MR. ZIEGLER: The ground rules are the same as you are by now familiar with. You can attribute what Dr. Kissinger says this evening, in response to your questions, to White House officials, without direct quotation.

Q Dr. Kissinger, the President says the South Vietnamese and ARVN forces have fought effectively in Laos. Isn't it more of a mixed result for the ARVN forces in Laos? And whether they are able to hack it or not once we get out of there, and the dichotomy of Saigon versus Washington?

DR. KISSINGER: I feel almost at home. Dichotomy I haven't heard since I left Harvard.

The situation with respect to effectiveness as we understand it, as the President mentioned in one of his interviews, is --- our information is that 18 out of the 22 battalions were engaged effectively, that of the four that had major difficulties, one was in difficulties that were due to a very complex local situation, in which it lost its battalion commander and deputy commander in the first hour of the military action.

Our judgment is that overall the ARVN fought effectively in Laos, and with the experience it has gained, the statement that the President has made is justified.

Let me make one general observation about this. We have undertaken as painstaking an analysis as we can of where we are, because we are now getting to a level where we would only be fooling ourselves if we made claims that in the event would not be justified. Of course, a painstaking analysis does not guarantee that it is correct, but this represents our best judgment.

No one can be interested, neither we, nor, for that matter, our critics, in bringing about a situation in which these judgments should turn out to be totally wrong. I am not saying our critics would be bringing about the situation, but I am just trying to tell you that we have made every effort to make sure, insofar as analysis can do that, that what we have said here will bear the test of the limited amount of time in which it will be certainly tested, given the rate of withdrawal that we are projecting.
Q Would you check us on the figures? If you take 100,000 more out between May and December 1, what is the figure you say that will leave on December 1?

DR. KISSINGER: 184,000. It is a rate of, I think, 14,200 a month.

Q In this withdrawal, do we anticipate that 184,000 Americans will still have a combat role on December 1?

DR. KISSINGER: The definition of what is a combat role is extremely complex. We are very reluctant to make flat statements that then shade into ambiguous situations. What will happen increasingly is that the American forces will concentrate more and more on the security of the base areas in which they are located, which does not mean they will stay in static defense positions, but that this will be their principal mission, while the principal mission of the South Vietnamese will be the overall combat responsibility for the security of the country.

Also, as these forces diminish, the combat forces, and, for that matter, the number of maneuver battalions will diminish, so all of this will have its inevitable impact on the degree to which the American forces can engage and will engage in offensive combat activities.
Q Dr. Kissinger, will the bases be consolidated as time goes on, brought farther down?

DR. KISSINGER: I would not draw that conclusion.

Q Would you repeat the question?

DR. KISSINGER: Do you want me to repeat the questions?

Q Please.

DR. KISSINGER: I will repeat them from now on.

Q Do you anticipate that air action will go down as ground action goes down?

DR. KISSINGER: Let me make a few comments about air action. One of the points that is often made is that we have increased air action as ground action has gone down, that we have purchased the reduction in ground combat by an increase in air combat and by an increase in civilian casualties.

I think a number of figures here would be of interest. One is the number of tactical air sorties in Southeast Asia has decreased, comparing January-February, 1969, with January-February, 1971. The decrease of tactical air activity has been 50 percent. The decrease in B-52 activity has been 45 percent.

Within South Vietnam, the decrease in American air activity has been 88 percent. That includes everything, reflecting the fact that the war has substantially moved out of South Vietnam, and South Vietnam is the most populated area.

Within Laos, the total reduction -- and that includes Lam Son -- has been 14 percent.

Q Are you using the same base dates for all those categories?

DR. KISSINGER: Yes, January-February.

Q And this is 1969-1971?

DR. KISSINGER: We are taking the period January-February, 1969, compared to January-February, 1971.

Q Can you give us those figures in terms of tonnage instead of sorties?

DR. KISSINGER: I do not have them in terms of tonnage.

Q Can you give them for Cambodia and North Vietnam?

DR. KISSINGER: I don't have them for North Vietnam but there is not a great deal for North Vietnam.

For Cambodia, of course, there was nothing in 1969. I don't know whether I can give the total number of sorties,
but, of course, there is an increase there. The total figure I gave you, and the major point I want to make -- I don't want to be drawn into a discussion which the Pentagon will have better details on -- the major point I want to make was in response to the question of are we reducing air activities.

The answer is yes, we have reduced tactical operations in Southeast Asia by 50 percent and B-52 activities by 45 percent.

