

Laos 1959-1961 - correspondence, official documents, press clippings, chrono...

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Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

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Blickenstaff, David (Dir. UNIC, Paris)

- 1 letter to D.H.
- 1 encl. (press clipping)



Wednesday 19 August

Dear Mr Hammarskjöld:

I cannot resist the temptation of sending you the enclosed article from today's London Times which you may already have seen. Its title says it is about Laos, but in reality it is about Lebanon. "Our special correspondent" should have been with us in Beirut to help draft the UNOARIL report! The whole Lebanese situation of last year is in this article - just change a few names. It all rings a familiar bell: - armed men from a border region with ethnic, political and ideological links with a neighboring state which is at odds with the central government; tribesmen who live on both sides of the frontier, "who could have come from across the frontier as could merely have walked from the next village but one"; (Chebaa or Banias?); arms of government origin in rebel hands; charges from across the frontier, and from a capital farther away, of anti-Communism (anti-Arab nationalism), of pro-American etc - it is all here. You can even find the Eisenhower doctrine, Chamoun and the Phalangist party in the article.

And the press is now beginning to mention what was our guiding principle in UNOARIL: - to reduce the crisis to its local dimensions by trying to

disentangle it from its international overtones.

For me the most remarkable difference in the present case is ^{the} change in language at the London Foreign Office (at least, as reported in the press). One might think they had been re-reading some UNOAIU reports.

Good voyage on your Latin American trip

Sincerely

David Gleason

CAUSES BEHIND THE FLARE-UP IN LAOS

MOVE IN COMMUNIST PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR

From Our Special Correspondent

VIENTIANE, Aug. 18

The war in northern Laos has ended as swiftly and mysteriously as it began, leaving behind it about 40 dead and wounded and countless exploded theories. Now that the "dust devils" of rumour and counter-rumour are subsiding in Vientiane it is possible to see a little more distinctly the outlines of the Sam Neua crisis.

In the last fortnight of July (the exact dates have not been established) armed men appeared in a number of villages in the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly, demanding the surrender of the small local garrisons of the Royal Laotian Army. The raiders, it is now generally agreed, were Thai-dam tribesmen, who live on both sides of the mountainous frontier between Laos and Communist North Viet Nam. The armed men could have come from across the frontier or could merely have walked from the next village but one.

WITHOUT A STRUGGLE

Many of the Army posts surrendered without a struggle; and at the first opportunity the soldiers, together with their wives and children, escaped to the nearest provincial centre. But in at least two villages there was a fight between the invaders and the garrisons. These engagements caused most of the casualties, some of whom have reached the military hospitals in Vientiane.

For the Foreign Ministers the important question is whether any of the raiders did in fact cross the frontier from North Viet Nam. No reliable answer is available now or is ever likely to be. But some of the authorities who at first proclaimed the presence of North Viet Namese are not so sure to-day. Among them is the Prime Minister of Laos, Mr. Phoui Sananikone, who remarked the other day: "The Viet-minh (Viet Namese Communists) are too cunning to be caught in the act."

"RED BELT"

From all accounts the situation in the northern provinces is such that it would not make much difference—except to the chanceries—whether the Viet Namese were involved in the fighting or not. After more than three years of occupation by the Communists the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua still constitute the "red belt" of Laos; while many of the hill tribes (as the Government concedes) have been won over by Communist propaganda. French missionaries who work in Sam Neua province paint a disturbing picture of Communist subversion and propaganda in the province. Arms there are in plenty, left in caches by the Communists before they returned the provinces to the Royal Government in 1957, as well as those supplied by the Government to the village home guards. There is reason to believe that some of these home guard rifles were turned against the Royal Army in the recent fighting. To create an armed rising in the northern provinces it would not be necessary to send more than a courier or two from Hanoi carrying orders for leading Communists in the provinces. Viet-minh soldiers would be superfluous and dangerous.

There is much speculation about the immediate cause of the Communist "diversion" in Sam Neua. Was it North Viet

Nam's response to the French-Laotian military agreement which has enabled Laos to employ 100 American technicians as civilian instructors for the Royal Army? Or was it a decision of high Communist policy reached during President Ho Chi-minh's recent visit to Moscow? Again, in the nature of things, no positive answer can be given.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR

However, it is abundantly clear that the Sam Neua rebellion is merely the latest move in the intense psychological war which China and North Viet Nam have waged for many months against Laos. The Communist countries charge first that Laos is moving into the American-S.E.A.T.O. sphere of influence, and secondly that Mr. Sananikone's Government is anti-democratic—that is anti-Communist.

The first charge is almost totally without foundation. The Royal Laotian Army of 25,000, though trained by the French, is sustained, undeniably, almost entirely by American aid. This, however, has been the position for the past three years, long before Mr. Sananikone took office. Two or three of the younger politicians in the present Government are in favour of more direct American aid and less French influence in the Army. Some moves have been made in this direction (for example with 100 American technicians), but they do not amount to a major shift of policy. Above all, the terrain of Laos and the character of its people effectively debar this remote kingdom from being anything more than a buffer State.

In accusing Mr. Sananikone's Government of anti-Communism, China is on stronger ground. Little more than a year ago two Communists held office in the Laotian Cabinet and the Communist Party had unlimited freedom of action. To-day the party leaders are under arrest, the party newspaper has been suppressed, a battalion of Communist troops has been compelled to merge with the Royal Army, and another has fled into the maquis. A propaganda campaign, intense by Laotian standards, is in full swing against the Communist and all his works.

AMERICAN BACKING

Most of these anti-Communist measures are inspired by the Committee for the Defence of National Interests—a group which started with the nucleus of a few Civil servants and which now includes three members of the Cabinet and publishes a weekly newspaper with the biggest circulation in Laos. The committee's campaign for cleaner politics and its struggle against Communism has the moral backing at least of the American Embassy.

But in their dream of a revitalized Laos clad in anti-Communist armour the young leaders of the C.D.N.I. may, perhaps, have mistaken the kingdom's situation. With an internal Communist problem and flanked by North Viet Nam and China, Laos must necessarily tread delicately like Agag. One of the bitter lessons of Sam Neua is that the Communist Powers can plunge a sword into the kingdom without themselves being "caught in the act." Each anti-Communist move by Laos is likely to provoke a counter-move in the manner of Sam Neua. Nor will a brace of United Nations observers or even a dozen protect Laos from this peculiar danger.