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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

33

JCSM-215-87

20 APR 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: PRAIRIE FIRE - Phase III (U)

1. (U) Reference is made to:

a. COMUSMACV message to CINCPAC, 250820Z March 1967, JCS IN 89390.

b. CINCPAC message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 010011Z April 1967, JCS IN 13559.

2. (TS) The area of Laos between the Tchepone-Se Kong River line and the Lao/Vietnam border continues to be dominated by North Vietnamese forces and to serve as the principal infiltration route and support area for enemy operations in South Vietnam. The avowed neutrality of Laos and the US desire to conform as closely as possible to the provisions of the Geneva Accords have limited friendly activity in the area to PRAIRIE FIRE reconnaissance and exploitation missions, air operations, and some CAS road watch teams. Although all of these efforts have gradually increased in scope and effectiveness, they are by no means capable of stemming the infiltration or denying the use of the area. Therefore, the search has continued for new or improved concepts to deal with the problem without a drastic shift in policy toward Laos and without upsetting that country's political and military balance.

3. (TS) During the conduct of PRAIRIE FIRE operations over the past few months, COMUSMACV's Studies and Observations Group (SOG) has identified and assessed a potential for the establishment of a friendly guerrilla force in the Annamite Mountain Region of southern Laos. This potential is the Kha tribal group which inhabits the area and is being exploited by the enemy.

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Past experience with Montagnard groups in Southeast Asia has shown that these people will respond to Caucasian influence and can be developed into guerrilla forces. Such a program could provide an important supplement to the existing counter-infiltration effort at a low cost in men and materiel and with a low risk of embarrassing the neutralist Government of Laos.

4. ~~(TS)~~ CINCPAC has endorsed (reference 1b) a COMUSMACV proposal (reference 1a) that SOG develop and direct a guerrilla program in southeastern Laos. The proposed concept of operations is outlined in Appendix A hereto. Estimates at this time indicate a potential force of some 3,000 men and a requirement for 135 US Army personnel.

5. ~~(TS)~~ The Joint Chiefs of Staff have examined the proposed concept and consider that this course of action should be pursued. Time consuming and carefully executed preliminary activities such as contact, exfiltration, training, indoctrination, reinfiltration, and recruiting must be undertaken before it will be possible to determine the exact scope and area of the program. These initial steps can be taken without an expansion of the PRAIRIE FIRE zone or the commitment of additional US Army Special Forces into Laos. However, this initial activity should not be undertaken without conceptual approval of the over-all program.

6. ~~(TS)~~ Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that:

a. The guerrilla warfare concept contained in Appendix A be approved in principle for further planning, training, and discussion with RVNAF.

b. Execution of the preparatory phase (Appendix A, subparagraph 1b (1)) be approved.

c. Execution of the exploitation phase (Appendix A, subparagraph 1b (2)) be approved, subject to the successful accomplishment of the preparatory phase and further assessment.

d. The phased PCS deployment to RVN of 135 additional US Army personnel be approved.

e. Additional funds in the estimated amount of \$2,000,000 be provided to the Department of the Navy for the support of this program through the fourth quarter of FY 1968.

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f. A memorandum substantially as contained in Appendix B hereto, together with Appendix A, be forwarded to the Secretary of State.

7. (U) Upon receipt of your approval, the implementing message in Appendix C hereto will be dispatched.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

SIGNED

EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

Attachments

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APPENDIX A

"PRAIRIE FIRE" PHASE III OPERATIONS (U)

