

LAOTIAN CHARGES COMMUNIST DRIVE

JAN 27 1973

Premier Says He Has Full

Support of U.S. Air Force

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VIENTIANE, Laos, Jan. 26—

Prince Souvanna Phouma, Premier of Laos, charged today that Communist forces had opened a general offensive in his country to take as much territory as possible before a cease-fire.

But he said that military measures had been taken and that he would have the full support of the United States Air Force.

The Prince said in response to questions at a news conference that he had been assured that United States air support would continue in Laos if needed after the cease-fire in Vietnam goes into effect on Sunday.

He also said he had been assured that United States air support would be renewed after a cease-fire goes into effect in Laos if there are violations by the Communists. The Premier said in an article published yesterday 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 truce.

American Declines Comment

An American spokesman declined to comment on Prince Souvanna Phouma's statement that American air operations over Laos would resume if there were truce violations.

The news conference today was held a day after senior officials of the Premier's Government said they understood that there had been a secret agreement between North Vietnam and the United States under which the North Vietnamese would withdraw 60,000 of their troops from Laos. Both

Henry A. Kissinger, the chief American negotiator in the Paris talks, and Le Duc Tho, his North Vietnamese counterpart, have denied the existence of any secret accords.

The cease-fire agreement that they worked out said only in general terms that so-called foreign troops would be removed from Laos and Cambodia. According to American military officials, there are 65,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos.

The Prince told newsmen today that there were hopes that the present situation in Laos was different from 1962 and 1963 before the last accord on Laos was signed.

Sees New Atmosphere

He said there was a new atmosphere of accord in the world and that he felt there was a good chance that the agreement in Paris would bring peace.

Regarding the negotiations for a Laotian cease-fire, Prince Souvanna Phouma said the Soviet Union was providing two planes for direct communication between Vientiane and the Pathet Lao capital at Samneua near the North Vietnamese border.

Flights can begin when technical details have been arranged, he said, and he foresaw an early meeting with Prince Souphanouvong, his half-brother, who is the nominal leader of the Pathet Lao.

The Premier was asked whether he could accept the idea of Laos remaining divided in two zones pending some eventual settlement if the current talks fail.

He declined comment, saying that this would be one of the matters that would be considered in the talks themselves.

"Up to now," he said, "the talks have accomplished nothing but the reading of statements with no real negotiating on the part of the other side. I hope that the Pathet Lao delegation leaders will return with new instructions, by which we can come to terms."

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