

SENATE
POLISH COMMENTARY ON U.S. REPORT ON LAOS

Source: Article entitled "Eloquent Report" in Dziennik Młodzież (The Banner of Youth) of 3 October 1971, page 3 - - a daily youth organ published in Warsaw, Poland/

An unusually informative report has been released by the USA Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. It was not published in its entirety but rather in substantially abridged form, and that only following five weeks of discussions and negotiations with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Washington administration. But even this fragmentary version of the Senate committee report gives a lot to think about. It indicates that the United States will be spending in the 1971-1972 fiscal year 2 billion dollars "to save Laos from communism." This sum constitutes 30 percent of total USA military aid to Taiwan over the last 25 years. We should mention also at the outset that half of this 2-billion dollar sum is allocated for covering the costs of bombing supply routes of the Laotian liberation forces as well as supply routes being used by the patriotic forces of South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The so-called military aid for the Royal Laotian Army - exclusive of the cost of maintaining Thai mercenaries - will amount to 347 million dollars. For purposes of comparison, let us add that last year it amounted to approximately 300 million dollars, or an average of 150 dollars for every citizen of Laos, not excluding infants and the aged. American economic aid for this country, on the other hand, will amount to only 52 million dollars. But let us not delude ourselves into thinking, however, that this "economic aid" will result in any new industrial plants for Laos, will contribute to the development of agriculture, education, health care, etc. It will be used to build

strategic roads and to purchase (of course, primarily in the United States) basic necessities, for the war-ravaged Laotian economy is unable to handle the needs of the domestic market, even in rice, although at one time Laos was an important rice exporter.

The notorious CIA for its part is spending 70 million dollars to maintain its own military forces in Laos and an equal sum on the Thai mercenaries fighting in Laos under CIA banners. It should be admitted that: this is the first instance of a revelation of an official American document which discusses in such frank terms CIA activities in Laos.

In the past the Washington administration and the Pentagon vigorously denied such "insinuations," endeavoring to conceal from world public opinion and its own people the nature and scope of activities in Laos of this American espionage and sabotage empire. Recently, one of the American diplomats stationed in Vientiane, possibly encouraged by the report of the Senate committee, ^dconfided to a correspondent of the Paris daily Le Monde: "We do not want American citizens to see on their television screens American soldiers fighting in Laos. What we are doing here has nothing in common with our type of society. We are conducting a war employing clandestine means and illegal methods which our society could not tolerate. We, therefore, do not wish to publicize our activities."

This was stated cynically but candidly, although this anonymous diplomat was merely confirming long-known facts. It has been known for some time that the American command of special military units made up of mercenaries and Laotians is located in Pakkao. Only a few kilometers separate the "secret base" at Lang-Cheng, at which CIA-financed units for special assignments

are stationed, under the command of Major General Vang Pao. In plain terms this is a CIA mercenary army whose task is to penetrate liberated areas, to set up ambushes, conduct sabotage and assassinations.

State Department statistics published this past January indicate that there were 1,034 Americans in Laos at the time. What were they doing there? There were 244 directly under the American Military Attaché in Vientiane, 300 were employed by Air America and Continental Air Service International - "private" airlines working in the service of the CIA. The ^{remain} remaining Americans were working for the International Development Agency subordinate to the United States [sic]. But even the Senate committee report does not reveal how many CIA agents are in Laos. Nor does it reveal the number of American military advisers who are right there in the ranks of the Lao rightist army.

The CIA has built 186 airfields in Laos from its own funds. These airfields are used by military aircraft in the support of military operations and sabotage actions. CIA military units are considerably better equipped and better paid than the Royal Army troops. They also have at their disposal all aircraft of the above-mentioned "private" companies. In recent months, however, these units have sustained heavy losses of personnel, and replenishment by means of recruitment among the Hmongs is encountering insuperable difficulties. In those areas where the hand of the CIA reaches, the villages have been deserted. Their inhabitants have sought refuge in liberated areas. That is why the CIA has been forced to recruit mercenaries in Thailand. Each mercenary costs 2,000 dollars a year plus 4,000 dollars in weapons and equipment.

* Desk Officer's Note: this is exact rendition of the Polish; perhaps Agency for International Development - AID was meant rather than International Development Association - IDA/

The Senate committee report ascertained that United States involvement in the Laotian "secret war" is considerably greater than the committee members and the American Senate had supposed.

The report contains wording which is not very flattering to the Lao allies of the United States. It stated thereby that the Royal Lao Army is in a pitiful state, numbering 25 people in a battalion which should number 300 soldiers. It is precisely for this reason, the report rationalizes, that the CIA must presently maintain a 30,000-man irregular army which is fighting against the Pathet Lao forces. So many soldiers of this "irregular army" have been lost, evaded induction, have deserted, or joined the Pathet Lao that "the CIA considered it necessary to bring succor to this army with 4,000 'Thai volunteers.'"

The CIA is also reaching for other "reserves." In recent months the agents of this institution have recruited 5,000 Cambodians - soldiers or refugees - and has established for them a special training camp in southern Laos. The CIA made a decision in this matter - which the Senate committee report explains - without informing the government in Phnom Penh, nor the government in Vientiane, nor even the American embassies in those countries. The only person whom the CIA informed of its intentions was Prince Boun Oun, the ruler of the southern regions of Laos. In any event, those regions which are still under the control of the Lao rightists. There is nothing surprising in this, for Boun Oun, a former agent of the French colonialists, went over to the payroll of the CIA when the French left Laos.

It must be stated, however, that the CIA agents are not very successful in their undertakings. The Mao army which they created has been practically annihilated. The Thai volunteers willingly fight against the defenseless villagers but painstakingly avoid ~~any~~ contact with the Pathet Lao armed forces. The Khmer units, trained by the CIA at great cost and effort, melted after their first battle with Pathet Lao forces. The reason? They recognized that they had been sent to the "most dangerous sectors of the front" and were being paid considerably less than the Thai mercenaries. In this situation one is hardly surprised that the authors of the report arrived at pessimistic conclusions. To be sure, in their words: "the Royal Lao Government is probably more dependent on the USA than any other government in the world," but that this is the sole "success" that the United States has achieved for its millions of dollars. The report ends with the assertion that "the situation is deteriorating from day to day, and the initiative rests in the hands of the enemy."

The authors of the Senate committee ended its report with the above statement, but a final conclusion is both logical and easy to draw: a national liberation movement cannot be quelled with forces of paid hirelings and mercenaries. With such methods no one has ever defeated a nation struggling to defend its freedom.

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