

ened our spirit as well as our forces, and it has conveyed the clear message that we define detente as a search for mutual and balanced, rather than unilateral, advantage.

In this context, we are prepared to enter into serious negotiations on long-range theater nuclear forces, within the framework of SALT III. Any agreement reached must—like SALT II—be balanced and adequately verifiable. We will not entertain any notion of a freeze which would confirm a Soviet preponderance in long-range nuclear forces in this theater. But we are prepared to negotiate an equitable agreement on U.S. and Soviet deployments of these systems at reduced levels. This would mean a reduction of the Soviet threat and a reduction in NATO's deployment program.

The modernization decision that we have made here also makes it possible for us to withdraw 1,000 nuclear warheads from Europe. In addition to this reduction, for each of these weapons we deploy, we will withdraw one existing weapon from Europe. Thus, far from increasing NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons, our decisions will result in a significant reduction in the size of NATO's overall nuclear stockpile in Europe.

Our willingness to enter into negotiations on theater nuclear forces in the SALT framework is but one of a comprehensive set of arms control initiatives which the alliance is now developing. Mutual and balanced force reductions and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe are other negotiations which the alliance members are pursuing with equal vigor.

The political effects of the decisions taken here today are considerable. Faced with a real challenge to the security of Western Europe, the alliance has reacted decisively, prudently, and in a way that invites the pursuit of arms control initiatives. I believe that our governments can be proud of this memorable achievement, and that the free peoples of the alliance will show overwhelming support for the decisions made here today.

**Statement by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State  
for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Colbert) Before a  
Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign  
Affairs: Use of Chemical Weapons in Indochina,  
December 12, 1979<sup>1</sup>**

Many members of the Hmong (Meo) hilltribes minority arriving in Thailand as refugees from Laos have reported chemical attacks by Lao-Vietnamese forces in Laos. In some cases, they have stated that they were the actual victims of such attacks. The attacks, directed against both civilian and military targets, are reported to have occurred from 1974 to as recently as May 1979. As we have already

<sup>1</sup> *Department of State Bulletin*, Mar. 1980, pp. 43-45. The statement was made before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs.

our forces, and it has conveyed the clear message as a search for mutual and balanced, advantage.

prepared to enter into serious negotiations with our forces, within the framework of SALT II must—like SALT II—be balanced and will not entertain any notion of a freeze in Soviet preponderance in long-range nuclear weapons. We are prepared to negotiate an equitable reduction of these systems at least to the level of a reduction of the Soviet threat and a payment program.

Decision that we have made here also makes it possible to withdraw 1,000 nuclear warheads from Europe. In the case of each of these weapons we deploy, we will not depend on them from Europe. Thus, far from increasing our nuclear weapons, our decisions will result in a reduction of the size of NATO's overall nuclear stockpile.

into negotiations on theater nuclear forces but one of a comprehensive set of arms control measures the alliance is now developing. Mutual and balanced force reductions and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe negotiations which the alliance members are conducting in a serious and vigorous manner.

the decisions taken here today are a direct and real challenge to the security of Western Europe. We have reacted decisively, prudently, and in a way that will help arms control initiatives. I believe that our actions are a part of this memorable achievement, and that the alliance will show overwhelming support for these decisions today.

**Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East and Pacific Affairs (Colbert) Before a Hearing of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on Chemical Weapons in Indochina, March 19, 1980**

Hmong (Meo) hilltribes minority arriving in Laos have reported chemical attacks by the Lao Government in Laos. In some cases, they have stated that the victims of such attacks. The attacks, directed at military targets, are reported to have occurred recently as May 1979. As we have already

*Foreign Affairs*, Mar. 1980, pp. 43-45. The statement was made by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East and Pacific Affairs.

heard, we do not have absolute proof of these charges; however, the result of U.S. Government investigations support the conclusion that some chemical agent or agents were being used in Laos during the period in question, as part of the Lao Government's effort to bring the Hmong under its control.

*Hmong Resistance*

The years of enmity between the Hmong and the lowland Lao and Vietnamese have left bitterness on both sides. During the Indochina wars, one faction of the Hmong worked with the Lao and Vietnamese Communists. However, the majority of the Hmong supported French and later American efforts to forestall a Vietnamese Communist victory in Laos. With their unmatched skills as guerrilla fighters, the Hmong played an important military role for both the United States and France.

When the communists came to power in Vientiane in 1975, a few Hmong settled under Lao-Vietnamese control semivoluntarily. However, many of the Hmong who had been allied with the French and the United States continued their guerrilla resistance in remote upland areas, threatening land communications and attacking isolated Lao and Vietnamese units. Other Hmong retreated deeper into the mountains of northern Laos or fled to Thailand.

