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WASHINGTON SPECIAL ACTIONS GROUP MEETING

December 2, 1970

Time and Place: 11:11 a.m. - 12:07 p.m., White House Situation RoomSubject: Indochina Contingency PlanningParticipation:

Chairman - Henry A. Kissinger	JCS	- Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt
		Capt. Charles Long
State - Mr. U. Alexis Johnson		
Mr. Marshall Green	NSC Staff - Mr. John Holdridge	
	Col. Richard T. Kennedy	
Defense - Mr. David Packard	Mr. W. Richard Smyser	
Mr. Dennis Doolin	Mr. D. Keith Guthrie	
Mr. George Fowler		
CIA - Mr. Richard Helms		

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SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of CIA and JCS briefings and the Defense Department contingency study, the WSAG reviewed recent military developments in Indochina and discussed assessments of enemy intentions and friendly capabilities. It was agreed that these assessments would again be examined at the WSAG meeting scheduled for December 11, and that in the meantime a special effort would be made to identify possible weaknesses which might be exploited by the enemy during the coming dry season. It was also agreed that the plans being prepared by the Defense Department for dealing with military contingencies in Indochina during the coming months would be reviewed at the December 11 WSAG meeting.

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Dr. Kissinger: The meeting today is primarily to discuss the contingencies that might arise. I understand we have another meeting next week to discuss the plans for dealing with these contingencies. (to Helms) Would you like to lead off?

Mr. Helms: [] can brief on recent developments since the assessment you have was prepared.

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[] There have been two military actions in North Laos. An operation directed at Ban Ban kicked off on November 26. It involves 1450 men and is going according to schedule. Three battalions from Bouam Long, north of the Plaine des Jarres, are going down Route 6 to meet the groups dropping south toward Ban Ban.

Dr. Kissinger: Can you show where this is? Ban Ban is not a household word.

[] This will be a two-week search and destroy operation. The troops will then go back to Long Tieng. With luck they will hit a number of enemy supply depots and dumps.

[]
Mr. Doolin: Is there any sign that the enemy is withdrawing from the Plaine des Jarres?

[] No.

Dr. Kissinger: Why has there been no opposition? The intercepts indicate an enemy operation is contemplated.

[]
Mr. Green: Is the target Ban Ban or the general area around it?

[] There are several targets in the surrounding area. These units will move around. They have been told not to get into sustained fire fights. This is a spoiling operation.

There has been some movement of North Vietnamese companies across the Plaine des Jarres. They might move on us in Ban Na in the next couple of months.

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if they go that far, they will be on the road to Pak Song and control of the Bolovens Plateau.

[REDACTED]

Dr. Kissinger: Who does all the planning for these operations?

[REDACTED] The field.

Dr. Kissinger: These are former military officers?

[REDACTED] Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: If we ever get this business settled, we will have to give you people a war somewhere else to keep you occupied.

Mr. Helms: One reason I want General Cushman to go out there is to make sure that the best possible use is being made of these troops.

Dr. Kissinger: Where is he?

Mr. Helms: He is arriving in Saigon today.

[REDACTED] We have been trying to secure the Se Kong. However, in the last two weeks our interdiction effort has stopped because of the loss of part of the Bolovens.

Mr. Green: What has happened to Prairie Fire?

[REDACTED] It continues to operate and has been very successful. The Prairie Fire operations are always of short duration. The important point is that we are out of the game as far as operations with Lao forces along Route 96.

Dr. Kissinger: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] One is to be deployed in the Bolovens in two weeks.

