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U.S. Diplomat Is Threatened By Pathet Lao

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VIENTIANE, July 3—An American diplomat was threatened with death by an armed Pathet Lao soldier today when he tried to enter the U.S. Information Service library here.

The library has been occupied by anti-American demonstrators since Saturday. Half an hour before the incident, a government spokesman had said that the Pathet Lao-dominated coalition government regretted the occupation and that the demonstrators had left the library when ordered out two days ago. The soldiers, the spokesman said, were there to protect property, not keep Americans out.

When the American diplomat, Lawrence Daks, went to test the government's word he found that the demonstrators were still in the library. Daks, the only USIS official left in the American embassy here, asked in Laotian if he could enter. A grim-faced Pathet Lao guard emerged from the building and, ramming a round into the chamber of his rifle, he pointed the weapon in the general direction of Daks and about half a dozen reporters and said: "Go back or I'll kill you."

Daks and the reporters left quietly, but the guard followed them to their cars, his finger pressed tight against the trigger.

The incident was but the latest in the looking-glass confrontation between the American embassy and the Laotian government, in which the intentions of the Pathet Lao are not yet clear. The incident was unusual only because of the threat of violence. The American embassy here has been subjected to continued harassment and occupations of em-

bassy property since May.

In recent weeks the number of the employees and dependents here has been cut from more than 800 to 22.

The U.S. charge d'affaires, Christian Chapman, said that the embassy is "seeking an explanation" to the latest incident "in light of statements made by a government spokesman and assurances received by the Foreign Ministry" today on the status of the USIS library.

"We want good relations with this government, but we have to have conditions in which we can run an embassy," he said.

The problem, as in the past, has been that it is not clear what the government wants. Government officials have said that Laos wants diplomatic relations with the United States, but the demonstrations continue with the government, so far, doing nothing about them.

In May, when the Pathet Lao began to take power, students began demonstrating against the Agency for International Development's missions here and in other Laotian towns. The students said, quite correctly, that the AID mission had been used by the Central Intelligence Agency to organize and supply the war in Laos.

The Americans agreed to close down the AID missions by June 30 and turn over AID facilities to the government. This was done, but on June 30 students occupied four American installations that the Americans say have nothing to do with AID—the library, a housing compound, a maintenance supply depot and a warehouse.

There seems to be some confusion in the minds of students, and perhaps the Pathet Lao as well, about how the American embassy works, what belongs to AID and what does not. Students interviewed at the library today said that USIS was a CIA front just like AID and therefore the library should have been turned over to the government on June 30.

The American embassy has been busy trying every day since Saturday to convince the Laotian govern-

ment that the installations are not part of the AID mission.

Last night the Cabinet met for four hours and, at a press conference this morning, the secretary of state for information, Ouday Souvannavong, said the Cabinet had decided that the Americans were right about the USIS library but it was still considering the status of the other installations. Ouday said the government regretted the USIS occupation and said there had been a misunderstanding on the part of the young demonstrators who were "hot-blooded." Worse things had happened during student demonstrations in other part of the world, he said.

Ouday was right about that, since the Laotian students have committed on violence or destruction of property. The occupation of the USIS library here has been far less violent than some of the campus demonstrations in the United States during the 1960s.

But Ouday was wrong in saying that the Pathet Lao soldiers there are not keeping Americans out.

What is happening in Laos, in the words of one diplomat, is a centrally directed movement by the Pathet Lao to take power. In recent weeks the right-wing ministers in the coalition government have fled the country, and the Pathet Lao have taken control of the army. All the consequential towns with the exception of Vientiane and the royal capital Luang Prabang have been liberated." The students, offended by the rampant corruption of the government, have aided in this

process.

Unlike the new leaders of neighboring Cambodia, the Pathet Lao are taking power without violence. This morning's incident with the Pathet Lao soldier was unusual, and it may well have been that the appearance of Daks at the library door, followed by half a dozen Caucasian reporters, frightened the soldier.

It is understood that if the Americans here get a clear indication that the Pathet Lao do not want diplomatic relations with the United States and do not intend to let the Americans run a normal embassy, then the Americans will leave Laos, the last country in Indochina with which they have relations. The Americans here know that to the Pathet Lao, the United States is the historic enemy and that for years B-52 bombed them in their forest caves. It is inevitable that everything American be viewed with suspicion.

For the past three weeks one of the difficulties has been that Phoumi Vongvichit—deputy prime minister, foreign minister and the leading Pathet Lao figure in Vientiane—has been away attending a meeting of the Central Committee in Sam Neua. In his absence, no one seems to be willing to make a decision on the embassy matter.

Today, Ouday announced that Phoumi Vongvichit and the Pathet Lao information minister, Souk Vongsak, had been granted leaves of absence to seek medical treatment abroad. Another Pathet Lao minister, Soth Pethrasy, was given permission to take a vacation abroad.

The spokesman cautioned reporters not to speculate about the departure of the three ministers, and said they were still members of the government. Diplomatic sources said that Phoumi and Souk were understood to be ill with heart trouble. They will leave in the next few days.

Speculation is inevitable because all three ministers were widely thought to be moderates in the Pathet Lao

leadership, compared to the more hard-line Communists still in Sam Neua. Diplomatic sources wondered if their departure, even if temporary, might lead to a new, harder line, perhaps determined at the Central Committee meeting that ended last week.

This morning Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and his half-brother, the Pathet Lao Prince Souvanouvong, left Vientiane for Luang Prabang and an audience with the king. Jittery residents of Vientiane fear that the absence of all these government leaders might set the scene for a complete Pathet Lao takeover of the capital.

Even if nothing happens, the absence of Phoumi and the other ministers is not going to make it any easier for the Americans who are trying to get some kind of statement of intention from the government.