

VOA 2/8/71

U.S. RENEWS CALL FOR INDOCHINA CONFERENCE (550)

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WASHINGTON -- IN EXPLAINING THE MOVE OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES, SUPPORTED BY AMERICAN AIR COVER, INTO LAOS, A STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN ON MONDAY AGAIN EMPHASIZED PRESIDENT NIXON'S CALL LAST OCTOBER FOR AN INDO-CHINA PEACE CONFERENCE.
ALBERT COMMENTS:

IN HIS MAJOR NEW PEACE INITIATIVE OF LAST OCTOBER SEVENTH PRESIDENT NIXON MADE THIS STATEMENT: "I PROPOSE AN INDOCHINA PEACE CONFERENCE. AT THE PARIS TALKS TODAY, "THE PRESIDENT WENT ON, "WE ARE TALKING ABOUT VIETNAM. BUT NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS ARE NOT ONLY INFILTRATING, CROSSING BORDERS AND ESTABLISHING BASES IN SOUTH VIETNAM -- THEY ARE CARRYING ON THEIR AGGRESSION IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA AS WELL." PRESIDENT NIXON ADDED THAT "AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IS NEEDED TO DEAL WITH THE CONFLICT IN ALL THREE STATES OF INDOCHINA. THIS WAR IN INDOCHINA HAS BEEN PROVED TO BE OF ONE PIECE; IT CANNOT BE CURED BY TREATING ONLY ONE OF ITS AREAS OF OUT BREAK."

THIS PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT OF LAST OCTOBER REFLECTS THE BASIC THINKING OF THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION. NOTHING HAS HAPPENED IN INDOCHINA SINCE TO CHANGE IT. ON THE CONTRARY, EVENTS IN RECENT MONTHS HAVE SHOWN QUITE CONCLUSIVELY THAT HANOI IS DETERMINED NOW TO USE LAOS EVEN MORE INTENSIVELY IN SUPPORT OF ITS AGGRESSION IN SOUTH VIETNAM. ALLIED ACTION IN CAMBODIA LAST SPRING DEPRIVED HANOI OF THE PORT OF SIHANOUKVILLE (KOMPONG SOM) AS MAJOR SUPPLY BASE FOR ITS FORCES IN THE SOUTH. THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL, GOING THROUGH LAO TERRITORY, HAS SINCE BEEN BUILT UP TO FUNNEL THE BULK OF THE NEEDED SUPPLIES TO THE SOUTH.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE VIOLATION OF LAO TERRITORY BY SOUTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS? THE LAO PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA, WHO HAS NOT APPROVED THE INCURSION, HAS PROVIDED A CLEAR EXPLANATION. IN HIS NEWS CONFERENCE OF FEBRUARY FOURTH HE FRANKLY ADMITTED THAT THE AREA IN QUESTION HAS BEEN OUTSIDE THE CONTROL OF HIS GOVERNMENT FOR QUITE SOME TIME. ACTUALLY, IT HAS BEEN USED BY NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES, IN VIOLATION OF TWO SOLEMN PACTS -- THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AGREEMENTS OF 1954 AND 1962-- FOR THE LAST SIX YEARS. THE WAR IN INDOCHINA HAS NOT BEEN WIDENED BY THE SAIGON ACTION. UNFORTUNATELY, HANOI HAS MADE LAO NEUTRALITY MEANINGLESS BY THE WAY IT HAS USED LAO TERRITORY FOR ITS AGGRESSION. HANOI NOW MAY CRY "WOLF", AND BE SUPPORTED BY MOSCOW AND PEKING. BUT WHERE WAS THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT ALL THESE YEARS WHEN THE PRIME

MINISTERS OF LAOS ADDRESSED IT AS ONE OF THE TWO CO-CHAIRMEN OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AND ASKED FOR ACTION ON HANOI'S CONTINUING VIOLATIONS OF LAO TERRITORY?

