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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PACIFIC AIR FORCES

JUN 20 2014

HQ PACAF/CS
25 E Street, Suite G-214
JBPHH, HI 96853-5420

Mr. John Greenwald



Mr. Greenwald

This responds to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request 2013-06414-F for a copy of documents titled as IRISNUM: 01103851; Author: 0007 Air Force 0013 Air Force Seith, Louis T; CALL K744.131-5 which contains information on debriefing by Maj General Seith to his senior officers returning from field assignment in Laos and "June Mail" indices for any other records that may pertain to this subject.

Attached are the responsive records that have been approved for release. The information denied is considered exempt under 5 U.S.C. § 552a (b)(6).

Exemption (b)(6) exempts "personnel and medical files and similar information that if disclosed would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy."

If you decide to appeal this partial denial, you must write to the Secretary of the Air Force. Your letter must be postmarked within 60 calendar days from the date of this letter. Include your reasons for reconsideration and attach a copy of this letter. Address your letter to:

Secretary of the Air Force
Thru: HQ PACAF/CS (FOIA)
25 E. Street, Suite G-214
JBPHH, HI 96853-5420

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy S. Cashdollar".

TIMOTHY S. CASHDOLLAR, GS-15, DAFC
Chief of Staff

Attachment:
Responsive Records

IRIS Record

Key Information

Main: DEPARTMENT OF AIR FORCE

Document Type:
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Abstract CONTAINS INFORMATION ON DEBRIEFING BY UNITED STATES AIR FORCE MAJ GEN LOUIS T. SEITH OF SENIOR OFFICERS RETURNING FROM FIELD ASSIGNMENT IN LAOS.

Descriptive Notes: PROJECT CORONA HARVEST REPORT NO. 0209314. TITLE MODIFIED. DOWNGRADED BY SOUTHEAST ASIA DECLASSIFICATION AND REVIEW TEAM ON 24 FEB 93. (FORMER TOP SECRET CONTROL NO. 8285.) INCLUDES LETTERS AND BRIEFING MATERIAL WITH MAPS. FULL TEXT DOCUMENT IS AVAILABLE IN ELECTRONIC FORM VIA CLASSIFIED NETWORK.

Title Added Entries DEBRIEFING REPORT

Author: 0007 AIR FORCE 0013 AIR FORCE SEITH, LOUIS T.

Subject:

Major Command:

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Hq USAF (AFXPDA)
 Laos - Defreezing of Senior Officers Returning
 from Field Assignment -
 Major General Louis Smith, USAF
 16 Jun 68 - 27 May 69

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REPLY TO
ATTN OF:

AFXPPE

6 January 1970

SUBJECT:

LAOS - Debriefing of Senior Officers Returning From
Field Assignment (U) - *Maj Gen Louis Smith*

TO:

ASI (ASD-1R)
Maxwell AFB, Ala 36112

1. Reference telecon Col (b) (6) HQ USAF, AFXDOC/
Col (b) (6) ASD-1R, 5 Jan 1970.

2. The attached debriefing report is forwarded.

(b) (6)

Capt, USAF
Executive, Eastern Regional Division
Directorate of Plans, DCS/P&O

1 Atch
Ltr by 7/13AF 25 Jun 69,
Subj: LAOS - Debriefing
of Senior Officers
Returning From Field
Assignments, w/5 Atch
Copy #R-1, (TS/NF)

RETURN TO
HQ USAFHRC
MAXWELL AFB AL 36112-6699

K744/131-5

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~~Facing 5:
1. LAOS - Debriefing Report of *Maj Gen Louis T. Smith* w/ at
Historical Background
2. US Objectives in LAOS
3. LAOS, Planning Factors
4. LAOS, Command & Control of Military Operations
5. LAOS, US Military Assistance and Friendly Forces
6. *Smith, Louis T., Major Gen*
7. *K744.131*~~

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For traces see TS-HQA-74-142

Dup see T.S.-HQA-74-142

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS DEPUTY COMMANDER
SEVENTH AIR FORCE (COMBATTING IN AIR FORCE), THAILAND (7AF CAP)
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96327



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REF ID: A61001

TO: MAC/C

SUBJECT: LAOS - Debriefing of Senior Officers Returning From Field Assignment (1)

FROM: 7AF (C)

1. In accordance with PACAF letter dated 12 September 1968, Subject: Debriefing of Senior Officers Returning From Field Assignments, forwarded herewith is a narrative report on Laos for the period of my assignment as Deputy Commander 7/13AF, 16 June 1968 to 27 May 1969.

2. Although the subject of this report is Laos, references to Thailand are included as needed to round out the report. TAB A is a brief historical background. The main conclusions of the report concern:

U.S. Objectives in Laos (TAB B)

U.S. Planning in the area, including Thailand (TAB C)

U.S. Military Command Arrangements (TAB D)

Administration of the Military Aid Program (TAB E)

LOUIS F. BETH, Major General, USAF
Deputy Commander

5 Atch
Tabs A-E a/s

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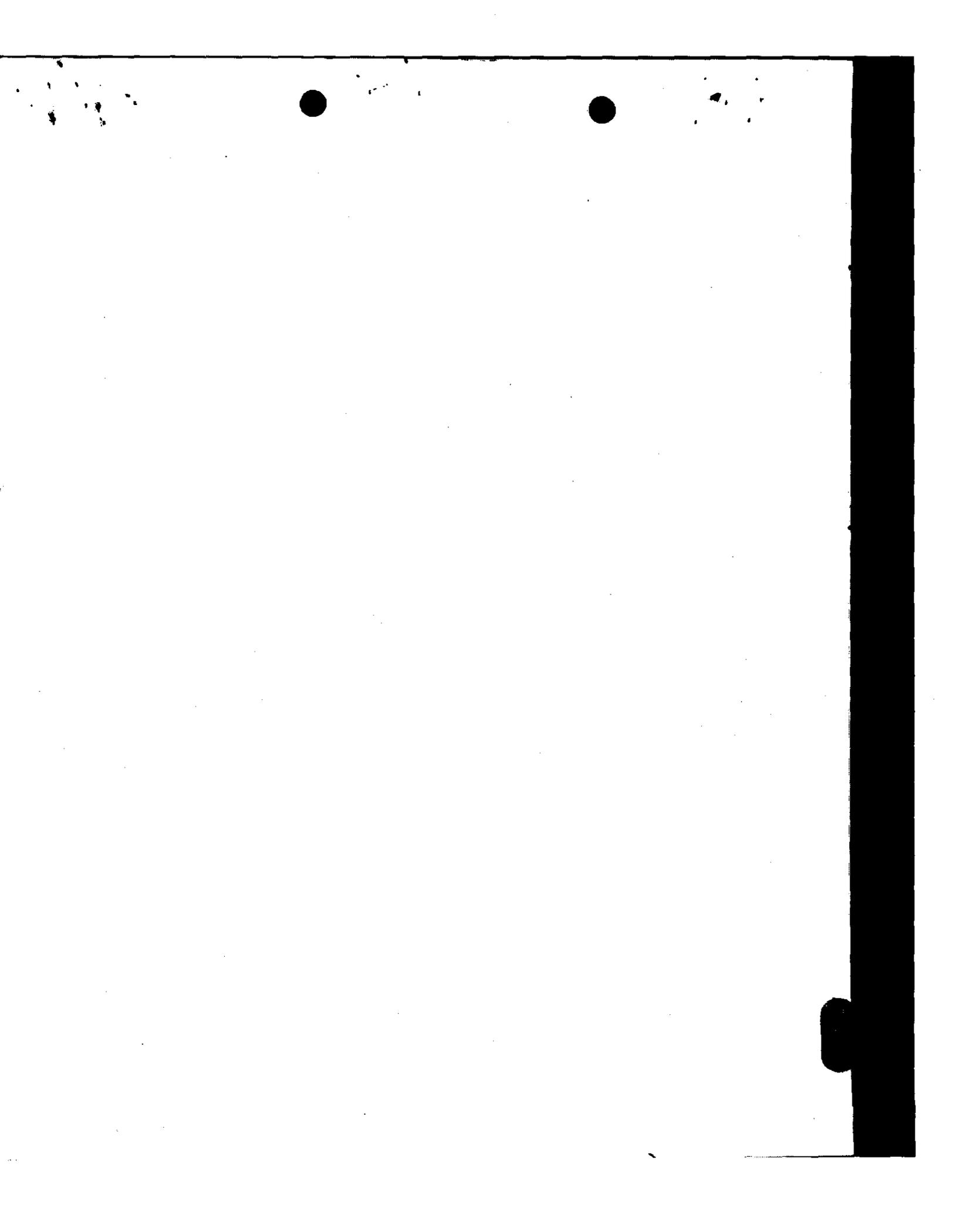
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TAB A - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. For centuries Indochina has been the scene of conflict between the kingdoms south and west of the Annam Mountains, and the Vietnamese to the east. As the Vietnamese pushed their influence from the crowded Red River Delta to the borders of Siam, the Siamese, in their own defense, have asserted control in Laos and competed for control of Cambodia. When the French arrived in the mid-19th century, Siam and Vietnam were facing each other across a neutral zone, comprising much of present day Laos and Cambodia.

