CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS CONCERNING THE LAOTIAN CRISIS

FIFTH INSTALLMENT:
1 JANUARY to 30 APRIL 1962

Historical Division
Joint Secretariat
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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1 Jan 62 Phoumi Nosavan, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister of the Royal Laotian Government (RLG), informed US Ambassador Winthrop Brown that he was still considering what reply, if any, to send to Prince Souvanna, the leader of a "neutralist" faction, had been given a mandate by King Savang to form a government of national union, and, in recent negotiations with the RLG and the pro-Communist Pathet Lao headed by Prince Souphanouvong, had proposed that, in such a government, the key Ministries of Defense and Interior be allotted to Souvanna's neutralist faction rather than to right or left wing groups of Phoumi and Souphanouvong (see item 27-30 December 1961). Souvanna had allowed Phoumi time to consider this, but the Prince had said that he and Souphanouvong would return to Vientiane for further negotiations only if Phoumi gave an affirmative reply.

On 31 December, Ambassador Brown had informed Phoumi that the US Government, in a reversal of its previous policy, now supported Souvanna's proposal with regard to the two ministries (see item). Reviewing this stand for Phoumi on 1 January, the Ambassador said that neither of the two strong opposing forces in Laos would ever agree to a government in which the other controlled the two key cabinet positions of Defense and Interior. Hence the only way to achieve a government of national union was to allot the disputed posts to the center faction.

Ambassador Brown pointed out to Phoumi that not to reply would be to break off negotiations with Souvanna. Phoumi must realize, therefore, that his decision would be "a very crucial one as regards US relations with him and Boun Oum [Premier of the RLG and titular head of the right wing faction] as well as regards Souvanna." Phoumi denied that the RLG had any desire to break off negotiations, and he refused to agree that a failure to reply to Souvanna could properly be so interpreted. Nor did he accept the reasoning behind the US conclusion that Defense and Interior must be conceded to the center faction. Phoumi said he had already made concessions in allowing Souvanna--a weak man and clearly not a true neutral since he had Soviet support--to seek to form a government. As for the effect of his decision on relations with the United States, Phoumi said he felt the US was already beginning to withdraw its support. According to Brown, "He said that he thought the US was continuing to retreat and that our whole policy had changed a great deal since January 1961."

In reporting this meeting to the Secretary of State, Ambassador Brown said he was convinced that "Phoumi now clearly understands that if decision he makes tonight is adverse it will not only mean rupture with Souvanna but loss of US support to him and Boun Oum . . . . The strong probability is that the answer will be unfavorable." This, said Brown in a subsequent message to Secretary Rusk and Assistant Secretary Harriman, would be a "direct refusal to follow our advice on a cardinal point of policy . . . . If we are ever to convince him [Phoumi] that we will not support him whatever he does we must therefore act."
The first step, continued Brown, seemed clear. He would request an immediate audience with the King and explain to him that a government of national union could only be attained if Defense and Interior were allotted to the center, that the US believed that the refusal of Boun Oum and Phoumi to send any message to Souvanna on this point rendered further negotiation impossible, that the US could not be expected to continue support of a government whose policies it disapproved, and that the US Government hoped His Majesty would exercise his influence so that US aid to Laos could be continued, either by changing the current decision of the Laotian Government or by a change in that Government.

Subsequent steps, continued Brown, were more difficult to choose. The problem was to "take some action that will be visible, have immediate effect and convince Phoumi viscerally as well as intellectually that he really risks having US aid to Laos cut off, but at the same time to avoid unnecessary harm to Laos," such as a dangerous impairment of the capabilities of the RLG's Army (the Forces Armees du Royaume, or FAR).

A public statement by Brown or the Department of State to the effect that the RLG was unreasonable in its position on the Defense and Interior Ministries, or a visit by Brown to Souvanna and Souphanouvong at Khang Khay, would dramatize US willingness to part company with Phoumi and Boun Oum. The "real sanction," however, would be "cutting aid and military aid is ... nearest Phoumi's heart." Any step short of such a severe step, such as letting it be known that aid would be entirely stopped, might drive Phoumi into a desperate military action in the hope that retaliation by the Pathet Lao would force the US to come to his support. Brown did not wish to call in the MAAG teams from the field because of the demoralizing effect on the troops and because it would cut the US off from knowledge of what was going on. The course Brown recommended was suspension of deliveries of military supplies into the country. In addition, he could tell certain ministers and other key personalities, without being more specific, that the US would not support the RLG position on the Defense and Interior Ministries.

Brown cautioned that these modest sanctions might be insufficient. The US should be prepared "to go all the way if necessary, realizing the cost to the FAR and ultimately to the Lao people if we drastically cut their military and economic aid." The US should not, however, expect quick results from the application of sanctions. A possible face-saving device for Boun Oum, if he wished to yield, would be a call by the Co-Chairmen of the 14-Nation Geneva Conference on Laos for another meeting of the three Princes in Geneva. Brown, however, was not optimistic.

"The hard fact is," he concluded, "that the sanctions we have available to us are somewhat like the atom bomb--too big to use without causing us almost as much harm as those to whom they are applied."

(S) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 919, 920, 1 Jan 62.
1 Jan 62

Ambassador Brown received word through the Chairman of the International Control Commission for Laos (ICC) that Souvanna planned to depart for Paris the following day, since he was certain that no satisfactory reply was to be expected from Phoumi and Boun Oum. Souvanna said he would be gone "for a week, a month, or even a year." Brown reported that French Ambassador Palaize was sending a message to Souvanna urging him to remain in Laos until 4 January, stressing the need for time to allow Western diplomatic pressures to work on the RLG and the fact that immediate departure would "play into Phoumi's hands." The Palaize message would include a statement that the US and British Ambassadors, as well as the ICC, concurred in the suggestion.

(Souvanna, nevertheless, departed for Paris on 2 January.)

(S) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 918, 1 Jan 62; 934, 3 Jan 62.

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Jan 62

The 14-Nation Conference on Laos reconvened in Geneva, having been in semi-recess during the Christmas holidays. The US delegation observed that the atmosphere of the Conference was far from favorable in view of the failure of the recent meeting of the three Princes at Vientiane. This failure was ascribed by the non-Communist Conference delegations to the obstructionism of Boun Oum and Phoumi, while the Communist representatives went beyond this by asserting that such tactics had been actively sponsored by the United States.

(S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1007, 6 Jan 62.

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Jan 62

Small-scale skirmishes between FAR and anti-government forces took place in the vicinity of Muong Sai, Tha Thom, Mahaxay, and Ban Hin Lap as FAR forces moved into better positions for initiating offensive attacks, if ordered. On 3 January CINCPAC reported to the JCS that there was no indication, however, of hostilities being resumed in the immediate future.


2 Jan 62

In a memorandum for its own use, the Far East Region, OSD (ISA), summarized an estimate of FAR capabilities and proposals for US policy. This estimate of FAR capabilities was substantially similar to that put forward by CHMAAG.Laos (see item 20 December 1961), except that it gave particular attention to the area's irregular warfare capabilities for irregular warfare. It gave the numbers and locations of tribesmen in every area of Laos, men thus far unarmed but evidently willing to fight if given weapons.

It would be "politically impossible" at present for the US to begin the large-scale and continuous arming of minority peoples in Laos. However, an inconspicuous and gradual arming...
of tribesmen—expanding from already friendly villages to adjoining areas, making these areas "safe" and expanding again—would be feasible, difficult for friend or enemy to detect, and politically defensible inasmuch as the enemy was also arming and training villagers. In this manner, tribesmen responsive to the US could largely take over Sam Neua province in three to six months and could begin to infiltrate the DRV. An accelerated program to build helicopter strips and airfields capable of handling CARIBOU aircraft (an experimental two-engine STOL transport under development for the US Army) would give the Meo and other tribesmen a greater mobility and a consequent opportunity to use new and more effective tactics in their operations.

In view of the improved FAR capabilities and of the latent possibilities of increased irregular activity by friendly tribesmen, it is recommended that the US:

1. Abandon its willingness to see the RLG accept a coalition government on terms which, in the "honest judgment" of both the RLG and the US, would probably mean the subsequent communization of Laos. The US should not contemplate any "drastic action," such as terminating aid to the RLG or announcing that Souvanna was the only possible Prime Minister for Laos. Rather, the US should support the RLG in insisting upon strong cabinet posts and strong numerical representation in the coalition government.

2. Recognize that prolonged negotiations would permit the RLG to improve its military situation; refuse, consequently, to allow a time limit to be placed upon negotiations, and insist instead upon the wisdom of allowing the opposing Lao factions to "proceed at their own pace and find their own levels."

3. Authorize the arming of Lao civilians who desired weapons for self-defense.

4. Authorize the "immediate" arming of 3000 to 4000 Meo in Xieng Khouang province, the "gradual" arming of additional Meo in Sam Neua province, and the "discreet" arming of Meo near Muong Sai and Yao tribesmen near Muong Sing.

5. Stop treating the RLG as a "caretaker government." Discussions should be inaugurated on economic aid and civil police programs; any programs agreed to should be implemented, whatever the status of negotiations at the time.

6. Be prepared to accept the continuation for one to two years of a "low-key struggle" for control of Laos, realizing that although "stalemate" would be the most favorable result to be expected from such a struggle, this stalemate would be on better geographical, military, and political terms than could presently be had.
During this period, MAAG would attempt to maintain the current "favorable momentum" in Laos. They would continue training the FAR and irregulars, build and enlarge airfields and helicopter strips and provide additional helicopters and light transport aircraft, provide the FAR with more and better equipment, continue to urge Phoumi to replace incompetent leaders, and begin to "marry" the FAR with the irregular forces. They would also prepare, by planning, training, and stockpiling, to carry out military or paramilitary portions of the suggested policy.

(S) "Proposal for Support of Additional Resistance Forces in Laos," w/apps, 2 Jan 62; OSD (ISA), FER/SEA Br. Files.

2 Jan 62 CHMAAG Laos commented to CINCPAC upon Ambassador Brown's proposed sanctions against the RLG (see item 1 January 1962). The suspension of deliveries of military supplies would not have much effect for 30 days, CHMAAG reported. Only motor gasoline (M0GAS) was in shorter than 30 days' supply. Ordnance and ammunition shortages would not be felt for 45 days, and the FAR could conduct its training and air transport operations at reduced levels with existing supplies for 30 and 60 days, respectively. The suspension of deliveries itself could be accomplished without great difficulty, since the US could control the traffic from its storage areas in Thailand.

The suspension of financial support to the FAR would have little impact for the first 39 days. Phoumi could undoubtedly then obtain a loan from the National Bank in Laos and delay insolvency in military finances another month. During the time that financial support was halted, CHMAAG presumed that the US would continue supporting ECCOIL [Filipino technicians] and providing Air America support for the FAR. He also foresaw that MAAG would probably assume the financial support of Thai volunteers.

Regarding the recall of Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) from the field, CHMAAG agreed with Ambassador Brown that this sanction should be employed only in case of absolute necessity. He pointed out that the FAR would be seriously demoralized by such an unmistakable sign of the withdrawal of US support, and this sanction would damage, possibly irreparably, the present excellent relations between the MAAG field elements and FAR commanders. CHMAAG also thought that it should be recognized that the MTTs should preferably be withdrawn entirely from Laos immediately after their withdrawal from the field. In this way, possible frictions between them and the FAR would be avoided, and the MAAG would be spared the effort of supporting them.

It was CHMAAG's opinion that the suspension of military deliveries and the suspension of financial support would both exert considerable pressure upon the RLG. Both sanctions would, moreover, leave open the possibility of resuming an effective US military aid program; the sanction of withdrawing MTTs, however, would probably not leave this possibility open.

(S) Msg, CHMAAG Laos to CINCPAC, DA IN 189103, 2 Jan 62.
Premier Boun Oum informed Ambassador Brown that the RLG would make no reply to Souvanna regarding his proposal (see item 1 January 1962) that the Defense and Interior Ministries in a government of national union be allocated to Souvanna's center faction. Brown then informed the Secretary of State that he had asked for an immediate audience with the King. He urgently requested instructions on whether or not to begin withholding military deliveries to the RLG, as he had recommended the previous day (see item 1 January 1962). The Department of State replied immediately that the sanctions should not be initiated, noting that Souvanna's departure for Paris earlier that day provided "a few days to take stock."

In his message Ambassador Brown had said that he did not think a resumption of hostilities was likely in the immediate future, but to be prepared he asked for confirmation of his understanding of the US policy for various contingencies (see item 14 December 1961). The State Department reply of 4 January authorized the Ambassador, at his discretion, to inform Phoumi that if he attacked or unilaterally withdrew to the South the US would withdraw its MAAG advisers, air support, and supplies. Brown was authorized to implement these measures to the extent considered necessary in the light of the "tactical political and military situation" at the time. If the enemy clearly initiated the hostilities, however, the US would continue its support of the FAR. The Department assumed that MAAG was currently taking precautions to prevent any FAR operations that could be provocative to the other side.

(S) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 924, 2 Jan 62; SecState to Vientiane, 583, 2 Jan 62; 589, 4 Jan 62.

A Radio Thailand broadcast rebuked the "many Western countries" that were advocating the speedy formation of a Lao coalition government—a government that, far from bringing strength to the fight against the Communists, would prepare the way for the Communist subjugation of Laos. The broadcast also cited unfavorably a "certain Western statesman" (probably Harriman, Ambassador Young reported), who had said that SEATO was willing to release a neutral Laos from its protection, and then scoffed that so far there had been no evidence of any SEATO protection. If SEATO had acted in Laos, it was charged, the Communists would not now be in control of half the country, with a military base in the Plain des Jarres.

