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5 August 1959

RENEWAL OF GUERRILLA WARFARE IN LAOS

1. We are almost certain that the decision to reopen guerrilla warfare in Laos was made by Hanoi and Peiping, and that the planning and necessary supply were provided by Hanoi. Moscow is probably much less interested in the Laotian situation than Hanoi and Peiping. However, we believe that Moscow was consulted prior to the decision to reactivate guerrilla warfare and that Moscow approved, although probably with the understanding that the armed action fall short of risking major hostilities with the US. Moscow, as one of the cochairmen of the Geneva Accords, has cooperated in supporting the requests of Hanoi and Peiping for the return of the International Control Commission (ICC) to Laos.

2. We believe it unlikely that North Vietnam has committed units of its regular army, or more than a handful of individuals, to the armed action in Laos. The level and type of military action that apparently has taken place thus far would not, in our view, require the intervention of Viet Minh units, and we can see no reason why Hanoi would risk unnecessarily having its

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units identified as participating in military operations in Laos, at least at this stage of the game. Laotian officials appear convinced that Viet Minh units have entered Laotian territory, but thus far the evidence presented has been inconclusive.

3. It is possible that a few clearly identifiable Viet Minh are involved in the guerrilla activity, particularly in coordination, communication, and advisory roles. It is likely that many of the guerrillas now engaged have received training in North Vietnam, and that supplies and equipment for the current operations have been provided by North Vietnam, and that the guerrillas may move into and out of North Vietnam as necessary. It is also possible that Meo and Black Thai tribesmen from North Vietnam are participating in guerrilla activities. However, we believe that it will be very difficult to obtain convincing proof of Viet Minh intervention.

4. Most of the guerrillas are probably ex-Pathet Lao soldiers, local sympathizers, and tribal people -- such as the Meo and Black Thai -- whose domain straddles the Lao-North Vietnam border. These two tribal groups make up most of the population of Sam Neua and Phong Saly. They have not been won over by the Lao Government and, in fact, the government had not succeeded in establishing its control and authority in those provinces before

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the current outbreak of guerrilla warfare. The guerrilla units are probably led by hard core Pathet Lao types who went underground at the time of the 1957 political settlement between the Lao Government and the Pathet Lao.

5. We believe that the guerrillas have the capability to retake effective control of Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces and large areas along the eastern border, without significant troop reinforcement by Viet Minh volunteers or units. Although there may be local incidents throughout Laos, we do not believe that the present guerrilla action presages a nationwide Communist effort to take over Laos by armed insurrection. We do not believe that the Communists have that extensive assets in Laos. Moreover, many known Pathet Lao have been gravitating to the eastern provinces during recent weeks. It is possible, however, that continued ineffective resistence by the Lao Army and civil guard units may encourage the Communists to expand their guerrilla efforts in Laos.

COMMUNIST INTENTIONS

6. We believe that the immediate Communist objectives are:

a) to regain effective control of Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces;

b) to create local and international pressures for the reactivation of the International Control Commission (ICC)

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Laos; and c) to frustrate the joint US-French training effort to improve the capabilities of the Lao Army. The achievement of any or all of these objectives would contribute to what is probably the broader objective of protecting and expanding Communist assets in Laos. Moreover, the Communists probably believe that a military crisis in Laos will strain relations among the Western allies and, in addition, might lead to a split in the Lao Hom Lao -- Committee of Defense of the National Interest -- army alliance and cause the Phoui government to break up.

7. The timing of the guerrilla attacks to coincide so closely with the arrival of the US training teams was probably coincidental; however, the Communists probably knew or strongly suspected thay some kind of major training effort was in the offing. The idea of frustrating training of the Lao Army and of re-establishing enclaves before that training became effective probably entered into their decision to resort to armed action.

8. The Communists were probably becoming quite concerned with the course of events in Laos. After the grant of special powers to Prime Minister Phoui in January 1959, and especially after the escape of the Pathet Lao battalion scheduled for

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integration, the Neo Lao Hak Zat (NLHZ) had been unable to pursue effectively its objectives in Laos by political means. In addition, the Lao Army and police has been carrying out a program to suppress ex-Pathet Lao and NLHZ members, particularly in the provinces, and had employed at times forceful and extra-legal means. At the same time, the moderate success of the government's civic action and propaganda programs has been undercutting Communist appeals and NLHZ strength in some sections of the country. To the NLHZ leeaders and to Hanoi the choice may well have appeared to be to take up arms and attempt to recreate the situation as it existed before 1957, or face a future of political checkmate, continued suppression and dwindling assets.

10. We believe that Hanoi, Peiping and Moscow will make every effort to bring about the reactivation of the ICC in Laos. The return of the ICC would provide an international mechanism which could be used to protect the NLHZ and to "expose" US military training as a violation of the Geneva Accords. It is possible that, if unsuccessful in their diplomatic moves and guerrilla activities, Hanoi and Peiping may increase pressures on Laos and the West by introducing military units or volunteers from North Vietnam, and, perhaps, South China. They probably

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believe that it would be most difficult for the US to bring effective US military force to bear in any serious security situation in Laos. It is also possible that Peiping and Moscow may decide to put SEATO to the test in Laos.

11. Peking and Hanoi may also decide to step up Viet Cong guerrilla and terrorist activities in South Vietnam, seeking to link US military training efforts in Laos with TERM activities in South Vietnam. This could lead to Communist demands for a full scale review of the Geneva Accords.

J. K. King

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