

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

May 26, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Vietnam

Attached is a report from General Haig based on recent conversations in Saigon. The following points are of particular significance:

- General Abrams believes that the major threat in South Vietnam in the foreseeable future is concentrated in I Corps. Some modifications from present withdrawal priorities may be required.
- General Haig cautions that even with the benefits of the Cambodian operation, the present deadline for withdrawal of 150,000 should be extended from May 1 to July 1, 1971. However, withdrawal of 50,000 by October 15, 1970 is satisfactory.
- General Haig also warns that existing plans for reduction of tactical air and B-52 sorties after July 1 are dangerous in light of military requirements. He recommends continuance of current levels through September 30, 1970, and believes General Abrams also shares this view.
- Ambassadors Bunker and Berger and General Abrams agree that President Thieu's post June 30 plans are completely compatible with US guidelines, with the exception of Thieu's plan to keep the water route to Phnom Penh open, and possibly a road route as well. In light of overall objectives, Thieu's plan is considered to be desirable.
- Two recent strikes against COSVN apparently were successful and may have hit COSVN solidly.

General Haig has also suggested a number of topics for the Sunday meeting, and these will be incorporated into your Talking Points.

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DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5

NLN03-40/8: Per Sec. 3.3(b)(1) ltr. 1-28-09

By P. H. - NARA, Date 10-14-09

CP. 106115

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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May 26, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Conversation with President Thieu

Attached is a report from General Haig of his conversation with President Thieu on May 26. In the course of the conversation, President Thieu:

- outlined his plans for future operations in Cambodia, which appear to be consistent with US guidelines;
- discussed his broad strategy for the war after June 30, which is also entirely consistent with your desires. His plan includes maximum effort on pacification and concentration on destruction of enemy forces remaining in South Vietnam, new emphasis on control of the borders, and maximum effort against enemy infiltration of men and supplies;
- stated that the most important benefit of the Cambodian operation has been the fact that the enemy is now deprived of the security and freedom of movement he previously enjoyed in Cambodia;
- expressed complete understanding of Cambodian sensitivities and stated that he had already issued instructions to impose stronger control of GVN forces in Cambodia;
- suggested that we urgently consider improving Cambodian communications so that they can better control their forces and be aware of the battlefield situation;

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- emphasized that a senior US military adviser is badly needed in Phnom Penh;
- said that he agrees with the assessment that Hanoi is hoping to topple Lon Nol quickly and cheaply, and that the answer rests with the will of the Cambodian people to resist until their forces can be rebuilt on a sounder footing.

In commenting on this meeting, Haig noted that:

- the issue of gravest consequence which should be receiving primary attention is what the GVN and US should do in the event NVA/VC forces make an all-out attack on Phnom Penh and the Cambodians urgently request help;
- it is essential that US spokesmen take an ambiguous and somewhat threatening position concerning future operations of the GVN.

Attachment

EYES ONLY

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~ 261025Z May 70 VIA CAS CHANNELS

FROM: GENERAL HAIG, SAIGON 661

TO: THE WHITE HOUSE, EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY DR. KISSINGER

Following meeting with Ambassador Bunker and President Thieu this a. m., met with General Abrams, Ambassador Bunker and Ambassador Berger at 2:30 p. m. local this afternoon. Gen. Abrams showed me message on May 31 meeting. I believe meeting will be most constructive if it is used to clearly enunciate President's views on several key questions facing us. I will list these later in this message.

Meeting was designed to discuss mutual problems and to coordinate subjects to be discussed by Abrams and Bunker preliminary to 6:00 p. m. meeting by both with Thieu this p. m.

As mentioned in earlier message, Ambassador had requested this meeting with Thieu to convey guidance received in from Washington on GVN operations in Cambodia after June 30. We reviewed results of our meeting with Thieu this a. m. and all agreed Thieu's own plans were completely compatible with U. S. guidelines except for continuing plan to keep water route and perhaps road route to Phnom Penh thru Parrot's Beak open. All assumed this post-June 30 objective compatible with guidelines. I believe this is desirable and General Abrams stated U. S. and GVN are training 900 - 1,000 additional Khmers to assist Cambodians to keep road open.

