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Laotian Reds Urge Private Truce Talk

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE
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VIENTIANE, Laos, Jan. 30
—Communist delegates to the Laotian peace talks proposed today that private meetings between their side and representatives of the Government begin tomorrow. They suggested that the sessions be had alternately at the residences of the delegation chiefs without newsmen present.

A Government spokesman said the proposal by the Communist Pathet Lao, which comes after a 16-week stalemate marked by fruitless exchanges of propaganda, would have to be studied.

Since the Government has wanted to hold private talks all along, the development

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Laotian Reds Propose Private Talks

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suggested that the negotiators were about to get down to serious business and that an agreement to halt the protracted fighting might be concluded quickly.

According to the Pathet Lao's plan, the first meeting would be held tomorrow afternoon at its residence here. Participants would include Gen. Phoune Sipraseuth of the Pathet Lao and the Interior Minister of the Vientiane Government, Pheng Phongsavan.

An immediate problem is that both delegations have been reducing both the rank and number of officials attending their meetings in recent weeks.

Today, both the Government delegation's chief, Mr. Pheng, and his assistant, Ngon Sanankone, were absent.

In reprisal, General Phoune and a number of other ranking Pathet Lao officials boycotted the meeting.

The Laotian Premiere, Prince Souvanna Phouma, is holding talks in New Delhi and is not expected to return here until Thursday.

Stand Annoys Premier

There was great disappointment in Government circles when Phoumi Vongvichit, a member of the Pathet Lao's governing group failed to arrive here Saturday on a flight from Hanoi. The Pathet Lao's refusal to send its highest-ranking negotiators to Vientiane has annoyed Prince Souvanna and his Government.

Nevertheless, there appeared to be significant progress toward resolving major disagreements.

After today's meeting a Government spokesman told reporters that the Pathet Lao still opposed the Government stand that military and political issues should be dealt with by separate commissions, but he added: "Their opposition to separate commissions seemed less obdurate than in the past. They were also less strident in their attacks on the American presence in Laos."

The acting Pathet Lao delegation chief, Tiao Sok Vongsack, said later, however, that it was essential that "the United States imperialists immediately cease their bombing of areas controlled by the patriotic forces" and that Vientiane give up trying to move its troops into such areas.

Silent on Air Activity

"Only if these requirements are met will there be an atmosphere favorable for an accord," he said. American officials here declined as usual to disclose any information about air activities over Laos since the Vietnam ceasefire went into effect over the weekend. Diplomatic sources say they understand that bombing has continued, particularly where heavy fighting persists.

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In fighting to recapture some of those points from the Communists, the Laotian command has had to transfer many troops from the southern to the northern theater, which has left key areas in the south dangerously unprotected.

"All the North Vietnamese would need to do now would be to move in a few extra battalions to make the situation really difficult at Muong Phalane and other points in the south," a military source said.

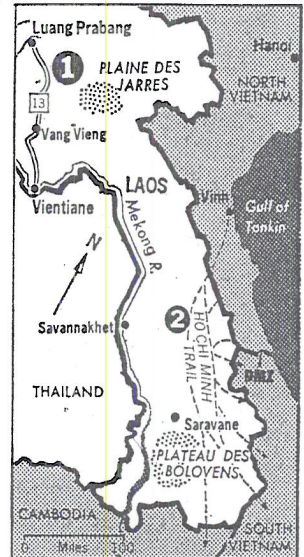
2-Month Seesaw Campaign

For two months Laotian and North Vietnamese forces have been fighting a seesaw campaign in the region between Savannakhet, on the Mekong River, and the Communist-controlled Ho Chi Minh Trail, to the east.

The military sources say that Communist movement along the trail does not seem to have diminished despite the peace agreement. In any case, ample numbers of North Vietnamese troops are believed to be permanently stationed along the trail.

Prince Souvanna Phouma said last week that a full scale North Vietnamese offensive had been launched to win control of population centers. Foreign military observers say that the North Vietnamese activity is not yet a general offensive but that there are danger signs that it could become one.

According to Prince Souvanna



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Fighting was reported in region between Vientiane and Luang Prabang (1). Communist movements were said to continue on Ho Chi Minh Trail (2).

Phouma, he has been assured of continuing American air support as long as he needs it.

3d Day of Raids on Laos

WASHINGTON, Jan. 30 (Reuters)—The United States today continued the bombing of Communist forces in Laos for the third day since the signing of the Vietnam cease-fire agreement, the Defense Department announced.

At the request of the Royal Laotian Government, U.S. aircraft, including B-52's, Tuesday (Southeast Asia time) continued operations over Laos," it said in a statement.