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Dr. Kissinger: Have you all seen General Abrams' summary of the situation and request for authorities?

Ambassador Johnson: No, I have not seen it.

Dr. Kissinger: (to Admiral Moorer) Would you summarize it briefly?

Admiral Moorer: (Gave a copy of the telegram to Ambassador Johnson and then summarized it briefly, noting that General Abrams had requested a series of additional authorities.) This is, of course, General Abrams' personal assessment. He puts all of the information and factors together and notes that a major enemy effort is impending.

Dr. Kissinger: (To Mr. Helms) Do you agree with Abrams' assessment?

Mr. Helms: Yes, essentially. We just received a new report today from our station chief. It says they are picking up indications that the enemy intends a countrywide general offensive as opposed to earlier comments about high points. This is a much starchier statement of their intentions than the enemy was giving in December. It seems that they intend to come on stronger than they had stated earlier.

Dr. Kissinger: Does this mean that they had always intended this or that they have changed their intended course since last December?

Mr. Helms: The report does not specifically state, but it is clear that they are talking in a much stronger tone now. They seem more confident.

Dr. Kissinger: What has happened to bring this change?

Admiral Moorer: They decided that they could make a much stronger push than they had earlier planned and that it would be to their advantage to do so over the next month or so.

Dr. Kissinger: But why do they see that differently now?

Admiral Moorer: I think it's primarily a political view timed with the trip to Peking.

Mr. Helms: I agree.

Dr. Kissinger: Well, either they have more resources than we had thought or they will use the resources they have more intensively to conduct a major campaign. They usually do this before they reopen negotiations.

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Mr. Helms: They are putting a lot of chips onto the table. There are a lot of troops in Laos and in Cambodia. They are going to orchestrate this thing. I believe they want to give you a good reception when you go to Peking.

Admiral Moorer: I agree.

Mr. Helms: I think it will come in early February.

Admiral Moorer: I would guess around the 10th; we had a flurry in the DMZ area over the weekend. They fired 200 mortar rounds. The Koreans also had quite a fight.

Dr. Kissinger: Do we think the ARVN can hold?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. The North Vietnamese probably could temporarily infiltrate into the Pleiku and Kontum areas. But General Minh has planned movement of his forces to reinforce against this very sort of attack. He also is going to hold all his forces on duty during TET, rather than let them go home as they usually do. We don't know how successful that will be. Most of them may just leave anyway. He also has plans for additional patrols and spoiling actions to cut the possibility of infiltration. He believes that the NVA will peak their effort before the Peking trip.

Ambassador Johnson: I think they want to make a heavy attack on the ARVN and then determine their future tactics based upon what happens. I don't think that they would necessarily come to the table in Paris.

Dr. Kissinger: But they might come to the table in Paris if they had humiliated the ARVN in their major attacks. If they had not been able to make much headway, they could elect to go to protracted war again. In either event it wouldn't make much difference what happened at Long Tieng.

Mr. Helms: I would like to comment further about the report that I mentioned earlier and read a part of it. (Mr. Helms read a paragraph of the cable which noted that the past three years had not been good for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. Pacification had been successful in separating the enemy from the people. Thus it was believed that the enemy might feel that they would have to show to the people that they could reassert some control, otherwise the people would believe that the Government had finally been able to assert its own control and they would make it even more difficult than for the NVA and the VC.)

Dr. Kissinger: Well, the President wants to do the maximum we can to support the ARVN. We should take a look at the authorities which General

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Abrams has requested, expressing our views. Then the President can take a look at the requests and our views of them. There are six authorities that were requested. They are not all related.

1. Airstrikes against the MIG bases at Vinh, Dong Hoi, and Quang Lang, all south of the 20th parallel.
2. Airstrikes against North Vietnamese GCI radar sites south of the 20th parallel.
3. Airstrikes against SAM sites in the DRV within 19 miles of the DMZ and the DRV-Laotian border to a point 19 miles north of the Mu Gia Pass.
4. Airstrikes against logistics targets in the DRV south of the 18th parallel.
5. Employment of sensors in the northern half of the DMZ.
6. U.S. air and helilift support as necessary for limited ARVN operations across the Lao and Cambodian borders.

