

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

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Laos. 1960

1-4 Jan.

Press clippings, New York Times

Army Rules in Laos As Premier Resigns

By The Associated Press.

VIENTIANE, Laos, Dec. 31 —Laos was placed under army control today following the resignation of Premier Phoui Sananikone.

King Savang Vathana twice rejected Mr. Phoui's resignation, then sent him a sharply worded letter accepting it.

"It is apparent that, in the face of the powerlessness of the Government to control an explosive situation, it is not morally possible for us to leave the nation in uncertainty of the future," the King told his reluctant Premier.

An official at the Premier's office said "the security of the country has been immediately placed under control of the army until a new Cabinet is formed." He added:

"Please don't dramatize the situation. It's a coup d'état Laotian style and not on the

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South American level. It's all en famille. No bloodshed."

Vientiane was enjoying the usual calm of the siesta hour as the Government radio broadcast the King's letter.

The King was believed to be backing an anti-Communist reform group, the Right-wing Committee for Defense of the National Interest, which includes top military commanders.

Three armored cars were drawn up beside the Royal Palace in Vientiane. The Premier's office said they were there for "protection" and had apparently been summoned by the King's chamberlain. The King had come to Vientiane from the royal capital at Luang Prabang for a meeting of the National Assembly.

The conflict between the army officers and Mr. Phoui developed when they accused him of adopting an appeasement policy toward the Communists and jeopardizing the electoral system.

The officers had called on the King to name a nonparty cabinet, including themselves, to prepare for new elections in April, 1960.

Mr. Phoui had accused some of them of seeking dictatorial powers. A Cabinet minister close to Mr. Phoui said the Premier felt menaced "politically and physically."

Mr. Phoui first sent his resignation to the King Monday, after the death of Deputy Premier Katay Don Sasorith. When it was rejected, he sent a second offer to quit.

Mr. Katay was the strong man in the Cabinet as president of the ruling Rally of the Laos People party, which controls thirty-six seats in the fifty-nine-member National Assembly. Mr. Phoui, the party vice president, has the allegiance of only about a fourth of the members.

Earlier this month Mr. Phoui defied a challenge from the officers' committee, which held seven posts in the Cabinet at the height of the fighting against the pro-Communist rebels. These ministers resigned Dec. 15 after Mr. Phoui had switched to a neutralist international policy. The Premier rode out that crisis with the support of Mr. Katay.

Mr. Phoui announced then that the Government and Assembly intended to stay in power until the April elections, even though their terms expired last Friday. The Assembly supported him.

MILITARY IN LAOS TIGHTENS CONTROL

But General Denies a Coup
—He Says Army Will Step
Down After Election

Special to The New York Times.

VIENTIANE, Laos, Jan. 3—
This Buddhist kingdom is now
under control of the Laotian
Army. But the army denies that
it has carried out a coup.

Brig. Gen. Phoumi Nosavan,
Laotian strong man and one of
the leaders of the reform group
known as the Committee for the
Defense of the National Inter-
ests, said in an interview:

"We have no intention of re-
maining in power. We are only
maintaining national security
and order until such time as the
country returns to normal and
His Majesty the King can ap-
point an interim Government,
which will supervise the holding
of elections."

Laos has been without a ci-
vilian government since New
Year's Day, when the resigna-
tion of Premier Phoui Sanani-
kone was accepted by King
Savang Vathana.

The resignation is reported to
have resulted from pressure by
the reform group.

Appeasement Charged

A dispute arose over what
the group considered to be ap-
peasement by Mr. Phoui toward
the Communists and over his
interpretation of the electoral
law.

General Phoumi labeled as
Communist propaganda charges
that the army had staged a
coup and that supporters of the
former Premier were in danger.
The general said:

"We are in power at present
only because the National As-
sembly is taking an unconstitu-
tional attitude toward the elec-
toral law. Under the Constitu-
tion the National Assembly and
the Government should have
terminated Dec. 25 when their
four-year mandate expired.

"When the National Assem-
bly is willing to dissolve and
permit the King to act constitu-
tionally and appoint a provi-
sional Government prior to hold-
ing national elections, then we
will be more than willing to
hand back the reins of power
to the civilians."

Elections Demanded

Premier Phoui, with the sup-
port of the Assembly, contended
that, despite the end of their
terms Dec. 25, the Cabinet and
the Assembly could continue to

function until the next election.
The Committee for the De-
fense of the National Interests,
seven of whose members held
Cabinet seats, had insisted that
the Government must go out of
existence Dec. 25 and had de-
manded immediate elections. As
a result of the dispute the re-
form group's members resigned
from the Cabinet Dec. 15.

The Premier is said to have
felt elections were not possible
at present because of the state
of insecurity caused by the re-
bellion started last August by
the pro-Communist Pathet Lao
[Land of the Lao].

General Phoumi contended
that elections were possible and
that a democratic form of gov-
ernment could solve the prob-
lem of Communist infiltration.

The general said the military
would take over the Prime
Minister's office until the crisis
was resolved.

Meanwhile, troops are pa-
trolling Vientiane streets and
guarding all major installations,
including cable and wireless of-
fices.

Army Imposes Censorship

VIENTIANE, Jan. 3 (AP)—
The Laotian Army command

has imposed military press cen-
sorship.

News dispatches delivered to
the Vientiane telegraph office
Saturday were sent to military
headquarters for censorship and
returned sixteen hours later.

An official of the Information
Ministry said the purpose was
to prevent the filing of "sen-
sational and inflammatory" re-
ports.

Reds Assail Laos Army

Special to The New York Times.

HONG KONG, Jan. 3—The
army's assumption of power in
Laos was denounced today in
Communist North Vietnam.

Nhan Dan, the daily organ
of the Communist Laodang par-
ty, called the move dangerous
to peace and democracy in
Laos. "It said the take-over of
government authority by the
military had been "instigated by
United States imperialists."