CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS CONCERNING THE LAOTIAN CRISIS,
SECOND INSTALLMENT: 1 FEBRUARY TO 31 MARCH 1961

HISTORICAL DIVISION
JOINT SECRETARIAT
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
19 MAY 1961

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The Department of State, in a circular cable, stated that, according to an officer of the British Embassy in Washington, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Sobolev had "emphasized" the need for an international conference on Laos. Reportedly, Sobolev told the British Ambassador to the USSR that the Soviet Government did not believe the ICC could operate without new instructions from a conference consisting of either the participants in the Geneva Conference of 1954 or a "larger group." In either case, according to Sobolev, the Soviet Government believed the Chinese Communists should be present at the conference to speak for themselves.

(S) Msg, SecState Circular, 1140, 1 Feb 61.

Hanoi Tass reported that Prince Souphanouvong had asked the Geneva Co-Chairmen to convene without delay an international conference "analogous to [the] Geneva Conference in order [to] bring [an] end to foreign aggression in Laos and insure peace, independence and neutrality [to] Laos."

(OUO) Msg, Moscow to SecState, 1812, 1 Feb 61.

To forestall Souvanna from possibly throwing in his lot with Kong Le and the Pathet Lao, the Secretary of State directed the US Ambassador to Cambodia to suggest to the British Ambassador that he advise Souvanna not to commit himself at a time when the new US Administration seemed about to evolve an important new policy towards Laos.

(S) Msg, SecState to Phnom Penh, 662, 1 Feb 61.

CINCPAC informed the JCS that he concurred in the recommendation of CHPEO to approve Phoumi's request for funds and equipment for four new infantry battalions (see item 23 January). In CINCPAC's opinion, these additional forces were urgently needed to enable Phoumi to continue the offensive, consolidate areas under his control, and relieve, for training, FAL units then in combat.

(S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 312254Z, 31 Jan 61 (rec'd 1 Feb 61).

A survey by CHPEO revealed that only 30 of a former 193 French military personnel were still engaged in training and logistical activities for the FAL. "It is obvious," reported the PEO Chief, "that this progressive decrease in French training and advisory personnel has left a void which has had an adverse effect on FAL efficiency."

(S) Msg, CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 80693, 1 Feb 61.

The Deputy Secretary of Defense informed the Chairman, JCS, that the JCS proposal to install a MAAG in Laos (see item 14 January) "would not be in consonance with the overall approach of the United States toward solution of the Laos problem. Accordingly, the proposal ... will be held in abeyance for the present." Representatives of the Defense and State Departments had considered the installation of a MAAG in Laos but, while recognizing the advantages of such a step, had concluded that anticipated political repercussions would outweigh them.

The Deputy Secretary recognized the desirability of increasing US responsibility for military training in Laos and assured the Chairman, JCS, that efforts would be made to reach agreements to that end with the Lao and French Governments.

(S) Memo, Deputy SecDef to CJCS, 1 Feb 61, 1st N/H to JCS 1992/890.
1 Feb

In negotiations on the status of Seno Air Base the French Ambassador, according to an official of the French Foreign Office, was able to persuade Phoumi to postpone the scheduled Lao takeover of the base (see item 29 January) from 1 to 5 February. According to Phoumi, this takeover would be "symbolic" and would involve only buildings already the property of the Laotian Government. The French Government instructed the Commander of Seno to receive FAL forces amicably if they demanded access to the base on 5 February but to take no official cognizance of their presence.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1452, 1 Feb 61; (C) Msg, Paris to SecState, 3052, 1 Feb 61.

1 Feb

The Australian representative presented to the SEATO Council of Representatives his Government's proposed answer to a request of the Laotian Government for a SEATO investigation of Communist military intervention in Laos (see item 22-23 January). The Australian plan called for an investigation by the Ambassadors to Laos of the SEATO nations. This investigation would seek to determine 1) how much war material had been delivered to Laos by Soviet planes, 2) the extent to which foreign Communist elements were present in the ranks of the Pathet Lao, and 3) the extent of deliveries of war material and personnel by land from North Vietnam.

Alexis Johnson, the US Ambassador to Thailand, reported that Thailand and Pakistan supported the Australian proposal wholeheartedly, while New Zealand was willing to accede if all other SEATO powers accepted it. France and Britain were opposed, the former "on principle" and the latter for fear of jeopardizing the negotiations concerning the ICC (see item 21 January). Ambassador Johnson stated that for the time being the US was "not able to take definite action."

(S) Msgs, Bangkok to SecState, 1350 and 1351, both 1 Feb 61.

2 Feb

Chinese Communist Foreign Minister Chen Yi, in a speech in Peking, called for an international conference on Laos preceding any resumption of operations by the ICC. According to the US Consul General in Hong Kong, this was a reversal of the Chinese Communist position stated on 28 December 1960 that the ICC should be reconvened first, and only if it failed should an international conference be called.

At the same time, continued the US diplomat, the Communists were making a determined effort to strengthen the claims of legality of the Souvanna Phouma Government. Several recent reports emanating from Hanoi and Xieng Khouang stated that while "Premier Phouma was staying abroad," certain members of the Souvanna group were to "be in charge all affairs of state," and that Souvanna would return to Laos soon and "continue to assume [responsibility for] affairs of [the] country."

(C) Msg, Hong Kong to SecState, 1338, 4 Feb 61.

2 Feb

A draft proposal intended to neutralize Laos with respect to the conflicts of the Cold War through a "Neutral Nations Commission" (NNC) was proposed to the Governmental Task Force on Laos by its Chairman, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs J. Graham Parsons (see item 10 February for announcement of this policy to US Embassies).
The proposal, which included a basic concept and the specific steps for carrying it out, was presented in five parts, as follows:

A. Circular "Concept" Message.
B. Circular on Neutral Nations Commission.
C. Circular on SEATO.
D. Instruction to Moscow.
E. Recommended Lines of Action, Objectives, and Time Table.

A. Circular "Concept" Message.

The US should, according to the draft proposal, explore the "feasibility of a neutral nations commission centering around Cambodia and Burma with suitable flexibility for additions." These countries were selected because, though "neutral and troublesome," they were "anti-Communist domestically," wished a "non-Communist Laos in their own self-interest," and had "themselves taken initiatives consistent with [the] approach we have in mind." In addition, the Communist Bloc was "actively wooing them and would find it difficult [to] rebuff their efforts on behalf of peace."

The "heart" of the draft proposal was an "understanding" between the US and the USSR. Because the Soviet Union might feel that time favored the Communist cause in Laos, the US might have to bring military and political pressure to bear before an "understanding" with the USSR could be achieved.

To assure close collaboration between the US and its closest allies and to reassure the Asian allies, the US planned to propose, at a special meeting called for the purpose, that SEATO "undertake certain limited actions all short of SEATO intervention in Laos, but designed [to] show [that] SEATO [was] prepared [to] act if necessary."

Upon the receipt of a signal to "execute," US Ambassadors to SEATO Nations were to make a presentation to their host governments along the following lines: 1) urge active support of the Laotian Government of Boun Oum as the legitimate Government of Laos even though, ideally, it should be broadened to be more representative of the Lao people; 2) explain that the US conceived of Laos as a "neutral state, unaligned in her international relations" and without foreign military bases, foreign troops, or military alliances; and 3) state that the US had suggested to the Laotian Government that it proclaim the neutrality of Laos by a "declaration which all interested governments would be invited to respect."

The Ambassadors should then, according to the draft proposal, explain the "Neutral Nations Commission," giving as its duties the following: 1) to stop in Laos all foreign military intervention in contravention of international agreements and inconsistent with [the] status of Laos as a neutral; 2) to bring about a "cease-fire and regroupment" of Pathet Lao forces in Sam Neua and Phong Saly Provinces; and 3) to establish machinery for supervision of "military material and equipment required for defense and maintenance [of] law and order."

The Ambassadors should also point out that, if the peaceful proposals failed, SEATO had an obligation to defend the "integrity of Laos and security of Southeast Asia which [the] outcome of the struggle in Laos will vitally affect."
The Ambassadors were also to state that the US would continue economic aid to Laos but would be prepared to withdraw its military training mission and submit its military assistance to control by the Neutral Nations Commission.

B. Circular on Neutral Nations Commission.
Under the draft proposal, King Savang Vathana was to invite Burma, Cambodia and Malaya to make up the Neutral Nations Commission. This invitation, issued through diplomatic channels, would also invite all other nations to respect the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and neutralized status of Laos and to desist from and condemn "foreign intervention in Lao internal affairs . . . not permitted by international agreements."

Upon issuance of the Lao invitation, the US would undertake the following actions:

1. Issue a unilateral declaration of respect for Lao neutralization and support for the Neutral Nations Commission.
2. Seek similar declarations by all interested powers, including US allies and the USSR.
3. Seek, "by all possible means," to persuade Cambodia, Burma, and Malaya to accept the Lao invitation.
4. Seek UN Security Council action that would take note of the Lao invitation and authorize the UN Secretary General to provide appropriate assistance to the Neutral Nations Commission.

C. Circular on SEATO.
The US "has watched with growing concern for [the] future of SEATO and effect on Thailand and South Viet Nam of SEATO failure to act in [the] deteriorating Laos situation." However, there was little hope, according to the draft message, of agreement by the UK and France, and probably Australia and New Zealand, with policies which the US, Laos, Thailand, and Viet Nam "would regard as optimum." The US, therefore, should seek agreement within the SEATO Council of Representatives to a limited course of action comprised of the following:

1. Send the Secretary General of SEATO and/or a military group to Laos to determine whether the Lao Government could control the principal population and communication centers.
2. If the report was negative, convene the SEATO Council of Representatives to examine the nature of intervention by the Communist Bloc in Laos.
3. Seek agreement of the Council to a minimum response consisting of encouragement of the Lao Government to resist and the stationing of a US force (battle group/air squadron size) in Thailand under the SEATO flag.

D. Instruction to Moscow.
Under the draft proposal, the US Ambassador to the USSR was to invite the Soviet Government to cooperate with the US Government in achieving a neutralized Laos under the conditions set forth in the draft proposal.
E. Recommended Lines of Action, Objectives, and Timetable.

This portion of the draft proposal called for the continuation of military measures already decided upon (see item 23 January) and a timetable integrating, chronologically, all US actions. This portion also summarized the broad objectives of US policy in Laos already developed in the other parts of the draft proposal.

The Director of the Joint Staff, in a memorandum for the JCS, concluded that the State Department draft proposal, with modifications, was "acceptable from a military standpoint." The modifications proposed were as follows:

6. a. Insure Laos is not stripped of U.S. training and operational support without explicit simultaneous phase-in of neutral substitute agencies with comparable demonstrated capabilities.

b. Insure the Neutral Nations Commission will have means in fact to observe, control or inhibit Pathet Lao preparations for eventual takeover of Laos.

c. Insure that no military ultimatum is issued to the USSR prior to making necessary political and military preparations.

d. Insure that indication is given of long-term measures that must be initiated to reduce present Communist influence in Laos.

The Director of the Joint Staff recommended that the JCS "approve the above conclusions as a basis for further coordination on this subject."

(TS) "Proposed State Department Message," JMF, Laos;
(TS) Memo, Director of the Joint Staff to the JCS, "State Department Draft Proposal Concerning Laos," DJSM-136-61, 3 Feb 61.

CHPEO advised CINCPAC that "the greatly increased tempo of operations within [the] FAL makes it necessary to add materially to [the] PEO advisory staff." At the higher levels, particularly in Air Force and Engineer matters, additional personnel were urgently needed for planning and advisory functions. At the lower levels an increase in staff was required because of the growing number of geographical locations where the FAL needed logistic advice, and the increased requirements for maintenance and repair of equipment.

The vacuum created by the reduction of the French military advisory activities (see item 1 February) was, in the opinion of CHPEO, an additional reason for an augmentation of his staff.

(C) Msg, CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 81318, 2 Feb 61.

The Soviet airlift from Hanoi to the Pathet Lao forces was reported to be continuing at the rate of two sorties a day. According to a Canadian military attaché who had just returned from North Viet Nam, the quantity of material being airlifted appeared to be far in excess of the requirements for the defensive actions in which the Pathet Lao was engaged.

(C) Msg, Saigon to SecState, 1337, 3 Feb 61.
3 Feb The JCS approved CHPEO's request for an augmentation of PEO by nine US Army Special Forces teams (Monkhood) on a 180-day basis. It was estimated that these teams would arrive in Vientiane in increments of three teams each on 1 March, 1 April, and 1 May.

(S) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 990154, 3 Feb 61.

3 Feb The US military attache in Laos reported that according to the commander of the Laotian First Military Region (bordering on Burma) approximately 6,000-7,000 Chinese Nationalist troops had entered Laos from Burma between 28 and 30 January.

(S) Msg, USARMA Laos to DA, DA IN 81402, 3 Feb 61.

4 Feb The CHPEO advised CINCPAC that Phoumi was enthusiastic about a program for providing Thai technical specialist volunteers for the PAL (see item 23 January).

The CHPEO listed 385 military specialist billets which, in his opinion, were needed to provide necessary specialist and technical support to the PAL.

(S) Msg, CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 81837, 4 Feb 61.

