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on the concept for the recapture of the Plaine des
Jarres.

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DATE EXEMPTED: MAR 2016

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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March 9, 1961

1961 MAR 10 AM 9 14

OFFICE OF THE
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

At a meeting in the Cabinet Room on March 9, 1961, on the general subject of Southeast Asia, the President authorized the following actions:

1. An increase in MEOs from 3000 to 4000 by April 1. (CIA)
2. Defense Department to supply 16 H-34 helicopters to CIA for CAT use.
3. Defense Department to select and sheep dip, with CIA, 16 helicopter pilots.
4. More maintenance and base support personnel for helicopters (300) (with consent of Thai government).
5. Defense Department to make available to CAT, appropriately marked, 4 C-130s. (On Okinawa or Taiwan)
6. CIA to supply 4 C-130 crews. (U.S. civilian plus ChiNat.)
7. CIA to make available 1 C-47 and 3 DC-4s, with crews.
8. In case of urgent supply requirements, USAF aircraft may resume delivery direct to Vientiane (C-130).
9. Negotiate with Sarit for immediate availability of up to 4 105mm batteries (Thai soldiers, equipment, and supplies).
10. PEO personnel will be augmented by approximately 100 officers and men, and the JUSMAAG personnel in Thailand by approximately 100.
11. Defense to make available 8 B-26s, plus necessary spares (at Okinawa).
12. Defense Department to supply 16 sanitized B-26 crews to CIA.

6(C)(C)
[A]

6(C)(C) + (4)
[A]

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b. CAS stocks on Okinawa can be increased to support such a force.

3. Air Support and Interdiction Operations:

a. It will be necessary to sustain combat air operations designed to:

- (1) Interdict Pathet Lao lines of communication
- (2) Destroy rebel supply dumps and installations
- (3) Fragment Pathet Lao concentrations.

Aircraft in the numbers and types needed to make effective delivery and achieve shock effect should be employed. They should be armed with guns, rockets, bombs and napalm, as required by the targets to be attacked.

b. There are nine armed T-6s (2/30 cal guns, 4/5" rockets, 2/100 lb bombs) in the Laos inventory. Five combat-ready Laotian pilots are available for current operations; four qualified Thai pilots are on hand. The T-6, though slow and lightly armed, has a psychological effect considerably greater than its destructive power. It has value as a supplement to more powerful aircraft.

c. (1) It is estimated that sixteen Sterile B-26s and 20 pilots are required to accomplish the missions envisaged in the attack on the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ).

(2) CIA has eight of these planes in Taiwan and the USAF can supply the additional eight, plus necessary spares support, available in a period of 2-3 weeks.

(3) CIA has four currently qualified American pilots, and it would require 3-4 weeks of training to provide more civilian American pilots. Sixteen [sanitized USAF] crews could be provided in 2-3 weeks. Volunteers from the Chinese Nationalist Air Force (CNAF), Philippine Air Force (PAF), and RTAF could not be trained in time. The former require 4-6 weeks and the latter two, 6-8 weeks.

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6(1)(C)

[A] Volunteers could be processed through "Sheepdip" (sanitized and proper arrangements made in event of capture or death). Sanitized USAF crews to man the four unmanned CIA aircraft can be provided in about 10 days.

(4) CIA can support approximately four sorties per day with 2-4 B-26s based at Takhli. Additional sorties will require augmentation of the CIA task force with operational planning, intelligence, maintenance, armament and ordnance personnel.

4. Helicopter Operations: Additional helicopter support is fundamental to the success of the proposed operation.

a. A total of 20 H-34 helicopters are required to provide airlift and pickup in the forward areas which lack landing fields for fixed-wing aircraft.

b. At present, CAT has four engaged in operations. An additional sixteen can be furnished by the Department of Defense within a week. Suitable aircraft are not available on the commercial market. Ostensibly they will be owned and operated by CAT.

[A] c. CAT has four qualified pilots flying these H-34s and is experiencing great difficulty in locating more as they are in short supply outside the armed services. The Department of Defense can supply sixteen additional pilots within about 10 days. They will be processed through "Sheepdip" and ostensibly be employed by CAT. (1)(C)

d. Their present hourly rate of up to 100 hours of flying per month is exceptional. It is difficult to estimate the sorties available because their mission times vary so drastically.

