

Report of Meeting of U.S. Envoys To Review Operations in Laos

Excerpts from cablegram, signed by Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, from United States Embassy in Saigon to State Department, Defense Department and Commander in Chief, Pacific, Sept. 19, 1964.

Following is a summary, coordinated with Vientiane and Bangkok, of the conclusions of the meeting of the three posts held at Saigon September 11 to review air and limited ground operations of the Lao corridor:

1. Air operations in corridor. This involves attack of 22 targets for which folders available at Vientiane and Saigon. If objective is primarily military, i.e., to inflict maximum damage to targets, to prevent VN/PL dispersal and protective measures, and impede rapid VN/PL riposte, it was agreed that a series of sharp, heavy attacks must be made in a relatively short timespan, which would involve substantial U.S. and/or VNAF/Farmgate attacks. If objective primarily psychological, military disadvantages of attacks over longer time frame would be acceptable and chief reliance could be placed on RLAF T-28s with some Yankee team strikes against harder targets, e.g., five bridges. Estimated sortie requirements for this second option 188 T 28 sorties and 80 USAF sorties. Time required [number illegible] days. Vientiane representatives believe Souvanna would [words illegible] would probably wish [words illegible] such attacks spread out over considerable period of time. Also felt Souvanna would prefer VNAF not conduct air strikes in corridor. It was general consensus that best division of targeting for immediate future would be RLAF/YANKEE team mix.

Vientiane is very reluctant to see VNAF participation such strikes and would hope that by keeping GVN informed of actions being taken by RLAF and US in corridor, psychological needs of GVN could reasonably be met. Saigon will seek to do this, but if there are compelling reasons for covert VNAF participation Vientiane would be given prior info on necessity, timing, and place of such strikes.

Alternatively, it was agreed that, if possible, joint Lao, Thai, RVN, and US participation in a common effort against a common enemy would be desirable but, recognizing that, even if possible, arrangements for such an effort would

take some time to achieve. If such negotiations are conducted, however, RLAF/Yankee team strikes should not be precluded. Vientiane has since stated it does not consider that it would be desirable to seek to formalize such four country participation in corridor operations as to do so would raise question of degree of Souvanna Phouma's knowledge and involvement which Vientiane feels would jeopardize success of operations.

2. Ground operations.

A. Although it was agreed that northern Route 9 area offered most profitable targets, conference proceeded on assumption that Vientiane would find operations astride Route 9 politically unacceptable at this time. However, Vientiane's 448 to dept, dispatched after return of conferees, now indicates that "shallow penetration raids (20 kilometers)... in Rte 9 area... by company-sized units" would be acceptable and would not require clearance by the RLG.

F. It was the view of Saigon group that authority for US advisors to accompany units is a prerequisite to successful operations. Without this US participation probability of success is judged so low that the advisability of conducting cross border operations would be questionable. Vientiane representatives were strongly opposed to presence US advisors because of difficulty with current SAR operations in Laos and political importance of US maintaining credible stance of adhering to provisions Geneva accords.

F. Embassy Vientiane had earlier indicated that they would insist on advanced clearance of cross border operations. All representatives agreed that this requirement would be met by Vientiane having opportunity to comment on all plans submitted to Washington for approval. Once approval to execute is received, Vientiane would be kept informed of day-to-day operations as information addressee on operational traffic between Saigon/Washington/CINCPAC....