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Embassy

Readies

Laos Exit

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VIENTIANE, May 26—In response to continuing harassment by the Communist Pathet Lao and their supporters, the U.S. embassy here intensified preparations today for evacuating all its remaining personnel, while concurrently pressing for a negotiated settlement.

While Marine guards shifted stocks of tear-gas grenades and 38-caliber revolvers to strategic locations in the embassy, diplomats made all-out efforts to resolve some basic differences with pro-Pathet Lao students.

Whether the differences can be resolved may determine the future of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Communist-dominated Laos that has emerged in the last few weeks.

There was some speculation that the Pathet Lao were trying to force the United States to break relations unilaterally.

By the end of the day, there were faint hints that the Communists were satisfied that they had humiliated the United States sufficiently and were now prepared to relax the pressure they have been applying.

Meanwhile, the evacuation of virtually all official U.S. dependents was completed and sources said some "nonessential" embassy personnel were now leaving the country as well.

"We're not taking the need for a total evacuation too seriously yet," said an embassy source. "But we're taking every precaution. We've certainly had plenty of warning."

Embassy officials were going to great pains to stress that the security of Americans, officials as well as private citizens, was not jeopardized here in any way comparable to Phnom Penh and Saigon. "There have been threats,"

one official said, "but no violence."

The Pathet Lao have succeeded by nonviolent means in getting the U.S. Agency for International Development to close down its vast aid operation throughout the country. They have also managed to

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turn hundreds of local AID employees against the agency in particular and the United States in general.

Embassy Charge d'Affaires Christian Chapman and AID acting director Gordon B. Ramsey met today with Premier Souvanna Phouma and two top Pathet Lao leaders in the Communist-controlled coalition government—Foreign Minister Phoumi Vongvichit and Economy Minister Soth Pethrasay.

An embassy source said the meeting concluded with Souvanna instructing Soth to get several dozen students out of the AID office and warehouse compound they have occupied for the past five days.

Both reportedly conveyed to the students, who are in close liaison with the Pathet Lao, a tentative agreement worked out at the meeting. Although embassy officials were reluctant to reveal details of the agreement, it evidently

contains the U.S. demand that the compound be freed before aid officials return to their offices to complete the payroll and to make arrangements for the turnover of agency property to the government.

A compromise with the students may entail the embassy's and AID's agreement to allow a government delegation to replace the students in the compound.

Chapman and Ramsey insist that AID cannot pay the local employees their salaries and severance allowances unless the students clear out of the compound, which is supposed to be diplomatically immune.

Also trapped inside three locked compound buildings are two Marine guards and an electrician employed by the Federal Electric Corp., on contract to the U.S. government. The three Americans have been in contact with embassy officials and said they have adequate food.

By dusk, there was no change. Students and armed

military police, some of them Pathet Lao and some of them from the so-called Vientiane side, were still inside the locked gates of the compound, which also houses offices of the embassy's defense attaches, a restaurant and the diplomatic commissary.

A feared demonstration by angry AID workers demanding their pay did not develop. Observers speculated that this meant that Soth had convinced the students that abandoning the compound would hasten the removal of remaining agency personnel and the transfer of the property to Laos.

But as is often the case in this quixotic little kingdom, nothing was really clear. The Pathet Lao "say they want to have relations with us and to receive direct economic assistance," noted one embassy source, "but their actions so far have been quite contrary."

Last Friday, in an address to an anti-American rally in Vientiane's soccer stadium,

Phoumi—the ranking Pathet Lao official in the government—said, "If the United States cannot give assistance to Laos in the form stipulated in the policy program, it is then invited to pull out from Laos. Our Lao people do not care at all if the United States pulls out."

He was referring to Pathet Lao demands that any U.S. economic assistance be handed over directly to the government, without AID personnel to oversee and account for its disbursement.

Phoumi also made an effort to dispel the impression that Laos could not get along without American funds. "There are many Socialist countries and other friendly countries throughout the world which are prepared to give free, Sincere assistance to our Lao people . . . Therefore, our Lao people are asked to continue the struggle to completely drive U.S. neocolonialism out of Lao territory."