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**“OPERATION TARNISHED EAGLE” THWARTS PLOT TO
OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT OF LAOS**

Hmong insurgency planned to use AK-47 automatic rifles, Stinger missiles, LAW rockets, anti-tank rockets and other arms and munitions to topple Lao government and reduce government buildings in Vientiane to rubble.

SACRAMENTO -- United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott, Acting Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Michael J. Sullivan, Kenneth L. Wainstein, Assistant Attorney General for National Security, and FBI Special Agent in Charge Drew Parenti announced today that a joint investigation conducted by Special Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, together with the Joint Terrorism Task Force, has successfully interrupted a plot to overthrow the government of Laos by force and violence.

Arrested this morning pursuant to a federal arrest warrants were: Harrison JACK, 60, of Woodland; Vang PAO, 77, of Westminster; Lo Cha THAO, 34, of Clovis; Youa True VANG, 60, of Sanger; Hue VANG, 39, Fresno; Chong Vang THAO, 53, of Fresno;

Seng Vue, 68, of Fresno; Chu LO, 59, and Lo THAO, 53, both of Stockton; all in California. Nhia Kao Vang of Rancho Cordova also was arrested and charges are pending. Vang PAO is commonly known as General Vang Pao, and was a general in the Royal Lao Army in the 1960's and 1970's who emigrated to the United States in 1975. Harrison JACK is a 1968 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and is a retired officer. Agents also executed search warrants at 14 locations simultaneously with the arrests.

The criminal complaint and arrests are the culmination of a six month undercover investigation, dubbed "Operation Tarnished Eagle," of suspected violations of the Neutrality Act, the object of which was to engage in the violent overthrow of the sovereign government of the nation of Laos. Today over 200 federal agents and local law enforcement officers executed pre-dawn search and arrest warrants and took the defendants into custody without incident. The warrants were executed in Chico, Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Stockton and Woodland.

"The United States cannot provide a safe harbor to those plotting to overthrow a government with whom we are at peace. These defendants flagrantly violated numerous federal laws, including the Neutrality Act, in planning to topple the government of Laos. The ATF, and in particular a very brave and dedicated agent of the ATF, as well as the FBI and its Joint Terrorism Task Force members, deserve enormous credit for their extraordinary investigation," stated United States Attorney Scott.

"This investigation read like a movie script, but turned out to be reality. The individuals arrested today thought an arms dealer would provide the necessary weapons and personnel to assist them in the violent overthrow of another government. An

undercover ATF agent lead them to believe he could fulfill their needs. These defendants posed a substantial threat to public safety abroad." said ATF Acting Director Sullivan. "Fortunately, we were able to disrupt their activities before their plot evolved into a coup against a country with which the United States is at peace."

"We cannot tolerate our country being used as a staging ground for foreign coup attempts. These defendants had developed an audacious plan to overthrow the Government of Laos, and were seeking to arm themselves with automatic rifles, rockets and surface-to-air missiles. Thanks to an exceptional investigative effort by the ATF, FBI, and U.S. Attorney's office for the Eastern District of California, the plotters have been arrested and the threat neutralized," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security Wainstein.

"The FBI and our partners on the Joint Terrorism Task Force were pleased to work with the ATF in this joint investigation targeting a group of individuals who had clearly expressed their intent to attack a sovereign government with which the United States is at peace. Investigations of this nature underscore both the ability and the willingness of federal, state and local agencies to combine resources and expertise to detect and disrupt serious criminal threats." said FBI Special Agent in Charge Parenti.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Robert M. Twiss and Ellen V. Endrizzi, who are prosecuting the case, the criminal complaint alleges that the defendants conspired to acquire hundreds of AK-47 automatic rifles, Stinger missiles, AT-4 anti-tank missiles, LAW rockets, claymore mines, C-4 explosive, and smoke grenades, which they intended to use to engage in the violent overthrow of the government of Laos. The criminal complaint outlines a series of meetings with an undercover ATF agent and

conversations among the alleged co-conspirators during which they outlined plans to ship arms to Laos via safe houses and drop zones in Thailand and Laos, and to use those arms to engage in a military operation in Laos. The complaint includes a statement by Lo Cha THAO in which he arranged for a team of special operations mercenaries to go into Vientiane, Laos and blow up several government buildings, including the Laos Royal Palace. According to the complaint, Lo Cha Thao stated that he wanted the mercenary troops to reduce the buildings to rubble.

All defendants are charged with: conspiracy to violate the Neutrality Act; violation of the Neutrality Act; conspiracy to kill, kidnap, maim and injure persons in a foreign country; conspiracy to damage government buildings and property in a foreign country; and conspiracy to receive and possess machine guns and explosive devices, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 371, 956(a), 956(b), 960, 922(o) and Title 26, United States Code, Section 5681. Defendants Harrison JACK, Vang PAO, Lo Cha THAO, Lo THAO, Hue VANG and Chong Vang THAO also are charged with conspiracy to receive and possess missiles (Stingers) which are designed to destroy aircraft, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2332g.

The maximum sentence which every defendant faces is imprisonment for life plus 38 years. The six defendants who also are charged with the conspiracy to receive and possess the Stinger missiles face an additional term of imprisonment for life, for a total of imprisonment for two life terms plus 38 years. There is a mandatory minimum sentence of imprisonment for 25 years to life on the Stinger count. However, the actual sentence will be dictated by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of factors, and will be imposed at the discretion of the court.

The charges are only allegations and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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