2. The French brought temporary peace to the whole area; but soon after WW II they became embroiled in the Vietnamese Nationalist war against them, which was under Communist leadership and which had Chinese Communist (CHICOM) help. The active roll of the Chinese brought the U.S. to the aid of the French. When the French left in 1954, century old fears and conflicts had been immeasurably increased, and a powerful Vietnam once again threatened Siam. But now, the U.S. and its SEATO allies were supporting Siam against the Vietnamese and their Chinese backers; and the ideology of Communism had become another imposed source of conflict.

3. At the Geneva Conference of 1954, it was thought that if Siam could be strengthened, a neutral Laos could be

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revived as a buffer state. Unfortunately, Laos is ill suited for such a role. The Lao, who dominate the country, compose less than half of the population. They are an extension across the Mekong River of one of the largest ethnic groups of Thailand; only a small percent of the Lao actually being in Laos. Most of the non-Lao people in Laos live in the hills and many have strong historical and economic links across the border with Vietnam. Thus, the people of this supposed buffer state are more likely to side with one or the other of their neighbors rather than act as a unit.

4. The 1954 conference gave status to three blocs; the rightists, the Communists, and the neutralists, under a neutralist coalition. Soon afterwards, under the competitive pressures of right and left, the neutralist position crumbled, and by 1960 Laos was in a state of civil war. The highlanders who had once served as a buffer between both sides were now almost entirely controlled by the Pathet Lao (PL) serving in the interest of North Vietnam and China. Laos was in effect partitioned along the same contour line between valley and hill peoples that had existed centuries before.

5. The Geneva Accords of July 1962 sought the same essential goal as the 1954 conference; a neutral Laos with a coalition government of pro-Communists, neutralists and pro-Western

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factions. The Chief of State and Premier was Souvanna Phouma, a neutralist, trying for the third time to unify Laos.

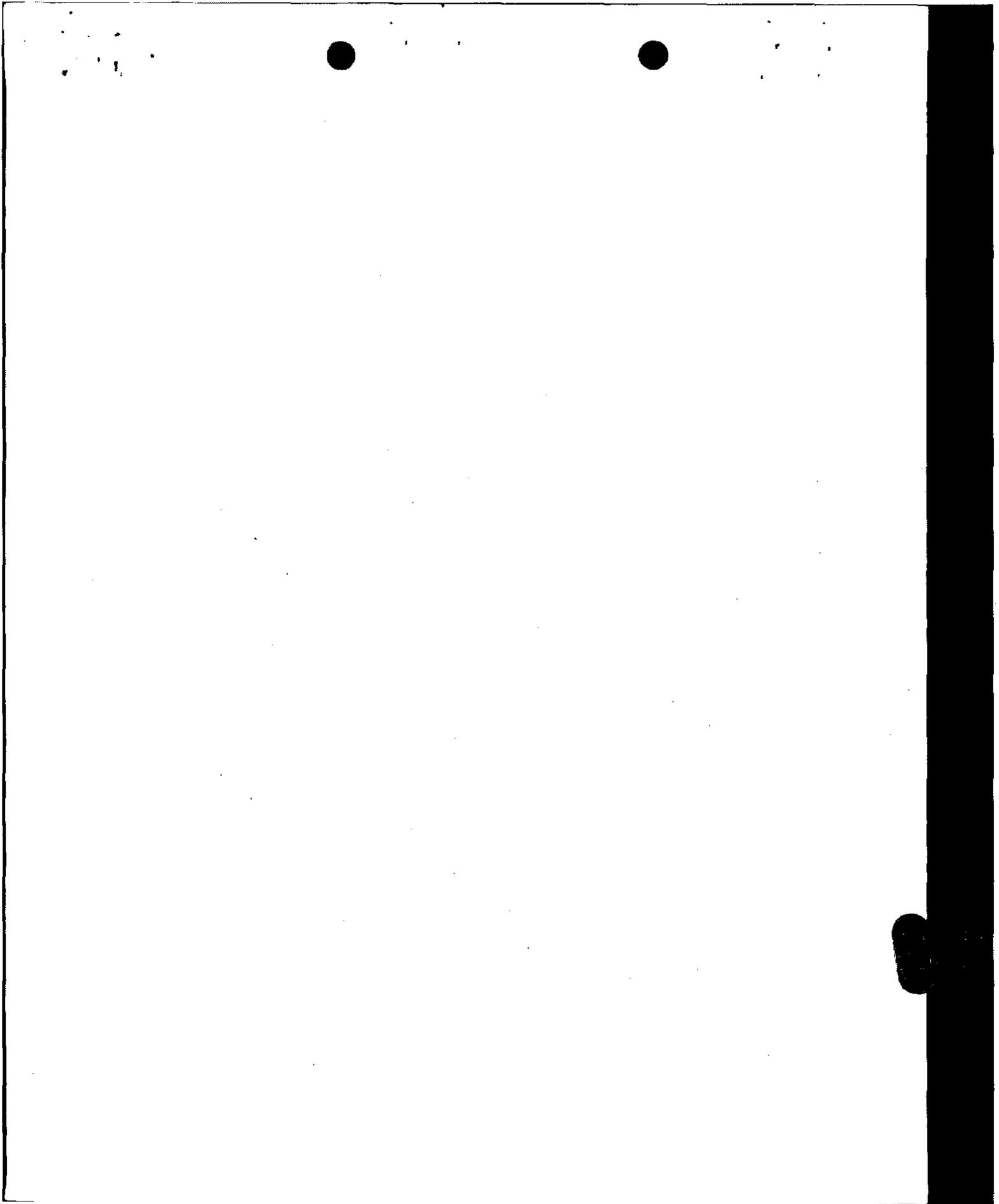
6. The Geneva signatories specified that foreign troops would leave the country. They also agreed that no foreign advisors other than French would be allowed in Laos. Hence, the U.S. military advisory group was withdrawn. Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese involvement in the South Vietnamese insurgency had by now reached a point where possession of certain Laotian territory (the Steel Tiger area) had assumed overriding importance in the passage of reinforcements into South Vietnam (SVN). Prior to consummating the Geneva agreement, NVN, through the PL, insured its control of this vital area by occupying key points and Lines of Communication (LOC's). They never relinquished this control, nor moved their troops out of the area.

7. Elsewhere, in spite of the formation of a coalition government, the PL, assisted by NVN, resumed the conflict. The NVN/PL have become increasingly Communist identified; and Russian aid has become more and more a factor. In turn, the U.S., while refraining from committing U.S. military ground forces in Laos, recognized that the Laotian Government had to be maintained and that Prince Souvanna Phouma provided the best and most stable leadership for it. Therefore, a renewed program of military assistance was begun.

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This program has developed in response to the peculiar situation in Laos and will be covered in the following tabs.

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and they agreed to refrain from actions that would drastically alter the basic military, economic and political balances at the time. It was mutually recognized that to destroy these basic patterns would benefit only Red China. At the time, the Soviets evidently expected to be able to control Hanoi; obviously this has not worked out altogether. Our policy since has been to avoid forcing the Soviets into the position of having to escalate its aid and support for the North Vietnamese on the one hand, and on the other, to support the neutralist Lao government to the extent necessary to keep it from losing ground.*

4. Conclusion: In view of the preceding two paragraphs, the following objectives seem more accurate for the short term:

a. To maintain an outward posture of strict neutrality for diplomatic reasons.

b. To maintain a relatively stable balance of political, economic and military position between the pro-Communist and the pro-U.S. factions in Laos.

c. To maintain a friendly or at least neutral government on the borders of Thailand, while maintaining strict controls on the level of aid and military effort in support of it, in order to be consistent with objective b above.

*Conversation, MG Seith & Ambassador W.H. Sullivan, Nov 1968

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d. To achieve maximum attrition and disruption of the NVN logistics flow to SVN through use of air power.

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TAB C - PLANNING FACTORS

1. General.

a. Historically, since 1962, the enemy has exploited the dry season (Dec to May) to expand his control along the major LOC's in Laos, to seize rice-growing areas for harvest and forage, and to assault RIG-controlled salients, outposts and STOL (short take off and landing) sites. During the rainy season (June to November), he withdrew to his base camp areas, securing LOC's, and regrouping his forces. Friendly forces habitually reoccupied forward areas during the wet season... often without major contact. This see-saw pattern, keyed to the changing monsoons, has reflected directly the condition of the roads, most of which have been motorable only in the dry season.

b. Of equal import, this has been war for population, particularly in Northern Laos. Control of populace will probably be a major factor in future bargaining; population is essential as a recruiting base for armed forces, labor support, and food production. This accounts for the fact that both sides regularly move large groups of people as the armed forces move forward or retreat. In the case of the Mco tribes in Northern Laos, this... and the families of soldiers ... has generated several large airlift requirements which have been partially supported by USAF helicopters.

instance in January 1969, the USAF provided over 500 helicopter

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sorties in moving Meo tribesmen south out of the Lima site 184 area of northern Laos. . .

c. This year's dry season has seen a more aggressive enemy campaign with improvement of roads, increased stockpiling in advanced areas, penetrations in greater depth and strength, and a substantial increase in anti-aircraft defenses. Despite recent RLG successes, the territories under the control of the PL/NVA are more extensive now than at any time since 1962. It could be, as some believe, that they are merely reoccupying the areas held by them in 1962 to achieve a stronger position in the Paris Peace Talks. More than likely, the PL hope to sway the RLG toward a negotiated settlement... primary conditions of which would be cessation of the U.S. air activity in Laos, and a strong PL position in the government.

d. The situation of the Royal Lao Armed Forces will, no doubt, improve somewhat when the wet season gets underway in May or June; but friendly forces are in poor condition to start an effective rainy season counter-offensive this year. Morale among the Meos, the Forces Armees Royales (FAR) and the leadership of the government has been up and down, but seems very fragile and highly responsive to the ebb and flow of enemy activity.

