

SECRET

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Mr. Rostow

RECOMMENDED COURSES OF ACTION -- LAOS

Mr. Rostow

Problem

The US has determined that in the long run the most desirable means of keeping Laos free and independent would be through its neutralization, which should be internationally guaranteed. The success of this policy depends on Communist recognition that the US is determined to support the independence and integrity of Laos and that, in advocating such a policy, the US is not acting from weakness. We are confronted therefore with the problems of (a) strengthening Laos internally to meet the Pathet Lao threat and (b) making clear that the security of Southeast Asia from Communist encroachment is a firm and non-negotiable US position.

A. Developments which have contributed to possible erroneous estimate of our intentions.

1. Inability to obtain meaningful SEATO action.
2. Soviet airlift has gone unchallenged.
3. RLQ offensive has bogged down.
4. US efforts to bring about peaceful solution through NNC or similar negotiations may have been interpreted by communists as willingness to pay any price to avoid military involvement.

B. Indications that an erosion of our position is taking place.

1. Support of Kong Le-PL "Government" in northern Laos taking place openly and in blatant disregard of Lao sovereignty.
2. Hardening of Souvanna Phouma's attitude by positive alignment with communist offensive. His trip to Xieng Khouang -- his statements there and on return to Phnom Penh -- bellicosity of Kong Le-Souphanouvong, etc.
3. Hesitancy of Cambodia and Burma to cooperate with any effort such as NNC which they fear would be unacceptable to communists. They are keeping their record clean lest in the takeover they anticipate ~~they~~ they would suffer at the hands of the new masters of the area.

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4. Genuine fear on the part of our allies such as the Philippines, Thais, Vietnamese to say nothing of GRC that our determination is faltering, e.g., Thai feelers on bilateral, Manila conferences, etc.
5. UK, France have taken considerable courage from growing conviction US will do nothing which can be interpreted as "provocative".

C. Steps to be taken to meet the problem.

1. Presidential statement when the Secretary takes off for SEATO setting forth our continuing interest in the security of SEA.

2. Request Ambassador Brown to study as a matter of priority the feasibility of drawing up a counter-insurgency plan along the lines of the one drawn up for Viet-Nam. It must be recognized that the plan for Laos will have to be "lighter" in view of the relative dearth of qualified personnel in all fields there. A start may be made on the basis of Phoui's old concept of "pacification committees".

3. Request Ambassador Brown to re-examine the training program immediately with a view to improving the FAL's counter-guerrilla capabilities as quickly as possible. In this connection we should continue to work with the Thais and, if feasible, with the French Military Mission.

4. Our instructions to Ambassador Thompson, in which we set forth our position and request the Soviets to explain theirs, represents a stiffening of our attitude toward the Soviets. We plan to inform the British and French as soon as possible of the content of this demarche and also indicate to them that this is an expression of continued US determination to preserve the independence of the area.

5. In view of the serious possibility that the communists are confident of the outcome of the situation in Laos and may therefore play it along without really seeking a peaceful settlement, we should be prepared to take measures which will make clear to all concerned that the US is not willing to see Laos go down the drain by default. Specifically, we have in mind moving a task force into Thailand which could be used not

only

only as an earnest of our determination but also to insure control of certain centers of communication in Laos if such a move became necessary. Such an action should preferably be taken within the context of SEATO but if as likely that proves impossible, we should be prepared to move unilaterally with whatever support we can obtain from our allies. With this course of action in mind, we should lay the groundwork by ventilating our views to our SEATO allies.

6. Groundwork for the above moves should also be laid by continuing to publicize communist actions in Laos and South Viet-Nam and particularly by emphasizing that these actions are coordinated and part of an over-all communist plan to take over Southeast Asia by force.

7. Offer assist GVN patrol its coast. This would be done with or without publicity as decided after consultation with GVN and after nature of US activity had been defined.

8. When it becomes clear that deterrent gestures and attempts at peaceful solutions are of no avail, we should be prepared to take direct measures against the Soviet airlift. If this action is eventually decided, the next step should also be considered at the same time. Specifically, we should expect a Soviet counterblow against Vientiane airport and perhaps also against Thai airfields. We should therefore be prepared to retaliate immediately by a strike against airfields in North Viet-Nam.

9. Whether or not our association with Thailand is further formalized in a bilateral treaty, we should as priority measure step up our military and economic programs in order to strengthen Thailand's security and ties to us.

10. Make effort to expand regional communications in SEA, especially roads of strategic importance, e.g., Bangkok --
Quinhon.

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SEATO program
Felt in it

Free hand of French - appeal for King
Surface Vietnam - Viet Minh
connection.

FE:SEA/Director and Staff 3/7/61

Dimd appeal