

Saigon Aide's Report

Ho Chi Minh Trail Is Invasion Target

No Word on U.S. Troop Involvement

Times-Post Service

Jakarta

South Vietnamese ground troops have crossed the border into Laos* to strike at the Ho Chi Minh trail, South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam revealed yesterday in Jakarta. *SEE 16 MAY

News of the intensification of the war in Laos was expected by diplomatic observers here to

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have severe political repercussions in the United States and to increase the threat of military intervention by China.

Lam said operations of the army of the Republic of Vietnam forces in Laos have been under way "for some time" and are continuing.

"The Americans have been striking at the trail in Laos from the air and we have been hitting it on the ground," Lam said. He said

the ground assaults are designed to interdict the trail but that the Saigon forces are not remaining on Laotian territory.

VAGUE

The South Vietnamese foreign minister was vague about whether American advisers accompanied the troops into Laos and said the question of American artillery support is "a technical question which the generals would have to answer."

He said the raids are being conducted from both the First Corps and Second Corps areas north of the tri-border junction of Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam.

Lam's report means that South Vietnamese forces now are actively engaged against

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North Vietnamese troops in both Cambodia and Laos, as well as South Vietnam in what can only appear as a further intensification of the war in Indochina.

A statement issued here by Lam at the conclusion of the two-day Asian foreign minister's conference on Cambodia said the Saigon government supported the resolution of the conference on the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodia. No mention of Laos was made in the conference communique, nor in Lam's formal statement. He disclosed the Laotian operations in an interview with the Los Angeles Times.

EXPECT

Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma said recently that he expected an intensification of the war in Laos as a result of the new moves there by the North Vietnamese and their Pathet Lao allies.

Lam's disclosure of the South Vietnamese operations in Laos came as news dispatches reaching here quoted a Laotian defense ministry spokesman as saying that the North Vietnamese seizure of villages and outposts there in an attempt to open new communication lines with Cambodia would make South Vietnamese intervention in Laos "a necessity."

Earlier this month, North Vietnamese troops took the southern Laotian provincial capital of Attopeu and moved on to Saravane, another provincial capital 65 miles north of Attopeu.

These thrusts into areas previously conceded to the Laotian government were taken at the time as efforts to find a way around American air attacks on the Ho Chi Minh trail. As a result of Lam's statement, it now appears that these new North Vietnamese moves in Laos may have been in response to South Vietnamese ground penetration of the Ho Chi Minh trail area.

CHINA

The Chinese-owned Hong Kong Standard warned there Saturday that an expansion of the war into Laos "will inevitably bring in the Communist giants," according to United Press International. The paper asked whether the South Vietnamese government hoped to drive all the Communists in Indochina into North Vietnam and keep them there with the help of the armies of Laos and Cambodia. It reminded its readers of China's intervention in Korea when Allied forces approached the Chinese border there.

Lam's mention of both American air action and South Vietnamese ground action raised the question of whether there is any coordination of the two which would amount to U. S. close air support of the South Vietnamese ground raids in Laos. The South Vietnamese

foreign minister did not comment on this nor did he state whether any armored units are involved.

The Laotian operations by South Vietnamese ground troops mean that Communist supply lines to Cambodia and South Vietnam now are being harassed along their entire length from Laos in the north to the former port of Sihanoukville in the south of Cambodia.