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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Case No.: 200701753

MAR 25 2010

I refer to your letter dated March 11, 2007 regarding the release of certain Department of State material under the Freedom of Information Act (Title 5 USC Section 552).

We searched for and reviewed the self study guides that you requested and have determined that all except one of them may be released. They are on the enclosed disc. One of the guides is being released with excisions.

An enclosure provides information on Freedom of Information Act exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made excisions, the applicable exemptions are marked on each document. With respect to material withheld by the Department of State, you have the right to appeal our determination within 60 days. A copy of the appeals procedures is enclosed.

We have now completed the processing of your case. If you have any questions, you may write to the Office of Information Programs and Services, SA-2, Department of State, Washington, DC 20522-8100, or telephone us at (202) 261-8484. Please be sure to refer to the case number shown above in all correspondence about this case.

We hope that the Department has been of service to you in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Margaret P. Grafeld".

for Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures:
As stated.

63934 Federal Register/Vol. 69, No. 212
Rules and Regulations

Subpart F – Appeal Procedures

§171.52 Appeal of denial of access to, declassification of, amendment of, accounting of disclosures of, or challenge to classification of records.

- (a) *Right of administrative appeal.* Except for records that have been reviewed and withheld within the past two years or are the subject of litigation, any requester whose request for access to records, declassification of records, amendment of records, accounting of disclosure of records, or any authorized holder of classified information whose classification challenge has been denied, has a right to appeal the denial to the Department's Appeals Review Panel. This appeal right includes the right to appeal the determination by the Department that no records responsive to an access request exist in Department files. Privacy Act appeals may be made only by the individual to whom the records pertain.
- (b) *Form of appeal.* There is no required form for an appeal. However, it is essential that the appeal contain a clear statement of the decision or determination by the Department being appealed. When possible, the appeal should include argumentation and documentation to support the appeal and to contest the bases for denial cited by the Department. The appeal should be sent to: Chairman, Appeals Review Panel, c/o Appeals Officer, A/GIS/IPS/PP/LC, U.S. Department of State, SA-2, Room 8100, Washington, DC 20522-8100.
- (c) *Time limits.* The appeal should be received within 60 days of the date of receipt by the requester of the Department's denial. The time limit for response to an appeal begins to run on the day that the appeal is received. The time limit (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal public holidays) for agency decision on an administrative appeal is 20 days under the FOIA (which may be extended for up to an additional 10 days in unusual circumstances) and 30 days under the Privacy Act (which the Panel may extend an additional 30 days for good cause shown). The Panel shall decide mandatory declassification review appeals as promptly as possible.
- (d) *Notification to appellant.* The Chairman of the Appeals Review Panel shall notify the appellant in writing of the Panel's decision on the appeal. When the decision is to uphold the denial, the Chairman shall include in his notification the reasons therefore. The appellant shall be advised that the decision of the Panel represents the final decision of the Department and of the right to seek judicial review of the Panel's decision, when applicable. In mandatory declassification review appeals, the Panel shall advise the requester of the right to appeal the decision to the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel under §3.5(d) of E.O. 12958.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Withholding specifically authorized under an Executive Order in the interest of national defense or foreign policy, and properly classified. E.O. 12958, as amended, includes the following classification categories:
 - 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
 - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
 - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
 - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
 - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
 - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(h) Information on weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
 - ARMEX Arms Export Control Act, 22 USC 2778(e)
 - CIA Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)
 - EXPORT Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 App. USC 2411(c)(1)
 - FSA Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4003 & 4004
 - INA Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f)
 - IRAN Iran Claims Settlement Act, Sec 505, 50 USC 1701, note
- (b)(4) Privileged/confidential trade secrets, commercial or financial information from a person
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Information that would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
- (b)(7) Information compiled for law enforcement purposes that would:
 - (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
 - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
 - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
 - (D) disclose confidential sources
 - (E) disclose investigation techniques
 - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request, excised with the agreement of the requester

Laos

A Self-Study Guide



George P. Shultz National Foreign Affairs
Training Center

School of Professional and Area Studies
Foreign Service Institute
U.S. Department of State

The *Self-Study Guide: Laos* is intended to provide U.S. Government personnel in the foreign affairs community with an overview of important Laotian issues related to history, geography, culture, economics, government and politics, international relations and defense. This guide should serve as an introduction and a self-study resource. Laos is far too complex and diverse a society to be covered in any depth using only the text in this guide. The reader is encouraged to explore the questions and issues raised in the guide by referring to the books, articles, periodicals and web sites listed in the Bibliography. Most of the published material can be found on the Internet or in the National Foreign Affairs Training Center Library, the Main State Library, or the major public libraries.

The first edition of the *Self-Study Guide: Laos* was prepared by Dr. Arthur J. Dommen, a former foreign correspondent in Laos and historian of Indochina who lives in Bethesda, Maryland. He is the author of two books and many articles on Laos and has lectured on Laos at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center. He has worked extensively with the archival materials in Record Group 59 and in the Nixon Presidential Materials at the National Archives II in College Park, Maryland, a good place to start for exploring the long and tortuous relationship of the United States and Laos. A selection of these documents can be found in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* volumes covering at this writing 1947-1968 (see Bibliography). But for longer Foreign Service Despatches and Airgrams reporting on political parties, election laws and results, economic trends, aspects of Lao society, Pathet Lao organization, and other matters the original documents should be consulted. Also, the “Yellow Books” of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) was an indispensable source on radio broadcasts relating to Laos until it ceased publishing these daily texts in the 1990's for budgetary reasons; fortunately, they are on microfilm and may be consulted at the Library of Congress.

The views expressed in this guide are those of the author or of his own or documentary sources, and do not necessarily reflect official policy or the position of the Department of State or the National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

This publication is for official educational and non-profit use only.

August 2004

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THE LAND

Laos (officially the Lao People's Democratic Republic; in Lao: Sathalanalat Paxathipatai Paxaxôn Lao) is a landlocked country located on the Indochinese Peninsula. It is bounded on the north by China, on the northeast and east by Vietnam, on the south by Cambodia, on the west by Thailand, and on the northwest by Myanmar (Burma). Laos extends about 650 miles (1,050 kilometers) from northwest to Southeast and has a total area of approximately 91,400 square miles (236,800 square kilometers). The capital is Vientiane (Lao: Viangchan).

Dominating the landscape of Laos are its inhospitable, forest-covered mountains, which in the north rise to a maximum elevation of 9,245 feet (2,818 meters) above sea level at Mount Bia (Lao: Phou Bia) and nearly everywhere make surface travel difficult and air travel dangerous, particularly in the rainy season. The principal mountain range lies along a northwest-southeast axis and forms part of the Annamese Cordillera, but secondary ranges abound.

Three notable landscape features of the interior of Laos may be mentioned. In the northern province of Xiangkhoang, the Plain of Jars (Lao: Thôn Haihin; the name derived from large prehistoric stone jars littering the plain) consists of extensive rolling grasslands and provides a hub of communications. The central provinces of Bolikhamxay and Khammouan contain karst landscapes of caverns and severely eroded limestone pinnacles. Finally, in the south the Bolovens Plateau, at an elevation of about 3,600 feet, is covered by an open woodland and has generally fertile soil. The only extensive lowlands lie along the eastern bank of the Mekong River.

The general slope of the land is downhill from east to west, and all the major rivers—the Tha, Beng, Ou, Ngum, Kading, Bangfai, Banghiang, and Kong—are tributaries of the Mekong (Lao: Menan Kong). The Mekong flows generally southeast and south along and through western Laos on its way to the South China Sea, forming Laos's boundary with Myanmar and most of the border with Thailand. The course of the river itself is severely constricted by gorges in the north, but by the time it reaches Vientiane, its valley broadens and exposes wide areas to flooding when it breaches its banks. Near the Cambodian border, the Mekong forms a series of rapids and waterfalls. A few rivers in eastern Laos flow eastward through gaps in the Annamese Cordillera to reach the Gulf of Tonkin; the most important of these is the Ma, which rises in Xiangkhoang province and flows through Vietnam.

Soils in the floodplains are formed from alluvium deposited by rivers and are either sandy or sandy clay with light colors or sandy with gray or yellow colors; chemically, these are neutral to slightly acidic. Upland soils derived from crystalline, granite, schistose, or sandstone parent rocks generally are more acidic and much less fertile. Southern Laos contains areas of laterite (leached and iron-bearing) soils, as well as basaltic soils on the Bolovens Plateau.

Laos has the typical monsoon climate of the region, though the mountains provide some variations in temperature. During the rainy season (May to October), the winds of the southwest monsoon deposit an average rainfall of between 50 and 90 inches (1,300 and 2,300 millimeters),

with totals reaching 160 inches on the Bolovens Plateau. The dry season (November to April) is dominated by the northeast monsoon. Minimum temperatures average between 60 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit (16 and 21 degrees Centigrade) in the cool months of December through February, increasing to highs of more than 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Centigrade) in March and April, just prior to the onset of the rains. In the wet season the average temperature is 80 degrees Fahrenheit (27 degrees Centigrade).

Laos has tropical rain forests of broad-leaved evergreens in the north and monsoon forests of mixed evergreens and deciduous trees in the south. In the monsoon forest areas the ground is covered with tall, coarse grass called *tranh*; the trees are mostly second growth, with an abundance of bamboo, scrub, and wild banana. The forests support a rich wildlife, including elephants, gaurs (wild oxen), deer, bears, tigers and leopards, monkeys, and a large variety of birds.

THE PEOPLE

The population of Laos in 2003 was estimated at 5.66 million. Laos is predominantly rural and agricultural. More than 75% of the population was rural in 2002, living in villages ranging from ten to 200 households, or up to about 1,200 persons. The numerous isolated valley communities preserve a variety of different traditions and dialects. Villages usually are located close to rivers and roads that give people access to itinerant traders as well as to each other. Most villages are laid out around a main street or open area, farmlands being adjacent to the residential areas. Every village, if it can, has a Buddhist temple and supports at least one monk. The temple compound usually includes a public building that serves as a school and a meeting hall. Village leadership is usually divided, the headman having authority in secular matters and the monk in religious. The hill peoples usually are organized on tribal lines and live in smaller groupings. They are hunters and gatherers of forest products, as well as farmers, but their practice of shifting cultivation prevents them from establishing permanent settlements. Hill peoples living close to lowland areas tend to acquire the languages and cultures of their neighbors and to engage in limited trade with them; those living at higher elevations remain unacculturated.

Urban life in Laos is limited mainly to the capital, Vientiane, the former royal capital, Louangphrabang, and four or five other large towns. With the exception of Louangphrabang, which is hilly, all these towns are located in floodplains of the Mekong. Their populations are predominantly Lao, with smaller groups of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Indians. Compared with the cities of Thailand, Malaysia, or Vietnam, those of Laos are small and provincial.

Laos is an ethnically diverse country. Before the Indochina wars, sources commonly identified more than 60 different population groups. The 1985 census listed 47 such groups, some numbering only a few hundred persons. More recently, these peoples have been officially grouped under three names: Lao Loum ("lowland Lao"), Lao Theung ("Lao of the mountain slopes"), and Lao Soung ("Lao of the mountain tops"). Aside from this rather crude attempt to

"Laocize" minorities for political ends, such a grossly oversimplified scheme bears little relevance to the reality of these people's linguistic and cultural diversity, even if individuals in the remotest villages are taught today to identify themselves to visitors using this nomenclature. The language spoken by the Lao of Vientiane, for example, bears closer resemblance to that spoken by the Thai across the river than to those spoken by the Black Tai (Tai Dam) and Red Tai (Tai Deng) of Houaphan province, who are officially also Lao Loum but who would more accurately be called Lao-Tai. The Lao Loum also include the Tai Phuan of Xiangkhouang province, the Lue of Oudômxay province, and the Phu Tai of the south. Altogether, the Lao Loum comprised 66% of the population of Laos in 2000.

The Lao Theung are of Austroasiatic origin and are the indigenous inhabitants of Laos, having migrated northwards in prehistoric times. Ethnic groups within this broad category include the Kammu and Lamet in the north, the Katang and Makong in the center, and the Loven and Lawae in the far south. The Lao Theung comprised about 23% of the population in 2000.

The Lao Soung comprise Miao-Yao or Tibeto-Burmese speaking peoples who have continued to migrate into Laos from the north within the last two centuries, and made up about 10% of the population in 2000. Ethnic groups here include the Hmong (formerly called Meo or Miao), Man (or Mien or Yao), Akha and Lahu.

The predominant religion of Laos is Theravada Buddhism. Buddhism was the state religion of the Kingdom of Laos, and the organization of the community of monks and novices, the clergy (*sangha*), paralleled the political hierarchy. Today Buddhists constitute about 49% of the population, concentrated among the lowland Lao. About 42% of the population are animists, particularly concentrated among the Lao Theung and Lao Soung, although among lowland Lao there is both a certain syncretistic practice of, and tolerance for, animist customs. Christians constitute at most 1.5% of the population. Other minority religions include the Baha'i Faith, Islam, Mahayana Buddhism, and Confucianism.

In the constitution of the LPDR, freedom of religion is provided for; however, the government restricts this right in practice, particularly with respect to the minority religions. After some heavy-handed attempts in the aftermath of 1975 to take over the *sangha*, which it perceived as a rival grassroots organization, and the resultant flight of many monks abroad, the government has tread carefully. Although monks are still required to study Marxism-Leninism and attend certain party meetings, the government has patronized a revival of Buddhist culture and merit-making in recent years. At the same time, in spite of the regime's public opposition to "superstitious" beliefs, these practices and beliefs have gradually returned.

Laos has the lowest population density of any Southeast Asian country, with 61.9 persons per square mile (23.9 persons per square kilometer). Environmental factors make for a low average life expectancy, 52.0 years for males and 55.9 years for females. A high birth rate (36.0 per 1,000 population) is offset by a high infant mortality rate (90.8 per 1,000 population). Major causes of death are malaria, pneumonia, meningitis, diarrhea and tuberculosis. There has been a considerable out-migration of people from Laos since the mid-1970's, including most of the educated and professional elite. An estimated 250,000 migrated to the United States from 1975

to 1996, including about 130,000 Hmong. Approximately 100,000 migrated to other countries, including Australia and France. More than 28,900 Hmong and lowland Lao have repatriated to Laos. Some 3,500 of these came from China and the rest from Thailand.

Table 1–Area and population

Provinces	Capitals	Area (sq. mi.)	Area (sq. km.)	Population (1996 est.)
Attapu	Attapu	3,985	10,320	87,700
Bokeo	Houayxay	2,392	6,196	114,900
Bolikhamxay	Pakxan	5,739	14,863	164,900
Champasak	Pakxé	5,952	15,415	503,300
Houaphan	Xam Nua	6,371	16,500	247,300
Khammouan	Thakhek	6,299	16,315	275,400
Louangnamtha	Louangnamtha	3,600	9,325	115,200
Louangphrabang	Louangphrabang	6,515	16,875	367,200
Oudomxay	Xay	5,934	15,370	211,300
Phôngsali	Phôngsali	6,282	16,270	153,400
Salavan	Salavan	4,128	10,691	258,300
Savannakhét	Savannakhét	8,407	21,774	674,900
Special Region		2,743	7,105	54,200
Viangchan	Muang Phôn Hông	6,149	15,927	286,800
Xaignabouli	Xaignabouli	6,328	16,389	293,300
Xékong	Thong	2,959	7,665	64,200
Xiangkhouang	Phôn savan	6,131	15,880	201,200
Viangchan Municipal	Viangchan	1,514	3,920	531,800
TOTAL		91,429	236,800	4,605,300

HISTORY

Early Period

The original inhabitants of Laos were Austroasiatic peoples who lived by hunting and gathering before the advent of agriculture. Trading was an important source of livelihood from earliest times. Traders used routes through the mountains, especially following the rivers. The Lao excelled at river navigation using canoes, which brought products like gum benzoin, cardamom, sticklac, and many foods to the hinterland. Traders who specialized in overland routes were the Yunnanese, the Shans, and the Burmese, using mules and horses, oxen, and elephants as beasts of burden.

