

TO: WASHINGTON

IN 38017

FROM: VIENTIANE

6 March 1962

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3.4(b)(1)-25Yrs
(S)

1. PHOUMI RECEIVED [REDACTED] 6 MARCH AT THE LAO EMBASSY IN BANGKOK FOR APPROXIMATELY THREE QUARTERS OF AN HOUR. WE FOUND PHOUMI IN MUCH BETTER PHYSICAL CONDITION AND APPARENTLY READY TO COME BACK TO WORK MARCH 7, AND WE INFORMED PHOUMI TO HIS SATISFACTION OF THE WELFARE OF HIS CHILDREN.

2. WE TOLD PHOUMI THAT WE HAD HEARD THAT BOTH SOUVANNA PHOUMA AND SOUPHANOUVONG HAD REJECTED THE IDEA OF A GOVERNMENT OF THE KING'S COUNCIL AND HOW IT WAS APPARENTLY AT PRESENT AN UNTENABLE POSITION. HOWEVER, BEFORE PHOUMI MADE UP HIS MIND WE WOULD LIKE HIM TO HAVE A CLEAR PICTURE OF US POLICY.

3. [REDACTED] THEN DELIVERED PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE TRANSMITTED ON 23 FEBRUARY PREFACING IT WITH SHORT STATEMENT THAT PRESIDENT MOST ANXIOUS PHOUMI PLAY USEFUL ROLE IN NEW GOVT AS ALREADY INDICATED [REDACTED] ABOVE. SINCE ADMIRAL FELT HAD JUST PRECEDED [REDACTED] BY 45 MINUTES, [REDACTED] ADDED THAT NOT ONLY WAS U.S. NOT PREPARED TO SUPPORT PHOUMI MILITARILY IN THE EVENT HE

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REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN COALITION GOVT OR NEGOTIATIONS COLLAPSED AS RESULT HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO ENTER INTO SUCH A GOVT, BUT THAT IT NOW FURTHER CLEAR THAT U.S. GOVT ALSO DETERMINED NOT COME TO HIS ASSISTANCE MILITARILY EVEN IN EVENT OTHER SIDE ATTACKED, WHETHER AS RESULT RUSSIAN INABILITY ANY LONGER CONTROL PL AND VM, OR AS RESULT OTHER SIDE'S IMPATIENCE WITH SLOW PROGRESS OF NEGOTIATIONS ETC. PHOUMI APPEARED LISTEN INTENTLY, THEN SAID THIS EXACTLY WHAT ADMIRAL FELT HAD JUST TOLD HIM A FEW MINUTES EARLIER. (PORTION GARBLED) THAT THE ONLY SOLUTION WOULD BE A SOUVANNA PHOUMA COALITION GOVERNMENT. AT THE VERY START WE WANTED TO IMPRESS ON PHOUMI THAT IN ANY COALITION GOVT THE U.S. WAS VERY DESIROUS OF HIS PARTICIPATION. WE REALIZED, HOWEVER, THAT IN A SOUVANNA PHOUMA COALITION GOVERNMENT HE COULD NOT HAVE THE MINISTRIES OF DEFENSE OR INTERIOR. HOWEVER, WHATEVER POSITION HE COULD GET, WE WANTED HIM TO KNOW THAT WE REALIZED THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO OPERATE BECAUSE SOUVANNA, BEING PRIME MINISTER, WOULD CONTROL A GREAT DEAL OF HIS FINANCES. FOR EXAMPLE, IF PHOUMI COULD GET MINISTRIES OF INFORMATION AND YOUTH AND SPORTS, KEEP THE SECRETARY GENERALSHIP OF THE VETERANS

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ASSOCIATION, AND LEUAM COULD HAVE THE MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION, THERE WOULD BE THEN GREAT POSSIBILITIES IN
THESE POSITIONS FOR USEFUL WORK,

[REDACTED]

WE STRONGLY URGED PHOUMI TO CONSIDER THIS BECAUSE, AS
FAR AS WE COULD SEE, THIS IS ABOUT THE ONLY WAY OUT.

