairman of the National Security Council Review Group (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, June 27, 1969.

SUBJECT

NSSM 37[2]

In accordance with NSSM 37 I submit herewith, on behalf of the NSC Ad Hoc Group on Viet-Nam, final draft papers on internal political settlement, phased mutual withdrawal, verification of mutual withdrawal and international guarantees.[3] In order to assist the NSC Review Group in focussing its attention on the principal issues raised by these papers, we have prepared a broad analysis of the major issues, together with individual summaries of each paper.

Major Issues

1. The central question of all those presented by these papers concerns the future internal political system of South Viet-Nam. The type

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–039, Review Group/Senior Review Group Meeting Folder, 7/10/69. Top Secret; Sensitive.

[2] Document 59.

[3] Not printed. (Department of State, S/S–I Files: Lot 80 D 212, NSSM 37)

of political settlement achieved in South Viet-Nam will, to a great degree, determine how mutual withdrawals will take place, how effective verification will be, and the factors to which international guarantees will be applicable or required.

In these papers, two types of political outcomes are discussed:

a. Maintenance of the present constitution essentially intact, retention of essentially the present GVN leadership, with NLF participation in elections as a political party.

b. An interim distribution of local political power which would offer the Viet Cong, without necessarily having to stand for elections, a degree of territorial and political control in those areas of the countryside where their present strength is primarily concentrated, in exchange for at least interim Viet Cong acceptance (agreed or de facto) of GVN national authority.

2. The principle recommendation emerging from the paper is that we continue to examine all the feasible options, but focus our consideration on a possible settlement which lies between Alternatives A and B, i.e., one which emphasizes division of political power at the local rather than the national level, but which requires such division to be made on the basis of elections (probably local elections). For negotiating purposes we should start from the position of Alternative A, but recognize that positions already taken more or less publicly by President Thieu lead in the direction indicated in the preceding sentence.

3. The alternative political outcomes have different implications for mutual withdrawals, supervision, and international guarantees.

4. The first case (paragraph 1 a) would be most advantageous to the US/GVN. It would offer a reasonable prospect for continuing political stability through a settlement based on self-determination and framed in terms that would give the Viet Cong a fair chance to compete for office under elections in whose administration they might have a part. Mutual withdrawals could proceed under optimum conditions. An international supervisory organization could be established and would be assured of maximum freedom of movement within South Viet-Nam. International guarantees would relate primarily to insuring that the political elements of the settlement were faithfully executed and that there were no repressive measures taken against NLF members who took part in the political process.

5. Because such an outcome would appear to be so favorable to the US/GVN, it is unlikely that the DRV/PRG would accept it. On the other hand, the case described in paragraph 1 b omits the element of elections, to which we and the GVN are committed.

6. It is likely, therefore, that the United States will have to consider an option which involves an interim distribution of local political power on the basis of elections as described in paragraph 2. This so-

lution would legitimatize areas of Viet Cong control so as to involve the Viet Cong in the political process and still preserve the overall structure of the GVN. The major emphasis would be on local level political competition and accommodation; the question of ultimate political participation at the national level could be left unresolved for the time being.

7. Assuming this situation, it is almost certain that the Viet Cong would not accept, initially at least, GVN officials or services in their areas. The GVN intent as to extension of control of territory during this period would be to extend GVN political control by administrative procedures, economic integration, local arrangements within the GVN political context, and eventual consolidation. This, of course, would be a long-term process.

8. Such a solution would complicate the other issues of a settlement. There would have to be regroupment of forces to conform with the results of local elections. It is unlikely that we would be able to verify by unilateral methods North Vietnamese withdrawals from these Viet Cong areas, particularly if they were along withdrawal routes or contiguous to the borders of South Viet-Nam. Similarly any international verification machinery would probably be denied access to these areas and could therefore not detect or confirm violations of any withdrawal agreement in those areas. In the absence of this verification of North Vietnamese withdrawals, the completion of our own withdrawals would be called into question. Any international system established to guarantee the political settlement could also be expected to be less effective in NLF controlled areas than in the territory directly controlled by the GVN.

Summaries

1. Political Settlement

This paper outlines the basic factors involved in an internal political settlement, including U.S. troop withdrawals, elections, the constitutional process, assurances and guarantees of personal security, political participation, international supervision, territorial accommodation, integration of forces, and national political leadership. It discusses the substantive and tactical positions of the United States the GVN, and the DRV/NLF. (This paper was prepared before the announcement of the Provisional Revolutionary Government and hence uses the term NLF throughout. The specific issues posed by the emergence of the PRG will be addressed in a separate paper.)

The paper analyses three broad alternative means of settlement. Alternative A would maintain the present constitution essentially intact, retain essentially the present GVN leadership, provide for elections within general constitutional limits, and permit the NLF to participate

as a political party, with NLF representation on a joint electoral commission as a possibility. There would be no explicit territorial accommodation, although some de facto division of local political power might result from local elections held under the GVN electoral system. The advantages of this alternative include offering a reasonable prospect for continuing political stability in South Viet-Nam and proposing a settlement based on self-determination and in terms that would allow Viet Cong participation in the electoral process with a fair chance to compete for office. Its major disadvantage is that it would probably be unacceptable to the other side since it falls far short of Communist demands of replacement of the present top GVN leadership and formation of a peace cabinet or coalition government, within the NLF Ten Point framework.

Alternative B would involve an interim distribution of local political power. In exchange for the NLF's acceptance, agreed or de facto, of GVN national authority, the NLF would be offered a degree of territorial and political control in the countryside without necessarily having to stand for elections. The major emphasis would be on local level political competition and accommodation; the question of ultimate political participation at the national level could be left unresolved for the time being. The advantages of this alternative are that the GVN would retain its national authority and constitutional legitimacy, and that it might serve as a flexible basis for negotiations, since the Viet Cong would be offered a large measure of local control of at least part of the country. Its disadvantages are that it risks de facto partition of the country and thus could undermine the GVN's national authority from the start.

Alternative C, a peace cabinet, would involve changing the present GVN leadership and substituting non-Communist figures who would be more acceptable to the other side. This peace cabinet would negotiate directly with the NLF and, depending on the outcome of these negotiations, the new government might hold new elections and set up a new constitutional system of its own. This alternative has the advantage of flexibility, including the chance of gaining the support of certain South Vietnamese groups who are not now aligned with the GVN, and it might attract some international support as a more "representative" government interested in negotiations. Its disadvantage is that it would run an extremely high risk of creating serious political instability in South Viet-Nam and would be opposed by major organized non-Communist groups as well as by the armed forces. By conceding to the Communists their major immediate political demand, it would result in weakening the GVN, risking overt anti-Americanism, and reversing our long-standing support of the constitutional process in South Viet-Nam.

The principal recommendation emerging from the paper is that we continue to examine all the feasible options, but focus our consideration on a possible settlement which lies between Alternatives A and B, i.e., one which emphasizes division of political power at the local rather than the national level, but which requires such division to be made on the basis of elections (probably local elections). For negotiating purposes we should start from the position of Alternative A, but recognize that positions already taken more or less publicly by President Thieu lead in the direction indicated in the preceding sentence.

2. *Phased Mutual Withdrawal*

This paper examines North Vietnamese and GVN attitudes toward withdrawal, the eight major considerations affecting withdrawal decisions, and then evaluates four specific alternative scenarios for phased mutual withdrawal. The paper is essentially a technical paper flowing from the policy decisions set forth in the basic NSC decision.

Of the alternative scenarios examined, Scenario A, assuming the most favorable conditions, envisages a 19-month withdrawal period following negotiations of a publicly announced agreement for phased mutual withdrawal and agreement on either general or local cease-fires, disengagement and regroupment of forces, and safe conduct of forces in the process of withdrawal. It also provides for an international mechanism to verify and supervise the disengagement, supervision, assembly and withdrawal of forces. This scenario, however, recognizes that in one respect the assumed conditions are less than optimum: the improvement and modernization program for the RVNAF. If withdrawal were begun much before December 1970, we would be faced with the choice of either leaving an inadequately balanced force in South Viet-Nam or completing our withdrawals within the 19-month period knowing that the RVNAF might not yet be capable of handling the residual threat.

Under Scenario B, assuming minimum acceptable conditions, we would specify that all U.S. and allied forces would be withdrawn within one year providing that North Vietnamese forces were withdrawn within 9 months. This scenario has the advantage of a rapid withdrawal of forces on both sides, but because of the speed of our withdrawal it would give little assurance that the other side was complying, and it would seriously risk the stability of the government.

Scenario C, providing for tacit or reciprocal de facto withdrawal, has major advantages in that we would have freedom to schedule our own withdrawals and we could apply military pressure on the enemy should his performance be deficient, without provoking major public criticism. Moreover, theoretically at least, South Viet-Nam might not have to trade political concessions for North Vietnamese withdrawals. Its disadvantages are that Hanoi would not be committed to any

specific timetable, nor would there be provision for adequate verification or supervision of withdrawal. Moreover, the implementation of such an arrangement, because of its secret or de facto nature, might create differences between the United States and the GVN.

Alternative D, agreed mutual withdrawal of major portions of non-South Vietnamese forces over a 12-month period, expands upon that element of the President's proposals of May 14. At the end of the 12-month withdrawal period there would be a force equivalent to two divisions numbering approximately 100,000 and a MAAG support element of about 60,000 remaining in South Viet-Nam. The decision to withdraw these forces would depend upon such factors as an analysis of enemy withdrawal into North Viet-Nam, the level of hostilities in South Viet-Nam, and the status of the RVNAF improvement and modernization program. As an integral part of the President's May 14 proposal, an international supervisory body would also include participation in arranging supervised cease-fires and in supervising elections—functions which lie outside the scope of this paper and hence have not been addressed here.

3. Verification of Mutual Withdrawal

Given the limitations on our unilateral capability to verify North Vietnamese withdrawals—in the best case a 25% margin of error; in the worst circumstances, at least 50%—we should seek agreement on effective verification machinery. The major value of such machinery in both the withdrawal and post-withdrawal periods will be its ability to investigate, confirm, and give public credibility to complaints by host governments of North Vietnamese violations of agreements. (The host governments themselves must be primarily responsible for *detecting* violations.) The numbers required to man such an international organization would vary from 400–600 personnel in South Viet-Nam and a similar number in Laos, for a minimum sized organization, to as many as 5,000–10,000 men for a largely self-sufficient organization capable of extensive patrolling of all key border areas of South Viet-Nam. The three major options for international verification in South Viet-Nam, Laos, and Cambodia are:

(a) a UN-sponsored body, which would have some advantages but little prospect of being accepted by Hanoi, Peking, or Moscow and, if it required the admission of both Viet-Nams to the UN, would be strongly opposed by the ROK, the GRC, and the FRG;

(b) a new body established by an international conference, with a "line" organization under a single commander on the UN pattern and with stronger Asian representation, e.g., India, Japan, and Indonesia; and

(c) an improved ICC with a council of interested states to replace the co-chairman, additional members (e.g., Japan, Indonesia), majority

vote, rotating chairmanship, increased personnel, and a new operational charter spelling out such matters as freedom of movement and access to territory.