4 Feb The Secretary of Defense approved CINCPAC's request for 115 additional Filipino military technicians (see item 20 January) provided they were used not to replace personnel of the French Military Mission but "to supplement and improve the current effort in the logistic field."

(S) Msg, OSD (CJ & TD) to CINCPAC, DEF 989769, 4 Feb 61.

4 Feb The Chinese Communist radio reported a statement by the Chinese Communist Vice Premier that "support by the Soviet Government to Laos in response to [the] request [of the] lawful government [of] Laos headed by Prince [Souvanna] Phoumi is in accordance with international practice and is righteous action .... If [the] lawful Government of Laos ... asks support from China, [the] Chinese Government too will certainly give it."

(C) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1471, 4 Feb 61.

The strategic road junction of Routes 7 and 13 was taken by the PAL, according to the JCS Laos Situation Report. Recapture of this road junction placed in friendly hands the primary ground communication route between Vientiane and Luang Prabang for the first time since January and opened the way for a drive on the Communist-held Plaine des Jarres.

(TS) JCS Laos Sit Rep 32-61, 5 Feb 61.

4 Feb The British Ambassador to Cambodia, having agreed to use his influence with Souvanna (see item 1 February), obtained an interview with the former Lao Premier. In this interview Souvanna stated that he planned a brief visit "of one or two days in the 'near future' to the Pathet Lao-held areas of Phong Saly and the Plaine des Jarres to see 'troops and ministers loyal to me.'" Following this trip, Souvanna said, he planned to visit various world capitals, including Saigon, New Delhi, Cairo, Paris, London, and Moscow.

The British Ambassador reported that his arguments to postpone this visit to Pathet Lao territory because a new US policy on Laos appeared imminent had no effect. Souvanna, in the Ambassador's opinion, was still determined to go.

(S) Msgs, Phnom Penh to SecState, 981, 3 Feb 61, and 991, 6 Feb 61.
Ambassador Brown reported to the Secretary of State that a Laotian takeover of Seno (see item 1 February) would involve the US in the French-Lao differences over the base. PEO logistics personnel had been assisting FAL operations at Seno for months. Also PEO training personnel might be required to visit FAL units moved to Seno.

In view of these anticipated difficulties the Ambassador requested guidance from the Department of State (see item 8 February).

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1472, 4 Feb 61.

5 Feb

The Laotian Government installed several "Headquarters elements" in the airport passenger office and other minor facilities at Seno. According to a French Embassy officer in Vientiane, the French Ambassador had protested this "unilateral procedure" to the Laotian Government, but the French Government still hoped to "arrange matters quietly."

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1480, 6 Feb 61; (U) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1480, 6 Feb 61; (U) Msg, Paris to SecState, 3121, 7 Feb 61.

6 Feb

The Government of the Republic of China declared its opposition to either the reactivation of the ICC or a 4-Nation Conference as proposed by Prince Sihanouk. In an informal note handed to the US Ambassador, the Chinese Nationalist Government stated that either of these proposals would contain a "built-in mechanism of Communist domination" and would mean "abdication of free world leadership in Laos and pave the way for a final Communist takeover."

(C) Msg, Taipei to Secstate, 453, 6 Feb 61.

6 Feb

In response to a request from the President for a statement of the capability of the US to commit military forces to Laos, the Chairman, JCS submitted a study of "US Air and Sea Lift, Readiness and Posture of Laos," (derived from JCS 1992/912).

According to this paper, the US could introduce sufficient forces into Laos within 30 days to protect key cities, communication centers, and lines of communication and to establish a secure base for subsequent operations to defeat the Pathet Lao, provided there were no overt intervention by Communist China or North Viet Nam. If North Viet Nam intervened overtly, US forces would be able to fight delaying actions and probably would be able to hold Vientiane and southern Laos. If both North Viet Nam and Communist China intervened overtly, US forces in Laos would still be able to hold Vientiane and southern Laos, provided other US and allied forces took certain counteractions outside Laos that would directly affect operations in Laos.

Intervention by US forces to prevent a Communist conquest of Laos would, according to the JCS paper, initially reduce the over-all capabilities of the US to wage general and limited war. Assuming that military production were increased and partial mobilization carried out as a result of US intervention in Laos, this over-all capability would eventually increase.

CHPEO cabled CINCPAC that Phoumi was organizing six special battalions in addition to the four for which US support had already been requested (see item 1 February). CHPEO also reported that he had informed Phoumi that the US Government had made no provision to pay or equip these six units; in addition, competent officers and noncommissioned officers would be difficult for Phoumi to obtain.

(On 7 February, CINCPAC concurred in the action taken by CHPEO.)

(S) Msg, CHPEO, Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 82068, 6 Feb 61.

The FAL jumped off to seize the Plaine des Jarres by an attack on two fronts. Force Sam Sen Thai (SST) moved east from RJ 7 and 13, while Force Phou Phi eng (PP) advanced north from Vang Vieng.

(TS) Msg, CHPEO to CINCPAC, DA IN 81972, 4 Feb 61.

CINCPAC recommended to the JCS that approval of "cognizant Washington, D.C. authorities" be obtained to allow the use of US aircraft to fly supplies for the FAL directly to Vientiane (see item 9 February). Under existing procedures, all military supplies for Laos had to be transhipped via CAT at Bangkok. Employment of CAT aircraft for this purpose resulted in inadequate airlift for necessary logistic support of FAL combat units.

(TS) Msgs, CINCPAC to JCS, DA IN 81190, 2 Feb 61, and 071820Z, 7 Feb 61.

The military situation in Laos, as presented by the Chairman, JCS, to the Secretary of Defense, was as follows:

1. The Laotian Government controlled the main towns and cities of northern, southern, and western Laos except for the Phong Saly area in the north. Much of the countryside in these areas was heavily infiltrated by the Pathet Lao.

2. The Pathet Lao forces, combined with those of Kong Le, controlled the northeastern portion of the country including the Plaine des Jarres/Xieng Khouang areas. The Pathet Lao were also active in the northeast, attacking Muong Sai, the last HLG garrison in Phong Saly Province, and in the south in the Thakhek and Attopeu areas. In general, the Pathet Lao were not conducting unusually aggressive operations, but they were being supplied by Soviet airlift with material in excess of their needs for "normal operations" in the Plaine des Jarres.

3. The FAL was planning an offensive to retake the Plaine des Jarres. In addition, guerrilla forces of Meo mountain tribesmen were active south of Xieng Khouang.


The French Ambassador in Phnom Penh, acting under instructions from Paris, pointed out to Souvanna that his visit to Xieng Khouang at this juncture could be advantageously utilized by the Soviets as evidence that Souvanna supported their intervention. Souvanna replied, the US Ambassador
informed the Secretary of State, that he was aware of this possibility, but nevertheless he felt it was essential that he visit his supporters to counter the greater danger that they would become discouraged and join forces with the Pathet Lao.

(S) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1003, 8 Feb 61.

7 Feb

The UN Secretary General advised the US delegate to the UN that he had strongly advised the Lao delegates to the UN against an appeal to the Security Council unless they had convincing factual evidence of intervention to back up their charges.

The Secretary General had also informed the Lao delegates that he hoped their government would seek to become more truly representative. If Souvanna could not be brought into the government, advised the Secretary General, at least some of his followers should be included so that "the other side" could not convert Souvanna into "another Lumumba."

(S) Msg, New York to SecState, 2136, 8 Feb 61.

8 Feb

In response to Ambassador Brown's request for guidance on the Seno problem (see item 4 February) the Secretary of State suggested that the Ambassador point out to Phoumi "that in taking action on Seno, [the] RLG would be well advised to keep three points in mind":

1. SEATO action to oppose any Communist aggression against Laos short of overt armed attack would require unanimous consent. Alienation of France by Laos would not facilitate such agreement.

2. The presence of French troops at Seno was recognized by international agreement. Forcing them off Seno might cause the French Government to withdraw all its troops from Laos, thus placing the US in an extremely difficult position because the presence of the PEO was still tied to the existence of the French Military Mission.

3. At a time when the Laotian Government needed all the support it could get, it was unwise to alienate a power which had always been friendly to Laos. Such action might also alienate other powers.

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 829, 8 Feb 61.

8 Feb

Ambassador Brown and his Country Team concurred in the recommendation of CHPEO that his staff be increased by 73. This increase was necessary, in the opinion of the Country Team, because of the increased responsibilities assigned the PEO (see item 26 January) and because of the gradual freeze-out of the French Military Training Mission.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1489, 8 Feb 61.

8 Feb

The Canadian Government, according to the text of its note as published by the Cambodian press, replied to Prince Sihanouk's proposal for a 14-Nation Conference by stating its preference for reactivation of the ICC. In the opinion of the Canadians, the most "rapid and most generally..."
acceptable means of reducing tensions" in Laos would be through the "existing organism, that is ICC Laos." The Canadian Government, therefore, was prepared to resume its duties in the ICC if requested to do so by the Geneva Co-Chairmen and if the King of Laos agreed to it.

(U) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1008, 9 Feb 61.

9 Feb

According to the text published in the Cambodian press, Prime Minister Nehru of India replied favorably to Sihanouk's 14-nation proposal. But, in Nehru's opinion, the ICC should meet, not as an alternative to the conference, but as an action to prevent "progressive deterioration" of the situation in Laos while the conference was being organized. The Indian Government also wanted any new conference to be a "continuation of [the] old Geneva Conference with new terms of reference" because to break away from it would leave "no sound basis" for approaching the question.

(U) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1019, 10 Feb 61.

9 Feb

Souvanna, in a letter to the US Ambassador to Cambodia, expressed his approval for a 14-Nation Conference as proposed by Sihanouk. According to Souvanna, only such a conference could end the civil war in Laos in view of the aggravated situation there. The ICC, in Souvanna's opinion, could be useful but only as an agent to carry out the decisions of the conference. As its members had already worked in Laos, the ICC could, unlike a new organization, begin its work immediately without losing precious time in familiarizing itself with Lao affairs.

(C) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1013, 9 Feb 61.

9 Feb

The JCS informed CINCPAC that the use of US aircraft to lift supplies for the FAL to Vientiane was not approved (see item 7 February). Use of Udorn in Thailand by US aircraft carrying military equipment to Laos was approved, and CINCPAC was directed to determine: 1) the capability of Udorn to support FAL operations; 2) facilities required to make Udorn capable of supporting planned operations; and 3) negotiations with Thailand required for use of Udorn.

(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 990025, 9 Feb 61.

9 Feb

The JCS recommended to the Secretary of Defense that US Laotian Training Advisory and Assistance Groups (LTAGs) continue to train FAL units without a formal agreement with the French. If the French objected, the US Government should negotiate with the French Government for an agreement while the LTAGs continued their activities in Laos. LTAGs had been established to train the FAL under a US/French agreement signed on 28 May 1959. For purposes of cover, these US training teams were placed under nominal French supervision, but there was no actual control or military command involved. Because of the coup by Kong Le on 9 August 1960, negotiations to extend the agreement beyond the expiration date of 1 September 1960 to 1 June 1961 were stopped. The LTAGs, however, continued to train FAL forces. More important, in the opinion of the JCS, the teams had provided advice and leadership without which the FAL would have been ineffective.


- 10 -
The Secretary of State, in three circular messages to US Embassies, supplies "background and rationale for use as appropriate with government to which accredited" in order to explain the US concept of a neutralized Laos whose neutrality would be safeguarded by a Neutral Nations Commission. Two of these circulars had been under consideration in preliminary draft form as "Circular Concept Message" and "Circular on Neutral Nations Commission" (see item 2 February). Now issued as Circulars 1190 and 1191, they differed only slightly from the preliminary draft version.

A significant modification of the early draft proposal was the following qualification to be met before the US agreed to submit its military aid or that of its allies to the supervision of a neutral commission:

We would expect RLG to insist that there be real evidence of effectiveness of control and supervision which would deny clandestine support before assistance from ourselves, French, and other anti-Communist sources would be subject to restriction.

The third circular was a declaration of neutrality to be offered to King Savang in the hope that he would issue it. This text stated the determination of Laos to remain sovereign and independent, reaffirmed the traditional Laotian policy of neutrality, and invited Cambodia, Burma and Malaya to form a commission under the leadership of Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia "to direct its efforts toward ensuring Laos against foreign intervention both overt and covert...."

(S) SecState Circulars 1190, 1191, 1192, 11 Feb 61.

The British Government was impressed by the NNC concept and willing to support it at home and abroad, the Foreign Secretary informed Secretary of State Rusk. But the British doubted it would work out exactly as described, and pointed out that the Communists were committed to a conference and were therefore likely to argue that it would be necessary to hold one in order to give international approval to the NNC. In addition, neutral countries might also feel that a conference agreement between the great powers would be necessary. (The British shared the US desire to avoid a conference.)

The British were also convinced that the Boun Oum regime was unacceptable to both the Communists and the neutrals. A solution to the Laotian problem could only be reached, according to the British, "on the basis of a government of national unity which at least includes Souvanna Phouma and is committed to return to [the] sort of arrangement we had under Vientiane Agreements."

(S) Msg, SecState, Circular, 1196, 13 Feb 61.

Premier Chou En-Lai stated in a letter to Prince Sihanouk that the Chinese Communist Government agreed to the necessity for a 14-nation conference to end foreign interference and restore peace in Laos. As reported by the US Consul General in Hong Kong, the Chinese Premier stated that the conference was needed to "make new provisions on tasks and function" of a reactivated ICC.

