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COUNTRY Siam/Indochina

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SUBJECT Free Lao Political and Military Developments

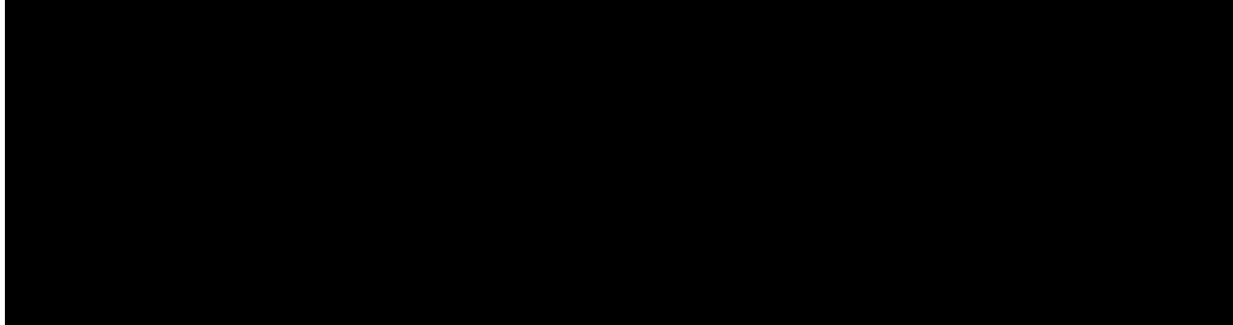
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SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO



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~~Comment.~~ Reference is made to ~~Comment.~~ concerning the ousting of Tao Oon from the Free Lao movement by the Free Lao princes in June 1948, representing the culmination of a series of personality clashes between the "plebeian" faction and the princes.)

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~~Comment.~~ It is possible that during 1947 in particular, this schism was widened by the activities of Mme Germaine Krull in the role of a ~~agent provocateur.~~)

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1. Much of the dissatisfaction of the Free Lao Plebeian group centers around the roles of Prince Souphanavong and his elder brother, Prince Petsarath in the Free Lao movement. Members of this group feel that Prince Petsarath has become too dictatorial, and that he has assumed too many direct executive functions in the movement. They feel that he should act only as an advisory "elder statesman", which was his original post in the Lao government. Phya Kam Mao, who is well liked by all factions and is very popular within Laos itself, could then exercise his full prerogatives as the Free Lao Prime Minister.
2. The Plebeians would like Prince Souphanavong to confine himself to the duties of Foreign Minister, his original position and one for which he is adequately qualified. They are in favor of his relinquishing his his post as "military commander", for which they feel he is unqualified. As an example, they cite his early 1947 strategy of massing the guerrillas for attacks rather than keeping them dispersed in small groups. This resulted in unnecessary slaughters.
3. In view of the extreme distaste and hatred which the princes now have for Tao Oon, who probably has the most extensive military experience of any of their leaders, the Plebeians are willing to compromise with the princes and have the four "area" military commanders within Laos direct military operations (~~Comment.~~ No identification of these military commanders is given, and it is not known whether or not the guerrilla forces would come under their jurisdiction.)
4. The Plebeian guerrillas, formerly under Tao Oon, are now led by his brother, Kam Suk, who works out of the Nong Khai area. They are based on a plateau in the vicinity of 18, 105 degrees (the intersection of a

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line drawn directly east from Vientiane and north of Thak Hek. Their estimated strength is probably approximately several hundred men (). 25X1X6

5. Prince Souphanavong, who returned to Bangkok from Laos in mid-September 1948 () after a six-week stay spent inspecting the guerrillas under his jurisdiction and planning operations, now has five well-organized units. The strength of each unit is believed to be in the vicinity of 100-200 men (). () Comment. An examination of numerous photographs of these troops revealed that (a) they were well-clothed and well-equipped with rifles, semi-automatic weapons, French-type helmets and knapsacks; (b) they looked well-fed and healthy; (c) they are Laos and not Vietnamese. This was partially illustrated by one photograph showing one of the units meeting a unit of Viet Minh troops "at the Laos-Viet Nam border".)

6. According to Prince Souphanavong, despite the heavy rains in Laos (which necessitated his walking, at one time, in water waste-high for about twelve hours), his guerrillas had managed to kill six Frenchmen during a seven-day period in early September 1948 (). He states that the Siamese have given the Laos no aid since the 9 November Coup d'Etat, but that his men have been receiving supplies and aid from the Viet Minh for approximately the past three months. This is the result of an accord reached between Prince Souphanavong and the Viet Minh, the terms of which are obscure, but are believed almost certainly to have included Viet Minh "technical advisers" as well as active military assistance ().

7. Viet Minh assistance, previously given to Tao Oon's forces, was cut off after the accord. Souphanavong's explanation of this is that Oon's group had been associated with a group of very extremist Vietnamese in Laos, of whom HO Chi Minh disapproved. He claims that he can prove this with a letter outlining HO's position, signed by HO himself. () Comment. In addition, Souphanavong claims that his negotiations with the Viet Minh culminated in the accord, which was a direct one between HO and himself. He adds that the agreement was in writing.) Nguyen Duc Quy, head of the Viet Nam Delegation in Bangkok, offers the explanation that the shift in the Viet Minh support of the Free Laos was simply a matter of expediency on the part of the Viet Nam government.

Recognizing that the Free Laos were divided (something for which the Viets have little patience), the Viet Minh chose to support the princes' group, as it was better organized and potentially more effective both militarily, and, to a much greater extent, politically (). () Comment. HO's frowning on "extremism" seems incongruous. It seems much more likely that the Vietnamese, with whom Tao Oon's group was working, were non-Viet Minh, and if not anti-Viet Minh, had at least not been successfully subordinated to the Viet Minh High Command.) () Comment. Prince Souphanavong, who is married to an Annamese woman, has always been more pro-Viet than any other Free Lao leader. He has been the only one who apparently does not share in traditional Laotian fear of Annamese and Vietnamese aggression. () reported that Tran Van Giau ingratiated himself with Souphanavong by helping the Free Laos obtain arms and ammunition. Tao Oon has been highly critical of Souphanavong's pro-Viet activities. However, () reported that Oon stated in January 1948 that he, himself, was "getting along better with the Viets".)

8. A mission from the French-sponsored Lao government is scheduled to come to Bangkok to confer with the Free Laos concerning the return of Lao refugees in Siam to Laos. Part of the mission is now (mid-October 1948) in Saigon. Both Prince Petsarath and Prince Souphanavong are somewhat

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optimistic about its possibilities and are prepared to confer with the members of the mission. [REDACTED] Comment. No report of the arrival of such a mission in Bangkok has been received to date.) [REDACTED] Comment. One of the principal reasons why Tao Oon was expelled from the Free Lao movement by the princes was his negotiations with Colonel Roux concerning the possibility of a compromise accord between the French and the Free Laos. Oon did not commit himself during the negotiations, and broke them off himself.)

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