FACTORS INFLUENCING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COMMUNIST PARTIES OF THAILAND AND LAOS

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ON THE SURFACE, relations between the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) are close and cordial. The Lao have expressed support for the Thai liberation movement, and the Thai have acclaimed the triumph of people's democracy in Laos. There is reason to believe, however, that relations are not as amicable as they appear. This paper will examine in historical perspective three sets of interlocking factors which affect relations between the two parties, and which are likely to become of increasing importance if and as the Thai insurgency continues to gain ground.

The first of these factors concerns the Sino-Soviet dispute and accompanying ideological differences. As the wars between Vietnam and Kampuchea and between China and Vietnam have both so starkly shown, ideological differences may serve to reinforce traditional antipathies based upon historical, ethnic, and geopolitical grounds. The resulting combination may cause relations to deteriorate to the point of war, even between states whose governments share a common devotion to Marxism-Leninism and the ideals of proletarian internationalism and solidarity. Increasingly the Thai and Lao communist parties find themselves on opposing sides of the Sino-Soviet divide—a development which promises to complicate relations between the two parties.

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A second factor influencing inter-party relations stems from the geopolitical position of Laos in the narrower context of a Thai-Vietnamese competition for dominance on the Southeast Asian mainland. What complicates this second factor is that both of the principal protagonists must conduct their affairs in the shadow of Peking's conception of a Chinese sphere of influence in the region. The deterioration of relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) has in part obscured this ancient Thai-Vietnamese rivalry. In addition China's relations with the states of mainland Southeast Asia are conducted in the context of its dispute with the Soviet Union. But this should not obscure the importance for Laos (and also Kampuchea) of Thai-Vietnamese relations, for historically the sovereign status of the Lao state(s) has depended upon the degree to which the influence of either Vietnam or Thailand has been dominant, or mutually balanced the other.

The third factor concerns irredentist Lao ambitions in the Northeast of Thailand based upon the area's ethnic constitution and cultural traditions. This bilateral factor, while it may not rank in importance with the previous two, nevertheless must be considered in analyzing the current state of CPT-LPRP relations, for it threatens further to exacerbate differences that stem from broader ideological and geopolitical considerations. From the combined perspectives presented by these three interlocking factors an attempt will be made to draw certain tentative conclusions about the likely shape of future relations between Thailand and Laos both on a party to party level and perhaps eventually on a state to state level.

Effects of the Sino-Soviet Dispute

The communist parties of Thailand and Laos have come to find themselves on opposite sides in the Sino-Soviet dispute. The reasons for this are partly due to calculated self-interest, partly to inescapable geopolitical conditions, and partly to historical accident. A Siamese Communist Party may have existed briefly in the 1930s when the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) may also have sought recruits in Thailand, but the present Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) dates its existence from 1942. At that time no fewer than four apparently distinct parties were operating on Thai territory: the Malay Communist Party in the far south, the ICP among Vietnamese in the northeast, the Chinese Communist Party of Thailand (CCPT) among overseas Chinese, and the CPT, which may at the time have been limited to ethnic Thai.

The CPT probably owed much to the guidance of the CCPT until the latter reduced its activities following establishment of the PRC in 1949 and most of its members joined the CPT. CPT links with the Chinese community in Thailand have thus continued, as have the party's ideological and organizational relations with Peking. The ma-

jority of members of the Central Committee of the CPT is reportedly still made up of ethnic Chinese,[1] although the full membership has never been published. Since its inception, therefore, the CPT has been almost entirely dependent upon Peking. Apart from a brief period from 1946 to 1948, the CPT has been illegal in Thailand, and has been forced to operate underground. Many of its leaders have lived for extended periods in Peking and news of the party's policies and activities have been published almost exclusively in Chinese news media, or over the Chinese-controlled clandestine radio station Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT) that broadcasts in Thai from southern Yunnan.

A relationship of sponsorship somewhat similar to that between the Chinese and Thai parties has existed between the Vietnamese and Lao, though for very different reasons. Whereas the former developed from the key historical role played by ethnic Chinese in the Thai communist movement, the latter originated in a common opposition to first the French and subsequently the American presence in Indochina.

The Lao communist movement can trace its origins to those Lao who became members of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in the 1930s. It was not until 1950 that the movement took on a character of its own when two organizations were set up in northern Vietnam, a resistance government of the State of Laos (Pathet Lao)[2] and a broad political front later known as the Neo Lao Hak Xat (NLHX, the Lao Patriotic Front). Following the formal dissolution of the ICP in March 1951, the Lao moved slowly in organizing their own party. Only in 1955, according to official Pathet Lao accounts, was the Lao People's Party (later the Lao People's Revolutionary Party—LPRP) founded. Throughout its existence the Pathet Lao (PL) have maintained exceptionally close ties with the Vietnamese communist movement, ties that have since been cemented by the signing in July 1977 of a 25-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the SRV and the People's Democratic Republic of Laos (PDRL).