Later, following the scattering of the Yueh ruling class in southern China after 333 B.C., one branch of these migrant peoples settled in a mountain range known as the Ai Lao, which is taken as the origin of the term Lao. These people brought the dragon ancestor myth and associated tatoos, and in turn adopted the confederative organization of the settlements they found among the indigenous people, which were known by a term already related to the much later *muang*. The ancestral couple known by the names Pu Ne and Na Ne, whose round faces still appear in folkloric ceremonies, if they have any basis in historical fact, probably lived in the 1st century A.D. A ruler, Khun Borom, is associated with the Lao legend of the creation of the world, which the Lao share with other people of the region like the Shan, and involves a huge gourd from which the commoners emerged. The current regime in Laos has connected its simplistic three-way ethnic categorization of the country to the gourd. As a 1996 publication of the Ministry of Information and Culture explains:

The gourd myth that has been told among the Lao illuminates historical realities with regard to the origins and national harmony in our country, Laos: The first group to be born are the Lao Theung; they are the eldest. Then, the Lao Loum followed, the younger of the two. And the last people are the Lao Soung, the youngest of the three.

From the 3rd century A.D., there is evidence of a number of princely fiefdoms in central Laos based on wet rice cultivation and trading with the Menam valley and the coast of Vietnam. Theravada Buddhism reached Laos in the 7th and 8th centuries through the Mon kingdom of Dvaravati centered on the lower Menam valley.

The 8th and 9th centuries were marked by the contending powers of the Nan Chao kingdom in Yunnan and the Khmer kingdom of Kambuja-desa, which, under its ruler Indravarman I expanded north to establish an outpost at Xay Fong, site of present-day Vientiane. The then ruler of Vientiane, a man of high religious merit named Canthaphanit, moved north to Muang Sua, present-day Louangphrabang, where he had a long and peaceful reign. In the meantime, the seacoast kingdom of Champa, an enemy of the Khmers, expanded into southern Laos and maintained a presence on the banks of the Mekong until 1070.

Lan Xang

A second expansion of Kambuja-desa at the end of the 12th century under Jayavarman VII brought brief Khmer suzerainty over Muang Sua. The invasion of the Mongols, who in 1253 destroyed Nan Chao, forced the Khmers to retreat and acknowledge Mongol suzerainty in 1285. Intending no doubt to consolidate their communications, which were threatened by Vietnamese

encroachments from the east, the Mongols arranged the kidnapping of two sons of the pretender to the throne of Muang Sua and sent them to Angkor, where the younger son, Fa Ngum, married one of the Khmer king's daughters. In 1349, Fa Ngum, at the head of a 10,000-man Khmer army, set out northbound on a series of conquests that would create a large kingdom, centered on the Mekong valley, to be known as Lan Xang. After a series of battles, Fa Ngum and his consort entered Muang Sua and were acclaimed by the population, whose ruler, Fa Ngum's father, had either committed suicide or fled. On June 24, 1354, Fa Ngum was crowned king at the future site of Vientiane, where he had won a victory over the local ruler. From his capital at Muang Sua, Fa Ngum reigned over a kingdom that extended on both banks of the Mekong from the border of China to that of Cambodia. Through relations of vassalage, he also extended his sway over principalities in the mountains adjoining Vietnam.

The first eight years of Fa Ngum's reign (1354-1362) appear to have passed uneventfully. Many Buddhist pagodas were constructed. This period was followed by six years of troubles (1362-1368). Fa Ngum's lamaistic Buddhism came into conflict with the gentler Theravada Buddhism espoused by the majority of his people. Forgetting the lesson of tolerance he had been taught as a young man, Fa Ngum severely repressed popular agitation that had anti-Mongol overtones, and many pagodas were torn down. A daughter of the ruler of Ayutthaya arrived at Muang Sua, as had been promised by her father, and became Fa Ngum's second wife. She arranged for a religious and cultural mission to come to the capital in 1373 and bring a hundreds-year-old statue of the Buddha from Sri Lanka, called the phrabang. In the same year, Fa Ngum, bowing to popular sentiment, withdrew and his son assumed the regency. He died in 1393. Mongol overlordship of the middle Mekong valley was at an end.

The kingdom founded by Fa Ngum lasted in its approximate borders for another 300 years. His descendants remained on the throne of Muang Sua, renamed Louangphrabang, for almost 600 years after his death. There were, to be sure, internal intrigue and external interventions during this long period, notably a massive Vietnamese invasion in 1478, followed by other invasions by the Siamese and Burmese. However, from 1633 to 1694, Lan Xang was ruled by a peaceful ruler, Souligna Vongsa, who brought stability and peace to the kingdom. It was during this period, regarded as Lan Xang's golden age, that European visitors first published accounts of Laos.

At Souligna Vongsa's death in 1694 the kingdom was left without a clear successor, and it split into three kingdoms. These were a reduced kingdom of Louangphrabang, a kingdom of Viangchan which included Vientiane and the surrounding area, and a kingdom of Champasak in the far south. The rulers of these three kingdoms, following personal ambition rather than statesmanlike motives, repeatedly appealed for foreign help from their Vietnamese, Siamese, and Burmese neighbors, leading eventually to the occupation of Viangchan by a Siamese army in 1779. The Siamese were now overlords of both banks of the Mekong. They enthroned Chao Nanthasen as ruler of Viangchan (1781-1792), but he earned the enmity of the Siamese by engaging in secret overtures to the Vietnamese, according to a treasure trove of official documents discovered in 1974 at the Vietnamese border post of Quy Hop. The Lao, for their part, were enraged by measures, which included tattooing, applied to the Lao who had been settled on the right bank by the Siamese after their first occupation of Viangchan. War broke out

anew when the Lao ruler, Chao Anou, after having failed to obtain relief by diplomacy, invaded the Khorat plateau. The Siamese marched again, overwhelmed Chao Anou's army, and occupied Viangchan again in 1827. This time the Siamese razed the capital and deported its entire population to the right bank. The Viangchan kingdom was no more. Sporadic resistance against the Siamese on the left bank continued for years, led for some time by the *latsavong*, or first prince of the old Viangchan kingdom.

Elsewhere the situation was hardly better. The kingdom of Louangphrabang had fallen into a pitiable state. Its ruler, Manta Thourath (1817-1836), was a vassal of Siam, which removed his viceroy, Oun Keo, to Bangkok as a hostage. Louangphrabang was able to maintain a precarious suzerainty over the Phuan principality centered in Xiangkhoang, where the Vietnamese under their emperor Minh Mang had also been active and had established a garrison in the fortified town of Khang Khay. Beginning in 1869 bands of warrior horsemen displaced from China after the failure of the Taiping rebellion wreaked havoc on the Plain of Jars. These were the Hos. Another people who arrived from southern China were the Hmong, who grew crops of dryland rice and maize at high elevations where they were not a threat to lowland dwellers. Further south, the Siamese installed outposts between the Mekong and the mountains, and removed entire villages to the right bank. Finally, the kingdom of Champasak was, like Louangphrabang, a vassal of Siam.

The French Protectorate

The French established themselves in Vietnam in the 1850's. Their interest in Laos was mainly as a route to China and they stuck mainly to the rivers. The expedition of Ernest Doudart de Lagrée, which visited the ruins of Viangchan in April 1867 and that of Rheinart and Mourin d'Arfeuille in 1869, traveled up the Mekong and did not penetrate into the mountains. In the dry season of 1881-1882, however, an Alsatian missionary, Father Charles Blanck, who had been charged by his apostolic vicar with the task of evangelizing all the "savages" of the uncharted lands lying between Nghe An and the Mekong, traversed the mountainous region from Kam Keut in the south to Muang Ngan in the north. At Muang Ngan, Blanck met the ruler of the Phuan principality, Prince Khanti, who had taken refuge in a fort built by the Vietnamese in 1836 against the Siamese, the rest of his kingdom having been terrorized by the Hos. In an article published in Paris in 1884, Blanck wrote that the Phuan ruler had been a sub-vassal of Annam and had received the regalia of appointment from an Annamese mission. Blanck thus became the first French observer to report, on the basis of first-hand information, the relations of vassalage that bound a left-bank principality to Annam. His article may have alerted the French government to the possibilities flowing therefrom, as they had guaranteed Annam the integrity of its territorial domains, whatever these were. The French accordingly put a researcher to work in the very complete archives of the Hue court. The court, however, was occupied for the moment by the disorders left at the death of the childless emperor Tu Duc in the previous year. The unfortunate Khanti was arrested in 1886 and placed under house arrest in Bangkok, where he died in 1893.

The Siamese conducted campaigns against the Hos in northern Laos for five consecutive years beginning in 1882. The first three campaigns were half-hearted affairs, entrusted to armies

made up of peasant recruits who had to go home again by rice-planting season each year. The campaigns of 1885 and 1886, however, were more serious. A Siamese force advanced as far as Muang Thaeng (Dien Bien Phu). By 1887, the Hos had been put to rout.

In the midst of these campaigns, the French consul general in Bangkok notified the government in June 1885 that a vice-consul had been appointed and a vice-consulate would be created in Louangphrabang in accordance with a most-favored-nation rights clause contained in a Franco-Siamese treaty of 1856. The vice-consul, Auguste Pavie, an official of the Cambodian posts and telegraph service, was duly designated in December. A new Franco-Siamese convention of May 7, 1886 acknowledged the role of Siamese officials in Laos for purposes of administrative dealings without implying French recognition of Siamese claims to sovereignty. After numerous frustrations and delays, Pavie arrived in Louangphrabang on February 10, 1887, accompanied by 10 Cambodians and a Siamese “minder.”

The resident Siamese commissioners granted Pavie’s request for an audience with the aged king, Oun Kham. A few days later, the Siamese commander of the recent campaign arrived and paraded his army down the main street. He described to Pavie in glowing terms how the entire region was pacified, and how he had taken a large number of hostages as a guarantee against further troubles. Pavie had not gone far on an exploratory trip to the north when he was warned that the ruler of the Sipsong Chuthai principality, whose sons had been taken away by the Siamese, was on the warpath. He therefore returned to Louangphrabang, finding the Siamese had decamped. He was just in time to pluck the king to safety from the ransack of the town and the murder of the viceroy, Prince Souvanna Phouma, the son of Oun Keo. The grateful King told Pavie that, because Siamese protection had proved worthless, he wished to place his kingdom under French protection.

Urged on by a strong colonial lobby in Paris, the French in Indochina sent three armed columns across the mountains into central and southern Laos to evict the Siamese. In a classic example of gunboat diplomacy, the French sent two warships to force the passage of a fort at the mouth of the Menam and anchor in the river with their guns trained on the royal palace in Bangkok. The Siamese accepted a list of demands presented by the French, and under a treaty of amity between the two countries of October 3, 1893, Siam renounced all claim to territories on the left bank of the Mekong and to islands in the river. Thereupon, Pavie was able to grant the aged Oun Kham’s wish for a protectorate over his kingdom, and was present at the investiture of a new king and viceroy, Boun Khong, son of the murdered Souvanna Phouma, at Louangphrabang on April 19, 1895. The rest of France’s new possessions were to be administered by posted French officials called *résidents*, who were on an equal footing with the Lao provincial governors, or *chao khuengs*. Vientiane was made the administrative capital. Further conventions with Siam in 1904 and 1907 ceded to French control the right-bank territories of Xaignabouri and Bassac. With adjustments of the eastern border, about which arguments among French officials continued on grounds of ethnic affiliations, Laos came to assume the shape we know today.

The Coming of Independence

The principal impact of World War II on Laos was the coming to power of the Pibul Songkram government in Thailand (the name adopted by Siam in June 1939) which, with secret Japanese backing, broadcast to the Lao to rise up against the French and mounted air raids on the towns along the Mekong. Under a peace convention of May 9, 1941, mediated by Japan (which had negotiated troop-stationing rights in Indochina in return for preservation of French sovereignty and administration), the Vichy government made territorial concessions to Thailand, including the ceding back of control over the portions of the right bank. In an attempt to assuage hard feelings, Marshal Henri Pétain signed a treaty with King Sisavang Vong on August 29, 1941, regularizing the protectorate and including Viangchan, Xiangkhoang, and Louang Namtha within the kingdom of Louangphrabang. The treaty also reinstated the position of viceroy, which had been abolished at Boun Khong's death in 1920.

The new viceroy, Prince Phetsarath (the son of Boun Khong by his second wife), was born in 1890. He prepared for a career in administration, and rose to the post of director of the Laotian civil service by 1919. In 1923 he was promoted by the governor general to be inspector of political and administrative affairs, and in this capacity organized a consultative assembly made up of district and province chiefs. He also reorganized the administrative system of the Buddhist clergy, or *sangha*, setting up a system of Pali schools for the education of monks. The French were eager to counter the pan-Thai irredentism propagated by the Pibul regime, and fostered Lao nationalism in the form of the Lao Nhay, or Lao Renovation Movement, which sought to provide Laos with its own personality with respect to its neighbors and to inculcate a sense of *patrie* (homeland).

Japanese troops moved into Pakxe, Savannakhet, and Thakhek on the evening of March 9, 1945, when Japan put an end to French administration all over Indochina. The following day they moved into Vientiane and Xiangkhoang. The Japanese quickly imprisoned French officials and their families. Hmong guerrillas operating under French command delayed the Japanese on the roads to Louangphrabang, where they did not arrive until April 7, after the French had gone. The Japanese suggested the king proclaim the independence of Laos, but Sisavang Vong demurred, replying that he had told French representatives to whom he had granted an audience that his attitude toward France would not change. Compelled by the Japanese, the king issued the proclamation demanded, but secretly entrusted Prince Kindavong, a younger half-brother of Phetsarath by Boun Khong's fifth wife, with the mission of representing him in Allied councils. The choice of collaborating with the Japanese or going into the jungle to join the active Franco-Laotian resistance, which was receiving supplies by air drops from B-24 Liberators of the British Force 136 flying from Assam in India, split many families of the Lao elite, including that of Phetsarath.

