

April 24, 1961

**Transcript of Talks during Chairman Mao's reception
of Prince Souvanna Phouma and Prince
Souphanouvong**

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Transcript of Talks during Chairman's [Mao Zedong's] reception of Prince Souvanna Phouma and Prince Souphanouvong

Talks on the situation in Laos
Not reviewed

Date: April 24th, 1961
Hangzhou: The Hangzhou Hotel, Hangzhou

[Souvanna] Phouma: We've requested [for] Premier Zhou [Enlai] to arrange this visit to the Chairman [so we may both] salute you and [so we may] represent Laos in showing our appreciation for all the support we've received from China.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: Very happy to receive [our] Laotian friend Prince Phouma on his visit to our country.

[Souvanna] Phouma: I hope after appeals from the co-chairs of the Geneva Conference that the method of cease fire leads to a unanimous agreement on Vientiane. A cease fire depends on the people of Laos. The international council's purpose is to oversee the enactment of the cease fire agreement reached by the people of Laos.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: The issue is currently being discussed by several political factions within Laos. What do you expect to be the outcome of these negotiations?

[Souvanna] Phouma: It's unclear at this time. We'll create a committee to be joined by both military and civilian personnel. A cease fire really depends on the military. After a cease fire is appealed for by the co-chairs of the Geneva Conference, my brother and I will give statements then observe the response from Vientiane.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: I've seen your statement. It's [a] very good [statement]. You are taking the initiative. [Prince] Boun Oum once stated that no matter where the cease fire, he can [still] advance [and participate in negotiations].

[Souvanna] Phouma: Splendid.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: In your statement you've requested the Savannakhet group to send representatives to Xiangkhouang Province for negotiations. [You have said you will] ensure their safety and convenience. This will benefit you.

[Souvanna] Phouma: We hope reason and the patriotism of the people of Laos will show Phoumi Nosavan and Boun Oum that the Laotian people have come to an understanding among themselves and that ending civil conflict is also beneficial to them.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: What their future actions will be [remains to be] seen. They've previously broken [past] agreements. Didn't you arrange a coalition with them before? They subsequently [caused it to] fail. Just as you've mentioned in your declaration, "because of interference from certain Southeast Asia Treaty Organization member states, civil war in Laos has waged for two full years."

[Souvanna] Phouma: We've realized this and I therefore emphasize that in this final

phase, the people of Laos need to be vigilant.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: In your statement, you encourage the people of Laos [to be] more vigilant, [aggressively] work towards unity and vigorously [carry on the] struggle. This is good. When things are in their favor, [the enemy] wants war, not peace. When circumstances are unfavorable to them, they call for peace. If you don't keep up your guard, they'll start war again and reject peace once opportunity allows. The Americans are also like this. The Americans also compromise agreements. The example set forth by the Cubans should be followed. Let them suffer a bit then they'll seek peace and compromise. The peace that they want now is the result of your nine month offensive. If they're on the losing end they'll [sue for] peace and if on the winning end they'll want [the war to continue].

[Souvanna] Phouma: Precisely! We have also seen that this is the situation. For instance, when they conquered Vientiane they wanted to resolve issues with force. Now that they are losing, they want a cease fire.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: They've also sent representative to Phnom Penh to meet with you, Prince Phouma.

[Souvanna] Phouma: They've sent representative to Vientiane three times to negotiate with me but I refused each time.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: Negotiating the peace is a battle in [and of] itself, it seems. As soon as negotiations begin, the problem of bargaining appears and both sides want to set conditions. The conditions you set forth they don't agree to. The conditions they set forth, you also cannot accept. Under these circumstances, negotiations will likely come to a standstill. We have political combat experience but for some experience one must wait for a demonstration when new circumstances arise in the future. Though it is likely negotiations in Laos will result in an agreement being reached, the enemy will say anything and sign an agreement while in defeat. Once they're prepared, all prior arrangements will be off and all agreements signed will be breached.

Premier Zhou [Enlai]: While in Beijing, I discussed some of our experiences with Prince Phouma.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: We once were also fooled some time ago. After Japan's surrender, we negotiated with [George Catlett] MARSHALL and the Chinese Nationalist Party [Guomindang]. At the time, it seemed peace was achievable but in the end fighting resulted. After defeating JIANG Jieshi [CHIANG Kai-shek] and liberating the entire area north of the Yangtze River, they wanted peace. We then set a few conditions, like having them send people to Beijing for negotiations and the like. You could deal with the issue of the Savannakhet group by segmenting the whole group into several components [and bringing over one or two]. While negotiating with the Nationalist Party, we won the support of all their representatives. The government in Nanjing opposed signing with us though the Nationalist representatives were willing to sign. This resulted in the representative not returning [to Nanjing]. The reason for them wanting peace now is they hope you won't attack Vientiane.

