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Authority NLS/CBS 10

By vis, MARS, Date 11-28-83

FROM WALT ROSTOW
TO THE PRESIDENT
CITE CAP89119

T O P S E C R E T

FROM WALTER ROSTOW

FOR THE PRESIDENT

HEREWITH AN INTERESTING CABLE FROM LOCKE, WESTMORELAND, KOMER
ON HANOI'S MILITARY POSTURE IN RELATION TO ITS DIPLOMATIC POSTURE.

1. WE HAVE NOTED VARIOUS BITS OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE, SUCH AS TRINH STATEMENT, WHICH SUGGEST HANOI SETTING STAGE FOR TALKS. WHAT STRIKES US FORCIBLY HERE IS SHARP CONTRAST BETWEEN THESE APPARENT SIGNS AND INCREASINGLY SOLID EVIDENCE OF MAJOR NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY BUILDUP AGAINST I CORPS AREA.

2. AS YOU KNOW, TRUCK TRAFFIC FROM NORTH VIETNAM DOWN HO CHI MINH TRAIL FOR LAST FEW MONTHS HAS REACHED MASSIVE PROPORTIONS. NOW THERE ARE GROWING INDICATIONS OF MAJOR NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOP REINFORCEMENTS IN BORDER AREAS OF QUANG TRI-THUA THIEN-QUANG NAM. GEN WESTMORELAND'S BEST ESTIMATE IS THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY MASSING FOR ANOTHER MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN THIS AREA, PERHAPS TARGETED THIS TIME ON KHE SANH.

3. SINCE FACT OF NEW NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY BUILDUP IS BECOMING INCONTROVERTIBLE, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO RELATE THIS TO SIGNS OF HANOI WILLINGNESS TO TALK. MOST PRUDENT EXPLANATION IS THAT APPARENT INCREASED WILLINGNESS TO TALK IS SMOKESCREEN TO COVER BUILDUP. TO GO FURTHER, IF HANOI COULD SECURE CESSION OF US BOMBING IN NORTH AS PRICE FOR TALKS, THIS WOULD IMMENSELY FACILITATE SUSTAINED NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY OFFENSIVE. THESE EXPLANATIONS WOULD SUGGEST THAT CURRENT POLITICAL FEELERS ARE ESSENTIALLY DESIGNED TO BOLSTER HANOI'S MILITARY POSITION.

4. ANOTHER POSSIBLE EXPLANATION IS THAT HANOI PLANNING ANOTHER MAJOR OFFENSIVE EFFORT TO ACHIEVE AT LEAST ONE PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY IN HOPES THIS WOULD ESTABLISH POSITION OF STRENGTH PRIOR TO NEGOTIATIONS. ALTERNATIVELY, HANOI MAY NOT HAVE YET DECIDED ON ITS EVENTUAL COURSE, AND BE AWAITING RESULTS OF NEXT OFFENSIVE.

5. WE HERE INCLINE TO FIRST VIEW, BUT PICTURE FROM THIS END IS STILL MURKY. HENCE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE IS MERELY TO COUNTER-POINT HANOI'S MILITARY PREPARATIONS AGAINST ITS APPARENT DESIRE TO CREATE IMPRESSION OF GREATER DESIRE TO NEGOTIATE. GEN. WESTMORELAND WILL SEND THROUGH MILITARY CHANNELS A MORE DETAILED APPRECIATION OF ENEMY BUILDUP AND LIKELY OFFENSIVE MOVES.

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THE JOURNAL