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6. Artillery Support. During the final assault phase on
Plaine des Jarres it is anticipated FAL will need up to four
105 mm artillery batteries in addition to present capabilities.
Because of the time frame involved, these units with equipment
will be obtained from Thai volunteer forces.

6(1)(c)+(4)
[A]

7. Augmentation of PEO and JUSMAAG Personnel. In order to
provide Chief, PEO, and Chief, JUSMAAG, increased advisory,
logistical, interpreter, and technical assistance, necessary
personnel augmentation will be furnished on a priority basis.
Personnel requisitions for this augmentation will be forwarded
by these organizations as soon as requirements are determined.

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32425007	202-10002-10129			PRESIDENT KENNEDY	03/09/1961	17

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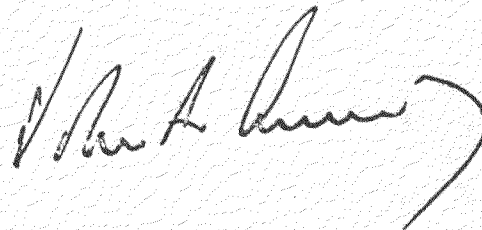
13. CIA is authorized to recruit non-U.S., non-ChiNat crews for B-26 and transport aircraft.

14. The Department of State will draft for the President's approval a message to Ambassador Brown giving the sense and meaning of the present steps.

15. General Boyle will go to work on Phoumi to lift the quality of FAL military leadership.

16. CIA is authorized to commit additional helicopters as obtained.

17. CIA is authorized to commit additional transport aircraft as obtained.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "W. A. Sullivan", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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COPY NO. 20

9 March 1961--1300

CONCEPT FOR THE RECAPTURE
OF THE PLAINE DES JARRES

Distribution:

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1300 - 9 March 1961

CONCEPT FOR THE RECAPTURE OF THE PLAINE DES JARRES

1. Purpose. This concept outlines a plan for the seizure 1
of the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) Base Complex of Laos utilizing 2
forces available. The concept envisages maximum utilization 3
of Laos Army (FAL) forces and resources; and a timely, selec- 4
tive and flexible employment of US transport aircraft and 5
"volunteer" forces. 6

2. Situation. 7

a. On 1 March 1961 the Commander in Chief, Pacific, stated 8
that the Pathet Lao "has become strong enough in the Plaine 9
des Jarres to block the FAL offensive and could take offen- 10
sive on their own at time of their choosing." In addition, 11
"it is likely that the Communists will attempt soon to seize 12
Luang Prabang in order to consolidate their position in 13
Northern Laos." The Joint Chiefs of Staff concur with this 14
evaluation and believe that, if accelerated action is not 15
taken to recapture the Plaine des Jarres and reverse this 16
trend, the balance of power will continue to favor the 17
Pathet Lao. Moreover, the enemy will continue to improve 18
his advantageous position for further military action and 19
political negotiations. 20

b. Military action at present is characterized by small 21
units carrying out probes and adjusting their positions in 22
consonance with assigned roles--the PL consolidating and 23
defending terrain in the PDJ area taken from Royal Army 24
Forces during ~~the latter part of~~ January while awaiting a 25
political settlement, and the FAL attempting to contain and 26
compress these forces prior to initiating a full-scale 27
attack designed to recover the PDJ area. Although the 28
terrain favors guerrilla tactics, the enemy has ^{suggested} abandoned 29
his ~~earlier~~ demonstrated preference for these tactics in 30
favor of more conventional techniques, thus projecting his 31
operations into a new, more sophisticated dimension of war- 32
fare.