Despite these differences in origins and alliances, official relations between the LPRP and the CPT have been, as far as can be determined, friendly and cooperative. With the escalation of communist activity in Thailand following the founding of the Thai Patriotic Front (TPF) early in 1965 and the subsequent initiation of armed struggle later in the year, aid channelled through the Pathet Lao became of increasing importance to the CPT. Party cadres and insurgents were trained in camps in Pathet Lao areas of Laos or were escorted in transit to North Vietnam and China, while agents, arms, and supplies found their way back across the Mekong.[3] Infrequent published references to each other

[1] Justus M. van der Kroef, "Communism and Political Instability in Thailand," *Issues and Studies*, 12:9 (September 1976), p. 96.

[2] This is the term under which the Lao communist movement as a whole has been most widely known internationally, and it will be so used in this paper.

[3] For one of many accounts of this two-way traffic see the reports on the Thai National Security Council's White Paper on Communist Insurgency carried in *The Voice of the Nation* (Bangkok), September 3, 4, and 5, 1976.

were limited to mutual support for policies pursued.

With the final victory of the Pathet Lao signed and sealed by the overthrow of the monarchy and proclamation of LPDR at the end of 1975, a new situation prevailed along the middle reaches of the Mekong. A communist Laos in full control of the Lao river towns was in an excellent position to increase assistance to the Thai communists and thus to increase its influence within the Thai communist movement. To date this influence appears to have been exercised principally on behalf of those states with which Laos has the closest political and ideological relations, namely the SRV and the USSR, but this should not obscure the potential the Lao have to act in their own interests should the need arise. Since 1975 Laos has come to be ever more closely identified, through alliance with the Vietnamese, with the Soviet side of the Sino-Soviet dispute. At the same time continued CPT dependence upon Peking has meant that party relations across the Mekong have increasingly been influenced by differences between Moscow and Peking. This has already led to tensions between the CPT and LPRP, tensions which, exacerbated as they are by additional factors to be considered below, could increase in the future to the point where they seriously affect the direction and progress of the Thai insurgency movement.

The Lao have trodden a helpless path in the slippery ground between Moscow and Peking. Despite what appears to have been real efforts to treat both as evenhandedly as possible,[4] Laos has been inevitably drawn into the Soviet orbit through Vientiane's relations with Hanoi, especially since the serious deterioration of relations between the Chinese and Vietnamese. Not surprisingly, as Lao relations with Moscow have become increasingly close, relations with Peking have cooled. The Chinese, however, perhaps in recognition of the Lao dilemma, have stopped short of denouncing the Lao regime in the kind of terms reserved for Hanoi.[5]

Lao-Chinese relations lost something of their former warmth with the signing of a cease-fire with the Royal Lao Government in 1973. Despite Peking's stated approval of the subsequent formation of a Provisional Government of National Union representing equally communists and rightists, there is reason to believe the Chinese were unhappy at this departure from accepted Maoist practice. However, this did not prevent them from providing assistance to the new government, as well as giving separate aid grants to the Pathet Lao. Any reservations the Chinese may have expressed must have returned to haunt them with the PL victory in 1975. What was of far greater concern to the Chinese, however, was the rapid influx of Soviet technicians and advisers, whom Peking quickly accused of trying to replace the Amer-

[4] At least this has been the conclusion of most observers. See, e.g., MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, "Laos 1977: The Realities of Independence," *Asian Survey*, 18:2 (February 1978), p. 174.

[5] The only criticism that has appeared has been in the pro-Peking Hong Kong press. *Far Eastern Economic Review* (*FEER*), July 14, 1978.

icans.[6] As Premier Hua Kuo Feng warned Lao Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihan during the latter's visit to Peking in March 1976:

> The superpower that hawks 'detente' while extending its grabbling claws everywhere . . . [is] stepping up arms expansion and war preparations and attempting to bring more countries into its sphere of influence and play the hegemonic overlord.[7]

Though the Chinese insisted that their relations with the Lao remained "correct," it was soon clear that the policies followed by the new regime in Vientiane scarcely met with Chinese approval. In an editorial congratulating the LPRP on the first anniversary of its founding, the Chinese once again called upon the Lao to maintain their "independence and self-reliance,"[8] but to no avail. Laos was being drawn ever more closely into the Soviet orbit. In retrospect, a pro-Soviet bias was evident even in the new Lao regime's first year in power. Lao Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihan twice visited Moscow in 1976, the second time at the head of the LPRP delegation to the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He went only once to Peking. The agreement he signed with the Chinese for economic and technical assistance and cooperation was little more than a formal document, and Chinese aid to Laos has remained limited compared to that of the Soviet bloc.

