

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

HS L 179:87



Dag Hammarskjöld's sand.

Laos - 1959

22 - 30 Dec.

Engers, J. F. (Exec. Off. of the Sec.-Gen.)

- 2 interoffice memoranda on Laotian situation
(to D.H.)

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary-General

Date: 22 December 1959

FROM: J.F. Engers *[Signature]*

FILE NO.: _____

SENDER'S TELEPHONE EXTENSION: _____

SUBJECT: Laos

The following is a short survey of developments in Laos since your departure.

1. The Laotian National Assembly voted on 18 December to extend its mandate until the national elections which are scheduled for 3 April. Phoui will now request the Assembly to extend the emergency powers of the government, which otherwise would expire in January.

2. According to Saigon radio, the Chairman of the National Assembly had on 16 December written to Prince Souvannavong and seven other leaders of the Nao Lao Hak' Xat party inviting them to attend the extraordinary session of the Assembly. A copy of this letter had been sent to Prime Minister Phoui asking him to provide all facilities for the Prince and his colleagues to attend the session.

They did, however, not attend the session because, according to a Government spokesman, the police had opposed the release of the prisoners on the ground that attempts might be made to assassinate them.

3. With reference to the incident on the Laos-Vietnam border on 6 December, Jakhelln informed us today that Phoui had replied to the complaint of the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam that he would investigate the matter and that, if the complaint proved justified, he would take strict measures against those responsible. He explained that the investigation was still proceeding and would take a long time because of the difficulties of terrain, undefined frontiers and the nomadic population in the region concerned. He also stressed that all Laos military had strict orders to avoid border incidents.

4. At a news conference in Honolulu on 19 December, Admiral Harry D. Felt, Commander in Chief, Pacific, stated that America's Far East forces were alerted to a possible new outbreak of communist-directed fighting in Laos "at any minute". "Laos is the key to the defense of South East Asia today. When the UN people leave there, it could break out at any minute."

"We are on a war footing out here: remember, there is only a truce in Korea, not peace. And, in Laos and the Taiwan straits, the communists can make trouble any time they want to."

Adm. Felt indicated that a UN fact-finding commission has been to Laos, leaving some observers behind. It was the expected departure of this rear-guard which he felt might signal another push by communist rebels in northern Laos.

If ordered to, American troops could get to Laos in 72 hours. Those troops would be Marines, airlifted from Okinawa. The Army and Air Force figure they could fly the entire 25th Army Division from Hawaii in 4 or 5 days. Etc. etc.

5. Other pieces of pleasant news are being dug up by Mr. Jim Lucas, the Scripps-Howard correspondent who is now in Vientiane and apparently in contact with the Laotian Army officers and disgruntled politicians. Yesterday he reported about a school building scandal in which the Prime Minister and one of his brothers, Phay Sananikone, appeared to have been involved.

6. As Mr. Cordier may have told you, I heard from private sources that Mr. Falaise, a former UN official, has been nominated to become Gassouin's successor.

7. The French translation of the report has been dispatched to Vientiane and arrived there this morning. Copies will be given to Bérard with an appropriate letter.

Since I did not want to bother you, during your last few hours in the office, I like to take this opportunity to wish you a successful trip and a happy New Year.
Sincerely,



INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary-General

Date: 30 December 1959FROM: J.F. Engers *[Signature]*

FILE NO.: _____

SENDER'S TELEPHONE EXTENSION: _____

SUBJECT: The Laotian situationSession of the National Assembly

1. The change of the Cabinet, the convening of the National Assembly and their aftermath have continued to have its repercussions. Prime Minister Phoui has had to use all his ingenuity to ward off the pressures from his adversaries on the left and on the right to stay in power. Thus far he has been successful, but his difficulties still remain substantial.

2. His major address in the Assembly, in which he asked for a vote of confidence and the prolongation of the Assembly's mandate, has been most conciliatory towards the Comité de la Défense des Interêts Nationaux, whose Cabinet members he praised highly. He also stated that the programme of the Government remained unchanged.

