

Text of the U.S. Statement on Laos

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8 (AP) —Following is the text of a statement made today by the State Department on the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos:

Last evening the Government of the Republic of Vietnam announced in Saigon that elements of its armed forces have crossed into enemy-occupied territory of Laos to attack North Vietnamese forces and military supplies which have been assembled in sanctuaries close to the border of South Vietnam.

These sanctuaries lie between the 16th and 17th parallels and comprise concentrations which are an important part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail system. Our military command in Vietnam has announced the limit of the U. S. military participation.

The decision of the United States to assist is based on the following policy considerations:

[1]

No American ground combat forces or advisers will cross into Laos.

[2]

The operation will be a limited one both as to time and area. The Vietnamese government has made it clear that its objective will be to disrupt those forces which have been concentrated in this region for use against South Vietnamese and U. S. forces located in the northern military regions of South Vietnam, and to intercept or choke off the flow of supplies

and men during the dry season which are designed for use further south on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

[3]

The operation will promote the security and safety of American and allied forces in South Vietnam and is consistent with statutory requirements. It will make the enemy less able to mount offensives and strengthen South Vietnam's ability to defend itself as U. S. forces are withdrawn from South Vietnam. It will protect American lives.

[4]

This ground operation by the South Vietnamese against the sanctuaries thus will aid in the Vietnamization program. The withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam will continue. During the month of April President Nixon will announce further withdrawals.

[5]

The measures of self-defense being taken by the Republic of Vietnam are fully consistent with international law. A report to this effect is being made by the Republic of Vietnam to the President of the Security Council of the United Nations, to the Geneva co-chairmen, and to the Governments which comprise the International Control Commissions.

[6]

This limited operation is not an enlargement of the war. The territory involved has been the scene of com-

bat since 1965. The principal new factor is that South Vietnam forces will move against the enemy on the ground to deny him the sanctuaries and disrupt the main artery of supplies which he has been able to use so effectively against American and South Vietnamese forces in the past.

[7]

The United States has consistently sought to end the conflict in Indochina through negotiations. President Nixon specifically proposed last October that there be (a) cease-fire throughout Indochina; (b) a negotiated timetable for the withdrawal of all forces; (c) the immediate release of all prisoners of war; (d) an international peace conference for all of Indochina, and (e) a political settlement. This continues to be the policy of the United States.

[8]

The Royal Lao Government has issued a statement, which, while critical of the current military action, points out that the "primary responsibility for this development rests on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which has violated and is continuing to violate the neutrality and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Laos."

The United States Government continues to favor the neutrality of Laos and the restoration of the situation contemplated by the 1962 Geneva accords, in which all foreign forces would be withdrawn from Lao territory. A new Indochina conference as proposed by President Nixon could accomplish this goal.