(OOU) Msg, Hong Kong to SecState, 1388, 17 Feb 61.
11 Feb

The Secretary of State informed Ambassador Johnson in Thailand that the US supported an informal British suggestion for an investigation of Communist intervention in Laos by the SEATO Committee of Security Experts rather than the Australian plan for an investigation by the Ambassadors of the SEATO nations in Vientiane (see item 1 February).

(S) Msg, SecState to Bangkok, 1197, 11 Feb 61.

11 Feb

FAL Force SST, attacking east along Route 7, was held up by an enemy defensive position on the Phou Soung Summit, about four miles east of RJ 7 and 13.

(TS) JCS Laos Sitrep 38-61, 11 Feb 61; (TS) CHPEO Laos PIR No. 2, 6 Mar 61, DA IN 90418.

12 Feb

The US Ambassador to Laos, Winthrop Brown, delivered a memorandum to the Laotian Government setting forth the US proposal for a neutralized Laos to be achieved through a Neutral Nations Commission (see item 10 February).

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1530, 15 Feb 61.

The US Ambassador to Thailand reported that the Foreign Minister of Thailand had reacted favorably to the US proposal for a Neutral Nations Commission (see item 10 February). The Thai diplomat doubted, however, that Sihanouk would accept membership on the NNC, even though he did not want a Communist Laos on the borders of Cambodia. In his opinion, Sihanouk would certainly check first with Peking and Moscow, and the Communists then would ask the Cambodian leader to query the RLG on its attitude toward incorporating the PL into the government. If there was to be any hope whatever of obtaining Communist acquiescence in the NNC concept, the RLG must be assisted and advised in making a carefully considered reply to the Communists on this point. The reply should not constitute a flat rejection but, without making any commitments, should "hold out some bait" to the Communist.

(S) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 1441, 14 Feb 61.

13 Feb

In remarks to the US Delegates to the United Nations, the Secretary General of the UN expressed his belief that the US proposal for neutralizing Laos was "helpful" and "constructive." He commented, however, that Laos lacked either a well-established tradition of neutrality or physical strength to enforce neutrality. A way would therefore have to be found, perhaps along the lines of Austria, to obtain international acceptance of Laotian neutrality. The Secretary General also stated that a broadening of the present RLG was important and that every effort should be made to persuade Souvanna to take part.

(S) Msg, NY to SecState, 2200, 14 Feb 61.

14 Feb

During a presentation by Assistant Secretary of State Parsons on the US Neutral Nations Commission plan (see item 10 February), the Indian Minister to the US said that
the three proposed members of the NNC were weak, and they could not guarantee the neutrality of Laos without support by a larger ring of powers. Furthermore, said the Indian diplomat, he had gathered the impression from his Soviet colleagues in Washington that if Laos developed into another Korea, the Chinese Communists would "necessarily control" the situation. However, the Soviets had hinted that so far they were still in command.

(S) Msg, SecState to New Delhi, 2199, 15 Feb 61.

14 Feb

The Secretary of State explained the US concept of a neutral Laos (see item 10 February) to the Australian, British, Canadian, French, New Zealand, Pakistani, Philippine, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Thai representatives in Washington.

In an informal note, the Secretary explained the US concept of a neutral Laos, "unaligned in international relations but free to exercise [the] sovereign right to manage [its] own affairs and to provide for its national integrity." Such a neutralized status would, according to the note, prohibit foreign bases or foreign troops on Lao soil except as permitted by previous agreements.

This neutralized status would be supervised by a temporary international commission centered around Cambodia and Burma. It would be established at the invitation of the King of Laos and would be reported to the UN in "some appropriate way." The responsibilities of the Commission would be to "arrange for cessation of all foreign military intervention" in Laos through effective supervision over military arms and equipment brought into the country. In the event that international neutralization did not bring about the hoped-for peace within the country, the Lao Government could request the aid of the Commission in stopping hostilities.

The US was prepared, according to the note, to have its military assistance screened by the Commission and to withdraw its military training teams when a competent neutral training mission was in place and able to perform its functions.

(S) SecState Circular, 1208, 14 Feb 61.

The US Government, in a joint State/Defense message, informed Ambassador Brown that the recommendation of the CIHPEO for an increase in the FAL to 32,522 men was approved. This increase was to provide four additional infantry battalions, supporting artillery, and special forces operational detachments with necessary command elements (see items 23 January and 1 February).

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 868, 14 Feb 61.

14 Feb

Ambassador Johnson reported that, at a meeting of the SEATO Council of Representatives, the British representative had proposed that SEATO limit its response to the Lao request for an investigation of Communist intervention (see item 22 January) to calling a meeting of the Council of Security Experts in Bangkok to "analyze various national contributions and prepare an assessment." Ambassador Johnson then suggested an amendment calling for the SEATO Council of Representatives to offer the services of the Security Experts to the Laotian Government for the purpose of making an investigation in Laos.

All representatives except the British and French had favored the US amendment. The British then suggested a
return to the Australian proposal (see item 1 February), and Johnson, hoping to get some action without further delay, had agreed to accept if all other representatives would do the same. The French refused, however, so no reply to the RLG request for an investigation could be agreed to.

(S) Msgs, Bangkok to SecState, 1439 and 1440, 14 Feb 61.

15 Feb

The Canadian Government expressed a "good deal of sympathy" for the US general approach to the Laotian problem displayed in the NNC proposal. Particularly encouraging, said the Canadian Minister in reporting the reactions of his government to the Department of State, was the recognition in the US proposal that the concept of neutrality for Laos required more than a unilateral declaration to bring stability to the area while maintaining the independence and integrity of the country.

The Canadian Minister also emphasized his government's recognition of the need to broaden the Laotian Government. In addition, the Canadian Government wished to know what relation the new measures, if put into force, would have to the Geneva settlement and what effect they would have on the ICC.

(S) Msg, SecState to Ottawa, G-53, 16 Feb 61.

15 Feb

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(S) Msg, SecState to Ottawa, G-53, 16 Feb 61.

15 Feb

(C) Msgs, CHJUSMAG Thailand to JCS, 131035Z and 151125Z Feb 61.

15 Feb

CINCPAC dropped all forces earmarked for and in support of JTF 116 to Defense Condition 4.

(TS) JCS Laos Sitrep 42-61, 15 Feb 61.

15 Feb

King Savang Vathana stated to Ambassador Brown his approval in principle of the US proposal for a Neutral Nations Commission (see items 10, 12 February) but refused to make a public declaration on his own initiative as requested by the US. The King expressed his views during an interview at which the Ambassador presented the US plan. Reporting the results of this meeting to the Secretary of State, Ambassador Brown explained that the King did not wish to undermine the parliamentary procedures of his country by making a declaration or issuing an invitation on his own authority. The Ambassador had explained that the US had in mind a procedure comparable to the British speech from the throne in which the monarch stated the
policy of his government and, by announcing it himself, gave it the support and backing of the throne.

The King had proposed India, Burma, and Indonesia as members of the Neutral Nations Commission. The Ambassador, however, had urged that Cambodia, as the nation with the most to fear from a Communist Laos, be invited to accept membership. He had also expressed US concern that India, while professedly neutral, usually sided with the Communists, and that Indonesia might be tempted to favor the Communists to gain Soviet support against the Dutch on the West Irian question.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1530, 15 Feb 61.

15 Feb

General Phoumi informed Ambassador Brown that the Laotian Cabinet had "almost completely accepted" the US proposal for a Neutral Nations Commission. In a message to the Secretary of State, the Ambassador reported that, according to Phoumi, the Laotian Government planned to seek final approval of the plan on 16 February at a meeting of the Council of Ministers presided over by the King. Phoumi then planned to fly to Phnom Penh and offer Souvanna a cabinet post. If he accepted, the National Assembly would be convened in special session at which a politically broader government would be presented. At this same session Phoumi planned for the King to make a speech from the throne presenting the neutral commission proposal and issuing invitations for participation in the Commission.

The Ambassador had replied by repeating the arguments made to the King in favor of inclusion of Cambodia on the commission and against India and Indonesia (see item 15 February). Phoumi appeared to understand, according to the Ambassador, but did not indicate whether or not he agreed.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1528, 15 Feb 61.

15 Feb

The Secretary of State explained that, by "broadening" the Lao Government, the US meant "inclusion of all non-Communist elements." In a circular message to US diplomatic posts, the Secretary pointed out that inclusion of Pathet Lao representatives in the government would be "unwise," as they would, in accordance with standard Communist practice, spread their influence within the government far out of proportion to their numbers.

(S) Msg, SecState Circular 1214, 15 Feb 61.

15 Feb

(S) Msg, CHJUSMAG Thailand to CINCPAC, 151355Z Feb 61.

16 Feb

The French Government concurred in the general concept of the NNC plan (see item 10 February), the French Minister in Washington informed the Department of State. But the
French expressed grave concern that the schedule in the plan would not permit sufficient time for a US-British-French approach to the USSR in order to gain Soviet acceptance of it. A "broadening" of the Laotian Government should also be carried out, in the opinion of the French, as a prerequisite to putting into effect the NNC proposal. In addition, the French believed that the Laotian Government should relate any new neutrality proposal to the Geneva Agreement, as it was the only existing paper on Laos agreed to by the Soviets and the Chinese Communists. The French also questioned whether sufficient consideration had been given to the practical aspects of the Neutral Nations Commission, such as logistical support and finance.

In response to these points, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs advised the French Minister that the US had grave doubts regarding the wisdom of a tri-partite approach to the USSR. Such a step could have the following adverse results:

1) It could convince the Soviets that the entire concept was being stage-managed by a "white club" and that the Laotians were only puppets.

2) It could cause the Soviet Government to respond by offering its own alternative which would then lead to endless negotiations.

With regard to "broadening" the Laotian Government, the Deputy Assistant Secretary pointed out that Phoumi was arranging to make the supreme gesture of going to Phnom Penh to seek reconciliation with Souvanna. Therefore, "broadening" attempts were taking place simultaneously with plans for launching the NNC. It was pointed out to the French Minister that his Government could help by using its influence and connections to persuade Souvanna to accept Phoumi's gesture as genuine. The French Government could also assist by urging Sihanouk to accept the vital role of Chairman of the NNC.

(S) Msg, SecState to Paris, 3368, 17 Feb 61.

16 Feb

The most important obstacle to Sihanouk's willingness to serve on the NNC appeared to be the emphasis the plan placed on recognizing the presently constituted RLG, the US Ambassador in Phnom Penh reported to Secretary Rusk. The Cambodian Chief of State regarded the RLG as lacking popular support. In his opinion the RLG although technically invested constitutionally, had actually been
"imposed" on Laos by the US and was entirely dependent on
the latter's support. Sihanouk's current position was
that a fresh start, "from zero," should be made to form
a government of national unity that would be truly repre-
sentative of the Lao people. Therefore Ambassador Trimble
believed that unless the base of the present RLG was
greatly broadened, and included Souvanna, the Cambodian
Chief of State would be unwilling to participate in the
Neutral Nations Commission. Further, declared Trimble,
Sihanouk would probably insist that the establishment of
a more broadly-based government should precede rather
than follow the creation of the NNC.
(S) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1051, 16 Feb 61.

16 Feb

Phoumi informed Ambassador Brown that the Laotian Council
of Ministers had decided that the King would broadcast a
statement of Lao neutrality on 19 February. The statement
would, according to Phoumi, request support of neutral
nations but would not issue specific invitations to join
the Neutral Nations Commission. Invitations to Cambodia
and Burma would be announced by the Laotian Government
at a press conference following the King's speech on the
19th.

According to Phoumi, the Council had not decided
what position to offer Souvanna nor had it discussed
reorganization to broaden the government. Brown cautioned
Phoumi that the offer to Souvanna should be "sincere
and respectable," to prevent the burden of refusal from
falling on the Lao Government rather than Souvanna.
(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1541, 16 Feb 61.

16 Feb

The Secretary of State informed US diplomatic posts
concerned with the Laos crisis that the US believed that
"specific mention of Malaya as well as Cambodia and Burma"
should be included in both the royal address and the Lao
Government invitation to participate in the Neutral
Nations Commission (see item 10 February).
(S) Msg, SecState Circular 1219, 16 Feb 61.

16 Feb

The British Foreign Office informed the US Embassy in
London that it had instructed its Ambassador in Phnom
Penh to do his utmost to persuade Souvanna to respond
favorably to Phoumi's offer to join the Boun Oum govern-
ment and help to bring about a cease-fire and the neutral-
ity of Laos. However, the Foreign Office was apprehensive,
the US Minister to Great Britain reported, that Souvanna
would not bring himself to join a government which had
revolted against him. Further, the British Ambassador
would be "up against tough competition" in the Soviet
Ambassador who had been seeing Souvanna regularly. If
Souvanna rejected the British Ambassador's plea, he was
then to urge Souvanna at least not to close the door on
Phoumi in a way that would make further attempts to protect
Laos "from civil war, or worse, impossible."

In British Foreign Office opinion, reported the US
minister, the best way to get Souvanna to join the new
effort in Laos would be to form an entirely new government that would include persons from whom he was not so completely estranged as he was from the present RLG. The Minister stated that when an Embassy Officer had voiced the opinion that to dismantle the Boun Oum government at this time might invite catastrophic demoralization of the FAL, the British Southeast Asia Chief replied that he did not think the FAL cared very much what happened so long as it did not have to fight.

