

May 25, 1959
**Transcript of the Discussion between Deputy
Director Zhang Wentian and Soviet Ambassador
Pavel Yudin at their Meeting**

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Summary:

Zhang Wentian and Pavel Yudin discuss the deteriorating situation in Laos, reviewing the positions of the Pathet Lao and the government.

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Transcript of the Discussion between Deputy Director ZHANG Wentian and Soviet Ambassador [Pavel] YUDIN at their Meeting

Date: 25 May 1959

Location: Foreign Ministry East Building Reception Room

ZHANG [Wentian]: You were invited here today to come and discuss the Laos problem. The Lao Patriotic Front has two battalions-one is in Luang Prabang, the other is in Xiangkhouang. The government of the Kingdom of Laos is anxious to annihilate these two battalions. One battalion has already been smashed, and for the other one, most of [the soldiers] in have run away. [They ran] in the direction of Vietnam. It is said that [this group of soldiers] comprised more than 500 people. The Lao government sent troops to blockade and attack [them.] [The Lao government] sent aircraft to drop leaflets ordering them to surrender. Another battle happened recently [and] the situation is not very clear. The Lao government has begun to monitor the leaders of the Lao Patriotic Front Party [the Pathet Lao]. In many places [members of the] Patriotic Party have been heavily persecuted. Meeting with the Vietnamese Workers' Party Central Committee, the Lao People's [Revolutionary] Party are currently discussing countermeasures. The Vietnamese government has already issued a statement. Furthermore, they have written a letter to the co-chairs of the Geneva Conference. Our Foreign Ministry also issued a statement protesting the Laotian undermining of the Geneva Agreement. In the name of Foreign Minister CHEN Yi, we have also sent a letter to the co-chairs of the Geneva [Conference]. Per the suggestion of Vietnam, we are now giving this letter to you and to the United Kingdom.

Now the situation in Laos is changing for the worse. Internal peace has been destroyed. A civil war is on the cusp [of taking place].

[Pavel] YUDIN: They want to drag Laos into the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

ZHANG [Wentian]: The Lao Patriotic Front cannot enter into a guerrilla war of self-defense as this matter was, in fact, started by Laos.

[Pavel] YUDIN: How many people does the Lao Patriotic Front have?

ZHANG [Wentian]: They are scattered throughout rural villages. Many [of them are] demobilized soldiers. Recently they were [for] unity and unification. Therefore there were many activities [in which] they did not engage. Now that the Lao government wants to wage war, they can come out. Because they were bitterly oppressed they wanted to rise up and take action from the earliest time. In the interests of domestic peace the leadership pressed them and did not ask them to move. Now the situation has changed. It is said that now is the time to rise up and take action. The viewpoint of our central committee is: this type of guerrilla warfare should only take place when forced [to take place]. But how will these guerrilla actions be conducted? They are studying.

[Pavel] YUDIN: Were any party leaders arrested or not?

ZHANG [Wentian]: Those who have acted in public are now prisoned. This is the case in the example of Souphanouvong. For those who have stayed in secrecy, some are already in Vietnam, some have not yet [made it to Vietnam]. They prepare to [hold a] meeting in Hanoi. This meeting is to solve policy problems. We believe that the overall policy is unchanged. The Geneva Agreement [will continue to be] maintained. Domestic unity, support for the royal family, peaceful neutrality, and national independence are the road [to be taken]. But, opposition to the pro-American Sananikone government [must be taken] as this government is destroying the agreement. [Sananikone's government] wishes to make Laos into an American military base. The nature of guerrilla warfare is self-defense. It is to mobilize the masses to fight against the pro-American [Sananikone] party. We haven't heard any news from their discussions. After the war is initiated, there are three possibilities for the development of the situation in Laos:

1. The Lao Government takes a step further towards the United States. [Laos] becomes a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Laos changes into a place for basing US military operations.

2. Has concerns and dares not openly participate in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Foreign policy is to maintain the status quo. Although not very blatantly pro-American, domestic policy is to intensify the persecution. In addition to trying to destroy the two camps, the Patriotic Party is declared illegal and the newspapers [of the Patriotic Party are all] closed.

3. After undergoing a struggle via guerrilla warfare, the masses are mobilized. [This] causes great difficulties for the current government [and it] cannot continue ruling. Restructuring of government is forced [to happen], Some people, such as Phoumi [Nosavan], are allowed to come out. The two sides resume negotiations. Actually, there are two possibilities, one of which is very bad and one of which is somewhat good.

ZHANG [Wentian]: We are not afraid of any of these three possibilities. Laos is nothing [for us] to be afraid of. The United States wants to have Laos as a [place] for military bases. This is not favorable for it. The terrain in that country is suitable for guerrilla war. The government is weak. If the United States stretches his hand out, it will be caught in a noose. China and Vietnam have 1500 kilometers of border with Laos. [This makes it] easy to have guerrilla warfare. [The border areas are] all mountainous. It seems that fighting will take place for a time. [Our] comrades in the Lao Patriotic Front are willing to fight a guerrilla war. They are accustomed to discussion and legitimate struggle.

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