

PREVIOUS [] AMPLIFIED BY MEMO 1147 7/05
and upheld MK 13-92 4/13
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MLK-05-111 7/05

The Situation in Laos

Our continuing basic objective is to force a cessation of Communist encroachment in Southeast Asia in order to allow a peaceful development of the area. In Laos, Pathet Lao-Viet Minh forces, in violation of the Geneva Accords, are eliminating neutralist Kong Le positions piecemeal through military attacks and political pressures. The continuation of this Communist tactic, particularly in the Plain of Jars, will symbolize to Laotians, their Southeast Asian neighbors, and the Communists alike that force can be used to erode Free World positions without the risk of serious consequences. Moreover, so long as neither Moscow nor Peiping sees such consequences as imminent, their dispute over Communist strategy will encourage each to compete with the other in supporting Pathet Lao attacks.

To halt this process, we have considered ways of making the risk of serious consequences from further Communist incursions both credible and serious, especially for Hanoi on whom rests primary responsibility for Communist aggression in Laos and South Viet-Nam. We doubt that Communist plans in Laos include so gross and overt an act of aggression as to provide us with an obvious

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provocation which in itself would give reason for our intervention. Rather, their erosive tactics, successful in the past, will be employed in hope of steadily improving Communist positions without arousing Free World counteraction. However, we believe the situation sufficiently serious to require our seizing the initiative at a time of our choosing. Therefore, our proposed moves are not linked to a future contingency but to the present and prospective situation. By so acting, we can halt North Vietnamese expansionist aggression in Laos and reduce its threat to peace in Southeast Asia.

We propose to achieve a stabilization of the situation either along the pattern of re-establishing the Government of National Union under the Geneva Agreements or through an informal but stabilized partition behind the facade of a neutralist government (i.e., without Pathet Lao participation). At the same time, we hope to retain our considerable political advantages by preserving the neutralist-conservative coalition under Souvanna Phouma.

The following is a phased program of action centering on Laos. However, in its final phase it will contribute toward a solution of the situation in South Viet-Nam. The three phases

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relate to a scale of escalation and objectives. The military measures include:

- (1) the use of non-US forces which can be supported by stretching the Geneva Agreements,
- (2) the non-combatant use of US forces, including certain violations of the Geneva Agreements, and
- (3) the combat use of US forces.

We recommend these and associated steps in pursuit of the objective of (1) reconstitution of the National Union Government under the Geneva framework, or (2) informal but stabilized partition under the facade of a neutralist government, growing out of a de facto cease-fire.

PHASE 1

Objective

Reconstitution of the National Union Government under Geneva Agreements. This would include:

- 1) Pathet Lao return to the cabinet in Vientiane.
- 2) Cease-fire.
- 3) Restoration of positions as of April 1, 1963.
- 4) Withdrawal of Viet Minh forces.

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5) Agreement by the Communists to permit full freedom of action to ICC. Alternatively, we would settle for establishing an informal but stabilized partition under the facade of a neutralist government, this would include:

- (1) Cease-fire
- (2) Full freedom for the ICC to supervise the cease-fire.

Rationale

We are not sanguine that this objective of reconstituting the Government of National Union will be achieved, but it is the proper starting point for a plan since it is politically advantageous to our side. Moreover, it establishes our moral position and provides a reasonable basis for the political and military actions planned for this phase.

The problem with an informal but stabilized partition is how to establish recognizable rules so that both sides would know when the arrangement was being respected and when violated. The minimum would appear to be (1) a cease-fire, and (2) full freedom for the ICC to supervise the cease-fire.

Political Actions

Discuss our plans generally with Souvanna Phouma to obtain

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his full cooperation at each stage. Utilize all available diplomatic, political, covert, and propaganda channels to generate additional pressure on the Communist side to meet the above objective. Convey the idea that our patience is growing short; if the Communists will not cooperate under the Geneva Agreements we must take other measures to protect Lao independence and regional peace. Stimulate supporting actions by friendly countries. Seek British cooperation, explaining that continued failure of the Communist side to cooperate would soon force us to take other measures. Brief SEATO and India and friendly Geneva signatories explaining that we are making a major effort to restore the Geneva Agreements to full operation before considering other courses.

