

SECRET

3

DISCUSSION

I. COMMUNIST INTENTIONS IN LAOS

7. We believe that the initiation of Communist guerrilla warfare in Laos in mid-July was primarily a reaction to a series of actions by the Royal Lao Government which threatened drastically to weaken the Communist position in Laos. For a period of about one year after the November 1957 political agreements between the Laotian Government and the Pathet Lao, the Communist controlled party in Laos—the Neo Lao Hak Zat—attempts to move by legal political competition toward its objective of gaining control of Laos. The Laotian Government had taken counteraction which checked this effort. Moreover, the US had stepped up its activities to strengthen the Laotian Government, notably through the decision to send military training teams, and clearly was increasing its presence in Laos. The Communist advance in Laos was losing impetus. To the Communist world, the future probably appeared to be one of increasing political repression, declining assets, and a strengthened anti-Communist position in the country.

8. Hence we believe that the current crisis was initiated mainly in order to protect the Communist apparatus in Laos, to stop the trend towards Laotian alignment with the US, and to improve Communist prospects for gaining control of the country. Judging by Communist propaganda and diplomatic representations, and by the scale of guerrilla activities to date, it does not appear that the Communists expected by military action to overthrow the Laotian Government and seize control of the country. They may have believed that the government would be intimidated into immediate concessions, restoring at least a major part of the legal and political position which the Communists had enjoyed after the 1957 agreements between the Pathet Lao and the government. We think it more likely, however, that the Communists expected a renewal of strife in Laos to alarm the world at large and to produce a widespread demand for restoration of quiet, and that they hoped thus

to bring about through international action a return of the International Control Commission (ICC) to Laos. Under the ICC the Communists had enjoyed substantial advantages, and they probably expected to enjoy them again if the Commission returned.

9. Whatever their initial aims, the Communists undoubtedly were prepared to adapt their tactics and their objectives to the developing situation, and even to press on towards an overthrow of the government and control of the country if the prospects for such actions developed favorably. They may also have in mind, as a feasible intermediate aim, the re-establishment of Communist control over the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly, and possibly the formation of a rival government in those areas as a springboard for future subversive efforts.

10. The Chinese Communists probably have certain interests in the present crisis in addition to those of North Vietnam. It is basic to Chinese Communist policy to oppose vigorously the strengthening of anti-Communist regimes in the area of their interest in Asia and to resist the strengthening of the US position anywhere on China's periphery. The Chinese Communists probably also wish to demonstrate to Southeast Asian governments, particularly the neutralist ones, that they cannot turn toward the West without serious risks. Although Peiping may well wish to emphasize its importance on the world scene and may regard the Laos crisis as useful for this purpose, this is probably no more than a bonus effect.

11. Soviet interests in the current crisis in Laos are more remote than those of Peiping and Hanoi. The USSR probably views the current actions of Hanoi and of the Communist guerrillas in Laos as a reasonable application of basic Communist revolutionary doctrine and in line with worldwide Communist interests. It is probably willing to let Peiping and Hanoi work out the details so long as the situation does not appear to risk major hostilities with the West. Moscow's propa-

SECRET

1244