Upon the Japanese surrender, Phetsarath, in his capacity as prime minister and taking advantage of the isolation of Louangphrabang, sent out from Vientiane a telegram to all *chao khouangs* informing them that the king's independence proclamation was still in force. He followed this up with a message to the king requesting a royal proclamation of the unity of Laos. Receiving word of a royal proclamation that the French protectorate over the kingdom of Louangphrabang continued, and not having received a favorable reply to his request, Phetsarath took matters into his own hands, issuing a proclamation of unification and announcing that a

Congress of People's Representatives would soon meet to decide all political, economic and social questions. Bolstered by assurances of support from French representatives of Charles de Gaulle's provisional government parachuted into Laos, the king accused Phetsarath of exceeding his authority and stripped him of his position as prime minister and his title of viceroy. The king was also fearful of the consequences of the Allied decision at the Potsdam Conference to have Chinese Nationalist troops enter Indochina north of the 16th Parallel to receive the Japanese surrender. Family ties are always important in Laos, and Phetsarath's position was made delicate in that he was married to a sister of Sisavang Vong; in actual fact, Phetsarath's main quarrel appears to have been with the crown prince, Savang Vatthana. In the midst of these dramatic developments, a team of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) landed at Vientiane from Kunming to report on the situation of Allied prisoners of war, and received petitions for Lao independence during its brief stay. The OSS team offered encouraging advice, but could promise nothing officially. The American position, communicated to De Gaulle by President Truman, was that the United States had raised no question concerning French sovereignty over Indochina.

Events in Vientiane now raced ahead. A provisional revolutionary government, called the Lao Issara, was proclaimed on October 12, a date still observed in Laos as the country's independence day. This government was composed of men whose families became prominent in Lao politics. The prime minister was Xieng Mao, the minister of interior and justice Chao Somsanith, the minister of finance Katay Don Sasorith, the minister of defense Sing Ratanassamay, the minister of education Nhouy Abhay, the minister of economy Oun Sananikone, and the minister of public works Prince Souvanna Phouma. A half-brother of Phetsarath by Boun Khong's sixth wife, Prince Souphanouvong, arrived from Vietnam, where he had been in touch with the Viet Minh (which had seized power in Hanoi in August), and was made minister of foreign affairs as well as commander in chief of a yet-nonexistent Lao independence army. Souphanouvong brought assurances of armed Viet Minh support against the French. Phetsarath himself, having announced his withdrawal from politics, became an adviser to the new government.

In an effort to give their government some semblance of legitimacy, the Lao Issara leaders hastily named a People's Committee of 34 members, which elected a Chamber of People's Representatives. This Chamber notified Sisavang Vong that, having failed to heed an ultimatum to abdicate, his "total destitution" had been voted. Franco-Laotian guerrillas, however, entered Savannakhet and moved north, reinforced by units of General Leclerc's expeditionary force in Saigon. Their advance met with stiff resistance at Thakhek from an entrenched mixed force of Viet Minh and Lao, and Souphanouvong himself was wounded by a strafing Spitfire and evacuated across the river before the French entered the town. The Lao Issara ministers abandoned Vientiane and moved to Louangphrabang where they implored the king to resume the throne, a request to which Sisavang Vong graciously acceded. A royal ordinance sanctioned the unity of Laos. The French entered the town as Phetsarath and the Lao Issara ministers fled across the river. The king then signed an ordinance declaring null and void all acts to which he had given his sanction under duress, and promised his people a democratic constitution.

With the French again in control, they took the first step to normalize the situation by establishing a Franco-Laotian joint commission in June 1946 to discuss future relationships. The commission produced a document confirming the existence of a unified Laos under sovereignty of the king of Louangphrabang, but in which the French retained major political, military and economic powers. A Franco-Siamese agreement signed in Washington on November 17, 1946, restored the right-bank territories to Laos. On December 15, 1946, in the face of guerrilla harassment in the form of raids from across the Mekong, 44 delegates to Laos's first popularly elected Constituent Assembly were chosen. Over the following months these delegates worked out, under French supervision, a constitution that was promulgated by Sisavang Vong on May 11, 1947, in fulfillment of his promise to his people. The constitution conferred equal citizenship upon all the races of Laos. The date became Laos's national day. On November 26, 1947, the 33 deputies of Laos's first National Assembly invested a government headed by Prince Souvannarath, a half-brother of Phetsarath by Boun Khong's fourth wife. France transferred its remaining powers. A modest royal army was formed, to be trained by the French. On February 7, 1950, the United States and Britain recognized Laos as a member of the French Union under the 1946 French constitution. Later that year, the United States opened a legation in Vientiane.

The Lao Issara exiles who had settled in Bangkok were having problems. First, a Thai government much less sympathetic than its predecessor to the anti-French resistance in Laos was brought to power in a *coup d'état*. Second, Phetsarath, still enjoying the position of supreme adviser, had a falling out with Souphanouvong over the latter's willingness to entertain close relations with the Viet Minh. The American historian Christopher Goscha, who has studied the archives in Hanoi, provides proof that the Viet Minh in this period were hoping to recruit Phetsarath to their cause. But Phetsarath was not only strongly anti-French, he was also anti-Vietnamese from his experience with the large numbers of Vietnamese with whom the French had staffed their administration in Laos, and he feared a Vietnamese takeover of the Lao Issara. Thus, when the French opened negotiations with the Bangkok exiles and offered an amnesty, the majority of the ministers accepted and flew back to Vientiane, leaving Phetsarath and Souphanouvong behind.

Souphanouvong was announced on the Viet Minh radio as presiding over a Lao resistance government formed at a congress held in the Viet Minh-held area of Vietnam in August 1950. This government included two Lao-Vietnamese *métis*, Kaysone Phomvihan and Nouhak Phoumsavan, as well as Phoumi Vongvichit and Tiao Souk Vongsak. Illustrative of the intended wide appeal of a new front also created by the congress, the Neo Lao Issara (Free Laos Front), was the naming of its militant wing as the Pathet Lao (Lao Nation). However, the reality of power remained with the Viet Minh, who made deep incursions into northern and central Laos in 1953 and 1954, stretching French airlift capacity to the limit.

In elections for a four-year term to the National Assembly held in August 1951, the Progressive Party, which had been formed by the returned Lao Issara ministers led by Xieng Mao, Katay Don Sasorith, and Prince Souvanna Phouma, a younger brother of Phetsarath, won 15 of 39 seats. A government headed by Souvanna Phouma, the first of many led by the prince who became Laos's indispensable man, was invested in November. Following further negotiations, the Lao signed a treaty of amity and association with France on October 22, 1953,

which removed the last strictures on independence. It was thus as the representative of a fully sovereign kingdom that a delegation from the royal government attended the 1954 Geneva Conference. The leader of this delegation, Foreign Minister Phoui Sananikone, declared that the royal government was prepared to offer integration of the Pathet Lao rebels into the body politic of Laos and guarantee them the rights and freedoms provided for in the constitution. Phoui also declared that Laos would not join any military alliance, allow foreign military bases, or request military aid “except for the purpose of its effective territorial defense.”

The armistice agreement for Laos, signed by the commander of French Union forces and the Viet Minh deputy defense minister, provided for the withdrawal of Viet Minh forces from Laos and the regrouping, “pending a political settlement, of the fighting units of Pathet Lao” in the border provinces of Houaphan and Phongsali. These favorable terms owed much to the diplomacy of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, whose large delegation overshadowed the much smaller Viet Minh delegation headed by Pham Van Dong. These friendly relations appeared to be cemented in April 1955 when Zhou Enlai at the Bandung Conference brought together the Lao delegation and the North Vietnamese delegation and Zhou and Dong gave the Laotians verbal assurances of non-interference in a neutral Laos. With the prospect of renewed peace and unity, Laos became a member state of the United Nations in December 1955.

It should be pointed out that, in the wake of the Geneva Conference, all members of the Lao elite (with the exception of the king, whose views will be discussed below) saw negotiations as the only realistic means of dealing with the problem posed by the Pathet Lao. The consolidation of the Viet Minh in a viable state in North Vietnam made a military solution unrealistic, as the Pathet Lao, many of whose recruits were members of minority tribes inhabiting the border region, would slip across the border if pursued into a permanent sanctuary, only to infiltrate back through the mountains to resume their guerrilla war when conditions permitted.

Accordingly, the Lao elite in Vientiane fully expected, even before the negotiations began, that the settlement would include a coalition government integrating the Pathet Lao into the body politic. Such a solution would depend on a foreign policy of neutrality and good-neighborly relations with North Vietnam and China. Even when the negotiations proved much more arduous than foreseen, a coalition solution based on genuine sharing of power at all levels was still advocated by most Lao leaders. This approach to the problem, however, depended on two critical assumptions: (1) that the Pathet Lao were first and foremost loyal nationalists who had opposed the French rather than the agents of a Marxist-Leninist revolution led by the Vietnamese Communists; and (2) that Laos would be able to adhere to strict neutrality in foreign affairs. Later on, as they saw their country become a battleground anew, many among the nationalists would come to see these assumptions as having been misplaced.

The First Coalition

Elections were held in December 1955, with 239 candidates contesting the 39 seats at stake. The Pathet Lao, seeing their advantage in stringing out the negotiations with the royal government that had begun at the end of 1954, boycotted the election. The Progressives again

emerged as the largest single party. The U.S. legation had been raised to embassy level following Geneva, and Ambassador Charles W. Yost warned that the Pathet Lao were embarked on a campaign of recruitment. The Eisenhower Administration was suspicious of neutralism in Southeast Asia, whether in a constitutional monarchy with democratic elections like Laos or in states ruled by one man like Prince Norodom Sihanouk and President Sukarno, and tended to equate neutralists with pro-Communists. On instructions from the State Department's Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Yost put the royal government on notice that any participation of Communists in the government, which he saw as inherent in the coalition strategy, would lead to a reconsideration of American support.

The investiture in March 1956 of a new government headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister gave the signal for a renewed effort at negotiations. The Prime Minister believed that he could negotiate in good faith with his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, to achieve the political settlement foreseen at Geneva. There were many difficulties, however, created by the Pathet Lao claim that the armistice agreement gave them the exclusive right to administer the two provinces of Houaphan and Phongsali. An International Control Commission (ICC) had been established to supervise the implementation of the agreement. The Indian chairmen of the ICC in the post-1954 period successively avoided supporting the royal government's claim to sovereignty over the whole territory of Laos. Instead, the Indians consistently attempted to find compromises between the two sides, as if the two parties were on the same footing, and at other times declined to take a stand at all on such issues as requests for on-the-ground inspections, arguing that the ongoing direct negotiations took precedence over ICC interventions. It was not until 1956 that the Canadian delegation, in the face of objections from the Poles, forced through a resolution affirming the principle of sovereignty. Another difficulty were the *démarches* by the then U.S. Ambassador in Vientiane, J. Graham Parsons, who, in accordance with his instructions from Washington, fought against a coalition at every step and objected to Prince Souvanna Phouma's acceptance of invitations to visit Peking and Hanoi. Souvanna Phouma was determined to persevere, however, and by the end of 1956 the outlines of a settlement began to emerge.

On October 22, 1957, final agreement was reached on re-establishment of the royal administration of the two provinces, formation of a coalition government, and supplementary elections to the National Assembly to be held in May 1958. Souphanouvong symbolically returned to the royal authority in the person of Crown Prince Savang Vatthana, the administration of the two provinces. A governor from the Lao civil service was appointed in Houaphan and a Pathet Lao governor in Phongsali, each with a deputy of the opposing camp. Mayors and other provincial officials were equally divided between the two parties. Two Pathet Lao battalions, totaling 1,500 men, would be integrated into the royal army, with the remainder being sent home. Souphanouvong and Phoumi Vongvichit became ministers of the royal government.

A shock came when the political party formed by the Pathet Lao, the Neo Lao Hak Sat (NLHS) (Lao Patriotic Front), together with its ally, the Santiphab (Peace) Party, won two-thirds of the seats contested in the supplementary elections. During the electoral campaign, a main theme of the NLHS's propaganda was that U.S. aid went to create many institutions in the capital

but did not reach the villages. Laos at this point was receiving more U.S. aid per capita than any other country in the world. Certain abuses in the commercial import program were being investigated by Congress. But the election victory was mainly due to the failure of the old-line parties to agree on limiting the number of their candidates, thereby splitting their votes and allowing the NLHS candidate to win a seat with a minority of the total votes cast in many constituencies. The change in climate in the summer of 1958 was further marked by the announcement that with the holding of the elections the royal government had fulfilled its obligations under the Geneva Agreement, and had requested the adjournment *sine die* of the ICC. The establishment of diplomatic relations with Taipei and Saigon also set a precedent unwelcome in Peking and Hanoi.

A major concern of U.S. policymakers had been the inadequacy of training and equipping the royal army following the departure of all French troops except for a small training mission at Xeno. Thus, without fanfare, the United States, in December 1955, established a disguised military mission in Vientiane, the Programs Evaluation Office (PEO), with staff whose names had been removed from the Pentagon's rosters of active service personnel. A possible threat soon appeared. North Vietnamese security forces in December 1958 occupied and claimed as their own a strategic sliver of territory abutting the Demilitarized Zone in the face of protests from Vientiane. This action coincided with the decision of the Vietnamese Communist Party to launch armed resistance against the government of South Vietnam. When then Ambassador Horace H. Smith showed Savang a message from the State Department declining to meet the crown prince's request for a guarantee of Laos's borders on grounds of imprecise demarcation and the complex history of the border areas, Savang told Smith bluntly he was dissatisfied with the reply. Savang claimed the maps establishing Laos's borders were precise and definite, but he accepted the U.S. right to decide whether or not to act in the matter. This incident was soon followed by the fleeing of the Pathet Lao battalions to the North Vietnam border, the resumption of guerrilla warfare during the summer of 1959, and an appeal by the royal government to the United Nations for a fact-finding mission, whose final report was, not surprisingly, inconclusive with respect to proof of foreign intervention. The government ordered the arrest of the NLHS deputies to the National Assembly. The first coalition was at an end.

Toward Full-Scale War

In October 1959, Phetsarath and King Sisavang Vong died in Louangphrabang within two weeks of each other. Phetsarath had been allowed to return to Laos from Thailand and had his title of viceroy restored in the euphoria over national reconciliation leading to the coalition, but had played no further political role. Crown Prince Savang Vatthana immediately succeeded his father, but remained uncrowned, a propitious date for the coronation ceremony not being found.

With the mandate of Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone approaching its end in December 1959, General Phoumi Nosavan, an ambitious general, and his supporters in the Committee for Defense of the National Interest (CDNI), a group formed in 1958 reportedly with financing from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), moved to force the king to grant them power. They put on a show of force and Radio Vientiane broadcast communiqués alleging a Communist plot.

However, Smith and the ambassadors from the United Kingdom, France and Australia secured an audience with the king and stressed the need to observe constitutionality. The crisis passed, and an interim government headed by Kou Abhay took over until new elections could be organized. The events in Vientiane of those days smacked of the way in which General Sarit Thanarat, a cousin once removed of Phoumi's, had recently seized power in Thailand. Temporarily rebuffed, Phoumi bided his time as minister of defense in the new cabinet.

The elections held in April 1960 were so fraudulent as to bear condemnation by the Western powers. Changes had been made to the electoral law, financial support for anti-Communist candidates was arranged, civil servants were enlisted as campaign workers, and ballot tampering was widespread. Prince Souvanna Phouma was elected without fraud and became president of the new National Assembly. A new government headed by Chao Somsanith was invested in June. The NLHS had not been allowed to run candidates. The Front's deputies in prison outside Vientiane escaped on a dark, rainy night in May, following a plan prepared by the Front's chief for the province of Viangchan, for which he afterwards was awarded a medal. The king held Phoumi responsible for the escape, which worsened relations between the two.