4. [REDACTED] THEN REINFORCED ABOVE BY SAYING TO PHOUMI
THAT AS A FRIEND HE WANTED TO BE SURE THAT PHOUMI
CORRECTLY UNDERSTOOD U.S. POLICY. WE WANTED PHOUMI
TO UNDERSTAND THAT BOTH [REDACTED] HAVE BEEN
GIVEN A CLEAR PICTURE OF U.S. POLICY, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE
NOT INVOLVED IN POLICY MAKING WITHIN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT.
FIRST, THEREFORE, PHOUMI SHOULD REALIZE THAT THE U.S. HOLDS
HIM LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FAILURE TO ESTABLISH A
SOUVANNA PHOUMA COALITION GOVERNMENT. ALSO THE U.S.
BELIEVES, RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY THAT THE UNTENABLE AND
DANGEROUS POSITION IN LAOS TODAY IS DUE IN LARGE PART TO
PHOUMI'S ACTIONS. AS PHOUMI HAS BEEN TOLD IN THE PAST, THE
U.S. WILL NOT SUPPORT HIM IF HE INITIATES MILITARY ATTACK.
PHOUMI, WE BELIEVE, ALREADY UNDERSTANDS THIS POSITION.

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RECENTLY THERE HAS BEEN A FURTHER CLARIFICATION OF POLICY WHICH PHOUMI MUST UNDERSTAND NAMELY, THAT IF THE SOVIETS ARE UNABLE TO HOLD BACK THE PATHET LAO FROM ATTACKING, THE U.S. WILL NOT, EVEN UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, COME TO THE SUPPORT OF PHOUMI.

5. PHOUMI WAS TOLD THAT THE U.S., AND INDEED WORLD OPINION, DEMANDS A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE LAO CRISIS AND, IN THE OPINION OF THE MAJORITY, THE ONLY PEACEFUL SOLUTION IS A SOUVANNA COALITION GOVT. PHOUMI WAS TOLD THAT IN OUR HONEST OPINION THE ONLY WAY OUT WAS FOR PHOUMI TO ACCEPT A POSITION OF IMPORTANCE IN THE NEW GOVT. WE REPEATED THAT WE WANTED PHOUMI TO CONTINUE TO HEAD ANTI-COMMUNIST ELEMENTS [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] WE URGED PHOUMI TO GIVE THIS HIS DEEPEST CONSIDERATION. IT WAS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO HIM AND HIS COUNTRY, AND WE BELIEVED FOR THE U.S. ALSO, THAT HE CONTINUE TO BE ONE OF THE LEADERS OF LAOS. WE COULD NOT URGE HIM TOO STRONGLY TO GIVE US AN AFFIRMATIVE ANSWER.

6. PHOUMI THEN AGAIN SAID THAT ADMIRAL FELT HAD EARLIER IN THE MORNING DELIVERED A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT WHICH WAS SIMILAR TO THE ONE [REDACTED] DELIVERED. PHOUMI

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SAID THAT HE WANTED TO TELL US THE SAME THINGS HE HAD TOLD ADMIRAL FELT. IT WOULD BE VERY "DIFFICULT" TO ACCEPT SOUVANNA PHOUMA AS A LEADER. THE BIGGEST ERROR THE U.S. HAD MADE WAS TO PUT SO MUCH CONFIDENCE IN THE WORD OF SOUVANNA. SOUVANNA IS NOT THE LEADER, THE STRONG MAN, THAT THE U.S. BELIEVES HIM TO BE. HE IS NO MORE THAN THE FRONT MAN FOR SOUPHANOUVONG AND THE PL, JUST LIKE BOUN OUN IS THE FRONT MAN FOR PHOUMI.

7. PHOUMI SAID HE SPENT THREE HOURS WITH MARSHAL SARIT MARCH 4 DISCUSSING THE LAO PROBLEM, PHOUMI SAID THAT A GREAT DEAL OF THEIR CONVERSATION WAS ON THE THAI RADIO BROADCAST MORNING OF 6 (WE HAD NOT YET SEEN THE TRANSCRIPT OF THIS BROADCAST AS OF TIME THIS CONVERSATION WITH PHOUMI.) PHOUMI WENT ON TO SAY THAT SARIT HAD AGREED TO TRY TO PERSUADE THE U.S. TO SEE THE ERRORS OF ITS WAYS IN PUTTING SO MUCH CONFIDENCE IN SOUVANNA BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE.

