

MEMORANDUM  
RM-5935-ARPA  
SEPTEMBER 1969

REVOLUTION IN LAOS:  
THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND  
THE PATHET LAO

P. F. Langer and J. J. Zasloff

PREPARED FOR:  
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*The* **RAND** *Corporation*  
SANTA MONICA • CALIFORNIA

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PREFACE

This Memorandum is part of a series of studies, sponsored by the Advanced Research Projects Agency, that deal with the Communist movement in Laos commonly known as the Pathet Lao. For the past decade or so, these dissident forces have been engaged in a military conflict with the legitimate Royal Lao Government, a war that is gaining in scope and intensity. The RAND inquiry, which is being conducted jointly by Paul F. Langer, a member of the Social Science Department's research staff, and Joseph J. Zasloff, a professor of political science at the University of Pittsburgh and consultant to The RAND Corporation, seeks to clarify the nature of the Lao Communist movement, to examine its domestic and foreign policies and to determine the precise role that outside powers are playing in the Lao insurgency. None of these topics has previously been explored in depth.

The function of the North Vietnamese presence in Laos is of particular importance today because of its bearing on the military situation in South Vietnam and because of the need for an assessment of North Vietnam's objectives in Southeast Asia. A first report addressing itself to this problem, a case study entitled The North Vietnamese Adviser in Laos: A First-Hand Account (RM-5688-ARPA), was issued in July 1968. The present Memorandum, the second in the series concerned with the insurgency in Laos, seeks to integrate and analyze the hitherto scattered information on the presence and activities of the Vietnamese Communists in Laos since the end of the Second World War. It focuses on their recent military and advisory support to the Lao

insurgents and attempts to assess the significance of these activities in sustaining and increasing the momentum of the Lao Communist movement.

RM-5935 is based on an extensive examination of documentary sources in Laos and in this country, supplemented by interviews with knowledgeable individuals, both Lao and Vietnamese.

SUMMARY

It has been clear for some time that the Lao revolutionary movement, commonly known as the Pathet Lao (PL), receives support from the North Vietnamese Communists, but far less is known about the relationship between these two movements. The present study inquires into the development and the precise nature of that relationship, using available documentary evidence supplemented by interviews with some two hundred well-informed persons, most of them Lao or Vietnamese. The authors conclude that the Lao revolutionary movement owes its existence to the direct initiative, guidance, and support of the Viet Minh movement and its leaders, and that in the period since the Viet Minh's successful struggle for the independence of Indochina, it has remained heavily dependent on Vietnamese assistance and direction. Thus, in the late 1940s, the Lao revolutionaries drew their strength from bases in North Vietnam. In the early 1950s, thanks to Viet Minh protection, they were able to transfer their headquarters to the border regions of eastern Laos. From these secure bases, following behind the Viet Minh military advance into Laos, the Pathet Lao succeeded in extending their influence westward toward the Mekong plains.

The authors' research suggests that, in the two decades of almost uninterrupted struggle between Communist and non-Communist forces in Laos, the superior military strength, organization, and fighting spirit of the North Vietnamese combat units have been decisive in expanding Communist control in Laos.

The Vietnamese military contribution to the cause of the Lao revolutionaries has been of three kinds. First, Vietnamese Communist military units assigned to protect the infiltration routes into South Vietnam at the same time serve as a deterrent against any inroads by non-Communist forces into the areas along the border that separates Laos from the two Vietnams. Second, certain Vietnamese units especially selected for duty in Laos are assigned to supplement and, whenever necessary, to provide the thrust for Lao Communist operations against the Royal Lao Government. Finally, a network of Vietnamese military advisers permeates the military apparatus of the Lao Communists. These advisers plan military operations, stiffen the Lao combat forces, and continuously work at improving the latter's effectiveness. The advisory effort is directed from North Vietnam through a separate command hierarchy, which supervises the Vietnamese military missions that are assigned to the Lao provinces under Communist control.

The Vietnamese Communists make a vital contribution to Communist strength in Laos by providing future Lao military cadres with training in North Vietnam. They also furnish the necessary logistic support for operations in Laos, where the Lao Communist forces are heavily dependent on Vietnamese assistance with regard to weapons, ammunition, communications, and other essential supplies for both military and civilian needs. Vietnamese specialists of various kinds continue to play a key role in the Communist zone of Laos, which lacks not only natural resources but trained personnel.

This assistance is by no means limited to the military sector. Vietnamese political advisers are attached to units of the Lao People's Liberation Forces and are found at key points throughout the political and administrative system of the Lao Communists. This system comprises two basic components: the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Patriotic Front), an open political party and mass organization -- rather in the nature of a political front -- and the Communist Party. Whether or not there is a Communist party has been a subject of controversy, but the authors' research clearly establishes its existence in the form of the semisecret People's Party of Laos (Phak Pasason Lao, or PPL).

In recent years, the so-called Group 959, operating out of North Vietnam under the direction of the Lao Dong (Workers) Party of Vietnam, has been a key instrument through which political advice has been channeled to the Lao Communist leadership. The function of this Group is to control the North Vietnamese political and administrative operations in Laos as well as to give political guidance to the Lao. The operational direction of this activity comes from an advance command post of the Group at Sam Neua, in the Communist zone of Laos, the site of the Lao Communist administrative and political headquarters.

Though the precise organizational links between the Vietnamese Lao Dong Party and the People's Party of Laos remain unclear, there is ample evidence of the close ties that bind the leaders of the PPL to the Vietnamese. The present leadership of the Lao party owes its position and influence to Vietnamese support. Most of its members have had at least two decades of intimate association with the

Vietnamese Communists and have spent much time in North Vietnam, and many are married to Vietnamese. The Viet Minh recruited and trained the "seed" cadres for the Lao Communist movement, men who are now in important civil and military posts. Young Vietnam-trained Lao are returning to Laos in increasing numbers. As they begin to replace their elders throughout the military, political, and administrative apparatus in the Communist zone of Laos, the character of the Lao Communist regime is likely to change in the direction of greater toughness and vitality, marking its increasing Vietnamization.

In view of the overwhelming influence of the Vietnamese in the Communist areas of Laos, one might expect considerable tension between the Lao and their Vietnamese mentors. Though some of the Lao interviewed by the authors did display resentment of the Vietnamese role, the evidence on the whole suggests that the Vietnamese Communists have been successful in maintaining a good working relationship with the Lao associates. The two parties' community of interests is reflected in their constant efforts to minimize any potential source of friction.

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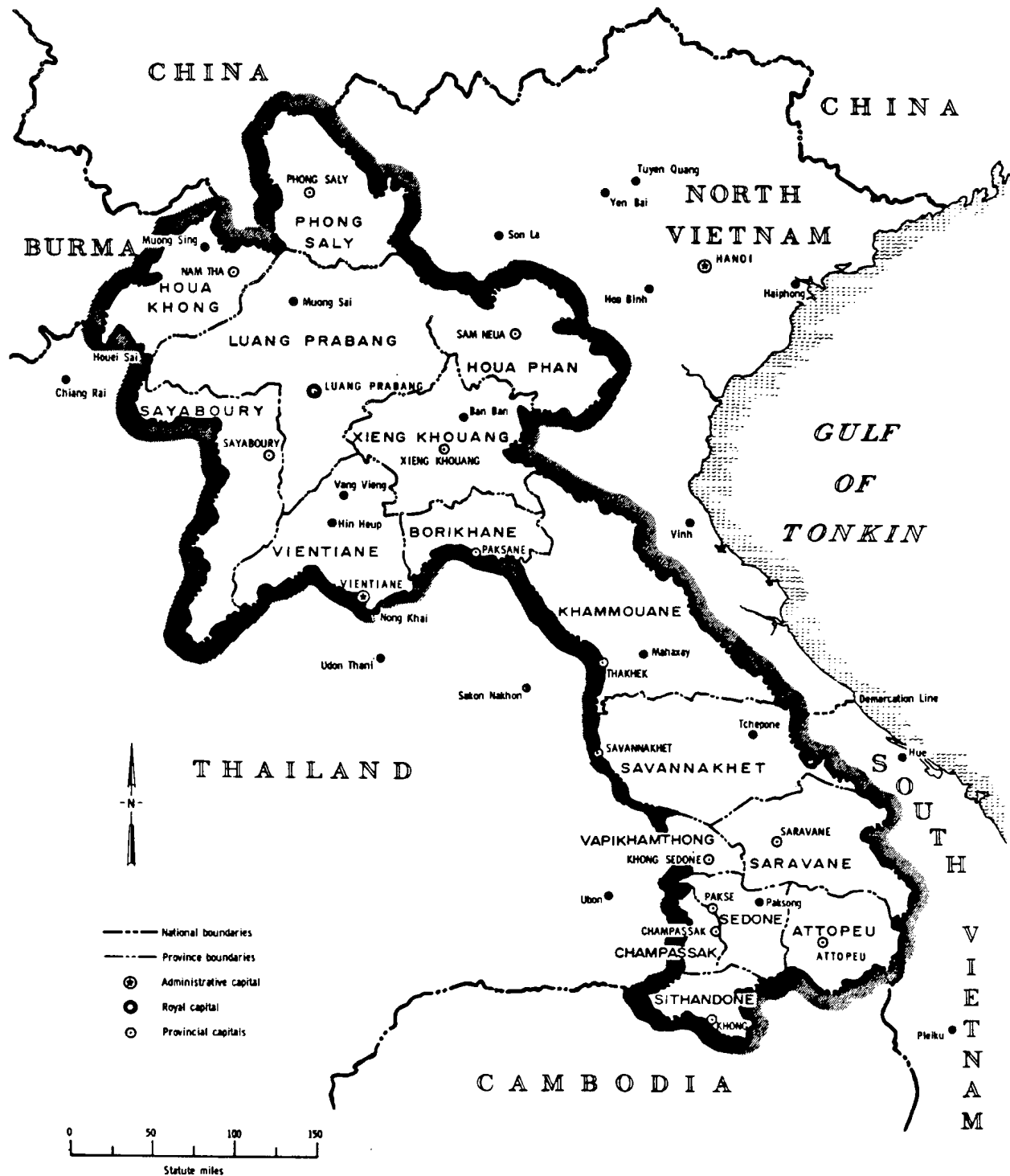
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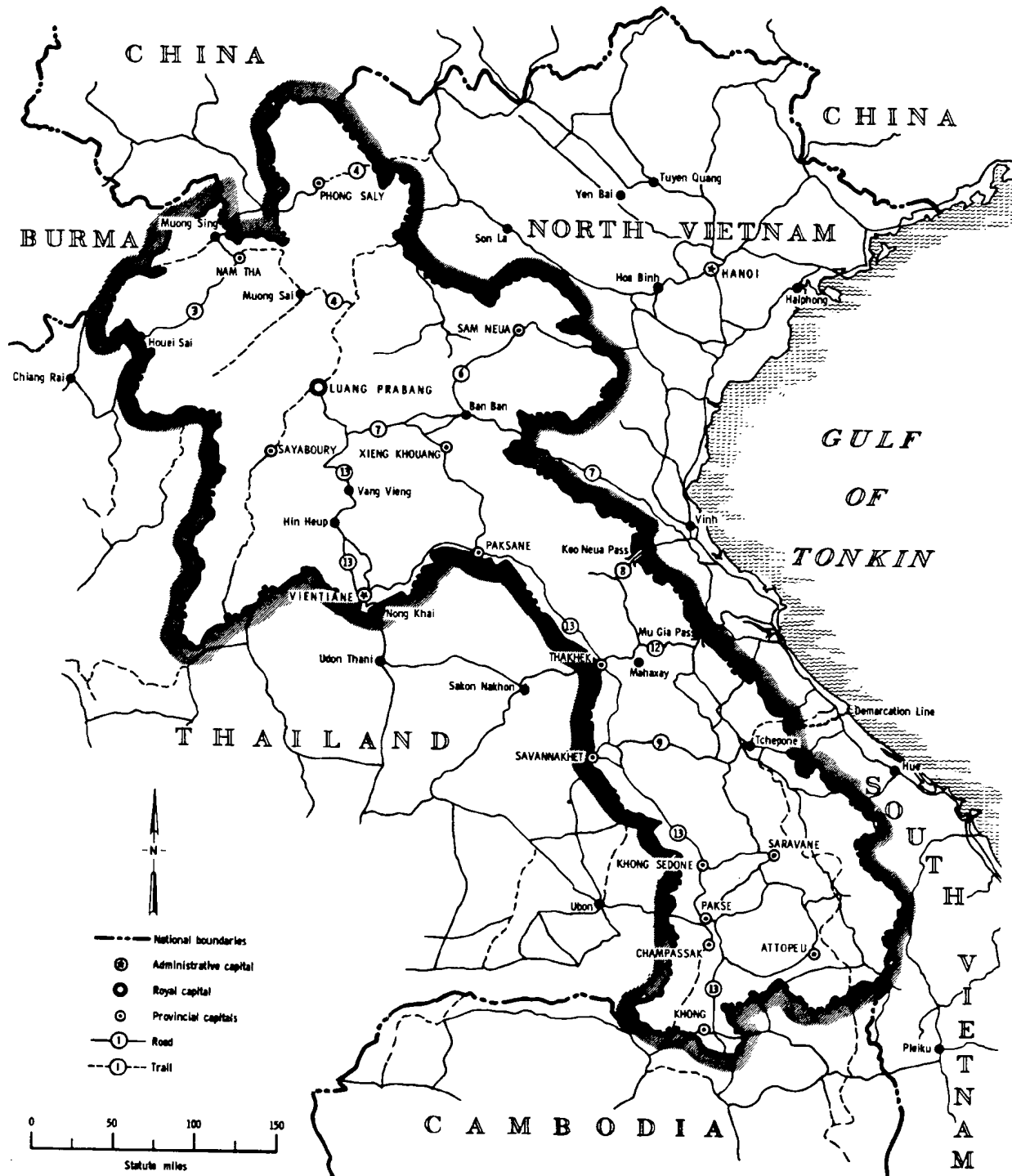
GLOSSARY

|       |   |  |
|-------|---|--|
| CDNI  | - | Comité pour la Défense des Intérêts Nationaux<br>(Committee for the Defense of National Interests) |
| DRV   | - | Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)   |
| FAR   | - | Forces Armées Royales (Royal Lao Armed Forces)   |
| ICC   | - | International Control Commission   |
| ICP   | - | Indochinese Communist Party  |
| KPL   | - | Pathet Lao Press (Khaosan Pathet Lao)  |
| LPLA  | - | Lao People's Liberation Army (Kongthap Potpoi<br>Pasason Lao)                                      |
| NLFSV | - | National Liberation Front of South Vietnam   |
| NLHS  | - | Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Patriotic Front)  |
| NVA   | - | North Vietnamese Army  |
| NVN   | - | North Vietnam  |
| OSS   | - | Office of Strategic Services   |
| PL    | - | Pathet Lao ("Land of the Lao")   |
| PPL   | - | Phak Pasason Lao (People's Party of Laos)  |
| RLG   | - | Royal Lao Government   |

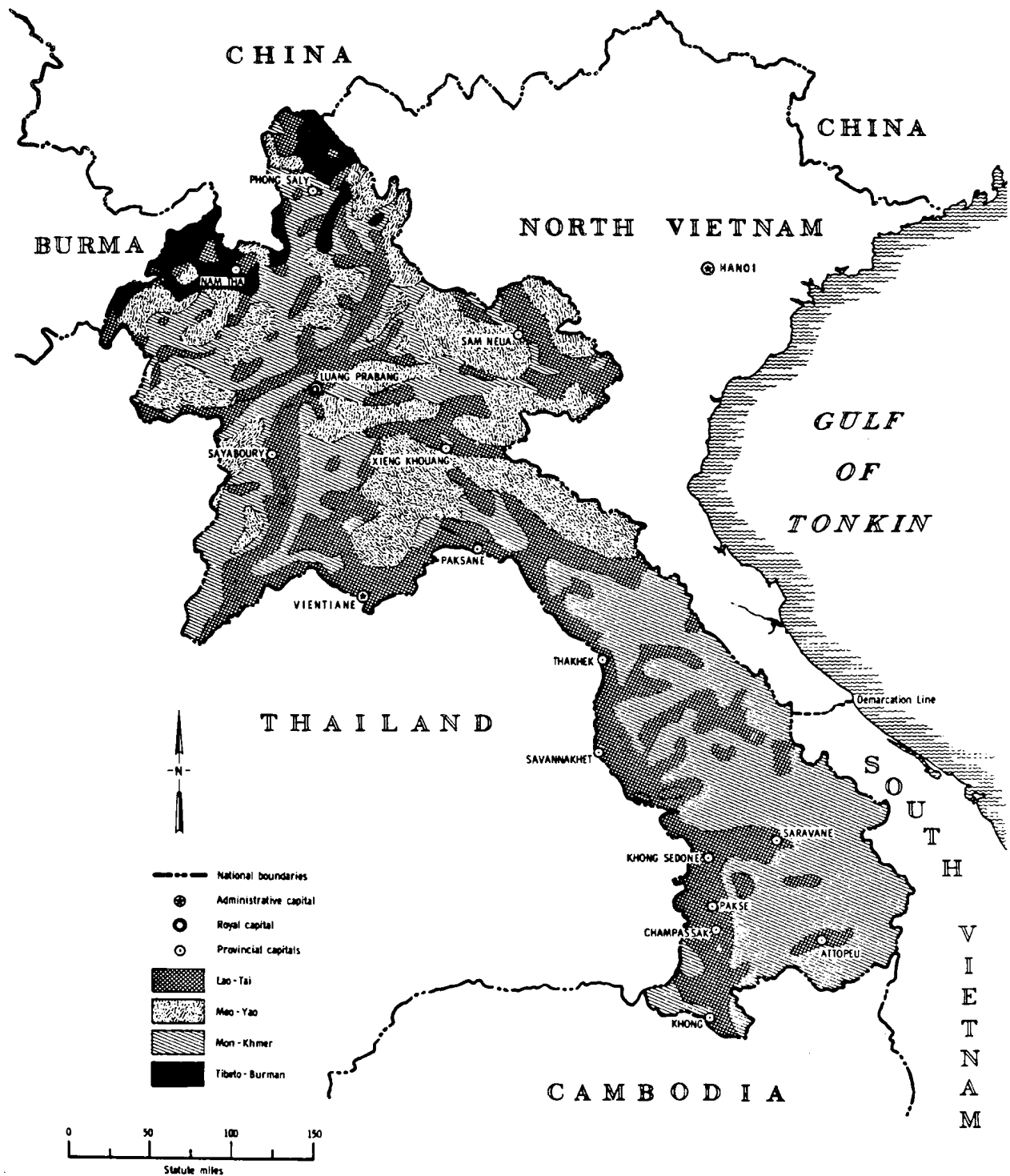




I. THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF LAOS



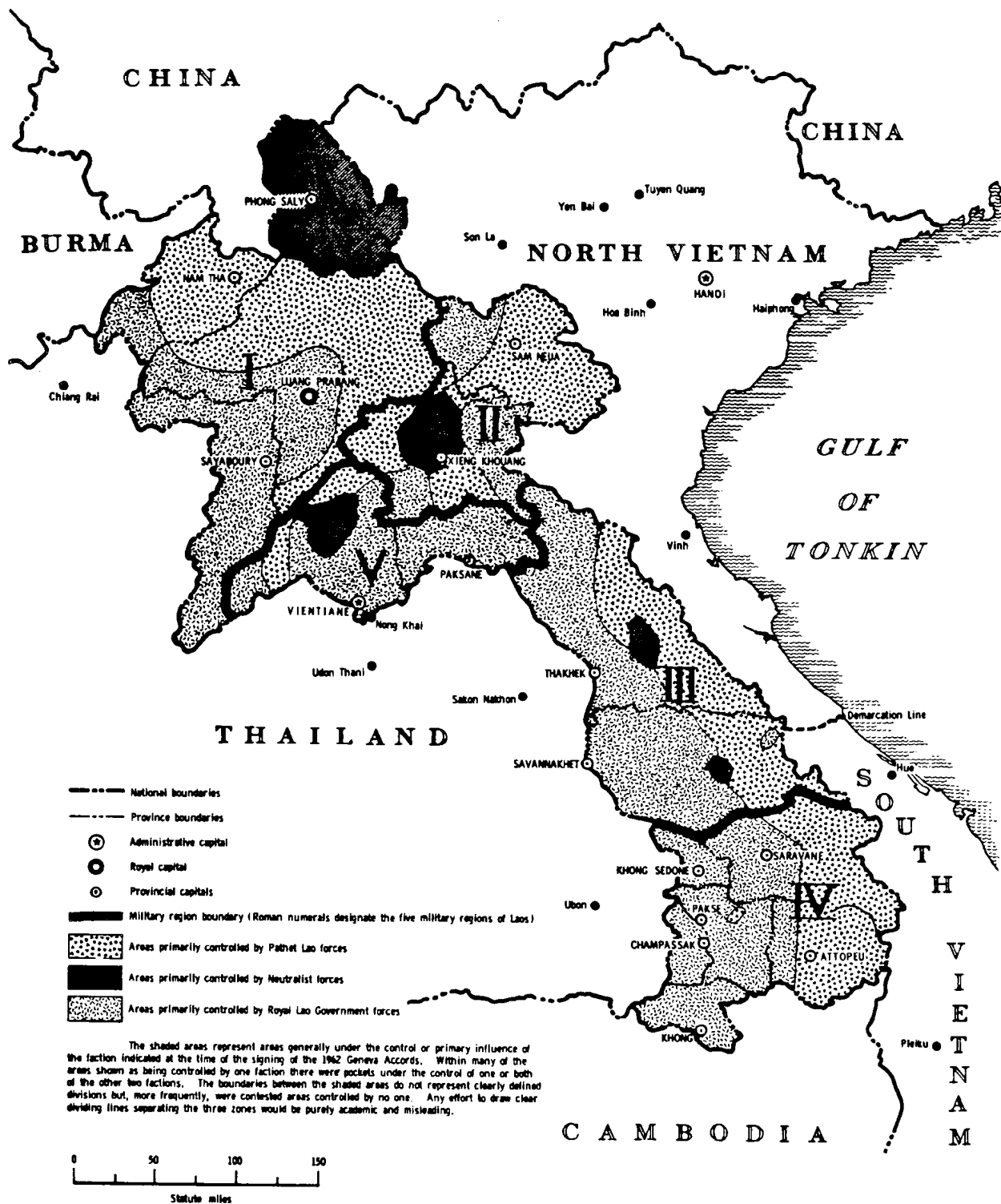
## II. THE MAJOR ROADS AND TRAILS OF LAOS



### III. THE MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS OF LAOS

(\* Source: Twelve Years of American Intervention and Aggression  
(in Laos, Neo Lao Haksat Publications, 1966)





V. THE DIVISION OF CONTROL AMONG THE THREE LAO FACTIONS  
AT THE TIME OF THE SIGNING OF THE 1962 GENEVA ACCORDS  
(Based on data obtained from Lao sources in Vientiane)



## I. INTRODUCTION

The events in Vietnam overshadow the struggle in Laos, which Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma has so aptly described as "the forgotten war." In Laos, as in South Vietnam, the fighting is in effect a continuation of the war that began when the defeat of the Japanese in the Second World War created a power vacuum in the former French Indochinese states -- a vacuum that France was never able to refill. The Lao war, therefore, contains several elements: of Vietnam's traditional attempts to assert hegemony over at least parts of what the French in the last century designated as Laos; of an extension of the North Vietnamese struggle to take over South Vietnam; and of a civil war between Lao Communists and anti-Communists.

North Vietnam's exploitation of the eastern portion of southern Laos -- commonly known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail area -- is the main reason that Laos has come to play so important a part in the conflict between North Vietnam and the United States over what shall be the future of the Indochinese peninsula. This involvement has caused Laos to be divided, essentially, into three parts: the Mekong Valley area, in which the non-Communist Royal Lao Government (RLG) maintains primary influence; the sparsely populated Trail area, where the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) operates with virtual autonomy; and the predominantly mountainous regions where the North Vietnamese and the Lao Communist movement exercise control. Because Laos is thinly populated, each side is able to maintain guerrilla bases behind enemy lines, and there are vast areas of no-man's-land, where any platoon that marches through can claim control.

Scholarly studies on Laos are few. Of the available literature, little is concerned with modern Laos, and even less with the Lao Communist movement. For Vietnam, the American research establishment has for several years poured vast resources into the study of Viet Cong organization, policies, and operations, with the result that at least some of the problem areas have been defined. No similar effort has been undertaken on the Laos side. To date, little is known about the origins, evolution, organization, and leadership of the Lao revolutionary movement, still commonly known as the Pathet Lao ("Land of the Lao"), the name by which the Lao Communists called their armed forces until late 1965.

The term Pathet Lao was first used in 1950 by those Lao forces that followed the Viet Minh's lead in refusing to accept the accommodation with the French to which other Lao nationalists had acceded the previous year. The term gained international currency when it was used at the Geneva Conference of 1954, although representatives of these dissident forces were not seated at the conference and it was a Viet Minh general who signed the cease-fire with the French on their behalf. The name remained in common use as a generic term for the Lao Communists despite the fact that a "legal" political party, the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Patriotic Front, or NLHS), was formed in late 1955 or early 1956. Therefore, although "Pathet Lao" is properly the name only of the armed forces of the Lao Communists between 1950 and 1965, it is colloquially used to include all non-Vietnamese components of the Lao Communist movement to this day. Among them are: the People's Party of Laos (Phak Pasason Lao, or PPL), the semisecret Communist Party

organization; the Lao Patriotic Front (NLHS), which is the legal front party; the administration in the Communist zone of Laos; the Lao People's Liberation Army (Kongthap Potpoi Pasason Lao, or LPLA), the name of the armed forces under the command of the NLHS Central Committee; and the Dissident Neutralists (or Patriotic Neutralist Forces, as they like to call themselves).

In this study we shall be using the terms "Lao Communists" and "Lao Communist movement" in referring to the above organizations, though we recognize that there is little Marxist-Leninist content in the thinking of their members, and that many of the participants have little or no knowledge of the true leadership of the front organizations to which they belong. The Communist movement in Laos will be understood to encompass the entire Communist apparatus in Laos, including the North Vietnamese advisers to the Lao People's Liberation Army, the NLHS administration, and the People's Party of Laos, as well as the North Vietnamese main force units in Laos and the NVA personnel for the logistic structure of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

As is true of most aspects of Laos, little is known about the Lao Communist movement, and prevailing views tend to reflect more political prejudice than knowledge. Thus, the NLHS -- the overt manifestation of the Lao Communist movement -- and its chairman, Souphanouvong, are believed by some to be no more than puppets manipulated by the hands of Hanoi, while others view them as indigenous nationalists dedicated to the unification of the country, the expulsion of all "neocolonialist" influences, and the realization of a program of social reform. The official line enunciated

by the NLHS in three Party programs and repeated in its continuous propaganda is, of course, designed to convey the latter impression. So far, little systematic study has been undertaken to establish the reality behind these conflicting viewpoints.

Yet the nature of the Communist movement in Laos does deserve study. Although small, sparsely populated, and weak, Laos, which borders on six countries, occupies a crucial geographic position on the Indochinese peninsula. In particular, being connected with the security of South Vietnam and Thailand, Laos is at present of considerable importance to the United States, which has commitments to the security of both those countries. Although the basic problem for Laos is uncertainty as to the intentions of Hanoi, whose army would need only those of its forces already in Laos to take over the whole country, the character of the Lao Communist movement is nonetheless of no small consequence. It is likely to have a bearing on the manner in which the non-Communists could be defeated, on the reactions of other countries with interests in the area, on world public opinion, and, indeed, on the very intentions of Hanoi.

In particular, if the United States and North Vietnam were to reach a settlement involving the mutual withdrawal of forces that would reduce the possibilities for direct military conflict, the nature of the Lao Communist movement, and especially its relationship to the (Communist) Lao Dong Party of Vietnam, would gain in pertinence. In this report, the second in a series on communism in Laos,\* we shall

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\*See Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, The North Vietnamese Military Adviser in Laos: A First-Hand Account, The RAND Corporation, RM-5688-ARPA, July 1968.

therefore focus on the role played by the North Vietnamese since the beginning of the Lao revolutionary struggle in the 1940s. (Unfortunately, not enough material is available -- and what there is is vague and ambiguous -- to permit us to trace the role of Lao elements in the Indochinese Communist Party in the period between the latter's inception in 1920, and the formation, in the 1940s, of Lao liberation groups, some of which were sponsored by the Viet Minh.)

An equally important subject for study is the Royal Lao Government and its external support, particularly that provided by the United States. A number of books already deal with it -- Arthur J. Dommen's Conflict in Laos, Arthur M. Schlesinger's A Thousand Days, and Roger Hilsman's To Move a Nation among them -- but the subject is not within the scope of this inquiry.

Our effort of gathering information for the present study involved eight months of field work in Laos, from December 1966 to August 1967, preceded and followed, in the United States, by a survey of the literature on Laos and by interviews with persons, many of them in Washington, who had special knowledge about the country. Earlier research projects, which had taken the authors to Laos and Vietnam, also contributed useful background information and a better appreciation of the forces at work in the two countries.

The dearth of documentation on the early years of the Indochinese Communist Party and the secrecy surrounding Communist operations in Laos as well as the lack of prominent defectors from the Communist ranks constituted important handicaps in our inquiry. Further, research in Laos

presents the normal difficulties that one would expect to meet in a developing country engaged in a war. In addition, there are special obstacles that confront any research effort concerned with insurgency in Laos. Only a very few individuals are responsible for decisionmaking within the Communist areas, and they are inaccessible to the researcher. The little information about the vital issues of organization and policy that passes beyond that inner circle is diluted as it is transmitted to lower and less sophisticated levels. Thus, the average defector or prisoner from the Pathet Lao ranks has a limited field of vision and finds it hard to place events in broader perspective. Studying the North Vietnamese role in Laos was rendered still more difficult by the assiduous efforts of the Vietnamese to conceal this role.

An analysis of the Lao Communist insurrection and of the part played in it by the North Vietnamese is further complicated by a certain lack of consistency and precision characteristic of the Lao. The confusion over Lao names and nomenclature will serve as one example. An individual name may appear -- with or without surname -- under a bewildering variety of spellings, so that it is often impossible even for a Lao to identify the person with confidence. A similar situation prevails with respect to the names of organizations and localities, and the dating of events also is often difficult. Yet another problem has to do with the Lao language; since it is in a state of flux, the precise meaning of a given statement may be in question.

Though at the outset we recognized the need for establishing modest goals with regard to comprehensiveness, depth, and precision, we collected a body of data



sufficiently large and reliable to enable us to construct a fairly complete picture of the North Vietnamese role in the Lao Communist movement. We found many Lao, in and out of government, willing to share with us their relevant experiences. Some had gone to school during the French colonial period with their future Lao or Vietnamese adversaries; others were linked to them by family ties; still others had been associated with them in the same political camp or had confronted them at the conference table. Defectors to the government side had no compunction about talking to us of their past experiences and observations. Interviews with knowledgeable third-country nationals supplemented our information.

More instructive about the Vietnamese role in Laos were the interviews we conducted in Laos with North Vietnamese defectors and prisoners who, for the most part, had been assigned to Laos during the past several years. While some of the ordinary Vietnamese soldiers could draw upon only limited service in Laos, others were officers, with greater experience, who had an understanding of the interaction between the Communist forces of Laos and those of North Vietnam.

The testimony of the North Vietnamese sources we interviewed, and a careful examination of the reports released by the Royal Lao Government of its interrogations of North Vietnamese prisoners and defectors, enabled us to construct a composite of North Vietnamese operations in Laos. In addition, we conducted interviews with former NLHS personnel and studied the interrogation reports issued by the RLG. We supplemented this information with

some 150 background interviews with individuals of various nationalities, the majority of them Lao.

The comparatively small number of relevant sources who could be interviewed in Laos compelled us to be less systematic and hence also less ambitious than we might have been had they been more abundant. This very deficiency, on the other hand, protected us against the temptation of proceeding to a quantitative data analysis, which, under the circumstances, could only have been faulty. Rather than treat the informants as respondents in an interview sample, we questioned each with a view to increasing our fund of knowledge, and correcting the often hazy and contradictory notions, about the Vietnamese role in the Lao Communist movement.

For historical perspective we drew, of course, on the substantial literature concerned with Indochina. Lao government archives, unfortunately, are still relatively undeveloped. This scarcity of documents reflects not only the low importance assigned to written communications but also the political uncertainties of life in contemporary Laos. A prominent Lao political figure once caustically remarked that the fewer papers in one's possession, "the less to burn in the next coup d'état."

Nevertheless, we were able to examine some captured Communist Lao and Vietnamese documents, including diaries and internal communications, as well as textbooks, newspapers, propaganda literature, and posters that we collected during our field work. These materials ranged from a single mimeographed sheet to several hundred handwritten or printed pages. Also useful were Vietnamese, Pathet Lao, Thai, Cambodian, Chinese, and Soviet broadcasts, some

printed materials emanating from Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow, and a few documents that we were able to obtain from private Lao collections.

Given the uncertainties of political life in Laos, we have considered it prudent not to identify by name those persons who were willing to share with us their experiences and judgments. Nor did we attempt to document every statement or append what would have been a bulky bibliography. Only where it seemed essential to the reader's appreciation of the evidence did we introduce specific details about the source directly into the text or in the form of a footnote.



PART ONE: THE PAST



## II. THE SETTING OF THE LAO REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

Any revolutionary movement bears the imprint of its environment. As the present study will demonstrate, conflict in Laos has been strongly marked by the physical character of the country as well as by its historical and social context. The Lao Communists' relationship to the North Vietnamese Communists, which is the focus of this study, has developed within this setting. Before examining the Communist movement in Laos, therefore, let us look briefly at some relevant characteristics of the country and its people.

### THE GEOGRAPHIC AND ETHNIC FACTORS

A glance at the political map of contemporary Laos shows the country to be divided into two zones, controlled by the Communists and the Royal Lao Government, respectively, with the exception of some pockets of enemy resistance in each zone. While there are gray areas not ruled effectively by either side, the limits of political control extend roughly in a northwest-southeasterly direction. It is significant that topographic and ethnic maps also show two distinct zones, and that these zones virtually coincide with the present political division of the country.

There is the Laos of the plains, controlled by the Royal Lao Government, and the Laos of the hills and mountain jungles, where Communist authority prevails. The plains are the domain of the ethnic Lao; the uplands are distinguished by a heavy concentration of diverse non-Lao

ethnic groups, which span the political borders of the country, reaching into neighboring Vietnam, China, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia. This cultural, linguistic, and racial variety is the result of frequent migrations into Laos from the various other countries of the region -- migrations which even today continue to complicate any attempt to stabilize the political situation and define the national borders. It is estimated that about half of Laos' approximately 3 million inhabitants (no precise population figures exist) belong to ethnic minority groups.

Apart from the predominant lowland ethnic Lao (or Lao Loum), we can distinguish three major ethnic groups within the territory of present-day Laos: the Meo (or Lao Soung), the Tai, and the Kha (or Lao Theung). The Meo are of Tibeto-Burman stock and belong to a group that has migrated in recent times, mostly during the past century, from its original habitat in South China to the adjacent areas of Vietnam, Laos, Burma, and Thailand. Today, roughly a quarter-million Meo live in northern Laos, and probably an equal number reside in the Tay Bac Autonomous Zone of North Vietnam, which borders on the Communist-controlled region of Laos. Our research suggests that the Meo, like the related Yao tribes, though often aware of their geographic origins, have little contact with or interest in the three million or so of their relatives who have remained in South China. The Meo of Laos are still in a seminomadic state and engage in slash-and-burn agriculture. They are organized in tribal units and are known in Laos for their fighting spirit.

The Tai tribes are scattered throughout the mountainous regions of North Vietnam and the adjacent areas of



China and Laos as well as through Northeast Burma and northern Thailand. According to the different colors of their upper garment, one distinguishes many subdivisions, such as Black Tai, Red Tai, and White Tai. Within Laos, Tai tribes are heavily concentrated in the provinces of Sam Neua, Phong Saly, and Xieng Khouang. Apart from their own language, they generally are fluent in Lao and in Vietnamese.

The Kha, or Lao Theung, are of Mon-Khmer origin and live largely in the mountain areas of South Laos, where they have traditionally been dominated and exploited by the lowland Lao (hence their Lao name "Kha," meaning "slave"). Throughout much of Laos, it may be said of the major ethnic groups that the Lao Loum prefer the lowlands, the Tai the mountain valleys, the Kha the mid-mountain level, and the Meo the mountain tops, although recent wartime dislocation and socioeconomic change have modified this stratification.\* Lao and non-Lao profess different religions: The Lao are Buddhists, the ethnic minorities, animists. Although through interaction they have influenced each other, they have developed different social and cultural patterns of life.

Since the Communist revolutionaries have been operating chiefly in regions inhabited by non-Lao, many observers contend that the Pathet Lao political movement is

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\* For an excellent discussion of the ethnic situation in Laos see Frank M. LeBar, Gerald C. Hickey, and John K. Musgrave, Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia, New Haven, Conn., 1964, and the relevant portions in Peter Kunstadter (ed.), Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations, Princeton, N.J., 1966.

based on an amalgam of non-Lao minority interests. They conclude that the civil war in Laos is primarily a reflection of ethnic confrontations. Actually, the majority of the Meo and related Yao tribes in Laos are aligned with the Royal Lao Government against the Communists. Moreover, the distribution of Communist power in the eastern mountain areas of Laos is mainly the result of their proximity to North Vietnam, which has played a vital role in the survival and growth of the Lao Communist movement.

Topographically, Laos is characterized by unusually difficult terrain and an extremely poor system of communications, conditions which foster regional isolationism and separatism. Few roads cut across the landlocked country, and fewer yet are passable during the rainy season. Moreover, the rudimentary road system built by the French runs from east to west, that is to say, it leads from Vietnam into Laos and, since Laos is laid out on a north-south axis, neglects communications within the country itself. Apart from the Mekong, there are virtually no navigable waterways, and railroads are nonexistent. Much of upland Laos can be reached only by narrow trails unsuited to vehicular traffic. All this applies particularly to the mountainous zones in the eastern part of the country, bordering on Vietnam, where the Communist movement first sank its roots and has continued to rule. This is country which offers ideal conditions for small groups of guerrillas to hide out and survive despite enemy pressure, especially when a Vietnamese sanctuary is available to them.

The very topography of the Communist zone of Laos, stretched out from the borders of southern China and North Vietnam to the boundaries of Cambodia, and the resultant

poor internal communications put obstacles in the way of any attempt to integrate this region administratively and govern it from a single center.

Geography affects the complexion of the Lao Communist movement in still other ways. The border areas of Laos provide ideal conditions for infiltration and exfiltration, particularly in the sparsely populated regions bordering on Vietnam. The same ethnic groups are found on both sides of the border, and boundaries, often ill-defined, tend to be ignored. It is not surprising, therefore, that throughout the history of Laos external influences have played a critical role in determining internal development. Following the tradition of Vietnamese rulers who have claimed suzerainty over territory also claimed by the Lao, the Vietnamese Communists today show an intense interest in these regions. Even if political considerations had not drawn the Pathet Lao into cooperation with the Vietnamese Communists, any Lao group competing for power in eastern Laos would have to face the fact that its survival hinges to a large extent upon the attitude of its much stronger Vietnamese neighbor. Since the government side draws its strength from the richer valley regions of Laos, and derives support not only from the United States and other Western powers but also from Thailand across the Mekong, the Lao Communists, to survive, understandably turn to the Vietnamese for backing.

#### THE LAO-VIETNAMESE RELATIONSHIP

For centuries, the Lao have been in conflict with their Thai neighbors across the Mekong. Thai power has

often expanded into Laos, and portions of what the Lao regard as their territory have been incorporated into Thailand. In fact, substantially more ethnic Lao now live in Northeast Thailand than in Laos itself. But the Thai have by no means been the only enemy endangering the survival of Laos; the Vietnamese threat has also been felt acutely. The Vietnamese have at times extended their control over large areas of Laos, especially in the north, and Lao kings have often paid tribute to the Annamese emperors. Thus, Laos has long been a battleground for the expansionist drives of the Thai and the Vietnamese.

If cultural affinity alone had determined the political orientation of modern Laos, it probably would have led to an association with Thailand, at least for the ethnic Lao population of the Mekong Valley. The two peoples worship at Theravada Buddhism, speak a similar language written in a script of Indian derivation, and belong to the Hinduized sphere of civilization. In contrast, the Vietnamese have Sinitic origins and are influenced by a Confucian tradition and a mandarin concept of administration. But the French occupation of the country, in the nineteenth century, forced Laos into a political grouping with Vietnam and Cambodia as a member of a new political unit known as French Indochina. This union, and decades of French rule from the Governor General's office in Hanoi, brought about some degree of integration among the three culturally and ethnically distinct peoples. At the very least, it produced among the indigenous elites of these countries a feeling of shared destiny and common objectives. French education, French viewpoints, and French civilization became the common heritage of the educated few in Laos,

Cambodia, and Vietnam, thereby creating bonds which to a remarkable degree have survived the collapse of the French colonial regime.

Ruling Indochina from Hanoi, France in its colonial policy tended to favor the Vietnamese. The latter were bound, in any case, to assume the leading position in the French colonial state, if only because of their numerical superiority and their higher economic and professional development, let alone their tough and dynamic national character. When the Vietnamese launched their anti-French independence movement under Ho Chi Minh, it was natural that they should have the support of some Lao with particularly close ties to the Vietnamese, such as the future Lao Communist leaders Kaysone Phomvihan and Nouhak Phomsavan. But even some members of the Lao upper classes, including Prince Souphanouvong, the future titular leader of the revolutionary movement, Phoumi Vongvichit, and Singkapo Chounramany, were ready to accept Vietnamese leadership in the making of their own revolution.

