

triated, within the framework and time limits of the Laos ceasefire and military protocol.⁹⁶

In testimony before the Select Committee, Ambassador Godley could not remember whether his cable was in response to, or independent of, Admiral Moorer's cable of nine hours earlier.

The March 23 cable

On March 23, 1973, Admiral Moorer sent a second cable to the United States Command in Southeast Asia. The cable, again transmitting an order approved by the President, the National Security Adviser and the Secretary of Defense, modified the order set forth in Admiral Moorer's cable the day before. The March 23 cable directed that the U.S. troop withdrawal would be completed within the 60-day period as long as the nine American POWs on the DRV/Laos list were released. The cable reads:

Seek private meeting with North Vietnamese representative. Our basic concern is the release of the prisoners and we do not object to the PLF playing the central role as long as the men are returned to us. We need precise information and understanding on the times and place of release of the prisoners on the list provided 1 February. The routes and place may be designated by the PLF. However, the United States must have the assurances, either privately from you or through other channels, such as the United States officials in Vientiane, that their release will take place by 28 March before we can give assurances that our withdrawal will be completed by 28 March. Of course, we intend to pursue the question of other U.S. personnel captured or missing in Laos following the release of the men on the 1 February list. For your information only, the purpose of the above is to try to get things back on track and moving again.⁹⁷

The revised U.S. position did succeed in getting "things back on track and moving again." On March 26, the North Vietnamese agreed to the release of the ten POWs on the DRV/Laos list provided only that the actual release be made by representatives of the Pathet Lao. The U.S. accepted the condition, thereby clearing the way for the completion of American troop withdrawals and the end of Operation Homecoming.⁹⁸

Summary

After the March 19 POW Subcommittee meeting in Saigon, the U.S. faced the possibility that the prisoners on the DRV/Laos list would not be returned. As mentioned above, the DRV had switched

⁹⁶ Cable from Amb. Godley to Secretary of State William Rogers, March 22, 1973.

⁹⁷ Cable from Adm. Moorer to Gen. Woodward, March 23, 1973.

⁹⁸ In a telephone conversation with Select Committee Vice Chairman Bob Smith on December 29, 1992, Dr. Kissinger said that he had informed President Nixon during the 60 day period after the peace agreement was signed that U.S. intelligence officials believed that the list of prisoners captured in Laos was incomplete. According to Dr. Kissinger, the President responded by directing that the exchange of prisoners on the lists go forward, but added that a failure to account for the additional prisoners after Operation Homecoming would lead to a resumption of bombing. Dr. Kissinger said that the President was later unwilling to carry through on this threat.