

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT  
FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER  
SUBJECT: U.S. Efforts in Laos Outside the  
Area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail

Secretary Laird has sent you a memorandum concerning the situation in Laos (Tab A). The principle purpose of his memorandum is to strike a cautionary note regarding what can and should be done to respond to the emerging situation in north Laos.

Secretary Laird believes that the basic question facing us is whether to make an all out effort in Laos with the prospect of little gain or to seek to minimize the significance of NVA advances in northern Laos on the grounds that the enemy is hitting there because of his weakened position in South Vietnam. He favors the latter course because he does not believe that we can rely on the Thai to provide the reinforcements or fighting spirit needed to stop the NVA in north Laos; he has little confidence in added use of air power and believes a major increase in effort would bring marginal gains at best. He is concerned about the political costs at home that would be entailed through an intensification of the air war in northern Laos.

The Secretary therefore concludes with the recommendation that the Administration move with great caution before extending our commitment and intensifying our effort in northern Laos.

Comment: There is growing evidence that the North Vietnamese are doing what they can in Laos and Cambodia to gain the maximum psychological impact in Indochina before your Peking trip. While we are constrained by Congressional limitations both with respect to the nature and the extent of our support, I can see little advantage in standing aside and not doing what we can within these constraints.

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5

By MLH NARA, Date 6/3/2010  
NLN 05-18/2 per HP. 12/8/2009

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The people in the field, including Ambassador Godley, have repeatedly said -- and the evidence supports them -- that our air support in Northern Laos is crucial both in terms of its direct effect on the enemy and the psychological boost it gives the friendly forces. If the North Vietnamese successfully break the defenses in Laos, we could be faced with that difficult political situation we have long sought to prevent -- a Laotian call for a halt in the bombing of the Trail. Moreover, the Thai could hardly take comfort from a serious North Vietnamese threat to the Vientiane Plain. It certainly would be in the Thai interest to prevent this, if they could do so by responding to the Lao request for manpower assistance. It would likewise be in our interest to encourage the Thai to be as forthcoming as possible to Laotian requests for help.

None of the foregoing need involve us to any substantial measure beyond the air support we are already providing. Such support is, in fact, limited both by the ability to provide forward air control and the relatively restricted areas in which air power can be usefully applied. Thus, I see no reason for us not doing what we reasonably can and would not in any way consider the high priority we have assigned to air for North Laos as a major escalation of our effort.