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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

• PRIORITY

## Intelligence Information Cable

COUNTRY LAOS

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SUBJECT

ENEMY ATTACKS ON FRIENDLY POSITIONS IN SOUTHERN PHONG  
SALY AND WESTERN LUANG PRABANG PROVINCESPLACE &  
DATE ACQ. LAOS, VIENTIANE (13 APRIL 1965)

REF

IN 44724

SOURCE  
AND  
APPRAISAL:

FIELD REPORT NO. [REDACTED]

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1. (SUMMARY: IN LATE MARCH AND THROUGHOUT THE FIRST WEEK OF APRIL, 1965, ADC UNITS IN SOUTHERN PHONG SALY AND NORTHWESTERN LUANG PRABANG PROVINCES WERE BEING ATTACKED BY ENEMY GROUPS RANGING IN SIZE FROM ABOUT 200 TO NEARLY 800 MEN. THE MAJORITY OF THE ATTACKING FORCES WERE PATHET LAO REINFORCED WITH TROOPS FROM THE PEOPLE'S ARMY OF VIETNAM (PAVN) AN ADC COMMANDER ESTIMATED THAT 200 OF THE TROOPS INVOLVED IN ATTACKS ABOUT 40 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA TOWN WERE REGULAR CHINESE COMMUNIST FORCES BUT THIS IS NOT CONFIRMED. A LOCAL RESIDENT OF THIS AREA REPORTED THE MOVEMENT OF A CHINESE COMMUNIST BATTALION FROM SHANGYUNG (QD 8058) TO 40 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA TOWN. THE

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AREAS UNDER ATTACK WERE IN THE VICINITY OF SJ 9038, 65 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA TOWN, AND IN THE VICINITY OF QD 9323, 41 KILOMETERS EAST OF NAM THA. THE ENEMY HAD OVERRUN THE POSITIONS OF AT LEAST FOUR ADC COMPANIES AND HAD EITHER DISPERSED OR CAPTURED THE ADC TROOPS. BY 12 APRIL BOTH ADC AREAS WERE UNDER HEAVY ENEMY PRESSURE.)

2. AN INFORMANT WITH ACCESS TO MUONG SING (QD 2445) GAVE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ON THE ENEMY TO MEMBERS OF A FRIENDLY UNIT:

A. ON 18 MARCH ABOUT 250 ENEMY TROOPS MOVED FROM MUONG SING TO NAM THA (QD 5118) THESE TROOPS WERE DRESSED IN GREEN UNIFORMS AND WERE ARMED WITH THREE UNIDENTIFIED HEAVY WEAPONS. (FIELD COMMENT: THESE MAY HAVE BEEN TROOPS OF THE 408TH PL BATTALION WITH NORTH VIETNAMESE (NVN) ATTACHED WHICH WAS LISTED IN THE 1 APRIL ENEMY ORDER OF BATTLE ESTIMATE FOR LAOS AS BEING HEADQUARTERED IN MUONG SING.)

B. ON 28 MARCH THERE WERE ABOUT 109 ENEMY TROOPS, INCLUDING POLICE, IN MUONG SING. ALL HEAVY WEAPONS EMPLACEMENTS HAD BEEN FILLED WITH DIRT.

C. THE ENEMY PROPAGANDIZED THAT THEY WERE BEGINNING A MAJOR OFFENSIVE AGAINST FRIENDLY TROOPS.

3. A VILLAGER WHO HAD ACCESS TO NAM THA TOWN TOLD A LAO ARMED FORCES (FAR) SERGEANT THAT ON 28 MARCH 120 PAVN/ETHNIC BLACK THAI TROOPS MOVED EAST FROM NAM THA TOWN. THESE TROOPS WERE ARMED WITH ONE 81MM MORTAR AND FOUR RECOILLESS RIFLES. FIFTY COOLIES CARRIED AMMUNITION AND SUPPLIES FOR THIS UNIT. (FIELD COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE INFORMANT IDENTIFIED SOME OF THESE TROOPS AS PAVN, IT IS POSSIBLE THEY WERE

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PART OF THE FORCE REFERRED TO IN PARA 2 A OR WERE FROM THE 5TH PL BATTALION, LISTED IN THE 1 APRIL ENEMY ORDER OF BATTLE ESTIMATE FOR LAOS AS BEING HEADQUARTERED IN NAM THA TOWN.)