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e. U.S. tactical air has been the major factor in preventing wholesale reverses and making these friendly moves possible. USAF and the RLAF T-28 force have performed remarkably well in defense of friendly ground positions, in providing close air support for offensive moves, and in destroying enemy supplies, equipment and bivouac areas. But air forces cannot substitute for ground force; they can only supplement them and increase their fire power and maneuverability.

2. Military Region (MR) 1 * - Northwest Laos (Phong Saly, Houa Khong, Western Luang Prabang, and Sayaboury Provinces).

a. This area, together with adjacent portions of Thailand, Burma and China, is a homogenous mass of mountains with connecting valleys and trails, where mountain tribesmen cross borders without regard for governmental authority. The rugged terrain affords natural cover and concealment, a sympathetic, or at least apathetic populace, and the shortest routes from China and NW Vietnam into North Thailand. Here is a virtual no mans land, by-passing the northern end of the Mekong River Valley. Given their propensity for operating under such conditions, it is a natural (to the Communists) base and a pathway from China (only 81 miles from the Thai border) and North Vietnam, towards the north and the central mountainous spine of Thailand. Accelerated insurgent activity in North Thailand supports this thesis.

*See attachment 1 for geographical references in MR 1

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b. Enemy pressure against friendly units and strongholds along the Mekong River continues. Neither side has complete control of this vital artery, but enemy presence along the river permits the interdiction of vital boat traffic and provides southern terminus for his infiltration and supply routes. The newest of these LOC's runs from Dien Bien Phu via Route 19 to Muong Khoua and the Nam Ou River, southwest via the new CHICOM road to Muong Xai and then on southwest via the old French logging trail (Route 46), terminating along the Mekong in the vicinity of Pak Beng. From this river bridgehead more men and weapons can be infiltrated into Sayaboury Province and the Thai border areas.

c. The enemy seems determined to subjugate the few remaining islands of pro-government tribes and guerrillas in Northwest Laos. Chinese forces are reported directly engaged against pro-government guerrillas in Houa Khong Province; this together with Chinese road building efforts in the area could portend a new phase of overt intervention; it is also possible that the Chinese will proceed no further south, but it seems prudent to assume that sooner or later, it will be necessary for U.S. Air Force recon, airlift or strike aircraft to operate in an area where confrontation

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with the Chinese is probable.

3. MR 2 and 5.[#]

a. Undoubtedly NVN feels a proprietary interest in Northeast Laos. (There is even a quasi political claim to part of the area; in 1942 the Vichy French Government gave administrative control of Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces to Hanoi.) Northeast Laos is an appropriate area for expansion from the crowded Red River Valley, as there are old ties of political and tribal kinship there. Souvanna Phouma also regards retention of this area as vital to the survival of his government.

b. The PL/NVN seem intent upon complete consolidation of the mountainous northeast provinces as a secure base area and buffer zone. Though administered by a puppet PL government, the provinces of Phong Saly (MR 1) and Sam Neua, as well as part of Xieng Khouang province, have, for all practical purposes, been annexed by NVN.

c. Historically, there is a yearly contest between RLG and PL/NVN forces for control of key positions (villages, Lima/STOL sites, strong points) in Xieng Khouang province. South and southwest of the Plaine De Jarres (PDJ) is the heartland of those pro-western ethnic Meo tribes which follow the Meo leader, Major General Vang Pao. Although not capable of pushing the enemy out of Xieng Khouang Province, these aggressive Meos usually make deep inroads into PL/NVN territory

[#]See Attachment 2 for geographical references in MR 2 and 5

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north of the PDJ during the rainy season. During the dry season, the Meos retreat to the south and act as the blocking force separating the enemy from RLG controlled Vientiane and Borikhane provinces which comprise MR 5. Although they have fulfilled this role for several years, there is some low level evidence that some Meo leaders are pressuring Vang Pao to withdraw the tribe to a new, more peaceful homeland, probably in the mountains of Sayaboury province to the west. If this takes place the balance of power in northeastern Laos would shift drastically in favor of the Communists.

d. Although there have been serious reverses in MR 2 this year, there have also been successes. Friendly forces have broken the historical see-saw pattern this year by launching two major dry season offensives. In November and December of 1968, General Vang Pao conducted Operation Pigfat in Houaphan Province; and though it fell short of its overall objectives, it effectively delayed the traditional Communist dry season moves, until January. At that time, Communist numerical superiority swung the pendulum of success to the PL/NVN, who applied pressure around the Plaines Des Jarres and gradually reduced the Pigfat salient, until they split pro-Government forces, then swept forward to overrun most of the friendly STOL/Lima sites and strong points north of the PDJ,

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including Site 36. Morale among the Meo, the Armed Forces Armee Royales (FAR) and the government leadership plummeted to a new low. In what must have been an act of desperation, the bombing restrictions against the Communist-controlled sanctuaries in the PDJ were removed, and General Vang Pao launched a second dry season offensive in the PDJ areas, designed to buy time until the rains began. The early phases of this surprise move exceeded all expectations, and coupled with increased USAF air activity permitted the temporary seizure of Xieng Khouangville and the heights commanding the southern approaches to the PDJ. To support this move, increased USAF and Air America airlift was required, while 7th Air Force and 13th Air Force strike aircraft support in the Barrel Roll Sectors was more than doubled. In the face of enemy counter-offensives and reactions, the final outcome of this latest friendly move cannot be predicted, but it has given the friendlies some impetus for further offensive actions during the rainy season.

4. Zones 1 and 2 of Steel Tiger Area.*

a. Enemy supply lines and logistics complexes in these areas have grown since 1964, to where they now have a major impact on U.S. military operations in SVN. This is in fact NVN occupied and controlled territory. Any effort to deny it to NVN troops by ground action would be extremely difficult,

*See Attachment 3 for geographical references to Steel Tiger Area. MR 3 and 4

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requiring a major increase in military effort by the U.S. The task of disrupting the flow of NVN logistics through Laos therefore, continues to be carried by air power.

b. In September 1968, Ambassador William Sullivan thought that this area might "dry up" once a lasting peace is achieved in Vietnam.* However, to the writer it seems more likely that the North Vietnamese regard this area as an extension of Vietnam, a frontier to the Mekong Valley, and a base from which to first support insurgency in the Mekong Valley, and later in Thailand.

c. Although the PL might claim jurisdiction over this area, it is doubtful that any new coalition government which included the PL would bring more than token control to the RLG.

5. MR 3, Outside Zones 1 and 2 of Steel Tiger Area.

a. Lack of RLG initiative throughout this area has permitted the PL to control (or at least to create a dangerous no man's land in) most of the area except for a narrow corridor paralleling route 13 and the Mekong River and a few salients to the east. Enemy pressure has increased against the Muong Phalane salient, and increasing numbers of PL/NVN have been infiltrating westward to the juncture of MR 3 and 4 in the vicinity of Khong Sedone. As a result, Route 13 has been

*Conversation, MG Seith and Ambassador W. H. Sullivan, Sep 68

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interdicted periodically by Communist forces, recently forcing the RLG to seek permission from the Royal Thai Government (RTG) for the movement of men and supplies through Thailand. The RTG was quick to grant such permission, (they have also cooperated with Laos forces at the southern border of Ubon province). The question might be raised whether this most recent activity of the RTG might provoke PL/NVN retaliation in the form of raids on Thai LOC's or incursions onto Thai territory. Actually, this is nothing new. The RTG has long assisted the RLG by permitting the transport of materiel across Thailand via rail, road and air from Bangkok to Vientiane, while providing training for FAR units, and bolstering the RLAF through the loan of qualified Royal Thai Air Force pilots. Royal Thai Army artillery units have assisted in the defense of the Neutralist (FAN) Muong Soui sector at the western end of the PDJ.

b. In the northern reaches of MR 3, enemy troops, almost all NVN, seem intent on eradicating RLG and Lao administrative control in the area. Supplies flowing through the recently reopened Nape Pass are being stockpiled, and route 81 west toward the Mekong is being improved. Patrols and probes into the Mekong Valley from this mountain stronghold and raids against important river towns in nearby MR 5, may

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herald a new move to sever RLG controlled areas of the North from the Laotian panhandle. This would also be a key base area for support of the insurgency in Northeast Thailand.