During 1977 the Soviet presence and influence in Laos increased considerably. Throughout the year the veritable stream of Soviet bloc delegations visiting Laos far outnumbered the Chinese, and a quick survey of the official Lao media showed that while a number of articles on Chinese achievements in science and technology were carried, news items with political content clearly favored the Soviets. At the same time the Soviet military presence in Laos increased. In April a high ranking Lao military mission led by the Minister of Defence Khamtay Siphandone visited the USSR for secret talks. By September the first ten MIG-21s had arrived at Vientiane's Wattay airport. Throughout the country Soviet and Eastern European teams of experts were everywhere in evidence. Kaysone's six-week tour of eight communist states, including Cuba and Mongolia, "cemented" the Soviet link.

Only in the far northern Lao provinces abutting the Chinese border has Peking maintained an important presence. A new agreement was signed in April 1976 to continue the construction of a system of roads begun in 1962 that snakes down from the Yunnanese frontier towards Ban Houei Sai and Luang Prabang.[9] The Chinese were also

[6] *New York Times,* October 9, 1975. By the end of the year there were reported to be over 500 Soviet advisers and technicians in Laos. *Ibid.* December 25, 1975.

[7] *Peking Review,* March 19, 1976.

[8] Editorial in *Renmin Ribao* (Peking) carried in *Peking Review,* December 10, 1976.

[9] *Khaosan Pathet Lao* (Vientiane) April 6, 1976, in *USSR and Third World,* 6: 2–3 (April 1 to July 31, 1976), p. 104. See also *Siang Pasason* (Vientiane), May 11, 1977.

reported to be guarding and supplying the "reeducation" camps set up in Phong Saly province for the more intractable former rightists. If the accounts of Thai prisoners released as a goodwill gesture are to be believed, even the camp medical personnel were Chinese.[10] In late 1977 the Chinese apparently attempted to counter the overwhelming Soviet presence by offering to extend their road network further south, set up a number of light industries and, most spectacularly, build a railway from Yunnan to Kampuchea down the length of Laos.[11] The Lao refused all three proposals. But this may not have been simply due to Soviet and Vietnamese pressure. The Chinese presence in northern Laos has caused concern in Vientiane for years, and the prospect of an extension of the Chinese presence further south may not have been palatable even to those unhappy over the degree to which Laos is subservient to Vietnam.

By the middle of 1978 Chinese-Vietnamese relations were deteriorating rapidly over the problem of the SRV's treatment of its ethnic Chinese minority. Initial Lao attempts to take a neutral position soon began to give way to a pro-Vietnamese stance.[12] On the first anniversary of the signing of the treaty of friendship and cooperation between Laos and Vietnam, Kaysone affirmed that the Lao stood by the struggle of the Vietnamese people "to defend their independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity against threats, pressure, trouble-making, provocation, violation, slander and sabotage, committed by the imperialists and the international reactionaries." By using the Vietnamese term for the Chinese ("international reactionaries"), Kaysone committed Laos to the Vietnamese side of Hanoi's dispute with Peking, a position subsequently reiterated by the Lao media. A somewhat ambiguous statement later by Lao President Souphanouvong complaining that unnamed third parties were attempting to "sow division between the Lao people and the Chinese people" may have reflected an attempt by the Lao ruling elite to right the balance.[13] But the Lao came out firmly on the Vietnamese side following the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam.[14]

The Chinese reaction to these developments has been controlled. While Peking has reportedly withdrawn some 10,000 soldiers and road workers from northern Laos with the completion of a major section of road, between 5,000 and 8,000 remain.[15] The Chinese have also ap-

10 *The Australian*, February 15, 1978.

11 Nayan Chanda, "Laos Caught in the Crossfire," *FEER*, June 16, 1978.

12 By the end of June a Lao army broadcast was calling upon the country's armed forces "in solidarity with Vietnamese armed forces, to improve themselves in the service of Indochinese and Southeast Asian sovereignty and independence," quoted by Agence France Presse (AFP) from Bangkok, June 29, 1978 (FBIS, June 30, 1978).

13 *New York Times*, July 23, 1978.

14 See commentaries carried by *Khaosan Pathet Lao* (Bulletin Quotidien), January 9, 1979 and February 21, 1979.

15 Nayan Chanda, "A New Threat from the Mountain Tribes," *FEER*, September 1, 1978.

parently closed down their de facto consultate at Oudomsay, but this was at Lao urging. Otherwise full diplomatic relations have been maintained on both sides. Thus while the Soviet Union undoubtedly holds the upper hand in Laos, the Chinese have refused to concede victory in this struggle for influence in such a strategic location.