The issue of Vietnamese influence over the Lao revolutionaries -- or perhaps one should say the phenomenon of the Lao revolutionaries' willingness to cooperate with, and even to subordinate themselves to, the Vietnamese Communists -- raises an important question of Lao attitudes toward their Vietnamese neighbors. A widely accepted thesis holds that the Lao dislike the Vietnamese. Our research points to a more complex relationship. For one thing, as will be discussed later, the typical lowland Lao rarely exhibits the acute, virulent nationalism and xenophobia so common in contemporary Asia, which often directs itself against the neighboring people. Among the broader

population, therefore, anti-Vietnamese feelings do not appear to be intense. It is true, however, that many members of the Lao elite fear what they perceive as the Vietnamese' aggressiveness, as well as their organization and drive. Often betraying a sense of their own inferiority, they see unfortunate implications for Laos in too close an association with a people that has shown tendencies to expand into adjacent, less populated areas. The feeling of inadequacy vis-à-vis the Vietnamese is particularly evident among those educated Lao who once had been placed in subordinate positions to the Vietnamese by French colonial officers, whose administrative policies tended to discriminate against the Lao.

Even in the towns on both sides of the Mekong, however, where recent decades have brought an influx of Vietnamese merchants and artisans, one encounters scant evidence of severe Lao-Vietnamese tensions. Despite the gap between the Lao and Vietnamese elites, there have been many cases of intermarriage. While such alliances tend to be frowned upon, the experience of French colonial rule that Lao and Vietnamese have shared has created ties that transcend cultural and national differences. Our research, and particularly the interviews with Lao defectors, suggests that the present generation of Lao revolutionaries has been able to accept Vietnamese assistance -- and even guidance -- without feeling the animosity that so often characterizes the donor-recipient relationship. It is open to question whether this will still be true of the next generation even if the Vietnamese Communists in their policy continue to take account of the sensitivities of their Lao allies.

THE ROLE OF NATIONALISM

The Lao's relatively mild emotional reaction against the Vietnamese (not to be confused with the ideologically and politically motivated antagonism that obviously exists among non-Communist Lao) can be attributed in large part to the low intensity of their nationalism and to their attitude toward the outside world in general.

Nationalism has proved the most potent political force in postwar Asia. Success or failure of Communist movements there has been fundamentally affected by the extent to which the Communists have been able to identify their cause with nationalism. In Laos, the Communists, for many reasons, have not had the success of their Vietnamese counterparts in virtually capturing what there was of nationalism. The powerful Lao state of Lane Xang was the product of a distant golden age, which ended in the seventeenth century. Thereafter, Laos was divided into separate kingdoms and principalities, a condition which encouraged the centrifugal forces of regional separatism rather than sentiments of national identification and unity. This state of affairs did not change fundamentally during the half-century of French rule, from 1893 to the end of the Second World War.

In fact, it may be argued that the weakness of Lao nationalism today is due in part to the nature of French colonial rule. The French viewed Laos as a quaint, though attractive, backwater of Southeast Asia, where not much profit could be obtained from modernizing the country. Thus, they built what compared with Vietnam was a modest French-style educational establishment open primarily to

a small urban elite. French rule left little mark on the rest of the population. France administered the country with no more than a few hundred French nationals stationed in all of Laos. Although they introduced French as the language of administration, the colonial authorities did not interfere much with the customs of the country, nor did they collect onerous taxes (except for corvée contributions exacted mainly from ethnic minorities) or make much of an effort to modernize the country. To judge by the reports of the time, traditional life in Laos went on largely undisturbed.

Except for the handful of leaders who were educated in Vietnam or in France, the lowland Lao did not deeply resent French rule, and there was no strong base for nationalism among the common people. Even those of the Lao elite who did resent French colonial domination appreciated the fact that it protected their country from its Vietnamese and Thai neighbors, who had overrun Laos in the past (although they might have had to admit that French policy also had the effect of reducing Laos' traditional cultural ties with Thailand). This explains the acceptance of compromise with France after the war on the part of most of the Lao elite -- with the notable exception of Souphanouvong and a few other members of the Lao independence movement, who favored association with the Viet Minh. It also helps us to understand why some Lao notables sided with the French during the days of Japanese supremacy even when there was danger in this association. These sentiments contrasted sharply with the virulent anti-French feelings so common in Vietnam during those same years.



The moderate Lao nationalism is further blunted by the ethnic complexity of contemporary Laos, where half the population is ethnically non-Lao and each group has its own historic and cultural associations and traditions. The Lao revolutionaries, led at the outset principally by members of the lowland Lao elite, could not appeal to Lao nationalist convictions, nonexistent among the tribal peoples that populate the highland areas nominally under their control.

As will be explained later, the breakup of the Lao nationalist independence movement in 1949 left Souphanouvong and his associates clearly in a minority position. Thus the Lao revolutionaries never monopolized the nationalist movement in their country as the Viet Minh did in Vietnam. Moreover, the close relationship between Lao and Vietnamese that had always characterized the Lao revolutionary movement further detracted from the nationalist appeal of the Pathet Lao.

Now that the struggle against "French imperialism" is no longer an issue, "Thai imperialism" and "American imperialism" are the themes that provide the Lao Communists with a political weapon. So skillfully employed by the Communists elsewhere in Asia, this weapon is of less value in Laos, where antforeign feelings are less intense. The luxurious living (at least by the modest Lao standards), corruption, and accompanying moral decay associated with the sudden pouring in of American aid during the 1950s did arouse resentment, which the Lao Communists used against the "American imperialists." Nevertheless, in our interviews with some of the Lao elite we found a forthright awareness of the fact that, to survive and develop in the

modern world, Laos will require outside assistance for a long time to come. On the other hand, this same realization also makes it easy for the Lao revolutionaries to accept, without resentment, substantial aid and advice from the Vietnamese Communists.

#### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Contemporary Laos is not characterized by gross inequities, such as maldistribution of land or abject poverty alongside great and conspicuous wealth. Oppression by officialdom has been largely absent from the Lao scene, and there has been relatively little exploitation of the populace by local magnates. To this day Laos remains a country of isolated hamlets and villages where the government official is rarely seen. Regionalism rather than centralized authority determines the pattern of social, economic, and political life. In the Lao countryside -- and even in the country's few towns -- the ordinary citizen shows little concern about affairs transcending his immediate interests and limited horizon. His level of participation in national life is minimal, partly because of the primitive state of communications and the widespread illiteracy of the population. Despite the existence of a National Assembly, broadly-based political organizations -- with the exception of the revolutionary movement's Neo Lao Hak Sat -- exist in name only. Even more than other developing nations of Asia, contemporary Laos looks for leadership to an extremely small group whose social status and educational background, combined with the requisite political ambitions and skills, qualify it for that role.

This elite is interrelated to an unusual degree, and family ties generally are strong enough to prevent complete alienation even among politically competing elements. In studying the Lao revolutionary movement we found that virtually every one of its leaders had close relatives on the government side. Except during periods of strenuous fighting, family bonds tend to remain intact. At least among the older generation, amicable relations with family members who are political enemies are acceptable in Laos all through the hierarchy, as was shown earlier in the relationship between Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and his political rival Prince Souphanouvong, who is his half-brother.

An example from our interview with a conservative Lao minister illustrates this point. His wife, he told us, is a close relative of Prince Souphanouvong, whose mother lived in the minister's household until her death, in 1963. While Souphanouvong was in Vientiane, participating in the coalition government, he frequently visited his mother. During this period, the minister, by his own account, would often launch political attacks on the floor of the National Assembly against his leftist relative in the morning and invite him for a family dinner in the evening. Taking down from the wall a picture showing the Communist Prince with his conservative relatives, the minister told us that relations within the family had remained quite affectionate. When asked whether their political differences didn't get in the way of their family relationship, he dismissed this with good humor. "After all," he said, "family ties have nothing to do with politics."

In contrast to the Vietnamese, even the educated Lao rarely are intellectuals or even avid readers. The desire for intellectual achievement, in the Western sense, plays little part in the life of the Lao elite. Our study of the Lao revolutionary movement's propaganda and of its internal communications thus revealed not only few traces of Marxist ideology but hardly any attempt to apply systematic analysis and "scientific thought" to the social, economic, and political problems of contemporary Laos. Thus, the public speeches of the movement's leaders are remarkable for their lack of ideological content and terminology. One can only conclude that ideology, for the revolutionary as well as the nonrevolutionary Lao, plays a distinctly subordinate role.

### III. THE GROWTH OF THE LAO REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE VIETNAMESE

The Vietnamese revolutionary independence movement was the catalyst for the first Lao attempts to gain independence from France. From its inception, the Lao nationalist movement was confronted with the need to clarify its position toward Vietnam. It was over this issue -- whether the Lao nationalists should enlist Vietnamese aid even at the risk of inviting Vietnamese influence over Laos -- that the Lao independence movement split in 1949. The group around Prince Souphanouvong, as well as a "Vietnam faction" of Lao that included most of the future Lao Communist leaders (especially, Kaysone Phomvihane and Nouhak Phomsavan), favored close alliance with the Vietnamese Communists and broke away from their more conservative compatriots in the Lao Issara movement. In due time, these two groups evolved into a single Communist-led and Vietnamese-sponsored Lao revolutionary movement, commonly called the Pathet Lao.

#### STIRRINGS OF LAO NATIONALISM

In 1893, the French placed Laos under their rule,\* thereby probably saving the Lao from being absorbed by their stronger and more vigorous neighbors, the Thai and

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\*The King of Luang Prabang was allowed to rule the northern part of the country under French supervision. The central and southern provinces of Laos were placed under the direct jurisdiction of a French administrator, who in turn was responsible to the French Governor General in Hanoi.

the Vietnamese, who had long been making inroads into Lao territory. Under the protective umbrella of French colonial power, Laos remained until well into the twentieth century the stagnant backwater of France's Indochinese empire. After the Second World War, Nhouy Abhay, one of the small number of educated Lao, expressed concern about his country's future as he wrote, with some justification:

One can state with confidence that until 1940 the Lao with a few extremely rare exceptions scarcely interested themselves in the affairs of their own country: obscurantism, the lack of communications facilities, and fifty years of [French] protectorate rule had marked the Lao soul and had put it to sleep in the soft bed of irresponsibility. . . .\*

Perhaps Nhouy Abhay did not sufficiently stress the connection between French policy and the conditions he deplored in Laos. Colonial policy toward Laos was formulated and directed from the Governor General's residence in Hanoi. With Vietnam and the Vietnamese forming the cornerstone of its Indochinese empire, France viewed Laos and the Lao as of secondary importance. Administered under French supervision largely by Vietnamese bureaucrats, Laos often appeared to the Lao themselves as a Vietnamese colony. This situation was reflected especially in education. There were very few schools in Laos as compared to Vietnam, and these few institutions not only were headed by French principals but were staffed almost exclusively by French and Vietnamese instructors, who tended to favor the

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\*From an original French manuscript, handwritten and unpublished. (This and subsequent translations from the French are by the authors.)

advancement of their young compatriots over that of their Lao pupils. This discriminatory treatment was the more pronounced, the higher the level of education. Such conditions were responsible for the latent anti-French and anti-Vietnamese feeling among some of the young Lao.

Many Lao, and certainly the small elite, must have been exposed, if vicariously, to the ferment of the Vietnamese revolutionary independence movement, since Vietnamese civil servants staffed the administration of Laos and Vietnamese students attended the country's one institution of secondary education -- limited at that -- the Collège Pavie in Vientiane, where Lao students were actually a minority. A few young Lao also went on from there to a full secondary education at the lycées of Saigon and Hanoi. A very few even traveled to France to obtain a university education. But there is no firm evidence of Lao participation in early revolutionary activity in France or in Indochina.\*

The beginnings of a documented Lao independence movement, which eventually gave rise to a Lao revolutionary organization, go back no further than the Second World War. The fall of France, in 1940, for the first time confronted the Lao with the possibility that the French protective umbrella might be withdrawn and that the future of Laos

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\* Some sources suggest that a few Lao and half-Lao (among them the future Communist leaders of Laos, Nouhak and Kayson) joined the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) at an early date. So did a number of Vietnamese residents in Laos. Although this information appears correct, no definitive evidence is available on this point.

would have to be determined by the Lao themselves. In that same year, as one of the leading participants in the adventure told us,\* a group of some 50 Lao youths, mostly students at the Collège Pavie, plotted an anti-French coup in the administrative capital of Vientiane. The amateurish scheme failed entirely, and the youthful Lao activists were forced to seek refuge across the Mekong in Thailand, where they received sympathetic but rather ineffectual support.

In 1945, the Japanese decided to replace Vichy France's administration of Indochina with direct Japanese rule. On March 9, a small Japanese detachment crossed the Mekong from the Thai border post of Nong Khai and, encountering little French resistance, entered Vientiane the following day. In neighboring Vietnam, Emperor Bao Dai responded to Japanese intervention by declaring his country's independence from France. In Vientiane meanwhile the Japanese, to the accompaniment of three banzai, proclaimed an end to colonial rule over Laos and told the populace that Japan was leading the fight against the white imperialists and bringing independence to the peoples of Asia.

It is a significant indication of the difference in political consciousness between the Vietnamese and the Lao that the first in Laos to respond to the Japanese proclamation were the Vietnamese residents of Vientiane. Here, as in most other small urban centers of Laos along the Mekong, the Vietnamese colony had steadily grown under French rule,

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\*Information based on personal interview with the former leader of this group, Tham Sayasithsena (now Colonel Tham), who was later to become Deputy Minister of Defense in the Free Laos (Lao Issara) government.



until in 1945 it was actually larger than the Lao population. Its numbers had been further swelled by the influx, from Thailand across the Mekong, of many Vietnamese who had lived there in exile during the war. A mammoth demonstration of Vietnamese residents took place in Vientiane on March 23 to celebrate the independence of Vietnam. Although on Lao soil, it ended with the hoisting of the Japanese and Vietnamese flags.

Lao eyewitnesses and former participants in the Lao independence movement have told us that at this point many Lao first felt concern that Vietnamese domination over their country might come to replace the French. Available evidence suggests that some of the several small political groups which sprang up in Laos during the spring of 1945 owed their origin almost as much to the fear of overwhelming Vietnamese influence as to the desire for independence from the French.

Direct Japanese rule in Laos was of short duration, as Japan capitulated to the Allies in August 1945. In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh established his People's National Liberation Committee, Emperor Bao Dai abdicated, and on September 2 Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).

Laos had neither the organization nor the experienced, sophisticated leadership present in Vietnam. Opinion was divided as to how Laos could best preserve its integrity against the certainty of external threats. These concerns, and the differences in the situations of Laos and Vietnam, were clearly stated by the most prestigious Lao of the time, the Premier and Viceroy, Prince Phetsarath:

Nourished by French civilization, I have not the slightest desire at my age to return to school to learn Chinese or Russian. . . . Our [Lao and Vietnamese] policies are not the same. Vietnamese policy seeks to rid itself entirely of the French whereas ours seeks to obtain independence within the framework of the French Union. . . . We still have need to lean on a strong power in order to protect ourselves against the designs of our neighbors both in the east and in the west, in the north and in the northwest.\*

But the Prince's views were not necessarily shared by other leading figures of his time. Some, like Oun (later on known as Oun Sananikone) and the group of young Lao nationalists returning from exile in Thailand, favored reliance on Thailand, or even a closer association with that kindred nation, both to prevent France from returning to Laos and to bar further Vietnamese expansion westward. Others sought to avoid dependence on either Thailand or Vietnam and hoped to convince the French of the wisdom of transferring political power gradually to the Lao leadership. Still others thoroughly distrusted the Thai and at the same time refused to entertain the thought of even temporary French participation in Lao affairs. To them, already influenced by the Vietnamese Communists, the struggle was essentially an anticolonial one, with racial (anti-white) overtones. Not surprisingly, supporters of this viewpoint, who favored a greater degree of domestic political and social change than did the other, more conservative factions, saw much in the Viet Minh movement to admire and

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\*Quoted from documents in the collection of the late Nhouy Abhay.

were inclined to seek its assistance for what appeared to them a common goal: absolute independence from France. Such assistance was gladly given by the Viet Minh, who actively sought out sympathetic elements in Laos.

For a while, the disparate Lao political groups were able to agree on a common program and on a person who could implement their consensus. On September 1, 1945, Prince Phetsarath announced Laos' independence from France, and two weeks later, in the name of the King, he proclaimed the unification of Laos through the merger of north and south under a single regime. On October 12, although disavowed by the King (then under the thumb of the French in Luang Prabang) and stripped by him of all his titles and prerogatives, the Prince lent his support and prestige to a new constitution, which for the first time made Laos a constitutional monarchy.\* That same day, a provisional government of Laos was set up in Vientiane with the backing of Prince Phetsarath. This new government, which was soon to be ousted from Laos by the returning French forces, enjoyed the support of the major Lao political groups, none of which, it is true, represented more than a handful of men at the outset.\*\*

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\*To this day, the Lao revolutionaries celebrate October 12 as national independence day.

\*\*In Vientiane there were three principal factions: the Committee of the People, headed by Phagna Khammao Vilay (Xiengmao), a former high government official under the French and a political moderate; the Committee of Laos for the Lao, in which a young military man by the name of Sing (now ex-Major General Sing Rattanasamay) played the leading role; and the Committee for a Free Laos, headed by a young man, Tham Sayasithsena (now Colonel Tham). It was this latter group which in the late 1940s gave the name Lao Issara (Free Laos) to the entire Lao independence movement.

Meanwhile, in the outlying areas of Laos, other factions and groups had made their appearance, among them one in Savannakhet, an important Mekong town at the end of the strategic Route No. 9 which leads out of Vietnam through Tchepone. This group was led by Prince Phetsarath's youngest brother, Prince Souphanouvong, who had just returned from almost a decade in Vietnam. As a political figure, first in his brother's Lao Issara government and later as the titular chief of an independent political movement, the Neo Lao Issara (later renamed Neo Lao Hak Sat and more commonly known as the Pathet Lao), Souphanouvong ever since has played a conspicuous role in the political struggle over the future of Laos. His real influence, however, has been increasingly eclipsed by that of his associates Nhouhak Phomsavan and the half-Vietnamese Kaysone Phomvihan, who, lacking Souphanouvong's aristocratic lineage and having close ties to Ho Chi Minh, have enjoyed more fully the confidence of the Vietnamese Communists.\* An examination of the Prince's early political career will shed some light on the beginnings of the revolutionary movement in Laos and on its increasingly close association with Ho Chi Minh's Communist Viet Minh.

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\* Kaysone, whose Vietnamese father lives in Savannakhet on the Mekong, attended the Faculty of Medicine in Hanoi in the early 1940s. He reportedly was active in the radical student movement associated with the Indochinese Communist Party and later joined that party. During this period, he is said to have known Vo Nguyen Giap. (Unconfirmed reports -- denied by the Communists -- have it that Kaysone was killed in an air raid in Laos some time in the late summer of 1968. He was last officially reported to be active in August of that year.) Nhouhak, a Lao whose trucking business involved frequent dealings with Vietnam, is said to have become a member of the Vietnamese Communist Lao Dong Party in 1946, when he became an arms supplier for the Viet Minh.

THE EARLY CAREER OF PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG

A good many legends have grown up around the personality and past of the "Red Prince," who has emerged in Communist literature as something of a folk hero, a man who spends much of his life outside his own country on secret missions to Hanoi and Peking or in leading guerrilla movements in the more remote mountain regions of Laos. The known facts about Souphanouvong's career cast him in a more ambiguous light, however. Although his biography contains some undocumented stretches, its general outline can be pieced together from official records scattered in Vientiane files, interviews with former classmates and associates, and his own official and private statements.

A notarized document, signed by the Prince, shows that he was born on July 13, 1909, in the royal capital of Luang Prabang, as the twentieth and youngest son of the "Viceroy," Bounkhong,\* and the latter's minor wife -- or perhaps concubine -- (Mom\*\*) Khamouane. Three of his brothers were to play leading roles in the history of contemporary Laos: the previously-mentioned Prince Phetsarath, acknowledged chief of the Free Laos movement and the second man in the realm; Prince Souvannarath, in 1947 the first Prime Minister of an independent Laos; and Prince Souvanna Phouma, who was to emerge as the political rival, and at times ally, of Souphanouvong.

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\* Bounkhong was the "King of the Front" (Vangna), a hereditary position of a collateral branch of the royal house. Through his father, Souphanouvong could trace his origin to a King of Laos who had ruled in the late eighteenth century.

\*\* The term designates the commoner wife of a prince.

While the brothers were all scions of an illustrious Lao family, Souphanouvong suffered from several disadvantages: Not only was he the youngest, but his mother, it seems, was not of royal blood.\* His remarkable vigor, his combative, adventurous, and romantic spirit, and a strong desire to excel -- qualities attested to by those we interviewed who knew him well -- may not be unrelated to the pressures he felt from an early age to make up for the handicap of being the son of a minor, if viceroynal, wife in a royal household.

Like Kaysone, Phoumi Vongvichit, and most of the other leaders of the Lao Communist movement, Prince Souphanouvong received his education largely in Vietnam. He attended the Lycée Albert Sarraut in Hanoi, where he reportedly was one of a very small number of upper-class Lao who could successfully compete with the young Vietnamese intellectual elite and with French students attending this institution, known for its high intellectual standards. A Vientiane notable and former classmate of the Prince confirms what other sources report: Souphanouvong impressed all who had contact with him as an intelligent, ambitious, and extremely vain young man with a tendency to play to the gallery. His outstanding scholastic record, his reported ability to handle eight or more languages (including Russian and

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\*It is said that Souphanouvong's mother was not taken into the Viceroy's household. At any rate, his father, Bounkhong, apparently paid little attention to him, and even was rumored not to be his real father. Phetsarath, Souphanouvong's much older brother, in many ways acted as a father to him. Nevertheless, the youth reportedly suffered discrimination because of his origins, and his financial and social standing consequently was not as substantial as that of his older brothers.

classical Greek), and his ostentatious vegetarianism tend to bear out this generally accepted description of the Prince.

Several Lao who knew him cite a number of reasons why Souphanouvong should have developed a strong resentment against the established order and French rule even before he came under the influence of Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese revolutionaries. They point to the circumstances of his childhood as well as to discrimination he suffered in Hanoi.\*

Probably more important for the Prince's future and political orientation were his stay in France, where his brother Phetsarath had sent him for further study, and the discriminatory treatment he received during his professional career after his return to Indochina. In France, Souphanouvong is said to have attended the first-rate French engineering school Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, from where he reportedly graduated in 1937 with an excellent academic record.\*\* It is fairly well established that, unlike other scions of prominent Lao families, he did not choose to lead a life of relative ease in France.\*\*\*

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\*An event of his schooldays in Hanoi reportedly had a marked influence on the young Lao, as it involved his rejection by a French métisse who apparently, despite her own mixed blood, felt superior to the "indigène."

\*\*One Vietnamese source states that the Prince attended a private engineering college of lesser renown in Paris. Even this informant, however, confirms that Souphanouvong obtained his French engineering license.

\*\*\*The Communist writer Wilfred G. Burchett, who frequently interviewed Souphanouvong in later years, reports that the Prince worked on the docks during his holidays to defray the cost of his studies. (See, for example,

Souphanouvong's student days coincided with the height of the popular-front movement in France. It would be hard to imagine, therefore, that he did not have some exposure to the political currents that were sweeping the country. Indeed, Wilfred Burchett asserts that "he had already some political convictions through contact with progressives in France."<sup>\*</sup> Such "progressive" elements presumably included the Communists.

It is not clear whether Souphanouvong's involvement with Communists and Marxists during his stay in France was a superficial or a deeper, ideological one.<sup>\*\*</sup> At any rate, after his return to Laos the Prince gave no evidence of having become steeped in Marxist theory, nor was concern with Marxism reflected in his writings and speeches<sup>\*\*\*</sup> -- which may be one reason why the Vietnamese Communists in later years apparently did not consider him fit to be more

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Burchett's account in Schatten über dem Dschungel [Shadows Over the Jungle], Berlin, 1963, p. 212.) Arthur J. Dommen, in Conflict in Laos, supports this story.

<sup>\*</sup> Wilfred G. Burchett, The Furtive War: The United States in Vietnam and Laos, New York, 1963, p. 177. Arthur Dommen also contends that the Prince was active in the French anti-Fascist popular-front movement and that it was in France that he "made his first acquaintance with Communists." (Conflict in Laos, p. 21.) A Lao government official who associated with Souphanouvong in Vietnam shortly after his return from France reported that the Prince was then a reader of the French Communist newspaper l'Humanité.

<sup>\*\*</sup> In this connection it is interesting to note that the Prince in one of his letters proudly refers to his having attended an international Buddhist congress in France in 1937.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> A U.S. military officer who knew the Prince well during his days of exile in Bangkok in the late 1940s, and again in the period of the coalition government of the late 1950s, confirms this assessment.



than the titular head of the Lao revolutionary movement. (Where the Prince professes to stand today, however, is not in doubt, as in 1967 he publicly proclaimed himself a Marxist-Leninist.)

Souphanouvong's experience after his return to Indochina, in 1938, must have heightened his resentment of French colonial rule, for, despite his good professional qualifications, the French assigned him to a relatively subordinate and poorly-paid job in the colonial administration of Indochina.\* Whatever disappointment or resentment he may have felt,\*\* however, he continued, until his return to Laos in 1945, to go about his civil engineering work in Central Vietnam. It was here that he made the acquaintance of his future wife, Le Thi Ky-Nam, and that his involvement with the Vietnamese Communists had its real beginning.

#### PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG AND THE VIETNAMESE

In view of Souphanouvong's eventual close association with the Viet Minh, his attitude toward the Vietnamese is of particular interest. One must remember that his formative years and, until he returned to Laos in 1945, most of his adult life were spent outside his native country, and

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\* A Vietnamese informant who in his youth resided near the village of Au-Hien (about 10 miles northwest of Thanh Hoa) remembers the Prince as having been the head of the irrigation service at this small post.

\*\* A document in Vientiane, purporting to reproduce autobiographic comments written by the Prince in 1943, has him describing his state of mind after his return to Indochina as "bitterness, revolt, discouragement."

largely in Vietnam; he actually had more frequent contact with Vietnamese than he did with his Lao contemporaries. Also, it should be recalled, the Prince had received the same French education as the Vietnamese elite, and he spoke fluent Vietnamese. He may have felt more of an intellectual tie with the educated Vietnamese than with the upper-class Lao, whom, to judge by his letters, he did not consider his equals. He was quite critical of the Lao for their inertia and political apathy, and the dynamism of the Vietnamese must have struck a responsive chord in him. No doubt, he viewed the Lao as "poor revolutionary material," badly in need of guidance -- his own guidance as well as that of the experienced Vietnamese.

That the Prince took a Vietnamese rather than a Lao wife made him suspect to some of his compatriots who feared the Vietnamese influence over Laos.\* An exceptionally attractive and equally strong-minded woman\*\* who is said to have had pronounced Viet Minh sympathies, Le Thi Ky-Nam

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\*There exists, for example, an interesting exchange of letters between the conservative politician Katay Don Sasorith -- himself half-Vietnamese -- and the Prince, in which the former makes critical remarks about this marriage and Souphanouvong defends himself against the accusation of being unduly under the influence of the Vietnamese. As for Le Thi Ky-Nam, the daughter of a hotel owner from Central Vietnam, she gave her husband at least nine children. An official document attesting to the Prince's clean criminal record, issued in Vientiane on December 5, 1957 (in connection with his candidacy in national elections), shows him as having nine children as of that date. Apparently another child was born thereafter.

\*\*An American who had occasion to observe the couple in 1946 in Bangkok gained the impression that the Prince was at that time actually somewhat in awe of his wife's dominant personality.

undoubtedly helped to strengthen the bonds between her Lao husband and the Vietnamese Communists. Many Lao are convinced that, in the early stages of his career and at least as far back as his marriage to a Vietnamese, Prince Souphanouvong became a prisoner, so to speak, of the Viet Minh, to whose authority he eventually succumbed completely. His half-brother Souvanna Phouma has said in looking back on the past:

Souphanouvong [in 1946] did not view things the way we did. He was strongly influenced by his Viet Minh friends. Little by little he completely came under their thumb.\*

Since Souphanouvong's world view, as reflected in words and actions during the early part of his career, was close to that of the Viet Minh, cooperation with the Vietnamese Communists would not have appeared to him as a betrayal of the cause of Lao independence. But if he threw in his lot with them and came increasingly under their influence, it may well have been more for pragmatic political reasons than from ideological motives. We know from eyewitness accounts how strong were the Prince's vanity and his urge to excel and lead. As the youngest brother of the famous Prince Phetsarath and junior also to another able brother, Souvanna Phouma, he could not, for reasons of age and blood lineage, expect easily to assume the leading position, especially since his rival brothers had the backing of the Thai authorities. Only Vietnamese assistance could provide the politically ambitious Souphanouvong with the

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\*From a speech reported in Lao Presse, November 3, 1967.

necessary leverage to propel himself to the top leadership of a Laos independent of France.

To judge by the Prince's own statements during this early period, he viewed Vietnamese assistance as indispensable to his quest for power in Laos, but was confident at the same time that he could prevent the Vietnamese from gaining undue influence. Available documents suggest that the Prince never believed that Laos alone could achieve independence from France; rather, like Ho Chi Minh, he subscribed to the notion that the three peoples of Indochina had to struggle toward that goal in close concert, and that for a backward and weak country such as Laos the only hope of modernizing its political and social institutions lay in a strong alliance with the Vietnamese revolutionaries.

By early 1945, Souphanouvong must have become well acquainted with the Vietnamese independence movement, as he moved around Vietnam in connection with his engineering work.\* His anti-French future wife may have been the first to introduce him to members of the Viet Minh.\*\* At any rate, we know that Souphanouvong made official contact with the Viet Minh at the time of the Japanese capitulation, in the summer of 1945.

By then, Ho Chi Minh was on his way to Cao Bang in northern Vietnam (Tonkin), and on August 16 he established

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\* Burchett, in his Schatten Über dem Dschungel, suggests this when he states that the Prince was deeply impressed with the miserable condition of the Vietnamese workers he encountered in his travels during the war years.

\*\* Souphanouvong's wife was acquainted with Le Van Hien, an associate of Ho Chi Minh and at present the North Vietnamese Ambassador to Laos.

the People's National Liberation Committee that was to lead the revolution and proclaim the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Prince Souphanouvong, in the Central Vietnamese town of Vinh at the time, apparently was sufficiently moved by these events to ask for an audience with Ho, who encouraged the Prince to launch an independence movement in his native Laos and pledged Viet Minh support.\* According to Burchett, Ho Chi Minh on that occasion exhorted the young Lao visitor to "oust the foreign imperialists."

As a result, Prince Souphanouvong set out for Laos in the fall of 1945, under the protection of guards and guns provided by the Viet Minh, to help advance the independence movement just then getting under way in Vientiane. As he crossed into Laos, he picked up local support, especially among the tribal people, and then descended toward the Mekong River towns, where the Japanese capitulation had created something of a political no-man's-land. In Savannakhet and Thakhek, towns inhabited mainly by Vietnamese, the Prince helped to establish "national liberation committees" on the pattern of those set up by the Viet Minh in Vietnam. Reportedly, the aforementioned Kaysone had already preceded the Prince to his home town of Savannakhet to make contact with Vietnamese residents and Lao nationalist circles there, and it is likely that he played at least as great a role as the Prince in creating the liberation committees. Souphanouvong then continued to march toward Vientiane to

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\* According to Arthur J. Dommen, Souphanouvong flew from Vinh to Hanoi to meet Ho Chi Minh on an airplane provided by General Philip E. Gallagher, chief of a small American military observer team in Vietnam. (Conflict in Laos, p. 23.)

join forces with the new Lao Issara nationalist government which had been established there a month earlier. He arrived in the capital some time in November, still accompanied by his Vietnamese bodyguards.

Souphanouvong probably had only the vaguest idea of what his next step would be, but he clearly wanted to play a leading part in his country's liberation from French rule. Returning to Laos after all these years, however, he was bound to seem a stranger to his own people and, worse yet, a stranger moving under the escort of armed Vietnamese. After several clashes between his group and some Lao activists, Vientiane proved too small to accommodate both Souphanouvong's ambitions and those of his rivals for power. He therefore returned to Savannakhet and Thakhek, where he soon created for himself a power base within the Lao community and among the large Vietnamese population sympathetic to the Viet Minh.

Partly in recognition of his ability, and perhaps even more as a concession to his brother Prince Phetsarath, who was the real authority behind the Lao Issara government, Souphanouvong was designated Foreign Minister and later also Minister of Defense and "Commander-in-Chief" of the Issara forces. None of these posts meant much in practice, since the total armed might of the new government probably did not exceed a few hundred men, who followed their local leaders rather than any so-called Commander-in-Chief. Nevertheless, for a few weeks at least, Souphanouvong exercised control over the Thakhek-Savannakhet area of Central Laos.

The reentry of the French into Laos destroyed, for the time being, any hope that the Prince or the Lao Issara

movement might have entertained of creating an independent Laos. In January and February 1946, French forces returned to the northern part of the country; by March, after securing an accord with Ho Chi Minh, they were approaching the Mekong towns of Central Laos. Prince Souphanouvong had to fight or flee. He preferred to stand and fight at Thakhek, but his forces were no match for the French, and he suffered a decisive defeat.

In the face of the French reconquest of Laos, the Lao Issara government fled to Thailand. Most of its members remained in exile until the fall of 1949, when a compromise between the French and the moderate Lao nationalists made their return to Laos possible. During those three years, the Lao Issara government in Bangkok, grouped around Prince Phetsarath, had little influence on the course of events in Laos. Its financial resources were extremely limited, and the Lao "liberation forces" consisted of small guerrilla bands operating outside the control of the "central" government-in-exile in Bangkok.

Though it is not always possible to pinpoint the movements of Prince Souphanouvong during these years, we know that he spent much of his time close to the periphery of Laos, and sometimes inside, seeking to organize guerrilla forces against the French. While most of his associates, including his brothers Phetsarath and Souvanna, were satisfied with the life of political refugees in Bangkok, Souphanouvong emerged as the activist of the group, to a point where some of his compatriots saw in him "un-Lao" character traits that reminded them of the Vietnamese.\*

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\*Nhoy Abhay, for example, one of the Lao who knew him well during this period, has said that "under the influence

Seldom even paying lip service to the authority of his brother Prince Phetsarath, he behaved like an independent leader rather than a member of a coalition government. Arrogant and strong-willed, he frequently displayed contempt for his Lao associates.

Souphanouvong's position was in many ways stronger than that of any of his rivals in Bangkok. By September 1946, all of Laos had reverted to French control, and external support for the Lao independence movement, therefore, was crucial to its survival. The remaining small guerrilla units were poorly armed, poorly led, and badly in need of training and financial support. Between 1946 and 1949, the Viet Minh provided the major share of external support for the anti-French activity in Laos, thus playing a critical role in sustaining the revolutionary momentum, and Souphanouvong served them as a useful intermediary.

The Prince might have sought to enlist Thai rather than Vietnamese support for his claim to leadership over the Lao Issara.\* During World War II, the Thai had indeed given some assistance to the Lao nationalists. But Souphanouvong's Vietnamese associations and leftist leanings, even if he was not the revolutionary ideologue that

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of his wife, he spoke only of total independence (from France) and of resisting to the death -- veritable Viet Minh commands -- forgetting that Laos is not Vietnam."

\*One might wonder why the Prince never sought United States aid since the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had shown an interest in the Southeast Asian nationalist groups during the war. Actually, from 1946 to as late as 1949, Souphanouvong did make approaches to American authorities in Bangkok to obtain support. His requests were refused, even though the Prince impressed his American contacts, military officers in Thailand, as a genuine Lao nationalist with outstanding qualifications for leadership.



many proclaimed him to be, may have been sufficiently incriminating for the Thai to hesitate to strengthen him rather than the conservative elements of the Issara government, to which they were already giving limited assistance. Even if suspicions of the Prince's ties to the Viet Minh were not the overriding factor in the Thai leaders' calculations, practical political considerations probably would have inclined them to continue giving their support to Phetsarath rather than shift it to the young Souphanouvong, whose chances of assuming control of the Lao movement for independence from France, Thailand's archenemy, must have appeared to them very slim.

Practical as well as political considerations thus pointed toward the Viet Minh as the Prince's most plausible source of support. Their policy toward Laos and the Lao independence movement did not openly conflict with the cause of Lao nationalism, and they carefully avoided creating antagonism among Lao leaders who, like Souphanouvong, were inclined to throw in their lot with the Viet Minh. Acknowledging Prince Souphanouvong as the titular head of the Lao independence movement, the Viet Minh under his prestigious name actively organized Lao resistance groups throughout much of the Laos-Vietnam border region. Within the limits of their own meager resources they supplied their Lao allies with weapons and money.\* Even Lao Issara leaders in

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\* One of our sources, who was in Hanoi at the time, indicated that on at least one occasion Souphanouvong received from the Viet Minh a sum of between 500,000 and 1 million piastres.

Thailand had to admit that much of the financial support to their movement came from the Viet Minh representative in Bangkok, though most of it was channeled directly to Souphanouvong.

#### THE REVOLUTIONARIES IN EASTERN LAOS

Communist accounts of the Lao revolutionary movement place much emphasis on the person and activities of Prince Souphanouvong. As already suggested, there can be no doubt about the Prince's intelligence and ambition. His vigor and colorful personality are attested to by many who have known him, and require no further elaboration. Yet it is doubtful whether Souphanouvong's importance in the development of the Lao revolutionary movement was ever as great as Communist propaganda would have it -- or as the Prince, who is known for his vanity, believes himself.

Part of Souphanouvong's fame stems no doubt from his aristocratic family background and his, by Lao standards, superior educational and professional training. Nevertheless, the Prince was little known in his own country, until in late 1945, his elder brother Prince Phetsarath, then Laos' leading statesman, appointed him to be both a minister in his cabinet and his Commander-in-Chief, the posts in which he rose to prominence. Reports on subsequent developments in Laos naturally drew heavily on news emanating from Phetsarath's government-in-exile in Bangkok. What the outside world knew about the independence movement in Laos, therefore, tended to concentrate on the more accessible regions along the country's western frontier, where the Lao Issara forces, which nominally at least were under Souphanouvong, were operating during the mid-1940s. One

cannot escape the impression that, at an early date, the Vietnamese Communists singled out Souphanouvong as the Lao who combined in himself the qualities they considered desirable in a public representative of a Communist-sponsored movement that wished to mask its true complexion.

It is understandable, therefore, that accounts of the early years of the revolutionary movement often give more attention to Souphanouvong's role than he may deserve. Indeed, any documented history of that period runs the risk of overstating the significance of events in the western part of the country. The other side to the story of the Lao revolution, which was centered in the east, probably will never be fully documented. Actually, however, it was more important for the development of the Lao Communist movement than were the activities of Souphanouvong. The rather shadowy figures of the principal actors in the border regions of Laos and Vietnam -- Kaysone, Nouhak, some Vietnamese whose backgrounds and careers remain obscure, and still others -- played a central role in shaping the course of events. Our interviews with several Lao revolutionaries who worked with these men enable us to summarize the pertinent developments in eastern Laos and the Vietnamese role in them, though it is somewhat more difficult to reconstruct from this evidence the full and chronologically accurate story of events.

In the sparsely populated border regions of Laos and Vietnam, French control was never firmly reestablished and the political situation was extremely confused. A prominent native of Tchepone, whose account is confirmed by other sources, told us that between the end of World War II and 1949, when the Lao Issara movement broke up, numerous

small anti-French resistance groups operated in this area.\* Some of these were in close contact with the Lao Issara government-in-exile in Bangkok; others were only nominally loyal to it; and still others -- especially those led by tribal chiefs -- operated independently. What they all had in common was their dependence on Viet Minh support. In some cases this assistance took the form of rice, money, arms, and ammunition. In others, Vietnamese advisers attached themselves to the Lao or tribal groups. And at times, the Vietnamese provided military protection for the small bands of Lao conducting ambushes or armed propaganda against the French.

One Lao leader of a resistance unit told us that he met with Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi in 1946 and that Kaysone and Nouhak, already closely associated with the Viet Minh, were present at this meeting, at which he was encouraged to step up his anti-French activities. In the summer of 1946, a "Resistance Committee of Eastern Laos" came into being under the sponsorship of the Viet Minh, and among its members were several who later became leaders of the Pathet Lao movement. It is from the foundation thus created that the small Viet Minh-supported resistance units grew gradually, between 1946 and 1949, especially in the areas near Vietnam. This process was going on quietly in eastern Laos while Souphanouvong, in a more dramatic fashion, was challenging his colleagues in Bangkok.

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\*For a discussion of guerrilla activity in Laos during this period from a French point of view, see Michel Caply, Guérilla au Laos (Guerrilla in Laos), Paris, 1966.

THE SPLIT IN THE LAO ISSARA AND THE VIETNAMESE ISSUE

During 1947 and 1948, the Prince visited Vietnam at least once (and probably several times) for talks with Viet Minh leaders. What exactly was agreed on is not known, but Viet Minh support increasingly came to ignore the Lao Issara government-in-exile and to be channeled directly to Souphanouvong and to the small Lao partisan groups that had for some time been operating under Viet Minh guidance along the Lao-Vietnamese border.

Events in 1949 produced the political division in Laos that has continued to this day. French policy having developed to the point where it allowed the Lao a measure of autonomy, the French-sponsored Lao government in Vientiane, in 1949, entered into communication with the nationalist exiles in Bangkok and invited them to participate in the administration of the country. Most Lao nationalists responded favorably, and later that year returned home. A notable exception was Prince Souphanouvong who -- taking his cue from his Vietnamese allies -- resisted the trend toward accommodation with the French.