The difficulties of verification in Viet-Nam and the obstacles to getting agreement on an international verification organization acceptable to both sides suggests that we should not rely too heavily on such an organization to insure a stable settlement. Consequently, we should employ more of our negotiating chips toward attaining a settlement which provides for strong governments in Viet-Nam, Laos, and Cambodia which are not inhibited in the exercise of the right of self-defense or in the right to call on outside assistance, rather than expending these negotiating assets on getting a fully satisfactory verification body.

4. International Guarantees

International guarantees, as defined in this paper, are those supporting undertakings by international organizations, or by one or more states, which would improve the chances that the basic obligations assumed by the parties would be carried out. South Vietnamese leaders consider international guarantees to be an important element of an overall settlement, but in their consultations with us they have not been precise as to what specific arrangements they envisage. The GVN has stressed international recognition of South Viet-Nam's unlimited right to call for outside assistance and if necessary for the placement of international military forces in Viet-Nam to prevent the resumption of hostilities. However, it seems likely that in the eyes of the GVN leaders the most important kind of international guarantee would be a full military commitment by the United States to assist South Viet-Nam with armed forces should the other side resume hostilities. However, since we would not be willing to undertake any commitment which would obligate the United States in advance to use our military forces, we should point out to the GVN that the concept of international guarantees includes a wide range of undertakings not involving direct military commitments, such as:

—Endorsement of the basic settlement agreements by a conference of interested states along the lines of the 1954 Geneva Conference.

—Endorsement of these arrangements by the United Nations.

—International commitments to consult on appropriate measures to be taken in the event of violations.

—Creation of an international body with the powers to impose sanctions.

—UN membership for both zones of Viet-Nam.

—Other UN involvement in implementation of a settlement.

These possibilities call for serious study as negotiations proceed, particularly the concept of UN membership for both zones of Viet-Nam. Nevertheless, we should recognize that the protection and additional

stability such alternatives might contribute to a settlement would be subject to the difficulties inherent in all international decision making.

William H. Sullivan

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92. Memorandum From Dean Moor of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, July 1, 1969.

SUBJECT

Growing Economic Problems in South Vietnam

During the last few weeks we have been getting an increasing number of reports from a wide variety of sources indicating that the problems of inflation, budget deficit, mismanagement and other economic woes have sharply increased in intensity over the last few months. Already, these problems are beginning to sap some of the Government's vitality in attempting to build a competitive position against Communists in a future post-war environment.

The cable at Tab A[2] is a rather good summary of the current scene. It sets out the views of an International Monetary Fund expert who made a study of the situation. His views are based on several previous IMF studies. Following are some of the highlights:

—The overall price stability maintained this year has cost the GVN some $80,000,000 in reserves. Loss of similar magnitude can be expected during the rest of 1969.

—Even so, maintenance of price stability is questionable in view of the recent GVN wage increase, probability of extra heavy military expenditures and other factors.

—The only solution is a massive new tax program. Both IMF and GVN officials, however, believe it impossible for the GVN to implement a significant tax program.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1320, Unfiled Material, 7 of 19. Secret. Sent for information.

[2] Tab A, telegram 13078 from Saigon, June 28, is attached but not printed.

—The situation is of such concern to the GVN that a shakeup in the economic leadership of the regime is contemplated, but few believe that this will do much good.

—The U.S. economic advisors in Saigon generally agree with the IMF view.

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

Washington, July 7, 1969.

SUBJECT

Sequoia NSC Meeting on Vietnam

As you know, you will be meeting on the *Sequoia* this evening to discuss Vietnam with Rogers, Laird, General Wheeler, General Cushman, Mitchell and me.[2] The following people have been advised that

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 74, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, Memos to the President for NSC, 1969. Secret. The date is handwritten on the memorandum. On June 24 Rogers suggested to Nixon creating a policy group on Vietnam chaired by the President and composed of Rogers, Laird, Wheeler, and Kissinger. In a July 2 memorandum Nixon informed Rogers that "I welcome the opportunity for periodic meetings of this group" but demands on his time precluded fixed meetings. Instead Nixon suggested convening the group as the need arose "in lieu of the full NSC and as part of the NSC process." Nixon also wanted Attorney General Mitchell as part of the group and instructed Kissinger to arrange a meeting for the next week. In his memorandum to the group Kissinger described the meeting on the *Sequoia* as a "NSC Executive Committee." (Memorandum from Nixon to Rogers, July 2, and memorandum from Kissinger to Rogers, et al., July 3; both ibid., Box 1008, Haig's Special Files, Haig's Vietnam File, Vol. 2 (Apr.–Oct. 1969) [2 of 2])

[2] The meeting on the *Sequoia* apparently lasted the entire cruise, from 7:31 to 11:29 p.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files, President's Daily Diary) No memorandum of this discussion has been found. In a telephone conversation on July 8 at 10:40 a.m., Laird told Kissinger that the meeting was "very good; it helped him tremendously." Kissinger then told Laird, "for his *own* use, the President has not excluded the possibility that he could take an option to the right in order to end the war quickly." (Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, Telephone Conversations, Chronological File) Kissinger recalled in *White House Years* that the "principal topic of discussion was the apparent lull in the fighting. Did it result from Hanoi's exhaustion, from a new negotiating strategy, or from an attempt by Hanoi to achieve de-escalation by tacit understandings?" Kissinger also recalled that there was "unanimity that we should respond by a reciprocal slow down" and agreement on changing MACV's mission statement from defeating the enemy and forcing his withdrawal from South Vietnam to assisting South Vietnam to strengthen its forces, pacify its territory, and reduce the flow of supplies to the enemy. (p. 276)

you may wish to call on them for a brief introduction to the subjects as listed:

General Cushman—The Current Situation in Hanoi and the Enemy Strategy.
General Wheeler—The Military Situation in South Vietnam.
Secretary Laird—Vietnamization.
Secretary Rogers—Paris Negotiations.

The main issues that are likely to arise are as follows:

(1) *Enemy Intentions.* The lull in the fighting is continuing: there have been few enemy initiated actions in the past several days and some NVN units have moved out of the Northern provinces into NVN. Hanoi has not begun to introduce new people into the pipeline. There is general agreement that the lull stems primarily from the enemy's need to regroup and resupply and his desire to conserve manpower. It is not yet clear whether he also intended a political signal. The empty pipeline—whatever its motive—will mean that Hanoi soon will be forced to drastically cut back its level of operations, at least for several months, even if it starts refilling the pipeline now. CIA has concluded from the empty pipeline, the 10-Point Program and the creation of the PRG, that Hanoi has decided that the time was ripe for a period emphasizing "talk" instead of "fight" (Tab A).[3]

Hanoi faces a dilemma with regard to inflicting casualties. The enemy wants to inflict enough U.S. casualties to keep up domestic pressure to end the war but not so many that we will halt our withdrawals. Similarly if they inflict too many casualties on ARVN we might cease our withdrawals. And the enemy wishes to conserve its own manpower. These factors may be leading Hanoi to concentrate on inflicting civilian casualties.

There are several possible general explanations of Hanoi's recent actions:

a. Hanoi is hurting badly.

1. There is no question that Hanoi is hurting and wants to conserve manpower.

2. I doubt that Hanoi is hurting badly enough not to be able to continue and, if necessary, accentuate her military effort.

3. If we were to conclude that Hanoi was hurting badly we should keep up our military pressure and maintain our current position in Paris.

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[3] Tab A, attached but not printed, is a July 3 CIA intelligence memorandum entitled "Hanoi's Short Term Intentions." The President saw this memorandum.

b. Hanoi is moving to a new negotiating strategy.

1. Hanoi may have concluded that reduced military operations combined with a new political strategy—perhaps a call for a ceasefire—is most likely to produce US concessions.

2. If we reach the judgment that this is Hanoi's intention we should keep up military pressure but modify our instructions to Gen. Abrams to reduce public criticism.

3. We should be forthcoming in Paris regarding election procedures and other concessions of high public impact.

c. Hanoi is signalling de-facto de-escalation in response to our troop withdrawals.

1. It is too soon to reach a firm judgment of whether Hanoi is signalling a move in this direction but we cannot exclude it.

2. If we were confident that this was Hanoi's intention we would want to respond by curtailing our operations in some way and accelerating withdrawals to see if a process of mutual de-facto withdrawals and de-escalation can be set into effect.

Recommendation

I believe that we need to change in some way the instructions to General Abrams. Domestic criticism will mount if we can be accused of not responding to enemy de-escalation. Moreover we cannot exclude the possibility that Hanoi is signalling a willingness to de-escalate. I have spoken to General Wheeler about providing new instructions to General Abrams but have not yet received his recommendations.

Until you make a decision on this question I believe that we should keep open our options with the following public line:

(a) We are of course watching the situation to determine if a political signal is involved.
(b) Since General Abrams' instructions are to minimize U.S. casualties, if the enemy avoids combat, casualties and the level of fighting will decline.
(c) If the lull continues this will affect our decisions on the rate of U.S. troop withdrawals.

Lodge might also be instructed to ask the other side privately and quietly about whether it intends any political signal.

(2) *Vietnamization.* The immediate issue which we face is the number of additional troops to be taken out this year. Secretary Laird has previously recommended the withdrawal of up to 25,000 men; Secretary Rogers has recommended the withdrawal of an additional 60,000. At this evening's meeting General Wheeler will probably support a relatively restrained rate of withdrawal. Secretary Laird, while privately prepared to support a higher figure, will probably support this

cautious approach. Secretary Rogers will press for the full 60,000, with a decision to be announced now.

We should certainly move as fast as possible with Vietnamization, but we must weigh in the balance the favorable impact on the U.S. as against a possibly unfavorable one on Saigon and Hanoi. A too-rapid withdrawal might seriously shake the Thieu Government, particularly if coupled with pressure on Thieu for a political settlement. It might also create excessive optimism in the United States and make the withdrawal irreversible. An additional factor is the effect on Hanoi: the Communists probably cannot be fooled as to the rate of progress which the GVN is achieving in taking over the military burden. Hanoi's reading of the domestic U.S. political implications of an accelerated U.S. withdrawal is likely in addition to be quite accurate.

Recommendation

I believe that you should defer judgment on further withdrawals until early August. This is when you have promised another review, and, by then, the enemy intentions should be much clearer and we will have fully analyzed them. If you make a decision now, it will leak.

(3) *President Thieu's Statement.* We have just received Thieu's draft (Tab B).[4] It is forthcoming on elections but makes them conditional on mutual withdrawal. It offers full participation to the NLF in its name and participation in an election commission. It also proposes international supervision.

Secretary Rogers wishes to have much of the discussion focus on Thieu's statement and will undoubtedly talk to it in his remarks. As you know, he feels that Thieu should be very forthcoming and offer the other side a whole range of possible election alternatives, as well as an election commission and a ceasefire. He will probably urge that we go back and press Thieu to add greater detail.

I doubt that Thieu can be moved off his position without a firm U.S. guarantee that we will not withdraw our troops unless Hanoi does.