4. THE COMMANDER OF AN ADC UNIT AT QD 9323, 41 KMS EAST OF NAM THA TOWN, REPORTED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ON THE ENEMY:

A. ON 31 MARCH ABOUT 300 PL/PAVN TROOPS ATTACKED AND CAPTURED AN ADC COMPANY POSITION AT QD 9019, 39 KILOMETERS EAST OF NAM THA TOWN. EIGHT ADC SOLDIERS WERE KILLED OR WOUNDED. THE ENEMY TROOPS SHOUTED IN VIETNAMESE DURING THE ATTACK.

B. ON 4 APRIL AN ENEMY FORCE OF UNDETERMINED SIZE ATTACKED AND CAPTURED AN ADC COMPANY POSITION AT QD 9228, 40 KILOMETERS EAST OF NAM THA. TWO ADC SOLDIERS WERE KILLED. THE ADC COMPANY RETREATED TO QD 9331, THREE KILOMETERS TO THE NORTH.

C. ON 5 APRIL AT 1920 HOURS ABOUT 200 ENEMY TROOPS ATTACKED AND OVERRAN AN ADC COMPANY'S POSITION AT QD 9334, 45 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA. THE ADC SOLDIERS WERE DISPERSED AND ONLY 18 ARRIVED AT THEIR HEADQUARTERS AT QD 9323.

D. ON 8 APRIL AT 2000 HOURS ABOUT 300 ENEMY TROOPS WITH 400 LOCAL VILLAGERS AS COOLIES ATTACKED AND OVERRAN AN ADC COMPANY AT QD 9339, 48 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA. THE ENEMY CAPTURED THE ENTIRE COMPANY AND FORCED IT TO CARRY SUPPLIES.

E. ON 9 APRIL THE ADC HEADQUARTERS AT QD 9323 MOVED TO RD 0121, 11 KILOMETERS TO THE EAST.

F. ON 10 APRIL THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 400 CHINESE COMMUNIST

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AND PAVN TROOPS AT QD 9331. (FIELD COMMENT: FURTHER EVIDENCE ON THE PRESENCE OF REGULAR CHINESE COMMUNIST TROOPS AT QD 9331 WITH THE PATHET LAO IS LACKING AND THIS IDENTIFICATION OF THE UNIT AS A REGULAR UNIT FROM CHINA SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WITH RESERVE AT THIS TIME.)

5. THE ADC BATTALION COMMANDER AT DOI SANG (SJ 9038) HAD THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ON THE ENEMY:

A. ON AN UNREPORTED DATE A TOTAL OF 779 ENEMY TROOPS ARMED WITH ONE 120MM MORTAR, TWO 75MM HOWITZERS, THREE 82MM RECOILLESS GUNS AND THREE 57MM RECOILLESS RIFLES ATTACKED AND ROUTED ADC TROOPS IN THE VICINITY OF QD 9431. (FIELD COMMENT: THIS IS PROBABLY THE ACTION REPORTED IN PARA 4 C.)

B. ON 7 APRIL AN ENEMY FORCE OF UNREPORTED SIZE WAS MOVING TO SURROUND DOI SANG.

6. THE ADC COMMANDER FOR THE NORTHERN LUANG PRABANG AREA REPORTED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

A. AN ADC COMPANY IN THE VICINITY OF RD 0239, 64 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA TOWN, WAS ATTACKED AND DISPERSED ON AN UNREPORTED DATE IN THE SECOND WEEK OF APRIL. ONLY THREE MEN FROM THE COMPANY REACHED ADC TROOPS IN THE VICINITY OF RD 1138.

B. ONE ADC COMPANY AND A LARGE NUMBER OF CIVILIAN REFUGEES WERE AT QD 9525, 35 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA, WERE ALMOST CUT OFF FROM ADC FORCES TO THE EAST ON 12 APRIL.

