THE WHITE HOUSE

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT'S FILES

SUBJECT:

National Security Council Meeting

DATE AND TIME:

Monday, May 8, 1972 - 9:00 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS:

President Nixon

Vice President Agnew
Secretary of State Rogers
Secretary of Defense Laird
Secretary of Treasury Connally

Director of Central Intelligence Helms

Director of Office of Emergcy Preparedness,

Lincoln

Assistant to the President for National Security

Affairs, Kissinger

President's Press Secretary Ziegler

Mr. John Negroponte, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

President Nixon: As you are all aware we have an important decision to make today on Vietnam. The current situation which is certainly not as critical as portrayed by the press is nevertheless in the balance. There are serious questions as to Vietnam's equipment and will. General Abrams needs more assets. We've sent air primarily. The Soviet summit is jeopardized by each option open to us:

- -- Doing nothing
- -- Only bombing the North
- -- Blockading or mining and bombing

Thus today we need a cold-blooded analysis.

Regardless of how we have helped the South Vietnamese, we have done reasonably well in some places and poorly in others. I am surprised at the fact that we have provided inferior equipment to that furnished by the Soviets. They have provided 13 new weapon sytems, big tanks-big guns; this shows what the South Vietnamese are up against. The South Vietnamese fighting performance is a mixed bag. Even by the most optimistic assessment

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there is a substantial danger that South Vietnam may not be able to hold up particularly in Hue; but in Military Regions III and IV where most of the population lives they are doing quite well.

Hue is of symbolic importance and they may attack within the next few days.

Putting it in those terms the real question is not what will happen to South Vietnam but what we have to do to affect the situation. We could wait the situation out. This is a tempting course. If the South Vietnamese can't do the job on the ground it would be tempting for political reasons. We could blame the opposition for getting us into the war and then for not letting us out. Congress undermined us at the negotiating table and we could tell the U.S. people let's flush it because South Vietnam couldn't hack it. This is a tempting proposition. It could be sold. Our Democratic friends would buy it and a great number of Republican friends would buy it as well.

But there are problems. The major one is that, if in the future after all the effort in South Vietnam, a Soviet-supported opponent succeeds over a U.S.-supported opponent this could have considerable effect on our allies and on the United States. Our ability to conduct a credible foreign policy could be imperiled. This leaves out the domino theory; but if you talk to the Thai, the Cambodians, the Indonesians and the Filipinos, as I have, the fact of a U.S. failure and a Communist success would be considered a failure of U.S. policy.

Secondly, the diplomatic track is totally blocked. The public sessions have been unproductive. Henry was in Paris last week and made every offer we had made previously and even more. They flatly refused and insisted on our getting rid of Thieu, releasing everybody from prison and so forth making a Communist takeover inevitable. The Communists now think they're winning and they're getting tougher at the bargaining table.

Thirdly, there is a considerable body of military opinion, not a majority, that we should put more air strikes into Hanoi and Haiphong. The difficulty with this course is, first the DRV will be better prepared, second General Abrams needs assets for the battle in the South and third, there is the serious question of effectiveness of resuming bombings on a regular basis. This raises problems similar to those previously faced and the question of what would be accomplished.

The fourth and final course would be to adopt a program of cutting off the flow of supplies by sea and rail. The effect of cutting off supplies by sea

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can be conclusive but the question of rail is in doubt because of our experience from 1965-68.

Whatever we do it won't affect the battle immediately in the South except perhaps the psychological effect. The real effect will be three of four months from now for sure.

As regards the summit, this latter course might jeopardize the summit. I think we have to realize that if the situation in Vietnam is as it is today there can't be a summit. The summit is jeopardized by all these courses of action. That consideration we have to assume. There will be no summit.

There is no good choice. The bug-out choice is a good political one but I am not sure what this office would be worth after doing that. The other military choices would have grave foreign policy consequences and political consequences at home. Nothing we can say is sure and all have serious risks regarding the summit, public opinion and Congress.

Anyone who raises a question of risk must look at the choices. We face a situation where nothing is sure. There are grave political risks and risks to the country if we try one of these policies and fail.

