

~~SECRET~~INFORMATION

12-17-70

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT: North Vietnamese Strength in Laos

On December 11 you asked CIA Director Helms for information on changes in North Vietnam force levels in Laos since last spring. Mr. Helms has responded with the attached report prepared by CIA in coordination with DIA, NSA, and State. Its main points are as follows:

--During the last six months the structure and strength of Communist forces in Laos have changed significantly. Large numbers of filler personnel and organic units have deployed from North Vietnam and organic units have deployed from North Vietnam and South Vietnam to south Laos, several NVA units in north Laos have returned to North Vietnam, and new logistical and tactical commands have either been established or come into prominence in south Laos. As a result of these changes, Communist strength has been substantially increased.

--Communist military strength in Laos is presently estimated at approximately 127,000 men, of whom about 82,000 are North Vietnamese and about 45,000 are Pathet Lao and Dissident Neutralists. Of this total, about 64,000 (40,000 NVA and 24,000 PL) are estimated to be in combat units, including some 9,000 men in artillery, armor, and antiaircraft units. About 55% of the 64,000 combat forces are deployed in south Laos. However, NVA combat forces -- who bear the brunt of combat operations -- now number 27,000 in south Laos and 13,000 in north Laos. The PL combat forces, on the other hand, remain concentrated in the north (16,000 in the north and 8,000 in the south).

--The large flow of combat and logistical personnel from North Vietnam and the diversion of combat forces from South Vietnam to south Laos since last April reflect Hanoi's growing concern for its remaining logistic route to its forces in the south. The Allied incursions into Cambodia in May and June, the loss of the Sihanoukville route, and concern over the growing harassment by friendly irregulars as well as the fear of large-scale Allied ground interdiction in Laos, all probably contributed to Hanoi's decision

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

NSA Review Completed.

MORI C05099319

~~SECRET~~

**SECRET**

2

to place a higher priority this year on securing and maintaining its logistical lifeline to the south. The changed situation in Cambodia also has led the Communists to expand their supply and infiltration system in south Laos and Cambodia. They apparently intend to use a new north-south route in the Panhandle this year, which is generally west of their previously established arteries. As part of the expansion, they have created a new logistics authority in deep southern Laos which extends into north-eastern Cambodia.

**Estimated Strength of North Vietnamese Army  
and Pathet Lao Forces in Laos**

	<u>May 1970</u>	<u>Nov. 1970</u>
<b>NVA forces <u>a/</u></b>	<u>67,000</u>	<u>82,000</u>
<b>Combat</b>	32,000	40,000
<b>Command and support</b>	35,000	42,000
<b>PL Forces <u>b/</u></b>	<u>48,000</u>	<u>45,000</u>
<b>Combat</b>	27,000	24,000
<b>Command and support</b>	21,000	21,000
<b>Total <u>c/</u></b>	115,000	127,000

a/ Including North Vietnamese elements in mixed North Vietnamese Army/Pathet Lao units.

b/ Including about 2,000 Dissident Neutralists.

c/ Totals contain some margin of error. Actual figures could range from 100,000 to 120,000 for May 1970 and 120,000 to 135,000 for November 1970.

**SECRET**

JHH:HL:vbs

12/17/70