

Pathet Lao Offer New Peace Plan

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The Pathet Lao, now in their ninth week of peace talks with the Laotian government in Vientiane, proposed an immediate cease-fire yesterday, to be followed by a withdrawal of all foreign troops within 90 days.

Yesterday's proposal was significantly different from past peace proposals by the Communist-led Pathet Lao in that it made reference for the first time to the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

In the past the Pathet Lao have called for the withdrawal of Thai and American troops without any reference to any other foreign troops. There are an estimated 60,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos. The new proposal brings the Pathet Lao stand more into line with Hanoi's position at the Paris talks.

Experts here also thought it significant that the Pathet Lao now appear anxious to get a cease-fire agreement as soon as possible.

The chairman of the Pathet Lao delegation, Phoun Sipraseuth, left Vientiane for Hanoi and the Pathet Lao capital of Sam Neua on Dec. 2, presumably for new instructions, and returned to Vientiane Sunday.

The new draft agreement was put forward at the regularly scheduled negotiating session yesterday. Phoun suggested that the agreement be

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signed immediately and that problems still to be solved could be discussed afterwards.

A Laotian government spokesman in Vientiane called it "a significant development," but that the government side would have to study it.

The Pathet Lao proposal calls for a complete halt to American bombing and all other military activities carried out by the United States and its allies, and a cease-fire.

The Pathet Lao and the government side would each administer the zone under its control during a transition period but the administrative capital of Vientiane would be declared a neutral zone.

There would be a ban on bringing in military personnel and war material from any foreign country and if either side needed to replace war equipment that could be discussed between the two sides.

An exchange of military and civilian prisoners of all nationalities would be carried out at the same time foreign troops were withdrawn.

In the political sphere, the Pathet Lao proposed a coalition Political Consultative Council, to arrange for free elections, and a coalition Prov-

isional Government of National Union.

Both these bodies would be tripartite with one part made up of Pathet Lao, another of representatives from the government side, and a third part made up of "patriotic neutralist forces," representatives from the royal family, and others of a neutralist bent.

Both the government side and the Pathet Lao are agreed in theory that a peace agreement should be based on the 1962 Geneva accords and a return to tripartite government made up of the left, the right and the neutralists.

But in the years since 1962 the neutralist faction has ceased to exist as a separate entity. Prince Souvanna Phouma's neutralists have blended with the rightist faction and the "dissident neutralists" have been incorporated into the Pathet Lao.

It is these latter neutralists whom the Pathet Lao now present as the "patriotic neutralist forces," and the Pathet Lao would like to see them recognized as the true neutralists.

The government side, on the other hand, says there is no need to set up a new government of national union. All the Pathet Lao need do, according to the government

side, is to return to the old coalition government and take up the portfolios which Souvanna Phouma has left open for them.

In short, both the government and the Pathet Lao agree that the right and the left should be equally represented in a tripartite coalition government, but there is as yet no agreement on how to divide up the center.

Yesterday's proposal, according to experts here, offered little that was new as to how power should be divided after a cease-fire and the withdrawal of foreign troops.