However, if Chinese influence within the LPRP is considerably less than that exercised by the Soviet Union, Soviet relations with the CPT have been nonexistent. The Russians have evidently felt that they could better exert an influence in Thailand by pursuing relations with the Thai Government than by supporting a relatively weak communist party so closely identified with Peking. This has left Peking in virtual control of the Thai revolution. Whether the Chinese exercise close direction at all levels of the insurgency movement—i.e., with the Thai People's Liberation Armed Forces (LPLAF)—is open to question, however. What is clear is that since 1964, when the CPT came out clearly on the Chinese side of the debate over revisionism, it has followed a course of unwavering support for Peking. The decision taken according to the CPT in 1961, but not put into effect until 1964, to escalate the struggle from political agitation to armed revoluion constituted a deliberate application of the Maoist model. "The path of seizing political power by armed force and surrounding the city with the countryside" still sums up the Maoist philosophy of the CPT.[16] At the same time the CPT has been loud in its criticisms of "Soviet revisionism" and the "Soviet social imperialists."[17]

Since 1976, therefore, an ideological rift has opened between the LPRP and the CPT. The CPT has been consistent in its support for the Chinese and in its application of Maoist principles of revolution, while the Lao have gravitated from a neutral position during their own revolutionary struggle to a pro-Soviet stance in line with changing Vietnamese policy. On an official level this has not prevented statements of mutual support; nor on a practical level has it meant any discernible decrease in the flow of aid to the Thai insurgents.[18] On the contrary, the flow of aid appears to have increased, but it is precisely because of this that friction has arisen, for such assistance is seldom given entirely altruistically. Indeed, the Lao appear to be using their new potential as a source of practical support for the Thai insurgents to undermine the ideological commitment of members of the CPT.[19]

[16] "The Dawn of a New Year of Unity and Victory," *Voice of the People of Thailand* (VOPT), December 31, 1976 (FBIS, January 6, 1977).

[17] See, e.g., VOPT, September 20, 1977 (FBIS, September 26, 1977) in which the claim is also made that with the phasing down of the U.S. military presence in Thailand the Soviets were attempting to take their place. The methods of the Russians, the broadcast warned, were "more dangerous and artistic" than those of the Americans!

[18] For CPT support for the Lao, see, e.g., VOPT, January 20, 1977 (FBIS, January 28, 1977). For material assistance, see the account given in *Bangkok Post Sunday Magazine*, April 6, 1975.

[19] John Everingham, last permanent Western correspondent to be expelled from Laos, personal communication, September 1977. Everingham reports meeting in

The threat that this poses to friendly relations between the Lao and Thai communist movements is obvious, but the threat is even more serious given Thai suspicions of Vietnamese intentions and the role the Lao are playing in bringing those intentions to fruition. The geographical position of Laos alone would make it necessary to take the broad context of Thai-Vietnamese competition for cultural and political dominance in mainland Southeast Asia into account in examining the relationship between the LPRP and the CPT. Lao alliance with the Vietnamese identifies them in the eyes of all Thai with an ancient rival, and thereby inevitably generates a degree of distrust even between fraternal parties.

Thai-Vietnamese Rivalry

It is probably too early to state that "The eliminations are over in determining which are the most vital civilizations on the peninsula [of Mainland Southeast Asia], and the finals are about to start. The finalists are Thailand and Vietnam."[20] But there is a ring of reality about this statement that both Thai and Vietnamese might recognize. Once the movement of the Vietnamese and Thai down the coastal plains of Vietnam and the Menam Valley, respectively, had reached its southern limits, both states turned towards the Mekong basin where the Lao were too weak and disunited to resist them. From the moment that Vietnamese and Thai came into direct confrontation in Laos in the 18th century, Lao relations with each power have been a function of relations with the other. Changes in fortune saw first the Vietnamese then the Thai gain political control over the Lao principalities. In Cambodia an inconclusive struggle led to the establishment of a joint mandate. The arrival of the French in Cambodia and in Laos by the end of the nineteenth century had the effect of tipping the balance against the Thai, for the French succeeeded in effectively destroying Thai influence over both countries.

Since the Second World War both Thailand and Vietnam have seen their defense and security as being intimately connected with the situation in Laos and Cambodia. A brief period of friendly relations between the Viet Minh and the "Free Thai" government from 1945 to 1946 was brought to an abrupt end by the military coup that returned Marshal Pibun Songkram to power in Bangkok. Since then ideological differences have reinforced traditional antagonisms between Thailand and Vietnam, adding an edge to their rivalry for influence in Laos, a rivalry played out for at least a decade prior to 1975 in a semiclandestine war of secret forces, each side supporting its own Lao client.

Vientiane a Thai student activist he had known in Bangkok. This student claimed to be a CPT agent sent to Laos after the Thai military coup of October 1976 to attend camps for CPT recruits. His instructions were to counter pro-Soviet propaganda on the part of the predominantly Lao instructors.

