

Letter

New View of Laos

To the Editor:

Princess Souvanna Phouma's letter of Dec. 5 contains a number of serious factual errors which should be corrected before they add confusion to the already complex Laotian situation.

She argues that while Phouma Nesan and Prince Souphanouvong have been belligerent, Prince Souvanna Phouma has upheld the Laotian tradition of nonviolence. Since Nov. 1, 1965, the United States Air Force has conducted between 20,000 and 30,000 bombing sorties throughout Laos, making it one of the most heavily bombed nations in the history of warfare. Yet it is Souvanna Phouma who permitted the bombing to begin in 1964, has allowed it to continue, and even denies that it is happening.

It is this massive bombing of homes and villages which has forced over 600,000 refugees to flee to government camps, not the continued presence of North Vietnamese troops.

The Princess argues that the 1962 Geneva Accords broke down because Souphanouvong kept North Vietnamese troops in Laos. In fact, the agreements broke down over the issue of Air America's arms flights to the C.I.A.'s secret army, which was conducting sabotage operations behind the Pathet Lao cease-fire line.

Nor is it true that Souvanna Phouma has never allowed foreign troops to fight on Lao soil. There are currently over 5,000 regular Thai Government troops in Champassak and Savaboury Provinces, some 1,500 Cambodian soldiers in Champassak, and an unknown number of "retired" U.S. Green Berets advising the C.I.A.'s secret army.

The Princess says that Souphanouvong can end the war simply by taking the Cabinet post which awaits him in Vientiane. However, after his electoral victory in 1958, Souphanouvong was arrested without cause and held for a year until he barely avoided execution by escaping from prison.

In 1963 he left the present Government with good cause after two of his political allies in the Government were assassinated in Vientiane.

ALFRED W. MCCOY
New Haven, Dec. 5, 1970

The author is a doctoral student in the Asian History program at Yale, and national coordinator of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars.