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Souvanna and desires Souvanna's resignation, thus far he has been unwilling to take any overt steps to this end. The Revolutionary Committee at Savannakhet received the King's private approval, and the 10 November coup in Luang Prabang probably had his blessing, although thus far he has been careful to avoid associating himself with either. It is possible that the King has played a significant behind-the-scenes role in the anti-Souvanna plotting and maneuvering. It is unlikely, however, that he will openly take a strong personal stand, or one which he believes would endanger the position of the monarchy.

17. *Kong Le.* There is some circumstantial evidence that Kong Le may have plotted his coup with Souvanna. However, Kong Le's August revolt apparently was conceived and executed on very short notice, and it may have been a decision made primarily by Kong Le himself. He probably was motivated largely by personal grievances arising from the way in which his 2nd Paratroop Battalion—the best combat unit in the Laotian armed forces—had been treated. However, the revolt has assumed proportions and opened up ramifications which Kong Le probably did not anticipate and which have been beyond his ability to cope with. He has now become so implicated with Souvanna and the Pathet Lao that he probably cannot turn back. Although there have been some indications that his control over his troops has been weakened, Kong Le is still an important element in the situation and could still rally a considerable number of troops to his personal command.

18. The role of Kong Le with respect to the activities of the Souvanna government is not clear. Until recently, it appeared that he exercised a veto power over those political and military decisions of the Souvanna government which he considered important to him. Now, however, it appears that his direct influence on the government is being usurped by the Pathet Lao. Although Kong Le has limited Souvanna's freedom of action, it is also clear that Souvanna has used Kong Le.

19. Shortly after the coup, Kong Le critically compromised his position with respect to the Pathet Lao when he distributed the arms stored in Vientiane to villagers, including many Pathet Lao, in the surrounding area. Although he probably did this to build strength against a possible attack from Luang Prabang and Savannakhet, once the arms were distributed his favorable balance of military power in the Vientiane area vis-a-vis the Pathet Lao was lost. Whatever his own wishes may have been, Kong Le has become increasingly a captive of the Pathet Lao. If Souvanna were to lose out and an anti-Pathet Lao government take over, Kong Le would probably join the Pathet Lao.

20. *The Pathet Lao.* The hand of the Pathet Lao has been strengthened greatly by events since the Kong Le coup. Any figures concerning the strength of their armed guerrillas are highly speculative. It is almost certain that their number is higher than at any time in the past. We estimate their present strength to be between 4,000 and 8,000. They have obtained considerable arms and ammunition from Kong Le and as a result of capturing equipment during the rout of Phoumi's forces at Paksane and their defeat and disarming of the Sam Neua garrison. They probably have been reinforced by cadres recently trained in North Vietnam, and they probably have concentrated increasing numbers of troops in the areas around Vientiane, Thakhet-Savannakhet, Phong Saly, and Luang Prabang. The Pathet Lao and Vientiane forces in the Vientiane area are deployed in such a manner as to either defend or attack the city, and the forces facing Phoumi along the Nam Ca Dinh line are of both Pathet Lao and Vientiane units. At present, anti-Pathet Lao operations are going on only in Phong Saly and Xieng Khouang.

21. The Pathet Lao probably view the developing situation as a golden opportunity either to force acceptance of their participation in the government and their foreign policy demands, or to seize control of Laos by armed action if they conclude that they can do so quickly and without risking outside intervention. We do not believe that the Pathet Lao—

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