

December 17, 1960
**Memorandum of Chairman Mao's Conversation with
Sihanouk on 17 December 1960**

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Summary:

Mao Zedong and Norodom Sihanouk discuss the deteriorating situation in Laos.

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Record of Chairman Mao [Zedong's] Reception of [Norodom] Sihanouk
(Has Not Received Approval)

Time: 17 December 1960, 5:00pm

Location: Zhongnanhai Government Reception Hall

[...]

Mao [Zedong]: Good. While you were out of country, the situation in Southeast Asia has undergone some changes.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Correct. We're actually very lucky in Cambodia, as we're quite safe.

Mao [Zedong]: The primary changes have been in Laos.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Prince Souvanna Phouma retreated to Cambodia along with some of his ministers. With the pressure America is exerting through Nosavan, they can no longer remain in Vientiane.

Mao [Zedong]: [Phoumi] Nosavan has already taken the majority of Vientiane.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Northern Laos belongs to the Laos military.

Mao [Zedong]: Phouma first lost Luang Prabang and later lost most of Vientiane. It was all the work of America and Thailand.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Thailand has been particularly helpful.

Mao [Zedong]: It's still America pulling the strings. They're American cannons and there are American soldiers in Nosavan's army.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: The Thai government is incredibly loyal to America, even to the point that they are even more extreme than America itself. They've even taken actions against us, though they've always failed.

Mao [Zedong]: You've done well.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Cambodia has recommended in the past that the two factions in Laos form an agreement to make Laos neutral. If the two factions can achieve that without the interference of other nations, then they could go a long way toward stabilizing the country.

Mao [Zedong]: Whether or not foreign countries interfere in Laos's affairs is up to them to decide, which is of course the ideal condition. However, Nosavan has already taken advantage of the four months he had to prepare and has the aid of America and Thailand. Phouma, on the other hand, has done no preparation. He doesn't have cannons, but they do and they also have parachute troops. Furthermore they can

attack Phouma through Thailand.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: This matter aims at the Lao Patriotic Front more than the policy of neutrality of Phouma's government because they are afraid of the Lao Patriotic Front being allowed to participate in Phouma's government, and it makes sense that they would fear that. There are elements of Phouma's government that have definite sympathies for the people. In terms of numbers and in governing power, Phouma is relatively weak. The Western nations along with Thailand are all very afraid of Laos leaning toward the Socialist camp. They criticize the Lao Patriotic Front for accepting the support of Socialist countries like the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In the past, Cambodia has raised the suggestion in the United Nations that the two camps in Laos make peace and stop criticizing each other in order to ensure stability. Whichever side refuses to make that guarantee will be revealed for what it is. Our team of representatives in the United Nations have been in contact with those from England and America. We requested them to help ensure the stability of Laos and not to interfere with their domestic affairs, but they were hesitant and unwilling to make that guarantee. They said that their guarantee would be useless without that of China, the Soviet Union, and The Democratic Republic of Vietnam. I replied that we not only request their guarantee, but also China's, the Soviet Union's, and that of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Last night, the ambassador from North Vietnam came to me and we spoke on this matter. The ambassador said that calling the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's actions in Laos interference is erroneous; Vietnam has not given aid to the Lao Patriotic Front. Vietnam abides by the Geneva Convention. I told him that that is good and will be useful in making other nations refrain from interference.

Mao [Zedong]: Over the past four months, Phouma has not asked for weapons from us, he has only asked for food supplies from Burma, and 5 tons of oil from the Soviet Union. (Sihanouk interjects: We've helped them with food supplies as well.) So he does not have military aid. Nosavan has received large amounts of aid from America, cannons from Thailand, and American military leadership. He also has Thai troops.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: That's exactly it. In my opinion, if we are to improve the situation, then we should hold a new conference. Participants should include the Soviet Union, China, Thailand, Vietnam, and of course Laos. That way everyone can talk things over face to face.

Mao [Zedong]: (Looking at a map) America and Thailand are supporting Novasan in two routes of attack on Vientiane, one through Laos and another through Thailand. (Points to the map) This is Kong Le's army. Those are the Thai cannons. Kong Le's troops are currently holding the Vientiane airport. They will not heed your suggestion. We have offered absolutely no support to Phouma over the past 4 months. Currently the problem isn't the English or the French, it's the Americans.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Right. We've had contact with America before, but they didn't listen to us, so I think we should hold another meeting of countries who participated in the Geneva Convention. This conference should be attended by America and Thailand because the Laos problem is essentially their problem.