C. ON 12 APRIL ENEMY CONTROL EXTENDED TO A LINE RUNNING FROM TJ 0527, 78 KILOMETERS EAST OF NAM THA TOWN, SOUTHWEST TO MUONG LA

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(TJ 0111) TO MUONG SAI (RC 1290), 67 KILOMETERS SOUTHEAST OF NAM THA.

(FIELD COMMENT: [REDACTED] ) REPORTED A PROBABLE ENEMY ATTEMPT TO CUT OFF THE ADC HEADQUARTERS AT DOI SANG FROM ADC UNITS TO THE SOUTH.) 1.5(c)  
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D. BY 12 APRIL ABOUT 800 ENEMY TROOPS WERE IN THE QD 9331 AREA, 43 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA TOWN. THE SUPPLY LINE FOR THESE TROOPS RAN FROM BATENE (QD 7744), 36 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA.

E. AN ESTIMATED 200 REGULAR CHINESE COMMUNIST TROOPS TOOK PART IN THESE ATTACKS. ACCORDING TO THE ADC COMMANDER, THE CHINESE TROOPS WERE IDENTIFIED BY THEIR UNIFORMS AND THEIR LANGUAGE. ADC TROOPS INVOLVED IN CLOSE QUARTERS COMBAT SAID THAT THE CHINESE WORE UNIFORMS WITH FOUR INCH LONG RED STRIPES ON THE RIGHT EPAULET AND GREEN OR BLUE BERETS. THE ADC SOLDIERS CLAIMED THEY HEARD SHOUTS IN CHINESE. (FIELD COMMENT: ADC TROOPS IN THIS AREA HAVE PREVIOUSLY REPORTED HEARING CHINESE WHEN THE LANGUAGE INVOLVED WAS UNFAMILIAR TO THEM. FURTHER EVIDENCE ON THE PARTICIPATION OF REGULAR CHINESE COMMUNIST TROOPS IN ATTACKS IS LACKING AND THE INFORMATION SHOULD BE TREATED WITH RESERVE UNTIL VERIFICATION IS POSSIBLE.)

7. ACCORDING TO A VILLAGER WITH ACCESS TO THE AREA DESCRIBED, ON AN UNREPORTED DATE ONE BATTALION OF CHINESE TROOPS MOVED FROM SHANG-YUNG (QD 8058) IN CHINA, 49 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA TOWN, TO VANG NA TOUI (QD 7631) IN LAOS, 28 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NAM THA TOWN AND JOINED WITH TWO PL COMPANIES WHICH ATTACKED FRIENDLY TROOPS IN THE QD 9323 AREA.

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(FIELD COMMENT: FURTHER EVIDENCE ON THE PARTICIPATION OF REGUALR CHINESE COMMUNIST TROOPS IN ATTACKS WITH THE PATHET LAO IS LACKING AND THE INFORMATION SHOULD BE TREATED WITH RESERVE UNTIL VERIFICATION IS POSSIBLE.)

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8. FIELD DISSEM: STATE ARMY AIR USAID CINCPAC PACFLT ARPAC PACAF  
USMACV-SAIGON 2ND AIR DIVISION SAIGON [REDACTED]

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SPECIAL  
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE  
NUMBER 58-65

# Short-Term Prospects for Laos

Submitted by the  
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the  
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf  
5 AUGUST 1965

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SPECIAL  
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE  
NUMBER 58-65

# Short-Term Prospects for Laos

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## SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS FOR LAOS

### SCOPE NOTE

Laos continues to lie as a secondary theater in the shadow of Vietnam. This estimate surveys the local Lao scene and evaluates the prospects for serious trouble arising from local political or military developments during the next few months. Extension of major ground operations of the Vietnam conflict into Lao territory would, of course, create a fundamentally new situation.

### SUMMARY

A. During the next month or so, the formation of a new government will create a period of some tension in Vientiane and will present problems in relations with the Pathet Lao (PL). Although the PL will launch propaganda attacks on any new arrangements made as a result of the recent elections, we believe the chances are better than even that they will not set up a rival government. Considering the characteristic volatility of Lao politics, a coup is an ever-present possibility, but we see no major threat at this time to Souvanna's continuance in office.

