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Tuesday, March 19, 1968
12:20 p.m.

~~TOP SECRET~~

MR. PRESIDENT:

You may wish to take into account at lunch these thoughts of the meeting of the Southeast Asian Ambassadors and Gen. Westmoreland at Cam Ranh Bay.

They raise, among other matters, the possibility of:

- a feint against North Vietnam;
- limited operations in Laos.

W. W. Rostow

~~TOP SECRET~~ attachment

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Authority OSD 10/6/78, NSC 8/14/80
By JK/Lg, NARA, Date 4/1/92

Copy of SAIGON 22495 March 19, 1968

Subject: Southeast Asia Coordinating Committee Recommendations

1. The Southeast Asia Coordinating Committee (SEACoord) convened at Cam Ranh Bay on March 7. Present were Ambassadors Bunker, Sullivan and Unger, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, together with their principal advisors. Following represents agreed summary of recommendations:

A. Vietnam - 1. In light of enemy divisions in DMZ-Khe Sanh area, the U.S. Government should study possibility of conducting amphibious feint north of the DMZ to relieve pressure on I Corps recommended by CINCPAC. Study should include careful re-examination of earlier expressed fear that failure to follow through on such a feint might be termed a propaganda victory for North Vietnam.

B. Laos - The extensive use of Laos by North Vietnamese military forces has greatly increased the problem of combating the enemy throughout South Vietnam. The use of Laotian territory by the enemy has reached a degree of seriousness where, despite the political problems involved, we should consider permitting limited military operations in Laos. Current military situation in Laos is moreover marked by aggressive enemy action which bears direct relation to increased North Vietnamese presence in Northern provinces of South Vietnam. Specially planned operations by US forces Khe Sanh plateau may encounter harassment and fire from enemy forces across the border in enemy base areas of Laos.

SEACoord recommends following actions relating to foregoing evaluation:

1. Contingency planning for possible limited ground operations by US and /or ARVN forces in Laos should proceed. The point may be reached when it will become necessary on a case by case basis to put limited ground forces into Laos. In that event, these forces should be employed close to the border and the operations should be conducted in such a way as to have no press exposure. It is important that the targets selected be worthy of the political risks involved. The Commander, US MACV will prepare contingency plans for consideration by Embassy Vientiane and will forward them to CINCPAC and the JCS for approval. The problems of deniability and/or press disclosure of such operations are recognized, and they will be covered in an appropriate annex.

2. Make immediate efforts to locate an alternate position for Site 85, primarily for aircraft guidance purposes. One such site, Phou Bia, would be valuable but requires specialized helicopter support because of altitude.

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The 7th Air Force will examine possibilities of obtaining such helicopters.

3. Authorize launching of Prairie Fire missions [REDACTED] recovering at forward refueling sites in Laos after team insertion when poor weather prevents operations from South Vietnam. These launches [REDACTED] will be subject to existing restrictions on Vietnamese presence in [REDACTED] Laos. [REDACTED] will coordinate with Embassy Vientiane re operating arc of current helicopters [REDACTED] in order to determine feasible forward refueling sites in Laos.

[REDACTED] The possible use of other sites will be studied by [REDACTED] Commander, U.S. MACV, having in mind military factors as well as the likelihood of approval [REDACTED] which must be sought before any extension in operations beyond the present authorization.

4. Commander, U.S. MACV proposed that Washington accept the principle that the current Prairie Fire boundary is a coordination line and authorize Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) and Embassy Vientiane to coordinate locally for exploitation of targets west of Prairie Fire boundary. Vientiane felt case by case coordination locally submitted through Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) for approval by Washington was adequate, but agreed to leave decision on this subject up to Washington.

5. Initiate a Prairie Fire intelligence collection operation, exploiting the potential of Kha tribesmen indigenous to the Prairie Fire area as elements of a low-level MACV-directed intelligence net.