Thieu's patience with us is wearing thin. He had promised a draft outline of his statement by July 3 but delayed it after reading initial press accounts of Secretary Rogers' press conference last week.[5] He provided the draft only after being reassured from reading the full text of the Secretary's remarks that he was not being pressured. He also ap-

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[4] Attachment Tab B was the draft central portion of Thieu's speech given on July 11 and transmitted in telegram 13655 from Saigon, July 7. The final text is in telegram 13916 from Saigon, July 10. (Both National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 69, Vietnam Subject Files, Vietnam, Thieu's Speech Material)

[5] Reference is to Rogers' press conference on July 2. (Department of State *Bulletin,* July 21, 1969, pp. 41–49)

pears to be reacting against jogging cables from Washington. I think we must realize that if we move too hard and too fast with Thieu we run the very serious risk of alienating him and causing his government to collapse. At the minimum we will make him uncooperative.

Recommendation

I believe that we should ease up on our pressure and see what we can make out of his present statement with minor modifications.

(4) *Vietnamization and Political Settlement.* Until now we proceeded on the assumption that our Vietnamization program was supporting our efforts to get a political settlement. U.S. troop withdrawals and the strengthening of ARVN was designed to press Hanoi to negotiate now before Saigon capabilities increased. These moves were also designed to reduce domestic criticism and to pressure Saigon into taking a reasonable position.

The safest course would be to proceed slowly both with Vietnamization and effort to get a political settlement. However this course might well fall between two stools causing us to lag far behind the expectations of our public opinion. We may be accused of not being forthcoming enough in Paris and not withdrawing quickly enough. I believe that we cannot accelerate both efforts.

I believe that the point is approaching where we may be forced to choose between Vietnamization and political negotiations. If we are really depending on Vietnamization and do not expect a political settlement Thieu should not be pressured to make a conciliatory political offer and to broaden his government to include neutralist elements. Such actions strengthen the belief in South Vietnam that the Thieu government will have to go and make it less likely that anti-Communist opposition groups will rally to the GVN.

If we are to concentrate on Vietnamization we should use our leverage to force changes in the ARVN command structure which General Abrams believes are critical to successful Vietnamization. Conversely if we are negotiating for a settlement we should proceed slowly with Vietnamization and use our leverage on Thieu to broaden his government and to make a forthcoming political offer.

If we do have to choose I would recommend proceeding with an accelerated Vietnamization program. However, there are several risks to this course.

1. We would still be charged with not making progress in Paris.
2. The enemy may succeed in embarrassing us by stepping up attacks on our forces keeping our casualties high, or by inflicting serious defeats on ARVN units.
3. Accelerate Vietnamization even if not accompanied by pressure on a political settlement could lead to a collapse in ARVN forces drastically reducing GVN territorial control.

4. Withdrawal, at some point becomes irreversible even if Hanoi steps up upon its efforts.
5. Hanoi may now be ready for a negotiated political settlement which would be foreclosed by our failure to exhibit greater flexibility on political issues.

Accelerating political negotiations would appear attractive if we conclude that Hanoi is ready for serious negotiations. In that case we would have either to move towards accepting a coalition government or, perhaps, proposing a ceasefire designed to lead to a formalization of the shared control of the countryside which now exists. The risks of this course are:

1. Hanoi may not be ready for serious negotiations.
2. We would have to put great pressure on Thieu which could gravely weaken the GVN for Vietnamization if negotiations fail.
3. Time may run out forcing us into ever greater concessions or a sudden major withdrawal.
4. We would have to assume responsibility for a settlement which could easily turn sour in a few years.

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94. Memorandum From Morton Halperin and Dean Moor of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)[1]

Washington, July 8, 1969.

SUBJECT

Review Group Meeting July 10, SVN's Internal Security Capabilities—The Basic Issues

The study[2] prepared in response to NSSM 19[3] is the first done in the Government which takes a really hard look at the capability of the

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–039, SRG Meeting, 7/10/69. Secret.

[2] A summary of the response was attached; the full report is ibid., NSSM Files, NSSM 19.

[3] NSSM 19, February 11, directed the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, and Director of Central Intelligence, to prepare for the President a "report on current plans and programs for the improvement of South Vietnam's internal security capabilities." The President was particularly interested in plans for developing indigenous police forces, how to improve them, and how to improve U.S. support of them. (Ibid.)

South Vietnamese to hold their own against the Communists at the grass roots level now and after the fighting has "officially" stopped.

By fully exploiting well-known data, the Study convincingly demonstrates that the present state of security is far from satisfactory and is unlikely to improve sufficiently to permit the GVN to counter fully the Communist para-military threat, if Saigon remains dependent on its present security apparatus. The basic difficulty is that the apparatus is badly organized, poorly manned, supplied, and trained, and has little real empathy with the GVN.

None of the participants in the Study takes serious exception to the finding on the situation.

The Study implies that, if the fighting ends soon, the GVN will probably gradually lose many of its gains in rural security over the past two years, particularly as the Communists rebuild their guerrilla, cadre, and underground organizations, which while badly battered remain as forces in being.

It is the need for drastic improvement now in the GVN security apparatus which underlies the recommendation in the Study that a wholesale reorganization of all the Vietnamese security forces be immediately undertaken with the U.S. mission developing the specific proposals for implementing this reorganization. The changes would be very drastic and would involve wholesale alterations in unit mission, manpower priorities, funding, and management.

The JCS, acting on the advice of MACV and CINCPAC, is totally opposed to any major reorganization at this point. They contend that it would create massive disarray and that the cut in the effectiveness so laboriously obtained over the past few years would greatly outweigh any presumed benefits. The JCS proposes working within the present framework of plans for Vietnamization of the war in what would be an evolutionary, rather than a revolutionary, manner.

Our View

We agree that the recommended changes are too drastic to be successfully carried out at this point in the war. Following are some of the problems:

—the GVN is trying to strengthen its security apparatus by working within the present framework. It has recently proposed a substantial strengthening of the present GVN security elements to MACV (Tab A).[4]

[4] Tab A, attached but not printed, was a July 1 memorandum from Rear Admiral Tazewell Shepard, Jr. (Director, East Asia & Pacific Region, DOD/ISA) to Moor that summarized GVN requested increases in military and paramilitary forces as presented at the Midway Island conference. The GVN requested support for 65,000 regular forces, 10,297 regional forces, 103,915 popular forces, and 15,000 additional National Police.

It would strongly resist the drastic changes recommended in the Study.

—The impact of pushing for such changes would probably be counterproductive on our overall relations with the GVN, especially on our efforts to get Thieu to take a forthcoming political stand.

—U.S. officials in Saigon, particularly MACV, would almost certainly drag their feet in implementing the suggested changes, and little would probably be done.

The urgency of the problem is such, however, that some middle ground is probably needed between the recommendation for a directive from Washington to go ahead with the plan and the JCS desire to shelve it. We believe that the U.S. mission in Saigon should be instructed to develop for Washington approval plans and programs based on the study for giving higher priority to internal security taking into account the possible disruptive political and administrative effects of such changes. This should result in some constructive thinking, if not action, on the problem in Saigon. It would also fit in acceptably with present GVN requests for additional help in the internal security field.

NSC consideration does not appear to be necessary at this time. The Review Group might be asked to agree to forward the study to the President. If the President accepts the need for further action the Saigon mission could be directed to prepare an implementing report. Further NSC action would then await the receipt of proposals from the U.S. mission in Saigon.

Washington Monitoring of Internal Security Operations

The other central finding of the Study is that there has been inadequate cooperation and integration of effort in Washington in support of security programs in South Vietnam. The study concludes that Washington responsibility is fractured among several agencies including Defense, CIA and AID. It recommends that a new organization be created, or that an existing one be delegated to monitor security programs and improve management and the use of resources.

Although the JCS opposes the creation of any new bureaucratic structure at the Washington level, there is clearly a need for greater Washington coordination in this field. The best solution would probably be to have a small group in the NSC system with representatives from all participating agencies. This group would be chartered to review ongoing programs and developments, suggesting where overlap could be eliminated. It would be empowered to report directly to the NSC on problems which could not be ironed out through normal consultation and coordination. Such a group probably could not function effectively if chaired by one of the agencies with an active stake in the current programs. Thus the choices are to assign the task to the NSC Ad Hoc Vietnam Working Group giving some staff to Sullivan for this

purpose or creating a new group chaired by the NSC staff or BOB. We recommend the former.

Washington Monitoring of Other Non-Military Aspects of Vietnam

BOB feels and we agree that a study is needed of the implications of Vietnamization for the South Vietnamese economy, for U.S. AID and MAP programs and levels and for GVN revenue, exchange rate and tax policies. Our declining expenditures and likely inflation in SVN will probably create a need for far more AID than we are now programming. There is also a need for better continuing coordination in Washington on these issues. If Sullivan's group is given responsibility for internal security it should also deal with these economic matters and be asked to do an initial study. If Sullivan is not given this mandate an ad hoc group should be created to examine these issues.

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95. Memorandum From President Nixon to Secretary of State Rogers[1]

Washington, July 9, 1969.

In thinking over the meeting on the *Sequoia,* I thought I should sum up my thoughts on Lodge's concluding speech at the next private meeting.[2] I would like the private meeting to take place as soon as possible. I should like the speech to be given—barring a major Hanoi concession—in the same way as the opening statement. I agree with you that the paragraph indicating a possible walk-out should be deleted.[3]

Richard Nixon

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[1] Source: National Archives, RG 59, William P. Rogers Official and Personal Papers: Lot 73 D 443, no folder title. Secret. Rogers wrote the following note at the bottom of the page: "Bill Sullivan—In view of Thieu's statement due in a day or two—let's not ask for a private meeting until Friday [July 11] at least. P.S.—The President did not know the date of Thieu's speech when this memo was prepared. W.P.R."

[2] Nixon is referring to telegram 109763 to Paris and Saigon, July 2, in which Sullivan and Rogers agreed with Bunker's suggestion that at the next private meeting Lodge should "give Le Duc Tho the full treatment." The cable contained a text of a final statement by Lodge giving a frank and realistic view of the U.S. unwillingness "to ever consent to a dishonorable withdrawal." (Ibid., EA/ACA Files: Lot 70 D 47, Paris Meeting & Plus Outgoing to Paris and Saigon, July 1–31, 1969)

[3] The paragraph on a possible walk out reads: "It adds up to this: all you have done in response to our many actions in the interests of peace is to intensify the war and escalate your demands. In these circumstances, I really don't see that we can accomplish anything by sitting here and talking any more today." (Ibid.)

96. Minutes of Review Group Meeting[1]

Washington, July 10, 1969, 2:25–3:40 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam: Negotiations and Internal Security

PARTICIPATION

Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman

State
Richard F. Pedersen
William Sullivan

Defense
G. Warren Nutter

JCS
LTG F.T. Unger

CIA
R. Jack Smith

OEP
Chris Norred

NSC Staff
Morton Halperin
John Holdridge
Winston Lord

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

With regard to the papers on Vietnam Negotiations (NSSM 37),[2] it was decided that the Ad Hoc Vietnam Interagency Group would draft certain follow-on studies. On *political settlement*, there would be papers on the nature and operations of a mixed commission for elections and on territorial/political accommodation as a means to a settlement. The latter paper would include an examination of alternative routes toward territorial/political accommodation. On *withdrawals*, there would be a fuller study of de facto mutual force withdrawals. The paper on *verification* would be modified somewhat and would include discussion of the option of using the International Control Commission in its present form. The study on *international guarantees*, which had received extensive comments from Embassy Saigon, would be put aside for the time being.