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c. Pro-Communist forces occupy the key centers of Xieng Khouang and the Plaine des Jarres, most of Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces, and a number of pockets in the central and southern provinces. Pathet Lao forces throughout Laos number an estimated 10,000. Those in north central and northeastern Laos number 4-5,000 and control all population centers and communications routes in Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang provinces. Soviet airlift to the Plaine des Jarres is supplemented by truck convoys using the road from North Vietnam which runs through Nong Het and Ban Ban. On 7-8 March, Government forces withdrew from positions east of the road junction of Route 7 and 13, in the face of Pathet Lao probing action, and established new positions on Route 13 just north and south of the road junction. The Pathet Lao have at least temporary control of this strategic intersection on the road connecting the Royal Capital at Luang Prabang with Vientiane, the Administrative center of the country. On the southern axis to the Plaine des Jarres, enemy forces located 20 miles south of Xieng Khouang are withdrawing slowly as part of a controlled withdrawal to improve their positions.

3. Concept for Execution. D-day is the day air interdiction operations begin.

a. Mission. Utilizing FAL Forces to the maximum, conduct immediate military operations to seize the PDJ base complex for FAL use and to deny its use to the enemy. It is visualized that the whole operation will require 6-8 weeks.

b. Interdiction Phase. The objective is to disrupt and fragment the enemy effort and thus enable FAL forces to resume the offensive. This will be accomplished by:

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(1) Conducting offensive air operations utilizing 1
 suitable combat aircraft armed with machine guns, 2
 rockets, high explosive bombs and napalm, to attack 3
 enemy air transport aircraft in Laos, supply routes, 4
 troop concentrations, and supply dumps. 5

(2) Conducting guerrilla operations, using MEO tribes- 6
 men, against enemy command posts, troop and supply con- 7
 voys and supply points. 8

(3) FAL will regroup for later operations and exert 9
 maximum pressure on the PL. 10

c. Attack Phase. See Annex A (Map) 11

(1) The objective of this phase is to seize assault 12
 positions on the perimeter of the PDJ area by means of 13
 a coordinated ground attack. This operation would be 14
 supported by combat air support and air and ground 15
 interdiction operations. 16

(2) On D-day, Task Force West, consisting of FAL Group 17
 Mobile (GM) 11 (4 infantry battalions, 4 artillery bat- 18
 teries, 1 tank company, 1 reconnaissance company, 1 engi- 19
 neer company and available MEO) from present positions 20
 in the vicinity of the road junction of Routes 7 and 13, 21
 will attack east and seize objectives on the west side 22
 of the PDJ. 23

(3) On D-day, Task Force South, consisting of GM A, B 24
 and C, (6 infantry battalion equivalents, 2 artillery 25
 batteries and available MEO) from present positions along 26
 the Paksane-PDJ road in the vicinity of Ban Ta Viang, 27
 will attack north then northwest along the Paksane-PDJ 28
 road seizing objectives on the southeast and south side 29
 of the PDJ. 30

(4) On D+5 days, Task Force Northeast, consisting of 31
 available MEO tribesmen and FAL troops to be airlanded by 32
 helicopter in the area west and north of Xieng Khouang- 33
 Moungh Phan, will conduct guerrilla harassing and inter- 34
 diction attacks against enemy lines of communication, 35
 command posts and supply units along the Xieng Khouang- 36
 PDJ road and along Route 7 northeast of the PDJ. 37

TOP SECRETd. Final Assault Phase. See Annex A (Map)

(1) The objective of this phase is to seize the PDJ Base Complex area for FAL use and to deny it to the enemy. This operation would be supported by combat air support and air and ground interdiction operations, both inside and outside the PDJ area.

(2) An Airborne Task Force (1 full strength airborne battalion equivalent and 2 infantry battalions) will conduct an airborne assault in the PDJ area. The airborne battalion will seize an available airfield to permit the airlanding of the two battalion follow-on infantry force.

(3) Task Forces West, South and Northeast will launch a coordinated attack to effect early link-up with the Airborne Task Force, to destroy the enemy in the PDJ Base Complex, and to seize and hold that area.

e. Special Operations. During all phases, operations will be conducted to:

(1) Jam and otherwise interfere with enemy air navigation aids in the PDJ area.

(2) Disrupt enemy communications.

(3) Deceive the enemy as to FAL capabilities and intentions.

4. Logistic Support

a. Concept. United States transport aircraft will be used to airlift supplies and equipment into Vientiane. Supply of the Task Forces will be accomplished by air delivery from Vientiane. This will be supplemented by surface lines of communication for Task Force West subject to the vehicle transportation capability and highway conditions. Enabling administrative action will be taken to make funds readily available to cover the cost of the operation.

