

3 AM 11:43

1971 MAR 3 16 33

WHITE HOUSE
SITUATION ROOM
ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

SECTION 1 OF 2

MORI/CDF C05076669 Pages 1-4

~~TOP SECRET~~ SENSITIVE 031220Z MAR 71 VIA CAS CHANNELS

State Dept. review completed.

FROK: AMBASSADOR BUNKER, SAIGON 0341

TO: THE WHITE HOUSE, EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY HENRY A. KISSINGER

1. I CAN APPRECIATE AND UNDERSTAND YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE OPERATIONS IN LAOS. THIS IS REINFORCED WHEN I READ THE DAILY PRESS SUMMARY FROM WASHINGTON. BUT I UNDERSTAND ALSO THAT YOUR CONCERN GOES MUCH DEEPER THAN THE MANNER OF PRESS REPORTING.

2. I HAVE DISCUSSED YOUR CONCERNS WITH GENERAL ABRAMS. WE MET PRIVATELY YESTERDAY, DECIDED TO REFLECT ON THE QUESTIONS YOU RAISED OVERNIGHT AND HAVE MET AGAIN TODAY. WE FOUND THAT INDEPENDENTLY WE HAD COME TO SIMILAR CONCLUSIONS. WHAT FOLLOWS, THEREFORE, REPRESENTS OUR JOINT AND CONSIDERED VIEWS ON LAM SON 719.

3. I THINK IT WOULD BE WELL TO BEGIN BY RECALLING THE ORIGIN OF THE OPERATION. INTELLIGENCE ACQUIRED SINCE LAM SON 719 BEGAN INDICATES THAT AFTER THE CROSS BORDER OPERATIONS INTO CAMBODIA IN 1970, THE ENEMY BEGAN SERIOUS PLANNING TO COUNTER A CROSS BORDER OPERATION IN LAOS. LAST OCTOBER, HE ESTABLISHED A HEADQUARTERS IN NORTH VIET-NAM NOW KNOWN AS THE 70TH FRONT. AMONG ITS MISSIONS WAS COMMAND OF THE COUNTER-ATTACK FORCES AGAINST OUR SIDE'S PENETRATION INTO LAOS. THE 70TH FRONT HAS COMMITTED NINE REGIMENTS OR 27 INFANTRY BATTALIONS TO THE BATTLE. THREE REGIMENTS ARE NOT COMMITTED AT THIS TIME - ONE IN LAOS AND TWO IN NORTH VIET-NAM. HEAVY ARTILLERY AND ABOUT 100 TANKS HAVE ALSO BEEN COMMITTED SUPPORTED BY NUMEROUS ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS. THE MAIN THRUST OF THE ENEMY EFFORT HAS BEEN POINTED AT ROUTE 9 IN A NORTH-SOUTH CORRIDOR ABOUT FIFTEEN KILOMETERBSWIDE FROM THE LAOS/ SOUTH VIET NAM BORDER WEST. THE ENEMY REFERS TO THIS AS THE ROUTE 9 BATTLE.

4. ON OUR SIDE, THE ARVN AIRBORNE, RANGERS AND ARMOR HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN HEAVY FIGHTING AGAINST THE ENEMY'S MAJOR THRUST FROM THE NORTH. SOUTH OF ROUTE 9, UNITS OF THE ARVN 1ST DIVISION DIRECTED THEIR EFFORTS TO CUTTING THE FLOW OF SUPPLIES SOUTH FROM BASE AREA 604. BEGINNING ON 2 MARCH, THE EFFORT OF THE 1ST DIVISION IS FOCUSED ON MOVING NORTH AND WEST PARALLEL TO THE ENEMY'S ROUTE 914 SUPPLY SYSTEM. THE DISRUPTION OF THE ENEMY'S LOGISTICAL COMPLEX IN THAT AREA AND IN THE AREA AROUND ICHEPONE ARE THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVES. THE MARINES ARE TAKING OVER FROM THE REAR OF THE 1ST DIVISION TO THE BORDER.