Admiral Moorer: You correct, they are not all related. There actually are two groups. The first three pertain to the air threat and the last three to the expected enemy offensive.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's look at the question of sensors in the northern half of the DMZ first. Does anyone have any problem with this proposal?

Mr. Nutter: This would be above the imaginary median line. We already have them in the lower half below the line.

Ambassador Johnson: Would we put them in by air?

Admiral Moorer: Yes. The idea is to be able to pick up the lateral activity that we can't now pinpoint.

Dr. Kissinger: Why don't they just pick those things up?

Admiral Moorer: They are well camouflaged. Even if they find them we simply put in others. The reason we want to do this is to pick up the truck movements that move through the northern half of the zone and simply go around the end.

Ambassador Johnson: I see no problem with this proposal.

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Mr. Nutter: I discussed this earlier with Secretary Laird and he sees no problem with it.

Mr. Helms: I think we should do it. There should be no problem.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's consider No. 6 - Tactical Air and Helilift Support. I thought the authority existed for this.

Admiral Moorer: The authority exists only for Base Areas 701 and 702 of Laos and the cross border operation areas in Cambodia. This would extend the authorities in Laos.

Mr. Nutter: A related question is the use of riot control agents in those areas where the helicopters might go. Our request is still pending. We don't have the authority to use the RCAs now in the areas although the ARVN does have.

Admiral Moorer: General Vinh's instructions call for small cross border operations all along the line. Only if ARVN resources were not adequate would they call upon US support.

Dr. Kissinger: How much support -- how many helicopters -- are we talking about?

Admiral Moorer: These are small operations. I would think 20 - 30 helicopters per operation.

Dr. Kissinger: How large would the forces be?

Admiral Moorer: They would be small. Perhaps company sized special forces units.

Mr. Nutter: These would be very small operations, but the ARVN may have its own resources tied up in other operations and need our help. The biggest benefit would be psychological -- knowing that we would be willing to help if needed. Also the gunships support would be very helpful to them.

Ambassador Johnson: What is the current authority?

Mr. Nutter: The current authority allows us to give this kind of support in the Toan Thang operational area and Base Areas 701 and 702. This request would expand the authority to all of Cambodia and Laos.

Ambassador Johnson: Our rules now do not allow anyone on the ground in Laos. Is that correct? Are we still doing any of the MACSOG operations?

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Mr. Nutter: That is right. Our current authority does not allow any ground operations in Laos. There are some MACSOG operations in South Vietnam but they are very small.

Dr. Kissinger: I don't see what the difference is. If we allow this kind of support in some areas, why don't we in the others?

Admiral Moorer: The last authority we had to operate this way in Laos terminated in May last year when the Lam Son operation there was over.

Mr. Nutter: These would be very small-scale operations, but the question would be the political reaction in this country.

Dr. Kissinger: I can't see the ARVN doing any large operations. If it doesn't cause any political problem in the areas where we are now authorized to support them, I don't see why it would make any difference if we extend the authority. I am sure that most people don't know that these are different areas or that the authorities are now limited.

Admiral Moorer: I think the important point is that if the authorities are granted and the ARVN knows that we would be prepared to support them they would undertake some operations. Otherwise they would not.

[All agreed that this authority should be granted.]

Dr. Kissinger: Let's turn to the bombing of logistic targets south of the 18th parallel.

Ambassador Johnson: Where does this extend?

Dr. Kissinger: It is about 60 miles north of the DMZ. Isn't that correct?

Admiral Moorer: Yes (referring to a map and some photos). There are a number of truck parks and five transshipment points.

Ambassador Johnson: As I understand it, the rationale would be to inhibit the movement of supplies which could support an attack.

Admiral Moorer: Yes, the authority to attack these targets would be in connection with the land battle. I discussed this with Secretary Laird. He would visualize perhaps a two-day or 48-hour authority. He would give only a specific period and say you can attack them during that period and then look at the situation again.

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Dr. Kissinger: The President does not want to give blanket authorities. He wants a series of 1, 2 and 3-day plans which he could consider and decide upon. How soon do we need to make a decision on this?

Admiral Moorer: Well, we could wait until the major action develops.

Dr. Kissinger: Since we know that the attack on the B-3 front is coming, we could wait until that attack occurred and then authorize attacks on the logistics targets as a response to that attack. Is that correct?

