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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: OCT 2001

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4. LAOS: A LAO COMMUNIST PROPOSAL THAT THE LONG-DELAYED EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS OF WAR BEGIN ON SEPTEMBER 12 HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE NON-COMMUNIST SIDE.4

THE COMMUNISTS PRESENTED THE PROPOSAL AT THE MEETING EARLIER THIS WEEK OF THE JOINT CENTRAL COMMISSION TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT. THE COALITION GOVERNMENT GROUP RESPONSIBLE FOR ARRANGING PRISONER REPATRIATION. THE PROPOSAL PROVIDES FOR REPATRIATION AT FOUR GENERAL SITES, BUT DETAILS OF THE EXCHANGES MUST STILL BE WORKED OUT.4

LAO CAPTIVES PROBABLY WILL BE AMONG THE FIRST GROUPS SET FREE. AN ESTIMATED 170 NORTH VIETNAMESE PRISONERS ARE BELIEVED TO BE HELD BY THE NON-COMMUNIST SIDE. THE PA...THET LAO ARE BELIEVED TO

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HOLD SOME 640 THAI PRISONERS AND ONE AMERICAN, CIVILIAN CONTRACT PILOT EMMET KAY.4

THE PATHET LAO ANNOUNCED THAT KAY WILL BE AMONG THE FIRST PRISONERS OF WAR TO BE RELEASED ON SEPTEMBER 12, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS FROM VIENTIANE.4

THE DECISION TO FREE KAY WAS UNEXPECTED. THE COMMUNISTS HAD CONSISTENTLY ARGUED THAT THEY DID NOT CONSIDER HIM A PRISONER OF WAR BECAUSE HIS CAPTURE IN MAY 1973 HAD OCCURRED AFTER THE CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED.4

THE PATHET LAO PROPOSAL ON PRISONER EXCHANGES COMES AS A SURPRISE. THE COMMUNISTS HAD INSISTED THAT OTHER "HIGHER PRIORITY" ISSUES--SUCH AS THE DEMARCATION OF BOUNDARY LINES BETWEEN THE PATHET LAO AND NON-COMMUNIST ZONES--BE RESOLVED BEFORE THE PRISONER PROBLEM COULD BE ADDRESSED. THE DEMARCATION EXERCISE IS NOWHERE NEAR COMPLETION. THE PROTOCOL SPECIFIED THAT 27 BOUNDARY MARKERS WERE TO BE PLANTED NEAR "HOTSPOTS," POINTS OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO ZONES, BUT TO DATE ONLY FOUR STAKES HAVE BEEN

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