(6) Msg, London to SecState, 3301, 16 Feb 61.

In response to a request from the President, the Chairman, JCS, submitted the following estimate of the maximum number of Communist Bloc military forces that could be introduced into Laos within 30 days:

1. **Ground forces.**
   - 15 Viet Minh divisions 105,000 men
   - 8 Chinese Communist divisions 48,000 men
   - 3 Chinese Communist parachute battalions 3,000 men
   Total ground 156,000 men

2. **Air forces.**
   - Chinese Communist jet fighters 340
   - Chinese Communist jet light bombers 125
   Total aircraft 465

This estimate was of the total military force that the Communist bloc could commit to Laos within 30 days and did not take into account such factors as military objectives, geographical limitations, or competing requirements for the forces listed. For instance, it would be unrealistic for the Viet Minh to commit their whole force to Laos in view of their internal security problems and the danger of possible attack by Viet Nam.

(S) Memo, CJCS to President, "Maximum Bloc Forces in Laos," 16 Feb 61, CJCS-091 Laos (1).

The SEATO Council of Representatives approved the Australian plan, as amended by the US, for an investigation of Communist intervention in Laos by the SEATO-nation Ambassadors to Laos (see item 1 February). The US amendment provided that the investigation take place only at the invitation of the Laotian Government and was adopted to meet the objections of Ambassador Brown, who feared that a SEATO investigation might side-track the RLG from proceeding with the NNC proposal. A requirement that the Laotian Government initiate action would, according to Brown, make the investigation less likely.

(S) Msgs, Bangkok to SecState, 1460 and 1461, and (S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1535, 16 Feb 61.

The Secretary of State informed Ambassador Brown that the US policy with regard to Chinese Nationalist irregulars in Laos (see item 3 February) was to obtain the withdrawal to Taiwan of those still under the control of the Nationalist Government and to resettle the remainder in small groups in Laos and Thailand. To further this policy,
the Secretary directed the Ambassador to urge the RLG to make clear to the Nationalist Government its displeasure over the presence of the irregulars in Laos.

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 878, 16 Feb 61.

17 Feb

Australian Prime Minister Menzies informed the US Ambassador that the NNC concept was "imaginative and constructive" and that his government would give it full support. However, he posed the same three questions that his Secretary of External Affairs had raised in a discussion with the Ambassador two days earlier.

According to the US Ambassador these points were as follows: 1) the Australians were doubtful whether the neutrals involved, particularly Sihanouk, would accept the invitation since it presupposed acceptance of the Boun Oum government. Further, they believed that the neutrals, before undertaking the proposed task would insist on some broadening of the RLG, or at least some assurance that the Boun Oum government was not to be regarded as immutable; 2) the Australians had pointed out that the three neutrals involved were all small and relatively insignificant countries, and had questioned the caliber of the commissioners the neutrals could provide in relation to the magnitude of the tasks confronting them; 3) and finally, the Australian Government had stated that much of the success of the plan depended upon the attitude of the Communist Bloc.

The US Ambassador also reported that the Secretary of External Affairs, expressing surprise at the choice of Sihanouk as the central figure in the plan, had questioned whether he was sufficiently responsible and reliable for the task.

(S) Msg, SecState to Canberra, 455, 18 Feb 61; (S) Msg, Canberra to SecState, 482, 15 Feb 61.

The New Zealand Government stated that it agreed with the NNC concept and would give it full support. However, the New Zealand Minister in stating the position of his Government to the Department of State made the following comments:

1) Burma and Cambodia might not accept membership on the commission unless a prior big power agreement was secured, and Cambodia especially might insist on a 14-nation meeting. It might be necessary, therefore, to accept a conference, if to do so would remove the only "stumbling block" in the way of the success of the plan.

2) The New Zealand Government had reservations about the Commission membership and considered it might be advantageous to include India.

3) The RLG should be broadened.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs informed the Minister that the US would be reluctant to agree to an international conference even if refusal to agree were the only obstacle to the success of the NNC plan. Turning to the question of the Commission's membership, the Deputy Assistant Secretary said that India's association with the ICC and its attitude toward the RLG almost precluded its being a member of the NNC. In conclusion, Mr. Steeves pointed out that everyone agreed
on broadening the RLG, and he told the New Zealand
Minister that Phoumi was planning to offer Souvanna a
post as Laotian Foreign Minister.
(S) Msg, SecState to Wellington, 332, 17 Feb 61.

17 Feb
The US proposed to the British that the UK make the first
presentation of the NNC plan (see item 10 February) to the
Soviet Government. In making this proposal to the British
Ambassador to the US, Assistant Secretary Parsons stated
that the US Government had decided against a joint demarche
with Britain and France because it would look too much
like a "white man's club."
(S) Msg, SecState Circular 1229, 17 Feb 61.

18 Feb
The British Ambassador to the US informed Assistant
Secretary Parsons that, unless the Soviets gave their
reply on the ICC before 20 February, the British Govern-
ment preferred that the US rather than the UK contact
the Soviets first in support of the Neutral Nations
Commission proposal. The US agreed and informed the
British Ambassador that the NNC proposal would be
presented to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington on
20 February.
(S) Msg, SecState Circular Unnumbered, 18 Feb 61.

18 Feb
CINCPAC drew the attention of the CHJUSMAG, Thailand, and
CHPEO, Laos, to the part of the NNC proposal (see items
2, 10 February) that "contained the thought that Lao
training could be conducted primarily
In CINCPAC's opinion, this idea was put forth by the
"State Department Planners" either "in the context of
their latest political plan which would eventually
neutralize Laos and remove PEO from the scene,"

CINCPAC directed the addressees to make the following
assumptions:

1. That a full-scale MAAG would not be authorized
for Laos but that the PEO operation would continue.

2. That, in order to insure future political
stability in Laos, US military objectives continued to be
to aid the FAL in maintaining internal security, to conduct
delaying operations against external aggression, and to
prevent seizure of Laos by the Communists.

Having made these assumptions, the addressees were
requested to comment on how training of the FAL should be
conducted in the future (see item 23 February).
(S) Msg, CINCPAC to Chiefs JUSMAG Thailand and PEO
Laos, 1820102 Feb 61.

18 Feb
The Commonwealth Secretary in New Delhi asked the following
four questions in regard to the NNC, Ambassador Bunker
informed the Secretary of State:

1) Who was going to determine what arms importations were "legal?"

2) Would Souvanna be asked to join the RLG?

3) How were "the others" to be brought into support of the plan?

4) Would Sihanouk be informed in advance of King Vathana's declaration?

The US Ambassador said he had not answered these questions in exact detail for he wished to avoid as much as possible the GOI's "ever-ready suspicion of US dictating Lao policy."

(C) Msg, New Delhi to SecState, 1758, 19 Feb 61.

18 Feb

The Soviet Government informed the British Ambassador in Moscow that it favored an international conference on Laos to provide a new basis on which the ICC could function. As reported to the Department of State by the British Embassy in Washington, the Soviet position was that changed conditions since the Geneva Conference of 1954 called for a new international gathering, either of the type called for by Sihanouk (see item 1 January) or like the Geneva Conference.

According to the British Embassy, the Soviet Government gave the British Ambassador in Moscow two draft messages. The first message was an invitation from the Co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference (Great Britain and the USSR) to the US, Canada, Burma, Thailand, and South Vietnam calling for an international conference to give the ICC new instructions. The second draft message was from the Co-chairmen to Nehru asking him to convene the ICC in New Delhi or some other convenient place where it would consider what further powers it would require to perform its assigned functions effectively.

(S) Msg, SecState Circular 1241, 19 Feb 61.

18 Feb

Souvanna Phouma reacted favorably to the presentation of the NNC concept by UX Ambassador Garner in Cambodia; however, Souvanna appeared "deaf" to British urging that he take part in a broadened Boun Oum government (see item 16 February). The US Ambassador to Cambodia, in reporting on the Souvanna-Garner conversation to the Secretary of State, said that Souvanna also indicated that he still favored a national union government with PL participation, but he stated that a "non political" one headed by the King would be acceptable. He envisaged the latter arrangement as an interim measure until new elections could be held, perhaps in three to four months.

(S) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1056, 18 Feb 61.

19 Feb

King Savang appealed to the peoples of the world to respect the neutrality of Laos and invited the governments of Cambodia, Burma, and Malaya to form a Neutral Nations Commission with the mission of "denouncing all foreign intervention . . . which would result in imperilling of the kingdom's independence integrity and neutrality."

The King's speech followed closely the content of the draft provided him by the US (see item 10 February)
except that it did not invite Sihanouk to head the Neutral Nations Commission.

Ambassador Brown reported to the Secretary of State that he had been told by the Laotian Foreign Minister that, while the King favored a reorganized government, Phoumi and others opposed it for fear they would lose their jobs as ministers.

(S) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 1553, 18 Feb 61, and 1561, 19 Feb 61.

19 Feb

CINCPAC approved a recommendation of the CHPEO to assume responsibility for support of all Meo guerrilla forces (see item 21 February). These forces, according to CHPEO, consisted of 2,000 Meo and some additional tribesmen. MAP support had been given the authorized 2,000 for initial issue of equipment, with few exceptions, provided resupply for this group and all supply for the guerrillas in excess of the authorized 2,000.

(S) Msgs, CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 86158, and CINCPAC to CHPEO Laos, DA IN 86161, both 19 Feb 61.

20 Feb

The Secretary of State called in the Soviet Ambassador and told him that the US Government hoped the USSR would permit the Laotian Government and Neutral powers of South-east Asia to "work out a solution which will minimize controversy and permit prompt implementation" in Laos. The Secretary said that the new US Administration wished to see Laos "independent, a genuine neutral unaligned in its international relations but free to exercise its sovereign right to manage its own affairs and to provide for its national integrity." The US Government was, therefore, prepared to cooperate fully to help carry out the proposals of the King of Laos for neutralizing his country (see items 17, 18 February), and it hoped the Soviet Union would do the same.

In response to the Soviet proposal for an international conference to work out a settlement of the Laotian situation (see item 18 February), the Secretary said that the US was opposed because such a conference would be "public and stimulate debate and would not be as conducive to a quiet approach." (See item 28 February for the Soviet reply.)

(C) Msg, SecState Circular, 1265, 22 Feb 61.

20 Feb

Vietnamese Foreign Minister Mau declared that the NNC was a good approach to the peaceful settlement of the Laotian problem. It would be difficult, he told US Ambassador Durbrow, for the Communists to continue an airlift and other aid to Laos if a NNC could confirm the facts.

The Vietnamese Foreign Minister was also pleased that King Savang had made such a firm appeal. He was convinced that all important Laotian leaders, having failed to work out a solution themselves, were now looking to the King for guidance. But Mau was not certain whether Souvanna would accept a position in the Boun Oum regime. In his opinion it was imperative that Souvanna be included in the government as a Cabinet member, but not as Premier.

The Vietnamese Foreign Minister agreed with Ambassador Durbrow that basically Sihanouk feared the Communists, and
he tended to concur that the Burmese had the same attitude. Although Mau initially questioned why India was not a member of the NNC, he subsequently agreed that the RLG as well as other western powers might not desire Indian participation in view of India's record on the ICC in Laos and Vietnam.

In conclusion, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister declared that it was important for all Southeast Asian countries to work together to prevent the Communists from taking over in Laos. If they were successful there, he said, they would try the same tactics in other countries.

(S) Msg, Saigon to SecState, 1385, 20 Feb 61.

The Philippine Government, in an aide-memoire given to the US Ambassador in Manila, said that the neutralization of Laos under the NNC held the promise of a feasible peaceful solution. However, the government had certain misgivings regarding the US proposal. An NNC constituted only on the invitation of the RLG, the note said, would be impotent to deal with non-compliance from within or without. In addition, the permanence of Laotian neutrality rested on such undependable factors as the reaction of the USSR, the likelihood of a Viet Minh agreement, and the inclusion of Souvanna and the PL in the government.

The Philippine Government also believed that the use of neutral nations such as Burma and Cambodia in the NNC would give respectability to the theory of neutralism, which could demoralize US allies in Asia.

The Philippine note suggested that the neutralization of Laos could be accomplished more directly and effectively by a United Nations Commission. The aide-memoire further noted that the NNC was outside the SEATO context, thereby diminishing SEATO influence. This loss of influence could be avoided by using a UN Commission, which would function in the same manner as the NNC but have the advantage of being a neutral body under higher authority than SEATO.

(S) Msg, Manila to SecState, 939, 20 Feb 61.

The Malayan Prime Minister declared that his country would be willing to be a member of the NNC (see item 10 February) reported the US Ambassador to the Secretary of State. He doubted, however, that the Communists would find a solidly anti-Communist Malaya acceptable as a member of the NNC, particularly when his government had just recently furnished arms to Vietnam to fight the Communists there.

(S) Msg, Kuala Lumpur to SecState, unnumbered [Control 11926], 20 Feb 61.