1. (S) Concept of Operations: 1
- a. General: PRAIRIE FIRE elements establish contact 2
with tribal groups in southeastern Laos in order to 3
identify individuals and villages which are susceptible 4
to recruitment into an anti-VC/NVA/PL guerrilla movement. 5
Selected individuals are removed to SVN, indoctrinated and 6
trained, and reinfilitrated to their home areas to continue 7
recruiting. Once a large enough force (approximately 100 men) 8
has been recruited, US Special Forces conduct training and 9
direct the force in the execution of guerrilla operations 10
against the enemy. Phase I and II PRAIRIE FIRE operations 11
continue and provide assistance and support to the guerrilla 12
forces during their formative stages. In later stages the 13
operations become mutually supporting. Tactical air continues 14
to support all PRAIRIE FIRE operations. US provides supplies 15
and support and directs program through COMUSMACV. 16
- b. Phases: 17
- (1) Preparatory Phase: 18
- (a) RVNAF/FAR discussions to obtain FAR agreement 19
to the program and to obtain the services of selected 20
Lao personnel to make initial contacts. US support, 21
participation, and control kept in background but 22
understood. 23
- (b) SCG trains initial contact personnel. 24
- (c) PRAIRIE FIRE teams reconnoiter area to identify 25
potential locales. 26
- (d) Contact personnel, protected and accompanied 27
by PRAIRIE FIRE teams, make initial contact with 28
selected village chiefs. Power of team to call in air 29
strikes and supply drops is demonstrated. 30

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(e) Recruits furnished by village chiefs are exfiltrated and given intensive indoctrination and training.

(f) Above groups reinfilitrated to continue recruiting in tribal areas and to conduct intelligence and psychological activities.

(2) Exploitation Phase:

(a) Once a large enough force has been recruited (approximately 100), a US Army Special Forces A Detachment trains the force in a safe area (either in Laos or in SVN) while recruiting of additional personnel continues.

(b) Guerrilla units, advised, directed, and supported by US Army Special Forces Detachments, initiate guerrilla operations against the enemy.

(c) PRAIRIE FIRE Recon Teams, Exploitation Forces, and US tactical air provide support as appropriate.

2. ~~(S)~~ Area of Operations:

a. During the preparatory phase, operations will be limited to the currently authorized PRAIRIE FIRE zone.

b. During the exploitation phase, guerrilla warfare operational areas will be assigned to the guerrilla units developed, based on such factors as the unit's home area, capability for expansion, target availability, and other friendly activity.

3. ~~(S)~~ US Participation:

a. During the initial RVNAF/FAR (Lao Armed Forces) discussions, US involvement will be kept in the background; but it will be understood that the US will provide principal support and direction to the program.

b. During the preparatory phase, US personnel, with the exception of Recon Team and Exploitation Force advisors, will not penetrate into Laos.

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- c. During the exploitation phase US Army Special Forces A Detachments will operate in Laos with the guerrilla units. Initial estimates place the guerrilla potential at approximately 3000. This would involve about 10 USASF A Detachments in Laos and some additional supporting personnel for COMUSMACV. 1
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- d. US tactical air continues to provide support for all PRAIRIE FIRE operations. 6
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- e. US provides equipment and supplies to guerrilla forces developed. 8
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- f. US exercises command and control through MACSOG. 10

APPENDIX B

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Subject: PRAIRIE FIRE - Phase III (U)

1. ~~(S)~~ The area of Laos between the Tchepone-Se Kong River 1
line and the Lao/Vietnam border continues to be dominated by 2
North Vietnamese forces and to serve as the principal infil- 3
tration route and support area for enemy operations in South 4
Vietnam. The avowed neutrality of Laos and the US desire to 5
conform as closely as possible to the provisions of the Geneva 6
Accords have limited friendly activity in the area to PRAIRIE 7
FIRE reconnaissance and exploitation missions, air operations, 8
and some CAS road watch teams. Although all of these efforts 9
have gradually increased in scope and effectiveness, they are by 10
no means capable of stemming the infiltration or denying the use 11
of the area. Therefore, the search has continued for new or 12
improved concepts to deal with the problem without a drastic 13
shift in policy toward Laos and without upsetting the country's 14
political and military balance. 15

2. ~~(S)~~ During the conduct of PRAIRIE FIRE operations over the 16
past few months, COMUSMACV's Studies and Observations Group (SOG) 17
has identified and assessed a potential for the establishment of 18
a friendly guerrilla force in the Annamite Mountain Region of 19
southern Laos. This potential is the Kha tribal group which 20
inhabits the area and is being exploited by the enemy. Past 21
experience with Montagnard groups in Southeast Asia has shown 22
that these people will respond to Caucasian influence and can 23
be developed into guerrilla forces. Such a program could provide 24
an important supplement to the existing counterinfiltration 25
effort at a low cost in men and material and with a low risk 26
of embarrassing the neutralist Government of Laos. 27

GROUP-1
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC
DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION.