The question of responsibility for training the royal army had led to differences between the French and the Americans. With De Gaulle in power in Paris once more, the French determined to resume their prerogative of training, which they had acquired at Geneva and had never surrendered. The differences were papered over in a temporary arrangement negotiated between Paris and Washington. On August 6, however, General Phoumi threatened the chief of the French military mission with a demand for the withdrawal of all French instructors. Encouragement in this course seems indicated by the fact that French military intelligence at Xeno had intercepted a message from Sarit to Phoumi urging him to seize power at all cost, according to a message from the French Embassy in Vientiane that I found in the archives of the Quai d'Orsay. On August 9, Captain Kong Le led his Second Paratroop Battalion, which happened to be in Vientiane between campaigns, in a real *coup d'état* against the royal government, whose ministers were away in Louangphrabang conferring with the king. Circumstantial evidence suggests that, rather than being a case of simple discontent on the part of Kong Le's soldiers, the action may have been planned between Phoumi and Kong Le as a way of Phoumi's seizing power. In that case, the plan went awry. Phoumi immediately flew from Louangphrabang, but unable to land anywhere in Laos, landed at Ubon, where he informed an emissary from the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok who met him that he planned to "straighten things out."

Negotiations between Vientiane and Louangphrabang followed in which the cabinet ministers tendered their resignation and were allowed to return to Vientiane. A new cabinet headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma was duly invested by the National Assembly and immediately offered conciliation to General Phoumi, who set up his headquarters in Savannakhet. General Phoumi, however, had solicited and received secret support from Sarit and U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Leonard Unger, the United States being unwilling to risk jeopardizing its close links with Sarit by rebuffing Phoumi's request. Aid to Phoumi was supported by a recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, and a channel to his

headquarters was opened through the PEO. Thailand immediately imposed a blockade on Vientiane.

In Vientiane, Ambassador Winthrop G. Brown, who had arrived at post only days before the *coup*, received cables from the State Department instructing him to find a way of getting rid of Kong Le. Prince Souvanna Phouma's government, having respected constitutionality, was recognized as legal by all governments except Thailand. Brown was placed in a difficult position by the Pentagon and CIA support for General Phoumi, but worked out a compromise with the prime minister to the effect that he would raise no objection to the aid so long as Phoumi did not use it against Vientiane. Phoumi on his U.S.-supplied radio transmitters was issuing a stream of communiqués alleging Pathet Lao threats to various royal army outposts around the country; these were false, as the Pathet Lao remained quiescent at this stage, and Phoumi with his new equipment took no action against them.

The stalemate continued thus for several weeks. A visit to Vientiane by former U.S. Ambassador Parsons, now Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, did nothing to dissuade Souvanna Phouma from his intention of opening negotiations with the NLHS with a view to restoring the coalition. Parsons perhaps had an exaggerated impression of Kong Le's power to influence events. The Pentagon, however, was thinking not just of finding a face-saving way for Kong Le to leave the scene. In a meeting with two high-level officials, Assistant Secretary of Defense John N. Irwin II and Vice Admiral Herbert D. Riley, chief of staff to the commander in chief Pacific, and a CIA representative in Ubon on October 17, General Phoumi received assurances that the United States was backing him "all the way." He opened his attack on Vientiane in the early days of December, using artillery fire freely, especially targeting the headquarters of the French military mission. Kong Le opened counterbattery fire using artillery pieces flown in to Wattay by Soviet Ilyushin-14's from Hanoi, further internationalizing the conflict. Hundreds of innocent civilians were killed. The American embassy was damaged. Ambassador Brown kept a diary, which is in the National Archives. Before the battle erupted, Prince Souvanna Phouma fled Vientiane to safety in Phnom Penh, although he and Prince Norodom Sihanouk had never been close.

Kong Le finally was forced to withdraw in good order up the Louangphrabang road. Soviet planes continued to airdrop supplies to his retreating column as it made its way northward to the Sala Phou Khoun junction and then turned eastwards toward the Plain of Jars. General Phoumi was slow to pursue, and by the time he mobilized his force it was too late to mount a defense of the Plain of Jars, where the Phoumist garrison with their PEO advisers had evacuated by air. The Plain was soon transformed into an armed camp by Kong Le's Neutralist troops and those of the Pathet Lao, who announced they had formed an alliance in support of Souvanna Phouma. The Prince maintained he had not resigned and was still Prime Minister. Early in the new year, he established his capital at Khang Khay, where he inaugurated the headquarters of his Neutralist Party (Phak Pen Kang). He was recognized as legal prime minister by all the Communist powers, and the Soviet Union, China and North Vietnam established missions at Khang Khay.

General Phoumi as Deputy Prime Minister formed a new government in Vientiane in early January with Prince Boun Oum of Champasak as Prime Minister. This government, after many debates and royal ordinances intended to regularize the actions of the past months, was duly invested. However, only the United States and Thailand accorded it formal recognition. The French position was that they were willing to work with the Boun Oum government as a de facto government but were unwilling to go to the extent of supporting that government as a juridically legal government. The French maintained their embassy in Vientiane, and Ambassador Pierre-Louis Falaize treated the situation as one where the government had simply left town. This forced him to resort to extraordinary means to communicate with Souvanna Phouma, such as traveling from Vientiane to Khang Khay via Phnom Penh, as General Phoumi did not allow any direct flights. Falaize and Brown formed an effective team together, working to tamp down the dangers of the situation as best they could. One of Brown's early concerns was to dissuade the Boun Oum government from appealing for Western military intervention; the kingdom, as a protocol state of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, was within its rights to appeal for assistance in the event of aggression.

As Brown and the State Department had been warning to little avail, the first days of January saw the commitment of significant numbers of North Vietnamese "volunteer" troops to the fighting for the first time. They joined Kong Le's troops in clearing Routes 7 and 13 as far south as Vang Vieng, compelling General Phoumi's ill-led troops to fall back in disarray. A number of PEO advisers were captured. Elsewhere, Tha Thom fell, followed by Laksao, Nhommarath, Mahaxay and Kam Keut. The general himself went nowhere near the fighting front. Marshal Sarit, after talking boldly about fighting the Communists in Laos, committed some security forces, who had a long history of association with the CIA, to advise and support Colonel Vang Pao, the leader of a Hmong guerrilla force operating on the fringes of the Plain of Jars. Taking advantage of split loyalties among the Hmong clans, the Pathet Lao had recruited a rival of Touby Lyfoung, the traditional Hmong leader in the French time, Faydang Lobliayao. Likewise, in the south the Pathet Lao adroitly enlisted the support of Sithon Kommadan, the son of a renowned rebel leader who had been killed by the French.

From his refuge in Phnom Penh, Souvanna Phouma wrote in February to President John F. Kennedy. The Prince had bitterly criticized Parsons in an earlier interview, but with the incoming of a fresh team in Washington, he hoped for more cordial relations. After some hesitation caused by concern for the impact on the beleaguered Boun Oum government, the administration responded to the overture, and in March Kennedy's ambassador at large, W. Averell Harriman, had tea with the prince on neutral ground at an official's house in New Delhi. The two men got along well. Souvanna Phouma recorded in his diary: "I believe I made a good impression on him." It was the beginning of a long friendship.

Following its defeats on the battlefield, the Boun Oum government lost little time in suing for a truce. The Neutralist radio station called for a meeting in the village of Ban Namone on the road between Vientiane and Louangphrabang. Like the truce-talks village of Kaesong in the Korean war, Ban Namone was 15 kilometers inside Communist-held territory. The radio instructed the Vientiane government to send an emissary under a white flag to meet a Pathet Lao representative near Ban Hin Heup on the front line. At this first meeting on May 1, a provisional

local ceasefire was put into effect. Two days later, one formal ceasefire order to the Pathet Lao forces was signed by General Khamtai Siphandon and another to the Neutralists was signed by Kong Le.

The talks began in the bamboo schoolhouse in the village of Ban Namone. The three delegations were headed by Pheng Phongsavan acting on behalf of the Souvanna Phouma government as chairman, Nouhak Phoumsavan for the Pathet Lao, and Sing Rattanasamay for the Boun Oum government. The delegations were flown in by helicopter. The atmosphere was convivial, with much exchange of news of families divided by the front line. But the Pathet Lao, with its strong backing from North Vietnam, was in a stronger position than it had ever been. At the same time, in faraway Geneva, an international conference convened under the leadership of the 1954 co-chairmen, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. The Kennedy Administration accepted only to participate in a 14-nation conference, of which Laos was one, but the Soviets insisted that the Ban Namone precedent be followed and the three Laotian factions, including the Pathet Lao, be seated. A face-saving formula, under which the issue of Laotian representation would be held in abeyance pending formation of an agreed government delegation, the participants would be free to recognize the Laotian government of their choosing in the meantime, and the conference would be allowed to go forward, was accepted all around. All Laos's neighboring states were represented at Geneva, as were the three ICC members and the co-chairmen, along with the United States and France.

The Second Coalition

The powers who had gathered at Geneva put together in relatively short order the principal features of an agreement neutralizing Laos. What took longer, and delayed the signing of the agreement, was getting the Laotian factions to decide on the composition of a new provisional coalition government that would assume power until elections for a new National Assembly could be organized and a government invested. The talks at Ban Namone had ended in September, and it was up to the three princes (Souvanna Phouma, Souphanouvong and Boun Oum) to pursue the negotiations, which they did in Laos and in various world capitals. All the while sporadic violations of the ceasefire were occurring, the overall effect of which was to enlarge the territory under the control of the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese backers. Harriman, who headed the U.S. delegation, placed the blame for the delay on General Phoumi, whom he suspected of maneuvering to involve U.S. troops in Laos and with whom he soon lost all patience and in the end treated very roughly, even cutting aid to Phoumi's troops.

Finally, the three princes met on the Plain of Jars on June 12, 1962, and signed an agreement fixing the composition of the Provisional Government of National Union (PGNU) and setting the rules by which it would operate. General Phoumi and Souphanouvong were deputy prime ministers and the remainder of the cabinet seats were allocated according to a complicated formula that differentiated between the Khang Khay Neutralists and the Vientiane Neutralists. The three princes next gathered in Vientiane. While Boun Oum tendered his resignation to the king, Souvanna Phouma lunched informally with Ambassador Brown, who was preparing to leave Laos on completion of his two years. The same afternoon, Souvanna Phouma presented the PGNU to the king, and the traditional investiture ceremony was held at Wat Sisaket. With a

few contrivances, constitutionality had been preserved, in accordance with the king's expressed wish. The documents of the Geneva Conference were signed on July 23. They consisted of a Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos, which incorporated a PGNU statement to this effect (signed by the foreign ministers of 13 participants) and a Protocol comprising 20 articles dealing with the nuts and bolts of neutralizing Laos (signed by all 14 participants). But the second coalition was different in several respects from the first. It was a coalition at the top and not a coalition from top to bottom.

The PGNU being provisional, the three princes had agreed at one of their meetings in Zurich that "in the transition period" (length unspecified) to the formation of a permanent government, each faction would continue to exercise administration in the territory it controlled. This in effect gave the Pathet Lao exclusive control over a vast portion of Laos resulting from the fighting, and in which they had established their administration. The outcome was that the Prime Minister was prevented from traveling in the Pathet Lao-administered areas. Further, a "troika" provision for decision-making within the PGNU had also been written into the agreement by the three factions, vastly reducing Souvanna Phouma's freedom of action in even minor matters. This came as a particularly nasty surprise to the United States and its friends in the conference, because for months, Souvanna Phouma had been grandly assuring everyone that he would be able to handle all problems. The ICC, which was to resume its work of supervision of the implementation of the agreement, was so hamstrung by the clauses referring to its degree of autonomy and the approval of its reports to the co-chairmen that its effectiveness soon proved minimal. Furthermore, the modalities for integrating and demobilizing the armies of the three factions were left to the PGNU to sort out, without any mandate of authority to the ICC. With respect to the procedures for the withdrawal of foreign military personnel from Laos, the gap between expectations and reality was just as wide; in the end, the provisions for withdrawal were so ambiguous as to be virtually meaningless. While the United States withdrew its several hundred military personnel, North Vietnam made no transparent move to withdraw its "volunteers" (thought to number about 12,500), in spite of several visits to Hanoi by the Prime Minister, from which he invariably returned with "assurances" from the North Vietnamese leaders.

The last structural flaw concerned the seemingly unobjectionable undertaking in the Declaration by the signatories not to use the territory of Laos to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. In view of Hanoi's doctrinal insistence that Vietnam was a single country, it believed it had not signed away its inherent right to use the network of trails through eastern Laos, known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, to transport war material into South Vietnam. (Hanoi's leaders, ever inventive, explained to their Pathet Lao allies that they were borrowing the Trail.) Finally, Harriman had reported early in the conference that he had been given assurances by the chief Soviet delegate, Georgi M. Pushkin, that Moscow would ensure compliance with the agreement by the Communist bloc in exchange for similar "policing" of its allies by the United States. The emerging Sino-Soviet conflict in the 1960's deprived Moscow of its ability to fulfill this pledge, as Khrushchev informed Harriman on a visit to Moscow. Pushkin himself died soon after the signing. Consequently, complaints of alleged violations of the agreement ended up on the desks of foreign offices in London and Moscow, where they remained unacted upon. When the delegates of Thailand and South Vietnam pointed out some of the flaws in the agreement and

intimated their intention not to sign, Harriman, with the anger for which he was well known, threatened them with dire consequences, and in the end they signed.

Cabinet meetings in Vientiane were marked by sharp exchanges among the three factions on the many issues of running day-to-day affairs. The Prime Minister received precious support for his stand in these arguments from the new U.S. Ambassador, Leonard Unger. Agreement was reached between the two men on continuing delivery of supplies to the Phoumist troops. As for the Neutralist army, concentrated on the Plain of Jars, it had been placed in dire straits by the siphoning off of its Soviet bloc supplies (which arrived by way of Hanoi) by the Pathet Lao. Accordingly, Souvanna Phouma and Unger agreed that the United States should make good the shortfall. The Hmong guerrillas under Vang Pao were also to be supplied, and for this purpose were to be considered members of the royal army. Many of the Hmong outposts could only be reached by air, and Unger arranged for the continuation of the operations of Air America after the deadline for foreign troop withdrawal had passed, with only the stricture that Air America would not be authorized to transport troops. Souvanna Phouma faced down Pathet Lao accusations, made to Tony Yared of The Associated Press by Phoumi Vongvichit among others, that Air America should be subject to the withdrawal of foreign forces provision and that the Hmong were “bandits” within the Pathet Lao zone of control. As there was no map showing the ceasefire lines, however, this argument was difficult to sustain, and the Hmong guerrillas continued to be a thorn in the side of the Pathet Lao. Another argument arose over the activities of the National Assembly, whose legality was not recognized by the Pathet Lao. Pulling itself together after nearly a year of inactivity, the Assembly began meeting again and receiving reports from the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Phoumi Nosavan. An important turning point in the standing of the Assembly came when it elected Phoui Sananikone as its president.

