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By ing, NARA, Date 7-17-95

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Thursday, October 19, 1967

Profile

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Your meeting with the Prime Minister of Laos,
Prince Souvanna Phouma, October 20, 1967

Souvanna arrives tomorrow (from New York where he has attended the UN General Assembly) -- and comes directly to your office for a meeting, following which you are hosting a working stag luncheon for 13 people. Later, Souvanna will see the Vice President, Secretary Rusk, and Averell Harriman. He leaves the country Saturday evening on his way to visit Australia.

He is anxious to have a thorough discussion with you on the current situation in Southeast Asia and the chances for peace. He has been shaken by the accounts he has read of domestic opposition and needs reassurance that our commitment in Southeast Asia is firm. You might also wish to:

-- Assure him we seek no wider war and intend to try to keep the Viet Nam war within its current boundaries.

-- Express appreciation for his speech at the UN (October 13), in which he emphasized the UN's responsibility for peacekeeping.

-- Express concern about the rice crop (which was hurt by floods last year and droughts this year).

Souvanna will probably raise the following matters:

-- His concern at the effects on Laos of the continuing war (each year 1500-2000 Lao are killed in combat -- the per capita equivalent of 100,000 American combat deaths a year).

-- He may plead for decisive action to bring the war to an end. In the past, he has privately argued that we should increase the pressure on North Viet Nam by bombing the dikes and other civilian targets. In

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New York he spoke at length with Ambassador Goldberg, urging a 15 day bombing pause on the basis that there was an obligation to try anything that might bring a settlement.

-- The Laotian need for additional military assistance because, in his view, Laos can no longer support the financial burden of both national defense and economic development. If he raises this point, I suggest that you reply that we are aware of his needs and are undertaking to provide for them.

A particular problem which Souvanna will probably raise with you is "the barrier". He is very fearful that "the barrier" will cause the North Vietnamese to be more aggressive in Laos, that it may lead us to commit U.S. forces overtly into Laos, and that we may use the barrier as an excuse to stop bombing North Viet Nam. Any of these actions, he thinks, would lengthen rather than shorten the war. He is absolutely opposed to any overt U.S. troop presence in Laos and has made it plain that he will have no choice but to publicly denounce any overt military presence as a violation of Laotian neutrality.

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[redacted] and assured Souvanna that we have no intention of introducing "any manner of ground system into Laos." Souvanna has reserved the right [redacted]

If he raises this matter, I think you will want to reaffirm Ambassador Sullivan's reassurances.

A special Caution. Our sensitive operations in Laos are something which Souvanna seldom discusses, even with his closest colleagues. Except when you are talking with him privately you should avoid mention of any operations in Laos unless Souvanna specifically raises them. Also, Souvanna does not expect, and would not be pleased by an expression of "gratitude" for his cooperation. In every instance, his cooperation has been obtained on the basis of Lao national interests. Souvanna does not consider that we are allies, but rather that harsh conditions force us to work together on some matters because "we are in the same boat".

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Souvanna will be accompanied by his daughter, Princess Moune (pronounced MOON) -- a tough-minded woman and a principal figure in the Lao Foreign Ministry. At Souvanna's request, she will be present at your "stag" luncheon. Souvanna is also accompanied by his Minister of Finance, Sisouk (SEE sook), the second most powerful man in the government and Souvanna's heir-apparent.

The briefing book prepared by State is attached.

W. W. Rostow

Att.

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