

# Laotians Report No Word Of an Incursion by Saigon

## Premier Said to Have Questioned U.S. Embassy on Attack by Vietnamese— Protest by Vientiane Is Indicated

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VIENTIANE, Laos, Jan. 31—Officials said here today that they had received no official word of a reported incursion by South Vietnamese troops into southern Laos.

There has been widespread speculation this weekend that the South Vietnamese, with American air support, had mounted or were about to mount an invasion aimed at enemy supply routes in Laos.

[Informed sources in Vientiane said that Premier Souvanna Phouma had checked with the United States Embassy and had been told that nothing was known at the moment of any South Vietnamese incursion, Agence France-Presse reported.]

Laotian sources indicated today that if South Vietnamese troops had struck, Vientiane would make it clear it opposed such incursions and would protest. The protest might just be a matter of form, since the Laotian Government forces, weakened by years of warfare,

are badly in need of support and a South Vietnamese strike would cause an important diversion of North Vietnamese strength away from the Laotian front.

Reports of a possible incursion have come with the hardening of the conviction in some quarters here that North Vietnamese forces in Laos are preparing a wide offensive in southern, central and northern Laos.

The North Vietnamese have steadily been reinforcing their base area in southern Laos, which was established when they were forced to pull back from northeastern Cambodia by the American and South Vietnamese drive into Cambodia last year.

The Boloven Plateau—which rises northeast of the North Vietnamese base area and above North Vietnamese lines of communication down the Sekong valley into Cambodia—

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is still mainly in Laotian hands and constitutes a highground threat to the Vietnamese.

The North Vietnamese had already struck at some Laotian positions on the plateau and recently captured one. Last week they occupied Phalane, 54 miles east of Savannakhet, and made thrusts with reinforced elements in the direction of Sam Thong and Long Cheng.

### Move Linked Threat in South

Informed sources here express the belief that a South Vietnamese attack into southern Laos would be related more to allied concerns in South Vietnam than in Laos. The move, these sources say, would represent a South Vietnamese attempt to thwart the growing threat of a North Vietnamese move in the highlands.

Despite the threat of North Vietnamese offensive, Laotian officials have been heartened by the continued resistance of the Cambodians to the North Vietnamese. Last week's successful North Vietnamese raid on Pnompenh's airport caused some dismay here but is now discounted in importance compared with Cambodia's success in reopening of Route 4 from the capital to the port of Kompong Som and in getting fresh supplies up the Mekong.

### Possible Objective Cited

Meanwhile some observers today pointed to the area of Luang Prabang, the royal capital of Laos 200 miles north of Vientiane, as another possible objective of a North Vietnamese attack.

Raids have been made to within a few miles of the capital and its important airport in the last few weeks.

However, a deterrent to any North Vietnamese attempt to take the city or the Vientiane area for that matter, is the apparent acceptance by the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese backers of the division of territory that existed between the Pathet Lao and the Vientiane Government when the Pathet Lao went into rebellion in 1964. Luang Prabang and the Vientiane plain as well as the lower Mekong valley was at that time in Government hands.