[20] Jeffrey Race, "The Future of Thailand," *Pacific Community*, 8: 2 (January 1977), p. 321.

Lao-Thai relations therefore need to be understood in the light of this historical Thai-Vietnamese rivalry, a rivalry which is unlikely to disappear, even in the event of a communist government coming to power in Bangkok. For "the competition, if not conflict, between the two peoples is fundamental to the political life of mainland Southeast Asia and, therefore, to the permanent security considerations of Thailand."[21] And one might add "and of Vietnam." And as in the past, since opportunities for direct interference in each other's affairs are limited, the primary arenas in which this rivalry is likely to continue to be played out are the Mekong states of Laos and Kampuchea.

The victory of the Pathet Lao in 1975 meant the victory of the Vietnamese, but a victory that is not necessarily final. The Thai have long considered that they have a special interest in Laos, and it is an interest any Thai government is bound to attempt to reassert should the opportunity arise. But any government in Bangkok will find it difficult to compete with the Vietnamese. Not only do many Lao fear cultural absorption by the Thai more than by the more ethnically, culturally, and linguistically dissimilar Vietnamese,[22] but Vietnam has stolen a march that will be hard to match. The dominant position of influence Hanoi has acquired in Laos is clear from the terms of the Friendship treaty between the two states, the provisions of which tie Laos closely to the Vietnamese politically, militarily, economically, and culturally. Of the economic provisions, the most important is certainly the promised use of Danang as a duty free port and construction of a road system linking it with the Lao Mekong towns. Once completed, this will free the Lao from reliance upon Thailand for the transit of goods. The pact also included a border agreement, the secret provisions of which reportedly "rationalize" the border at two points, both in Hanoi's favor.[23]

The military provisions of the agreement, however, were of greatest interest. Article two pledged close cooperation between the two powers and mutual support in "reinforcing the defence capacity, preserving the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and defending the people's peaceful labour against all schemes and acts of sabotage by imperialism and foreign reactionary forces."[24] The "hostile policy" of the Thai government, especially in permitting the use of its territory for American bases, was singled out as a principal threat. Military assistance will be provided against "imperialism and foreign reactionary forces," a designation taken to include Lao rightist insurgents operating

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21 David A. Wilson, *The United States and the Future of Thailand* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 52.

22 During two years spent in Laos as correspondent for United Press International (UPI), the author quite frequently heard fears of Thai cultural domination expressed, especially among neutralist students and junior military officers.

23 John Everingham, personal communication, January 1977. These areas are reportedly two "bulges" which the Vietnamese had previously occupied, one east of Savannakhet, the other southeast of Sam Neua. See Carlyle Thayer, "Viet Nam's External Relations: An Overview," *Pacific Community*, 9:2 (January 1978), p. 231, note 3.

24 *FEER*, July 29, 1977.

from Thailand. The treaty therefore provides a legal basis for the stationing of Vietnamese troops in Laos for the forseeable future.

The terms of the Lao-Vietnamese treaty call into question long-term Vietnamese objectives in Southeast Asia. It was a consistent claim of the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea (Cambodia) that the Vietnamese intended to establish an Indochinese federation in which they would play the dominant role. What is evident is that since the inception of the Indochinese Communist Party, the Vietnamese have shown a continuing interest in what happens in Kampuchea and Laos that represents something more than an altruistic concern for one's neighbors. The 1951 platform of the Viet Nam Workers' Party (the Lao Dang) states in article 12 that:

> In the common interests of the three peoples, the people of Viet-Nam are willing to enter into long-term co-operation with the peoples of Laos and Cambodia, with a view to bringing about an independent, free, strong, and prosperous *federation of states* of Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia, if the three peoples so desire.[25] (emphasis added)

This is the earliest reference to an Indochinese federation in the form that the Kampucheans so object to. But it is also the last, at least in official publications resulting from the deliberations of the highest policy-making body in Vietnam, the National Congresses of the Vietnamese Communist Party. What is more, the Vietnamese have specifically denied any such intentions. During the period of internal struggle that lasted until 1975 it seems clear the Vietnamese modified their position.[26] The treaty with Laos must now be viewed as taking the place of any closer political union.[27] This relationship of "militant solidarity" and "special friendship" is all that Hanoi now desires, but both were rejected by Kampuchea as resulting in a loss of independence similar to that in a formal federation. But while the provisions of the 25-year treaty leave Vietnam in an ideal position in Laos, free of the obligations and drawbacks implicit in a federation, it also does permit the Thai a certain latitude they would otherwise not have had in pressing their own interests in Laos.