6. MR 4 -- Outside Zones 1 and 2 of Steel Tiger Area.

a. More so than in MR 3, the PL/NVN move with relative freedom throughout the area, except for virtually surrounded enclaves of RLG presence in the towns of Saravane, Attapeu and Pakse. The bulk of the Lao Army forces in the area are tied down in static defense and are inadequate in quality or quantity to accomplish much more. Recently, Route 13, paralleling the Mekong River has been interdicted by Communist troops in a number of places both north and south of Pakse. FAR sweep operations have temporarily cleared those threatened segments of the road, but destroyed bridges and the continuing threat of ambush and further interdiction has seriously impaired overland transportation of men and supplies to MR 4. There is also an increasing Communist presence in Champassak and Sithandone provinces near the Cambodian and Thai borders.

b. The recent moves discussed above place Communist forces in positions to increase their support of Thai insurgency, or to conduct clandestine harrassing and foraging sorties into Thailand.

7. Enemy Intentions.

a. In the writer's judgment, the U.S. continues to operate in Laos on the basis of the tacit agreement between the U.S. and Russia that the military, economic and political balance that existed between Communist and pro-west factions in 1962 will in substance be maintained. The U.S. Deputy Mission Chief in Laos believes that this balance has in fact been maintained, not by military force but most likely by the force of this political understanding.* This may be so. However, there is another possibility that has to be considered, (and which is recognized by the U.S. mission in Laos); that is that the Communists intend to achieve their objectives without seizing all of Laos or overtly toppling the government and without seeming to violate the U.S.-Russian understanding; that their objective is not Laos itself, but control of the areas, people and Lines of Communications within Laos needed for carrying the Communist insurgency into Thailand; and that they are obscuring this objective for the moment, by enfolding it in what appears to be a Nationalistic war for the State of Laos.

b. NVN appears to have the military capability to take over Laos, or at least to exert enough military pressure to topple the RLG, and there is evidence that the upgraded NVN/PL

*Conversation Mr. Robert Hurwich and Maj Gen Seith, 30 May 69

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Army is in fact increasing its ability to operate in much of Laos outside the main population centers. But, it is probably not in the NVN interest at this time to take all of Laos by force. This would risk involving U.S. and SEATO military forces; and NVN has enough to occupy it in SVN for the present. Instead, it would be more desirable from the NVN viewpoint to allow a facade of political control to be maintained by the RLG over those areas which the Neutralists controlled in 1962 and to attempt to take control of the government by political means. Thus, in the Communist scheme of things, the RLG would be allowed to retain control of the main population centers (as is being done) while the PL/NVN continue to consolidate control of key outlying areas needed by them to support future operations in Thailand. This course of action would also prevent, as it seems to have, the U.S. from entering Laos with a more effective MAP effort.

c. The PL/NVN do, of course, seek to alter and control the RLG. So it is also in their interest to preserve the fiction of a nationalistic PL guerrilla-style struggle for a place in the Laotian government. This fiction covers the fact that the PL has increasingly become a thin veneer covering rigid NVN control.

d. Souvanna Phouma is under pressure to include the PL in his government.* Return to the government (of the PL)

*Conversation, MG Seith & Ambassador Sullivan, fall 1968

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is a carrot that is held out by the PL in return for concessions - and undoubtedly a major Communist objective - which would require the RLG (Souvanna) to halt U.S. bombing in Laos. In turn, Souvanna holds out for withdrawal of all NVN troops from Laos. If the PL/NVN increase their military pressure in Laos, and the FAR continues to lose, Souvanna would see an increasing risk to his government; this would weaken his resolve to hold out for arrangements which will ensure his continued control of the government. Souvanna's resolve will be strengthened by evidence that the U.S. is firmly supporting him. In this respect, however, increased air effort against NVN logistics flow in Southern Laos (Steel Tiger area) is not accepted by him as direct U.S. support, because this is NVN occupied territory of little immediate demographic or geographic import for the RLG. In fact, Souvanna probably feels that the risk to his regime is increased by the effectiveness of the U.S. air effort in Steel Tiger because it forces NVN to open up more LOC's further west into the Mekong Valley area of Laos. Thus, the level and effectiveness of U.S. air power outside the Steel Tiger area has a direct impact upon the will of the Laotian government to continue resistance to Communist encroachments, and therefore, on the U.S. ability to continue to operate

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militarily in or over Laos.*

e. It is doubtful that the Communist hierarchy - whether Chinese or NVN - considers Laos as a national entity, except as it serves their interest. The Communist interest there lies more in consolidating it as a buffer, and in absorbing other areas and LOC's needed to support broader plans and operations aimed at Thailand. In this respect the current dry season offensive is reminiscent of PL/NVN tactics immediately prior to the signing of the 1962 Geneva Accords.** At that time, the enemy was careful to seize essential areas and LOC's that would be needed for his continued prosecution of the war in SVN before allowing the agreement to take effect. Again today, the enemy may be seizing key areas and LOC's that would be essential in supporting infiltration efforts into Thailand. For him this campaign would be a necessary prelude to any negotiated Laotian peace, whether achieved in Paris or through direct accommodation with the RLG. This very real probability should receive the closest attention by U.S. authorities.

*NOTE: Increasingly, the past year, 7th and 13th Air Force units have supported the Laotian counterinsurgency. Currently scheduled air sortie levels (before weather losses) are greater than those of last year by an order of magnitudes. Effectiveness of the RLAF T-28 force has also increased. Unfortunately, there has been no comparable increase in the effectiveness of the Laotian ground forces; to the contrary, they have lost important territory in recent months.

** See Attachment 4 for approximate dividing line - 1962

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8. Conclusions:

a. The level and effectiveness of U.S. air power outside the Steel Tiger area has a direct impact upon the will of the Laos government to continue resistance to Communist encroachments; and therefore on the U.S. ability to operate militarily in and over Laos.

b. The enemy is bent on gaining control of the areas and LOC's in Laos that he needs for continued or increasing support of the Thailand insurgency; and he intends to seize these areas without raising an obvious danger signal which could cause the U.S. and its allies to react, or without seeming to violate the 1961 U.S.-Russian understanding concerning a Neutralist Laos. At the Paris conferences on Vietnam, any agreements reached should, if possible, include Laos. These arrangements for Laos should deny the Communists freedom to operate anywhere on the borders of Thailand, and should not foreclose possible future U.S. requirements for effective inspection, detection and reaction to Communist moves in Laos. Unless major political changes occur, it is safe to assume that the enemy will continue to employ the tactic of keeping their infiltration operations below the threshold that would sway world opinion against them.

c. Given effective Laotian Armed Forces, cooperation between Thai and Laotian forces, a credible U.S./SEATO planned response to any enemy occupation of the area and

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continued support of a friendly Lao government, denying the enemy free use of the Mekong Valley for infiltration is probably a reasonable objective for U.S. planning purposes. However, that the valley is outflanked by the mountainous area of Northwest Laos must be kept in mind.

d. U.S. planning needs more emphasis on the mountainous areas of Northwest Laos, Northeast Burma and Northern Thailand, insofar as enemy capabilities to operate are concerned. These areas should be treated as a single territory. The potential threat to Thailand is relatively great in this area because there is little real government presence there; furthermore, neither Thai, Laotian, or U.S. military forces possess the LOC's, bases, nav aids, communications or logistics for responding to the threat at this time, let alone an increased threat.

e. U.S. military contingency and/or Military Assistance planning for defense of Thailand in the north should provide for:

(1) U.S., Laotian and possibly Thai combat air operations in Northwestern Laos, to include air strike and reconnaissance operations supported by infiltration detection technology and paramilitary ground operations.

