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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

JCSM-170-68
21 March 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: PRAIRIE FIRE - Phase III (U)

1. (U) Reference is made to:
 - a. JCSM-215-67, dated 20 April 1967, subject as above.
 - b. A memorandum by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, dated 30 June 1967, subject as above.
 - c. COMUSMACV message to CINCPAC, 150407Z January 1968, JCS IN 36859.
 - d. CINCPAC message to the JCS, 060115Z March 1968, JCS IN 53073.

2. (S) On 20 April 1967, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense (reference 1a) a proposed concept for the development of a guerrilla potential in the southeastern panhandle area of Laos. This proposal was visualized as a complementary effort to ongoing PRAIRIE FIRE operations and included as an essential element direction, control, and participation by US Special Forces personnel under COMUSMACV's Studies and Observations Group.

3. (S) After consultation with the Director of Central Intelligence, the Deputy Secretary of Defense advised (reference 1b) that the Central Intelligence Agency had concurred in the proposal and had asked that the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, seek the concurrence of the Department of State before undertaking actual operations.

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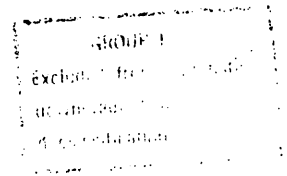
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4. (S) There followed a series of meetings and consultations between the representatives of COMUSMACV and US Embassy, Vientiane, which culminated in an Embassy position, supported by the Department of State, proposing a substantially modified concept of operations. Most significant in the modification was the absence of US participation and control.

5. (S) This situation has resulted in COMUSMACV deciding (reference lc) that, under these restrictions, the program would not be effective and that the proposal should therefore be withdrawn.

6. (S) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have reexamined this matter. They consider that, although the original concept had considerable merit, the chances of developing an effective program without a reasonable degree of US participation are minimal.

7. (U) The Joint Chiefs of Staff withdraw the recommendation made in reference la.

8. (U) A recommended memorandum to the Secretary of State, advising him of this decision, is contained in the Appendix hereto.

9. (S) A further recommendation regarding the development of improved intelligence capabilities among the indigenous inhabitants of the PRAIRIE FIRE area, as mentioned in paragraphs 4 and 5 of reference lc and in reference ld, is the subject of a separate memorandum (JCSM-171-68).

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

Earle G. Wheeler

EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

Attachment

APPENDIX

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Subject: PRAIRIE FIRE - Phase III (U)

1. (U) Reference is made to:
 - a. CM-2490-67, from the Chairman, JCS, to the Under Secretary of State, dated 5 July 1967, subject as above.
 - b. Department of State letter from the Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities, dated 1 December 1967.
2. (U) Reference is requested State Department concurrence in a proposal to develop a guerrilla potential in the PRAIRIE FIRE area of southern Laos.
3. (U) Subsequent to consultations in Southeast Asia between representatives of COMUSMACV and US Embassy, Vientiane, concurrence in a substantially modified concept was given (reference 1b). At the same time, the US Ambassador to Laos advised COMUSMACV that he would concur in a similarly restricted program.
4. (U) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have reexamined this matter and conclude that it would be unwise to undertake the program under the modified concept. Specifically, past experience has proven that, without a certain degree of US direction and control, tribal elements, particularly in a difficult operational environment such as the southeastern panhandle, will not function with any degree of effectiveness.
5. (U) Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have withdrawn the proposal forwarded by reference 1a.

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Appendix

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