General Abrams also confirmed he had just received authority for air operation in Eastern Cambodia with appropriate safeguards. He was obviously pleased.

General Abrams reviewed situation on ground in SVN and noted that major threat in foreseeable future was concentrated in I Corps where some 14 enemy regiments could be employed. He now believes some modification in his withdrawal priorities may be required and intends to discuss this problem with Thieu so he will be armed with Thieu's thinking prior to Sunday's meeting. Abrams' current planning is based on his latest instructions from White House on that subject. Guidance provides for:

1. Redeployment of 150,000 by May 1, 1971.
2. Reduction of levels from 434,000 to 384,000 by Oct. 15, 1970.
3. In meeting 1 and 2 above Abrams now plans to withdraw 2 Army brigades from II Corps and one Marine RLT from I Corps by 15 Oct. with their standdown from operations about 1 Sept. By Jan. 1, 1971, one additional RLT from Marines in I Corps and by May 1 additional 90,000 including 4th Division Americal and 1st Cav. Airmobile plus remainder of Marines in I Corps.

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Emphasize above thinking is tentative but in my view is too fast even after benefits of Cambodian operations are fully felt. I believe we can live with 50,000 drawdown by Oct. 15 but still consider balance of 100,000 should be stretched out until July 1. I recognize desirability of early impact withdrawal in wake of Cambodian operation and agree it is both politically and militarily desirable not only to confirm wisdom of decision but also to rein in any residual GVN ambitions for greater commitment on their part in Cambodia. This will tend to focus their attention on need to progress in South Vietnam.

General Abrams also reports his planning reduction for air operations will be:

1. Reduction from 20,000 tac air sorties to 13,000 by July 1.
2. Reduction from 1,400 B-52 sorties to 1,000 over same period.

Both of these cutbacks strike me as foolish and dangerous in view of increased need to interdict trail conduct operations in Cambodia and postured to react to real danger of major enemy attack in I Corps or against Phnom Penh. I can see no political gain in this action, only fiscal savings. As I mentioned earlier, President should direct maintenance of current tac air and B-52 levels thru 1st quarter of FY71. I am sure General Abrams shares this view.

General Abrams also informed me that his system tried twice now on targetting B-52's against COSVN have apparently been successful. After these two strikes, knowledge of which was given to only 5 officers, COSVN went off air for 13 hours. Since that time, they have displaced erratically with a totally inconsistent pattern. Abrams believed he probably hit COSVN solidly or as a minimum has deprived them of early warning, reported by prisoner taken this month.

Recommend you prepare positions on following topics prior to Sunday meeting:

1. US/GVN reaction to major NVA attack on Cambodia with or without request for help and with fall of Phnom Penh imminent.
2. Diplomatic initiatives needed to obtain support of Asian states for Lon Nol government.
3. Character of U.S. presence in Phnom Penh. (I will discuss this problem with you personally, but believe drastic changes are needed as soon as possible to include Ambassador of special qualifications -- senior military

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Per Sec. 3.36)(D)

advisor with small and highly qualified staff -- expanded communications,
[redacted]

4. Character of direct U. S. military assistance to include immediate survey to determine needs within established guidelines scope will involve: up to 30,000 small arms automatic weapons and individual equipment, communications, transportation.

5. Character of indirect U. S. assistance (covert and through third countries) to include additional T-28 aircraft from Thais or elsewhere, training and equipping of Khmers from Thailand and SVN, third country training of Cambodian forces and officers. Third country arms and equipment support.

6. Possible GVN operations in tri-border area after June 30 designed to inhibit enemy use of trail and alternative routes which may be developed.

7. Level of sorties for U. S. air in conjunction with above.

8. Withdrawal schedules for U. S. forces and deployment and stationing planes in light of Cambodian situation and threat in I Corps.