Ambassador Young commented that this broadcast was open evidence of the frustration felt in Thailand regarding Western efforts to establish a coalition government under Souvanna. He described the Thai as caught between the desire to maintain close alignment with the US and the firm belief that US policy in Laos was naive, dangerous, and bound to end in facilitating a Communist take-over "right up to the Thai border."
Young said that until recently the Embassy had been "fairly certain" that Thai officials were not trying to influence Phoumi to ignore US advice. "Now we [are] not so sure although we have no new evidence one way or the other." To Young the radio commentary indicated a Thai disposition toward closer identification with Phoumi's cause regardless of Western policy. If the US decided to apply the sanctions against Phoumi recently recommended by Ambassador Brown (see item 1 January 1962), Young anticipated great difficulty in convincing Thai officials that such action was in their best interests.

Replying on 4 January, the Secretary of State told Ambassador Young that the Thai broadcast had engendered serious concern in Washington. Although the US did not expect active Thai support on all issues, "we cannot countenance overt or covert steps by the RTG deliberately to sabotage our efforts at peaceful and acceptable settlement." Such actions could complicate the negotiations in Geneva, the Secretary continued, making it difficult if not impossible to place the blame on the Communists and/or Souvanna if negotiations should fail. He urged the Ambassador to make these views known to the Thai Government (see item 6 January 1962).

(S) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 4 Jan 62; SecState to Bangkok, 941, 4 Jan 62.

3 Jan 62

In a message to the JCS, CINCPAC endorsed Ambassador Brown's observation (see item 1 January 1962) that sanctions against the RLG would harm the US almost as much as the RLG. According to CINCPAC, the "drastic step" of suspending military aid to the RLG would amount to a reversal of the US policy of strengthening the FAR in order to bolster the RLG's negotiating position. Such a sanction could dim further the US hopes for a neutralist government; it could even encourage the Kong Le/Pathet Lao faction, which was still receiving supplies from the Communist Bloc and improving its military position, to launch a military offensive.

(S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 030422Z Jan 62.

3 Jan 62

Ambassador Brown, in an audience with King Savang, explained the US policy of supporting Souvanna's proposal for a government of national union with the Defense and Interior Ministries controlled by Souvanna's neutralist faction. Brown had informed Phoumi of this US position, making clear that the US could not support him in his opposition to the Souvanna proposal. Phoumi, however, evidently did not believe it.

The King replied that Phoumi did believe it and considered that US aid, by a decision of the whole US Government, had been terminated as of the previous day.

When Brown asked what should be the next step, the King replied he had nothing to say, that the RLG did not amount to anything without US support and in effect was committing suicide not only for itself but for Laos.
The Lao, however, could not give up their principles or betray their souls. They must therefore resign themselves.

(S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 931, 3 Jan 62.

3 Jan 62 Upon returning to Geneva, Soviet Ambassador Pushkin proposed to the other Co-Chairman, MacDonald, that they invite the three Princes to come to Geneva. Sullivan, Deputy Head of the US Mission, urged MacDonald to delay in the matter, but at the same time he pointed out to the State Department that the US use of delaying tactics should not go so far as to appear to "shelter Boun Oum in his obstinacy." He therefore stated that, unless otherwise instructed, he would support issuance of the invitations, which MacDonald had succeeded in having postponed until 5 January. Sullivan considered the Soviet draft invitation to be quite moderate and therefore acceptable with certain minor changes.

(S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 994, 3 Jan 62.

3 Jan 62 Secretary of State Rusk informed Ambassador Brown that, according to the US delegation at the Geneva Conference, an invitation from the Conference Co-Chairmen would soon be issued to the three Princes to meet in Geneva. Rusk requested Brown to use all possible pressures on Boun Oum and Phoumi to get them to accept.

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 585, 3 Jan 62.

3 Jan 62 It was agreed by Co-Chairman MacDonald and by the US delegation that the stalemate at the Vientiane talks and the suspicions felt among the Communist delegations regarding alleged US and Thai support for the negative attitude of the RLG made it inadvisable to negotiate at Geneva on the delicate questions of Lao relations with SEATO and the disposition of the private armies. The US delegation therefore reported that "no attempts will be initiated [at] Geneva" toward any agreement on these issues.

(S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 993, 3 Jan 62.

4 Jan 62 Upon arriving at Paris, Souvanna answered questions from reporters. His replies indicated that, though he had come to Paris ostensibly for a rest, he would not discount the possibility of going to Geneva if such a journey would help resolve the Lao crisis. When asked about the "duality of US policy," he expressed confidence that the US, in spite of charges to the contrary by elements of the French press, did desire a neutral Laos. Souvanna added, however, that continued US pressure on the RLG would be necessary.

Souvanna also denied that his followers and those of Souphanouvong were united. In response to a question about Russian arms, he admitted that he received such weapons and said he distributed them as he saw fit. This last answer distressed the French Foreign Office, which feared that the statement might be quoted out of context and therefore was considering the issuance of a clarification of Souvanna's remark.

A UK Embassy officer speaking on behalf of France as well as Britain, in a brief private conversation with Souvanna, sounded him out on the possibility of a meeting of the three Princes at Geneva. Souvanna seemed receptive
but indicated that the Conference should, for the present, only agree in principle to invite the Princes, withholding the actual invitation for several days to see if there was some favorable development. He undertook to instruct his representative, Quinim, to urge acceptance of this plan by the Conference (see item 6 January 1962). US Ambassador Gavin believed that the Anglo-French approach had been designed to anticipate Pushkin's "making a grandstand play" by calling for a meeting of the Princes at Geneva.

While waiting for the plane carrying the Prince, Quinim had "wondered aloud" to an officer of the British Embassy whether Souvanna entertained hopes of getting the Conference Co-Chairmen to visit Laos and add to the existing pressure for negotiations.

(S) Msg, Paris to SecState, 3315, 4 Jan 62.

Ambassador Brown replied to Secretary Rusk (see item 3 January 1962) that he had "no pressures left to use on Phoumi and Boun Oum." He had made "all the threats that words alone can convey. Though my words have been general, they have been interpreted as saying aid would be cut off." These threats had been "categorically defied." What was needed now, continued Brown, was "action repeat action." He therefore renewed his recommendation (see item 1 January 1962) that military shipments be stopped. If this step was not taken, pressures on Phoumi and Boun Oum to go to Geneva should be left to representatives of the Co-Chairmen.

Later in the day, the Secretary of State replied to Ambassador Brown that the expected invitation from the Co-Chairmen created a new situation that made it desirable to hold back on further sanctions for the present. A break with Phoumi and Boun Oum, if it became necessary, should be on the issue of their willingness to go to Geneva and carry on negotiations rather than solely on the question of two specific cabinet posts.

High level discussions in Washington were planned, continued the Secretary, and specific instructions would then be issued to Brown. For use in these discussions, the Secretary requested Brown's opinion on the following:

1. Could sanctions be made so painful to other Lao that they would either force Phoumi to resign or appeal to the King to remove him?

2. Could these objectives be achieved merely by suspension of military deliveries and financial support?

3. If Phoumi were forced out, would other Lao, willing to negotiate realistically for a coalition government, be available to take over?

4. How would the Army react if it became apparent the US would no longer support it with Phoumi in charge?

5. How many forces would follow Phoumi if he went South?
6. Would the FAR command structure become totally disrupted by Phoumi's departure?

7. What commitments should the US try to get from Souvanna, with whom it would be necessary to come to some understanding in advance in the event it became necessary to break with Phoumi? (See item 6 January 1962 for Brown's reply.)

The Secretary of State informed Ambassador Brown that consideration was being given to the possibility of obtaining Soviet agreement to restrain the Pathet Lao if, in the interest of producing a negotiated settlement, the US was forced to apply strong military sanctions against the RLG.

(S) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 937, 4 Jan 62; SecState to Vientiane, 588, 4 Jan 62.

4 Jan 62
French Ambassador to the US Herve Alphand was, at his own request, briefed by Harriman on various aspects of the situation in Southeast Asia. Concerning Laos, Harriman reviewed the status of negotiations and said that the US was trying to persuade Boun Oum to go to Geneva for a meeting of the Princes. Alphand agreed to Harriman's proposal that the Ambassador suggest that the Government of France contact Souvanna and encourage the Prince to pursue his efforts to form a coalition. When the French Ambassador expressed satisfaction with tripartite cooperation at the Geneva Conference, Harriman indicated that "quiet" cooperation between France and the US would also be desirable in the event Souvanna succeeded in forming a government.

(C) Msg, SecState to Paris, 3729, 5 Jan 62.

4 Jan 62
The ICC report for the period 15-31 December 1961 became available to the US delegation at Geneva. The report largely consisted of a chronological record of events in Laos, including descriptions of the meetings and conflicting demands advanced by the three Princes, the various violations of the cease-fire alleged by the three sides, and the actual fighting of which the ICC had knowledge. The ICC expressed concern that a more serious breakdown of the cease-fire might occur if a coalition government were not soon formed, and it therefore urged that the three Princes be invited to meet in Geneva should all else fail.

(S) Msgs, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 996, 4 Jan 62; CONFE 1007, 5 Jan 62.

5 Jan 62
The Joint Chiefs of Staff presented their views on "Reassessment of US Policy in Laos" in a memorandum for the Secretary of Defense.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff described the US material and technical assistance being given Laos as "designed to maintain or strengthen the military and bargaining position of the Royal Lao Government, until such time as an acceptable agreement on a neutral Laos is achieved." Meanwhile, in the realm of political-diplomatic action the United States was restraining the RLG from military counteractions and applying pressure to its leaders to make concessions to Souvanna. The JCS thought these
restraints and pressures, though well-intended, were having the effect of undermining the prestige, determination, and effectiveness of the RLG and its armed forces, to a point where "the legal government may soon have no tenable position from which to negotiate." In short, the US political-diplomatic efforts and military assistance efforts in Laos were at cross-purposes in some respects.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were concerned over the appearance that, in pursuing the objective of establishing a coalition government under Souvanna, US policy would make whatever concessions were necessary to obtain the "best possible" negotiated settlement. Meanwhile, they pointed out, there was no evidence that the Communists had abandoned their goal of dominating Laos. Indeed, there was considerable evidence that they had taken deliberate advantage of the cease-fire and the Geneva negotiations to intensify military operations against South Viet Nam and infiltration of Thailand and Cambodia. To the JCS the Communist tactic appeared to be to continue to negotiate over Laos until South Viet Nam had fallen and until the pro-Western elements in Laos had become so demoralized and ineffective as to pose no significant obstacle to a Communist take-over in Laos after a coalition government was formed.

The JCS believed that the military position of the RLG was not such as to make it necessary to seek a peaceful settlement at all costs. The RLG was now stronger vis-a-vis the Kong Le-Pathet Lao forces than at the beginning of the cease-fire. It could and should negotiate from a position of strength. The FAR was increasingly competent; the peoples, both Lao and minority tribesmen, were evidently willing, if armed, to organize local defense forces against the Communists; and because of superior air and rail equipment and facilities, the RLG could take better advantage of the coming rainy season than the enemy.

In these circumstances there was an opportunity for the United States to "exploit the shifting power balance in a manner to strengthen the negotiating position of the RLG while simultaneously weakening that of the Souvanna Phouma-Souphanouvong group." Not to take up this opportunity would be to neglect "an effective alternative means of executing the existing policy of achieving a neutral and independent Laos." The JCS believed that "the interests and prestige of the United States require that the Departments of State, Defense, and other agencies involved, combine their resources in a common effort to utilize those assets available to the United States and to maintain the prestige, popular support, determination, and military effectiveness of the Royal Lao Government."

"Specifically, the United States should not attempt to persuade the representatives of the Royal Lao Government at current or future negotiations to make concessions merely for the sake of agreement." To cut off US aid to the RLG as a means of pressure would be self-defeating, particularly since there was no evidence that comparable pressure was being applied from any source to Souvanna.
and Souphanouvong. "To remove MAAG groups from Laos would set up an irreversible chain of events which would be disastrous to US interests and prestige."

The prime example of the type of concession the JCS believed the United States should not pressure the RLG leaders to make "merely for the sake of agreement" was the yielding of the Defense and Interior Ministries to the neutralist faction. "The retention of these two key ministries by the present RLG in any Government headed by Souvanna Phouma has great importance for the preservation of the hard-won and very considerable American military assets in Laos. A so-called neutral Defense Minister would almost certainly bar Western-oriented Laotian officers from positions of high command." Further, a diversion of US-supplied equipment from the FAR to the Kong Le and Pathet Lao forces would be likely. Fully aware of these dangers, the RLG leaders were determined to stand fast in claiming Defense and Interior, but, "notwithstanding the apparent community of interest of the two nations, the United States is exerting strong pressure on the RLG to yield on this point." The JCS observed that occasional restraint of the RLG was undoubtedly required, "but encouragement and full assurance of continued US support are equally necessary to the attainment of US objectives in Laos."

[On 12 January the Deputy Secretary of Defense forwarded this JCS memorandum to the President and to the Secretary of State. In his covering memorandum to the President, the Deputy Secretary withheld endorsement of the portions dealing primarily with political matters, but he directed attention to the fact that the JCS assessment of the military situation—that RLG capabilities were better relatively than at the time of the cease-fire—had just been confirmed by SNIE 58-62 (see item 11 January 1962). His own conclusion from the SNIE was the "we can take advantage of time effectively to further improve the situation of the RLG forces" and that there was reason to believe that the RLG forces could retain control of the major areas they currently held, so long as the enemy received no additional reinforcements from North Viet Nam.]

(TS) JCSM-12-62 to SecDef, "Reassessment of US Policy in Laos (C)," 5 Jan 62, derived from (TS) JCS 2344/28, 29 Dec 61; (TS) 1st N/H of JCS 2344/28, 16 Jan 62. All in JMF 9155.2/3100 (29 Dec 61).

5 Jan 62 Ambassador Brown, with the authorization of the Secretary of State, informed the Laotian Finance Minister that the US was withholding the $3,000,000 January cash grant payment for all forms of aid. The US, said Brown, was "very disappointed at events of the last few days, at some positions taken by Phoumi and Boun Oum and at the fact that no message had been sent to Souvanna on January 1." As a consequence, the US was re-examining its entire economic, financial, and military aid program for Laos. Events of the next few days would influence the final decisions of the US. An invitation was coming from the Co-Chairmen to the three Princes to resume their discussions in Geneva. The reaction of the RLG to this invitation would be an important factor in the final decisions of the US.
The RLG reacted to the withholding of the January payment with a suspension by the National Bank of dollar and franc sales. Commercial banks quickly followed suit. The immediate effect was a rise in private kip-dollar exchange rates from the official 80 to 1 to anywhere from 85 to 150 to 1. Gold prices rose 25 per cent; food prices rose 10 to 25 per cent.

