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TO RUMJFS/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE IMMEDIATE 2537

INFO RUMJIR/AMEMBASSY SAIGON 0679

RUMTBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 9838

RUMJDH/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 8180

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BT

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SUBJECT: PROPOSED STATEMENT ON AIR INCIDENTS VICINITY CHINESE ROAD

REF: VIENTIANE 0553

IF ASKED, STATE SPOKESMAN WILL USE FOLLOWING REVISED GUIDANCE.

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 AN AIR AMERICA CREW OF THREE US AND ONE LAO, WAS ON A NORMAL RESUPPLY MISSION.

AIR AMERICA AIRCRAFT DO NOT INTENTIONALLY FLY OVER THE CHINESE-BUILT ROAD. THERE WERE STRONG SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS AT THE TIME. IN ADDITION, NAVIGATIONAL AIDS IN LAOS ARE MOST UNSOPHISTICATED AND WE HAVE LEARNED THAT AT THE TIME OF THE PLANE'S DISAPPEARANCE THERE WERE TWO NAVIGATIONAL SITES IN THE AREA WHICH WERE NOT FUNCTIONING.

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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.

IN THE CONDUCT OF THESE EFFORTS, AT LEAST THREE 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, INJURING SOME OF THE CREW OF THAT PLANE. YOU WILL RECALL THAT I ADDRESSED THIS QUESTION ON JANUARY 17. I HAVE NOTHING TO ADD TO WHAT I SAID AT THE TIME.

QUESTION: DO WE HAVE ANY EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT IT WAS CHINESE FIRE THAT HIT THESE PLANES?

ANSWER: WE WILL NOT SPECULATE ON THE SOURCE OF THE 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 YUNAN PROVINCE IN SOUTHERN CHINA TO PHONG SALLY. 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 THIS ROAD?

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