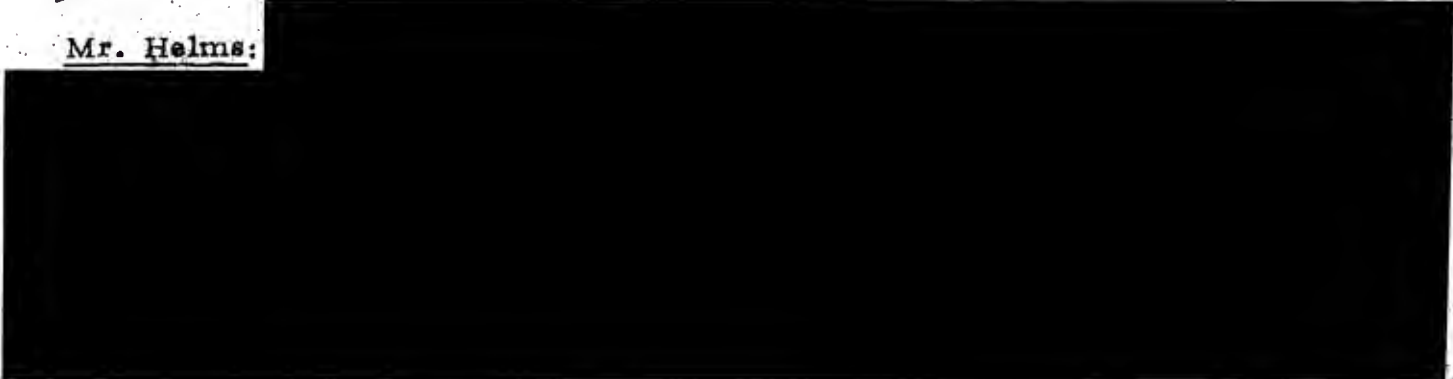
Dr. Kissinger: [REDACTED]

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Mr. Helms:



Mr. Doolin: It is a question of areas which they used to have.

Mr. Green:



Dr. Kissinger: Are they any good?



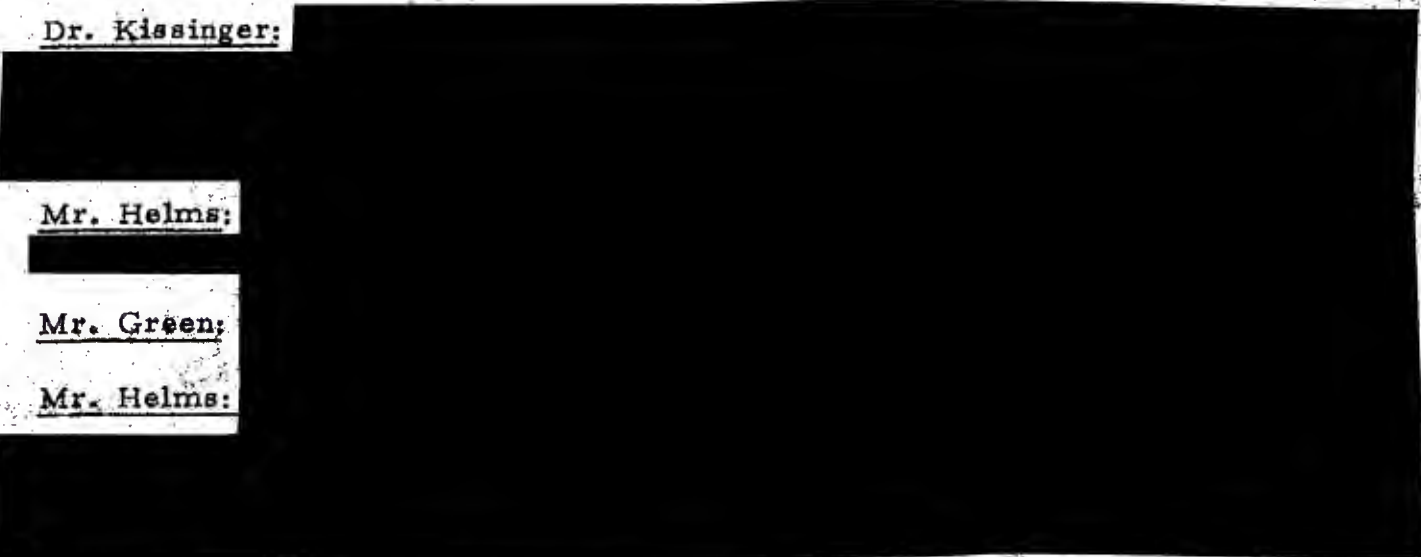
Dr. Kissinger: Why?