(S) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 943, 5 Jan 62; SecState to Vientiane, 590, 4 Jan 62.

5 Jan 62

In Paris, Ambassador Gavin called upon Souvanna to convey his respects and to wish the Prince well in the endeavor to establish a free, neutral, and stable Laos. Souvanna responded to these sentiments with a recital of complaints about the "negative behavior" of Boun Oum and Phoumi during his recent stay in Laos. Since he had received no satisfactory reply from Boun Oum to his suggestions for negotiations, Souvanna had decided to journey to Paris to await developments.

In reply to Gavin's comment that the Co-Chairmen appeared to be planning to invite the Princes to Geneva, Souvanna said that, although the idea was good, the invitations should not be issued for several days. By intervening too bluntly in the kingdom's internal affairs, the Co-Chairmen might "wound Lao sensibilities." Instead, the Conference should allow a short time for "diplomatic activity" and for exchanges among the factions before calling a meeting of the Princes.

Souvanna then informed the Ambassador that he had told Consul General Holt at Zurich that the US should stop its aid to the RLG and, most important, should continue to pay the soldiers. To halt the pay of these men would, Souvanna believed, raise the possibility of a mutiny at this most critical moment. The US, however, should exert pressure by withdrawing all logistical support, transportation, and military advisory teams. In addition, pressure would have to be applied against South Viet Nam and Thailand to prevent them from aiding the Boun Oum regime. Souvanna believed that the RLG's decision to suspend the sale of both dollars and francs (see earlier item, 5 January 1962) indicated that Phoumi had taken seriously the American threats of sanctions.

Souvanna next turned to the question of Communist aid to his own faction. He declared that, although he had accepted help offered by Communist China, North Viet Nam, and the USSR, he did not intend that Laos become a Communist state. He believed that the Communist Bloc was sincere in its statements that a neutral government be established in Laos.

Although admittedly aware that Viet Minh forces were crossing southern Laos to enter South Viet Nam, Souvanna observed that he did not control the area in question. If, however, his government were established over the entire kingdom, he could, as he had intimated to Harriman, seal this invasion corridor (see item 15-17 September 1961). For the present, the problem was not
southern Laos but the establishment, by means of the Geneva Agreements and with the consent of the Lao people, of a government headed by Souvanna.

Ambassador Gavin commented that the conversation had been amicable throughout. The Prince expressed his appreciation for Gavin's visit but did not mention the oft-repeated invitation that he visit Washington. Souvanna also remained silent about Prince Souphanouvong and did not inquire in detail about any US plans or decisions to withdraw aid from Phoumi.

(C) Msg, Paris to SecState, 3333, 5 Jan 62.

5 Jan 62 The JCS, adopting a CINCPAC recommendation of 15 December 1961, augmented the Joint Table of Distribution of MAAG Laos by 73 Army spaces, to a total authorization of 349 (317 Army; 4 Navy; 28 Air Force). The additional personnel were intended to carry out increased MAAG responsibilities for communications, within Laos and between Laos and Thailand.

(S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 152046Z Dec 61; (C) Msg, JCS to CSA and CINCPAC, JCS 2806, 5 Jan 62; both in JMF 1040.1 (14 Apr 61).

5 Jan 62 The 38th plenary session of the Geneva Conference (first session of the reconvened Conference) met with Pushkin as Acting Chairman. He began by stating that continued disagreement among the Princes seriously endangered the cease-fire agreement, and then indicated anew where Soviet sympathies lay by reading the 1 January letter to the Co-Chairmen from Souvanna and Souphanouvong attacking Boun Oum for allegedly having refused to negotiate at Vientiane. Pushkin then presented the message drafted by the Co-Chairmen, inviting the three Princes to come to Geneva at once, mildly rebuking them for the obstructions that a Laotian settlement had continually faced, and stating that the new meeting could provide an opportunity for negotiations toward the formation of a government of national union. The invitation was approved by the Conference without comment.

Speeches from the heads of the Indian and the UK delegations followed, appealing for moderation and restraint by all, in the hope that a settlement could be reached, but delegates from North Viet Nam, the Pathet Lao, and the Chinese Communists all replied with vigorous attacks against the RLG and, above all, the US, which was castigated for purported "double-dealing," "insincerity," and "obstruction" of attempts to reach Laotian settlement.

Pushkin and the Polish delegate, Balicki, also spoke. They focused their accusations almost entirely on the RLG, limiting their remarks about the US to a few allusions to the secret support that "certain circles" were purportedly giving to Phoumi and Boun Oum.

(C) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONPE 1001, 5 Jan 62; (OUO) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONPE 1009, 7 Jan 62; (U) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONPE A-21, 11 Jan 62.
Referring to reports from CHMAAG Laos at the end of December 1961 (see items 20 and 22 December 1961) and to the recent situation as reported in his own messages to JCS of 3 January (see item 1–4 January 1962), CINCPAC urged that the US take advantage of the shift in the balance of power in favor of the RLG. This shift, according to CINCPAC, could be exploited to a considerable degree so as to improve the RLG negotiating position.

The favorable factors included: 1) Improved FAR combat capability indicated by increased competence in weapons, tactics and leadership. The antigovernment forces, CINCPAC reported, could not now capture any major city in the Mekong River from Pakse to the north without overt and considerably reinforced North Vietnamese participation. 2) Evident willingness of tribal minorities to organize local defense, and the demonstrated capability of larger tribes, particularly the Meo, to maintain damaging guerrilla warfare operations against the enemy. 3) Meo capability to expand their resistance into northern and western Laos. 4) New tactics, which required only the enlargement of airfields in Meo country and the availability of suitable aircraft, of rapid deployment of FAR regulars to reinforce Meo harassment capability. In addition, CINCPAC believed that the RLG could exploit the rainy season beginning in mid-April better than the enemy could, because of a larger and more flexible airlift and generally better transport facilities.

CINCPAC suggested that by failing to exploit the shifting balance of power the United States would be neglecting an effective alternative means of executing the existing policy of achieving a neutral and independent Laos.

(5) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 050218Z Jan 62.

In a memorandum to the "Special Group," the Southeast Asia Branch, Far East Region, OSD (ISA), suggested a new course of action in US attempts to persuade Phoumi to accept allocation of the portfolios of Defense and Interior to the Souvanna neutrals. The Southeast Asia Branch recounted that the Department of State had already requested the CIA (in an attempt to persuade Phoumi either to 1) go to Geneva and accept the Souvanna plan for a 19-member cabinet with Phoumi as Minister of Public Works, or 2) withdraw from the RLG in favor of someone who would accept Souvanna's offer; there appeared to be two possible ways to achieve one of these three results: bribe or coup d'etat. Phoumi might be bribed into resigning or acquiescing in the Western position; but a "simple bribe" would probably not be effective since Phoumi appeared more interested in power than in money. The Southeast Asia Branch therefore suggested an offer of funds that would be related to the acquisition and maintenance of power. The ISA office recommended that Phoumi be approached and told once again the firm intention of the US to go forward with sanctions.
if the RLG did not cooperate in Western policies

With this

money Phoumi could "take care of" his loyal supporters in the FAR, fight Communism through community development schemes, and maintain his own political position. If Phoumi did not accept this offer, the Southeast Asia Branch then postulated, he might be so disturbed by it and other pressures upon him that he would consider resigning his office. The US should be quick to perceive such a trend in Phoumi's thought and be ready at the opportune moment to offer him funds again—"substantial funds" in retirement to "take care of" his loyal followers. (See items 6 and 7 March 1962.)

The Southeast Asia Branch acknowledged that staging a coup d'état would not be impossible, but recommended that such a course of action not be considered at the present time. According to the Branch, a successful coup would take too long in preparation to achieve the State Department objective of early negotiations. Moreover, even a successful coup would risk the fragmentation of FAR loyalties and a consequent serious weakening of the military position of the RLG. As a result, the West's bargaining position might be weakened to a point where "the present reasonably favorable situation would no longer obtain."

(S) (Eyes Only) Memo for the Special Group [from FER/SEA Br., OSD (ISA)], 5 Jan 62; OSD (ISA), FER/SEA Br. Files.

5 Jan 62

Reviewing the deadlock in Laotian negotiations and examining all possible courses for a way out, Ambassador Brown recommended that "at least some consideration should be given" to an arrangement with Phoumi as Minister of Defense, assigning Interior to the Pathet Lao. Brown recognized the dangers and disadvantages of this but wondered if the result might not be more favorable than what might be expected from the current US policy. If the United States continued its attempt to induce Phoumi to concede Defense and Interior to the center faction to the point of applying military sanctions against him, the result might be to leave the right wing in Laos leaderless and ineffective and the Army crippled.

Assistant Secretary Harriman replied two days later, saying he felt that measures might still be found to make Phoumi more amenable to the Souvanna solution without bringing on the collapse of the right wing that concerned the Ambassador. At the moment a way was being sought to let Phoumi know the United States still considered him a friend, with an important role to play in an independent Laos, and that unwillingness to support him claim to Defense and Interior did not mean that the United States was abandoning him entirely. After considering Brown's suggestion, Harriman continued to believe the effect of allotting Defense to Phoumi and Interior to the Pathet Lao "would ultimately be disastrous." In any event, he
was certain that Souvanna would not accept the Pathet Lao in so sensitive a post as Interior. "If he did, it would be clear tip-off that he is prepared to lose [the] country to communists so that whole Souvanna solution would become unacceptable to us."

(S) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 942, 5 Jan 62; SecState to Vientiane, 600, 7 Jan 62.

6 Jan 62

Ambassador Brown, with the aid of the Country Team, replied to Secretary Rusk's questions of 4 January (see item) as follows:

1. It was highly doubtful that making sanctions painful to other Lao would result in their forcing Phoumi out of office. The original revolutionary committee (see item 18 August 1960) would probably remain loyal to Phoumi at least to the extent that they would not go over to Souvanna or join a group prepared to negotiate with him. Other Lao were discouraged from differing with Phoumi because he controlled the instruments of power, such as the Army, the police, and the security services of Colonel Siho. The so-called "Vientiane neutrals" had no clear rallying point.

2. Suspension of deliveries of military supplies and financial assistance over a long period would eventually bring Phoumi down; the time required would depend upon Phoumi's determination and the amount of support he received from Sarit. More severe measures such as withdrawing MAAG advisors would accelerate the process but at a cost that was "obvious." Either to apply these measures for a long period or to go beyond them would seriously damage the FAR and the Lao economy.

3. The King could not be counted on as a replacement for Phoumi; the Ambassador could think of no other likely volunteer. The burden of further negotiation for the right wing would probably fall on the US.

4. Most of the Army would remain loyal to Phoumi because most southern Lao would stick with him, and the Army had been recruited mostly in the South. Continued direct US support of Vang Pao would provide a measure of influence on Meo operations.

5. Many Southerners in the Army would follow Phoumi South; it was impossible to predict what others would do. "The reaction of the other side would also have a bearing on the attitude of the FAR."

6. In the opinion of Chief MAAG, the departure of Phoumi would have a disastrous effect on the FAR command structure.

7. With regard to what commitments the United States should seek in advance from Souvanna, Ambassador Brown thought Souvanna should pledge to include in his government the most capable rightists available and that he should be required to give "satisfactory undertakings" on reprisals, elections, private armies, the corridor to South Viet Nam, the ICC, the release of US prisoners
held by the Pathet Lao, and so forth. The Ambassador observed, however, that the drastic actions necessary to topple Phoumi would frustrate one standing US objective, namely, the inclusion in the coalition government of an effective rightist group with a strong leader. Implying that Souvanna might be unable to maintain an independent course as head of an unbalanced coalition, Brown suggested that any commitments made by Souvanna in advance might be of doubtful dependability.

Ambassador Brown raised a question regarding the Secretary of State's proposal to attempt to obtain Soviet agreement to "hold back PL" in the event the United States was forced to apply strong military sanctions against the RLG. Was this sufficient? "If we are to suspend military supplies should we not ask Russians to stop their airlift for instance? We ought to exact a high price from them for our abandonment [of] Phoumi."

On the same day, CINCPAC supplied comments to the JCS on the State Department questions. CINCPAC, too, felt that Phoumi probably could not be forced from office by "sanctions painful to other Lao," that even in the face of these sanctions the original revolutionary committee would probably remain loyal to Phoumi, and that a substantial portion of the Army would follow Phoumi South. CINCPAC noted that Phoumi had established a complex of military installations around Savannakhet and had deployed six of his nine GM in this southern region. If Phoumi went South, CINCPAC concluded, he probably "would not leave much command structure behind him."

Like Brown, CINCPAC saw reason to doubt that Souvanna could fully live up to any commitments he made in advance. To CINCPAC the minimum acceptable commitments appeared to be pledges by Souvanna 1) to exclude the Pathet Lao from cabinet and sub-cabinet positions in the Defense and Interior Ministries, and 2) to keep a police or other paramilitary security force separate from the Defense Ministry, so that it would be "unaffected by Geneva requirements and in a position to receive United States advice and material assistance." Calling attention to the views he had submitted on 5 January 1962 (see item), CINCPAC said, "I still think we do not have to take the irrevocable step of publicly disowning the anti-Communist elements in Laos and cutting off our aid to them."

(S) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 949, 6 Jan 62; CINCPAC to JCS, 060154Z Jan 62.

6 Jan 62

The Secretary of State provided Ambassador Brown the instructions promised him on 4 January (see item). These instructions, based on the assumption that Boun Oum would probably accept the Co-Chairmen's invitation (see item 3 January 1962), were as follows:

1. Follow up the Co-Chairmen's invitation directly with Boun Oum and Phoumi.

2. Make every effort to persuade Phoumi to accompany Boun Oum, since decisions taken in Phoumi's absence were
not likely to be binding. Phoumi's nonattendance at Geneva would not, however, be the cause for further withholding of the January payment.

