

17

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~~No Foreign Dissem/Background Use Only~~LAOSWhy the Communists Procrastinate

The Lao Communists appear in no great hurry to join a new coalition government in Vientiane. Their latest tactic has been to link agreement on political issues to a set of military proposals which are unacceptable to the Lao Government. These include a formal demarcation of zones of control, a prohibition on the integration of irregulars into the Lao Army, and the abandonment of government enclaves such as Bouam Long. While these provisions almost certainly represent the Communist initial bargaining positions and will be modified in further negotiations, they do ensure a lengthier process of reaching final agreement.

Several factors are probably tipping the scales toward delay. By not forming a new government, the Pathet Lao and their mentors in Hanoi set back the deadline for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops and have given themselves more time to assess the durability of the Vietnam accord. The Lao Communist leaders may also believe that Souvanna will eventually grant additional concessions to get a coalition government organized.

Government leaders in Vientiane over the past few days have been peddling stories of a split in the Lao Communist leadership to explain Pathet Lao procrastination. No evidence has been presented to substantiate these rumors, however, and it appears hardly credible that the senior Communist leaders have had a sudden falling out after nearly 25 years of close harmony.

Whatever the cause of the delay, the Lao Communists probably see few reasons to move quickly to complete the peace agreement. Even though it imposed a 30-day deadline for forming a new government, the February agreement contained no penalties for delay and the government has no practical way to pressure the Pathet Lao. The Communists, moreover, are guaranteed half the seats in a new government and control of approximately two thirds of the country, and they are spared the pressure of US bombing. ~~(S)~~  
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6 April 1973

-7-

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