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INFORMATION

April 8, 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John Holdridge

SUBJECT: Communist Activity in the Western Highlands of II Corps

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

Over the past several months, the Communists have intensified political and guerrilla activities among the rural population in the Western Highlands of II Corps. Small armed squads have become more active in the provinces of Kon Tum, Pleiku, Darlac, and, to a lesser extent, Quang Duc. Communist terrorists have increased the kidnapping or assassination of village and hamlet officials; in other instances, they have attempted to win over local officials or have supported their own candidates in government-sponsored local elections.

The enemy has also been active in attempting to thwart the relocation of montagnards from insecure hamlets to safer areas. This tactic has enjoyed some success, since there is a natural desire among the montagnards to live in their traditional areas. In Darlac Province, large groups have moved back to areas under Viet Cong sway, while in Pleiku Province montagnards on at least two occasions have demonstrated against government objections to allowing them to return to their former homes.

Communist propagandists are playing on local fears by belittling the capabilities of government forces and threatening widespread violence after the withdrawal of the U. S. 4th Division has been completed. At the same time, the Communists are conducting an intensive psychological warfare program against the ARVN 47th Regiment, which is scheduled to move to Pleiku in the near future. Many dependents of soldiers in the 47th, which is now located in Phu Yen Province, have been abducted and subjected to intensive political indoctrination. The

[redacted] the morale [redacted] was not good and that they were concerned about the safety of their families once they move to Pleiku. (The 47th Regiment is not rated very high to begin with, and there would have been worries in any case about its performance in the Central Highlands.)

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Several Vietnamese officials with experience in the Highlands believe that security has deteriorated there. During a recent conversation [redacted] two such men agreed that district chiefs tend to overstate the degree of government control and to hide unpleasant developments. The two officers reportedly believe that if the Communists once again combine large unit warfare with guerrilla activities, both Kontum and Pleiku Provinces might fall under Viet Cong control.

25X1 Since that conversation, the Communists have stepped up their main force action as a part of the country-wide military surge. In particular, a large enemy force--some two or three regiments controlled by an element of the B-3 Front headquarters--have begun to harrass a Special Forces camp northwest of the provincial capital of Kontum. Other major enemy forces are situated just across the border in Laos and may eventually join the campaign. Twice last year multi-regimental enemy forces massed near similar camps in the Highlands but were driven back with heavy losses on each occasion.

Comment: Vietnamization is obviously going to be tested severely in the Highlands. Withdrawal of the U. S. 4th Division will not be offset by a corresponding increase in ARVN forces; as already noted, only one mediocre ARVN regiment is scheduled to deploy to the Highlands.

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