

NYTimes MAY 21 1975
**LAOS COMMUNISTS
REPORTED TAKING
SOUTHERN TOWNS**

**Pathet Lao Troops Occupy
Savannakhet, Where U.S.
Officials Are Detained**

NO RESISTANCE OFFERED

**Crowds Are Said to Toss
Flowers as Reds Move to
Replace the Rightists**

By **DAVID A. ANDELMAN**

Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, May 20—

Communist-led Pathet Lao forces have reportedly begun moving into virtually every major town in the Laotian panhandle area that previously was under rightist control.

Pathet Lao troops today occupied the central city of Savannakhet, where student demonstrators have held American aid officials and their families under house arrest since last week.

It was reported that another major town, Pakse, was taken over last Friday.

According to reports received here by Western military officials, Pathet Lao troops have been moving in small numbers into other parts of the region as well.

The Pathet Lao appeared to be filling a void left by right-wing Vientiane officials who fled from the region last week. The troop movements came less than two weeks after the resignation of most rightist ministers from the coalition government, resulting in increased influence for the Pathet Lao, the other major coalition partner.

The take-over of Savannakhet came without violence. More than 20,000 people reportedly lined the streets to greet the Pathet Lao soldiers, estimated to number fewer

than 500. Flowers were tossed at them. Three tanks that led the march were covered with blossoms.

Leader of Force Greeted

The rightist commander of the military region in which Savannakhet is situated, Brig. Gen. Noupheut Duoheuang, stood in front of the provincial government compound and greeted the Pathet Lao commander as he stepped out of a tank.

Other soldiers of the rightist, or Vientiane, side of the coalition stood quietly by, apparently relieved that the take-over was to be accomplished without bloodshed.

The Pathet Lao troop movements began last Friday, when 1,000 soldiers and about six tanks from the Boloven Plateau occupied the town of Pakse, within hours after the last representatives of the American Agency for International Devel-

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opment, the aid-distributing organization, had left.

American officials expressed surprise over the development. They had apparently been told that it would be "advisable" for them to leave Pakse, with an implication that there might be anti-American demonstrations. It was only today that they learned they had moved out only hours ahead of Pathet Lao troops.

Accounts of the take-over of Savannakhet were given here this evening by several foreign reporters who returned from the city.

According to the reports there has been no bloodshed in the Pathet Lao movements today over the weekend.

In the last two weeks, a number of the Vientiane Government's military units in various parts of the country have indicated their sympathy for the Pathet Lao troops. They are apparently prepared to stand aside wherever the Pathet Lao troops move in the countryside.

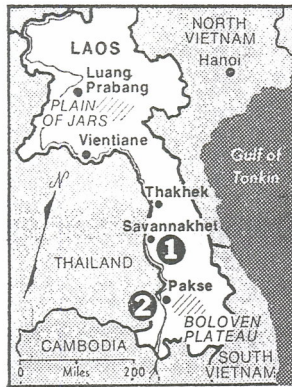
It was still not clear today whether the Pathet Lao had decided to abandon the coalition altogether and take over the entire country.

Reports Are Contradictory

Last week, Pathet Lao officials said repeatedly that they wanted the coalition rule to continue.

It also was not clear whether the student demonstrations in Pakse and Savannakhet, which began a week ago, were designed to pave the way for the arrival of Pathet Lao troops.

Early today, an American official in Vientiane said that radio reports from Savannakhet indicated that two of the 12



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Savannakhet (1) and Pakse (2) were among towns occupied by Pathet Lao.

Americans there were taken from their homes by students this morning and had disappeared.

However, the reporters who returned this evening said they had talked with the Americans an hour after they had supposedly been taken from their homes and that they were well. Students were reported to have been present in all Americans' houses and the Americans were clearly under at least a loose form of detention. But they appeared to be under no threat of physical danger.

The presence of Americans in the middle of the shifting situation in the south has caused concern to United States Embassy officials here.

One diplomat said that the United States was particularly upset that the one specific demand of the students—that the Minister of Interior and his deputy go to Savannakhet to negotiate with them—still had not been met.

It now seems possible sources

here said that the Ministers of Interior and his deputy had advance knowledge of the military development in the south and refrained for that reason from going there.

"For reason that escape me," an American official said today, "the Government still has not managed to get those two over there, and suddenly this morning the situation has turned sour."

Plane Allowed to Land

Last night, a United States Embassy courier in a plane of the Agency for International Development went to Savannakhet to deliver mail and official dispatches. The students permitted him to arrive and depart peacefully. All the Americans were safe in their homes when he was there, the courier reported.

An American official said this morning that the embassy still had no plans to try to evacuate the Americans in Savannakhet by force. But he said the embassy had stepped up a program of "thinning out unnecessary personnel."

American officials said they were continuing to press the Laotian Government for a decision on the form of United States aid in the future.

U. S. Files a Third Protest

WASHINGTON, May 20 (Reuters)—The State Department said today it had lodged a third protest with Laos over the detention of 12 Americans in Savannakhet, and said it was continuing to withdraw United States officials from the country.

The State Department had no comment on reports that Pathet Lao forces had entered Savannakhet.