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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

12 June 1959

STAFF DRAFT: LAOS . . . thru the looking glass, darkly . . .

1. On June 6, the Lao Government decided to release the leaders of the Neo Lao Hak Zat (NLHZ) from house arrest and to declare the incident of the renegade Pathet Lao battalion ended. At least for the immediate future this decision has ended the danger that the Lao Government and military would undertake an overly enthusiastic effort to suppress all pro-Communist elements. Such an effort would have risked serious international repercussions and further complicated the problem of getting underway a joint US-French program to train the Lao Army. The Lao Government's decision will probably lead to some tapering off of the barrage of charges and threats issuing from Hanoi and Peking until some new issue presents itself.

2. On May 29 the US-French talks in Paris on a joint training program for the Lao Army were concluded and a memorandum, "General Principles Looking Toward a Possible Eventual Agreement with the Royal Lao Government on Training of its Army," was submitted to the US and French governments for

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approval. On the one hand, this memorandum calls for a considerably greater role for the US than the French originally appeared willing to accept. On the other hand, it preserves a far greater role for the French than the Lao Government has indicated it is willing to accept.

3. The vague terms of the Memorandum concerning command relationships provide many possibilities for friction between the US and French training personnel. Moreover, the suspicion of many French military and administrative advisors that the US is seeking to elbow them out of Laos will almost certainly complicate the working arrangements. However, we believe that these problems will be less acute at higher military and diplomatic levels and that the French Government will probably be more cooperative than it has in the past, particularly if de Gaulle personally approves the joint-training program, as we believe he will.* The French both in Laos and in Paris, appear finally to have realized that the Lao have a strong desire to end the Franco-Lao military relationship. Many French will persist in the belief that the growing anti-French attitude of the Lao is due to US machinations. However, the French,

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* On 12 June, State received informal word that the High Defense Council, with de Gaulle presiding, has approved the Memorandum.

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particularly at higher levels, probably are becoming convinced that for the short run at least, their best chance of maintaining a position in Laos lies in cooperation with the US.

4. The manner and timing of presenting to the Lao the general principles for joint-training arrived at in the Paris talks are yet to be worked out. No matter how presented, a plan for a joint US-French training program will probably be resisted by the Lao. They have become increasingly outspoken in their dissatisfaction with the French record in Laos and in their desire that the US take over all French functions in training, equipping and advising their army. However, the Lao have little choice but to accept a joint-training program and we believe that they will do so, although probably with some reservations and dissatisfaction.

5. Initiation of a joint-training program for the Lao Army will almost certainly evoke strong protests from Hanoi, Peiping, and Moscow, and probably India. There will probably be a new round of demands for reconvening the ICC-Laos and ^{for} a meeting of the Geneva Co-chairmen (UK-USSR). Thus ~~f.r.~~, the UK has stood firm on its position that the Lao Government's actions have not violated the Geneva Accords but have been in

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fact tolerant in the face of Pathet Lao provocations. If the training program is deftly handled, the UK will probably continue to stand firm. It is possible that Hanoi and/or Peiping may make some military gestures designed to create crises in Laos which could be used to launch a campaign for a high level international conference, including Communist China, to review completely the Geneva Accords or to consider broader Far East issues. Such a crisis, which could involve "volunteers" from North Vietnam, would probably be intended to fall short of provoking US military intervention, but the chances of miscalculation could be great. We continue to see no direct connection between the Berlin crisis and Communist actions with respect to Laos.

JACK KERRY KING

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