Not all Lao are happy with the close relationship with Vietnam. Popular resentment of the Vietnamese presence and influence in Laos is

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25 *People's China, Supplement,* 3:9 (May 1, 1951), p. 8. Dennis J. Duncanson in "Indo-China: The Conflict Analysed," *Conflict Studies,* no. 39 (October 1973), p. 12, note 6, maintains that the last phrase, "if these peoples so desire," was only added in the English translation.

26 It has been suggested that a move in the direction of federation was attempted with the signing of a joint declaration by delegates from North Vietnam, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge, and the PL in 1970 pledging mutual assistance in the struggle against U.S. imperialism. See Ellen J. Hammer, "Indochina: Communist but Non-aligned," *Problems of Communism,* 25:3 (May–June 1976), p. 2.

27 Such a situation fulfils, so far as Laos is concerned, the demands of Vietnamese foreign policy of monolithic proletarianism and the possibility of pursuing "protracted militancy" vis-à-vis Thailand, and by extension, ASEAN. See Douglas Pike, "Conceptions of Asian Security: Indochina," *Asian Forum,* 8: 4 (Autumn 1976), p. 84.

widespread—one reason why Vietnamese troops only visit Lao towns in small groups for short periods. Despite every attempt by the LPRP to encourage friendly feelings towards the Vietnamese, suspicion of Vietnamese motives runs deep, even within the Pathet Lao, some of whom have reportedly joined antigovernment insurgents in the south precisely for this reason.[28] I have argued elsewhere that divisions exist within the politiburo of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party which can best be seen as differentiating a moderate Lao "nationalist" faction loosely grouped around Souphanouvong and Phoumi Vongvichit, from a hardline pro-Vietnamese majority led by Kaysone, rather than as an ideological division along strict Sino-Soviet lines.[29] Charges that Kaysone himself is more Vietnamese than Lao (his father was Vietnamese) rub a particularly raw nerve in Vientiane, and there were no fewer than three attempts on his life in the course of a year. It would clearly be in the best interests of Thai of any political persuasion to attempt to influence events in Laos in favour of the Lao "nationalists." And the Thai communists may well find themselves in a better position to do this in the future than the government in Bangkok.

Since the Lao, given their geographical position, can hardly escape becoming embroiled in the long-term rivalry between Thai and Vietnamese, they are left with two alternatives: to throw in their lot with one or other of the two protagonists, or to attempt to balance one against the other by distancing themselves from both. While the dominant faction within the Lao politburo has opted for the Vietnamese, the latter course would appear to be preferred by the "nationalist" faction. However, given the power and ambitions of the Vietnamese, such a course is only possible with the support of one of the great powers. The Thai alone are an insufficient counterweight to the Vietnamese. The former Kampuchean regime turned to China, a course that would also be open to the Lao. Both states might have turned to the Soviet Union had Moscow not decided that its anti-Chinese interests were best served by fostering relations with Hanoi. The Soviet presence in Laos is unlikely to permit the Lao to counter Vietnamese pressure, for the Soviets will almost certainly defer to Hanoi over any conflict of interests in Laos.

Thai-Vietnamese rivalry as it affects Laos is, however, complicated by a further factor, hostility leading to the border war between Hanoi and Peking. Competition between Vietnamese and Chinese for influence in mainland southeast Asia has been traced back to the establishment of a Thai Autonomous Region in southern China in 1953. While this is uncertain, it does seem that the setting up of the Thai Patriotic Front was a Chinese attempt to undercut Vietnam's growing

[28] AFP dispatch from Bangkok in English, August 21, 1977 (FBIS, August 21, 1977). See also Robert Shaplen, "Letter from Laos," *The New Yorker*, August 2, 1976, p. 66. For reports of PL defections to the rebels, see *Daily Time* (Bangkok), February 22, 1977 (FBIS, February 23, 1977).

[29] Martin Stuart-Fox, "The Lao Revolution: Leadership and Policy Differences," *Australian Outlook*, 31: 2 (August 1977), pp. 279–288.

influence in northeast Thailand. As early as 1966 the CPT, on behalf of Peking, criticized the failure of Hanoi to adopt a pro-Chinese position in the Sino-Soviet dispute.[30] The Chinese were well aware that Vietnamese influence in Thailand might open the way for Soviet interference in the Thai insurgency. With the signing of a 25-year treaty of friendship between Vietnam and the USSR and the entry of the SRV into Comecon, Peking's worst fears have been confirmed. The Chinese have a special interest, therefore, in counteracting Vietnamese influence not only in Thailand but also, if possible, in Laos and now in Kampuchea. Chinese efforts in this direction are likely therefore to work in support of Thai interests in both states.

