

Meetings in Laos Raise Peace Hopes

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—Delegates of the Laotian Government and the Communist-led Pathet Lao held the first in a new series of secret peace talks here today, amid hopes that a cease-fire agreement in Laos can be concluded quickly.

The Pathet Lao delegation's leader, Gen. Phoune Sipraseuth, and two members of his delegation met with the Government representatives at the home of Ngon Sananikone, acting head of the Vientiane Government delegation.

Despite the relatively low rank of the delegates, it was expected that the talks would move rapidly, and it was apparent today that the procedural problems that characterized the last 15 weeks of formal talks were no longer a bar to progress.

The Pathet Lao delegates had proposed during yesterday's regular weekly meet-

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ing that the first of the secret talks be held at their compound here, and that the regular head of the Vientiane delegation, Pheng Phongsavan, should be present. That the meeting took place at Mr. Ngon Sananikone's home, without Mr. Pheng Phongsavan's participation, indicates a new Pathet Lao flexibility that would have been unlikely a few weeks ago.

The two sides agreed to continue the formal talks, held regularly on Tuesdays, along with the private sessions.

The Laotian Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, is due back here tomorrow from a visit to India with a stop in Bangkok. It seems probable that Prince Souvanna Phouma himself will soon be involved in the talks, possibly with the participation of a Pathet Lao representative of correspondingly high rank.

Communist sources have discounted the possibility of a cease-fire in Laos within 15 days of the Vietnamese cease-fire, as predicted by Premier Souvanna Phouma. But they agree that a cease-fire will come soon.

Airlift Offered by Soviet

According to Government sources here, the Pathet Lao have finally dropped their objections to the Government proposal that discussions of a military cease-fire be separated from negotiations on a political solution for this divided country.

The Soviet Union has offered to operate an airlift between Vientiane and the de facto Pathet Lao capital at Samneua, about 200 miles to the north-

east, to facilitate the talks, and Prince Souvanna Phouma has said he has no objection to such an airlift.

Meanwhile, foreign military sources reported that sharp fighting continued in some areas of Laos but said that this was normal for this time of year. They said there was no evidence that any major push

was in progress by either side. An American spokesman, asked about reports that B-52 bombers had been heavily attacking Communist troops in Laos, said he could not go beyond a statement issued at Pacific headquarters in Honolulu that B-52 missions over Laos had been flown at the request of the Laotian Government.

He declined to say where or what kind of raids these had been, and Laotian sources were also unable or unwilling to shed light on the subject.

U.S. Says Raids Continue

HONOLULU, Jan. 31 (UPI)—The office of the commander of United States forces in the Pacific announced here today that American aircraft, including B-52 bombers, carried out raids over Laos for a third straight day at the request of the Laotian Government.