According to Vietnamese sources (corroborated by interviews with former members of Souphanouvong's movement), the Lao "liberation forces" -- nominally under the Prince's direction but in fact under a variety of leaders who for material and tactical support were dependent on the Vietnamese Communists -- had since late 1947 been shifting gradually from western to eastern Laos, that is to say, away from Thailand and closer to Vietnam.\* Between the end of 1948

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\* See the official Communist publication Su That (Truth), No. 154 (no date given).

and early 1949, they had set up the "military zones" of Southeast and Northeast Laos (Sam Neua). Here they began to launch armed propaganda activities with the aim of establishing "people's power bases."\* On January 20, 1949,\*\* Souphanouvong made the final break within the Lao nationalist camp by proclaiming the establishment of Lao Issara forces responsible only to him and not to the Bangkok government-in-exile. He had been having increasingly acrimonious exchanges with his erstwhile associates in Bangkok, who were already quietly preparing to return home.

Souphanouvong's letter of March 26, 1949, officially declared an end to his participation in the national coalition. This document,\*\*\* an official copy of which we discovered in a private collection in Laos, clarifies the differences which had come to separate the partners in the Lao independence movement. Souphanouvong lashes out at what he considers the traditional weaknesses of the Lao people -- no doubt contrasting these in his own mind with the dynamic leadership qualities he found among the Vietnamese Communists:

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\* Although these claims may sound exaggerated, our interviews dealing with the early period of partisan activity in the Lao-Vietnam border region suggest that there was some substance to them.

\*\* This day is celebrated in Lao Communist territory as the anniversary of the founding of what was to become the People's Liberation Army (LPLA).

\*\*\* The document, written in French, is numbered No. 3235/KT, confidential. It bears the letterhead "Kingdom of Laos -- Provisional Government of the Free and Independent Government of Laos -- Ministry of Foreign Affairs" (Souphanouvong was Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as Minister of Defense), and is addressed to Prince Phetsarath, "Chef Effectif du Gouvernement."

The patriot who consciously sacrifices himself for the sake of national liberation is sure to encounter at the end one of these three things: death, prison (and exile), or victory. If you wish only for a riskless victory, then you have embarked on a "gondola of dreams." Then you had better leave the political arena which demands men of action and of self-denial. As for me, I decided at the age of thirteen to rid myself, whatever the cost . . . of this inclination toward letting things drift, . . . of indolence, of this "resting on big words," all so characteristic of our country and of declining races destined to serve as sheep to the hungry wolves.

The Prince sees a clear connection between the regeneration that he urges upon Lao people and government on one hand, and his country's ability to obtain and preserve national independence on the other: "As long as the Lao will not rid themselves of their disastrous inclination to make the least effort," he insists, they will forever be destined to occupy only the lowly position of the coolie, will never enjoy freedom on their own soil and hence will not achieve national independence.

Souphanouvong rejects the government's concern over his decision to recruit Hô tribe mercenaries, for which he is quite willing to accept full responsibility.\* He tells his colleagues in Bangkok that they are lacking in "political suppleness," without which any government will end up

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\*The letters exchanged between Souphanouvong and the Lao Issara government in Bangkok indicate that this particular instance of insubordination on the part of the Prince increased in early 1949 the mutual bitterness that had been building up over time between Souphanouvong and the other members of the Lao Issara government. This impression is confirmed by the testimony of eyewitnesses.

resembling one of "children or old ladies who repeat endlessly the same rigid principles." He also makes it very clear that he does not see the international situation as do his colleagues in Bangkok. Speaking of the need to fight the "French colonialists, docile instruments of the Anglo-Americans," he explains that he does not share Bangkok's apprehension that the French might come to terms with the Vietnamese and Chinese Communists if the Lao Issara should remain stubbornly in opposition. (Significantly, it was over this issue, the role of the Vietnamese, that his major disagreements with the Lao Issara government-in-exile developed.)

The Prince accuses his colleagues of always having suspected him of having sold out his country to Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam. He points out that, in the face of French pressure, Vietnamese aid had been the only way in which a Lao liberation front could be maintained in the eastern part of the country and that he, Souphanouvong, had been instrumental in obtaining this vital assistance. Long before the battle of Thakhek against the French (i.e., before March 1946), he had sent his envoy to Ho Chi Minh with a request for the "loan of a million" (presumably, piastres). These Vietnamese funds enabled the Lao resistance movement to operate in Sam Neua, Xieng Khouang, and other provinces of eastern Laos and to help Sithon Khommadam and Khamtay Siphandone in organizing resistance\* against the French in

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\*Today both these men are top military figures in the LPLA. Sithon, less influential, is the son of a famous anti-French rebel tribal leader of Lao Theung origin, who was very powerful in an area contiguous to Vietnam. Khamtay, an ethnic Lao, is Commander-in-Chief of the LPLA forces and wields political influence. He is one of the leading members of an important clan of Sithandone Province.



the Saravane-Attapeu region of southern Laos. No doubt playing up his own role, for the two men were prominent in their own right and possessed contacts of their own with the Vietnamese, Souphanouvong calls attention to the fact that the weapons in the hands of these forces are the product of his personal initiative with the Viet Minh.

Souphanouvong singles out the lesson implicit in the experience of the Vietnamese resistance movement:

Our weapons -- because weapons, and effective ones at that, are necessary, and so is ammunition, which must be constantly renewed or manufactured -- must protect our propaganda, ensure the security of our political leaders and buttress our diplomatic action.

And then he asks rhetorically: "But from where, Your Ministerial Excellencies, do we take these indispensable weapons?" He goes on to say that all weapons in their possession have come from the Vietnamese, and that to place hope in the vague promises of others seems hardly realistic. Nor is there reason to count on a friendly gesture on the part of the "colonialist hangmen."

Moreover, he points out, it is utterly unrealistic to think of the possibility of obtaining aid from a foreign country, party, or political organization "without serious and duly guaranteed countervalue. You must understand that it is only the Buddha and the true Lao patriots who love and will continue to love the Lao fatherland selflessly (and for its own sake). . . ." Did the Prince consciously pay a political price for the Viet Minh loans, and, if so, what was that price? Neither he nor the available documents tell.

Souphanouvong concludes his long and impassioned letter with the statement that his dignity and political integrity would be injured were he to participate further in the Lao Issara government, and that, therefore he saw himself compelled to submit his resignation as of the date of the document, March 26, 1949.\*

A subsequent exchange of letters between the government and the Prince brought to light other, significant points.\*\* Katay Sasorith, writing on behalf of the Lao Issara government, states that Souphanouvong had quite consistently acted like an autocrat, seeking to create for himself a power base among his military forces by systematically eliminating from them all former (French-trained) career and noncommissioned officers. Although asked several times to relinquish his position of Commander-in-Chief of the Lao Issara forces, he had not complied with the order and, in general, had refused to keep the government apprised of his actions and transactions. This applied especially to Souphanouvong's relationship with the Vietnamese, said Katay, and he proposed that "we give the Prince Souphanouvong the opportunity to disengage himself

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\*It should be noted, however, that, in the eyes of former members of the Lao Issara government, they had by that time already effectively severed their relations with the fractious Prince because of a long series of insubordinations on his part.

\*\*Unnumbered letter marked "confidential" and signed by Katay Sasorith, a member of the Lao Issara cabinet (later to become Prime Minister of Laos), on May 12, 1949; Souphanouvong's reply (letter No. 3280 of May 13, 1949) bearing his seal and signature; and another letter by Katay, dated May 16, 1949. Both men apparently were then residing in Bangkok.

correctly from the Vietnamese on the day when we will be obliged to conclude a compromise with the French."

Katay asserted that Souphanouvong had entered into agreements with Ho Chi Minh and his representatives but had refused to inform the government of the contents of these agreements. "We don't even know to this day," he wrote, "to what point we are under an obligation to the Vietnamese nor what obligations we have incurred toward them." Katay's suspicions about the Prince's dealings with the Vietnamese were obviously reinforced by what he called Souphanouvong's "most delicate personal position due to his wife, who actively and openly meddles in political matters . . . the compromising situation resulting from the nationality of origin and political attitude of his wife." Katay added that the prestige of the Lao Issara was not being helped by the fact that the Prince had dispatched guerrilla forces into Laos which were more Vietnamese than Lao, if not entirely Vietnamese, and that he had gone so far as to employ a Cambodian among his unit commanders, and also a Lao-Vietnamese métis by the name of Boun Kong, who earlier had been in charge of a Vietnamese unit.

During May 1949 one more round of bitter exchanges centering around the Vietnamese issue took place between Souphanouvong and the spokesman for the government-in-exile in Bangkok. The Prince's views were stated very clearly in his letter of May 13. In it, he pointed out that the members of the Lao Issara government who were now opposing him had distinguished themselves and proved their resistance spirit principally by serving with honor under the French colonial regime -- the very regime that the Lao

Issara was supposed to be fighting. How could he, the Prince, have confidence in such men? While reiterating his patriotism as a Lao, he suggested that perhaps his own stature was best proved by his fame abroad rather than by his being, like his opponents, "illustrious only within a small enslaved and backward country like Laos." Then, turning to what he termed the "thorny question of Vietnamese financial aid," he refused to explain further his dealings with Ho Chi Minh, since his opponents, "anti-Vietnamese by principle or prejudice," would at any rate never understand them. In strong language he added:

As to the various conventions and agreements entered into with the Ho Chi Minh government, they cannot be placed on the agenda until the day when there will exist a Lao Issara government worthy of that name "Free Laos," i.e., a government which has the support of a strong majority of the Lao population engaged in the resistance movement and made up of politicians of some stature. Ho Chi Minh will never talk with bluffers or pseudo-resistance fighters. He would use those simply as instruments of his Indochinese policy or [to advance the cause] of Vietnamese victory.

He went on to argue that, while it was all very well to demand that the Lao resistance forces be made up only of Lao elements, it was first necessary to have such indigenous forces and to have arms. Without these, "there is no solution but to resort to a core of foreign support," around which indigenous military strength can be developed.

It is logical to assume that the Prince had thrown in his lot with the Viet Minh in the conviction that their support was essential, and that it could bring his country independence from the French and give him the leadership

of a free Laos. He did not seem altogether unaware of the strength and the intense ambitions of the Vietnamese Communists -- ambitions that might well extend to Laos -- but appeared confident of his ability to handle his allies once he had gained uncontested leadership and mass support. Or, perhaps, he merely had concluded that cooperation with the Vietnamese, particularly under a leader who, like himself, was sympathetic to their goals and strategy, was the only way for weak and backward Laos to survive as a more or less independent political entity, surrounded as it was by stronger and more dynamic neighbors.

This last exchange marked the final parting of the ways of the two schools of thought within the Lao Issara movement. On May 16, 1949, the government officially removed Souphanouvong from his posts. Looking back on events in the spring of 1949, Prince Souvanna Phouma has said: "Dissension had reached such a point that our government tired of the servitude [to the Viet Minh] accepted by Souphanouvong and expelled him in May 1949. His fate from this time on was sealed and he became the creature of the North Vietnamese."\*

On July 19, 1949, France and Laos signed an agreement providing for the continued membership of Laos in the French Union and giving the Lao limited autonomy. On October 25 the Lao Issara government disbanded, and most of its members (but not Prince Phetsarath) returned to political life in Laos.

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\* From a speech delivered by Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma at Canberra, Australia, on November 2, 1967, as carried in the official Lao Presse of November 3, 1967.

Souphanouvong, after his falling out with these former associates, set out with a few followers on a trek to eastern Laos. There he found a Lao "resistance movement" which was sponsored and controlled by the Viet Minh, and, at the latter's urging, merged his faction with the anti-French resistance groups already operating in eastern Laos. He was allowed to become the titular leader of the coalition, but much power, not surprisingly, remained in the hands of Kaysone and Nouhak who, thanks to their close association with the Viet Minh, commanded a stronger power base than the ambitious Prince.

IV. THE DRIVE FOR INDEPENDENCE: THE VIET MINH AND  
THE PATHET LAO, 1949-1954

PATHET LAO AND VIET MINH PERSPECTIVES

At the time that the Lao Issara leaders returned from Thailand to Vientiane, in 1949, Souphanouvong's faction (which had split with its former allies, as just described) clearly represented a minority within the relatively weak Lao nationalist movement. Lao nationalism then was not a potent force, and neither the Lao Issara nor its opponents had succeeded in mobilizing mass support. Yet the new Vientiane government in which the returning Lao Issara exiles participated could, in addition to some nationalist appeal, draw upon the traditional claims to obedience that its ruling elite enjoyed within lowland Lao society.

Neither of the contending parties could lay claim to the allegiance of the diverse but important ethnic minorities, whose political orientation was determined by each tribe's chieftain. It was he to whom and through whom the appeal for allegiance had to be made. Once his support had been won, his tribe would ordinarily accept his choice. Sithon Khommadam was one such leader whom the Vietnamese Communists apparently identified as a key figure. The son of a Lao Theung nationalist chieftain who had won fame for leading a bitter struggle against the French during the first decade of this century, Sithon enjoyed considerable prestige among the numerous Lao Theung tribes of southern Laos. As he was won over by the Viet Minh, he brought with him substantial tribal support. The Vietnamese were less successful with the Meo in the northern mountain regions (who

tended to side with the Vientiane government), but they did enlist one prominent Meo, Faydang (Phaydang), who commanded the loyalty of a minority segment of the Meo population. However, his alliance with the Communists was probably more a reflection of internal feuds among the Meo tribes than it was the result of ideological conviction.

Not only was his popular base a small one, but Souphanouvong in 1949 commanded a weak organization, few arms, and little money. It is not surprising, therefore, that when he split with the Lao Issara he felt compelled to shift his operations to the eastern regions of Laos along the borders of Vietnam, there to join other Lao revolutionaries, who were already heavily dependent on Viet Minh guidance and support. The Viet Minh organization at that time was itself struggling to expand, having been engaged in a bitter war with the French ever since 1946. Compared to the Lao resistance groups, the Viet Minh was a powerful movement, having already developed a cohesive corps of leaders, a revolutionary ideology, and an impressive organizational structure, and enjoying widespread support among the peasantry. The small rebel faction challenging the legitimacy of the new government of Laos, therefore, was forced to rely heavily on the Vietnamese for political and military guidance, security, arms and ammunition, food, and money.

The Lao resistance leaders at this stage might be divided into two broad categories: those, like Prince Souphanouvong and Prince Souk Vongsak, who for reasons of birth and education had a claim to status and positions of influence within the Lao society; and others, like Kaysone and Nouhak, who, lacking those prerogatives, could



attain power only through Vietnamese support. The first group thus may have had an alternative way of fulfilling its political ambitions but for a number of reasons chose to align itself with the Viet Minh rather than accept continuing French tutelage. The second, having no choice, developed a close alliance with the Vietnamese Communists and used it to maximum advantage in advancing its aspirations for power in Laos. Not surprisingly, the first group had initially been part of the Lao Issara movement centered in Thailand, while the second group from the beginning had built its power base in eastern Laos in a symbiotic relationship with the Vietnamese Communists.

The loyalists who returned to Vientiane have never ceased to criticize Souphanouvong and his associates for throwing in their lot with the Vietnamese, historic enemies who in the long run seemed to them a greater threat to Lao independence than the French.\* But to the Pathet Lao leaders, continued French influence in their country was the greater danger, and they believed that Lao and Vietnamese interests coincided in the desire to expel France from Indochina. A Lao nationalist who viewed this as the foremost goal for his country had no option but to accept Vietnamese support. (The United States -- which, as

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\* For example, RLG Minister of Finance Sisouk na Champassak has written: "But strangest of all was a patriotism so suspicious of even a provisional collaboration with France (whose authority in Laos, especially of late years, had been diminishing), but able to accommodate itself so easily to a powerful ally like the Viet Minh, which made no secret of its plans for the entire peninsula (including Laos)." Storm over Laos, New York, 1961, p. 24.

previously mentioned, Souphanouvong had approached for help -- despite its professed anticolonialism was disinclined to exert its power to force out the French. Indeed, after the start of the Korean War, in 1950, American material support to the French war effort in Indochina mounted substantially.) The resulting cleavage between those Lao who chose to align themselves with the Vietnamese and those who returned home to semiautonomy under France has remained to this day the basic political division of Laos. As for the Viet Minh, their involvement in developing a Lao Communist movement in southern Laos enhanced their stake in Laos and provided a cover under which they could intervene in Laos at will.

There is no doubt that the primary purpose of the Viet Minh was to win independence for Vietnam, after which they would tackle the transformation of the country's economic, social, and political order. Whatever contribution the Lao could make in weakening the French, small though it might be, would serve that purpose. It was in the Viet Minh's interest, therefore, to help build a Lao organization that would cooperate with them in the struggle. Viet Minh leaders may also have been thinking of a future in which Laos would be firmly linked to Vietnam.

At the time that the Pathet Lao, having broken with the Lao Issara, drew closer to the Viet Minh, prospects for the latter's success in the war against the French were turning brighter as the result of the consolidation of Communist power in China and the arrival, in 1949, of Chinese Communist troops on the northern frontiers of Indochina. The victory of a powerful ally who shared the same ideology, and the expectation that Chinese supplies

would be forthcoming, raised the morale of the Viet Minh. By the same token, France's anxieties increased with the presence of a hostile power on the border of its colony. Though the worst French fears of a direct intervention by Chinese troops were not realized, Chinese supplies indeed began to flow to the Viet Minh in 1950, and rose to the level of an estimated 4000 tons per month by the end of the war.\* With this assistance the Viet Minh were soon able to support their Lao allies substantially.

#### PATHET LAO GROWTH AND VIET MINH SUPPORT, 1950-1954

Following the dissolution of the Lao Issara in October 1949, Souphanouvong journeyed to meet Ho Chi Minh at the Viet Minh headquarters at Tuyen Quang, North Vietnam, to negotiate for Vietnamese support. The Viet Minh had long envisaged bringing the disparate Lao resistance groups into a single political front which, with Vietnamese backing, could challenge the Vientiane government for political power over Laos. Not long after the meeting with Ho, Souphanouvong launched an appeal to all militant Lao elements to convene at a "First Resistance Congress." And in the summer of 1950 they met, their 105 representatives\*\* including Faydang, Sithon Khommadam, Kaysone, Nouhak, and Phoumi Vongvichit. (Most of the participants in the 1950 congress now play leading roles in the Lao Communist movement.) Following this meeting, an announcement was made on

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\* George K. Tanham, Communist Revolutionary Warfare: The Vietminh in Indochina, New York, 1961, pp. 68-69.

\*\* For a partial list of participants see Appendix III.

August 15, 1950, that the traditional name for the Lao independence movement, Lao Issara had been dropped in favor of a new label, Neo Lao Issara (meaning, "Free Laos Front").\* The new political organization, modeled on the Viet Minh Patriotic Front, was headed by Prince Souphanouvong, who also served with other members on its Central Committee.\*\* In addition, the congress announced a new "resistance government," to be composed of Souphanouvong as Premier and Phoumi Vongvichit as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Internal Affairs, with Kaysone and Nouhak holding the levers of power (the ministries of Defense and of Finance, respectively) and Prince Souk Vongsak as Minister of Education. Sithon Khommadam and Faydang, serving as Ministers without Portfolio, represented for the first time in any Lao government the two great tribal minority groups of Laos, the Kha and the Meo.\*\*\* According to a former PL official who attended this congress, two important Vietnamese advisers, Hung and Chanh, actively guided the PL leaders at the

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\* See, for example, the official Communist account of these events in 20 Years of Lao People's Revolutionary Struggle (Neo Lao Haksat Publications, 1966). Our interviews and evidence from other, non-Communist sources confirm this information.

\*\* According to a participant at the meeting, the Central Committee included (1) Souphanouvong, President, (2) Phoumi Vongvichit, Vice President, (3) Nouhak Phomsavan, (4) Prince Souk Vongsak, (5) Kaysone, (6) Sithon, (7) Faydang, (8) Khamtay Siphandone, (9) Phoun Sipaseuth, (10) Mun, (11) (Phra Maha) Kham, (12) Ma, (13) (May) Souk. There were probably other members, whose names we do not know.

\*\*\* See Cambodia and Laos Fight Hand in Hand with Vietnam for Freedom (Vietnam Central Information Service), 1951 (a pamphlet issued by the insurgents, which lists no place of origin).

meetings, as the new resistance government proclaimed its internal and external policy.\*

In February 1951, a national congress in the DRV announced the founding of a specifically Vietnamese Communist party to be known as the Lao Dong (Workers) Party. This national party was proclaimed to replace the Indochinese Communist Party, founded in 1930, which had been "officially" dissolved in 1945 with the arrival of Chinese Nationalist troops in Vietnam, although, in Ho Chi Minh's

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\* Internal Policy: 1. Widen the circle of unity throughout the country to include those of all races and religions, of both sexes and all ages, to defeat the French imperialists and their puppet government, and to make the country independent, free and strong. 2. Open the opportunity for people of all tribal groups to the right of liberty and democracy for all. 3. Eliminate illiteracy, which makes men deaf and blind. 4. Develop handicrafts and commerce. 5. Sweep out the backward French colonial rule. 6. Get rid of gambling and drunkenness. 7. Develop guerrilla forces into regional forces, and further develop these into a national army.

Foreign Policy: 1. Develop unity and cooperation with countries fighting for their independence. Help, for example, the resistance struggle of the Vietnamese and Cambodian peoples on the basis of equality, each side sharing benefits. 2. Demand independence from the French and insist that the French nullify the agreement of the French Union. 3. Establish good relations with all countries of the world on the basis of mutual respect for sovereignty.

This version of the policy statement was furnished by the aforementioned participant, A-14. (This and subsequent numbered references to Lao or Vietnamese informants are keyed to the detailed identification of these sources in Appendix I.) A similar summary of the same policy declaration can be found in A Chronicle of Principal Events Relating to the Indochinese Question, 1940-1954, World Culture Publishing House, Peking, 1954, p. 35.

words, "in reality it went underground."\* The fact that a number of Cambodian and Lao leaders attended the 1951 congress in Vietnam adds significance to the passage in its official manifesto regarding Vietnam's relationship to its brother countries in Indochina:

The people of Vietnam must unite closely with the peoples of the Pathet Lao and Khmer country and give their every assistance in the common struggle against imperialist aggression, for the complete liberation of Indochina, and for the defense of world peace.

In the common interests of the three peoples, the people of Vietnam are willing to enter into long-term cooperation with the peoples of Laos and Cambodia with a view to bringing about an independent, free, strong and prosperous federation of the states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia if the three peoples so desire.\*\*

Immediately following this Lao Dong Party congress, and perhaps at the very same location, the Viet Minh convoked a meeting of Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian leaders, including Ton Duc Thang (later Vice President of the DRV), Sieu Heng, head of the Khmer Liberation Committee, and Souphanouvong. On this occasion they announced the creation of a Vietnamese-Khmer-Lao alliance committed to struggling jointly against both French colonial power and the "American interventionists." According to the Australian Communist writer Wilfred Burchett, this "alliance

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\* Bernard B. Fall (ed.), Ho Chi Minh on Revolution, New York, 1967, p. 214.

\*\* Vietnam Central Information Service, Manifesto and Platforms of the Vietnam Lao Dong Party (no place of publication given), April 1952.

of the Pathet Lao with the Viet Minh paved the way for Vietnamese volunteers. They were strongly reinforced by Vietnamese already living in the country."\*

The Viet Minh were important in helping the Lao revolutionary leadership mobilize a modest military force. While the Vietnamese insurgents welcomed any military effort that contributed to making trouble for the French, the Lao troops were never a significant factor in the Viet Minh's ultimate success. (Estimates of their troop strength ranged from 1500 to 3000 troops at the time of the 1954 Geneva Conference.) Most of the Lao units, supplied by the Viet Minh with rice, arms, and money, were used merely for support activities. In those few cases where the Lao did operate independently of the Viet Minh, they proved much less vigorous in pursuit of the enemy than did their Vietnamese allies. One former Lao commander (A-24) of such a Lao unit told us of the accommodation which his officers had worked out with their compatriots in the RLG forces, then still under control of the French: "We agreed that as long as we didn't meet any French, if Lao met Lao, we would not do anything." Relations were so relaxed that the children of PL and RLG officers played together. As our informant explained, it was not a severe war for the troops, since they seldom encountered any French.

The case of one of our interviewees (A-18) illustrates the Viet Minh's role in training and employing Lao units

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\* Wilfred Burchett, Mekong Upstream: A Visit to Laos and Cambodia, Berlin, 1959, p. 239.

prior to the Geneva Conference of 1954. Recruited from his father's opium business in Vientiane in 1945, he was sent with 24 other Lao to North Vietnam for a month's training by Vietnamese who spoke Lao and was then assigned to northern Laos. There he became the leader of the 25 Lao recruits, who were attached to a Viet Minh battalion inside Laos to serve largely as guides, interpreters, and propagandists. When the battalion approached a village, his unit would be sent as an advance party, usually to engage in propaganda among the local people. In his words, "We Lao knew the local habits and customs. The Viet Minh didn't and, therefore, feared incidents if they had direct contact with the population." When this Viet Minh battalion was pushed back into North Vietnam by the French two years later, he and about 30 others (20 ethnic Lao and 10 Lao Theung) were given further training by the Viet Minh and then assigned to a unit of some 200 Vietnamese operating in Sam Neua Province. This time the task of the Lao was not only to conduct propaganda but to engage in guerrilla tactics. As our informant explained, "We could reach the Meo and the Lao Theung in the mountains, where the French didn't go. We set ambushes against the French near the Na Ma River. The Meo and Lao Theung lacked salt -- we brought it. They lacked needles and buttons and things like that. We brought these too."

In describing his relationship with the Viet Minh, the interviewee made it clear that the Lao functioned as ancillary elements of the Viet Minh military. Significantly, his description did not reveal resentment at this subordinate role, but rather left the impression that the Lao then looked upon the Viet Minh as mentors whom they



respected because they were strong and competent. He pointed out that the Viet Minh, recognizing the Lao sensitivities, sought to promote the myth that Lao and Vietnamese units were fighting alongside each other. For example, his own unit was given arms by the Viet Minh prior to entering a village as a way of demonstrating to the population that the Lao revolutionary movement possessed some military strength independent of the Vietnamese.

The Viet Minh's decisive contribution to the Pathet Lao's claim to power at the Geneva Conference of 1954 was the situation created in Laos by the major military offensive of 1953/1954, in which the Viet Minh plunged through northeastern, central, and southern Laos. This campaign "liberated" the Lao provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua as well as other areas on the frontier of Vietnam. Partly to honor the French treaty commitment to defend Laos, and partly because General Navarre, the French Commander-in-Chief in Vietnam, thought he could trick the Viet Minh who were overrunning Laos into attacking an invulnerable fort, the French blundered into concentrating a powerful force at Dien Bien Phu, near the border of northern Laos. The disaster inflicted by the Viet Minh on the French forces there is well known. At the Geneva Conference, which opened with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the Viet Minh, in an attempt to further Pathet Lao interests, claimed that the 1953 offensive against the French in eastern Laos had been unleashed by Lao forces, with only limited support from the Viet Minh. Our interviews clearly show that the reverse was true: The Viet Minh provided the bulk of the troops, and were assisted by a small number of Lao guerrillas. After the elimination of the French outposts, the

Lao "resistance government," still under close Vietnamese guidance, was transferred from Vietnam to Lao soil in Sam Neua.

Although we have no doubt about the fact that the Vietnamese Communists played a critical role in the development of the Pathet Lao movement from 1950 to 1954, there are gaps in our knowledge of the methods they used in working with the Lao. Even today, little is known about the decision-making process of Lao Communist leaders in the early years, and even less about their Vietnamese advisers. Though we succeeded in identifying some of the advisers, it was more difficult to obtain biographical details or to uncover information about their personal relationships with the principal Lao figures. Nor was it easy to learn what role Vietnamese residents of Laos played in the Lao Communist movement. An indication of the extent to which some Vietnamese became involved in the Lao nationalist struggle at an early date was contained in the account of a one-time chief of the Viet Minh security unit, Tran Van Dinh, who had been assigned by Ho Chi Minh to accompany Prince Souphanouvong back to Laos in September 1945 to help him build an independence movement. Dinh, who described himself as Chief of Staff of the Viet Minh forces in Laos in 1945, claimed that, in addition to recruiting Lao to serve as partisans with Souphanouvong, he and his Vietnamese officers were using the Prince as a front while they recruited Vietnamese residents of Laos and Thailand for the insurgent movement.\* The Royal Lao Government, suspecting

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\*Dinh's activity in that respect is confirmed by the accounts of other informants.

the Vietnamese residents of Laos of collaborating with Viet Minh and Pathet Lao organizations, expressed those suspicions at the Geneva Conference of 1954.

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE OF 1954\*

When the Geneva Conference met in May 1954, the absorbing concern of the delegates was to produce a settlement of the conflict between the French and the Viet Minh, while the future of Laos was treated as a secondary issue. Of the Pathet Lao's Communist allies, the USSR and China were obviously the dominant powers at the Conference. Communist China's immediate aim in regard to Laos was to eliminate the presence and influence of the Western powers from its southern flank. The Soviet Union had little direct interest in Laos at the time and supported the demands of its Chinese and Vietnamese Communist colleagues within the context of its world power position, particularly its goals in Europe. The DRV's primary interest was in obtaining as favorable a solution as possible in Vietnam, and the decisions about Laos were important to its security. DRV spokesmen wanted the French troops withdrawn not only from Vietnam but from all of Indochina, and they sought guarantees that other foreign troops -- particularly American -- could not be introduced in the future. Like Communist China to the north, the DRV also wanted the provinces of Laos adjoining its own borders to be under the control of the Lao faction friendly to the DRV. It is even possible (though it can be neither

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\*We are much indebted to Anita L. Nutt for suggestions she contributed to our discussion of the Geneva Conference.

proved nor disproved) that the DRV had aspirations to replace the French as the dominant power in all of Indochina.

In keeping with its active role in Laos, the DRV acted as the principal advocate for the Pathet Lao at the Geneva Conference and advanced bold claims on their behalf. The DRV delegation included the Lao Communist leader Nouthak Phomsavan, who reportedly was traveling on a Vietnamese passport.\* In the course of the bargaining, however, the DRV proved willing to modify its demands with respect to Laos in return for concessions in Vietnam.

As regards the Pathet Lao leaders at the Geneva Conference, it is difficult to get an accurate sense of their expectations. (Since they were not officially represented, there is no public record on the bargaining, and their private views can only be surmised.) They must have realized that the advantages they could derive from the negotiations depended less upon their own feeble assets than upon the vigor of their diplomatic sponsors. The goals of the Royal Lao Government, which was represented at the Conference, are clear. They included withdrawal of the Viet Minh "invaders," an end to Viet Minh military support of the "rebel" groups so that the Royal Government might establish control throughout the country, and an international guarantee of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Laos.

The first issue debated at Geneva was the demand of all three Communist powers for representation, at the Conference,

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\* See Dommen, Conflict in Laos, p. 52.

of the "Pathet Lao resistance government" as well as the Cambodian "Khmer resistance government." With the support of Molotov, speaking for the USSR, and Chou En-lai, representing the Chinese Communists, chief DRV delegate Pham Van Dong claimed that "the resistance government of Pathet Lao" had liberated half of the country and that in the "liberated areas" it had "carried out democratic reforms and all the measures necessary to raise the people's standard of living. . . ."\* He further contended that the Lao and Cambodian resistance governments "enjoy the support and warm affection of the population in liberated areas, and they enjoy great prestige and influence among the population of both countries. These governments represent the great majority of the people of Khmer and Lao, the aspirations of whom they symbolize."\*\* The French delegate, in reply, labeled these governments "phantoms." And the chief RLG delegate, Phoui Sananikone, vigorously disputed the DRV claims, pointing out that there were no more than 125 Lao with the Viet Minh before the Vietnamese aggression in the spring of 1953.\*\*\* He said that "the government and people of Laos learned with great surprise of this so-called government of Pathet Lao under the leadership of Prince Souphanouvong. . . . This so-called Pathet Lao

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\* See the U.S. Verbatim Minutes of the Geneva Conference, Second Plenary Session, Indochina Phase, of May 10, 1954, p. 61. See also Jean Lacouture and Philippe Devillers, La Fin d'une Guerre (The End of a War), Paris, 1960, p. 140.

\*\* U.S. Verbatim Minutes, First Plenary Session of May 8, 1954, p. 16.

\*\*\* Royaume du Laos, Memorandum, adressé le 13 avril 1955 à la Commission Internationale de Surveillance et de Contrôle au Laos (Royal Lao Government, Memorandum of April 13, 1955, to the ICC in Laos), Vientiane, May 1955, p. 55.

represents absolutely nothing."\* For the Royal Government, "there is no civil war in Laos; rather, there has been a characterized [sic] foreign invasion . . . these foreigners who are foreigners to Laos by race, by ideology and by tradition, apply their efforts to establish in the future conditions which would be propitious to a civil war."\*\*

The Western powers supported the Royal Government in rejecting Pathet Lao representation, pointing out that the Berlin Conference, which had established the terms of reference for Geneva, had called for attendance only of interested "states"; in the words of the American delegate, the "nonexistent so-called government of the Pathet Lao" had not been recognized even by its Communist sponsors. The Communist nations finally gave up their claim, but not until mid-June, having meanwhile exacted from their adversaries a number of compromises in regard to Vietnam. The decision not to seat the representatives of the Pathet Lao at the Geneva Conference seems to have sprung from a realistic appraisal of the Pathet Lao's weak claim to legitimacy as a government. Nevertheless, since the Pathet Lao and their Communist allies had pressed for recognition as official participants, this denial represented a defeat for them.

The substantive discussions at the Conference regarding the future of the Pathet Lao revolved around their political and territorial claims. The Communist powers advanced the position that elections should be held simultaneously in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam six months after

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\*U.S. Verbatim Minutes, First Session, p. 35.

\*\*Ibid., Second Session, pp. 80-81.

the cease-fire and, furthermore, that an electoral commission should be set up in each country to prepare and supervise the national elections. In Laos the Pathet Lao and the Royal Government would be equally represented on such a commission. The Communists persisted in their demands until the closing days of the Conference, when they finally accepted the government's stipulation that elections be held in accordance with the Constitution of Laos, "in the course of the year 1955, by secret ballot and in conditions of respect for fundamental freedom," as the Final Declaration of the Conference put it.

Communist China and North Vietnam, for obvious reasons of self-interest, concentrated upon securing for their Lao allies military and administrative control of as much territory as possible in the northeastern provinces bordering on China and North Vietnam. This issue was focused on the number, size, and location of "provisional assembly areas" into which the Viet Minh and the Pathet Lao would be required to move their forces. The Communists opened with the exorbitant demand for almost half of Laos, but in the final hours of the Conference settled for an arrangement which gave the Viet Minh five provincial assembly areas, and the Pathet Lao twelve areas (one in each province of Laos). Within 120 days after the cease-fire, all Viet Minh forces were to be withdrawn to North Vietnam, and all Pathet Lao forces that did not choose to be demobilized on the spot were to be moved out of ten of the twelve provinces of Laos and concentrated in the two provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly, "pending a political settlement." Although the Western Powers and the Royal Government understood the agreement to mean that an area within

each of the two provinces was to be designated for regroupment, the article was not specifically worded, enabling the Pathet Lao to claim subsequently that the agreement authorized them to occupy Sam Neua and Phong Saly in their entirety, as indeed they did.

Another important issue concerned the future of those Vietnamese who had settled in Laos before the hostilities but had joined the Viet Minh invading forces. The RLG considered them to be disloyal foreign residents and demanded that they withdraw with the Viet Minh forces. The Communists contended that they were simply dissident but legitimate residents of Laos, who should not be expelled. No agreement was reached on this controversy, and its solution was put off for later negotiation between the parties and conclusion of a special convention, which was, in fact, never concluded.

During the Conference and immediately following it, there were reports that the Pathet Lao, assisted by the Viet Minh, were engaged in a vigorous recruiting campaign designed to increase the strength of the troops before they were moved into the assigned regroupment areas. Our interviews tend to confirm these reports. According to one source, the Pathet Lao forces grew from 1500 in July to 3000 in August 1954, and were up to 4000 by the time the Communist forces finally moved into their regroupment areas. The Viet Minh informed the International Control Commission (ICC) -- the supervisory agency established by the Conference and composed of Canada, Poland, and India (as chairman) -- that they planned to withdraw 5000 troops from Laos, including all Vietnamese/Lao "volunteers" whom the Royal Government had sought to expel. There was no way



for the ICC to know if this figure represented all of the Viet Minh forces in Laos, nor could the ICC control their actual departure. Our interviews suggest, as the next chapter will show, that the bulk of the Viet Minh troops departed, but that political and military advisers were left behind in Sam Neua and Phong Saly to give technical assistance and advice to the Pathet Lao.

The settlement at Geneva, when considered in the light of the Pathet Lao's purely indigenous strength (as distinct from their DRV support), served their interests well. In its implementation the Lao Communists secured a base area in the two provinces from which, with DRV assistance, they could build up their political and military strength. By the time of the second round at Geneva, in 1962, the Pathet Lao had become powerful enough to win recognition as a Conference participant, gain admission in a coalition government, and achieve de facto control of a much larger area.

V. NORTH VIETNAM AND THE  
LAO COMMUNISTS' BID FOR POWER, 1954-1962

COMMUNIST AND VIET MINH PERSPECTIVES, 1954-1959

As Laos gained independence, following the Geneva Conference of 1954, it soon became evident that the Pathet Lao had no intention of limiting their struggle for power to mere participation in Vientiane politics, that is to say, to competing with other political groups within the framework of the existing political system. While engaging in cautious negotiations with the Royal Lao Government, they sought to consolidate their control over the two provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly which had been designated by the Conference to provide them with regroupment zones for their military forces prior to integration into the national army. At the same time, the Lao Communists began to build their own political and administrative institutions in the two northeastern provinces so as to have a permanent base for future advances into other areas.

Hanoi meanwhile was busy repairing wartime destruction at home, consolidating its political power, and converting army and party to peacetime functions. The first two years after the Geneva Conference were filled with internal turbulence for North Vietnam. Almost three-quarters of a million refugees, mostly Catholics, had fled to the South. The revolutionary agrarian program, modeled on the Chinese Communist experiment, had gone badly and caused great discontent, culminating in a peasant uprising in Nghe An |

Province in 1956.\* In view of these conditions, the North Vietnamese were all the more interested in ensuring that the Lao provinces adjacent to the DRV border remained in "friendly" hands, and therefore encouraged and assisted the PL leaders in consolidating their control over Sam Neua and Phong Saly. Although they seem to have been skeptical about the Pathet Lao's participation in politics in Vientiane, they apparently made no attempt to interfere with these efforts. Indeed, the role of North Vietnam in Laos between 1954 and 1959 was low-keyed, especially when compared with its active military engagements there immediately preceding and following this period.

#### PL ACTIVITIES AND NORTH VIETNAMESE SUPPORT, 1954-1959

In consolidating their political domination in the two northeastern provinces, the Pathet Lao set up as their "government" base the wartime headquarters that they had established, with Viet Minh assistance, in Sam Neua Province in 1953. They directed their attention to constructing an administrative apparatus with which to govern those areas under their control, and to selecting and training village, district, and province officials. They established schools and published a newspaper, the Lao Hak Sat. In January 1956 they created a political party, the

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\* For Ho Chi Minh's evaluation of the postrevolutionary years, 1954 to 1960, see Part IV, "Reconstruction and Errors (1954-60)," in Fall, Ho Chi Minh on Revolution, pp. 281-341. See also Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, New York, 1964.

Neo Lao Hak Sat ("Lao Patriotic Front"), commonly shortened to NLHS.\* This party was not formed merely to obtain popular support. The Pathet Lao, in line with the Geneva Agreements, had agreed to merge their armed forces with the national army. But there was nothing in the Agreements to prohibit them from establishing their own separate party organization, against the eventuality that their military forces might be integrated and thus removed from their control.

This new body, which replaced the Neo Lao Issara, was meant to constitute a mass organization that would attract various strata of both the Lao and the non-Lao population. Prince Souphanouvong was elected its chairman, a position he continues to hold to this day, and Nouhak, Kaysone, Sithon Khommadam, Faydang, and virtually all the leading NLHS figures of today appeared prominently on its roster from the beginning. NLHS cadres went out into the villages to mobilize the local populace into various constituent organizations, such as peasant, women's, young men's, and young women's federations. And during the same 1954-1959 period there emerged also the real instrument of political control of the Pathet Lao movement -- as contrasted with the open NLHS political party -- the Phak Pasason Lao (PPL),

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\* Also written Neo Lao Hak Xat, or Neo Lao Hakxat, and abbreviated NLHX. Neo Lao Haksat represents the official Communist version. In this report we have adopted this spelling, although, in line with our principle of separating words that have distinct meaning, we are writing the term in four words rather than three.

or "People's Party of Laos," a semisecret Communist party, whose role will be discussed more fully in a later section.\*

While the Communists were consolidating their military control in the two provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly and continuing vigorously to recruit new soldiers after the signing of the Geneva Agreements,\*\* the Royal Lao Government, eager to return the two provinces under its domination, dispatched military missions there from time to time. This resulted in frequent skirmishes between PL and RLG troops, since the Communists were determined not only to protect their investment but actually to expand it.

To judge by the testimony of those interviewed, the bulk of the Viet Minh troops who had fought in Laos against the French prior to 1954 were withdrawn to the Vietnamese side of the border after the Geneva Conference. But the Vietnamese military and political cadres who were left in Phong Saly and Sam Neua to serve as advisers to their Lao allies and to fill certain technical posts, made a significant impact upon the Pathet Lao during this period, particularly in the training of the military.

