

**General John D. Lavelle, USAF  
1916 – 1979**

**Transcript of audio-taped conversation of  
February 3, 1972 of  
President Richard Nixon,  
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, &  
Ambassador Ellsworth F. Bunker**

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3 February 1972, Thursday  
White House  
Time: 10:53 am - 11:33 am  
Location: Oval Office

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The President meets with Ellsworth F. Bunker and Henry A. Kissinger

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EB It's also, that's it, they've done an increasingly good job on this interdiction. The, the trucks they get, the throughput, is a small proportion of the input.

EB On this question of the bombing that involve B-52s. The bombing of the SAM sites becomes important. And one thing, and both Gen. Abrams and I want is . . . if we could get authority to, to bomb these SAM sites. Now the authority is for bomb when, when they fire at aircraft.

RN I saw that.

EB Now, when the radar's locked on. . . but the problem is, that that's, that's late to start attacking. And the other problem is weather, you've got to see it. Now a, you know sometimes you only get an hour a day.

RN Well, my point is that I think protection reaction is, can, should include a the right of the and Abrams might want to, to do something about it, it's stupid the right to hit SAM sites, in other-protective reaction should include preventative reaction.

HK I think

EB It's a hard thing.

HK I think the way to handle it, Mr. President. I haven't had a chance to talk to Ellsworth yet, is that. One is to give them a blanket authority, that has the disadvantage of

RN To get out.

HK . . . of getting out and also of as least doing something with the aircraft. The other is. A right now they can hit only when the radar is locked on,

RN Yea.

HK . . . and that's very restrictive because that means that the plane which is in trouble also has to fire. The third possibility is to say Abrams can hit any SAM site that has locked on even if it is no longer locked on. Other words,

EB Yea.

HK and use high explosives too--right now they can use only Shrikes

EB This one thing we would like to do.

RN Sure, sure.

(It sounds as if Ambassador Bunker is directing the President's attention to a map in which Ambassador Bunker identifies SAM sites)

EB . . . Here are these locations of these SAM sites here.

RN Have all of these fired at some time on our planes?

EB No, they haven't, but.. We've located. That means here's the range.

EB So the B-52s have got to keep out of this.

RN Excuse me.

EB And what, what a Abrams would like to have is authority to bomb these SAM sites, the, within the 19<sup>th</sup> North mile of the border the...

RN mmm...

EB See that a . . .

HK Could he knock it off while we're in China? And not do it that week . . .

EB Yea, yea sure he could do it now.

EB He could do it now, and he could stop.

RN I don't think they should be doing it while we're in China.

EB No, no.

RN Only, when in China, should only be protective reaction, in a technical sense. But right now harassment is enough.

HK But couldn't we stage it, as long as, we and .. agree and on the grounds that they had fired rockets. . .

RN No body, in a, seems to me . . . He is to say.. He is to call all of these things protective reaction. Just call it protective reaction.

EB Well he is . . .

RN Alright, because preventive reaction. I am simply saying that we expand the definition of protective reaction to mean preventive reaction where a SAM site is concerned. And I think that, that, to be sure that anything that goes down there is just to call it ordinary protective reaction. Who the hell's gonna say they didn't fire?

HK Now, could they stop from blabbing it at every bloody briefing?

EB Yes.

RN Why do we have to put? You tell them I don't want to beat around any more. Tell 'em. I want you to tell Abrams when you get back that he is to tell the military not to put out extensive briefings with regard to our military activities from now on until we get back from China.

RN Do it, but don't say anything.

EB Yea.

RN Goddamn it, he can do that.

RN .. ERO officer ..

EB Oh, yea, yea, sure.

EB And, uh, you see, a, Mr. President, there are about... the enemy has about 168 SAM sites. That's down in Southern Laos, three in

Southern Laos now. Now we've got about 28 of them mapped. But they can move these anywhere within 6 hours from one site to another. And that's what they do. And a, so, and a. The B-52 is very vulnerable. We

RN Well, listen. Too, I would never forgive myself for not knocking those sites out. Henry?

HK I have no problem with it.

RN Alright, you're problem with it is that you don't want them over while we're in China, is that it?

HK I don't want them flying from the 17<sup>th</sup>, from the time you leave until . . .

RN Yea, yea.

HK . . . until the time you come back.

RN Between now and the 17<sup>th</sup>, you work out the authority. He can hit SAM sites period. Okay? But he is not to do it with a public declaration, alright. And if it does get out, if it does, he says it's a protective reaction strike. He is to describe it as protective reaction. And he doesn't have to spell it out, if they strike, that's all he needs is a SAM site, a protective reaction strike against a SAM site. As you know, when we're hittin' .. unless we call that protective reaction

EB Yea.

RN . . . we can bomb the hell out of a lot of other stuff.

EB Sure.

RN Okay? So what we want are protective reaction, fair enough?

HK Fair enough.

RN So, you got about two weeks, about 10 days now to scare the hell out of them at least. From the 17<sup>th</sup> to about the first of March he dead.

EB Yea.

RN As far as North Vietnam is concerned. But then tell him to get those damn bombers and start getting something from South Vietnam.