

Laos Talks at an Impasse Both Sides Sem to Accept

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE
Special to The New York Times

VIENTIANE, Laos, May 10— Negotiations to bring a formal close to the war in Laos and reunite the country seem to have become deadlocked, but neither side seems to mind much. And in an increasingly relaxed atmosphere, fighting has virtually disappeared throughout the land.

"It may be that the best hope for real peace in Laos is simply the tacit agreement between the two sides to disagree peacefully, without going back to fighting," a diplomat involved in the talks said. "Both sides have reason to be scared of signing papers that will commit them formally and publicly to all kinds of unpalatable things."

At a Vientiane garden party last night, Phoumi Vongvichit, secretary general of the Neo Lao Hak Xat, the political form of the Communist-led Pathet Lao, was dressed in a sport shirt and was obviously at ease. He chatted and laughed about the situation with Soviet, North Vietnamese and English guests, and even an American.

Better With Less Fighting

"I am not satisfied as long as even one Laotian is being killed," he said in French. "But it is certainly better with so little fighting, and I have to be optimistic."

"Oh, they threaten us sometimes. Sisouk threatened me at one point, saying he was ready to go back to war." His reference was to Sisouk na Champassak, the right-wing acting Defense Minister in the Vientiane Government.

"I told him we don't want that," he said, "but that if that's what he wants, we can finish off the war fast enough by capturing Vientiane itself. He didn't have any answer to that."

Mr. Phoumi Vongvichit, who signed the Laotian cease-fire accord Feb. 21 for the Pathet Lao, retains negotiating powers, and sees Premier Souvanna Phouma every few days.

One-Document Settlement

The current subject of discussion between Vientiane and the Pathet Lao is a Pathet Lao proposal a week ago that would supposedly solve all outstanding problems in Laos, political and military, with one document of eight sections.

Under the Feb. 21 accord, the two sides agreed to share Cabinet posts equally in a new coalition government. But under the Pathet Lao proposal, cabinet posts would be accorded three levels of importance, and each of these categories would have to be shared equally.

The four most important ministries under the proposal, would be defense, interior, (police), foreign affairs and

finance. The Pathet Lao insists on having two of the four posts, with the same distribution in each of the other categories. Furthermore, in each ministry with a Vientiane minister, there would have to be a Pathet Lao deputy, and vice-versa.

Pathet Lao Vice Premier

Most important the Pathet Lao insists that there be a Pathet Lao Vice Premier under Souvanna Phouma, or otherwise, that the Premier himself be from the Pathet Lao.

This part of the proposal is completely unacceptable to the Vientiane Government, and appears to be an irreconcilable difference between the two sides.

The second article would create the Political Consultative Council provided in general terms by the cease-fire accord. This council would have the role of an overseer in bringing about a permanent new government, national elections and the reuniting of the country.

The Pathet Lao proposes that the council have 42 members, including 12 neutralists named by both sides, 15 persons designated by Vientiane and 15 by the Pathet Lao. A sticking point is that the Pathet Lao insists that the president of the council be their man.

Stationing of Troops

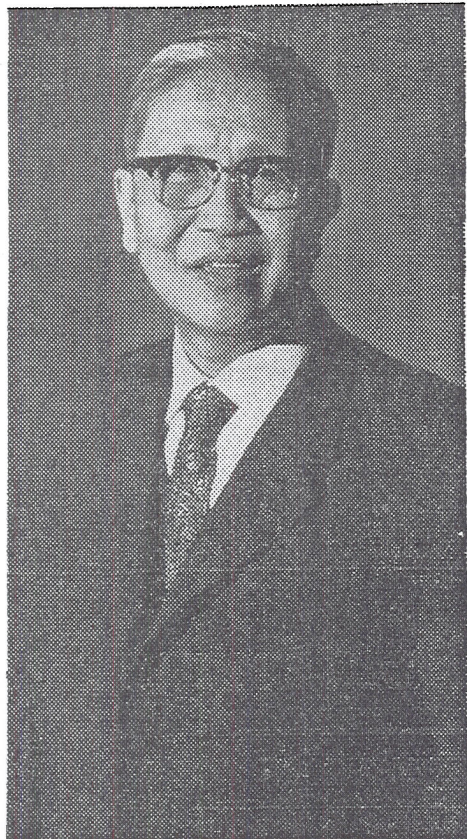
The third article concerns the neutralization of the cities of Vientiane and Luang Prabang, and the Pathet Lao proposal to station three battalions of troops in Vientiane and two in Luang Prabang, ostensibly to insure the safety of Pathet Lao officials. The proposal also calls for the withdrawal of Vientiane Government troops from the center of these cities, and the creation of a mixed police force. But the stationing of any large number of Pathet Lao troops would be unacceptable to Vientiane officials.

The fourth article provides guarantees of civil rights and democratic procedures.

Article 5, the one perhaps least acceptable to the Vientiane Government, would fix a "provisional" demarcation line between the two sides, along which mixed cease-fire teams and International Control Commission officials would have jurisdiction. Vientiane objects to this on the ground that a demarcation line, even if provisional, would only perpetuate the division of the country.

Return of Prisoners

The sixth and seventh articles call for the withdrawal of foreign troops, including the United States aid mission, and the return of all prisoners and ref-



Phoumi Vongvichit



Sisouk na Champassak

ugees in three equal stages within 60 days of the naming of a coalition government.

The final article calls for each side to create an organization to carry out the rest of the agreement.

Non-Communist diplomats here feel that there can never be over-all agreement between the two sides, and that only small agreements can be reached in stages.

The first priority, as they see it, would be the creation of a coalition cabinet and adequate guarantees for the security of Pathet Lao ministers living in Vientiane. To seek broader agreement than that initially, they say, is hopeless.

In the view of the Vientiane Government and its Western allies, the Pathet Lao can be expected to stall on an agreement until Hanoi indicates that it wants a Laotian settlement. A present, North Vietnam is said by American intelligence officials to be actively using the Ho Chi Minh supply network through Laos, which at least in principle would have to be abandoned by Hanoi 60 days after the formation of a new government in Vientiane.

The Pathet Lao, in turn, says that Vientiane is stalling the talks to gain time for military operations against the Communist-controlled zone of the country.

In fact, few Government officials are enthusiastic about having to share administration of the non-Communist zone on an equal basis with the Pathet Lao while being denied even the right of access to the Pathet Lao zone. This would be the situation if the February cease-fire accord were fully carried out.

No Progress on Coalition

But such prospects seem more remote all the time. The cease-fire agreement called for creation of a provisional coalition government within 30 days, and that deadline passed more than a month ago with no perceptible progress.

One Government official said: "Neither they nor we have

much to gain by reaching formal agreement, and as a matter of fact, we may both have quite a lot to lose, for different reasons. So why should we agree, as long as there is no shooting? Even with no agreement, Laos is the only country in Indochina at the moment with a real chance for peace, if others will just leave us alone."

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Committee on Colonialism, subcommittee on Pacific Ocean Territories—10:30 A.M.

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space—10 A.M.

Scientific and technical subcommittee—immediately after adjournment of main committee and at 3 P.M.

SOCIAL COUNCIL

Economic Committee — 10:30 A.M. and 3 P.M.

Social Committee — 10:30 A.M.

Coordination Committee— 3 P.M.

CHILDREN'S FUND

Executive Board—10 A.M. and 3 P.M.

Tickets may be obtained at the public desk, main lobby, United Nations Headquarters. Tours: 9 A.M. to 4:45 P.M.