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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON

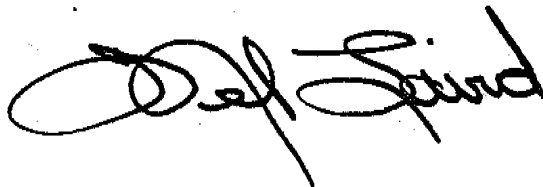
13 AUG 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THRU: DR. KISSINGER

SUBJECT: Military Options in Laos

Attached is the coordinated State/Defense/CIA response to Dr. Kissinger's message SCWH90008/131900Z August requesting an analysis of military actions which might be undertaken in support of the Royal Lao Government.



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OSD Review completed

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MILITARY OPTIONS IN LAOS

(A). Initiate B-52 reconnaissance and strike operations in the northern and heretofore restricted areas of Laos:

Pros

(1) B-52 reconnaissance operations may signal the North Vietnamese that since they have escalated the fighting in Northern Laos, the United States is preparing to conduct B-52 bombing operations in Northern Laos to counter North Vietnamese efforts.

(2) The salutary effects of massive B-52 strikes could raise the morale of the RLG and its forces enough to persuade them to stand and fight.

(3) Strikes against high priority area type targets, which have been defined as suitable for B-52 operations, could have a psychological and destructive effect capable of upsetting the enemy's offensive plans in Northern Laos.

(4) B-52 strikes flown at night and with a defensive support package (MIG CAP, ECM support, etc.) should minimize North Vietnamese MIG threat.

Cons

(1) In response to our escalation of using B-52s in north Laos, the NVA could counterescalate by attacking on the ground at some sensitive location, perhaps Luang Prabang. The enemy also has the capability to mount commando raids against Vientiane and even commando or rocket attacks [redacted]

[redacted] Having used the B-52 in north Laos, our only counter-response would presumably be intensified B-52 strikes. In the Lao situation where the North Vietnamese retain most of the options for escalation, it is doubtful that the use of B-52s would result in anything other than a worsened situation with which we would be even less able to deal than the present one.

(2) B-52 operations in Northern Laos may be the escalatory step which will interfere with, if not negate, diplomatic efforts to cool the situation in Northern Laos, e.g., United States and United Kingdom conversations with the USSR, RLG appeal to the United Nations.

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(3) There are insufficient B-52 resources available to satisfy all valid strike requirements in support of United States and Free World Forces in South Vietnam. When priority target nominations for strikes against lucrative targets in Southern Laos are added to those in South Vietnam, the requirement for B-52 strikes to support the United States and Free World Force operations exceeds the available strikes by a ratio of 5:1.

(4) One reason that B-52 operations have been so successful in South Vietnam and the Laotian panhandle is that MACV has the necessary resources for the collection and analysis of a variety of intelligence regarding enemy planning, movement, and operations<sup>(25X1)</sup> in order to develop targets suitable for B-52 strikes. This support includes the complete spectrum of human, electronic and imagery outputs, supported by an experienced military intelligence organization. The results of this targeting intelligence are applied at both the Field Force and MACV levels.

Although initial targets in Northern Laos have been nominated, the collection resources and processing facilities for target validation are not comparable to those supporting current operations. It is therefore unlikely that B-52 targets can be developed in Northern Laos which could approach the worth of those nominated in South Vietnam and Southern Laos. To date, six targets have been nominated for B-52 strikes in Northern Laos. Three of the targets have some military significance but were selected primarily because of the psychological effects of the strikes. The remaining three targets include areas used as truck parks and storage areas. It is questionable, however, if any of these nominated targets could compete favorably with targets nominated in South Vietnam or Southern Laos.

(5) B-52s would be flying further north than any previous ARC LIGHT strikes and considerably closer to active North Vietnamese MIG airfields. Although selective time over target and the provision of a defensive support package can minimize the MIG threat, the destruction of a B-52 in Northern Laos through North Vietnamese action would provide the enemy with a strong propaganda point to be used in current US/NVN negotiations.

(6) Although the B-52 can bomb accurately using aircraft radar, the lack of a ground radar (MSQ) site to direct the aircraft to the release point in the Northern Laos target area limits the operational flexibility for striking alternate targets that the B-52 has over South Vietnam and the Special ARC LIGHT Operation Areas in Southern Laos.

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(7) Utilization of B-52s in Northern Laos would focus more 25X1  
attention on our air operations and thereby could increase pressure  
for a bombing reduction or halt, with unforeseen consequences for  
Vietnam as well as Laos.



