MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Policy Regarding the Use of Herbicides in Vietnam (U)

Reference is made to Dr. Kissinger's memorandum of 28 December 1970, which stipulated that any extension of the current herbicide program in South Vietnam be submitted for your approval.

As you know, Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams indicated in December 1970 that US herbicide operations would be phased out in South Vietnam while preserving the option to reinstitute the program, if necessary. Since then, herbicide operations in Vietnam have continued to decline. During January, February and March 1971, only one fixed wing and approximately 25 helicopter missions were flown. The anticipated phase out date was 1 May 1971.

In our memorandum of 19 February 1971, we indicated to you that we would seek your approval should it become necessary to extend herbicide operations beyond that date. The JCS have requested retaining the option to use herbicides around fire support bases and installations using helicopter and ground spray equipment. We support their request. Since the enemy is placing greater reliance on sapper and ambush tactics as we continue our redeployments, the option to use herbicides in this manner is deemed vital for the protection of US and allied forces. The perimeters of fire support bases and their surrounding fields of fire are the most critical areas requiring the use of herbicides. The presence of vegetation within and adjacent to their perimeter defenses compromises their security to an unacceptable degree. Most fire support base perimeters contain barbed wire entanglements, mines, booby traps, claymores and flammable munitions. Burning or manually clearing unwanted vegetation would require physical removal of these devices, a procedure which not only constitutes an unwarranted personnel hazard, but also degrades the perimeter defense while the ordnance is inactive. Alternate non-mechanical means of clearing vegetation, such as using petroleum products are relatively inefficient, are more expensive to use than herbicides, and are known to cause permanent soil damage.

We are currently evaluating a JCS plan for a limited herbicide capability for the RVNAF. This plan will be forwarded for your consideration. However, until the RVNAF possesses a herbicide capability (or until 1 December 1971, whichever is earlier), we request authority for US forces to continue to use herbicides as needed around fire support bases and installations. Our current military objectives do not call for more extensive use of chemical herbicides in Vietnam at this time. Furthermore, there are no restraints under international law or under the Geneva Protocol, should the United States become a party to that agreement, regarding their use in Vietnam. If this request is approved, the existing stocks of herbicides
BLUE and WHITE in RVN will be used for such operations. The USDA restrictions governing the use of these herbicides in the US will still be applicable in RVN during this extension.

The Secretary of State will provide his comments concerning this request in a separate memorandum.