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Grave Situation in Indo-China

One week has elapsed since the offensive operations against southern Laos by South Vietnamese Forces and the US support forces was first reported. During this interval, a strict news blackout was imposed by the White House and the State and Defense Departments in the US, and in Saigon and Thailand; a part thereof was made public in Saigon on the 4th.

According to the announcement, it is said that in the ~~operation~~ this time, 29,000 allied troops have deployed into Khe Sanh which is an important position situated in the northern part of South Vietnam. It is said that an offensive crossing of the border into Laos has not yet been decided. However, the aspect of the combat operations, which have spread to the whole area of Indo-China, and the statements issued by the USSR, North Vietnam, and Pathet Lao pointed to the gravity and the complication of the situation. Apart from the question as to whether the operation this time is a short-term operation or the operation has the intention to split Indo-China into South and North and maintain it, there is no doubt that the

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expansion of the war will become a main cause of deepening confusion in Indo-China. We should like to warn that the development of the new operation by the US and South Vietnamese Forces is serious.

Referring to the question of advancing into Laos, US Secretary of Defense LAIRD stressed repeatedly that, "We will continue imposing a news blackout to secure the lives and the safety of the US Forces. We have not dispatched US ground troops to Laos." In comparing this statement with the Defense Department's statement to the effect, "70,000 North Vietnamese troops, centering on supply units, are now making preparations for combat operations and the military situation in Laos has become extremely bad," it is clear that the principal aim of the operations is to destroy the HO Chi Minh Trail, leading to South Vietnam and Cambodia by passing eastern Laos. The HO Chi Minh Trail has been utilized to the maximum extent by the North Vietnamese side as a supply route of personnel, weapons, and commodities from North Vietnam and has become the source of great pressure on South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The US Forces are attaching importance to the effectiveness of the "sanctuary operations" with the thought that as a result of carrying out the destruction operations against the communist side's "sanctuaries," situated on the border of Cambodia and South Vietnam, the attacks of the communist forces from the Cambodian side have become weak and the US Forces have become to be able to concentrate their energies on the re-construction and the strengthening of the South Vietnamese Forces. It is true that a communist large-scale attack has not been made in South Vietnam in this half-a-year period. It looks as if the role to be played by the HO Chi Minh Trail in the Vietnam war has become small.

The operation this time is to move the Cambodian operation a step forward and become the starting point of a plan for decreasing the communist side's military pressure on Cambodia and South Vietnam and carrying out the US Forces' withdrawal safely. Is the US Government considering the operations this time in such a way? The withdrawal of the US Forces from Vietnam in pursuance of the NIXON Doctrine is the NIXON Administration's public pledge. If he has to go into the next year's Presidential election as a President who will realize the termination of the Vietnam war, he might have ventured to carry out the operation this time, while expecting nothing but criticism against and danger of expanding the war.

However, as is strongly criticized by the US Congress and mass media, there is no guarantee that this will not lead to a new start of the Indo-China war. In view of the estimated mobilized strength of the US and South Vietnamese Forces, it is not conceivable that the US Forces have started to stage a long-term protracted war. However, the North Vietnamese side seems to be showing a posture to make a strong counterattack against this, on the grounds that this is an infringement of the Geneva Agreement of 1962. As a matter of fact, probably in response to the statements of criticism issued by the USSR and Pathet Lao, the North Vietnamese side's offensives in the northern part of Laos and in South Vietnam have increased suddenly.

What is feared from the response made by the North Vietnamese side up to the present is the point that the expansion of the war fires into Laos may not come to be linked with the acceleration of the US Forces' withdrawal from Vietnam which is expected by the US. As is pointed out by a US newspaper, if the new operations are to increase the danger of expanding the war and if the US is to be involved in an endless war in the whole area of Southeast Asia, criticism against the new operation will come to be further raised. As to the way of preventing it, the US has no other recourse but to concentrate all its consideration and effort again on the original point of the Indo-China war, that is to say, on a solution to the Vietnam war and a political settlement thereof.