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MEMORANDUM

Subject: Meeting of Task Force on Laos, March 7, 1961

Review of Decisions Reached at White House Meeting

Mr. Parsons reviewed the decisions which had been reached at the White House meeting of March 3.

1. Formulation of plans by Defense for the recapture of the Plaine des Jarres.

2. Interdepartmental meeting to approve these plans.

Since Admiral Felt and Chief PEO are returning to Washington on Wednesday, March 8, it was decided that it would be preferable to wait for their return before holding this meeting.

3. Advisability of Ambassador Johnson's going to Phnom Penh to see Souvanna Phouma. After discussing this idea in the Department, it was decided instead to instruct Ambassador Trimble to see Souvanna Phouma. The possibility of Ambassador Brown's going to Phnom Penh would then be examined. Ambassador Trimble's report on his talk with Souvanna was reviewed.

4. Efforts to broaden government. Phoumi is going to Phnom Penh to meet with Souvanna on March 9.

5. General Gavin should see General de Gaulle to request greater French cooperation. It was decided that it was still a little early to proceed with this matter.

6. Admiral Felt and a PEO officer should be brought back to Washington for consultations. They are arriving March 8.

7. Advisability of Admiral Felt's going to Laos after his visit to Washington. This matter will be considered a few days hence.

8. Department should give maximum publicity to expose Russian build-up of Pathet Lao forces.

It was noted that to do more than what was now being done would require our answering what we were prepared to do to stop this build-up.

British

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JFKL: JFKP: NSF: Country File, b.130, F: "Laos: General 3/1/61-3/13/61."

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British Demarche

The British demarche requesting our agreement to the Soviet proposal for recalling the ICC in New Delhi was reviewed. It was noted that the matter had already been leaked to the press in England and that the British had recently used this tactic on a number of occasions—a tactic which makes it very difficult to hold private discussions with them. It was decided to wait for the outcome of a number of actions which are in train before giving our answer (i.e., comments from the field on this demarche; discussions with Admiral Felt; discussions among the Lao in Phnom Penh).

Recommended Courses of Action

In introducing the paper on recommended courses of action, Mr. Parsons noted that it had always been recognized that for the Neutral Nations Commission proposal to have any chance of success, there had to be an element of strength to persuade the other side to dampen down its activities. Since we did not move in SEATO and the offensive against the Plaine des Jarres has not succeeded, this element is lacking and explains the fact that we have had no more success.

It was noted that the Communist bloc considered the conquest of Southeast Asia as a whole and that a further paper would attempt to address itself to that question.

After considerable discussion, it was agreed that Defense should make recommendations as to what could be done on the ground to help our diplomatic action and that

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Consideration will be given to the substantive position we should take at the SEATO Ministerial Meeting.

Consideration will be given to what we would do to support and train the FAL if the situation continues as at present.

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Lao Police

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Laos Police

The problem of police force was brought up. It was pointed out that the authorized complement which we had agreed to finance was 3,200 men. Phoumi had raised this force to 12,000 without prior consultation with us and ICA insisted that it would only pay and train the original 3,200. Thus there was a floating group about which a decision had to be taken. The question was: What was to be the role of the police? The mission of the original 3,200 force was to maintain law and order and included a special branch. Phoumi now wanted to build up a para-military force along the lines of the Malay police.

It was decided that: (a) we should seek an opinion from the Country Team; (b) if the increased force level is approved, request Department of Defense's views as to their military value; (c) this matter would also be discussed with Admiral Felt as Ambassador Brown had recommended.

SNIE

Finally, it was agreed that an interdepartment group should meet as soon as possible to consider a SNIE setting forth the basis for possible courses of action.

March 8, 1961

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