PAGE 2 -- U.S. RENEWS

CAN ANYONE REALLY EXPECT THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT TO STAND IDLY BY WHILE HANOI CHANNELS MORE AND MORE OF ITS TROOPS AND SUPPLIES THROUGH LAOS, WHILE THE LAO GOVERNMENT IS UNABLE TO DO MORE THAN PROTEST? OR CAN THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT REALLY BE EXPECTED TO RISK THE SECURITY OF ITS THINNED-OUT FORCES WITHOUT AIDING SAIGON BY ITS AIR POWER TO AT LEAST RETARD SUCH A THREAT?

WASHINGTON IS DETERMINED TO CONTINUE ITS TROOP WITHDRAWALS. IT IS AS READY AS IT ALWAYS WAS FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION OF THE INDO-CHINA WAR. IT HAS OFTEN POINTED OUT THAT ITS TROOP WITHDRAWALS AND VIETNAMIZATION OF THE WAR TAKES MUCH LONGER AND IS MUCH MORE COSTLY IN LIVES AND RESOURCES. NEITHER SAIGON NOR WASHINGTON HAS THE SLIGHTEST INTEREST IN WIDENING THE WAR. THEIR INTEREST IS IN ENDING IT. IT CANNOT BE ENDED, EITHER BY A POLITICAL SOLUTION OR BY VIETNAMIZATION, WITHOUT CONSIDERING CAMBODIA AND LAOS ALSO. ONLY PEACE CAN MAKE THE NEUTRALITY OF THESE TWO COUNTRIES A REALITY RATHER THAN FICTION. ITEM

2/8/71 605P GD

LAOS INCURSION MEETS MIXED REACTION IN CONGRESS (700)

WASHINGTON -- A NUMBER OF U.S. CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS HAVE VOICED SUPPORT OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY OPERATION AGAINST NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES IN SOUTHERN LAOS, WHILE OTHERS HAVE EITHER DISAPPROVED OR WITHHELD IMMEDIATE COMMENT.

THE OPERATION IN LAOS HAS U.S. AIR SUPPORT, BUT NO U.S. GROUND COMBAT TROOPS ARE INVOLVED.

SENATOR HENRY M. JACKSON, WASHINGTON DEMOCRAT AND A MEMBER OF THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE, SUPPORTED THE EFFORT TO INTERDIC COMMUNIST SUPPLIES MOVING THROUGH LAOS ALONG THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL, TRADITIONAL ROUTE OF COMMUNIST WAR MATERIEL IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

"THIS IS DEFINITELY RELATED TO THE SAVING OF AMERICAN LIVES AND HOPEFULLY SHORTENING THE CONFLICT," HE SAID.

SENATOR ROBERT DOLE OF KANSAS, THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, SAID THE OPERATION INVOLVES "NO CHANGE OF LOCALE" BECAUSE THERE ALREADY HAD BEEN INTERDICTION OF ENEMY SUPPLIES IN THE AREA WEST OF KHESANH. THE PURPOSE, HE ADDED, IS TO AID IN U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWALS FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA.

SENATOR JOHN SHERMAN COOPER, KENTUCKY REPUBLICAN, SAID "THAT'S A PERFECTLY GOOD OPERATION MILITARILY," AND I DON'T SEE ANYTHING IN THE LAW THAT PROHIBITS IT."

LAST YEAR SENATOR COOPER COSPONSORED WITH SENATOR FRANK CHURCH, IDAHO DEMOCRAT, THE COOPER-CHURCH AMENDMENT WHICH PROHIBITS USE OF AMERICAN GROUND COMBAT TROOPS AND MILITARY ADVISORS IN CAMBODIA. NO RESTRICTION WAS PLACED ON AMERICAN AIR SUPPORT.

EARLIER, CONGRESS HAD PLACED THE SAME RESTRICTION AGAINST USE OF U.S. GROUND TROOPS IN LAOS, IN A DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS MEASURE.

PAGE TWO -- CONGRESS

U.S. OFFICIALS HAVE REPEATEDLY STRESSED THAT USE OF AIR POWER AS NEEDED WILL PERMIT ORDERLY WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN FORCES FROM SOUTH VIETNAM AND ENABLE THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE TO STRENGTHEN

THEIR FORCES TO MEET COMMUNIST AGGRESSION. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE HAVE SOME 50,000 TROOPS IN THE NORTHERN PANHANDLE OF LAOS AND AN ESTIMATED 20,000 IN NORTHERN AREAS OF SOUTH VIETNAM.