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[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–111, SRG Minutes, Originals, 1969. Secret; Nodis. The meeting was held in the White House Situation Room.

[2] For a summary, see Document 91.

With regard to the study on *Internal Security* (NSSM 19),[3] it was decided that a new summary paper would be drafted to treat the problem in terms of optional courses of action. This study would be an interagency effort, headed by OSD (Mr. Nutter), and would be completed prior to the President's departure on his trip. In addition, CIA would submit, within about 10 days, an assessment of the current internal security situation in South Vietnam, and more precisely, the degree of confidence which we have in our present indicators.[4]

VIETNAM NEGOTIATIONS (NSSM 37)

Kissinger noted that there were two subjects to be discussed: a study on internal security in South Vietnam which the President requested some months ago, and four papers on Vietnam negotiations submitted by the Ad Hoc Vietnam Interagency Group. He suggested starting with the negotiating paper on political settlement. He believed that this paper and the one on withdrawals were excellent, although somewhat overtaken by events.

He noted that the *political settlement* paper laid out three broad alternatives—elections, territorial/political accommodation, and peace cabinet. Our present emphasis was on elections and our approach would be shaped by the forthcoming Thieu statement. The advantage or limitations of the elections route would become apparent within the next few months. He wondered whether NSC treatment of this subject at this time would be fruitful and asked Sullivan's opinion.

Sullivan responded that the President's May 14 speech committed us to elections rather than a coalition government. That is Administration policy unless some change occurs. He believed that both the imminent Thieu speech and the paper under discussion fit into this policy framework. He commented that if we get nibbles from the other side on our call for elections, we may see emerging de facto partition of the country.

Kissinger wondered whether there should be further treatment of the questions of an international body and election commission. Sullivan said that they had tried to treat the former subject but found it very difficult to do so at this time. Kissinger wondered whether we would be ready to respond if the other side accepted the suggestion of election supervision by a mixed commission and an international body. Sullivan acknowledged that we would not be ready, but pointed out that the other side has rejected international supervision. He believed we should concentrate on what a mixed electorial commission might

[3] For a summary and analysis, see Document 94.

[4] Not found.

look like or do. He and Kissinger agreed that it would be useful to address such issues as the powers and functions of an election commission. There followed a brief discussion of the treatment of a mixed commission in Thieu's forthcoming speech.

Kissinger raised a second issue in the political settlement paper that he believed deserved further examination, territorial accommodation or the local distribution of power. He noted that Sullivan had foreseen through the elections route the possibility of some provinces falling under the control of the other side. He suggested a paper might treat the following problems. It could give us some idea of what would happen in the case of local political accommodation, what we really mean by this term, and which authorities would be permitted to exercise which functions. Finally, the paper could look at alternative routes toward this type of settlement. Sullivan had mentioned elections as one possibility; if the other side responded to the President's speech, there could be supervised local ceasefires which might constitute another route. Sullivan noted that this is what the other side had in mind when it talked about "how elections ought to be organized." They are thinking of getting sanctification of the legitimacy of local elections carried out by their (PRG) committees. In response to Kissinger's query, Unger believed that the paper that he had suggested would provide helpful information.

Sullivan then briefly described the essence of Thieu's elections offer. In commenting on probably South Vietnamese reactions to Thieu's speech, Sullivan said that for many elements in SVN the important thing was to keep the army intact.

With regard to the political settlement paper, Unger said that hopefully something could be negotiated between Alternative A (elections) and Alternative B (Territorial Accommodation). Sullivan noted that the paper suggested some softening of Alternative A, with Alternative B being left as a prospect for negotiations. We assume the other side would stick with Alternative C (peace cabinet), but they might show some interest in exploring how far we might go within the framework of Thieu's proposals.

There followed some more discussion of the Thieu speech and its implications. Sullivan said that Thieu knew that the other side would not buy a winner-take-all proposition like national elections under the present constitution. By not limiting his proposal to Presidential or general elections, Thieu was in effect leaving open territorial accommodation options for possible response by the other side. However, this implication was *not* being stated either publicly or privately for the time being. Pedersen noted that Thieu was saying that all elements could participate in the election process.

Kissinger summarized the situation as being that the present emphasis on elections could lead us toward a territorial/political accom-

modation type settlement and that we should be ready for this possibility. As for Alternative C, this depended on how one interpreted phrases like "peace cabinet". He repeated that a new study on local territorial accommodation could examine what the current situation is and therefore what the distribution of power would look like, and alternative routes toward such a settlement. The latter subject would include electoral commissions, local elections, and perhaps ceasefire or other means. It would be useful to have a scenario for the next few months based on the President's speech, the Midway meeting, and Thieu's proposals. These elements would confirm our position for the next three months. Sullivan said this was true, barring a dramatic move by the other side which we could not rule out. For example, they might call for a ceasefire along with a coalition government. In response to Kissinger's question, Sullivan said that a separate and somewhat tortured paper on ceasefire was being developed. He believed it was better to treat this subject separately because of its many implications and complexities. One of the problems was that it was artificial to extract a ceasefire from the political context. Kissinger said it would be useful for him to get a better idea of what precisely is meant by a general ceasefire, e.g., what orders are given to which authorities. Unger and Sullivan noted that the Joint Staff would help with this question and would look at such elements as the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, permissible logistic and military movements during a ceasefire, and terrorist activities. Kissinger noted the importance of having a clearer picture of who had units where in the country, who would stand still in a ceasefire, what each side could and could not do, etc.

Unger noted that the position of the Chairman, JCS was that there should be no ceasefire without mutual withdrawals. There was a basic gut feeling that the advantages of a ceasefire would lie with the other side. Kissinger noted that the President's instincts were generally in line with General Wheeler's. However, if faced with a ceasefire proposal we must be prepared. Unger agreed that this subject should be studied, especially its relationship to election proposals. Sullivan felt that a ceasefire proposal would probably not surface in such a benign fashion. The other side was more likely to combine it with a coalition government and play the whipsaw game between Washington and Saigon. Unger said that a combination of ceasefire and coalition government would be difficult to resist on the home front. Sullivan agreed but noted the difficulties for Saigon. Halperin commented that we could be in an even worse position if the other side simply announced a unilateral ceasefire. He believed it would be harder to refuse such a move. Kissinger believed that such a move would strengthen the ceasefire proposal, but it would be the suggestion of a coalition government that would whipsaw the GVN and ourselves. Halperin noted that Saigon would not even accept a ceasefire by itself. Sullivan said that

the Thieu speech would mention the subject, and Holdridge commented that the key factor for Saigon was the circumstances surrounding a ceasefire. Kissinger summarized that the group agreed that a paper should spell out various approaches to territorial/political accommodation and that there would be a separate paper on ceasefire.

The group agreed with Kissinger that the issue of *negotiating* procedures, e.g., US-DRV bilaterals or four-party discussions, was largely overtaken by events and did not need further treatment. He mentioned that at some point we would need to discuss the possible conflict between the Vietnamization process and the Paris negotiations. Sullivan suggested that we see reactions to the Thieu speech and that further down the road this issue might be discussed.

Kissinger then took up the paper on *withdrawals.* He noted the problem of the other side's forces coming back into South Vietnam after having been withdrawn. He did not believe that we had ever spelled out precisely what we mean by de facto withdrawals, how we would recognize them and at what point we would reciprocate beyond what we were already doing. Unger commented that our information on the other side's withdrawals would be gleaned from our unilateral intelligence efforts. Kissinger asked whether by withdrawals we meant that they would proceed into North Vietnam. Unger noted that withdrawals into Laos and Cambodia would be into havens, but that we could not rule out consideration of this prospect. Kissinger noted again the need for criteria on this question. He said that mutual withdrawals were a process beyond the troop replacement program, which is largely independent of the other side's actions.

Sullivan suggested the example of withdrawals by attrition. He said that 70% of the enemy's forces were not North Vietnamese. If they continue to suffer casualties like they have had the first six months of this year, and yet no troop replacements were sent through the pipeline (this should show up in South Vietnam at about the end of the month), then we would have a developing situation where the North Vietnamese proportion of enemy forces was dropping. This would add up to withdrawals by attrition. He had talked to Joint Staff personnel working on Vietnamization and they were considering this aspect. They were assuming a residual force of a 40,000 filler base of North Vietnamese.

Kissinger asked what the latest information was about enemy infiltration. Smith said that the figure for the next few months of 11,200 represented forces that we believe had already been counted before. Holdridge noted that it usually takes four months for personnel to arrive in South Vietnam after entering the top of the pipeline. Thus, most of those who had started out should be arriving in Vietnam by now. Smith said that the intelligence community was still intensively study-

ing this question. For the moment, he cautioned against people reacting to a figure of 11,200 as a sign that infiltration was starting up again. There was not yet enough evidence to draw any conclusions on this issue. Sullivan said that if infiltration does continue to stay down, then the other side would be heading toward the base force that had been mentioned, perhaps in a matter of months. Kissinger noted the basic concept that Sullivan had raised that de facto withdrawals were not only a function of replacements, but also could come about through attrition. Sullivan noted the related factor of the level of combat which brings one back to the potential of a ceasefire. Kissinger suggested that we needed some definition of de facto withdrawals and believed that the one added by Sullivan was very helpful. We needed criteria to help us decide at what point we could take reciprocal action. Sullivan noted that one response could be troop replacements but in greater degree. Kissinger concurred, saying that such reciprocal action would be beyond what we ordinarily would do under the Vietnamization program.

Kissinger then raised the issue of the *verification of withdrawals.* He believed that the three possibilities in the paper (UN body, improved or expanded ICC, and a new organization) covered the basic possibilities. Smith agreed. Kissinger asked whether everyone concurred that we should not expend too many negotiating assets on a verification body but rather rely on what we could do unilaterally. He noted to Smith that the CIA had a big task in handling both SALT and Vietnam. Smith responded that the paper did say that, given limitations on our unilateral verification capabilities, we should seek agreement concerning a verification body. In response to Kissinger's query whether everyone agreed with the formulation of our approach in the paper, Nutter noted that it fell between insistence on a verification body and not raising the issue at all. The fundamental question was whether one should insist on such a body if our chances of getting one appear hopeless.

Kissinger assumed that everyone had seen the cable from Embassy Saigon on the *international guarantees* paper.[5] He wondered what the reaction was to this cable which proposed substantial restructuring of the paper. Sullivan felt that international guarantees were such an esoteric and marginal possibility that the subject matter did not merit the effort that would be required to restructure the paper and take account of the Embassy's suggestions. The cable did contain some useful points, but may have mixed the subjects of guarantees and verification. Guarantees could be nebulous and beyond the control of individual parties. Nevertheless, the US might wish to go back into the country if agreements were disrupted. Otherwise we could be left with nothing but

[5] Not found.

pious expressions of concern. Smith noted that even if we took this line, it did not mean that we would actually be able to go back in.

Kissinger returned to the question of the verification of withdrawals and asked about the relationship between our unilateral verification capability and the number of forces we had in Vietnam. Smith and Holdridge noted that this depends largely on where our forces were and what type we had. Kissinger wondered how much our unilateral capabilities were degraded by a decreasing US presence. Unger said that Saigon and MACV had looked at this question and that some 4,700 troops were directly involved in maintaining our present capabilities for unilateral verification. He confirmed that this included not only cryptographic personnel but those needed to fly reconnaissance planes etc. Smith noted that there was a 25% margin of error in our estimates which rose to 50% if we lose all SIGNINT.

