

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

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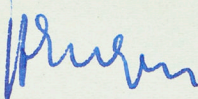
Interoffice memorandum from J. F. Engers
to D. H. with press clippings

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary-General

Date: 21 January 19560

FROM: J.F. Engers 

FILE NO.: _____

SENDER'S TELEPHONE EXTENSION: _____

SUBJECT: The situation in Laos

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1. There is attached a clipping from the Bangkok Post of 9 January - the same dispatch was carried by the Bangkok World - which tends to indicate that you were in no small way instrumental in keeping the affairs in Laos on an even keel. That your action was in no way superfluous would seem to be confirmed by dispatches in the area press, which as late as 5 January reported that the return of Sisouk, Oudone Sananikone and Inpeng to the government was imminent.

2. An interesting new development is the cablegram with greetings on the formation of the new government sent to Kou Abhay by the Prime Minister of North Vietnam, Pham Van Dong. In it the Prime Minister of the DRV expresses the "hope that under your leadership, the new government of the Kingdom of Laos will correctly implement the Geneva agreements on Laos, strictly follow the policy of peace and neutrality, and take measures to improve the neighbourly relations between our two countries and enable the Vietnamese and Laotian peoples to enjoy peace and welfare." If this is the prelude to an exchange of communications on the prime minister level (after the existing one on the head of state level) some small improvement of the relations between the two countries might be in sight. In any case the initial reaction to Kou Abhay is not completely negative.

3. Prince Sihanouk, writing in the Phnom Penh newspaper Nationaliste, tells that Khoman had approached him with a Thai-Philippine plan for South-East Asia organization comprising, in addition to the initiators, Malaya, Indonesia, South Vietnam, Burma, Laos and Cambodia. Though its terms of reference seemed attractive - to study ways and means to help one another, particularly in the economic, scientific, social and cultural realms - and adherence to the organization would not constitute an obligation to abandon one's current political and ideological lines, Sihanouk on balance had decided to reject the invitation to join the block. He felt that because of its genesis his Government would not be in a position to provide any logical reply to the accusation of its constituents that it was "falling into the trap set by the great powers which use the Asian allies as bait". He also noted that only one half of divided Vietnam was invited. Thus he foresaw that the new block would reap the enmity of the Communist countries. "The result would be the most serious of crises, of which Laos has furnished us an example."

4. *Faits divers*. The new Laotian Vice-Premier, Nhouy Abhay, is a younger brother of the Prime Minister, who seems to be destined to run the new government in view of the age and disability of Kou Abhay. Of this man I read that "he knows much French literature and little about Laos". Also that he was inclined to drink too much "until recently". "He was in ill health as a result". He is a moderate and was defeated in the supplementary elections in the spring of 1958.

5. I may end on a historical note, a quotation which I know, however, you will not find completely irrelevant. It is from Eden's *Memoirs* in the *London Times* and describes a meeting with Dulles, Bedell Smith and another personage late in April 1954:

"Meanwhile Mr. Robertson, whose approach to these questions is so emotional as to be impervious to argument or indeed to facts, was keeping up a sort of 'theme song' to the effect that there were in Indo-China some three hundred thousand men who were anxious to fight against the Vietminh and were looking to us for support and encouragement. I said that if they were so anxious to fight I could not understand why they did not do so. The Americans had put in nine times more supplies of material than the Chinese, and plenty must be available for their use. I had no faith in this eagerness of the Vietnamese to fight for Bao Dai."

The Background:

Laos Army Was Ready To Nab Phoui, Before He Resigned

VIENTIANE, Jan. 8 — (AP) — Civil authority is functioning in Laos Friday after a week of Army rule following a half-cooked coup d'etat which toppled the government of Premier Phoui Sananikone Dec. 31.

King Savang Vatthana named a 10-man provisional Cabinet to prepare for general elections, which informed sources said will "certainly be held in May."

The Cabinet is headed by Kou Abhay, 70-year-old neutral and moderate ex-president of the King's Council and includes three members of the Committee for the Defense of National Interests (CDIN) who were against Phoui, three

members of Phoui's party the RPL Rally of Lao People and three other neutrals.

Competent observers Thursday called it a typical Laotian solution providing elements of neutrality moderation and conciliation.

As the dust of this crisis settled a leading member disclosed in an interview that the Army had been ready to seize power by force Dec. 24 if Phoui had refused to resign.

The fully-fledged comp stalled as Phoui asked to negotiate during the meeting at his residence with Army strongman Brig. Phoumi Nosavan.

The country's two crack paratroop battalions were marched to near the capital and armored cars were ready to move in, a source said. If Phoui had resisted there may have been an armed clash between Phoui and CDIN supporters.

He estimated Phoui's relatives in the Army could have mustered 20 per cent of the troops.

Some of the most heated Army leaders were considering jailing Phoui, members of his Cabinet and the entire National Assembly,

he said.

While Phoui and the Army negotiated and some civilian members of the CDIN urged caution, Deputy Premier Kathay Sasorith died Dec. 29 leaving Phoui isolated.

Phoui sent his resignation to the King Dec. 30 but the King refused to accept it on the ground the letter allegedly distorted his position.

The source confirmed that while many CDIN members knew a meeting was going to happen around Dec. 25 only four persons had planned the military coup. They were identified as Brig. Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, Brig. Gen. Ouan Rathikoun, former Foreign Minister Khampan Panya, and the King's confidant Tiao Sopsap.

Eventually a few armored cars rumbled into the capital Dec. 24 and several took up positions near the King's palace.

After the Army takeover immediately following Phoui's resignation a few paratroopers occupied key posts in the city. But there were no incidents. The Army and CDIN claimed they acted to restore constitutional order which they contended Phoui and the National Assembly had violated by ruling and voting that their mandate didn't expire Dec. 25 but lasted till the next elections.

Vientiane's 1,000-man police force chief who reportedly was disgruntled with Phoui had told the Army Dec. 23 he was ready to cooperate in the coup, the sources said.

Immediately after the Army High Command took over powers the American, French, British and Australian ambassadors called on the King. On Wednesday, as an Army High Command spokesman was holding a news conference, a cable to the King arrived from U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold.

"I allow myself to express the hope that the line of independent, neutral and democratic work for economic progress . . . will be firmly maintained," it said in part.

A CDIN source said this put the last touch on the neutral moderate Cabinet lineup announced by the King though work on the list already has begun before the Hammarskjold cable.

Some Army and CDIN leaders wanted an all Army CDIN provisional Cabinet, he said, but agreed it was better for Laos this way.

The character of the present new Cabinet was "80 per cent determined by international pressures," he said.