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INFORMATION

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**MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY KISSINGER**

**FROM: Tom Latimer**

**SUBJECT: CIA and Lam Son Intelligence Failures**

Director Helms has provided you with some interesting reading regarding Lam Son and intelligence. As a result of press allegations that there were intelligence failures in connection with the Lam Son operation, his staff prepared a memorandum listing the charges and the "facts." The upshot of the CIA memorandum (Tab 1) is that there was no failure on CIA's part. Director Helms' covering note to you states that he has sent a copy of this memorandum to the PFIAB. (Tab A)

The CIA memorandum breaks the press charges down into four sets of failures:

- a) the intensity with which Hanoi would react
- b) Hanoi's reinforcement capability
- c) the enemy's anti-aircraft artillery capability
- d) the enemy's armor capability.

On the question of Hanoi's intentions:

- A CIA memorandum dated 21 January 1971 (Tab 2 in Helms' memo) was done at your request and it noted Hanoi's anticipation of allied ground attacks against its infiltration routes in south Laos.
- It also noted the large deployments of North Vietnamese troops to protect those routes, deployments which put the Communists "in a good posture to contest such an operation vigorously and promptly."
- CIA observed that the Communists might evade combat for a few days or longer but in the face of a sustained allied drive

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"Hanoi would be likely to do whatever it could to make the position of the South Vietnamese in Laos untenable and it would be prepared to accept the heavy manpower losses this might entail."

- CIA concludes that, far from failing to predict Hanoi's response, it "came about as close to calling the shots as one is ever likely to come in the real world."

As for the enemy's reinforcement capability, the CIA memorandum states:

- A CIA/DIA/State memorandum dated 14 December 1970 (Tab 3) flagged in detail the expansion and buildup of Communist tactical strength in south Laos then in train.
- It estimated overall NVA combat strength in south Laos at about 27,000 men -- 22,000 infantry plus 5,000 artillery, armor and anti-aircraft -- augmented by about 8,000 Pathet Lao.
- The 14 December memo stated that the largest concentration of the newly arrived NVA forces was in the vicinity of Tchepone and that elements of the 320th, 308th, 2nd and 304th NVA divisions were in the Tchepone area.
- It also noted that one or more of the nine regiments of the 304th, 308th, 320th and 325th NVA Divisions not then in Laos could be deployed southward.
- On 3 February 1971 a CIA memorandum (Tab 4) updated the 14 December 1970 memorandum and flagged the presence in the Tchepone area of 11,000 NVA combat troops, plus a pool of about 70,000 in immediately adjacent areas, any of which, it noted, could be easily deployed to the Tchepone area.
- That memo explicitly stated that Hanoi could add some 10,000 men to its 11,000-man combat force in the Tchepone area within a week.

On the anti-aircraft artillery question, CIA states:

- Both the 14 December 1970 memo and an 11 February 1971 memorandum (Tab 5) noted the enemy's anti-aircraft artillery

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strength clearly and accurately and the 11 February memorandum, issued eight days before major enemy resistance commenced, stressed that Lam Son 719 would be resisted with all the resources that Hanoi could muster.

Regarding the armor issue:

- CIA memoranda prior to Lam Son 719 did not highlight the probable enemy use of tanks but the 14 December 1970 memo did make explicit reference to the 5,000 NVA artillery, armor and anti-aircraft forces in south Laos.
- The 3 February 1971 update specifically noted the presence of the 198th Armor Battalion and located it as being possibly at the intersection of Routes 23 and 9, a short distance from the Lam Son operation area.

CIA's conclusion is that the charges and allegations of intelligence failures regarding Lam Son 719 are demonstrably without fact.

Attachments

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