The issue that finally led to a showdown between Souvanna Phouma and the Pathet Lao was the latter’s attempt to subvert the Neutralist army. By propaganda radio broadcasts and other means, the Pathet Lao induced a number of Neutralist officers to defect and join the Pathet Lao, calling them “Patriotic Neutralists.” In this, the Pathet Lao took their cue from the way Ho Chi Minh had succeeded in splitting the nationalist parties in his coalition government in Hanoi in 1946. Souvanna Phouma was well aware of this history, and he resented the Pathet Lao machinations on the Plain deeply. At the end of 1962 the dissidents were responsible for shooting down an Air America plane ferrying supplies to the Neutralists, and in early 1963 the situation was worsened by a series of retaliatory assassinations, including that of the coalition’s foreign minister, Quinim Pholsena. Souphanouvong and Phoumi Vongvichit used these acts as a pretext for withdrawing from Vientiane. Meanwhile, two junior ministers belonging to the Prime Minister’s own party fled to Phnom Penh. By April 1963, open warfare between Kong Le’s troops and the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese backers broke out on the Plain. The crisis was dramatized by an incident in which the Pathet Lao fired on two ICC helicopters that landed on the Plain. However, in the new ICC chairman, Avtar Singh, the Pathet Lao were dealing with someone who took his peacekeeping responsibilities seriously, and the ICC maintained a presence in the conflict zone, over the loud objections of the Polish delegate, Marek Thee, who later published a memoir boasting of his close liaison with Hanoi’s Laos specialists.

The situation on the Plain remained in an uneasy calm. But, after Souvanna Phouma's visits to Peking and Hanoi and the breakdown of a summit meeting of the factions on the Plain in April 1964, an attempted *coup d'état* by rightist officers in Vientiane upset the precarious balance. The rightists proclaimed themselves against the Geneva Agreement, against the coalition, against the ICC, and wanted to take the offensive against the Pathet Lao. They placed the Prime Minister under house arrest. Pheng Phongsavan took refuge in the Soviet embassy. The attempted *coup* was dismantled thanks to the intervention of Unger and the other Western ambassadors, who dissuaded Souvanna Phouma from making good on his threat to resign and informed the military officers involved that their seizure of power would mean the certain and immediate termination of Western support for the government. The rightists' timing had been poor, as the United States was trying to cope with the chaos caused by one *coup* attempt after another in South Vietnam following the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem the previous November. President Lyndon B. Johnson was heard at this time to make a famous expletive remark about these *coups*, and he was not about to see the chaos spread to Laos.

But the attempted *coup* and the adjustments the Prime Minister made to meet the complaints of the rightists, such as his move to merge the Neutralist army with the Phoumists, led to the Pathet Lao's adopting the position that the coalition had ceased to exist. General Phoumi, who had gradually lost influence within his own faction, left the scene shortly thereafter. Kong Le, for his part, also departed. He had been sadly disillusioned by the perfidy of the Pathet Lao and by the ever larger intervention of the North Vietnamese, and he despaired of Laos ever becoming a neutral state so long as the war escalated.

Full-Scale War

Thus, despite a further futile round of negotiations among the three factions in Paris in August, the war began in earnest in the summer of 1964. French policy at this time was strongly influenced by the head of the Asia and Oceania desk at the Quai d'Orsay, Etienne Manac'h, who according to the Mitrokhin archive, had been in secret contact with the Soviet KGB since his posting in Turkey in 1942 and whose three volumes of memoirs reflect strong anti-American sentiment. The French began floating suggestions in diplomatic circles that the future of Laos depended on Souphanouvong, and the visits of the new French ambassador, Pierre Millet, to the Plain and his friendly discussions with Souphanouvong, no doubt on instructions from the Quai, displeased Unger's successor, William H. Sullivan. As a result, the French-American split continued.

The North Vietnamese rotated entire divisions into Laos during the dry season, and their presence now averaged 40,000 troops, both in the north and manning the Ho Chi Minh Trail in eastern Laos. The Neutralists were obliged to give up the last of their positions on the Plain, leaving the task of harassing the enemy as best they could to Vang Pao's Hmong. American air strikes against North Vietnamese positions in Laos also began in the summer of 1964, concurrently with the bombing of North Vietnam, by planes from bases in Thailand, South Vietnam, or aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The post-Khrushchev Soviet leaders, blithely ignoring their responsibility as co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, supplied North Vietnam with the trucks to keep the traffic on the Trail flowing. Special forces troops from South

Vietnam were landed across the border into Laos in raids to disrupt this traffic. Souvanna Phouma took the position that by adopting neutrality as its foreign policy a state did not forfeit the right of self-defense, and the royal government was within its rights to seek military assistance from the United States, an action that had the full support of the king.

On the U.S. side, there was no declaration of war or even a “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” but only Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United States considered that if the Geneva Agreement was broken by the other side, that relieved the United States of itself observing the agreement. The French nevertheless criticized the bombing as a violation. In spite of President De Gaulle’s Delphic pronouncements about the neutralization of Indochina, he could not see his way to support the one genuine neutralist government in Indochina. Souvanna Phouma could denounce Hanoi’s violations of the 1962 Geneva Agreement to the North Vietnamese ambassador in Vientiane and from the speaker’s podium at the United Nations General Assembly to which he traveled every year, in press conferences, and in white books showing photographs of captured North Vietnamese prisoners. Thus the United States, which had done its best to undermine Souvanna Phouma when the Pathet Lao were weak and could have been contained, if not defeated, by political action aimed at separating them from their foreign mentors, found itself waging war in Laos against the now-undisguised North Vietnamese aggression. Laos had become another front of the Vietnam War.

From 1965 to 1973, the war seesawed back and forth in northern Laos. It was a war characterized by short, but often very sharp, engagements fought between the two sides rather than by sweeping troop movements, but cruel nevertheless in view of the rudimentary facilities to evacuate and treat the wounded. The Hmong, particularly, suffered from the war, which was dubbed the “secret war” but which in fact was far from secret, as their front-line positions came under attack and they had to move their families to safety, abandoning their crops and livestock. Isolated outposts everywhere depended on the planes and helicopters of Air America to resupply food and ammunition and, in the worst cases, to escape under frontal assault by North Vietnamese regulars. A group of American fliers called the Ravens provided spotter coverage for Vang Pao’s tiny air force based at Long Chieng. The Hmong, in return, went to the rescue of countless downed American fliers, saving many of them from capture. The ground offensives and the bombing created refugees, whose number reached 378,800 in October 1973 and whose care in camps around Vientiane added to the burden on the royal government. Along the Trail, meanwhile, the bombing assumed huge proportions, eventually resulting in tonnages that exceeded World War II tonnages. The air campaign was directed by the air attaché’s office at the embassy in Vientiane. In cases where civilians became victims of air strikes by error, the embassy was rigorous in paying compensation.

During these years Souvanna Phouma, ever the optimist, puffing on his pipe, maintained vacant the cabinet seats allotted to the Pathet Lao, and by adroit contortions managed to preserve the framework of the PGNU. When the National Assembly, in one of its displays of its prerogatives, rejected his budget in debate in September 1966, he obtained a vote in the King’s Council dissolving the Assembly. Elections were held in 1967, and again on January 2, 1972, bringing in 41 new faces out of 59 deputies elected. The Pathet Lao, as usual boycotted the elections and called them illegal. The Prime Minister stayed in contact with Souphanouvong,

occasionally using the ICC and the Soviet and North Vietnamese ambassadors as messengers. Powerless to stop the war, he endured the attacks on his person of the Pathet Lao radio, which called him traitor, capitulationist, and tool of the U.S. aggressors, and a campaign of denigration by anti-war activists in the United States, many of them in academia, one of whom called him “a savage and voluntary Asian rightwinger.” This courageous figure, who never ceased opposing the subversion of his small country by an armed minority at the command of a foreign power, reminds one of Jan Masaryk, who was caught up in the dramatic events of Czechoslovakia twenty-seven years earlier. When asked for his reaction to a reported statement by Abram Chayes, an adviser to Senator George McGovern in the 1972 American presidential election, that if North Vietnam demanded it a Democratic administration would permit Souvanna Phouma to fall, the Prime Minister replied politely that it was under the Democratic administration of President Kennedy that the United States helped Laos to acquire the status of neutrality and that this implied a certain moral responsibility. But Souvanna Phouma was not partisan when it came to American politics. Informed by Ambassador Sullivan on the eve of the election that Richard Nixon might win, he said in that event he would resign, remembering his bitterness at the Eisenhower Administration’s treatment of him. Sullivan did his best to persuade him that candidate Nixon was a “new” Nixon.

The Third Coalition

In October 1972, after a lapse of eight years, negotiations resumed between the royal government and the Pathet Lao. The latter referred to Souvanna Phouma’s party to the negotiations as the “Vientiane government,” a demeaning way to signify its refusal to recognize the authority of the king or the National Assembly. Souvanna Phouma successfully resisted a Pathet Lao attempt to introduce a “Patriotic Neutralist” delegation composed of officers who had defected from Kong Le on the Plain of Jars in 1963 as a separate party to the talks. Souvanna Phouma once again turned to Pheng Phongsavan, his old negotiator from the Ban Namone talks, as his chief negotiator. Phoumi Vongvichit was named “special adviser” to the Pathet Lao delegation, and these were the two men who signed the final agreement.

The timing of the resumption of talks coincided with the accord reached in the secret negotiations in Paris between President Nixon’s national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, and Hanoi politburo member Le Duc Tho for a draft peace agreement in Vietnam. The Paris draft included a clause on withdrawal of foreign troops from Laos. The government of South Vietnam, while not a party to the secret talks, had drawn Kissinger’s attention to the fact that a peace agreement in which North Vietnam would be permitted to maintain its troop presence in neighboring Laos after a ceasefire, an American troop withdrawal, and a political settlement involving elections in South Vietnam, would not be worth much. However, Kissinger failed to get the North Vietnamese to set a date certain for a foreign troop withdrawal from Laos. The North Vietnamese argued that they had to defer to the sovereignty of the Pathet Lao, who would decide if and when they wished their allies to withdraw. Souvanna Phouma instructed his ambassador in Paris to impress on the American negotiators the extreme importance of obtaining a commitment from the North Vietnamese to withdraw their troops from Laos. However, Article 20 of the Paris Peace Agreement, which was signed on January 27, 1973, made no mention of a deadline connected to the obligation of the signatories to withdraw their troops from Laos.

By then, the Laos negotiations had progressed quite far, with agreement to set up a new provisional coalition government representing two factions rather than three. Pheng Phongsavan kept the American Embassy informed of progress in the negotiations. In return, then Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley kept the royal government up to date on issues of importance to the United States (such as the release of American prisoners and an accounting for the missing) that should be included in the draft text. The Agreement to Restore Peace and Reconciliation in Laos was signed on February 21, 1973. It provided for a ceasefire effective at noon on the following day covering all actions on the ground and in the air originating both within Laos and from foreign countries. The withdrawal of foreign forces from Laos was addressed in an article that stipulated they had to be withdrawn within sixty days of the date of establishment of the provisional coalition government. This was the closest Kissinger (in his talks in Hanoi earlier that month, in which Laos figured prominently) had been able to extract from his ever-smiling hosts a date for withdrawal. Also the parties were to furnish information on those missing in action.

In accordance with an unwritten understanding Kissinger had with Le Duc Tho to the effect that the release of American prisoners had to include all Indochina, the Pathet Lao released, in a ceremony at the Hanoi airport, nine captured Americans within the time allotted by the Paris Agreement for POW releases. This left the fate of the approximately 350 military and civilian personnel listed as captured or missing in Laos, of which 215 were lost under circumstances that the United States believed that some information should be available, a mystery.

With Phoumi Vongvichit absenting himself from Vientiane for months at a time, the Pathet Lao delayed the formation of the PGNU by linking it with military issues that they said had to be settled first, like the neutralization of the capitals Louangphrabang and Vientiane. In a new round of secret talks in Paris in May and June 1973 designed to “improve” the Paris Peace Agreement, Kissinger and Tho, who professed himself unable to commit his allies to anything, reached a written understanding stating that they “had been informed by the Laotian parties that the PGNU would be achieved by July 1.” Finally, on September 14, 1973, a protocol was signed by the chief negotiators providing for the structure, composition and functions of the PGNU and a National Political Consultative Council (NPCC). The PGNU and NPCC were finally formed on April 5, 1974, launching Laos’s third coalition government.

The People’s Republic

When Phoui Sananikone sent his usual letter to the cabinet for transmittal to the king requesting the traditional royal presence at the opening session of the National Assembly on May 11, the Pathet Lao prevented action, citing the rule providing for unanimity of decision-making. In July, when seven deputies initiated a petition to be signed in the National Assembly building against the continued presence of North Vietnamese troops beyond the sixty-day deadline for withdrawal set by the Vientiane Agreement, Souvanna Phouma ordered the building cordoned off. He announced that the two sides in the PGNU had unanimously agreed to ask for dissolution of the Assembly. The next day, the Prime Minister suffered a heart attack,

incapacitating him for several months. The Pathet Lao effectively blocked the holding of new elections, required by the constitution. Thus, the last freely elected legislature passed into history.

On the Indochina battlefield in March 1975, North Vietnamese divisions from their well-established bases in southern Laos launched an attack on Ban Me Thuot in what was to be the launching of their final campaign to take over South Vietnam. This violated both Article 20 of the Paris Agreement and the withdrawal clause of the Vientiane Agreement. Later that month, the Laos ceasefire was violated at the road junction of Sala Phou Khoun as the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese backers drove southwards as far as Muong Kassy. As usual, the Pathet Lao claimed infringements of the ceasefire by “ultra-rightist reactionaries.” Vang Pao’s Hmong soldiers awaited their fate at their base of Long Chieng. The United States, having failed to react to the massive North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam, could hardly go to the defense of the Hmong, for to do so would re-involve the United States in the war and bring into question its sincerity in signing the Paris Agreement which had been praised by President Nixon as ending American involvement. A hastily improvised airlift of American planes evacuated 2,500 Hmong, including Vang Pao’s six wives and many of his officers, to safe haven in Thailand. Vang Pao was spirited away in great secrecy. Because he feared a stampede, Vang Pao’s CIA minder drove him out of the valley to a rendezvous with a waiting helicopter. About 40,000 Hmong, including soldiers, village headmen, and civil servants, were left behind, leaderless and without orders or instructions about how to care for themselves and their families in the new situation.

In Vientiane, a campaign of intimidation against rightist members of the government and officers of the royal army, who felt isolated by the departure of the last Americans from Phnom Penh and Saigon, gathered speed. Souvanna Phouma tried at first to ban the demonstrations, but then gave in and sided with their aims. On May 8, some 3,000 young people and teachers carrying placards and chanting staged a march past the American Embassy. Laotian and American guards could not get the gate shut, and several demonstrators climbed the fence. A few stones were thrown and an attempt was made to lower the flag, but a student leader sitting on the fence and Pathet Lao policemen, who patrolled the city under the neutralization terms of the Vientiane Agreement, shouted at the demonstrators to move on, and they obeyed. Five rightist cabinet members resigned after this. Demonstrators also took over the offices of the U.S. Agency for International Development. On June 26, AID closed its mission for the first time since 1951.

In spite of appeals from AID workers that Laotian colleagues and acquaintances were at risk as a result of these dramatic events, the embassy refused facilities for evacuation of non-Americans. Laotian officials and their families, abandoning their houses and belongings, fled by their own devices, hiring boats for nighttime river crossings or bribing Pathet Lao guards not to open fire. When non-essential staff and dependents had been evacuated, the American community, which had numbered more than a thousand, was reduced to a skeleton embassy staff of about one dozen. The Chargé d’Affaires, Christian A. Chapman, decided to maintain the embassy in the face of all provocations rather than close it, and his decision was approved in Washington. Chapman’s decision, in view of the uncertainty about how the new regime would

treat official Americans and the total control of the access to Vientiane by land, water, and air by the Pathet Lao and their foreign allies, was a courageous one. The previous year, an American tourist, Charles Dean, had been captured by the Pathet Lao and executed.