9. Objectives for size and character of Cambodian armed forces.

10. Availability of U. S. equipment as between SVN and Cambodia resulting from U. S. troop withdrawals.

11. Possible negotiating initiatives in Paris or in other forums.

12. Economic situation in SVN. Augmentation of Embassy staff.

13. Long term status of Cambodia among Asian states.

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261000Z MAY 70

[Redacted]

Per Sec. 3.3(b)(3)
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FROM: General Haig, Saigon 660

TO: The White House, Exclusively Eyes only Dr. Kissinger

I have just completed an hour long meeting with President Thieu and Ambassador Bunker in the President's palace. Below are the highlights of our discussion. Ambassador Bunker and I carefully reviewed what we hoped to cover prior to the meeting. We decided not to press hard on what ARVN operations after June 30 should entail since Thieu is scheduled to meet again this evening with Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams to discuss this topic in light of recent Washington guidance.

1. I opened discussion with strong affirmation of continuing Presidential support for Thieu and conveyed President Nixon's admiration and respect for ARVN's performance in recent weeks. Ambassador Bunker informs me that some of Thieu's advisors had suggested to Thieu that the U.S. was behind some of his recent domestic difficulties both from the Vietnamese students and in the economic area. For this reason I emphasized strenuously President Nixon's great personal confidence in President Thieu.

2. President Thieu then turned to the question of the June 30 deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. units. Although he did not specifically comment to this effect there was some evidence in his tone and language that he did not favor the public announcement of this limitation and was hoping for some additional U.S. flexibility beyond the termination date. I confirmed that U.S. forces would in fact be withdrawn from Cambodia by June 30 but went on to point out that my extensive survey of the Third Corps area yesterday convinced me that given all the factors of weather, extent of coverage in the sanctuaries, growing enemy activity, conditions in South Vietnam, etc., U.S. forces will have largely obtained maximum benefit from their operations in Cambodia before the terminal date. Thieu seemed to accept this logic though I suspect his real problem is not date itself but fact that we had publicly committed ourselves to it thus weakening deterrent effect on enemy.

3. Thieu then raised on his own his view of future operations in Cambodia by ARVN. He cited following criteria:

A. GVN does not intend permanently to remain in Cambodia. GVN's purpose is to help Vietnamization and assist Cambodians, not take over their battle or their territory.

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B. GVN does hope to clean out all known caches and would remain longer (or return if intelligence suggests others exist) if required to do so.

C. GVN must do what it can to protect South Vietnamese residing in Cambodia.

D. GVN will continue to keep Mekong open to Phnom Penh but this, at least for present, does not appear to require strong military presence on river.

E. GVN will provide material support to Lon Nol government the full extent of which has not been decided upon.

F. GVN hopes to work out arrangement with Cambodian government to permit limited cross border operations to prevent enemy from rebuilding bases, to preclude movement of forces across border from Cambodia or conversely to preclude enemy from strengthening his posture in Cambodia by forces under his control now in South Vietnam. Thieu believes latter increasingly likely to occur.

G. Finally, GVN must retain its flexibility on steps to be taken in the event of a serious emergency in Cambodia such as an attack on Phnom Penh and a request for direct assistance from the Cambodian government. (I believe this is of course the 64-dollar question and the one which poses the most serious implications for the U.S. We must consider our posture in the event this occurs on a most urgent basis--Ambassador Bunker has been asked this question and will give Embassy Saigon's views. Until a firm U.S. position is developed, however, I believe Thieu's position is exactly correct both in the public and private vein. I also believe it is essential that U.S. spokesmen take a similarly ambiguous and somewhat threatening position. To do otherwise will merely invite a decision by the enemy to take Phnom Penh. I also believe time has come to again muzzle our Washington spokesmen who never cease to give comfort to the enemy and concern to our allies by what is now becoming an almost obsessed preoccupation with publicly circumscribing limitations on future U.S. and even GVN operations against the enemy in Cambodia.)

Thieu then turned to the broad outlines of his current strategy for the war post-June 30. Without my urging and apparently as a

result of his own assessments he enumerated the following priorities:

1. Initiate immediately an urgent review of the situation in both Cambodia and South Viet-Nam in the light of the Cambodian operations.
2. Place maximum effort in the post-June 30 period on pacification, especially in the III and IV Corps areas in order to exploit the results of the Cambodian success. Thieu stated ARVN forces must largely return to SVN to destroy the enemy forces remaining in SVN and assist with a new and intensified pacification program which will now be launched.
3. Place new emphasis on control of the borders for reasons outlined earlier and concurrently place maximum effort against enemy infiltration of both men and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the border areas and especially along Cambodian border with II Corps. (I told President Thieu that his strategy coincided completely with that of President Nixon and that he could expect that there would be no problems in obtaining complete U.S. cooperation in and support for these priorities.)