3. (S) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have therefore proposed
that COMUSMACV develop and direct a guerrilla program in
southeastern Laos. The proposed concept of operations is
outlined in the Appendix.*

4. (S) I have examined the proposed concept and consider
that this course of action should be pursued. Time consuming
and carefully executed preliminary activities such as contact,
exfiltration, training, indoctrination, reinfiltration, and
recruiting must be undertaken before it will be possible to
determine the exact scope and area of the program. These
initial steps can be taken without an expansion of the PRAIRIE
FIRE zone or the commitment of additional US Army Special Forces
into Laos over and above the present PRAIRIE FIRE program.
However, conceptual approval of the over-all program should
precede such preliminary activity.

5. (U) Prior to taking any action on this matter, I would
appreciate your views.

* Appendix A hereto

APPENDIX C

DRAFT

FROM: JCS
 TO: CINCPAC
 CSA
 INFO: COMUSMACV
 AMEMB SAIGON
 AMEMB BANGKOK
 AMEMB VIENTIANE

Ref a is JCS
 IN 89390
 Ref b is JCS
 IN 13559
 Ref c is JCS
 IN 47122

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Subj: PRAIRIE FIRE - Phase III (U)

Refs: a. COMUSMACV msg MACSOG 09951/250820Z Mar 67
 b. CINCPAC msg 010011Z Apr 67
 c. COMUSMACV msg 15103Z Jan 67

This message in two parts. 1

Part One for CINCPAC. 2

1. () Program for the conduct of guerrilla 3
 operations in the Annamite Mountain region of 4
 southern Laos contained in reference a is approved 5
 for continued planning, training, and discussion 6
 with representatives of the RVNAF and for execution 7
 on order of the JCS upon successful accomplishment 8
 of preliminary steps. 9

2. (TC) Authority is granted to initiate 10
 preliminary activity subject to the following 11
 guidance: 12

a. Operations will be limited to the current 13
 PRAIRIE FIRE area of operations. 14

b. Reconnaissance and contact with indigenous 15
 personnel may be carried out. 16

c. Recruitment, exfiltration, and training of 17
 initial contact teams and cadre may commence. 18

d. Trained personnel may be reinfilitrated 19
 to their native area to conduct intelligence, 20
 psychological, and recruiting activities. 21

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e. Phase I and II PRAIRIE FIRE operations may support these initial steps as appropriate. 1
2

f. US Army Special Forces personnel, other than those engaged in Phases I and II operations, will not repeat not penetrate into Laos during this stage. 3
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g. The JCS will be kept informed as to the progress of the above activity. 6
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3. ~~(S)~~ Based upon the results of this preliminary activity and upon your specific recommendation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff will authorize the initiation of guerrilla warfare in specific areas and for the infiltration of US Army Special Forces teams.. 8
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4. ~~(S)~~ Requests for funds to support the above program will be submitted through appropriate channels. 13
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5. ~~(S)~~ The additional US Army personnel required will not be available for assignment on a PCS basis until 1 January 1958. 15
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6. ~~(S)~~ State concurs. 18

Part Two for CSA 19

7. ~~(S)~~ Request that you prepare for deployment on PCS to RVN the US Army personnel outlined in reference c, para 4 c, commencing NLT 1 January 1958. Spaces for these personnel are approved as an exception to the Program 4 manpower ceiling. Gp-1 20
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24

Writer:
Lt Colonel R. B. Rheault, USA
Eastern Division, SACSA
Extension 76529