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May 13, 1962

MEMORANDUM OF MEETING AT THE WHITE HOUSE ON SUNDAY, MAY 13, 1962, 4:30 p.m., ATTENDED BY THE PRESIDENT, RUSK, McNAMARA, GILPATRIC, LEMNITZER, HARRIMAN, THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, McCONE, BUNDY, HILSMAN, BALL (FOR A SHORT TIME) AND CASE.

Secretary Rusk outlined the problem in Laos as it had been left the day before, referring to reply cables received from Ambassador Brown and General Tucker, (IN 34474 and IN 34470) (b)(3)

He noted there was no reply from Bangkok. Rusk advanced the view that introduction of the maximum sanctions against Phoumi which would be necessary to move him out, would probably result in the loss of all of Laos. He therefore proposed that we suggest that Phoui replace Phoumi as the Deputy Prime Minister and be responsible for negotiations with the three Princes and that Phoumi concentrate on his military problems. In answer to questions Rusk stated that the relationship between Souvanna and Phoui were just as bad if not worse than those between Souvanna and Phoumi and he reiterated the report from Brown and others that Phoumi's position, militarily and politically, had not substantially deteriorated because of the Nam Tha. incident.

As the meeting proceeded Rusk returned time and again to the above plan stating that he would propose discussions of the plan with the King, Souvanna, Phoumi, Phoui and others to get complete agreement

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on the procedure. Rusk also reported that good progress had been made in the last 24 hours on a meeting in the immediate future between the three Princes . The only unresolved problem was a meeting place and that Plaine des Jarres was under consideration. He hoped this meeting would be arranged at once.

In response to questions McCone reviewed the CAS report on the military situation as outlined in [redacted] cable, pointing out probability that Viet Cong had military advantage in seven important locations each of which was identified. McCone emphasized this report was raw intelligence and had not been evaluated and an estimate would be forthcoming Monday morning. (b)(3)

During the course of the meeting McCone emphasized that he personally took exception to paragraph D of Rusk's telegram as it literally placed the MAAG in command in Laos at a time when the military situation was disintegrating dangerously. This point was recognized as valid by the President, McNamara and Lemnitzer .

(b)(3) McCone also from time to time emphasized the importance, as reported by [redacted] of being absolutely sure of the line of succession to Phoumi, as we moved in the direction of eliminating Phoumi. This was agreed but Rusk felt his ~~point~~ plan as mentioned above would take care of this situation

Hilsman reported no air activity which would indicate planned immediate action in any other point in Laos. McCone opposed this, stating that there were two or three locations where, in the opinion of CIA, the Viet Cong could move with resources in hand in the field and without an airlift reinforcement.

Robert Kennedy suggested that we approach Phoumi with (a) offers of assistance of a type that we can give him, assuming that he conform to our direction both politically and militarily, and (b) threats of sanctions if he did not agree. Rusk countered that this procedure had been followed without effect for many months.

In an extended discussion of the possibilities of dividing Laos and holding Southern Laos with Phoumi or other RLG forces, ^{it} was the opinion of General Lemnitzer ~~and~~ ^{that} the Viet Cong forces were so strong in South-eastern Laos that a major military effort would be required to clear the situation up. Hilsman volunteered that any such action would require American-Thai occupation of all principal cities and Mekong river communities, freeing the RLG forces to go out into the country and work on the guerrillas and disperse the Viet Cong forces. McNamara felt the time was not right for the commitment of American forces in Laos. The President agreed.

The President seemed of the opinion that the possibility of a political settlement was not hopeless, and there was not a clear-cut positive indication that the cease-fire had been broken but rather the Nam Tha incident might have been the result of provocation, and every effort should be made for a political settlement. There was general agreement on this point. McCone emphasized that if this course is to be followed then troop movements and fleet movements in Thailand and actions the Viet Cong may make in South Vietnam should be made in such a way as to serve as a deterrent in Laos and thus strengthen our negotiating position. McCone pointed out that at the present time the routing of the RLG forces placed us in a very weak negotiating position and this could only be changed by evidence of some intention on our part of possibly introducing our forces into Laos.

concerning the
Discussions/of movement of fleet and the introduction of troops into Thailand were inconclusive as no message had been received from Ambassador Young, and therefore Sarit's approval of such military moves had not been secured.

The meeting was adjourned subject to call later today or Monday at the will of the President. In the meantime the President ordered State to transmit telegrams to Ambassadors Brown and Young, summarizing

~~SECRET EYES ONLY~~

the views which were developed in the meeting.

Following the meeting McCone arranged to transmit message (b)(3) to (a) urging extreme care on the part of all CIA personnel to adhere to the expressed policy with respect to the handling of Phoumi and not to deviate under any circumstances or to give Phoumi encouragement under any condition, and (b) to report immediately/field evaluation of whether the cease-fire had actually been broken or the Nam Tha incident was could be accounted for by provocation on the part of the Phoumi forces.

John A. McCone
Director

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~~SECRET EYES ONLY~~