Nutter suggested that the verification paper should assess the ICC in its present form. Sullivan noted that this was not one of the three alternatives; we did not consider the ICC in its present form to be what we should aim for. Nutter thought that it would be better than nothing; Pedersen commented that it would not be much better. Nutter believed that these views were not really stated in the paper. Sullivan read the paper's segment on the ICC's value and said that he believed that Nutter was saying that if all other alternatives fail, we might wish to fall back on the current ICC. Holdridge noted the possibility of increasing clandestine operations to monitor withdrawals. Sullivan added the factor of improvements in South Vietnamese capabilities; this was related to the subject of internal security (NSSM 19). He acknowledged that the alternative of the current ICC as a verification body was only in the paper implicitly, not explicitly as a last resort. Nutter thought that it would be a next to last resort and that in any event there was something to be gained by insisting on the principle of international verification. Pedersen suggested that this was more in the nature of guarantees which we would assume we could not negotiate. Nutter suggested that perhaps we could trade this objective for something else in the negotiations.

Kissinger summed up the results of the discussion. Sullivan's Ad Hoc Group would draft papers on the operations of a mixed electoral commission; the nature of territorial/political accommodation, including alternative routes to this outcome (for example the relationship to a ceasefire); de facto mutual withdrawals; and whatever modifications were needed in the verification paper, including the option of the ICC in its present form. It was agreed to put aside the paper on international guarantees and the Saigon Embassy comments.

Nutter suggested that it would be useful for the Ad Hoc Group to spell out more fully the paper's recommendation which fell between

Alternative A (Elections) and Alternative B (Territorial Accommodation). This mixed alternative should be treated as fully as the original alternatives themselves. Sullivan noted that a fuller treatment of this in-between option would come largely from the two political papers that Kissinger had suggested on mixed electoral commissions and territorial/political accommodation. It would also partly be a by-product of reactions to Thieu's elections proposal.

INTERNAL SECURITY (NSSM 19)

Kissinger then introduced the subject of the internal security study.

Smith did not believe the paper was ready for higher level consideration. He was surprised that it was before the Review Group for discussion. He was not speaking out of intimate knowledge or out of any parochial interest. He thought that it was out of key with the other papers under consideration and did not parallel their basic framework or concept. When asked by Kissinger about his principal objections, he said that it was partly a matter of not having had enough time to review the paper, and partly also his belief that it should be made consistent with other Vietnam studies. He suggested that he might submit a constructive critique in a day or two suggesting how the paper might be improved.

Unger noted that OSD and the JCS were on opposite sides of this question. He had gone into the paper in great detail. He had found it very complicated and not ready for NSC consideration. There was a significant split here between the views of the JCS and OSD. His people had made an effort to delineate the differences of view through a charting effort and even this had proven complicated. He was referring to the different missions to be performed by various forces, command and control arrangements, etc. He added that beyond the differences between OSD and the JCS, there were also different viewpoints among other agencies, like State, CIA and AID, who had agreed to the report in principle. Given these many differences, he did not believe that we should impose this study on Saigon at a time when Saigon would say that the recommendations would complicate our efforts in this field. Our South Vietnam mission would say that this study would derail our pacification programs, and would urge an evolutionary rather than revolutionary approach.

Kissinger commented that before the report goes to Saigon it must go to the President, who asked for it at one of the early NSC meetings. His interest had been triggered by the remark that most of the country was "relatively secure". This could also mean that most of the country was relatively insecure. He wished to know precisely what we meant by our estimates. This paper being discussed need not necessarily be the response to his questions, but something was needed. He

did not believe that this study lent itself to NSC treatment but perhaps there could be a paper based upon it. The President had indicated that he wants a study on this question before he leaves on his trip.

Kissinger then mentioned some of his own concerns on this subject. During his visits to Vietnam, and when he looked at charts on the situation in the villages, he saw the enormous premium placed upon the judgment of the reporting personnel. When he asked these people their criteria for judgment of village security, their answers ranged from the highly sophisticated to the appallingly crude. It was a difficult task, given the rapid turnover of personnel in Vietnam. He believed that we needed some feel for the range of confidence we have in our security estimates. He had received many letters from people who were worried about how we arrived at our estimates. We needed to know where and why there were disagreements. These questions were closely related to the problem of local accommodations. We could conclude that the present internal security programs were less than satisfactory, but that we would not wish to touch them because of all the other objectives we have in Vietnam. Smith concurred that our estimates were troublesome.

In response to Sullivan's question, Kissinger said that the President wants as a minimum information and judgments about the situation. However, beyond that he would want to consider greater internal security efforts. There had been some inconclusive discussion of this subject at Midway. On the other hand, Thieu might think that major recommendations by us would add to his problems. In any event, the President would like recommendations on how to improve the internal security situation.

Unger commented that some of the recommendations in the paper had already been accomplished in part, thanks to the study. He noted the various plans that had been drawn up and some of the recommendations that had been put into effect. In response to Kissinger's query, he said that the major problem with the study was its change in organizations, its switching of ministries and assignments of forces. There would be competition for talent and money among the RVNAF, Territorial Security Forces and Internal Security Forces. Kissinger said that any objections to various recommendations would certainly be placed before the President.

Nutter said that he too had had some problems with the paper. He had sent it back for redoing after seeing an earlier version. The study basically reflected OSD, State and CIA views. The emphasis was on the need for reorganization, both in Vietnam and in Washington. There was the essential factor that the internal security situation had not improved enough—he was never happy when the answer to such a problem was to reorganize the system. He noted that much of the

paper had been done some time ago. He acknowledged that it was very bulky and for that reason he had requested a summary. He thought that the study could be treated in either one of two ways. A summary could be sent to the NSC and simultaneously transmitted to MACV for their response. Meanwhile, the group which drafted the paper could be asked to spell out the kind of Washington organization that they felt was necessary. Alternatively, the study could be sent back to the group for re-examination in light of the critiques being made upon the paper. He noted that there is some urgency to this problem, and that considerations related to constabulary forces and troop replacements were coming more and more to the fore. Kissinger concurred that internal security was becoming an increasingly important subject. Pedersen noted that all reports indicated that efforts in this field were not progressing well. Sullivan added that the manpower squeeze was becoming acute. Decisions on allocation of manpower were already a problem for us, and between us and the South Vietnamese. Nutter suggested that the working group could add specific issues which had not been treated, e.g., the possible use of over-age people for the constabulary force.

Kissinger noted the problem of deciding what MACV is supposed to do with this study. He would like to see a paper showing where we are currently in internal security; recommendations on how to improve the situation in a general way (e.g., force strength); and specific examples, (e.g., manpower priority).

Sullivan noted that one of Smith's problems with the paper pertained to what situation would prevail in the event of an agreed or de facto cessation of major hostilities involving RVNAF. In this situation one would assume that internal security forces took on even more importance. Smith agreed and noted the many ramifications to this problem, e.g., what the RVNAF could do in such a situation.

Unger believed that all types of forces were involved in the question of internal security. It was difficult to differentiate between missions. Abrams had already undertaken many of the study's suggestions, e.g., giving more control of forces to provincial districts. Thus, if there was a settlement based on local accommodation, these local levels would have their own forces. Sullivan noted the additional concept of using regular forces for internal security.

Pedersen believed that this problem presented a classic situation for an options paper. Kissinger thought this was a very constructive idea. He did not believe that the paper needed to make agreed recommendations. This would meet many of Unger's points. Unger agreed and repeated that the paper as it stood was too complicated. JCS/MACV views would lend themselves to options in a shorter paper.

Kissinger then asked Nutter to take responsibility for directing an interagency effort on a new paper drawing upon all the relevant agencies. This paper should be in the form of options and could include an assessment of where we currently stood as regards internal security. Smith interjected that the latter subject could be done more rapidly. He said that his agency would do a paper on the confidence level in our assessments of the internal security situation and coordinate it with other agencies. In response to Kissinger's query he said that he believed he could circulate this paper within a week or so.

Kissinger said that the President shared Nutter's feeling that reorganization does not solve problems. Smith added that his agency thought that NSSM 19 would be like NSSMs 36 and 37.[6] He wondered if NSSM 19 was designed to be a planning vehicle. Kissinger said that this was not what had been intended originally. It was designed to relate the internal security picture to the war situation. Now however it would be useful to make it consistent with NSSMs 36 and 37 (Vietnamization and negotiations) for planning purposes, as well as to relate internal security to on-going hostilities.

[6] See Documents 87 and 91 for summary of responses to NSSM 36 and 37.

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

Washington, July 14, 1969.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with Sainteny, Tuesday, July 15, 1969 10:30 a.m.[2]

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 106, Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. A stamped note on the first page reads: "The President has seen." Attached as Tabs B and C were brief talking points for Kissinger and the President.

[2] The meeting was a secret one and is not included in the President's Daily Diary. From the diary it is possible to conclude that Kissinger and Nixon met with Sainteny from 10:32 to 11:10 a.m. (Ibid., White House Central Files) Kissinger recalls that he was forced to act as interpreter even though his French was "shaky." No record of this discussion has been found. Kissinger describes the meeting in *White House Years,* pp. 277–278, and Nixon in *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon,* pp. 393–394. Nixon recalls that they told Sainteny that unless some breakthrough occurred in the negotiations, he would be obliged to have recourse "to measures of greater consequence and force."

You will recall that during your last meeting with Mr. Sainteny you:

—asked Sainteny to go to Hanoi to deliver a letter to Ho Chi Minh which reiterated that a just peace is achievable;

—subsequently, Sainteny spoke to Hanoi's representatives in Paris and they advised him to transmit the communication in Paris which we declined to do.[3]

We then decided to bring Sainteny to Washington to get his assessment of the situation and to suggest that he help arrange a meeting between me and Le Duc Tho.

—I now think I should deliver the letter to Ho Chi Minh via Le Duc Tho (letter at Tab A).[4]

In addition, you should inform Sainteny:

—You are determined to:

(1) achieve an honorable settlement;

(2) not be pushed beyond a certain point (just in case Sainteny leaks your conversation to the other side).

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[3] Kissinger reported to the President in a June 24 memorandum that Sainteny was unable to convince Mai Van Bo to allow him to go to Hanoi to deliver a letter from Nixon to Ho Chi Minh. Sainteny described the letter as "of great importance" but did not say it came from Nixon, only that it was not "from the French Government." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 106, Country Files, Far East, Vietnam, "S" Mister, Vol. 1)

[4] Tab A was not attached; for text of Nixon's July 15 letter and Ho Chi Minh's reply of August 25, both released to the public on November 3, see *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pp. 910–911.

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

Washington, July 18, 1969.

SUBJECT

Operation Against Barracks and Storage Facilities in Dien Bien Phu in North Vietnam

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[1] Source: National Security Council, Nixon Intelligence Files, 303/40 Committee Files, Subject Files, Vietnam, 1965–1969. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent for action.