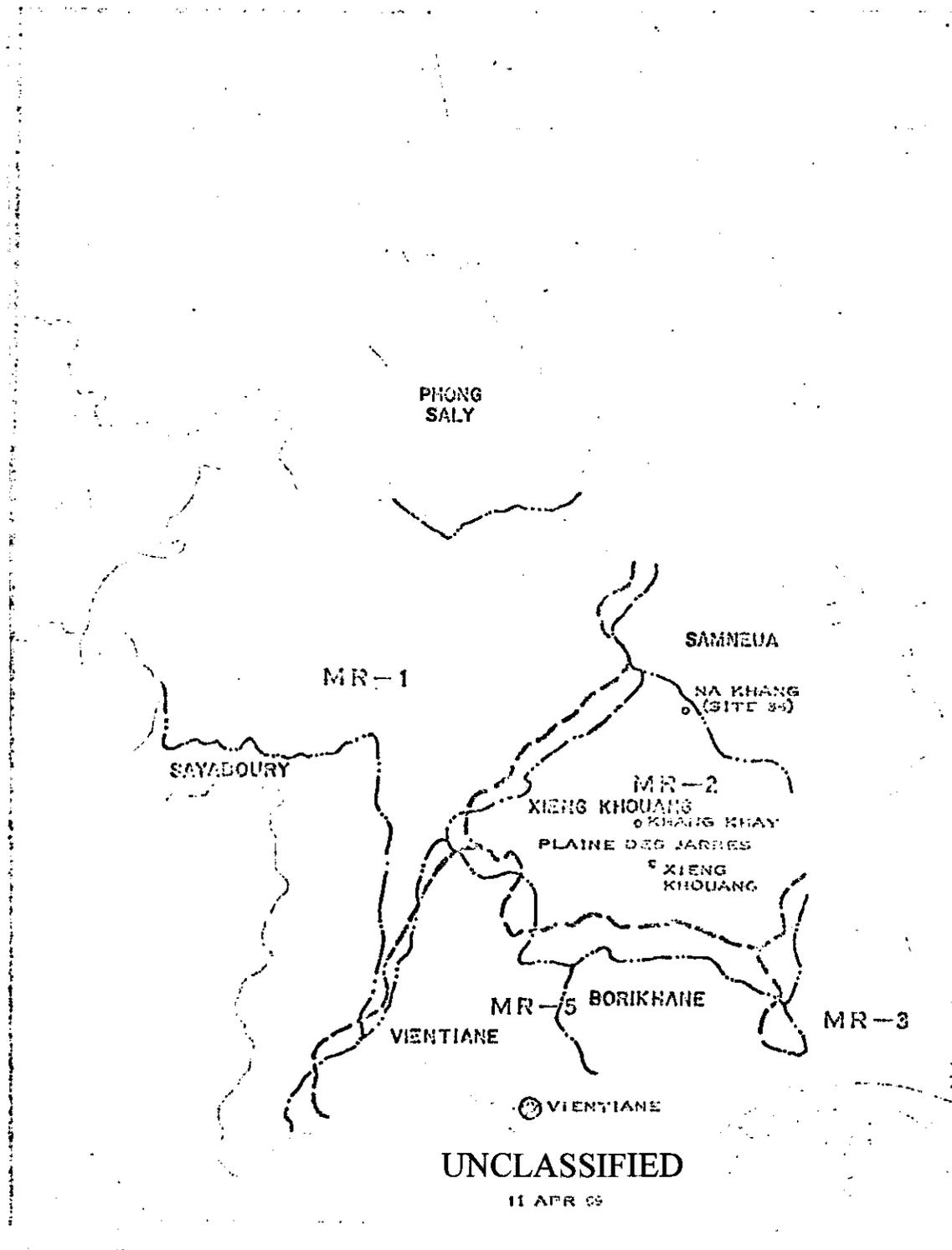
(2) Military response from within Thailand to selected levels of Communist infiltration into Northern Thailand.

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(3) The possibility of confrontation with Chinese military/paramilitary forces in Northwestern Laos by U.S. military aircraft if air operations are conducted there.

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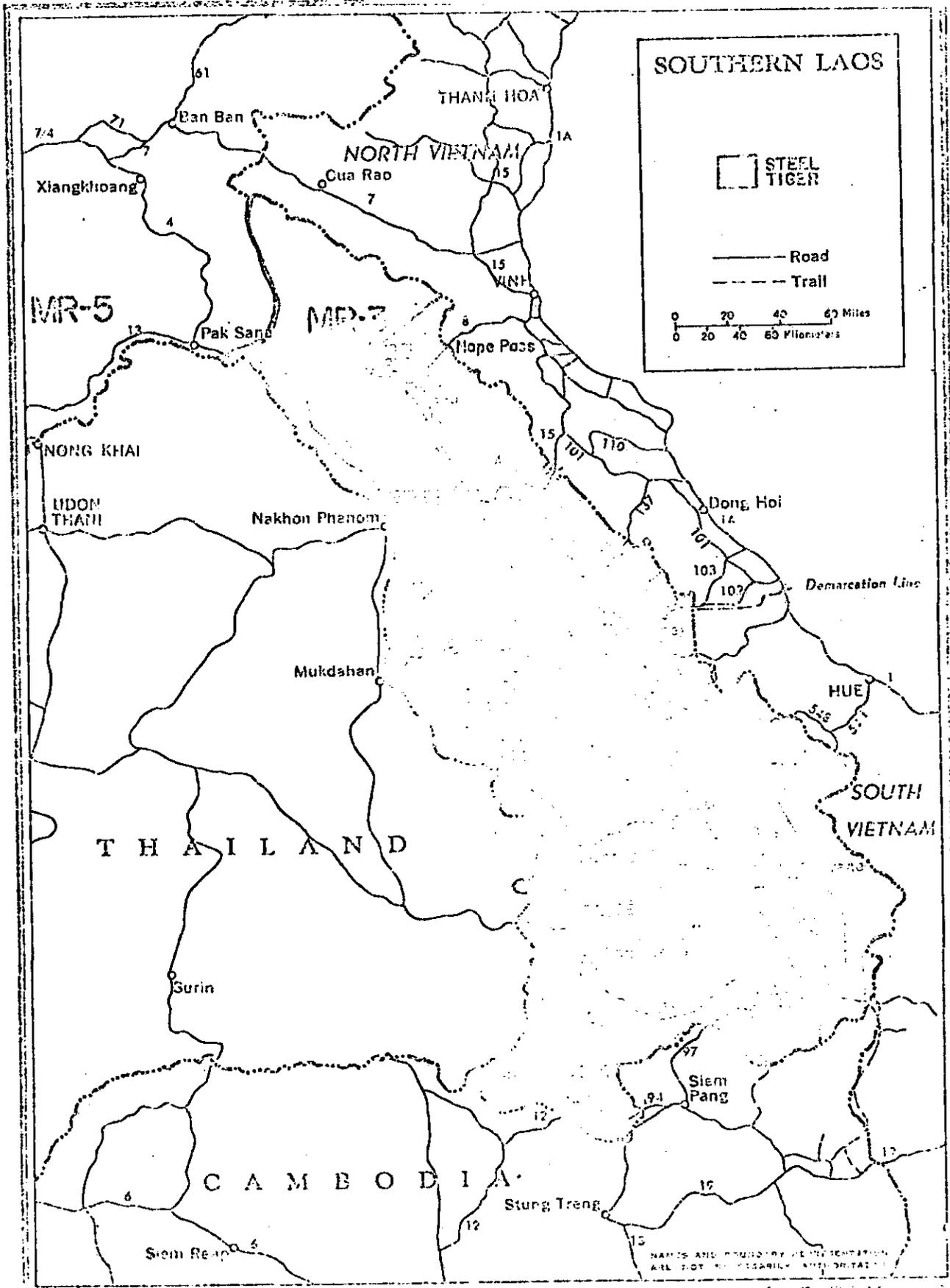


