4-20-1964

Coup d'etat against Souvanna Phouma - Laos

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
The report that Sowanna Phouma has either been deposed or forced to resign is bad news for U.S. and all of S.E. Asia. He was one of the only men who could have been successful in keeping his country from being fragmented just as, in my opinion, the late Ho Chi Minh was the best possible man, despite the pressure against him at home and from abroad, to insure the future of Free Viet Nam.

The result would have been a further shifting of Cambodia toward Communist China, a possible further weakening of our position in S.E. Asia and the fortification of Laos between the Pathet Lao and the Revolutionary forces. All this meant more trouble for us unless we played our cards carefully and did not act impulsively.

If we want to support the statement made by Rusk and the Administration against the statement of Laotian Sowanna Phouma and others writing with interest the report and recommendations of Howard Hunger, our Ambas. to Laos, which should furnish us some guidelines as to what our future course should be.
Mr. President:

The news this morning indicates that the coup d'état against Souvanna Phouma has backfired and that Souvanna Phouma has once again resumed his position as Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Laos on the basis of the stipulations laid down by the Geneva Accord of 1962. I hope this is true. Yesterday's report that Souvanna Phouma had been overthrown was bad news for Laos, for the United States, and for all of Southeast Asia. He was and is the only man who could have been successful in keeping his country from being fragmented just as, in my opinion, the late Ngo Dinh Diem was the best possible man, despite the pressures against him at home and from abroad to insure the future of Free Viet Nam.

Had the coup succeeded the result would have been a further shifting of Cambodia toward Communist China, a possible further weakening of our position in Southeast Asia, and the partition of Laos between the Pathet Lao and the Revolutionary Group. All this would have meant more trouble for us unless we played our cards carefully and did not act impetuously. I am waiting with interest the report and recommendations of Leonard Unger, our Ambassador to Laos, which should furnish us some guidelines as to what our future course in that country should be.

I fully support the position of President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk in their statements against the coup d'état which sought to force Souvanna Phouma out of office.
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It would have meant, also, that the Accords which we entered into in regard to Laos have now been violated, and I fully support the statements made by Secretary Rusk and the Administration against the revolt forcing Souvanna Phouma out.
MEMORANDUM

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