3. The parts of the speech dealing with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were on the whole rather violent and echoed the position represented vis à vis the Sub-committee of the Security Council.

4. It should, incidentally, be mentioned that Phoui indicated that the Government was in financial difficulties and that it had been able to meet its financial deficits only by withdrawing reserve funds from the National Bank to the amount of 250 million kips (over 3 million dollars) per year.

5. The explanation the CDIN has given for its dissent from the Government, in a lengthy communiqué dated 15 December, sounds extremely legalistic and hardly convincing as a political document. One of the points made was that Phoui's action would lead to the admission of the deputies of the Nao Lao Hak Xat Party to the Assembly, an assumption that, as will be explained below, proved most premature.

6. The circumstances surrounding the question of the attendance of the Nao Lao Hak Xat members is still somewhat obscure, but in the main it seems to have developed as follows: The 9 members under detention, including Prince Souphanouvong, were included in the convocation issued by the President of the National Assembly. Then, on 12 December, the Vice Minister of Justice sent a letter to the President of the Assembly, in which he requested the Assembly to remove their immunity in order to prevent them from attending the extraordinary session. This letter was discussed by the so-called Administra-

tive Committee of the National Assembly on 16 December, which in turn requested the Minister of Justice to submit details on the charge against these members as soon as possible. Whatever happened thereafter is unclear, but on 19 December the National Assembly voted on the request for the removal of the immunity of Prince Souphanouvong and his colleagues "in order to prevent them from attending the current extraordinary session of the National Assembly." This vote was taken on the basis of Art. 34 of the Constitution and the Rules of procedure of the National Assembly and resulted in 29 votes against their attending the session, 10 in favour and 8 abstentions (other reports speak of a vote of 33 to 12).

7. This action raises two important questions. In the first place, whether the Assembly acted to legalize a de facto situation, namely the inability of the Government to guarantee a safe conduct for the dissident members; and, secondly, whether this suspension of immunity will have a bearing on the legality of the detention of Souphanouvong c.s. and their eventual trial.

Reactions of Hanoi

8. The reactions of Hanoi towards the recent events have been worth noting. They announced obvious gratification at "the ousting of the clique of Sisouk Na Champassak, Khampan Panya, Ouan Ratikoun and so forth from the Government" and, in the significant bow to the King, mentioned by name, praising him for having "taken opportune actions which create conditions for the Laotian people to push back the forces of the most brazen reactionaries, who, over the past few months, have driven the nation into a serious impasse." Interesting also was the criticism of the new Cabinet of Phoui in which "all important powers are concentrated in the hands of a small number of privileged persons." The question was asked whether this Government would "continue to violate the Constitution, encroach upon the powers of the National Assembly and the King (!), and persecute and repress the people as before."

9. Similarly, in the report at the plenary meeting of the National Assembly in Hanoi, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, touching on the Laos situation, had been comparatively mild, though of course insisting that the International Commission resume its activities as the competent international organization and that "no other organization, even the UN, has the right to interfere in Laos." But after the contents of Phoui's address became known, the Foreign Minister of DRV issued a lengthy statement which, while not new in content, indicated an aggravation of the situation.

Internal developments

10. During the Christmas weekend, rumours of a military coup d'Etat were prevalent in Vientiane and unusual movements of military forces and material were noted. Given the dismissal of General Southone, Minister of Defense, such an eventuality had to be reckoned with from the beginning, in view of his close alliance with the CDIN. It appears, however, that United States support for such a move has not been forthcoming. In any case, Phoui must have had certain assurances when he called in the General

and other high officers together with leading CDIN members and told them that of course he was not physically able to resist them if they were to seize power, but that they would not get support from "our friends".

11. A new complication has entered the situation by the death of Katay yesterday. His departure makes the Government even less representative than it was before. In view of the rather insignificant differences that separate the Government from the CDIN, one wonders what stands in the way of their return, except for a posture of greater friendliness towards Hanoi which already looks as having been abortive.