5. WITH MOVES NOW IN PROGRESS, THE ARVN WILL HAVE FOR EMPLOYMENT IN LAOS THE AIRBORNE DIVISION (7 EFFECTIVE BATTALIONS), THE 1ST ARVN DIVISION WITH THREE REGIMENTS (11 EFFECTIVE BATTALIONS), THREE MARINE BRIGADES (9 EFFECTIVE BATTALIONS), AND THE ARMOR

TASK FORCE WITH THREE BATTALIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT THE ARVN HAS COMMITTED ADEQUATE STRENGTH FOR THE OPERATION. THE ARVN 4TH REGIMENT IS MOVING UP FROM SOUTHERN I CORPS AND, WITH ELEMENTS OF THE U.S. 101ST AND 23RD, WILL COVER ROUTE 9 FROM THE BORDER TO THE COAST.

6. THE AIRBORNE BATTALIONS FIGHT WELL, BUT THE DIVISION COMMANDER IS APPREHENSIVE AND MECHANICAL. THE RANGERS ARE WELL LED AND FIGHT WELL. THE ARMORED COMMAND SEEMS EFFECTIVE. THE 1ST ARVN DIVISION HAS STRONG, SKILLED, AND HIGHLY MOTIVATED LEADERS FROM BOTTOM TO TOP. MARINE PERFORMANCE HAS STILL TO BE PROVEN, BUT CONFIDENCE IS JUSTIFIED BASED ON PAST PERFORMANCE. GENERAL LAM IS TOUGH AND CAREFUL. HE IS HANDLING THE OPERATION WITH PROFESSIONAL SKILL. GENERAL VIEN IS DETERMINED, CONFIDENT, AND INTELLIGENT. PRESIDENT THIEU, FROM THE BEGINNING, HAS PERSONALLY INVOLVED HIMSELF IN THE OPERATIONS, INCLUDING DEPLOYMENTS, TACTICS AND OBJECTIVES. ALL SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE BASIC PLAN HAVE BEEN DIRECTED OR APPROVED BY HIM PERSONALLY. IN THE TALKS WITH GENERAL ABRAMS AND I HAVE HAD WITH HIM, HE HAS BEEN RESOLUTE, CONFIDENT, AND DETERMINED TO PURSUE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE BASIC PLAN.

7. WITH THIS DESCRIPTION OF THE MILITARY SITUATION, I SHOULD LIKE TO MAKE SOME FURTHER OBSERVATIONS. IT IS TRUE THAT WHAT HAS HAPPENED HAS NOT MATCHED THE SCENARIO USED TO EXPLAIN THE CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS. CHANGES IN THE ORIGINAL PLAN HAVE BEEN NECESSITATED BY WEATHER CONDITIONS, BY THE CONDITION OF ROUTE 9 WITHIN LAOS AND BY THE LAOTIAN TERRAIN. IT WAS UNFORTUNATE THAT TCHEPONE WAS EMPHASIZED AS THE OBJECTIVE IN THE BEGINNING. THE OBJECTIVE IS THE INFILTRATION NETWORK WHICH CONVERGES BETWEEN THE VIETNAM/LAOS BORDER AND TCHEPONE. THIS WAS STATED BY PRESIDENT THIEU ON FEBRUARY 8 WHEN HE SAID "THIS IS AN OPERATION LIMITED IN TIME AND SCOPE WITH A CLEAR AND UNIQUE OBJECTIVE OF DISRUPTING THE KWSUPQTY AND INFILTRATION NETWORK OF THE COMMUNIST NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS LYING IN LAOTIAN TERRITORY...USED TO LAUNCH ATTACKS AGAINST OUR COUNTRY".

8. IN OPERATIONS OF THIS KIND, ONE CANNOT BE TIED TO PRECONCEIVED IDEAS OF WHAT MIGHT BE THOUGHT OF AS IDEAL PROCEDURES. A POSTURE HAS TO BE MAINTAINED FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ADAPT TO FLUID CONDITIONS WHICH MAY BE GOVERNED EITHER, TERRAIN OR CHANGES IN ENEMY TACTICS. SOME FACTORS WHICH ARE TEMPORARY HAVE SLOWED OPERATIONS TO A CERTAIN EXTENT: A) IN SOME CASES, BECAUSE OF WEATHER OR ENEMY ACTION, EVACUATION OF WOUNDED WAS DELAYED; B) AGAIN, BECAUSE OF WEATHER, THERE WAS OCCASIONAL DELAY IN GETTING SUPPLIES TO SOME UNITS.