B. Whereas we are fairly confident in our judgment that the Communists probably do not intend to *initiate* any major military action in Laos in the next few months, we are certain that they would *react* vigorously to any offensive in Laos which they felt seriously threatened the infiltration route to the Viet Cong or moved into the territories bordering on the DRV and Communist China. Despite some improvement in the Lao army in the past year or so, we believe that any major Lao offensive into these sensitive areas would be repulsed with great damage and a severe setback to general military morale.

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## I. POLITICAL SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

1. In 1962, the neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma was made premier of the tripartite regime established as a result of the 14-nation conference at Geneva. Two deputy premiers, Prince Souphanouvong and Phoumi Nosavan, represented the pro-Communist and rightist factions respectively. Pro-Communist participation in the government practically ended in the spring of 1963 when Prince Souphanouvong and one of the PL ministers left Vientiane for Communist territory. Although some cabinet posts are still held open for the pro-Communists, the government has since been in effect a neutralist-rightist coalition, with rightist influence growing. Souvanna himself has become increasingly anti-Communist.

2. The flight of Phoumi Nosavan from Laos after his attempted coup last February eliminated one important source of political instability and strengthened Souvanna Phouma's position. Souvanna has some degree of backing from most of the non-Communist political factions in Laos. The King has supported him increasingly, and even such powerful conservatives as the Sananikone family, whose position was also strengthened by Phoumi's departure, have been generally content to work with him as premier. Most Lao politicians consider it useful to continue him in office because he symbolizes the Geneva legitimacy of the Lao Government (RLG). Nevertheless, dissensions among military leaders, although more related to rivalries between the general staff and the field officers than to Souvanna's role, could erupt in a manner that would threaten or destroy stability.

3. Although Souvanna keeps tight control of foreign affairs and has increased his command of the sources of power in the government (patronage and money), he has tended to leave a large part of the everyday management of government affairs to others. A number of relatively young civil servants and junior cabinet officers have recently come into prominence, of whom the most important is Sisouk na Champassak. By Lao standards they are a hard-working and generally honest group. A few have already been accused of lining their pockets, however, and we cannot be confident that increased authority or frustration will not incline them toward the corrupt ways of their elders. Souvanna has been promoting the cause of Sisouk in a way that indicates he sees him as a possible successor to the premiership, but, as Sisouk himself recognizes, he has not yet acquired the necessary maturity and prestige for that difficult job.

4. The approach of the National Assembly elections of 18 July stimulated some uncertainty and considerable activity, including threats and bribery, among the various factions, for whom seats in this largely rubber-stamp body represent at least accretions of prestige and political influence. The electorate, restricted to about 20,000 military officers, government functionaries, and teachers returned an Assembly generally younger and more energetic and capable than its predecessor and one accordingly that is likely to seek a more active role in the government.

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5. The outcome of the election was favorable for the preservation of stability. No group won such complete dominance that others would feel driven to overthrow it, and no group was so badly defeated that it would feel a coup was required for self-preservation. On the whole, the chief gainers were the "Young Nationalists," who line up with Sisouk na Champassak. Since the election enough of the successful candidates have gravitated to Sisouk to give him a majority, which he can be expected to use in support of Souvanna. The chief losers were the Sananikone family, but even they won about 10 of the 59 seats. The leading Sananikones, former Premier Phoui, and his nephew, General Kouprasith, commander of the military region which includes Vientiane, have both expressed satisfaction with the outcome.

6. During the election campaign, rumors of coups were rife in Vientiane. Advance knowledge of what was perhaps the most serious coup threat—arising from rivalries and antagonisms within the armed forces—enabled US officials to persuade the leaders that such a move would be unwise. There will always be a threat to stability, however, as long as command relationships remain in contention and distrust persists among the military leaders, particularly between Vientiane and the field commanders. However, we believe the chances are better than even that the legal government will survive these dangers and that Souvanna will continue as premier.

7. The ambitious General Phoumi, now in exile in Thailand, poses little present threat. Although he still retains some following, particularly among middle ranks in the military, he has little chance of recouping his position as long as the present balance prevails in Laos. His diminished standing with the Thai was further lowered by his ill advised play for power early this year; the Thai leaders are willing to let him remain in Thailand as a refugee, but they almost certainly have no intention of backing Phoumi in an attempt to return to power. Although the Thai leaders do not much care for some of the present Lao leaders, they are willing to accept them or any other non-leftist group that appears able to provide a modicum of stability in a non-Communist Laos. Phoumi would remain available for the Thai to back should the situation in Vientiane collapse into chaos.

