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NSS, State Dept. reviews completed

INFORMATION

*Handwritten:* MAR 5 1970  
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger  
(Signed) HK

SUBJECT: Enemy Intentions in Laos

State has produced a brief analysis of the Communist's short-term intentions in Laos (Tab A.) You may find it of interest.

State concludes that the chances are at least even that the Communists will strike some new targets, such as the Neutralist headquarters at Vang Vieng north of Vientiane, or the headquarters of the Meo guerrilla general Vang Pao, southwest of the Plain of Jars. Even without going so far as Vang Vieng, they could cut the Vientiane/Luang Prabang road at Sala Phou Khoun. They could make feints at a major town (all of which are within reach of their forces, except Vientiane). They may engage in terrorism or harassment but are unlikely to take a major town. Similarly, State does not expect a drive to the Mekong to divide Laos, since the Communists probably wish to keep the options of dealing with Souvanna and revitalizing the Geneva accords.

Both State and CIA have recently tended to upgrade the possibility that the Communists might put pressure on Laos as a technique to increase war weariness in the U. S.

The Pathet Lao spokesman in Vientiane has recently suggested the possibility that the Communists would stop at the "1962 line" if the U. S. stops bombing in Laos. His reference to the "1962 line" raises a point which may not have come to your attention. There is an imprecise but real understanding as to what constitutes the "1962 line". In brief, the Rightists controlled the Mekong plains, the Communists controlled the eastern and northern highlands, and the Neutralists controlled the Plain of Jars and the river valleys north of Vientiane. Since 1962, however, the neutralist military forces have split into two factions, one of which continues to support Souvanna, the other supporting the Communists. (Neither neutralist force is worth anything militarily.) As a result of the division,

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both sides conceive of the erstwhile neutralist areas as being on "their side of the 1962 line." Souvanna in his recent offer of neutralization at least seemed to offer the possibility of some compromise on this point. The Communists have not made any such gesture.

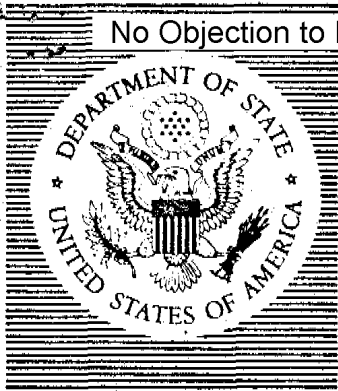
The Communists have good reason to assert their ownership of the true neutralist movement since, under the 1962 arrangements, this would give them two legs of the tripartite government and would pretty much make Souvanna their hostage. On the other hand, Souvanna's legitimacy itself is based upon his claim to represent the neutralists, and he cannot willingly allow the Communists to claim the neutralist area or to destroy the last vestiges of his neutralist forces.

The important point is that the area in which State thinks that the Communists may try to take the offensive this spring are ones to which both sides lay claim, and the "1962 line" is of no use even as a concept for resolving this issue.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that the base for Vang Pao's Meo guerrillas is within this neutralist zone. With our help, these forces are a much more serious irritant to the Communists than in 1962. This reinforces the Communists' inclination to assert control over the area and drive Vang Pao to take refuge west of the Mekong.

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# INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

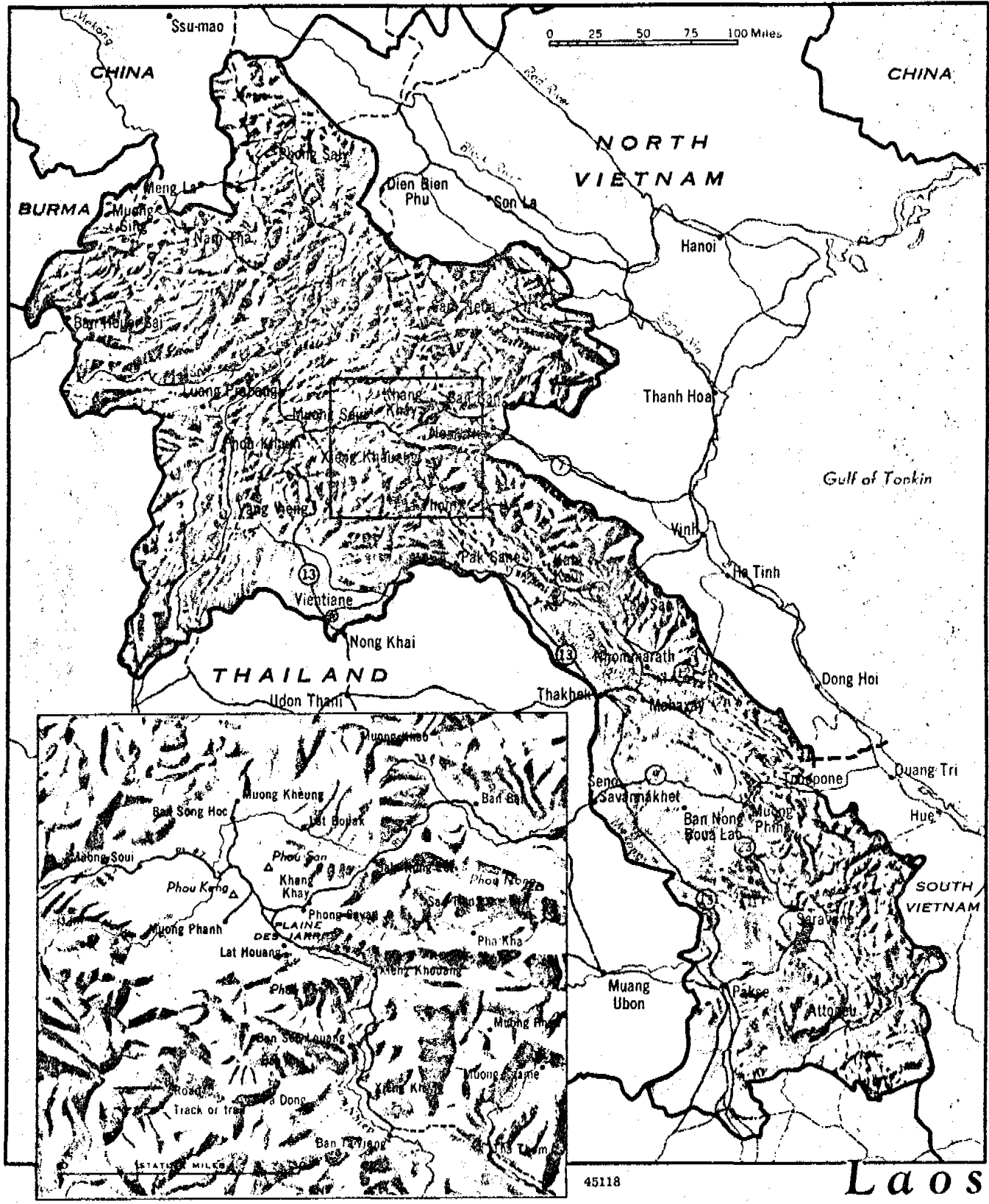
To : The Secretary  
 Through: SAS  
 From: INR - George C. Denney, Jr. *g.c.d.l*  
 Subject: Enemy Intentions in Laos