You will recall that you had previously approved in principle an operation conceived by CIA, which would result in an attack against barracks and storage facilities at Dien Bien Phu in North Vietnam utilizing a rocket attack by CIA-supported guerrilla troops from Laos. Subsequently, after the operation was planned in detail and ready for execution, I suggested that we submit it for the consideration of the 303 Committee in order to preclude subsequent charges of unilateral White House action. On July 8, the 303 Committee met to consider the proposal and despite the fact that CIA had proposed the plan, for unexplainable reasons, General Cushman supported State and Defense in recommending that the operation not be approved.[2] I have summarized below the highlights of the departmental positions as they developed at the meeting.

Alex Johnson expressed the State Department view that the costs and risks involved were not commensurate with anticipated gains. He could foresee no real military or political objectives to be accomplished through the effort even if successful. He conceded, however, that probably nothing would be lost, either.

General Cushman supported Alex Johnson's position. He felt that the necessary operational limitations on the size of the infiltration team precluded getting enough rockets into the target area to have any real impact unless a lucky hit was scored on an ammunition dump. General Cushman pointed out that CIA had been asked to examine the various possibilities within its capabilities for mounting a harassment operation having some psychological impact against North Vietnam and that this proposal was the best CIA could offer. He conceded that CIA's capabilities for mounting harassing operations of any magnitude against North Vietnam are very limited.

Dave Packard was not enthusiastic about the probable results to be achieved from this operation. He felt no real military damage was likely and doubted that the psychological impact would be great.

John Mitchell suggested proceeding with the preliminary operational preparations of rocket testing, targeting, team selection and training and deferring the decision on implementation. Final decision on whether or not to go forward with the operation could then be taken in the light of factors prevailing at that time.

John Mitchell's alternative would entail three to four weeks in time and minimal costs. I support Mr. Mitchell's proposal and recommend that I instruct the CIA to proceed with the operational preparations for this mission subject to final mission approval at a later date.[3]

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[2] The minutes of the July 8 303 Committee are ibid., 303 Committee Minutes. Kissinger's account of the discussion at the meeting closely follows these minutes. On July 3 the CIA prepared a 7-page proposal for the operation for the 303 Committee. (Ibid., Subject Files, Vietnam, 1965–1969)

[3] Nixon initialed the approve option.

99. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to President Nixon[1]

Washington, July 18, 1969.

SUBJECT

The Situation in Laos

In connection with your upcoming trip to the Far East,[2] I want to bring to your attention what I see to be a deteriorating situation in Laos. While in Southeast Asia, you may well want to examine what is occurring there in the context of its effects on American equities in Vietnam.

Since 1962, this Agency has played a major role in support of United States policy in Laos. Specifically, we have developed and maintained a covert irregular force of a total of 39,000 men which has borne a major share of the active fighting, particularly in Northeast Laos. In this latter area, under the leadership of General Vang Pao, guerrilla units formed of Meo tribesmen have been engaged for more than eight years in a seesaw battle with the North Vietnamese Army and Pathet Lao troops.

Up until this year the fighting in North Laos has had a cyclical nature with friendly forces advancing during the rainy season from July until November and enemy forces advancing during the following dry season. This year the pattern has been broken. We are several weeks into the rainy season and the North Vietnamese have continued to attack. They have captured and held, using elements of two North Vietnamese Divisions, including tanks, the former neutralist stronghold of Muong Soui on the edge of the Plaine des Jarres and they are now advancing west along Route 7 toward its junction with Route 13 which links the capital city of Vientiane with the royal capital of Luang Prabang. (See attached map.)[3] There are also indications that enemy units are moving south and west of the plain in a direction which would threaten the major Meo bases of Long Tieng and Sam Thong. The Lao Cabinet, somewhat leaderless with Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma

[1] Source: Central Intelligence Agency, DCI Executive Registry, Job 80–B01284A, Laos, 1 Jan.–31 Dec. 1969. Secret. Copies were sent to Rogers and Laird.

[2] On July 23 Nixon flew to the South Pacific to witness the splashdown of the Apollo XI moon flight. This began a world tour that included stops in Guam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, South Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Romania, and Great Britain.

[3] Attached but not reproduced.

vacationing in France, is in a panic over this situation and has been belaboring the United States Embassy in Vientiane with requests for action, particularly heavier air strikes against the enemy.

The Embassy is working with the 7/13th Air Force to provide a considerable increase in tactical air strikes directed against enemy lines of communication in hopes of inhibiting any major enemy move west of Muong Soui. Although air strikes in the past have exacted a heavy toll, the North Vietnamese forces appear so far in their current campaign willing to pay the price. They may also have chosen to keep moving because tactical air sorties are limited by the extremely bad weather prevailing in the area at this time of year.

On the ground, the neutralist forces which formerly occupied Muong Soui are dispersed and completely ineffective as a fighting force. The Force Armes Royale (FAR) is tied down in defense of other areas and incapable of stopping regular North Vietnamese divisional units. The Meo units under Vang Pao have been forced into a defensive position to protect their key bases. Moreover, these irregular forces are tired from eight years of constant warfare, and Vang Pao is unable to find the manpower resources to do more than keep up with his losses. Already he has been forced to use 13 and 14 year old children to replace his casualties. We think Vang Pao will fight hard to maintain his Headquarters in the Northeast highlands, but as the military pressure on it increases, it will be more and more difficult for him to control his tribal elders, some of whom are already talking about evacuation to safer areas in western Laos.

The Department of State is aware of the problem and is moving diplomatically to urge the Soviets to intercede with the North Vietnamese to slow their advance.[4] Preliminary Soviet reactions are not encouraging.

North Vietnamese intentions are unclear and their current advance may have only limited aims but there are many Lao, including Vang Pao, who believe the North Vietnamese plan to encircle and threaten the royal capital at Luang Prabang and move down Route 13 to Vang Vieng and the edge of the Vientiane plain. Should they do this, they would be able to negotiate from a position of strength. In these circumstances the Lao Government might not be able to hold together and Souvanna could be forced to make some accommodation with the Communists. The North Vietnamese goals may be (1) either a partition of Laos giving them full authority over the areas they control at the

[4] As outlined in telegram 118077 to Vientiane, July 16. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1969–73, POL 27 LAOS)

point of a future cease fire or (2) the reconstitution of the Tripartite Government but consisting this time of a coalition they control: Souvanna Phouma on the right, Communist controlled neutralists in the middle, and the Neo Lao Hak Sat front group on the left.

The North Vietnamese now have the option, if they choose to exercise it, of provoking a most serious political crisis in Laos. In this situation the limits have largely been reached on what this Agency can do in a paramilitary sense to stop the North Vietnamese advance in Laos which is now threatening.

Richard Helms[5]

[5] Printed from a copy that indicates Helms signed the original.

100. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler) to Secretary of Defense Laird[1]

CM–4441–69 Washington, July 21, 1969.

SUBJECT

Report of Trip to South Vietnam

[1] Source: Washington National Records Center, DOD/ISA Subject Files: FRC 330 72 A 6308, Box 8, Vietnam #2, 1969, 000.1. Top Secret; Sensitive. Kissinger sent a copy of this memorandum to Nixon under cover of a July 22 memorandum in anticipation of a meeting the President was to have at 6:30 p.m., July 22, with Laird and Wheeler. Kissinger wrote: "Although there is much substantive discussion which could be held as a result of Gen. Wheeler's report, this meeting should be primarily cosmetic, with the view to setting the stage for more detailed subsequent discussion. General Wheeler's trip report is optimistic in terms of progress being made in all areas of Vietnamization, and especially in terms of the military situation in Vietnam which he assesses is the best he has ever found it." Also attached to Kissinger's covering memorandum was a draft of a mission change statement that was undergoing coordination with the JCS. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1320, Unfiled Material, 1969)

REFERENCES

a. Memorandum of Secretary of Defense to ASD (ISA), dated 14 July 1969, subject: Guidance for Southeast Asia Visit[2]
b. Memorandum of Conversation with President Thieu[3]

1. In accordance with our conversation of 14 July 1969,[4] I visited the Republic of Vietnam during the period 16–20 July. The purpose of my trip was, as you announced in Washington, to

—Make a thorough assessment of the current military situation.

—Study all aspects of the continuing Vietnamization Program, including US troop deployments.

—Consult with other military leaders on US military strategy.

2. During my stay, I consulted with Admiral McCain, General Abrams and his deputy, General Rosson, and their component commanders; and with principal US field commanders in Vietnam. Also, I met with civilian officials of the Government of Vietnam and the principal military leaders of the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

The Current Military Situation

3. My impression is that the military situation in Vietnam is better than I have observed on any of my earlier visits there. The military situation appears well in hand. I consider that we are well prepared for any initiatives the enemy may attempt.

—The enemy has severe food shortages in I CTZ. The combined efforts of our interdiction program, the improvements of pacification which increasingly deny him local support, and the pressures exerted by friendly operations appear to have limited his ability to undertake major sustained operations with forces now in Northern South Vietnam.

—ARVN battalions are spending almost 20% more of their time in combat operations than a year ago. The growing effectiveness of the RF/PF has permitted a further ARVN concentration against enemy main forces.

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[2] Attached but not printed.

[3] Wheeler met Thieu at the Independence Palace in Saigon on July 19 from noon to 1:20 p.m. Also at the meeting were McCain, Abrams, and Berger. The participants discussed the current lull in the fighting, modernization of South Vietnam's armed forces, the U.S. withdrawal schedule, and understandings and decisions growing out of the Midway meeting between Thieu and Nixon. The tone of the conversation was optimistic. (Memorandum of conversation, July 19; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL 27 VIET S)

[4] No record of this conversation has been found.

—The declining enemy activity has enabled an increase of US and ARVN effort in direct support of pacification, further to compound the enemy's support problem and to strengthen the security of the population and friendly forces as well.

—The Regional Forces continue to produce about the same number of casualties and maintain a constant kill ratio of more than 4:1 in spite of a general decline in enemy activity. Their ratio of weapons captured to weapons lost is more than three times the ratio of 18 months ago.

—The Popular Forces improvement in performance is reflected in a gradually increasing kill ratio and a growing weapon exchange ratio, both now more than 3:1.

—There is an increase of almost 50% in the major roads open to traffic in South Vietnam; now two-thirds of the waterways (more than a four-fold increase in 15 months) are open to traffic. In January 1967 only ⅓ of the railroad mileage was open; that figure is now ½. This year the mileage has increased from 44% to 49%.

—The trend in pacification continues slowly upward.

4. Although the situation is generally improved and unspectacular progress continues, a number of countervailing factors persist:

—The enemy retains a capability in the vicinity of the DMZ to mount a multi-battalion attack, with ample logistic back-up, if he so chooses.

—The enemy continues to expand and improve his network of LOCs in Laos, to include a POL pipeline from Vinh through Mugia Pass. His offensive toward Muong Soui and Luang Prabang in Laos is considered by General Vang Pao and some senior US military people to be aimed at forcing the Royal Laotian Government to require suspension of US bombing of the NVN LOCs in the Laos Panhandle.

—The enemy retains the capability to sortie from his Cambodian sanctuaries against friendly forces in II and III CTZ and, in the latter, to mount multi-battalion attacks against Tay Ninh and some lesser effort against Saigon. There continues to be four VC/NVA divisions within and contiguous to III CTZ.

—Although in the Delta no multi-battalion attacks have taken place since last year, enemy main force units as well as NVA units have been introduced in recent months for the first time.