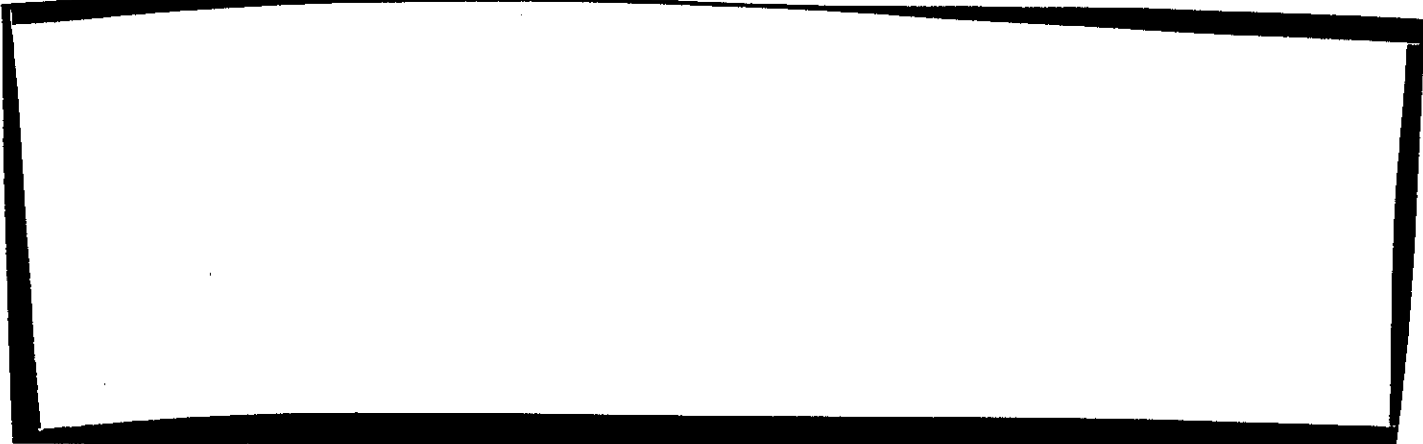
6. Since enemy operations in Laos threatening Khe Sanh area appeared to require ~~extension of dump truck area southward in Laos~~, it was agreed that Embassy Vientiane would submit a proposal through channels for such extension.

7. Embassy Vientiane proposed an increase in A-1 and A-26 aircraft [REDACTED] available for operations in Laos. It was agreed that the weekly planning meetings [REDACTED] between the 7th Air Force and Embassy Vientiane would include planning air support for ground force operations in counter-insurgency context.

8. Seek immediate ~~augmentation of helicopters~~ for entire SEACORD area and employ a portion of this augmentation to provide better support for [REDACTED] activity in Laos panhandle.

C. Cambodia - Political

1. Discussion at the SEACoord meeting emphasized the great importance of the collection and exploitation of specific hard intelligence on Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army use of Cambodia, as well as of circumstantial evidence which is convincing by dint of its quality and quantity. Collection of all types of intelligence on Cambodia should be given higher national priority than heretofore. Use of more aggressive intelligence collection methods should be authorized where necessary to obtain such intelligence. Movement of supplies to and through Sihanoukville is a particularly important area for an increased intelligence collection effort. Internal political and insurgency developments should also be covered in new tasking for CIA collection efforts.



3. Sihanouk should personally be presented with evidence of Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army use of Cambodia on a regular and continuing basis. He should be asked what his investigation of the material we have already given him has revealed. The Australians should be asked to impress him again with the seriousness with which we view the situation and call for action on the evidence provided him.

4. Assuming there is no sign of real action to correct the situation on Sihanouk's part in the near future, we should bring our evidence of VC/NVA use of Cambodia to the attention of other friendly governments and ask them to stress our concern to the Cambodians.

5. Pressure should be maintained on the Indians to work to make the International Control Commission an effective instrument for policing VC/NVA use of the border, though we recognize that such a transformation is unlikely. Meanwhile, evidence of VC/NVA use of Cambodia should be presented to the ICC on a regular and continuing basis.

6. No particular pressure should be applied to the Vietnamese to open up the Mekong. The closing of the Mekong puts additional pressure on the port of Sihanoukville, complicating any movement of VC/NVA supplies through that port.

7. The question of reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Cambodia should be kept under continuing review. While presence of a U. S. military attache with freedom to travel would be helpful, the present moment -- one in which we do not wish to make a major conciliatory step at a time we are pressing him toward more effective action on his own to deny VC/NVA use of his territory -- does not seem an appropriate time to move toward a re-establishment of relations.

