

[0071/03/004]

MILITARY MATTERS RELATED TO LAOSSummary

North Viet-Nam calls the military tune in Laos. U.S. military efforts, principally in the air, are directed against North Vietnamese infiltration into South Viet-Nam and in support of RLG defense against North Vietnamese and Lao communist troops. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] makes a modest but significant military contribution.

**SANITIZED**

per sec. 3.3(b)(1)(6)

Current Order of Battle

As of mid-May 1969 -- exclusive of those transiting to South Viet-Nam or taking temporary respite in Laos near the South Viet-Nam border -- there were 48,095 confirmed North Vietnamese soldiers in Laos. Over half were combat troops. Lao communist forces totaled 50,385. Confirmed enemy strength was just under 99,000, not including some 6000 Communist Chinese engineer troops building a road that now extends from the Yunnan border over 50 miles into North Laos. Also not included were an estimated 500-800 Communist Chinese tactical troops operating around Muong Sing in Northwest Laos close to the Chinese border.

Although government forces total just over 100,000, they are no match for the North Vietnamese who have long had the capability to seize almost any target in Laos that they wish. The North Vietnamese have intensified their military pressure during the last two

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Group 1

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years. During the current dry season, they have stepped up terrorism and road interdiction, and have solidified base areas close to the Thai border in both north and south Laos. They have not yet overturned the military equilibrium established in 1962, however. The principal counterbalance to the North Vietnamese is U.S. air activity, plus some ground reconnaissance in the south [REDACTED]

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per sec. 3.3(b)(1)(6)

### Policy Considerations for the U.S. Military Role

U.S. military efforts in Laos are dual: against North Vietnamese infiltration through Laos into South Viet-Nam, and in support of RLG defensive actions. They must be continued within a policy framework, in part imposed by the 1962 Geneva Agreements, that limits U.S. operations to areas and types of activities that can either obtain the approval of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, or be conducted without his awareness. For most of those operations that Souvanna has approved, neither the U.S. nor he can make public acknowledgement. Overt U.S. intervention would cause the collapse of the facade of Souvanna's neutral government, and thus remove the less than effective, but still accepted, international support for the 1962 Geneva settlement. It would also permit North Viet-Nam to assume open backing of the "patriotic" Lao by dropping present restraints on their military action in and through Laos, and thus could generate additional requirements for friendly troops to protect the entire Mekong line.

### U.S. Ground Operations

In the eastern portion of the Lao Panhandle, within a strip roughly 20 kilometers deep along the Lao/Vietnamese border from somewhat north of the DMZ to Cambodia, the Military Assistance Command, Viet-Nam, operates combined U.S./Vietnamese intelligence and harassment teams under the code name Prairie Fire. These teams also install, under the Igloo White program, those sensors that are not air-dropped.

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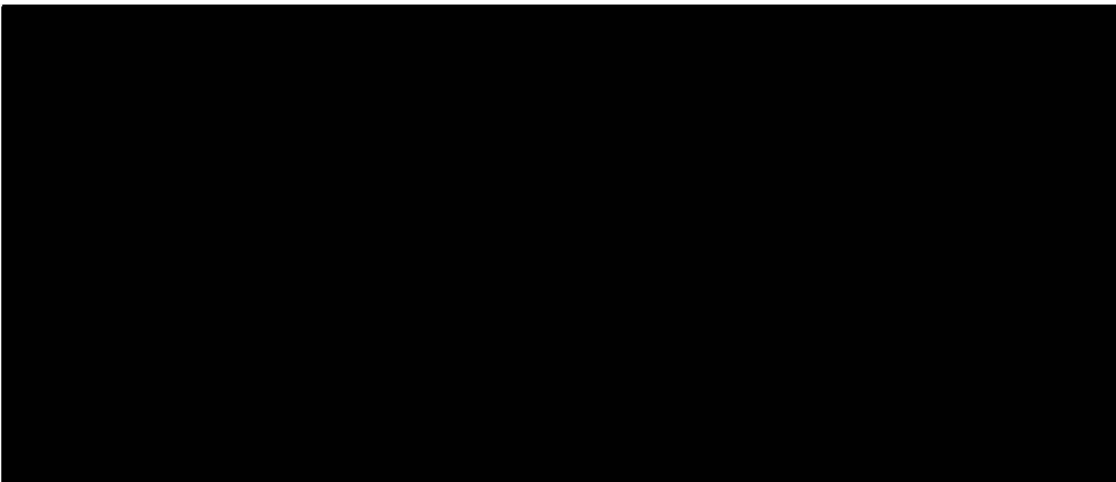
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U.S. Air Operations