9. I HAVE MENTIONED THE PERFORMANCE OF ARVN UNITS. THE 39TH RANGER BATTALION, WHICH SUFFERED HEAVY LOSSES, INFLECTED THREE TIMES AS HEAVY LOSSES ON THE ENEMY. IT SEEMS APPARENT THAT TWO BATTALIONS OF THE ENEMY REGIMENT OPPOSING IT WERE VIRTUALLY DESTROYED. THEY HAVE DISAPPEARED FROM THE INTERCEPTS AND THE 3RD BATTALION HAS JOINED ANOTHER REGIMENT. THE 2ND BATTALION, 3RD INFANTRY (1ST DIVISION) WITH 200 EFFECTIVES HAS BEEN WITHDRAWN TO TAKE ON REPLACEMENTS. THEIR SPIRITS ARE HIGH; THEY ARE CONVINCED THEY HAVE DEFEATED A REGIMENT. THE FACTS WE DO NOT KNOW, BUT AS GENERAL ABRAMS HAS SAID - SPIRIT IS THE ROOT FIBER OF A GOOD ARMY.

TOP SECRET SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET SENSITIVE

71 MAR 3 AM 10:58

WHITE HOUSE
SITUATION ROOM

FINAL SECTION OF TWO

T O P S E C R E T SENSITIVE 031220Z MAR 71 VIA CAS CHANNELS

FROM: AMBASSADOR BUNKER, SAIGON 0341

TO: THE WHITE HOUSE, EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY HENRY A. KISSINGER

10. THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY RISKS IN ANY OPERATION OF THIS KIND. THE ENEMY UNDERSTANDS THAT WE ARE AFTER HIS JUGULAR; THE NETWORK REPRESENTS HIS LIFELINE TO THE SOUTH. WITHOUT IT, HE IS FINISHED. HE IS BOUND TO REACT, AND IS REACTING. HE HAS BROUGHT IN A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF HIS FORCES. HE IS EMPLOYING HEAVY ARTILLERY AND A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF TANKS. THIS IS A TOUGH JOB, BUT IN GENERAL ABRAMS' AND MY VIEW, IT IS ONE THAT HAS TO BE DONE. IN OUR JUDGMENT, BASED ON THE TALKS WE HAVE HAD JOINTLY WITH PRESIDENT THIEU, AND MEETINGS FOR PLANNING WHICH GENERAL ABRAMS HAS HAD WITH GENERAL VIEN, WE ARE BOTH CONVINCED THAT THIS IS ALSO THE VIEW OF BOTH PRESIDENT THIEU AND GENERAL VIEN. THIEU CLEARLY UNDERSTANDS THAT HIS REPUTATION AND HIS POLITICAL FUTURE ARE CRITICALLY INVOLVED IN THE OPERATIONS IN CAMBODIA AND LAOS.