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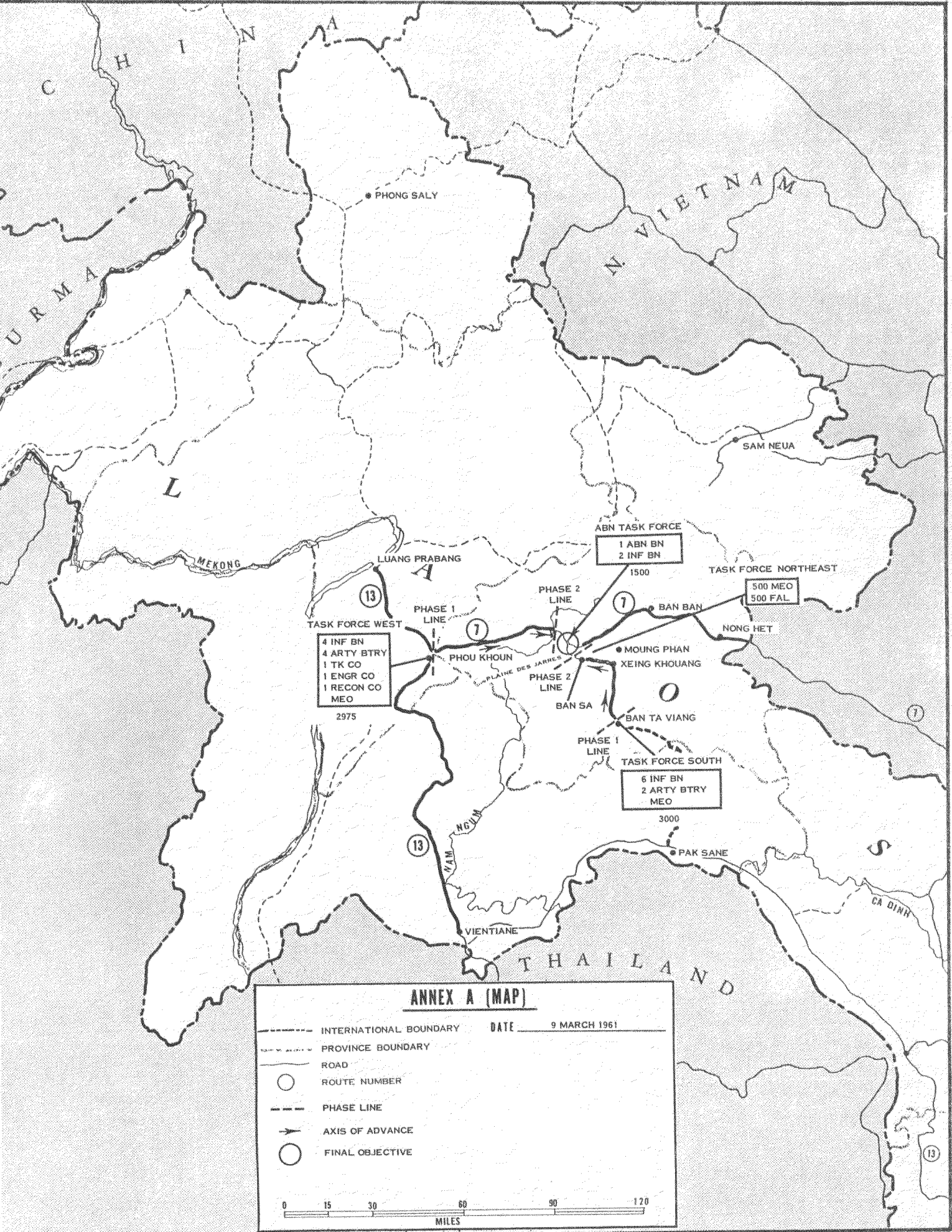
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b. Operations. Sufficient stocks of materiel will be 1
made available in Laos and Thailand including weapons, 2
petroleum, ammunition, communications equipment, cargo 3
parachutes, airdrop containers, and other critical items 4
to replace combat attrition. Maintenance and supply 5
support will be available for the helicopters employed. 6
Sanitized US personnel on temporary duty in Laos and 7
JUSMAAG Thailand will maintain the impetus of the logistics 8
effort. 9