8. It is recommended that the Secretary brief his colleagues on Cambodia in the seven nations meeting in Wellington, with a view to bringing them to understand the lines of action we have in mind and to enlist their cooperation where pertinent. Such a presentation would be an opportunity both to encourage governments with access to Cambodian government to join in emphasizing to it their concern over security problem posed by NVN/VC sanctuary and to explain to all the need for restraint in short term actions against Cambodia while determining what Sihanouk can and will do.

D. Cambodia - Administrative

1. Primary US field responsibility for matters relating to Cambodia (except for VC/NVA use of Cambodian territory) should continue to be vested in Embassy Bangkok. Bangkok will also take initiative in formulating recommendations on appropriate action as viewed from the field, keeping other SEACoord posts informed. Embassy Bangkok should be given necessary resources to do the job. Saigon will continue to have primary responsibility for reporting and policy recommendations relating to VC/NVA use of Cambodian territory, keeping other SEACoord posts informed. Embassy Bangkok will be sending follow-on telegram which will contain specific recommendations for improving collection, collation and dissemination of information.

2. It is recommended that member agencies assign a high priority to the interdepartmental working group under State Department chairmanship that has been established in Washington to coordinate and take action on matters pertaining to Cambodia.

E. Cambodia - Military

Meanwhile, it would be desirable, in the aftermath of the VC/NVA

use of Cambodia in connection with the Tet offensive, to [REDACTED] conduct limited military operations in unpopulated areas of Cambodia. We recommend that increased military activity by U. S. forces against NVA/VC in Cambodia begin now on a small scale, gradually increasing our operations as the situation permits, using care to avoid foreclosing through this program the possibility of obtaining Sihanouk's cooperation with us to reduce VC/NVA use of his territory. We recommend a scenario for U. S. operations in Cambodia as follows:

1. Beginning immediately:

A. The present restrictions on the number, depth, and frequency of Daniel Boone insertions be relaxed in Zone A and that more helicopter support be authorized for cross border operations in Zone A of the Daniel Boone area. This is essential if we are to develop better intelligence for use in the Vesuvius Operation. Further we need to develop hard targets that can later be exploited by fire in the unpopulated areas of Cambodia.

B. Exercising extreme caution to ascertain no Cambodian presence, initiate active defensive measures of short duration in remote, unpopulated sections of the Cambodian border area.

(1) Reconnaissance. Beyond present Daniel Boone squads, authorize US platoon/company size forces be inserted by helicopter and/or ground.

(2) Pursuit by fire on enemy targets retreating into unpopulated areas of Cambodia by use of artillery, gunships and tactical air.

[REDACTED] exploit differences between the Cambodian government, on the one hand, and the VC/NVA, CHICOMS and their Cambodian supporters on the other.

D. Expand the area of coverage south to the Gulf of Thailand, exercising safeguards to preclude loss of an aircraft in Cambodian territory.

2. Subsequent military operations:

Depending on Sihanouk's reactions to our political pressure and to our increased military operations recommended above, we visualize a carefully controlled and gradual increase in strength and effectiveness of US operations into Cambodia, while at the same time avoiding actions which would jeopardize any political progress we are making with Sihanouk.

The following subsequent military operations are recommended for initiation if it becomes clear that efforts to induce Sihanouk to act more effectively are not going to produce results and in circumstances where there would be a clear military imperative.

A. Increasing our reconnaissance capability by authorizing over-flights to a depth of 20 kilometers along the entire Cambodian border area with the QT-2 noiseless aircraft as soon as it proved its operational capability. Also allow the airborne personnel detector (people sniffer) to be employed along the border as an additional airborne sensor. In order for this to be employed effectively, authorize additional low-level reconnaissance coverage.

B. On a case by case basis, authorize night-time B-52 strikes on clearly defined significant targets in unpopulated, remote areas astride the South Vietnam-Cambodian border.

C. Increase the strength of our active defensive measures of short duration in remote, unpopulated sections of Cambodia close to the border by:

(1) Raids. Attack specific enemy targets with company/battalion task force supported by artillery, gunships, and tactical air.

(2) Pursuit. Forces not to exceed battalion task force size forces to maintain contact and destroy enemy forces retreating into Cambodia.

(3) Reaction forces. Employment of company/battalion task force size forces to reinforce reconnaissance/raid action and to assist disengagement and withdrawal of forces as necessary.

BUNKER