

... required for such programs. And they share with all humanity the hope and determination that the less developed peoples will succeed in their valiant efforts to achieve sustained economic progress.

Next week the Development Assistance Group, which is soon to become the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, will meet in London. As an indication of the importance I attach to all phases of the work of OECD, I have instructed George W. Ball, our Under Secretary of

State for Economic Affairs, to represent the United States at this meeting.

The subject matter of this meeting represents one of the central tasks of OECD. I look forward to the development of joint approaches, and joint solutions, in which each of the member countries will assume its fair share of our common responsibility. I am confident that this meeting will represent a substantial forward step in this effort.

NOTE: The text of the convention is published in the Department of State Bulletin (vol. 44, p. 11).

92 The President's News Conference of March 23, 1961

THE PRESIDENT. [1.] I want to make a brief statement about Laos. It is, I think, important for all Americans to understand this difficult and potentially dangerous problem. In my last conversation with General Eisenhower, the day before the inauguration on January 19, we spent more time on this hard matter than on any other thing. And since then it has been steadily before the administration as the most immediate of the problems that we found upon taking office. Our special concern with the problem in Laos goes back to 1954. That year at Geneva a large group of powers agreed to a settlement of the struggle for Indochina. Laos was one of the new states which had recently emerged from the French union and it was the clear premise of the 1954 settlement that this new country would be neutral—free of external domination by anyone. The new country contained contending factions, but in its first years real progress was made towards a unified and neutral status. But the efforts of a Communist-dominated group to destroy this neutrality never ceased. In the last half of 1960 a series of sudden maneuvers occurred and the Communists

and their supporters turned to a new and greatly intensified military effort to take over. These three maps [indicating] show the area of effective Communist domination as it was last August, with the colored portions up on the right-hand corner being the areas held and dominated by the Communists at that time; and now next, in December of 1960, 3 months ago, the red area having expanded; and now from December 20 to the present date near the end of March the Communists control a much wider section of the country.

In this military advance the local Communist forces, known as the Pathet Lao, have had increasing support and direction from outside. Soviet planes, I regret to say, have been conspicuous in a large-scale airlift into the battle area—over 100—1,000 sorties since last December 13th, plus a whole supporting set of combat specialists, mainly from Communist North Viet-Nam, and heavier weapons have been provided from outside, all with the clear object of destroying by military action the agreed neutrality of Laos.

It is this new dimension of externally sup-

ported warfare that creates the present grave problem. The position of this administration has been carefully considered and we have sought to make it just as clear as we know how to the governments concerned.

First, we strongly and unreservedly support the goal of a neutral and independent Laos, tied to no outside power or group of powers, threatening no one, and free from any domination. Our support for the present duly constituted government is aimed entirely and exclusively at that result. And if in the past there has been any possible ground for misunderstanding of our desire for a truly neutral Laos, there should be none now.

Secondly, if there is to be a peaceful solution, there must be a cessation of the present armed attacks by externally supported Communists. If these attacks do not stop, those who support a truly neutral Laos will have to consider their response. The shape of this necessary response will, of course, be carefully considered, not only here in Washington, but in the SEATO conference with our allies, which begins next Monday.

SEATO—the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization—was organized in 1954, with strong leadership from our last administration, and all members of SEATO have undertaken special treaty responsibilities towards an aggression in Laos.

No one should doubt our resolutions on this point. We are faced with a clear and one-sided threat of a change in the internationally agreed position of Laos. This threat runs counter to the will of the Laotian people, who wish only to be independent and neutral. It is posed rather by the military operations of internal dissident elements directed from outside the country. This is what must end if peace is to be achieved in Southeast Asia.

Thirdly, we are earnestly in favor of

constructive negotiation among the nations concerned and among the leaders of Laos which can help Laos back to the pathway of independence and genuine neutrality. We strongly support the present British proposal of a prompt end of hostilities and prompt negotiation. We are always conscious of the obligation which rests upon all members of the United Nations to seek peaceful solutions to problems of this sort. We hope that others may be equally aware of this responsibility.

My fellow Americans, Laos is far away from America, but the world is small. Its two million people live in a country 3 times the size of Austria. The security of all Southeast Asia will be endangered if Laos loses its neutral independence. Its own safety runs with the safety of us all—in real neutrality observed by all.

I want to make it clear to the American people and to all of the world that all we want in Laos is peace, not war; a truly neutral government, not a cold war pawn; a settlement concluded at the conference table and not on the battlefield.

Our response will be made in close cooperation with our allies and the wishes of the Laotian Government. We will not be provoked, trapped, or drawn into this or any other situation; but I know that every American will want his country to honor its obligations to the point that freedom and security of the free world and ourselves may be achieved.

Careful negotiations are being conducted with many countries at the present time in order to see that we have taken every possible course to insure a peaceful solution. Yesterday the Secretary of State informed the members and leaders of the Congress—the House and Senate—in both parties, of the situation and brought them up to date. We will continue to keep them and the