Dr. Kissinger: What were they told?



Dr. Kissinger:



Mr. Helms:

Mr. Green:

Mr. Helms:

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Dr. Kissinger: Can you tell me what the hell they think they are doing losing 18,000 Cambodians this way? It is not worth it.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: They took the heat off Kompong Thom; the enemy has swung toward Kompong Cham. In terms of casualties, the Cambodians are not doing badly. There is no major threat to any of the principal cities.

Dr. Kissinger: Are they going to lose that column?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: No. Only one battalion was hit hard.

Dr. Kissinger: Why can't the enemy trap and destroy the column?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Each time the Cambodians learn a lesson. If they had really been hit hard, we would have expected to have desertions.

Dr. Kissinger: Why should the column survive if it sits on the road?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: The enemy doesn't have that much strength.

[] That is a key point.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: They only have 33 battalions.

Mr. Packard: The column was caught in an ambush.

Dr. Kissinger: Are they going to keep the column there?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: The plans don't involve staying there.

The main threat in Cambodia is a movement in the Kompong Cham area.

The ARVN is wearing down the North Vietnamese 101D Regiment along Route 4 south of Phnom Penh.

Mr. Johnson: They are getting short of POL in Phnom Penh.

Dr. Kissinger: Is this coming through Saigon?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Are you getting ARVN to work on this?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: We have gone out with a message.

Dr. Kissinger: How is the 101D Regiment being supplied?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Overland from Vietnam. The way they have always done--carrying supplies on their backs and on bicycles.

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We are planning a pincer operation against the 101D Regiment with Cambodian forces.

Dr. Kissinger: Are the Cambodians any good?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Yes, they are line units from the Phnom Penh area. We have asked the RVNAF supply forces to come along side of Route 4, but so far they have not agreed.

We have asked CINCPAC to work out a plan to work with the ARVN and really go after the 101D Regiment.

Mr. Johnson: How many troops are involved in that division?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: 1100.

Mr. Green: What has been the effectiveness of our air action?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: It was quite effective. Now the enemy is beginning to adapt. They are getting their shovels out and digging in. They are still taking a lot of casualties--in this and all other operations. This has by no means been a debacle from the standpoint of the FANK. The enemy is losing more troops. The FANK is now up to 232 effective battalions.

Dr. Kissinger: Effective or organized?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Well--they are organized. We are beginning to see the fruits of our labors.

The situation at the moment is that we have got to break the deadlock on Route 4. We are sure to do that in the next week or two.

Also we need to safeguard the rice crop and protect Kompong Cham. The enemy has a whole division there. The ARVN is doing some planning on this. Lon Nol had requested an ARVN operation to clear out the area.

Dr. Kissinger: He has a Napoleon complex.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: General Tri has gone in with a plan to clear out the plantation area.

Dr. Kissinger: Is this going to be done or is it just palaver?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: It is now being discussed at the Thieu level. We are pushing on it. If the operation is mounted, it will relieve Kompong Cham.

Dr. Kissinger: When will we know whether it is going to be mounted?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: It is encompassed in the plans you asked to have prepared and which will be done this week.

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Dr. Kissinger: Will it be executed?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: If we get the approval of everyone.

Mr. Johnson: The FANK is holding Kompong Thom?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: The relief column is stalled on Route 7. The ARVN is operating almost up to Kompong Cham. They have been inflicting casualties.

[] It is worth noting that there was a successful resupply of Kompong Cham via the Mekong last week.

Dr. Kissinger: Does this pretty well cover everything?

[] Yes. I might add something about infiltration. 20,000 personnel have been sent to COSVN during October-November. This compares with 17,000 for the same period last year. COSVN is now operating just outside Kratie. If the ARVN operation is successful, it might mean the movement of COSVN.