Armed Pathet Lao bands arrived in Pakxe and Savannakhet to take over law enforcement duties from rightists. On August 23, the Pathet Lao completed their seizure of local power with the takeover of the Vientiane city administration by a revolutionary committee. As 1975 drew to a close, signs multiplied that events were accelerating. In October, the NPCC established new screening procedures for electoral candidates that effectively eliminated all persons who had not supported the Pathet Lao. The NPCC also announced that elections to a new National Assembly would be held on April 4, 1976. In the last week of November, the NPCC and PGNU were convoked to meet at Vieng Sai, the Pathet Lao headquarters in Houaphan. While demonstrators in Vientiane demanded the end of the PGNU and the abolition of the monarchy, Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong flew to Louangphrabang and obtained the abdication of King Savang Vatthana “in response to the aspirations of Lao nationalities throughout the country.” A hastily convened National Congress of People’s Representatives met on December 1 and 2 in the deserted gymnasium of the former American school in Vientiane, at which the leaderships of the new state and government were proclaimed. Souphanouvong was President and Kaysone, who appeared for the first time in Vientiane, was Prime Minister. Laos had joined the socialist camp.

The First Years of the LPDR

The new regime was under the control of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP), a Marxist-Leninist party that had been founded on March 22, 1955, in the post 1954 Geneva Conference period, but had hitherto remained clandestine. Its general secretary was Kaysone. The names of the other six members of the politburo were also made public for the first time. Important positions in the party and government overlapped so as to ensure complete compliance with the party’s decisions, reached at secret meetings of its central committee, which was made up of old-line revolutionary leaders. The first years were marked by the party’s steps to ensure control over the country and the people in whose name the revolution had been fought.

Ex-King Savang Vatthana never had anything to do with the new regime, so far as is known. He received the meaningless title of adviser to President Souphanouvong. He lived quietly in the royal palace in Louangphrabang as a private citizen until March 1977, when he, Queen Khamboui, and Crown Prince Say Vongsavang were spirited away by helicopter to Houaphan, officially for their own safety, but in reality to prevent the monarch from being used as a symbol of resistance to the regime. It was still a period of instability, and pockets of resistance, mainly among the Hmong, continued to operate. Imprisoned in Seminar Camp 01, the Crown Prince died on May 2, 1978, and the King eleven days later of starvation. The Crown Prince had insisted his father share their meager rations. The Queen died on December 12, 1981. All were buried in unmarked graves by a small stream outside the camp’s perimeter, according to an eyewitness. No official announcement of their deaths was made. More than a decade later, during an official visit to France in December 1989, Kaysone confirmed reports of the king’s death in an innocuous aside that attributed it to old age.

But the party did not dare abolish the Buddhist *sangha*, of which the king had been the supreme patron, although it did modify the traditional position of this body so as to shape it also into an instrument of control. In March 1979, the Venerable Thammayano, the 87-year-old *Sangha-raja* of Laos, the country's highest-ranking abbot, fled by floating across the Mekong on a raft of inflated tire tubes. After a few initial experiments on a local level in which monks were denounced as parasites threatened to cause popular agitation against the regime, monks were not directly ordered to work. But a monk was not eligible for a government rice ration unless he worked, by gardening or in some other productive task, such as teaching handicrafts or addressing meetings on behalf of the government. Ordinary monks were not forbidden to preach, but their sermons were commonly tape recorded and monitored for signs of dissidence. As a result of these pressures, the number of monks in Laos decreased sharply after 1975. Spirit worship continued, but its existence was officially denied.

The seminar camps were the centerpiece of the new regime's program for those it had defeated. The party's Marxist-Leninist dogma did not allow any respite in the class struggle, and those who had made themselves the lackeys of the foreign aggressors during the national liberation phase of the revolution or were members of the feudal class were the presumed saboteurs and subversives of the socialist phase that was just getting under way. As long as they remained free, they would spy on the security forces of the people's regime, and might even prepare the way for a return of the Americans. The work of building the camps had begun even before the proclamation of the LPDR. Known only by their numbers to the people who built and occupied them, there was Camp 01 at Sop Hao, Camp 03 near Na Kai, now given the Pali name Vieng Xai, meaning "Victorious Town," Camp 05 near Sam Teu, and Camps 04 and 06 near Muang Et, all in Houaphan. There was also a camp at Muang Khoua on the Nam Ou and other camps in the center and south. There are no official figures on the numbers sent for reeducation; the entire network of camps was kept a secret from the outside world with the only news of them being brought out by former inmates and their families. Published estimates have put the number variously at 30,000, 37,600, and 50,000.

In July 1975, the first groups of high-level officials of the old regime, including *chao khouangs* and *chao muangs*, were transported to the camp sites and set to work constructing them. They had received letters signed by Souvanna Phouma ordering them to attend an important meeting in Vientiane. They arrived in full dress uniform. After an overnight stay in Vientiane, they were flown to the Plain of Jars, where a festive atmosphere prevailed. The officials, about 70 in all, were given a party, with food and a movie, and with Vietnamese advisers present. They were then flown on to Houaphan, separated into small groups, and organized into work parties.

In August and September 1977, an incident occurred at Camp 05 in which a group of 26 "reactionary" high-ranking officials and military officers were accused of plotting a revolt and were arrested. They were taken away to Camp 01. They included Pheng Phongsavan, the minister who had signed the Vientiane Agreement; Touby Lyfoung, the Hmong leader; Soukhan Vilaysan, another of Souvanna Phouma's ministers who had been with him in the Lao Issara and had risen to be secretary-general of the Neutralist Party; and Generals Bounphone Maekthapharak and Ouane Ratikoun. All died there. Others were more fortunate. Tiao

Sisoumang Sisaleumsak, one of two ministers who had held Souvanna Phouma's government together at Khang Khay in the dark days of early 1961; General Sengsouvanh Souvannarath, who had taken command of the Neutralist army in 1966; and Sing Chanthakoummane, who as a young lieutenant in the Second Paratroop Battalion and had taken part in Kong Le's *coup*, were held in seminar camps for 15 years or more before being released. All resisted the efforts to indoctrinate them.

Souvanna Phouma accepted his fate calmly and with the dignity of adviser to the government whose title had been bestowed upon him. He did not end his life like Jan Masaryk who was pushed out of his bathroom window in the Czernin Palace in Prague in the dead of night by the goon squads of the new regime, but died a natural death of old age in 1984. He no doubt owed much to the tacit protection of his half-brother, who died in 1995.

Many Hmong fled south to make the hazardous crossing of the Mekong. Remnants of Vang Pao's army, determined to remain in Laos, took to the mountains once again, evading the Pathet Lao as best they could, and resisting with whatever weapons they had left. The government began a campaign of extermination against these remnants, using helicopters armed with biological weapons supplied by Hanoi from stockpiles in the Soviet Union's large biological warfare program.

Over the succeeding years, various groups using high-sounding names abroad have announced resistance activities against the LPDR. Some have invoked the backing of Vang Pao, others have said they were carrying on the struggle in the name of the royal family. The resistance has remained a shadowy affair. Occasionally bombs have exploded near markets in Vientiane, and buses have been ambushed on the Luangphabang road with loss of life, including those of foreign tourists. The political goals of such incidents, if any, have remained murky.

Questions and Issues

1. Discuss how the American close relationship with Sarit constrained U.S. policy in Laos in the late 1950's, especially considering the broader history of Lao-Thai relations.
2. In the context of the Eisenhower Administration's suspicion of neutralist regimes in Southeast Asia, discuss the State Department's failure to cultivate Crown Prince Savang Vatthana's staunch anti-Communist sentiments, specifically the failure to respond positively to his request for a guarantee of Laos's borders on the pretext that these were undefined.
3. On the eve of the outbreak of full-scale war in Laos in the summer of 1964, what foreign country was in the best position to guarantee the independence of the Kingdom of Laos? What event, or series of events, prevented this country from assuming this role? Discuss in the light of postwar power relationships in the region.
4. Discuss the moral dilemmas raised by the Kennedy Administration's commitment to arm the Hmong in 1961 and the war's toll on Hmong fighters and their families.

CULTURE

In areas that do not impinge on politics, the peoples of Laos carry on their everyday lives in much the same manner as they did before the advent of the new regime and its revolutionary rhetoric. The traditions of Buddhism and the *boun* (festival), which are historically associated with the village but now extend to urban life as well, dominate the lives of the lowland Lao. The merit-making ritual of giving alms to monks during their morning rounds never disappeared despite the regime's attempts in the early years to regulate it and to accuse the monks of being "parasitic" like the old "feudal classes."

Among the upland peoples, who are sometimes grouped under the collective descriptor "animist," traditional rituals also persist. The Hmong, for example, do not feel the same attachment to the village as a spatial or social unit in the way the lowland Lao do. To the Hmong, the primary foci of social identification are the household, the group of close relatives (*kwv tij*), and the clan, irrespective of any temporary or even permanent settlement. Their social identity is thus fixed through the concepts of patrilineal descent groups ("lineages" and clans), the actual units of which, however, are dispersed nowadays on a truly cosmopolitan scale. The Hmong are divided into about 18 clans. The Hmong cosmos is inhabited by a large number of different spirits (*dab*), the most important categories of which are household spirits, medicine spirits, nature spirits, and shamanic spirits. Among the Hmong, an important ritual is the celebration of the New Year, at which a chicken or pig is usually sacrificed to the household spirit, and whose altar (*dab xwm kab*), is usually placed on the wall opposite the main door.

The traditional ritual of the *baci*, in which strings are tied around someone's wrist (*mat kaen*), not to be removed for fear of bad luck, has indeed been elevated in Laos today to the place of a national custom. The *baci* is associated with transitions, namely births, marriage, entering the monkhood, going away, returning, New Year, and welcoming or bidding farewell to foreign guests. Official sanction to the *baci* ceremony was first given at the Lao New Year in 1980 when it was announced that the administrative committee of Vientiane province held a *baci* and those attending included the highest leaders of the LPDR. Today it retains an important place in state ceremonies of all kinds. This is the more ironic in that the structure of the ritual language contained in the ceremony is replete with royal references and style.

The official calendar of the LPDR contains the following holidays: New Year's Day (January 1), Pathet Lao Day (January 6), Army Day (January 20), Women's Day (March 8), Lao People's Revolutionary Party Day (March 22), Lao New Year (April 13-15), May Day, Children's Day (June 1), Lao Issara Day (August 13), Liberation Day (August 23), Freedom from the French Day (October 12), and National Day (December 2). These primarily affect state organization, the bureaucracy, and schools. For holidays celebrated by particular ethnic groups, the state grants leave to its officials concerned, who live mainly in the capital and urban areas. In rural areas, the traditional calendar centered on the *wats* and determined by the agricultural cycle remains in operation beyond the reach of the state.

Members of the household work the land together, although there is a separation by tasks. In wet rice cultivation (*naa*-cultivation), men do the plowing and preparation of the seedbed, controlling water flow to the fields, and threshing of the crop. Women do the transplanting and weeding, and are responsible for carrying the sheaves of rice to the threshing place. In upland rice cultivation (*hai*-cultivation), men handle the cutting and clearing of the fields, while women do the sowing and weeding. Activities in wet rice cultivation begin with the onset of the rains in April or May and end with harvesting in October and November. Activities in upland rice cultivation begin with burning off vegetation and clearing fields at the end of the dry season in February and March when the air is full of smoke; harvesting takes place in November. Cultivation of secondary crops is interspersed with rice cultivation; gardening on river banks, for example, follows the dropping of water levels at the end of the dry season.

In addition to strictly agricultural activities, the daily lives of rural people center around a number of other necessary activities, like fetching water from wells, often located near *wats*, and important economic enterprises like gathering and foraging. Among forest products are counted small game, birds and eggs, fruit, honey, spices, medicines, resins, latexes, dyes, fuel wood and charcoal, as well as structural materials like rattan, bamboo, wooden poles and various fibers. Gathering and home processing of forest products are importantly associated with women.

The receding into the past of the struggle against the imperialists and feudalists, the collapse of European communism, and the introduction of a mixed economy in which private initiative is encouraged, have all deprived of any meaning the construction of a socialist state in Laos as a goal worthy of attainment. Accordingly, the regime has had to seek alternate sources of legitimacy to Marxism-Leninism. Not surprisingly, this search has taken the form of a retraditionalized nationalism that is meaningful to the people.

In a move of great symbolism, the That Luang, or Grand Stupa, built originally by the 16th Century King Setthatirath and destroyed and pillaged several times, only to be rebuilt each time with loving care, replaced the hammer and sickle as the centerpiece of the national emblem over each ministry and on official documents and on a new 1,000-kip note in 1991, the year of the adoption of the new constitution. The That Luang, on the outskirts of Vientiane, is the site of the great fair and festival held every November between the thirteenth and fifteenth day of the twelfth month in the Buddhist calendar. On these days, thousands of people stream toward the stupa to pay homage. The king used to preside over the festival, but today it is the leading figures of the LPDR who officiate. In January 2003, a four-meter-high statue of Fa Ngum was formally unveiled at a ceremony in Vientiane at which a number of party leaders were in attendance and were observed to fall to their knees in veneration of the kingdom's founder. The day of the ceremony was a national holiday.

The New Year celebration in Louangphrabang, although shortened from two weeks under the old regime to three days now, still takes place with much pomp and color. The parading of the Prabang, the holy relic and palladium of the former kingdom Lan Xang, which was brought to the royal capital during the reign of its founder, Fa Ngum, remains a central feature. Government officials, dressed in *sampots* and led by the Foreign Minister and the Governor of the province, line up on the steps of the former royal palace, now a museum. After appropriate

rituals by members of the *sangha*, the Prabang is carried down the steps by attendants and placed in its palanquin for the procession to Wat May amid crowds lining the streets. The That Luang festival has always included a traditional game of hockey (*tiki*). It is played with bamboo sticks and a ball made of roots. In its effort to keep up with the outside world, traditional contests like this one, as well as the boat races on the Mekong, have been "modernized." Football has become a popular spectator sport. Laos has participated in the summer Olympic Games.

The replacement of the hammer and sickle as official emblem has also coincided with: (1) the overhaul of billboards that used to proclaim the glory of socialist construction, (2) the allowing of the loudspeakers that used to blare out propaganda from telephone poles in the capital to fall into gentle dereliction, and (3) a concerted attempt to present the regime's leaders as being good fathers, acquirers of merit, and supporters of Buddhism who are entitled to receive high Buddhist funeral ceremonies--in short, more human beings than the stylized portraits of heroic and seemingly immortal leaders of the recent past. The current attempt to re-legitimize the regime bears many of the marks of a scissors-and-paste effort with its selective evocation of the six centuries of the Lao monarchy. It also raises interesting questions about the justification of the 30-year-long struggle for power by the party, and all the sacrifices that it entailed.

