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"Laos, Little Land, Big Threat"

The title I assigned for this visit today was "Laos, Little Land, Big Threat." I am sure you are aware the fact that this little kingdom of Laos is very much in the public eye and that the world attention is focused upon it at the present time. It's a matter of interest to me, a special interest I think, because I journeyed around and visited in that general area in 1953. While I did not actually go to Laos, and may I say at that point the real pronunciation is "Louz". I do know the correct pronunciation but I try not to confuse.

When I was in that area in 1953, as a sort of an unofficial emissary of the President of the United States, at that time I visited Indochina, now broken into two countries; also Burma and Cambodia and Thailand, which was originally known as Siam; and there in the middle of this cluster is this country of Laos. A little country! So when it began to attract world attention and it appeared that many things could happen as a result of the developments there, I hauled out the old notebooks that I made on the trip, and then I thought I ought to talk to you about it a little bit and give you some of my impressions of that general area and what this whole development means.

First, we ought to look at the land of Laos and see where it is and what kind of land it is. If you were to start out from Mexico City and travel about 11,000 miles in a due westerly direction along a parallel of latitude you would probably land in a town called Luangprabang, that's the royal capitol of Laos. Singularly enough the country has two capitols, one Vientiane, as they call it, which is the administrative capitol. The royal capitol is where the king and

resplendent past. It was a great country and strong. It had a great agriculture and raised fine beef stock and cattle and sheep and many of those, of course, were destroyed and their agriculture was put back many, many years as a result of enemy occupation. It had a glorious history long ago and moved forward until such time as its neighbors began to first peck at this part of the country and that part and it lost some of its terrain, and it lost its prestige, it lost its glory, and it lost its greatness.

Some 90 years ago the French took over this country as a protectorate. In fact, they took over Laos and the country lying southwest of there called Cambodia and also the long strip extending from the Chinese border down along the China Sea called Indochina. They operated it as a protectorate and as a colonial possession so to speak and knowing a little something about it, I would say that it was colonialism at its worst. It seems to me they were there mainly to milk the land and draw off its resources and put little or nothing back. I think the best fortification for that statement can be found in the fact that after 90 years of tutelage over these little countries, including the kingdom of Laos, they, the French, had trained virtually no natives for civilian administrative purposes. The only thing that I could find that they had done out there was trained some doctors. That was mainly compelled, I think, by the incidence of tropical disease. So there were no local administrators, no people who had been brought up as civilian administrators at different levels of government and that was the weakness of that whole picture. But there the French were for some 90 years and in one country at least, in Saigon in Indochina, they built what I have often referred to as a kind of miniature Paris and there they transported a French civilization. But that's the only place where it happened. And that's where most of the French administrators and the French rulers lived. But think of administering three little coun-

tries like that for a period of 90 years and leaving them worse off than when the colonial hand was first put upon them.

Sooner or later there had to be a rebellion of sorts and that rebellion came in Indochina in 1946. It was triggered in the main in the north sections of the country by the Reds and those who had infiltrated North Viet-Nam and this struggle went on for a long, long time and it was of significance to us because it proved a veritable sinkhole for France and we had to bail in hundreds of millions of dollars to keep France afloat.

The outcome finally was settled at the Geneva Conference in 1954 and out of that conference came an independent neutral Laos and an independent neutral Cambodia, an independent republic called South Viet-Nam, and a people's republic under communist domination called North Viet-Nam. So here are these little countries and they are still there struggling along as best they can.

In World War II, the Japanese came in and fairly decimated the country. When they moved out, the French resumed their colonization efforts and took over again. However, under the Geneva accord, they left only military missions because we tried to assure these countries they would be independent and neutral. Now there has been an infiltration by the Reds, not only from the Soviet Union and not only from China but from next door, namely North Viet-Nam, the northern section of what was once Indochina. There in the northern part of Indochina, there is an excellent air field; soldiers and supplies can be brought in in four motored planes. They can be transhipped on two motored planes to the very central part of Laos. That's the reason you have a situation where the Reds, fortified by some of the Laotians themselves whom they refer to as the "pathe Laos" and fortified by weapons from the outside, have fairly taken over the strong spots in the country and as a result have jeopardized the continuance of a free, independent, neutral country.

Now our interest in the matter lies in the fact that first we have a two hundred million dollar stake in Laos because that much of the people's money has been bailed into this little country. Secondly, we have a stake because Laos could very well be a communist springboard to finally bring Cambodia and South Viet-Nam and Thailand and Indonesia and Burma and virtually every other section of southeast Asia under communist control.

That's the reason for the concern today. And the choices are very few. You could move in with the troops supplied by the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization or you could arrange a cease fire and work out ultimately a coalition government. But a coalition government can only mean that communism will have representation in such government and that will be the old story such as we have had it in Korea, in Hungary, in Poland, and elsewhere. But we have not only a money stake in Laos, the free world has a stake because if this should prove a springboard for the ultimate subjection and the communization of all southeast Asia, that effort would not stop but would go on from there. Then we truly could say that communism had reduced some of the bastions of the Free World and extended its domain so far that it in truth and in fact is a world threat.

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