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or Peiping and Hanoi—are likely to let this opportunity pass. The longer the present crisis continues, the better the Pathet Lao will be able to consolidate their political and military positions.

22. They would prefer to gain their objectives through negotiations and political action because this would reduce the chances of outside intervention. Events since the Kong Le coup have moved along lines favorable to such tactics. They have profited greatly from disunity among the non-Communist political and military leaders. Moreover, they hold Vientiane virtually a hostage and have been able to exert considerable leverage on Souvanna and Kong Le, and Quinim, the most influential member of the government after Souvanna himself, has apparently become their tool.

23. Although Pathet Lao tactics have emphasized negotiations, psychological pressures, and political action, they have maintained a fairly high level of military pressure on the Laotian armed forces and have built up their guerrilla strength in key areas. This puts them in a favorable position to seize by force large parts of the country, including such key points as Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, the Phong Saly. If the Pathet Lao were to exert their full guerrilla warfare capabilities, the Laotian armed forces, in their present disorganized condition, probably could not prevent the loss of large parts of the countryside and a number of key towns.

II. POSSIBLE FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

24. If present trends continue, the situation in Laos will remain one of confusion, drift, and disintegration. Ultimately this would probably result in the fragmentation of the country, with the Communists, supported by the Bloc, assuming control over most of the north and the Revolutionary Committee attempting to set up a separate state in the south. Without large amounts of outside assistance, a separate southern Laos probably would not survive for long.

25. We believe it more likely, however, that the pace of events will quicken over the next

few weeks and, barring a quick victory by the Phoumi forces, that the situation either will move toward some form of political settlement or will degenerate into widespread civil war. Although a political settlement based on a compromise agreement between the Vientiane and Savannakhet groups may still be possible, we believe that odds are against it. Souvanna and Phoumi are not likely to find mutually acceptable terms for cooperation at this late point in their conflict. Any negotiations held between them are not likely to be conducted in good faith. Although it is conceivable that the King might be induced to exert more influence than he has in the past, we do not believe he can be induced to take personal charge of the situation. Moreover, we do not believe that Souvanna is likely to resign voluntarily. If an effort is made to upset his government by calling a special meeting of the National Assembly in Luang Prabang to pass a no-confidence motion, Souvanna could maintain that the deputies and the King, as prisoners of rebel forces, were acting under duress. He could declare their act illegal and invalid, and maintain that he was the legal head of the government. If, on the other hand, Souvanna were forced out by political pressures, the Pathet Lao would probably step up sharply their military activity. Consequently, it is probable that any political measures to oust Souvanna will be ineffectual unless enforced by military means.

26. Thus, we believe that Laos is heading toward civil war, with supporters of the Souvanna government—primarily the Pathet Lao and the followers of Kong Le—on one side and anti-Pathet Lao elements and supporters of the Savannakhet group on the other. The conflict could be triggered by a Phoumi attack on Vientiane or by a Souvanna or a Kong Le-Pathet Lao attack on Luang Prabang. Both sides have major problems of logistics, communications, and transport. The struggle would probably be one of widely-scattered, small-unit operations in which the staying power, the training, and the relatively shorter supply lines from North Vietnam would give the Pathet Lao guerrillas an advantage. Without extensive outside assistance, the Phoumi forces would probably soon collapse,

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