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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Stabilizing the Situation in Southeast Asia

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The Communists may well see an opportunity for broad forward movement in the recent course of events in Southeast Asia. The political climate is dominated by widespread speculation on neutralist solutions for the area sparked by France's recognition of Communist China and deGaulle's statements as well as Prince Sihanouk's efforts to obtain international guarantees of Cambodian neutrality by threatening to turn to Hanoi and Peiping. The Communists may well believe that the United States is unwilling to exert its power effectively to defend its positions in Southeast Asia. They, as well as deGaulle and Sihanouk, must be disabused to any such ideas; and our friends, especially the Thais and Vietnamese, must be reassured as to our determination and intentions.

In our view the recent Communist advances in central Laos highlight the continuing erosion of the situation in Laos. We have a clear and understandable immediate issue -- the continued flagrant Communist violation of the Geneva Accords.

Objectives

With respect to Laos, we must undertake a series of coordinated

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political and military actions designed (1) to discourage the Communist side from continued advances against the neutralist/conservative forces, (2) to give us additional time to continue the efforts we have been making to strengthen and consolidate areas under the control of neutralist/conservative forces, and (3) to preserve our freedom of action in responding to any further actions undertaken by the Communists. ^{we propose} These actions do not involve committing U. S. forces to Laos.

Argument

In the broader context of Southeast Asia, our actions must be designed to give the Communist side reason to believe that we are prepared to escalate the conflict in the area in order to defend our positions there. Our actions should in no way foreclose options we may later wish to pursue with respect to South Viet-Nam or North Viet-Nam as well as Laos. Communist concern should be reinforced by gradually accumulating evidence of our willingness to support actions against North Viet-Nam itself under the presently approved plan (OPLAN 34-A-64) or on a more extensive scale. We should make it clear that our actions stem from our concern over the situation in Southeast Asia as a whole, and that our actions with respect to Thailand and Laos are indeed coordinated with our assistance to South Viet-Nam.

While none of the actions we propose is decisive in itself, all of them taken together should represent some actual increase in United States military capability within Southeast Asia and demonstrate our concern over the course of recent events together with our determination

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to reverse that course.

Reconvening of Geneva Conference?

We do not propose to reconvene the Geneva Conference on Laos at this time. Nevertheless, the Communist side could do so, and Prince Souvanna might if he became extremely discouraged over the situation in Laos. Moreover, at some future time, it might actually be in our interest that a Conference be held. In any event, the measures which we are proposing would tend to put us in a stronger position to participate effectively in such a Conference should one occur.

Regional Cooperation

In view of Souvanna's key importance in the Geneva settlement, it is essential to coordinate closely with him, obtaining his support or tacit acquiescence.

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This coordination is particularly important because both Souvanna and the Thai may have reservations on varying specific actions to be taken. Their reaction will be conditioned by the intensity of Communist pressures and our willingness to meet them squarely.

The actions we propose will not in themselves cause Prince Sihanouk to accelerate his timetable to threats unless they are executed in such a manner as to cause suspicion that they are directed against

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b. With regard to Southeast Asia outside of Laos (timing as mutually agreed by Department of State and Department of Defense).

***(1) Deploy additional US combat forces (ground and/or air) to Thailand.

***(2) Deploy a carrier group in South China sea to area off South Viet-Nam.

(3) Expansion and/or extension of current Special Warfare Exercise in Thailand, if feasible.

(4) Earlier scheduling of the SEATO air exercise now scheduled in Thailand for April, if feasible.

2. That, together with the foregoing measures, we move in the diplomatic arena (a) to reassure our allies as to our intentions to stand by US commitments in Southeast Asia, (b) to indicate that the US is considering further measures for coping with Communist aggression in the area, (c) to produce evidence of North Vietnamese intervention in Laos and South Viet-Nam. Among the diplomatic measures to be taken, we will:

(a) Publicize fully Communist actions in Laos in violation of the Geneva Accords.

(b) Consult with Souvanna Phouma in order (1) to convince him of our intention to prevent the Communists from destroying the

* Actions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 of Group A of Phase II

** Actions No. 1 of Group C of Phase II

*** Actions 1, 3, and 4 of Group B of Phase II. It is impossible at this time to determine the duration of deployment.

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the Geneva settlement and to uphold the position of his government and (2) to obtain his support or tacit acquiescence in our course of action.

(c) Consult fully with Thailand

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[Redacted] Continue to encourage the Thai to strengthen their military forces in Northeast Thailand

(d) Coordinate with Thailand the extent and character of SEATO approval and involvement.

(e) Obtain maximum support and contributions from the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

(f) Urge the British to go to the Soviets again urgently and demand Co-Chairmen action in support of Souvanna. If the Soviets continue to stall, the British should issue a unilateral statement in reply to Souvanna's appeal.

(g) Follow up the British approach with a direct approach of our own to the Soviet Co-Chairman. We should also speak to the Poles.

(h) Inform the Indian and Canadian governments and their ICC Commissioners of our projected actions, and continue to press them for more forceful action in the ICC.