

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

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Laos - 1961

23 Feb. - 8 March

a) Tuomioja, Sakari (Special Consultant to
the Sec.-Gen., Laos)

- 3 letters to D.H.

b.) D.H.'s reply (draft by J.F. Engers, dat. 28 Feb., 14 March)

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

BOITE POSTALE 345
VIENTIANE, LAOS

23 February 1961

Dear Dag,

The past seven days have been tied up primarily with the conveyance of the new U.S. policy to the Government, and the ensuing Declaration of the King. From the moment Ambassador Brown communicated to us the plan I sensed an element of hesitation on his part, no doubt because of the uncertainty regarding the Soviet reaction to a policy which seems to be presented to them on a "take it or leave it" basis.

I drew attention to the danger of not having preliminary consultations, but by Friday the stage had already been set for the King's pronouncement. Ambassador Addis (UK) informs me that they have tried to help both in Moscow and Phnom Penh and added that the Americans too were pursuing the matter in New Delhi. However, it seems Sihanouk was not approached, and I gather Menshikow was told in Washington after the event.

There is no doubt that if the Americans had come out with this policy last September, when Souvanna was in power, the chances of it working out were good. Now it will be more difficult, and it will probably get worse as the time goes by. However, even if one is not over-enthusiastic about the way the programme was launched, we are bound to support it as there is nothing else that might produce an early solution. If it fails, the only thing is, it seems to me, to start preparing for an international conference which, given a modicum of good will and considerable preparatory work, might produce the desired solution for Laos. It is for this reason I thought you might want to direct a personal appeal to Sihanouk, since he is the first fence that has to be negotiated.

The military situation shows no change, possibly owing to a three-day rain that bogged down all operations. In addition, General Phoumi is said to be obsessed with the idea of possession the French base at SENO. For four days last week there was trouble again when the Lao Commander asked to take over another building in the base. The instructions this time from Paris to the French Commander were to resist force by the use of arms. The situation was tense for 4 days, eventually Ambassador Falaize saw General Phoumi and was told it was all a misunderstanding. So the crisis is finished for the time being. Meanwhile however, General Phoumi spent, probably, more time thinking about SENO than the Plaine des Jarres.

Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld
Secretary General
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New York, N.Y.

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When the King read his declaration, everyone was surprised, including the Laotians, with the purposefulness of his tone. But soon after, depression set in when it became clear that much had been left to chance. The British here have been most outspoken in their condemnation of the declaration for "doing little more than bolstering the Boun Oum Government". Messinesi had a long talk with the Counsellor of the Embassy, and pointed out that there was an element of exaggeration in this statement since there is a genuine desire on the part of Phoumi to negotiate with Souvanna, and, in this, presumably, he is reflecting the new American policy. The British, however, said the Embassy Counsellor, feel that the policy as a whole is a half-hearted attempt that is doomed to failure, and that once Souvanna has been duly placated as non-cooperative, the Americans will be able to proceed without interruption in maintaining a protective screen North of their SEATO allies. I have the feeling that the French Ambassador holds rather similar views.

While I don't quite agree with this approach, I too do not feel too optimistic. A broadening of the Government to the degree that it would correspond to a sufficiently wide political spectrum does not seem feasible for the time being, and certainly not without the concurrent establishment and operation of the Observation Commission. This, primarily, because the Americans would hesitate to give their wholehearted support in the absence of guarantees that the tables would not be turned against them.

The next two weeks ought to produce some developments. In the meanwhile there is little, it seems, that I can do except keep you informed by cable.

I do not go into further details as Messinesi will bring up some additional points in his letter to Engers.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Sakari'.

Sakari Tuomioja

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

BOITE POSTALE 345
VIENTIANE, LAOS

2 March 1961

Dear Dag,

The week that elapsed since my last letter has not brought in its train any interesting developments. The King has returned to Luang-Prabang, while the Government has reverted to its inactivity after the rebuff they received from Premier Sihanouk. The Prime Minister has gone with the American Ambassador on a combined recreation and inspection tour to the South of the country. The Americans look rather confused and perplexed, and don't know what to do, wondering about what went awry with the launching of their generous program. The military operations have likewise come to a stalemate. *Dolce far niente* envelopes the World of Laos. And this, I am afraid, will persist until the big boys in Washington, Moscow and London reach some understanding which won't happen probably before a few more weeks have gone by.

The upshot of all this is that I feel very useless here and could just as well pack up and go home. But as there are only two more weeks before the expiration of my contract, I have to acquiesce. But I am sure you understand that under the present circumstances there is little of any interest to report to you.

The failure of the American enterprise is of course to be regretted because it contained so many new constructive and welcomed elements and the present seemed a good time to launch it. One can say, of course, that in one respect, this flop clarifies the situation by eliminating one possible solution. It seems to me there are not very many possibilities left. In fact, in my view there is only one: an international conference coupled with the reactivation of the I.C.C. Evidently this country alone can't find a solution. Whether an international conference can do it, God only knows! Certainly, it is going to mean endless bickering, accusations and recriminations, but as Churchill used to put it: Better jaw-jaw than war-war. And I am not alone favouring an international conference: This is how I see the position of the principal players of this game:

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- 1) The present Laos Government: is prepared to accept the International Control Commission and a conference if the Americans agree;
- 2) USA: is against the conference, but may swallow eventually this bitter pill, preferring it to a military show-down, even if it means participation in a meeting where Communist China is also represented;
- 3) UK, France and India : favour an international conference and the immediate reconvoation of the Geneva Commission prior to the conference;
- 4) Cambodia: is primarily interested in having a 14-power conference meet to examine in freedom the problem of Laos without being tied down to the I.C.C. although they would agree to the reactivation of the I.C.C. should the conference so decide;
- 5) USSR: favour the reconvoation of the I.C.C. upon the invitation of India, but it would await new terms of reference issued by the Geneva Conference or a 14-power conference. For the purpose of assisting the conference the I.C.C. would submit proposals on how to resume its activities and the additional terms of reference it would need to operate effectively;
- 6) China: is not against the reactivation of the I.C.C. provided such a move is preceded by an international conference;
- 7) SEATO: some members favour a conference, others a solution without Communist participation.