The press and broadcasting, plus now the Internet, are judged by the regime to be in the sphere of political activity and thus are subject to control. In a country that used to have many newspapers identified with contending political parties and factions, there is today a severe limitation on publishing. Total circulation of daily newspapers in 2000 was about 21,000. The largest circulating daily newspaper is the party's official organ, *Pasason*, published in Vientiane. The party's quarterly journal, also published in Vientiane, is *Aloun Mai*. The official news agency is Khaosan Pathet Lao (KPL). Radio broadcasting is by far the most widespread medium of mass communication. The National Radio of Laos broadcasts in a number of languages, principally Lao, English, and French. Not subject to government control are the Lao-language broadcasts of the BBC, the Voice of America, and Radio Free Asia, which contain news of events in Laos. There is also a government-run television station, which competes with Thai television stations broadcasting from across the river. Laotian sensitivity to the latter was indicated on May 14, 2004, when the Ministry of Information and Culture issued an order prohibiting all Thai television channels and videos from being shown in public places like airports, bus stations, hotels, restaurants and markets.

Questions and Issues

1. The anthropologist Carol Ireson has studied the economic role that forest products play in the well-being of women in rural Laos. Fishing is also an important economic activity. Discuss the social effects of deforestation and large-scale development schemes like hydropower projects.

SOCIAL ISSUES

In the past, the teaching in Laos of much cultural lore and reading and writing took place in Buddhist *wats* and was available only to men. The French introduced modern education into Laos with the opening in 1902 of elementary schools in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. By 1969/1970, there were about 200,000 elementary public school pupils and another 25,000 private school pupils. A 1968 study concluded that the rate of literacy, defined as the fourth-grade reading level, among men between 14 and 45 years of age was 50 to 60%. The rate among women between 14 and 35 was about 25%. In the youngest age group surveyed, 14-24 years of age, the literacy rate was 75% for men and 29% for women. Figures for 1995 show that overall literacy for the population over 15 years of age was 56.6%, with the rate for men being 69.4% and for women 44.4%. There were reported to be 7,896 schools for primary age (6-10) children with a total enrollment of 786,335 students in 1996-1997.

The new regime's primary concern in education was political, and the main objective was to spread knowledge of the party's policies. Political education became an important part of the curriculum in schools and other institutions. Party cadres led sessions at every level in which attacks on the old "neo-colonial" regime and American imperialism, celebrations of the patriotic struggle for independence, and exhortations to defend the country against "traitors" and to build socialism featured prominently. Most books dating from the old regime were destroyed, foreign books were no longer available, and the standard text published by the Committee for Social Science Research of the Ministry of Education in 1989 (the three-volume *History of Laos from 1893 to the Present*), renders the country's modern history simply as a struggle for independence led by the party against foreign aggressors and their local puppets. Historical research outside this very narrow scope was discouraged by equating it with opposition to the LPDR.

With the collapse of communism in Europe and the return to Laos of young people who had been sent to Eastern Europe for higher education, a reassessment occurred and the education system was reoriented. In higher education, the biggest reform was to reorient language training from Russian and East European languages to English and French. Then textbooks were revised. The standard history text was rewritten to tone down ideological rhetoric. Since 1994 new primary texts have begun to appear with important changes in subject matter. A new third grade reader omits mention of socialism, and a new fifth grade reader emphasizes serving the people in peacetime rather than extolling wartime heroism. Stories emphasizing the importance of respecting teachers and elders, of being a well behaved family member and a good citizen, and of observing good hygiene, as well as animal stories intended to convey moral lessons had never quite disappeared, but are now given greater space. A new curriculum discouraging the rote learning associated with the system followed after 1975 came into operation throughout Laos in September 1996. A new university was inaugurated in November 1996 years after the break-up of the royal government's university by the new regime.

Despite some hopeful signs, the education system of the LPDR still suffers from the backwardness manifest in inadequate teacher training and facilities stemming from inadequate investment in schools and educational human capital on the part of the government for many years running. Building village schools has never appeared as attractive to the ministries in Vientiane as large, centralized, capital-intensive development projects, whether in the field of agriculture or industry. The majority of the young people in Laos today have only an imperfect

knowledge of their country and the world beyond the borders. This is particularly true of the history of the former regime and of the kings of the ancient past. Whatever they know comes from what their parents and elders may have told them. However, it is in the schools where young people first come in contact with the state, where they salute the flag and sing the national anthem, and where they see the photographs of their current rulers. This knowledge, while imperfect, does enable them to identify themselves as the "Lao" of the "Lao People's Democratic Republic." This is, in the final analysis, what their government wants.

Medical care is also limited by inadequate communication networks and lack of human and financial resources devoted to the health sector. In 1996, there were 1,167 physicians for the whole country (1 per 4,115 inhabitants) and 10,364 hospital beds.

HIV/AIDS prevalence has remained low in the LPDR, with estimates of around 0.05% of the total population. Findings of the national second-generation surveillance in 2000-2001 showed that 6 of 811 (0.9%) female service workers in entertainment sites were HIV positive. Another study involving 108 female sex workers showed a total STI infection rate of 54%, which is higher than anywhere else in Southeast Asia. Although much of Southeast Asia was adversely affected by the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), there were no reported cases of the illness in Laos.

Questions and Issues

1. Discuss the present-day prospects for educating young Laotians in the history of their country.

ECONOMICS

Laos is included on the United Nations list of the world's least developed countries. The urban-based, free market economy of the years 1954-1975 was sustained by large amounts of foreign, notably U.S., aid, with the Chinese minority playing an important commercial role in

what was essentially a small urban-based monetary economy. In 1975 the new regime, with its Marxist-Leninist doctrine and support from the Soviet bloc, attempted to replace this economy with a socialist one. The attempt was a failure and led to severe disruptions, especially in rural areas with the attempt to collectivize agriculture. The attempt to instill socialism was abandoned in 1986 when private markets were introduced. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the sources of aid shifted once again. The economy today may accurately be described as post-socialist, and comprises state and private sectors co-existing side by side. In 2003, the Constitution was revised to formally recognize private property and the legitimate activity of the private sector on an equal footing with the state enterprise sector. The country is still heavily dependent on foreign aid and investment. A large number of nongovernmental organizations, including some from the United States, have been assisting the government, mainly in the fields of rural development and public health.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2001 was estimated at US\$1.6 billion, making GDP per capita about US\$300.

Laos has mineral resources of iron, copper, manganese, lead, gold, silver, tin, gypsum, oil, and natural gas. Tin has been mined commercially since colonial times, and gypsum has become important; the other minerals have been worked only in primitive and unsystematic ways. There are in fact over 500 recorded mineral occurrences distributed more or less evenly over the whole country. Foreign companies have shown interest in exploration and development of minerals, including barite, gold ores, precious stones, and oil and natural gas. Laos also has considerable hydroelectric power potential. Laos's forest resources have also provided for several important wood processing industries, although timber extraction has been periodically banned by the government for environmental reasons.

Agriculture is by far the principal occupation in Laos and in 2001 contributed 50.9% of GDP and employed three-fourths of the labor force. With an estimated land area of 23.68 million hectares, fewer than one million hectares, or less than 4%, are cultivated. Rice accounts for about 80% of cultivated land, including about 422,000 hectares of lowland wet rice and about 223,000 hectares of upland rice. In addition, about 800,000 hectares are used for pasture or contain ponds for pisciculture (i.e., fish reared by artificial means). Agricultural production is subject to large year-to-year fluctuations due to weather; alternating droughts and floods have severely affected lowland wet rice production in particular.

Rice yields are low, averaging about 2.25 tons per hectares, reflecting the absence of high-yielding varieties and the low use of other inputs like fertilizer. In upland rice production, no modern inputs are used at all, the soil being fertilized by the residues of vegetation cleared and burned off to establish the field, or swidden, and the crop is entirely rainfed.

Principal non-rice crops include cardamom, coffee, cotton, fruit, maize, mung beans, peanuts, soybeans, sugarcane, sweet potatoes, tobacco and vegetables. The only crop produced for export in substantial quantities is coffee, grown mainly on the Bolovens Plateau. Opium is also produced in hill areas, although opium poppy cultivation for export is illegal. Today, Laos

remains the third largest producer of opium after Afghanistan and Myanmar, producing about 180 metric tons in 2002.

The main activities of the country's small manufacturing sector, which accounts for about 18% of GDP, are food processing (rice milling and beverage production), saw milling, manufacture of building materials, production of a variety of light consumer goods (small tools, cigarettes, detergents, insecticides, matches, rubber footwear, salt, and clothing), and more recently a thriving garment export sector accounting for 26% of exports in value. Energy production, entirely in the hands of the state, is important for export. Electricity produced from dams on the Ngum River north of Vientiane and at Xeset near Salavan in the south and sold to Thailand accounts for 32% of exports in value. Four additional projects are under construction and a further eleven projects are being assessed for their environmental effects. However, criticism of international donors for construction of big dams and their effects on human, fauna and flora populations, as well as their economic viability, has slowed the planning process. The Asian economic crisis beginning in 1997 also reduced Thailand's demand for electric power. In Laos, the debate has centered on the Nam Theun 2, a projected dam on the Na Kay plateau in central Laos. Handicrafts also provide an important source of income generation. Further development of the mineral sector is contingent upon the willingness of private companies to invest; lack of adequate data, a trained labor force, dependable infrastructure, and legislation are inhibiting factors here. The sale of aircraft overflight rights is a major contributor to foreign exchange earnings.

Laos's main sources of imports in 2000 were Thailand (52.0%), Vietnam (26.5%), China (5.7%), Singapore (3.3%), and Japan (1.5%). Laos's main export destinations are Vietnam (41.5%), Thailand (14.8%), France (6.1%), Germany (4.6%), and Belgium (2.2%).

Until March 1988 the government controlled all banking activities. In that month Decree 11 on the reform of the banking system was passed, separating commercial bank functions from state bank functions. The Vientiane branch of the old State Bank became the central monetary agency. In June 1990, the Central Banking Law was passed, establishing the Central Bank to replace the State Bank. Under this law, the Central Bank assumed responsibility for regulation and supervision of commercial and regional banks; maintenance of foreign exchange reserves; issuance and supervision of money for circulation; licensing, supervision, and regulation of financial services; and management of the monetary and credit system. Other branches of the former State Bank were transformed into autonomous commercial banks to promote private investment. By 1991, Laos had seven commercial banks, including some joint Lao-Thai ventures. Responsibility for the debts of state-owned enterprises was transferred to the commercial banks, giving them enormous liquidity problems. To alleviate these, the government in 1989 allowed foreign banks to begin operations in Laos. The value of Laos's currency, the kip, declined by half in 1998 alone as a result of the Asian economic crisis. Tourism has been a growing sector, appealing mainly to Thailand, but also to Europe, the United States, and other foreign countries.

Laos still has a rather primitive transportation network. Rivers and roads are the main avenues of communication, supplemented by air transport. Of an estimated 13,494 miles

(21,716 kilometers) of roads, 24 percent are paved and 30 percent gravel, although passage on even the main roads during the rainy season is often difficult. In 1996 there were 16,320 passenger cars and 4,200 trucks and buses. There are about 4,600 kilometers of navigable waterways, including 1,330 kilometers of the 2,030 kilometers of the Mekong in Laos.

Navigability of the Mekong for international commerce is impeded by the Khone Falls, a series of interlocking falls and cataracts spread across some 11 kilometers near the border with Cambodia, and by smaller falls on the river between Vientiane and the China border. Both public and private trade associations handle river traffic. Lao Airlines, the national airline, services domestic and foreign points from Wattai Airport at Vientiane.

Telecommunications have seen a remarkable improvement of their capacity in recent years. There is an Internet server in Vientiane, but it is subject to strict government control. There were 18,000 Internet users in 2002. The country also had 15,000 personal computers and 55,200 cellular telephone subscribers in that year.

Questions and Issues

1. Laos has accumulated considerable experience over the past three decades in the design of projects and programs aimed at reducing opium poppy production. Nevertheless, the problem persists, proving that it knows no ideological boundaries. Discuss some of the factors involved.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Since its establishment in December 1975, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been effectively controlled by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. This self-described Marxist-Leninist party, in alliance with the Vietnamese party, secretly led the revolution that ended in the seizure of state power and the abolition of the monarchy. Top government positions are held by high-ranking party members, who constitute a Central Committee with a Politburo at the head. The current president of the LPDR, Khamtai Siphandon, is also general secretary of the party.

The LPDR constitution adopted in 1991 states in Article 3 that the “people’s rights to be the masters of the country are exercised and ensured through the functioning of the political system with the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party as its leading organ.”

The main institutions of the LPDR today, besides the cabinet, are an array of mass organizations, led by the Lao Front for National Construction; the National Assembly, whose members are elected to five-year terms; and a judicial system headed by a Supreme People's Court. These institutions are subject to party control and have an interesting history. In view of the confusion caused by the not unnatural tendency of Western scholars to assume that when Marxist-Leninist regimes like the LPDR speak of elections they are speaking of the kind of elections familiar to Westerners, it is extremely important to analyze what the regimes themselves say about elections. The election law of the LPDR adopted in 1991 states in Article 2 under Chapter I “Overall Principles”:

All Lao citizens, regardless of sex, ethnic origin, religious beliefs, social status, domicile, or professions, who are 18 years and older, have the right to cast votes; and those who are 21 years and older, have the right to stand as candidates for the election as members of the National Assembly.

In Article 7 under Chapter II dealing with candidates standing for election, the law states:

Candidates standing for election as members of the National Assembly must be fully qualified, as follows: by having a patriotic spirit, and a spirit of cherishing the popular democratic system and fulfilling responsible tasks; by maintaining a certain level of knowledge on the party’s line and policies and the state’s laws, and being capable of putting them into actual practice; by gaining trust from the people; and having good health.

In Article 8, the law further specifies:

The Lao Front for National Construction and other mass organizations, with the coordination of the electoral committees and various state and party organizations of various services at various levels, are in charge of proposing and confirming names of the candidates for the election as members of the National Assembly.

In Article 9, the law states that “documents of verification” for each candidate must be submitted to the national-level electoral committee not later than 14 days before election day. These documents include, notably, besides birth date the date of joining the revolution. The effect of these conditions is to disqualify any candidate who has not demonstrated a patriotic spirit by joining the revolution. Obviously, the earlier the date of joining the revolution the higher the candidate’s qualifications are considered, and for those too young to have taken part in the national liberation struggle (1950-1975) joining the revolution means serving meritoriously in one of the party’s front organizations, such as the ones for school-age children and revolutionary youth.

The difference in these qualifications with those of Western-style elections will be obvious, and there is not the slightest chance that the LPDR's election law will suddenly be transformed into a liberal election law, whatever Laotian exile groups may think. For Marxist-Leninists, it is a matter of dogma that defining voters and candidates for election who are patriotic is their prerogative. That this question of who votes and who gets to be a candidate must be left ambiguous in the party's propaganda during the struggle to seize state power is a source of the confusion among Western observers.

The LPDR's first attempt to institutionalize some sort of mandate from the people it claimed to represent was the Supreme People's Assembly, which was not elected at all but was appointed by the National Congress on December 2, 1975. Its twice-yearly meetings were reported in the controlled press, but it rapidly faded into obscurity. Perhaps because the regime wished to bolster its popular credentials, it suddenly announced in 1988 that elections would be held for a new SPA. Elections were held on June 26, 1988 for 2,410 seats on district-level people's councils, and on November 20, 1988 for 651 seats on province-level people's councils. On March 26, 1989 elections were held for 79 seats on the SPA. The second SPA had as its task the completion of the draft constitution, preparations for which had been talked about for years. The constitution was at last approved by the SPA on August 15, 1991 and was officially adopted. The leading role of the party, enshrined in the constitution, was manifest in the fact that 65 of the 79 members of the SPA were party members. Elections for the third SPA, now renamed the National Assembly, were held on December 20, 1992, with the participation of 93.3% of eligible voters. Elections to the National Assembly were also held in 1997 and 2002.

