

# Report on Laos Bombing Halt

## Vientiane

The United States has told Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma that it will halt all bombing in Laos next Sunday, highly reliable diplomatic sources said yesterday. 28 FEB

A spokesman for the U.S. embassy said there would be "absolutely no comment" on the report.

The reason for the date, the sources said, is that the Nixon Administration does not want to enter the international conference on Indochina, which begins in Paris on Sunday, while U.S. planes are still bombing Laos in support of Laotian government troops. 16 FEB

Prince Souvanna was reportedly advised of the U.S. decision Friday by visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William H. Sullivan, a former ambassador to Laos.

It was generally understood that Sullivan reported on America's intense interest in seeing a cease-fire brought about quickly between the government and the Communist Pathet Lao. Negotiations between the two sides, which began October 17, are still dragging on.

There were also indications that Sullivan may have tried to assure Souvanna that the Hanoi regime intends to abide by Article 20 of the Paris agreement and withdraw all its forces from Laos after a cease-fire.

This issue is a matter of intense concern among rightists in the royal government.

Most observers believe that Hanoi will pull out its estimated 65,000 men within whatever deadline is established in a Laotian peace accord. This matter itself is now under debate. The government is demanding that all foreign forces be out of the country within 30 days of a cease-fire, and the Pathet Lao is insisting on 90 days.

According to one knowledgeable diplomatic source, there are indications that American bombing will end in Cambodia at about the same time as in Laos.

As the two sides in the Laotian peace talks prepare

for another open meeting on their two delegations today (as opposed to the secret sessions going on simultaneously), it is understood that negotiators have narrowed their differences to three main points:

- The Pathet Lao drive for a 50 percent share in a new coalition government (although on the surface the government would be tripartite).
- The discrepancy of the 90-day and 30-day demands for withdrawals of foreign forces.
- The Pathet Lao insistence that Souvanna's side be called "the Vientiane government" instead of the royal Lao government.

*Washington Post Service*