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16 November 1960

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN



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Next 2 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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South Vietnam: President Diem's intentions remain uncertain in the wake of last week's coup attempt, whose leaders have fled to Cambodia. He may proceed to carry out a government reorganization, but there has been no formal announcement of cabinet changes.

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Reports of civilian arrests and a temporary suspension of newspapers which published rebel communique's suggest the possibility of reprisals which could lead to popular unrest.

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Laos: The increased tension brought about by the recent coup in Luang Prabang, which brought that area over to the side of Phoumi's Savannakhet Revolutionary Committee, has given rise to persistent rumors of impending military action to be taken by General Phoumi's forces, by the Pathet Lao or by the Vientiane garrison. The upshot of King Savang's separate talks in Luang Prabang on 14 November with Phoumi and former Premier Phoui Sananikone is that Savang is still reluctant to initiate the formation of a new government until Souvanna Phouma either resigns or is ousted.

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III. THE WEST

El Salvador: A struggle for power among military groups and the pro-Communist and pro-Castro civilian faction of the six-man civil-military junta that replaced the Lemus regime on 26 October appears to be nearing a showdown. The leftists continue to entrench themselves in the provisional government and reportedly are making plans to organize and arm a peasant militia in order to defy any attempt by the armed forces to dislodge them.

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The Situation in Laos

[Increased tension resulting from the shift of Luang Prabang to the side of General Phoumi's Savannakhet Revolutionary Committee has given rise to numerous rumors of impending military action by the Pathet Lao, by forces loyal to Souvanna Phouma, by Captain Kong Le, or by Phoumi against variously reported objectives.]

[The Pathet Lao have been rumored ready to march on Luang Prabang or Vientiane, although their ability to take either town unaided is open to question. Souvanna has told Ambassador Brown he intends to retake Luang Prabang by force, but he denied that Pathet troops would be used in such a venture. His ability to take the royal capital, however, would seem to have been considerably reduced by the apparent capitulation of General Ouane--Souvanna's armed forces commander--to the Savannakhet group. Ouane had previously been reported to be north of Luang Prabang gathering troops to retake the town. Phoumi has denied rumors that his forces intend either to attack Vientiane or to engage Second Paratroop Battalion elements southeast of Pak Sane. He claims, however, that the paratroopers may be preparing to resume their offensive.]

[Many of these rumors may have been deliberately circulated by the contending groups as part of a war of nerves in support of their political maneuvering. In the present state of tension, however, clashes are entirely possible.]

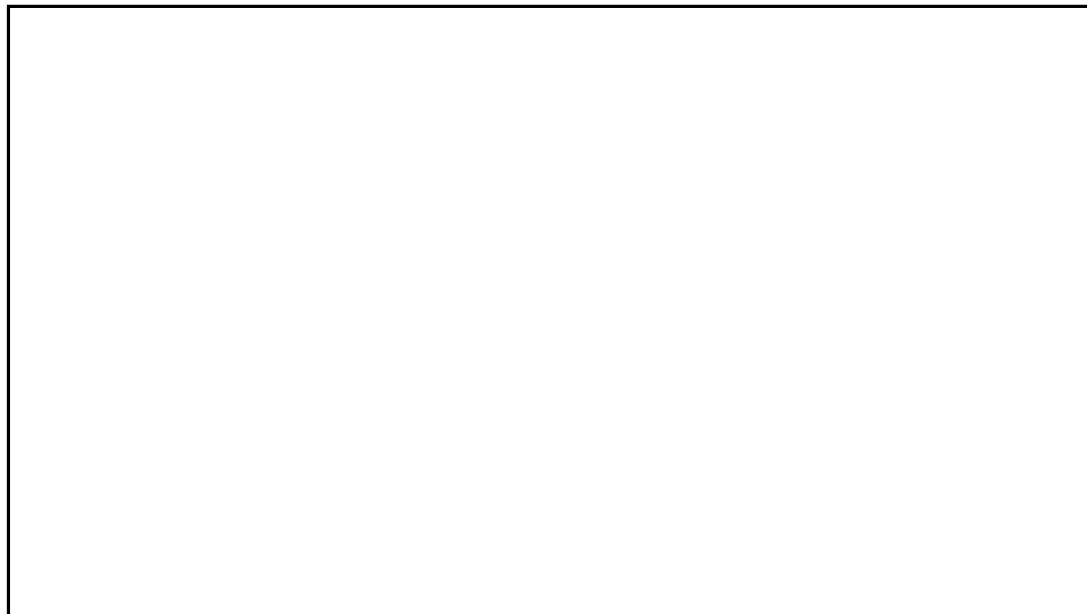
[Phoumi, during his 14 November visit to Luang Prabang, apparently consolidated his control of the First Military Region. He reportedly plans to establish military headquarters in Luang Prabang, with General Bounleut as his commander in chief. Ouane and the former First Military Region commander, Col. Houmpanh, have been flown to Savannakhet. A new regional commander will eventually be appointed to replace Houmpanh; in the meantime, Major Bountheng, who]

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{seized control of Luang Prabang on 10 November, will serve
as acting chief of the First Military Region.]



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El Salvador

A showdown seems near in a struggle for power in El Salvador among military groups and the pro-Communist, pro-Castro civilian faction of the six-man civil military junta that replaced the Lemus regime on 26 October. The three civilians on the junta and several cabinet members suspected of being Communists or Communist sympathizers have continued to entrench themselves in the provisional government by putting pro-Communists and suspected Communists in numerous posts from subcabinet level down through third-echelon ministerial and administrative positions, especially in the ministries of justice and labor.

The US Embassy in San Salvador reported on 15 November that leftists have taken over the regime's information and propaganda network and are continuing their drive to place their men in the country's nerve centers without any significant opposition yet from the military members of the junta. There are strong indications that the leftists are planning to organize and arm a peasant militia in order to defy any attempt by the armed forces to dislodge them.

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