I believe the first course of action is the least viable. It is the best politically, but it is the least viable for our foreign policy. Escalation in the bombing or a naval and air cutoff have questionable value. Neither will surely tip the balance to the side of success. It is only a question of degree. The only question in regard to increased bombing or a cutoff is whether this provides South Vietnam with a better chance of success.

Admiral Moorer will brief on the military aspects of the mining and air activities.

Admiral Moorer: I will first address the mining plan. There are two kinds of mines, the large mines and the second kind are the smaller Mark 36 destructor mines -- a special mine for the interdiction of small craft. The area of concern is the Haiphong Channel. It is ideal for mining because it is a narrow channel. The green area is where we would place the big mines and any ship which hit a mine and sank would block the channel. The red area shows where we would put the destructors.

There are an average of 42 ships per month in Haiphong. The pier can accommodate 16 to 17 ships and there is a separate off-loading pier for

POL supplies. The three mile limit is there. It's been put in by the International Lawyers.

President Nixon: The State and Defense Department lawyers have been working on this.

Admiral Moorer: The DRV claims a twelve mile limit. The lawyers contend that because other countries such as the Norweigans and the Japanese claim a three mile limit and we mine beyond that three mile limit, they could claim that mining up to the twelve mile limit would set a precedent.

<u>Dr. Kissinger:</u> Ambassador Johnson came up with a formulation yesterday whereby we could make a proclamation that does not force a decision. We could simply state that the mining is taking place within DRV territorial waters rather than specifying whether it is within claimed DRV territorial waters or territorial waters as we view them legally.

Admiral Moorer: We shouldn't say what we won't do. At 9:00 p.m. tonight 30-45 minutes before laying the mines there would be preliminary suppressive air actions prior to the mines going down.

President Nixon: Would they all be dropped by air?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. Each plane drops four mines.

President Nixon: How many planes would we lose?

Admiral Moorer: We will be using A-6's and A-7's. We will not lose many. It is not as much of a risk as our previous bombing of Haiphong. There will also be gunfire support.

President Nixon: When will the Newport News arrive?

Admiral Moorer: It is arriving tomorrow. The big mines will be set for 72 hours. There is no flexibility on the destructors for the small mines and they can only be set for 24 hours; so the destructors will be dropped 24 hours later. The sterilizers make the big mines inactive within 120 days. This is not absolutely precise but about 120 days. We don't propose initially to put destructors in the channel itself because they have a life of 180 days.

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These mines are magnetic; we have other mines which are more difficult to sweep but we are not putting them in in the initial effort. We could put them in if the other side makes a concerted sweeping effort. The mines are set off at random so that if a sweeping could be made they could be set for three or four or five passes. They are not moored mines like the old World War I mines. They are implanted on the ground. The situation then would be that 72 hours after the first drop the mine field would be activated.

We would lay the larger mines in this area and we would lay the destructors inside the rivers further south. The black line is the three mile limit; the red is the twelve mile limit. Near the DMZ we would lay destructors at Dong Hoi, Quang Khe and Thanh Hoa. These ports are used by little craft that hug the coast to supply routes leading to the Ban Karai and the Mu Gia pass. We will reseed the mines as necessary and we can continually go back and reseed. Associated with this action would be the suppressive air support for the mine laying aircraft...

With regard to the interdiction of the rail lines there are three rail lines from Hanoi to the Chinese border. We would attack the marshalling yards, the junctions, the railroad lines and the highway bridges. We have already done some good work on the lines of communication. As far as the level of effort is concerned we are already putting 200 sorties per day in the Freedom Train area. We would augment this by 100 sorties. This would leave ample assets in the South. Four additional squadrons and the Saratoga have been involved in the augmentation effort and would be used for suppression of air defenses and then to hit the rail and supply lines.

The ships could withdraw or stay. If they stayed, they would block the dock area but we would continue with the attacks against warehouses. If the ships leave we would totally destroy the docks. Laying the mines will be simple.

President Nixon: Regarding the seaborne traffic, is mining enough? Won't we have to stop the ships?

Admiral Moorer: The ships come from two directions. Most come from South of Hainan. The Soviet ships come from the Black Sea and not from Soviet pacific ports. The destroyers would provide a screen to warn ships that the channel has been mined and we would take steps to be sure that cargo is not off-loaded on the beach. They cannot go into the ports without a pilot and there is not a chance of them going up knowing that the channel is mined.