3. If Boun Oum went to Geneva, Brown should release the January payment at an "appropriate moment." Brown was authorized to indicate in advance that resumption of payments was contingent upon Boun Oum's accepting the Co-Chairmen's invitation.

4. If Boun Oum refused the invitation, payments would continue to be withheld; subsequent steps would be considered in Washington in the light of Brown's recommendation at that time.

5. Seek to prevent Phoumi and Boun Oum from repeating publicly their adamant stand on the allocation of the Defense and Interior Ministries prior to the Geneva meeting.

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, 596, 6 Jan 62.

6 Jan 62
Ambassador Gavin forwarded to the Secretary of State reports from French and British diplomats concerning happenings at Geneva and comments made by Souvanna in Paris.

M. Manac'h, Director, Asian Affairs, French Foreign Office, in reviewing events in Geneva, declared that Soviet pressure had forced Quinim to agree, contrary to Souvanna's stated wishes (see items 4 and 5 January 1962), to the immediate issuance of invitations to the Princes for a meeting in Geneva. Manac'h, however, believed that a few days of waiting would be useful, since reports from the French Ambassador at Vientiane indicated that Phoumi and Boun Oum were growing more reasonable.

An officer of the British Embassy reported that Quinim had told Co-Chairman MacDonald that Souvanna had agreed to the immediate dispatch of invitations to the other Princes. British sources further declared that Souvanna had been annoyed with Quinim for accepting in the Prince's name this change of plans. Souvanna, however, had later said that he would go to Geneva whenever the other Princes did. Souphanouvong, he added, had expressed willingness to accept an invitation to Geneva. Souvanna hoped, moreover, that the US would persuade Phoumi to accept, for without Phoumi, Boun Oum's presence was useless.

Souvanna, during a conversation with an officer of the British Embassy, had again urged that the US, while withdrawing its logistic, transportation, and MAAG support from the FAR, should continue to pay Phoumi's soldiers.

Finally, Souvanna suggested to the Embassy officer that Phoumi, rather than accept Souvanna's leadership, might simply disappear from the political scene. In that case, the Prince still would be willing to organize a government according to the 19-man formula already proposed.

(c) Msgs, Paris to SecState, 3342, 3343, 6 Jan 62.
6 Jan 62 As instructed by the Secretary of State (see item 2 January 1962), Ambassador Young met with Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman to explain US policy for a peaceful settlement in Laos. Thanat, while minimizing the Thai radio broadcast of 2 January (see item 2 January 1962) as an unofficial press item of little consequence, set forth Thai views: Thailand would continue to accept the concept of a neutral Laos and, with "deep misgivings," a coalition under Souvanna. Thailand did not advocate a military solution to the Lao crisis, but it did believe that there was more than one political option open to the West. Balanced representation in the Lao cabinet was the key to an acceptable neutral coalition since it could prevent the Souvanna-Pathet Lao combination, which the Thai government considered now as firmly fixed, from dominating the country. Conceding the Defense and Interior posts to this combination, or even to Souvanna alone, would mean the end of neutral Laos. Thailand, therefore, felt a deepened apprehension over the "inevitable Communist seizure" of Laos and the probable consequent subversion of its own northeast border area. The Thai must concentrate on saving "their own necks next."

Despite this growing concern for its own security, Thailand had acted with restraint and caution in the Lao situation and had assisted the US in carrying out its policy in Laos. Now that the US supported the idea of a Souvanna-led coalition, however, Thailand must consider all hope of a negotiated settlement in Laos with adequate safeguards for Thai security impossible since the Communists would in "no time" be in full control of Laos. As a result of the recent developments in the Lao situation and the "scant" attention given Thailand by her allies, particularly in SEATO and the UN, a growing sentiment for neutralization or independent action was developing in Thailand. Thai apprehensions would be substantially relieved, however, if the US would: take a stand on SEATO reform and revitalization; set forth the priority and scope of its future support and assistance for Thailand (see item 16 January 1962); and divulge its specific plans regarding the Souvanna coalition. (S) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 957, 7 Jan 62.

7 Jan 62 The Secretary of State, "gratified by the Ambassador's excellent approach to Souvanna" (see item 5 January 1962), instructed Ambassador Gavin concerning the manner of following up this interview. Gavin's objective, the Secretary continued, was to take advantage of Souvanna's presence in Europe, where the "Communist pressures of Xieng Khouang" were lacking, to establish a closer understanding with the Prince.

In future talks, Gavin was to emphasize the strong pressures that the US was exerting on the RLG. These, the Secretary of State pointed out, should give evidence of the US desire to aid Souvanna in forming a truly neutral government. Furthermore, the Ambassador should tell Souvanna that the US realized the necessity of paying the men of the FAR and appreciated the Prince's stated desire to prevent the Viet Minh from using Lao territory as a corridor into South Viet Nam.
Secretary Rusk expressed the hope that, when contacts among the Lao factions were renewed at Geneva, Souvanna would display reasonableness and understanding "in order to help Boun Oum and Phoumi get past this very difficult phase of the negotiations." The Secretary believed, however, that it was preferable for Souvanna to remain in Paris until Boun Oum had journeyed to Geneva.

(C) Msg, SecState to Paris, 3752, 7 Jan 62.

In accordance with instructions that he present a personal message from Assistant Secretary Harriman, Sullivan saw Pushkin at Geneva and informed him that: 1) US attempts to force Boun Oum and Phoumi into sincere negotiations might require the withholding of aid and that, in fact, as "Pushkin has probably noticed," the January financial subsidy had not been deposited and would not be until Boun Oum agreed to meet the other Princes in Geneva; 2) since such pressure would weaken the RLG vis-a-vis the Pathet Lao, "we will need assurances from Pushkin that the Soviets will see to it that the PL do not undertake military action against PAR positions"; 3) however, if the Pathet Lao should nevertheless launch an unprovoked and large-scale attack, US aid to the RLG would be prompt and on the scale needed for a successful defense.

Pushkin's reaction to what Sullivan described as "an almost unprecedented exposure to the Soviets of our entire policy position," was mixed. Seizing on the statement that the United States would back the RLG against a PL attack, he argued that this invalidated the US position, since the RLG would now have a "license" to provoke such an attack. However, Pushkin did mention that the Soviets had halted PL military action in the past and that he felt the present PL policy of standing on the defensive was entirely correct. The conversation ended with Pushkin's assurances that Sullivan's message would be transmitted to Moscow precisely as rendered.

Sullivan concluded, as did MacDonald, whom he had been empowered to inform of the conversation, that the Soviets favored a defensive posture by the PL and that Pushkin's remarks on this score constituted "a tentative assurance that no attacks will be launched."

(S) Mags, SecState to Geneva, FECON 685, 6 Jan 62; Geneva to SecState, CONPS 1011, 7 Jan 62.

Ambassador Brown submitted to the Secretary of State two further ideas developed during his review with the Country Team of all possible ways of breaking the deadlock in negotiations for a coalition government in Laos (see item 5 January 1962). The second of these he expressed briefly. "We might as last resort try to pressure Souvanna and Souphanouvong to accept King as Prime Minister, in which case Phoumi has said he would agree to Souvanna's holding Defense."

The first idea, admittedly leading only to an interim arrangement, required greater explanation. Basically, it elaborated upon a thought expressed by Souvanna in November 1961, when he had looked forward to "establishing his provisional government in Luang Prabang, but with Vientiane and Khang Khai continuing as administrative centers of government with a Vice
Premier in each place." Brown listed the essential features as follows:

1) Provisional coalition government under Souvanna as Prime Minister would be set up in Luang Prabang with Souvanna as Defense Minister and Pheng Phongsavan as Interior Minister. Government composition would be along lines suggested by Souvanna at Vientiane. Cabinet ministers, at least those from center group, would also establish their seats of office in Luang Prabang.

2) Phoumi and Souphanouvong would remain in Vientiane and Khang Khay respectively, each designated Deputy Prime Minister.

3) Defense and Interior Ministers in Luang Prabang would each have two deputies, one in Vientiane and one in Khang Khay. Vientiane deputy ministers could be Phoumi and Leuan respectively, with Khang Khay deputies to be chosen by PL.

4) Existing administrative structures controlled from Vientiane and Khang Khay would initially be left provisionally in place as provided in Zurich agreement.

5) Other important ministries in Luang Prabang could also have deputy ministers (secretaries of state) in Vientiane and Khang Khay answerable in first instance to Deputy Prime Ministers in these two cities.

6) All US and other aid would be channeled through central government at Luang Prabang.

Brown recognized that the scheme "bristles with practical difficulties" and might even result in permanent partition of Laos. Still it seemed to him to offer certain advantages. It would avoid the disintegration of the RLG and FAR that might result from the application of severe US sanctions against Phoumi over an extended period. There was reason to believe the arrangement would be negotiable. If successful, it would produce a single legal government that could promptly send a delegation to Geneva with full authority to issue the declaration of Laotian neutrality and sign the Geneva agreement. The central government in Luang Prabang, despite its provisional character, could begin immediately to integrate the country, "possibly starting with consolidation of various public services and moving without too much delay into unification [of] armed forces and police and demobilization of excess. Problem of unifying Laos would thus be removed from battlefield and three prince slugging match to practical discussions among politicians and technicians." Finally, the arrangement would make it possible, if Phoumi and Souvanna proved willing, for the two "to work together over a period to develop Souvanna's political party, and perhaps develop a real alliance against the PL."
Ambassador Brown described the objective of this policy as "promotion of phased integration of [the] country by patient negotiations among Lao which might even continue for years." It would be compatible with the "Lao penchant for inexact politics based primarily on personal relationships."

(S) Mag, Vientiane to SecState, 960, 9 Jan 62.

9 Jan 62

Ambassador Gavin informed the Secretary of State of various comments made by Souvanna to French and British officials in Paris. The Prince declared that, since Phoumi obviously sought to avoid a meeting of the three Princes, he had decided to give the US time in which to exert pressure on Phoumi. Souvanna, however, had heard reports from the "Pentagon" were offering advice to the HLG different from that given by the Department of State. The UK Ambassador replied that accounts of differences in US policy regarding Laos were greatly exaggerated and counseled Souvanna to be patient.

Souvanna, however, appeared concerned that the US might fail, either because of these internal differences or because of actions by Thailand and South Viet Nam, to convince Phoumi that he should cooperate. The Prince noted that he had stressed to Gavin the need for the US to control its Asian allies. According to British diplomats, Souvanna seemed most concerned about Thailand's supporting Phoumi and interpreted a recent rise in the value of the ldp as evidence that such support was indeed being given. A British Embassy officer, however, reassured him that the ldp, which had declined too far in value, was merely stabilizing itself.

Souvanna also expressed concern that South Viet Nam and Thailand might withdraw from the Geneva Conference. The UK Ambassador responded to the Prince's statement by suggesting that the Co-Chairmen go to Laos to assist in the stalled negotiations, thus prolonging the Conference. Souvanna "took to the idea," suggesting that King Savang might regard it as more proper for the kingdom's problems to be discussed in Laos than at Geneva.

The British raised with Souvanna the subject of the demobilization of the Pathet Lao. The Prince indicated that he had discussed the problem, which he did not consider insuperable, with Souphanouvong and other leaders of the Pathet Lao. They had agreed to demobilize if Phoumi did likewise and if early elections were held. Although Souvanna at one time assured the UK Ambassador that he would not hold elections while the factions "had guns in their hands," he later spoke of holding elections after a "partial demobilization."

Souvanna thereupon expressed his belief that Communist China not only agreed with Russia regarding Laos but also needed peace because of internal problems. He contended that, under such circumstances, he could gain for the kingdom ten years of stability, after which Laos would be safe from Communism. Not only could he "play off" China against Russia, he also could "short-circuit" North Viet Nam by appealing directly to either of the other two Communist powers. Souvanna also gave categorical assurance
that he would call upon the ICC to halt Viet Minh infiltration through Laos into South Viet Nam.

In conversations with the French, Souvanna "remained a little fuzzy" regarding demobilization and the timing of elections. Nevertheless, he did suggest that the factions be represented in a 15,000-man unified Army in proportion to the number of cabinet portfolios held by each group. He again expressed concern (see item 6 January 1962) that Boun Om would not bring Phoumi to Geneva. He dismissed questions regarding ICC participation in the unification of the factional armies on the ground that the integration of forces was a domestic matter. He also spurned Sihanouk's suggestion that the Princes meet in Cambodia.

Finally, Souvanna repeated his earlier statements (see items 4 and 5 January 1962) about Soviet aid and admitted receiving assistance from North Viet Nam. He denied, however, that either the Soviets or Communist Chinese were represented at Xieng Khouang, but he did not state his future plans regarding these nations.

9 Jan 62

In accordance with suggestions by the US, UK, and French delegations at Geneva, a French representative in Paris agreed to propose the following to Souvanna on 9 January: 1) that one of his first acts upon becoming Prime Minister of a government of national union should be the issuance of a cease-fire proclamation which would record his intention of unifying the Laotian armed forces, provide against political reprisals, and, "hopefully," refer to the RLG's intention of keeping the Conference Co-Chairmen informed of the progress made in integrating the armed forces; 2) that he make no direct reference to SEATO in the neutrality declaration; and 3) that he begin, with French assistance, drafting the Lao neutrality declaration while in Paris.

It was reported that Souvanna was willing to consider a cease-fire proclamation but was non-committal regarding the contents. Although at first utterly opposed to the ICC having integration of the armed forces as one of its functions, he later admitted that integration was a "matter of concern" for the ICC. He agreed to omit a reference to SEATO. No discussion of the neutrality declaration took place.