[Souvanna] Phouma: We don't want to attack Vientiane or Luang Prabang because the problem is not simply seizing these two areas but they also need to be defended. If we wanted to capture these areas it could be done tomorrow.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: It's best not to be captured right now.

Premier Zhou [Enlai]: The Prime Minister has previously stated that they want to move the capital to the Plain of Jars [in the Xieng Khouang Plateau] because Vientiane borders Thailand which is a security concern.

[Souvanna] Phouma: If we remain there, the Thais would likely send assassins every evening.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: This is a very good plan.

[Souvanna] Phouma: Though the Plain of Jars is a good area, it's still nothing but forest land.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: Not to worry. It can be developed.

[Souvanna] Phouma: Going forward, everything will have to be developed.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: It would be to your disadvantage to remain in Vientiane.

[Souvanna] Phouma: There are 1.2 million Laotians living within Thailand's borders on the opposite side of the Mekong River. That's 3 times the population of Laos.

Vice Premier Chen [Yi]: Thus, Thailand [sees] you as posing a threat.

[Souvanna] Phouma: It is because [they see us as a threat] that, in 1954, just before the Geneva Conference, Thailand arranged the assassination of our Defense Secretary.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: You're bordered on both sides by two unfriendly nations. One is Thailand. One is Vietnam.

[Souvanna] Phouma: I'm now also considering what to do about Vietnam.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: In the meantime, move the capital to the Plain of Jars. At this stage, it would be advantageous for you to develop that area into a new urban center. You can move it back in the future. When the political climate changes perhaps Laos could grow to a population of 1.5 million. Of course this is a future matter [far down the road] and is not the current situation.

[Souvanna] Phouma: A short amount of time may be all that's necessary. I'm sure that once the Laotians residing in Thailand see Laos' development, they're certain to want to return to Laos. This type of movement does exist in Thailand.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: Is it possible you'll receive most of the parliamentary votes through domestic elections?

[Souvanna] Phouma: Under normal circumstances we're definitely guaranteed victory.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: This may be a struggle, I'm afraid. The interim coalition government may subsist for an extend period of time.

[Souvanna] Phouma: Only about 5 or 6 months are needed. We currently have 95% of the population's support.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: The populous supports you but the problem is areas controlled by the Phoumi Nosavan military. Patriots won't be elected [in these areas]. If they're the majority in parliament, the situation will become difficult.

[Souvanna] Phouma: But I'm still confident we'll be victorious. If the 14 parliamentary member states can ensure Laos' neutrality, then there'll be no need to maintain the military. There'll be a reduction in military personnel and an increase in the police force.

Premier Zhou [Enlai]: Premier Phouma has spoken with our ambassador on numerous occasions regarding the exclusion of Phoumi Nosavan and Boun Oum from the coalition government. If not included, they'd disrupt progress. Wicked people like Phoumi Nosavan and Boun Oum naturally shouldn't be part of a coalition government. Preparations to do battle on this matter should be made. The Americans admire Phoumi Nosavan but Boun Oum is a bit more of a puppet. Boun Oum once announced that if Laos could truly unite, he needn't remain Prime Minister. Britain has pointed this out to him and he is well aware his luck will run out. Phoumi Nosavan and Boun Oum are quite different.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: Phoumi Nosavan is a rather dodgy character. There's no future for Ngo Dinh Diem, Sarit Thanarat or Phoumi Nosavan because they've distanced themselves from the people. The people can endure their tyranny for a period of time but won't be subjugated long-term. The masses will see the light. There needn't be any foreign presence to overthrow them. The citizens will overthrow them themselves. China is an example. China's overthrow of JIANG Jieshi didn't rely on any foreign intervention.

Premier Zhou [Enlai]: JIANG Jieshi only received foreign support.

Chairman [Mao Zedong]: We were in a much worse situation than you are now at that time. After Japan's surrender, we had only 7,000 people in the city of Yan'an. We also had a few rural village bases. In areas occupied by Japan we set up a few bases for the resistance but they were scattered. [But the situation on your side is quite different,]the land in your possession is now integrated into a whole. The military is equipped and has high morale. The enemy has already failed in their offensive. The current situation is in your favor. The current policy of America and Phoumi Nosavan is to seek a truce so you can easily be overthrown down the line. Whether they're capable of overthrowing you is another question. I think not. But as you said in your statement, be more vigilant, aggressively work towards unity and vigorously carry on the struggle. On December 17th of last year when you withdrew from Vientiane, January and February were your worst months. From mid-February the situation began to improve. Phoumi Nosavan and Boun Oum had awful reputations worldwide. Not even a few countries recognize the government they established.