The Lao alliance with the SRV has not enabled the LPRP to escape the continuing Thai-Vietnamese struggle for dominance in mainland Southeast Asia. If anything it has had an opposite effect. For the Thai are distrustful of Vietnamese intentions, especially following the invasion of Kampuchea; and whatever Hanoi's proclaimed policies towards Thailand, the Lao-Vietnamese alliance allows Vietnamese-Thai rivalry to continue, as it were, by proxy.[31] Thus the Vietnamese-Thai struggle should be seen as continuing at two further levels: one affecting relations between the Lao and Thai governments; another relations between the LPRP and the CPT.

LPRP-CPT relations within the Thai insurgency have been influenced by Chinese-Vietnamese antipathies. There is evidence that a struggle for influence between the two powers has been waged for control over the Thai revolution. The importance of this for long-term Thai-Vietnamese rivalry lies in the fact that if the CPT could be wooed away from its pro-Chinese position to one more sympathetic to the Vietnamese, Hanoi would have gone a long way towards reducing Peking's influence in the region, an influence which could favor the Thai. As the upper echelons of the CPT are staunchly pro-Chinese, Hanoi was forced to focus its propaganda at the middle-echelon level of the party and among the guerrillas of the Thai People's Liberation Armed Forces (TPLAF). Here the Lao again played a crucial role.

Two events completely altered the nature of armed revolution in Thailand, opening the way for the Vietnamese to pursue their aims: the first was the victory of communists in South Vietnam, Kampuchea, and Laos; the second was the Thai military coup of December 6, 1976. An end to fighting and the U.S. presence allowed the Indochinese states to channel something of their considerable revolutionary experience elsewhere—and where better than Thailand with whose government old scores were still to be settled. Already by the end of 1975

[30] Donald E. Weatherbee, *The United Front in Thailand: A Documentary Analysis* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 1970), p. 48.

[31] Thus Vietnamese promises not to aid the Thai insurgents do not necessarily mean that aid will dry up. The Lao can always be held responsible. See *FEER*, November 10, 1978.

reports quoting diplomatic sources spoke of an increased flow of weapons to the Thai insurgents.[32]

The violence of the Thai right-wing military coup and the harsh antileftist bans and penalties that followed ensured a notable increase in recruits for the CPT and its front organizations. These included hundreds of students, a number of ranking members of the Socialist Party of Thailand (SPT) and their followers, intellectuals, workers, and peasants. Many of these were directed to training camps in Laos[33] where their instructors included Vietnamese, Lao, and Thai cadres.[34]

The CPT welcomed all new converts to the revolutionary cause, and called for the creation of an expanded national front to include not only workers, farmers, and small capitalists, but also "national capitalists of all nationalities," students, teachers, and intellectuals. The party specifically declared its willingness to join with "any political parties, organizations and people who are patriotic and democracy-loving."[35] This resulted in the formation of the Committee for Coordinating Patriotic and Democratic Forces (CCPDF) on September 28, 1977. The inclusion of student radicals and SPT members under the leadership of former MP Khaisaeng Suksai in this organization is likely to be significant for the future policies of the CPT since both are less ideologically committed to Peking. The long-term effect may be to strengthen the hand of pro-Soviet elements[36] and those cadres within the party who would prefer the CPT to adopt a more even-handed approach to the Sino-Soviet dispute on the pragmatic grounds that this would ensure aid from both camps and permit the party more flexibility in prosecuting the revolution.[37] The Lao are in a position to encourage any tendency within the CPT in this direction. Thai press reports of a division into pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet (pro-Vietnamese) factions, however, cannot be definitely substantiated,[38] and reports of

[32] *New York Times,* October 9, 1975.

[33] For Thai students training in Lao camps see *Siam Rath* (Bangkok), January 29, 1977 (FBIS, February 3, 1977).

[34] *Bangkok Post,* February 7, 1976 (FBIS, February 9, 1976) for Vietnamese cadres taking seminars for Thai recruits.

[35] CPT Thirty-fourth Anniversary Statement, reprinted in *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 7: 3 (1977), pp. 430–434.

[36] Moscow has reportedly deposited $10 million in Vientiane to send Thai students to study in the Soviet Union, Justus M. van der Kroef, "Thailand: A New Phase in the Insurgency," *Pacific Community,* 8: 4 (July 1977), pp. 615–616.

[37] The CPT has managed to gain support from student radicals and former socialists for its Maoist strategy of rural insurgency. VOPT, January 2, 1977 (FBIS, January 6, 1977); VOPT, September 3, 1977 (FBIS, September 7, 1977). See also *FEER,* November 19, 1976, and the statement by four SPT leaders carried in *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 7: 2 (1977), pp. 264–267. But it is also clear that the CPT is encountering some opposition from its new recruits to its pro-Chinese line. The National Student Centre of Thailand has stressed the necessity for students who have joined the armed struggle "to study and master the political line," and "seriously adjust themselves to the new concepts." VOPT, January 2, 1978 (FBIS, January 6, 1978).