Thieu then proceeded to recount the advantages obtained from our operations in Cambodia. He emphasized that while the material damage to the enemy was great, that the enemy killed and captured also helped, that the most important benefit came from the fact that the enemy was now deprived of the security and freedom of movement he has previously enjoyed in Cambodia. This he sees as the key benefit among many. Thieu referred to Cambodia not North Viet-Nam as the enemy's actual communications zone and recounted with pleasure that recent operations have changed the whole picture.

I then mentioned to President Thieu the attitude I had found in Phnom Penh emphasizing a growing self-consciousness on the part of the Cambodians as to the difference in power between ARVN and Cambodian forces. I also recalled evidence of some growing concern about Vietnamese intentions in Cambodia and briefly mentioned the difficulties which excess destruction such as the Chup air strikes, thoughtless public statements or poor troop conduct could pose. This issue I stated is the only one on the horizon which could be exploited by the enemy to alienate the Cambodian people from the Central Government.

Thieu agreed completely and assured us that he has taken steps to be sure that the JGS and General Vien assume greater control over actions by South Vietnamese troops and careless remarks by commanders. Thieu was very conscious of this problem and stated he had already issued instructions to impose stronger control of operations in Cambodia under JGS at expense of Corps Commanders who should not make policy for him. He hopes to establish immediately a Liaison Group between JGS and Cambodians to improve communications and exercise greater control. He pointed out quite correctly, however, that main problem is that since Phnom Penh lacks communication with its forces, the facts are best known at Corps level and below, thus his Corps Commanders get facts first and tend to act on them including public statements.

Thieu suggested that we consider on an urgent basis the provision of some means of communications for the Cambodians which will enable them to control their own forces and know what is going on on the battlefield. He also expressed great concern for the tactical and strategic incompetence of the Cambodian military and their tendency to rush forces to and fro without full knowledge of the situation. He emphasized that a senior U.S. military advisor is badly needed to help in Phnom Penh. He also stated advisors are needed across the board to help at every level. I told him the U.S. could not help with the latter but was considering sending an advisor. I have heard nothing further on Ladd and trust this matter is proceeding apace.

I mentioned to President Thieu the great assistance the Khmers from SVN had been to the Cambodians and their desire to obtain further support of this type from both SVN and Thailand. He agreed this would be possible but insisted in SVN it must be done in a careful organized way and not in a precipitous manner which would strip his RF/PF capabilities or disrupt his own recruiting base.

At conclusion of meeting we discussed enemy's intentions in Cambodia. I told President Thieu that Cambodians believed NVA/VC were moving to occupy all of Cambodia, then even planning to move north to hit Thailand's underbelly. Thieu agreed with my assessment that Hanoi was too weak to undertake such operations at least for now, but rather was hoping to topple Lon Nol quickly and cheaply and wished, above all, to secure a revamped logistical structure to carry on the conflict in South Viet-Nam for this reason Thieu believed the answer rested with the will of the Cambodian people to resist the NVA/VC highpoint until their forces can be rebuilt on a sounder footing.

In sum, meeting was most cordial and constructive. Thieu attitude on future operations in Cambodia perfectly consistent with U.S. guidelines as are his plans for future operations across the board. It is evident, however, he is as confused as are embassy and MACV and perhaps Washington on what GVN and U.S. should do in the event NVA/VC forces continue all-out attack on Phnom Penh and Cambodians urgently request help. This is issue of gravest consequence that may soon develop with varying shades of ambiguity. It should be receiving primary attention there to include Congressional consultation in my view.

I am postponing my visit to IV Corps today to meet with General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker this afternoon. Court and party will cover Corps operations for me. We plan to depart here at 1000 A. M. local via CINCPAC aircraft for brief stop at CINCPAC and return to Washington by Friday.

Best regards.