PL soldiers were sent to schools in North Vietnam where they were taught both political and military subjects, sometimes by Lao with Vietnamese advisers, sometimes by Lao-speaking Vietnamese, and other times by Vietnamese

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\* See "Communist Instruments of Policy Control in Laos," pp. 121ff.

\*\* According to Dommen (Conflict in Laos, p. 82), by mid-1956 more than 3000 partisans had been recruited from the populations of Sam Neua and Phong Saly, neither of which totaled more than 100,000.

using Lao interpreters. One important training center was at Son Tay (in the northwest sector of Vietnam), where military and political instruction was given to cycles of as many as 200 students at a time, the length of a course varying from 3 to 6 months.

Among our interviewees were several who had received technical training, at special schools in Vietnam, such as mechanics school, and one man, a former PL captain, who had been selected from his group of thirty recruits to study medicine in Ha Dong, North Vietnam. Two months after the Geneva Conference, the North Vietnamese helped transfer the principal Pathet Lao officer candidate school, the Khommadam School,\* from Phu Quy in Nghe An Province, North Vietnam, to Sam Neua Province. Most of the PL officer corps has passed through this school. According to the man who was its director from 1954 to 1955 (A-18), the institution had a Vietnamese advisory component there of twenty men, who helped with the operation of six-month training cycles for 300 to 400 cadets, and a Lao instructional staff of twelve -- six for military and six for political subjects.

It appears that the principal control mechanism used by the North Vietnamese in Laos during this period was a command headquarters known as Doan (Group) 100. The above-mentioned director of the Khommadam School, who later served in the Pathet Lao military high command, gave an account of Doan 100 from personal experience. About two months after the Geneva Agreements, Doan 100 was moved from an unknown location elsewhere in Vietnam to Ban Na Meo, directly on the Lao border. It was only a short walk from

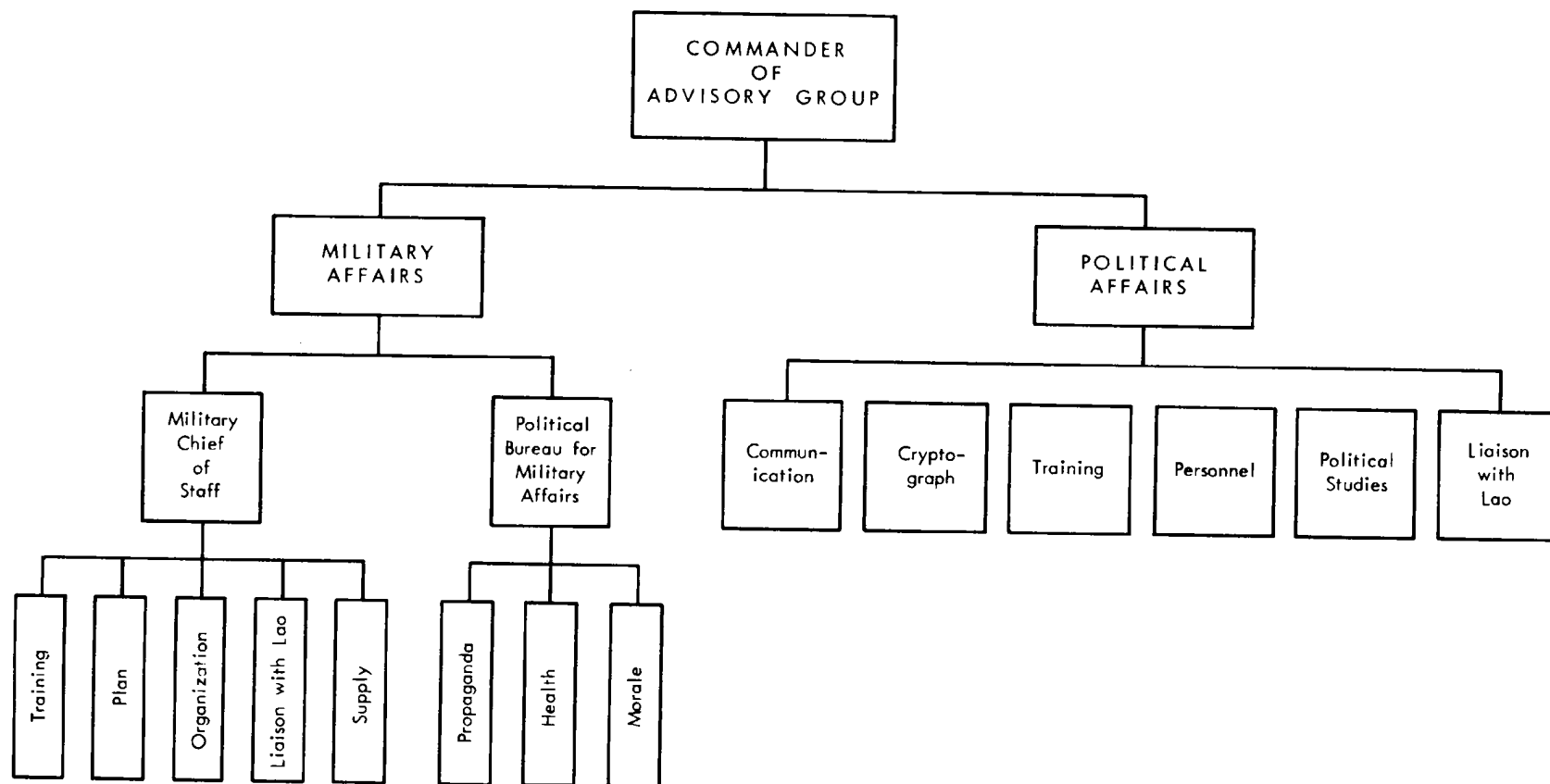
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\*Named after the famous tribal leader Khommadam.

there to the headquarters of Souphanouvong and Kaysone in Sam Neua Province. Our source estimated that 300 Vietnamese were assigned to Doan 100, of whom 200 had military advisory functions and 100 fulfilled political tasks. Those performing the political tasks were the more important, and were all members of the Lao Dong Party. The organization of Doan 100, which our informant reconstructed from memory, is shown on Chart I.

#### ATTEMPTS AT INTEGRATION

While they were building up their forces, in the years immediately following the Geneva Conference, the Pathet Lao were reluctant to negotiate with the Royal Lao Government on any diminution of their power in the two provinces where they had established themselves. They refused, for example, to take part in the elections for the National Assembly, scheduled for 1955 under the Geneva Agreements, unless their administrative control of those provinces was recognized. In the spring of 1956, Neutralist Souvanna Phouma resumed office as Prime Minister in Vientiane and appealed for integration of the Pathet Lao into the national political process, thereby creating a new political climate in Vientiane. By the fall of 1957, Souvanna Phouma and his half-brother Souphanouvong had finally arrived at a plan for national reconciliation. Souphanouvong and another prominent Pathet Lao, Phoumi Vongvichit, would be admitted to the Vientiane government as ministers, the NLHS would contest the partial elections for the National Assembly scheduled for 1958, the two northeastern provinces would be absorbed into the national government with the



Notes:

The commander of the Advisory Group was reported to be Colonel Chu Huy Man; the head of Political Affairs, Mr. Hung, probably Colonel Dai Viet Hung. There were approximately 200 men in the Military Affairs section and 100 in the Political Affairs section. The Military Affairs section directed the Vietnamese advisory functions to the L.P.L.A. The Political Affairs section, whose staff were all members of the Lao Dong Party, carried out the more important political advisory tasks.

Chart I—Vietnamese advisory group, Doan 100, for Laos, 1954-1957



NLHS sharing in the appointment of its administrative chiefs, and 1500 Pathet Lao soldiers (about one-fourth their total number) would be integrated into the Royal Army in two battalions.

As pointed out earlier, the North Vietnamese did not attempt to sabotage the efforts at integration, but neither were they strongly in support of them. They seem to have been willing to wait and see if the NLHS could gain political advantage by entry into the government in Vientiane, while continuing through their advisers to help the Pathet Lao build military strength and solidify Communist control of the provinces adjacent to the DRV. Testimony that the North Vietnamese were retaining a PL military hedge against the failure of negotiations for integration came to us from an interviewee (A-20) who had been sent to Dien Bien Phu in 1957 for officer training. While there, he and other Lao trainees learned on the Vientiane radio that agreement had been reached to integrate two PL battalions into the RLG army, and that the Pathet Lao were to join the national government and community. When their Vietnamese training officers gave no sign of any plan to send them back to Laos, he and his friends asked for an explanation and were told:

We know that there has been an announcement that the Lao people have been united. This does not mean that the war in Laos is over. It is only a temporary cease fire -- but the struggle continues. You know that Souphanouvong has no hand in the government. He is just considered a representative of the NLHS. Many members of his party have not been admitted into the government.

We are training you here so that you will replace the two battalions -- the only

force of the NLHS -- in case they are destroyed by the Americans. All of you must remain here and continue your training.

In 1958, however, the prospects for integration dimmed. On the political side, the Royal Lao Government had entered the two northeastern provinces and nationwide supplementary elections had been held in May 1958 as agreed. To the dismay of their RLG opponents, the NLHS won 9 seats contested, and their allies, the Santiphab Party, won 4 seats, the NLHS having benefited from the infighting among their adversaries, who had run 85 candidates for the 21 seats contested. The elected NLHS deputies, who included several of the most prominent men in the NLHS organization,\* took their seats in Vientiane, but they were constantly harassed by close police surveillance.

On the military side, even though the men for the two PL battalions had been selected for integration with the Royal Army, the actual implementation was stymied by differences between the NLHS and the Royal Government over the ranks to be assigned to certain PL officers. The government forces favoring integration suffered a political defeat in August 1958 with the coming into power of a right-wing government under Phoui Sananikone, along with a new political party, the CDNI, both vigorously hostile to the Communists.\*\* The NLHS leaders who had gone to the capital as

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\* Among those elected were: (1) Souphanouvong, (2) Phoumi Vongvichit, (3) Nouthak Phomsavan, (4) Sithon Khommadam, (5) Phoun Sipaseuth, (6) Khamphai Boupha, and (7) Sisana Sisane. All are important figures to this day.

\*\* The initials CDNI stand for Comité pour la Défense des Intérêts Nationaux (Committee for the Defense of National Interests).

negotiators or as newly-elected deputies found the atmosphere in Vientiane increasingly unsympathetic. They viewed with distrust the growing American influence, which accompanied the huge flow of American aid and the arrival of American and Filipino military advisers, and the developing links to SEATO. They were appalled by the burgeoning of an American-supported RLG military apparatus that took an increasingly active role in politics, and by the flagrant corruption in the army, the bureaucracy and the political leadership.

In the new, anti-Communist climate of Vientiane, two important incidents marked the end of efforts to bring the Communists and the Royal Lao Government together. First, in May 1959, the Royal Army troops surrounded the two battalions and attempted to disarm them. Any possibility of integrating the forces had thus been destroyed. A part of one battalion was captured, but the remainder escaped, as did the entire other battalion, and they subsequently fled to North Vietnam. Second, RLG police arrested 16 NLHS leaders, including the seven prominent deputies who had been elected to the National Assembly.\* The NLHS leaders were held in prison in Vientiane for approximately a year; they succeeded in escaping to their home base in May 1960.\*\*

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\*The group also included Singkapo Chounramany.

\*\* A widely-quoted story holds that Souphanouvong and his coprisoners carried off a dramatic escape during a violent tropical storm, after the Prince had persuaded some prison guards to join the fugitives. A less romantic account suggests that a substantial number of kip changed hands before the prison gates opened.

THE COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE, SUMMER 1959

The mounting hostility between the government in Vientiane and the Pathet Lao erupted in July 1959 in a series of Communist military actions against Royal Army posts in northeastern Laos.\* As they had done on numerous earlier occasions, the RLG leaders sounded the alarm at what they described as another North Vietnamese "invasion." On September 4, 1959, they appealed to the United Nations for assistance. The Security Council appointed a three-nation subcommittee on Laos, with the Tunisian delegate as chairman, to investigate these complaints. The fighting, which included an intensive attack from July 28 to 31 and continued through early September, abated with the arrival of the UN commission. After listening to witnesses presented by the Royal Lao Government, the commission reported that "hostile elements received support from the territory of the DRV consisting mainly of equipment, arms, ammunition, supplies, and the help of political cadres." As to the presence of North Vietnamese troops, the subcommittee reported that the "ensemble of information submitted to the subcommittee did not clearly establish whether there were crossings of the frontier by regular troops of the DRV."\*\* This report has frequently been viewed as evidence that

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\* For a description of this military campaign, see A. M. Halpern and H. D. Fredman, Communist Strategy in Laos, The RAND Corporation, RM-2561, June 14, 1960, Chapter 5.

\*\* Report of the United Nations Security Council Subcommittee on Laos, November 3, 1959, UN Document S/4236, dated November 5, 1959, pp. 30-32.

Vietnamese troops were not involved in the fighting in a major way.\*

Our study of the issue sheds a somewhat different light on the DRV's role in this military campaign. The UN subcommittee, with only a few weeks to spend and a small staff, was not equipped to conduct an independent investigation of the activities of the North Vietnamese. Because the Communists did not permit its members to travel in the areas they controlled or to interview any Pathet Lao or North Vietnamese, the committee was compelled to rely entirely upon evidence supplied by the Royal Lao Government. The latter assigned two officials to the job of presenting the Lao government's views to the UN subcommittee, and they and their small staff were overwhelmed by the importance and urgency of the task. We interviewed

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\*For example, Roger Smith, after discussing this UN report, writes the following regarding Viet Minh involvement in Laos: "Most observers now agree that nothing more than a reactivation of PL activity had taken place and that North Vietnam was providing aid that it had in the past." He cites E.H.S. Simmonds, "A Cycle of Political Events in Laos," World Today, Vol. 17, No. 2, February 1961, pp. 63-64. (Roger M. Smith, "Laos," in George McT. Kahin [ed.], Government and Politics of Southeast Asia, 2nd ed., Ithaca, N.Y., 1964, p. 550.) See also Dommen, Conflict in Laos, pp. 123-124, and Bernard B. Fall, "The Pathet Lao," in Robert A. Scalapino (ed.), The Communist Revolution in Asia, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965, pp. 187-188.

The German writer Eckhard Budewig, who had occasion to talk to Prince Souphanouvong, reported in his book Wird Asian Rot? (Is Asia Going Red?), Stuttgart, 1961, that the Pathet Lao did not admit having received support by Viet Minh units in their combat operations, but that they conceded that weapons, ammunitions, and supplies reached them from across the Vietnamese borders.

the key person on the staff serving the RLG officials who were assigned to the UN delegation, and through him came to appreciate what enormous problems they faced.\* They were given very little time to prepare evidence of North Vietnamese involvement -- at most, a few weeks -- and there were neither captured documents nor prisoners to show incontrovertibly the North Vietnamese role in the attacks.\*\* In the end, the UN committee's report did not state that there were no North Vietnamese troops in Laos; it said only that the documentation examined did not prove their presence.

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\*This key staff member was a captain, who was then and is still an officer in the G-2 section of the FAR. The captain, a Black Tai, born in North Vietnam near Laos, had served in the intelligence branch of the French army in Vietnam from 1949 to 1954. From July 1954 to March 1955, he was a staff member on the French-Lao side of the Mixed Armistice Commission while still a member of the French army, acting as interpreter in Lao, Vietnamese, and French. He was integrated into the FAR in June 1955, and continued to serve in intelligence posts, keeping close track of North Vietnamese involvement in Laos. The captain is a respected and competent intelligence officer, whose information has generally proved reliable. We had frequent conversations with him over an eight-month period. He is a principal source of our information concerning the North Vietnamese role during this period.

\*\*The first Vietnamese prisoner was not taken in Laos by the Royal Army until December 1961. This fact is sometimes cited to add weight to the claim that no North Vietnamese were fighting in Laos during this period. However, the absence of Vietnamese military prisoners in Royal Army prisons was attributable to the Royal Army's reluctance to accept battle with the Vietnamese, and its failure to fight with great conviction whenever battle was thrust upon them, rather than to the absence of North Vietnamese troops in Laos.

In subsequent interrogations of Pathet Lao prisoners and defectors who had participated in this campaign, the key intelligence officer cited above was able to reconstruct a more specific account of the North Vietnamese role in this summer offensive than had been reported to the UN commission. In essence his account shows that the following North Vietnamese units, with central headquarters in the DRV, were engaged in this campaign:

- The 174th Regiment and the 176th Regiment of the 316th North Vietnamese Division;
- Battalions from the 280th Regiment and the 673rd Regiment of the 335th Division (these units attacked RLG posts in Sam Neua Province);
- The 910th Battalion, the 920th Battalion, and the 930th Battalion of the 148th Independent Regiment;
- Battalion 263 of the 270th Regiment (attacked in a region of Central Laos just north of the 17th Parallel);
- The 120th Independent Regiment (attacked in Khammouane Province).

The pattern of engagement by North Vietnamese units in this campaign was the one that has been followed in more recent ones, both before and since the 1962 Geneva Accords. The North Vietnamese would throw first-line troops against predetermined RLG objectives, complete their mission, and thereupon withdraw to the DRV, leaving Lao forces that had accompanied them as support elements to secure the gains. In the face of a counterattack, the North Vietnamese could be called in again from their bivouac areas across the border.

Although we do not have enough corroborative evidence to prove that in 1959 North Vietnamese units were involved in precisely this way, our other interviews confirm that

it was the general pattern of North Vietnamese participation in the campaign. Lending weight to this interpretation is the fact that the military organization was in disarray at the time. The two PL battalions which were to have been integrated into the Royal Army had fled to North Vietnam only a few months before the attack and would hardly have had time to regroup or prepare for such an offensive. Though the Pathet Lao may have had several thousand men, in addition to the 1500 who had been designated to fill the ranks of the two battalions, these were not in organized, well-trained units likely to achieve such striking successes. In fact, the summer of 1959 was probably the low point of PL military strength.

The interests of both the PL and the DRV were advanced by this successful, if limited, military campaign. Regions of Sam Neua and Phong Saly that had been reoccupied by government forces after the 1957 agreements on integration were returned once again to Communist control, permitting the further development of the PL base area. From the Communist point of view, the attacks were a response to the Royal Government for alleged duplicity in violating the integration agreement and, particularly, in surrounding the two PL battalions and arresting the NLHS leaders. The attacks served as a warning to the RLG that the Pathet Lao commanded powerful outside support that could swiftly be brought to bear in case of future threats.

Moreover, the DRV through this offensive was signaling to the Royal Government its displeasure at the growing U.S. involvement in Laos, reflected in the appearance of U.S. technicians in civilian clothes who had been dispatched to train and outfit the expanding Royal Lao Army. The



Vietnamese also objected to Laos' increasing ties with the SEATO powers.\* In an editorial of August 1, 1959, the official DRV newspaper Nhan Dan charged the "U.S. imperialists" with being "the chief promoters of the tensions in the relations between Laos and the DRV" and further claimed that the United States had drawn Laos into a military alliance with Thailand and South Vietnam with the aim of inducing Laos to call for SEATO help. This accusation was clearly aimed at discouraging Vientiane from tying itself too closely to the anti-Communist bloc. Even as it was signaling this message to the Royal Government, however, Hanoi denied any direct involvement in this campaign and masterfully camouflaged its true role. The difficulty of proving its military participation, and the limited nature of the engagement in Laos, served to reduce the risk of retaliation from the United States or other SEATO powers.

#### THE PERIOD OF TURBULENCE, 1959-1962

The failure of efforts at national reconciliation in Laos may not have been unwelcome to Hanoi, and the resumption of fighting between the Royal Government and the Pathet Lao in 1959 came at a fortuitous time, for it coincided with a new turn in the DRV's policy.

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\*For a brief discussion of the U.S. role in Laos in the 1950s, see Roger M. Smith's discussion in Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia, pp. 546-551. See also Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, New York, 1965, pp. 323-334.

At the Third Party Congress of the Lao Dong Party, in 1959, Hanoi had decided to step up its contribution to the insurgency in South Vietnam. It therefore became particularly important for the North Vietnamese to secure and control the territory in the southern panhandle of Laos through which their personnel and matériel had to pass on their way to the south, those infiltration routes that are commonly known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Regular infiltration over these routes began in 1959.

The period of renewed political turbulence in Laos, which started in 1959 and only ended -- temporarily -- with the Geneva Accords of 1962 and the establishment of a tripartite government including the NLHS, offered the DRV an excellent opportunity to advance its own objectives at the same time that it was helping its Lao Communist allies. During these years of coups and countercoups, the Communists made significant territorial gains, extending their control into new areas of Laos. They benefited particularly from the confusion which followed the coup of the paratroop commander Kong Le, in the summer of 1960. The young captain, son of a Lao Theung tribesman, with little formal education, but a vigorous combat officer and charismatic leader, had pledged that he would put an end to corruption in Laos and to the internecine struggle among Lao, and had returned the leader of the Neutralist faction, Prince Souvanna Phouma -- half-brother of Souphanouvong -- to power as Prime Minister.

From the beginning, however, Souvanna faced serious difficulties in reestablishing peace among the contending parties. Met with bitter hostility not only from right-wing elements in Laos but also from the United States, which cut

off its aid to the Royal Government, Souvanna Phouma turned to the USSR for assistance. Beginning in December 1960, therefore, a massive Soviet aid program was mounted on an emergency basis.\* This Soviet aid was transported through the DRV, and the North Vietnamese had a key role in its distribution. As a result, so Neutralist officers told us who during this period had served in Hanoi and on the Plain of Jars (where Neutralist and Pathet Lao headquarters were established side by side), these supplies were directed first to the North Vietnamese in Laos, second to the Pathet Lao, and last -- and least -- to the Kong Le Neutralist military forces. As Soviet aid began to pour in through North Vietnamese channels, the PL forces were substantially reinforced in equipment and supplies. With active North Vietnamese guidance, the two battalions which had fled from Laos to North Vietnam in 1959 provided cadres for the organization of new PL units. In addition to the Soviet supplies, the Pathet Lao forces had received a windfall of arms and supplies which their ally, Kong Le, had earlier seized from the Royal Army stocks. With these added assets, they were able to expand their hold over the province of Sam Neua, capturing Sam Neua city in September 1960. In November they seized the strategic town of

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\*According to Arthur Schlesinger (A Thousand Days, p. 331), G. M. Pushkin, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, told Harriman later that "apart from the Second World War, this was the highest priority Soviet supply operation since the Revolution." Dommen (Conflict in Laos, p. 178) reports that during the period from December 1960 through January 1961, Soviet aircraft flew 184 supply missions into Laos from logistic bases in North Vietnam. For President Eisenhower's account of U.S. policy at this time, see Dwight D. Eisenhower, White House Years, Vol. 1: Waging Peace, 1956-61, Garden City, N.Y., 1965, pp. 609ff.

Ban Ban, at the juncture of Routes 6 and 7 which lead into North Vietnam.

The countercoup, on December 8, 1960, by the "Revolutionary Committee" of right-wing General Phoumi Nosavan made another major contribution to political chaos in Laos from which the Lao Communists and the DRV ultimately profited. As a result of the coup, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma fled first to Phnom Penh, Cambodia; later, he set up headquarters at Khang Khay, on the Plain of Jars, where the Kong Le troops had retreated from Vientiane. Three separate headquarters were established at Khang Khay: one by Souvanna Phouma's Neutralists, another by the Pathet Lao, and still another by the North Vietnamese.\*

Between mid-December 1960 and May 1961 there was active fighting, as a result of which the PL forces, thanks largely to the support of the North Vietnamese, consolidated their control of significant new territory. The hostilities had begun with an attack on Route 13 by Phoumi Nosavan's forces, including tanks, followed by a counterattack from the Communist forces, which were composed mainly of North Vietnamese troops from the 925th North Vietnamese battalion and other, unidentified North Vietnamese units plus the 6th PL battalion and other, unidentified PL units. In a major engagement at Pha Tang, north of Vang Vieng on Route 13 (the country's chief north-south artery, which links Vientiane with Luang Prabang), the Communists succeeded in pushing the RLG troops as far south as Hin Heup, some 60 miles north of Vientiane. At the same time, battalions of

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\* For a discussion of the relative secrecy of these three headquarters at Khang Khay see Chapter 9.

the 325th North Vietnamese division directed minor attacks against Tha Vieng and Tha Thom, north of the Mekong River town of Paksane. In the now familiar pattern, the North Vietnamese forces would act as spearheads, and be followed by PL troops, and sometimes Kong Le Neutralists, who consolidated the gains and provided camouflage for the earlier presence of the North Vietnamese.\*

#### THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON LAOS, 1961-1962

When President Kennedy took office, in January 1961, he was confronted with a serious situation in Laos. The Communist military offensive there was making steady headway, and the West had reason to be concerned about its ultimate objectives. As the United States and the Soviet Union were actively backing contending forces in Laos, they were on a collision course that threatened to lead them toward an unwanted military confrontation. Late in April 1961, therefore, the two powers agreed to defuse the situation. A cease-fire was to be arranged among the forces fighting in Laos, and an international conference called, in an effort to find a way of taking Laos out of the

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\* Details about the North Vietnamese units participating in these attacks was provided by the previously-mentioned captain, who pieced this information together from LPLA prisoners and defectors and four Vietnamese prisoners captured during this period, as well as from interviews with some of the 180 RLG prisoners who were taken by the North Vietnamese in the Pha Tang engagement described above. These POWs reported that they had been taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese and led through the Plain of Jars by the North Vietnamese, who turned them over to the Kong Le Neutralists and to the Pathet Lao.

East-West conflict.\* The chances for convening such a conference were good, as Communist China, too, seemed interested in a political solution which eliminated any possibility that U.S. ground forces would one day enter Laos and appear on China's southern borders.

As the prospects for an international conference on Laos brightened, the Communists hastened -- as they had done on the eve of the 1954 Geneva Conference -- to seize as much ground in Laos as possible before a cease-fire stabilized the situation. It was during those months that such key points of access to Vietnam as Mahaxay and Tchepone fell to the Communists. The Pathet Lao displayed little interest in concluding a cease-fire agreement even after it became clear that the convening of a conference at Geneva hinged on whether some arrangements could be worked out to suspend the fighting while negotiations were under way; no doubt, they were hoping to improve their territorial holdings while taking part in protracted talks about a final settlement for Laos. The United States, on the other hand, insisted on an end to the fighting as a prerequisite for diplomatic talks. Eventually, a compromise

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\* As early as September 1960, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, concerned about the effect on his country of the continuing turbulence in neighboring Laos, had proposed at the United Nations that an international agreement remove Laos and Cambodia from the international power struggle by neutralizing these two countries. On January 1, 1961, he had followed up with a concrete proposal for an enlarged conference at Geneva -- patterned after that of 1954 -- to take up the Laos question. A week earlier, the USSR and North Vietnam had made similar proposals.

was reached,\* and in mid-May the International Control Commission announced itself satisfied that "a general de facto cease-fire" had been achieved, thus clearing the way for the opening of the conference. Throughout the following months, however, frequent violations of the cease-fire were reported from Laos. The situation there was further complicated by the absence of any official territorial demarcation line separating the three rival factions and by the fact that the ICC lacked the capabilities for an effective enforcement of the cease-fire.

The Geneva Conference on Laos opened on May 16, 1961, and held its last session some fourteen months later, on July 21, 1962. The length of the negotiations was due primarily to the complexity of the internal situation in Laos, but the large number of Conference participants -- fourteen\*\* -- also proved rather cumbersome. While the

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\*The Western powers agreed to set a date for the conference, while the Communists agreed that a cease-fire would be put into effect between the time of the announcement of the conference and its actual opening. This solution was promptly accepted by the Royal Lao Government, but the Pathet Lao and their Neutralist allies insisted that negotiations on political and military issues must precede any agreement to end hostilities. Finally, probably as a result of combined Soviet and Vietnamese pressure, the three factions agreed to instruct their respective forces to cease fire. This was done on May 3, 1961. Five days later, the International Control Commission resumed its activity in Laos. (The complex maneuvering involved in these arrangements and subsequent negotiations in Laos and at Geneva are discussed in considerable detail in Anita Lauve Nutt, Troika on Trial--Control or Compromise?, a study of the ICC prepared for the Office of International Security Affairs, Department of Defense, September 1967. Our account has greatly benefited from this valuable study.)

\*\*Conference participants, apart from Laos, were the following: four Communist powers (the Soviet Union --

discussions were going on in Geneva, representatives of the three Lao factions fought and negotiated for a political formula that would satisfy their conflicting claims. The Laos settlement of 1962 thus grew out of two separate sets of negotiations.

In the seven years that had elapsed since the Geneva Conference of 1954, the Pathet Lao's position had visibly increased in strength. Militarily, their forces, aided by the North Vietnamese and allied to the Kong Le Neutralists, had overrun half of the country and seemed capable of continuing their momentum. Politically, they were allied with the Neutralists of Prince Souvanna Phouma, whom the Communist powers as well as some of the non-Communist nations recognized as the legitimate chief of the Lao government. The enhanced status of the Pathet Lao was reflected in the role they played at the 1962 Conference. In 1954, their top representative, Nouhak, traveling on a

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Co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, Communist China, the DRV, and Poland, the Communist member of the ICC); four Western powers (the United Kingdom -- the other Co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, the United States, France, and Canada in its capacity of ICC member); two Asian allies of the United States and neighbors of Laos (South Vietnam and Thailand); and three neutralist nations with interests in the area (Burma, Cambodia, and India -- the ICC Chairman). Arthur Lall, who served as Chairman of the Indian delegation, recently revealed that, in an effort to speed up agreement, the "inner six," i.e., the chiefs of the delegations of the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, United States, Communist China, France, and India, met in off-the-record sessions and in strictest secrecy to hammer out the Conference declaration on the Laos question. ". . . though some twenty meetings were held, their existence did not become known to any delegation that might have taken exception to them." Arthur Lall, How Communist China Negotiates, New York, 1968, p. 131.



Vietnamese passport, had had to be satisfied with the status of an observer. In 1961, the Pathet Lao delegation,\* although, unlike the Rightists and the Neutralists, it did not claim to represent a government, nevertheless was recognized as one of three coequal delegations destined to be superseded by a single delegation after the establishment of a national-union tripartite government.

Prodded by the major powers, the titular leaders of the three Lao factions (Prince Boun Oum na Champassak for the Rightists, Prince Souvanna Phouma for the Neutralists, and Prince Souphanouvong for the NLHS) finally met in Zurich on June 19, 1961, and agreed in principle to form a government of national union that would include the three parties. It took another three months for the rival factions to agree on Souvanna as the leader of such a coalition government. Meanwhile fighting had once more flared up, and thereafter virtually no progress was made in translating the Zurich Agreements into specific terms acceptable to all three parties. The Pathet Lao and Neutralists, enjoying military superiority, were extremely reluctant to slow the momentum of their drive and to make any concessions at all for the sake of national unity. Just as reluctant -- and, as the months went by, more so -- was the Rightist faction, for it hoped still to redress the military balance by enlisting outside support and in the meantime preferred to stall rather than pay the political price of military inferiority.

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\*The Geneva delegation of the NLHS was headed by Phoumi Vongvichit. Meanwhile, Nouhak was representing the Communists in the more important and intricate negotiations with the Neutralist and Rightist factions.

By December, the Geneva Conference had finally approved the provisional drafts for a Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos, but as long as the situation in Laos remained unsettled, and in the absence of a Lao government recognized by all the major powers, the Conference participants could not place their signature on the agreement. The resistance of the Lao contestants was such that even a meeting of the three princes in Geneva under the watchful eyes of the Conference powers brought no resolution of the rival claims for ministerial portfolios and positions of influence. The deadlock was finally broken when Communist forces, in January and February 1962, scored a convincing military victory at Nam Tha in northern Laos.

A large portion of General Phoumi Nosavan's forces had been stationed in that locality, only a few miles from the borders of Communist China, when a Communist counterattack sent them in disarray to the Mekong River and thence to safety on the Thai side of the border. There is some difference of opinion as to whether the majority of the troops on the Communist side were Lao or North Vietnamese. Arthur Schlesinger states that Nam Tha was seized by the Pathet Lao, though with North Vietnamese support.\* Our interviews, however, indicate that the North Vietnamese were the major force at Nam Tha, with the Pathet Lao forces serving, in the familiar pattern, as support troops.

As a result of this rout and of the pressure that the United States put on the Rightists to accept a compromise settlement, the three princes were able to meet once more

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\* A Thousand Days, p. 516.

for a serious attempt to move from the agreed-upon principle for a solution of their differences to its implementation. It is a testimony to the deterioration of the Boun Oum government's position that this final meeting of the princes, in June 1962, took place at Khang Khay on the Plain of Jars at the Neutralist/Pathet Lao headquarters rather than in the capital of Laos or at a neutral site.

At the June conference, the three factions announced agreement on the details of a coalition government to be headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma, with Prince Souphanouvong serving as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Planning, and Rightist leader Phoumi Nosavan as another Deputy Prime Minister and as Minister of Finance.\* On June 23, 1962, the King of Laos formally approved the new government, which thereupon dispatched its representative to the Geneva Conference. On July 23, the Conference participants signed the Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos and a related Protocol outlining the provisions for the neutralization of Laos. This was to have been the

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\*The agreement specified that, of the 19 cabinet posts (including those of the Prime Minister and his two deputies), 4 should go to the Rightists, 4 to the NLHS, and the remaining 11 to the Neutralists. (The last were in turn split into two factions, of which the Souvanna Phouma faction was allocated 7 seats and the so-called Vientiane faction received 4.) The portfolios of Defense and Interior, which had all along been major bones of contention among the three factions, both went to the Neutralists, but it was agreed that in the vital areas of Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs unanimity of the three factions would be mandatory. As the jurisdiction of these ministries could be defined as broadly as any faction wished it to be, each group thus retained in practice a veto over all important policy decisions.

first step toward a complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Laos and the beginning of an era of national reconciliation among the contending Lao factions.

One may wonder why the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese Communists should have been willing to accept a political settlement short of all-out control over Laos after they had convincingly demonstrated at Nam Tha that the military balance of forces was in their favor. One explanation is that at least the North Vietnamese may have been afraid that further advances in Laos would provoke a U.S. response and endanger their earlier gains. Soviet policy, no doubt, also exerted a moderating influence, and so did the American reaction to the events in Laos. Though the United States had made clear its willingness to accept an uncommitted Laos under a government headed by the Neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma, this did not mean that it would permit a direct military takeover of Laos by the Communists. In fact, in response to the critical situation caused by the Communist attack against Nam Tha and as a signal to Hanoi and Moscow, President Kennedy had dispatched some 5000 U.S. troops to northeast Thailand, from where they would be able to cross the Mekong into Laos on short notice.

The opportunities presented by the looseness of the arrangements made at Geneva and among the three factions in Laos also facilitated the Communists' acceptance of a troika coalition government and of the agreement for the removal of foreign forces from Laos. In compliance with the Geneva Accords, U.S. and Filipino personnel who had been fighting on the side of the Royal Lao Government were withdrawn from

the country.\* The same could not be said of the North Vietnamese forces (estimated at 10,000 men), who had been the backbone of Pathet Lao military strength. The North Vietnamese never admitted the presence of their fighting units, and only 40 of their personnel passed through the ICC checkpoints after the signing of the Geneva Accords. This concealment of the Vietnamese role in Laos was possible only because the International Control Commission remained ineffective,\*\* owing to its inadequate authority and enforcement capability as well as to the fact that its Communist member (Poland) was able to veto or obstruct any investigative action that might have revealed the continued

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\* In all, 666 Americans and 403 Filipinos were evacuated from Laos under ICC supervision.

\*\* The deficiencies of the ICC are analyzed and illustrated in the aforementioned study by A. L. Nutt, Troika on Trial. Shortcomings of the Commission's operational arrangements -- the result of Communist opposition to an effective International Control Commission -- included these features: (1) The Pathet Lao had accepted only three ICC checkpoints. Of these, only one was in their own zone and it was located so far West of the Vietnam-Laos border that the checking out of foreign troops could not possibly be effective, for the North Vietnamese forces were concentrated in the area between the checkpoint and the border area (particularly near the important Mu Gia Pass infiltration point). Moreover, no routes had been designated for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Laos. (2) There were no provisions for ICC supervision of points of entry into Laos nor for the creation of fixed ICC teams for inspection and investigation of suspected violations. (3) In the view of the NLHS, ICC teams could only proceed to investigations at the unanimous invitation of the Lao government, which gave the NLHS an effective veto. (4) Communist opposition to any investigation of reported violations of the withdrawal agreements resulted in such lengthy delays that the Commission's activity could not possibly serve a useful purpose.

Vietnamese presence in Laos or could otherwise have embarrassed the Communist side.

The negative attitude of the North Vietnamese and of the Pathet Lao with regard to international inspection and enforcement of the neutralization of Laos was clearly stated by their representatives at the Geneva Conference. The DRV delegation insisted that ". . . the neutrality of Laos should be mainly safeguarded by the Laotians themselves"; the Pathet Lao expressed their view in these brutally frank terms: "We should like to add that we will not tolerate guarantee or control by an international body, however constituted, of our country's sovereignty and neutrality."\* North Vietnamese forces thus remained free to cross over into the Communist zone of Laos at will. Meanwhile, so long as the military and administrative integration of the three factions remained to be carried out, the NLHS, now enjoying the status of a legitimate political party and constituent element of the national union government, retained full possession of the large zone that it occupied thanks to massive assistance from North Vietnam.

By the time of the Geneva Accords of 1962, the territory which the DRV and PL forces controlled was roughly the same as the territory the Viet Minh had held at the close of the war against the French, in July 1954. This meant the bulk of the highlands of Laos, or about half of the territory, although the population in these areas was only 20 to 30 per cent of the country's total.

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\* As quoted from Conference records by A. L. Nutt, Troika on Trial, p. 531.

The evidence is strong, therefore, that the Communist military success at the end of the 1961-1962 offensive in Laos was due primarily to the troop commitment from North Vietnam.\* From their own point of view, the North Vietnamese had attained substantial accomplishments in Laos. Not only was the area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail now securely in Communist hands, but the northern provinces bordering on Vietnam were also clearly within Communist control, thereby providing a buffer between Vietnam and a potential enemy. In the future, this buffer zone could serve as a staging area for further advances into other parts of the country. Laos was now divided, and it seemed unlikely that peaceful reunification could be achieved without North Vietnamese consent.

The role of the North Vietnamese had made possible substantial gains for the Pathet Lao forces too.\*\* In

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\* According to American estimates the NVA forces involved in Laos during this period were: September 1961 - 3200; January 1962 - 5100; July 1962 - 9000.

\*\* In a preface dated December 5, 1964, to the RLG "White Book" Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma wrote the following: "In this civil war, which has lasted for more than 20 years . . . the principal actions in these combats have been led by the North Vietnamese troops, a fact I was able to verify myself when I was at Khang Khay. The Pathet Lao who, at the origin, disposed of only two battalions . . . could not expect to find success against the strong governmental forces of more than 20,000 men. That the Pathet Lao have not disappeared from the scene is due to the support of its ally of the north which has supported, armed, trained, and encadred its guerrilla activities. It is not necessary to look elsewhere for reasons for this survival of a political party which gathered together at the outset only an insignificant handful of revolutionary Marxists." (L'Ingérence Nord-Vietnamienne au Laos [North Vietnamese Interference in Laos], published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vientiane, December 1964, p. 3.) In this context,

1959 the two PL battalions of 750 men each had been dispersed. Only two years later, at the time of the cease-fire of May 31, 1961, PL troops were estimated at 16,000, and by the conclusion of the Geneva negotiations, in July 1962, they had further increased their strength to an estimated 19,500. Pathet Lao control of approximately half of the territory of Laos was in effect legitimized by the 1962 Geneva Accords, as conditions at the cease-fire resulted in the drawing of an unofficial dividing line between the NLHS- and RLG-controlled areas. It must be stressed, however, that the Royal Government never accepted the contention that the cease-fire line constituted a de facto recognition of a partition of Laos. And, indeed, no official demarcation line was ever agreed upon. But in the circumstances created by the cease-fire, both sides now had time to regroup their forces, consolidate political control, and work at building their strength.

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it is also interesting to note Souvanna Phouma's repeated assertion that he received verbal assurance from DRV Premier Pham Van Dong that Vietnamese forces would be promptly withdrawn from Laos if Souvanna would pledge not to raise this issue at the Geneva Conference. The Vietnamese Communists did not live up to their word, as only a handful of Vietnamese "civilian advisers" withdrew from Laos after the Conference.



PART TWO: THE PRESENT



## VI. THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT STRUGGLE

In June 1962 Prince Souvanna Phouma, with the support of the major interested nations and the consent of the three domestic factions contending for power -- the Rightists, the Neutralists,\* and the Neo Lao Hak Sat -- established his troika government. From the beginning it seemed doubtful whether the difficult balancing act attempted by the Prince could bring about a reunification of the country and a return to conditions of peaceful political competition. Less than a year after the signing of the 1962 Geneva Accords, the two most prominent NLHS representatives in the coalition government, Prince Souphanouvong and Phoumi Vongvichit, left Vientiane to return to the Neo Lao Hak Sat stronghold of Sam Neua, contending, not entirely without justification, that their security was threatened in the capital. They were soon followed by the two other NLHS representatives in the cabinet. They left behind in Vientiane only a small military contingent under the veteran Pathet Lao Colonel Sot Phetrasy, who to this day maintains liaison with the Royal Government, but must operate from a position of isolation in a hostile environment.

