

22 FEB 1973

FOREIGNERS AGAIN TO OVERSEE TERMS

Laos Gets 3rd Chance at Peace in 19 Years

BY JACK FOISIE

Times Staff Writer

VIENTIANE—The people of Laos will try again—as they did in 1954, and again in 1962—to live in peace under an agreement that will be supervised by foreigners.

This is the substance of the new agreement ending a 10-year-old war in Laos. It was signed Wednesday forenoon in the parlor of Prince Souvanna Phouma, who has been premier of the Lao government during the troubled 10 years of conflict with the pro-Communist Pathet Lao.

In a text of the agreement released in Lao and French, and unofficially translated into English, here are the pertinent parts:

The government, to be formed within 30 days, will again be a coalition of former enemies. In a National Council, which will rule for an unspecified period, there will be eight representatives of the Pathet Lao, who now call themselves "the patriotic forces."

There also will be eight representatives from what has been known as the royal Lao government, headed by Souvanna, which in the agreement is being called the "government of Vientiane."

Each of the two parties will choose two other members of the National Council who are mutually agreeable to both sides. And Souvanna will be prime minister, directing, or being directed by, the council.

This 18-member body, in effect a cabinet, will try to resolve the many political and economic problems afflicting this "poor country cousin" to Vietnam and Cambodia in Indochina.

But at least temporarily the Pathet Lao will continue to control the two-thirds of the country that it gained during the war, assisted mightily by the North Vietnamese army (NVA). The NVA was interested in Laos primarily as a conduit for its troops and supplies needed for the war in adjoining South Vietnam, and later for combat on behalf of ousted Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia.

The agreement says that the 1962 Geneva agreement, which attempted to neutralize Laos, will again apply in many sections covering military disengagement of foreign armies from Laos.

All prisoners held by either side will be exchanged within 60 days.

They will include a few Americans — the Pathet Lao claim they hold only seven but American officials list a total of 311 persons missing in action.

Nowhere in the agreement is North Vietnam specifically named as supporting the Pathet Lao, although the United States and Thailand are named as assisting the Vientiane government. Under the cease-fire terms, however, "all foreign powers" are to remove themselves militarily from Laos, also within 60 days.

The agreement was signed by deputies of both parties. But Souvanna was present—indeed, he was host at the signing.

And he said "it was a great day for Laos."

Everyone hopes so, particularly the ambassadors of five nations who, in one way or another, apparently have been persuaded to try again, as they did after 1962, to make the agreement work.

They are Britain and the Soviet Union, who are the co-chairmen of the 1962 Geneva Convention, and Canada, India and Poland, which have kept a peace-keeping force in Laos

since 1962—even after war had become full-scale.

Another interested witness to the signing was American Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, who had directed both political and military support for Souvanna for the last several years. American civilian aid can continue under the new agreement, apparently. The Lao government, through its newly formed Council of National Unity, is supposed to ask for replenishment of military arms only as needed.

Almost before the ink on the signatures of the new pact was dry, the American Embassy began assuming what it considered a hands-off attitude on internal Laotian affairs.

Embassy spokesman Andrew Guzowski said that entry into the American base of Long Cheng in northern Laos is now a matter for the new two-party Lao government. American-chartered aircraft can not fly correspondents there.

Guzowski also said the United States would not even provide an unofficial version of the cease-fire pact.

"It's a foreign document," he said.

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: 29-Oct-2009