Military Actions

- 1) Accept FAR and Kong Le forces at present levels, without further demobilization, and provide additional funds as necessary to support FAR and Kong Le forces through MAP and AID programs.
- 2) Step up flow of heavy weapons and replacement of worn-out equipment on a selective basis.
- 3) Establish direct US contact with neutralist forces and pro-Western tribal elements; encourage improved liaison, coordina-

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tion, and military planning among these forces and the FAR.

4) Improve intelligence capabilities:

(1) Increase intelligence reconnaissance and patrol activity in Southern Laos by South Vietnamese-led tribal teams.

(2) Provide additional third country intelligence and communications training with a view to increasing intelligence team activity in central Laos and the Bolovens area, and initiating such activity in northwest Laos.

5) Increase air re-supply of arms on a selective basis to Kong Le, pro-West tribal groups, and FAR outposts in Pathet Lao territory.

6) Expand tribal group program in non-Pathet Lao-held territory; intensify tribal group activity against Communist forces and supply lines in present areas of operation.

7) Augment Souvanna's airlift capabilities.

8) Encourage FAR forces to take positive action to gain firm control over areas not now controlled by the Pathet Lao. In addition, encourage FAR in eliminating Pathet Lao in areas now generally controlled by the FAR.

9) Provide T-28 aircraft and armament to FAR in Laos to conduct reprisal strikes.

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10) Commence a combined social, political, and military effort through a strategic hamlet program in the Mekong Valley area.

11) Initiate aerial reconnaissance of Laos by ICC.

12) Expand the use of highly mobile South Vietnamese border patrols in Laos to interdict entry into South Viet-Nam and to gather intelligence.

Timing

Begin immediately.

PHASE 2

Objective

The objective remains the same as in Phase 1.

Rationale

A decidedly increased military effort in Laos, including some measures overtly outside the Geneva framework and coupled with a mobilization of US power outside of Laos, may accomplish our objectives.

Political Actions

Reiterate our support for the Geneva Agreements, but emphasize that, even though our objectives are limited, we will, in the face of Communist abandonment of the Agreements, take extraordinary measures to offset Communist expansionism. Gear all

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steps closely to the developing situation in Laos and to the willingness and ability of Souvanna Phouma to cooperate. Discuss with the British as a Co-Chairman, and with the French to obtain their support and cooperation. Brief our SEATO allies and the GVN on our estimate of the situation and intentions and ask the former to prepare to send contingents to Thailand. Continue close consultations with India and Canada and inform other friendly nations as appropriate.

If the Communists should propose a conference at this stage, we would insist that they first comply with the terms of the Agreements negotiated at the Geneva Conference. Maintain flexibility to take up any promising overtures.

Military Actions

- 1) Resume US aerial reconnaissance of Laos.
- 2) Expand US military advisory role to FAR and Kong Le forces.
- 3) Encourage selective offensive action by FAR/Kong Le forces.
- 4) Encourage selective offensive use of T-28's and T-6's.
- 5) Consider the retention in Thailand of US combat forces now there, for use in conjunction with other moves under this Phase.

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6) Expand the use of PARUs (Police Aerial Reconnaissance Units) and other specialist teams (covert).

7) Expand the use of highly mobile South Vietnamese border patrols in Laos to conduct guerrilla operations in Laos Corridor.

8) Further enlarge pro-Western guerrilla units in Laos and expand operations in enemy-held territory.

9) Support third country Special Forces units in active operations against Pathet Lao, primarily SVN and Thai "volunteers." Encourage third country encadrement.

10) Provide sanitized combat aircraft and contract American or third country pilots to the Laotian forces and authorize their use against the Pathet Lao concentration and supply points.

11) Expand sabotage operations against Viet Minh bases, both in Laos and North Viet-Nam (covert).

12) Move US Air Force units into Thailand.

13) Move US naval carrier task force off South Viet-Nam.

14) Take selected Category II actions against North Viet-Nam. (Category II: Overflights, high and low altitude reconnaissance of Laos and North Viet-Nam; harassment of DRV shipping.)