The Secretary of State informed the US diplomatic posts in countries concerned with the Laos crisis of the principal reservations expressed by governments consulted on the NNC proposal. He listed the Department responses thereto, to be used in discussions of the Neutral Nations Commission with the host governments:

1. Adequacy of neutral nations' resources to ensure the neutral status of Laos. The Department of State believed that the neutral nations had sufficient trained personnel to maintain adequate supervisory machinery. Technical and administrative assistance might be provided the commission by the UN Secretary General if necessary.
2. Necessity to broaden the Laotian Government. The Department recognized that the Laotian Government should be broadened to represent all non-Communist elements but should not include the Pathet Lao. The King's declaration of neutrality (see item 19 February) and Phoumi's plan to offer Souvanna a government post should attract broader domestic and international support for the present government.

3. Desirability of an international conference prior to establishment of the Neutral Nations Commission to set terms of reference for it. The Department believed that recent Chinese Communist criticism of the new US Administration, as well as Soviet behavior in the Congo and the UN General Assembly, indicated that a large conference would only "exacerbate international tensions over Laos rather than reduce them."

4. Desirability of obtaining Soviet approval of the NNC plan prior to its implementation. The Department believed that the Soviets would probably have rejected the proposal if it had been presented to them prior to implementation and would have insisted on an international conference. Soviet rejection of the Neutral Nations Commission, once it was launched, would clearly put the onus of failure on them.

5. The difficulty of determining which military aid agreements were legal. The Department believed the Neutral Nations Commission would make its determinations on the basis of the King's announcement of 19 February (see item). Despite doubts that the existing government was not fully representative of the Lao people, Communist aid to the Pathet Lao could hardly be "defined as pursuant to international agreement," even by the most skeptical neutrals.

(S) Msg, SecState, Circular, 1258, 21 Feb 61.

In an interview with Ambassador Brown, Phoumi discussed 1) his ideas for broadening the Lao Government and 2) his attempt to obtain an interview with Sihanouk. With regard to 1), Phoumi stated his intention to offer Souvanna either the Deputy Premiership, the Ministry of Public Works, or the Foreign Ministry, and to broaden the Government to include other prominent political leaders. A major difficulty, according to Phoumi, would be finding a premier of sufficient stature to "ride herd on such diverse 'hautes personnalites' as Boun Oum, Phoui, and Souvanna." Phoumi claimed that he had suggested to the King that His Majesty head such a Government, but the King had refused on political grounds. With regard to 2), Phoumi stated
that Sihanouk had said he would be too busy for an official visit until April but would not object to an earlier private visit.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1578, 21 Feb 61.

21 Feb

Phoumi informed Ambassador Brown that the RLG was fully aware of the dangers created by the presence of Chinese Nationalist irregulars in Laos. Four to five hundred of them had been recruited for the FAL, but only from among Chinese irregulars who had lived in Laos "a long time" (see item 16 February).

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1577, 21 Feb 61.

21 Feb

Ambassador Trimble informed the Secretary of State that the Cambodian Government had declared that it would be unable to participate in the NNC. Cambodia declined for the following reasons:

1. The unilaterally proposed commission would not be able to verify all foreign interference without agreement of the authorities in control of the eastern provinces of Laos.

2. The Cambodian Government believed that a Commission could be set up only after an international conference, as proposed by Sihanouk, had been able to lead the great powers into renouncing any interference into Laotian internal affairs.

3. A definitive settlement of the Laotian problem could not be obtained until the Laotian people had a complete international guarantee that they would be allowed fully to select a government of their own choice.

(Two days later the Cambodian Information Ministry Daily News Bulletin published Cambodia’s official refusal to serve on the Commission.)

(S) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1068, 21 Feb 61;
(U) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState 1079, 23 Feb 61.

22 Feb

The Secretary of State suggested that the US Ambassador urge the Laotian Government to defer any reaction to and, above all, avoid any public mention of, the reported Cambodian refusal to participate in the NNC (see item 21 February). A change in Sihanouk's position, said the Secretary, would be "far less unlikely" if the initial refusal were not made public.

(S) Msg, SecState Circular 1271, 22 Feb 61.

22 Feb

The US Ambassador to Japan reported to the Secretary of State that, according to a Japanese official, the US proposal for a NNC (see item 10 February) had made a "good impression" in the Foreign Office. Continuing, however, the official had stated that the Japanese Foreign Office considered the following three points important:

1. The fact that Boun Oum's government was the only legal one in Laos should not be stressed too much, because it was important to "bring back Souvanna and associate him [with the] present RLG." To give too much importance to Boun Oum would make the return of Souvanna more difficult.

2. The ability of the NNC to control effectively the shipment of arms to Laos was the most critical feature of
the NNC plan. Since the US did not propose to stop arms shipments until the NNC was able to prevent the Communists from doing so, it was doubtful that the Pathet Lao would deprive themselves of Communist aid until arms shipments to the RLG had stopped.

3. A long-term policy should be developed and implemented for Laos going "beyond the tactical solution of present state of hostilities," and providing a "broader basis for governmental stability and strong recognition by all concerned of advantages of Lao neutrality."

(S) Mag, Tokyo to SecState, 2391, 22 Feb 61.

The JCS informed CINCPAC that his objections to US support for two additional Thai RCTs (see item 15 February) had prompted an investigation to determine whether the decision of 23 January (see item) was "intended to be permissive rather than directive."

(TS) Mag, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 990721, 22 Feb 61.

Chinese Communist Foreign Minister Chen Yi charged that the US support for King Savang's proposal for a neutral Laos marked "the start of [a] new US scheme [to] bury [the] Geneva Agreements and use [the] prestige of neutral countires to legalize [the] rebel clique in Laos." The "sole correct way" to solution of the Laos problem according to Chen Yi, lay in an enlarged Geneva Conference as proposed by Sihanouk (see item 12 December 1960), reactivation of the ICC, and recognition of the Souvanna Government. Chen Yi's remarks were made at a diplomatic reception in Peking and were reported by the US Consul General in Hong Kong to the Secretary of State.

(OUO) Msg, Hong Kong to SecState, 1420, 24 Feb 61.

Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko denounced the NNC proposal (see item 10 February) and insisted that the solution to the Laotian problem lay in adherence to established agreement and procedures--such as the Geneva Agreement and the ICC. The US Minister in Moscow reported to Secretary Rusk that Gromyko (in conversation with British Ambassador Roberts) had acknowledged that King Savang Vathana's declaration, which he called a US proposal on the NNC was considered by the Soviets to show an improvement in the US attitude on the Laotian problem. But he declared that the new proposal was the US way of getting around the Geneva agreement and procedures. Also Gromyko viewed the proposal as a US attempt to exclude Poland.

In response to Roberts' remarks on the disadvantages of a public airing of controversy in a new conference, Gromyko said the situation was serious and must be discussed among responsible powers.

(C) Msg, Moscow to SecState, 1993, 23 Feb 61.

In response to a request from CINCPAC for comments on the future conduct of the training of the FAL (see item 18 February), CHPEO stated that, provided certain conditions were satisfied to make possible effective supervision, a Neutral Nations Commission would not jeopardize the operations of the PEO. These conditions were as follows:

1. Any agreement for a neutral Laos should provide for a Laotian internal security force of fixed composition and strength.
2. The RLG should have the right to request a foreign military training mission of a size agreed upon in advance. All other foreign military bases and troops should be prohibited.

3. All training should take place on Laotian soil to avoid the appearance of trying to deceive the Neutral Nations Commission.

(S) Msg, CHPEO to CINCPAC, DA IN 87292, 23 Feb 61.

23 Feb

CHPEO advised CINCPAC that Air America was not able to operate the 20 additional helicopters approved for commitment to Laos (see item 26 January). In CHPEO's opinion, so large a requirement could best be met by employing a complete sanitized US unit.

(TS) Msg, CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 87244 23 Feb 61.

23 Feb

A Pravda article stated that the legal government of Laos, recognized as such by the Lao people and "an international scheme" was that headed by Souvanna Phouma.

(CG) Msg, Moscow to SecState, 2001, 23 Feb 61.

24 Feb

(S) CHJUSMAG Thailand to CINCPAC DA IN 92201 24 Feb 61.

24 Feb

Vietnamese Secretary of State Thuan declared that since King Savang Vathana had put forth a good proposal for dealing with the Laos problem, he saw no reason to abandon it just because Cambodia had declined to participate. Reporting this statement to US Secretary of State the US Counselor of Mission in Saigon stated that Thuan had agreed with the US view that if another country should be needed to replace Cambodia, Tunisia would be a good candidate. It could be pointed out that Tunisia had served on a UN committee to conduct an investigation in Laos in 1959.

(C) Msg, Saigon to SecState, 1400, 25 Feb 61.

24 Feb

In the belief that the existing composition of the Laotian Government was the key obstacle to realization of the Neutral Nations Commission plan, the Secretary of State instructed Ambassador Brown to continue to "press energetically" for a broadened regime. The Secretary requested further comments on two approaches to a broadened Laotian Government: 1) Phoumi's concept of a cabinet of former premiers and deputy premiers; and 2) a government headed by some other prominent and generally respected Laotian such as Kou Abhay (see item 27 February).

(S) Msg, SecState Circular, 1288, 24 Feb 61.

24 Feb

Premier U Nu announced that Burma would not participate in the NNC, since such participation would imply Burma's
recognition of the Boun Oum Government. Cambodia's proposal for a 14-nation conference also was not acceptable to Burma.

U Nu declared that Burma wanted the people of Laos to choose their own government. In order to achieve this, he said, the following three steps were necessary: 1) the big powers of both the East and West must take their hands off Laos; 2) the major political parties in Laos must accept the principle of a free and fair general election; and 3) a commission of neutral nations must be formed to supervise the elections.

Burma would be ready to serve on such a commission, U Nu added, if it were the desire of all concerned.

25 Feb
SEATO's Secretary General Pote Sarasin endorsed King Savang Vathana's call for a NNC as the "best solution for Laos," and one "which will permit Laos to have [a] chance to develop," reported Ambassador Johnson to the Secretary of State.

(SEATO) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 1505, 25 Feb 61.

26 Feb
CINCPAC recommended to the JCS that the following measures be taken to provide additional air support needed to recapture the Plaine des Jarres:

1. Supply additional airlift through CAT or other means.

2. B-26 aircraft to attack enemy convoys and supply dumps in the Plaine des Jarres area.

3. Encourage Lao pilots to use their T-6 aircraft for bombing.

4. Pursue further the use of AD-6 aircraft piloted by Vietnamese volunteers.

5. Recruit US volunteers to fly AD-6 aircraft, thereby, providing a means for successfully combatting any Communist prop fighters operating in the Plaine des Jarres area.

(CINCPAC to JCS 262255z, 26 Feb 61.

26 Feb
Phoumi advised Ambassador Brown that the RLG had decided to ask the Nationalist Chinese Government to remove all its irregulars from Laos except those accustomed to living there and not under direct orders of the Nationalist Government.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1602, 27 Feb 61.

27 Feb
Ambassador Johnson reported to the Secretary of State that, in a discussion regarding Burmese and Cambodian refusals to accept the NNC concept, the Thai Foreign Minister had indicated that he agreed the US should seek to bring pressure on Rangoon and Phnom Penh to meet the US point of view. This course was preferable to giving up the NNC proposal and "doing anything" that might be interpreted as a US unilateral move to meet the Communist viewpoint.

Consideration should also be given according to the Foreign Ministry to the possibility of selecting two other
countries to serve on the NNC. He suggested Japan and Tunisia.

(S) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 1513, 27 Feb 61.

27 Feb

In response to the Secretary of State's instructions to press for a broadened RLG (see item 24 February) Ambassador Brown stated that, although the composition of the RLG had been an obstacle to the success of the NNC plan, the more fundamental difficulties had been the Communist refusal to accept the concept of the NNC, and the existence of a rival "government." The Ambassador agreed, however, that the RLG needed more personal ability and prestige and a wider representative character if it was to govern effectively and pursue a probably arduous and prolonged military effort.

To make the RLG more representative, Ambassador Brown proposed a government composed of all former premiers and deputy premiers. Phouni would be retained as Minister of Defense for this government, and several key personages with "special characteristics," such as family and tribal influence, would also participate. The Ambassador felt that the disadvantages of the King heading such a government outweighed the advantages. Therefore, Brown concluded, unless Boun Oum was considered too great a liability, he should remain as the Prime Minister. Khou Abhay was too aged and feeble to head a government, and there were, in Ambassador Brown's view, no other "prominent and generally respected Lao" available.

The Ambassador was also of the opinion that a way should be left open for Souvanna to enter the Government on honorable terms in spite of his recent statements at Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang that he would never compromise with Boun Oum or Phouni.

The Ambassador saw "merit" in the opinion of former premier Sananikone that there should be a new government, not merely a reorganization of the existing one. Not only would formation of a new government be a dramatic act, but it would, according to Brown, eliminate the "taint of illegality" attached to the present one.

The question of fundamental importance in a governmental reorganization, according to the Ambassador, was the probable effect on the RLG military effort. In the Ambassador's opinion, a "more comprehensive and respectable government should appeal even more to [the] officer corps" than the present one.

Finally, the Ambassador cautioned that the present RLG was a "one man (Phouni) government," and that, so long as Phouni spent most of his time in "mending his political fences," the war effort would suffer. The Ambassador recommended that Phouni "be told in unmistakable terms that . . . his primary effort must be directed toward retaking the Xieng Khouang-Plaine des Jarres area, in order to be able [to] negotiate from . . . strength."

