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Fear Sparks Laotian Flight

No U.S. Evacuation

From News Dispatches

VIENTIANE, May 10—More than 2,000 persons, including some high-ranking government officials, were reported by border police today to have fled from Laos as fears of a Communist takeover spread.

The U.S. embassy urged Americans here to remain calm.

Immigration police at Ahadeau, on the Laotian bank of the Mekong River, said among those fleeing into Thailand were Tianethone Chantharassy, deputy foreign minister; Col. Loun Sisounon, commander of the national military police; and Somphet Sossavanh, deputy commander of the neutralist faction in the Laotian government.

Thousands more were believed to have crossed the Mekong from other towns along the river, particularly in the south, where there have been antirightist demonstrations in the past week.

The exodus was prompted by a Pathet Lao push 60 miles north of Vientiane and by leftist students who attacked the U.S. embassy yesterday demanding the resignations of five rightist Cabinet ministers.

Premier Souvanna Phouma's office announced that four right-wing Cabinet members and three generals had resigned, the official government radio said.

The radio identified the ministers as Defense Minister Sisouk na Champassak; Finance Minister Ngon Sannanikone; Deputy Foreign Minister Tianethone, and Deputy Public Works Minister Houmphanh Sansayngasith.

The generals who resigned were Gen. Vang Pao, former chief of the CIA-sponsored clandestine army of mountain tribes-

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Red Control Seen

By Murray Marder
Washington Post Staff Writer

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Laos is slipping rapidly into Communist control, even though a shrunken fig leaf of coalition rule may be retained for a time by Premier Souvanna Phouma, U.S. experts said yesterday.

The momentum of Communist victories in South Vietnam and Cambodia is contributing to the early disintegration of the precarious, two-year-old Laotian coalition government, American officials said in private.

Because of the peculiarities of the situation in Laos, which is in a relative state of peace, American experts are hopeful that country will escape the physical dangers that South Vietnam and Cambodia experienced. "There is no need to threaten much force to bring down the Lao government," said one U.S. specialist; "a good huff and puff could do it."

"This thing could fall apart anytime—either precipitously or gradually," said another. By May 19, birthday of the late North Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh, one U.S. official ventured, Communist power could dominate all Indochina, although North Vietnam's degree of influence would vary from country to country.

Unlike South Vietnam and Cambodia, in Laos there has been no demand on the Communist side, at least so far, for a cut-off of American aid. For two decades American funds, totaling more than \$2 billion, have been the prime support for the central government of Laos.

The Communist-led Pathet Lao have indicated they want to control the receipt of U.S. aid, not eliminate it. U.S. military and economic aid has been cut back sharp-

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men; Brig. Gen. Thonglith Chokbengvoun, who commanded the 5th Military Region around the capital, and Maj. Gen. Gouprasith Abhay, the deputy army commander.

A communique from the office of the premier said the resignations would be considered at the next meeting of the Cabinet, which normally meets Wednesdays.

Under the complicated provisions of the coalition formed 13 months ago, there have been five rightist, five Pathet Lao and two neutralist ministers in the Cabinet.

The Pathet Lao ministers each have a right-wing deputy and the right-wing ministers each have a Pathet Lao deputy.

One neutralist minister has a Pathet Lao deputy and the other a right-wing deputy.

A U.S. embassy spokesman said no evacuation of the more than 800 Americans in Laos was underway or planned. But he said an emergency handbook of evacuation instructions entitled "Bend With the Wind" had been circulated.

It said U.S. diplomats had been given assurances from both rightist and leftist factions that Americans would not be harmed.

Flights out of Laos were booked solid and trains on the Thai side of the Mekong River border were also booked for days ahead, mostly by Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai residents.

Many of Vientiane's 10,000-member Vietnamese community, panicked by the fall of Saigon and apprehensive about their status under a government dominated by the pro-Communist Pathet Lao, have already gone. So have many Chinese, who have been told their Taiwan passports will no longer be recognized.

Both communities dominated the business life of Laos.

Troops of the Vientiane or rightist faction have been ordered not to fight by Souvanna Phouma.

Those interviewed at the Mekong River crossing today said they were leaving because they were afraid the Communists would kill them or confiscate their property.

Many of the wealthier evacuees took their cars. But the Pathet Lao members of the mixed police force guarding the exit points allowed them to take only hand luggage.

Trucks loaded with furniture, household goods and television set were turned back.

DIPLOMACY, From A1

ly since the 1973 cease-fire in Laos, to a 1975 ceiling of \$70 million, with reduction of American personnel. The State Department said there are now about 1,000 Americans in Laos, about 320 of them officials, 530 dependents, and 150 businessmen, journalists, missionaries, teachers and others.

One U.S. official said yesterday that "it seems almost impossible" that the ignominious scenes of emergency helicopter evacuations of Americans from Saigon and Phnom Penh will be repeated in Vientiane. But American officials are too seared by those episodes to guarantee there will be no repetition in Laos.

Officially, the State Department disclaims any expectation that the Laotian coalition government "is in danger of collapse," or that any evacuation is anticipated. The reports from Vientiane of circulation of U.S. evacuation guidebooks entitled "Bend With The Wind," however, indicate U.S. apprehension.

