

Laotians See Some Basis Of Hope of Limited Truce

By HENRY KAMM AUG 6 1970
Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, Aug. 5—Optimism that a limited truce may be reached between the neutralist Government and the Communist-led forces is greater here now than it has been in recent months.

The optimism, which remains cautious, is founded on a belief that there is good reason for North Vietnam to halt the war in northern Laos at least for the time being to concentrate its efforts on areas of primary interest: South Vietnam and Cambodia.

There is no hope for a suspension of the fighting in South Vietnam or Cambodia, where Communist activity has considerably intensified since the Vietnamese war spread into Cambodia at the end of April.

But Laotian and foreign sources feel that the war in the north, regarded as a separate conflict for the political control of Laos, has become more of a liability to Hanoi.

The hope for a limited truce pervades all currents of Laotian political opinion, including the rightists, who recently attempted and failed in a political maneuver to shake the strong hold of Prince Souvanna Phouma, chief of the nominally neutralist faction, whose neutrality is generally conceded to have fallen victim to unrelenting North Vietnamese aggression.

Hopes have been raised principally by the Communists' apparent softening of their insistence that all American bombing be halted before talks could be held. Without imposing any preconditions and on their own initiative, they have sent a Pathet Lao envoy Tiaosouk Vongsak, who is regarded as sufficiently high-ranking to conduct at least preliminary negotiations.

Prince Souvanna Phouma reported to the Cabinet today

on his first meeting with Mr. Tiaosouk although no substantive conversations have taken place.

Exchanges looking to new negotiations began last March in an effort to end the warfare that was abated by the 1962 Geneva agreement on the neutralization of Laos only to revive in 1963 with the breakdown of the coalition government formed as a result of the agreement.

Concurrently with the new discussions, Soviet officials here are giving currency to reports that the Pathet Lao is increasingly tired of the war and that the North Vietnamese—who do not acknowledge that their troops fight in Laos—are preoccupied with more immediate concerns.

If that is true, highly placed Laotian sources say, a truce is possible along lines previously proposed by Premier Souvanna Phouma, who has said in effect that he is ready to accept a division of Laos into two fighting arenas in which different conditions apply.

He said that the areas adjacent to Vietnam are remote and have slipped from Government control. What happens there—in the mountainous, thinly populated region of the Ho Chi Minh Trail—has become a matter between North Vietnam, which uses the trail to move troops and supplies to South Vietnam in circumvention of the demilitarized zone, in Vietnam, and the United States, which tries to interdict the movements through heavy bombing.

But, the Premier has said, fighting elsewhere could be brought to a halt. That means, in effect, that he would ask the United States to halt the bombing in the north in exchange for the Communists' agreement to limit themselves to the positions they now hold.