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Secretary Laird: We have the names of all the ships on the way and the cargo they are carrying.

Admiral Moorer: Mr. Helms will talk about the logistics aspects.

President Nixon: How could our interdiction effort be more effective than it was from 1965 to 1968? Will we be using more B-52's?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. In 1965 to 1968 since so many supplies were by sea the railroad was being used at 10-15 percent capacity. Now there would be many more trains and targets and they would have to operate in the daytime. The interdiction would be much more effective now.

President Nixon: Would we have more planes now or less?

Admiral Moorer: We would have slightly less. In 1968 we were running at 30,000 sorties per month, about our present level.

President Nixon: The only advantage could be the B-52's?

Secretary Laird: We're now running 500 sorties a day or about 15,000 per month.

Secretary Connally: Couldn't we knock out the railroads?

Admiral Moorer: The advantage is that then the railroads weren't used to full capacity. When you get to the question of fuel there is an estimated 100,000 tons available which could last three months. It is a very different proposition to bring fuel and food in by rail. You cannot go after a logistics system one category at a time.

Secretary Rogers: Are you satisified that the mining will block the channel?

Admiral Moorer: Yes.

Secretary Rogers: What about off-shore unloading?

Admiral Moorer: They will try some off-shore loading and perhaps they will use some of the China ports. That's why we will be interdicting both the ports and the railroads. But we can cut down the lighters to a trickle.

Secretary Laird: They'll use lighters. They have thousands of them. They off-loaded Soviet ships near the DMZ with 500 lighters.

Secretary Rogers: In effect it would be a blockade if we attack the ships.

<u>Dr. Kissinger:</u> If it is inside territorial waters it is interdiction. If we stop vessels outside territorial waters if would be a different matter.

<u>President Nixon:</u> The difference would be one of not stopping vessels on the high seas.

Secretary Rogers: If they off-load on the high seas?

Mr. Lincoln: If we attack ships off the coast then why wouldn't this be a blockade?

Dr. Kissinger: We have the option of only attacking the lighters.

Secretary Laird: You can't have both the mining and attacking the docks.

Vice President Agnew: If the boats have 72 hours to get out?

Dr. Kissinger: Why can't you go after the docks?

Secretary Laird: I'm sure the Soviets will keep ships at the docks.

Dr. Kissinger: The immediate operational question is that of whether you attack the lighters or the ships.

Secretary Laird: The docks must go out in any event. The military significance will be in four or five months. Most of the stuff is economic in nature and food. Almost all the military equipment comes in by rail.

President Nixon: What about POL?

Secretary Laird: The POL comes through port facilities but they have four months' supply in-country.

Secretary Connally: What about the tanks?

Secretary Laird: The tanks come in by rail -- so do the SAMs.

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Admiral Moorer: We have never been able to verify whether the SAMs come in by rail or by sea.

President Nixon: The main thing is the oil.

Secretary Laird: They have four months' supply. If they go on ration they could stretch it to five months.

President Nixon: Does that assume the planned air strikes?

Admiral Moorer: The additional air strikes on POL storage points and warehouses have thus far been limited to south of the 20th parallel.

President Nixon: It would not make sense to take this risk unless we go all out on the rail facilities in a fashion better than in 1968 and we cannot have any stop-start bombing. We must stop movement into Haiphong, particularly the oil; we must bomb the power plants and the attacks must be heavy. There is no easy way. I would like to think that the mining is easy but there must be mining; we must hit the railroads so they cannot divert to rail and we will be hitting stock piles in a substantially increased way north of the 20th parallel. Either we do all that or nothing.

Admiral Moorer: Compared to 1968 the number of DRV motorized vehicles and artillery is much higher.

President Nixon: It is a different war.

Admiral Moorer: The consumption rates are much higher.

Mr. Lincoln: How many planes will be diverted from South Vietnam?

Admiral Moorer: The plan will leave General Abrams with what he needs in view of the recent augmentations.

<u>President Nixon:</u> Tell us what assets we had when we began and what we have there now.

Admiral Moorer: We began with 17 destroyers, now we have 36. We began with three CVA's, now there are six. We have ten more squadrons of aircraft and we have doubled the B-52 capability.

Secretary Connally: In a real sense we are not taking anything away from General Abrams.