We expect that the basic policy of reduction will continue, but it will continue at a slower rate with respect to air activities than with respect to ground activities.

Q Why 1969 instead of 1970, Dr. Kissinger?

DR. KISSINGER: Because that is when we came into office.

Q But why not 1970 rather than 1969?

DR. KISSINGER: We tried to compare what it was when we came into office with what it is now. But there has been a decrease as compared to 1970, also. I just don't have the figures here.

I have looked at the figures for 1970 and there is a decrease in every category between 1969 and 1970 and between 1970 and 1971. The only reason was I didn't want to bore you with giving each of the years.

There is, to be fair, for February 1971, a slight increase in Laos over February 1970 because of Lam Son. But if you take the total you will find a proportionate decrease. You will find the curve going down. There is no hidden meaning to it. It was just that we gave the beginning date and the end date.

Q With regard to future draft calls, sir, will it mean considerably fewer men drafted this year than last year?

DR. KISSINGER: I would prefer to have the Pentagon answer that question because I do not know what the precise impact on the draft will be. My estimate is that it would affect it in the direction of reduction of draft calls, but to what degree I can't say. I really don't want to say something which I haven't looked into.

Q Dr. Kissinger, what effect will this have on the withdrawal of allied forces, such as the Koreans, if any? Is there going to be a coordination of withdrawal or are they going to remain?

DR. KISSINGER: We are talking to the other troop-contributing countries, and we are generally aware of the plans of reduction of some of the other troop-contributing countries. But I don't want to speak for the other countries.

Q Dr. Kissinger, what do you see beyond December 1 in the way of troop withdrawals?
DR. KISSINGER: The withdrawal beyond December 1? I will not speculate as to numbers because we will be judged by the results. The President has committed himself to the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. The President so far, when we have come to the end of every withdrawal period, has indicated a further withdrawal.

What the rate will be, over what period of time, I think is premature to speculate on now, except that we are serious about our policy and we expect to be judged by it.

Q Would you compare your figure of 14,400 a month withdrawal rate with the present rate, giving us the figures on that?

DR. KISSINGER: The present rate is 12,500 a month. Let me make this point about it: When we say rate, this is the average rate per month over the period. It doesn't mean that there were 12,500 every month of the last increment.

For example, the last few months it was a higher rate and the first few months it was a lower rate. We are not saying there will be 14,200 a month being withdrawn each month. Some months it will be more; in others, it will be less. But the average rate will be 14,000.

Q Dr. Kissinger, on page two of the President's speech, in the next to the last paragraph, the last two lines, he says, "Our goal is a total American withdrawal from Vietnam. We can and we will reach that goal through our program of Vietnamization."

How does that jibe with his promise to keep some American forces there as long as there are American prisoners of war in the North?

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DR. KISSINGER: What the President means is at the point when we have reached whatever number will be judged necessary to talk about the prisoners, when our forces are there only for bargaining purposes, this is when we feel we have achieved the Vietnamization goal, when they are not needed primarily for the local role.

Q Dr. Kissinger, at what point will you be able to go to an all volunteer force in Vietnam?

DR. KISSINGER: This is a question to which you can be sure we have given the most careful consideration. The problem with announcing that ahead of time is the anguish it causes to people in the interval. We would prefer to wait with making that announcement when we can implement it, rather than to make it ahead of time.

Q Dr. Kissinger, what does the term residual force mean to you when you talk about it? Without necessarily giving a specific number, can you give us the range of what you mean by residual force?

DR. KISSINGER: I don't want to speculate on the number. A residual force is a force that, in itself, is not subject to a significant, constant draw down, for whatever reasons there may be.

Q Dr. Kissinger, could you give us the reasoning that went into the limitation of the seven month withdrawal now, especially in view of the fact that the President, I believe, in one of the interviews, said that the Laotian campaign would decide the withdrawal for next year?

DR. KISSINGER: Yes, but those two things are in no way ---

Q Can you give us the factors or reasoning?

DR. KISSINGER: Yes. The reasoning that went into the seven months was as follows: We have a withdrawal program which we had projected into early next year. The reason for picking that particular increment was two fold: One, as you get down to these lower numbers, each additional increment you withdraw is a greater percentage of the total and, therefore, its relative impact on the situation can be greater.

Secondly, we had picked the period for early next year because one can usually gauge the rate of infiltration and logistics re-supply, and the scale of efforts that the North Vietnamese want to make, by November-December of any one year.

