


THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 6, 1970

Memorandum for Congressman Gerald Ford

From The President



Here are some random thoughts that you may want to include in your speech at the Republican Conference and on the Floor.

The decision to go into the North Vietnamese-occupied sanctuaries in Cambodia was for the purpose not of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam and protecting the lives of 450,000 Americans who are stationed there. The decision was made under the Constitutional power and responsibility of the President as Commander-in-Chief to take measures for the defense of American men when they come under attack any place in the world.

If we had done nothing, the North Vietnamese-occupied sanctuaries would have been linked up into a belt at the very least covering the whole border between Cambodia and Laos with the result that after we pull out our next 150,000 men (which will mean that by that time we will have pulled out the great majority of all of our ground combat forces) the enemy could launch a massive attack which would not only risk their lives but destroy the pacification program, the Vietnamization program and over-run Vietnam.

In other words, the decision we had to make now was whether to do something against the sanctuaries or to face up to the fact that we would have to withdraw now. Doing nothing would mean that we should withdraw all American forces now to prevent the situation they would find themselves in which I have described above.

The decision is limited both as to the extent of territory it is to cover and as to the time involved. Our troops and the South Vietnamese troops will go into Cambodia up to a maximum



depth of 21 miles. In most cases, they have to go in only five to six miles. Most of the operations will take a week to two weeks to complete. All American forces will be out of Cambodia during the first or the second week of June at the very latest. There will be no American or South Vietnamese forces whatever in Cambodia after that time because our operations will be completed.

The purpose of these operations was not directed against North Vietnamese personnel but primarily against their materiel and their logistics bases. While the operations against personnel have been very successful - to date over 2500 enemy have been killed and over 500 have been captured. This was not the primary purpose.

The weapons, the rice and the other logistic supplies which we are uncovering and capturing take four to five months to come down the Ho Chi Minh trail. When you add to that the four months of the rainy season, which will begin in about three weeks, this means that we have bought the precious time - 8 to 10 months - which is absolutely essential for the success of our withdrawal program. Ten months to a year from now the ARVN will be ready to take on more of the responsibility for its own defense. It will be a formidable fighting force.

As a result of our program, these things have already been accomplished:

The enemy's timetable has been completely disrupted and we have bought the precious time necessary for the Vietnamization and withdrawal program to go forward.

The withdrawal of 150,000 Americans over the next year will go forward.

American casualties will be reduced.

On the latter point, I think it is very effective to point out that already 3,000 individual weapons, over 200 crew served weapons have been captured. More graphically it can be pointed out that 125,000 rounds of small arms ammunition (as of yesterday) have been captured, 1039 mortar rounds and 3000 rockets. Those 125,000 rounds of small arms ammunition could have killed American men. The mortar rounds could have been lobbed into our base camps and killed American men. The rockets could have



been lobbed into our base camps and into the cities of South Vietnam and killed American men as well as Vietnamese. Everything that we have captured in the way of weapons has saved American lives.

In the final analysis, this decision was made by the President as Commander-in-Chief because of his conclusion that failing to make it would endanger the lives of American men, would completely disrupt our withdrawal program and would inevitably result in an ignominious defeat and precipitate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam.

On the plus side - and particularly on the diplomatic side - it should be pointed out that the credibility of American power in Vietnam as well as in other places in the world has now been re-established. I warned in my speech of November 3, December 15 and on April 20 that if the enemy took actions in Cambodia, Laos or North Vietnam which I considered endangered American men I would react strongly. By reacting this way in Cambodia, the enemy now knows that if he comes across the DMZ, if he escalates our casualties in Vietnam, if he tries to disrupt our withdrawal program that not only is Cambodia not a privileged sanctuary but that he may have problems in other parts of his long front. For the past five years, great powers as well as small powers have had serious doubt that any American President would have the will to use our power for the defense of our interest. Now that doubt has been dispelled. This means not that we will become engaged in more conflicts but that this will deter the conflicts. The lesson of Korea comes to mind in this respect.

If you want to make some pretty hard-hitting points, I would say very bluntly - look, you can vote against the war in Vietnam and vote against the war in Cambodia but there are 450,000 American men there - don't tie the hands of our Commander-in-Chief. If you do - then you have the responsibility for their lives rather than leaving that responsibility and the decisions connected with it to him.

Don't stab our men in the back at the time they are fighting for this country in Vietnam.

Don't take any actions on the floor of Congress which will give aid and comfort to the enemy and encourage the enemy to launch more offensives and kill more Americans.



One final point that should be made is with regard to public reaction. You can point out that the Gallup Poll indicated that 51 percent to 35 percent of the American people favored our policy; that the CBS poll showed that 62% of the people favored the President's move in Cambodia. The Chilton Research Poll, with over 1000 samples, taken immediately after the speech on Friday showed that 65% of the American people favored the action taken by the President in Cambodia.

I think you should squarely put on the backs of the Congress the risking of American lives and also their responsibility for an ignominious American defeat if they tie the President's hands through a Congressional appropriation route.

Only through the adoption of the Findley Amendment can the President have the power which is not only indispensably needed to save the lives of our fighting men but also to keep the enemy off balance and discourage him from indiscriminate attacks in that area and other places.

Lean hard on the fact that this decision rejected getting sucked into another war in Cambodia. We rejected a huge arms program for Cambodia. We rejected sending American men in to defend Cambodia. What we are protecting are American men whose lives are threatened by an enemy who are perched in privileged North Vietnamese-occupied sanctuaries on the borders of Cambodia and Laos.