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1591, 27 Feb 61.

27 Feb

Souvanna Phouma was described by a close associate as "bitter, determined, farther left in [his] views" and "bent on [a] showdown with [the] King." In a conversation with Ambassador Brown, this associate, who had been with Souvanna
in Phnom Penh since December, reported that the former premier still believed he had broad popular support and could control the Pathet Lao. Despite recent declarations to the contrary, Souvanna would still be willing to come back as premier of a coalition government excluding extremists or as deputy premier in a transition government under Khou Abhay.

(C) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1598, 27 Feb 61.

The Soviet Union rejected the NNC plan (see item 20 February) and proposed instead an international conference to 1) consider measures to "normalize" the situation in Laos, and 2) issue new terms of reference for the ICC. The Soviet position, as given to the Secretary of State by the Soviet Ambassador, was that the US, by supporting the NNC idea, was proposing to abandon the Geneva Agreement and replace it with a new commission for which there was no legal basis. The Geneva Agreement was still in force and provided the legal basis for its instrument, the ICC. However, because of changes in the situation, the Geneva Agreement on Laos was no longer adequate. For this reason, a new conference was necessary to provide additional powers for the ICC.

(C) Msg, SecState, Circular 1302, 28 Feb 61.
The US Ambassador to Cambodia reported to the Secretary of State that Souvanna had returned to Phnom Penh after a nine-day trip to Hanoi and Xieng Khouang.

According to an official Cambodian Government press release, Souvanna claimed that his "government" controlled three-fourths of Laos, namely the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, a great part of Xieng Khouang and Luang Prabang, and part of the south. Souvanna admitted that his "government" was receiving aid from Communist countries. But without it, he declared, "we would be crushed due to [the] enormous aid that our adversaries [are] receiving from [the] US, Thailand, Taiwan, and SVN."

The following day Ambassador Trimble, in a message to the Secretary of State, reported Michael Field's comments regarding the trip to Xieng Khouang. (Field, a London Telegraph correspondent, had accompanied Souvanna on his trip.) He told Trimble that the Russians he had met had been most vehement in insisting that the USSR would not permit Laos to become a pro-West neutral. Field was strongly convinced that the Bloc attached the greatest importance to the convening of a 14-nation conference. In response to Trimble's question as to why the RLG proposals had not met alleged USSR objectives, Field emphasized that their emanation from the Boun Oum Government had made them "highly suspect" to the Bloc.

The CHPEO informed CINCPAC that he had again emphasized to Phoumi the US concern over Phoumi's formation of six additional special FAL battalions (see item 6 February). Phoumi claimed that these units were only temporary and would be phased out when the four new infantry battalions (see item 6 February) became operational. He "fallaciously" pointed out, according to CHPEO, that the Laotian Government had not asked for US support for the six battalions because they were being equipped with arms taken from Auto-Defense units. Pay, said Phoumi, was being provided from other than FAL sources.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) informed the Chairman, JCS, that the Department of State had agreed, if necessary, to conduct negotiations with the French Government for continued training of the FAL by the US (see item 9 February).

The JCS recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he seek negotiation by the US of a formal agreement in principle with Pakistan to provide US lift and support for a Pakistani force "package" to be employed in Laos if necessary. The Pakistani Government had committed such a force consisting of a brigade group, a fighter squadron, and a destroyer for SEATO Plan 5/60 (Combatting Communist Insurgency in Laos), and it had been earmarked as part of the SEATO General Reserve Force. However, said the JCS, the demonstrated reluctance of several member nations to support "meaningful" SEATO assistance to Laos raised the possibility that the US might have to commit a force unilaterally or join a multilateral force drawn from only some of the SEATO powers to...
prevent Laos from falling to the Communists. Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines were the SEATO powers most likely to join the US in such an effort. (TS) JCS 1992/918, US Lift and Logistic Support for Pakistani Forces Committed to SEATO Plan 5/60 (C), 2 Mar 61.

2 Mar

In reply to Ambassador Brown's recommendations of 27 February (see item), the Secretary of State said he concurred in general with the Ambassador's excellent analysis and recommendations but had the following comments:

1. He agreed that a government composed of former Premiers and Deputy Premiers offered an advantage, but the addition of figures chosen for special characteristics might make the government subject to attack as a hand-picked pro-West group.

2. Although the Secretary accepted the validity of Brown's arguments against the King heading such a government, he commented that ultimately it might be the best way to resolve the political problem along lines that would be satisfactory to the United States.

3. He recognized the difficulty in dropping Boun Oum from a reorganized government but considered that if he remained as Premier, the new government would be an easy target as "new Boun Oum government." The Secretary of State agreed that Khou Abhay was unsuitable for the premiership, and suggested the name of Prince Khamphan who, though weak, would give the government royal cachet.

4. He agreed that the door should be left open for Souvanna but did not consider that the effort to bring about a new government should hinge on his inclusion. The "posture," he declared, should be increasingly to force Souvanna into a position where he would "clearly bear the onus" for not working with a representative and respected government and where his strength clearly depended on Communist support.

5. Although he agreed it was necessary that Phoumi devote more attention to the war effort, Secretary Rusk believed, nevertheless, that the Laotian General needed to bring about a change of government. Rusk though it would be best, therefore, to urge Phoumi to form a new RLG to that he could then devote his full attention to pushing the war against the PL, especially in the Plaine des Jarres.

6. The Secretary concurred in the proposed policy for the RLG but suggested that Brown consider recommending that in liberated areas the RLG should carry out a publicized policy of granting amnesty to former PL adherents and integrating them into the national community. This, concluded the Secretary, would serve as an example to those still in rebellion.

(S) Msg, Sec State Circular 1323, 2 Mar 61.

2 Mar

US Ambassador Trimble informed the Secretary of State that, according to the Burmese Ambassador to Cambodia, Souvanna had stated that he was thoroughly convinced of the necessity of a 14-nation conference. Souvanna felt that if agreement could be reached on holding such a meeting, the issue of a "legal government" could be resolved by the King appointing a "caretaker" government composed of civil servants and technicians.

- 32 -
Souvanna also had stated that the conference should concentrate on the following three principal tasks: 1) an immediate cease-fire; 2) determination and elimination of foreign interference; and 3) creation of a commission to supervise free elections in Laos which would provide the basis for forming a new representative government.

(C) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1126, 3 Mar 61.

A French Embassy officer informed the Secretary of State of a conversation between the French Ambassador to Cambodia and Souvanna. The Laotian was alleged to have said that he was convinced that the Communists could still be prevented from dominating the situation but time was growing short. He also said that Souphanouvong agreed with him that Laos should follow a Cambodian-type socialism. According to Souvanna, this would not be a serious danger to Western positions, to which he remained "very attached."

Souvanna had seen Pham Van Dong, North Vietnamese Premier, and Giap in Hanoi, and they had told him that their Government would be "content" to see the re-establishment of true neutrality in Laos. The Bloc's strong reaction against the US, Souvanna reported, was the result of information they had received that the US had surveyed Plateau du Tranhin to set up rocket launching sites.

(Secretary Rusk passed this information to Ambassador Brown on 6 March.)

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 934, 6 Mar 61.

Ambassador Trimble informed the Secretary of State that, in addition to clarifying the US position on the Laotian King's proposal for an NNC (as set forth in the Secretary of State's message of 14 February - see item), he had informed Cambodia's First Minister of US concern that the Bloc "would" merely use the 14-Nation Conference as a propaganda forum. This would increase rather than decrease international tension, he said.

Ambassador Trimble, also reported that he had explained the US attitude on a reorganization of the RLG. The US favored a RLG with a broadened base to include all representative elements. Naturally such a government would include Souvanna. The King must be the point of departure in forming such a government since he was the only one who could count on the support of the Laotian population. Trimble then added that the US was against Communist representation in the government itself, but not against legally-elected NLHX members being seated in the National Assembly.

(C) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1124, 3 Mar 61.

In a letter to President de Gaulle Prince Sihanouk expressed the belief that had the proposal to reactivate the ICC been quickly implemented it would have offered "certain possibilities" of restoring peace in Laos. But, unfortunately, opposition to this plan deprived it of the "possibility of bringing about a cease-fire and [an] end to foreign interference."

- 33 -
The most recent proposal to create a "Commission of Experts in Foreign Interference" [the NNC], the Prince declared, was also destined to fail, despite strong US support. Because of the existence of two de facto governments in Laos, the Cambodian Government was "obliged decline to accept proposal which because of its unilateral character alone unable have concrete results." Therefore, Prince Sihanouk concluded, a conference of countries most interested in Lao problems was becoming increasingly urgent, "while precarious balance of forces can be maintained."

(Sihanouk's letter to de Gaulle was made public by the French Government on 27 March, and on 28 March Ambassador Gavin reported its contents to the Secretary of State.)

(U) Msg, Paris to SecState, 4068, 28 Mar 61.

3 Mar

According to the New York Times, US Ambassador Thompson said that during a talk with Foreign Minister Gromyko he had requested a meeting with Premier Khrushchev to give him a message from President Kennedy. The message was reported to express hope for an improvement of Soviet-United States relations, and to include President Kennedy's views on the situation in Laos.

(U) NYT, 4 Mar 61, 1.

3 Mar

At a White House meeting the President instructed the Chairman, JCS, to prepare a plan for recapture of the Plain des Jarres (see item 9 March) and to recall CINCPAC, CHPEO, and one officer of the FEO staff to Washington for consultations.

(S) Memo for Record, Admin Asst to CJCS, 3 Mar 61, CJCS-091 Laos (2), 1 Mar 61; (S) Memo, CJCS to JCS, 6 Mar 61, CJCS-091 Laos (2), 1 Mar 61.

4 Mar

Secretary Rusk informed Ambassador Brown that a British Embassy official had reported highlights of a conversation between Phoumi and the British Ambassador to Laos. The Laotian General, Secretary Rusk said, had expressed a desire to visit Phnom Penh. Phoumi, particularly desired to explain to the Cambodian Government that King Savang's proposal for a NNC had been conceived essentially to prepare for an international conference of the type proposed by Sihanouk.

In addition, Phoumi had pointed out to the British Ambassador that the internal and international aspects of the Laotian situation were now so interconnected that a domestic settlement could no longer be sought independently from an international agreement; a conference therefore was necessary.

The British Ambassador in Laos had been non-comittal on the conference idea. But, Secretary Rusk said, the British diplomat had encouraged Phoumi to meet with Souvanna.

The Secretary of State told Ambassador Brown that he considered it most undesirable for Phoumi to take the line he had proposed in advocating an international conference. "You should explain this to Phoumi," the Secretary continued, "and be sure he understands [the]
It would be better, the Secretary concluded, for Phoumi to talk with Souvanna and/or Sihanouk along the lines of the discussion between the US Ambassador to Cambodia and the Cambodian First Minister (see item 3 March).

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 929, 4 Mar 61.

The British Foreign Office informed the US that in the UK Government's reply to the USSR draft proposals (see item 18 February) the British planned to tell the Soviets that they were willing to accept the Russian draft letter to Nehru, calling for a revival of the ICC. The British said that they would also state that they were not yet prepared to express any additional views concerning a conference until the USSR had given its own further views on: 1) Laotian representation at the conference; 2) the kind of settlement that might come out of the meeting; and, 3) how to insure that discussions would be constructive, and "not just a propaganda exercise."

Finally, the British planned to inform the USSR that they would reserve their position on the Soviet draft communication--further, discussions in the ICC might help to clarify whether the conference would be necessary and could fruitfully be held.

The British Counselor of Mission in Washington, in discussing the proposal with Secretary Rusk, said that his government saw no harm in sounding out the Soviets and giving them a reply. In addition, the British did see an advantage in getting the ICC into action in New Delhi.

The British Foreign Office did not agree with the US view that a "broadening" of the RLG would bring the crisis in Laos nearer to a solution. In their opinion, the only change of government that could end the fighting would be to have Souvanna as Prime Minister of a "government of center" without any representation of the Phoumi/Boun Oum Group. However, they doubted that such a government could be created at this stage or that the PL would agree to any settlement without bringing "international machinery" into play.

Furthermore, the British believed that the military situation in Laos was much too dangerous for the West to just sit around and wait for events, and they feared that there was a serious risk that the Communists might try to push toward an international conference by unleashing further significant military action in Laos.

(S) Msg, SecState, Circular 1337, 5 Mar 61.

The Secretary of State instructed US Ambassador Thompson in Moscow that in his forthcoming discussion with Khrushchev, he should refer to the Secretary's meeting with the Soviet Ambassador on 28 February (see item), and bring out the following points:

1. The US was disappointed in the Soviet reply to the NNC concept (see item 28 February) because it failed to clarify Soviet objectives. The conference proposed by the Soviets, to which the participants would
go with issues unresolved and the purposes of the conference undefined, could be source of increased tensions. The net result might well be that a political settlement having failed, the situation would become a military issue.

