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Approved For Release 2006/10/18 : CIA-RDP78T02095R000500320001-8

This is a set of documents  
relating to Lam Son 719.  
Some of them I know are  
not in your files. It is  
imperative that this  
set be kept intact  
because LS 719 will  
eventually be the  
subject of an NSCIC  
review.

Paul  
28 MAR 1973

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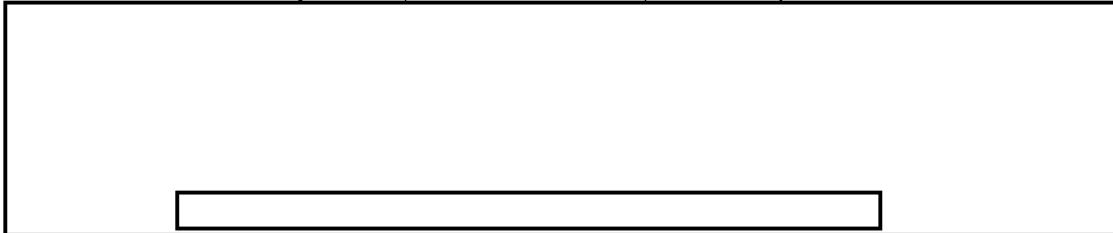
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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Probable Reactions of Various Concerned Parties to a Possible Allied Action in South Laos

I. ASSUMPTIONS AND SCOPE

1. As requested, this memorandum postulates an Allied raid against Communist logistic targets and activities in the Tchepone area of south Laos. It assumes a raid carried out by an ARVN ground force of at least two divisions with extensive US air support (both troop lift and tactical air combat support from both rotary and fixed wing aircraft) but without any US ground force participation.

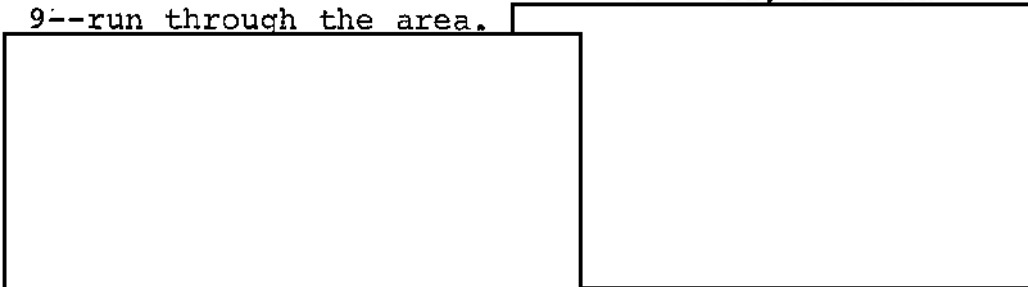


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II. PROBABLE EFFECTS OF GROUND INTERDICTION OF THE TCHEPONE AREA

2. The Tchepone Area As a Target. Subject to the qualifications discussed below the Tchepone area presents logistic targets which are potentially highly lucrative. In and around the Tchepone area the NVA operate significant logistics facilities, and several of the major LOCs feeding supplies for Cambodia and South Vietnam--Routes 911, 914 and 9--run through the area.



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3. Although the Tchepone area has reasonably high prospects as a target for ground interdiction, it also has some potential disadvantages. It is one of the two areas in the Panhandle (the other being the Bolovens) with the heaviest concentration of security forces and, further, is close to the North Vietnamese border. In common with the rest of the northern Panhandle, the Tchepone area has a highly redundant road network. Thus the opportunities for leakage of supplies in even an interdicted environment are considerably greater than they would be farther south in the Panhandle. Finally, the opportunities for uncovering supplies are somewhat limited by the fact that stockpiles and caches, particularly in the areas around Tchepone and the northern Panhandle, are widely dispersed.

4. Logistics. The probable effects of a large-scale ground attack in the Tchepone area on NVA logistic capabilities can be assessed in three ways:

--first, the immediate impact in terms of casualties sustained and the loss of supplies captured or destroyed during the attack.

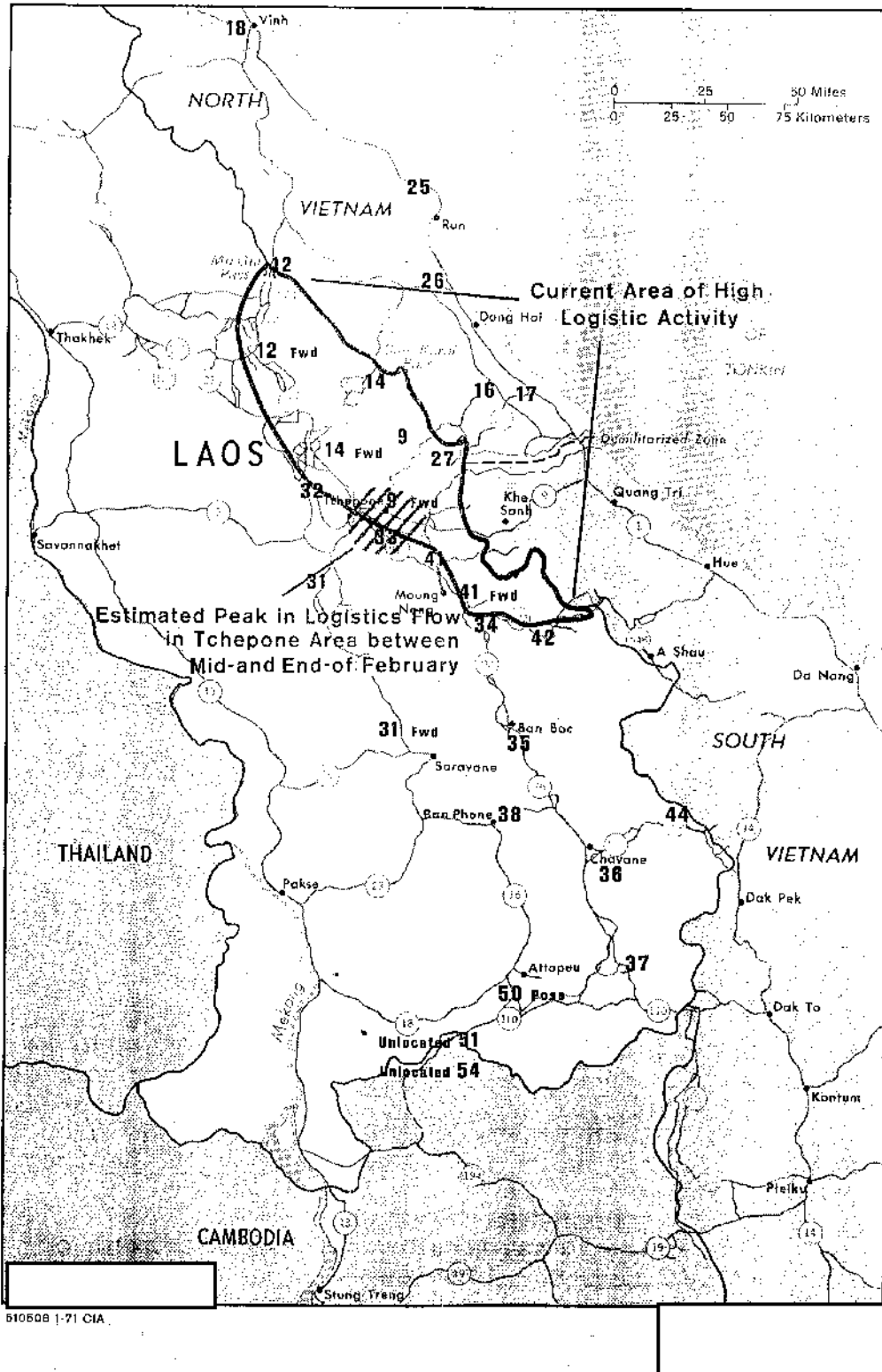
--second, the longer-term impact resulting from the physical disruption of the logistic system and the consequent need to rebuild it.

