

Cambodia Expected to Announce a 72-Hour Cease-Fire to Test Foe;
Laos Hears Hanoi Vows Pullout

VIENTIANE HOPES

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North Vietnam Held Ready to Withdraw 60,000 Soldiers

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VIENTIANE, Laos, Jan. 25—

Senior Laotian Government officials said today that 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 had been informed that in addition to the North Vietnamese troops expected to leave Laos, at least 3,000 North Vietnamese and possibly several times that number would be withdrawn from South Vietnam.

Denial on Secret Acts

Henry A. Kissinger, the chief American negotiator, in discussing the Paris agreement yesterday at a news conference in Washington, specifically denied that there were any secret protocols, "formal obligations" or understandings.

"The only protocols that exist are the protocols that have been made public," he declared. Asked about understandings, he said, "There are no secret understandings."

He said the accord reached in Paris did not specifically provide for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam. But he said that in view of the prohibitions against military movements into South Vietnam, "there is no way that North Vietnam can live up to that agreement without there being a reduction of the North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam."

American military officials have estimated that there are

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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.

The Laotian Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, said today in an article published by the Laotian newspaper Xat Lao that he had 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 remark indicated that his Government had not been involved or consulted in the decision and Laotian cease-fire, but that the decision had been presented as a fait accompli, presumably by Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., President Nixon's representative, who stopped in Vientiane last week.

Meanwhile, diplomatic sources reported military intelligence indicating that North Vietnam was 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 United States Air Force and Navy, freed by the cease-fire from operations in Vietnam, would be brought to bear against the offensive in Laos.

Dependence on Powers

"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 Saturday for consultations in New Delhi.

In an address this morning to the Laotian National Assembly, the Prince reiterated his hopes that India could be induced to strengthen her role as chairman of the old three-nation International Control Commission on Laos (on which Canada and Poland have also served. But a commission

source said he doubted that the role of peace-keeping observers in Laos would be strengthened.

"Everything depends on what kind of an agreement Prince Souvanna works out with the Pathet Lao," he said. "All the commission can do is assist the two sides in keeping the agreement."

American and Laotian sources continued to say that the United States would back the Premier's Government fully, with military support if an agreement breaks down. But many Laotian Government officials and others here feel that the United States has basically left Laos out in the cold in settling the Vietnam war.

Leaders of the Pathet Lao negotiating delegation, currently in their de facto capital of Samneua, are expected to return here Monday, possibly aboard a special International Control Commission flight landing at Samneua itself. No such flights have landed at Samneua in years, and there is anxiety now that the airstrip at Samneua, which is near the North Vietnamese border, has been so badly damaged by bombing that it is dangerous to use.

It is hoped here that negotiations will move swiftly when the Pathet Lao leaders return here.

One Pathet Lao official said that despite reports by the Prince and others, he did not see how a cease-fire agreement could possibly be concluded in 15 days, because of the problems still separating the two sides.

Some Government officials expressed worry about the probability that the United States had made secret agreements with North Vietnam.

"It is nice to know that Hanoi told the Americans under the table that it would withdraw 60,000 troops from Laos," one said. "But what did Washington give them in exchange?"

Hanoi's chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho, told newsmen in Paris yesterday that there had been no secret agreements.

Meanwhile, fighting intensified in several parts of Laos yesterday. Reports said that Communist forces blew up a bridge between Vientiane and Paksane to the east along Route 13, near the Mekong River. In the south, North Vietnamese troops were apparently pushing westward from the town of Saravane. A government battalion command post 15 miles west of Savarane was hit by 1,000 shells yesterday afternoon and withdrew after its commander was wounded.