2. In order to seek a common ground for a political settlement of the Laotian problem the US wanted to make its position "crystal clear." The United States believed there was a potentially highly dangerous situation in Laos. The US flatly rejected the Soviet statement that this situation had been brought about by US military support of the RLG. This support had not been nor was it even intended to be used to threaten any of Laos' neighbors, and the present US arms delivery to the RLG was no more than it had been during the past five years. However, recently, there had been a massive Soviet airlift of arms and ammunitions to the FL forces in the eastern provinces, and the presence of Viet Minh technicians was widely known. This build-up of FL forces supported by the Viet Minh could only lead to an ascending state of conflict. The US wanted to avoid such a consequence and hoped that the USSR also wanted to do the same.

3. The United States considered that recognition of Souvanna's "government" as a legitimate one was untenable both in fact and in law. The US therefore "must conclude that Soviet support of Souvanna Government is power play to push Communist cause in Laos."

4. The United States was prepared, as a token of good faith, to have its military assistance to Laos screened by a Neutral Nations Commission and to examine the possibility of channeling all economic aid through some appropriate international mechanism.

5. The United States believed sincerely that a common basis of understanding could still be found and would appreciate a more detailed statement of what the Soviets might consider an acceptable basis of settlement.

(S) Msg, SecState to Moscow, 1439, 6 Mar 61.

The Secretary of State advised Ambassador Trimble that he should present to Souvanna as soon as possible the US policy for a neutral Laos (see item 14 February). In addition to recommending that he follow the line of argumentation he had used with the Cambodian First Minister (see item 3 March), the Secretary of State also gave the Ambassador the following guidance:

1) The genuine desire of "this administration" to bring about a neutral Laos, fulfilling many of the objectives for which Prince Souvanna had allegedly been working, should be impressed upon Souvanna. The unique opportunity to play a truly patriotic role in responding to the invitation to return to Laos and participate in the process of broadening the government and unifying all elements willing to cooperate for the salvation of his country should be pointed out to Souvanna. Further, it would be appropriate to remind him that US future plans for Laos envisaged a continuation of very substantial economic aid.
2) Souvanna should be warned that to follow the line he was reported to have enunciated in PL headquarters of encouraging Communist and PL forces to attack the established government of Laos was fraught with the utmost danger. It could only result in bloodshed and unnecessary hardship. The US was willing to exert considerable effort to achieve a satisfactory situation in Laos through some device such as the NNC. At the same time, however, Souvanna should be left in no doubt as to US determination to thwart the purposes of the Communist forces that were threatening the security of Laos and Southeast Asia. (S) Msg, SecState, to Phnom Penh, 774 and to Vientiane 930, 5 Mar 61.

Ambassador Trimble reported to the Secretary of State that he had carried out the instructions contained in the Secretary's 5 March message (see item). The discussion with Souvanna had brought out the following "highlights":

1. Souvanna had asserted that only he could save Laos; that 90% of the country was behind him and his policy of neutrality. Given the choice, the Lao would choose him rather than the Phoumi/Boun Oum group or the Pathet Lao. What was required in Laos, Souvanna had declared, was a national union government composed of all three of these elements.

2. As an immediate step, Souvanna had expressed strong support for the dissolution, by the King, of the Boun Oum Government (Souvanna said he would never serve in an enlarged Boun Oum government), and the creation of an apolitical government at which time he [Souvanna] would submit his own resignation. This government could be presided over by the King himself with a First Minister, or the King could designate the President of the King's Council as Prime Minister. It would be composed of civil servants, ambassadors, etc., who would prepare for general elections. Elections, Souvanna had continued, should be supervised by an international commission, and the countryside disarmed, except for the police. The outcome of these elections, Souvanna declared, should determine the composition of the new government.

3. Souvanna had expressed the belief that the ICC could do a better job than the NNC in Laos. Although at first Souvanna had taken the position that a 14-nation conference was essential, he ultimately had agreed with Ambassador Trimble that a conference would not be necessary if interested countries made written unilateral declarations recognizing and supporting the neutrality of Laos.

4. Souvanna also had expressed the opinion that the Bloc did not want a Communist Laos. He stated that Mao Tse-tung, Chou En-lai, and others had told him that they "wanted [to] prevent Laos from becoming [a] Western base because [the] Chicom and DRVN need peace for [the] next 30 or 40 years in order [to] develop their countries." A Communist Laos would only bring insecurity to them, as the "US would not accept it."
The Bloc, Souvanna had commented, looked upon Laos as a buffer.

When questioned as to whether the Soviets, in view of their substantial build up of military equipment in the Plaine des Jarres area, would permit areas under PL control to return to the Laotian Government, Souvanna declared with great assurance that they certainly would; Laos would not permit "otherwise."

(C) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1141, 7 Mar 61.

According to an official Cambodian press release, Sihanouk, in a message to Chou En-lai, had said that he and his Government fully shared the Chinese Communist viewpoint that it was indispensable to preserve the spirit and principle of the 1954 Geneva Accords. Sihanouk had declared further that the problem posed by two governments in Laos was inseparable from that of settling the problems of civil war and foreign military assistance to the two sides.

The best solution, Sihanouk had declared, would be a cease-fire and cessation of foreign interference followed by reciprocal self-dissolution of both governments and the formation of a new government of national union. The principal and urgent task of the new government should be the preparation for free elections.

(S) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1142, 7 Mar 61.

According to an official Cambodian press release, North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong declared that both the origin and the immediate cause of the present dangerous situation in Laos resided in US intervention in the internal affairs of that country with a view to transforming Laos into an American military base. This would, Pham Van Dong warned, constitute a "permanent threat to our security."

Dong also stated that the only "radical" solution to the situation was to put an end to US intervention and assure respect for the basic national rights of the Lao people, as stipulated in the Geneva Accords. The North Vietnamese official also stated that he fully endorsed Sihanouk's proposal for a conference.

(The message was published in the Cambodian official news bulletin on 15 March. The US Embassy reported its contents to the Secretary of State the same day.)

(U) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1194, 15 Mar 61.

According to a PEO intelligence report submitted to CINCPAC, FAL units of Force SST retreated under enemy attack and gave up RJ 7-13. The enemy attacks began with platoon-size probing actions supported by artillery. When FAL company-size units gave way before these probes, the enemy committed two companies in a well executed turning movement. At this point the FAL forces gave up their positions and retreated rapidly. By the morning of 7 March they had withdrawn north and south of RJ 7-13.

(S) Msg, CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 93661, 15 Mar 61.

In response to an inquiry from CINCPAC, Chief JUSMAG
The US Ambassador to the USSR, commenting on the British proposed reply to the Soviets (see item 4 March), told Secretary Rusk that he believed the "important thing at present is to keep situation fluid."

The Soviets were confident, he said, that the military situation in Laos and the attitude of the Asian neutrals, as well as the British and French desire for compromise, would permit them to be very firm about a conference.

Under the circumstances, Ambassador Thompson believed there was some advantage to the British proposal, for ICG discussions in New Delhi. It would keep the Soviets engaged in finding a forum for a negotiated settlement, and it would keep the Chinese Communists out of the picture until a better idea of Soviet intentions was obtained.

(S) Msg, Moscow to SecState, 2107, 7 Mar 61

Ambassador Brown told Secretary Rusk that the RLG was sending Phoumi, Bouavan Norasing, and Ngon Sanantikone to Phnom Penh on 9 March to confer with Souvanna. During a discussion on Phoumi's proposed trip, the US Ambassador had told Phoumi that Souvanna was leaving on a world tour on 11 March, and the US felt that his meeting with Souvanna would be very important. Phoumi had replied that he intended to explain the RLG policy of neutrality to Souvanna and also tell him of the RLG's desire to form a new government that would contain all nationalist elements, including Souvanna. Ambassador Brown had agreed that such a government would be highly desirable. Further, the US would be inclined to give full support to any government of national reconciliation which the Laotians themselves worked out, providing: 1) the PL was not included; and 2) Phoumi remained in charge of military affairs.

The US Ambassador also had advised the Laotian General that the US thought it would be important in his talks with Souvanna to stress the King's proclamation that he and the government of Laos bore no ill will to any Laotian and had a spirit of conciliation and friendship for all.

Ambassador Brown had pointed out to Phoumi that Souvanna's idea of supplemental elections, which might give the NLHX a voice in the Assembly, but not in the government, might be "usefully accepted." Phoumi had
replied that he had considered this and had no objections to it. In addition, he had agreed with Brown that Souvanna's suggestion for general elections at this time was premature. 

(8) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 1636 and 1642, both 7 Mar 61.

7 Mar

In a message to the Secretary of State, Ambassador Trimble reported that Prince Sihanouk had claimed Laos was now divided between pro-Bloc and pro-West supporters and that there were no real neutralists left. Sihanouk had also asserted that, if a settlement could not be reached in the near future, the only alternative would be a divided Laos, a prospect he greatly deplored.

(C) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1149, 7 Mar 61.

8 Mar

Commenting on the proposed British reply to the Soviets (see item 4March), Ambassador Brown declared that British acceptance of the proposal for the reactivation of the ICC would "spell doom" to the NNC since the two were "mutually exclusive." The doom of the NNC would be a "propaganda blow to US initiative," and redound unfavorably on the King.

Further, an ICC meeting would be likely to accelerate rather than preclude an international conference. In Ambassador Brown's opinion, if a reactivated ICC decided it needed new instructions, the Soviets would use the meeting to argue for a Geneva-type conference for which Poland and India would probably vote.

Ambassador Brown did not agree that a government headed by Souvanna and excluding the PL and the Boun Oum-Phoumi group, as suggested by the British, was the only one that would be capable of ending the fighting. He pointed out to Secretary Rusk that both the RLG and Souvanna had expressed a willingness to serve under the King as Prime Minister, and that even one of the King's close relatives might be satisfactory, providing an agreement was reached on the rest of the Cabinet. This was the key question, Brown said, since it would determine whether Souvanna would dissolve his "government" and join or abet the successor to the present RLG. Moreover, he continued, it was by no means certain that creation of a government headed by Souvanna would, in itself, stop the fighting since the PL did not take orders from him. His premiership, however, would probably make "the other side more inclined in this direction."

In conclusion Ambassador Brown expressed the opinion that, until the US and Great Britain arrived at an agreed position on the military situation, the two countries would probably have difficulty in pursuing together the same international political courses of action.

(8) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1657, 8 Mar 61.
In response to the Presidential instructions of 3 March (see item), the JCS produced a "Concept for the Recapture of the Plaine des Jarres." The JCS plan was designed to seize this base complex and deny it to the enemy. The plan called for preliminary interdiction operations by aircraft and Meo guerrillas, followed by a two-pronged FAL attack from the East and South, and culminating in an airborne assault with which the two ground attacking forces were to link up.

The JCS recognized that the FAL lacked the means to execute this operation. Recapture of the Plaine des Jarres would require reinforcement from the US and other friendly powers. The JCS recommended, therefore, that the following reinforcing measures be taken:

1. Increase the guerrilla capability in Laos by expanding the existing 3,000-men Meo irregular force as rapidly as possible by 1 April.

2. Provide 16 "sterile" B-26s in order to interdict enemy lines of communication, destroy supply dumps and installations, and fragment troop concentrations.

3. Provide 16 additional helicopters to CAT for airlift and pickup in forward areas lacking landing fields for fixed wing aircraft. These aircraft were to be provided by the Department of Defense. The crews, "sheep-dipped" and ostensibly employed by CAT, were also to come from the Department of Defense. Maintenance was to be furnished by a Marine Corps maintenance unit.

4. Provide the necessary airlift by reinforcing CAT with four C-130s, three DC-4s, and a C-47. To shorten the turn-around time of the CAT aircraft, authorize the USAF to airlift supplies to Vientiane.

5. Reinforce the FAL artillery support by obtaining four volunteer Thai batteries of 105-mm howitzers.

6. Furnish the necessary operational and logistical advice and technical assistance by augmenting PEO Laos and JUSMAG Thailand.

Recognizing that the will to win was as important as the means, the JCS urged remedial action to improve the leadership in the FAL. According to the JCS, failures in leadership had resulted from the fact that Phoumi was "devoting most of his time to coping with governmental problems, instead of fighting the war." These problems had arisen "largely from efforts by the United States, the United Kingdom and France to persuade..."
Phoumi to broaden his government base and "win support of the Lao people." These problems, combined with the "conflicting pressures of diverse family interests and distrust of his subordinate leaders," had made Phoumi feel insecure. His refusal to retain battle-tested, successful leaders in crucial command positions had been one result of this distrust. In addition, doubts as to the extent of US support had contributed to Phoumi's feelings of insecurity.

To improve Lao leadership, the JCS recommended the following:

(1) The US mission in Laos should be directed to accept as a matter of overriding priority the military mission of recapturing PDJ and should support Phoumi accordingly.

(2) Present efforts to broaden the base of the RLG and to seek a political solution should be given secondary priority to enable Phoumi to concentrate on the PDJ military operation.

(3) US influence with other governments should support these priorities. Other governments should be informed that it is our judgment that a satisfactory political settlement is not attainable until there is an improvement in the military situation.

(4) All US personnel, including the Ambassador and the United States Mission, should impress upon Phoumi the importance of putting his best commanders in the field and relieving inept officers who are losing battles for him.

(5) Above all, the additional air and artillery support and logistic means needed to capture the Plaine des Jarres should be provided. The Chief, PEO, should be authorized to inform Phoumi of support to be provided, operations to be undertaken and results expected.