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(F). Provision of Additional Equipment to Laotian Forces. Deliveries of equipment to the Laotian forces could be stepped up and additional types of equipment, i.e., M-16 rifles, M-79 grenade launchers, 106MM recoilless rifles, 105MM and 155MM howitzers, tactical communications equipment, light tanks and armored personnel carriers could be supplied, and additional T-28s and augmented maintenance facilities could be furnished to Laos by redistributing US assets.

Pros

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- (1) Responsive to RLG requests.
- (2) Enhance morale.
- (3) Improve capabilities.
- (4) Provide quick increase to Laotian air capability.
- (5) Additional fixed-wing and helicopter airlift and close air support would be particularly effective. The terrain in Laos makes rapid surface movement impossible and the fact that the enemy

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is tied to his road and trail nets limits his ability to react quickly to surprise attacks in his rear areas (e.g., the May 1969 attack on Xieng Khouangville by Meo Irregular Forces yielded 5000 tons of enemy equipment, and it took the enemy 25 days to react to this operation even though it took place near a major road network essentially controlled by the enemy).

#### Cons

(1) Deliveries of equipment to RLG would in most cases be at the expense of the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program.

(2) Laotian forces have limited ability to maintain and operate tanks and armored personnel carriers.

(3) Redistribution of US T-28s would exhaust the currently programmed attrition backup required to sustain a long-term capability. A considerable amount of time would be required to combat configure additional T-28s, were they made available from service assets.

(4) Due to the situation, the United States has only minimal control over proper end-use of the equipment.

(G). Increased Lao Salaries and Food Allowances. US AID could provide greater support to provide for more adequate pay and proper food allowances which are important to troop morale and effectiveness. FAR salaries are low: about \$3 per month for a soldier, about \$30 a month for a colonel. The Prime Minister has requested that the US study the possibility of enabling the Lao to raise salaries. The payments to those invalidated out of the army are usually nonexistent, and death payments to dependents are inadequate, if paid. The food allowance as a rice supplement is under 12 cents a day, but most of this is siphoned off at various levels starting with the Prime Minister for what are often legitimate expenses not provided for in the budget.

#### Pros

(1) Improve the status, organization, morale and, hence, effectiveness of Lao troops.

(2) Ease the recruitment of new troops and improve the relationship of the troops with the local population.

#### Cons

(1) Over half the present Lao budget deficit is already being covered by the US, Japan, Australia, UK, and France. The Lao would be unable to increase salaries and food allowances without an increased

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US AID impact. Treasury and the Bureau of the Budget are distressed at the foreign exchange drain which the present US contribution to the Foreign Exchange Operations Fund represents and would certainly be most reluctant to see an increase. Defense of this aspect of the AID program to Laos also is difficult with the Congress.

(H). Summary and Conclusions

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(1) Each of the considered measures would tend to bolster the Laotian Government and would marginally improve the ability of the RLG to resist military action by the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. They would all be costly in US monetary and hardware resources and would require additional funding by the US.

The psychological benefits alone would not justify diverting B-52 sorties from high priority targets in the Republic of Vietnam and Southern Laos. In today's environment of reduced resources, available assets can best be utilized in operations in direct support of the Republic of Vietnam. The various courses of action cannot be considered, even collectively, to constitute prompt remedial military action that would prevent the overrunning of Laos should the communist forces make the political decision to employ their present capability to do so.

(2) In summary, should Hanoi decide to pay the price and conquer Laos, Laos could not be defended short of massive US intervention on the ground, as well as a renewal of air and naval operations against North Vietnam. For example, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have expressed the view that it would not be militarily sound to commit US ground forces in Laos unless the decision were also made to destroy the capability or the will of the North Vietnamese to persist in their aggression. The North Vietnamese continue to hold most of the military cards in Laos. They have long been capable of taking almost any target of their choosing in the country. Their restraint thus far has been one of politics and tactics rather than incapacity. The Laotian problem can best be kept manageable by a mixture of means -- diplomatic, political, economic, and military -- and military means alone are insufficient.

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On the basis of a benefits/cost analysis, given domestic political constraints together with limited assets, we would recommend against extending B-52 operations to Northern Laos.

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However, we would recommend that serious consideration be given to the feasibility of introducing additional modern equipment, increasing the Royal Lao tactical air capability, raising salaries and food allowances, [REDACTED]

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