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Speech of Senator Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.)
For Release on Delivery

THE SITUATION IN LAOS

Mr. President: The Kingdom of Laos can hardly hope to compete for world attention with Big Four Conferences and other major international developments. Nevertheless, what happens to the Kingdom, one of the three successor states in Indochina, ought not to be overlooked. To its million and a half inhabitants and to the nations of Southeast Asia which border on Laos, developments in that country are of the utmost importance.

I take this occasion, therefore, to point out the serious situation which now exists in that remote land.

Before the Geneva agreement last year, Laos was invaded several times by the Viet Minh communists from northern Viet Nam. In addition, a small band of communists-inspired dissidents numbering not more than several hundred men, called the Pathet Lao, was attempting to overthrow the government.

Under the terms of the Geneva agreement, the Viet Minh communists agreed to withdraw entirely from Laos and the Pathet Lao were to regroup and concentrate in the two northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua.
In a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations after my return from Laos last year, I noted that

The Laotian dissidents in the northern provinces are interpreting the Geneva accord to mean that they may exercise full powers in Phong Saly and Sam Neua... Compulsory political indoctrination is being enforced in the villages which they control. Young men from all over Laos are being brought to the provinces for training and some are being sent to north Viet Nam for the same purposes.

As a result, the Pathet Lao have increased in number from several hundred to several thousand and they have refused to permit the government to restore its authority over the two northern provinces. They have attacked government army contingents which have attempted to penetrate Phong Saly and Sam Neua.

All reports from Laos suggest that the Communists are acting in utter disregard of the Geneva armistice.

In recent days a startling development with little or no publicity has taken place in north Viet Nam. Radio Hanoi, the voice of Ho Chi Minh, has been broadcasting information about the formation of an "autonomous Thai-Meo Zone" in the northwestern sector of the Vietminh territory. In December, 1954 Ho Chi Minh's Council of Ministers adopted a resolution to establish an Autonomous State of Thai and Meo Peoples. The Fourth session of the National North Vietnamese Assembly held in March of this year, rubber stamped this an "extremely important resolution." The Communists' decision was "unanimous."

At the time of the Bandung Conference, Ho Chi Minh issued decree 230-SL which formally set up the new autonomist area. At the time this
A decree was issued, it was also stated in an annex to it, that the Thai Zone would have the authority to organize its own militia, including guerillas, and also the right to use the Thai language and script in its administrative territory. At approximately the same time General Vo Ngyuen Giap, the Commander in Chief of the Communist forces in Viet Nam, advised the people in a separate message to "push forward in the Thai-Meo Zone with the building of a local army, guerilla forces, and militia in order to protect the autonomous area, protect its frontiers, smash all enemy-sabotaging maneuvers, and contribute a worthy part to the struggle for peace, unity, independence, and the democracy of all our people."

Following this, the state-controlled press in North Viet Nam got into the act and began an editorial campaign of "warm welcome" to the autonomous region.
In the first place, they agreed at Geneva to recognize the territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Laos. The refusal of the Pathet Lao dissidents to permit the government authorities to reoccupy the northern provinces, however, has the effect of dividing the country into two states.

In the second place, the Viet Minh agreed to withdraw from Laos in 120 days. A year later, however, Viet Minh cadres are stationed with Pathet Lao units and Viet Minh contingents are reported operating in the northern provinces of the Kingdom.

Finally, the Geneva agreement provides for a cessation of hostilities. Pathet Lao forces in flagrant violation of this provision, however, have attacked government troops at Houei Thao, Muong Peun and Nong Khang and Pakha in Sam Neua province.

There is an International Control Commission supervising the carrying out of the Geneva armistice in Indochina. It consists of representatives of India, Canada, and Poland. By unanimous vote, the Commission has recognized that the Geneva Agreement affirms the territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Laos and the government's right to administer the two northern provinces.

Yet this ruling continues to be ignored by the Viet Minh and the Laotian dissidents. When, these violations of the Geneva armistice in Laos are added to those in Viet Nam, where thousands of people have been prevented from quitting the communist-held areas, serious doubt is cast
upon the sincerity of Communist professions of peace in the Far East.

If we are going to have a worldwide relaxation in tensions then even remote Laos must share in it. The Soviet Union is a guarantor of the Geneva accord. The Russians have the influence with the communists in Indochina. They can remove one more cause of tensions by using that influence to end the defiance of the Geneva agreement in Laos.