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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: The Mounds in Communist China

CIA has wrapped up all known information about the strange mounds in China and has offered some thoughtful but not compelling speculation that they are intended to serve as ground defense strongpoints. The CIA memo admits that some analysts have serious doubts about the strongpoint hypothesis. (CIA's memo is at Tab A)

The facts are that there are now some eighteen of these unusual structures under construction in China. None of them has been completed although work on some was first noted in 1966. All of them show fundamental similarities. Each is built at or near ground level on flat, open land. Each has an interior network of interconnecting concrete corridors and each is surrounded by a moat about 30 feet deep and up to 200 feet wide.

A major research effort has been undertaken by the intelligence community to figure out what purpose the mounds are intended to serve. Intelligence specialists on China were consulted along with others having specialized knowledge of scientific and technical subjects. Experts from outside the government were brought in from such fields as construction engineering, nuclear physics, geology, hydraulics and military engineering and asked their opinions as to the function of the mounds.

Among the functions considered were:

NGA HAS REVIEWED

- Ground defense installations
- Strategic missile launch sites
- Storage for bacteriological or nuclear weapons
- Personnel shelters
- Command and control centers
- Storage for conventional supplies
- Utility plants for electric power or water supply

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- Solar pumps
- Hospitals
- Industrial plants
- Tombs or crematoriums

By late 1968, aerial photography disclosed that weapons positions were being added to the mounds, making it clear that they were to have some sort of military function. This fact served to rule out such possible functions as burial mounds, hospitals or industrial facilities. Moreover, they appear to have only enough electric power and other utilities for routine housekeeping purposes. No special powerlines, auxiliary power systems or special communications equipment have been observed. The various engineers and other specialists consulted ruled out utility plants and solar pumps. There were also problems with most of the military uses postulated for the mounds. The command and control center hypothesis was vitiated by the fact that so many mounds (eight) were grouped together in one area near the missile test center. The same consideration made it unlikely that the mounds were intended as personnel shelters. There are so many more convenient, more secure and less expensive ways to construct storage facilities that this possibility seemed unlikely also. By early 1969 available photography had made it clear that the dimensions and configuration of the corridors and rooms were not suitable for handling, storing or launching strategic missiles. Nor do the mounds appear well suited for nuclear weapons storage or servicing.

The CIA memo concludes that the most likely explanation for the mounds is that they are ground defense strongpoints to protect certain strategic areas from invasion. Six of the mounds in North China are situated at strategic rail and road junctions leading to important military and economic centers. Three others strengthen the defense along a traditional invasion route from the sea and the eight mounds at the missile test center appear placed to defend against an attack from across the Mongolian border. CIA notes, however, the following points which argue against the strongpoint view:

- Concentrated artillery fire on the corridor openings or direct bomb hits probably would cause earth slides that could obstruct the entrances.

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-- Most of the mounds have only four to six firing positions with limited fields of fire on the side from which an attack would be most likely.

-- The fortress concept is outmoded by modern tactical capabilities.

-- They are situated in flat, open areas and could be bypassed by an advancing force.

-- Defensive strongpoints would contradict Mao Tse-tung's theories about the importance of guerrilla and highly mobile regular force tactics.

My own view is that the mystery of the mounds has not yet been solved. It is inconceivable to me that the Chinese would construct Pentagon size structures for only four to six firing positions. CIA will continue to keep a close watch on these odd mounds and so will I. Perhaps as we collect more information from our satellite photography and as we continue to ponder these strange shapes we will develop a line of reasoning in which we can all have more confidence.

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