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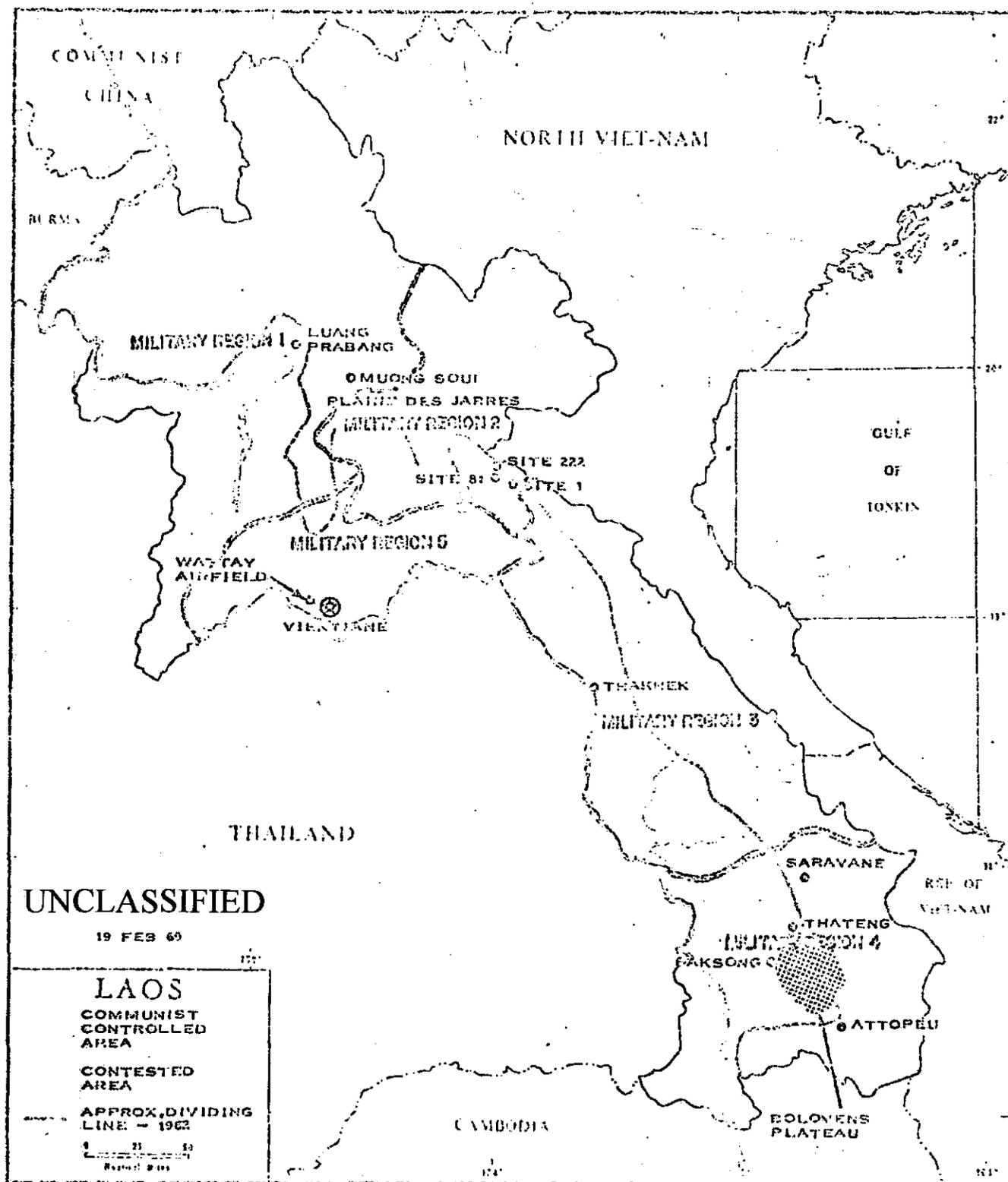
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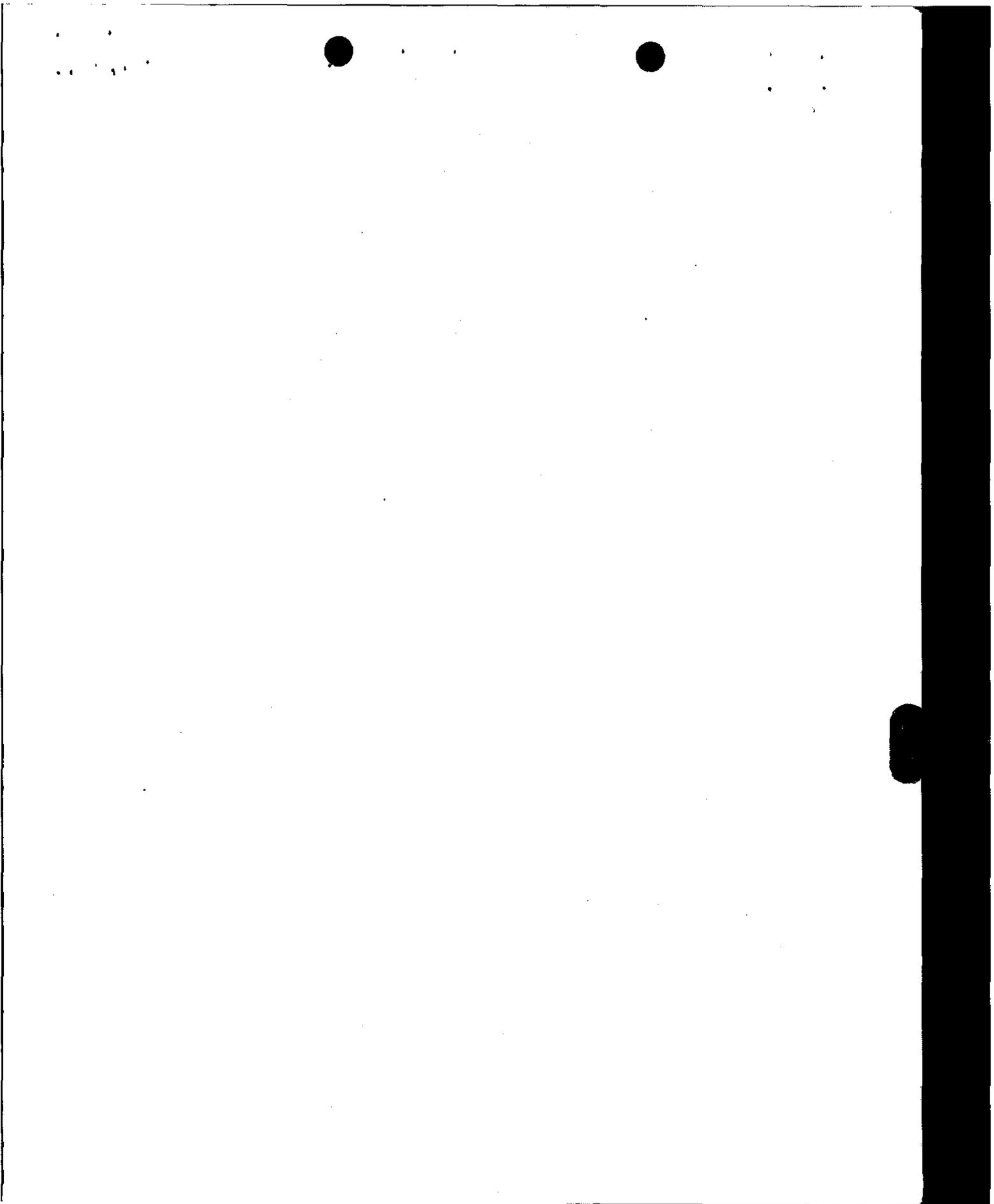
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TAB D - 'COMMAND AND CONTROL OF MILITARY OPERATIONS

1. General.

a. By Presidential directive, the U.S. Ambassador to Laos is responsible for the overall direction, coordination and supervision of U.S. activities in support of the Royal Lao government.

b. By authority of CINCPAC# the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), will "...conduct an air campaign against enemy forces, selected targets, LOC's and LOC-associated targets and to support friendly forces located in authorized operating areas in Laos...COMUSMACV will... coordinate with and obtain approval from ANEMB Vientiane for the conduct of air operations in Laos by PACOM forces;... CINCPACFLT and CINCPACAF will support COMUSMACV by allocation of sorties in excess of primary Rolling Thunder/Blue Tree requirements... Targets in Laos recommended for strike areas and routes (including rivers) recommended for armed recce, and areas will be nominated to ANEMB Vientiane. Following approval by Vientiane, targets, routes and areas will be promulgated by COMUSMACV who will maintain an up-dated status, keeping ALCOM informed." The above CINCPAC directive also contains operating restrictions in Laos, many of which stem from the requirements of ANEMB Vientiane.

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c. As can be seen, the U.S. Ambassador, Vientiane has a primary impact on the two wars in Laos. On the one hand he directly affects the prosecution of the air war against the NVN logistic pipeline into SVN by his control over operating restrictions, by his authority to validate targets and tactics, and also by his control of certain paramilitary operations. On the other hand, through his direct control of the U.S. MAP program and paramilitary operations against the insurgency, and his regular contact with the government, he inevitably develops requirements for U.S. air support, and directly controls the force structure, equipping and advice on employment of the Lao armed forces.

2. Air operations in support of the counterinsurgency.

a. The Air Attache (AIRA) advises the Ambassador on air matters affecting both the USAF and RLAF; he is the Embassy's point of contact for USAF operations in Laos. Special requests for air support originating from either Controlled American Sources (CAS) or Army Attache (ARMA) sources are evaluated jointly with the staff of 7/13AF at Udorn; target lists and air support plans are then submitted to 7AF.

b. Application of USAF tactical air strikes in direct support of Lao ground forces is controlled by Forward Air

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Controllers (FAC) - either "Raven" FAC's, attached directly to AIRA, FAC's of the USAF 23rd TASS, or air crews of the USAF 56th SOW and recently jet FAC's, depending upon the area and the type of target.

c. Direct air support operations in Laos function with CAS and ARMA advisors acting in the capacity of specified ground force commanders. "Raven" FAC's attached to AIRA, and the AIRA himself, function as Air Liaison Officers in a similar manner to the senior FAC's in the Tactical Air Control Parties in SVN.

d. Most USAF direct air support operations have been tied to the scheme of ground maneuver of CAS sponsored paramilitary forces in Northern Laos. There is a relationship of cooperative liaison between AIRA, CAS Hq, and 7/13AF which, in most cases, provides a mutual exchange of information and which has responded well to requirements for immediate air strikes in defense of Lima sites and for troops in contact. For the development of fixed targets on the other hand (usually supply complexes and bivouac areas), and air support for special operations and for FAR operations, the arrangement has been less responsive. Ground to Ground Communications systems in Laos do not compare to the Army Air Ground System (AAGS); fast systematic processing of preplanned requests for air support is thus made more difficult. On earlier occasions,

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CAS/AIPA did not always bring 7/13 intelligence and operations staffs into the planning in time for adequate study and evaluation of CAS proposals. This, in turn, did not give 7AF the proper opportunity to study the request, plan the support required, and assign it priority relative to the many other requests vying for the limited number of sorties available. Work continues among Hq 7/13AF, CAS, and AIRA Vientiane and the Embassy to improve these arrangements and much progress has been made in the past 6 months. Little progress has been made to improve communications, however.

e. Where Arc Light sorties are concerned, MACV deals direct with the AMEMB Vientiane. Advice to the Ambassador on this subject is provided by his own staff (POMIL) and AIRA. In practice, CAS also advises the Ambassador, particularly concerning the desirability and validity of Commando Nail targets, special munitions and Arc Light strikes. In this respect the CAS staff includes ex-USAF pilots. However, the Embassy has not always had the benefit of advice direct from the 7AF or 7/13AF staff, because neither of these staffs have been in the chain of communications between MACV and the Embassy.