Mao [Zedong]: The French and English attitudes toward this problem are a little better.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: I've met with Charles de Gaulle, he is in support of Nosavan, and approves of Phouma's plan for resolution. According to the report I received last night, the French ambassador in Cambodia is requesting that we allow him to move French embassy officials and their families to Cambodia. This proves that the French and Americans can't stand to be together there.

Mao [Zedong]: If the French disperse to Cambodia and the Americans disperse to Thailand, then a portion of the American embassy in Vientiane will be destroyed.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Aside from holding a new conference, I don't see any other method.

Mao [Zedong]: That might be possible. The question is whether or not America and Thailand will participate. Last time Thailand didn't participate and America did not sign the agreement.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: If their intentions are good, then they will participate. If they don't participate, then their true motives will be revealed.

Mao [Zedong]: The past four months have already revealed them for who they are. However, Phouma needs to learn from lessons. His troops at Luang Prabang has defected and surrendered. Later, another unit surrendered to Nosavan in Vientiane. This is a very complicated issue. Let's stop here. If you are willing to continue talking on this subject, I can have our Premier speak with you. There's one other matter. The Chairman of the People's Republic of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, has asked us to deliver his greetings to your majesty. He has a great amount of respect for your highness and if possible, would like to invite you to visit the People's Republic of Vietnam.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Thank you for passing on Ho Chi Minh's greetings. I would be happy to visit the People's Republic of Vietnam. However, I will be unable to go this time as I must return to Phnom Penh on December 26th to host the Day of the National Assembly.

Mao [Zedong]: One more thing, Chairman Ho would also like to know if your two countries could move forward in bilateral relationship. That is to say, he'd like to ask to establish formal diplomatic relations.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Vietnam has been asking this for a while now, but we have always refused because we cannot establish relations with a divided country, this is a principle on which we will not waver. For instance, we will not have relations with Germany or Korea, as we must maintain neutrality and balance. If we recognize one side, then we will no longer be neutral. West Germany is still very unhappy with us over this as they believe that East Germany absolutely cannot become a country. We hope that these countries will be united by the will of the people. Then and only then can we establish diplomatic relations with them.

Mao [Zedong]: That must be very difficult for you.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Yes, we have a consulate in Vietnam, but we do not have diplomatic relations. If North Vietnam is willing to, they may build a consulate in our country. Our colleagues can confirm that West Germany makes things difficult for us frequently. So, we suggest that we establish consular relations but not formal diplomatic relationships. If we have an East German consulate and a West German one, it actually wouldn't be inconvenient for us. That's exactly what we've suggested to West Germany. There are two consulates in New Delhi. It's very difficult to choose one side and not the other as both sides have a large group supporting them. For instance, East Germany has the Soviet Union who recognizes them, but America is trying fervently to get us to recognize Adenauer.

Something like this happened in 1958 when the South Vietnamese military entered our country in pursuit of North Vietnamese political prisoners. Premier Zhou published a statement in support of us. The South Vietnamese army then dispersed. Later, Ngô

Đình Diệm's brother Ngô Đình Nhu came to us saying that since we had recognized China getting rid of Chiang Kaishek, in order to maintain balance, we could recognize them. I told him that there do not exist two Chinas, but there are two Vietnams. Wu Tingru then said that our recognition of China caused the West to lose face and that we could recognize South Vietnam in order to give them back that face.

Mao [Zedong]: Ngô Đình Diệm has been a source of trouble lately too. Didn't a South Vietnamese military officer defect to Cambodia?

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Yes, he did! We're becoming poorer and poorer. If we're to feed all of these people, we'll wind up very poor. We're even using the money we'd set aside for our 5 year plan to take care of them. 400 more Lao refugees are coming into Cambodia, and more are coming from South Vietnam as well. The Prime Minister can confirm that we've already asked the Soviet Union to help.

Mao [Zedong]: They're all uninvited guests.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: There are people coming from Laos every day, and every day there are planes coming in from Vientiane. Our airports have to turn on the lights every night as there are constantly planes landing. Actually it's not a big deal if the French diplomats come as their embassy will give them food, but the Laos and Vietnamese people want us to give them food. Originally it was just 90-some members of the South Vietnamese communist party fleeing to Cambodia who wanted to go to the North. South Vietnam asked us to turn them over, but we did not respond so they carried out attacks against us in retaliation. Aside from that we also have some scholarly factions who oppose Ngô Đình Diệm.

Mao [Zedong]: You will still have to take more Lao refugees.

[Norodom] Sihanouk: Even Luang Phibun used to come to Phnom Pehn seeking refuge.