Ambassador Johnson: Well, theoretically, that's true, but at that point we obviously couldn't effect that part of the battle with those attacks.

Admiral Moorer: But the 320th Division is already down there so it is really almost too late to have any major effect on the B-3 front battle. We might be able to restrict some supplies headed for the 320th.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you think the Division is there without supplies for the attack? Up to now we have seen no evidence that major supply movement to support the Division has occurred.

Mr. Helms: I don't believe that. I believe the supplies are already there and may have been there all the time. Besides, I think that they may be carrying a good deal of it with them.

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Admiral Moorer: We have to remember that there are very few days of good weather in February in which targets like this could be struck. Our records show that during February we can expect only three days in which we could have six hours with a 10,000 foot ceiling and only six days in which we would have three hours with a 10,000 foot ceiling.

Dr. Kissinger: (To Admiral Moorer) Would you please get some plans over for 1, 2 and 3-day attacks? The President will then consider possible authorities in the light of those plans. If the authority is granted, we will notify only the people in this room. For the B-3 battle, there is no urgent need for this authority. Clearly we could not give an authority which would result in attacks occurring while we were in Peking. It could be phrased in a way which would give the authority to conduct the strikes against these targets for a limited period, whenever the weather was suitable up to a specific date.

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Admiral Moorer: I will get the plans over to you this week.

Dr. Kissinger: Let's now turn to the question of air strikes on SAM sites. Couldn't we just do this by running armed recce along the DMZ and when we activate their radars, attack them?

Admiral Moorer: We are looking into that possibility and others. We could have one set of authorities now, for example, and a different one later when the battle is joined.

Dr. Kissinger: But couldn't you step up the amount of armed recce as a way to get at this problem?

Mr. Nutter: General Abrams wants the authority requested in order to save air assets. Increasing armed recce would run counter to this. He would simply give them the authority to attack whenever they are identified.

Ambassador Johnson: But he wants to bomb them. That also will require air assets.

Admiral Moorer: They can fire now whenever a SAM radar is locked on.

Dr. Kissinger: But I still don't understand why we don't step up the armed recce and fire whenever the radar is activated.

Admiral Moorer: There are two ways to attack the SAMs. You can fire a missile when you have been fired on or you can make an out-and-out attack on the site.

Mr. Kissinger: If we're trying to avoid a unrestricted authority to attack, we need to find an authority which makes operational sense and increases the threat to the SAM sites.

Mr. Nutter: They can't fire now unless the radar is locked on. We could authorize them to fire whenever fired on.

Admiral Moorer: Abrams wants to have the authority to attack the sites with bombs whenever a site is identified.

Dr. Kissinger: But I think we should try to avoid a situation which would result in daily stories of attacks. There would seem to be three possibilities. We could (1) increase the amount of armed recce and provoke the SAM or radar reaction and then attack, (2) attack the sites with bombs whenever they fire, or (3) attack the sites whenever we find them. The third possibility has the disadvantage of generating what will be daily news stories

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of attacks. Couldn't we marry the second and third possibilities giving them a one-time authority to hit sites that have been found. Our experience has been that you get the same amount of heat domestically for a four plane attack as you do for 400. (To Admiral Moorer) Could you please give us a proposal?

Admiral Moorer: I will get this for you.

Dr. Kissinger: How about the GCI radar sites.

Admiral Moorer: This is straightforward. We want to fire on these radars when they lock in our aircraft. We want the same authority as we have to attack SAM radars.

Dr. Kissinger: Where are they located?

Admiral Moorer: There are five of them south of the 20th parallel. They are shown on the map here (map attached).

Ambassador Johnson: Are these sites in populated areas?

Admiral Moorer: No, but we would have to restrict the direction of the attack to avoid the missile going north toward Hanoi.

Dr. Kissinger: We would attack these and the authority would be used only when the radars were painting our aircraft?

Admiral Moorer: Yes, we would start only by firing missiles when the radars picked up our planes.

Ambassador Johnson: Do they usually fire up the radar when the aircraft is in the area and they have a MIG tracking?

Admiral Moorer: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: General Abrams also wants to attack the airfields where the MIGs are based.

Ambassador Johnson: Won't you be able to hit them when you hit the SAMs?

Admiral Moorer: No. We could handle this with photo recce. We could increase our photo flights and attack the MIGs when they shoot at our aircraft taking pictures.