President Nixon: Abrams has double the resources.

Secretary Connally: Is there any doubt that you can'tknock out the three rail lines?

Admiral Moorer: I am confident we can.

Secretary Connally: I don't think we should do this if our planes cannot knock out the rail lines.

Vice President Agnew: What about SAMs?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, they have SAMs. They fired 250 of them on the last Hanoi raid and achieved one hit. Last night just west of Hanoi there was only light SAM firing.

Secretary Laird: They still have 8,000 SAMs and have fired 7,000 of them.

<u>Secretary Rogers</u>: How effective will these measures be? Do you think they are the most effective or is there something else we could do?

Admiral Moorer: The only other more effective measure would be an amphibious landing.

President Nixon: That is the other option. We have the Marine division in Okinawa. I have said we would not introduce ground troops. Leaving the mining out, can we step up the bombing on Hanoi and Haiphong?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. We could hit the marshalling yards and the warehouses on the docks.

<u>President Nixon:</u> The problem with respect to bombing is the restraints. The difficulty is civilian casualties. Mining may be the most humane course in this kind of situation.

Secretary Rogers: We would be doing all three. First maximum effort in South Vietnam, secondly the docks, third a blockade.

President Nixon: I have to decide at 2:00 p.m.

Admiral Moorer: We are planning to execute.

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President Nixon: Whatever we do we must always avoid saying what we're not going to do, like nuclear weapons. I referred to them saying that I did not consider them necessary. Obviously, we are not going to use nuclear weapons but we should leave it hanging over them. We should also leave the threat of marines hanging over them. To protect our 69,000 forces, if the GVN collapses, the 18,000 U.S. personnel in Da Nang would be in great peril. In terms of ground forces, an offensive role is one question, a defensive one is something else. We shouldn't give reassurances to the enemy that we are not going balls out. I like the three to twelve mile limit question. I think we should leave it open. Whether we hit ships or lighters should also be left open.

Admiral Moorer: There are enough supplies in the DRV to permit the continuation of current operations. The question is what happens next August and next year if we leave the situation as it is.

President Nixon: It is tempting to do nothing. We are already doing a hell of a lot. We have doubled the B-52's. We have upgraded the army. But we must think of where we are going to be. There is no way we can go to Moscow with the situation as it is. Further down the road in September or October, assuming South Vietnam holds, they will have an enormous incentive to give us one last punch just before the elections. Whoever the democratic candidate is McGovern, Humphrey or Teddy Kennedy, both the DRV and Moscow would like nothing better than to have these men in office.

When we are out can South Vietnam survive? The problem is if South Vietnam goes down the tube next year, we have to look at this in terms of U.S. foreign policy. Should we not do things now to seriously impair the DRV ability to attack then?

One thing I am certain and that is that we cannot be sure that this will work. It depends also on South Vietnam. Do we take great risks regardless of whether the GVN flops or not. The bombing option is perhaps open. The difficulty is that, unless we take off the wraps, your feeling is that it is not going to be effective.

Mr. Helms, will you now brief the situation.

 $\underline{\text{Director Helms}}\colon$ (Director Helms then read the briefing paper attached at Tab A.)

Secretary Connally: (To Director Helms) Why doesn't your assessment give consideration to continuation of what we're doing now? What if the

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69,000 troops are trapped? Where are you with respect to U.S. opinion and world opinion. What happens if we continue the way we are?

<u>President Nixon:</u> When we asked Dick to prepare a briefing it was to brief on the effects of the contemplated course of action.

<u>Secretary Laird:</u> I have sent you a net assessment on the capabilities of North and South Vietnam.

President Nixon: That is only part of it. The bigger question is that of the effect on the U.S. and world opinion of continuing what we're doing and failing or doing what we are considering and failing. The best of both worlds would be to continue as we are and succeed. The reason we are considering this or bombing is that we feel the current situation is one which carries a great risk of failure. How much will this change the situation? I think there is a better than even chance that if we do nothing we will fail. I think there is a better than even chance of success if we do this.

Secretary Connally: The greatest risk is failure by doing nothing more. We have been there ten years. If there is a Dunkirk then this will be a failure on the part of the United States. It will destroy a viable foreign policy for the United States. It will ensure your political defeat, Mr. President, if we fail. If anything happens you can't win with the doves. You can't run the risk of 69,000 American soldiers being trapped.