9 Jan 62

Ambassador Young delivered an informal memorandum to Thai Prime Minister Sarit summarizing the US position on Laos. For his part, Sarit seemed to disapprove a Geneva meeting of the three Princes and any surrender of the Interior and Defense posts to Souvanna. He did not, however, indicate whether he would or would not try to prevent either action. Sarit remarked that he had never really agreed with US policy on Laos but had never interfered in the past. Fatalistically, he concluded the discussion
on Laos by telling the Ambassador to "go ahead and let things deteriorate in your own way."

Ambassador Young commented that this discussion had once again highlighted the basic difference of opinion regarding Souvanna that existed between Thailand and the US. Sarit reiterated the Thai belief that erection of a Souvanna government would mean surrender of Laos to the Communists. Thailand would then be subject to Communist infiltration across a long frontier, "just as Laos and Viet Nam have been." Sarit wished to know what plans the United States had for retrieving the situation if it became clear that the Souvanna solution was leading to a Communist take-over of Laos. Further, should the Communists come to dominate Laos, what US support would be available to Thailand in resisting the inevitable infiltration?

(S) Msgs, Bangkok to SecState, 969, 970, 9 Jan 62.

9 Jan 62
In reply to a request from the JCS for specific information regarding the capabilities of the opposing forces in Laos, urgently needed for the preparation of a SNIE, CINCPAC forwarded a message he had received from CHMAAG Laos, estimating that North Vietnamese troops in Laos consisted of 2 headquarters, 5 to 6 infantry battalions, and 2 infantry companies, with a total strength of 3,000 to 4,000, plus an additional 2,400 advisors (including gunners and radar operators) with Pathet Lao and Kong Le units. He estimated that since the end of the rainy season in September 1961 an average of 195 tons of supplies per week had been flown into Laos from North Viet Nam, plus an additional total of at least 2200 tons trucked over Route 7 from 15 November to 15 January and an indeterminable amount over Routes 8 and 12. Communist forces, according to Chief MAAG, no longer possessed the strength to launch a series of successful attacks either simultaneously or in rapid sequence nor the mobility to shift forces rapidly so as to mass overwhelming superiority at several strategic areas in sequence. The enemy did have the capability, however, of rapid and overwhelming reinforcement from across the North Viet Nam border with minimum danger of detection in areas where it might choose to attack.

CINCPAC referred the JCS to his message of 5 January (see item) and in reply to the specific questions of the JCS stated that of the enemy forces estimated in CHMAAG's message, 5 artillery/mortar batteries and 3 AA batteries were believed composed principally of North Vietnamese in addition to part of an engineer battalion; that since the cease-fire the enemy's consumption of supplies had about equaled the amount received, i.e., the 30-day stockpile estimated at the time of the cease-fire was being maintained; that if hostilities were resumed, the Meo alone could not stop the supply support of the Pathet Lao-Kong Le forces, but that it was extremely vulnerable to air attack; that Meo activities should be recognized for what they were--hit and run blows that were disruptive only and mostly concentrated in the Plane des Jarres area--and should not be overestimated, but nevertheless their capabilities had not been fully exploited; that he agreed with the assessment of enemy capabilities in the message from CHMAAG and concurred in the latter's view that "time-
is on our side," but that the balance could be changed by North Vietnamese intervention so that "we must be ready and willing to fight . . . . , if all other measures fail."

(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, JCS 2821, 062057Z Jan 62; (TS) Msg, CHMAAG Laos to CINCPAC, 071730Z Jan 62 (readdressed to JCS, 092117Z); (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 092052Z Jan 62.

9 Jan 62

In response to a request of the Department of the Army, the US Army Attaché (USARMA) in Vientiane submitted his estimate of the military capability of the opposing forces in Laos. Speaking with the concurrence of CHMAAG Laos, USARMA stated that FAR morale and combat effectiveness had improved markedly since the cease-fire. The relatively quiet conditions had enabled the FAR to devote its time effectively to training for the first time. The expansion of the MAAG into lower echelons of the FAR had been particularly effective in instilling some spirit into the Lao troops, and the various formal training courses in leadership and technical skills were turning out personnel that were badly needed. Successful small unit operations had shown increased FAR effectiveness and had given FAR officers and men some confidence in their own abilities. Even in those operations that did not succeed, the FAR had demonstrated an ability to regroup, reorganize, and continue operations with an "aggressive-offensive" attitude. A new FAR desire to take the offensive had, in fact, given CHMAAG "no end of difficulty" in his attempts to dissuade the Lao from committing obvious cease-fire violations. Coupling all these gains in FAR effectiveness with the improvements made since the cease-fire in the status of FAR equipment and weapons, USARMA concluded that, despite similar efforts on the part of the enemy, the FAR had improved more than its opposition.

There was not enough evidence to judge the exact nature and intensity of the enemy programs, but Bloc equipment had undoubtedly continued to flow into enemy territory—40 to 50 armored cars had recently appeared on the Plaine des Jarres—and some troops had received artillery training in North Viet Nam. However, difficulties in transportation and the very thinness of enemy ranks made it unlikely that any substantial number of the approximately one-third of the enemy who were untrained recruits had left Laos for extensive training. There were, moreover, indications that enemy morale was no better than fair. Neo harassments, poor living conditions, RLG psychological warfare, disenchantment with Communist ideology, and, among the neutralist troops, impatience for a political settlement; these among others were factors that contributed to sagging morale and frictions between the Kong Le and Pathet Lao units.

USARMA then estimated FAR and RLG capabilities in specific military and political situations, as follows:

1. If the enemy was not further reinforced by Viet Minh cadres and if MAAG advisers remained with FAR units, the FAR could hold its ground against the enemy, except possibly in the Thakhek area.
2. The FAR did not yet have the ability to interdict Routes 8, 9, and 12—three principal east-west routes in the Laotian panhandle—as it now did Route 7 in the Plaines des Jarres. If present guerrilla operations were expanded, however, the FAR might in time, with the assistance of SVN troops, be able to successfully extend its operations along these roads.

3. If the special security forces of Colonel Siho remained in the Vientiane area, the RLG had little to fear from coup attempts or sabotage.

4. Because the FAR felt that it was improving with time and US advice, the RLG led by Phoumi could survive prolonged, inconclusive combat. Furthermore, the longer the present state of truce continued, the better the FAR would become. Additionally, the Lao people were losing their confidence in Souvanna as he demonstrated more and more his close association with Souphanouvong. The RLG would probably, therefore, gain political support as well as military strength as time passed.

5. It was not probable that either the FAR or the enemy could mount a surprise military campaign without the other gaining prior knowledge; the FAR might, however, have a chance of achieving surprise if it conducted an operation from southern Laos.

USARMA believed, in short, that the FAR-Keo forces had definitely improved vis-a-vis their opposition. They could hold the enemy, as the enemy was presently constituted, but they could not successfully engage an enemy reinforced by additional Communist Bloc troops.

(S) Msg, USARMA Vientiane to DA, DA IN 191004, 9 Jan 62.

10 Jan 62 During a luncheon given for Souvanna by Ambassador Gavin, the Prince, after referring to the RLG's defiance of US economic pressures, remarked that the US should remember to exert appropriate pressures on Thailand and South Vietnam. He then repeated his frequently stated advice that the US should continue to pay the FAR.

Secretary Rusk's hopes that Souvanna would be sympathetic toward Boun Om and Phoumi during any Geneva meeting (see item 7 January 1962) were dashed. When Gavin offered this suggestion, Souvanna replied with a bitter recital of Boun Om's discourtesy at Vientiane and a lengthy commentary on Boun Om's and Phoumi's love of ostentation.

After Gavin had indicated that the US was prepared to discuss the aid that would be given a Souvanna government, the Prince expressed interest and enumerated such basic needs as schools and hospitals. Souvanna urged that, wherever possible, US aid should be in the form of a specific project. He preferred this course to the turning over of funds, with the attendant danger of "diversion by Lao and Americans." He also noted that he had asked North Viet Nam for specialists who would study the possible resettlement of the Montagnards.
The Prince stated that he had warned Kong Le and the Pathet Lao that, if they violated the cease-fire, he would refuse to return to Laos. The MAAG, he hoped, would stop "inciting the Meo" to attack villages in the Xieng Khouang area. The populace, he continued, had grown disenchanted with the Pathet Lao, and at least one PL battalion had sought to defect to him. To exploit popular sentiments, Souvanna, to the extent allowed by limited funds, had dispatched representatives to take over local administration and thus extend his influence.

When asked about elections, the Prince merely declared that no ballots should be cast while the factions retained their arms. In any free election, he declared, he could not fail to win, since 80 per cent of the citizenry supported him.

Souvanna dismissed as RLG propaganda reports that Chinese and Viet Minh troops were present in Laos. The Prince further claimed that, while in Vientiane, he had learned that Phoumi was preparing to attack Tha Thom, Muong Sai, and along Highway 12. This information, he continued, had been forwarded to the ICC. The Prince added that, after his departure from Vientiane, the RLG had made many arrests, presumably among his followers.

In reply to questions about Sino-Soviet differences, Souvanna said that he was convinced that both nations desired a truly neutral Laos. He would, however, be willing to "play the card of Sino-Soviet rivalry in the Far East" in order to maintain the independence of the kingdom.

(S) Msg, Paris to SecState, 3402, 10 Jan 62.

10 Jan 62 At the conclusion of an extended exchange of messages among the State Department, the US Geneva delegation, and the US Embassy at Vientiane, the Department described as "non-negotiable" the proposals that Ambassador Brown had made on 28 December 1961 concerning an enlarged role for the ICC in the integration of the Laotian armed forces. Discussions between the US Geneva delegation and Quinnin indicated that Souvanna would object to certain of the proposals, while the permanent status that the proposals tacitly assigned to the ICC would, so the US Geneva delegation had stated, be resisted by the Communist states and by India and Canada as well.

The State Department followed with a specific proposal which would deal with the ICC question and would, hopefully, be included in the neutrality declaration to be signed by the Laotian government:

The Government of Laos undertakes, with such assistance from the International Control Commission as the Government of Laos may deem necessary, to bring about the unification of the various armed forces in Laos into a single national army and the demobilization of all forces in excess of the requirements of this national army in order that the continued existence of such excess forces shall not constitute a threat to the maintenance of the cease-fire.
Should this be unacceptable, reference to the ICC's function would be eliminated, although the State Department voiced the hope that Souvanna would concur in the US interpretation that the ICC might nevertheless assist as requested.

(C) Msgs, Vientiane to SecState, 896, 28 Dec 61; Geneva to SecState, CONFE 987, 29 Dec 61; SecState to Geneva, FECON 694, 10 Jan 62.

10 Jan 62
The UK Foreign Office defined as "inappropriate" the proposal of 9 January (see item) concerning the drafting of a RLG neutrality declaration in Paris with French assistance, and suggested instead that the US, UK, and French delegations at Geneva handle the matter jointly, on the basis of the foreign policy sections of the Zurich communique (see item 22 June 1961). The US delegation was authorized by the State Department to participate on this basis.

(Canadian representatives joined the drafting group on 12 January.)

(C) Msgs, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1021, 10 Jan 62; SecState to Geneva, FECON 694, 10 Jan 62; (S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1032, 12 Jan 62.

10 Jan 62
Ambassador Young reported to the Secretary of State on the growing pessimism and disappointment in Thailand over the US course of action in Laos. Thai military leaders had become extremely critical regarding US treatment of Phoumi and the failure of the US to consult with its major ally in SEA on the Laos problem. The Ambassador quoted the Chief of Staff, Supreme Command, an outspoken friend of the US, as urging Young to "talk some sense to the US Government"; otherwise Thailand would have to take a new look at its pro-Western policy.

The Ambassador also quoted a Thai editorial critical of US policy in Laos which ended: "Thailand, on the other hand, would prefer Laos partitioned to having pro-Communist coalition government or coalition government dominated by pro-Communist elements."

(C) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 974, 10 Jan 62.

10 Jan 62
Continuing the development of US policy for furnishing aid to a future neutral government of Laos (see item 22 December 1961), the Secretary of State forwarded draft guidance for military assistance planning to the Embassy in Vientiane. According to the Secretary, US relations with a Souvanna regime would be radically different from relations with past and present Lao governments; this difference would be particularly marked in the area of military assistance. The proposed Geneva Agreement and past US policy would "limit drastically" the US role in Lao military affairs. Any US action that seemed to be an attempt to maintain the present US position in Laos would make Souvanna suspicious, would bring on a strong Pathet Lao reaction, and would thereby jeopardize the political and economic programs which, the Secretary emphasized, would be the principal US efforts to ensure the neutrality and independence of the new government.

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Such military assistance as might be furnished at the RLG's request would have to harmonize with these political and economic programs.

The Secretary believed that, since large quantities of military equipment were already in Laos, the Souvanna government would initially need little more than "force maintenance material" in the way of military assistance. Even for this limited assistance, however, a new US-Lao agreement would have to be negotiated if the Geneva Agreement prohibited US civilian military advisors in Laos. If the US was thereby barred from inspecting the uses to which its assistance funds and equipment were put, then military assistance could be furnished only by Presidential waiver under Section 614 of the Foreign Assistance Act [Public Law 87-195, 87th Congress, S.1983, 4 September 1961. Section 614 empowered the President to expend certain funds for military assistance "without regard to the requirements of the Act."]

Another problem the US would encounter in dealing with the Souvanna government would be the retrieving of military equipment that the US and RLG considered surplus to the needs of the FAR. The RLG was obligated by the terms of acquisition to consult the US in the disposal of surplus military assistance equipment, but the Secretary anticipated that the subject would be a difficult one to broach at the outset of negotiations. He noted that the US would probably desire to turn some items of surplus equipment over to the Lao police forces and the ICC.

Looking forward to the first meeting of US representatives with Souvanna following formation of his government, the Secretary indicated that it would be important to impress Souvanna clearly on that occasion with the understanding that the US had no desire to maintain its previous dominant role in Lao military affairs. The US wished only to do what Souvanna thought would assist him in following a neutral and independent policy. The US might assure Souvanna initially, for instance, that the MAAG would be withdrawn in accordance with the Geneva Agreement. US representatives should take no initiative in offering military assistance, but at the same time, they should avoid any implication that the US would deny assistance to the FAR. If Souvanna asked what the US was prepared to do, he should be told that the US believed the RLG would need only "force maintenance material" in the immediate future and that, at any rate, the first step toward the resumption of US assistance should be joint RLG-US discussions to determine the exact nature of the assistance needed by the RLG and the legal provisions for it, and to designate surplus equipment and decide its disposition.