The President approved the following 17 military courses of action for Southeast Asia:

4. DOD to provide a maintenance base and 300 maintenance personnel for the 16 helicopters.

5. DOD to make available four C-130s to CAT.
with crews.

8. USAF to resume direct supply delivery to Vientiane in case of emergency.

9. Department of State to obtain up to four 105-mm howitzer batteries from Thailand.

10. DOD to augment PEO Laos and JUSMAG Thailand by approximately 100 personnel each.

11. DOD to make available on Okinawa eight B-26s with necessary spares.

12. 

13. 

14. Department of State to draft instructions to Ambassador Brown for approval by the President.

15. CHPEO to press Phoumi to improve the quality of FAL leadership.

16. 

17. 

According to the New York Times, US Ambassador Thompson and Soviet Premier Khrushchev met in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk to discuss international issues confronting the two nations. (U) NYT, 10 Mar 61.

According to FAL reports, Muong Kassy, a village about 20 miles south of RJ 7-13 on Route 13, fell to the Pathet Lao. The FAL claimed it was establishing a blocking position 10 miles south of the captured village. (S) Msg, CHPEO Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 91842, 10 Mar 61.

A joint communique, signed by Phoumi and Souvanna at the end of their two-day meeting in Phnom Penh, declared that the two parties recognized that a policy of "strict neutrality and conventional neutralization" of Laos constituted the fundamental basis for regaining peace and national concord. Both leaders agreed that foreign interference must cease in order to permit the restoration of a climate of mutual confidence for national reconciliation. This could only be accomplished, the communique pointed out, with the aid of an impartial commission which could operate over all of Laos.

General Phoumi affirmed his confidence in Prince Souvanna as the "only Lao statesman" able to serve as a link with the NLF, and, the communique said, Prince Souvanna assured the General he would do all he could.
to achieve a national reconciliation. However, Prince Souvanna declined General Phoumi's invitation to return immediately to Laos, saying that he could better serve a reconciliation by residing at Phnom Penh rather than at Vientiane.

Prince Souvanna suggested a meeting at Phnom Penh of representatives of the three groups whose forces were now facing each other in Laos, with a view toward finding a definite solution to the national problem. General Phoumi, the press statement continued, accepted the principle of the meeting but stated that it could not take place until after cessation of foreign interferences.

Both parties, the communiqué concluded, agreed to further discussion.

(The communiqué, although signed on the morning of the 10th, was not made public until the following day.)

Upon returning from Phnom Penh, Phoumi and members of his delegation gave the following account of their meeting with Souvanna. The delegation had asserted, Ambassador Brown informed the Secretary of State, that Souvanna had been "very insistent" about a meeting of the three representatives which would decide the future cabinet. He also had been "insistent about an international conference" like the 14-Nation Conference proposed by Sihanouk. Phoumi added, however, that Souvanna had been willing to solve the crisis step by step.

The delegation had stated that, after a cease-fire and cessation of delivery of foreign arms, the "first" step would be to have a neutral commission (Cambodia, Burma, Malaya) make a fact-finding tour of all of Laos. The "second" step would be to convene an international commission that would receive the findings of the NNC and would guarantee the neutrality of Laos. Finally, the "third" step would be a round table conference between Phoumi, Souphanouvong, and Souvanna.

Meanwhile, in Phnom Penh, the Laotian Ambassador to Cambodia reported his version of the meeting to the US Counselor of Mission. The Laotian diplomat's version, while agreeing in many respects with both the official communiqué and the RLG delegation's account, differed on the following points. The Laotian declared that although Souvanna had not rejected a neutral commission idea at the appropriate stage, he had insisted that the "first" step should be an "immediate" meeting of representatives of the three groups to reach an agreement on a cease-fire and formation of a central government of nonpolitical figures, which would prepare for elections. The elections would be followed by the formation of a national union government.

The US diplomat asked the Laotian representative if Phoumi had been disappointed with the results of the visit. The Laotian Ambassador had replied "slyly" that Phoumi had not been at all disappointed. Phoumi
had not expected Souvanna to accept his proposals and his visit had been just a maneuver, designed to show people in Laos that he had done all in his power to bring Souvanna back to Laos and into the RLG.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1669, 10 Mar 61; (C) Msg, Phnom Penh to SecState, 1167, 10 Mar 61; (U) Msg, Phnom Penh to State, 1169, 11 Mar 61.

11 Mar

Ambassador Brown reported to the Secretary of State additional details of the Souvanna-Phoumi meeting, as provided by Phoumi. According to Phoumi, Souvanna had stated that if he returned at once to Vientiane he would lose his influence with the other side; he could be more useful, therefore, in Phnom Penh.

Souvanna also had stated that his interpretation of the NNC proposal was the same as Sihanouk's. Phoumi had explained that the NNC was, in essence based on Sihanouk's proposal; Souvanna had then agreed that the NNC was better than the ICC, and stated that he would attempt to persuade Sihanouk to accept the chairmanship of the NNC.

Ambassador Brown had reminded Phoumi that the US had serious reservations about an international conference. Phoumi had replied that he thought it might be possible to avoid a conference by stalling and "otherwise," after the NNC had begun to operate.

(C) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1671, 11 Mar 61.

11 Mar

Secretary Rusk told Ambassador Brown that US reaction to the Phoumi-Souvanna talks was one of "guarded optimism." If Souvanna's initial attitude was a sincere reflection of his willingness to cooperate, and if Phoumi's reports of their meetings were accurate, it might be the beginning of a workable rapprochement of an indigenous character.

However, the Secretary cautioned Ambassador Brown that any undue haste, "unilaterally or multilaterally," in attempting to "stage manage" every facet of the delicate situation might be counterproductive.

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 952, 11 Mar 61.

11 Mar

The JCS requested CINCPAC to supply 16 H-34 or HUS helicopters "at a time and place mutually agreeable," and to be prepared to move the necessary maintenance personnel for 20 such helicopters to Thailand when directed (approved actions 2 and 4; see item 9 March).

(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 991704, 11 Mar 61.

12 Mar

Recalling the disastrous influence that Dien Bien Phu had had on the Geneva Conference, the Secretary of State expressed deep concern to Ambassador Brown over the probability that the Communists might take advantage of the seemingly conciliatory climate to make a major military effort in Laos. The Secretary of State told Ambassador Brown that this would place the Soviets in a most advantageous position to negotiate or, to communize Laos by force of minority element backed by Viet Minh personnel and Soviet supply.

Secretary Rusk stated that every effort, therefore, should be made now to re-establish the situation with
the military means available. At the same time, he added, preparations must go forward against the possible deterioration of the situation and the necessity of raising the level of military actions.

The US still believed that a political settlement that would insure the genuine independence and integrity of Laos (similar to Austria's neutrality) was the best solution. In view of the present exploration for a political settlement and the danger that the Communists might attempt to push their military advantage, it was essential, Secretary Rusk declared, that the US be prepared to give the RLG additional military support. It was also necessary that the RLG be reorganized as to obtain international recognition and to make the position of the alleged Souvanna "government" untenable. Therefore, the Secretary of State requested Ambassador Brown to review the situation along these lines with Phoumi, and perhaps with the King. If possible, the US Ambassador was instructed to "push" Phoumi's suggestion of having either the King or a member of the Royal family assume the Premiership, with Boun Oum and Souvanna as Deputy Prime Ministers.

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 957, 12 Mar 61.

12 Mar The Secretary of Defense informed the Secretary of State, the Director, CIA, and the Chairman, JCS, that the President authorized the movement, as promptly as possible, of eight CAT B-26 aircraft and crews from Taiwan to Thailand (approved action 11; see item 9 March).

(TS) Memo, SecDef to SecState, Dir CIA, CJCS, 13 Mar 61, CJCS-O91 Laos (2), 1 Mar 61.

12 Mar The Chairman, JCS, informed the Secretary of Defense that CINCPAC had ordered two sanitized HUS-1 helicopters airlifted to Bangkok for assignment to Air America (approved action 2; see item 9 March).

(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 991727, 13 Mar 61.

13 Mar The Department of State informed US Embassies abroad of a lengthy conversation of the Secretary of State with the British and French Ambassadors.

The Secretary had stated that the US did not believe the military situation in Laos hopeless. The Secretary had speculated, however, that perhaps the Phnom Penh discussions had made the FAL field commanders less aggressive; on the other hand the prospect of a settlement possibly had moved the PL to enlarge its control.

The Secretary had stressed to the Allied diplomats the importance of removing the pretense of legality which a Souvanna "government" afforded the Communists. Until this "front" had been removed, either by Souvanna's return to Vientiane to participate in the RLG or by his removal to Paris, the US did not, according to the Secretary, "look forward" to the early convening of an international conference which would immediately debate the legality of the two governments. Furthermore, to
reconvene the ICC would lead to such a conference, since the ICC, as India had frankly specified, required further terms of reference.

The British Ambassador had queried the Secretary on the timing of the British reply to the USSR proposal for the reconvening of the ICC; the Secretary had stated that the US favored further delay of the reply "pending developments and further discussions."

French Ambassador Alphonse had reiterated the French position that a tripartite approach to the Soviets was necessary. Alphonse had also noted that, in the French view, Ambassador Thompson's approach to Khrushchev had omitted two essential points - reference to the Geneva Accords as the essential basis for any solution in Laos, and recognition that there must be a place for the NLHX in the Laotian political structure.

The Secretary had replied, concerning the necessity of NLHX representation, that the US would not object if the NLHX won some seats in an appropriately elected Assembly. But "this [was] quite different," the Secretary had concluded, "from [a] place in [the] government itself."

(C) Msg, SecState Circular, 1384, 14 Mar 61.

13 Mar
The US Minister in London informed the Secretary of State that British Foreign Office reaction to the Phoumi/Souvanna meeting (see item 10 March) was "guarded" because of lack of information. They were encouraged, however, because the two factions were trying to find a solution.
(S) Msg, London to SecState, 3653, 13 Mar 61.

The Secretary of Defense, "in accordance with the authority granted . . . by the President this morning," told the Chairman, JCS, to "take the necessary action" to accomplish the following: 1) arrange for the de-mothballing of 16 additional B-26s and the "sheep dipping" of 16 additional B-26 crews; 2) instruct Admiral Felt to arrange for the use of five Laotian T-6s, piloted by Laotians on bombing missions.

The B-26s and crews were to be "made ready for operations" but were to be retained in the continental US.
(TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Mar 61, CJCS - 091 Laos (2), 1 Mar 61.

13 Mar
The Chairman, JCS, reported to the Secretary of Defense that CINCPAC had alerted a Marine Air Base Squadron for movement to Udorn to support 20 HUS-1 helicopters (approved action 4; see item 9 March).
(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 991727, 13 Mar 61.

13 Mar
At a conference between representatives of the Joint Staff, the decision was taken to seek the 16 volunteer helicopter pilots required to implement approved action 3 (see item 9 March) from the Marine Corps before turning to the other services.
(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 991823, 14 Mar 61.

14 Mar
The JCS authorized CINCPAC to make all necessary preparations for bombing with T-6 aircraft in Laos.

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This authorization included the positioning of bombs in Vientiane and the use of Lao pilots. However, the use of napalm was prohibited.

(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 991799, 14 Mar 61.

Ambassador Brown informed the Secretary of State that, according to Phoumi, Indian Ambassador Ratnam in Laos had been pressing King Savang for a return of the ICC or even an enlarged ICC to Laos, the enlarged ICC to include Cambodia and Burma, but not Malaya. Ratnam had argued that the advantage of the ICC was that it was already in existence, and could begin to operate immediately with recognized authority.

Phoumi had stated he had countered the Indian diplomat's efforts by suggesting to the King that, if the ICC was to be enlarged, Malaya should be included. Furthermore, the ICC should be a "new" commission rather than an enlarged one.

Phoumi, in explaining to the US Ambassador why he had not discussed his proposal of a reorganized government with the King, had stated his belief that any reorganized government should "start from [the] beginning," with Souvanna participating. Any reorganized government "before that" would necessarily be temporary and unable to "take positive attitudes," and this, Phoumi had declared, would be undesirable for the country and the war effort.

Ambassador Brown had summarized, in response to a query from Phoumi, the US positions, as follows: 1) the US was pleased that Phoumi supported the NNC and was prepared to consider, albeit not enthusiastically, a conference called to ratify and implement the actions of the NNC, but was opposed to a conference before the activation of the NNC, believing that such a conference would produce a "propaganda field day" in which the interests of Laos would likely be submerged; 2) the US wholeheartedly approved of the effort Phoumi was making towards reconciliation of the nationalist elements in the country; and 3) the US felt that the military effort should be "continuous," and was prepared to support Phoumi in this effort.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1693, 14 Mar 61.

The JCS informed CINCPAC that he was "authorized to airlift supplies direct to Vientiane when in your judgement supply requirements are sufficiently urgent" (approved action 8; see item 9 March).

(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 991798, 14 Mar 61.

The JCS reported to the Secretary of Defense the additional C-47 for employment in Laos required by approved action 7 (see item 9 March).

(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 991623, 14 Mar 61.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in accordance with instructions from the Secretary of Defense, ordered Lt. Gen. T. J. H. Trapnell, Commanding General of the XVIII Airborne Corps, to depart on 15 March on a survey and familiarization visit to the Southeast Asian area. Gen. Trapnell was ordered to do the following: