

U.S. Decides To Speed Up Laos Pullout

MAY 22 1975

From News Dispatches

The United States has decided to speed up its pullout of Americans from Laos following recent attacks on U.S. personnel in Vientiane and Savannakhet, the State Department said yesterday.

Spokesman Robert Funseth said, however, that the State Department had no report from the embassy in Vientiane about whether the stepped-up evacuation had begun or how many of the estimated 1,000 Americans still in Laos would be removed.

The U.S. Charge D'Affaires in Laos, Christian A. Chapman, met with two Communist Pathet Lao Cabinet ministers last night in an attempt to resolve the most recent confrontation—the student occupation of the U.S. Agency for International Development compound in Vientiane with two Marines and a civilian inside it.

In the southern city of Savannakhet, a dozen Americans and six other persons began a second week under loose house arrest but reportedly were in no immediate danger.

Chapman, who met at the U.S. embassy with Culture Minister Maha Khou and Planning Minister Soth Pothrasay after an earlier meeting with Premier Souvanna Phouma, said many American families in Vientiane were “virtual prisoners,” since they were stopped by policemen from going in and out of an American housing area.

Arrangements were being made in Vientiane for a chartered DC-6 to fly out some U.S. AID officials, their dependents and the dependents of other U.S. officials expected to leave soon, Jacques Leslie of the Los Angeles Times reported from Vientiane. He said it was probable that the charter would be the first of several in coming weeks to take out U.S. officials and their personal belongings.

Funseth indicated that the State Department's decision to speed up the evacuation was at least partly spurred by “the continuing situation in Savannakhet and this most recent incident in Vientiane.”

He said the U.S. government

LAOS, From A1

would “thin out” its presence in Laos “in the next several weeks.” He said the State Department did not know whether the U.S. embassy in Vientiane had advised nonofficial Americans to leave the country.

The students demonstrating against the Americans have demanded the immediate dissolution of AID in Laos and the departure of all of its U.S. employees. They also demand

that the agency turn its facilities over to the Laotian government, including personal goods that have been imported tax free, and that taxes be paid on personal property of Americans before they leave the country.

The U.S. embassy said in a statement Monday that it was ready to “modify, reduce or eliminate” AID operations to meet the demands.

The political situation in Laos has changed rapidly in recent days, as the precarious

three-way coalition government has lost most of its rightist representation through resignation and exile, leaving the Communist-led Pathet Lao in virtual control.

In the latest demonstration, about 200 students and some employees of AID climbed over the fence of the Aid compound in Vientiane and took it over early yesterday morning. The demonstrators also seized an AID warehouse five miles outside Vientiane and prevented traffic from entering or leaving a residential area where many AID officials live. The demonstrators carried away goods from the AID compound and warehouse.

AID now has stationed in Laos slightly fewer than the 162 officials tabulated during the last count, at the end of April.

Students who seized the compound hung signs from the chain-link fence around it saying, “Americans Leave,” and “CIA Go Home.”

No Americans were allowed

to enter the compound, although three stayed from the beginning of the seizure.

By mid-afternoon yesterday, students had broken into many of the dozen buildings inside the compound, but they had not entered the two main office buildings where the two Marine Guards were. The Marines were in radio contact with officials at the nearby U.S. embassy.

Tension throughout the rest of Vientiane's American community appeared to increase substantially.

The embassy issued a press release stating that Chapman met with Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and Foreign Minister Phoumi Vongvichit “to protest these illegal actions.”

“The mission is seriously concerned over the complete lack of police protection at the U.S. embassy compound, where [Lao police] have done nothing to protect property and premises,” the statement said.