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Bangkok Finds Laos Relations Turning Sour

By Bruce Palling

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BANGKOK, Aug. 14—Relations between Thailand and the pro-Communist Pathet Lao-dominated government in Laos have soured in the past few weeks after what now looks like a false start toward a better relationship.

The latest stumbling block was the Laotian government's arrest of two Thai deputy military attaches and their driver in Vientiane last week on charges of spying. As a result, the Thai government expelled two Laotian diplomats and recalled the Thai ambassador to Laos, Sawet Komolpati.

When the Laotians decided today to expel the two Thai attaches, their action was coupled with a statement from the Foreign Ministry condemning Thailand for what it called a "two-faced" policy.

The Laotians said the two Thais had confessed to spying as part of an American CIA network. The Laotians have charged the United States with operating a large spy network, according to reports in Bangkok today.

While the two Thais were being held by the Laotians, tensions had reached a new height.

Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj warned that stern measures would be taken if they were not released. There were reports that Thai union members were refusing to ship goods to landlocked Laos through Thai ports. The Laotians charged that weapons had been discovered in a truck

removing belongings from a recently closed Thai consulate in southern Laos.

"The Thai government has no real intention to improve its relations with Laos on the basis of mutual respect for fundamental national rights," the statement said.

If the two attaches, who have been in Laos for eight years, are not released soon, Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj has warned that stern measures could be taken.

The Thai Foreign Ministry is particularly upset at this sudden downturn in relations after assiduous efforts in the past year to improve Thailand's poor relationship with the Pathet Lao. The situation has not been made easy by the recent chaotic transformation of former strongholds of the rightist elements in the Laotian government into acquiescent "neutralized towns."

More than 30,000 Meo tribesmen from Laos have fled to Thailand as have several prominent rightist generals and government ministers who came across the Mekong River into neighboring Thailand last May.

Despite the Thai government's assurances that all of these refugees and rightists must leave Thailand, there are no signs when this might happen and the complete freedom the former ministers enjoy to move around Thailand unhindered has done nothing to reassure the touchy Pathet Lao

about Thailand's good intentions.

Some Foreign Ministry sources believe that this is the chief reason for the frosty relations between Thailand and Laos, though actions in the recent past

also play an important part.

A Laotian spokesman told a news conference today in Vietnam that Thai failure to expel Laotian "reactionaries" was proof of Thailand's policy toward Laos. "Laos has no intent to start a war," the spokesman said, but it would defend its borders.

Some observers speculate that the purpose of the diplomats' arrest was to put distance in Thailand's relationship with the new, pro-Communist Laos, not to mention the nationalistic points to be scored by denouncing Thai involvement in Laotian internal affairs.

For eight years, U.S. heavy bombers flew massive bombing raids over the Pathet Lao zone of Laos from large air bases securely situated in Thailand. In the late 1960s, Thailand even consented to send 20,000 "army volunteers" to secretly assist the flagging forces of the former Laotian government against the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese allies.

These actions, plus high transportation fees for all Laotian goods that must pass through Thailand, have compounded the problem between the two countries, which share similar languages and the same form of Buddhist worship.

In an endeavour to get relations with Laos on a better footing, the Thai government earlier this year granted \$750,000 worth of commodity and financial aid to Laos, some of which has now been frozen pending improved relations.

Since the de facto takeover last May, Pathet Lao radio has harshly criticized the "ultra-reactionary Thai clique" in language reminiscent of that used during the Indochina war.

The first sign of deteriorating relations came last month when Pathet Lao soldiers fired on Thai patrol boats that the Laotian gov-

ernment alleged had strayed into its territorial waters on the Mekong River.

Despite the Thai government's offer to organize joint border patrols of the river, nothing more was heard from the Pathet Lao on the matter and last week's arrests make it highly unlikely that the response will be positive.

With recent reports from Pathet Lao sources in Vientiane saying that the capital of Laos will soon be moved deep into the northeastern Pathet Lao zone near the North Vietnamese border, indications are that the Laotian government will be looking towards North Vietnam in the future.

The steady removal of the last vestiges of the American presence in Laos with the forced closure of the large U.S. AID missions throughout the country in June is further evidence of the end of Western and, indirectly, Thai influence in Laos.

Transfer in Cyprus

Agence France-Presse

NICOSIA, Aug. 14 — The transfer of Turkish-Cypriots from Greek sectors of Cyprus continued today with the move of 450 Turkish Cypriots from Paphos in the south to the Turkish-controlled part of the island.