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For Signature (2/26/71)

February 25, 1971

NSA Review Completed

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT: North Vietnamese Infiltration

CIA has published a new memorandum which discusses the apparent stand down in North Vietnamese infiltration since January 5 (Tab D). It offers no firm conclusion on the actual state of infiltration since that date; instead, it discusses the following possible explanations:

-- Infiltration may have been drastically curtailed because of the use of the support facilities within the infiltration system by organic units which have recently deployed from North Vietnam to reinforce the Laotian panhandle.

-- Infiltration may have continued since January 5 but gone undetected. On that date, the North Vietnamese Rear Services way station whose radio communications have provided most of the information on infiltration departures from the Vinh area was physically relocated, and in its new location it may not need to use its radio.

In conclusion, the memorandum notes that if we have lost our ability to detect infiltration departures from the Vinh area, our future estimates of infiltration will be much less timely and complete.

Comment. In our view, current evidence strongly suggests that infiltration continues and that we have indeed lost our ability to detect infiltration departures from the Vinh area. The following points apply:

-- The uncertainty over infiltration hinges on communications from one key way station in the Vinh area. The fact that we have not

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heard from it since January 5 is our only reason for believing that there has been an infiltration stand down.

-- Yet on that very date this station moved 25 miles closer to Vinh, in a position to use more secure means of communication with the Binh Tram in Vinh and to dispatch troops southward by road, rail, and water. It seems strange that this move would have been made only to have all infiltration cease--beginning on the very same day.

-- This way station has maintained radio silence in its new location even though it was previously told to be ready to receive one infiltration group each day from January 5 through January 10.

-- There are various indications of a general enemy effort to improve communications security elsewhere in southern North Vietnam.

-- On January 27, an infiltration group was detected moving through the Ban Karai Pass into Laos. If it had been moving at a normal pace, it would have passed through the way station in Vinh about the middle of January. (The way station, of course, has not reported this or any other group since January 5.) Moreover, the numerical designator of this group suggests that 10 other undetected groups, or the equivalent of about 6,000 men, may have preceded it south after January 5.

-- Since the CIA memorandum was published, other infiltration groups have been detected for the first time in the Laotian panhandle. It seems almost certain that some of these started out from North Vietnam after January 5 (Tab C).

It also appears more than likely that additional groups will be discovered in the coming weeks. As this occurs, the conclusion that infiltration continues--and that we have lost our intelligence advantage in the Vinh area--will be inescapable, if it is not already so.

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As the CIA memorandum points out, this will represent a serious intelligence loss. The pattern of infiltration will begin to emerge only when the groups are much closer to their destinations in South Vietnam and Cambodia, and even then our estimates will probably be hedged by phrases such as "plus or minus 40 per cent."

We believe that it is not too early for the intelligence community to begin a thorough examination of this problem from the operational point of view in the hope of discovering some new exploitable links in the infiltration system or of using our past experience ⁽⁴⁰⁾ derive the best possible data. We have drafted a memorandum along these lines from you to Mr. Helms (Tab B). We have also drafted a brief memorandum to the President informing him of developments and what is being done about them (Tab A).

RECOMMENDATION:

That you forward the memoranda at Tabs A and B to the President and Mr. Helms respectively.

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