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A 'Secret' Pact' on Red Withdrawal

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Senior Laotian government officials said yesterday they understood there was a secret agreement between North Vietnam and the United States under which Hanoi would withdraw 60,000 of its troops from Laos and a lesser number from South Vietnam.

The agreement reached in Paris between North Vietnam and the United States omitted any reference to the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam, and said only in general terms that foreign troops would be removed from Laos and Cambodia.

The Laotian officials said their government has been informed that in addition to the North Vietnamese troops expected to leave Laos, at least 3000 North Vietnamese

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and possibly several times that number would be withdrawn from South Vietnam.

TRAIL

American military officials have estimated that there are 65,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos, many of them operating on the Ho Chi Minh Trail supply route and 145,000 in South Vietnam.

There is growing evidence that the Paris agreement

might have included a number of secret protocols affecting not only Vietnam but neighboring Laos and Cambodia.

The Laotian premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, said yesterday in an article published by the Laotian newspaper *Xat Lao* that he has been "informed by diplomatic sources" that there would be a cease-fire in Laos 15 days after the Vietnamese cease-fire.

The phrasing of his re-

mark indicated that his government had not been involved or consulted in the decision on a Laotian cease-fire, but that the decision had been presented as a fait accompli, presumably by General Alexander M. Haig Jr., President Nixon's representative, who stopped in Vientiane last week.

Meanwhile, diplomatic sources said military intelligence indicated North Vietnam is preparing a general offensive in Laos to secure for the Communist-led Pathet Lao the really large population centers of the country. The Pathet Lao already claims control of four-fifths of Laotian territory.

Such an offensive would, most likely, be in southern Laos, aimed at large towns along the Mekong river border with Thailand, possibly including Savannakhet, the second largest city in Laos.

The same sources expect that the full weight of the U.S. Air Force and Navy, freed by the cease-fire from operations in Vietnam would be brought to bear against the offensive in Laos.

"We are a tiny, weak country in the hands of those more powerful than us," a Laotian official said. "We hope the North Vietnamese will respect our sovereignty this time, but without the help of great powers there is little we can do."

The premier and his government have placed much of their hopes for a workable peace on the strengthening of an international peace-keeping body in Laos, and to that end Prince Souvanna Phouma is leaving tomorrow for consultations in New Delhi.

Longer (NYTimes) story filed POWs