

MEMORANDUM

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

January 24, 1972

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN...
THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

HENRY A. KISSINGER *K* *H*

SUBJECT:

OSD and JCS reviews completed

The Military Outlook for the Current
Indochina Dry Season

Secretary Laird has forwarded a study by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as some separate comments by General Westmoreland on this subject (Tabs A and B). Mr. Laird draws upon General Westmoreland's comments to conclude that friendly forces should be able to cope with the situation with the help of U.S. air and providing that ARVN uses its mobility to respond to enemy initiatives. The JCS study is a bit more cautious; it raises the possibility that the situation could become extremely critical if U.S. air power were forced to respond to simultaneous enemy pressure in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

Beyond this difference, there seems to be general agreement on the following points:

-- The enemy is currently engaged in a significant buildup in the western highlands of South Vietnam and adjacent Laos. Heavy fighting is expected to erupt in the South Vietnamese highlands probably next month in order to coincide with your trip to Peking as well as to shake the confidence of the ARVN. The magnitude of the enemy buildup is sufficient to require the dispatch of ARVN reserves, but it is not big enough to suggest that the enemy intends to push into the coastal lowlands.

-- Elsewhere in South Vietnam, the situation appears to be reasonably well in hand. The enemy does not have the capability to conduct sustained offensives in the southern half of the country. NVA units could move fairly quickly through and around the DMZ into northern MR I. If they did, ARVN reserves would also be needed there. General Abrams has reported that the ARVN general reserve is now being readied for deployment as necessary.

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-- The enemy is expected to continue to exert pressure in Laos and Cambodia, but not to implement an all-out military option in either of these countries.

Comment. The difference between the JCS paper and the comments of General Westmoreland is largely a matter of emphasis. General Westmoreland focuses on the probability that friendly forces will cope with the situation, while the JCS paper notes the possibility that a critical situation could develop. Otherwise, there is general agreement that the enemy will not opt for an all-out offensive in Indochina during this dry season. A recent CIA assessment also conveyed this judgment.

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