

Souvanna Phouma Asks Friendship With U.S., Now That Aid Unit Is Gone

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VIENTIANE, Laos, June 29— "Help us keep the friendship of America," was Premier Souvanna Phouma's parting comment to this correspondent after an interview on Friday.

In the reflective conversation that preceded it, the 73-year-old prince, a neutralist when this country was split into Communist, neutralist and rightist factions in 1962, reviewed the long American involvement in Laos and concluded that on balance it had been positive.

The Premier said that recent anti-American acts had only one goal—to put an end to the form of aid represented by the Agency of International Development. The mission to Laos of the agency, he said, amounted to "a state within a state, a parallel administration to the Laotian administration."

An Offer of Friendship

Now that the agency's presence has ended, Prince Souvanna Phouma said, there was no reason that the two nations could not be friendly.

But had not events shown that Laos has turned against the United States? the Premier was asked.

"But not at all, not at all, not at all," he replied. "We are not at all against the United States. We ask to keep the friendship of the American Government. Whether it be myself or the Pathet Lao, it is all the same."

A few hours after this conversation, Pathet Lao soldiers and policemen and pro-Pathet Lao demonstrators seized three American embassy facilities, including a compound where about a dozen Americans were living. They remained under guard by the Pathet Lao today. The embassy has halved its staff to 22 and is considering withdrawing from Laos.

The difference between the Premier's words and the Pathet Lao's actions indicate what is left of non-Communist freedom of action in the three-sided Government that Souvanna Phouma heads. "He is just the flower in the buttonhole," a nonpartisan senior diplomat said of the Prince's role.



Abbas/Gamma

Premier Souvanna Phouma at his home in Vientiane

U.S. Role in War

Some American diplomats consider him a front man for the Pathet Lao who speaks the language of the faction's anti-American propaganda. That was not the case in the interview Friday. Asked to assess the role in the United States played in Laos during the war, when the American Air Force steadily and heavily bombed large parts of this country, and the United States

underwrote and directed a Laotian army of mercenaries, the Premier replied:

"Given the difficult situation at the time, it was necessary for us to have military aid. For the protection of Laos, the independence, territorial integrity and neutrality of Laos, the United States showed itself in a positive way. Because what the United States did was merely to respect its signature of the Geneva accord of 1962."

In that pact 14 parties, including the United States and the Soviet Union, undertook to protect Laotian independence and neutrality. Asked to distinguish between American and North Vietnamese intervention in Laos, the Premier replied:

"Everybody is at fault in that affair. When one interferes in the affairs of a small country, you crush the rights of the country. One has no voice."

Powerless to Intervene

He reaffirmed the position he held throughout the war when he said that much of that war was a matter between North Vietnam and the United States, in which Laos was powerless to intervene. "That was the Ho Chi Minh trail," he said. "We could do absolutely nothing at the time. Even if we had protested it would have been without result." The old North Vietnamese supply route to South Vietnam passed through part of Laos.

Of G. McMurtrie Godley, the United States Ambassador at the height of American military activity here, the Prince said:

"Godley is an excellent friend of mine; I can say nothing bad about him. He received orders; he was obliged to carry them out."

Asked about former Maj. Gen. Vang Pao, who command-

ed the American-sponsored mercenary army of mountain tribesmen, the Premier said: "He did all he could to maintain the authority of my Government during those years."

If General Vang Pao had not fled to Thailand last month, the Premier said he would have "protected" him by giving him a military assignment in Vientiane. But he said, he would not have left the general in command of his wartime forces in the mountainous north

Denies a Take-Over

The Prince has slimmed down since he had a heart attack last year. He no longer smokes cigars and he now affects comfortable Laotian blouses rather than business suits. He spoke with his old vigor, in his flawless French, when he denied that the Pathet Lao had taken over.

"We signed an accord in 1973," he said. "The aim of that accord is to reunify our country. Now that the accord is two years old, it is time that we began."

He rejected the idea that reunification is so far a one-way street, with the Pathet Lao moving into all areas controlled by the Vientiane, on the rightist side, which the Premier represents. He said he had asked the Pathet Lao to consider accepting some Vientiane civil servants in its zone, and that one military company had been moved into the Communist area.