

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

SECRET

March 9, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: WWR *WWR*

SUBJECT: Evolution of Our Policy in Laos.

Following is a summary of the evolution of our policy towards Laos since January 20.

1. In line with Ambassador Brown's cable (Vientiane 1364, January 18, 1961) we decided to seek a diplomatic solution in Laos based on a neutral commission. As a means of maximizing our bargaining position, an offensive was to be launched by General Phoumi against the Plaine des Jarres, which called for its capture, on our estimate, in the period of February 6-27.
2. Communist policy was to continue to press for an ICC meeting; to hold and strengthen the Pathet Lao position in the Plaine des Jarres; and to frustrate Phoumi.
3. In line with our diplomatic proposal, the King of Laos made his declaration of policy on February 19; but the neutral proposal had evidently failed by the end of February. Neither Burma nor Cambodia would play.
4. By February 27 it was also clear that General Phoumi was incapable of coping with the armed resistance of the opposition, having moved only a few kilometers down Route 7 to the Plaine des Jarres.
5. At a meeting of March 3 with the President, a reassessment of our position began and it was decided to recall Admiral Felt for consultation.

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E. O. 11652, SEC. 3(E), 5(D), 5(E) AND 11

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6. On March 6-7 a probing operation by the Pathet Lao forces pushed General Phoumi's forces out of the Phou Khoun road junction, the area from which he had hoped to launch his offensive.

7. Although General Phoumi has stated his intention of regaining the road junction, the capabilities and morale of his forces are in question.

8. On the diplomatic front, pressures are growing for an ICC conference. Diplomatically the British support for our position has been somewhat ambiguous; and the French have been, on the whole, openly dissident with respect to both Phoumi and ourselves.

9. In short, our initial dispositions with respect to Laos, both diplomatically and militarily, have not succeeded; and we enter a new phase.