3. The War against the logistic pipeline to SVN (in Steel Tiger Zones 1 and 2.)

a. Just as the conduct of the war in Vietnam has changed vastly over the past seven years, so has there been corresponding change in the "panhandle" of neighboring Laos, and

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particularly in the area known as Steel Tiger Zones 1 and 2 (the eastern one-third of the panhandle contiguous to Vietnam). In an earlier era, the conflict there could be handled as a counterinsurgency problem of primary interest to the U.S. country team in Laos. Now it has become a massive logistics complex having serious and direct impact on the war in Vietnam; and COMUSMACV and his operating elements, primarily Seventh Air Force, have an urgent requirement to respond rapidly to targets in this area as they develop. The Vientiane staff does not always fully appreciate MACV's military requirements in the area because they do not and cannot keep up with the day-to-day tactical intelligence and operations in that area.

b. In spite of the fact that, practically speaking, this area is no longer a part of Laos, the RLG must maintain claim to it because of its importance in the political and military maneuvering still to come on Southeast Asia. So the AMEMB Vientiane needs to preserve his basic political authority in the area. But this need not carry with it direct authority over military operations to any greater extent than is retained by the Ambassador in Saigon over military operations in SVN. The MACV requirement should be recognized as paramount in assigning responsibility for military and paramilitary operations in this particular area.

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4. Conclusion:

a. COMUSMACV should be named to the U.S. Country Team in Laos as the CINCPAC authority for controlling U.S. military operations in Laos.

b. Further, COMUSMACV should become the primary coordinating authority for all U.S. operations in Zones 1 and 2 of Southern Laos, including those conducted by CAS Vientiane, and other members of the Laos Country Team.

c. MACV should have a representative in Vientiane.. or if this is not acceptable, then in Udorn... to provide liaison, current information, and military advice on matters of direct MACV concern.

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c. The next most pressing improvement to be made is teaching the Lao Armed Forces to use more effectively what they already have. This includes not only tactics and techniques, but also the development of organization, programs, and procedures -- particularly in the administrative and logistical fields, and at the national military level as well as at the depot and battalion levels. Again, there are programs, but little support from the Laotians to make them effective.*

d. The logistical function for the Armed Forces in particular needs strengthening. There has been little effort by the U.S. to reorganize or retrain people in the military logistics, fiscal, or communications systems. The result is that while there is a sufficient quantity of equipment delivered it too often does not find its way down to the fighting units, nor is it even properly maintained in those cases when it is received.**

e. There is very little Lao initiative; no mobile reserve at any level; artillery is almost set in concrete, badly displaced and badly directed.***

f. There must be a way to transfer to Laos experiences and lessons learned the hard way in Vietnam. A great step forward would be training of intermediate leaders and managers. At present there is no third country training program for Lao

* Ibid

** Ibid

*** Ibid

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staff officers, commanders, and province officials.*

2. The Royal Lao Air Force.

a. A shortage of pilots, poor maintenance, close identification of the officers with the military-political in-fighting within the RLG and a limited number of advisors have all hampered training of the RLAF and detracted from its ability to perform at peak effectiveness. Nevertheless, the RLAF has achieved some notable successes with its T-28 force, both in the generation of combat sorties and in combat effectiveness. This is attributable in part to the fact that U.S. assistance to T-28 units amounts almost to a supervisory cadre; the Air Attache operates four Air Operations Centers (AOC's); at Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet and Pakse. A typical AOC is composed of a commander, T-28 instructor pilot, one or more FAC's (Raven FAC program), one medic, one radio operator/repairman, and one specialist each for aircraft armament, engine and ordinance. U.S. maintenance personnel are actually maintaining aircraft, and loading munitions.**

b. RLAF cargo and helicopter operations have not been so successful. Air crews are very proficient, but they lack supervision at the middle and high (command) levels similar to that provided by USAF personnel in the T-28 operation.***

c. According to Deputy Chief, JUSMAGTHAI, repeated attempts have been made to expand RLAF self sufficiency.

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However, in late 1967 it became apparent that this concept was not going to work. Excessive stocks were being laid in; funds available were being spent for "goodie" items; pilferage and theft were exorbitant; supervision was practically non-existent; and the individual motivation was extremely limited and sporadic. These conditions are attributed to two factors:

- (1) The lack of sufficient advisory personnel and;
- (2) The lack of competent leadership at all levels of the RLAF command structure.*

d. While the limited number of Lao pilots have proved competent, a satisfactory maintenance capability has never been developed. For example, the RLAF is incapable of performing more than 50% of the phase inspections for a total of 36 aircraft.**

3. Paramilitary Forces.

a. The U.S. has supplemented its MAP effort by organizing, training, and financing... with RLG approval... extensive paramilitary forces to bolster the RLG presence in remote regions where no regular forces are stationed. These forces are advised and controlled clandestinely through entirely separate channels from the MAP. They respond to U.S. interests and provide a buffer between the populous regions under RLG control and the areas under PL/NVN domination.

b. Auto Defense de Choc (ADC) units were organized in the remote villages or areas where the lack of FAR presence left the populace open to PL/NVN subversion and terrorism.

* Ibid

** Ibid

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These ADC's are "home guard" irregular forces, skilled in scouting and guerrilla warfare, though lacking in formal military training. In addition to acting as local security forces, they also provide a valuable net for the collection of intelligence on enemy movement and activities. At the same time, the U.S. began an intensive campaign to win the loyalty of the large, non-committed hill tribes for the RLG. This entailed supplying rice, arms, and leadership. Though not an effective, integrated force, the thousands of hill tribesmen bring a formidable, friendly guerrilla presence to the rear and along the flanks of the enemy-held LOC's and areas of control. Their mere presence has tied down thousands of PL/NVN in static defense and costly pacification programs.

c. But to stem the tide of the PL/NVN advance these measures were not enough. The FAR hesitance or inability to conduct offensive operations, and the lack of means of establishing a counterstrike capability could not carry the war back to the enemy, without committing the U.S. to overt military intervention on the ground. These considerations led to the formation of the Special Guerrilla Units (SGU's), with RLG approval, and under the facade of RLG control. In practice however, the SGU's are trained, professional mercenaries, U.S.-paid and U.S.-advised.

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They are not tied to a local area as are the ADC units, and they are ill-suited for garrison duty in the towns. Coupled with USAF and Air America airlift capability, they comprise an air-mobile guerrilla strike force for the harrassment of enemy logistics, for special operations, and as quick-reaction reinforcements. In addition, they perform in a new role as Forward Air Guides (FAG's), locating and pinpointing enemy units for air strikes. The SGU's are not, however, infantry units; and they are not suited for holding ground against a determined enemy attack. In all of Laos except MR 2 the SGU's are still almost completely reliant upon their CAS advisors. In MR 2 they are under Major General Vang Pao who has become a leader in his own right, but who has good competent USA advisors in the field with him and his subordinate units.

d. General Vang Pao is himself of special interest. Although, as Commander of MR 2, he has regular forces as well as paramilitary forces under his command, his real offensive strength is the SGU's. Of all the FAR general officers, he is the only one who has enjoyed any notable success against the Communist forces in Laos. Vang Pao is a Meo, but considers himself a Lao. Because of his ethnic background, he has always been looked down upon by his

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contemporaries in the FAR, and it has been only through his battlefield successes and ability to command the loyalty of the Meo tribes that he has risen to his present status. As a Meo, Vang Pao is also fighting for his homeland and a place for his people in Northeast Laos. His popularity and personal magnetism is manifest among the people in Northeast Laos as well as among his troops. Because of his background, U.S. advice and counsel are assimilated quickly; and he now plans his own operations only referring his plans to his CAS advisors for their review and approval. This, of course, he must do, for the U.S. holds the purse strings and controls logistics, and provides much of the tactical airlift and tactical air strike support upon which he relies heavily. Some elements of the RLG view Vang Pao's actions and methods as an attempt to gain political power for himself rather than as necessary maneuvers to win military successes. Because of this, he has been forced to lean heavily upon U.S. support to achieve his aims, often ignoring or circumventing the FAR General Staff, thus lessening his acceptance and widening the gulf between the ruling clique and himself. Souvanna Phouma and King Savong, however, have reluctantly come to bestow honor and recognition upon Vang Pao, which assures his tenure in the FAR for the present. General Vang Pao learned from early experience that

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the line units of the FAR and other Lao forces could not withstand the better weaponry and training of the North Vietnamese in conventional warfare. Therefore, he chooses to employ his forces in a manner which gives them the advantages of surprise, mobility, and knowledge of the terrain. With the RLAF and U.S. airlift capability available to him, Vang Pao has enlarged upon the original concept of mobility and now carries the fighting behind the Communist lines to attack or harass base camp areas and LOC's. These tactics are designed to tie down large numbers of enemy troops in defensive or security roles, thus bringing about a better balance in the areas of confrontation. In addition to sound tactics, Vang Pao provides charismatic leadership to his troops and people. He makes a point of appearing in the front lines or in remote areas to direct operations and strengthen morale, building a greater bond of loyalty and promoting spirit. The patterns of warfare in northeast Laos indicate that, without the presence of the NVN, regular friendly forces and the SGU's could effectively deal with the PL and dissident Neutralists. It is interesting to note that under General Vang Pao there are more diversified units, ethnic minorities, and irregular forces than in any part of Laos, yet they come closest to comprising a truly "national" Army than in any other region. This same hodgepodge of

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regular battalions, SGO's, and irregulars also opposes the largest number of NVA and PL of any area of Laos, and nevertheless appears to accomplish the most. These are the only troops which seem intent on carrying the war to the enemy rather than fighting defensive or delaying actions. They also represent the greatest obstacle to Communist aggression in Laos despite recent setbacks in MR 2 which have seriously impaired friendly morale.