Those who continued their resistance did so without any U.S. assistance, then or now, drawing instead largely upon cached weapons and ammunition and inspired by their perennial fears of control by the dominant lowland Lao and the Vietnamese. Most Hmong have seen their actions as defensive and that of the Vietnamese and Lao Government forces as an attempt to eradicate Hmong tribes, at least those who are former followers of General Vang Pao and their families in Phu Bia and Phu Ma Thao.

*Lao-Vietnamese Resettlement Campaign*

The Lao Government, with strong Vietnamese assistance, is waging a military campaign against the 300,000 Hmong. This campaign is aimed ultimately at resettling them, primarily in the lowlands and plains where they can be more easily controlled. The government contends that such resettlement is essential to its security. It fears foreign support of the Hmong insurgency if the Hmong are left in remote areas. It is also the Lao Government's policy to put an end to the Hmong traditional practice of slash and burn agriculture which results each year in the destruction of valuable timber—one of Laos' few natural resources.

The practical effect of this campaign has been to create great hardship for many Hmong, resulting in the flight to Thailand of approximately one-fifth of the Laos Hmong population. Beginning in 1974, and gradually increasing in frequency in 1976 and 1977, there were reports of use of poison gas by Lao and Vietnamese troops against insurgent Hmong tribes. All of the reports on this subject referred to

air delivery of a chemical agent — or agents — causing illness or death. Descriptions given by refugees of color and other characteristics of the agents and the symptoms of the illnesses caused vary widely. Several reports told of repeated chemical attacks on Hmong villages under control of the Lao Government.

I should emphasize that as we have heard, it has been very difficult to obtain physical evidence of poison gas. Some of the symptoms described could possibly result from materials other than lethal poison gas, e.g., defoliants, riot control agents, phosphorous shells, etc. The physical evidence of most toxic agents normally dissipates very rapidly. In addition, persons severely affected by toxic agents would be unable to survive the long journey to Thai refugee camps and this, in effect, has ruled out the possibility of physical examination.

Nevertheless, as we can see in the materials released today, we believe that the reports are numerous enough to warrant our attention and concern. In 1977 we had begun a dialogue with U.S. agencies and other governments as well as with Lao officials in which we sought to focus concern on the welfare of Hmong caught up in Lao-Vietnamese resettlement schemes. The chairman has already mentioned our diplomatic efforts in this regard. In early October 1978, we specifically raised our concern about the reports of gas use in Laos with the Lao chargé d'affaires in Washington. Later in October Assistant Secretary [for East Asian and Pacific Affairs]<sup>2</sup> Richard Holbrooke, in Vientiane, reiterated to the Lao leaders our concern over Hmong human rights and other issues relating to them.

Still later in 1978, the State Department directed U.S. diplomatic missions in the area to seek further information on the possible use of poison gas against the Hmong.

In January 1979, the Department again informed the Lao Embassy of its concern about reports of poison gas use in Laos, coupling this with a similar demarche in Vientiane. The Lao denied the reports. At the same time we also notified the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of our concern.

In March the U.S. Representative to the 35th session of the U.N. Human Rights Commission [Jerome J. Shestack] expressed U.S. concern about the plight of the Hmong, specifically raising the issue of reported use of poison gas in Laos against this tribal minority.

In May a State Department representative went to refugee camps in Thailand to interview Hmong claiming to be eyewitnesses and/or victims of poison gas attacks in Laos. The State Department representative also visited Vientiane where he discussed the problem with various diplomatic missions and the senior U.N. representative in Laos. He raised the problem directly with the Lao Foreign Ministry, noting that he had been assigned to seek evidence of gas use from among Hmong refugees in Thailand. Working with another officer

<sup>2</sup> Brackets throughout this document are in the original.

agent — or agents — causing illness or death. Refugees of color and other characteristics of symptoms of the illnesses caused vary widely. Repeated chemical attacks on Hmong villages Government.

As we have heard, it has been very difficult because of poison gas. Some of the symptoms result from materials other than lethal agents, riot control agents, phosphorous shells, and most toxic agents normally dissipates and persons severely affected by toxic agents on the long journey to Thai refugee camps and the possibility of physical examina-

As I see in the materials released today, we have seen numerous enough to warrant our attention. We had begun a dialogue with U.S. agencies as well as with Lao officials in which we discussed the welfare of Hmong caught up in Lao schemes. The chairman has already mentioned this in this regard. In early October 1978, we were concerned about the reports of gas use in Laos which were in Washington. Later in October Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs<sup>2</sup> Richard Goodwin has reiterated to the Lao leaders our concern and other issues relating to them.

The State Department directed U.S. diplomatic efforts to obtain further information on the possible use of poison gas.

The State Department again informed the Lao Embassy about reports of poison gas use in Laos, coupling this with reports from Vientiane. The Lao denied the reports. At the request of the International Committee of the Red Cross, we are concerned.

At the representative to the 35th session of the U.N. General Assembly [Jerome J. Shestack] expressed U.S. concern about Hmong, specifically raising the issue of chemical attacks on Laos against this tribal minority.

