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Laos - 1959

24 Nov.

J. F. Eagers to D. H.

- 1 interoffice memorandum
- 1 encl. (dat. 20 Sept.)

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary-General

Date: 24 November 1959

FILE NO.:

FROM: J. F. Engers

SUBJECT:

While cleaning out my files in Vientiane I found this draft which, as you will see, I wrote on 20 September, a few days after our arrival here and which we didn't send to you because both David and myself thought it a little bit premature. You may look at it as a historical curiosum, but I think except for certain details the piece so far has stood up very well.

Jack

20 September 1959

Since the Mission arrived here early this week it has been going through a number of moods and it is difficult to say whether sentiment has crystalized yet. There is no doubt that the members of the Sub-Committee have become more impressed with the exposé you gave them on your dealings with the Laos question as they have become more familiar with the problem at first hand. Later on other factors of a contrary nature may be brought to bear upon them and since they are impressable people they may easily swing in another direction.

The problem as we see it now before our own eyes has both internal and international aspects and the main issue is whether the one or the other constitutes the prevailing factor. It is of course impossible to leave out the internal situation and the Government of Laos on their part do not intend to do so, but whether and to what extent they will be able to fairly substantiate the charges of international aggression remains still to be seen. On this point, the diplomats stationed in this area seem to be divided and consequently their advice as to remedies differs.

The Americans here seem inclined to accept the Laotian submission almost up to the last detail. Closely related to this view is that of the Australians who are in favor of "beefing up" the present Government, militarily and morally, and who consider a United Nations umbrella essential in order to gain time for this operation. They feel that left to their own devices the present Government of Laos will sooner or later have to give way to a mixed Government in which communists take part and that soon thereafter like Czechoslovakia, Laos will come under communist control, endangering the weak administrations now in power in Cambodia, South Viet-Nam and Malaya.

There is on the other hand the British point of view which considers the situation mainly as an internal affair deriving from the antagonism between the southern leaders and the northern minority which is different linguistically and racially and which furthermore lives in a region which traditionally has escaped much from the control of the central authorities. Like the troubles at the northern borders of Greece at the time, there is intermingled with the political factor that of pure brigandry which exacts its toll from the population in these border regions. The British seem to feel that no solution to the Laotian Government can be found unless a certain satisfaction will be given to the minorities who have to be spiritually integrated into the nation; thus a broadening of the basis of the present Government is in their view required.

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The French position does not basically differ from that of the U.K. It is of course somewhat mixed with satisfaction to see the situation in Laos deteriorate now that the French control has been relinquished. They take on the whole a long term view of the situation in which they take into account the age old antagonism between the Viet-Nam and Lao peoples and the fact that the rulers of Laos have never been able to come to grips with the problem of the north. One of the relevant factors in this situation, they feel is that the Laotian Government has done very little for the north except to levy taxes, if and when they could, and that the army has behaved in a cruel and oppressive manner against them. The Pathet Lao on the other hand has provided some kind of "social service" to these peoples and must appear to them as the only friends they have in this world. A basic change in the attitude of the army roughly towards the position of the Canadian Mounted Police in frontier days would they feel be an important contribution towards the satisfaction of the north. They too feel that changes in the central Government in the end would be essential.

The Laotian Government itself while uncertain about the methods to be applied seems foremost preoccupied with finding ways and means for self-preservation for the present rulers and in this scheme of things they believe that the United Nations can play an important role. How this should be effected has not been fully thought out, it seems. In any case for the moment the presence of the Sub-Committee is an important factor they are using even to the extent that some of the Delegates feel that they are being "put on display".

The appeal to the United Nations made on 4 September appears not to have been part of a pre-conceived scheme but rather to have been inspired by a sudden panic caused by military developments in the last days of August, which seemed to indicate that a large scale attack from Viet-Min had already started. The magnitude of this military operation seems now to have been overrated though it will depend on the Laotian submission whether it was an event of sufficient magnitude to convince the Sub-Committee that indeed international aggression has taken place.