That is, when the dry season has begun and when the first inflows through the system begin operating. Our analysis of the Laotian operation indicated -- and I am speaking now about the purely military analysis. I am not making any of the psychological or political judgments.

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On purely military terms our analysis was that within the time period that we had originally projected, a sustained major offensive by the North Vietnamese was improbable. It does not mean that there cannot be high points and it does not mean that there cannot be even attacks of several regiments over a period of days or weeks. But a sustained, major offensive over several weeks.

This being the case, we felt that we could shorten the period over which the withdrawal had been projected, and also we felt that regardless of what the level of infiltration would be in November, October-November, its major impact in South Vietnam could not occur, say, before March. That is the same in each area.

I am just giving you a rough idea of the sort of analysis that was made.

So, we believe that we will be able to assess in November what is ahead of us next year and what the impact would be. What we did, therefore, was to take roughly the same increment and shorten the time periods to which it would apply.

Q Dr. Kissinger, several weeks ago when he was interviewed on ABC-TV, the President said the next troop withdrawal announcement would give some indication as to the end of the tunnel. I don't see it. Could you tell us about that, where it is?

DR. KISSINGER: I would say we started with drawing troops on July 1, 1969. If anyone had predicted on July 1, 1969, that by December 1, 1971, we would have withdrawn 365,000 troops, that we would have reduced air operations by nearly 50 percent and that the military situation would be better than it was on July 1, 1969, we would have been accused of wild optimism.

I think anybody would then have known that we were engaged on a road that was pretty self-evident.

I would think, having gone this long on this road, that the direction in which we are going, coupled with the rather explicit language of the President, is perfectly plain. We are not prepared to give a terminal date for many reasons, of which the desire to prolong the war doesn't happen to be one of them. I just will not go any further than what we have said. To us it seems that the end of the road should be fairly clear from our actions, from the rate of our casualties and from our general performance and from our promises.
Q The majority of the people in this country think this is pretty small potatoes. Seventy-three percent of the people want this war over by the end of this year.

DR. KISSINGER: I am simply explaining our position.

Q Well, it is not good enough for the majority of the people of the country who expected much more tonight.

DR. KISSINGER: That the future will show. I am not here to debate. I am here to explain the policy and not to debate.

Q Dr. Kissinger, could you tell us when the President made his decision, whom he consulted and how he went about making his decision?

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DR. KISSINGER: It depends, of course, at what stage of the process we are talking. We had intensive discussions after Secretary Laird returned from his trip to Southeast Asia about the projected rate and our long-term objectives.

Let me, however, not go through every single discussion that may have gone on. The people most closely consulted, of course, were Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird, General Abrams and Admiral Moorer. In addition, there were special studies made by the intelligence community in order to determine what was ahead of us this year and next year, and what the impact of recent military operations was on the future.

The President then spent a great deal of his time in San Clemente going over these studies. He had memoranda from all his senior advisers. Then he made the decision over the weekend, essentially, of the rate that he felt was sustainable.

Q How would the President react if the Congress asked him to have a complete withdrawal from Vietnam?

DR. KISSINGER: The President has made his view clear as to what his thinking on that matter is. He does not believe that this is the correct policy for the United States.

Q Doctor, can you or Mr. Ziegler give us the reaction of the bipartisan leaders to this program?

DR. KISSINGER: Mr. Ziegler is mumbling something to me which, I take it, means I shouldn't answer that. But I don't think it would be appropriate for me to answer.

My experience with Congressional leaders is that they are not reluctant to express themselves. This has been my experience lately.

Q Was Mr. Boggs at the meeting?

DR. KISSINGER: Mr. Boggs was not at the meeting.

Q Do you know why not?

DR. KISSINGER: I have no idea.

Q Dr. Kissinger, the President said in the third paragraph from the end of his speech, "I pledged to end American involvement in this war. I am keeping that pledge. You should hold me accountable if I fail."

The only time the voters can hold him accountable is 1972. Does he mean, "If I fail in 1972," by the election day to end American involvement in this war, that they can...
hold him accountable?

DR. KISSINGER: I suppose this would be a fair reading or one reading that would certainly occur to one.

MR. ZIEGLER: This will have to be the final question.

Q Dr. Kissinger, how many of the 100,000 troops will be ground combat troops?

DR. KISSINGER: I think you should get the breakdown from the Pentagon. I don't have it.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Doctor.

END (AT 8:10 P.M. EST)