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Ambassador Johnson: At present if they see a MIG on the ground, can't they hit it?

Admiral Moorer: No. Unless the MIG takes offensive action, current authorities do not permit attack. We can only hit them if they show hostile intent.

Ambassador Johnson: I can see a case for destroying the MIGs on the ground as distinct from a general strike on the airfields.

Mr. Helms: From a public relations point of view, what difference does it make?

Dr. Kissinger: The problem again is one of stories appearing in the press of attacks every day. If we could state this authority in a way which wraps these strikes into a package of a 2-day strike, for example, it would be good.

Admiral Moorer: The objective is to suppress MIG attacks in Laos.

Mr. Nutter: One way would be to let other aircraft follow in and attack an aircraft after one of our aircraft is attacked. They can't do that now.

Dr. Kissinger: Could we get a statement by Wednesday morning of the alternative kinds of authorities which might get at this problem? Then we can meet again Wednesday to discuss this.

Admiral Moorer: I will do that.

Dr. Kissinger: There is one other problem that I would like to raise. General Abrams says he is short of aircraft. Could we put another Carrier out there?

Admiral Moorer: He didn't exactly say that. He said that the number of sorties is going to be tight because he is diverting aircraft to other missions. Did you mean four rather than three Carriers?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes, I was speaking of four Carriers. Abrams cites Laos requirements as limiting available sorties.

Admiral Moorer: If we keep two Carriers on line all the time, there would be a significant increase. Actually our rate has been 1.6 Carriers on line. Abrams has not been flying up to the 10,000 sortie level yet. We can increase greatly within it. We could raise the Navy sortie rate, for example, from 3,300 to 4,200 per month by keeping two Carriers on line. With three Carriers on line we could get to 6,300 Navy sorties. I will look at the possibility of having four Carriers out there during February and March.

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Dr. Kissinger: If the other side is surging its effort, they'll peak for a couple of months and then they will have to lower their level of activity. We should not continue business as usual. We should be in a position to put in the maximum effort through April. Can we put in more Tac Air in Thailand?

Admiral Moorer: We have a plan to augment in Thailand by bringing aircraft from Clark Field in the Philippines. An increase, for example, of 15 aircraft would provide 450 sorties more per month. We also have the capacity to put more planes at Da Nang but we are trying to get out of there.

Dr. Kissinger: We all are trying to save getting run out all over South Vietnam.

Admiral Moorer: But there are two pressures that we have to live with -- the political necessities and the military feasibility. We want to be sure that we do what's possible.

Dr. Kissinger: The President wants to be sure that we have the assets to do what is necessary. He wants a judgment as to what is needed. If more is needed, he wants to be told how to get it. He will be the judge of political feasibility. He is prepared to do more over the next three months. We need some proposals this week.

Admiral Moorer: I will have some for you.

Dr. Kissinger: I spoke to Secretary Laird who told me that he had worked out with Admiral Moorer a way to avoid the rapid drawdown of helicopters that we discussed at our last meeting and to keep more helicopters out there as we draw down to 69,000.

Admiral Moorer: Yes, we have a plan that will keep about 670 helicopters with the 69,000 man force. We should recall, however, that there will be a further drawdown starting in June and that will mean cutting into the helicopter force again.

Dr. Kissinger: But we need to keep up that capability now. If we can get through until June, we will have passed the point of maximum danger of attack and will be getting on toward the rainy season.

Mr. Nutter: I would just add that we are concerned about what the ARVN is not doing. They are not keeping their forces up in strength. The strength of most of their combat battalions is down to 50%. We have been trying to push them to keep them up to 90% but despite all our efforts, it seems to continue downward. We have urged Bunker to press Thieu on this matter.

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Admiral Moorer: I based my earlier statements on a message from Bunker. It said that December showed the first upturn for several months in recruiting and draftees. Part of the problem, of course, is the fact that the ARVN has been expanding but they have not been keeping their units up to strength as they should.

Dr. Kissinger: Can't we ask Abrams and Bunker to look into this and take it up with Thieu and give us some explanation and recommendation as to how we can get on top of this problem?

Mr. Nutter: We have done that over and over again but nothing seems to happen.

[The meeting ended at 5:30 PM]

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