The U.S. representative went to refugee camps in Laos claiming to be eyewitnesses and/or victims of gas attacks. The State Department representative where he discussed the problem with the Lao Foreign Ministry and the senior U.N. representative in Laos. He discussed directly with the Lao Foreign Ministry. The U.S. representative signed to seek evidence of gas use from the Lao Government in Thailand. Working with another officer

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from the American Consulate in Udorn, Thailand, he completed a report in June based on over 20 interviews with Hmong who claimed to be eyewitnesses and/or victims. The report concluded that based on these interviews, there was reason to believe that some chemical agent was being employed in Laos.

Also, during this mission, the two State Department representatives received from Hmong refugees two samples of material that the Hmong claimed to be poison gas residue collected at the sites of two attacks in Laos. We have already heard from the medical people about the difficulties here.

We have provided these reports and our conclusions from these investigations to the Lao Government to substantiate and underscore our concern. We have also made demarches to the Vietnamese and the Soviets and provided them with these June interview reports, urging that the Soviets use their influence with both Hanoi and Vientiane to raise the matter with their allies. The Vietnamese and the Lao have categorically rejected reports of the use of such gas. The Soviets have stood behind these assertions. We have also provided information developed in these reports to other governments, asking each to share with us any available information they may have. Thus far, none have come forward with additional evidence.

In late September of this year, an Army medical team was dispatched to Thailand to interview Hmong who claimed to have knowledge of gas attacks in Laos. The team interviewed over 40 eyewitnesses and produced a report which reinforced the findings of the June investigation and elaborated in greater detail the symptomology of the alleged victims. Dr. [Charles W.] Lewis has discussed his findings in detail. I can assure you that we will very strongly raise Dr. Lewis' findings with various governments in a manner similar to our demarches based on the June report.

As recently as October 4, Assistant Secretary Holbrooke met with Lao Acting Foreign Minister Khamphay Bouppha in New York and expressed deep U.S. concern about reports that poison gas was being used in Laos. The Lao, as in the past, rejected the allegations.

As Chairman [Lester] Wolff has noted, we have received no reports of the use of poison gas in Laos later than May 1979, providing some hope that whatever may have been taking place before that time has since ceased. However, there have been a few reports recently from Khmer refugees and from Khmer resistance groups that Vietnamese forces seeking to consolidate control in Kampuchea are using lethal chemical agents.

In late 1978, we had noted isolated allegations by the Pol Pot government, at that time still in control of the country, that Vietnamese troops were using poison gas delivered by artillery fire in eastern Kampuchea. Following the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Kampuchea, these allegations began to multiply as did refugee reports of apparent gas attacks that were in some instances lethal. While we obviously cannot accept Pol Pot allegations at face value, we are concerned by and investigating refugee reports.

We do not have the volume of reporting from Kampuchea at this time that we have seen from Laos. We are, however, monitoring developments related to reports of gas use in Kampuchea very closely. We note that in Kampuchea, Vietnamese forces and their allies face a guerrilla resistance, often based in rugged and relatively inaccessible terrain, much as they do in Laos. In our demarches to the Vietnamese and Soviets, we made it clear that our concern about these reports related to all of Indochina.

In sum, on the basis of very sketchy reports of gas use in Laos, over a year ago, we acted to expand our knowledge on the question. Operating on the basis that the mounting numbers of reports give them collective weight, and on our conviction that given their subject matter warranted our deep concern, we have also, for over a year, used diplomatic channels to draw them to the attention of those with influence in Hanoi and Vientiane. In the case of Laos, we expressed our concern well in advance of the availability of significant evidence. We note the absence of any gas reports by refugees from Laos in over 6 months. We will, of course, continue to monitor the situation very closely.

In Kampuchea, while we do not have the weight of refugee testimony that we have had in the case of Laos, the similarity of the terrain and the nature of the fighting suggests that Vietnamese might possibly choose to rely on lethal chemical agents, if they have not already begun to do so, as some reports indicate.

We will continue to scrutinize developments in Kampuchea and are prepared to use diplomatic and public pressure on the Vietnamese should we develop additional information pointing to possible gas use in Kampuchea.

**Statement by the ACDA Assistant Director for Multilateral Affairs (Davies) Before a Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs: Use of Chemical Weapons in Indochina, December 12, 1979**<sup>1</sup>

The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, of course, has taken a particular interest in the reports from Laos and Kampuchea that chemical agents have been used. We have been working closely with the Department of State and the Department of Defense in trying to obtain more definitive information.

It is a well-established principle that chemical weapons must not be used in war. This principle is embodied in the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which in effect bans the first use of chemical and biological weapons in war. The United States and some 114 other countries are parties to the agreement.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Use of Chemical Agents in Southeast Asia Since the Vietnam War: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-sixth Congress, First Session*, pp. 47-49.

<sup>2</sup> The protocol may be found in *Documents on Disarmament, 1969*, pp. 764-765.

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