4. U.S. Military Assistance Policy in Laos.

a. The deficiencies of the Lao Armed Forces are recognized and, to a degree, accepted by the U.S. mission to Laos. There is a rationale to this... the assumption (no doubt true) being that no matter how effective the Lao Armed Forces become, the NVN/PL could and would always muster superior forces; and that in the end, short of total military involvement itself, the U.S. must rely on political arrangements (the U.S./Russian understanding of 1961) to maintain a stable political, economic and military situation. This is not to say that a Lao military force is unnecessary. Some deterrent is needed to make PL aggression at least moderately costly, if only to assist the Russians in controlling their side's activity. But strong FAR would only cause the NVN/PL to upgrade their forces, and make them that much more difficult for the Russians to control. Apparently, the present level

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of efficiency of the Laotian Armed Forces is judged (by the U.S. Mission Chief) to be about right.*

b. There is a frequently heard rationale that these deficiencies are inevitable in a nation where the Buddhist Religion is strongly pacifist; the people are more lovers than fighters; basic internal cohesion is sadly lacking; and the population is small, poor and technically uneducated. Thus, it would be folly to attempt to force the Lao's to do more than they as a nation are willing to do, and therefore wrong to put any substantially greater effort -- U.S. advisors or funds -- into the Military Aid Program. This rationale is logical; but the assumption concerning fighting ability of the ethnic Lao is open to challenge.. Lao T-29 pilots have shown that they can be highly aggressive (in fact foolhardy), if led that way. There is also the example of CAS's guerrillas, who illustrate what better pay, better advice, and better leadership can do.

c. There is probably another strong (and unspoken) reason against substantially increasing the effectiveness of the Laotian armed forces. An effective Army might put too much power in the hands of Lao military rightists who might undertake too ambitious a military campaign, or take over the neutralist government and thus trigger an overwhelming PL/NVN reaction which the Russians might not be able

*Conversation Minister Hurwich and MG Seith, 30 May 69

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to control, and which could force the U.S. and Russia into a confrontation which neither want. The U.S. mission is probably very conscious of the example of General Phoumi Novason, who in the late 1950's seemed about to drag Thailand and reluctant U.S. with him into a major confrontation with Red China, as a by product of the Laotian Civil War.

d. If the above thesis concerning operating U.S. policy in Laos is correct, why has the U.S. mission in Laos asked for M-16 rifles for the FAR, and why does it emphasize increased air support? Probably, the M-16 rifle represents a badly needed boost to morale and proof of continued U.S. support, but not as a serious escalation of the Lao Army's capability. As to air power, it cannot occupy ground nor capture population, and so does not directly threaten the political and economic balance in Laos; and it can be turned off at will by the Ambassador, because the bulk of it belongs to the U.S. Thus, U.S. air power can be used to compensate for the deficiencies of the Lao ground forces, without running the risks that a potent ground force would carry. Air power can also be used to slap the wrist of the Communists if they go too far (witness the unprecedented relaxation of air operating restrictions in the Plaine Des Jarre area in April 1969...Operation Rain Dance... when the NVN/PL seemed about to threaten the Meo Heartland and Vang Pao's forces.) Probably,

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the Communists were expected to read a message in this, and limit their offensive accordingly. And the PL offensive was indeed limited.

4. MAP Organization for Laos.

a. Although no foreign military advisors other than the French are allowed in Laos, the 1962 Geneva Accords permit Military Assistance Programs by other nations. This partially explains the small number of advisors in the field, and the unusual organizational arrangement which divides military assistance functions into four parts, each reporting independently to the AMEMB Vientiane. These arrangements... few advisors and fragmented organization... do assure that the program can be kept within the scope of U.S. objectives by the U.S. Ambassador, even if they have not created the best attainable military force out of the U.S. materiel resources committed. A description of the main elements of the organization follows:

(1) Dep Chief JUSMAGTHAI. MAAG Laos was withdrawn in 1962 and was reestablished in Bangkok under the cover title "Deputy Chief, JUSMAG, Thailand" although it continued to report directly to CINCPAC. The "Dep Chief" is responsible for planning and programming military assistance programs and for the receipt, storage, and shipping of MAP supplies and

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equipment. In practice his logistic activities are confined to the receipt and storage of equipment and supplies in Thailand, for he has no responsibility to ship or account for supplies in Laos. He also supervises training programs accomplished in Thailand and processes the requirements for training which requires execution outside the country. In addition he is responsible for advising the Ambassador on MAP matters. This function is located in Bangkok, and does not really participate directly in the day-to-day operation of a MAP program for Laos.

(2) Requirements Organization. In 1962, retired and ex-military personnel, from junior NCOs to senior officer personnel, were set up in Vientiane as the Requirements Organization (RO), within the U.S. agency for international development (AID). Today the office has 30 personnel. The RO formulates the military assistance program and develops qualitative and quantitative requirements for the Lao military forces in cooperation and coordination with the Deputy Chief JUSMAGTHAI. RO manages the delivery and accounting for equipment and supplies from Thailand to Laos in each of the five military regions without military supervision or inspection. RO personnel are not part of DOD; they do not act as advisors, and are not charged with reporting on the final use of the items supplied.

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(3) The U.S. Air and Army Attaches provide military advice to the Lao Armed Forces and, in practice, have influence over its force structure. There is no Defense Attache. The Attache offices also perform normal DIA tasks, and are administratively supported by DIA. Control over the military advisory function of the Attaches lies with the Ambassador, as CINCPAC has no direct authority over the Attaches, and DIA has no responsibility in this respect.

(4) In 1966, DOD approved "Project 404" which attached 117 military and 5 civilian personnel to the Deputy Chief JUSMAG THAI JTD for the purpose of assisting and advising the Lao armed forces. Seventy-one "Project 404" Army personnel were sent to Laos as Assistant Army Attaches. But only about 18 or 20 Army personnel are directly engaged in advising the Lao Army in the field. The remainder of the Army personnel are based in Vientiane, assigned largely to intelligence and communications support. About 34 AF "Project 404" personnel are under operational control of the Air Attache, but are in the country clandestinely. The Air Attache's office has also been augmented with TDY personnel to a total of about 120. The bulk of the USAF personnel are in the field, but only a relatively small number are devoted to advisory services, for most of the effort must be applied to direct support of the air war in

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Laos and to the support of maintenance and munitions operations for the Laotian T-28 force.

c. There is a very strong U.S. Mission position against allowing a U.S. military officer to operate the MAP for the Laos country team, even clandestinely. There are many reasons given, the chief of which are the 1962 Geneva Accords; there is also a contention that the present arrangements work fine.* But the writer believes that the greatest (unspoken) fear is that a military man will, if he is good, work too hard to make the Lao Armed Forces more efficient; he might generate too much pressure for many actions to upgrade the Laotian Armed Forces; he might become too emotionally involved with the objectives of the Lao military leaders whom he advises. For all of the above reasons it is suspected that the Mission has deliberately kept control of the military aid program directly in the hands of Mission Chief, so that it can be maintained at a level consistent with U.S. policy, as postulated in the previous paragraphs.

5. Conclusions:

a. U.S. policy for Military Assistance to Laos should be verified by CINCPAC. If for overriding political reasons the policy is to permit the Lao Armed Forces to remain at a lower than attainable level of efficiency within approved force levels, then the present arrangements are probably

*Conversation Minister Robert Horwich and MG Seith, 30 May 69

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as good as any. This policy, if it exists, should be reviewed in light of the current situation, which finds weak Laotian armed forces facing better equipped and supported PL and NVN battalions throughout the country. It should also be reviewed in light of "T-Day Planning"; if the Laotian Armed Forces are low in quality after hostilities in South Vietnam end, and if covert fighting continues in Laos as it most probably will, then the requirement for continued U.S. air support will be correspondingly larger.

b. If U.S. policy is to get the most military quality for the money invested, it can do better with military assistance in Laos by taking the following steps:

(1) Place an adequate number of U.S. advisors where the guidance and direction is needed, specifically in the Logistics, Administrative middle management and leadership areas. The number of advisors required is probably not large.

(2) Integrate all MAP functions under one organization which receives its technical direction and administration from CINCPAC and which, for policy and operational control is responsive to the U.S. Ambassador. The need for cover is recognized. However, if the situation demands it - and appropriate cover for a MAAG function can be developed - additional effective and experienced military personnel who are equal to this job are available.

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