Mr. Johnson: COSVN is running the war in Cambodia?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Yes, and in Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger: The North Vietnamese have 104 battalions in Cambodia but only 33 targeted against the FANK. Where are the others?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: In eastern Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: They could turn on the Cambodian forces.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Yes.

Mr. Helms: We don't know where they are headed.

[] They have stepped up truck movements and logistics operations.

Mr. Green: Overall their principal effort is to rebuild the supply line to South Vietnam.

[] The paper tangles with this. We feel they first want to maintain their supply system. Then, they probably will want to take action to secure a safe area from which to operate into South Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger: How can they make it safer than it is?

[] We are building some unconventional warfare teams--to be set up by Defense rather than GIA. Northern Cambodia is a sponge. The Cambodians are not contesting it, but there are many areas that are wide open.

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Mr. Packard: They will probably have to build up troops and supplies there. No one knows for sure what they will do.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: The enemy supply effort got off to a bad start this year. There were heavy rains, and our air raids hit them.

Dr. Kissinger: Did the raids do any good? Do we have pictures?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Yes.

Mr. Holdridge: DIA has pictures.

Dr. Kissinger: Are they going to share them with us?

Mr. Packard: We will send them to you.

Dr. Kissinger: Did the raids make any difference? These are the protective reaction raids in North Vietnam?

Mr. Holdridge: No.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: In North Vietnam the weather closed in. We didn't get any good pictures.

Up until about a week ago, the enemy had zero throughput to South Vietnam and Cambodia. In the last two weeks they have been delivering about 29 tons a day. The situation is improving for them as the roads dry out and they can go around the interdiction points. They are moving SAMs to defend the routes at the chokepoints.

Mr. Packard: Their trucks are moving down. Our gunships have not been as effective as they should. We are sending someone over there to find out why. However, we are not going to stop all of their supplies.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: The truck kills have been very disappointing this year.

Mr. Johnson: Is there a shortage of targets?

Mr. Packard: There have been technical problems.

Mr. Green: How effective is the sensor system?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: The on-the-ground sensors to detect traffic are okay, but there have been problems with the links to our fire-control system.

Mr. Packard: We will get that fixed.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: During all of November we got 134 trucks. That is a piddling amount.

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Dr. Kissinger: How many did you get in 1968?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: 623 during the same month.

The trucks are there, but we are not hitting them.

Dr. Kissinger: You have been hitting them for years. Why not now?

Mr. Packard: There are problems in getting the sensors tied in to the gunships. We have new crews. We will get this fixed.

Col. Kennedy: Is there a change in the mix of the aircraft used?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: We have new equipment, new sensors, and new armament.

Mr. Packard: We now have more gunships and some B-57s.

Dr. Kissinger: Is there anything in Vietnam itself on which we need a briefing?

[] Nothing in particular.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: There is a major ARVN operation in the U Minh forest. It looks like it will pay off.

Mr. Johnson: They have been through that area so many times that it must be pretty well chewed over by now.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: There are about 2500-3000 Viet Cong there.

Dr. Kissinger: What do we think the North Vietnamese are going to do? What is their campaign plan for 1971?

[] We can't tell.

Dr. Kissinger: How does the rate of infiltration compare to pre-Tet 1968.

[] It is much lower.

Mr. Packard: They do not have enough personnel and supplies to support more than small-unit operations.

Dr. Kissinger: All we foresee is a whack at Cambodia?

Mr. Packard: Yes, plus continued small-unit operations.

Dr. Kissinger: What do we mean by a whack at Cambodia?

[] They will try to firm up their base area.

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Dr. Kissinger: It looks pretty firm now.

[] We think that during the dry season they will try to neutralize those bases from which our interdiction teams and SGUs operate. They will also try to minimize the effects of the bombing.

