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## U. S. May Send Troops to Laos

From the Herald Tribune Bureau

WASHINGTON.

The State Department's top-ranking expert on Southeast Asia says a successful drive by the Communists in Laos could force the United States to send American troops to defend the Neutralist government there.

The statement was made May 4 by William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, in testimony before a House subcommittee on foreign appropriations. The subcommittee released the testimony yesterday.

Mr. Bundy was asked whether he believed the Neutralists' 3,000 soldiers and the Laotian Rightists' 70,000 were Pathet Lao. He said that they were not.

The local forces could handle quite decently, probably lick them," Mr. Bundy told the subcommittee. "But . . . the North Vietnamese can send in reinforcements to encadre individual units and also send separate units of their own, and quickly get military ascendancy.

That is . . . a fact of life. The only response we would have would be to put our own forces in there."

The Laotian Neutralist Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, has charged for months that Viet Minh Communists from North Viet Nam have been helping the Pathet Lao. Last week the U.S. said it had photographic evidence of Viet Minh participation in the fighting.

Mr. Bundy's testimony preceded that evidence, of course, but its release yesterday left little doubt that the U.S. was convinced of massive North Vietnamese involvement months ago, even before a new Red offensive last month dislodged the Neutralists from the strategic Plain of Jars.

Mr. Bundy also said the U.S. had opposed an attempted coup against Prince Souvanna by Rightist generals as a violation of the Geneva accords guaranteeing Laotian neutrality. "For them to upset the accords at this time," he said, "was to take

on a civil war which they could not handle."

"Frankly," Mr. Bundy added, "it comes down to our introducing forces . . . or else you lose territory in large doses to the Communists." Presumably the introduction of American forces would exceed the U. S.'s current involvement in South Viet Nam.

The war against the Communist Viet Cong is making progress despite an estimated nine-month setback caused by two government coups and last year's Buddhist crisis, Gen. Paul D. Harkins, retiring U. S. commander in South Viet Nam, said yesterday.

In a farewell news conference in Saigon, Gen. Harkins said that with implementation of the program for pacification of the provinces "we are gradually winning back control." He said the Vietnamese Army is "in a much better position to meet the Communist insurgency now than they were when I came here in 1962."

Gen. Harkins, who will leave Saigon tomorrow for

Washington and retirement, said he felt the Viet Cong had improved in strength and had more weapons but "are still not capable of overrunning a district town or a provincial capital and holding it."

An estimation of Viet Cong strength was given yesterday by William H. Sullivan, special assistant on Viet Nam affairs to Secretary of State Dean Rusk. He said the hardcore, trained guerrillas number less than 30,000. They are supported by 60,000 to 80,000 local recruits, he said in a speech to the Foreign Policy Conference in Cleveland.

Official sources in Washington said yesterday that several pilots from Thailand, Laos' pro-Western neighbor, have been flying combat missions against Red positions for the Neutralist government of Premier Souvanna Phouma. But a State Department spokesman, apparently preferring not to talk about a matter involving two foreign countries, said he was "unable to confirm" the reports.