The title equally fits the present posture of ailing, 74-year-old Prince Souvanna Phouma. As one State Department official said, the princely coalition leader is determined "to end his life

with a united Laos," whatever accommodation that requires with the Pathet Lao.

The three-sided coalition headed by Souvanna is the only surviving remnant of the "peace with honor" in Indochina projected by the United States in the 1973 Paris cease-fire accord on Vietnam. The cease-fire in Laos was agreed to in February of that year, but it was not until Sept. 14, 1973, that terms were signed for creation of a coalition government. Power was divided among five right-wing ministers, five Pathet Lao ministers, and two neutralists, with each minister counterbalanced by a deputy from another side.

The forced resignations of leading rightist ministers in the coalition, which now awaits only formal governmental acceptance, will shatter the intended equilibrium, U.S. experts said, whatever public claims there may be.

No matter who replaces the current rightist ministers, several American specialists said, the balance will be gone. It is "only a matter of when and how, and not if, the Pathet Lao takes over," said one American analyst: "they clearly are going to take over in practice, if not in name."

"Nothing in Laos is ever

simple and clean-cut," said one veteran American observer of the Laotian scene. "There is always a haze over every conclusion."

One of these hazy uncertainties is whether North Vietnam really wants a total Communist takeover in Laos now, or whether the momentum of Communist conquests in South Vietnam and Cambodia has outrun anyone's plans in Laos.

American officials are convinced that neither China, which has built key roads into Laos, nor the Soviet Union, want to see Laos under outright Communist control, dominated by North Vietnam. Neither Moscow nor Peking want to see North Vietnam all-powerful in Southeast Asia. For years the offsetting American, Soviet and Chinese interests sustained a degree of equilibrium in Laos.

For North Vietnam, Laos provided back-door access for troops and equipment to the war in South Vietnam—the Ho Chi Minh Trail, heavily guarded by Hanoi's troops. The comparatively small war in Laos for control of that nation was a sideshow to the war in Vietnam.

U.S. experts on Southeast Asia smile wryly these days over the fact that when President Eisenhower was

handing over power to President Kennedy in January, 1961, Laos was the preoccupied danger perceived by the United States. Eisenhower told Kennedy that Laos was the key to all Southeast Asia, so important that if its fall was threatened, the United States should be prepared "to intervene unilaterally" with U.S. troops.

"Clearly no one is regarding it as the key to anything now," one American specialist said yesterday.

The United States, nevertheless, invested major resources to sustain, originally, and anti-Communist government in Laos, and then, switching and lowering its objectives, to maintain neutralist Souvanna Phouma.

An army of Lao irregulars, composed mainly of Meo tribesmen and reinforced by mercenaries from Thailand, was "organized, trained, equipped and controlled by the Central Intelligence Agency," as an official Senate report described the main military venture.

The remnants of this "secret army," once proudly led by Gen. Vang Pao, are today still the main propaganda target of the Pathet Lao, although the Bang Pao troops were combined in

1973 with the Royal Lao army and the CIA fully concedes now that the Pathet Lao is the force that has won out in Laos.

A Pathet Lao news agency broadcast yesterday, however, continued to fire broadsides at the old adversary:

"The Vang Pao 'special forces,' organized, equipped, funded and commanded by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, have willfully served the intervention and aggression by U.S. imperialism in Laos.

"This contingent is directly commanded by the CIA headquarters 'HQ 33' installed at Udon Base in Thailand. . . .

The Vientiane ultra-rightists have resorted to these forces to sow discord and enmity among the population in service of the long-term U.S. aggressive scheme."

Vang Pao's forces and their base camps never were dismantled as required by the Laotian 1973 cease-fire accord, the Pathet Lao charge. Neither were the North Vietnamese forces totally removed from Laos as similarly required by the agreement, the Laotian rightists counter, and some 30,000 of them remain in Laos.

The Pathet Lao repeatedly have charged the Vang Pao forces with initiating the violations of the cease-fire in April, which launched the recent sporadic fighting in Laos. An American source said yesterday that according to U.S. reports from Vientiane, Vang Pao's troops were re-

sponsible for starting the outburst of fighting, and the Pathet Lao subsequently launched another round of combat.

Another U.S. source said that "it is not altogether clear who started the fighting," He said the Pathet Lao "clearly want to get rid of Vang Pao," and at the start "that may have been their only objective."

Developments in Laos "were accelerated," this source said, by the Khmer Rouge victory in Cambodia, the Communist conquest of all of South Vietnam, and by the collapse of the value of the currency of Laos, the kip.

The Laotian rightists, never effective leaders in the government, this official continued, were dismayed by the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon. They also came under attack from Souvanna, who charged that they were blocking the development of effective government by refusing to cooperate with the Pathet Lao.

In addition, determined to avoid further bloodshed in Laos, Souvanna opposed any resistance to Pathet Lao military advances.

In these circumstances, U.S. analysts say, it is difficult to assess what actions were encouraged by North Vietnam, and what actions were mounted against the right-wing members of the coalition by the Pathet Lao, on their own initiative. The result is the current exodus from Laos, in fear that what one U.S. official called the danger that "the whole house of cards" can fall at any time.