President Nixon: Your point is to provide greater leverage if South Vietnam collapses.

Secretary Connally: Yes.

Secretary Laird: We wanted two years. The election in 1968 was decided on the Vietnam issue. The problem is in South Vietnam -- in MRs 1, 2, and 3. The problem is not caused by equipment. In MR-1 not a single M-48 tank has been knocked out by a T-54.

President Nixon: The ARVN had 48 tanks -- they have 500; I saw the figures.

Secretary Laird: The problem facing South Vietnam is whether they are willing to stand and fight and search out the artillery. Their marines are doing a good job but not the others. We have the guns but we need the spotters.

<u>President Nixon:</u> We don't have spotters. Regarding the tanks, all but nine of ours were knocked out. Our small tanks are no match for the T-54s.

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North Vietnam has ten times as many tanks. You recall that the Defense Department opposed my sending heavy tanks there.

Secretary Laird: The problem is spotting artillery. The South Vietnamese spotters work within the South Vietnamese camps. The North Vietnamese spotters are better. They accurately pinpoint the South Vietnamese. The reverse is not true. We are using C-130s with infrared against their artillery. This is becoming more effective. When the NVA put 4,600 rounds of artillery into Quang Tri on the last day it caused panic. General Lam was not so good. He had disagreements with General Abrams. We are making certain changes. The point is that the battle in South Vietnam is going to be decided on the ground. Air and naval support are important but they won't win unless there are improvements in the RVNAF leadership. General Minh, the Three Corps Commander, wants out. The ARVN has to change its leaders.

The ground battle in South Vietnam is important. If we take the course we are contemplating it will have an effect in four to six months. I think North Vietnam will stay the course with a U.S. election coming up. These actions will give the impression of working for four to six weeks but then after that they will not.

President Nixon: It might help next year.

Secretary Laird: I agree it might help next year. We are already extended to 1.6 billion dollars. We can't get money from Congress. We are drawing from all over the world for this. I have seen two administrations place everything in Southeast Asia. This Administration has been able to build its strength in Europe. It has come to certain understandings with the USSR and China. If we do this, I think we will go into the campaign on the defensive and it will be a minus. We should not be on the defensive.

President Nixon: You disagree with Secretary Connally. You mean that we should just look at this question from the point of view that if the South Vietnamese can't make it, just resign ourselves to the fact and make a plus out of our other policies.

Secretary Laird: I think South Vietnam can make it. Hue may go but it will not be as bad as 1968.

<u>President Nixon:</u> Your point is South Vietnam can make it without either the strikes or sea interdiction. You don't think from the psychological standpoint it would be helpful even beyond the elections.

Secretary Laird: It will not have a bearing now.

President Nixon: But what about the future?

Secretary Laird: Yes. But even in the future it is perhaps doubtful.

<u>President Nixon:</u> Suppose we are wrong? Suppose Vietnam fails? How do we handle it? You don't assess the risks for our policy?

<u>Secretary Laird:</u> We must hedge on equipment. We have given them everything they have asked for and will continue. If they don't have enough incentive, then all the equipment in the world won't save them.

Secretary Connally: Why do you use the argument that cost is too great? You aren't going to save any money.

Secretary Laird: The military equipment route is the cheapter route.

<u>Secretary Connally</u>: Explain that to me. Haven't all the assets already been sent there?

Secretary Laird: We are conducting a massive air campaign in the DRV and in South Vietnam. It runs up into tremendous amounts of money. Just to give you an example, one B-52 strike costs 40,000 dollars in ammunition.

Dr. Kissinger: What you are doing is arguing against the present scale of air effort.

Vice President Agnew: I don't think, if we just let things go, we can afford to let South Vietnam slide. When South Vietnam goes it will be utter collapse if something isn't done. It will be a complete loss of U.S. diplomatic credibility around the world. We must move the Soviets off center. We must move off gradualism. We should stop saying what we are not going to do. We are not in a confrontation with the Soviets. There is still the possibility of a face-saving solution in Paris. Before a confrontation with the Soviets they could go to the DRV and say let's find a solution. What will happen if we let South Vietnam slide into defeat?