This whole situation weighs heavily on the Sub-Committee, theirs is a heavy responsibility. They quite well understand that if they were to report that international aggression was fully proven, they would, regardless of the merits of the case, not make a contribution to the settlement of the internal problem. If on the other hand they would in so many words reject the contentions of Laos of

international aggression they would declare the application of 4 September frivolous and unfounded. Their problem put in other terms is that they have to save Laos and also to a certain extent the present Laotian Government.

In their present mood with some of the evidence in, yet rather critically received, other still to come and unknown, they seem to be inclined to look for a solution which would not close all doors nor bring about the fall of the present Government. It is in this connection again that your statement to them seems to offer an alternative which would appeal to all or most of them if not - eventually - instructed otherwise by their Governments. The resumption of the diplomatic activity which you had undertaken and which is now being interrupted would seem to appeal to them and as men of good will they would like to make their contribution to this end. One of the possibilities that might appeal to all parties concerned might be some kind of United Nations presence, not by way of a Security Council or Assembly Committee but through the Secretary-General the one principal organ that might be acceptable to all. This idea which has not been worked out, has the advantage of bringing in the United Nations as neutral and not as an ex parte factor which would at the same time be serving as an anodine for the local situation.

Regardless of what procedure eventually will be followed and leaving aside for the moment whether the United Nations in one form or another may play a role in this affair, the one requirement of the situation, on which fairly general agreement is found here, is that representation of the important minorities in the Government should be affected if possible in such a way that persons of communist or related coloration should be left out; whether such persons can be found is a question difficult to answer but there is no doubt that this will become more difficult the longer it would be delayed.



PERSONAL - CONFIDENTIAL

Vientiane, 24 November 1959

My dear Dag,

Today I visited Mr. Horace Smith, the United States Ambassador, together with Engers and Jakhelln. Mr. John Holt, Counsellor of the Embassy, was also present.

1. The Ambassador had just returned from a trip to Saravane, in one of the most southern provinces where it had been reported that much Pathet Lao activity was going on. The Ambassador was most relieved by what he had seen there and believed that the situation was fairly quiet and that the authorities had the situation more or less in hand. We also talked about the so-called Chinese invasion in Phong Saly; his information was that the occupying forces had withdrawn after a few days without a fight. We didn't go into any discussion of the nature of the troubles in that area which had been described by some sources as Chinese bandits whose operations would have had no ideological or strategic connotations. His general impression was that the situation as a whole in Laos was comparatively quiet at the moment.

2. We then had a conversation about the internal political situation; on our part the rumour that had been heard around Vientiane that Phoui Sananikone would step down shortly to make place for Khamphan was brought up, but this seemed to be complete news to him. He told us of another rumour that had been reported to him by the Indian Ambassador to the effect that Souphanna Phouma might be re-instated as Prime Minister but that also seemed to be without any substance.

On the question of the trial he had nothing new to report and he felt that if it were to be deferred, most or all credit would go to you; he was still holding his fingers crossed.

3. We had a long conversation about economic problems. He gave an extensive résumé of his views on the importance of the economic survey and the consequent action that should arise from it. Most of it was a résumé of what you apparently had told him and he showed himself a good disciple. He even used some

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Secretary-General
United Nations

of your favorite expressions such as "a United Nations umbrella" to cover the assistance efforts of the United States, France and others. Repeatedly he emphasized that these were his "personal views" and that he did not know what the position of Washington was on these matters, but that he was trying to impress his point of view on them. The question of special contributions to be used for Laos through, e.g. the United Nations Special Fund, was also brought up by me and seemed to elicit a favorable reaction. In general he stressed the need for a speedy finalizing of the survey, even if incomplete, because of technical fiscal arrangements in the United States, which require much advance budgeting, often two years ahead of actual performance and expenditure.

4. On parting we agreed to keep a close and regular contact with each other while in the meantime our economists, on a lower level, would be given all information available at the Embassy in Vientiane.

With kindest regards.

Sincerely yours,

Tuomioja

S. Tuomioja