15) Take preparatory measures for the implementation of CINCPAC OPPlan 32-63.

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16) Request SEATO members to prepare to deploy forces to the area.

Timing

Begin upon determination that the objective under Phase 1 is unobtainable without further moves by us. Duration will depend on developments on the ground and our interpretation of Communist behavior and intentions. Continued Communist military pressures and political intransigence would force the conclusion that a new phase would have to be entered.

PHASE 3

Objective

In addition to the objectives in Phases 1 and 2, it may be desirable to agree to a Geneva Conference to establish a formal partition, in which case our objective would be to ensure non-Communist control of:

- 1) The Panhandle (to prevent DRV use to support subversion in South Viet-Nam).
- 2) The Mekong lowlands, Sayaboury Province, and southern Nam Tha Province (to protect the Thai frontier and control access to the River).

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3) The Vientiane terrain compartment (to protect the base of the RLG).

4) If possible, a foothold in the Plain of Jars (for strategic and political reasons).

Rationale

At this stage, actions on the part of the United States should demonstrate unmistakably US determination to achieve a stabilized Laos.

Political Actions

Seek an RLG request for, or approval of US and/or SEATO intervention. Once our forces have been introduced to points in Laos along the Mekong River, the extent to which they would advance and the extent of our operations against North Viet-Nam would depend on Communist behavior. If a formal partition subsequently seems desirable, announce that, since the PL/VM are dividing the country instead of cooperating to unify it under the Geneva Agreements, the only way to preserve the independence and neutrality of the non-Communist part against Communist aggression is to define the limitation of the Communist zone and establish an international force to patrol it. Seek the assistance of the

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British in negotiating the partition. Propose or accede to an international conference in accordance with our objectives. Present appropriate resolutions to the UN and inform it of our actions and our purposes, emphasizing that we are reacting only to the Communist violation of the Geneva Agreements. Remain flexible to take up and exploit any overtures which appeared promising in order to reach a stable arrangement as quickly as possible. Utilize appropriate channels to make it understood that our purposes are limited but our determination is not and that we will not be deterred by an attempted reprisals elsewhere in the world.

Military Actions

State Department Position

Defense Department Position

(a) Move US ground force units into Thailand.

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(b) Move token US forces into Laos occupying Vientiane, Savan-nakhet and Pakse.

(b) Implement selective Category III actions against North Viet-Nam. (Category III: Intensified harassment of shipping; blockage of Haiphong or DRV; mining in the Gulf of Tonkin or

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Haiphong approaches; blocking river entrances or Haiphong channel; bombing of selected targets in North Viet-Nam.)

(c) Simultaneously air strike against selected Pathet Lao/Viet Minh targets in Laos.

(c) Simultaneously air strike against selected Pathet Lao/Viet Minh targets in Laos.

(d) Implement selective Category III actions against North Viet-Nam. (Category III: Intensified harassment of shipping; blockade of Haiphong or DRV; mining in the Gulf of Tonkin or Haiphong approaches; blocking river entrances or Haiphong channel; bombing of selected targets in North Viet-Nam.)

(The above actions would be conducted concurrently.)

(e) Commit US and allied forces to North Viet-Nam and Laos as appropriate to achieve the objective.

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* The Secretary of Defense and the JCS would omit any separate course of action introducing "token" US forces into Laos, and the JCS would prefer to designate Defense's (d) as a separate Phase 4, to indicate that this would be a major new element.

NOTE:

The commitment of US/Allied ground forces in Southeast Asia and air/naval action against North Viet-Nam would necessarily be preceded by preparatory and visible deployments. Actual commitment of forces would be phased as the situation required and would not necessarily require the full commitments contained in CINCPAC OPPlan 32-63.

Should earlier US political and military measures fail to accomplish the objectives, the plan culminates in major military action against North Viet-Nam.

Taking this final action will in itself enlarge our objective from that centered on Laos to the cessation of DRV subversive activity in the remainder of Southeast Asia.

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Timing

To be carried out when it is determined Phase 2 has not succeeded and that direct utilization of US forces is essential.

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