

SOVIET AND HANOI SPUR ROLE IN LAOS

**Their Presence Increases as
Americans Withdraw**

VIENTIANE, Laos, June 15 (AP) — While the American presence in Laos dwindles, that of the Soviet Union and North Vietnam is growing.

A Russian diplomat has acknowledged the growth of Soviet presence here saying that Moscow was sending in new officials and technicians.

The Soviet mission, now one of the largest here, has a staff of about 100, with more coming as the pro-Communist Pathet Lao movement takes control of Laos.

Crews and technicians of Aeroflot, the Soviet airline, take up the largest bloc of rooms in the Lane Xang Hotel.

A United States source with access to such information said there were about 30,000 North Vietnamese soldiers in Laos, scattered in remote areas.

He added that about 14,000 Chinese roadbuilders and their guards remained in Laos but did not appear to be branching out from their construction of a road leading from southern China toward Thailand.

The total of American diplomats and aid officials in Laos now is about 100, down from 1,200.

U.S. Aid Still Desired

Foreign Minister Phoumi Vongvichit, a member of the Pathet Lao, said in a recent broadcast that Laos still wanted American aid and experts but on Laotian terms and with no strings attached.

Some experts here say the Laotians, technically under the leadership of a neutralist Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, want an American presence to balance other foreign influences and to help assure their independence.

Neutrality is the official policy of the Prince's Government, which, until the Pathet Lao gained in power, was made up of leftists, rightists and neutralists under the terms of the 1973 Laotian cease-fire agreement.

The North Vietnamese, who fought on the side of the Pathet Lao during the war here, are reported to have political officials in southern Laos near Pakse and in the northwest.

United States sources say their activities seem aimed against neighboring Thailand, which is troubled by Communist-backed insurgencies in border areas.