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\*These commonly used terms are misleading if we attribute to them the meaning as it is understood outside the Lao context. The Neutralists were not then, nor are they today, a party, and few of them would describe themselves as occupying a middle ground, domestically, between the Rightists and the NLHS. On the other hand, most Rightists accept Souvanna's basic policy of international neutrality for Laos guaranteed by the Great Powers as the best, if not the only, hope for the survival of Laos as an independent state capable of maintaining domestic peace.

From the very inception of the coalition regime, it became evident that none of the three contracting parties, particularly not the NLHS, was prepared to make concessions for the sake of national reunification. Each faction held on to the military power it had developed earlier, and each, in accordance with the Zurich Agreements,\* sought to continue administering the areas under its physical control. The lines between the three zones were never neatly drawn, because there had been no official cease-fire line and small-scale fighting had continued even at the height of the coalition period. The Pathet Lao thus maintained their hold over the regions along the Vietnam borders which they had been ruling for a decade with the active assistance of the Vietnamese Communists.

To judge by the available documentary evidence, corroborated by our interviews, the focus of the Communists' attention was on the areas they held rather than on the Vientiane experiment in political integration. (One indication of this is the fact that Kaysone Phomvihane, who by the 1960s had become the ranking member of the Lao Communist hierarchy, stayed away from Vientiane, dividing his time between the NLHS zone along the Vietnamese border and frequent visits or prolonged stays in North Vietnam itself.)

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\* In the Agreements it was stipulated that each faction would continue to administer temporarily its own zone of control until such time as all military forces and all administrations were unified by mutual agreement.

The mission of maintaining, and if possible expanding, the Communist foothold in the hostile territory of right-wing-dominated Vientiane was assigned to Prince Souphanouvong and Phoumi Vongvichit, who were the chairman and secretary-general, respectively, of the NLHS. Phoumi Vongvichit, a former high official in the Lao government, was particularly suited to this task. Souphanouvong, although nominally the leader of the NLHS, by 1962 apparently was no longer free to make important decisions on the spot, according to interviews with men who worked with him, but required the consent of (or perhaps had to defer to) his colleagues in NLHS territory and, directly or indirectly, the North Vietnamese. As will be shown later on, there is also ample evidence that the Vietnamese Communist forces were never completely withdrawn from Laos, that their advisers remained to stiffen the NLHS administration and military apparatus, and that the top figures in the Lao Communist movement continued to look to the Vietnamese for political guidance and inspiration.

The period of coalition in Vientiane lasted less than a year, from the fall of 1962 to the following April. It was thus too short to allow Souphanouvong and his associates to leave a mark on the national government's policies and programs, especially since the careful balancing of the three factions' influences tended to militate against any drastic departure from the status quo. We know from our interviews with government officials who worked under Souphanouvong that the Prince, while competent and hard-working, was careful not to reveal his inner thoughts on such issues as the future of the coalition or his functions in the Communist apparatus. It is fair to say that the

brief episode of the NLHS' participation in the national government left no substantive legacy that would clarify their social and economic policies. For such information one must look at the experience of the border provinces which have formed the base of the NLHS administration. Here, a virtual government apparatus has emerged over the years, with its own administrative structure, its armed forces, and a set of social and economic policies that have been formulated without reference to the programs of the national tripartite government in Vientiane.

On the basis of the slender evidence available it is impossible to say to what extent -- if at all -- the North Vietnamese mentors of the Pathet Lao were directly responsible for breaking up the coalition of the three power groups in Laos and for provoking, in 1963, open warfare by the Communists against their one-time Neutralist allies under Kong Le. It seems probable, however, that Souphanouvong's decision, in the spring of 1963, to abandon his cabinet post in Vientiane and to resume the civil war could not have been taken without the consent and the cooperation of the Vietnamese Communists, on whom the Pathet Lao were dependent in all respects.

Trouble between the Neo Lao Hak Sat and its Neutralist allies developed almost immediately upon the official cessation of the fighting, in 1962. The Neutralists and the Pathet Lao maintained headquarters adjacent to each other in the Khang Khay area on the Plain of Jars, where they also shared the airfield. Both parties were dependent upon Soviet supplies, which arrived via North Vietnam and were distributed by the Vietnamese. Given the ambitions of the NLHS to gain control over all of Laos, it is not surprising

that friction developed between the two factions that eventually turned into open military conflict. Though it appears that the North Vietnamese encouraged the NLHS to break with the Neutralists, there is no unequivocal evidence that Vietnamese forces in Laos assisted the Pathet Lao forces directly in their operations against Kong Le.

In the spring of 1963, the Pathet Lao forced Kong Le out of his headquarters at Khang Khay, and within a year he had been compelled to retreat toward Vientiane, leaving the strategic Plain of Jars region to the nominal control of a few self-styled Neutralists who were opposed to him. By thus evicting the principal Neutralist military leader, the Lao Communists had achieved two things: They were now able to consolidate their position in an important area of Laos in preparation for further advances, and they had effectively destroyed the power base which would have permitted Souvanna Phouma, the leader of the national union government and of one of its three factions, to speak from a position of strength as a Neutralist. Souvanna's influence was thus greatly reduced, since it had been understood that each faction would have a voice commensurate with the strength of the military forces under its command.

As a consequence of these events, the Plain of Jars became the headquarters of new and different Neutralists, utterly dependent on their Communist "allies," who had virtually created them and have continued to provide their encadrement. This small splinter group of Neutralists still in the Communist camp is commanded by Colonel Deuane, an enemy and rival of Kong Le. It consists of perhaps a few hundred men (although the figure of 2000 is sometimes

mentioned<sup>\*</sup>). These have been described by the Communists as "true" or "genuine" Neutralists, and, more recently, as "Patriotic Neutralists."

If the Communists choose to maintain a nominally separate identity for the Neutralists they created in 1963 rather than to absorb them, it may be partly because, in the familiar pattern of Communist movements, it strengthens their claim during the initial phase that their administration is not a Communist monolith but represents a broad range of political views. But there may be the additional reason that in any future political settlement for the reestablishment of a national union government that would comprise the three Geneva factions -- Rightists, Neutralists, and NLHS -- the "Patriotic Neutralists" could constitute an important asset. For the Communists could assert, as they do now, that only Colonel Deuane and his men deserve to be called "Neutralists," whereas Souvanna Phouma had forfeited his claim to that label by his cooperation with the United States. If they succeeded in gaining for the "Patriotic Neutralists" recognition as representatives of the Neutralist faction, the Communists and their sympathizers would form a majority in a future national union government, whereas under the arrangements worked out by the Lao factions at the time of the Geneva Accords of 1962 they now constitute a minority.

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<sup>\*</sup>See Robert Shaplen, "Letter from Laos," The New Yorker, May 4, 1968.

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Kong Le, having been evicted from the Plain of Jars, was forced into a relationship of dependence on the powers in Vientiane. He was no longer able to draw on Soviet supplies arriving via Vietnam, and Souvanna's request to the Soviet Union that it supply Kong Le directly had met with refusal. As a result, Kong Le's forces, like those of the Rightists, became dependent on support from the United States.

By 1964, the process of polarization which had been briefly interrupted by the implementation of the Geneva formula had once more reached a critical stage in Laos. The NLHS was proceeding all but in name to the establishment of a separate government while seeking to wrest new territories from Vientiane. In April 1964, Prince Souvanna Phouma survived a Rightist military coup, but the course of events in Laos increasingly pointed toward a confrontation between the Communist forces on the one hand and a combination of non-Communist conservatives and Neutralists on the other. By the spring of 1964, a serious military struggle had developed, in which the Vietnamese Communists were playing a major role. It continues to this day.

#### DISTRIBUTION OF POWER

Though the NLHS representatives abandoned their cabinet posts in 1963, these chairs have been kept vacant, formally awaiting the return of the incumbents to Vientiane while their colleagues have temporarily assumed their duties. Prince Souvanna Phouma continues to head the coalition government, but the line between Neutralists and Rightists is more blurred today than it was several years ago. In

the National Assembly the NLHS lacks representation, having refused to participate in elections. The symbol of the country's unity remains the King of Laos. He resides in Luang Prabang, and all three factions continue to swear formal allegiance to him.

Although the NLHS and the Royal Lao Government are at war with each other, contacts between them have not entirely ceased: The two princes have exchanged diplomatic notes and even personal communications,<sup>\*</sup> and at a number of low-level meetings their representatives have discussed the prospects for political integration. The contending parties frequently issue claims (always conflicting) as to the size of the territory and population they control. Under prevailing circumstances it is impossible, or at best not very meaningful, for either side to confirm or deny such claims. Much of Laos is sporadically or sparsely populated, and the discontinuous, fluctuating front characteristic of guerrilla warfare and small-scale military engagements constantly shifts the boundaries of control between the two main areas involved, not to mention the many enclaves in enemy territory. Moreover, population figures in government-held territory are known to be highly unreliable, and this is probably just as true of those regions where the Communists have the upper hand. Any statistical assessment is further complicated by the mass movement of refugees from Communist and contested zones.

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<sup>\*</sup>Thus, it was reported in February 1969 that the Soviet Ambassador to Laos on a visit from Vientiane to the NLHS zone (by way of Hanoi) was carrying a personal letter from Souvanna Phouma to his half-brother Souphanouvong, who replied through the same channel.

While the Communists now hold about one-half the land area of Laos, the government controls a much larger portion of the total population, perhaps more than two-thirds. The government's influence reaches into only a few of the mountainous and sparsely populated regions along the border of the two Vietnams, but it is paramount in the more densely populated Mekong Valley, where all the country's larger towns are situated. Some provinces, such as the old Communist strongholds of Sam Neua and Phong Saly -- both bordering on North Vietnam -- are firmly in the hands of the NLHS. In others the Communists have only a small toehold, as in Sayaboury Province, on the right bank of the Mekong, where their influence is estimated to reach no more than five per cent of the population. On the whole, there have been remarkably few changes in the geographic distribution of political control since 1962, an indication that neither side wishes to risk upsetting the precarious balance lest any major change in the situation provoke even greater foreign military intervention and large-scale internationalization of the conflict. Each side, however, continues to nibble at the other's position.

#### COMMUNIST INSTRUMENTS OF POLICY CONTROL IN LAOS

The Neo Lao Hak Sat regions of Laos are controlled by three indigenous and interrelated instrumentalities: the Communist Party and its political front organization; the administrative apparatus; and the military organization. As will be shown, these internal control mechanisms are in turn inspired, stiffened, and guided by an external force -- that of North Vietnamese communism.

Laos' own Communist apparatus is rather feebly developed and not highly centralized, if we apply the standards of other Communist organizations, particularly the Vietnamese. But the physical, economic, and political conditions of Laos are not the same as those in Vietnam. If the Lao Communists appear far inferior to the Vietnamese Communists in organization, sophistication, and drive, we must remind ourselves that their adversary, the Royal Lao Government, suffers from similar inadequacies and handicaps that are inherent in the Lao scene, including the difficult topography, the paucity of natural and human resources, and the underdeveloped state of both the economy and the cultural life of Laos. It is these conditions which have made all contenders for political power in that country so dependent on foreign assistance, encouraging, on one side, the Pathet Lao's symbiotic relationship with the Vietnamese Communists and, in turn, forcing the Royal Government to rely heavily on the United States for economic and military assistance.

There has been some controversy over the years as to whether or not there is a separate Communist party in Laos, apart from the mass organization known as the Neo Lao Hak Sat (NLHS). Those who believe that there is, disagree among themselves on the exact name of the party. Our interviews, the documents we have collected, and a study of the existing literature on the subject have enabled us to throw some light on this issue. We are satisfied that a Communist party does indeed exist in Laos, and that it is recognized as such by other Communist parties. It is the Phak Pasason Lao, or People's Party of Laos (PPL), to this day a semi-secret organization. Because of the clandestine nature of its

operations, little was known about this Communist party until recently, and even today it is not possible to piece together a full picture of its history, organization, and activities.

A captured document intended for the training of Party members states that the Phak Pasason Lao was officially proclaimed on March 22, 1955, although, it is pointed out, the organization already existed before then. The document emphasizes that the PPL was to continue the thought and spirit of the Indochinese Communist Party, which, founded in January 1930, had provided leadership in the struggle against the French in the three Indochinese countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. (It must be recalled that in 1945, to camouflage its identification with communism and present a more effective nationalist appeal, the ICP had formally dissolved itself and been replaced publicly by a broadly-based political association, though there is little doubt that the former ICP continued to furnish leadership for another six years.)

In 1951, according to the training document, the Second Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party decided to break up the ICP into three separate parties. As for the Lao party, the manual states that "though it had been organized and expanded sometime before, the People's Party of Laos was proclaimed on March 22, 1955," identified in the document as the official birthdate of the People's Party of Laos.

Such evidence as we have been able to find confirms that the establishment of the PPL was indeed officially proclaimed on March 22, 1955. But our sources differ as to the when and how of the party's actual origins. One

source (A-14), who was with the Pathet Lao until 1957 and subsequently studied the organization of the Lao Communist movement, claims to have attended a founding session of the PPL in 1954, some time after the Geneva Conference. He was then serving as a propagandist at Mahaxay, in the eastern part of Khammouane Province in South Laos. The meeting, presided over by Prince Souphanouvong, was held in the jungle somewhere in Sam Neua Province, and was attended by some 20 leading members of the Pathet Lao, including Kaysone, Nouhak, Phoumi Vongvichit, Faydang, Prince Souk Vongsak, Ma, Khamtay Siphandone, Phoun Sipaseuth, Sisavath, and Sisana Sisane. It was during this meeting, according to our source, that Nouhak proposed that they set up a "leading party," a recommendation supported by Kaysone, Khamtay, and Sisavath. Souphanouvong, Phoumi, and Faydang apparently agreed that such a party might be useful but expressed certain reservations (which our informant did not make clear). Sisana Sisane led the faction that strongly opposed the idea of a new party. After three days of discussion, the meeting ended without having reached a decision. Some time later in 1954, however, the Party was formed, and, according to our source, it had begun to plant its cadres in key positions in the administration and the military before being proclaimed in March of 1955. We have not been able to verify this account, but its author has been a useful and reliable informant on other subjects.

Still another source (A-9), who had rallied to the Royal Government in 1955 and currently holds a leading position in the Special Branch of the Lao police in southern Laos, claimed to have been a member of the People's Party

of Laos as early as 1950 (or, more likely, 1951), when he had the responsibility for issuing PPL membership cards. According to him, it had been decided after the dissolution of the ICP that new parties with new names would be established in each of the three countries, and this had led, in Vietnam, to the forming of the Lao Dong Party; in Laos, the Phak Pasason Pativat (literally, the "Revolutionary People's Party"); and a party of a similar name in Cambodia. The informant contended that Phak Pasason Pativat was an earlier name for Phak Pasason Lao, but gave no precise indication of when the name changed. While, again, we could not verify this account of the PPL's origin, the interviewee did provide details about its recruiting activities and its method of control within the civil and military hierarchy, all of which correspond to information we have from other sources.

At any rate, in the light of these accounts and other, corroborating evidence, we have no doubt that for the last fifteen years the PPL has been the controlling instrument in the Neo Lao Hak Sat areas, making the key policy decisions to be carried out by the administration and the military.

The People's Party of Laos subscribes to the principle of Marxism-Leninism. Its exact position on the Peking-Moscow spectrum is not easily determined, because, like the Vietnamese Lao Dong Party whose orientation it follows closely, it must seek to maintain amicable relations with both of the great Communist powers, and therefore has, on the whole, refrained from taking positions that would identify it with either. The sympathies of several of the PPL's leading figures appear to lean toward Peking, but

the overriding influence on its international position is without doubt that of its sponsors, the Vietnamese Communists.

In the past, when the PPL appeared at foreign Communist Party congresses and international Communist functions, it kept its existence secret. Its recent public acknowledgment\* may be a sign of growing strength and confidence and may also indicate that the PPL is ready to assume

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\*It had been rumored that the People's Party of Laos was officially represented at the 22nd Congress of the CPSU, in 1962. An examination of official Soviet records, however, shows no such mention (although it could well be that the party's representatives, even if not officially listed, were in attendance). The first definitely established use of the PPL label is encountered in the December 1966 issue of the Japanese Communist Party's monthly Zen'ei (Vanguard), which on the occasion of the JCP's 10th Convention published a letter from Laos that began, "Dear Fellow Comrades" and spoke of the NLHS and the PPL as separate entities, with the latter directing the former. It bore the notation, "October 24, 1966. At Sam Neua. Kaysone Phomvihane, Secretary General, representing the Central Committee of the People's Party of Laos." The following year, on July 15, a Hanoi domestic broadcast stated that a letter of condolence had been received upon the death of Nguyen Chi Thanh. It came from the Central Committee of the PPL and again was signed "Secretary General Kaysone Phomvihane." More recently, on March 22, 1968, the East German Communist organ Neues Deutschland, discussing plans for the Budapest consultative meeting of Communist parties, stated that a number of "Marxist-Leninist parties born since 1960" should be invited to participate. Among those parties we find listed the People's Party of Laos (together with the People's Revolutionary Party of Cambodia). Still another reference to the PPL appeared in the summer of 1968, this time in the Polish Communist press.



openly the directing role in Lao affairs, superseding its front organization, the NLHS, in this function.

From interviews with former Pathet Lao members, the study of Lao reports, and other source materials we conclude that the PPL, in its upper echelon, is organized like most Communist parties, with a Central Committee (composed of some 20 members) and a Secretary General (Kaysone). Among its Central Committee members, Nouhak -- an early associate of the Vietnamese Communists -- appears to be the most influential. We know that membership in the organization is extremely small. It may be only a few hundred for all of Laos, but the meagerness of available data makes this at best an educated guess.

Because of the secrecy surrounding it, we have only scant information about the PPL's operating principles and activities. We know that, like the Lao Dong in North Vietnam, it seeks to practice democratic centralism, and that it directs the open political party, the NLHS. Communist Party cells permeate the key institutions of society, i.e., the administration and the armed forces, at least at their upper levels. Virtually all prominent figures of the movement who are mentioned in public reports as governmental or military leaders also appear on various rosters of PPL members we have examined. An important exception may be Prince Souphanouvong, whose Party membership is not clearly established, despite the high position he occupies in the public eye and the historic role he has played in strengthening the Pathet Lao-North Vietnamese alliance.\*

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\*In this connection, the Vientiane newspaper Sat Lao on December 12, 1968, reported on the capture of a

Although there is no doubt that from the inception of the Pathet Lao movement its leaders have worked most intimately with the Vietnamese Communists, the precise relationship between the Lao Dong Party of North Vietnam and the Communist Party in Laos remains unclear. According to one widely-held theory, North Vietnam keeps control of the Lao Communist movement by having certain Lao Communists maintain dual membership in the PPL and the Lao Dong Party.

In December 1958 an informant contended that there had been seventeen Lao members<sup>\*</sup> in the Lao Dong Party when it was formed in 1950,<sup>\*\*</sup> but that "the strict subordination of the Lao to the Vietnamese dissatisfied the Lao, and in 1952 the Lao section was made independent of the Lao Dong under the name of the Workers Party (Phak Khon Ngan)." This informant further asserted that "all the directives passed through the Lao Dong to the members of the Lao Communist Party, who were also members of the Lao Dong." Principally on the basis of this report, the thesis has gained currency that there are four concentric circles of control, the innermost of which consists of the seventeen Lao Communists who have joint membership in the Lao Dong Party, and the next, of members of the PPL, with members of the NLHS and, finally, the population at large occupying the farther circles.

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Vietnamese-language document dealing with the origins of the PPL and indicating that Souphanouvong was admitted to membership in 1961.

<sup>\*</sup>Other sources speak of only one or two Lao members of the Vietnamese Party in that early period.

<sup>\*\*</sup>The Lao Dong Party was actually formed in 1951, so that this informant was mistaken at least in his date.

Though we cannot disprove this thesis, we have searched unsuccessfully for evidence to support it; instead, we find that it contains a number of clear-cut mistakes. For example, it appears that there never was a Lao Party known as the Phak Khon Ngan. (This term is simply a translation into Lao of the Vietnamese words Dang Lao Dong, meaning Workers Party.) According to a number of knowledgeable persons interviewed, the PPL has been the leading Party in Laos from the outset. Our investigation suggests that the thesis of joint membership came from a single source, whose motivation at the time the information was recorded was judged as dubious. The story seems to have been picked up in subsequent reporting and found its way into the literature on the subject.\* At this point, there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the existence today of a dual-membership arrangement by which certain Lao Communists also are Lao Dong members.\*\*

If the PPL is the guiding instrument of policy and control in the Pathet Lao regions, the transmission belt and mass mobilization mechanism is provided by the Neo Lao Hak Sat, or Lao Patriotic Front. The NLHS, as already mentioned, constitutes a broad political organization,

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\*For example, Arthur Dommen (in Conflict in Laos) and Bernard Fall (in his essay on "The Pathet Lao" in The Communist Revolution in Asia) have used this piece of information to construct the same thesis.

\*\*There is also the theory that Ho Chi Minh serves concurrently as Chairman of all three Indochinese Communist parties. In support of this contention it is pointed out that the PPL has a secretary general -- Kaysone -- but that there has not been any mention of a Party chairman.

which has functioned (and been recognized by the RLG) as a legitimate political party since its creation, in 1956. It admits freely "all progressive people," as is clear from the documents we have studied and from the accounts of eyewitnesses. Since the PPL does not normally make its existence known even to most of the inhabitants of the Communist-controlled zone, we have a situation wherein a true Communist party organization, the PPL, operates but is very rarely mentioned, while an open political party, the NLHS, appears on the surface to be the only political organization of that zone. This impression is reinforced by the official foreign Communist press, such as Pravda, and in Soviet writings on Laos, which avoid mention of the PPL and tend to talk only of the NLHS.

The Neo Lao Hak Sat corresponds to the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam. Prince Souphanouvong, who has been the chairman of its Central Committee from the beginning, also serves as the international spokesman for the Pathet Lao, and is acclaimed in the literature coming out of the Communist zone, as in the book Worthy Daughters and Sons of the Lao People, issued in 1966 by the official Neo Lao Haksat Publications, which calls him "the respected leader of the Lao people" (p. 31). Yet there is ample internal evidence to suggest that Souphanouvong, despite his worldwide reputation and official rank, occupies a lower position of influence than PPL Secretary General Kaysone and some of his less-known associates. The NLHS reaches down to the villages, where it commands a variety of constituent organizations, including those for farmers, young men, and young women.

On the administrative level, the Pathet Lao have modified the traditional system, which operates through the provincial, district, and canton level down to the villages, by adding a parallel chain of command whose function it is to provide the political supervision. At each level in the chain of command this political component adds the label "Neo" (meaning "front," and referring to the NLHS) to the administrative designation. Thus, a province will have a Chao Khoueng, i.e., a provincial governor, and in addition a Neo Khoueng, whose responsibilities are primarily political ones, such as the implementation of PPL policy (via the NLHS channels) and the supervision and control of personnel. Informants have told us that the Neo officials look over the shoulders of their colleagues on the administrative side to make sure that the instructions emanating from "the Center" are followed throughout the chain of command. In comparing the rosters of high administration officials in the Communist zone with those of the NLHS Central Committee and the various lists of PPL members, we find, not surprisingly, that there is considerable overlap, for Laos suffers from a dearth of qualified administrative and technically competent personnel and must make the most of available talent. Moreover, the combination of the underdevelopment of their region and the destruction brought about by the war has greatly complicated the administrative task of the Lao Communists, who have been forced to operate from makeshift headquarters (often in caves) and from primitive "offices" that are moved around the jungle areas.

The Lao People's Liberation Army (LPLA) has improved in size and quality over the years as a result of continuing battle experience, Vietnamese assistance and instruction,

and the allocation of substantial resources to the military buildup. Figures regarding its military strength vary substantially, partly because of the difficulty of obtaining information amidst conditions of guerrilla warfare but also because one must distinguish among regular forces, regional troops, and the village militia. The regular forces probably number about 25,000. To these must be added the regional troops and village militia and, most important, about 40-45,000 North Vietnamese forces stationed in Laos. Some NLHS publications describe the active role that women play in both military and political capacities.\* As documents from LPLA military forces make clear, the People's Party of Laos has firm control over the armed forces. One document puts it this way: "The military are under the leadership of our Party, [the PPL] . . . they must act in accordance with its policy."

Our sources lead us to conclude that little fundamental revamping of the social and economic life of those under NLHS rule has as yet been attempted. No doubt, this moderation is the result of the severe physical difficulties encountered in modernizing Laos, the limited availability from abroad of resources for civilian purposes, and the desire to avoid adverse political repercussions during wartime. Thus, there has been no collectivization of agriculture, but only a slow trend toward mutual-aid teams

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\* See, for example, Rains in the Jungle, Neo Lao Haksat Publications, 1967, p. 43, and Phoukout Stronghold, Neo Lao Haksat Publications, 1967, p. 21. (No place of origin is listed on either publication, but they look similar to literature published in Hanoi.)

and cooperative management; no large-scale expropriation of "capitalists," but restrictions on trade and distribution of goods. While class origin is increasingly a factor in the selection for responsible positions, a "bourgeois" or aristocratic background (as in the case of Prince Souphanouvong, Prince Souk Vongsak, and Singkapo Chounramany) is in itself apparently no serious obstacle to success.\* However, obligatory self-criticism and study sessions, in addition to more severe disciplinary measures, are widely used to eradicate what are considered failings springing from "capitalist" or "reactionary feudalism" tendencies, and to inspire dedication to the ideal of an "antiimperialist, antifeudalist, and progressive, democratic Laos." There is no question but that the Communists have made a determined effort to raise the level of social consciousness and to instill ambition in the people. Despite wartime conditions, programs for adult education are under way throughout the Communist zone.

Probably the most drastic changes have taken place in ethnic policy. The Pathet Lao have from the outset stressed the need for equality of opportunity and close cooperation among all ethnic groups. This is reflected to some extent

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\* However, it appears that the Communists are rearing a new generation of leaders and cadres -- men of humble origin. The sons and daughters of the more prominent families have been going for training to Moscow, Eastern Europe, and Peking, but the new cadres seem to be drawn from those who were trained in North Vietnam. Thus, one can expect to see develop in the NLHS zone a generation conflict as well as tensions caused by differences in social background and training.

in the leadership structure, where the tribal leaders Faydang and Sithon Khommadam have risen to positions of at least nominal prominence.\* Pathet Lao textbooks, newspapers, and other literature constantly hammer away at this theme, and, to judge by the accounts of defectors, Communist practice appears to live up to these principles.

#### THE PATHET LAO AND THE COMMUNIST POWERS

As will be demonstrated in some detail later in this study, the North Vietnamese have remained the single most important outside influence affecting the character and orientation of the Lao revolutionary movement. Because of the strategic location of Laos in Southeast Asia, however, the great powers are strongly interested in its fate and have become involved, directly and indirectly, in the domestic struggle. It was to prevent a dangerous confrontation of outside powers over Laos that fourteen nations met in Geneva in 1962 and agreed to refrain from intervening in that country's internal affairs.

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\*We cannot be certain of the weight that these two representatives of the major ethnic minority groups carry in the councils of the Lao Communists, but there are indications that at least Faydang's role is that of a mere figurehead and propaganda spokesman. General Vang Pao, the Meo general who leads the fight of the Meo on the RLG side, takes a slightly different view. He too sees in Faydang a figurehead of the Lao Communists, but believes him to be essentially neutral toward them (whose interests, of course, coincide, at least for the moment, with his own). What can be said with assurance is that both Sithon and Faydang regularly figure as spokesmen of their ethnic minority groups in statements praising the NLHS.



The policies of the USSR and Communist China toward the Lao Communist movement are of special interest here because of the role of North Vietnam, whose operations in Laos are, in a substantial manner, dependent upon those two powers. For example, without Soviet or Chinese aid, or both, North Vietnam would be obliged to cut its deliveries of weapons to the LPLA; indeed, Hanoi would be unable to carry on its operations in South Vietnam on the present scale, and this in turn would affect the situation in Laos.

Soviet interests in Laos can hardly be considered of great significance in themselves. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union is in an awkward position from which to conduct a consistent policy toward Laos: on one hand, its interests do not warrant the risk of provoking a hostile reaction from the United States; on the other hand, as a Communist power increasingly in competition with Communist China, the Soviet Union can ill afford to ignore North Vietnam's interests in Laos but must provide at least limited support to a fraternal Communist "liberation movement."

Prior to the Geneva Conference of 1962, the Soviet advisory role to the Pathet Lao had been very brief, and no organic relations had developed between Moscow and the Lao revolutionaries. Since then, Soviet policy toward the Lao Communists may appear contradictory at first glance, for Moscow officially supports Souvanna Phouma and his government while paying at least lip service to the cause of the NLHS. Thus, the USSR maintains its Embassy in Vientiane, receives Souvanna Phouma in Moscow despite NLHS criticism of him as an "American tool," and listens patiently to the Royal Government's objections to North Vietnamese interference in Laos. At the same time, Soviet

newspapers and broadcasts give propaganda support to the NLHS, and the Soviet Union is certainly aware that some of its aid to North Vietnam flows on into the Communist areas of Laos.\*

This seeming inconsistency of Soviet policy is merely one more reflection of the anomaly of the situation in Laos. As we have seen, although Laos has a tripartite government, the country is in fact divided. While international agreements have in theory removed Laos from the international power struggle, in practice various nations, directly or indirectly, have intervened to maintain a balance of power. Vientiane, the capital of the tripartite government, thus provides an unusual setting for international diplomacy: Not only does it shelter an NLHS mission -- in the midst of a civil war pitting the Royal Lao Government against the Neo Lao Hak Sat -- but it can boast of accommodating the South and North Vietnamese embassies as well as the Embassy of Communist China, although the last two also maintain Economic and Cultural Missions at Khang Khay in the NLHS zone.

The Lao Communists must recognize that Soviet aid to North Vietnam benefits them, but the ambivalence of the official Soviet policy toward them makes for rather tenuous relations. The Soviet Union does not, like the DRV and Communist China, maintain an Economic and Cultural Mission in the NLHS zone; its journalists, and other Soviet and East European visitors, reportedly have not been as free

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\*The Soviet position is that the USSR is giving support to the DRV and has no control over the use that the latter makes of Soviet supplies.

in the past to move within that zone as have the Vietnamese and Chinese, although recently more and more such visitors have entered the zone from Hanoi and their reports have received considerable publicity in the Soviet and East European press.

In view of the Soviet-Chinese competition in Asia, one might expect Peking to play a particularly active role in the Communist-controlled zone of Laos. In fact, the Chinese have made vigorous efforts to propagate the Chinese line within the Lao Communist movement. But they have refrained, it seems, from interfering in the organizational sphere. Although there are indications (such as the extension of the Chinese road network into adjacent areas of northern Laos) that Peking may wish to establish more direct influence over the PPL, for the moment at least it continues to respect North Vietnam's vested interests in Laos. So long as relations between Peking and Hanoi do not seriously deteriorate, their present division of labor in the Laos area is likely to continue.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communists maintain their Economic and Cultural Mission in Khang Khay, run a Sino-Lao Friendship School in NLHS territory, provide their Lao friends with a profusion of Chinese cultural exports (such as films, propaganda literature, and theatrical and opera troupes), and offer scholarships to Lao students for study in Mainland China. In exchange for this Chinese support (and also reflecting, no doubt, their own anti-American sentiments), the Lao Communists have not hesitated to congratulate Peking on its nuclear testing and on the "accomplishments of the Cultural Revolution"; otherwise, however, they have gone to great lengths to appear neutral

in the Sino-Soviet conflict. With respect to the Paris talks, they have followed the Hanoi line, which had the support of the Soviets but, initially at least, was opposed by Peking.

#### THE NATURE OF THE WAR

If the war in Laos seldom makes the headlines, it is not only because it is overshadowed by the more important events in Vietnam but also because the fighting in Laos rarely produces the dramatic engagements that attract the journalists' attention. In this relatively large but sparsely populated territory, operations are conducted mostly by small units, rarely bigger than company or at the most battalion size. Such units frequently move undisturbed through isolated villages in a no-man's-land where neither side is permanently in control.

As mentioned earlier, forces on each side hold enclaves within the area of the other, from which from time to time they venture forth on reconnaissance or hit-and-run operations. Curiously enough, terrorism is largely unknown in urban areas, and the LPLA generally refrains from attacking the towns under government control.\* The "nibbling" operations of the two opponents hardly change the outline of the political map, as the alternation of dry and wet seasons seem to offer certain advantages and opportunities to each side in turn. The wet season, as a rule, favors

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\*Early in 1969, however, the LPLA blew up an FAR ammunition dump a few miles outside Vientiane. This incident and subsequent similar ones may foreshadow a change of tactics.

the armed forces of the Royal Lao Government (commonly known as the FAR, as in "Forces Armées Royales"), whose small air fleet (C-47s and helicopters as well as light planes) provides mobility and allows it to strike at Communist outposts immobilized by the rains. During the dry season, the North Vietnamese and the LPLA normally turn the tables on their opponent and end up retaking the territory lost during the wet part of the year.\*

Although the fighting in Laos has not reached the grim proportions of the war in Vietnam, it has disrupted the lives of a significant segment of the population, particularly in the Communist and contested areas. In neighboring government-controlled regions one can see this reflected in the makeshift refugee settlements strung out along the roads, which testify to the painful dislocation suffered by these refugees. Many are tribal people who once inhabited the highlands and mountain valleys of eastern Laos and who have been forced out by the pressures of war -- primarily the bombing. Their number over the past few years has been placed at 250,000; recently, an

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\* While this alternation of FAR and LPLA initiative has generally been characteristic of the fighting in Laos, there have, of course, been exceptions to this rule. Also, the Communist forces on the whole had the initiative up to 1965, taking in the process much of the territory previously held by the Kong Le Neutralists. Then, from about 1965 to 1967, the FAR attempted to tie together areas difficult of access to the enemy (such as Operation Triangle in the Vang Vieng area and the Sedone Valley region). Since then, the initiative has again largely reverted to the LPLA.

official Lao report mentioned the astounding figure of 600,000.\*

The effect of the war on the country's economy, too, is far from negligible. The RLG maintains an army whose real strength is between 55,000 and 75,000 men, or probably as much as 3 per cent of the total population. This number, which would correspond to a six-million-man army in the United States, constitutes a heavy burden on a country that is particularly dependent on its labor force because of its primitive, largely agricultural economy. The manpower problem is even more severe in the Communist areas, which lack a sufficient pool of labor yet must maintain armed forces capable of holding their own against the FAR. Their attempt to fill the gaps through forcible conscription has intensified popular resistance and increased the flow of refugees and defectors to government-held areas. Another consequence has been the Communists' continuing need for Vietnamese military support.

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\* See White Book on the Violations of the Geneva Accords of 1962 by the Government of North Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos, Vientiane, 1968, p. 7.

VII. NORTH VIETNAMESE ADVICE AND SUPPORT

The North Vietnamese continue to play a substantial role in supporting the Communist cause in Laos. Their political and military advisory staffs are placed at key points throughout the Lao Communist political, administrative, and military system, and they also provide their Lao allies with training (both in Laos and in Vietnam), logistic support, medical and technical aid, and communications.

THE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ADVISERS: ORGANIZATION AND ROLE

Doan 959

The Vietnamese Doan (Group) 959 is the key instrument through which North Vietnam furnishes advice to the Lao leadership. Group 959, we discovered, had its historical precedent in the earlier, similar advisory organization labeled Doan 100.\* In addition to these principal channels for guiding their Lao comrades, the North Vietnamese have no doubt influenced the PPL through their constant and close contacts with Lao Communists in Hanoi. We know, for example, that the most prominent leader of the PPL, Kaysone, spent long periods in Hanoi and that he has returned there frequently. The same is true, if to a lesser degree, of most leading figures in the Lao Communist organization, and particularly of Nouhak, whose close ties to the

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\* See above, pp. 84-86.

Vietnamese Communists go back to the 1940s and whose influence is considered second only to that of Kaysone. There are thus ample opportunities for the North Vietnamese to exert influence over the PPL leadership even without their having to resort to such a formal disciplinary mechanism as the institution of dual party membership (although, as stated earlier, the existence of such a mechanism cannot be ruled out). Also, at the present level of military pressures from the FAR, the Lao Communists are heavily dependent on Vietnamese assistance of every kind.

The principal data concerning the role of Group 959 came to us from the former North Vietnamese adviser to an LPLA battalion, Senior Captain Mai Dai Hap (B-9), who served in northern Laos from 1964 until 1966, when he defected to the Royal Government.\* When Captain Hap was first assigned to Laos, he reported to the headquarters of Group 959, at Gia Lam (North Vietnam), just four miles outside Hanoi. According to Hap, Group 959 receives its orders from the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party (or one of its subcommittees charged with Lao affairs) and from the Commander-in-Chief of the North Vietnamese military forces. The function of Group 959 is to control North Vietnamese political and administrative operations in Laos and, particularly, to give political guidance to the Lao.\*\*

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\*For further information about Mai Dai Hap, and excerpts from his testimony, see Langer and Zasloff, The North Vietnamese Military Adviser.

\*\*Military matters are handled through a separate hierarchy, to be described later.



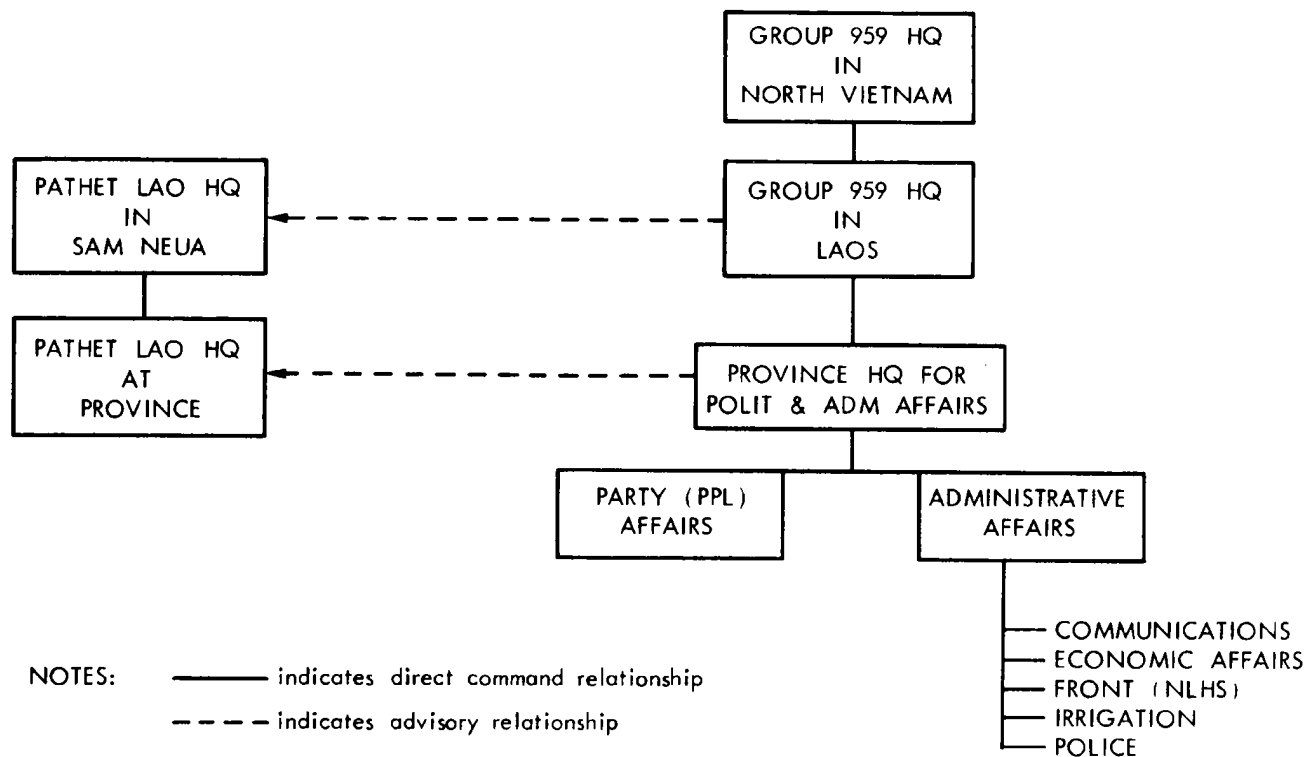
According to Captain Hap, approximately 50 persons were working at the Group 959 headquarters in North Vietnam in 1964. They were commanded by Nguyen Van Vinh, a member of the Committee of National Defense in the DRV Ministry of Defense. The advance command post of Group 959 was at Sam Neua, in Laos, where both the PPL leadership and the NLHS administration have their headquarters, which many of our Lao interviewees call the "Center." (Captain Hap had never visited Group 959's command post at Sam Neua and could not describe its membership, but several other North Vietnamese informants confirmed its existence, although, having been lower in rank than Hap, they were not fully familiar with its functions.)\*

Most of the information gathered from our interviews about the advisory and support operations that Group 959 directs concerns the province (khoueng) and district (muong) levels. Permanent advisory posts do not normally extend below the level of the province,\*\* though province advisers are responsible for the districts in their regions and visit them periodically. The NLHS administrative hierarchy is composed of dual echelons at every level. At the province level, for example, we find the regular administrative channel (Pok Khong Khoueng) and a smaller, more important political channel (Neo Khoueng). Vietnamese

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\* Chart II shows the organizational structure of Group 959.

\*\* Recently, there have been indications that in southern Laos NVN advisers are also found on the district level, but these are perhaps exceptional cases.



Group 959 Hq in North Vietnam was situated at Gia Lam, 4 kilometers from Hanoi. In 1964 it was commanded by Nguyen Van Vinh. Group 959 Hq in Laos was set up in Sam Neua, where it interacted with the NLHS Administration and Party as well as with the PPL. A Vietnamese advisory team headquarters was located at each of the NLHS provinces (khoueng). Ten to fifteen cadres were assigned to each province.

