

Rusk Query to Vientiane Embassy On Desirability of Laos Cease-Fire

Cablegram from Secretary of State Rusk to the United States Embassy in Laos, Aug. 7, 1964. Copies were also sent, with a request for comment, to the American missions in London, Paris, Saigon, Bangkok, Ottawa, New Delhi, Moscow, Phnompenh and Hong Kong, and to the Pacific command and the mission at the United Nations.

1. As pointed out in your 219, our objective in Laos is to stabilize the situation again, if possible within framework of the 1962 Geneva settlement. Essential to stabilization would be establishment of military equilibrium in the country. Moreover, we have some concern that recent RLG successes and reported low PL morale may lead to some escalation from Communist side, which we do not now wish to have to deal with.

2. Until now, Souvanna's and our position has been that military equilibrium would require Pathet Lao withdrawal from areas seized in PDJ since May 15 and that such withdrawal is also basic precondition to convening 14-nation conference. Question now arises whether territorial gains of Operation Triangle, provided they can be consolidated, have in practice brought about a situation of equilibrium and whether, therefore, it is no longer necessary to insist on Pathet Lao withdrawal from PDJ as precondition to 14-nation conference. This is in fact thought which has previously occurred to Souvanna (Vientiane's 191) and is also touched on in Secretary's letter to Butler (Deptel 88 to Vientiane). If Souvanna and we continued to insist on PDJ withdrawal other side would inevitably insist on our yielding Triangle gains, and our judgement is that such arrangement substantially worse than present fairly coherent geographical division. If withdrawal precondition were to be dropped, it could probably best be done at tripartite meeting where it might be used by Souvanna as bargaining counter in obtaining satisfaction on his other condition that he attend conference as head of Laotian Government. Remaining condition would be cease-fire. While under present conditions cease-fire might not be of net advantage

to Souvanna—we are thinking primarily of T-28 operations—Pathet Lao would no doubt insist on it. If so, Souvanna could press for effective ICC policing of cease-fire. Latter could be of importance in upcoming period.

3. Above is written with thought in mind that Polish proposals [one word illegible] effectively collapsed and that pressures continue for Geneva [word illegible] conference and will no doubt be intensified by current crisis brought on by DRV naval attacks. Conference on Laos might be useful safety valve for these generalized pressures while at same time providing some deterrent to escalation of hostilities on that part of the "front." We would insist that conference be limited to Laos and believe that it could in fact be so limited, if necessary by our withdrawing from the conference room if any other subject brought up, as we did in 1961-62. Side discussions on other topics could not be avoided but we see no great difficulty with this; venue for informal corridor discussion with PL, DRV, and Chicoms could be valuable at this juncture.

4. In considering this course of action, key initial question is of course whether Souvanna himself is prepared to drop his withdrawal precondition and whether, if he did, he could maintain himself in power in Vientiane. We gather that answer to first question is probably yes but we are much more dubious about the second. Request Vientiane's judgement on these points. Views of other addresses are so requested, including estimated reactions host governments. It is essential that these estimates take account of recent developments: military successes non-Communist forces in Laos and latest demonstration US determination resist Communist aggression in Southeast Asia.