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TOP SECRETREQUIREMENTS TO IMPLEMENT THE CONCEPT OF
OPERATIONS FOR THE CAPTURE OF THE PLAINE DES JARRES

Additional psychological moves, fire support and logistic effort are required to implement successfully the Plaine des Jarres operation. All of these measures should be undertaken urgently in order to complete this operation before the onset of the rainy season about the first of May. Most of the proposed measures can be undertaken with little fear of compensatory or retaliatory action by the Communist Bloc. These additional requirements include:

1. Appraisal and Problems of Leadership:

a. Phoumi is running a one-man show, giving little freedom of decision to commanders or to staff officers. He is now devoting most of his time to coping with governmental problems, instead of fighting the war. These problems stem largely from efforts by the United States, the United Kingdom and France to persuade Phoumi to broaden his government base and "win the support of the Lao people," and the numerous concepts for the intervention of control commissions.

b. Phoumi feels insecure due to the internal situation in Laos, the conflicting pressures of diverse family interests and distrust of his subordinate leaders. His refusal to retain battle-tested, successful leaders in crucial command positions is one result of his distrust. He also feels insecure because he does not have confidence in complete US support. During his Revolutionary Period, he developed the conviction that the US favored Souvanna instead of himself. Based on this experience, he is uncertain of US support; and conversely, the US Ambassador is uncertain of Phoumi's capabilities and trustworthiness.

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TOP SECRETc. Solutions:

(1) The US mission in Laos should be directed to accept as a matter of overriding priority the military mission of recapturing PDJ and should support Phoumi accordingly.

(2) Present efforts to broaden the base of the RLG and to seek a political solution should be given secondary priority to enable Phoumi to concentrate on the PDJ military operation.

(3) US influence with other governments should support these priorities. Other governments should be informed that it is our judgment that a satisfactory political settlement is not attainable until there is an improvement in the military situation.

(4) All US personnel, including the Ambassador and the United States Mission, should impress upon Phoumi the importance of putting his best commanders in the field and relieving inept officers who are losing battles for him.

(5) Above all, the additional air and artillery support and logistic means needed to capture the Plaine des Jarres should be provided. The Chief, PEO, should be authorized to inform Phoumi of support to be provided, operations to be undertaken and results expected.

2. Maximum Utilization of MEO Guerrillas:

a. By a maximum effort, including full cooperation by the FAL, the present effective strength of 3,000 MEO irregulars will be increased as rapidly as possible by 1 April. The MEO guerrillas can be most effectively employed in harassing actions behind enemy lines, cutting supply routes and making hit-and-run attacks on enemy formations. They would be supplemental, therefore, to an attack mounted by FAL regular forces.

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b. CAS stocks on Okinawa can be increased to support such a force.

3. Air Support and Interdiction Operations:

a. It will be necessary to sustain combat air operations designed to:

- (1) Interdict Pathet Lao lines of communication
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Aircraft in the numbers and types needed to make effective delivery and achieve shock effect should be employed. They should be armed with guns, rockets, bombs and napalm, as required by the targets to be attacked.

b. There are nine armed T-6s (2/30 cal guns, 4/5" rockets, 2/100 lb bombs) in the Laos inventory. Five combat-ready Laotian pilots are available for current operations; four qualified Thai pilots are on hand. The T-6, though slow and lightly armed, has a psychological effect considerably greater than its destructive power. It has value as a supplement to more powerful aircraft.

c. (1) It is estimated that sixteen Sterile B-26s and 20 pilots are required to accomplish the missions envisaged in the attack on the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ).

(2) CIA has eight of these planes in Taiwan and the USAF can supply the additional eight, plus necessary spares support, available in a period of 2-3 weeks.

(3) CIA has four currently qualified American pilots, and it would require 3-4 weeks of training to provide more civilian American pilots. Sixteen sanitized USAF crews could be provided in 2-3 weeks. Volunteers from the Chinese Nationalist Air Force (CNAF), Philippine Air Force (PAF), and RTAF could not be trained in time. The former require 4-6 weeks and the latter two, 6-8 weeks.

