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SECRET STATE 010899

SUBJ: PROPOSED STATEMENT ON AIR INCIDENTS IN VICINITY OF
CHINESE ROAD

REF: STATE

FOLLOWING IS OUR PROPOSED PRESS GUIDANCE ON AN IF-ASKED
BASIS REGARDING DOWNED AIRCRAFT IN VICINITY OF CHINESE
ROAD. APPRECIATE YOUR COMMENTS AND/OR SUGGESTIONS BY
OPENING OF BUSINESS WASHINGTON, JANUARY 20.

BEGIN TEXT

QUESTION: WHAT INFORMATION DO YOU HAVE WITH REGARD TO
THE RECENT INCIDENTS INVOLVING US PLANES IN NORTH LAOS
IN THE VICINITY OF THE CHINESE ROAD?

ANSWER: ON DECEMBER 27, AN AIR AMERICA C-123 WAS REPORTED
MISSING IN NORTHWEST LAOS. THE UNARMED CARGO AIRCRAFT,
WHICH CARRIED ON AIR AMERICA CREW OF THREE US AND ONE
LAO, WAS ON A NORMAL RESUPPLY MISSION. THE LACK OF
ADEQUATE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION IN SOME AREAS OF LAOS RE-
QUIRES THAT SOME TOWNS BE SUPPLIED BY AIR. NAVIGATIONAL
AIDS IN LAOS ARE MOST UNSOPHISTICATED AND AT THE TIME OF
THE PLANE'S DISAPPEARANCE WE HAVE LEARNED THAT THERE WERE

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TWO NAVIGATIONAL SITES IN THE AREA WHICH WERE NOT FUNCTIONING. IN ADDITION, THERE WERE STRONG SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS AT THE TIME. SEARCH AND RESCUE EFFORTS HAVE CONTINUED SINCE THE PLANE WAS REPORTED MISSING, AND THE FAMILIES OF THE CREW HAVE BEEN KEPT APPRISED OF THESE EFFORTS. EFFORTS TO LOCATE EITHER THE PLANE OR THE CREW HAVE BEEN FUTILE TO DATE. (PARA) IN THE CONDUCT OF THESE EFFORTS, AT LEAST TWO OTHER AIR AMERICA PLANES HAVE BEEN HIT BY GROUND FIRE. THE LATEST OF THESE INCIDENTS OCCURRED ON JANUARY 15, WHEN A SMALL UNARMED PLANE (VOLPAR) WAS HIT BY GROUND FIRE, INJURING SOME OF THE CREW OF THAT PLANE. (PARA) AIR AMERICA AIRCRAFT NEVER INTENTIONALLY FLY OVER THE CHINESE COMMUNIST ROAD AREA. IN THE CASE OF THE C-123, ADVERSE CONDITIONS I DESCRIBED EARLIER MAY HAVE RESULTED IN THE PLANE WANDERING OVER THE ROAD AREA AND BEING SHOT DOWN. IN THE ABSENCE OF SUCCESS IN LOCATING EITHER THE PLANE AND/OR THE CREW, THIS REMAINS A SUPPOSITION. (PARA) IN THE CASE OF THE VOLPAR, AN ANALYSIS OF SHELL FRAGMENTS, WHEN COMBINED WITH THE KNOWN ALTITUDE AND POSITION OF THE PLANE AND THE TYPE OF WEAPONRY USED BY THE VARIOUS FORCES IN THE AREA, INDICATE A POSSIBILITY THAT THIS PLANE WAS HIT BY CHINESE FIRE.

QUESTION: DO WE INTEND TO RETALIATE OR TO PROTEST TO THE CHINESE OVER THESE INCIDENTS?

ANSWER: I HAVE NOTHING FURTHER TO SAY WITH RESPECT TO EITHER THE C-123 OR THE VOLPAR INCIDENTS.

QUESTION: WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF THE CHINESE ROAD?

ANSWER: CHINESE ROAD CONSTRUCTION CREWS HAVE WORKED INTERMITTENTLY IN NORTHERN LAOS SINCE 1962. AT THE REQUEST OF THE ROYAL LAO GOVERNMENT, THEY COMPLETED A ROAD FROM YUNNAN PROVINCE IN SOUTHERN CHINA TO PHONG SALLY. (PARA) FROM 1968 TO THE PRESENT THE CHINESE HAVE BUILT ABOUT 160 MILES OF ROAD IN NORTHERN LAOS. THERE ARE AREAS ALONG THESE ROUTES WHICH ARE HEAVILY PROTECTED BY ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONRY. WE ESTIMATE THAT THERE ARE OVER 20,000 CHINESE PRESENT IN THESE AREAS HAVING TASKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ROAD CONSTRUCTION.

QUESTION: WHAT ARE CHINESE INTENTIONS WITH REGARD TO

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THIS ROAD?

ANSWER: I WILL NOT SPECULATE ON CHINESE COMMUNIST INTENTIONS IN THIS OR ANY OTHER REGARD. END TEXT ROGERS
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