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NAME: President Richard M. Nixon
OCCASION: News Conference
DATE: February 17, 1971

NORTH VIETNAM

Q. Mr. President, may I ask a question, if I could get back to Vietnam for just one moment? There has been quite a bit of speculation about the possibility of the North Vietnamese coming down through the DMZ.

Would this scrap any obligations that you may have under the bombing ban in the North and would you be in a position then of having to retaliate for any crossing of the DMZ?

THE PRESIDENT: My action in case that happened—and I do not believe it will happen—but my action will be guided by the same principles that I have laid down before. I would use the power of the United States, and particularly its power in the air, to the extent that I consider it necessary to protect our remaining forces in South Vietnam.

We have a considerable number of forces, as you know, on the DMZ. The blocking forces along Route 9, before you get to the border of Laos, are primarily American. I will not allow those forces to be endangered by a massive North Vietnamese incursion, if one should be undertaken. I think the very fact that the North Vietnamese know that I intend to take strong action to deal with that incursion means that they are not going to take it. If they do, I can assure you that—I don't want to assure you, I simply want to have the record clear that I would not be bound, of course, by any so-called understandings which they have already violated at the time of the bombing halt.

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Nixon cont'd.

Now, the President of the United States, as Commander-in-Chief, holds a responsibility to those men to see that they are not subjected to an overwhelming attack from the North. That is why we must continue reconnaissance, and that is why also, if the enemy at a time we are trying to de-escalate, at a time we are withdrawing, starts to build up its infiltration, starts moving troops and supplies through the Mu Gia Pass and the other passes, then I, as Commander-in-Chief, will have to order bombing strikes on those key areas.

That was one of the reasons for this strike, and it will be done again if they continue to threaten our remaining forces in Vietnam. But only on those military targets, and only if necessary.

NAME: President Richard M. Nixon
OCCASION: News Conference
DATE: March 4, 1971

NORTH VIETNAMESE ANTI-AIRCRAFT MISSILES

Q. Mr. President, on the subject of enemy missiles, the North Vietnamese seem to be using more and perhaps a different type of missile shooting at American planes supporting the Laos operation.

I'm wondering if this is of unusual alarm to you and if you have any special retaliation other than bombing that you intend to take?

THE PRESIDENT. We are following that very closely, and it is not unusually alarming. We expect the enemy to improve its capabilities just as we improve ours. And we are prepared to take the protective reaction measures which will deal very effectively with it. But I can say it will not be tit for tat.