The U.S. Air Force conducts over Laos photo reconnaissance, armed reconnaissance, pre-planned strikes, close air support for Lao ground operations, and search and rescue missions. Arc Light is the code name for B-52 strikes. They are conducted in Laos against selected infiltration targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The U.S. tactical air strike program in north Laos is code named Barrel Roll; in south Laos, Steel Tiger. Commando Hunt is a special interdiction campaign inaugurated in November 1968 against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It includes coordinated Arc Light, Igloo White, and Prairie Fire efforts

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per sec. 3.3(b)(1)(6)Thai Involvement

Thailand regards retention of the Mekong Valley in friendly hands as fundamental to its security. Thai Prime Minister Thanom has a direct liaison officer with Souvanna, thus bypassing the Thai Foreign

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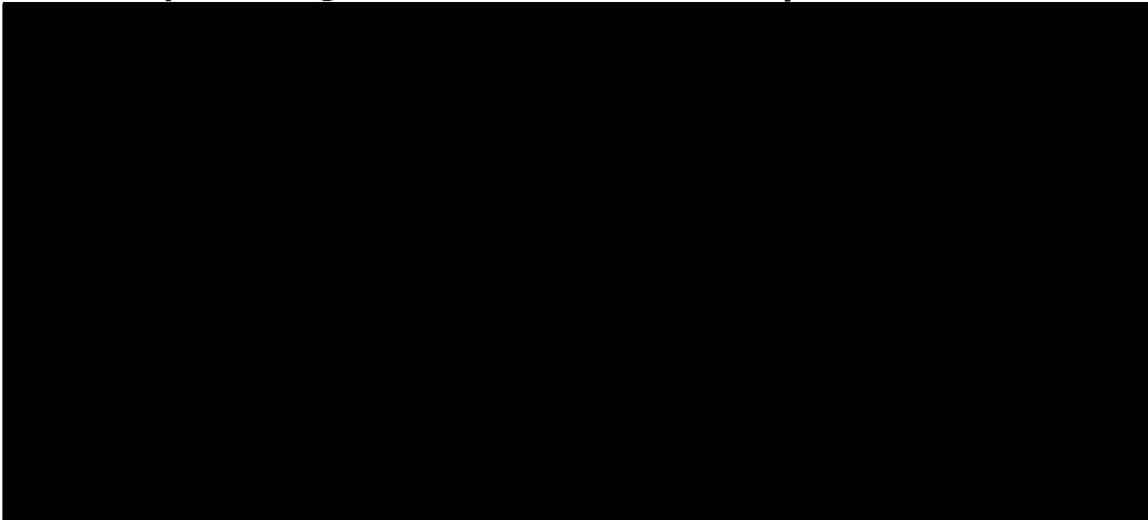
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Ministry in Bangkok and the Thai Embassy in Vientiane. per sec. 3.3(b)(1)(6)



Drafted by:	EA/LC - TJBarnes
Cleared by:	EA/LC - Mr. Corcoran
	EA/TB - Mr. Starbird
	EA - Lt.Col.Wang
	DOD/ISA -Col.Mobley
	EA/VN - Mr. Burke
S/S -S	AParker x6952

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