8. PHOUMI DID SAY, HOWEVER, THAT IF HE COULD HAVE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE WHICH WOULD ASSURE HIM OF ARMY SUPPORT HE WOULD ENTER A SOUVANNA PHOUMA COALITION GOVT, BUT WITHOUT ARMY SUPPORT HE WOULD HAVE NO POWER AND WOULD BE REDUCED TO NOTHING. WHEN WE SAID THAT LOGICALLY THE COMMAND STRUCTURE OF THE ARMY WOULD REMAIN INTACT UNTIL INTEGRATION TOOK PLACE, PHOUMI REPLIED THAT THIS WAS



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AMERICAN LOGIC, NOT LAO. PHOUMI THEN ASKED, "WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO US IF SOUVANNA AS PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE RELEASED GENERAL AMKHA FROM PRISON AND MADE HIM COMMANDER IN CHIEF?" PHOUMI WENT ON TO SAY THE U.S. DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE REALITIES OF INTERNAL LAO POLITICS.

9. WHEN WE REFERRED TO THE HARD TIMES IN THE PAST WHEN DIFFICULT DECISIONS HAD TO BE MADE, ESPECIALLY DURING SAVANNAKHET DAYS, PHOUMI SAID THAT AT THE TIME KONG LE HAD CONTROL OF ONLY VIENTIANE AND THAT WAS EASY TO GET BACK BECAUSE HE KNEW WHERE HIS ENEMY WAS. NOW, IF PHOUMI GIVES IN, IT WOULD BE COMPLETE CAPITULATION, AND THE ENEMY WOULD BE EVERYWHERE, EVEN BEHIND HIS BACK. IT WOULD BE GIVING ALL LAOS TO THE ENEMY AND THERE WOULD BE NO WAY OF GETTING IT BACK LATER.

10. PHOUMI ALSO SAID THAT HE WOULD NO LONGER HAVE CONTROL OF THE ARMY BECAUSE WHOEVER PAYS, CONTROLS, AND IT WOULD BE SOUVANNA WHO PAID. WHEN ASKED IF HE DID NOT THINK THAT THE POST OF MINISTER OF FINANCE, IN THIS CASE MIGHT PROVE POWERFUL ENOUGH, PHOUMI REPLIED THAT IT WAS COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE AND NO GOOD. AT THIS POINT REFERRING TO THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, PHOUMI REMARKED THAT MOST OF TRAINED PROPAGANDISTS AND ORGANIZERS ARE

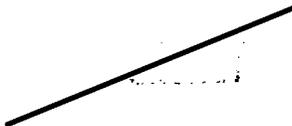


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PATHET LAO, AND WE WOULD NOT HAVE TIME TO ORGANIZE HIS OWN MEN.

11. PHOUMI SAID THAT HE IS NOW STRONGER THAN THE OTHER SIDE AND THAT WITH JUST A LITTLE MORE BACKING HE COULD WIN. PHOUMI WAS TOLD THAT THIS WAS ONE OF THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AND THAT THE U.S. DID NOT BELIEVE PHOUMI WAS STRONGER NOW AND CONSEQUENTLY A SOLUTION MUST COME IN THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE TIME. PHOUMI SAID THAT HE REALIZED THAT WITHOUT U.S. SUPPORT HE COULD NOT GO ON AND THAT THE U.S. SHOULD REALIZE THAT BY WITHHOLDING SUPPORT FROM HIM THEY ARE ONLY PLAYING THE COMMUNIST GAME.

12. AGAIN WE URGED PHOUMI TO CONSIDER OUR PROPOSITION BECAUSE THE ALTERNATIVE WOULD ONLY MEAN THE U.S. COMPLETELY WITHDRAWING ITS SUPPORT WHICH WOULD HAVE DISASTROUS RESULTS. PHOUMI SAID THAT IF HE WENT TO A CABINET MEETING AND ASKED HIS FELLOW MINISTERS TO GO ALONG WITH THIS, THEY AND EVEN THE KING WOULD LAUGH AT HIM, AND ACCUSE HIM OF BEING THE SLAVE OF THE AMERICANS. AT THIS POINT WE ASKED IF IT WOULD HELP ANY FOR US TO TALK TO OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CABINET. PHOUMI SAID, "PERHAPS - DO IT IF YOU WANT TO."