February 27, 1970

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In two weeks, the Communists in Laos have recaptured all that Vang Pao had conquered in the Plain of Jars, thereby restoring the territorial situation as of June 1969. Judging by previous Communist dry-season drives, we doubt that the current campaign has yet run its course. The question is how far will the Communists push.

Further Communist Attacks Likely. We think the chances are at least even that the Communists will strike some targets they have previously avoided, even though these have been clearly within their capabilities. Such targets include the Neutralist headquarters at Vang Vieng and Vang Pao's headquarters at Sam Thong and Long Tieng, south and southwest of the plain; Communist troops have already been reported as possibly deploying toward Long Tieng. The Communists may also, or alternatively, take the much softer target, Sala Phou Khoun, just west of Muong Soui at the juncture of Routes 13 and 4, the access point to Luang Prabang to the north. They could move from Sala Phou Khoun to Vang Vieng which controls Route 13, the important access route to Vientiane to the south. They may even go as far as to make threatening feints at some important urban centers (such as Luang Prabang, Paksane, and Pakse), without actually attacking them, and they may step up terrorist and harassing actions generally throughout the country.



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We believe that the Communists might be encouraged to embark on a more extensive campaign of this kind in the belief that the costs involved would be justified by the political impact in the United States as well as in Laos.

A principal objective would be to put pressure on Souvanna to request an end to the US bombing of Laos and to accept an internal political settlement favorable to the Communists. The Communists, of course, cannot be entirely certain that Souvanna's request for a bombing halt would be honored or that he and other non-Communist leaders would cave in the face of such military pressure. But short of this, they could deal still further blows to RLG morale and military capability, thus advancing the prospect that final settlement will be on Communist terms.

Another objective--and one that we believe is increasingly important to the Communists--would be to demonstrate to the American public that military progress in Indochina is fleeting, that Communist military proficiency, despite reports from South Vietnam, is still formidable, and that Laos is a military and political morass, thereby adding to American war-weariness and pressures for limitations on US activities.

But Not A Drive To The Mekong. However, we do not believe that the Communists will drive to the Mekong or seize Luang Prabang or Vientiane.

They will be restrained, as they have been in the past, by their desire to retain the Geneva facade. Hanoi sees this facade as enhancing its image abroad and preserving important political options for the Pathet Lao, while not critically restricting its ability to achieve its immediate military and political objectives in Laos. Similarly, Hanoi does not want to take actions that would destroy all prospects of a future accommodation with Souvanna (and the King).

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As the Geneva-sanctioned and internationally respected leader of neutral Laos, Souvanna's acquiescence would lend legitimacy to a Hanoi-dictated political settlement.

In addition, the Communists, while less concerned than in the past, cannot be certain that the US would not respond militarily--at least, in terms of intense air action in Laos and possibly North Vietnam--to an all-out Communist push in Laos. Finally, an effort of these proportions, while within Hanoi's capabilities, would require the diversion of manpower and logistic resources more needed for the war in South Vietnam where victory, the Communists probably believe, would quickly enable them to bring Laos under their control with relative ease.

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March 4, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT: State's Assessment on Laos

INR in State has produced a brief estimate of short-term Communist intentions in Laos. The President might find this of interest.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the memorandum to the President at Tab A.

Att.

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