--third, the disruption of the Communists' carefully laid plans for the resupply of their forces in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

5. The magnitude of these effects, particularly the first, would be highly dependent on the timing of the ground attacks. The results would also be greatly influenced by whether the ground attack is a one-time shot of relatively brief duration or involves sustained physical occupation of the area around Tchepone with intensive search and destroy operations.

6. Timing Considerations. The movement of supplies through the Laotian Panhandle, particularly in terms of peak levels of activity, tends to follow a surge pattern. The first surge occurs during the early months of the dry season at the entry routes

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[REDACTED]

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from North Vietnam [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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the dry season draws to a close the focus of activity is in the Southern Panhandle and along the exit routes in the Tri-border area.

7. After some initial delays, the logistics offensive of the current dry season finally got underway [REDACTED] Thus the current levels of high logistic activity are still in the Northern Panhandle (the area generally north of Route 922). Based on our observation of the timing and relative volume of supplies moved during the 1969-70 dry season supply push, we would expect the movement of supplies in the Northern Panhandle to be at or approaching peak levels in another 4-6 weeks. We cannot predict these peak levels with any high degree of accuracy. However, assuming that the current logistics offensive moves at about the same pace as last year, the optimum time for ground attacks in the Tchepone area would seem to be between mid- and end-February. The prospects should be good at that time that the transshipment facilities in the area should be well stocked. [REDACTED]

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8. Duration Considerations. ARVN operations in the Tchepone area of only limited duration, (i.e., measured in days) would not significantly reduce the enemy's capabilities to maintain a military presence in South Vietnam and Cambodia. Either in terms of material or human resources Hanoi would be able to replace its losses in relatively short order. The enemy has demonstrated time and time again an impressive ability to repair the disruptions of short-term interdictions and to mount impressive surge operations to increase the flow of supplies in the aftermath of such operations.

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9. A ground interdiction program involving a sustained presence of ARVN troops--i.e. something on the order of 4-8 weeks--would be much more lucrative and inflict significantly greater disruption on the enemy. Furthermore, maintaining an active ARVN presence in this area for such a period of time would greatly complicate Hanoi's continuing effort to rebuild the logistic system and restore supply flows before the end of the current dry season (normally in April).

### III. PROBABLE NORTH VIETNAMESE REACTIONS

10. Hanoi anticipated stronger allied ground attacks against its infiltration routes in southern Laos--including use of South Vietnamese regulars--even before the coup d'etat in Cambodia last spring. Its concern rose sharply after the turnabout in Phnom Penh, and during the second half of 1970 thousands of North Vietnamese troops were sent to guard the routes in Laos. In addition, several regiments in North Vietnam have shifted farther south where they could be used to reinforce Communist defenses in the Lao Panhandle. Thus, while the North Vietnamese would be alarmed and would react strongly to the proposed move, we do not think they would be unduly surprised. Their troop deployments to date have put them in a good posture to contest such an operation vigorously and promptly.

11. For a few days or even longer the Communists might try to evade allied forces and just accept a temporary disruption in their supply effort. Fading away was their tactic when US and South Vietnamese forces moved into Cambodia last spring, and since then Communist forces have rarely tried to slug it out with well-equipped South Vietnamese units backed by strong tactical air support.

12. But a sustained allied drive into the Tchepone area would be an entirely different matter. The target would not be an extremity of the Communist force structure that could be reconstituted over time, but an artery that needs to function now in order to sustain enemy military forces farther south. Therefore, we think that any prolonged South Vietnamese operation in the Tchepone

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area, particularly at the height of Hanoi's annual drive to move supplies, would prompt strong military countermeasures by the Communists. They probably would commit a substantial portion of the units they have nearby in Laos, South Vietnam, and North Vietnam. Moreover, additional replacements and supplies could be moved in rather quickly from North Vietnam. In short, the so-called economy-of-force strictures the Vietnamese Communists have been operating under in most of Indochina for some time would not be applicable in this situation. 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.

13. Although we think Communist military reactions would center on South Vietnamese units in southern Laos, Hanoi might over time decide to strike out elsewhere. One possibility would be attacks across the DMZ into MR 1. Another would be investiture of the Mekong River towns in Laos. Or Hanoi could decide to move in North Laos, where the Communists could mount larger offensive operations. Hanoi's play of its hand in Laos, however, would be heavily influenced by Souvanna's initial public reaction and Hanoi's estimate of its chances of influencing his behavior. We think Hanoi would be willing to scale down its activities targetted against the Lao government and possibly even to pull back some forces if it was sure Souvanna would come out publicly against the allied operation.

14. Hanoi could also be expected, of course, to pull out all the stops in denouncing the US for expanding the war and in trying to stimulate opposition both in the US and elsewhere. Because the stakes would be so high, there is at least some chance that the North Vietnamese would suspend the Paris talks in the hope that such a dramatic move might build public pressure on the US to call off the operation.

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15. In sum, if Hanoi read the Tchepone raid as signalling either a sustained allied ground presence in Laos or a series of large-scale assaults throughout the Panhandle, Hanoi would undoubtedly be greatly concerned. The psychological impact of having the Laos system physically disrupted after months of hard work and the large-scale commitment of military manpower would be unsettling. This development would also be seen as a further narrowing of Hanoi's limited options for maintaining a viable logistics system. It would, moreover, significantly impair Hanoi's capabilities for providing the logistic support essential to raising the scale of military activity above the current extremely low levels. A sustained and successful ground interdiction program in southern Laos would deprive Hanoi of any realistic capability for big unit warfare (except possibly in northern I Corps) at least until the closing months of the 1971-72 dry season. For all these reasons Hanoi can be expected to contest the Tchepone raid with whatever resources it can muster.

#### IV. PROBABLE SOVIET AND CHINESE REACTIONS

16. An ARVN foray into the Laos Panhandle on the scale contemplated in this paper would be a matter of deep concern to both the Soviets and the Chinese. They would almost certainly recognize that such an operation had the potential for disrupting seriously the flow of supplies to Communist main forces in Cambodia and much of South Vietnam. North Vietnamese efforts to dislodge the intruding forces could themselves be costly to Hanoi in terms of manpower losses. Both Moscow and Peking would recognize that the ARVN effort, if reasonably successful, could lead to additional major operations in southern Laos and Cambodia that might critically undermine the Communist structure and organizations essential to protracting the armed struggle in South Vietnam at any effective level.

17. Thus both Moscow and Peking would expect Hanoi to request its Communist friends and allies to provide fresh military and political assistance in dealing with this potentially disastrous situation. They would feel that their responses would

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have an important bearing on Hanoi's future prospects in the struggle and on their respective positions of influence in Hanoi.

18. For the Russians, the response would be particularly difficult since there is little that they could do to help with the military situation. They could, and almost certainly would, take the lead in beating the propaganda drums around the world against this "expansion" of the war and in raising the specter of great dangers to world peace in an effort to force a withdrawal of US support from the GVN. A verbal campaign of this sort would cause the already poor climate of Soviet-American relations to deteriorate further, and presumably make negotiations of other issues--Berlin, the Middle East--more difficult. It is unlikely, however, that in the Soviet scale of priorities, what happens in the Laos Panhandle would justify an enlargement of risks in more crucial areas, say by provoking a diversionary crisis.

19. The Soviets may no longer see any net advantage in a prolongation of the Vietnam war, but they have been unwilling or unable to do more in Hanoi than to let nature take its course. It is possible that Moscow might take the occasion of a large-scale intrusion in the Laos Panhandle to nudge Hanoi in the direction of more serious political initiatives at Paris or even toward an enlarged Indochina conference. It is more likely, however, that Moscow would wait for Hanoi's lead, meanwhile providing material, moral, political and propaganda support to Hanoi in its chosen course.

20. Peking would almost certainly make highly ominous and threatening noises in support of Hanoi. It would also respond positively to any requests from Hanoi for increased arms, food, etc. But on the gut question, we doubt that Peking would solicit or Hanoi would levy any request for Chinese troop assistance in the Laos Panhandle. Peking's posture will be influenced by its continuing concern over the Soviet threat on its northern borders, and by the chances of becoming involved in direct hostilities with the US. So long as the territory of North Vietnam itself remains essentially intact

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and the grip of the Hanoi regime on the north is not challenged, Peking will probably rest on its essential position that armed liberation movements must rely basically on their own forces.

21. Peking would probably encourage Hanoi to persevere in a protracted struggle, cutting down further on large-unit warfare if necessary, and relying on guerrilla tactics, terror, and political and psychological action to maintain a presence in South Vietnam. If Hanoi should decide that the "objective situation" required that a respite in the struggle be gained through negotiations, Peking would probably accede to Hanoi's desire and claim a role in any Indochina-wide settlement.

#### V. PROBABLE LAO REACTIONS

22. The proposed ARVN operation into the Tchepone area would confront Souvanna Phouma with the most serious political problem he has faced since 1962. Whatever its rationale, the operation would be widely interpreted as a major departure in the war in Laos and a clear-cut violation of the 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos. Souvanna would find it difficult to publicly countenance military operations by large numbers of South Vietnamese troops on Laotian soil without appearing to discredit his foreign policy and the underpinnings of his coalition government. If he were to state publicly that he supported the operation or that he now considered the ground war in the Laotian Panhandle in the same way that he has long considered the air war--namely, an affair that principally concerns Hanoi and Washington rather than Vientiane--then he would risk losing the acquiescence of the Soviets, the North Vietnamese and even the Chinese Communists. All three Communist countries still maintain diplomatic relations with Souvanna's government and still, at least tacitly, recognize his position as a leader of the Vientiane government. His utility to the Communists, or so Souvanna might reason, would be seriously--perhaps fatally--impaired if he were to go this additional step in supporting large allied operations in the infiltration corridor or failed to effectively, or at least for the public record, oppose them.

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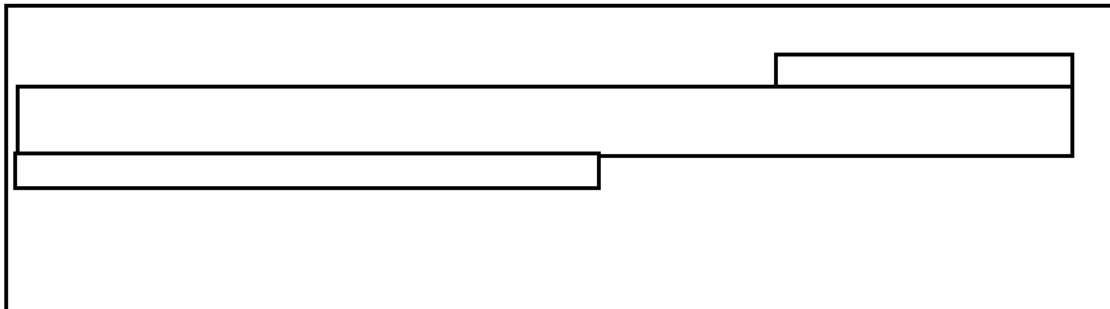
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23. On the other hand, if Souvanna comes out against the ARVN operation, he jeopardizes his position with the US, on whom he is now almost totally dependent. If he attempts to obstruct the operation-- for example, by threatening to step down as prime minister--he runs the risk of prompting into action those rightist leaders who would be only too glad to send him packing, and who are already pressing him for closer military cooperation with South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand.



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troops in Laos. Last June, for example, he told Ambassador Godley to "tell Washington" that if South Vietnamese troops intervened in southern Laos he would order Lao troops to fire on them and he himself would "clear out." This past fall he again stated publicly that he has always rejected bringing foreign troops into Laos "as I rejected the extension of the McNamara line into Laos." Only last week, he turned aside a proposal by the rightists that Laos form an anti-North Vietnamese alliance with a crack about it could be done after he had left the scene.



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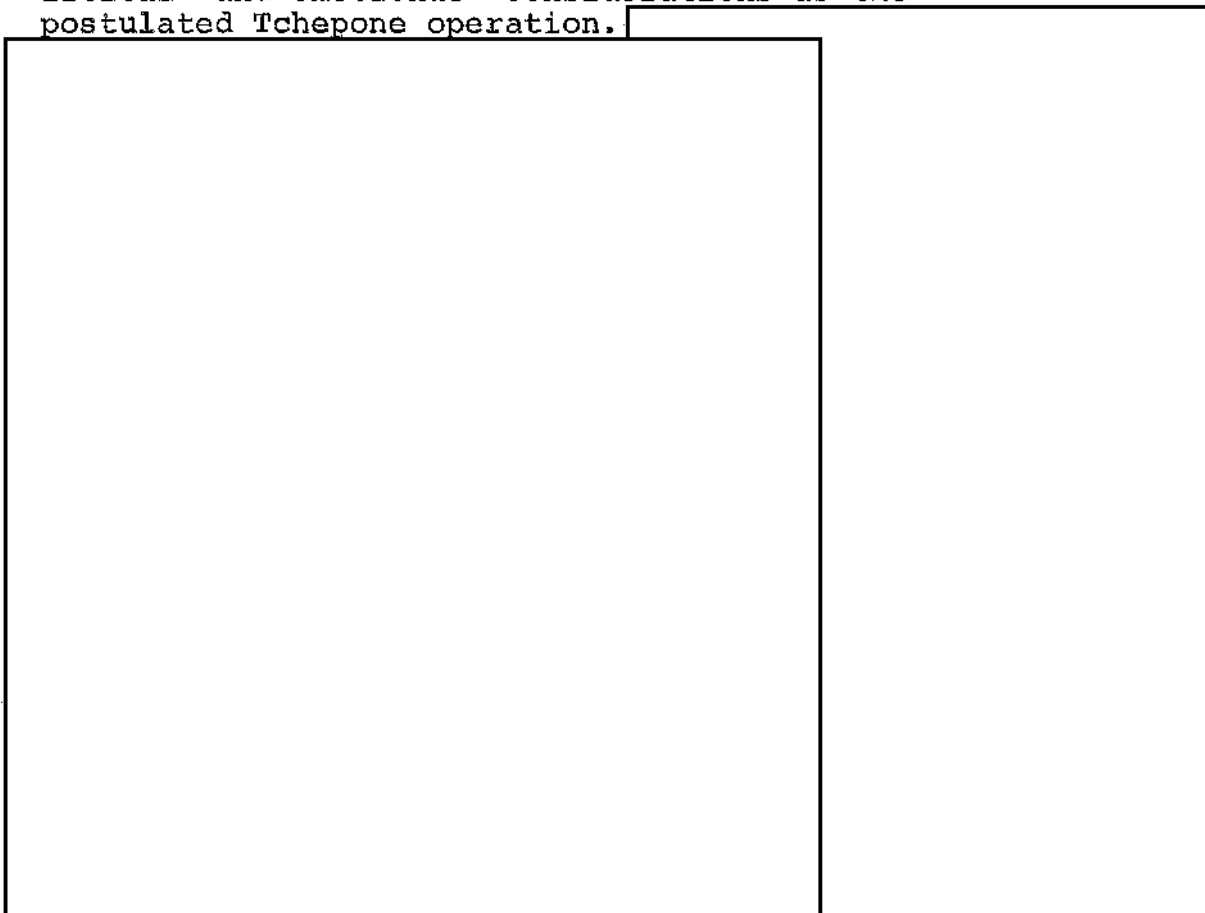
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26. We cannot guarantee how Souvanna will react to an issue so charged with conflicting political--and emotional--considerations as the postulated Tchepone operation.

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28. In estimating reactions to the proposed move into the Tchepone area, the possibility of more profound shifts in the Communist conduct of the Indo-chinese war merits examination. The key question here would be Hanoi's estimate of the success of the Tchepone raid and what that operation might portend. If the ARVN probe were repulsed by Communist forces and Hanoi thus gained a major victory, the North Vietnamese would be encouraged to continue their current strategy. But if the Tchepone operation led--or in Hanoi's estimate seemed likely to lead--to a situation in which allied ground activity in Laos could deny the NVA an effective logistic system, Hanoi would be compelled to re-examine the basic validity of its over-all strategy in prosecuting the war.

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29. Merely to persevere throughout most of South Vietnam in a low-level guerrilla effort, on the pattern of the early sixties, might appear fruitless to Hanoi in the face of Saigon's expanding internal security and military capabilities. Negotiation from a position of public weakness would almost certainly appear highly unpromising. In desperation, the Communists might lash out militarily in northern Laos and the DMZ area in a deliberate effort to restore the escalatory atmosphere of 1965-68 to the Indochinese theater and, in Hanoi's view, incite strong domestic pressures in the US (and internationally) for prompt negotiations of the conflict on terms not unfavorable to the Communist cause.

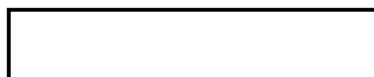
30. These actions would involve substantial risks of large-scale manpower losses and might have the effect of tearing apart the 1962 Geneva framework in Laos. But Hanoi might in the circumstances assume that these risks were unavoidable. We cannot, of course, predict with any degree of certainty that all this will occur in the wake of the Tchepone action. But it will clearly be in the Communist's interest to intensify concerns world-wide about the course of the war and a degree of boldness and (inevitably) sacrifice might appeal to the Communist leadership if it appeared that the only viable alternative was the indefinite postponement of the achievement of its objectives in South Vietnam.

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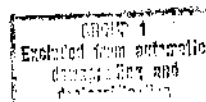
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4 February 1971

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL

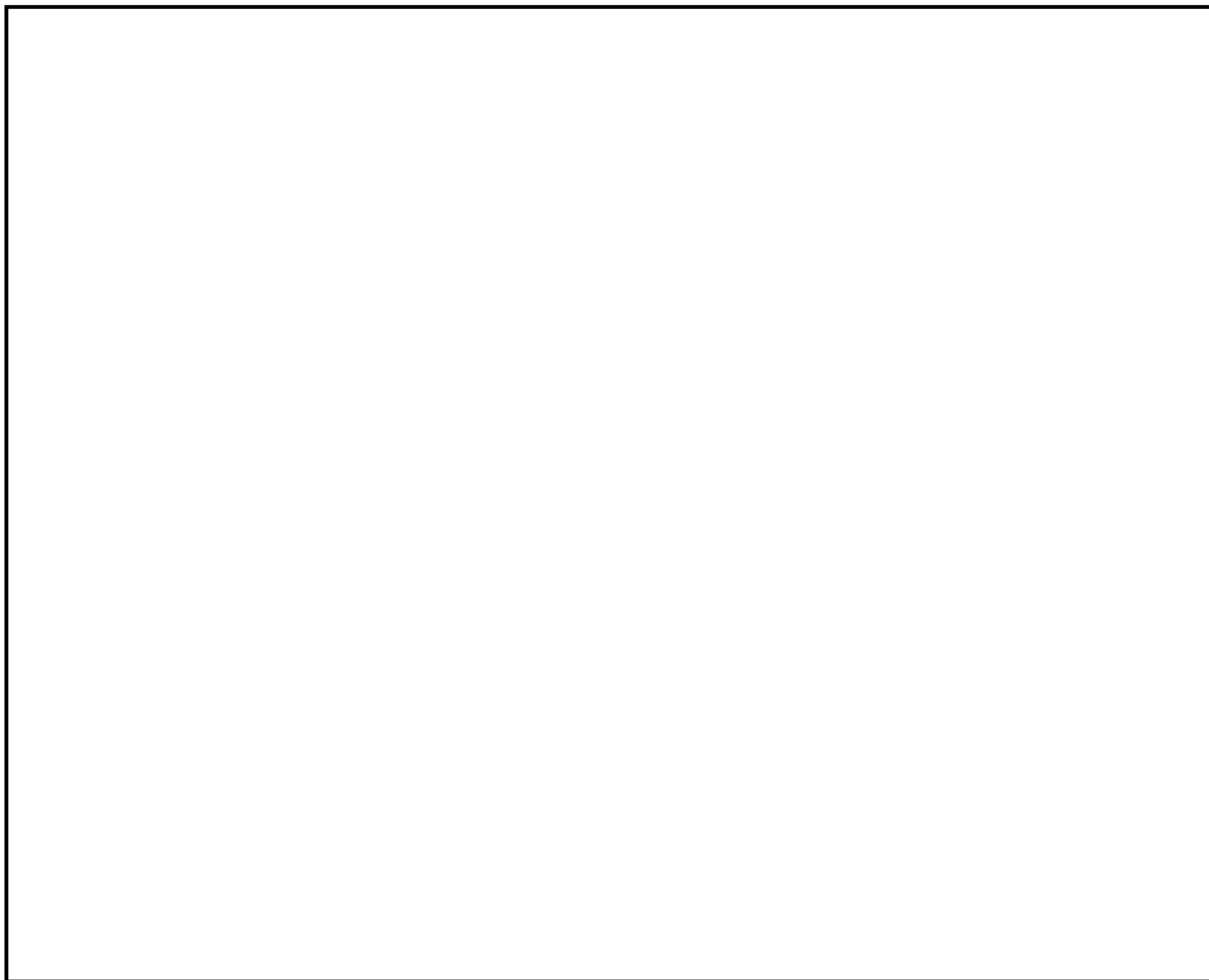
- I. The North Vietnamese over many years have developed a complex logistical system in the Laotian Panhandle -- the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail -- to support their forces in South Vietnam. Always important to the enemy's war effort in northern South Vietnam, the Trail is now the vital life line for the Communist forces in all of South Vietnam and Cambodia.
- II. Hanoi's success in making this system work during this dry season will determine whether or not we see a marked upswing in enemy offensive actions during 1971.
  - A. There are at least 1,500 miles of main and bypass roads within the system plus thousands of trails and two waterways.
  - B. In addition, in the northern areas of the Laos Panhandle there are two POL pipelines.
  - C. To move supplies through the system and into South Vietnam and Cambodia, the Northern Vietnamese use; trucks, watercraft, pipelines, oxcarts, bicycles, and porters. But the main mode of transport is by





truck. The majority of them are of Russian make, each carrying about 4 tons of supplies.

