

~~SECRET EYES ONLY~~51
10 May 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Discussion with General Eisenhower: Mr. McCone and Mr. Forrestal present

Essential points were as follows:

1. McCone and Forrestal described the current military situation which has grown out of the fall of Nam Tha and the retreat of the Phoumi forces some 85 miles southwest and across the Thailand border, pointing out that Phoumi forces did not offer resistance though they had numerical superiority and that this situation had occurred previously in the Plaine des Jarres and elsewhere.

2. Phoumi's intransigence politically had foreclosed the formation of a government of national union in which those same political elements would be present as were represented in the last Souvanna Phouma government during the Eisenhower administration. The effort was not a coalition, but was a neutral government with a firm commitment to keep Laos free from Communist intrusion.

3. The political and military situation which has evolved confronts us with only two alternatives:

a. The accomplishment of the national union government under Souvanna with Phoumi's participation or,

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b. The use of U. S. forces in Laos with possible assistance from the Thais but not others and with very little likelihood of strong military activity by the Laotians themselves because of their demonstrated inadequacies.

Eisenhower's views might be summarized as follows:

1. He questioned McCone closely as to whether Souvanna was a Communist, stating that he was convinced when Souvanna fled Laos and resided in Cambodia that he had turned Communist. McCone stated every check indicated Souvanna was not a Communist though he was a weak man.

2. Eisenhower stated that every government irrespective of what it was called, which incorporated Communists and others, eventually was taken over by the Communists. For that reason he was opposed to the proposed Souvanna government but he did not refer to that government as a "coalition government."

3. Eisenhower dwelt at length on the danger to South Vietnam and Thailand as both will be outflanked if Laos is in Communist hands and concluded that such a situation would be so critical to Southeast Asia and so important to the U. S. that most extreme measures, including the commitment of U. S. forces to combat in Laos, were justified.

4. Eisenhower urged a partitioning of Laos into Northern and

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Southern sectors with the line as far north as possible and that to accomplish this we should support General Phoumi and his forces. When McCone pointed out Phoumi's demonstrated inadequacies, Eisenhower stated he named Phoumi because he thought he was a strong leader but recognized some alternate might be desirable.

5. McCone and Forrestal pointed out that this would involve a commitment of U. S. troops, very possibly with no assistance from other countries. Eisenhower replied that this would be proper, defensible, that he would support it and he felt the Congress would support it. At this point he urged that the President go before the Congress and seek a resolution authorizing him to act in Southeast Asia, the resolution being similar to those passed by the Congress at Eisenhower's request in connection with Formosa and the Middle East. McCone stated that he seriously questioned Congressional approval, citing Russell's statement. Eisenhower responded that he was sure that Congress and the people would support such a resolution and he personally would use his influence with his Party and the Congress to assist its passage.

6. Throughout the conversation, General Eisenhower expressed concern over a compromise position. He frequently compared the

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Souvanna arrangement with earlier compromises in China and stated that his sampling of public opinion indicated a desire for the U. S. to demonstrate strength rather than compromise. He expressed great confidence in Thailand and also in President Diem of South Vietnam.

7. Finally Eisenhower warned of the consequences of losing Southeast Asia, pointing out that if it is lost, nothing would stop the southward movement of Communism through Indonesia and this would have the effect of cutting the world in half.

John A. McCone

Dictated but not read.

Orig - Handcarried to The President by Walter Elder 5/10/62
lcc: Mr. Mike Forrestal by hand on 5/11/62
lcc: Memo for Record file

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