(S) Msg, SecState to Vientiane, CA-782, 10 Jan 62.

10 Jan 62

Ambassador Brown received word that Boun Om was sending a letter accepting the invitation of the Co-Chairmen to attend a meeting of the three Princes in Geneva, and that Phoumi was to be a member of the RLG delegation. Text of the letter was to be released the following day.
Although there was a hopeful aspect to the fact that the three Princes were now scheduled to meet at Geneva, Ambassador Brown warned that Phoumi's current attitude was one of "determination to squeeze Souvanna out of the picture" and that a showdown with him might still become necessary. The Ambassador had heard that Boun Oum planned to declare at Geneva that Souvanna had failed in his mission to form a cabinet and that the RLG no longer considered him Premier-designate. Further, it was understood that Phoumi intended to convene the National Congress to vote full powers to the King. By the time Boun Oum made his projected declaration, Phoumi hoped to have in hand a letter from the King summoning the three Princes to Luang Prabang. The next step in Phoumi's scheme was to have the King assume active direction of a government.

(COD) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 969, 10 Jan 62; (S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 965, 10 Jan 62.

11 Jan 62 Special National Intelligence Estimate 58-62 evaluated the relative military capabilities of opposing forces in Laos. Reflecting the earlier reports of CHMAG Laos, USARMA Vientiane, and CINCPAC (see items 63, 69, 2, 5, and 9 January 1962) the SNIE reported that both government and antigovernment forces had increased their capabilities during the cease-fire, but that the government forces had improved more than their foes.

The government forces had been defeated and demoralized and were near collapse in May 1961. Since then, however, they had grown to a strength of 71,500 men: 51,500 regular army, 11,000 auto defense, and 9,000 Meo guerrillas. They were much better trained and equipped than they had been at the time of the cease-fire, and they had acquired some self-confidence. By reason of extensive technical, logistical, and communications support from US, Thai, and Filipino personnel, moreover, they probably had gained an important advantage over the enemy in supply and mobility. Regular army units had been "stiffened" in selective instances by US trainers, and the Meo tribesmen had become an effective guerrilla force in the enemy rear.

The antigovernment forces had also been strengthened. Their size had increased from 20,000 to 34,000: 19,000 Pathet Lao, 6,000 Kong Le, 4,000 Kham Ouane, 1,600 Viet Minh cadres, and 3,500 Viet Minh combat troops. The training facilities for antigovernment forces were limited, however, and many of the new troops, particularly those in Kong Le and Kham Ouane forces, were probably inadequately trained. In addition, there was evidence of some friction between the Kong Le and Kham Ouane forces on the one hand and Pathet Lao on the other because of inequities in the distribution of supplies and jealousy regarding command responsibilities. The antigovernment forces had received considerable additional equipment from the Communist Bloc, most notably 40 to 50 light amphibious tanks, suitable for defending the Plaine des Jarres and for limited use elsewhere.
Complicating any assessment of the over-all capability of either side was the wide variation in the effectiveness of different units on the same side; each force had its poor and elite units. The critical weaknesses of the government forces had been lack of motivation, unstable morale, and poor leadership. Whether or not these weaknesses had been successfully remedied by training programs and recent small-scale military successes was not yet known; these forces had not yet undergone the strain of serious combat. In past times of quiet or success their morale had appeared to be high, only to dissolve in the face of adversity. Poor morale was not a critical weakness among the antigovernment forces. The Pathet Lao had maintained discipline and relatively good effectiveness for a number of years, through successes and failures. Their morale probably remained good, as probably did the morale and effectiveness of the Viet Minh units. The Kong Le and Kham Ouane forces, however, maintained only "spotty" morale; probably only a few of these units would perform well.

Yet another factor in estimating effectiveness, this one currently working to the advantage of the government forces, was the deployment and mission of forces. The government forces, with greatly reduced territory to control, could concentrate their strength, maintain some reserves, and establish short and reasonably dependable lines of communication. The antigovernment forces, on the other hand, in seeking to control large and widely separated areas in Laos, had increased their logistical problems, lessened their mobility, and diffused their strength. In their rear areas, they had poor lines of lateral communication, some of which were harassed by the Meo guerrillas.

A final consideration advanced by the SNIE was that the Laotian terrain and other difficulties in conducting conventional military operations in Laos would make it relatively easy for either side to deny control of territory to the other.

Bearing all of the above factors in mind and assuming that there would be no change in the levels of aid and assistance given the two sides by their respective sponsors, the SNIE then hypothesized as follows:

1. If the antigovernment forces concentrated an attack upon an important government stronghold, including "almost any one of the major towns along the Mekong," they could probably capture their objective, but they could not hold it against a determined government counterattack.

2. Similarly, the government forces could make initial gains in an offensive on the Tha Thom-Khounang perimeter or in southern Laos. If the Pathet Lao and Kong Le troops were defeated by a sustained government attack, they would quickly revert to guerrilla tactics and continue to contest government authority in widespread areas. In this event, the government forces could not establish firm control of these areas. Specifically, the government would not be able to consolidate its hold on the Plain of Jars, the Nhommarath-Mahaxay area, or the Tchepone area.
On balance, the SNIE concluded, the government forces would have a slight edge if fighting were resumed on a pattern comparable to that prior to the cease-fire, intensified only by the strengthening of both sides. Furthermore, this edge would increase as time went on if the military situation remained quiet and if the recent rates of improvement of the two sides continued. The antigovernment forces continued, however, to have the greater guerrilla warfare capability. Additionally, if at any time the government forces threatened areas considered "critical" by the Communists, the antigovernment forces would be quickly and effectively reinforced from North Vietnam in whatever degree necessary to the protection of the threatened area.

(See item 31 January 1962 for a significant modification of the above conclusions.)

(S) SNIE 58-62, 11 Jan 62.

11 Jan 62
CHMAAG Laos reported to CINCPAC that the FAR-MAAG program to deactivate approximately 8,000 FAR troops (see item 2 December 1961) would probably be cast aside by Phoumi because of the US campaign to force him to cooperate in negotiations for a coalition government. CHMAAG related that during December 1961 the Ministry of Defense had designated certain FAR units for deactivation, without announcing an effective date. CHMAAG felt that more recently Phoumi had begun to consider continuing his resistance even if US aid was withdrawn, by returning his soldiers, still armed, to their villages where they would continue to fight for him until such time as he could resume full support for them. Accordingly, CHMAAG expected that Phoumi would in the future pay only lip service to the deactivation plan; that is, that Phoumi would remove units from the FAR force structure, and therefore from MAP support, but would continue them in existence, paying them from "other sources" and supplying them from MAP stocks. The Ministry of Defense had, in fact, already stated that the deactivated troops would continue to draw pay. CHMAAG assured CINCPAC that he would continue to exert every effort to convince Phoumi that the FAR should institute a "true reduction in force" to MAP-approved levels, but he observed that success was not probable while the current US-RLG friction continued.

(S) Msg, CHMAAG Laos to CINCPAC, 111305Z Jan 62.

11 Jan 62
Ambassador Gavin passed on to the Secretary of State information received by Manac'h from an intelligence source. According to this French report, Phoumi's forces were preparing to attack Mahaxay in central Laos and Tchepone to the south. The French also claimed that the RLG was considering acts of violence against Americans, if the US pressure on Phoumi were maintained. Arrests of neutralists in Vientiane had already begun, and the population was nervous.

(S) Msg, Paris to SecState, 3417, 11 Jan 62.

11, 13 Jan 62
CHMAAG Laos recommended that on 11 January that they be authorized to arm KHA resistance forces from US stocks in Thailand controlled by the Department of Defense, and that the costs of creating such a force be counted as part of
the program of supporting the Meo. The US officials reported that Phoumi had again approved the concept of creating a Kha resistance movement; the Lao leader claimed, however, that he would be unable to provide equipment from FAR stocks. The news of the arming of the first 100-man Kha unit by the MAAG (see item 22 December 1961) had already spread among the Kha villagers, CHMAAG reported further, and the MAAG already had special forces teams ready to train more Kha. This momentum should not be lost. Kha operations could help to secure important areas in southern Laos. The Laos Country Team approved the creation of a Kha resistance program; only approval from Washington was lacking.

On 13 January, the Department of Defense informed that up to 300 Kha tribemen could be armed in the manner recommended, for the purpose of interdicting Viet Cong trails into South Vietnam. The use of up to one million kip and the drawing of necessary arms from US stockpiles in Thailand were also approved. (See item 25 January 1962.)

According to the J-3 Southeast Asia Situation Report of this date, "excellent relationships" were reported by CHMAAG Laos to be prevailing between US Special Forces advisors and FAR units, with the FAR accepting advisors down to company and platoon levels in some cases. The only exception was in the 5th Military Region, the headquarters of which were at Vientiane, where relations between the local MAAG advisor and the regional commander had been "somewhat stymied" by news that all US military aid had been stopped.

There had been no significant change in military activity, according to the Situation Report, except for stiffening enemy opposition in the Muong Sai area, which had necessitated the dispatch of two companies to reinforce the FAR units in that area.

Information provided by CHMAAG a week later disclosed that this action near Muong Sai, a Pathet Lao stronghold and supply depot, had been on a larger scale than any other for several months past, and that it had resulted in a serious setback for the FAR. Sweeping up the Nam Beng Valley, elements of Group Mobile 11 (including the 3rd Infantry Battalion and the 15th Volunteer Battalion) encountered stiff enemy resistance on 7-8 January about 15 miles from Muong Sai. An enemy counterattack by an estimated three battalions (two Pathet Lao and one North Vietnamese), totalling about 1,000 men, dispersed the FAR units and forced them to withdraw hastily towards the Mekong River, about 80 miles in a straight-line distance from Muong Sai. By 14 January the PAR troops had crossed the Mekong into Sayaboury province, where the two battalions spent the remainder of the month being reorganized and refitted.

(TS-NOFORN) J-3, Southeast Asia Sitreps #2-62, 11 Jan #3-62, 18 Jan, #4-62, 25 Jan 62; (S-NOFORN) Msg, CHMAAG Laos
12 Jan 62 The US January cash grant to the RLG was deposited. Suspension of the sale of foreign exchange by the Laotian National Bank remained in effect.

12 Jan 62 M. Manac'h of the French Foreign Office and Souvanna exchanged views regarding various aspects of the Zurich communique (see item 22 June 1961). The principal subject discussed was the integration of the factional armies, but the prohibition of reprisals and the statement on alliances to be included in the neutrality declaration also were mentioned. Souvanna, after observing that the question of alliances was "virtually recognized," raised no objections to French views concerning the prohibition of reprisals and the formation of a unified Army. The Prince seemed more positive than he had been in his last conversation with Manac'h (see item 9 January 1962).

Souvanna stated that demobilization should take place before elections were held, since the presence of factional armed forces would stifle the democratic process. Approximately six to seven months would elapse between the installation of the coalition and the election of a government to succeed it. During this interval three Secretaries of State for Defense, one from each contending faction, would supervise the process of demobilization. The cadre of the unified Army would be selected from among the Lao career soldiers, while existing laws requiring military service by the citizenry could fill the ranks of the reconstituted force. Souvanna, Manac'h believed, was aware of the economic and social problems that would arise from the demobilization of the factional armies.

Since Souvanna desired that the new Army "be what it was before the beginning of the present troubles so Laos would not again fall under military dictatorship," the kingdom also would require the services of a gendarmerie and a police force. The gendarmerie would be responsible for military security and would guarantee the loyalty of the Army. The police force, composed of civilians and under control of the Minister of Interior, would serve local civilian authority by, among other things, guarding against subversion.

Souvanna, when questioned about French instructors for the unified Army, stated that it would be premature to discuss the matter at this time. He did, however, agree to give the French ample time to plan for such activity. The Prince seemed confident that there would be no difficulty in negotiating the type of Lao-French agreement called for in the Geneva Protocol.

Souvanna, after listening as Manac'h likened North and South Viet Nam to the two Germanies, refused to commit himself regarding the recognition of North Viet Nam. Manac'h believed that this problem could best be dealt with at Geneva.

(S) Mags, Paris to SecState, 3445, 13 Jan 62; 3456, 15 Jan 62.
12 Jan 62 After being informed by MacDonald that he and Co-Chairman Pushkin had discussed the idea of holding a plenary session of the Geneva Conference with the three Princes present, Sullivan expressed strong US opposition to this idea, arguing that a public forum might simply lead to propaganda speeches by the Princes. "After some fairly blunt exchanges," Sullivan and MacDonald worked out a plan, of which MacDonald was to inform Pushkin, for ensuring that the forthcoming meetings of the Princes were conducted with a minimum of public friction and opportunities for propaganda and that time would be available for the US delegation to exert pressure on Boun Oum and Phoumi, for the Co-Chairmen to consult on procedural matters, and for Assistant Secretary Harriman (arriving in Geneva on 14 January) to meet with Pushkin. (C) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1034, 12 Jan 62.

12 Jan 62 Ambassador Young delivered a letter to Prime Minister Sarit, an authorized, full-scale exposition of US policy on Laos. The letter stated that the US continued to seek a stable, effective, and independent government in Laos while insisting upon adequate safeguards for the interests of the Free World, including Thailand. In this connection Ambassador Young was authorized to reiterate his government's position as conveyed to Sarit on 3 July 1961. The US wish to keep negotiations on Laos open until a peaceful solution was reached. At the same time the US was determined to avoid unacceptable concessions and would not approve any arrangement that would facilitate the Communist domination of Laos. The Ambassador was authorized to repeat to Sarit the US position on the composition of a neutral Lao government as outlined in the memorandum of 5 September 1961 (see item).