D. The North Vietnamese logistical units have been in the Lao Panhandle a long time.



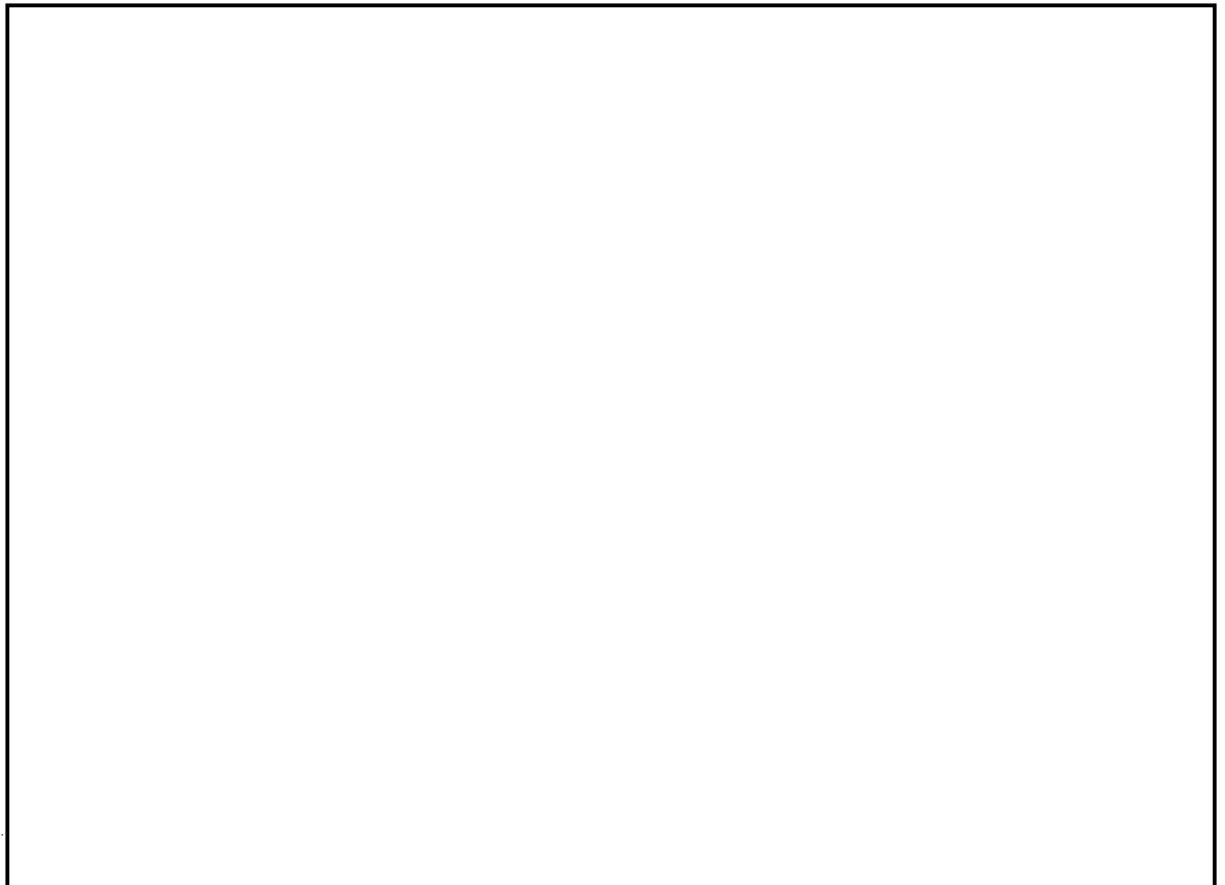
E. Supplies enter the Panhandle of Laos from North Vietnam through three major corridors:

1. The well-known Mu Gia Pass
2. Ban Karai Pass which opened in April 1966
3. A western DMZ road complex which began operating in October 1969.



F. Supplies move within the Panhandle through a series of interconnecting roads and bypasses which give the Communists various options for lessening the effects of the bombing.

G. Supplies exit the Panhandle to South Vietnam and Cambodia on a number of east-west roads that extend from the A Chau Valley in northern South Vietnam to Cambodia in the south. Also, the Sekong river is used for movement into Cambodia.



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year as many as 500 trucks will be on the road at one time, almost entirely during the hours of darkness. The total truck inventory committed to this effort is about 2,400 trucks.

III. There is a distinct seasonal pattern of operation for the logistics system in the Laotian Panhandle. The major throughput of supplies occurs in the dry season that extends from October through May. The general pattern of logistical operations is:

A. October - early December. Restoring the system. Repairing road damage caused by heavy rains and accumulated bomb damage.

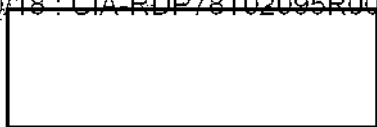
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B. December - early January. Restocking the system.

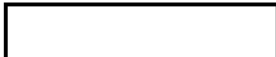


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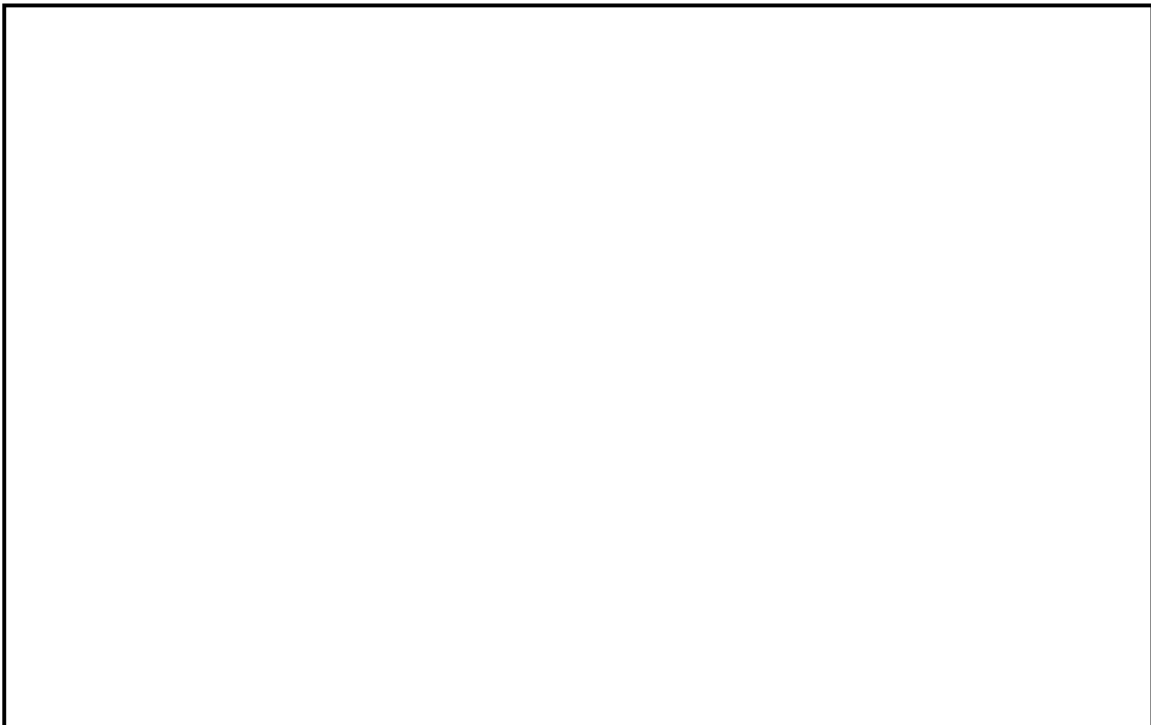