So the differences of opinion do not appear great. In fact, there is a pathetic agreement about the necessity and the sacrosanct duty to "respect the sovereignty, independence, unity, territorial integrity and neutrality of Laos".

Where and when and how you envisage the UN coming into the picture, I don't know. It seems to me that the UN should not stay completely outside.

One of the first stumbling blocks, though I think a minor one, will be the question as to who will represent Laos at the conference and deal with the Commission. China, USSR and its consorts do not want to have anything to do with the "Phoumi-Boun Oum clique". My opinion is that this obstacle can be by-passed if the King himself appoints a delegation representing him and Laos at the negotiations.



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However, I better stop now speculating about future events.

It goes without saying that the whole mission here is following your breathtaking struggle with the Congo problem with boundless sympathy and admiration, and I take this opportunity to convey to you everybody's warmest wishes for success.

With kindest regards,

Sakari

Sakari Tuomioja



BOITE POSTALE 348

VIENTIANE, LAOS

8 March 1961

Dear Dag,

Now that my brief mission assignment is coming to an end, I would like, in summing up my impressions, to submit to you my thoughts which have "crystallized" during the past five weeks, on how the hard nut of Laos should be cracked (till den kraft och verkan det hava kan).

I do not believe it is possible to get a settlement in Laos before Americans and Russians get together and reach an understanding about the necessary programme that must be followed for letting Laos live in peace. This means an agreement on stopping all military and economic aid that is now directed towards a part of the country for the exclusive use of a fraction of the people. Unless these two powers agree on the basic framework upon which the detailed structure can be built, it is impossible to expect, in the foreseeable future, that the Communist bloc will stop its subversive activities here or that the Americans will stop supporting a Government and régime which does not represent the whole nation. Similarly, I believe, that to ask the Lao people to adopt a spirit of national conciliation before there is an agreement among the two Powers, is unrealistic.

For such an understanding between Washington and Moscow (who would speak also for Peking and Hanoi) two main pillars are absolutely essential:

- 1) it must be agreed that no troops, military personnel, armaments and ammunitions will be introduced into Laos nor will there be any kind of bilateral aid in money or any other form of supply or assistance. An international machinery for proper enforcement is essential.
- 2) it must be agreed that through mutual efforts of the two powers a widest possible solicitation for international contribution will be made for multilateral aid that will reach Laos through the U.N. or through agreed channels along the lines of your memo to Khampan Panya of January 24, 1961.

Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld
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New York, N.Y.

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Adequate facilities should be provided to enable countries that are unable to contribute in convertible currencies to do so in kind or by personnel, but again only through international channels.

With the proclamation of this agreement the necessary recomposition of the Government would have to take place, which though excluding perhaps extremist elements from both sides would nevertheless be representative of the country as a whole.

I think that after these moves it would be relatively easy to bring about a cease fire.

The next step would be to convene an international conference, say of 14 powers under the auspices of the U.N. :

- 1) to guarantee the neutrality of Laos;
- 2) to give its blessing to the above agreement;
- 3) to fix with the Lao Government the modalities for holding general elections;
- 4) to establish the necessary international machinery for the implementation of the agreement and for its proper supervision. Here it would be advantageous if the I.C.C. were not reactivated but instead a new body come into being. This, because, in addition to the State Department, most Laotian politicians either do not trust it or consider it ineffective. India probably would object to this, but there is room for adjustment in so far as India could be asked to serve on a new Commission.
- 5) to appeal to all UN members for aid for Laos that will be internationally channeled and under international supervision.

All this is nothing very new on thinking, but attention should be paid to the right "tagordning" in tackling with the problems. And more than ever there is now periculum in mora. Presently with the impending trip to the U.S.A. of Souvanna there is a golden opportunity for the Americans to study his thinking and try to find a common ground for future action. This is a chance that they should not miss.

After these valedictory suggestions it only remains for me to thank you for your confidence and wish you every success in your superhuman efforts to help this tragic and stupid world.

With kind regards,

Savari

14-III-67

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To HP.
for file.
E 1-III-61

To: The Secretary-General

I suppose Sakari is entitled to some reaction on your part, perhaps along the lines of the draft below:

"Your letter of 23 February and cables 98, 102, 103, 107, 110. You know my views from my 65 and 66 and further information available is not of nature to reconsider my position. ~~As I see it, combining non-alignment declaration with three power proposal was inept and insufficient diplomatic preparation in Phnom Penh and Rangoon grave tactical mistake.~~ Any move on my part at the present time would most likely involve us in the procedural imbroglio so well prepared by others, without much chance to do something useful about it."

28 February 1961.

Lauren

14 March 1961

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To: Secretary-General

From: J.F. Engers *J.F. Engers*

I think something like draft below is called for.

"Tuomioja from Secgen

Your 120 and your letter of 8 March. Many thanks for your lucid reports which generally agree with and confirm my thinking on subject. Fully understand your desire and necessity returning Helsinki and agree that your latest letters obviate oral report headquarters. Greatly appreciative services rendered and hope you will be able to assist Unations efforts when called upon in the future."