Chart II—Vietnamese advisory group, Doan 959

advisers are assigned principally at the NLHS level, where the important Lao cadres are members of the ruling party, the PPL. Among the important tasks of the Vietnamese advisers, almost all of whom are members of the Lao Dong Party, is the guidance they provide to PPL members in their decision-making roles. Administrative advisers give technical assistance in such fields as policy formulation, communications, economic affairs, and irrigation.

A former NLHS district chief, or Chao Muong (A-16), in an NLHS-controlled region of Luang Prabang Province told us of the work of four Vietnamese advisers who were stationed at the Neo Khoueng office there. He pointed out that when difficult problems arose the Lao cadres asked their advisers for opinions, which were invariably accepted because of the stature of the Vietnamese. To make the point, he recounted the following incident:

For instance, there was an order from the Center that one ton of rice had to be conscripted from the people in a certain village. Before the conscription was made, members of the Pok Khong Khoueng and the Neo Khoueng held a meeting to discuss the matter. The Chao Khoueng, who realized that the village was small and the people could not afford to give that much rice, objected to the order. A long discussion followed. During the discussion, the Vietnamese advisers generally kept quiet. They did not say anything until they were called upon. Then, the Vietnamese advisers suggested that the Chao Khoueng reduce the amount of rice to the quantity he believed the people could afford to give, and told both the Chao Khoueng and the Neo Khoueng to submit a report of this decision to the Center. Decisions of the Vietnamese advisers were, as a rule, approved by the Center, even if they did not conform to previous orders.

Mai Dai Hap said there were ten to fifteen Vietnamese advisers working on the civilian side in Houa Khong (NLHS Nam Tha) Province. The triple function of these cadres was frequently designated by the slogan "Dan Chinh Dang." "Dan" (Vietnamese for "population," meaning mass organization) referred to the advisers' role in helping organize the population into groups of young men, young women, farmers, older women, and other mass organizations as members of the NLHS. "Chinh" (administrative powers) referred to technical assistance to the NLHS administration. "Dang" (Party) meant the advisory effort to the People's Party of Laos (PPL).

Unfortunately, we have little firsthand information about the Vietnamese advisory process at the Center. However, from the data that we have assembled it seems certain that Vietnamese advisers work closely with the policy-making officials of the PPL, and, undoubtedly, there are advisers at the political level in Sam Neua, just as there are in the provinces, as well as advisers assigned to the key administrative posts. Throughout the system -- at least to the province level, and in some cases down to the district level -- the Vietnamese provide experienced, disciplined personnel who add competence to the operations of their Lao associates. We have found that these Vietnamese advisers are widely respected by the Lao for their dedication to duty. By their example, by on-the-job training, and by guidance, generally tactful, they goad the less vigorous Lao into better performance. They frequently act as arbiters of internal disputes within the Lao organization. And they are particularly important in directing essential resources from the DRV to the proper channels in Laos.

The Military Advisory Effort\*

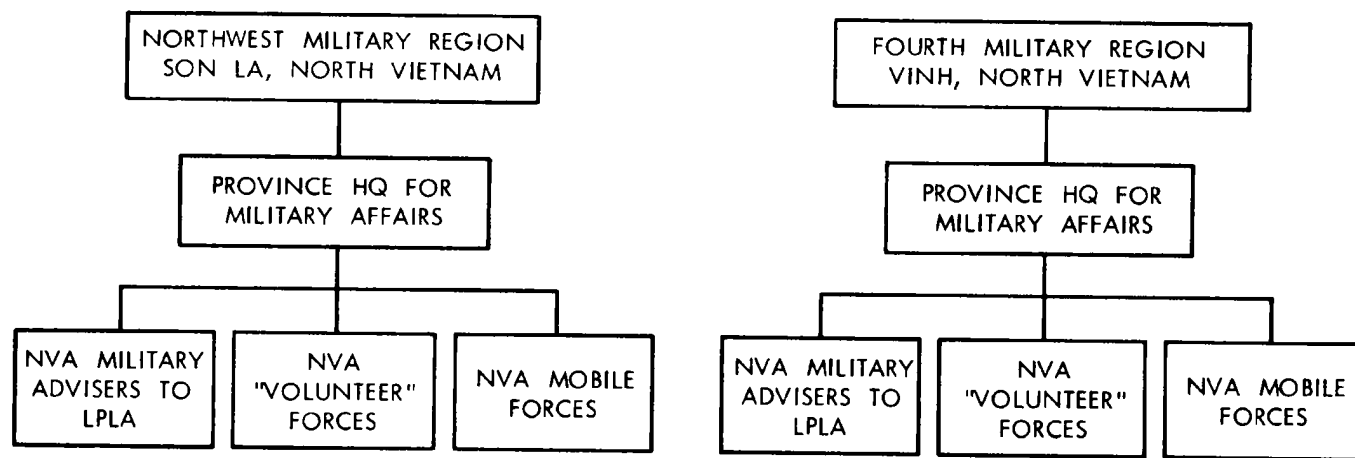
The military advisory effort is handled through a separate North Vietnamese hierarchy. The Northwest Military Region, at Son La in North Vietnam, directs all North Vietnamese military operations in the northern provinces of Laos, including the advisers, and the Fourth Military Region, at Vinh, has charge of operations in the central and southern provinces. Each NLHS province has its Vietnamese military mission, whose chief is located at the LPLA province headquarters and is responsible for commanding the Vietnamese military advisers assigned to LPLA units within the province, for advising the Lao provincial authorities on military matters, and for advising the Vietnamese military units assigned to the province. These units normally consist of two or three companies of 100 to 125 men each (they are called "volunteer forces" for reasons of morale) and of mobile forces assigned from North Vietnam and transferred throughout Laos, as required.\*\*

Normally, each LPLA battalion is assigned one military and one political adviser. The two have a staff of from three to five men, all of whom serve at the battalion headquarters. Formerly, organized battalions also had advisers at the company level, but these were discontinued in 1966 for reasons that are not entirely clear. Very likely, the

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\* Much of the information for this section is drawn from interviews with and written memoirs of two former North Vietnamese military advisers in the NLHS Province of Nam Tha: Mai Dai Hap (B-9) and Ngo Van Dam (B-10).

\*\* Chart III, which follows, shows the NVA command structure for military activities in Laos.



Notes:

The Northwest Military Region (commanded by Colonel Vu-Lap, who replaced Brig. General Bong-Giang in 1964) controlled NVA activities in the 6 (NLHS) provinces of northern Laos, and the Fourth Military Region controlled NVA activities in the 6 (NLHS) provinces of central and southern Laos. Each province headquarters for military affairs normally commanded the three components shown above: (1) advisers to LPLA; (2) "volunteer" forces, 2 or 3 companies of 100 to 125 men; (3) mobile forces sent from North Vietnam, as required.

Chart III—NVA command structure for military activities in Laos

DRV, under growing pressure for trained military personnel, did not wish to use the experienced officers necessary for advisory duty in Laos at the company level, and relied upon the battalion advisers, as one of the latter told us, to exert their influence on the subordinate companies. However, advisers to LPLA "independent" (ekalat) companies (that is, companies operating at the district level which are not part of an organized battalion) have been continued.

At least once a month, the key Vietnamese officers at all levels of the LPLA hierarchy report to the Military Region Headquarters in North Vietnam on the military situation in their province, usually by 15 watt radio. Every three months, they send a broader summary of general conditions. In unusual circumstances, they may ignore this schedule and consult headquarters immediately for advice or action. The Military Region Headquarters also sends officers into Laos to inspect the work of its representatives. In addition, the advisers are called back from time to time, generally once yearly, for a conference to exchange views and to receive instructions about future plans.

Mai Dai Hap attended such a convocation at Son La in September 1966. It was presided over by Colonel Vu Lap, then commander of Northwest Military Region, and attended by Deputy Political Commissar Colonel Le Hien, Chief of Staff Senior Colonel Thang Binh, and about 200 other officers. During the five-day meeting there was a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the past advisory performance in Laos, and the superior officers of the Military Region on this occasion unfolded a plan of activity for the dry season of 1966-1967, described as follows by Captain Hap:

The goals for the Vietnamese and Lao were laid out. We were to hold on to the zones already liberated, maintain control of the population there . . . organize and consolidate the popular guerrilla forces; develop secret political and military bases; and improve the strength of existing military units. . . . The aim of the meeting was to assess our past aid operations in Laos and project future plans for 1966-1967.

As Hap learned in discussions with the advisers he met at the Son La conference, his own advisory team to the 408th PL Battalion in (NLHS) Nam Tha Province was characteristic of North Vietnamese advisory operations throughout the provinces. His five-man team, which advised a battalion made up of 147 Lao Theung (highlanders) and 6 Lao Loum (lowlanders), was composed of the military adviser (himself), a political adviser, a logistics officer, a coder and decoder, and a radio operator. The advisers had received no special training for Laos prior to their assignment, but the two chief advisers, military and political, were captains, that is to say, experienced officers, who had served since Viet Minh days and, as devoted Lao Dong Party members, were expected to adapt themselves to their new situation. Hap did not speak Lao before going to Laos, but he learned rapidly. (Both Vietnamese and Lao, though they have few cognates, are tonal languages with similar word order.) Hap maintained that the command made no special effort to send Vietnamese of minority groups as advisers to Laos. Although he pointed out that two officers on the province advisory staff were of the Tho minority, he attributed their presence, and that of some 35 Vietnamese Black Tai in the NVA transport company operating in the



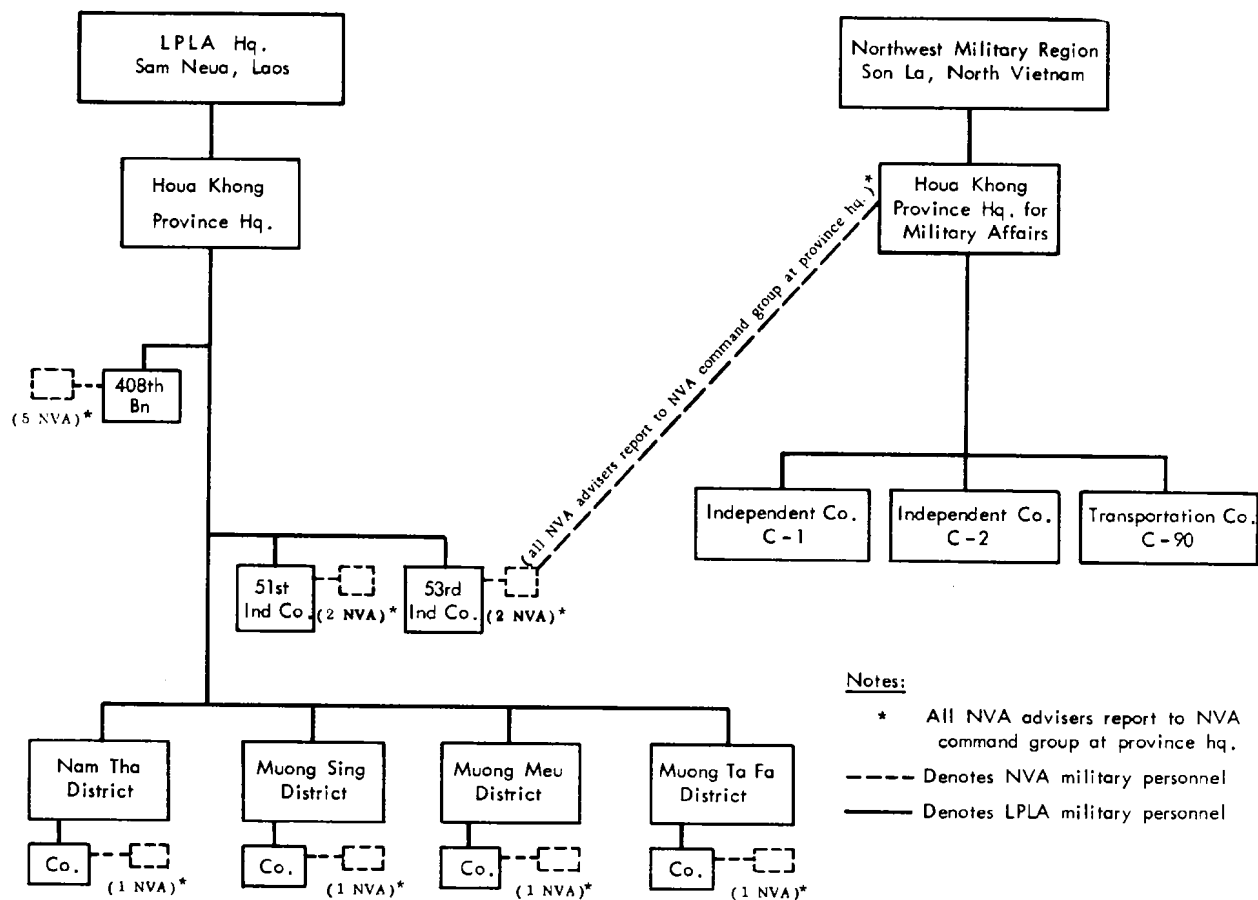
region, to the large minority population in the Northwest Military Region in Vietnam, some of whom would normally be assigned to Laos. Hap's description of both the North Vietnamese and the LPLA organization and advisory structure in Nam Tha Province is reproduced in Chart IV.

North Vietnamese policy in Nam Tha Province was discussed informally when the military and political cadres met from time to time, but a formal mechanism called a "command" committee and composed of three military officers and three political cadres coordinated the Vietnamese political and military effort in the province. Chart V shows the organization of these committees.

The principal aim of the Vietnamese advisory effort in Laos, both military and political, is to improve the effectiveness of Lao operations. Although the Vietnamese try to respect Lao sensibilities, they are directed not simply to make friends for the DRV but to get the job done. The differences in the two cultures make it improbable that the North Vietnamese will ever be satisfied with the performance of their Lao allies.\* The more easygoing Lao, and the diverse highland-tribal minorities, are unlikely to adopt the rigorous habits of their Communist neighbors. They look upon the puritanism of the Vietnamese cadres with respectful amazement, but our Lao interviewees note that it would be difficult for Lao soldiers to emulate. Most of the control mechanisms used by the Vietnamese have been

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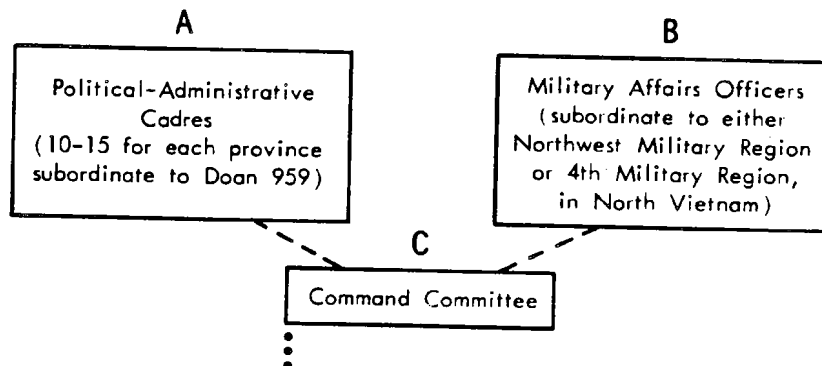
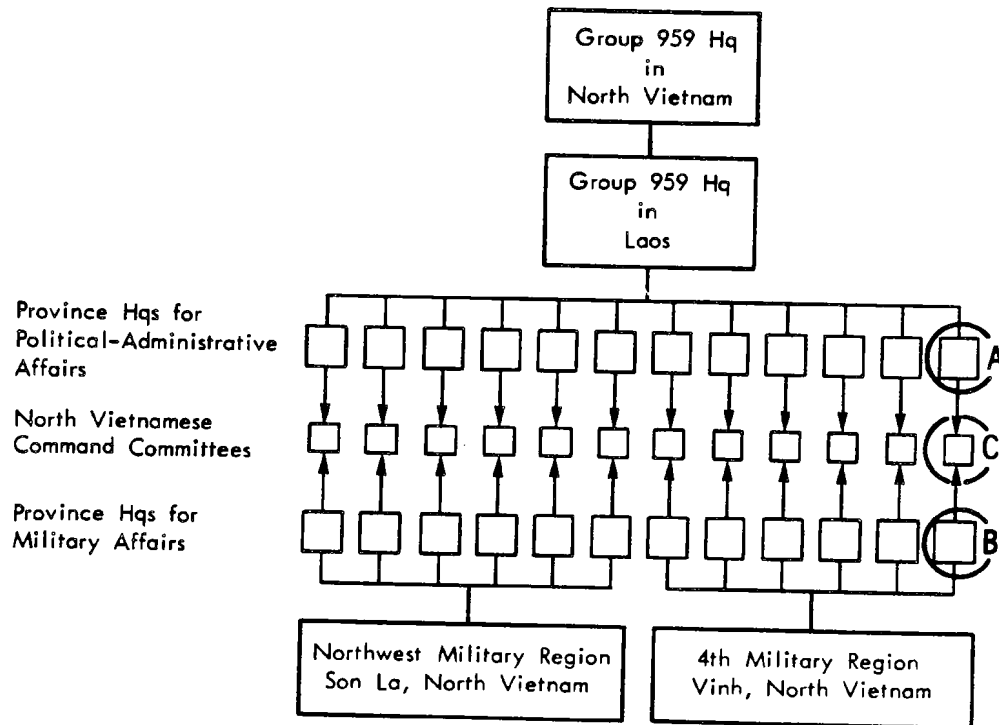
\* See Langer and Zasloff, The North Vietnamese Military Adviser in Laos, for Mai Dai Hap's dissatisfaction with the LPLA troops he advised. Another Vietnamese adviser, a medical technician (B-10), revealed similar attitudes.



The Northwest Military Region Hq (on right side of Chart), at Son La, North Vietnam, commanded all NVA military activities in the six northern (NLHS) provinces of Laos, including Houa Khong (NLHS Nam Tha) Province. There was an NVA province command post, located in a forest in Nam Tha town, with 30 to 35 men. The headquarters consisted of a command group, directed by a military officer and a political officer, a security section, and a communications unit which had a 15 watt Chinese radio. Three NVA companies were under the command of this group: C-1 and C-2, "independent" companies of "volunteers" of 125 men each; and C-90, a transport company of 47 men (3/4 Black Thai Vietnamese and 1/4 lowland Vietnamese). The province command group also gave instructions to the NVA military personnel assigned to LPLA units.

The LPLA headquarters at Sam Neua, Laos, commanded military activities in all twelve (NLHS) provinces, including Houa Khong (NLHS Nam Tha) Province. Assigned to the 408th Battalion (147 Lao Theung, 6 Lao Loum) was a Vietnamese advisory team of 5 men (including Capt. Mai Dai Hap, source for Chart). Also under provincial military command were two "independent" (ekalat) companies, the 51st, with 70 men (all Lao Theung), and the 53rd, with 50 men (all Lao Theung). Both independent companies were assigned 2 NVA advisers, one military and one political, who were lieutenants. Each of the four districts had a company whose strength varied from 20 to 80 men, and was composed of the local ethnic group (Black Thai, Lu, Ko), each with one NVA adviser. All NVA advisers to LPLA units were responsible to the NVA command group at province headquarters.

Chart IV—LPLA and NVA military command structure in Houa Khong  
(NLHS Nam Tha) Province



Normally composed of three military officers at province-level assignment, and three province-level political-administrative cadres. Met intermittently, between once monthly and tri-monthly, though more frequently in extraordinary circumstances. A military officer generally presided. The Committee coordinated all Vietnamese activity in the province and determined overall policy. There was a command committee in each of the twelve (NLHS) provinces of Laos.

Chart V—North Vietnamese command committees at province level

introduced into the Lao system, but they function differently there. For example, the self-criticism sessions of the Lao Communists seem slovenly and lackadaisical to the Vietnamese. Even though the Lao do not meet the Vietnamese standards of performance, there is no doubt that they operate a good deal more effectively than they would without the Vietnamese presence.

The Vietnamese military adviser plays an important role in the planning of LPLA operations. After making intelligence estimates, assessing logistic needs, and coordinating his projections with Vietnamese units in the area, he initiates campaign plans for his Lao unit. He then discusses these plans with the Lao officers -- careful to avoid offending their sense of authority -- and the officers in turn communicate the decisions to lower echelons. Political and administrative advisers, too, provide inspiration for program plans that are later "ratified" by their Lao counterparts. According to Mai Dai Hap, "if the North Vietnamese advisory machinery were to get stuck, the Pathet Lao machinery would be paralyzed."

It has been charged that the DRV is more interested in ultimately absorbing the territory of its Lao allies than in simply strengthening the viability of their operations. We shall touch on this important question in the final section of this study. Suffice it to point out here that, whatever the future aims of the DRV in regard to Laos, the maintenance of its advisory system, with access to and influence in all key posts, certainly helps to keep Vietnamese Communist options open for a variety of choices.

### Training

To provide training, both in North Vietnam and by advisers in Laos, has been an important contribution of the DRV to the strength of the Lao Communist movement. Its long-range effect is likely to make itself felt increasingly in the policies, organization, and personnel of the Communist zone in Laos.

Before 1954, the Viet Minh helped recruit and train the "seed" cadres -- that is, the older generation of the Lao Communist movement, who are now in the important civil and military posts -- and the Vietnamese style of the Lao Communist organization and operations reveals the significant impact of that training. A second generation was trained from 1954 to 1962 at such schools as Son Tay and Dong Hoi in North Vietnam, and with the help of Vietnamese advisers at the Khommadam School for officers and at other training facilities in Laos. The Vietnamese advisory staff of the Khommadam School developed the curriculum and provided the basic lesson plans in both military and political subjects for that institution, which has produced the majority of the LPLA officers.

From 1959 to 1962, the DRV reorganized and trained the two battalions that had fled Laos after the failure of integration, and subsequently moved them back into Laos to serve as encadrement for the Communist forces there, which were expanding as a result of active recruiting by the Lao Communists and their Vietnamese advisers. Since the 1962 Geneva Accords, the North Vietnamese have continued to provide in their own country military, political, and technical-specialist training in a variety of fields to

selected Lao candidates, particularly young officers, teaching them skills for which Lao Communist schools do not have adequate resources.

Among those we interviewed, for example, was a former 2nd Lieutenant (A-31), who had been recruited by the Communists in 1961 from his home in Pakse, one of a group of 300 Lao to be sent to Dong Hoi, North Vietnam, for a month-and-a-half of political and military training; he was then selected, with 16 others from his group, to attend the Thai Nguyen Technical School. There, from November 1961 to November 1963, a class of 165 students, including Meo, Kha, and lowland Lao from fourteen Lao provinces, were taught auto mechanics, weapons repair, and electrical generator maintenance. (Another such cycle began as soon as this group had graduated.) The instructors were Vietnamese, and they used as interpreters two Vietnamese from Northeast Thailand, where a Thai dialect almost identical with Lao is spoken. Another of our informants, the medical chief of the NLHS Province of Attapeu (A-10), had received five years of medical training (1959-1964) at Ha Dong, about 7 miles from Hanoi, together with 80 other Lao and 30 Vietnamese. One of the instructors was a Vietnamese who had lived in Northeast Thailand and spoke Lao, and there were also some Russian and Chinese faculty. Lectures were translated into Lao during the first six months, after which the students were expected to understand Vietnamese.

Training schools in Vietnam had a great impact both in shaping the attitudes and in developing the military skills of young Lao recruits. This was perceptible, for instance, in our discussion with a former LPLA captain (A-20), who had gone through three cycles of training in

North Vietnam. In 1954, he was with a group of 200 youths aged 13 to 20, and including both lowland and highland Lao from Sam Neua, Phong Saly, and Luang Prabang provinces, who attended a six-month basic training program at Dien Bien Phu. He told us that, before this training, he and 60 other youths in his unit had grown homesick and discontent with the harsh life they had already endured for six months, and they had threatened to quit the army. However, "after the training, I was no longer lonely and I didn't want to go back home any more." Having proved himself a good soldier during the next couple of years, he was selected for training at a school for military cadets near Dien Bien Phu, along with a group of fewer than 100, ranging in age from 15 to 19. The training included political indoctrination, combat tactics and other military subjects, and a course in leadership. As in his earlier course, the instructors were Lao who gave lessons prepared by their Vietnamese advisers. In December 1961, the informant was sent to North Vietnam once again, this time to attend an advanced military course at Son Tay. The class was composed of 200 officers up to the rank of captain, and the five instructors, all Vietnamese, used three interpreters.

In each of these three training cycles, the informant's instructors, in keeping with Vietnamese Communist practice, placed great emphasis upon political indoctrination. To judge by his and the experience of other Vietnam-trained Lao we interviewed, the indoctrination provided by the Vietnamese is well suited to Lao conditions: It is unsophisticated and appeals primarily to the emotions of the Lao youth. Its political orientation is toward Maoism

rather than a Soviet-style Marxism or "revisionism." The former LPLA captain recounted the lessons he learned, reiterating the theme we had heard from many others:

I was repeatedly told that I was the owner of Laos. Laos is a beautiful country, with an abundance of rivers and streams and natural resources. The Lao people could not do anything to use these resources because of the aggression and oppression of foreign countries. The French, for instance, had ruled Laos for more than sixty years. As the owner of the country and a member of the Issara, I should fight for freedom. Members of the Issara should never surrender.

They told us that now the principal enemy of the Lao people is the American imperialists. They said that the French had already withdrawn from Laos; and that the Americans seized the opportunity to dominate Laos by using Katay Sasorith as their tool. At that time there were no American troops in Laos -- but later on the Lao troops would be commanded by Americans. From squad and platoon leader up to the commander in chief would be Americans. And so the country would be under the rule of the American imperialists.

Almost unanimously, interviewees who had received training in North Vietnam stated that they had found these political lessons credible and impressive. Since a large percentage of the Lao who attend schools in North Vietnam are or will become officers in the LPLA, the Vietnamese mark on their thinking is all the more significant.\* Also,

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\* Other interviews showing the impact of North Vietnamese training were those with two LPLA officers (A-1 and A-17) who in 1963 received training, along with 100 other Lao up to the rank of captain, 7 miles outside of Hanoi.



the determined efforts of experienced NVA advisers raise the level of training in Laos, and thereby contribute to the improvement of military skills, discipline, and "revolutionary consciousness."

The support given to the Lao Communists through North Vietnamese training points to the larger issue of education in general. We did not gather conclusive data on the Lao studying in North Vietnam -- except for the military trainees -- nor on the Vietnamese impact upon the educational system in Laos. On the basis of information gleaned from interviews and documents, however, we are certain that a much smaller number of students receive scholarships to study in Communist China and the Soviet Union, and even fewer in the East European countries, and that the major educational opportunities for the promising young Lao Communists continue to be in North Vietnam.

It is too early to judge the impact of this Vietnamese education on the men who one day will constitute the Communist Lao elite. Vietnam-trained Lao to whom we have talked clearly appreciate their own opportunity for gaining an education. Though some secondary schools have recently been established in the Communist part of Laos -- there are at this point no institutions of higher learning -- it seems likely that for some time to come the young Lao in that zone will continue to depend on the North Vietnamese for much secondary and most technical training. As for who will be chosen, we have not thus far learned much about the role of the North Vietnamese in selecting Lao youths for education. Nor do we know the ethnic distribution of those selected, an important question for the future leadership of Laos.

Medical and Other Technical Aid

From interviews with former residents of the Communist zone of Laos and a variety of eyewitness reports that have appeared in the Soviet, French, East European, and Japanese press, we know that a beginning has been made in developing indigenous technical skills. Some spinneries and other simple production facilities have been established in recent years (several of them in caves, to avoid bomb damage). These modest facilities are apparently staffed largely, perhaps even wholly, by Lao, some of whom have undergone training in North Vietnam. But there remains a serious shortage of many essentials of civilian life, and most of these still come in by road from North Vietnam.

Particularly valuable is the North Vietnamese contribution to Communist Laos in the field of medicine. As mentioned earlier, a few able Lao students are regularly chosen to study medicine in the DRV. Medical supplies, largely of Soviet and Chinese manufacture, are provided by North Vietnam to the medical installations in Laos.\* The North Vietnamese have been instrumental in setting up a simple medical training school in Sam Neua Province, for which they furnish the key training staff. Other Vietnamese medical personnel not only care for the Vietnamese troops and advisers in Laos and treat some Lao, but they also teach Lao nurses.

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\*Interview with a former LPLA doctor (A-10), who had been chief of Attapeu Hospital.

A Vietnamese medical technician (B-10),\* who had served in (NLHS) Nam Tha Province, told us that in March 1967 he helped to set up a course that would graduate 25 Lao nurses every three months, and a more advanced program designed to turn out 40 nurses in six months. The teaching staff for these training programs was Lao, but the materials and methods were prepared by Vietnamese. At the more sophisticated medical installation at Muong Sai, the instructors are all Vietnamese; they teach in Lao, using Vietnamese only for technical terms. A male nurse (A-2), who from 1963 to 1966 worked in the hospital at Khang Khay that served the Neutralist faction of Colonel Deuane, told us that the medical personnel there, too, included Vietnamese.

#### Logistic Support

The Communist areas of Laos are dependent upon the DRV for many of the supplies which their own primitive economy does not produce, and they rely heavily upon the North Vietnamese for management of their logistic apparatus. It appears that the North Vietnamese have assumed responsibility for supplying the sector east of a line that might be drawn from the Nam Nu River to Muong Si, through the middle of Luang Prabang Province. The Communist Chinese supply the western sector, but their logistical support is administered through North Vietnamese channels. Mai Dai Hap (B-9) unraveled for us the complicated procedure by which

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\*Incidentally, this technician married a Lao nurse who worked at one of the installations he advised, and together they fled to the RLG side.

this logistical operation is apparently conducted in (NLHS) Nam Tha Province,\* in the Chinese supply sector, and this process is likely to be much the same in Phong Saly and in the northern, Communist-held sector of Luang Prabang Province that Lao Communist broadcasts often refer to as Udomsay.

In other parts of the Communist zone of Laos, the logistic operations involve directly only the DRV and the Lao. The authorities of both in each province are required yearly to submit, through their own channels, a list of their supply needs to the appropriate headquarters. Vietnamese requisitions go to the Northwest Military Region at Son La, North Vietnam, from where they are forwarded to the central government. The Lao send their requisitions to the Center, in Sam Neua, where the requests are combined in a total supply list, which is then transmitted to the DRV central government. Having thus received both sets of requisitions, Hanoi then presents the Chinese government with a request for supplies for the western sector of Laos. Once the Chinese have determined the kinds and quantities of supplies they are willing to provide, they inform Hanoi, which, in turn, notifies the headquarters at Son La and Sam Neua.

Next, Vietnamese and Lao representatives are ordered to Kunming, Yunnan Province (China), to receive the supplies and establish a schedule for transporting them to Laos. To handle the North Vietnamese portion, NVA Company 90, assisted by civilian labor, will go to the Sino-Lao

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\* Another Vietnamese defector (B-10) from Nam Tha Province confirmed the general pattern of this logistic flow.

border near Muong Sing to transport the supplies to depots in the town of Nam Tha, from which further distribution is then made to Vietnamese units in the province. Then supplies will include arms and ammunition, basic staples (such as canned meat and fish, fish sauce, sugar, milk, cigarettes, soap, and toothpaste), as well as rainproof clothing, kitchenware, sandals and shoes, blankets, and mosquito nets.

NLHS agents receive their goods at the Chinese frontier and store them in warehouses on the Lao side of the border, from where Lao civilians later transport them to other points. Besides the kind of items furnished to the Vietnamese, the Lao also receive groceries, agricultural tools, cloth, and other merchandise, to be sold by the NLHS authorities to the civilian population. Proceeds from these sales, according to Hap, are used to defray NLHS administrative expenses in the province.

### Propaganda

The DRV provides important support to Communist propaganda efforts in Laos. North Vietnamese advisers, whose doctrine places great emphasis on winning over the population, help train Lao propaganda agents and guide the NLHS authorities in developing propaganda activities. Occasionally, they even assign Vietnamese -- especially members of ethnic minority groups that are similar to those in Laos -- directly to propaganda duty on behalf of the Lao Communists. One such example was a Vietnamese Meo, a defector (B-19), who had been trained in propaganda for two months and assigned, in early 1966, to work among the Meo in northeastern Laos. In his interview with us he described the activities of the soldiers who had trained with him:

The Meo would propagandize in the Meo villages and the Vietnamese in the Lao villages. Some of the Vietnamese could speak Lao since they came from areas near the Lao-Vietnam border, and some who were Black Tai or White Tai could speak Lao.

Of his own duties he said:

I seldom met NLHS officials in the villages where I was. When I finished with my mission, I would report to the battalion commander who would take care of everything. I guess he had contacts with the civilian officials. Our battalion worked under the authority of the LPLA forces. Individually, we had no contact with them. But when, say, they needed some propaganda in a village, my battalion commander would receive orders from LPLA headquarters; then he would assign us to carry out some propaganda.

#### Other Support Activities

There are a great many Vietnamese support activities, in addition to those already discussed, that will not be treated in detail here. Some derive from the presence of Vietnamese troop units and include the maintenance of roads by Vietnamese engineers, transportation assistance by Vietnamese military vehicles, and artillery and antiaircraft support from NVA units. A variety of technical assistance, both civilian and military, is provided by Vietnamese specialists. Some of this is furnished by the advisory teams. Mai Dai Hap reported, for example, that the Lao commander in his military unit used the Vietnamese communication channels to maintain contact with his superior headquarters, as the Lao communications were unreliable. In short, the Vietnamese make an effort to give, within the

limits of their resources, whatever assistance is required to keep the Lao Communist system operating.

HOW LAO AND VIETNAMESE SEE EACH OTHER

One cannot study the role of the North Vietnamese in Laos without being impressed by their effective influence on the Lao. In view of Lao nationalist sensibilities about domination by North Vietnam, one would expect considerable tension between the Lao and their Vietnamese mentors. And our interviews did indeed turn up some cases of resentment, which we shall describe; but we were struck by how successful the Vietnamese were in keeping such resentment at a minimum.

Even Lao defectors who denounced the political role of the Vietnamese in Laos admitted that the Vietnamese advisers got on well with their Lao counterparts. Most informants agreed that the Vietnamese were diplomatic in their dealings, making suggestions rather than demands, keeping their presence and their role discreet, and paying attention to the particular sensitivities of the local authorities they advised. Vietnamese cadres were always careful to work through the proper Lao or Vietnamese channels. For example, a Vietnamese adviser who wished to pursue a certain policy but who found it impolitic to approach his Lao counterpart directly might communicate through Vietnamese channels to his own superior, requesting that the appropriate Lao commander order his subordinate to carry out the desired policy.

Vietnamese military advisers live at the same level as the Lao personnel they advise, wear the same clothes, eat

the same food, and share their hardships. A former LPLA junior officer (A-31) spoke frankly about the respect that the Vietnamese advisers had gained among the Lao troops:

The troops in Laos very much respected the Vietnamese advisers. They tried to give them good food, but the Vietnamese advisers wouldn't accept the food. They ate the same food as the soldiers, and stayed with them. The Lao officers, and some soldiers, seemed to be very grateful for their assistance.

In regard to the Vietnamese troops in Laos, to be discussed in the next chapter, our interviews suggest that there is almost unanimous respect in the LPLA ranks for their fighting ability. They are regarded as well trained, unusually well disciplined, militarily competent, and possessed of high morale. One former Lao officer (A-21), who had served in southern Laos, where he had had frequent contact with Vietnamese troops, commented on their quality:

During our fighting together, I can say that the Vietnamese troops had higher morale than the Lao. The Vietnamese were prepared to sacrifice their lives for their duty. They often said that they preferred to die rather than stay alive, since death would be the end of their fighting duties. They have higher morale because the Vietnamese officers are well-trained. They fight with greater devotion, never complaining about their problems.

Another former LPLA officer (A-20), who also had been engaged in joint operations with the Vietnamese over a period of several years, was questioned about his reaction to the entry of the Vietnamese into an engagement in Sam Neua, in 1961. He said:



We fought together -- shoulder to shoulder. I didn't have anything more than a feeling of relief that the Vietnamese had come to our assistance during this attack (in Sam Neua). Once the Vietnamese were able to capture their objective, the Lao would not have to fight for that position.

As regards the relations of the Vietnamese with local civilians, our research indicates that the Lao concerned find them generally satisfactory. Vietnamese troops are kept clear of the Lao population centers, generally bivouacking in sparsely settled areas. Where the troops do have contact with the local people, they appear to be well-behaved. One former Lao soldier (A-4), who had grown up in Vietnam and had served with the Vietnamese forces in Laos before joining an LPLA unit, made the following observations:

The Vietnamese military dealt with the Lao civilian population in a very nice way. They never took anything free of charge. If they wanted something, they bartered.

They don't drink, and women are against regulations. With Lao soldiers, it's different.

Several other Lao defectors confirmed the observation that the North Vietnamese generally behaved better toward the local inhabitants than did the Lao soldiers. LPLA troops were less disciplined than the rigidly controlled Vietnamese and frequently helped themselves to local products (such as chickens and fruit) as well as girls. Punishment is severe for any Vietnamese soldier who chases the local girls, while for the Lao troops, though the rules are similar, the enforcement of discipline is much more lax.

The only ones to express resentment toward the Vietnamese were defectors who had disliked their interference in

Lao matters. Even some of those who were grateful to the Vietnamese for supporting Lao independence found the continuing Vietnamese involvement in local Lao affairs intolerable. A former district chief (chao muong) (A-16) told us that, in 1953, he had been convinced that the Vietnamese were only helping the Lao in their struggle and that "once the Lao were free, the Vietnamese would return to Vietnam." He changed his mind, however, in 1963, when he became chao muong and could observe that they were still interfering: "There were Vietnamese advisers in the province, and every decision was made by them," he complained. The Lao physician mentioned earlier (A-10), even though he was indebted to the Vietnamese for his medical education, expressed animosity toward the interfering Vietnamese major who had been his adviser. The officer (A-21) whom we quoted as admiring Vietnamese troop morale said that he defected because of his opposition to the pervasive Vietnamese domination of Lao affairs, and particularly because he resented the Vietnamese attempt to influence his own decisions. Still another defector (A-17), who was appreciative of his training in North Vietnam, intensely disliked the surveillance by his Vietnamese adviser to which he was subjected in his post as chief of an LPLA quartermaster unit. We do not have sufficient data to judge how widespread and intense this discontent with the Vietnamese presence is. We suspect that, despite some resentment among the Lao, the problem is not as yet a serious threat to the relationship of the two allies.

Captain Mai Dai Hap (B-9) gave us an insight into how at least one Vietnamese adviser saw the Lao ally, and the problems he encountered were reminiscent of those often

described by American military advisers in South Vietnam. Many of his observations, moreover, were confirmed by the Vietnamese medical technician (B-10) who had served as adviser to the Lao medical services in the same province. Hap complained that the LPLA leadership was poor, troop discipline shamefully inadequate, and morale low. Whenever Lao and Vietnamese went into battle together, the burden of the assault always fell upon the Vietnamese. In Hap's comparisons the Vietnamese military forces invariably were far superior to the Lao, as in the following characteristic judgment:

The Vietnamese are disciplined and well organized. The Lao are not. Sometimes the Lao troops will say frankly that they want to defect or that they don't want to work. Their chiefs will often just listen and smile. If that happened in a Vietnamese unit -- watch out. If there were a Vietnamese unit operating in Laos, and someone said he wanted to defect, a meeting would be called immediately. The person who said this would have to explain himself. It would be dealt with either at the platoon or company, or battalion level, as the case demanded. It might even call for the person being repatriated to NVN and appearing before a military tribunal. But in the Pathet Lao, a cadre who would discipline such a man would have to fear being shot, either by the man or by another soldier in the unit. At best, the cadre would fear upsetting the men in his unit if he tried to enforce such discipline. If you sent a soldier back to his home village in Laos, the people would rejoice. They would say that it's just fine; he has been liberated from the army. In North Vietnam, by contrast, the family would lose face.

Captain Hap recalled that, when the Soviet and Communist Chinese advisers had assisted the Viet Minh in their

struggle against the French, they had provided only "general advice" while "we, the Viet Minh soldiers, devised the plans and programs. The Vietnamese are intelligent, and we handled our own decisions. But with the Lao, you must tell them everything . . . even what to do about rusty cartridges." Hap believed that the Lao troops depended on their Vietnamese advisers for their continued operation. "If the Vietnamese went home," he contended, "the Lao wouldn't know what to do." He disclosed that Vietnamese officers were disdainful of the Lao officers, though they hid their disdain. "They mocked the Lao officers, who often carried their pistols in a holster far down on their hips, with a swaggering walk." Hap believed that the LPLA soldiers respected the Vietnamese advisers more than they did their own officers. This was indirectly confirmed by some of our interviews with defectors from the LPLA, who stated that Lao officers at times used this respect for the Vietnamese advisers to tighten discipline among their Lao subordinates.

There are some indications, however, that the young Vietnam-trained Lao, who are returning to Laos in increasing numbers, are a tougher, "Vietnamized" breed. As they begin to replace the more typical Lao throughout the military, political, and administrative structure of the Communist zone of Laos, the character of its regime is likely to undergo a change, particularly at the upper levels of the hierarchy.

