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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
1 January 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Laos Situation Report
(As of 0900 EST)

1. The North Vietnamese have shelled Long Tieng, but no infantry attack has developed. In south Laos, the situation has rapidly deteriorated and the Communists are advancing to the western edge of the Bolovens Plateau.

North Laos

2. At mid-afternoon of 31 December the North Vietnamese hit irregular positions on the ridge just north of the Long Tieng valley with 130-mm. artillery, mortar, and recoilless rifle fire. Long Tieng itself then came under heavy fire from the 130-mm. guns. Firing continued throughout the afternoon and early evening and resumed for a short period this morning. It is estimated that as many as 300 rounds impacted in the valley.

3. The artillery fire was highly accurate and was obviously targeted against the airstrip and the T-28 ramp. The runway itself was not cratered, but the main ammunition dump was hit and was still burning on the morning of 1 January. All the ordnance and buildings of the Lao Air Force are considered a total loss. As of mid-day today no aircraft had been damaged. One 105-mm. howitzer was damaged by a direct hit.

4. Although most of the airstrip is still usable, no fixed wing aircraft were landing at Long

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Tieng on 1 January. Logistics support and air operations have been moved to Ban Son, about 19 miles south of Long Tieng.

5. So far only four irregulars have been reported wounded, but final casualty totals are expected to be much higher because many rounds hit the village on both sides of the runway. Unconfirmed reports also state that an irregular position on the ridge north of the complex took several direct hits.

6. The 130-mm. guns are firing from positions just south of the Plaine des Jarres. These sites were struck by all available USAF tactical aircraft and gunships on 31 December. Pilots believe they have silenced four of the guns and damaged one more; over 400 secondary explosions were observed around the artillery positions. However, on the morning of 1 January air observers reported that at least four 130s were active. Heavy cloud cover and haze has hampered efforts to destroy these guns.

7. Ground activity over the past two days has been limited to scattered small clashes. A four battalion irregular force, totaling 1,026 men, arrived in Long Tieng from Savannakhet on 30 December. These irregulars, who have been highly effective in previous combat, have already been deployed to positions along the defensive line north of Long Tieng.

South Laos

8. The situation on the Bolovens Plateau has rapidly deteriorated. Lao Army units manning positions about five miles west of Paksong dispersed after they came under heavy attack on 31 December. Three 105-mm. howitzers and an undetermined number of cargo trucks were abandoned. Other Lao Army units west of Paksong pulled back to an irregular position at Ban Gnik, on the western edge of the Plateau, about 11 miles west of Paksong.

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9. The morale of all Lao Army troops between Paksong and Pakse appears to be very low and these troops seem incapable of holding positions against determined Communist attacks. The irregular battalions at Ban Gnik are badly understrength so that the North Vietnamese might be able to push off the Bolovens Plateau. There is no evidence, however, that the North Vietnamese intend to depart from their longstanding policy and attack Pakse or other Lao population centers along the Mekong River.

10. All American dependents had been evacuated from Pakse to Vientiane by mid-day of 1 January.

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