

**Laos 1959-1961 -
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Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

Laos - 1959

12 June

D.H.'s memorandum (talks with Asst. Secy
Walter Robertson)

12 June 1959

SECRET

Assistant Secretary Walter Robertson had asked to see me together with Lodge. The two of them came up yesterday for a one hour talk at 2.30 pm. Mr. Cordier was present.

It was quite clear from what Robertson said - Lodge was a silent witness - that he considered himself to have the only true version about the situation in Laos and Cambodia (and Burma, although the Burma case was not discussed). His version, however, differed considerably from mine, which he supposed that I had been talked into by some people inspired by communist propaganda. It was obvious that his own sources were mainly CIA, although of course he has personal contact with people on the top level. There was in his whole tone an accent of contempt for the way in which we may have permitted ourselves to be fooled.

He regarded Laos as more stable than it had ever been in its history, which was somewhat contradicted by the fact that he, on the other hand, scorned my theory - according to him - that "it was largely a family affair". His judgment about the stability seemed to mean only that the Pathet Lao people were kept under strict control and that the Government had got rid of graft. He did not understand why I could take an interest in negotiation: "what could it yield"? In his whole exposé it was characteristic that he dramatised the communist element, for example the "fights" with the Pathet Lao forces. It was also typical that he gave a very one-sided, or at least simplified description of the attitudes of the UK and Canada towards the Commission. However, he assured me that the US wants a neutral Laos and did not strive for any alignment; their economic assistance, which was considerable, was the only alternative to economic assistance from the USSR, and what help they had given to the build-up of the Laos army was "necessary" and perfectly in line with the Geneva accord.

As regards Cambodia, he gave emphatic assurances that the US wishes the country to remain neutral and was strongly against any move to unseat Sihanouk "out of which nothing good could come for the West". He said that this stand was very well known to Mr. Allan Dulles and to the CIA people. Regarding the plots against Sihanouk's life, he said that the US ambassador had known nothing about them but that, naturally, CIA agents had: "however, how could they possibly go to the Government and tell them about it". "By the way", he added, "they had already been warned by the French and the Russians". He insinuated the possibility of foul play from the French ambassador against the US. (These statements regarding the information they had was in reply to what I had told him about Son Sann's concern that, although the ambassador must have known about the plots, he had not informed the Cambodian Government. When Son Sann had brought the matter up with the US ambassador, the ambassador had said that he did not know anything about it. I did not add that, when Son Sann had replied to the ambassador that, if that was so, he all the same believed that the CIA people knew, the ambassador had answered: "no US agent knows anything about which I am not informed". - Thus, there is a very exact parallel to what we saw happening in Beirut in the summer of 1958.)

Regarding Burma, Robertson held that Ne Win had straightened matters out, that there was firmer budget control than ever under U Nu, that every decision of the Government was constitutional and that there was no doubt that Ne Win would leave when his term ran out. I replied that this did not rhyme with my information, which in this case was based on rather good sources. However, again, it was largely a question of nuances which it was difficult to disentangle in a short discussion.

I brought Thanat Khoman cautiously into the picture, avoiding anything that might be held against him. However, I considered it possible to bring out the fact that Thanat Khoman had fully endorsed my analysis of the situation in the region and the three neighbour countries. It was obvious that Robertson had not learned about or registered the switch in Bangkok policies which had followed Thanat Khoman's take-over. (Of course

I did not tell him that Thanat Khoman had said that what mattered for him was only the good neighbour policy which should not be impeded by their adherence to NATO; were Cambodia to turn communist, it was none of his business and he could not care less).

Robertson made a nervous impression. He gave the picture of a man who had been upset by my reported opinions and who restrained himself from criticism. This, in fact, made him act as if he were strongly on the defensive. I am sure he carried away the impression that he had not influenced our view. However, the atmosphere at the end of the talk was relaxed, if not happy.