Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

25X1

DRAFT DCI BRIEFING FOR
VINSON SUBCOMMITTEE

1 August 1964

LAOS

I. There is a new look to the fighting in Laos this summer but it is too early to say whether it is just a matter of appearances, or whether the government forces will actually succeed in taking the initiative as they plan.

25X1

A. When the Kong Le neutralists were pushed out of the Plain of Jars in late April, the shock may have been a healthy one. Ever since that time, while intentions have been better than execution, Souvanna Phouma, the Royal Laotian Army, and the neutralists have all been showing more determination to stand up to the Pathet Lao.

(Map, Laos)

1. One example has been the fighting for possession of Phou Kout, a mountain dominating Route 7 near the western exit from the Plain of Jars. Phou Kout can serve as the forward defense of the main neutralist position before Muong Soui, 13 miles farther

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

25X1

west, or it could eventually cover the jump-off for a government drive back into the Plaine des Jarres. It has changed hands several times in the last few weeks. None of the actions have been major ones, but such persistence on the part of the neutralists is unusual and encouraging. The Pathet Lao now control the key positions on the hill.

B. After nearly a month of troop movements and other complicated preparations, the FAR and the neutralists launched a major drive on 26 July to cleanup the Pathet Lao pocket which for two years or more has been blocking Highway 13 from Vientiane to Luang Prabang, and its junction with Highway 7.

1. This operation involved a major realignment of troops by airlift to get the best available government battalions into position. Rightist forces were supported by Meo guerrilla units as well as three Kong Le battalions.

2. The combined forces have met with initial success and have taken their key objectives at Phou Khoun and Muong Kassy.

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

25X1

3. The Pathet Lao have thus far failed to make any major countermove. It is probable, however, that they will undertake some action--perhaps a sharp move elsewhere in Laos--to counter the government attack.

C. The military arithmetic of Laos remains the same--the Pathet Lao are outnumbered, but have shown the capability, with North Vietnamese stiffening and support, to take and hold whatever territory they want in the absence of outside help for the government forces.

D. One factor which may change this picture, however, is the recent activity by T-28 aircraft, [redacted] 25X1 These planes have been hitting Pathet Lao troop concentrations, supply points, and roads with considerable effectiveness.

1. The Communists have attested to this by rushing in anti-aircraft from North Vietnam, and by using darkness and bad weather to cover their movements.

2. The Laotians have about 40 of these aircraft. In the recent actions, despite the rainy season, they have been flying an

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

25X1

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

average of about 30 sorties a day.

3. In addition to the direct military impact, there has been a welcome boost in morale of the government forces as a result of this air offensive. Contrary to Pathet Lao claims, only two of the aircraft have been destroyed by enemy action. 25X1

II. There is no sign of any political progress over Laos to match the possibility of some military improvement.

A. There is still no agreement on any new international conference, and there appears to be less and less likelihood for the immediate future of the tripartite Laotian talks which Souvanna Phouma feels must precede any international meeting.

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

B. Souvanna and Pathet Lao leader Souphannouvong are both calling for talks, but neither will accept the possible sites--all outside of Laos--suggested by the other.

1. Souvanna appears adamant in his insistence upon his preconditions for 14-power talks:

   (a) Pathet Lao agreement to a cease-fire;

   (b) Pathet Lao withdrawal from positions taken in May.

2. Even tripartite talks appear unlikely in the near future. Dissident neutralists are claiming that they--not Souvanna and Kong Le--now must represent the neutralist faction in any talks, a position which would be absolutely unacceptable to Premier Souvanna and his Western backers.

3. The rightist camp formerly headed by Phoumi and Prince Boun Oum has been divided and volatile ever since the attempted coup in April, and the leaders of the coup continue to limit Souvanna's freedom of action.

C. Even if Souvanna could bargain with the Communists from a position of strength, there appears to be little likelihood that he can ever

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

put together a viable three-way coalition as envisaged in the 1962 Geneva Accords.

III. Soviet policy on Southeast Asia continues to reflect the apparent assumption that there is little present danger of military escalation in Laos and South Vietnam.

A. Moscow primarily wants to forestall developments which might lead to a dangerous confrontation with the US and to an expansion of Chinese Communist influence in Southeast Asia. The Soviets apparently have little ability to influence North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao actions, and they have not attempted to match Peiping's strong pronouncements.

B. The USSR's July 26 call for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference in August, reinforced by its threat to withdraw from its responsibility as co-chairman, was intended to increase pressure on the US and Britain to agree to a 14-nation meeting.

1. The Soviet call for a new conference was timed to coincide with British Foreign Secretary Butler's visit to Moscow. Since last spring Soviet behavior has reflected

a desire to disengage as much as possible from a deteriorating situation in which the USSR has had little influence. The co-chairman functions at times have complicated Moscow's relations with the Pathet Lao, North Vietnamese, and Chinese, and have resulted in embarrassing displays of Soviet impotence.

2. Khrushchev showed very little give on Laos in his talks with Butler. The Foreign Secretary received the clear impression that the Soviets "want to get out." Khrushchev and Gromyko took the position that if their proposal for a 14-power conference is rejected, as they expect, they would then abandon the co-chairmanship. They would not accept any preconditions to a 14-power meeting.

25X1

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6

Approved For Release 2005/01/06 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400160009-6