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4. Helicopter Operations: Additional helicopter support is fundamental to the success of the proposed operation.

a. A total of 20 H-34 helicopters are required to provide airlift and pickup in the forward areas which lack landing fields for fixed-wing aircraft.

b. At present, CAT has four engaged in operations. An additional sixteen can be furnished by the Department of Defense within a week. Suitable aircraft are not available on the commercial market. Ostensibly they will be owned and operated by CAT.

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d. Their present hourly rate of up to 100 hours of flying per month is exceptional. It is difficult to estimate the sorties available because their mission times vary so drastically.

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e. Maintenance personnel are in short supply, and it will be necessary to move a military maintenance unit in to maintain the 20 aircraft. CHPEO has a site near Nong Khai, Thailand, in mind for a maintenance base. Bangkok is too far away, and the airfield at Vientiane too vulnerable to rebel action. A Marine maintenance unit can be moved into Thailand from PACOM in 2-3 days. Personnel would comprise 225 Operations and Maintenance personnel and 75 base support.

5. Airlift Operations:

a. Using Vientiane, there is a requirement for sixteen operational C46 equivalents plus 4 C130's during the peak phase of the attack. An estimated ten C46's daily are required prior to the troop drop and thirteen C46's daily after the troop drop.

b. CAT can supply 4 C130 crews, and the Defense Department can supply the aircraft.

c. CAT has eleven C46's and four C47's assigned to Southeast Asian operations. It can make available one more C47 and three DC4's which are presently used on other commitments. The FAL has seven C47's.

d. CAT has adequate personnel to operate their aircraft, and the FAL can count on using five C47's with FAL pilots.

e. It is urgent to shorten the turn-around time of the C46 and C47 aircraft being used to supply the FAL. This can be most effectively accomplished by airlifting supplies by USAF aircraft directly into Vientiane. If this is not permitted and the present Shuttle between Bangkok and Vientiane is continued, there will not be sufficient operational C46 equivalents available during the most crucial phases of the battle.

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6. Artillery Support. During the final assault phase on 1
Plaine des Jarres it is anticipated FAL will need up to four 2
105 mm artillery batteries in addition to present capabilities. 3
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Personnel requisitions for this augmentation will be forwarded 10
by these organizations as soon as requirements are determined. 11

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ASSESSMENT OF RISKS

1. It must be recognized that the planned operation will present the opposition with a decision as to its response.

2. We consider it most likely that the enemy will seek soft spots, particularly in southern Laos, to create counter-pressure. If the planned PDJ operation is successful, it should be possible for the FAL to meet this threat.

3. SNIE 58-61, dated 21 February 1961, provides an estimate of Communist Bloc response to the use of "volunteer" combat aircraft by the FAL in Laos. This estimate is:

"The commitment of 'volunteer' combat aircraft to ground support operations in Laos. The Bloc would probably seek to increase PL AAA capabilities, possibly covertly introducing DRV AAA units. Soviet threats would be made against the (Thai, Vietnamese, or other) bases supporting the air operations. The chances are about even that 'volunteer' Communist ground attack aircraft would be committed in Laos. However, the chances of such commitment would rise sharply if the non-Communist aircraft had attacked and destroyed Soviet airlift aircraft. We believe it less likely that Communist air strikes would be attempted against the supporting non-Communist air bases."

It is considered possible to meet this threat without further escalation on our part.

4. Should this not be possible, overt US air support from outside Laos may be necessary.

5. We consider it important to leave the enemy uncertain as to our reaction should the other side then further escalate.

6. The reported recent arguments between the Soviets and the CHICOMs indicate that the Soviets are sensitive to the dangers of escalation. Failure on our part to present them

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with this risk would tend to support the CHICOM position that aggressive Communist action presents less risk to the Communist side than the more careful operations implied by the Soviet "peaceful coexistence" program.

7. An essential complement to the military actions proposed is the requirement for concomitant political action to insure that our limited military objectives are clearly understood by the Communist Bloc. On this basis, the advantages to be gained far outweigh the risks involved.

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