The US also wanted to assure Thailand that it had never lessened its concern for the problems of SEA and was determined to meet its obligations in that area, as evidenced by its all-out effort in South Viet Nam and increasing military assistance to Thailand. Because Thailand was one of its best friends and closest allies in SEA, the US had given Thailand binding assurances. "Thailand can continue to count on our support under these commitments," the letter continued. In pursuing its present course of action in Laos as long as it saw reasonable chance for achieving an acceptable peaceful settlement, the US intended to maintain the friendship of such a valuable ally as Thailand. The US would continue to emphasize the immediate and long-range security interests of Thailand as defined by the Thai Government.

The US did not believe that the present unstable situation in Laos could continue indefinitely; should hostilities break out, the present government would be incapable of withstanding a major Communist offensive. Thus, the current situation would probably deteriorate in a way directly harmful to Thailand and SEA unless prompt political measures were taken. In particular, the US viewed with concern the threat of Communist infiltration of South Viet Nam and Thailand through Laos. The sooner an effective independent government could be established in Laos and a written promise could be extracted from the USSR respecting
that independent government and its territory, the
greater would be the chance for South Viet Nam, with
considerable outside aid, to control its Lao frontier
and Thailand its northern borders.

The US was satisfied that considerable headway had
been made at Geneva in piecing together an acceptable
"package" for peaceful settlement. One key to an
acceptable political settlement was the establishment
within the national coalition of a non-Communist group
including General Phoumi in a high civilian post. Another
key was to deny sensitive positions in significant
ministries to the Communists. The US had agreed to accept
Souvanna as Prime Minister if he lived up to certain
conditions, and from available evidence he seemed to be
trying to satisfy those conditions. If Phoumi insisted
on retaining either the Defense or Interior post, however,
the other would have to go to the Pathet Lao, a situation
similar to both Thailand and the US. Moreover, a division
of these posts between Phoumi and the Pathet Lao would
result in an unstable government, increasing the capabili­
ties of the Communists for penetrating and subverting
other areas of SEA. The US believed that very positive
advantages had been gained at Geneva for the security of
SEA, in particular the Soviet guarantee of Lao neutrality.
This and other advantages could be lost, however, "by
wrong tactics and untimely actions regarding Laos."

(S) Msgs, SecState to Bangkok, 960, 7 Jan 62; Bangkok
to SecState, 998, 13 Jan 62.

In a message
the Laos Country Team recommended that the
US continue to expand the local resistance and defense
capabilities of the population of northern and central
Laos in order to prevent further Pathet Lao encroachments in
those areas. This expansion should take place as rapidly
as possible without compromising the security of the opera­
tion or unduly provoking the enemy. There was little
danger, the Country Team thought, of the present RUG ever
finding out about such a program. The Country Team sought
to justify its recommendation as follows:

1. Whatever the outcome in Laos, whether partition,
resumption of hostilities, or successful formation of a
coalition government, it would be to the distinct advantage
of the US and any non-Communist Lao government if the
present Pathet Lao access to, and consolidation of control
over, the population of northern and central Laos could be
blocked or even reduced. If the Pathet Lao were not
prevented at this time from consolidating their hold on
these areas, then all later political, psychological or
military efforts of any new RUL to recapture these areas
would most likely be unsuccessful.

2. The various tribal minorities who comprised
the bulk of the population in northern Laos were strongly
opposed to the Pathet Lao and Viet Minh and were, further­
more, "not seriously 'separatist'" in their sentiments
regarding the present RUL. Neither were they particularly
opposed to the Lao neutralists, except insofar as Souvanna
was reputed to be bound closely to the Pathet Lao. If
these tribesmen were aided now in the defense of their
3. Armed tribesmen would be able to harass the enemy's lines of communications and deny him local sources of supply and intelligence. Conversely, the US and any future RLG would gain valuable intelligence on Pathet Lao and Viet Minh political and military activities in Laos. In addition, the tribesmen along the Lao-DRV border would observe Viet Minh compliance, or lack thereof, with their promise not to infiltrate either Laos or South Vietnam through Laos.

The Country Team believed that a slightly different emphasis should be given to programs in northern and central Laos, respectively, and presented outline programs for each area.

In northern Luang Prabang province and the Nam Tha area, the primary purpose of the program would be to strengthen local defense capabilities, the will to resist Pathet Lao encroachments, and the willingness to report on enemy activities. The Country Team believed that the issuing of Springfield 1903 rifles would be adequate for these purposes and less expensive than providing the full 100-man weapons units used to arm the Meo. If 103s were available, 5,000 should be shipped to Thailand; 2,500 to be distributed in the northern area of Laos and 2,500 to be held in Thailand for similar subsequent distribution elsewhere. (If these last 2,500 were not used, they could be issued to the Meo as "turn-in weapons" in the event of demobilization. The Country Team did not think that the better weapons actually used by the Meo could be recovered.)

In the Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua provinces, and in central Laos, the purpose of the program would be not only to increase local defense capabilities, but also to increase the existing military resistance of established guerrilla units. For this purpose, the/Meo should be authorized to draw more modern weapons from US stockpiles in Thailand for arming additional tribesmen in the "gradualist" fashion described in earlier messages (see item 2 January 1962). The Country Team did not envisage this program as a "recruiting spree," but rather a controlled response to tribal demands for weapons. Thus, new recruits would not be discouraged by a lack of US response to their initiative and the "psychologically vital" momentum of the resistance movement would be maintained.

The Country Team believed itself to be the body best able to determine the proper tempo and areas for expansion. It therefore recommended that it be given the authority to oversee this expansion of the resistance program. (See item 5 February 1962.)
In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense recommending policies for South Vietnam, the JCS presented at length their views of the strategic importance of the Southeast Asian mainland. Advancing portions of CINCPAC's appraisal of Communist tactics in Laos as they affected South Vietnam and Thailand (see item 23 December 1961), which appraisal had already been cited in a JCS policy recommendation on Laos (see item 5 January 1962), the JCS averred that the fall of South Vietnam would mean the eventual Communist domination of the entire Southeast Asian mainland. The JCS urged several courses of action to counter Communist efforts to take South Vietnam. They also noted that, if US combat forces eventually had to be introduced into Southeast Asia, the following three factors would be of greatest importance:

1. Any war in Southeast Asia would be a "peninsula and island" campaign. All elements of the US armed forces were particularly well suited for such action by reason of their experiences in World War II and Korea.

2. The Communists could support only limited forces during a war in Southeast Asia, because of logistical and transportation restrictions imposed by nature.

3. The present world military posture of the US was such that existing contingency plans for Southeast Asia could be implemented without unacceptable reduction of the US capability to carry out planned operations in Europe relating to Berlin.

(S) JCSM-33-62 to SecDef, 13 Jan 62, derived from JCS 2343/70, 13 Jan 62; JMF 9155.3/9105 (30 Nov 61).

The Soviet Charge d'Affaires in Washington, Smirnovsky, presented an official statement to Secretary Rusk, complaining that the stubborn attitude of Boun Oum and Phoumi, especially their insistence that their faction receive both the Defense and Interior Ministries in the projected coalition government, was blocking a settlement in Laos. Smirnovsky charged that the United States "has it in its power" to bring Boun Oum and Phoumi to terms.

Secretary Rusk denied that the United States could exercise such control over the RLG, and he rejected some of Smirnovsky's other statements as well. Rusk noted, for instance, that Souphanouvong's statement upon arriving at the last meeting of the Princes had been contentious and had made no contribution to a reasonable spirit of negotiation. He also pointed out that the three Princes had not yet really come to grips with the detailed negotiations necessary to the formation of a coalition government. The "best influence" of all interested Governments would be necessary to maintain the cease-fire and push the negotiations to agreement.

(S) Mag, SecState to Geneva, FECON 701, 13 Jan 62.

General Phoumi told the press during a stopover in Bangkok that the US had announced the intention of halting all aid to the RLG if it refused to relinquish the Interior and Defense posts in the coalition government to Souvanna.
Phoumi reiterated his government's policy: the RLG was determined to retain these posts in order to balance the power of the other two parties in the proposed coalition and would maintain this position "at all costs" at Geneva. If US aid were withdrawn, the Lao people would "struggle to survive and live completely independent lives in the future." Phoumi charged Souvanna with the failure of the Vientiane talks (see items 27 and 27-30 December 1961) and insisted that Souvanna should have relinquished his mandate to form a government at that time.

Ambassador Young reported to the Secretary of State that Sarit avoided meeting Boun Oum and Phoumi during their Bangkok stopover because he wished to avoid implicating Thailand in the RLG's intransigent stand. While in Bangkok, the RLG leaders again mentioned the possibility of forming a "King's government" after a royal revocation of Souvanna's mandate. Thanat told Ambassador Young that the Thai Government was now looking into the possibilities of this solution.

If this "King's government" scheme failed, Boun Oum and Phoumi declared themselves ready to move into southern Laos and establish there a government, independent of US aid if necessary. The Thai were reported extremely concerned over being dragged into this "Southern venture" and feared the possibilities of being involved in hostilities without US support. Recognizing that their relations with the US far outweighed any Lao political maneuvering in importance, the Thai were anxious to seek a compromise over Lao internal difficulties.

At Harriman's suggestion, US, UK, French, and Canadian delegates formed a task force at Geneva that met throughout this period to discuss the possible alternative solution proposed by Ambassador Brown on 9 January (see item), involving a government divided among three centers: Souvanna at Luang Prabang, Phoumi at Vientiane, and Souphanouvong at Khang Khay. The reaction was "decidedly negative." All three Allies of the US condemned the proposal as simply preparing the way for a Laotian partition, since the conflicting FAR and PL forces would remain un-integrated while their political counterparts could be expected to score substantial successes in the forthcoming election, each in its own area. Thus the Right and Left would solidify their power at the expense of the neutralist Center under Souvanna.

Various alternative possibilities for a Laotian settlement were then explored. These were: 1) an entirely neutralist government under Souvanna; 2) a government under the King with three Deputy Prime Ministers; 3) outright partition or a confederation loosely grouping the territories of the three factions; and 4) a continuation of the present Laotian situation. All were rejected as being either unrealistic and impractical in light of the current tense situation, or else as being essentially an acceptance of the status quo. The task force therefore concluded that the
only feasible course to pursue was the continuation
of the current effort toward a carefully balanced
coalition government under Souvanna.

The UK representative then suggested that Phoumi
might be influenced to enter into serious negotiations
if the Western Ambassadors in Vientiane should begin
ostentatiously to develop a "new power combination" on
the Right, composed of Phoui Sananikone and the leading FAR
generals. The US, French, and Canadian representatives
had certain hesitations regarding this gambit but finally
agreed to recommend it, although the US representative
privately urged the Department of State not to adopt it.

(5) Msgs, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1044, 16 Jan 62;
CONFE 1050, 18 Jan 62.

15 Jan 62 The Consul General in Hong Kong reported that the Chinese
Communist news agency had announced the signing in Khang
Khay on 13 January of air transport and highway agreements
between the Chinese Communists and the "Kingdom of Laos"
(the Souvanna "government"). Under the highway agreement
the Chinese Communists engaged to build a road from the
Yunnan border to Phong Saly. The air pact provided
that air transport companies appointed by both sides would
conduct flights, scheduled or irregular, on agreed air
routes.

In commenting on this event the Consul General noted
that the preliminary agreement on the highway construction
project had been reached during Souvanna's visit to
Peiping in April 1961. He thought it of interest, however,
that both the current agreements and the one of March 1961
regarding a Chinese Communist economic and cultural mission
to Laos had been announced while Souvanna was out of the
country. He surmised that the aim was to lessen the
appearance of involvement by Souvanna with the Chinese
Communists. To the Consul General the agreements indicated
an increasing Chinese Communist stake in Laos, and he saw
in the by-passing of North Viet Nam a determination to
enhance Chinese Communist capacity to act independently
of both Hanoi and Moscow.

(OUO) Msg, Hong Kong to SecState, 744, 15 Jan 62.

15 Jan 62 Ambassador Gavin reported to the Secretary of State that
an officer of the American Embassy had raised with the Viet
Nam Desk Officer of the French Foreign Office the question
of Lao recognition of both North and South Viet Nam. The
desk officer stated that Souvanna had indicated that he had
hopes for full relations with both North and South Viet Nam.
Manac'h had added that the French Foreign Office would
consider what could be done to alter the Prince's views,
but he believed that the Government of South Viet Nam would
have to accept a compromise.

(C) Msg, Paris to SecState, 3454, 15 Jan 62.

15 Jan 62 Harriman reported on a conversation with Pushkin at Geneva
in which the latter once again called for a plenary session
involving the three Princes (Harriman remained silent
regarding this), while optimistically stating that the
Princes should be able to reach an agreement in five or
six days. Harriman countered that such a view was unrealistic.
He informed Pushkin that, while the United States would not dictate policy to a sovereign state such as Laos, pressure would be exerted if needed and he would expect Soviet assistance in restraining any offensive action by Pathet Lao forces, as Sullivan had previously explained (see item 7 January 1962).

(S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1039, 15 Jan 62.

15 Jan 62 During a lengthy discussion with UK representatives at Geneva, Boun Oum and especially Phoumi expressed the strongest opposition to relinquishing control of the Defense and Interior Ministries. Phoumi repeatedly opposed Souvanna as Prime Minister, proposing instead that the King receive this post and Souvanna become Minister of Defense. Statements by the UK representatives that this idea was "utterly non-negotiable" had no effect whatever as Phoumi appeared (according to the UK diplomats) to be "obsessed with [his] own power."

(C) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1054, 18 Jan 62.

15 Jan 62 During a discussion of the recent US letter to Prime Minister Sarit (see item 12 January 1962), Foreign Minister Thanat told Ambassador Young that the Thai Government was in agreement with the US on objectives in SEA and had appreciated recent US assurances. US-Thai difficulties arose, however, over the means applied to achieve these objectives in Laos. The crux of the US-Thai differences was their disparate evaluation of Souvanna, his intentions and capabilities. Although long suspicious of Souvanna, the Thai Government had come a long way toward accepting him as Prime Minister of a coalition subject to adequate checks and balances. To give him the Defense and Interior posts without insuring a compensatory balance, however, would be demanding the "suicide" of the RLG. Souvanna had no strength or organization to oppose the Communists or win an election, the Thai believed, even if the US was right in thinking he did really desire neutrality. Moreover, the Thai emphasized that Souvanna had never publicly expressed the views that had so impressed the US with his anti-Communist and anti-Pathet Lao leanings. If Souvanna were to express these views publicly, Thailand might "hedge" somewhat on Souvanna.