## VIII. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY PRESENCE

### SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION

An estimated 40,000 North Vietnamese military personnel now serve in Laos.\* Of these, some 25,000 operate the infiltration system over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which runs through the southern panhandle of Laos to South Vietnam. This figure includes service units such as engineers who maintain the Trail, labor battalions who perform coolie functions, and security forces; it does not include the thousands of military personnel who regularly hike through the Trail on their way from North to South Vietnam. The remaining 15,000 can be subdivided into three components: the advisers to the LPLA forces (approximately 700 men); mobile units, as required; and NVA troop units assigned to the several provinces.\*\*

NVA units assigned to a province often undertake joint operations with the area's LPLA forces.\*\*\* While there is

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\*This figure is frequently cited by both RLG and U.S. sources. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, speaking to the Lao National Assembly on May 30, 1968, said that the figure included 57 North Vietnamese army combat battalions. (The Washington Post, May 31, 1968.) Ambassador W. Averell Harriman cited these same figures at the June 5, 1968, session of official conversations between the United States and North Vietnam. (See U.S. Department of State, For the Press, No. 131, June 5, 1968.) A slightly higher figure of 45,000 was being mentioned in late 1968. (See The New York Times, November 13, 1968.)

\*\*See Charts II, III, IV, and V, pp. 144, 148, 152, and 153, respectively.

\*\*\*The NVA units that frequently operate with LPLA forces are sometimes referred to as "mixed" NVA LPLA units; their troop strength is estimated to be 7000.

interaction between the Lao and the Vietnamese officers at the command level in such cases, the troops serve in their own units, obey their own officers, and sleep, eat and fight separately. Technically, therefore, the Lao do not serve within Vietnamese units, nor do the Vietnamese serve as "encadrement" for the LPLA, except when they are temporarily called upon to act as guides and local support personnel. Since, however, Vietnamese advisory personnel are assigned as low as at company level (in the so-called "independent companies"), their influence goes well beyond that of ordinary "military advisers." Moreover, they possess superior military (and political) training and educational background, and are closer than are the Lao commanders to the source of real power -- the DRV. Thus, even though the LPLA units operate under their own Lao commanders, the Vietnamese advisers, while not formally part of the LPLA command structure, are in fact the decision-makers.

#### OPERATING THE TRAIL

As part of their task of operating the infiltration system to South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese run the Ho Chi Minh Trail as if it were a strategic rear area of South Vietnam. Vietnamese engineer units maintain existing roads and build new ones for intermittent motor vehicle, bicycle, animal, and human transportation. Vietnamese labor battalions, which include women units, keep the roads and paths in good repair. They construct bridges over the streams and install wooden planks on those segments of the road where trucks might otherwise be mired in the mud.

In earlier years, the Vietnamese used local hill people in the Trail area as laborers, porters, and guides. More recently, although some of the local employees may have been retained, most of this work has been done by Vietnamese. However, Vietnamese commanders operating in the Trail area sometimes enlist assistance from the nearby Lao authorities. A Lao mechanic (A-31), for example, whom we interviewed normally was employed at repairing Lao trucks in an NLHS-controlled area of Savannakhet Province. Since his repair shop was only half a mile from a segment of the Trail, he was called upon from time to time to repair Vietnamese trucks. Before he could begin to work on such a truck, however, the Vietnamese driver was required to show the written approval of the local LPLA commander.

At suitable protected areas near the Trail, the Vietnamese have established storage points for the distribution of equipment and supplies. Trained Vietnamese medical personnel staff infirmaries in the corridor which treat both infiltrators and locally assigned Vietnamese, and distribute drugs and other medical supplies to the passing infiltrating groups. To provide some distraction in the arduous life of the Vietnamese stationed in the Trail area, entertainment troupes pass through from time to time with presentations of patriotic plays and songs. During the Christmas 1966 bombing pause, the North Vietnamese showed moving pictures in the Mu Gia Pass region, just across the border from Laos, to the hundreds of road maintenance personnel in the area.

Traffic for the Trail starts from various points in North Vietnam and enters Laos mostly through the Bannakai and Mu Gia mountain passes. The Vietnamese infiltrators,

who are trucked through North Vietnam late at night, continue their difficult journey on foot once they are in Laos, marching mostly by day through well-camouflaged trails. The infiltrating groups, which may range from small squads of a few men to units of over 500 troops, are led by local guides, who take them one day's march southward. An infiltrator who falls ill -- and large numbers suffer from malaria -- may be treated immediately and continue with his group, or he may be detained for treatment in a rest camp until he can join a later infiltrating group. All the infiltrators interviewed who have described their journey recall the strenuous mountain climbs, great fatigue, chilly nights, and general hardships of their one- to three-month trek through Laos. The strains of this long march have been a contributing motive in some defections.\*

Even prior to the intense Vietnamese activity in the southern panhandle of Laos, the area was only sparsely populated by mountain-tribal groups. In the past few years, as the infiltration has been stepped up, bombing and military engagements in the area have increased, causing many

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\* One soldier, who passed through the Trail in 1965, stated that there were six defectors from his company in Laos. (AG-370, answer to question 53; one in a series of interviews with North Vietnamese prisoners and defectors conducted by a RAND team between 1964 and 1968, and now on file with The RAND Corporation.) Another North Vietnamese whom we interviewed (B-6) fled with a fellow-soldier when their infiltration group bivouacked near a supply point in the region of Attapeu Province. He had been living in northern Thailand and been persuaded to go to North Vietnam, where he was recruited into the army. Disappointed with life in North Vietnam, and wishing to find his way back to his parents in Thailand, he took advantage of the infiltration journey to escape.



of the hill people to flee. Most infiltrators nevertheless report having caught a fleeting glimpse of local people in Laos, but they had been ordered not to speak to them; nor did they know their language. Here is a typical account by a Vietnamese soldier:

We walked for days without meeting any people. From time to time we did meet some montagnards. We didn't speak to them because we didn't know their dialects. They only smiled at us but didn't help us with anything. We didn't consider them as either friends or enemies.\*

North Vietnamese troops generally are told before leaving for Laos that trading with the local population there is forbidden. (One soldier said his unit had been cautioned that the enemy might bribe the local people to give poisoned food to the North Vietnamese.) However, some of the groups were not strict in enforcing this prohibition. One prisoner in South Vietnam reported that, in return for the clothes and thread which the troops in his infiltration group could offer, they received chickens, rice, green beans, vegetables, cigarettes, and flare-bomb parachutes that they used for hammocks and blankets. Another prisoner gave the following account of the trading carried on by his infiltration group:

We had only salted meat. We continued to receive our daily ration of rice -- 750 grams -- but when cooked, its volume didn't increase enough to fill our stomachs. We ate it with a

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\*AG-370, answer to question 10. Similar statements can be found in AG-446, question 178; AG-202, question 57; AG-504, question 125; AG-536, question 185; and AG-447, question 72, in RAND's interview files.

sort of soup made with seasoning powder, salted meat, water, and a plant called "rau tau bay" whenever we had time to look for it in the forest.

The local inhabitants didn't give us anything, although we got some food from them by giving them our clothes in exchange. As we had only the clothes we needed, we exchanged our underclothes for food. For a pair of drawers, one got 7 or 8 manioc roots; for two undershirts, one got a fowl.

This same soldier reported that, although it was forbidden to trade with villagers, even some of the cadres did so. Others recalled that, when they were caught, they were subjected to criticism sessions.

Although most Vietnamese working in the Trail area or infiltrating through it have little contact with the local inhabitants, some are specifically assigned to dealing directly with the residents. For example, we interviewed a former Vietnamese supply officer (B-12) who had been responsible for purchasing livestock from local farmers and then cooking, salting, and drying these products for shipment to South Vietnam. He traded salt and clothes in return for buffalo, cows, pigs, ducks, and chickens.

In keeping with Vietnamese Communist doctrine, the military or civilian advisers in the Trail area take special pains to encourage their Lao counterparts to win over the local population through effective propaganda techniques. A notebook of a Vietnamese cadre who worked with the Lao Communists near the Lao Ngam district of southern Laos assessed the weak points of their military and propaganda operations in this area:

The military activities at some places did not coincide with politics. They were not used for armed propaganda activities or to motivate people. Activities in the enemy-controlled areas were not undertaken. In combat, direct attack was practiced too much, while guerrilla warfare was neglected.

In some cases, especially in areas where the highland minorities live, Vietnamese cadres engage directly in propaganda addressed to the local population. The Vietnamese supply officer quoted above spent three months in propaganda and intelligence activities in the Attapeu region, in southern Laos, before he was assigned the supply function. The instructions he received from his Vietnamese regimental commander before his first visit to the LPLA leader in Attapeu Province reveal some of the issues that most concerned the Vietnamese:

First, he (the Vietnamese regimental commander) told me that I should try to influence the thinking of the villagers to support us. Second, to try to stay in close contact with the villagers and with the Lao provincial authorities in order to get information about enemy activity. Third, I had to make propaganda among the villagers about enemy terrorism in the areas already bombed or about to be bombed. Fourth, I should try to watch and report the feelings of the people towards North Vietnamese personnel. Last, I should report any relations between Vietnamese personnel and the girls of the village or any cases of North Vietnamese trying to buy or sell anything among the villagers, or stealing anything -- all these things should be reported.

I did this work together with a Lao soldier because we needed a man who knew the area and operations there. It would also help the NLHS to control the population. If there were any problems with the villagers, the Lao soldier would report to the NLHS provincial authorities.

DRV STRATEGY AND TACTICS IN LAOS

Apart from the protection of their country's border regions against unfriendly elements (such as the forces of the anti-Communist Meo General Vang Pao), the North Vietnamese military in Laos have two principal missions: operating the Ho Chi Minh infiltration system and strengthening the position of the Lao Communists. Regarding the first, the DRV's primary interest is in a successful conclusion to the war in South Vietnam, and they judge it fundamental that they be able to move men and supplies freely from the North to the South. By its military actions in the area the North Vietnamese have made it clear to the Royal Lao Government -- and the United States as well -- that they will fight aggressively to protect their investment in the vital artery to South Vietnam. The government, recognizing how small would be its chances of success against such determined Vietnamese opposition (unless, of course, it were supported by outside forces), hesitates to undertake military action within the Ho Chi Minh Trail area. Baldly stated, even though the Royal Government finds any Vietnamese occupation of Lao soil repugnant, under the present circumstances it tends to look upon the Trail area as being too intimately linked to the prosecution of the war in South Vietnam to permit interference with North Vietnamese designs. Further diminishing Vientiane's inclination to confront the Vietnamese in the Lao panhandle is the fact that the area is sparsely populated by mountain tribes, to whom the Lao elite feel a less intense commitment than they do to the lowland Lao.

North Vietnam, to judge by its own statements, is understandably less worried about the FAR than it is about

the possibility that American or Thai ground troops could move into southern Laos to cut off its infiltration to South Vietnam. Reflections of this anxiety are Radio Hanoi's frequent broadcasts denouncing alleged plans by the United States and Thailand to "establish bases" within southern Laos from which to attack both North and South Vietnam. After the start of construction on the "McNamara Line" between North and South Vietnam (the infiltration barrier that was begun but not completed), Hanoi intermittently accused the United States of planning to extend the barrier into Laos. Further, the North Vietnamese charge that the United States and Thailand have been violating the Geneva Accords of 1962 by bombing and introducing military personnel in Laos. Their pronouncements on these subjects fulfill several functions. On the one hand, by focusing international attention on what they claim are violations by the United States and Thailand, they hope to pressure these enemies into suspending all hostile action in Laos, and perhaps more important, to discourage future ground attacks by Americans and Thai in the Trail area. On the other hand, they appear to be signaling their enemies that they would respond to such attacks in kind. By their presence throughout Laos, NVA troops in a sense hold the Mekong Valley area of Laos hostage, for, if their enemies threaten their vital supply route, they can retaliate by attacking other areas of Laos.

Regarding the second principal mission of the North Vietnamese military in Laos -- strengthening the position of the Lao Communists -- we have already described the Vietnamese advisory role. In addition, the NVA has established a relatively sophisticated apparatus that serves

both North Vietnamese and Lao troops and includes the necessary communications network, logistics operations, and transportation units. From a Vietnamese defector (B-21), a Black Tai, who had been engaged in road repair on Route 7 in Xieng Khouang Province, we learned, for example, that the Vietnamese assign engineer units to maintaining the truck arteries to North Vietnam. This is how he described his work for one month in early 1967:

Our function was to fill the holes in the road, and to dig drains. We all used pick and shovel. If airplanes would bomb the road, we had to fill the holes and flatten the road. We had no machines.

There were no Lao -- we were all Vietnamese. We were separated into squads for the work. On Route 7, Battalions 2 and 3 worked on the roads. This is Route 7, which leads to Phou Kout and on which a lot of Vietnamese troops come into Laos. I was told that we had a lot of troops in Phou Kout, so we had to work hard and pave the way for them.

The NVA commit special units to performing functions for which the Lao do not have the capability. For example, the heavy weapons and antiaircraft units are North Vietnamese.\* As indicated earlier, the NVA have established a separate medical system to serve their own personnel and to provide assistance to the Lao troops. A Vietnamese medical technician described to us five rudimentary hospitals -- three Vietnamese and two Lao -- that he helped

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\* See B-8, a Vietnamese Black Tai defector, who served with an antiaircraft unit from September 1965 to December 1966.

to establish in (NLHS) Nam Tha Province, during 1966 and 1967.

To bolster the military strength of the LPLA, North Vietnamese troops stationed in Laos coordinate their efforts with Lao units, often operating alongside them. The pattern of earlier years, when special NVA shock troops would be sent from North Vietnam to soften up RLG defense positions for later consolidation by the provincial LPLA and NVA units, has continued into the present. Against such concerted attacks, the FAR generally is a poor match for the well-trained Vietnamese. A vivid description of one Vietnamese shock-troop engagement was given us by a 19-year-old Vietnamese prisoner, Nguyen Van Bay (B-14), who had been a member of a company of Dac Cong (commandos) when, in May 1967, his unit was assigned to what the North Vietnamese designate as "Mission C," i.e., combat in Laos. The Dac Cong were elite troops, who had undergone a year of intensive training in commando tactics which included work with all types of explosives. Bay claimed that when he graduated from his training course, his regiment was addressed by Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Pham Van Dong, who inspired the young commandos with their great praise, telling them that the Dac Cong were the North Vietnamese answer to the American B-52s. Bay's company was ordered to carry out an attack against an FAR post in Saravane Province early in August 1967, and succeeded in causing great destruction to the post.\* After the attack the

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\* First, ten men, including Bay, were selected from his company of 66 (of whom 60 were members of the Lao Dong Party and 6 were members of the Labor Youth Organization) for an intelligence reconnaissance mission on which they

commandos were to withdraw, allowing Lao and Vietnamese troops to take their place. Bay was wounded by a mortar burst during the action and lost his comrades. He dragged himself through the woods, but was discovered the next day by an FAR soldier and taken prisoner. The Royal Government confirmed the success of the Vietnamese attack described by Bay.

The DRV uses its troops to remind RLG authorities to exercise restraint in their own military initiatives. An example of such use of military power occurred in late 1967 and early 1968, when the commander of the FAR in southern Laos was engaged in an ambitious pacification effort in the Sedone Valley. NVA troops with LPLA support attacked Lao Ngam, an important post in the area, and launched a campaign of pressure throughout the region of which the La Ngam assault formed a part. As a result,

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were to scout the FAR post to be attacked. They infiltrated the FAR positions successfully, spent two days gathering details of the defenses of the FAR post, and reported back to their headquarters, where a sand table model of the FAR position was constructed. A Lao deputy commander of the LPLA battalion stationed in the area who heard the reconnaissance report and saw this sand table model expressed amazement and admiration, according to Bay, since his battalion had not gathered in four months the intelligence that the ten-man Vietnamese scout teams had collected in two days.

The Dac Cong unit attacked the FAR position several days later. According to Bay, one Vietnamese soldier was assigned to take out each of the two 105 mm cannons, another to knock out the several machine guns they had spotted on their reconnaissance, and still another to blow up the barracks and some oil storage containers. They planted their explosives against their objectives and, upon signal, blew them up.



they wiped out much of the FAR's accomplishment in pacification.

The aim of attacks like the one on Lao Ngam is partly psychological: to demonstrate the fragility of the FAR, and to persuade the RLG to be respectful of the power of the DRV and, by extension, its Lao ally. There have been cases, however, in which NVA attacks on RLG positions in southern Laos have backfired. On March 9, 1965, for example, a North Vietnamese unit assisted by Lao elements attacked an FAR officer training school at Dong Hene in the province of Savannakhet, apparently to demoralize the FAR. This time, the FAR soldiers successfully repulsed the attackers, inflicting heavy losses on them (according to one RLG communication about the battalion-size assault, there were at least 50 enemy dead and 50 wounded) and taking 9 North Vietnamese prisoners. These prisoners were then presented before the International Control Commission as proof of North Vietnamese military intervention in Laos. The ICC investigated the "Dong Hene Incident," interrogated the prisoners, and eventually transmitted a 747-page report of its investigation committee, signed by the Canadian and Indian members,<sup>\*</sup> to the Co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference on Laos, Great Britain and the USSR.<sup>\*\*</sup> Though both

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<sup>\*</sup>On a legal technicality, the Polish member refused to sign.

<sup>\*\*</sup>The Indian Chairman of the ICC transmitted this document to the Co-chairmen by letter as a report of the ICC investigation committee. Lacking the Polish member's endorsement, this report is not an official ICC report. Excerpts from this document can be found in Report of an Investigation by the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos of an Attack on Dong Hene by

the DRV and the LPLA denied having been involved in the attack on Dong Hene, the overwhelming public evidence of the Vietnamese role was undoubtedly an embarrassment.\* Moreover, this relatively rare victory by FAR troops over attacking Vietnamese was widely publicized by Vientiane, and it boosted RLG morale.

Another military effort in southern Laos that went badly for the North Vietnamese was the joint attack with LPLA units on RLG positions in Khammouane Province in November 1965. The FAR troops repulsed the attack, in the course of which they cornered a platoon of fifteen Vietnamese, including two officers, in a cave near Thakhek. The trapped men bravely fought on against a much larger FAR force for several weeks, until their food supply was exhausted and they surrendered. Testimony from these fifteen

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North Vietnamese Troops (no date or publisher listed). Part of the evidence of this attack at Dong Hene that was presented by the RLG to the ICC, and a segment of the ICC Report, can be found in Livre Blanc sur les Violations des Accords de Genève de 1962 par le Gouvernement du Nord Vietnam (White Book on the Violations of the Geneva Accords of 1962 by the Government of North Vietnam), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos, Vientiane, August 1965, pp. 5-13, 69-100.

\*Radio Pathet Lao, on March 31, 1965, labeled the charges of North Vietnamese participation in the Dong Hene attack as "groundless," calling them "merely the old puppet show which was put on several times in the past with the aim of criticizing the NLHS and the DRV." It is not clear whether the Vietnamese unit which attacked Dong Hene was diverted from its journey to South Vietnam or whether it had been sent, especially from North Vietnam to launch the attack. Most of the prisoners believed that they were on their way to South Vietnam. One of them told us that his unit was only "borrowing the road" in Laos to reach South Vietnam (B-17). However, North Vietnamese troops are not always aware of the plans of their commanders.

North Vietnamese soldiers captured on Lao soil was publicly presented, enabling the RLG not only to offer further evidence of the DRV's military intervention in Laos but also to feel pride in having won an engagement against the Vietnamese.\*

The North Vietnamese role in Laos differs from region to region. The Vietnamese presence is preponderant in areas where the RLG is a serious threat to the Lao Communists, such as Xieng Khouang, or where the DRV judges its own interests to be vital, such as Khammouane Province, the northern flank of the Vietnamese strategic route complex to South Vietnam. In all regions except the area of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the North Vietnamese apparently permit NLHS officials to handle civil affairs and to deal directly with the local population, assisted, of course, by their DRV advisers.

The primary deterrent to RLG action (apart from the unfavorable geography of the country), and the guarantor of the NLHS' continuing control in its area, is the weight of North Vietnamese military strength. The NVA maintains a strategic capability that permits it to mount coordinated attacks throughout Laos. Recent demonstrations of that capability, though exercised with obvious restraint, were the attacks, in late 1967 and early 1968, on Nam Bac in the northern mountains, in the region of Paksane in the Center,

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\* See Livre Blanc, 1965, pp. 15-57. More recently, in 1968, the FAR succeeded in repulsing an NVA attack on Lao Ngam in southern Laos, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. However, the Lao forces had to evacuate Lao Ngam thereafter because of the generally unfavorable military situation in the region.

and near Saravane in the South. Thus, when the RLG is tempted to move into a Communist-held area which it feels confident it could seize, it must risk either retaliation elsewhere in the country or loss of the newly-gained territory a year or two later. Indeed, the war has followed a pattern that has included trade-offs, as each side has from time to time initiated a limited campaign to improve a tactical position or to gain a psychological advantage. Although the basic territorial balance between the two contending camps in Laos has not changed since the days of the 1962 Geneva Conference, some important campaigns have been undertaken by both sides: these include the PL/NVA campaign of 1963-64, which deprived the Neutralists of their power position on the Plain of Jars and strengthened the Communist posture in Laos; the successful Operation Triangle by the FAR in 1964; and the LPLA/NVA campaign of 1967-68, which gained the Communists territory in North and South Laos.

The situation in Laos is often described as a stand-off, with each side holding the line while waiting for the outcome in Vietnam, which will be crucial to the future of Laos. But the apparent military balance, it is argued, should not rule out the likelihood that, if the DRV wished to increase its military effort with the aim of seizing all of Laos, the RLG could not resist for long without direct, massive outside assistance. Writing of the 1963 period, the then U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Roger Hilsman, stated that the "Communist North Vietnamese could easily put enough troops into Laos to take it over within two to four weeks, if they were willing to take the risk of an

American intervention."\* This assessment still appears valid today, though the drain of troops would now be more painful to the DRV in view of its effort in South Vietnam and the reconstruction tasks in North Vietnam.

Even if the North Vietnamese were not inclined to overrun all of the Mekong Valley, they could easily call for harassment of the urban centers\*\* -- Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, Pakse, and other towns that have so far experienced little fighting or terror -- just as they have done in South Vietnam since the Tet offensive of 1968. The present military equilibrium in Laos is thus largely the product of North Vietnamese self-restraint.

If the NVA could so readily seize control of all Laos, why, we must ask, has it not done so? Leaving the discussion of the DRV's long-range aims in Laos for our final chapter, we shall merely offer here some of the reasons for the North Vietnamese self-restraint that are relevant in the present context. It must again be emphasized that the DRV's primary interests are in winning the war in the South and in defending and reconstructing the North. Any effort that would divert them from these central objectives would be considered too costly. An NVA-led attack into the Mekong Valley would create the risk of direct intervention in Laos by the United States and Thailand, the latter being greatly troubled by the prospect of a hostile Communist

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\*To Move a Nation, Garden City, N.Y., 1967, p. 154.

\*\* A change of tactics in favor of greater emphasis on guerrilla activity behind the lines may be in the making, however, as indicated by a succession of LPLA/NVA attacks against RLG airfields and the blowing up of ammunition dumps near Vientiane and in southern Laos.

enemy on its borders. Under present circumstances, the DRV's military presence in Laos actually reduces the danger of an American or Thai attempt to put in ground troops to seal off infiltration to South Vietnam, because of the threat that in the face of such an attempt the NVA would indeed overrun the rest of Laos. If the North Vietnamese were to take the initiative in widening the war in Laos, they would lose that leverage, and then not only could expect to suffer greater punishment from the United States in North Vietnam but also would be inviting the direct action against their operations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail which they so intensely wish to avoid. This is certainly true since the start of negotiations between the United States and the DRV in Paris and the American decision to halt the bombing of North Vietnam. Any large-scale military action in Laos by the Vietnamese Communists would destroy the Geneva Accords and endanger the outcome of the Paris negotiations. It could also provoke a U.S. resumption of bombing in North Vietnam.

Although the 1962 Geneva Accords have been repeatedly violated, the DRV sees advantage in their being preserved. If Hanoi were to disregard the terms of the treaty openly by invading large areas of RLG-controlled territory, the constraints on its enemies would be lifted and the war might well be widened, forcing the DRV to spend scarce resources that it would rather commit to achieving victory in South Vietnam. Thus far, as we shall see, the North Vietnamese have zealously camouflaged their military presence in Laos, publicly maintaining that they have no troops in that country, and in every way trying to convince the rest of the world that they have respected the Geneva

Accords, while the United States and its "puppets" have been violating them. An occupation of Mekong Valley Laos would cost the North Vietnamese much foreign sympathy, and would counteract their attempt to create an image of themselves as the beleaguered small nation defending itself against an unjustified attack by the imperialist Americans.

On the basis of this analysis of the situation, the relative stability that has been maintained so far between government- and Communist-held territory in Laos had best be described as a political rather than a military balance.

## IX. THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

### RELATIONS BETWEEN THE VIETNAMESE AND LAO COMMUNISTS

#### Public Positions

In their international propaganda, the North Vietnamese frequently plead the Lao Communists' cause, denouncing the intervention of the "American imperialists" in Laos, denigrating the government leaders in Vientiane, and insisting that "peace in Indochina is indivisible." At the same time, both the NLHS and the DRV have stated that the situation in Laos must not be made a subject of discussion in the Paris talks, as Laos is a sovereign nation whose affairs can be dealt with only through negotiations between the Lao parties. Obviously, to raise the issue of the future of Laos in the Paris talks would mean to touch on the North Vietnamese role in that country -- something both the Lao and Vietnamese Communists are not eager to do.

At the two Geneva Conferences -- 1954 and 1961-62 -- the DRV acted as spokesman for the Lao Communists while pursuing primarily its own interests. Although since 1962 there has been less occasion for the North Vietnamese to represent their Lao allies in a diplomatic context, it is reasonable to expect that in any future negotiations on Laos they will act as the mentor of the NLHS, at least behind the scenes.

Even though DRV authorities do not publicly admit to the fact that they maintain troops in Laos, they do not deny their close spiritual alliance with the Lao Communists.



The following recent broadcast is typical of North Vietnamese propaganda statements regarding Laos:

The Vietnamese and Lao peoples have always maintained close neighborly relations, like those between lips and teeth. These are relations between kith and kin who share weal and woe and march together through life or death. The Vietnamese have always given unreserved support to the Lao people's just struggle and consider the success of the Lao people as their own.

The Lao frequently match these effusions of devotion with eloquence about their own solidarity with the Vietnamese people. A telegram from Prince Souphanouvong to President Ho Chi Minh on the occasion of Ho's seventy-seventh birthday is representative of these statements:

The Lao people who have struggled against the common enemy on the battlefield rejoice very much at the grandiose victories won by the brotherly Vietnamese people and consider these victories as their own.

So far, in struggling against the United States, the Lao people have received the sincere support and aid of the Vietnamese people and workers and the DRV government. Therefore, I take this opportunity to voice our sincere gratitude for this sincere support and aid. I hope that the friendly relations and the very close militant solidarity between the Lao and Vietnamese people will be further tightened. (Letter signed at Sam Neua, May 17, 1967.)\*

In a speech he delivered in Sam Neua on March 19, 1968, Prince Souphanouvong publicly acknowledged the close ties

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\* North Vietnamese broadcast of May 29, 1967.

between the NLHS and the North Vietnamese and the interrelationship between their two revolutionary movements:

The victories of the Lao armed forces and people are an actual result of the struggle which we conduct jointly with the brotherly Vietnamese people. . . . I appeal to all our cadres, combatants, workers, and people to strive to learn from the lesson of sacrifices and valiant struggle provided by the Vietnamese armed forces and people. . . . We consider the victories of the fraternal Vietnamese people as ours. . . . We must voice and extend to them our sincere and active support by struggling and winning brilliant victories and by coordinating our struggle with theirs.\*

The Royal Government makes intermittent efforts to document the interference of the DRV in Laos. It has submitted a number of memoranda to the International Control Commission, listing a long series of North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962.\*\* In

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\*Radio Pathet Lao broadcast of March 25, 1968.  
(Emphasis added.)

\*\* (1) "Memorandum" (no publisher or place listed), April 13, 1955, addressed to ICC in Laos, and consisting of a Preliminary Note, a memorandum relating to the 1954 Geneva Accords on Laos, Annexes to an RLG memo of April 12, 1954, on Communist Lao and North Vietnamese activities in Laos, letters between the ICC and Premier Katay Sasorith of Laos, and a document entitled "Position du Royaume du Laos dans les événements concernant la Péninsule Indochinoise," presented to Nehru on October 17, 1954, during his visit to Vientiane. (2) L'Ingérence Nord-Vietnamienne au Laos, consisting of a Preface by Souvanna Phouma followed by a text offering proof of North Vietnamese troops in Laos (including the capture of three North Vietnamese prisoners, documents and declarations of prisoners, and letters between Souvanna Phouma and ICC). (3) Livre Blanc of August 1965, which presents proof of Viet Minh violations in the Dong Hene attack of March 1965, the Thakhek attack of

addition, RLG spokesmen frequently make statements to the international press charging North Vietnam with intervention in Laos.\* Both the DRV and the NLHS categorically deny these accusations, which they counter with charges of "American imperialist" military intervention in Laos and

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November 1965, and operations Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua in the form of interrogation reports, documents, and ICC report on Dong Hene. Other White Books on the subject of North Vietnamese interference in Lao affairs were issued by the RLG in 1964 and 1966. The latest of this series, issued in 1968, covers the period 1966 to early 1968 and presents substantial evidence of North Vietnamese violations of Lao neutrality. See also numerous official statements by Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, such as his address to the National Assembly of Laos on May 30, 1968.

\* See, for example: (1) "Souvanna Says Laos Invaded by Red Troops," Bangkok World, April 3, 1967. (2) "Premier's Spokesman on Military Situation," Vientiane Domestic Radio Service, February 23, 1966; statement by Bouasy on location and extent of Vietnamese interference. (3) "Souvanna Phouma Speaks of Indochina Problem," Delhi Domestic Radio Service, July 27, 1965, which claims that there were then 60 North Vietnamese light battalions in Laos, each 300 to 500 strong, and calls for reconvening of Geneva Conference. (4) "Foreign Ministry Protest to DRV Embassy," and "General (Sang) Interviewed on Viet Minh Prisoners," Vientiane Domestic Service, June 22, 1963, on mixed LPLA Vietnamese forces activities. (5) A series of RLG Defense Ministry communiqués from January to June 11, 1962, Vientiane Domestic Service, on Vietnamese interference in specific areas in Laos. (6) "Sisouk Interviewed on Laos Situation," Vientiane Domestic Service, April 10, 1962, commenting on extent of Viet Minh troop involvement. (7) "Bouavan Norading: DRV Troops in Southern Laos," Singapore, Reuters, January 21, 1961. (8) "Premier Phoui Sananikone's Address to National Assembly," Vientiane Domestic Service, December 18, 1959, with comments on the DRV's inciting rebellion in Laos and protecting Lao Communists who flee to DRV.

U.S. domination of what they term the "puppet" government in Vientiane.\*

THE STYLE OF DRV OPERATIONS IN LAOS: SECRECY

In the pursuit of its military mission in Laos, the DRV has been masterful in camouflaging its true role. Historically, this remarkable secrecy has been part of the

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\* See, for example: (1) Charges from DRV: "Nhan Dan Refutes Souvanna Phouma Slander," Hanoi VNA, October 24, 1967. (2) "Failure of U.S. Laos Policy Is Unavoidable," Hanoi VNA, May 17, 1967. (3) "VNA Denounces Laotian Charges of Intrusion," Hanoi VNA, December 29, 1967. (4) "DRV Envoy Denies Existence of POWs in Laos," Paris AFP, December 19, 1966. (5) "Nhan Dan Hails Victories of Lao People," Hanoi VNA, November 20, 1965, refuting "hackneyed allegations" by U.S. and RLG of North Vietnamese in Thakhek battle. (6) "DRV Embassy Denounces U.S. Bombing in Laos," Peking NCNA, January 25, 1965. (7) "Pathet Lao Radio Rejects Souvanna POW Claim," Hanoi VNA, October 12, 1964.

For examples of charges from the NLHS, see: (1) "Souvanna Phouma Plays Key Role as U.S. Lackey," Radio Pathet Lao, November 4, 1967, claiming that Souvanna acted shamefully in reporting to President Johnson that North Vietnam had invaded Laos. (2) Phoumi Vongvichit speech, Radio Pathet Lao, September 9, 1966, denying the existence of supply lines between North and South Vietnam through Laos. (3) "High Command of Lao People's Liberation Army Denies 'Categorically' Presence of North Vietnamese Troops in Southern Laos," Radio Pathet Lao, February 3, 1966. (4) "Liberation Forces Deny Presence of DRV Troops," Radio Pathet Lao, December 21, 1965. (5) "Les Agents Américains à Vientiane Inventent la Comédie sur la Soi-Disant Capture des Prisonniers Nord-Vietnamiens pour Couvrir Leurs Activités au Laos," Radio Pathet Lao, April 7, 1965. (6) "Les Calomnies de S.A. Souvanna Sont Celles que les Américains et Leurs Agents Ont l'Habitude de Faire," Radio Pathet Lao, October 8, 1964, about the "so-called prisoners" presented to the ICC as being part of North Vietnamese troops in Laos.

Vietnamese-Communist insurgent style. The Viet Minh, for example, during their struggle against the French that lasted from 1946 to 1954, received material assistance from China under strict secrecy. Although, by the end of the war, Chinese supplies had reached substantial proportions, neither the North Vietnamese nor the Chinese Communists have ever admitted that any such contribution was made.\* This pattern of dissimulation, so effective against the French, was continued in Hanoi's subsequent campaign to seize control of South Vietnam. After the Geneva Conference of 1954, the DRV sent clandestine political agents to the South to help the insurgents' struggle against the Diem regime, and between 1959 and 1964 it infiltrated from 20,000 to 50,000 men, mostly southerners who had been regrouped in the North and were being returned to their native region.\*\* Since 1964, the DRV has assigned thousands of northern troops to combat in the South. Yet, in the early part of this struggle, the North persistently denied having sent any troops to South Vietnam, and, until the widening participation of northern troops in the war in recent years, those who wished to show the true role of North Vietnamese involvement bore a difficult burden of proof.

This same pattern of secrecy has also characterized the Vietnamese Communist role in Laos. The Viet Minh cadre who, in September 1945, led the group that escorted Prince

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\* Cf. J. J. Zasloff, The Role of the Sanctuary in Insurgency: Communist China's Support to the Viet Minh, 1946-1954, The RAND Corporation, RM-4618-PR, May 1967, pp. 36-41.

\*\* See U.S. Department of State, Aggression from the North; The Record of North Vietnam's Campaign To Conquer South Vietnam, Washington, D.C., 1965, p. 3.

Souphanouvong on his hike back to Laos to build an independence movement recalls that, when they crossed the border of Laos, the Vietnamese accompanying the Prince took off their Vietnamese insignia and "put on the three-headed elephant emblem of the Lao Liberation Army."<sup>\*</sup> The Viet Minh's practice of changing into Lao uniforms when marching through Laos was adopted in the 1960s by soldiers from North Vietnam on their infiltration route to the South,<sup>\*\*</sup> and by NVA troops and advisers serving in Laos.

Because of the DRV's common frontier with Laos, the North Vietnamese can easily move their troops in and out of that country, as indeed they have done for more than fifteen years. But it is exceedingly difficult to obtain firm evidence of their troops' presence. In 1962, the DRV maintained that it had only 40 troops in Laos, whom it withdrew, and though this was a patently incredible invention, the ICC had no independent means of checking this claim.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup>Tran Van Dinh, "Laos, the Fiction of Neutrality," The New Republic, February 24, 1968, p. 29.

<sup>\*\*</sup>See, for example, AG-256, a respondent who had marched with an infiltrating group through the Ho Chi Minh Trail in August 1962. See also Aggression from the North.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>For example, we learned of an incident during the 1961-1962 Communist offensive which shows how meager were the resources of the ICC to verify reports of North Vietnamese intervention in Laos. In 1961, the ICC headquarters had dispatched a committee of its members to investigate a complaint that North Vietnamese troops were stationed at Ban Hin Heup, between Vientiane and the Plain of Jars. Arriving at the location of the alleged North Vietnamese unit, the ICC investigating committee came upon some soldiers bathing in a stream. As the commission members drew close to them, these soldiers showed no signs of embarrassment. Since the Lao are generally more modest than

A possible source might have been the testimony of NVA prisoners and defectors in Laos, had there been more of them. Indeed, to many observers the negligible number of captives suggests that the North Vietnamese were not heavily involved. The Royal Government could claim only five prisoners and one defector before the Geneva Conference of 1962, and all of these since 1959.\* As suggested earlier, the lack of Vietnamese prisoners is more easily explained by the FAR's reluctance to engage in battle with the Vietnamese than by the absence of Vietnamese troops. As one Lao officer pointed out to us, "It was the Vietnamese who took us prisoner -- we did not take them."

Even toward their allies of 1960 to 1962 (the Neutralist forces of Kong Le and Souvanna Phouma) and toward the Lao Communists, the North Vietnamese have been extremely secretive about their troops' disposition. In interviews with Neutralist government officials and military officers, and with Souvanna Phouma himself, we learned that access to the North Vietnamese command headquarters on the Plain of Jars had been severely restricted, and that only a relatively few could gain admittance. Officers of the Neutralist army, presumably allies of the North Vietnamese as well as of the Lao Communists, reported to us that they were treated with suspicion, even hostility, when they tried to obtain some picture of the operation of their

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this about nakedness in front of strangers, the commission deduced that they had seen North Vietnamese soldiers, but they were not empowered to make a closer investigation.

\* See Appendix IV.

"allies." Consequently, these officers, several of whom had the rank of colonel, were remarkably uninformed about the North Vietnamese troop strength and disposition, except for the particular units with which they had had personal contact.

Yet it is not easy for DRV troops to go unnoticed in Laos. Most North Vietnamese do not speak Lao, and though they resemble the Lao racially, a close observer can distinguish Lao from Vietnamese by physiognomy and, above all, by cultural characteristics. However, as we shall show presently, the North Vietnamese take pains to camouflage their presence, and RLG intelligence is generally poor. As a result, outside observers -- at least until 1962 -- have tended to doubt the Lao government's reports about the North Vietnamese presence in Laos, the more so as some of its earlier claims of DRV interference had indeed been exaggerated.

Our interviews are rich in detail about the measures taken by the North Vietnamese to conceal their military presence in Laos, or at least to make it unobtrusive. Many units were required to bivouac outside of populated areas, often in the jungle, so as to reduce their contact with the local population to a minimum. Vietnamese soldiers often wore uniforms resembling those of the LPLA. We had a number of statements similar to the following:

Before coming to Laos, we were issued uniforms which were made of Vietnamese material but in the style of Pathet Lao soldiers. The shirts had epaulets as the Lao uniforms have, the hats were Lao hats.\*

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\* From an interview with B-22. Other relevant information came from A-3, A-17, B-12, B-11, and B-4.



Both military and civilian Vietnamese advisers took Lao names, and those who worked in a civilian capacity, even if they were military officers, wore civilian clothes similar to those of their Lao counterparts.\*

At the time of their departure from North Vietnam, most of the enlisted men in combat or support units were not informed that they were going to Laos, and though some guessed their destination, many claimed that they had not realized it until they found themselves on Lao soil. Only a few of our informants said that they were permitted to receive mail, and a small number said that they could write home but pointed out that they were prohibited from mentioning that they were in Laos. One soldier (B-1) explained it this way:

We received explanations that we had to keep our activities in Laos secret . . . word of casualties might discourage families at home and word would get back to the troops and hurt their morale.

All Vietnamese personnel in Laos are severely cautioned against discussing Vietnamese plans, troop movements -- or, indeed, any activities -- with unauthorized persons. In short, just as in South Vietnam, the NVA's internal security in Laos, in contrast to that of its opponents, is very good.

The North Vietnamese involvement in Laos is further protected from discovery by the fact that most outside personnel is prohibited from entering the Communist-controlled zone. In the past, ICC observers occasionally

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\*Cf. A-27, A-31, B-4, and B-9.

gained admission to limited areas under careful scrutiny, but it has been years since the ICC was last able to go anywhere in NLHS territory, and the Commission has effectively been paralyzed. Furthermore, "unfriendly" newsmen are unwelcome in the Communist zone of Laos. Foreigners who do gain access, such as a Japanese film crew and, in 1968, a French visitor, usually are known to be well disposed to the Communist cause and are always carefully guarded. The few foreign residents in NLHS territory are Communists. The few other foreigners who come as visitors are given little opportunity to assess the extent of the Vietnamese presence in Laos.

X. AN ASSESSMENT

Though the early history of the revolutionary movement in Laos is still incomplete, it is clear that the Vietnamese Communists under Ho Chi Minh played the decisive role in creating that movement and in keeping it alive in the years immediately after the Second World War.

Between 1946 and 1949 -- the formative years of the Lao Communist movement -- several Lao "resistance groups" survived in eastern Laos thanks to the leadership and aid furnished by the Vietnamese Communists. The merger of these groups, in 1950, was effected under the guidance of the Viet Minh, and the First Lao Resistance Congress convened on Vietnamese soil. Thereafter, the Viet Minh invasion of Laos provided the Lao revolutionaries with their first territorial base, in the border province of Sam Neua, which to this day has remained the headquarters of the Lao Communists. Since then, with the advice and assistance as well as the military might of the Vietnamese Communists, the Lao Communists have succeeded in bringing under their domination perhaps one-third of the country's population and about one-half of its territory.

From its inception, the Lao Communist movement was made up of individuals closely associated with the North Vietnamese. The two most important figures in the movement, Kaysone Phomvihan and Nouhak Phomsavan, who lacked the attributes of social background and status to make them part of the traditional Lao elite, were favored in their climb to power by the Vietnamese. Prince Souphanouvong, whose aristocratic origins carried prestige in Lao society, but who apparently was not as close to or as fully trusted

by Hanoi, was never more than the titular leader of the NLHS.

