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R 042002Z OCT 74  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2  
TAGS:--MASS, VS

SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON AMMUNITION SHORTAGE

1. FOLLOWING IS EXCERPT FROM CIA 604336, EAST ASIAN  
BRIEF 151/74, DATED 1 OCTOBER, WHICH WAS SENT TO A  
NUMBER OF MILITARY ADDRESSEES AND EXECUTIVE BRANCH  
AGENCIES, THOUGH NOT TO SAIGON.

"SOUTH VIETNAM: THE RECENT CUTBACKS IN THE USE OF  
ARTILLERY BY GOVERNMENT FORCES--PARTLY AS A RESULT OF  
LESS COMBAT AND PARTLY AS A RESULT OF ORDERS TO CON-  
SERVE SUPPLIES--HAVE NOT YET LED TO HIGHER CASUALTIES OR  
THE LOSS OF SIGNIFICANT NEW TERRITORY TO THE COMMUNISTS.  
THE REDUCTION IN FIREPOWER, HOWEVER, HAS MADE THE SOUTH  
VIETNAMESE MORE WILLING TO ABANDON REMOTE OUTPOSTS AND  
HAS CONTRIBUTED TO MAKING THEM LESS AGGRESSIVE IN THEIR  
OPERATIONS TO RETAKE LOST GROUND.

RECENT REPORTS INDICATED GOVERNMENT FORCES ARE NOW  
USING ONLY TWO THIRDS AS MUCH ARTILLERY AS THEY DID IN THE  
SUMMER. GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES DECLINED IN EACH OF

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THE PAST THREE WEEKS, AND DURING THE THIRD WEEK OF SEPTEMBER, THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE USED JUST OVER 60,000 ARTILLERY ROUNDS COMPARED TO A WEEKLY AVERAGE OF APPROXIMATELY 90,000 ROUNDS IN JULY AND AUGUST. THE

LARGEST DECLINE OCCURRED IN THE CENTRAL PART OF THE COUNTRY, WHERE THE FIGHTING HAS EASED. IN MILITARY REGION 2, FOR EXAMPLE, THE GOVERNMENT REDUCED EXPENDITURES BY HALF, AND IN THE PROVINCES SURROUNDING SAIGON, THE CUTBACK AMOUNTED TO SOME 85 PERCENT.

THE FIGHTING HAS BEEN FAIRLY INTENSE IN THE NORTHERN SECTOR OF THE COUNTRY, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S USE OF ARTILLERY THERE HAS NOT DECLINED MUCH. IN THE DELTA, THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE HAVE BEEN USING SLIGHTLY MORE ORDNANCE THAN EARLIER.

ON A COUNTRYWIDE BASIS USED FAR MORE ARTILLERY MUNITIONS THAN THE COMMUNISTS. DURING THE FAIRLY INTENSE FIGHTING DURING JULY AND AUGUST, THE GOVERNMENT FIRED APPROXIMATELY 300 SHELLS FOR EACH COMMUNIST ROUND. THIS RATIO--WHICH EXCLUDES THE ROCKETS AND MORTARS BOTH SIDES USED HEAVILY--DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE CHANGED MUCH IN RECENT WEEKS.

BOTH SIDES MAY BE HUSBANDING THEIR RESOURCES FOR THE NEXT GOOD FIGHTING SEASON IN EARLY 1975. FOR THEIR PART, THE COMMUNISTS POSSESS HUNDREDS OF ARTILLERY WEAPONS AND TANKS AS WELL AS LARGE STOCKPILES OF MUNITIONS WHICH THEY HAVE BROUGHT IN SINCE THE CEASE-FIRE, BUT THEY HAVE USED THIS HEAVY EQUIPMENT SPARINGLY. THE COMMUNISTS ARE ESTIMATED TO HAVE SUFFICIENT SUP-

PLIES ON HAND IN THE SOUTH TO SUSTAIN THEIR FORCES FOR AT LEAST A YEAR AND A HALF AT THE 1972 RATE OF CONSUMPTION.

MOST REPORTING INDICATE DO NOT HAVE A SHORTAGE OF AMMUNITION. ACCORDING TO A RELIABLE SOURCE, A RECENT SOUTH VIETNAMESE JOINT GENERAL STAFF STUDY INDICATED THAT GOVERNMENT STOCKPILES AS OF THE

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END OF AUGUST WOULD LAST MORE THAN SIX MONTHS AT THE RELATIVELY HEAVY EXPENDITURE RATES OF JULY AND AUGUST AND ABOUT TWO MONTHS AT THE MUCH HIGHER 1972 RATE. THESE ARE PROBABLY CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATES.

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE EFFORTS TO CONSERVE MUNITIONS ARE DIRECTED AT FORCING GOVERNMENT TROOPS TO BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO FIGHTING WITH LESS SUPPORT FROM THE US AND CREATING A FAVORABLE IMAGE IN THE US BY DEMONSTRATING THAT THEY ARE MAKING MAXIMUM USE OF THE SUPPORT BEING GIVEN. A NUMBER OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY LEADERS EXPRESSED STRONG RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE CUTBACKS INITIALLY AND CLAIMED THAT THEY WOULD HAVE A

DETRIMENTAL IMPACT ON THEIR PERFORMANCE IN THE FIELD, BUT THEIR FEARS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT EXAGGERATED."

2. WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT ABOVE ITEM WAS BASED ON A SEPTEMBER 28 NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN REPORT, I.E., IT REPRESENTS A COORDINATED WASHINGTON INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT.

3. WOULD APPRECIATE MISSION COMMENTS. KISSINGER

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