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TALKING POINTS

The Current Military Situation in Laos

1. On February 8, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam with U.S. air support crossed into enemy occupied territory of Laos to attack North Vietnamese sanctuaries close to the borders of South Vietnam between the 16 & 17 parallels. This is a South Vietnamese operation. No U.S. ground combat forces or U.S. advisers will enter Lao territory. The U.S. role is confined to providing (a) whatever air support is required to augment the capabilities of the South Vietnamese Forces, and (b) artillery support from positions exclusively in the territory of South Vietnam.
2. The purposes of this operation are (a) to attack and disrupt North Vietnamese bases, arms and supplies in sanctuary areas on South Vietnam's borders in Laos, and (b) to choke off the flow of North Vietnamese supplies and forces passing through this key center of the Ho Chi Minh trail system on their way southward into South Vietnam and Cambodia, and thereby enhance the safety & security of South Vietnam as the U.S. continues to withdraw additional personnel as part of the Vietnamization program. This action will be limited in time and area. The reasons for this action have also been clearly stated in a statement issued on February 8 by President Nguyen Van Thieu of the Republic of Vietnam.
3. The stockpiling of supplies in Laos, the use of the Ho Chi Minh trail to move tens of thousands of men and large amounts of equipment, and the use of these illegal sanctuaries in Southern Laos as bases of operation have contributed greatly to North Vietnamese ability to mount military attacks against South Vietnam and Cambodia. South Vietnamese forces are now increasingly capable of taking self-defense measures against the North Vietnamese supply lines and sanctuary areas in Laos and Cambodia.
4. The United States and the Republic of Vietnam have respected and will respect the independence, neutrality and sovereignty of the Royal Kingdom of Laos. The current action is directed solely against the North Vietnamese aggressive forces which have so long, so systematically and so flagrantly violated the territory of a neighboring country whose neutrality Hanoi had promised to respect. In reaffirming his government's position on this point on February 8, President Thieu pledged that when this limited operation ends, the Armed Forces of South Vietnam will withdraw completely from Lao territory.

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5. The self-defense measures undertaken by South Vietnam with U.S. support are fully consistent with international law. The Republic of Vietnam has reported and explained its actions to the President of the U.N. Security Council, the Geneva Co-Chairmen, and the governments which comprise the International Control Commission (ICC) under the Geneva Agreements.
6. The current action is not a spreading of the war. This area of Laos has been invaded and controlled by the North Vietnamese armed forces for many years in violation of international law and in contravention of the most solemn obligations undertaken by North Vietnam in the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements. The original Lao civilian population has long since fled from the area, which is totally occupied by the North Vietnamese armed forces. The Royal Lao Government has repeatedly condemned this violation of its soil and has acknowledged its inability to exert control over the area or to expel the North Vietnamese invaders.
7. This is not a new theater of military operations. Since 1965, the United States has exercised air interdiction against the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. A large number of North Vietnamese troops are now present in Laos, many of them involved in building up supply lines and bases in Southern Laos. North Vietnam's aggressive military operations directed against South Vietnam and Cambodia have been almost entirely mounted from and through these illegal sanctuaries in South Laos. Since the beginning of the current dry season, the North Vietnamese have sharply increased the amount of military equipment and supplies which they have introduced into this area. They have also significantly increased the armed forces deployed there, threatening the South Vietnamese and U.S. forces in South Vietnam.
8. The Republic of Vietnam has long considered an operation of this type, which it has now decided to launch because of (a) the mounting threat of attack on South Vietnam from this North Vietnamese base area, and (b) the growing capabilities and strength of South Vietnam's forces.
9. The current operation will promote the security and safety of allied forces in South Vietnam, and improve prospects for South Vietnam to defend itself in the period ahead. For the U.S. will continue to move ahead with Vietnamization and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam. By May 1 of this year, the number of U.S. forces in South Vietnam will be about one-half the number in May, 1969. The war is definitely winding down. The limited moves now taken by the South Vietnamese armed forces with U.S. air support in Laos are designed to promote that process.

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10. The United States continues to urge that the conflict in Indochina be resolved through negotiations. President Nixon specifically proposed last October that there be a cease-fire throughout Indochina, negotiated withdrawals of all forces, immediate release of all prisoners of war, an international peace conference for all of Indochina, and a political settlement. This continues to be the policy of the United States.

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