The political system of the Communist-controlled areas of Laos has a dual structure in which the front organization, the Neo Lao Hak Sat (NLHS) political party, is controlled by a small, semisecret Communist party, the Phak Pasason Lao (PPL) or People's Party of Laos. Vietnamese advisers are distributed throughout both organizations.

While the over-all relationship between the North Vietnamese Communists and their Lao allies is clear, the exact interaction between the two Communist organizations -- the Vietnamese Workers Party (Dang Lao Dong Vietnam) and the People's Party of Laos -- remains to be clarified. After the formal dissolution, in 1945, of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), three separate Communist parties were created, at least nominally, for the three countries of Indochina. It is possible, as some observers maintain, that former Lao members of the ICP hold membership in both the Lao and the Vietnamese party and that Hanoi exercises control in Laos by this device. But, given the presence of a Vietnamese political-administrative mission (Group 959), which guides the policy-making institutions of the Communist zone of Laos, and given the dependence of the Lao Communists on Vietnamese military and economic support, there would appear to be no compelling need for such a device; indeed, it could even have political disadvantages in ignoring certain Lao sensitivities. At any rate, we found no evidence of anyone's maintaining dual membership in the two parties (which does not, of course, rule out the possibility that such a phenomenon exists).

The external policy of the Lao Communists, not surprisingly, parallels that of the DRV. In the Sino-Soviet conflict, for example, Lao spokesmen follow the lead of Hanoi. Thus, in a broadcast of August 1968 concerning negotiations for a settlement of the Vietnam issue, Radio Pathet Lao praised the DRV decision to go to Paris, while Radio Peking was silent. Also, the Third Extraordinary Congress of the NLHS, which convened in October 1968, adopted a program that seemed to echo the earlier (1967) program of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLFSV). In internal policy, the Lao Communists have not been so orthodox; but the fact that they have not closely followed the measures of the Lao Dong Party would be attributed by a Vietnamese adviser to the more backward state of their country's economic and social development.

Our investigation shows that in virtually every important field of Lao Communist development the North Vietnamese have played a critical role. They are largely responsible for selecting the Lao Communist leadership, which has shown remarkable stability and cohesion. Like the leadership in Hanoi, these men have served together in Laos for some twenty years with dedication and self-sacrifice. The DRV also has provided facilities and guidance for the training and political indoctrination not only of the top leadership but of almost the entire cadre structure of the Lao Communists. (Only a very small group, by contrast, has received training in the Soviet Union and Communist China.) North Vietnamese advisers have helped these cadres construct an army, a bureaucracy, a Marxist-Leninist party, and political and mass organizations, all based upon the DRV model. Not surprisingly, the

political system of the Communist zone of Laos is the image -- if only a pale one -- of that of its neighbor and mentor.

Still another important contribution of the North Vietnamese is the sense of over-all direction and cohesion they provide to the Lao Communists. Even more than on the RLG side, the population in the Communist zone of Laos is extremely diverse, divided by regional, ethnic, tribal, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences. Left to themselves, the Lao Communists might well bog down in factional disputes. The Vietnamese, however, are sensitive to these group differences, and they provide the needed coordination through an effective advisory staff, which enjoys a neutral, unbiased vantage point that a Lao staff could not claim. Not only are Vietnamese advisory and control activities in Laos conducted with a view toward concealing them from outside observation, but Vietnamese policy in Laos is careful to present the picture of a partnership between equals -- a difficult feat in view of the vast military, economic, and organizational superiority of one partner over the other and the impressive range of North Vietnamese assistance efforts in Laos.

It seems hardly necessary to spell out the importance to the Lao Communists of the North Vietnamese military presence in Laos. Khamtay Siphandone, the supreme commander of the Lao People's Liberation Army, sent a telegram to DRV Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap on January 22, 1969, in which he said: "Because of the close relations between Laos and Vietnam which have existed since ancient times, our Lao armed forces and people are always wholeheartedly supported by the fraternal Vietnamese people and armed

forces." He was more accurate in describing the present than the past. North Vietnamese military units in Laos give evidence of the same effective leadership, organization, discipline, and will to fight that they show in South Vietnam. These assets are all the more formidable in Laos, where the opposition from government forces is greatly inferior to the opposition in South Vietnam. Moreover, in its favorable location astride Laos, the DRV enjoys relative ease of supply and communication with its troops.

While it is possible that some Lao Communist leaders have grown restive about their dependence upon the North Vietnamese, or that certain individuals are unhappy with their fate because of Vietnamese disfavor, one measure of their commitment to this alliance is the fact that, in the two decades since they split with the Lao Issara, there have been no defections of Lao Communist leaders to the RLG. It is true that a handful of lower-echelon cadres elected to accept integration into the Royal Government and Army in 1956, when the formal agreement -- never fully implemented -- was made. Since that time, the Lao Communist leadership has maintained a remarkable unity, at least outwardly.

Nevertheless, the alliance with the DRV has not been without some grave disadvantages for the Lao Communists. It has drawn them, and all of Laos, into the ugly struggle of Vietnam, first against the French and now against the South Vietnamese and the Americans. The war has brought devastation to Laos and an outpouring of more than a half-million refugees from the combat zones. Their allies cannot supply them with as abundant material resources as

the Americans have lavished upon the Royal Government. Life in NLHS territory, as in North Vietnam, is austere, and its hardships contrast vividly with the relative easy life of Vientiane. In spite of sacrifices, however, we see no signs that the Communist leaders' resolve to continue their struggle has been seriously shaken.

As described earlier, a number of factors explain the Lao Communists' reliance upon the North Vietnamese: Their historical association has created conditions of psychological and ideological dependence on the part of the Lao and a readiness to accept Vietnamese advice. The great scarcity of human and material resources in the Communist zone has encouraged the Lao to turn for assistance to the North Vietnamese. The NLHS zone is handicapped by a small and dispersed population, a dearth of trained military and civilian personnel, and lack of organizational experience in civilian and military affairs. It has poor communications, and few production facilities that would allow the Lao Communists to maintain their political and military struggle out of indigenous resources. Since their enemy has been able to draw on the support of a rich outside power, the United States, it is not unnatural for them to look to North Vietnam for protection and a safe haven.

During the two decades that they have depended on the North Vietnamese for advice and assistance, the Lao Communists, as we have shown, found themselves sharing many of the interests of their Vietnamese allies. Both parties opposed French colonial rule, working together under the direction of Ho Chi Minh. They faced a common enemy: first France, and then the United States. They



also held a similar view of the world and of the desirable solutions to its problems. In some cases, this affinity was further strengthened by Vietnamese family relations, (e.g., Kaysone) or marriage ties (Souphanouvong, Nouhak, and Singkapo, among others). From their own perspective, the Lao Communists have not compromised their legitimacy as a nationalist movement by their dependence on Hanoi.

The North Vietnamese, in turn, in sponsoring the Lao Communists over the past two decades, have been pursuing three fundamental objectives: the protection of their borders, access to South Vietnam, and the establishment of a politically congenial regime in Laos. In its search for security, the DRV has been concerned that the areas along its borders, particularly the regions of Sam Neua and Phong Saly, not become sites for hostile activity. Hanoi has wished to prevent, for example, any attempt by the American "imperialists" and their "puppets" to mobilize ethnic minorities on both sides of the frontier in the struggle against the DRV. Access to South Vietnam through the corridor in southern Laos became especially important to the DRV in 1959, when it stepped up its delivery of supplies and personnel in support of the insurgents in the South. As the war there intensified, the North Vietnamese, not content with friendly Lao control, virtually operated as if the Ho Chi Minh Trail were in their own territory.

Hanoi's fundamental interest in Laos during the earlier, anti-French war was equally clear. The goal of the Viet Minh was the expulsion of the French from all of Indochina. Therefore, in addition to their own, important military operations in Laos, they enlisted whatever Lao support they could mobilize for this struggle.

The foregoing interests of the North Vietnamese might be defined as their minimal aspirations in Laos. An important question is whether their goals may be even more ambitious.

In the precolonial period, Vietnam had dominated portions of Laos and had constantly competed with other neighboring powers, particularly Thailand, for influence in the region. While the Lao may look with trepidation at the history of Vietnamese westward expansion, Hanoi, by the same token, may well find it natural that it should exercise suzerainty over their divided neighbor. Even France began by conquering Vietnam and from there expanded its colonial domination to Laos and Cambodia, and several authors contend that the French development of Indochina was a natural outgrowth of earlier, Vietnamese aspirations.\*

During most of the colonial period, Laos was ruled from Vietnam, and Vietnamese were hired to serve in the more important administrative posts not filled by the French. Two Lao provinces were administered directly from Hanoi: Xieng Khouang until 1942, and Sam Neua still longer.

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\*Characterizing the French acquisition of Indochina, one author has written: ". . . through their adoption of Vietnamese ambitions and traditional relationships, the French created in Southeast Asia a colonial empire that was a fulfilment of long-standing goals of Vietnamese expansionism. . . . The power of France was equal to imperial dreams even greater than those of the Vietnamese." John T. McAlister, Jr., "The Possibilities for Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," World Politics, Vol. 19, No. 2, January 1967, p. 265. For similar views, see John F. Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, New York, 1964, p. 419, and Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam, New York, 1968, p. 5.

Just as other newly independent colonies have claimed all of the territory relinquished by the former colonial power -- India and Indonesia, for example -- some vigorous Vietnamese may feel justified in laying claim to all of Indochina. Even those Vietnamese leaders who would not press so extreme a claim would not regard as sacrosanct the Lao areas on their borders which France assigned to non-Lao tribal minorities similar to groups in the adjacent regions of North Vietnam. These mountain people have never shown a strong loyalty either to the lowland Lao who rule them from the Mekong River Valley or to Ho Chi Minh, and might well be considered fair game for Vietnamese rule.

North Vietnam's military record in Laos supports the argument of its expansionist designs. In 1953-54, the Viet Minh launched a major offensive in Laos (which was to culminate in the disaster at Dien Bien Phu) and "liberated" almost half the country. These successful military operations would add weight to the claim of the North Vietnamese to part of Laos. Roughly the same area which the Viet Minh had attacked in their independence campaign, the Lao Communists and the NVA overran once again in the offensive of 1961-62. Since then, as our study shows, the North Vietnamese have contrived to maintain a significant military presence in Laos.

Another argument pointing to Hanoi's ambitions in Laos is the fact that the DRV is an outgrowth of the Indochinese Communist Party, whose very name suggests the intention to establish a single Communist regime, under Vietnamese control, in the former Indochinese states. The ICP was founded in Hong Kong in 1930 by Ho Chi Minh and other Vietnamese Communist leaders, many of whom are still in power in Hanoi

today. At its founding, the new party was to have been called the Vietnamese Communist Party. But, according to the official DRV party history,

Following the Communist International's instructions, the Session decided to change the Party's name to Indochinese Communist Party because the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian proletariat have politically and economically to be closely related in spite of their difference in language, customs, and race.\*

It is true that the ICP was officially "dissolved" in 1945, but this was a tactical move designed to make more appealing to non-Communists a newly-formed national united front against the French (the Viet Minh). The ICP, as Ho Chi Minh has admitted, remained underground. In 1951, a new Communist party, the Vietnamese Workers Party, was announced in Vietnam, and national Communist parties, including the People's Party of Laos and the Cambodian People's Revolutionary Party, subsequently appeared in Laos and Cambodia, no doubt a sign that the Vietnamese were aware of the neighboring states' susceptibility to nationalist appeals. However, if one puts credence in a secret directive of the Lao Dong Party dated November 1, 1951, and reportedly captured by the French Expeditionary Corps in North Vietnam during the spring of 1952, "the three revolutionary parties of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos" were to "be reunited to form a single party" when conditions

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\*Thirty Years of Struggle of the Party, Hanoi, 1960, p. 27.

permitted.\* The document is said to have stated further that the Vietnamese Workers Party was still the old ICP and that it retained the right of supervision over the Cambodian and Lao parties.\*\*

We have no doubt that the present leaders of the DRV would like to see Communist systems established in neighboring Laos and Cambodia, but the one-time existence of an Indochinese Communist Party is not in itself proof of their intention to bring this about by Vietnamese expansion. Communist blueprints are not always reliable guides to future behavior.

Through its relationship with the Lao Communists, the DRV has been able to play an active role in shaping developments in Laos to its own needs while maintaining the façade of noninterference. The Pathet Lao assisted the Viet Minh in the struggle against the French, if only in a minor role. The North Vietnamese energies spent in helping the Pathet Lao acquire control of the area adjacent to Vietnam have been repaid with the DRV's present security and access to South Vietnam. Moreover, apart from its pursuit of self-interest, the Vietnamese Communists, in keeping with the principles of "proletarian internationalism," would naturally be inclined to support fellow-revolutionaries against what they consider the corrupt, feudal, Western-oriented leadership of the Royal Lao Government.

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\*Quoted by P. J. Honey, Communism in North Vietnam, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, p. 170. This same document is cited by the U.S. Department of State, The Situation in Laos, September 1959, pp. 2-3, and by Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam, p. 170.

\*\*Duncanson, p. 170.

Working intimately with the Lao Communists has also, however, posed problems for Hanoi. North Vietnamese advisers report that their counterparts are poorly organized, indolent, and lacking in ideological zeal. Frequently frustrated, many of these advisers wish for more direct intervention by their countrymen. But despite some dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of their junior partner, the leaders in Hanoi have found it desirable to continue in the advisory role.

The North Vietnamese have made a significant investment in Laos and have developed assets that keep open for them a wide range of options. How they will use these assets will be critically influenced by the course of the war in Vietnam. Though we do not intend to discuss the impact that different scenarios in the Vietnam struggle might have upon the future of Laos, we can state with considerable assurance how North Vietnam is likely to react with regard to her fundamental interests in Laos.

Whatever the outcome in Vietnam, Hanoi will continue to regard the Lao territory bordering on North Vietnam, particularly in the provinces of Phong Saly, Luang Prabang, Sam Neua, and Xieng Khouang, as essential to its security and will strive to ensure that these areas are not controlled by hostile forces. Hanoi's interest in access to South Vietnam through Laos, on the other hand, may diminish, depending on the nature of the settlement. The DRV, having added to its stake with the Lao Communists for over two decades, cannot be expected to abandon its ally, unless the pressures to do so are great or its own interests are substantially enhanced by such a move. A Communist victory in Vietnam would appear to the Lao Communists as an immense

contribution to their own cause, and the morale of the government forces would suffer correspondingly. In such circumstances, North Vietnam could expect pressure from its Lao allies for more massive assistance toward the achievement of a similar victory in Laos.





Appendix I

SELECTIVE LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED OR CONSULTED

A. LAO WHO AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER WERE WITH THE PATHET LAO\*

1. Defector; b. 1944, Luang Prabang Prov; Meo  
Ed: primary, ages 9 to 10½  
Occ before joining: farmer  
PL service: 1957-Jul 1959, in PL village unit, sgt;  
Feb 1960-Mar 1967 - Lt, asst chief QM office in Kkhay  
NVN trng: mil admin course Nov 1961 for 30 mos  
Def: Mar 1967
2. Defector; b. 1940, Nong Khai, Thailand; Tai  
Ed: med trng, course at OB hosp, Vientiane; studied  
in Vientiane wat (about ages 15 to 19)  
Occ before joining: supply clk at OB hosp  
PL service: 1962-1966; 1962 - joined Kong Le, briefly  
arrested by PL, given med trng & worked in villages  
for Kong Le Neutralists; 1963 - captured by PL &  
Deuane Neutralists, then coolie & nurse in KKhay  
Def: Aug 1966
3. Defector; b. 1930, Sayaboury  
Ed: no formal ed  
PL service: 1954-1957, soldier; 1959 - fled into  
jungle & stayed there as guerrilla; 1960 - joined  
Kong Le forces; 1962-66 - PL forces, 2nd Lt;  
1963 - asst co cmdr  
Def: Sep 1966
4. Defector; b. 1931, Khammouane Prov; Tai Dam (moved  
with family to SVN in 1937)  
Ed: ages 6 to 18, in SVN  
Occ before joining: 1949-1953 - served in French Army  
until captured by VM; 1955-1957 - prisoner in NVN;  
1957-1962 - released and served in NVA (squad ldr,  
taught mil subjects to Lao, interpreter at Son Tay)  
PL service: 1962-1966, cmdr of Lao 2nd Co under NVA  
36th Bn; later, asst co cmdr in PL bn in Saravane  
Def: Jun 1966

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\*These include Lao Loum as well as persons of Meo, Lao Theung, Black Tai, and other Tai descent.

5. Defector; b. Jun 1937, Xieng Khouang Prov  
Ed: learned to read & write Lao at local temple  
Occ before joining: farmer  
PL service: 1953-57, sgt & chief cook in PL bn;  
1961-63 - mil pol with Kong Le faction until captured by PL; 1963-67 - S/Lt & propagandist  
Def: Feb 6, 1967
6. Prisoner; b. 1946, Sedone Prov  
Ed: 2 yrs (1957-59)  
Occ before joining: student  
PL service: 1959-1966 or 1967; 1966 - chief of QM  
with regional hq at Lao Ngam  
Cap: 1966 or 1967
7. Defector; b. about 1948, Luang Prabang Prov  
Ed: 3 mos primary sch; can read & write; med trng  
for 7 mos under PL  
PL service: 1961-1967; in dance show for propag  
purposes; 1964 - Nam Tha hosp where she met Ngo  
Van Dam (see Appendix I, B-10) in late 1966  
Def: May 1967
8. Defector; b. 1938, Luang Prabang Prov  
Ed: can read & write  
Occ before joining: farmer  
PL service: 1960-1966, soldier & propagandist  
Def: Sep 1966
9. At present high police official, Pakse; b. 1930,  
Sedone Prov  
Occ before joining: schoolteacher  
PL service: 1950-1955, cadet sch; Co Cmdr; 1953 -  
to VN; 1954 - C/S of southern Laos, representative  
of Lao Issara in Central Commission & member of  
Mixed Sub-Commission in Paksong; member of PPL  
Def: Oct 1955
10. Defector; b. 1938, Attapeu Prov  
Ed: 3 yrs as novice monk until age 21  
Occ before joining: student  
PL service and NVN trng: 1959-1966; 1959-1964 - med  
student in Ha Dong; chief of med unit in Attapeu  
after 1964 grad; capt.  
Def: Sep 1966

11. Prisoner; b. 1930, Khammouane Prov  
Ed: 2 yrs formal, 3 mos French Army trng (1944)  
Occ before joining: farmer, then volunt'd for French Army (1951-53)  
PL service: 1953 - fled to VN, worked as cook to wealthy Lao, then sent to Savannakhet Prov as warehouse keeper for PL; 1956 - PL driver; 1958 - demob'd; 1960-1966 - Kong Le driver & laborer in tool shop for PL  
NVN trng: 1955 - mechanic  
Cap: May 1967
12. Defector; b. Attapeu Prov  
Ed: learned to read & write in war  
PL service: 1954-1957, soldier in inf unit; 1957-1959 - sent home, farmer; 1959-1967 - M/Sgt, asst cmdr, 1st Lt of Ind Co; 1966 - assigned to regional hq in Savannakhet Prov  
NVN trng: 1954 - post-Geneva; 1955 - 6 mos at Muong Vinh  
Def: Spring 1967
13. Defector; b. 1937, Khammouane Prov  
Ed: taught self to read & write; 1955-1958 - novice monk (2½ yrs)  
Occ before joining: farmer  
PL service: 1959-1967 - propagandist, Lt  
Def: Apr 1967
14. At present in Min of Info, RLG; b. Dec 1931, near Tchepone  
Ed: sch in Savannakhet, Pakse, & Vientiane  
Occ before joining: student  
PL service: 1945-1957, Issara guard under Thao O; 1946 - moved with unit to VN; next few years, into Laos for propag work; 1948 - head of polit section in Exec Cmte for Nat'l Liberation organized in VN  
NVN trng: 1954-1957; 1952 - propaga chief of subdiv in Mahaxay; on ed staff of Neo Lao Hak Sat newspaper
15. Defector; b. 1941, Savannakhet Prov; Lao Theung  
PL service: 1957-Jan 1967; 1958 - propagandist; asst plat ldr, 2nd Lt  
NVN trng: 1958 (3 mos); 1959 (5 mos)  
Def: Jan 1967

16. Defector; b. 1927, Luang Prabang Prov  
Ed: literate  
PL service: 1953-1964; 1953 - appt'd canton chief  
by VM; 1957 - worked in devl section of LPrabang  
Prov cmte; 1963 - named dist chief of Pakseng  
until 1964, when asked to resign; then a farmer  
Def: Feb 1967
17. Defector; b. 1939, Luang Prabang Prov  
Ed: to elem grade 4  
Occ before joining: student  
PL service: 1959-1966; 1965 - chief of QM unit,  
LPrabang region  
NVN trng: 1959 (3 mos); 1963 - cadet sch near Hanoi;  
1½ yrs polit, mil, and QM courses  
Def: Aug 1966
18. At present RLG Lt Col; b. about 1925, Savannakhet Prov  
Occ before joining: in father's opium business  
PL service: 1946-1957  
NVN trng: 1946-48; 1951 - member of mil cmte for  
Sam Neua Prov; 1955 - Director of Khommadam Sch  
for off trng; then directed guerrilla troops in  
SNeua & PSaly; rank of major when he rallied to  
RLG in 1957
19. Defector  
PL service: 1945-49 & 1952-56; dir of off sch, med  
sch, & QM of Xieng Khouang area  
Def: 1956
20. Defector; b. 1942, Luang Prabang Prov  
Ed: elem until age 12  
Occ before joining: student  
PL service: Oct 1954-Jan 1967; 1962 - capt & co cmdr;  
1964 - cmdr of protection co with Souk Vongsak in  
Vientiane  
NVN trng: 1955 - DBPhu (6 mos); 1957 - adv trng  
(18 mos); 1961 - Son Tay, adv trng (10 mos)  
Def: Jan 1967

21. Defector  
Ed: grade 2 (French system)  
Occ before joining: student  
PL service: 1952-Sep 1965, bodyguard, medic; 1960 -  
co cmdr; 1962 - mil staff member, Attapeu Region;  
Lt cmdr, Sithandone; Dec 1964 - chief of combat  
section under Gen Phomma  
NVN trng: 1953-55; 1958-59 (1 yr 2 mos) medical  
course; 1960-61 - Dong Hoi (8 mos adv trng)  
Def: Sep 1965
22. Defector; b. 1936 or 1937, Sedone Prov  
Ed: 1 yr in monk's sch for elem ed; 4 yrs monk trng  
in Thailand (1947-51)  
Occ before joining: student monk  
PL service: 1954-67, C/S 2nd PL prov bn  
NVN trng: 1954-57, automechanics at Bac Yang (3 yrs);  
about 1959 - at Son Tay for off trng, graduated as  
capt & co cmdr  
Def: Feb 1967
23. Defector; b. 1940, Sam Neua Prov  
Ed: 6 yrs from ages 12 to 18; also teacher trng  
course in Sam Neua  
Occ before joining: trader in clothes and opium (3 yrs)  
PL service: Nov 1960 to 1966 - PL teacher, with ed  
dept in Sam Neua, sch director in Sam Neua  
Def: 1966
24. At present official in RLG judiciary, Savannakhet;  
b. 1919, Tchepone  
Ed: Savannakhet (1928-31); Hanoi (l'Ecole des Frères  
and Institut Gia Long, 1931-37)  
Occ before joining: commerce; with French company  
operating a lead mine near Tchepone as liaison agent  
PL service: 1945-57; 1945 - chosen cmdr of Issara  
forces of Tchepone; 1946-49 - to VN to organize  
forces and direct guerrilla and propag forces in  
Laos; formed Cmte for Nat'l Liberation with Nouhak  
as chief, while maintaining liaison with Issara govt  
in Thailand; 1949-57 - returned to Laos to command  
local troops in Tchepone; from there to NVN, where  
interned with family (about 3 yrs); then served in  
minor functions, including liaison to ICC, until his  
integration into RLG in 1957

25. Defector; b. 1935, Vientiane Prov  
Ed: elem  
Occ before joining: 1960-63, in Kong Le's Neutralist police until taken prisoner by PL  
PL service: 1963-65, warrant officer; 1964 - policeman in KKhay; Apr 1965 - polit instructor to ex-RLG personnel in Deuane forces  
Def: Dec 1965
26. Defector; b. probably late 1940s, Sam Neua Prov  
Ed: can read & write  
Occ before joining: farmer  
PL service: 1960-66, soldier & propagandist  
Def: Sep 1966
27. Defector; middle-aged; b. near Muong Hong, NE Laos; Meo  
Ed: cannot read or write  
Occ before joining: farmer, asst village chief (1954-58), Xieng Ngeun  
PL service: 1958-66, propag agent near native village  
NVN trng: 1961-62, Hanoi & Haiphong  
Def: Oct 1966
28. Defector; b. 1940, Xieng Khouang Prov  
Ed: grade 6, elem  
Occ before joining: teacher  
PL service: 1962-66; 1962 - village captured by PL, served as PL instructor  
Def: Sep 1966
29. Defector; b. 1929, Saravane Prov; Lao Theung  
Ed: learned to read & write in wat; novice monk (3 yrs)  
Occ before joining: farmer  
PL service: 1950-54, propagandist; 1960-66 - soldier  
Def: 1966
30. Defector; b. 1921, Khammouane Prov  
Ed: self-educated, reads & writes Lao  
Occ before joining: farmer, after being RLG asst platoon ldr of home guards  
PL service: 1962-66, PL canton chief  
Def: Nov 1966

31. Defector; b. Sep 1942, Sedone Prov  
Ed: 1948-61; attended College of Pakse and spent  
4 mos at wat as novice monk  
Occ before joining: student  
PL service: 1961-66, mechanic & asst platoon ldr;  
1963 - S/Lt  
NVN trng: 1961-63, Dong Hoi and Thai Nguyen Tech  
Sch, automechanics  
Def: Dec 1966

B. MEMBERS OF NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY (NVA) IN LAOS

1. Cam Minh Phat  
Defector; b. 1946, Thanh Hoa, NVN; Tai Dam  
Ed: 6 yrs village sch  
Occ before joining: farmer  
NVA service: Apr 1963-Mar 1967; 1964 - to Laos as  
soldier; 1965 - made cpl & stationed at Muong Sa,  
Laos; 1966 - 2nd Lt, asst co cmdr, Bn 923, Laos;  
1967 - in Houei Tom attack when defected  
Def: Mar 1967
2. Doung Ly Cuong  
Prisoner; b. 1943, NW NVN; Chinese-Tai Dam  
Ed: 5th class, DRV  
Occ before joining: oxcart driver in cooperative  
NVA service: Jul 1966-Jan 1967, private; Jan 1967  
- to Laos, taken while attacking FAR post  
Cap: Jan 1967
3. Hoang Hinh  
Prisoner; b. 1947, Yen Bai, NVN; Vietnamese  
Ed: about 3 yrs  
Occ before joining: farmer  
NVA service: 1966-Jan 1967, soldier; Oct 1966 -  
to Laos; Jan 1967 - wounded and taken in attack  
by FAR  
Cap: Jan 1967
4. Kha Dinh Toan  
Defector; b. 1943, Xieng Khouang Prov, Laos; Tai  
Deng (Red Tai); moved with family to VN in 1951  
(move forced by VN troops)  
NVA service: 1959-66; orderly to VN adviser in  
Xieng Khouang Prov, Laos, & also with VN adviser  
to 17th PL Bn, Khammouane Prov; propagandist &  
soldier in Thakhek area until defection  
Def: Jul 1966

5. Le Chi Thanh  
Prisoner; b. 1946, NVN; Vietnamese  
NVA service: 1965-Feb 1966, soldier; Jan 1966 -  
to Laos, wounded and taken prisoner  
Cap: Feb 1966
6. Le Duc Phu  
Defector; b. 1945, Vientiane Prov; Vietnamese  
Ed: speaks, reads, writes Thai & Vietnamese (moved  
with family to Thailand 1945-62); also 10 mos  
mech trng Phu Tho, NVN  
Occ before joining: mechanics student  
NVA service: 1962 - recruited by VN agents in  
Thailand & sent to NVN; 1965 - recruited into NVA;  
1965 - assigned to SVN; defected while going  
through Laos  
Def: Apr 1966
7. Le Huy Linh  
Prisoner; b. 1930, Nghe An, NVN; Vietnamese  
NVA service: capt; 1965 - arr in Laos, fought in  
Thakhek battle  
Cap: Nov 1965
8. Le Van Oi  
Defector; b. 1942, Muong Lan, NVN; Vietnamese-Tai  
Dam  
NVA service: 1962-66; 1965 - squad ldr & jr off  
after grad from cadet sch, Thanh Hoa; Sep 1965 -  
to Laos  
Def: Dec 1966
9. Mai Dai Hap  
Defector; b. Dec 1930, Thanh Hoa, NVN; Vietnamese  
NVA service: Jan 1950-Dec 1966; 1958-60 - off sch  
at Son Tay & promoted to 1st Lt; 1963 - acted as  
C/S to Bn 1; Feb 1964 - to Laos as adviser to PL  
Bn 408; Oct 1966 - Sr Capt  
Def: Dec 1966
10. Ngo Van Dam  
Defector  
Occ before joining: med student finishing 1st yr  
of 5 yr course at Ha Dong  
NVA service: Oct 1966-May 1967; Oct 1966 - to Laos  
to head Nam Tha Prov med services for VNese and to  
advise PL  
Def: May 1967



11. Ngo Van Ngo  
Prisoner; b. 1942, Vinh Phuc Prov, NVN; Vietnamese  
Ed: completed 5th grade  
Occ before joining: farmer (1960-64)  
NVA service: 1964-Jul 1966, soldier; May 1966 -  
to Laos  
Cap: Jul 1966
12. Nguyen Khac Thanh  
Defector; b. 1937, Thanh Hoa, NVN  
Ed: 3 yrs (1952-55)  
NVA service: 1959-67, S/Lt, subaltern in QM service;  
May 1964 - to Laos, Attapeu Prov; Feb 1965 -  
polit agt for VNese with PL  
Married: Mar 1966  
Def: Apr 1967
13. Nguyen Tham Hao  
Prisoner; b. 1949, NW NVN; Vietnamese  
Ed: 5 yrs (1960-65)  
NVA service: Jan 1966-Mar 1967, private; Jul 1966 -  
to Laos, in combat about 5 days after trng about  
6 mos  
Cap: Mar 1967
14. Nguyen Van Bay  
Prisoner; b. 1948; Vietnamese  
NVA service: 1966-Aug 1967; May 1967 - intel recce  
mission to Laos in commando co when taken following  
NVA attack in Saravane on FAR post  
Cap: Aug 1967
15. Nguyen Van Chua  
Prisoner; Vietnamese  
NVA service: Aug-Sep 1966, soldier; Aug 1966 -  
to Laos when wounded and taken prisoner  
Cap: Sep 1966
16. Nguyen Van Hoan  
Prisoner; b. 1940; Vietnamese  
Ed: 3rd grade  
NVA service: 1963-65; assigned to 1st Ind Bn & then  
to Laos, cpl; in Thakhek battle  
Cap: Nov 1965
17. Nguyen Van Thi  
Prisoner; b. 1946, NVN; Vietnamese  
Ed: 4 yrs  
NVA service: 1964-65; 1965 - sent to Laos, wounded  
and taken at Dong Hene  
Cap: Mar 1965

18. Pham Dinh Thao  
Prisoner; Vietnamese  
NVA service: 1958-65, low-level comm off; 1965 -  
arr Laos, in Thakhek attack  
Cap: Nov 1965
19. Song Mee  
Defector; b. NVN; Meo  
Ed: no formal ed  
NVA service: 1962-67, sgt; propagandist amg Meo  
in Laos  
Def: after Tet 1967
20. Tran Van Ha  
Prisoner; b. 1947 (approx); Vietnamese  
NVA service: 1964-65, soldier; Oct 1965 - entered  
Laos and taken prisoner after wounded  
Cap: Dec 1965
21. Truong Quang Lam  
Defector; b. 1945, Nghe An Prov, NVN; Tai Dam  
Ed: primary (1959-66)  
NVA service: Jan-Feb 1967, private; assigned to  
road repair unit near Ban Ban, XKhouang, Laos  
Def: Feb 1967
22. Van Kiem  
Defector; b. 1947, Xieng Khouang Prov; Lao Loum  
Ed: 1953-63, in Hanoi, thru 8th grade under govt  
sponsorship, grew up in orphanages  
NVA service: 1964-67; Spring 1964 - to Laos,  
aspirant, platoon ldr  
Def: Jun 1967

Appendix II

THE LAO COMMUNIST MOVEMENT -- A BASIC CHRONOLOGY

I.  
Important Events in the  
Evolution of the  
Movement

II.  
Important Events  
Outside the  
Movement

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | March 1945<br>Japanese defeat of French<br>in Indochina                               |
|   | September 1945<br>Ho Chi Minh proclaims DRV<br>in Hanoi                               |
| October 12, 1945<br>Lao Issara constitution<br>and government formed                        |   |
|   | November 1945<br>Ho Chi Minh formally dis-<br>solves Indochinese Commu-<br>nist Party |
| April 1946<br>Issara government flees<br>to Thailand after French<br>enter Vientiane        |   |
| January 1949<br>Armed forces called the<br>"Lao Issara Armed Forces"                        |   |
| May 1949<br>Souphanouvong splits with<br>Issara and is removed<br>from his posts            |   |
|   | July 1949<br>Elysée Treaty in Paris   |
| October 1949<br>Issara announces its dis-<br>solution, and moderates<br>return to Vientiane |   |

I.

August 1950  
First Resistance Congress  
elects new government of  
"Pathet Lao" at Tuyen Quang,  
North Vietnam

March 1951  
DRV sets up Vietnam-Khmer-  
Lao alliance among Commu-  
nist leaders of three  
countries

March 1953  
Viet Minh forces invade  
Laos; Sam Neua turned  
over by Viet Minh to  
Souphanouvong as govern-  
ment seat

July 1954  
Geneva Conference; PL  
assigned Sam Neua and  
Phong Saly Provinces for  
regroupment

March 1955  
People's Party of Laos  
(PPL) proclaimed

II.

February 1950  
United States recognizes  
French-sponsored govern-  
ments in Phnom Penh,  
Saigon, and Vientiane

October 1953  
France affirms Laos' full  
independence in French  
Union

March-May 1954  
Battle of Dien Bien Phu

1954  
SEATO Treaty

April 1955  
RLG White Book to ICC about  
North Vietnamese inter-  
ference; Bandung Conference

I.

II.

1955

(Neo) Lao Hak Sat newspaper  
founded

January 1956

NLHS Party founded; Lao  
Issara changed to NLHS

December 1956

Joint communiqué by Souvanna  
Phouma and Souphanouvong an-  
nouncing Government of  
National Union

November 1957

Final agreement for National  
Union Govt. and reintegra-  
tion of PL into RLG Army

February 1958

1501 PL formally integrated  
into RLG Army

May 1958

Pathet Lao, with affiliated  
Santiphab Party, wins 13 of  
21 seats in national elections

1959

Regroupees from North  
Vietnam begin using Ho Chi  
Minh Trail in growing  
numbers to infiltrate to  
South Vietnam

Spring 1959

Two Pathet Lao battalions  
escape from integration into  
RLG after being surrounded  
by FAR troops

July 1959

Souphanouvong and other  
NLHS leaders arrested by RLG

December 1959

Phoumi Nosavan coup

I.

May 1960  
Souphanouvong escapes from  
prison with guards

August 1960  
Radio Pathet Lao begins  
broadcasting

January 1961  
Soviet airlifts to Pathet  
Lao

October 1961  
Meeting of leaders at Hin  
Heup and Ban Namone --  
agree to establish coali-  
tion government

May 1962  
Pathet Lao and Vietnamese  
seize Nam Tha; U.S. Marines  
sent to Thailand

June 1962  
Coalition government in-  
cluding NLHS formed

July 1962  
Geneva Accords signed --  
Declaration of Neutrality  
of Laos

II.

August 1960  
Kong Le coup

December 1960  
Boun Oum and Phoumi Nosavan  
retake Vientiane and Kong  
Le flees to Pathet Lao

May 1961  
Geneva Conference on Laos  
opens

December 1961  
First Vietnamese prisoner  
taken by RLG

March 1963  
Fighting among Neutralists  
on Plain of Jars; Pathet  
Lao and Deuanists drive  
Kong Le from Plain

I.

April 1963  
Souphanouvong and Phoumi  
Vongvichit leave Vientiane  
government for Khang Khay  
claiming security inade-  
quate in Vientiane

April 1964  
Second National Congress  
of NLHS elects Central  
Committee and adopts 10-  
point program

January 1965  
Livre Blanc published by  
NLHS

October 1965  
Name of "Pathet Lao Fight-  
ing Units" changed to "Lao  
People's Liberation Army"  
(LPLA); joint political  
conference of NLHS and  
Neutralists in Sam Neua  
issues 4 pts. and 5 prin-  
ciples

November 1965  
Pathet Lao/Viet Minh attack  
on Thakhek

II.

April 1963  
Assassination of Quinim  
Pholsena

August 1963  
Souvanna Phouma at UN calls  
for end of foreign inter-  
ference

April 1964  
Kouprasith-Sananikone coup  
attempt

December 1964  
RLG Livre Blanc on North  
Vietnamese interference

February 1965  
Phoumi-Siho coup attempt

I.

1968

Communist offensive in  
northern Laos (Nam Bac)  
and southern Laos (Lao  
Ngam)

Summer 1968

Lao Communists indicate that  
settlement of Laos issue  
must take into account the  
"realities of the current  
situation"

August 1968

Temporary (?) eclipse of  
PPL Sec.-Gen. Kaysone

October 25-November 1, 1968

Third National Congress of  
the NLHS; adoption of a  
new program

II.

September 1966

Siho killed during alleged  
prison escape

November 1966

Kong Le resigns from  
leadership of Neutralist  
forces and goes into exile

January 1967

National elections in RLG-  
controlled territory

1968

RLG issues White Book on  
the violations of the  
Geneva Accords by the DRV



Appendix III

PARTIAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIRST  
RESISTANCE CONGRESS OF LAOS (August 13, 1950)

The following listing, furnished by a former Pathet Lao official who attended the meeting, includes more than a third of those who were present and indicates the provinces they represented. The starred names are those of persons who are now prominent in the Lao Communist movement. The spelling provided by the informant has been corrected to conform to the authors' system of transcription. (Further research is required to establish in all cases beyond doubt the identity of the individuals listed and the correct rendering of their names.)

ATTOPEU PROVINCE

- (1) Phoun Sipaseuth \*
- (2) Khamtay Siphandone \*
- (3) Boun
- (4) Suan
- (5) Chareun

KHAMMOUANE AND SAVANNAKHET PROVINCES

- (1) Nouhak Phomsavan \*
- (2) Khamfeuane Tounalom
- (3) Som Phommachan
- (4) Toulam
- (5) Singkapo Chounramany Sikhot \*
- (6) Sot Phetrasy \*
- (7) Sisana Sisane \*
- (8) Ounheuane Phomsavan
- (9) Nouankham Anourak
- (10) Maha Phamone
- (11) Nakhonkham Bouphanouvong
- (12) Apheui
- (13) Boun Nhong Vorasane

VIENTIANE AND HOUAI SAI PROVINCES

- (1) Prince Souk Vongsak \*
- (2) Phoumi Vongvichit \*
- (3) Inta
- (4) Mun
- (5) Saly
- (6) Outtama
- (7) Sithong
- (8) Thongchanh

SAM NEUA PROVINCE

- (1) Kaysone \*
- (2) Ma
- (3) Sawath
- (4) Nang Khamla
- (5) Phya Thomsombat
- (6) Chanthavong
- (7) Maisouk

XIENG KHOUANG PROVINCE

- (1) Faydang \*
- (2) Thit Khamphong
- (3) Nhia Vu
- (4) Lo Fung
- (5) Ba Tou

Appendix IV

NORTH VIETNAMESE PRISONERS AND DEFECTORS IN LAOS  
PRIOR TO THE 1962 GENEVA CONFERENCE

1. Nguyen Van Nham. 2d Lt., 335th Division. Captured at Ban Van Vieng, 70 km. north of Vientiane, by BV 53 about January 31, 1961. Sent to Hanoi at the end of 1962, after the formation of the Government of National Union.
2. Dinh Van Quang (also known as Manh Ha). 2nd-class soldier, 1st Bn., 316 Brigade, of NVA. A radio operator captured at Ban Na Pa by an FAR unit in December 1961. Sent to Hanoi in 1962.
3. Ne Tong. An ethnic Jaray from Darlac Province in South Vietnam who had been regrouped to the North with Viet Minh troops in 1954. Served in Laos with the 120th Independent Regiment. Captured by the 10th Infantry Bn., of the FAR, at Nong Het on Route 7, about December 1960.
4. Tran The Trung. Served with 927th Bn., 359th Regiment, a frontier defense unit. Captured by an FAR unit at Ban La The, in Laos, near the Mu Gia Pass leading to North Vietnam. Liberated from prison by Kong Le forces in 1960, and thereafter worked in Vientiane as a barber. After the coup by Phoumi Nosavan in December 1960, arrested once again and kept in prison until 1962. Chose to go to Saigon in 1962.
5. Vi Van Lang. A Red Tai, Sgt., serving with the 925th Bn., 359th Independent Regiment (a frontier defense unit). Captured at the battle of Ban Pha Tang in late April. Sent to Hanoi in 1962.
6. Linh (family name unknown). Intelligence agent of the 4th R.M. of NVA. Defected to RLG near Thakhek, in Khammouane Province in 1961 or 1962. Chose to go to Saigon after the Geneva Conference.