COMMENTING ON THE CURRENT STRIKE INTO LAOS, SENATOR CHURCH SAID: "I CAN ONLY HOPE THIS PROVES TO BE ONE OF THE LAST REAR-GUARD ACTIONS."

SENATE ASSISTANT MINORITY LEADER ROBERT P. GRIFFIN, MICHIGAN REPUBLICAN, SAID: "IF THIS MANEUVER SUCCEEDS...IT WILL SURELY CONTRIBUTE MIGHTILY TO A SWIFTER RATE OF (TROOP) WITHDRAWAL."

COMMENTS ON THE LAOTIAN OPERATION ALSO CAME FROM LEADERS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

HOUSE SPEAKER CARL ALBERT, OKLAHOMA DEMOCRAT, SAID HE WAS ADVISED U.S. PARTICIPATION IN THE LAOS OPERATION WAS LIMITED TO LOGISTIC AND AIR SUPPORT. "IF THAT IS TRUE," HE ADDED, "I THINK IT IS A PRUDENT ACTION ON THE PART OF OUR GOVERNMENT."

PAGE THREE -- CONGRESS

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER GERALD R. FORD OF MICHIGAN SAID PRESIDENT NIXON'S SUPPORT OF THE OPERATION INTO LAOS "IS WITHIN THE SPIRIT AS WELL AS THE LETTER OF THE COOPER-CHURCH AMENDMENT."

MR. FORD SAID AT A NEWS CONFERENCE THE PRINCIPAL BENEFIT FOR THE UNITED STATES IS THAT IT "WILL OPEN THE DOOR TO ACCELERATED WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN TROOPS FROM VIETNAM." PRESIDENT NIXON'S GOAL IS TO REDUCE AMERICAN TROOP LEVELS TO 284,000 MEN BY MAY 1.

AMONG THE OPPONENTS OF THE THRUST INTO LAOS WAS SENATE MAJORITY LEADER MIKE MANSFIELD, MONTANA DEMOCRAT. HE CALLED THE ACTION "A DEEPENING OF THE TRAGEDY AND AN EXTENSION OF THE WAR."

HE SAID IF THE OPERATION DOES NOT SUCCEED IT MAY BRING ABOUT A REVERSAL OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S TROOP WITHDRAWAL POLICY.

IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW FEBRUARY 8, BEFORE THE LAOTIAN ACTION WAS ANNOUNCED, SENATOR EDMUND MUSKIE, MAINE DEMOCRAT, SAID HE WOULD OPPOSE AMERICAN SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT IN SUCH A MILITARY OPERATION.

SENATOR JACOB K. JAVITS, NEW YORK REPUBLICAN, SAID HE BELIEVES THE SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA HAS EXCEEDED CONGRESSIONAL RESTRICTIONS. "THE ONLY ANSWER," HE SAID, "IS A U.S. POLICY TO WITHDRAW FROM VIETNAM WITHOUT REGARD TO VIETNAMIZATION," PRESIDENT NIXON'S PROGRAM FOR TURNING CONDUCT OF THE WAR OVER TO THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT.

PAGE FOUR -- CONGRESS

SENATOR HAROLD E. HUGHES, IOWA DEMOCRAT, SAID "THE INVASION OF LAOS BY SOUTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS PROVES THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS NO PLANS FOR ENDING THE WAR -- ONLY ONE TO WIDEN IT. THIS DESPERATE ACT MUST LEAD TO RENEWED CONGRESSIONAL ACTION TO STOP SUCH ESCALATION OF THE WAR."

REPRESENTATIVE CHARLES A. VANIK, OHIO DEMOCRAT, CALLED THE OPERATION "A DANGEROUS COURSE OF ACTION WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MASTERMINDED IN THE PENTAGON."

AMONG KEY CONGRESSMEN DECLINING IMMEDIATE COMMENT WERE SENATE MINORITY LEADER HUGH SCOTT, PENNSYLVANIA REPUBLICAN, SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY, MASSACHUSETTS DEMOCRAT, AND HARRY F. BYRD, JUNIOR, VIRGINIA DEMOCRAT, THE SENATE ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER. ITEM

2/8/71 615P GD