## II. MILITARY SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

8. At present the Lao Government forces (FAR) have about 54,000 men (including about 1,000 in the Air Force and 450 in the River Flotilla). The Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF), under the leadership of General Ma, has available about 45 propeller-driven fighter-bombers (T-28s), and its pilots have shown commendable courage and skill in close air support action and in harassing enemy movements and supply. Last summer's successful clearing operation around the junction of routes 7 and 13, this spring's successful defense of Dong Hene against an attack by North Vietnamese troops, the absence of a Communist offensive before this year's monsoon, and, perhaps most important, the increased ground attack capability of the RLAF (plus US air action in Laos)

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have combined to give the FAR improved morale and confidence. FAR capabilities are probably the best they have been, but this still leaves it as a third-rate fighting force with little capability against determined opposition.

9. A significant element on the anti-Communist side is the large number of tribal irregulars who continue to put up vigorous defense of their mountain-top home areas and have provided some effective harassment of enemy supply lines. The neutralist forces commanded by General Kong Le should also be counted on the anti-Communist side, but these largely demoralized 8,000 or so men have a very limited military capability.

10. The Communist forces in Laos are estimated to include about 22,000-25,000 Pathet Lao (PL) and about 9,000 North Vietnamese troops (PAVN), of which about 2,000 are encadred in PL forces.<sup>1</sup> There are also about 2,600 rather ineffectual dissident neutralists under the commands of Colonel Deuane and General Khamouane Boupha. The Deuanists, like their counterparts under Kong Le, are of wavering loyalty, even though encadred with PL. It is unlikely that there are any organized Chinese military units in Laos, although detachments of armed guards have probably at times accompanied Chinese road-building crews and supply convoys in Phong Saly and Nam Tha provinces.

11. The Communist forces—particularly the PAVN—are generally more effective than the non-Communist Lao forces and retain the capability of rapidly seizing such exposed places as Thakhek or Luang Prabang. The interior southern towns of Saravane and Attopen are especially vulnerable to Communist attack and could be seized by small forces. They could not overrun FAR-held territory quite so swiftly and easily as they might have in the past, however, because of the improvement of the FAR and especially because of the effect of air attacks on their forces and supply lines. Seizure of Vientiane, Pakse, or Savannakhet would almost certainly require the introduction of substantial additional PAVN forces.

12. The Communists give no sign of wanting to stir up the military situation in Laos. They already control those parts of Laos which are most important to them: the areas adjacent to China and North Vietnam and the part of the panhandle used as a supply and infiltration route into South Vietnam. Not since 1962 have they moved to take an important town from the FAR, and this year they have even passed up the usual pre-monsoon offensive against the neutralists. They have conducted some fairly vigorous clearing actions against the anti-Communist irregulars along their supply lines in Sam Neua province, and they are currently increasing pressure on the anti-Communist irregulars in the region where Luang Prabang, Phong Saly, and Nam Tha provinces come together. These efforts have resulted in some improvement of the security of

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<sup>1</sup> In past summers, Hanoi has substantially reduced PAVN forces in Laos to lessen the monsoon supply problem, and it may have done so this year. The 9,000 figure does not take into account this possible reduction; neither does it take into account PAVN troops in transit through Laos into Vietnam.



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their supply lines, but much of the rugged country outside the roads and strong points remains in the hands of the tribal irregulars. The results have shown that Communists also find it difficult and costly to suppress guerrillas. In addition, air action has complicated their supply problem and lowered morale.

13. Whereas we are fairly confident in our judgment that the Communists probably do not intend to *initiate* any major military action in Laos in the next few months, we are certain that they would *react* vigorously to any offensive in Laos which they felt seriously threatened the infiltration route to the Viet Cong or moved into the territories bordering on the DRV and Communist China. Any FAR offensive into these sensitive areas would be repulsed with great damage to the FAR forces involved and a severe setback to general FAR morale.

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