Two significant trends emerged in LPDR politics in the postwar period. The first was the preponderance of the military in positions of power in the party and government. By 1994, the party leader and prime minister, the ministers of national defense, interior, and agriculture and forestry, and the chairman of the National Assembly were all generals. The other trend was the noticeable under-representation of ethnic minorities in government-controlled institutions. This was somewhat surprising in view of the important role played by ethnic minorities during the struggle for power, which might have argued for their representation at least commensurate with their population numbers. Official explanations of this phenomenon are hard to find. However, the authors of the previously-cited 1996 official history draw the conclusion that "The specificity of the living conditions and the relations between various ethnic groups engender favorable conditions for national harmony" and refer to "the population of Laos, with the Lao-Thai speaking community [i.e. the ethnic Lao] as its core, in a multi-ethnic structure."

The country is divided into 16 provinces, one municipality, and one special region (see Table 1). Provincial governors wield considerable power and enjoy a large measure of autonomy in such matters as approval of economic development projects. Decree 64 of April 23, 2003, established committees for investment and cooperation at the provincial level, which were authorized to license foreign investment projects valued at \$2 million or less.

Questions and Issues

1. The National Assembly is the institution of the LPDR that is most likely to bring about new ways of doing things in the LPDR. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss your reasons.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The last American ambassador to the Kingdom of Laos, Charles S. Whitehouse, departed on reassignment in April 1975. The embassy remained open with a Chargé d'Affaires and a skeleton staff. Ambassadorial relations with the LPDR were not restored until 1992. The first U.S. ambassador to the LPDR was Charles B. Salmon, Jr.

The normalization of relations represented by the naming of an ambassador followed positive steps to resolve two issues of vital importance to the United States, which were pressed by many visiting delegations to Vientiane. The first of these was the POW/MIA issue, on which the LPDR's agreement in 1984 to start hosting search parties for U.S.-financed on-site excavations of aircraft loss sites was a breakthrough. On POW's, no similar progress was registered, however. The LPDR's repeated affirmation that it was not holding any POW's was reluctantly accepted as fact. The harsh conditions in which American prisoners endured during the war made long survival unlikely in any case, even disregarding the fact that the Pathet Lao regarded such prisoners as criminals and denied them the application of the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. In spite of many rumors, often propagated by unscrupulous individuals seeking pecuniary gain, no POW's ever emerged from the jungles of Laos after 1975.

The second issue of importance was the drug issue. By war's end, Laos had become a major producer and exporter of opium and heroin, much of which found its way to the United States. To meet this illegal trade, the United States in the postwar years financed a series of projects designed to offer Laotian farmers alternative sources of crop revenue. Some of these joint projects, as other development projects, were implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGO's).

An issue of importance to the LPDR is the removal of unexploded ordnance left over from the war. More than 12,000 people, many of them children, are estimated to have lost their lives due to explosions of ordnance littering the countryside. The United States has contributed to efforts to remove such ordnance.

The United States responded quickly and generously to the exodus from Laos provoked by the coming to power of the LPDR. These people, who had tied their lives to the royal government and its American backers and who saw little future for themselves under a regime that made class struggle and the distinction between patriots and lackeys of foreign imperialists its hallmark, began new lives relatively easily thanks to their education and their professional skills. Their children acquired American citizenship and went into professions in the United States, including the military, and a son of the Na Champask family was among the soldiers

killed in Iraq in 2004. The first wave of Laotian refugees was followed by a second composed largely of rural people with little or no education but who saw no hope for themselves and their families under the exploitative agricultural policies instituted by the new regime soon after its takeover with the aim of turning Laos into a proletarian dictatorship on the Marxist-Leninist model. Many among this second wave, either because they lacked qualifications for resettlement or because they feared journeying to a strange land, remained bottled up in camps along Thailand's river border with Laos.

Strong family ties, particularly among the Hmong, eased the resettlement process. Large and cohesive Hmong communities sprang up in California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and other states. The continuing resistance of the Hmong who remained in Laos, however, created a major political problem for Thailand and the United States, which were seeking to improve relations with the LPDR. The LPDR's campaign to eliminate the resistance produced a continuing flow of asylum seekers across the river. Anti-Communist Hmong in the United States raised funds among the expatriates and funneled them to Thailand where they served to finance armed resistance activities across the river. These activities reached a peak in the early 1990's, and the backflow of Hmong seeking escape from the fighting in Laos strained the resources of the Thai government.

From 1992 to 1994, following a tripartite agreement among the LPDR, Thailand, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for repatriation of the Hmong in Thailand, the State Department spent nearly \$3 million to send Lao and Hmong refugees back to Laos. The living conditions of the repatriates were difficult to verify on the ground. Several prominent Hmong who voluntarily returned to Laos in those years disappeared. In 1994, the Thai government announced its intention to close the last camp along the border, at Ban Napho, which, according to one Congressional report, had assumed the aspect of a concentration camp. The Pathet Lao had seized intact the personnel files of Vang Pao's army in Long Chieng; without orders to destroy them, the officer in charge of the files had simply locked them and pocketed the keys when he left the valley. And of course from the LPDR's viewpoint there was no statute of limitations on crimes against the people. Thus, thirty year after the end of the war the Hmong in the camp were still bearing its tragic consequences. The problem was compounded by the fact that the UNHCR personnel responsible for screening inmates were mainly young people who lacked any background in the history of the thirty-years war. They screened out thousands, making them automatically ineligible for resettlement, even if they had been willing to go to strange lands. Accordingly, many Hmong broke out of the camp, fleeing to the hills of northern Thailand or to a temple at Saraburi, Wat Tham Krabok, which seemed to offer sanctuary. By 2004, some 20,000 Hmong and Lao were living in squalid conditions and under tight security at Wat Tham Krabok. An agreement in December 2003 to make an exception and admit 15,000 of the refugees at the temple for resettlement in the United States was welcomed by Hmong leaders in the United States.

Although the Kennedy Administration's decision in January 1961 to arm the Hmong (one of its first actions on taking office) was not written into a formal commitment, the participation of succeeding administrations in attempts to repatriate Hmong refugees left stranded in exile raised moral issues. This was particularly the case with the Hmong, who had been abandoned

literally from one day to the next by the CIA, which managed the program to support the “secret war” from its Langley headquarters. The CIA station chief in Laos, who went on to become the division chief managing the program at CIA headquarters at the time the abandonment occurred, had been awarded the Order of the Million Elephants, Laos’s highest honor for a foreigner, by King Savang Vatthana.

Over the years in Washington, the Hmong veterans of the Laos war and their families adopted the American custom of organizing themselves to lobby Congress on the plight of refugees and on other matters of concern, such as passage of a bill in Congress at the initiative of the Bush Administration seeking to grant Normalized Trade Relations (NTR) to the LPDR, a move favored by American business leaders.

As the LPDR skillfully managed its bilateral relations with the United States, it also moved in the direction of becoming a responsible member of the community of nations in the post-Cold War period. The LPDR inherited Laos’s seat at the United Nations. It joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in July 1997, and expects to host the ASEAN summit in Vientiane in December 2004. In a move to meet criticisms from human rights groups, the LPDR introduced in 2002 a decree intended to formally protect religious freedom.

Thailand moved rapidly to improve its relations with the LPDR in the late 1970's following a change of government in Bangkok. However, political relations continued to be strained by a border dispute (in fact, a dispute over old French maps of the border dating back to the beginning of the 20th century), which led to clashes in the 1980's, and by the continuing armed resistance. In an attack on an immigration checkpoint at Ban Vang Tao ethnic Lao rebels briefly hoisted the royal flag before falling back on their base in Thailand. The LPDR exerted heavy pressure on the royal Thai government to extradite 16 Lao who had taken part in the attack. The Thai courts ruled that the 16 should be granted political asylum. However, the 16 were returned to the LPDR in the dark of the early morning of July 4, 2004.

Relations with Vietnam are based on mutual security concerns and reflect the legacy of the close ties during 30 years of war in Indochina from 1945 to 1975. Observances of important anniversaries, such as the founding date of the party, and exchanges of delegations are marked by joint communiqués extolling the “relation of friendship and special unity between Vietnam and Laos.” This relation is said to be an “objective law.” Historically, Cambodia has also been included in this triangular relationship.

With the People’s Republic of China relations also continue on a close and friendly course, with numerous exchanges of visits. China also has a more dominant commercial role in Laos than does Vietnam.

The LPDR maintains friendly ties to Myanmar (Burma), whose leaders see eye-to-eye with those of the LPDR on the need to repress internal political dissent. Another state with which the LPDR maintains close relations is the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea).

An agreement with Russia on restructuring the LPDR's debt levels was agreed during Prime Minister Bounyang Vorachit's visit to Moscow in 2003. The debt was accumulated during the immediate post-1975 years when the Soviet Union was the LPDR's main foreign aid donor. The agreement principally entails a 70% write-down in the aggregate debt level, to the equivalent of US\$380 million, and thereby effectively reduces the LPDR's aggregate long-term debt burden by about half.

Questions and Issues

1. Laos's relations with the six countries that adjoin it reflect the impact of history as well as of ideological differences and similarities. Discuss.

TIMELINE

- 1354 - Fa Ngum crowned ruler of Kingdom of Lan Xang.
- 1478 - Vietnamese invasion.
- 1713 - Lan Xang splits into three: Louangphrabang, Viangchan, Champasak.
- 1779 - First occupation of Viangchan by Siamese.
- 1827 - Second occupation of Viangchan by Siamese.
- 1887 - Louangphrabang destroyed, King Oun Kham requests French protectorate.
- 1893 - October 3: Siam gives up left bank of Mekong under Franco-Siamese treaty.
- 1895 - April 19: French protectorate of Kingdom of Louangphrabang declared; French administer rest of Laos directly.
- 1941 - May 9: Convention signed ceding right-bank territories back to Thailand.
- 1941 - August 29: King Sisavang Vong signs treaty of protectorate with France.
- 1945 - March 9: Japanese occupy towns of Laos; Franco-Laotian resistance movement develops; Sisavang Vong quarrels with Prince Phetsarath, viceroy.
- 1945 - September: OSS mission lands at Vientiane to investigate POW situation.
- 1945 - October 12: Lao Issara government formed in Vientiane.
- 1946 - French reoccupy Laos, Lao Issara government flees to Thailand.
- 1946 - November 17: Franco-Siamese agreement restores right bank territories to Laos.
- 1946 - December 15: Constituent Assembly meets.
- 1947 - May 11: Sisavang Vong promulgates constitution unifying Laos under his rule.
- 1949 - Lao Issara government in exile breaks up, most return to Vientiane under French amnesty.
- 1950 - February 7: U.S., UK recognize Kingdom of Laos as member of French Union.

- 1950 - August: Prince Souphanouvong announces Lao resistance government (Pathet Lao) supported by Viet Minh.
- 1951 - August: Elections for National Assembly.
- 1953 - Viet Minh invade Laos.
- 1953 - October 22: France signs treaty conferring full sovereignty on Kingdom of Laos.
- 1954 - Viet Minh again invade Laos; Geneva Agreement signed covering Laos; royal government declares its readiness to reintegrate Pathet Lao.
- 1955 - April: Laos attends Asian-African Conference at Bandung.
- 1955 - June: Negotiations open between royal government and Pathet Lao.
- 1955 - December 14: Laos becomes a member of the United Nations.
- 1955 - December 25: Elections for National Assembly; U.S. establishes PEO to provide assistance to royal army.
- 1957 - October 22: Agreement reached for first coalition government with Prince Souvanna Phouma as prime minister.
- 1958 - May: NLHS, political party of Pathet Lao, wins seats in supplementary elections for National Assembly.
- 1958 - December: North Vietnamese occupy territory abutting DMZ; royal government protests.
- 1959 - NLHS deputies arrested, guerrilla war resumes on North Vietnam border.
- 1959 - December: Deaths of Phetsarath and Sisavang Vong, Savang Vatthana ascends throne.
- 1959 - December: Government crisis; king intervenes at urging of Western ambassadors; caretaker government formed.
- 1960 - April 24: Elections for National Assembly, considered fraudulent.
- 1960 - August 9: *Coup d'état* in Vientiane led by Captain Kong Le; new government headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma invested..
- 1960 - December: In battle of Vientiane, Kong Le driven out.

- 1961 - January: Prince Boun Oum and General Phoumi Nosavan form government backed by U.S., Thailand; Kong Le allies his force with Pathet Lao, captured Plain of Jars.
- 1961 - North Vietnamese take part in fighting; truce talks open at Ban Namone; 14-nation conference opens in Geneva; neutralization backed by Kennedy Administration.
- 1962 - June 12: Three princes reach agreement, second coalition government invested with Souvanna Phouma as prime minister.
- 1962 - July 23: Geneva Agreement signed.
- 1962 - November: U.S. transport plane shot down at Plain of Jars, anti-aircraft crew revealed to be dissident Neutralists.
- 1963 - April: Fighting breaks out between Neutralists and Pathet Lao on Plain of Jars; foreign minister assassinated in Vientiane.
- 1964 - April: Attempted *coup d'état* in Vientiane by rightist officers.
- 1964 - August: Attempted negotiations fail; U.S. air strikes begin at royal government's request.
- 1967 - January 1: Elections for National Assembly.
- 1972 - January 2: Elections for National Assembly.
- 1972 - October: Negotiations between royal government and Pathet Lao open in Vientiane.
- 1973 - February 21: Vientiane Agreement signed, ceasefire takes effect.
- 1973 - March: Pathet Lao release nine U.S. POW's in ceremony at Hanoi airport.
- 1973 - September 14: Protocol signed in Vientiane giving effect to Vientiane Agreement.
- 1974 - April 5: Third coalition government invested with Prince Souvanna Phouma as prime minister.
- 1975 - March: Fighting breaks out, violating ceasefire.
- 1975 - May: Anti-government demonstrations, orchestrated by Pathet Lao, in Vientiane.
- 1975 - June 26: U.S. AID mission closes.
- 1975 - August 23: Pathet Lao complete takeover of principal Laotian towns.

1975 - December 1-2: National Congress of People's Representatives meets in Vientiane, LPDR proclaimed, King Savang Vatthana abdicates, Souphanouvong becomes president.

1977 - July: LPDR and Vietnam sign 25-Year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

1984 - Death of Prince Souvanna Phouma.

1986 – Private markets introduced in the economy at the Fourth Party Congress.

1988 - June 26: Elections for district-level people's councils.

1988 - November 20: Elections for province-level people's councils.

1989 - March 26: Elections for Supreme People's Assembly.

1991 - August 15: Constitution adopted.

1992 - December 20: Elections for first National Assembly.

1994 - April: Friendship Bridge across the Mekong with Thailand opened.

1997 - Elections for Second National Assembly.

1997 - July: Laos becomes full member of ASEAN.

2002 – February: Elections for Third National Assembly.

INTERNET SITE GUIDE

- Lao Embassy in Washington, D.C.: www.laoembassy.com.
- Lao news publications: www.laosnews.net.
- Lao tourism: www.visit-laos.com.

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