TOP SECRET SENSITIVE

11. ALTHOUGH THE OPERATION IS ONLY A LITTLE OVER THREE WEEKS OLD, AND No Objection to Declassification in Full 2011/10/17 : LOC-HAK-490-3-14-9 ORIGINAL PLANS, IT HAS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED ITS VALUE. ENEMY SOUTHWARD TRAFFIC HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED ON ROUTES 9 AND 92 AND GREATLY REDUCED ON ROUTE 914. THE ENEMY HAS BEEN FORCED TO ACCEPT COMBAT AWAY FROM THE TERRITORY OF SOUTH VIET-NAM. AS GENERAL ABRAMS HAS SAID, WE ONCE FOUGHT THE NVA 9TH DIVISION AROUND SAIGON, AND WE ARE NOW FIGHTING IT IN CAMBODIA; WE ONCE FOUGHT THE NVA 308TH AND 320TH DIVISIONS AROUND HUE AND DANANG, AND THEY ARE NOW BEING FOUGHT IN LAOS. THE ENEMY HAS LOST HEAVILY IN TANKS, WEAPONS, AMMUNITION AND OTHER MATERIEL. HIS POL PIPELINE HAS BEEN CUT. FRIENDLY CASUALTIES REPORTED TO DATE ARE 393 KIA AND MAY BE HIGHER. ENEMY CASUALTIES ARE REPORTED AS 3,742 KIA. EVEN DISCOUNTING THIS FIGURE BY A SUBSTANTIAL PERCENTAGE, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ENEMY HAS SUFFERED HEAVILY. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THE COMBINED FIGURES FOR LAM SON 719 AND TOAN THANG 01/71. COMBINED FRIENDLY CASUALTIES FOR THE TWO OPERATIONS ARE REPORTED TO BE 708 KIA. TOTAL ENEMY KIA IS REPORTED AT 6,992. AGAIN DISCOUNTING THE ENEMY KIA FIGURE, IT IS CLEAR THAT HE IS BEING BADLY HURT.

12. GENERAL ABRAMS HAS PROVIDED OUTSTANDING SUPPORT FOR BOTH OPERATIONS. OUR AIR SUPPORT, WE BELIEVE, WILL PROVE NOT ONLY TO BE A NECESSARY, BUT A DECIDING FACTOR.

13 PRESS REPORTING: ONE OF THE PROBLEMS WITH WHICH WE HAVE HAD TO CONTEND IS THE CHARACTER OF PRESS REPORTING. THEIR ATTITUDE FROM THE BEGINNING HAS BEEN SKEPTICAL OF THE OPERATIONS. THEY GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT TCHEPONE WAS THE PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE. WE HAVE TRIED TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THIS IS NOT SO, BUT THE FACT THAT THIS BECAME LODGED INRUHEIR MINDS LED THEM TO CONCLUDE THAT BECAUSPTCHEPONE HAD NOT BEEN REACHED, THE OPERATION HAD "BOGGED DOWNXM WE ARE STRIVING CONTINUALLY TO IMPROVE THIS SITUATION. YOU WILL HAVE SEEN GENERAL ABRAMS' RECOMMENDATIONS TO SECRETARY LAIRD WHICH WERE APPROVED AND HAVE BEEN PUT INTO EFFECT. WE HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH THE VIETNAMESE TO IMPROVE THEIR BRIEFING. COLONEL LEONARD, MACV INFORMATION OFFICER, AND COLONEL HIEN, GVN INFORMATION OFFICER, ARE PRESENTLY IN I CORPS TO TRY TO IMPROVUHE SITUATION THERE. GENERAL ABRAMS WILL HOLD A BACKGROUND SESSION WITH THE PRESS THIS WEEK.

14 I HAVE TRIED TO GIVE YOU A FRANK APPRAISAL OF THE SITUATION AS GENERAL ABRAMS AND I SEE IT. WE AND THE VIETNAMESE ARE DAILY MODIFYING TECHNIQUES AND TACTICS IN ORDER TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE ARE OPERATING. WE WILL HAVE SOME BAD MOMENTS. THIEU AND GENERAL VIEN EXPECT HARD FIGHTING AND ARE PREPARED TO TAKE HEAVY LOSSES. . . BUT THEY ARE CONFIDENT IN THE QUALITY OF THEIR TROOPS AND IN THEIR ABILITY TO INFLICT HEAVIER LOSSES ON THE ENEMSIM GENERAL ABRAMS AND I ARE BOTH CONFIDENT THAT IF WE HOLD STEADY ON OUR COURSE, THE CAMBODIA AND LAOS OPERATIONS WILL HAVE THE IMPACT ON THE ENEMY'S ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND OUR TROOP WITHDRAWALS WHICH WE ORIGINALLY CONTEMRQATED.

15. ALWAYS THE BEST AND WARMEST REGARDS.

TOP SECRET SENSITIVE