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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

DOS REVIEWED 16 MAR 2011 NO OBJECTION TO DECLASSIFICATION

March 29, 1974

Dear Mr. Harvey:

Mr. Laird has asked that I reply to your December 29 letter in which you sought his views on the bombing of Cambodia for your friend, Mr. Ted Leipprandt, Sr. Please accept my apology for the delay of this response.

From 1965 on, North Vietnamese forces occupied military sanctuaries along the Cambodian frontier with South Vietnam. These sanctuaries significantly assisted the North Vietnamese to attack our forces fighting in South Vietnam and provided them a safe haven whenever our forces threatened to destroy or capture the Vietnamese Communist troops.

Diminishing the usefulness of these areas to the North Vietnamese was considered critical to the safety of our men and to the eventual turn over of combat responsibilities to the South Vietnamese. However, we also realized that public acknowledgment of our bombing would pose serious problems for the Cambodian head of state, at the time, Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The Cambodians were trying to avoid becoming entangled in the Vietnam conflict, but wished to see the sizable North Vietnamese presence in their country checked or reduced.

The absence of protests from the Cambodians during the secret bombing confirmed that Prince Sihanouk had no serious objections to attacks on Vietnamese Communists who denied their presence in his country. Indeed, diplomatic relations were reestablished during this period.

We found that the bombing did reduce the usefulness of the sanctuary areas to Hanoi and consequently that the dangers to our forces were reduced. We also realized the anomaly of concealing our actions from the American public, but thought that the extraordinary diplomatic circumstances argued for our acting in this way. As you may know, however, certain members of Congress were aware of these raids and our rationale for avoiding public acknowledgment of them.

Our bombing, of course, was not directed at Cambodia or Cambodians. Our intention was to protect our forces in South Vietnam and indirectly to

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ease North Vietnamese pressures on Cambodia, while allowing that country itself to remain generally out of the conflict. Although subsequent political events in Cambodia altered its situation, our actions were framed to help our military forces while doing the least possible harm to Cambodia.

Sincerely,

W. R. Smyser
Senior Staff Member

Honorable James Harvey
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

3/27/74


Dick Simyer
Timmons would
not react well
to answering a
letter to a Congressman
over 3 mos late -
especially when it
didn't come thru his
office. I suggest
you sign it Dick.
Thanks Bud

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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March 26, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: BILL TIMMONS
THROUGH: ROBERT C. MCFARLANE
FROM: WILLIAM L. STEARMAN 
SUBJECT: Reply to Congressman Harvey
on Cambodia Bombing

Attached at Tab A is a suggested reply to a December 29 letter (Tab B) from Congressman Harvey requesting a defense of the "secret bombing" of Cambodia. The reply is based largely on a State Department draft subsequently edited by the NSC Staff.

Since Mr. Laird has left government service, the attached reply might be signed most appropriately by a member of the legislative liaison office.

The reply points out that our Cambodia bombing was intended to protect U.S. forces in South Vietnam and was not directed at Cambodians but North Vietnamese forces illegally occupying strategic sections of that country's frontiers. The letter also notes that selected members of Congress were informed of this operation. Our concern for not complicating the position of the then Cambodian head of State, Prince Sihanouk -- who did not object to the bombing -- lead to the decision not to publicize this activity.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the letter at Tab A.

JAMES HARVEY
8TH DISTRICT, MICHIGAN

HOUSE ADMINISTRATION
INTERSTATE AND FOREIGN COMMERCE

2352 RAYBURN OFFICE BUILDING
(202) 225-2808

JAMES M. SPARLING, JR.
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

December 29, 1973

DISTRICT OFFICES:

2700 WEST GENESEE AVENUE
SAGINAW, MICHIGAN 48602
(517) 799-0336

318 FEDERAL BUILDING
BAY CITY, MICHIGAN 48706
(517) 893-9443

Honorable Melvin Laird
Assistant to the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

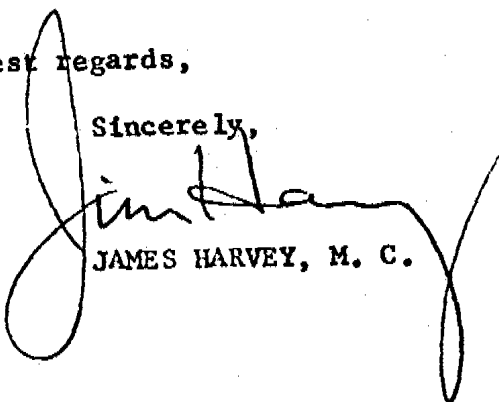
Dear Mr. Laird:

A constituent who is a good friend of mine, Mr. Ted Leipprandt, Sr., has come to me with a question. He says, "Some folks I know have been highly critical of Nixons orders in secret bombing of Cambodia. Some folks are highly critical of Melv (sic) Laird and his counsel to continue our problem in S.E. Asia. I would honestly like to know his defense for this attitude."

I would appreciate any comments you care to make on this subject that I could pass on. Thank you for your assistance.

With kindest regards,

Sincerely,



JAMES HARVEY, M. C.

JH/d1

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

For Staffing &
draft reply
for Laird's
signature.

RCM



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

January 18, 1974

Memorandum for: NSC Secretariat
The White House

Subject: Harvey Letter on Cambodia

Representative James Harvey wrote to Mr. Laird on December 29 seeking his views on the secret bombing of Cambodia. A suggested reply is attached for Mr. Laird's signature.

The original correspondence is returned for your files.

A. B. ...
Secretariat Staff

Attachments:

1. Suggested Reply.
2. Mr. Harvey's letter.