—The net rate of ARVN desertions, although declining, continues as a cause of concern.

—The RVNAF leadership, although improving, still appears as a limiting factor on the improvement of the RVN forces.

—Despite the improvement in overall security of the population, terrorism continues to rise. Some small comfort may be derived from the fact that the enemy's fewer successes in larger scale hostilities encourages diversion of his effort to terrorist activity.

—The large number of refugees continues as a serious problem, having the potential also to threaten the progress of pacification and political stability.

5. On balance, I concur in the judgment of Admiral McCain, General Abrams, General Rosson and other senior commanders that there is continuing improvement in the military situation in Vietnam. Conversations with Vietnamese military leaders and with President Thieu support this judgment.

Vietnamization, Including US Troop Deployments

6. Progress in the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization program is heartening. The turnover of equipment to RVNAF forces is on overall schedule and, in many cases, ahead of schedule. Because of good RF/PF performance, acceleration in the ARVN equipping program has been possible in a number of cases due to completion of training programs earlier than planned.

7. The Vietnamese Navy has received a large part of the vessels scheduled for turn-over and, after a considerable period of "over the shoulder" training, has assumed responsibility for operations in the Delta area. Our naval commanders report that their staff work is good, their morale high and their operations show professional results. They have accepted their responsibilities with spirit and determination.

8. The Vietnamese Air Force has shown marked improvement in recent months. As you know, both the ARVN and US Army forces have long respected the professionalism of the VNAF close-air support operations. It is now interesting to note their performance across the spectrum:

—With fixed wing tactical fighter aircraft, the VNAF, possessing 21% of the inventory of VNAF plus USAF tac fighters, in May 1969 supplied 26% of the strike sorties flown by these forces.

—The VNAF airlift squadrons are lifting over 25% of current RVNAF tactical airlift requirements.

—The more than 65 VNAF UH–1 helicopters are maintaining an in-commission rate equal to US forces overall and higher than some US elements.

—The infusion of the 0–1 observation aircraft with VNAF has expanded their reconnaissance and forward air controller activities as a part of the VNAF–ARVN air-ground team we are seeking to build.

—Most important, the VNAF confidence and diligence have markedly risen in the past few months and the VNAF appears to be reaching out to attain self-sufficiency. This is attributed by General Brown's people to these factors:

—The infusion of new equipment which, due to its long lead time, has only lately begun to arrive.

—A higher priority in RVNAF for personnel, achieved by the establishment with the Joint General Staff of a formal manning structure and justified requirements for the right type of personnel.

—The momentum and confidence derived from increasingly successful operations.

—The realization that US forces are going to be withdrawn and the VNAF must stand on its own feet.

9. There are a number of problems in VNAF remaining, particularly a weak command and control system and a lack of coordinated staff work. Too, some difficulties in management are ascribed to Vice President Ky, whose continued influence within the VNAF inhibits changes which would be desirable.

10. Our people consider that there is much intelligence and ability in the RVNAF to get things done. However, there are difficulties in fitting together the styles of doing things between Americans and Orientals. It appears, however, that the realization that significant US force re-deployments are in prospect is having a beneficial effect on RVNAF diligence and initiative. General Abrams and his people are continuing to emphasize with all levels of the RVNAF the importance of improving RVNAF leadership and reducing the impact of the desertion problem.

11. The performance of ARVN units continues to show improvement. Should the present low level of activity continue, and barring a concerted enemy effort to overwhelm a major ARVN unit, the ARVN divisions can give a good account of themselves and can hold their own against the enemy after the first increment of US troops are re-deployed. However, as you are aware, there has not yet been adequate time for the enemy to react to the US troop re-deployments; hence no assessment of enemy reaction to the deployments can so far be made. However, it is the estimate of General Abrams that a second 25,000 increment can be withdrawn without unwarranted risks to RVNAF success and confidence unless significant changes in enemy dispositions and patterns of activity should take place. I join Admiral McCain, General Abrams and General Rosson in their judgment that assessment of enemy reactions should precede each decision to withdraw further US forces. In other words, I advocate a cut-and-try approach.

12. Meanwhile, the program to accelerate ARVN effectiveness is being pursued by General Abrams with vigor and imagination. Joint ARVN-US operations continue to be carried out with a view to enhancing ARVN confidence and tactics. These have included two operations in which the VNAF has provided helicopter lift for ARVN. The resulting growth in material confidence among the Vietnamese military services is encouraging.

US Military Strategy

13. My first undertaking upon arriving in Saigon was to discuss with Admiral McCain, General Abrams, and General Rosson the military strategy and tactics governing our operations. The results of our discussions were conveyed to you and to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I understand that the JCS have forwarded to you a formal expression of our coordinated views.[5] However, there are two additional aspects of this matter which are pertinent and timely:

a. The operations of friendly forces in South Vietnam have undergone, in fact, a change in pattern as a result of a modification in the enemy pattern of activity. In essence, the enemy has been holding the bulk of his larger formations in remote sanctuaries in-country or in Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam. Guerrilla units operating in smaller elements—squad and platoon—have directed their major activities toward attacks by fire on friendly installations and population centers, acts of terrorism against the population, varied by occasional ambushes along roads and small ground attacks against isolated units. In response to this pattern of activity, General Abrams and his associates have sought to maintain contact with and pre-empt the movements of the larger enemy formations against population centers and have encouraged subordinate commands, using smaller friendly units, to seek out and destroy the small enemy units operating within country. The Regional Forces and Popular Forces have been particularly active in this latter role.

b. An increasing number of combined operations is being undertaken. I found in I and III Corps Tactical Zones that the so-called "Buddy System" is being extensively employed. By means of having a US battalion operating on a continuing basis with a designated ARVN battalion, the ARVN is being encouraged to be more active in the field. Collateral beneficial effects have been to inculcate higher professional standards and a growing confidence in the ARVN that they can operate effectively on their own.

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[5] On July 26, after consultation with McCain and Abrams, the JCS informed Laird that the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese fundamental objective had not changed from bringing all Vietnam under Communist control. To achieve this objective the enemy had to defeat U.S. forces or cause them to withdraw. While the enemy had reduced his level of activity, he had not changed his strategy. Therefore there was no need to change U.S. strategy and mission. (Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs to Laird, JCSM–459–69, July 26; JCS Files, JMF 907/520 (2 July 1969), as cited in Historical Division, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Vietnam War, 1969–1970,* p. 96) At a meeting on July 28 Laird informed the Joint Chiefs that to conform with Presidential statement and COMUSMACV current tactics, the mission of defeating Communist aggression was to be replaced by one of assisting South Vietnam in preserving the opportunity to decide its own political fate free of outside interference. (Ibid., pp. 96–97)

c. In view of these changing patterns of operations, the semantic difficulties that have arisen over the use of the term "maximum pressure on the enemy," and the wide-spread misconception that mobile offensive operations are more costly in casualties than static defensive operations, I suggested to General Abrams that the terms "search and destroy" and "reconnaissance in force" be stricken from the lexicon of military terminology employed in South Vietnam. He readily agreed to my proposal; I expect that he and his subordinates will hereafter employ a phrase such as "pre-emptive operations" or words to that effect.

14. In connection with the foregoing paragraph, I wish to iterate my professional judgment that the concept of operations being followed by General Abrams in the conduct of ground operations is militarily sound in that it has consistently frustrated achievement by the enemy of his objectives and has incurred the lowest level of casualties consistent with achieving our minimum stated objectives in Southeast Asia. He has consistently used mobility and massive firepower to reduce the exposure of his forces to the enemy. He and I concur in the judgment that the adoption of tactics which would permit the enemy to move men and supplies at will would result inevitably in an increase of casualties among all friendly forces and would permit the enemy, once again, to launch attacks against South Vietnamese population centers.

Selective Items of Guidance for Southeast Asia Visit (References a and b, above)

15. As to size and timing of withdrawal of US forces: General Abrams will be prepared to forward his recommendations regarding the second CY 1969 increment for US redeployments in the last week of July 1969. In this connection, the following items are pertinent:

a. As noted in the Memorandum of Conversation with President Thieu, he will confer with Minister of Defense Vy and appropriate members of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff on Wednesday, 23 July, as to the size and composition of the increment and the takeover of vacated areas and installations by elements of the RVNAF. He does not believe that, at this late date, an additional increment above 25,000 would be feasible. He cites as factors persuading him to this view the fact that both the civilian and military officials of South Vietnam are conditioned to an increment of this size, and they have made plans to assume the responsibility from withdrawn US forces. To increase the number to be withdrawn at this late date will throw a real burden upon the Vietnamese military in the planning for and redeployment of their own forces, and will introduce an unfavorable psychological factor because of the discussions and planning done to date. On the US side, General Abrams pointed out to me the very intricate staff work that

will have to be accomplished in order to insure that we maintain the proper balance in composition of forces, their geographical location, and the level of support which could be rendered to the command.

b. As to the withdrawal of 100,000 in CY 1969: It was very apparent to me during my conversation with President Thieu that he is highly apprehensive that our CY 1969 withdrawal program will go beyond the level discussed with him by General Abrams and by President Nixon at Midway. As is set forth in the Memorandum for Conversation, he expects further withdrawals in CY 1970, and he suggested that General Abrams and his staff confer with the Vietnamese Joint General Staff to the end of determining the magnitude and timing of further withdrawals subsequent to 1 January 1970. Moreover, in view of his reference to and discussion of President Nixon's three criteria, it is my belief that he anticipates further exchanges between President Nixon and himself concerning CY 1970 withdrawals. In view of these factors, I am of the opinion that a withdrawal of more than 50,000 in CY 69 and/or failure to consult with President Thieu regarding CY 1970 would impose severe psychological and political handicaps upon the Government of Vietnam. Additionally, I believe that the effect upon the RVNAF could be deleterious in the extreme.

c. Vietnamization and the NSSM 36 exercise: As I understand it, inputs from the field regarding the NSSM 36 exercise will be received in accordance with the established time table. I wish to stress, however, that, in my judgment we can not complete the whole program by 31 December 1970 or by 30 June 1971. If all goes according to plan, we can complete the ground forces component of the program within those dates and most of the Navy programs; however, the Air Force program can not be completed before 1972. An additional point which must be borne in mind is that the resulting structure is not designed to provide the South Vietnamese Armed Forces the capability to deal with both the full enemy guerrilla force in country and cope with the North Vietnamese armed forces. This fact highlights two points; namely, the imperative requirement to obtain the withdrawal of North Vietnamese formations and individuals from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to North Vietnam; and the strong probability that we will have to maintain a residual support force in South Vietnam for some years to come unless and until the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese is achieved.

d. As to RVNAF composition: I queried General Abrams as to the desirability of creating a constabulary force. He responded that he could see no value militarily to such an organization; on the contrary, he believes that the creation of another paramilitary force in South Vietnam would further deplete the manpower pool, impose additional disruptive demands on our and GVN resources and will offer little or nothing beyond what the ARVN, RF, PF and National Police now con-

tribute to population security. As to the associated question regarding the adequacy of quantitative levels to handle the existing threat, I revert to my earlier comments regarding the necessity for removing, by one means or another, the NVA from the threat equation. So long as North Vietnamese divisions and regiments are poised on the periphery of South Vietnam, it is my view that the RVNAF alone cannot in the near future maintain the integrity of South Vietnam.

e. As to RVNAF achievements: As pointed out earlier in this report, although the performance of all elements of the RVNAF is not of uniform quality across the board, there is definite indication of progress in all areas. The slow but steady progress in pacification is evidence of the validity of this statement. On the other hand, I am not satisfied that the achievements of the RVNAF are properly publicized or understood, either in South Vietnam or in the United States. I asked for a separate report on this subject and I have directed the Joint Staff to work with OASD (PA) to ascertain what and how improvements can be made.