Mr. Packard: There are two possibilities. The infiltration is enough to support their present level of activities. They could direct all of this to Cambodia and have a high level of activity there. If that happens, I don't think the Cambodians have the capacity to hold them off. We would have to get the ARVN to help out.

Dr. Kissinger: What happens if they seize Phnom Penh? Wouldn't it have primarily symbolic value?

Mr. Smyser: It is the single biggest port in Cambodia.

Mr. Packard: They would control a larger area.

Dr. Kissinger: Do you think we can hold Phnom Penh?

Mr. Packard: With ARVN help.

Dr. Kissinger: In every military campaign one general has always been wrong.

Mr. Doolin: This [the defense of Phnom Penh] is one thing we are looking at [in the plans that are being prepared].

Dr. Kissinger: What I get out of the briefing and the DOD paper is, first, that there is a low probability of a North Vietnamese offensive in North Laos.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: I think there will be an offensive in North Laos. They will try to take Long Tieng. The paper does not say otherwise.

Mr. Helms: I agree.

Dr. Kissinger: Will they succeed?

Mr. Johnson: They have less strength. The 312th Division is gone.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Their current moves are to position themselves to move against Long Tieng.

Mr. Johnson: Why have they decreased their strength?

Lt. Gen. Vogt: They have other commitments to meet.

Mr. Helms: They can always put the 312th in again.

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 It is just outside Vinh in North Vietnam.

Dr. Kissinger: There will be more pressure on the Bolovens and some as yet undetermined but larger effort in Cambodia. We don't expect larger operations in South Vietnam.

Mr. Packard: They can't mount bigger operations in MR 3 and 4 without securing a larger area in Cambodia.

Mr. Johnson: They can't do this without pulling units out of Cambodia?

Mr. Packard: There is no probability that they could do it in the short term.

Dr. Kissinger: The short-term, I take it, is through the dry season.

What about I and II Corps?

Mr. Packard: They could raise a little fuss. They are not in a position to mount any big operation.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Infiltration south was 240,000 in 1968, 84,000 in 1969, and 72,000 in 1970.

Mr. Green: But currently there is a sharp increase.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Arrivals this year were 54,000.

Dr. Kissinger: I am worried about arrivals in 1971.

Mr. Packard: I agree.

Dr. Kissinger: How about I Corps. There are three divisions in the DMZ and three in Laos that they can move in.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: There are four divisions in South Laos. I don't believe they are going to be willing to throw these divisions into any operation.

Mr. Helms: Back at the time of the Tet offensive they had 40 main-force units in South Vietnam. Now they have only about 20, and they are distributed differently.

Dr. Kissinger: When you were all meeting prior to Tet, what did you think would happen?

Mr. Helms: Tet. Only we were wrong about the timing.

Dr. Kissinger: The locus of the offensive was not surprising?

Mr. Helms: No.

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Mr. Smyser: I believe the North Vietnamese are as sensitive to our training statistics as we are. If they are, they will think that this year is the time to move.

Dr. Kissinger: Therefore they will do nothing in South Vietnam.

Mr. Smyser: I am reasonably persuaded that Cambodia will be the target.

Lt. Gen. Vogt: Of the 16,000 going south, 10,000 are going to COSVN. My impression is that they want to put pressure on Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: We can meet next week to go over the plans. However, we should look over these assessments again and try to see what a clever man in Hanoi would want to do. We should look for weaknesses on our side. The last thing we need is a disaster early next year.

Mr. Helms: I agree. We do have weaknesses, for instance, the troops in South Laos. We should make a catalogue to make sure we have all bases covered.

Mr. Packard: I think what we should do is take some action to upset their plans.

Dr. Kissinger: Isn't that in the study that is being prepared for next week's meeting?

Mr. Doolin: We mean some initiative on our part--not just responding to enemy actions.

Mr. Packard: Perhaps we could do something to tie them down in the North.

Dr. Kissinger: If that is necessary, the President would be willing to pay the price. He would prefer to do it this year rather than next year. Any ideas you have on how to upset Hanoi will be well received.

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