

Rightist Block**A New Delay
In Laos Truce**

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Vientiane

A cease-fire in Laos has been delayed by a "hardening of terms" by the American-backed government of Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma, it was learned yesterday.

Diplomatic sources said the agreement ending a decade of war in Laos was almost ready for signing last week but was called off after rightist elements in Souvanna's patchwork coalition complained.

They asserted that some provisions of the draft agreement represented a sellout by Souvanna to the Pathet Lao insurgents. The rightists, probably on instructions of their most powerful advocate, Prince Boun Oum, demanded stronger guarantees that North Vietnamese troops in Laos — an estimated 67,000 — would leave.

North Vietnamese troops have borne most of the fighting in recent years for the Pathet Lao. Should Hanoi forces remain, the rightists contend it will make a Pathet Lao takeover of the government inevitable.

American air support of the Vientiane government would end with a cease-fire, and presumably Thai "volunteers" supporting the embattled government troops also will leave.

Souvanna, although strongly pro-American, is himself a neutralist and has always had trouble with rightist elements in politics. Laotian generals — of whom there are about 30 in Vientiane and few with troops in the field are mostly ambitious rightwing politicians as well, with trouble-making capacity. Western diplomats were fearful last week that "a hothead young officer" might try to assassinate the prime minister.

Souvanna, who is 72, seems unconcerned about personal security.

In other respects, the Laos settlement is apt to be patterned closely after the cease-fire terms in Vietnam. But the Pathet Lao government will remain active in its capital of Sam Neua in northwest Laos until a durable coalition government is set up in Vientiane. The coalition will include Souvanna's half-brother.