Summary

16. I recognize that this report does not provide answers satisfactory to us in all areas; nevertheless, I believe that, within the limits of time available to me, it sets forth a realistic assessment of the situation and the direction and degree in which we can move without endangering the progress we have made in the past year and a half.

17. I am convinced that we are on the right track. I was impressed by the determination and the quiet confidence expressed by American and Vietnamese military leaders that they can cope with the situation which will be created by the withdrawal of US forces. I was also impressed by the expansion of the pacification program which, I think, is hurting the enemy badly. On a less optimistic note, I can only conclude that the situation remains fragile, and we must proceed with deliberation if we are to avoid making an irretrievable wrong step.

Earle G. Wheeler

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101. Editorial Note

On July 25, 1969, during his world tour, President Nixon made informal remarks to newsmen for attribution but not direct quotation and on background. Nixon was in Guam after witnessing the splashdown of Apollo 11 astronauts on their return from the first landing on the moon. Beginning at 6:30 p.m. in the Top O' the Mar Officer Club,

Nixon expounded on what was first called the Guam Doctrine and then came to be known as the Nixon Doctrine. After reaffirming the United States treaty commitments with Asian allies, Nixon stated, "that as far as problems of internal security are concerned, as far as the problem of military defense, except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons, that the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves." The full extent of the remarks in Guam are printed in *Public Papers: Nixon, 1969,* pages 544–556.

The statement caused great interest among the press and public in both the United States and Asia. It was refined and restated in later, more formal, Nixon speeches. See Nixon's address on Vietnam, November 3, ibid., pages 901–909. As to the origins of the doctrine, Kissinger recalls that it had been a theme of preparations for Nixon's trip and the original intention had been to develop a major Presidential speech along similar lines for later in the summary. Kissinger recalled that Nixon himself was surprised by the reaction to the statement. Kissinger also suggests that there was "less to the Nixon Doctrine than met the eye." See Kissinger, *White House Years,* pages 222–225. Nixon's own recollections of the event are in *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon,* pages 394–395. Additional documentation on the Nixon Doctrine is in *Foreign Relations,* 1969–1976, volume I, Foundations of Foreign Policy.

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102. Memorandum of Conversation[1]

Bangkok, July 29, 1969, 4 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

The President
Ellsworth Bunker, Ambassador to South Vietnam
Robert S. Lindquist, Chargé in Malaysia
William H. Bruns, Chargé in Singapore
G. McMurtrie Godley, Ambassador to Laos
Arthur W. Hummel, Ambassador to Burma
Carol Laise, Ambassador to Nepal
Andrew V. Corry, Ambassador to Ceylon

[1] Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 1023, President's Asian and European Trip, July–August 1969. No classification marking. No drafter indicated. The meeting was held at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok.

Leonard Unger, Ambassador to Thailand
Norman Hannah, DCM in Thailand[2]
Robert G. Neumann, Ambassador to Afghanistan
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
Ronald Ziegler, Assistant to the President
Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

President: Thanks for coming. Time precludes visiting some countries. On the other hand, being in area provides opportunity hear your countries' reactions to our policies generally—everything from foreign assistance over. What I have tried to get across on trip so far:

I have general belief that Asia is where the action is and ought to be—in spite of Vietnam. Other areas naturally important too. US/Soviet relations will be taken care of at highest level. Latin America will not change much. Africa will not govern itself for 200 years. But in terms of conflict involving us, likeliest place is Asia. Mid-East possibly, but there less likely because that would be between US and USSR. But in Asia, countries on edge of China ripe for export of revolution.

As I see it, the way we end Vietnam war will determine whether we can have viable policy in Asia—a settlement that will not be seen as US defeat and will not lead to Communist takeover in a few years. Don't have to put this in domino terms.

One could conclude that getting out of Vietnam any way would be best thing we could do. But—though everyone wants peace—the most detrimental effect of a Vietnam settlement would be a settlement that produced Communist victory in a few years. US people would throw up hands on further active Asian involvement. We are going through critical phase for US world leadership—American people never wanted to be world leaders in first place and maybe that's why we have never had a world policy.

Let's start with Laos.

Godley: King has volunteered his confidence in President and US. King asked Godley say Lao military concerned US might pull out, but they aren't worth much. King and Souvanna main elements of stability. People of Laos have not really grasped problem but they are basically

[2] In Norman Hannah's book, *The Key to Failure: Laos & the Vietnam War* (pp. 269–274), he recalls that at a state dinner with the Thai Prime Minister on July 30, President Nixon told Hannah that he was aware of his strong ideas on Laos and he wanted to hear them. Hannah was loath to give his judgment to the President since it was not shared by Ambassador Unger. Unger and Kissinger subsequently worked out an arrangement resulting in a long telegram, 606 from Bangkok from Unger to Kissinger, August 3, which presented both Unger's more gradualist approach to combating the North Vietnamese in Laos and Hannah's bold advice to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail in the Laos panhandle by using U.S. air and ground forces. (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 545, Country Files, Far East, Laos, Vol. II, 1 August 1969–10 October 1969)

for us. Meo are one good fighting element—our most dedicated friends. Internal situation serious. By and large good friends.

President: What about military situation?

Godley: Very serious—7 North Vietnamese battalions—4–6,000 men, now tanks used for first time. Troops using heavier weapons. Enemy has given logistical support never before seen in rainy season. 50–50 chance, next 3–4 weeks enemy would have reacquired most of his plus neutralist 1962 position. Has several options for handling Lao political situation—could now liquidate neutralists as a political force and go into bilateral conflict with non-Communists. Faced with enemy step-up in North, we have increased rate of air sorties in support (from 50 to 200) without altering rules of engagement.

Where from here? We have been trying to press Soviets and British co-chairmen. Embassy Vientiane proposed contacting Soviets to point out enemy buildup, express concern. Thinks Soviets would like to stabilize Laos—aware of Chicom road. Tell Soviets we would reduce sortie rate to 50 a day for 2–3 days and expect enemy assume defensive positions in areas they now control. Would be interesting to see Soviet reaction. Might be able to stabilize situation. Do not recommend total US standdown—Lao would lie down and roll over.

Hummel: Burma neutralist with left-wing government that is politically and economically unsuccessful. Most Burmese blame US and North Vietnam equally. However NeWin wants to see some US counterweight after Vietnam, though not applied in Burma. Have Chicom-sponsored insurgents; are planning renounce friendship treaty with China. But Burma thoroughly neutralist and do not want to lean on us. Do not want to lean on big powers for economic aid.

Lindquist: Malaysians want us in Vietnam and want kind of settlement President described. They believe we will try for right kind of settlement but have nagging doubt this will be possible. This comes at time of other disappointments—breakdown of British security system in Far East. Reappraising own security arrangements—will look more to Australia, Indonesia, Thailand. Slowly readjusting relations with Communist camp (Soviet Embassy there). Interested in Brezhnev proposal. Work closely with us, though no bilateral aid program. US posture correct, letting Commonwealth take lead, but we should go on putting money through regional organizations.

Bruns: Lee Kuan Yew—Post-Vietnam's influence will depend on when post-Vietnam occurs. If 1970–71, he believes that will be too soon because won't be going government in Saigon.

Neumann: Vietnam is not problem in Afghanistan—Indo-Pak and Mid-East problems far closer. There is, however, a good tacit understanding with USSR. We in 1953 did not get into military aid. Russians have pressed Afghans to phase out Chicom programs. Democratic ex-

periment. Economic progress hampered by illiterate parliament trying to deal with complex development problems. Relations with Iran good, and Iran's influence becoming greater. Pakistan: Pushtunistan very much down; transit difficulty up. Countries from Turkey down interested in transit agreement. Have suggested President say word to Yahya about transit; Pakistan could ease transit problem. "A manageable corner to unmanageable problem—Indo-Pak relations."

Corry: Senanayake government replaced radical government in 1965—takes moderate stand. Presses agricultural development and trying reduce communal tensions. Believes peace in Vietnam can come only from withdrawal of all foreign troops. Hopes US will continue show lively interest in Asia. Immediately problems have to do with reelection of this government. We helping grow-more-food campaign.

Laise: Nepalese government takes direct interest in Vietnam. Does not want peace that is US retreat. Nepal wants US presence and aid—constitutes important balance. Chinese and Indian activity have stepped up. Nepal has reacted against India but now back on tracks. India is fumbling for a policy—imagine that US had USSR or China on other side of Canada. India holds string on our presence because our aid financed from rupees. Our interests in Nepal not vital so will depend on US India policy.

Bunker: Aside from military situation—which not bad—Thieu has "used up all his credit but hasn't overdrawn his account." Now broadening base of his government—new cabinet (efficiency, acceptable to assembly, popular base). Fashioning a parliamentary bloc. Forming consultative group outside cabinet, necessary because of disarray his statement created. He will need broader backing for later flexibility in negotiating. May have cabinet formed in another couple of weeks.

President: Can they survive troop withdrawals?

Bunker: Depends on speed and adequate psychological preparation. But if impression we on a rigid timetable could have disastrous effects. Can have good effects if done well—Vietnamese moving ahead rather well.

President: Let me sum up.

On Mid-East, no progress of significance. I anticipate none. May only come at a very high level only when Soviets realize they may be drawn in. Arabs they support in shaky positions. Very pessimistic situation at this time.

On Vietnam, no significant progress in Paris on public talks—don't talk about private contacts. Soviets have played minimal role; expect none unless they can get something because they can't get caught at it. Escalation that would involve US and USSR remote. Ties us down. One factor in other direction is that they have their troubles. As long as Vietnam going on, difficult to make progress in other fields with us.

If USSR needs or wants better relations with US, moving on Vietnam would open door. If I were where they sit, I would keep "giving it to the US" in Vietnam.

Chinese-Soviet and US attitude. I don't think we should rush quickly into embrace with USSR to contain China. Best US stance is to play each—not publicly. US–USSR–Europe lined up against rest of Asia not a pretty prospect. US–USSR security pact would invite Soviet adventurism in area; can let people talk about it but not do anything about.

What really rides on Vietnam, is whether US people are going to play big role in world or not. That question is very serious doubt. Mass of people usually think right but intellectuals oppose all but passive US role. How can we conduct policies in Asia so that we can play role we should:

1. Viable Vietnamese government for at least five years.
2. Where problem is internal subversion, countries must deal with problem themselves. We will help—but not American ground forces. Even when there is foreign exported revolution. Not talking about invasion by conventional troops.
3. I feel that with all criticism of US, Asia leaders realize worst thing for them would be for US to bug out of Vietnam because that would leave vacuum. Collective security is a good theme—but not real for five years (even Japan).
4. We have to conduct policy so we can sell it in US.