C. January - spring. The throughput stage



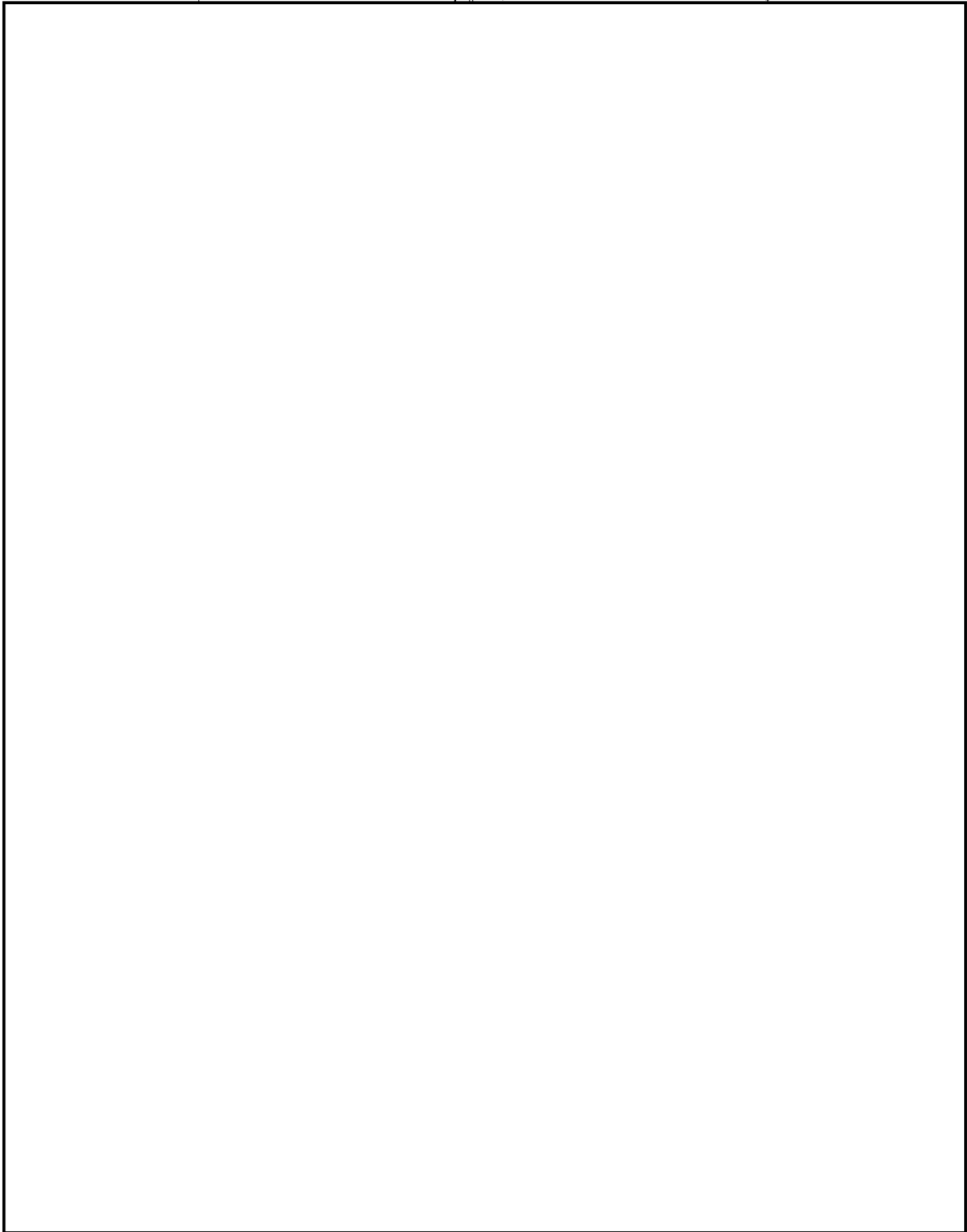
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1. It's purpose is to move supplies through the system to rebuild stockpiles for its combat forces fighting in South Vietnam, and this year, Cambodia as well.



IV. There is no way of accurately measuring the total volume volume of supplies that are moving through the system at any one time, or the extent of enemy stockpiles in any one location. But we have sufficient evidence to say with assurance that the enemy maintains very large stockpiles and that the system handles large volumes of supplies.

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V. Current Situation

A. The enemy's logistical reaction to events in Cambodia has been pronounced.



3. No supplies were moved through the system during the rainy season but the North Vietnamese did improve and maintain the system in an effort to get a quick start once the roads dried out in October.

B. Delays, however, have characterized this dry season's effort.

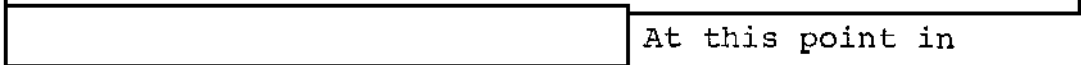
1. Heavy rains continued well into October.
2. The heavy bombing of the entry routes further compounded the enemy's problems.
3. It was not until early December that the enemy's resupply effort got underway.

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C.



At this point in

time the peak level of activity is in the northern

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Panhandle, in the area north of Route 922. It is still too early to determine how it is going, but our last assessment in late January was that, barring further delays, the enemy was headed toward moving more throughout this year than ever before.



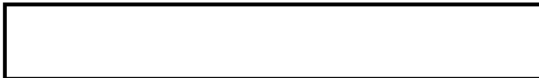
2. The volume of supplies detected moving into the Panhandle so far has been at a very high level.

D. We do not know how many supplies Hanoi wants to move through. The first need will be to refill their depleted stockpiles in South Vietnam and Cambodia. The extent to which they are able to move greater amounts will also determine whether we will see renewed or widespread offensive activities in 1971.





E. If they are not successful in meeting the goals



the resulting logistic

constraints will probably mean that any grandiose

military ambitions on Hanoi's part will have to

wait until next year to be carried out.

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22 March 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Probable Consequences of the  
Termination of Lam Son 719

*I. Parameters of the Problem*

1. This memorandum is based on the controlling assumption that a decision has been made to terminate the Lam Son 719 operation and to extract the ARVN forces engaged in it from Laos as rapidly as possible in an orderly fashion. Taking that hypothesis as a given, the memorandum attempts to assess the impact of Lam Son 719, and its manner of termination, on Hanoi's over-all capabilities, especially in the logistics field, and on the current military balance in Indochina. It also addresses the over-all impact of Lam Son 719 on Vietnamese Communist attitudes and intentions, the South Vietnamese armed forces, the South Vietnamese populace, and on President Thieu's political position and prospects.

