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January 7, 1961



MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT
January 3, 1961

Others present: Secretaries Herter, Merchant, Mr.
Allen Dulles, Mr. Richard Bissell, Secretaries
Gates, Douglas, Anderson, General Lemnitzer,
Mr. Gordon Gray, General Goodpaster

This discussion (on Laos) followed an earlier discussion on the subject of Cuba, on which Mr. Gray is reporting separately. Mr. Herter showed the President a letter he had just received from Lord Home on policy and actions to be taken with regard to the situation in Laos. The President read the letter very carefully, and kept a copy for his files. Mr. Herter then said that the Laotian assembly was supposed to be meeting sometime that day, and the intent is that it will legitimize the Boun Oum government. He said that the French were a little less adamant against considering this matter in a SEATO meeting held yesterday. At this meeting our representative gave intelligence information on the situation in Laos and the French did not object, indicating in fact that their intelligence agrees with ours. General Lemnitzer commented that the French should have the best intelligence of anyone concerning Laos inasmuch as the military assistance group there is French.

Mr. Herter said that Marshal Sarit is being very cautious about taking military action in the area unless he is given SEATO backing. Specifically, he is very slow regarding the use of the RT-33s for reconnaissance purposes. General Lemnitzer said his understanding is that Sarit just has not agreed as yet, not necessarily that he is opposed or reluctant to do so. Secretary Gates thought that Sarit probably wants more assurance than he has had so far.

The President commented that Lord Home's argument is all very fine about the best way internationally of approaching this

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problem. But the harsh facts are that if the Communists establish a strong position in Laos, the West is finished in the whole southeast Asian area. He said he was in full agreement that we must do everything that can be done by peaceful means before going beyond this. Mr. Herter said that the State Department is leaning toward the idea of bringing in the ICC. Up until now the Indians have favored the Souvanna Phouma government, and we could not afford to bring in the ICC lest it confirm Souvanna Phouma as the legal authority. He thought that bringing in the ICC is better than taking the matter into the UN. The President said he thought that if the Boun Cum government becomes recognized, we would then be in position to make use of the ICC.

General Lemnitzer then gave a report on the military situation in Laos from the day's JCS military situation report. Mr. Bissell stated that one B-26 should be in the area and ready to operate, using CAT pilots. Additional B-26s should be arriving shortly.

Mr. Herter then suggested that it might be desirable to make a press release bringing out the substantial size and flagrant nature of the Soviet air lift. Mr. Dulles said there is a close question involved regarding this use of special intelligence, particularly with regard to day by day figures. All things considered, however, he was prepared to agree to its use. The President said the phrasing of the statement would be important. He thought a statement could be made that at least so many aircraft operated during this period. He approved putting out such a statement.

Mr. Dulles reported that additional Thai volunteer communications teams are being formed and should be ready to operate soon.

A. J. Goodpaster
Brigadier General, USA