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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATION

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March 17, 1971

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE *J.H.H.*

SUBJECT: CIA Estimates Chances of Peking's
Sending Troops to North Vietnam

A recent CIA memorandum (Tab A) speculates that Hanoi might ask Peking to send troops to North Vietnam to free the additional North Vietnamese troops needed to deal the ARVN a critical blow in southern Laos.

-- Hanoi might regard the present battle in the LAMSON area as critical to its ultimate success in South Vietnam. Hanoi might, therefore, want to move large numbers of new troops from North Vietnam to this sector, but would hesitate to weaken the home defense against possible Allied attacks.

-- In this case, it might ask Peking to send troops both to free the additional North Vietnamese troops needed and to warn the Allies that China is prepared to defend North Vietnam.

-- Hanoi no doubt calculates that ARVN forces will cease operations in southern Laos with the advent of the rainy season (early May) and would be most vulnerable when withdrawing.

-- If Hanoi plans a major infusion of troops to this area in time for action in mid or late April, it would have to make preparations without delay.

-- Both Hanoi and Peking, albeit for different reasons, would be reluctant to see Chinese troops stationed in North Vietnam; however, the memorandum concludes, if Hanoi made a strong case for this Peking would almost certainly comply, but would station troops only in the northern part of North Vietnam.

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-- If Hanoi believes there is a good chance of an Allied ground attack on North Vietnam, the sending of Chinese logistic, or even combat, troops to North Vietnam could have been discussed during Chou's recent visit to Hanoi. If so, this should soon be reflected in Peking's propaganda and probably in other channels as well.

Comment: We have reported this CIA assessment because we believe you should know it. However, even Mr. Helms in a brief covering note to you has pointed out that this is an internal working paper and does not attempt to address all the options open to Peking.

Our own estimate is that the likelihood of Chinese troop assignments to North Vietnam in order to relieve northern troops for duty in Laos is quite slim at this time. Chinese forces would have to be concentrated in northern North Vietnam, whereas the area from which the North Vietnamese could quickly draw forces for Laos would be in southern North Vietnam. In addition, it should be kept in mind that the troops which the Chinese previously sent to North Vietnam did not carry out the types of duties normally given to NVA units. They appeared mainly intended to protect rail lines which, although they ran through North Vietnam, were part of the Chinese rail system. In addition, Chinese forces aided in the movement of supplies and in construction and recovery tasks. They were not, in short, the kind of combat forces which Hanoi might have to replace in North Vietnam to send to Laos.

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