

SECRET

4

ganda has concentrated on charging the Laotian Government with violations of the 1954 Geneva Agreements, but on the whole, Moscow has continued to follow a more restrained line than Hanoi or Peiping. Soviet restraint on this question is likely to continue at least as long as the current high-level East-West discussions are underway.

II. PROSPECTS FOR GUERRILLA WARFARE

12. Many conditions in Laos, especially in the northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, are favorable for Communist guerrilla warfare. The country is mostly jungle covered mountains. It is sparsely populated. Most of the people live in small isolated villages connected only by foot trails and waterways. The few roads which do exist, except those in the immediate vicinity of the major towns, are little more than jeep trails. Furthermore, the supply routes from Hanoi into Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces and into central Laos are considerably better than those from Vientiane. Air facilities in Laos are limited. The two primary airfields (Seno and Vientiane) have a year-round capability to support medium transports with limited loads. Three secondary airfields (Luang Prabang, Pakse and Xieng Khouang) can support light transport operations on a year-round basis. The remaining airfields are of marginal value, particularly during the rainy season. Communications facilities are inadequate even for minimum administrative requirements in peacetime. Vientiane has radio communication with the provincial capitals and the regional military commands. Most villages, army outposts, and self-defense units must depend upon runners for communication with higher authorities.

13. Current monsoon rains hamper Laotian Government military operations and logistic support more than they do Communist guerrilla operations. The rainy season generally slackens about mid-September to mid-October and is followed by a five-month dry season.

14. The social and political situation also offers favorable opportunities for Communist guerrilla and psychological warfare. The au-

thority of the Laotian Government has never been thoroughly established throughout the nation, due in part to the physical characteristics of the country and in part to a general lack of interest by the ethnic Lao governing elite, which is concentrated in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. People of Lao stock make up only half of the population. These considerations have inhibited the development of a Laotian national spirit, or identification with the central government. The common people of Laos, especially those in the villages, are superstitious and simple folk highly susceptible to rumors, propaganda and intimidation. Communist psychological warfare has been at least as effective as armed action in the current effort.

15. Government authority has been especially weak in the northern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly which were under Pathet Lao control until late 1957. During the lull between the 1957 Laotian Government-Pathet Lao agreements on unification and the renewal of Communist guerrilla activity in mid-July of this year, the government had made only a beginning in the process of re-educating the population of these two provinces away from Communist influences, or away from their traditional trade ties with northern Vietnam. This is particularly true among the Kha, Meo and Black Thai tribal groups, whose mountainous domain straddles the Laotian-North Vietnamese border. These tribes, which make up about 50 percent of the population of Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces, have traditionally been antagonistic toward the Lao people and government.

16. Most of the guerrillas in the northern provinces are ex-Pathet Lao soldiers, and Meo and Black Thai tribal people. Elements of the Pathet Lao battalion which refused integration and escaped to North Vietnam are probably involved. It is almost certain that many of the guerrillas now engaged have received training in North Vietnam, that some supplies and equipment for the current operations have been provided by North Vietnam, and that the guerrillas move into and out of North Vietnam as necessary. The total number of guerrillas involved up to the present is

SECRET

1245