Thanat also asked again how the US would retrieve the situation if the Souvanna coalition failed. Coalition under Souvanna could turn out to be worse for Thailand and South Viet Nam than the current uneasy circumstances, he claimed, and the Thai were convinced that the Communists would win the elections sooner or later. They did not feel the US had adequately answered their questions regarding checks and balances in a coalition government and "retrievability."

Thanat also reintroduced the idea of having the Lao King act as chief executive, at least for a temporary period. He acknowledged the Communists would not accept this plan except perhaps under pressure from all sides. Nevertheless, he felt the King's gambit would be feasible, despite Communist opposition, if the Western powers, the Soviet Union, and "Thai neighbors" all united behind it as an expedient to avoid an impasse or breakup of negotiations.

(S) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 1009, 15 Jan 62.
16 Jan 62 Harriman reported on a conversation with Souvanna at Geneva, in which the former made the following points:

1) Souvanna was assured that the United States wished to support him as Prime Minister of a neutral and independent Laos; 2) the United States favored neutralists receiving the Defense and Interior portfolios and had so informed Phoumi, Boun Oum, and Pushkin; 3) the United States also supported a formula for distribution of cabinet portfolios by which the Pathet Lao would not receive any vital posts and would be evenly balanced by the supporters of Phoumi and Boun Oum, while the neutralist factions controlled a majority of the posts; and 4) Phoumi had been warned that US support would be withdrawn if he either did not negotiate in good faith or launched an attack.

While asking Souvanna for suggestions on how to get Boun Oum to negotiate, Harriman pointed out the danger that overly-drastic measures against the RLG might "impair the balance of forces," and thus weaken Souvanna's position.

Souvanna "appeared to agree." He suggested that US logistical support be denied to the FAR and insisted that the Pathet Lao would not take advantage of the situation. He had warned his own and PL commanders that if they attacked during his absence he would not return to Laos. Souvanna asserted that RLG strategy was to force him to turn in his mandate to the King; the RLG would then call for US assistance in combating the Pathet Lao.

Harriman urged Souvanna not to become discouraged, authorized him to mention US backing on the Defense-Interior question, and asked him to propose a definite list of cabinet ministers, which would aid the United States in pressuring Boun Oum.

(S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1043, 16 Jan 62.

16 Jan 62 At a Geneva press conference held by Khamphan Panya, a cousin of Boun Oum and a high RLG official, it was announced that Boun Oum would not accept the invitation of the Co-Chairmen to address a plenary session, on the ground that the presence of the other Princes would give them a degree of recognition that constituted an infringement on the sovereignty of the RLG.

In response to questions, Khamphan denied that US aid had ever been used to exert pressure on the RLG, but stated that, should aid be terminated, it "would be natural for countries in the area sharing the same point of view as the RLG to come to its assistance." Discussions might take place in Geneva, he continued, but only in Laos itself could a binding agreement be concluded, and this in turn would be possible only if the RLG was given the Defense and Interior Ministries. He also announced that Boun Oum, "for family and other reasons," had to return to Laos by 21 January, barely five days later.

(U) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1045, 16 Jan 62.

16 Jan 62 Ambassador Young received instructions to deliver a letter from President Kennedy to Prime Minister Sarit concerning US economic aid to Thailand. The President commented at length on the results of Dr. Howard Bowen's economic
mission to Thailand, characterizing it as a "new and improved basis" for joint cooperation in the economic development of Thailand. The President also detailed several specific proposals for expanded US aid efforts in Thailand. He informed Sarit that the US had approved the recent Thai loan application and was ready to begin several Thai irrigation projects immediately.

(On 19 January, the Ambassador reported that the President's letter had been delivered to Sarit.)

(C) Msg, SecState to Bangkok, 1006, 16 Jan 62; (S) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 1042, 19 Jan 62.

16 Jan 62 Ambassador Young reported to the Secretary of State a conversation with Pote Sarasin, the Secretary General of SEATO. Pote had assured Young "as categorically as he could" that Sarit was not encouraging Phoumi to resist US advice or break up the Lao negotiations. Since Sarit remained in general sympathy with Phoumi's views regarding Souvanna's neutrality and the question of the Defense and Interior posts, however, he could not be expected to contradict Phoumi on these matters.

Pote also discussed Thailand's major concern: its relationship with the US and its dependence on US support for its economic and military security. According to Pote, Sarit was deeply worried by the shift in US policy that saw the Americans now taking the lead from the British and French in the attempt to put Souvanna in power and "avoid any kind of hostilities in Laos at any price." Sarit was still more troubled when he looked to the future. He foresaw that some day when Thailand was threatened or attacked, the British and French might try to get the US to act in a similar fashion, watering down its commitments to Thailand if fulfilling them would risk US military involvement. Pote concluded that, notwithstanding Sarit's deep personal distrust of Souvanna, the more the US explained its position to Sarit and assured him regarding Thai security, the better chance it would have for working out political details on Laos.

(S) Msg, Bangkok to SecState, 1010, 16 Jan 62.

17 Jan 62 During a return call on Harriman in Geneva, Souvanna stated that: 1) he had not yet been able to arrange a meeting with Boun Oum; 2) he was prepared to discuss matters with Phoumi, should Boun Oum leave Geneva, provided Phoumi had full powers; 3) he was ready to include demobilization of the armies, a problem whose great importance he recognized, in the Lao declaration of neutrality; 4) all matters referred to in the Zurich communique (see item 22 June 1961), but not dealt with in the Conference Protocol, would be mentioned in the Declaration of Neutrality; 5) he was much concerned about the recent remark by Khamphan Panya (see item 16 January 1962) implying that the RLG might turn to Thailand (Harriman stated that success in this was doubtful if US aid should be cut off; 6) he recognized that Sarit feared a Communist Laos, as he did himself, but felt that the partition advocated by Sarit was no real solution, since Communist pressure would only be shifted to the new boundaries; and 7) Thailand should therefore support his policy of a
neutral Laos, and he in turn would give a "categoric assurance" that Laos would "cause no trouble of any kind" among the Lao-speaking tribesmen of northeastern Thailand.

(S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1049, 17 Jan 62.

17 Jan 62

Concerned by an increasing concentration of Pathet Lao-Kong Le-Viet Minh forces in and round Mahaxay, only about 25 miles east of Thakhek (headquarters of Group Mobile 14), RLG military authorities set in motion a series of defensive sweeps by elements of GM 14 and GM 12 aimed at forestalling any PL move against Thakhek. A reconnaissance patrol of the 36th Infantry Battalion (GM-14) in an engagement with an enemy squad lost one man killed and one man wounded. In support of the operations, three T-6 aircraft conducted air strikes. MAAG representatives, investigating reports that Thailand had offered bombs and fuses to the FAR Air Force, reported the strong probability that bombs had been employed on at least one of the air missions.

(S-NOFORN) Msg, CHMAAG Laos to CINCPAC and JCS, 171618Z Jan 62, DA IN 193939; (S-NOFORN) Msg, CHMAAG Laos to CINCPAC and JCS, 181515Z Jan 62, DA IN 194573; (S-NOFORN) Msg, CHMAAG Laos to CINCPAC, 172143Z Jan 62, DA IN 193647; (S) Msg, Vientiane to SecState, 1051, 27 Jan 62.

17 Jan 62

Referring to missions flown by FAR T-6 aircraft in support of recent ground operations, the JCS reminded CINCPAC and CHMAAG Laos that under the policy established by the JCS in August 1961 T-6 aircraft should be used only against Kong Le-Pathet Lao forces which in violation of the cease-fire were conducting operations against FAR-Meo forces, and that reports of air missions must contain a specific statement whether or not the enemy forces were violating the cease-fire.

The JCS directed CHMAAG to find some way of curbing such air missions if they were not in accord with the policy.

(TS) Msg, JCS to CINCPAC and CHMAAG Laos, JCS 2940, 172254Z, Jan 62.

18 Jan 62

During a forthright session with Phoumi and Boun Oum at Geneva, Ambassador Brown informed them that the President wished a peaceful settlement in Laos; this could only be achieved through a coalition government (to include Phoumi and his followers) under Souvanna, with the Defense and Interior Ministries in neutralist hands. Brown countered Phoumi's continued objections by stating that "it would be very hard on the country," and on the RLG armed forces as well, if the United States was "unable to continue its support." Phoumi exploded angrily that Brown was threatening him and that "one should never threaten an Asian." Brown apparently succeeded in placating Phoumi, who stated that the "new" understanding he had just gained of the US position faced him with a "very difficult decision." Brown also appealed directly to Boun Oum, urging him "to consider his heavy responsibilities to his people and not to cast away the structure of international guarantees now available to his country nor to deny it US support."
Later in the day, Harriman informed Boun Oum and Phoumi of US disappointment that discussions among the three Princes had not yet begun, warned that the formation of a government was not a purely internal question, as Boun Oum claimed, but was vital in ending a civil war involving international elements, and urged that Phoumi continue discussions should Boun Oum have to return to Laos for family reasons. Harriman continued by stating that US aid "had been given to Laos and not to Phoumi or any other individual." Phoumi replied by agreeing to stay at Geneva beyond the meeting that afternoon with the Princes, should this be necessary, and hinted at some concession by stating that some positive results might be expected from their meeting. Harriman then addressed Phoumi directly and with emphasis, stating that "you are a Lao for whom we have great respect. We hope that you, yourself, have a good future as well as your country." He was obviously relieved and gratified by this expression."

(S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1055, 18 Jan 62.

18 Jan 62

After two days of intensified pressure by the US, UK, and other delegations, Boun Oum and Phoumi met for the first time at Geneva with the other Princes and the Co-Chairmen; various advisers were also present. Previous attempts by Souvanna to arrange such a meeting had been blocked by Boun Oum's insistence that Souvanna come to him "if he has anything to say."

During the session, Souphaouvong and Souvanna readily accepted the draft Protocol to the Declaration of the Neutrality of Laos, but Phoumi reversed the conciliatory impression he had just given Harriman (see previous item) by objecting to Article 5, which dealt with the French presence in Laos, asserting that this was a purely domestic affair to be handled later in the Laotian Neutrality Declaration; he also expressed reservations (unspecified) over Article 9, which commissioned the ICC to "supervise and control" the cease-fire.

The Co-Chairmen then withdrew to enable talks to begin on Laotian internal matters, but Phoumi scotched these by insisting that such discussion could only take place in Laos. (Souvanna and Souphanouvong had categorically rejected this idea at a private luncheon earlier in the day, saying that the Geneva meeting was the last opportunity to discuss a coalition government.) The meeting then adjourned.

During the reception that followed, the leading delegations present expressed acute disappointment regarding the meeting. Pushkin spoke to Sullivan and Harriman in most excitable terms, fervently denouncing Phoumi's actions and predicting they would result in a renewal of fighting in Laos. He charged further that RLG forces were violating the cease-fire and that Chinese Nationalist troops also were involved. Harriman disputed these assertions, but Pushkin refused to be placated. Ambassador Brown reproached Phoumi and insisted that a further meeting of the Princes be scheduled for the following day; Phoumi reluctantly accepted.

(C) Msgs Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1052, CONFE 1057, 18 Jan 62; (S) Msg, Geneva to SecState, CONFE 1058, 19 Jan 62.
Commenting from Geneva on the series of questions recently posed from Bangkok by Ambassador Young (see items 9, 15 January 1962), Assistant Secretary Harriman briefly reviewed the US position. To avoid either abandoning Laos to Communism or having to introduce American troops with or without the participation of SEATO allies, the United States had chosen the middle course of arranging a cease-fire followed by negotiations for a unified, neutral, and independent Laos. Over the months a better basic agreement had been worked out at Geneva than some had thought possible. Its most encouraging feature was the undertaking of the Soviet Union to police the Communist Bloc’s observance of the agreement (when finally in force), including the provision that Lao territory would not be used as a corridor for activities against other countries, such as South Vietnam. "We believe it is risk worth taking to hold Soviets responsible for closing this corridor. Khrushchev’s personal good faith is attached to it."

Harriman observed that Sarit’s opinion that Souvanna was "irretrievably sold out" to the Communists was not supported by evidence and that the United States and most other nations represented at Geneva were convinced that Souvanna did not wish to see Laos go to the Communists. Harriman declared that the United States had the right to expect Sarit, as an ally, "to cooperate with and not sabotage our policy." He noted that there was considerable evidence that word from Sarit had contributed to Phoumi’s intransigence in demanding control of both the Defense and Interior Ministries, and that Phoumi’s current stand was a refusal to negotiate at all. This raised a fundamental question of whether Phoumi could dictate the military and political policies of the United States. "It is unthinkable," Harriman wrote, that "we should be led to a military action in Laos by Phoumi. This is the basic issue."

Harriman said that no detailed answer could be given at present to Sarit’s question about US planning to retrieve the situation in Laos if the Souvanna government showed signs of succumbing to the Communists. The United States would of course continue to watch the situation closely, would attempt to strengthen the Souvanna government with political and economic assistance, and would try to deal with any unfavorable development. A key test would be the elections scheduled to be held after demobilization of the armed factions. Souvanna believed that the Pathet Lao could be defeated in the elections if the non-Communist groups could be brought to agree on a single candidate per district. Harriman observed that the future depended to a considerable extent on whether Laotians were willing to subordinate their personal political ambitions to preservation of their country’s independence. The cooperation of the Thai Government in bringing about a favorable outcome would be "of real importance."

Harriman instructed Ambassador Young not to open discussion in Bangkok of the possible alternative solution described by Ambassador Brown on 9 January (see item).