President Nixon: These are all things we don't know.

<u>Vice President Agnew:</u> If there is a collapse, the Soviets will be encouraged in the Middle East, in the Indian Ocean. It will be a green flag for wars of

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national liberation anywhere. I personally believe in the domino theory.

<u>President Nixon:</u> We could do this and still fail. Mel (Laird) is aware of this. The South Vietnamese could still collapse. Then it would only be a chip for our Prisoners of War.

Vice President Agnew: By not doing anything more we would be giving testimony to our weakness. The Europeans have let us be out in front of every fight they have. If something happens with the Soviets then let the Soviets be nervous. Politically and domestically I think it will be vicious for the Administration but, Mr. President, if I were sitting where you are I would say we have got to do something. We're the greatest people in the world for handcuffing ourselves. We are compulsive talkers. I don't think you have any option. The effect could be great in South Vietnam. It could stop the erosion of the internal structure and beat DRV morale.

Mr. Lincoln: I believe the domino theory.

President Nixon: I think we all do. The real question is whether the Americans give a damn any more. American's don't care about Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Philippines. No President could risk New York to save Tel Aviv or Bonn. We have to say it -- our responsibility is to say it -- because we must play a role of leadership. A lot of people say we shouldn't be a great power. That is all well and good if there were not another couple of predatory powers on the scene. The Soviets already have a tremendous capability and the Chinese are developing one.

If you follow <u>Time</u>, the <u>Washington Post</u>, the <u>New York Times</u> and the three networks, you could say that the U.S. has done enough. Let's get out; let's make a deal with the Russians and pull in our horns. The U.S. would cease to be a military and diplomatic power. If that happened, then the U.S. would look inward towards itself and would remove itself from the world. Every non-Communist nation in the world would live in terror. If the U.S. is strong enough and willing to use its strength, then the world will remain half-Communist rather than becoming entirely Communist.

Mr. Lincoln: We really have to hedge against a failure in South Vietnam even if the chance of failure is only ten percent. Those who criticize us will say why didn't we do it sooner. This action hedges against it. Four or five months from now it is likely to be of some help. It is a less inflamatory step than just actually bombing.

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I have one technical concern and that is the question of availability of air power. In the short run can it be better used in support of our air mission in South Vietnam than in this interdiction?

President Nixon: I understand the problem. Hue is a little bit like Verdun. The Germans and the French decided it was important and fought for it. Three million men were killed as a result. Hue is a hell of a symbol. General Abrams is using as much as he can.

Secretary Laird: Abrams is dividing up his planes between MR's 1, 2 and 3.

President Nixon: Abrams has 35 B-52s which he does not allocate every day. They are used for targets of opportunity.

Admiral Moorer: He also has a call on the resources operating north of the DMZ.

President Nixon: One advantage of this operation as distinct from bombing more is that, if we bombed more, our credibility will be diminished. If we do this option it will be with the assumption that Abrams will have all the resources he needs. The main battle is in the South. The reason there was no second strike on Hanoi and Haiphong was because General Abrams did not want to divert the resources. I was much persuaded by the needs that he expressed and if the military commander says what he needs, we will support him.

<u>Vice President Agnew:</u> Whatever we do, we should do it all. First, we should free up the air. Second, we should surprise them and third, we should lessen the domestic impact. The docks are part of this. We should go the whole route.

Secretary Connally: I couldn't agree more. It is not only a question of Vietnam but Laos, Cambodia and all of Southeast Asia. Mr. President, you say United States people are sick of it. You said we will withdraw. If Vietname is defeated, Mr. President, you won't have anything. I agree it won't happen in three weeks but it is a mistake to tie our hands as we did in the mid-1960's. At that time many Americans thought we were doing this on a no-win basis. If we move we ought to blockade, we ought to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. It is inconceivable to me that we have fought this war without inflicting damage on the aggressor. The aggressor has a sanctuary. If Russia gets away with it here like it did in Bangla Desh then it will be all of

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Southeast Asia. Where next? The Middle East? We must think about these things. The other problem is South Vietnam's ability to survive.

President Nixon: Then you would approve this operation.

<u>Secretary Connally</u>: Don't let them nibble you to death on this. You've got to make a conscious decision one way or another. What the people want is leadership.

President Nixon: There is no sure choice. I will have to decide before 2 o'clock. Everything you say will have to be weighed. Secretary Rogers will evaluate the world aspect. We see risks of confrontation. We must have in mind the fact that the USSR, with so much on the plate, might move to cool it rather than heat it up; so there is a question about the USSR there. I think we have to bear in mind that they expressed concern about the problem. They expressed an interest in getting Hanoi back to the conference table. I don't know whether they can influence Hanoi to do something. But as far as the USSR is concerned this course may be an incentive or disincentive.

Secretary Rogers: If there is a failure in South Vietnam that is disastrous for our policies.

President Nixon: Even if we try?

Secretary Rogers: Secondly, we shouldn't be carried away. I think the U.S. people think you have done enough and that you have done very well. The question, therefore, is whether there is something more you can do to be effective. I agree with Dick's (Helms) paper. It is a good one. We assume the effect will be good. LBJ said that it didn't work. Do we think it will work? It is clear that it won't have the effect militarily in the short term and maybe it won't have any effect at all. It could have a psychological effect on both South Vietnam and North Vietnam and, if so, that would be worthwhile.

But it could have the opposite effect both on the battlefield and domestically. I think it's going to be a tough one with our people and with our allies. We will have some help from the British and a few others.

As for Congress and public opinion, I think they will charge that this will have no military effect. It looks from Dick's (Helms) paper that most supplies can come by rail. Maybe they can't but I'm assuming that the CIA paper is right on this.

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If we do this and fail, I think that would be worse and more damaging to our prestige. I don't know whether it will be effective or not. We must rely on the military. If this will strengthen the military hand and the hand of the South Vietnamese, I think we should support it. Could we wait? Perhaps a week? Is there a time factor? I learned in my discussions from the Europeans that the DRV wants to destroy the summit.

Secretary Connally: This will put the summit in jeopardy but I don't think it is certain that they will cancel it.

<u>Dr. Kissinger:</u> I think that if we do this there is a better than even chance that the Soviets will cancel the summit.

<u>President Nixon:</u> I couldn't go to the summit if conditions in South Vietnam are the same as now or worse.

Secretary Connally: It is better for the Soviets to cancel the summit than us.

Secretary Rogers: The question is is it going to work or is it going to hurt us?

<u>Vice President Agnew:</u> I think we are better off if we do it even if we lose Hue.

Secretary Laird: Let's not make so much out of Hue. We lost it in 1968.

<u>Vice President Agnew:</u> The media are making a big thing out of Hue. That is something we cannot help.

Secretary Laird: The problem is one of assets.

<u>Dr. Kissinger:</u> The problem with all these figures is that one cannot construct a program analysis approach type model. The fact of the matter is that they would have to redirect 2.2 million tons of seaborne imports. At present they are only importing 300,000 tons by rail. We did not stop all of their rail transport in 1965-68.

President Nixon: It is very different now. Sihanoukville is cut. Now we will cut off the port.

Dr. Kissinger: They have a theoretical capacity but they can't use trains by day and if you analyze every segment of the railroad in China you will

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find that one segment of the railroad is apt to get overloaded. You can't throw these figures around without a better analysis. It is easy to say that they have a four months' capacity and could go all out and end the war but they would end with zero capacity. Another possibility is that they would try everything in one month or alternately cut way down on their activities. One thing is certain they will not draw their supplies down to zero.

President Nixon: The key point is if it is militarily effective. Looking to the future we have to think about whoever sits in this chair after the election. We must consider the long term advantages as well as the short term. If South Vietnam goes and we have done this, Bill's (Secretary Rogers) view is that we are worse off. John's (Secretary Connally) and the Vice President's view is different.

My view is that either way, if South Vietnam goes, as far as the political situation is concerned we are done. What is on the line is an election. The only effective thing is to decide now that, if South Vietnam isn't going to succeed, then we should withdraw before the debacle, blame it on the Senate and pull out. I could make the God damnest speech to this effect and win the election, but I couldn't bring myself to do that because I know too much. I'm not sure that U.S. training is equal to Communist style training. This is no discredit to us. We are different and we believe in permisiveness. The North Vietnamese fight because they're afraid of what will happen to them if they don't.

My main point is that I will consider the possibility of simply chucking it now, blaming the doves for sabotaging the negotiating track and encouraging the enemy and telling the North Vietnamese we'll do everything they want to get back our prisoners of war.

The price they are demanding for our prisoners of war is not just a deadline for the withdrawal of our forces. We've tried that. They won't give back those prisoners of war until we get out of Southeast Asia totally. At least with this option we have something to bargain for POWs. We certainly can't pay the price that they have demanded.

<u>Vice President Agnew:</u> I disagree that this is a viable political alternative. I don't think we can sell it.

President Nixon: We have several choices. The first is a bug-out. The second is the choice of continuing to do what we're doing. The risk of this course is failure. In any event we are not going to Moscow. When I came back from Communist China I didn't get a damn thing on Vietnam.

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We go to the Soviet Union, we agree on principles, credits, and we toast each other at a time when Soviet tanks are kicking hell out of our allies. If we act and then we have a summit, perhaps we can do that. The real proposition is, are we better off letting the dust settle or will more drastic action tip the balance in a decisive way? I will have to weigh these. All of you come down on these matters in varying degrees and shades. It comes down not to whether we lose in Vietnam but first what can we do to prevent that and second what should we do to make the losses palatable if we do in fact lose.

Secretary Connally: One option was negotiations and last fall and spring there was hope for negotiations but that hope is down the drain. We have lost the negotiating option. At the moment our country's future is in the hands of the South Vietnamese and whether they stand and fight. We cannot allow this situation to continue.

Secretary Laird: I am limited to 2.4 billion dollars annually. I have put in 2.9 billion dollars already, hiding it under the table. I am taking it out of the hide of the Services.

Secretary Connally: You're already pregnant.

Secretary Laird: It's a question of where you are next year. If you are to have a viable policy, you can't break down your whole force posture. You've got to have the support of the people and the Congress.

Vice President Agnew: If we don't get anywhere on the Vietnam question, then we won't be anywhere anyway.

Secretary Connally: We can't make this decision on the basis of cost. You can't convince me that if you bomb the railroads, the ports of Haiphong and Hanoi, you can't persuade me that it won't affect the psychology both in South and North Vietnam.

Secretary Laird: I agree.

Secretary Connally: Maybe you can give the South Vietnamese the necessary will by doing this.

President Nixon: The U.S. way of training may not be the most effective.

Secretary Laird: That may be so but I would only say that in the battle of An Loc, when the North Vietnamese tanks attacked, the only NVA who was not chained to his tank was the tank commander himself.

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Secretary Rogers: Is it going to work with respect to South Vietnam and North Vietnam? Is it going to work with respect to public opinion. Congress and so forth?

President Nixon: The answer is that we aren't sure. I have to balance all these things. The risks of doing what we're doing versus the risks of doing more. I find Mel's (Secretary Laird) analysis of the military situation reassuring but General Abrams' message of May 2 was not reassuring. Mel, would you agree that you would not be surprised to see South Vietnam fold?

Secretary Laird: Out of 44 province capitals maybe the Communists will take five.

President Nixon: I'll decide by 2:00 p.m. In the meantime, if we decide to do this, I will want the operative aspect to be checked with Secretary Rogers and Secretary Laird. If we do this we will want to put it in the most conciliatory terms and yet in strong terms as well. This is a decision of great import. We must keep this in confidence. Everyone must support the decision. I don't want to see columns appearing in the papers saying who agreed and who didn't agree. If we decide to do this, it won't work unless we do it with all-out ferocity. I don't know how it will affect the Vice President's trip to Japan.

Vice President Agnew: A few hundred thousand student demonstrators won't bother me. I would not want to assume that the summit is cancelled.

Secretary Rogers: I won't go back to Europe. Assistant Secretary Hillenbrand is over there.

President Nixon: If we do it, we will need all the big guns here in Washington.

Secretary Laird: I think it would be a mistake for me to cancel my meeting with the military planning group of NATO the week after next.

Secretary Rogers: Whatever you decide, Mr. President, you will have our total support.

President Nixon: First, I will weigh Mel's options. Second, I will weigh the bombing option which I don't like; and third, I will weigh the operation

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we have discussed today which does not take so much from General Abrams.

The meeting ended at 12:20 p.m.



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