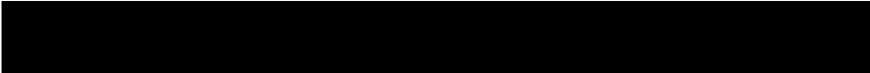


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13. PHOUMI WENT BACK TO THE KING'S COUNCIL CONCEPT AND ASKED IF THE U.S. WOULD SUPPORT IT. PHOUMI WAS REMINDED THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD IN THE PAST THAT THE U.S. WOULD SUPPORT IT IF ALL PARTIES CONCERNED AGREED, BUT NOW SOUVANNA AND SOUPHANOUVONG HAD REJECTED THIS CONCEPT AND IT MUST BE CONSIDERED A CLOSED SUBJECT. PHOUMI ARGUED FOR TIME. IT IS ONLY A QUESTION OF TIME AND HE COULD CONVINCE THE OTHERS OF THE MERITS OF A GOVERNMENT BY KING'S COUNCIL. PHOUMI WAS TOLD THAT TIME WAS OF THE ESSENCE AND THAT WE CANNOT WAIT. PHOUMI POINTED OUT THAT PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE AND SHOULD BE PRACTICED.

14. PHOUMI SAID THAT HE WOULD BE WILLING TO WORK WITH SOUVANNA BUT HE IS NOW AN ENEMY AND THAT BEFORE PHOUMI COULD WORK WITH HIM SOUVANNA MUST PROVE HIMSELF. PHOUMI SAID HE IS CONVINCED HE COULD WIN OVER SOUVANNA AND HIS SUPPORTERS TO PHOUMI'S SIDE. PHOUMI AGAIN MENTIONED THE FUNDAMENTAL ERROR IN U.S. JUDGMENT IN HAVING TOO MUCH CONFIDENCE IN SOUVANNA PHOUMA.

15. BEFORE LEAVING WE AGAIN URGED PHOUMI TO THINK OVER THE ADVANTAGES OF GOING INTO A SOUVANNA PHOUMA GOVERNMENT

 WE ASKED PHOUMI TO KEEP THIS STRICTLY TO HIMSELF, ADDING HOWEVER, THAT IF HE WISHED TO MENTION IT TO MARSHAL SARIT, WE WOULD HAVE

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NO OBJECTIONS. PHOUMI SAID HE WOULD TALK TO SARIT BUT NOT ABOUT OUR SUPPORT. PHOUMI TOOK US TO THE DOOR AND SAID THAT MAYBE WE SHOULD TRY THIS ON SOMEONE ELSE. "I DON'T THINK I CAN GO ALONG WITH A SOUVANNA PHOUMA GOVERNMENT AND I MAY RETIRE TO THAILAND." PHOUMI WAS URGED TO GIVE UTMOST CONSIDERATION TO OUR TALKS. WE SAID THAT AFTER HIS RETURN TO VIENTIANE, WE WOULD ASK HIM FOR HIS ANSWER. IF NECESSARY WE WOULD TALK LATER ABOUT RETIRING.

16. COMMENTS:

A. DURING THE WHOLE CONVERSATION PHOUMI SEEMED SOMEWHAT SUBDUED, BUT WAS COURTEOUS AND FRIENDLY.

B. THE ONLY INDICATION THAT THE ABOVE CONVERSATION, OR PERHAPS ADMIRAL FELT'S EARLIER CONVERSATION, HAD MADE ANY IMPRESSION ON PHOUMI WAS HIS FREQUENT REFERENCE TO THE VERY DIFFICULT OR SEVERE PREDICAMENT IN WHICH HE FOUND HIMSELF, HIS RECURRENT OBSERVATION THAT THE AMERICAN POSITION IS VERY DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND, AND FINALLY, HIS REFERENCE TO POSSIBLE RETIREMENT.


OBSERVES, IN THIS CONNECTION, THAT PHOUMI RARELY ACCEPTS

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ANY SUGGESTION THE FIRST TIME.

17. WE WILL MAKE APPROACH TO BOUN OUM, ALONG
ALREADY APPROVED LINES, 7 MAR. WE WERE UNABLE SEE
HIM EVENING 6 MAR.

18. AMBASSADOR BROWN HAS SEEN THIS MSG.

END OF MESSAGE

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