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INFORMATION

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December 23, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER
FROM: W. R. SMYSER (signed) HK
SUBJECT: A Few Observations on Pacification Resulting From My Trip

You will by now have received a report from Al Haig on the security situation in Vietnam and Cambodia. The following are some additional personal notes to supplement his more thorough survey.

Most Vietnamese we saw characterized the current state of the war as "calm," a pregnant term which reflects both the low current level of warfare and the recognition that the Communists may be down but are not out.

It is clear that the government -- profiting from massive U.S. help and Communist mistakes -- has gained control of much of the countryside. Roads once closed are open, in some cases 24 hours a day. One no longer hears bombs and artillery every night in Saigon. Trade and commerce flow more freely.

The life of the Viet Cong has become harder. The sanctuaries and bases are gone. Large units are broken up. The great cadre structure which once ruled much of South Vietnam, at least by night, has been decimated.

Illustrative of Viet Cong difficulties is the story that the recent increase in abductions in some II Corps provinces reflects Viet Cong cadre travel to secret meetings: in order to justify their absence to attend such meetings, cadre have to pretend they were abducted. There is also a subtle irony in the fact that the cadre who had sworn to destroy the GVN apparatus are now pretending to be part of it in order to survive for a better day.

But it would be foolish to take too much comfort from all this. The assets of the infrastructure are still considerable. The North Vietnamese Army

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2

could significantly increase infiltration. And there is still a general feeling in South Vietnam that the Communists could rise again. This feeling alone is a significant power factor in a society where accommodation and compromise are often preferred solutions to political problems.

However, we also heard from several Vietnamese that the Tet offensive hurt the Communists badly, killing their best cadre and violating the spirit of the religious holiday. One Vietnamese, hardly a supporter of the government, told us flatly that the Communists could no longer win because of their Tet losses. The fact that at least some Vietnamese are saying this is significant as an indication that they may not forever believe in a Viet Cong resurgence.

One major difficulty is that at this point, while the situation is a great deal better, we have no really clear guidelines as to where we go from here. We have a number of programs but it is difficult to see how they will all mesh to accomplish the results we want.

We have done what we know how to do -- defeated the Communists in a large scale military contest. We are now entering the phase where we must defeat them in the kind of political contest of which we know very little.

It is now also clear that the Cambodian operations increased security in South Vietnam, particularly in III and IV Corps. To that extent, those operations constituted a direct benefit to our pacification program. On the other hand, we must recognize that Cambodia could become a hindrance to pacification if too many ARVN soldiers are sent there for too long.

Two South Vietnamese generals with whom I discussed this appeared to have real reservations about sending any of their forces to Cambodia for any length of time. They felt that it would hurt pacification in their home areas. We will have some difficult decisions to make regarding resource allocation, but it seems to me much more important on balance to keep Cambodia on our side than to worry about some possible minor losses in our HES statistics.

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