

U.S. Calls Move 'Limited'; Benefits Seen in Vientiane

FEB 9 1971

Americans Are Barred

By **TERENCE SMITH**

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8—The United States today portrayed the American-backed South Vietnamese invasion of Laos as a limited operation to protect "the security and safety of American forces in South Vietnam."

"This limited operation is not an enlargement of the war," the State Department contended.

Reliable sources at the White House and the State Department reported that operation plans called for the South Viet-

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namese to remain in Laos up to three months to disrupt the flow of North Vietnamese supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail for the rest of the dry season, which ends about May 1.

The sources said no American ground forces would enter Laos, even if the military tide began to turn against the South Vietnamese.

"My understanding," one official said, "is that no American troops are going in, no matter what happens."

However, a formal eight-point statement, amplified in briefings at the White House

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But Souvanna Protests

By **TILLMAN DURDIN**

Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, Feb. 8—There was a general feeling here today that if the South Vietnamese incursion into southern Laos went well it would deal a serious blow to the North Vietnamese. It was felt that the drive could prove beneficial to Laos in the long run even if at the moment it added to the problems of her international relations.

Nonetheless, while the move produced satisfaction in some quarters, there were misgivings in others. The Government's formal displeasure with the South Vietnamese drive was voiced in a statement issued by the Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, after he learned from Saigon radio reports that it had begun.

He noted that it was the North Vietnamese who "in defiance of international law accords solemnly concluded in 1962 at Geneva" had first violated the neutrality and territorial integrity of Laos and continued to do so. He said that this could not "constitute a justification for the entry of other protagonist troops into Laos."

The Premier demanded that all foreign troops withdraw immediately from Laos and urged

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U.S. Says 'Limited' Move Does Not Widen War

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and the State and Defense Departments, sought to justify the use of American air power.

The statement and the spokesmen stressed that the operation was intended to buy time for the South Vietnamese armed forces to improve themselves and to facilitate the withdrawal of American troops.

The United States contended that the invasion of nominally neutral Laos was "fully consistent with international law," based on the right of South Vietnam to protect itself against threatened attack. A declaration to that effect was submitted to members of the United Nations Security Council by Saigon. A spokesman said the United States was considering submitting a parallel statement.

A group of Democratic and Republican Senators challenged the contention that the operation did not constitute a widening of the war, but the initial reaction on Capitol Hill was mild compared with the furor that followed the incursion into Cambodia last year.

The Senate Majority Leader,

Mike Mansfield, led the critics of the operation, describing it as a "deepening of the tragedy and an extension of the war."

"If it doesn't succeed," the Senator said, "It's quite possible it may bring about a reversal of the withdrawal policy."

The Senate Minority Leader, Hugh Scott, expressed support for the operation, predicting that if it succeeded, "the enemy will have great difficulty in maintaining a sustained offensive til the end of the rainy season, in September or October."

Senator Scott—who said he was briefed Sunday on the details of the operation by Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser—said he expected the South Vietnamese to operate in Laos "until May or June, whenever the wet season begins."

Other Democratic Senators denounced the invasion as an unwarranted extension of the fighting that would lead to further involvement by the United States in Indochina.

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey said the incursion had dangerous implications for all countries involved, and Senator Harold Hughes of Iowa charged

that the operation "proves that the President has no plan to end the war — only one to widen it."

The White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, said the basic decision to invade Laos was made in January after intelligence reported an unusually heavy concentration of North Vietnamese troops and supplies in southern Laos. He said a final decision was made last week.

Mr. Ziegler insisted that there had been no delays in the planning and execution of the operation. He said the six-day news blackout on the early phase of the operation had been designed to protect the security of the forces "as they moved into a vulnerable area."

This was a reference to the northwestern corner of South Vietnam, where intelligence expected heavy resistance from a force estimated to be nine regiments of North Vietnamese regulars. As it developed, the allies encountered no significant resistance.

Other officials let it be known that the operation would be reviewed from week to week and its duration would depend on events. They said the goal was

more to disrupt the flow of supplies than to capture them, as was the objective last spring in Cambodia.

Intelligence agencies said last month that the North Vietnamese had begun shipping in average of 300 tons a day along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Only 10 per cent of this material is said to have reached enemy troops operating in Cambodia and South Vietnam. About two-thirds of the supplies, intelligence experts say, is still north of Route 9, the road across southern Laos that the South Vietnamese have moved onto. The objective is to hold Route 9 and thereby force the North Vietnamese either to fight or postpone the shipment of their supplies.

Cars Damaged in Athens

Special to The New York Times

ATHENS, Feb. 8—Three cars—two owned by United States military personnel—were slightly damaged last night by explosions in two residential suburbs of Athens. A United States Embassy spokesman confirmed that two of the cars belonged to members of the Joint United States Military Aid Group to Greece.

the powers responsible for insuring respect for the Geneva stipulations to take the necessary measures to compel all signers of the accords to respect their spirit and letter.

Prince Souvanna Phouma said that the Laotian Government "deplored once again that foreign troops belonging to countries and governments that have pledged to guarantee and defend the sovereignty, neutrality and inviolability of Laos have chosen to deliberately use her territory as a field of battle."

He noted that the South Vietnamese incursion, with American logistic support, had occurred over the "illegal route of access and infiltration called the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which the North Vietnamese had used for years to reach Cambodia and South Vietnam despite incessant protests and denunciations from the Royal Government of Laos."

It seemed clear that his protest was aimed not only at the Saigon Government but at the United States as well. Both have signed the Geneva accord of 1962, which included an agreement for a peaceful settlement between Communist and non-Communist factions in Laos on the basis of the neutrality, sovereignty and integrity of the kingdom.

North Vietnam Blamed

It seemed clear that the Premier assigned major blame for the present incursion to the North Vietnamese as the first transgressor on Laotian territory, which they first entered almost 20 years ago to support Communist-led Laotian dissidents against the Royal Government.

His statement was plainly intended to emphasize Laotian neutrality, and thus make his Government less vulnerable to the attacks over the South Vietnamese incursion that have already come from Communist countries and will doubtless increase.

Prince Souvanna said that he had not been informed or consulted either by President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam or by President Nixon on the incursion. Despite the Prince's statement, however, it was understood in Saigon that he had known in advance of the South Vietnamese plans.

He was visited this afternoon here in the country's administrative capital by the South Vietnamese Ambassador, Hoang Co Phuy, who expressed the hope that the new drive would not damage the friendship between the two countries.