*II. Critical Variables*

2. The assessments presented below are offered with considerable diffidence. They are perforce tentative and should be read as such. The information available at this writing is conflicting, confusing and considerably less than complete. Furthermore, the ultimate impact of Lam Son 719 on the groups and matters addressed in this memorandum will be significantly influenced by at least three sets of critical variables.

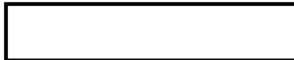
3. The first is what actually happens in the next week or two. Much depends, for example, on the balance struck--or at least the balance that appears to be struck--between making the extraction of GVN forces from Laos rapid and keeping it orderly. Much also depends on what GVN forces, especially those in Military Region 1, then do, or do not do; for example, whether or not they soon launch another cross-border operation. Communist behavior and actions in the next few days and weeks will also influence final judgments on the matters here considered.

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We expect Communist forces to make a maximum effort to harass and cut up GVN units being withdrawn from Laos. From a political and psychological perspective, it would clearly be in Hanoi's interests to continue pressing the attack even after Lam Son 719 has ended. Whether or not the Communists make such an attempt will tell us a good deal about the immediate impact on their over-all capabilities of the heavy casualties they have clearly sustained in the recent fighting. In short, the actual behavior of GVN and Communist forces in the Lam Son/MR 1 area over the next week or two will do much to shape at least popular judgments on whether Lam Son was a "victory" for one side or the other or a stand-off draw.

4. Secondly, the real measure of Lam Son 719's impact will be made manifest in the pattern and level of Communist activity, particularly military activity, in South Vietnam and Cambodia over the next several months, say between now and the October 1971 presidential elections. In the sense of rendering any final verdict on Lam Son 719, the jury will have to remain out until we see what the Communists prove themselves able, or unable, to do during what Hanoi clearly regards as a critical year.

5. The third set of variables is rooted in the truism that people's political judgments and behavior are more influenced by what they believe to be the case than by what others might think could be proved to actually be the case. Hanoi, well aware of this, is already building up a propaganda and psychological warfare campaign which, in its eyes, could be as important as the conduct of the actual fighting on the ground. Hanoi clearly intends to extract maximum advantage from the way Lam Son 719 has been treated in the US press and media. The outcome of the propaganda struggle will probably have as much influence on Lam Son's ultimate impact as what actually happened during the course of the operation itself. The development over time of a widespread conviction among the ARVN and the GVN populace at large that the Communists have suffered a major setback significantly crimping their capabilities for future action will produce one set of political and psychological consequences. Quite a



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different set of consequences will be produced if the belief or impression that ARVN has suffered a major defeat gains wide currency and general acceptance in South Vietnam and abroad, including within the United States.

*III. Logistic and Manpower Considerations*

6. Impact to Date: Operation Lam Son 719 brought about considerable disruption of the North Vietnamese logistic support system and forced a heavy reorientation of that system. In addition to coping with the normal dry season task of pushing large amounts of supplies through the Panhandle, the North Vietnamese since 8 February have had to meet the added logistic requirements of an expanded force structure fighting at very high combat levels.

7. Through 20 March ARVN forces reported the seizure or destruction of almost 2,800 tons of supplies in operation Lam Son 719.\* The foodstuffs lost would feed all the enemy forces in the Tchepone area for about two months. The ARVN forces also destroyed or seized 389 vehicles (281 trucks, 108 tanks) and about 600 tons of POL.

8. Communist weapons losses included more than 4,500 individual weapons and more than 1,600 crew-served weapons. These losses were enough to equip more than 12 combat battalions. Ammunition losses through 20 March amounted to more than 600,000 rounds.

9. In addition to these losses, the Lam Son 719 operation significantly raised the North Vietnamese logistic burden because of the need to support a combat force which has increased by more than 15,000 troops since 8 February. On the basis of research still in progress, we estimate that logistic support of these forces as well as the previous

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\*This discussion excludes consideration of supply losses resulting from bombing. The data required to quantify these losses are not yet available in Washington.



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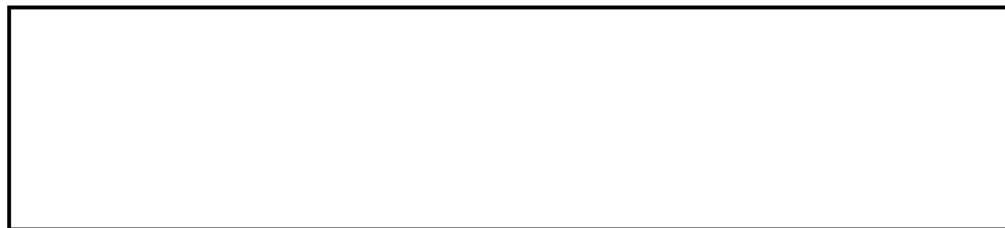
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expansion of forces undertaken in anticipation of allied incursions increased the burden on the system by 35-50%. This burden would be substantially greater if the North Vietnamese felt compelled to replace the supplies lost as a result of ARVN ground actions.

10. A final logistic impact of operation Lam Son 719 is that it forced an unplanned and accelerated drawdown of supply stocks in Laos and forced the diversion of some supplies which otherwise would have moved toward South Vietnam and Cambodia.

11. Enemy Efforts to Move Supplies: Despite the considerable disruptions and losses sustained as a result of Lam Son 719, the North Vietnamese did not lose sight of the need to maintain a southward flow of supplies destined ultimately for their forces in South Vietnam and Cambodia. At the same time that they were maintaining an intense resistance to the allied incursions, the NVA also launched "crash" programs to maintain a high level of supplies around the Tchepone area and southward throughout the system. The preliminary and highly tentative results of research still in train point to two general conclusions:



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b. The volume of supplies which has moved into these southern areas during the period 1 October-18 March would appear to be at least 4,000 tons and could be as much as 8,000 tons. Given the low level of combat in these southern areas and the smaller numbers of enemy forces deployed there, this volume of traffic, if confirmed, would appear to be adequate to provide for a throughput of supplies at least equal to that needed to sustain the low levels of combat observed in South Vietnam and Cambodia during 1970. These tonnages are roughly equivalent to the amounts taken from the Cambodian base areas during 1970.

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12. Effects of Terminating Lam Son 719: Termination of Operation Lam Son 719 will have the immediate impact of lightening the burden and disruptions placed on the NVA logistic system. It will also provide the NVA a period of time during which conditions will probably be favorable for offsetting the disruptive effects of the operation.

13. We do not know at this point what volume of supplies Hanoi intended to move through the system during the current dry season. At a minimum, the Communists probably wanted to move enough supplies to compensate for the loss of Sihanoukville. They also undoubtedly wanted to move sufficient supplies to provide them with a greater choice of offensive options than they were able to exercise in 1970.

14. Given the disruptions of Lam Son 719, the accelerated withdrawals of stockpiles, and the diversion of some of the supplies intended for South Vietnam and Cambodia, Hanoi's logistic goals have undoubtedly been set back. The immediate priority after the cessation of Lam Son 719 will almost certainly be to compensate for these shortfalls and to restore the logistic system.

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15. The North Vietnamese have at least four weeks--longer, if the rainy season should be late--to carry out these programs. If there are no further ground incursions into south Laos, the North Vietnamese will undoubtedly use the remaining period of the dry season to carry out an intensive logistic offensive. The past history of their logistic capabilities would indicate that they should be able to make some progress in raising the level of throughput into South Vietnam and Cambodia. We cannot at this time give a quantitative assessment of what this future throughput would be. On balance it would seem, however, that it would fall short of that needed to carry on sustained and widespread offensives throughout South Vietnam between now and the start of the next dry season.

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16. Manpower Losses: Manpower rather than supply losses will probably prove to be the most grievous penalties paid by Hanoi during operation Lam Son 719.

17. Reported enemy manpower losses through 0600 on 21 March total more than 11,800 killed-in-action; (including some 3,700 killed-by-air). In addition to these losses, untold thousands of enemy troops have undoubtedly died of wounds or have been so seriously wounded that they are no longer combat effective. Statistics on enemy KIA are probably among the most unreliable of the war, but whatever the level of inflation might be in the above figures, it seems clear that enemy manpower losses during Lam Son 719 were extremely high and cannot be viewed lightly in Hanoi.

18. Put in perspective with losses reported by ARVN--989 KIA, 169 MIA--(figures which probably are understated), Hanoi appears to have lost something on the order of 10 troops for each ARVN loss. This enemy-to-friendly KIA ratio is one of the highest ever observed during the Vietnam war. Even if one effects some upward adjustment in the ARVN figure and downward adjustment in the Communist figure, the resultant ratio is still significantly high.

#### IV. *The Impact on Hanoi*

19. The evidence currently available suggests that Hanoi's confidence in its ability to stay the course in Indochina has probably been enhanced by the results of the fighting in southern Laos during the past six weeks. As indicated above, the North Vietnamese have paid a heavy price in terms of manpower, diversion of military effort, and disruption of supply activities. But when Lam Son 719 began it quickly became apparent that Hanoi was prepared to sacrifice heavily in this situation in the hope of inflicting a significant setback on the South Vietnamese. Early termination of South Vietnamese operations in Laos will probably lead Hanoi to believe that its forces have accomplished this objective. In these circumstances, the North Vietnamese will certainly claim a "victory" and Communist forces will

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probably receive the kind of psychological boost they have not had in South Vietnam for nearly two years.

20. Hanoi recognizes, however, that regardless of the psychological mileage it may be able to extract from Lam Son 719, Communist forces are still a long way from reversing the tide that has been running against them, particularly in South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese will probably try--or at least want--to shift more units to the northern provinces of South Vietnam in an attempt to keep the South Vietnamese under pressure. But because Communist units seem to have taken such heavy losses in Laos, we are inclined to think the North Vietnamese will be more inclined to concentrate on making the best possible use of the time they have left this dry season to move supplies southward.

21. If Hanoi wishes to make a bravura gesture elsewhere to reinforce propaganda claims that Lam Son 719 did more damage to ARVN than to Communist forces, Hanoi could sharply step up the level of Communist activity in north Laos. The harassment of Luang Prabang could conceivably be the opening shot in a north Laos campaign. If so, the long-anticipated assault on Vang Pao's positions at Ban Na, Tha Tam Bleung, and Long Tieng may be timed to coincide with the extraction of ARVN forces from the Laos panhandle.

22. In any event, we are inclined to think that the Communists will make some strenuous attempts during the next six to eight months to flex their military muscles in both Cambodia and South Vietnam, if only to demonstrate that Lam Son 719 did not undercut their capacity to fight. They might also believe that several sharp surges of military action in South Vietnam and Cambodia would tend to discredit President Thieu and to diminish his chances for re-election next autumn.

23. But we do not expect the Communists to pull out all the stops anywhere during the next few months; indeed, they are not in a position to alter the situation on the ground significantly in South Vietnam, and probably not in Cambodia. Moreover,

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the Communists are likely very soon to be planning for the next major round of military activity in late 1971 and early 1972. Hanoi must be confident that many more US troops are going to be withdrawn from South Vietnam between now and then, and it clearly hopes that the results of Lam Son 719 can be portrayed to cast further doubt on the ability of the South Vietnamese to persist as this happens. In addition, Hanoi is probably now more confident that it will be able to cope with whatever allied operations are mounted against Communist supply activities in Laos.

V. *The Impact on ARVN and the Military Balance*

24. We are far too close to a still continuing operation and the available evidence is too confusedly conflicting to attempt any net judgment on the ultimate impact of Lam Son 719 on the GVN's armed forces or the balance of the military equation, even in MR-1. This operation was the largest and most complex endeavor in which the GVN's armed forces have played a leading role. Even though they were palpably, and critically, dependent on US air support of all kinds, the ground fighting was managed and executed almost entirely by the South Vietnamese. Some senior Vietnamese military officers have criticized the staff work, planning, and command arrangements or decisions of their colleagues and the latter's alleged errors in handling liaison with essential US air support. Carping at the professional skill of one's colleagues, however, is not unique to the South Vietnamese Army, and all armies engaging in new types of operations have to learn certain lessons from experience. Furthermore, the GVN was on the strategic offensive in an environment where the terrain and other circumstances gave the Communist defenders obvious advantages. The Communists knew the area well, having controlled it for over a decade, and had a heavy concentration of AAA and other ordnance plus well prepared techniques designed to facilitate defense against just this kind of attack. GVN casualties were heavy but, as noted above, the enemy's were far heavier.

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25. The actual net impact of or lessons to be derived from Lam Son 719 with respect to the GVN's military capabilities thus involve complex judgments that will have to be sifted as more data become available. At another level, however, the psychological impact of the operation on ARVN morale, hence performance, will be heavily influenced by attitudes or quasi-emotional judgments that jell within the next few days or weeks. Much will depend on whether the ARVN officers conducting the extraction from Laos and the units involved therein view it as an operation running to plan or an enforced retreat. More will depend on the pattern of ARVN activity in the immediate aftermath of Lam Son 719's termination,

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GVN troops directly involved and their comrades who were not participants come to think of it as a victory--as they came to regard the battles of 1968, especially Tet, where fighting was also intense and GVN casualties even heavier. The leadership role and behavior of the GVN's military establishment and government in the days immediately ahead will have a significant impact on this largely emotional and attitudinal issue.

VI. *The Impact on South Vietnamese Popular Attitudes*

26. Despite inevitable sniping from some of Thieu's critics and political opponents, most politically concerned South Vietnamese seem to regard Lam Son as having been costly but, so far, successful, despite a somewhat slow start. Such popular attitudes could be most adversely affected if the extraction of GVN forces should look like a precipitate retreat enforced by enemy pressure. Assuming the extraction is reasonably orderly, however, its timing (i.e. now as opposed to two or three weeks hence) is unlikely to make much immediate impact in this arena. What will make an impact is the course of future events, especially the nature and level of Communist military activity within South Vietnam itself and the manner in which the ARVN reacts, plus

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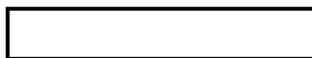


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the GVN's adroitness or lack thereof in coping with Hanoi's "great victory" propaganda offensive, which VC cadre throughout South Vietnam will certainly attempt to further.

*VII. The Impact on Thieu's Position and Prospects*

27. Again, the way the extraction of Lam Son forces from Laos is handled and presented to the public will be important here. Assuming reasonable success and good management in that area, the timing adjustment of Lam Son's termination will be of minimal intrinsic importance. If subsequent events--again, especially the level of Communist activity within South Vietnam--enable Thieu to claim plausibly that Lam Son facilitated a favorable evolution of the situation in South Vietnam, then Thieu can turn the operation very much to his political advantage. If the situation in South Vietnam deteriorates over the next several months, Thieu's opponents will be quick to allege that his mismanagement of Lam Son was an operative factor. The jury on that issue will render its verdict in October.



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