

SECRET

3

both the domestic and international spheres. On 17 November, his government and the Communist Neo Lao Hak Xat announced an agreement to establish a national coalition government including representatives of the NLHX. The agreement also provided that the government would soon accept aid from Communist China and North Vietnam and would send a delegation to those countries to negotiate for exchange of economic and cultural relations, for the re-establishment of telecommunications with North Vietnam, and for the immediate opening of the Laos-China border. On 29 November, Souvanna's cabinet named a 10-man friendship mission, headed by the Prime Minister, for a visit to Peiping and Hanoi beginning 10 December. Deliveries of Soviet food and POL to Vientiane have begun and a 3-man Soviet Embassy staff has taken up residence in Vientiane.

11. Thus, Souvanna now relies very heavily upon the support of pro-Communist and Kong Le elements. It appears that this will continue, and that as opposition to him mounts he will keep on seeking broader and more specific support from the Communist Bloc. Souvanna probably still hopes to keep Communist influence in check, but some of his measures to protect his position by moving closer to the Communists are irrevocable, and most, if not all, of them have been highly favorable to future Communist domination of the Vientiane Government.

12. *Phoumi*. The position of Phoumi, and of the Revolutionary Committee he has set up with Boun Oum, has a number of serious weaknesses. In southern Laos, there are about 7,500 combat troops, most of whom are under commanders probably loyal to Phoumi. Most of these troops are scattered widely through the area, and have their hands full attempting to cope with local Pathet Lao activities. In the Thakhet-Savannakhet area, Phoumi has about 1,500 troops. He is in the process of recruiting and organizing an additional battalion. It is unlikely that Phoumi's troops without continued US assistance could or would offer very strong or effective resistance to a determined attack on their positions by Vientiane and Pathet Lao forces.

13. Phoumi's military capabilities have markedly increased since he received additional US aid and moral support. Moreover, the pro-Savannakhet coup of 10 November in Luang Prabang greatly improved Phoumi's military and political positions. Nearly all the commanders in the Luang Prabang region have pledged their support to him. Several small units operating against the Pathet Lao in Sam Neua are being supplied by Phoumi and are probably responsive to his guidance. Phoumi is handicapped, however, by poor communications with these units. In Xieng Khouang, the militant Meo tribesmen are being supplied with arms by Phoumi and are currently conducting effective anti-Pathet Lao operations.

14. The Revolutionary Committee probably has some political appeal in southern Laos. Boun Oum is a member of the Royal Family of Champassak which ruled southern Laos until Laos was united by the French following the Second World War. However, we believe that Boun Oum and Phoumi lack broad political appeal outside the south. Phoumi's loss of prestige among both political and military leaders in Laos as a result of the Kong Le coup has been only partially made up by the Luang Prabang coup and General Ouan's defection. Moreover, Phoumi has in the past proved to be an undependable and, at times, careless military leader, highly ambitious and opinionated.

15. Phoumi's motivations in the present situation are probably a combination of personal pride and anti-Communist convictions. He is frustrated by what he believes to be inadequate US support and an ambiguous US policy. However, he probably has never intended to come to terms with Souvanna, and probably has felt that the US would, in the final analysis, support him. He would like to retake Vientiane by force and almost certainly has plans for such an operation.

16. *King Savang*. The King appears to have no personal courage. He has been extremely careful to stay within constitutional limits and he has never asserted, openly and clearly, his potential authority and influence. Although it is quite clear that he distrusts

SECRET

1342