[38] General Saiyut Koetphon, Deputy Director of the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC), suggested in an interview that the TCP was losing ground

the founding of a separate pro-Soviet communist party in southern Thailand can be discounted. For evidence of a struggle for influence within the Thai revolution one must look at the pattern of insurgency.

During the past decade armed insurgency in Thailand has expanded from a few minor incidents in the northeast of the country in 1965 and 1966 to the present situation where well over half the nation's provinces have been declared "communist infiltrated."[39] The number of insurgents has shown a slow but steady increase to an estimated figure in 1977 of some six to eight thousand men under arms supported by up to a million sympathizers.[40] Of the four principal areas of insurgency, that in the south appears to be under Chinese control, though the situation is clouded by the Muslim separatist movement. That in the north, principally among Meo tribesmen has, at least since 1971, been firmly in Chinese hands.[41] Weapons and supplies enter Thailand along the Chinese-built and controlled road network in northern Laos, while Meo cadres are trained in South China.[42] The slight insurgent activity in the central-western provinces along the Burmese border is as yet of negligible importance.

In the crucial northeastern Isan region, however, the insurgents have always drawn their principal support from Vietnam via Laos. Here Vietnamese influence is most pronounced. The intricate supply network linking Vietnam with northeastern Thailand across Laos enables Hanoi to move its agents rapidly into the region. This presented a standing threat to Chinese control of the Thai insurgency. Between 1976 and 1978 Chinese and Vietnamese-backed insurgents competed for control of key base areas, in particular the strategic Khao Klor mountains where the provinces of Loei, Phitsanulok, and Petchabun come together, and in the southern provinces of the Thai northeast along the Kampuchean border where Kampuchean support of the CPT appears to have been part of a Chinese design to maintain Peking's influence in the Isan region vis-à-vis Hanoi.[43]

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since it had been unable to call a party congress because of an internal power struggle between pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet factions. *Bangkok Post*, February 7, 1976.

[39] By mid-1978 the number was 46 of 73 provinces. *FEER*, July 28, 1978.

[40] Estimate by Anders Tandrup in *FEER*, February 27, 1976. These are slightly higher than figures given by ISOC. *Bangkok World*, February 3, 1977 (FBIS, February 4, 1977).

[41] Frank C. Darling, "Rural Insurgencies in Thailand—a Comparative Analysis," *Southeast Asian Spectrum* (April 1975), p. 15. Also Thomas A. Marks, "Sino-Thai Relations," *Asian Affairs*, 61: 3 (October 1974), p. 309.

[42] Of the regional insurgencies, the Meo are most directly dependent upon a high level of foreign (i.e., Chinese) support. Darling, "Rural Insurgencies," p. 15.

[43] Both are areas pinpointed in McColl's analysis of the most effective base area for guerilla operations in Thailand. Robert W. McColl, "A Political Geography of Revolution: China, Vietnam and Thailand," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 11 (June 1967), pp. 153–167. For a detailed analysis of the Chinese-Vietnamese struggle for control of the Thai insurgency, see my "Tensions in the Thai Insurgency" (forthcoming). But for the Khao Klor mountains see *FEER*, June 26, 1976 and *Daily*

The role of the Lao in this contest for influence was essential if Hanoi was to compete with Peking. There is no love lost between the Thai and the Vietnamese. To send Vietnamese cadres into Thailand could easily in the end be counterproductive.[44] The Thai Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) claims to have evidence that "foreign military advisers" have caused some friction within CPT ranks.[45] But if the Vietnamese are foreigners (and the presence of the unassimilated Vietnamese community in the northeast does not help their image), this hardly applies to the Lao, especially if they confine their activities to the Isan region where the Thai population is ethnically and lingustically identical. LPRP cadres can move into the region at will and pass themselves off as Thai-Lao. In this more than in the provision of weapons and supplies, transit facilities, or training locations, lies the importance of the Lao role in the Thai insurgency. The very ease with which the Lao can operate in Thailand, given their close identification with the Vietnamese, makes them doubly suspect in the eyes of the CPT central committee.

The Vietnamese-backed invasion of Kampuchea in January 1979 has radically changed the balance of forces in mainland southeast Asia, though the subsequent Chinese attack on Vietnam may to some extent mitigate its effect. The Vietnamese are likely to sign some kind of Friendship treaty with their puppet regime in Phnom Penh similar to that with Vientiane, thereby procuring, de facto, the federation they desired. They are then likely to turn to the problems of economic development and coping with the Chinese. Thus Pham van Dong's assurances in Bangkok that Hanoi would not support the Thai insurgents either directly or indirectly may perhaps be taken at face value. This will not mean that the Lao can escape involvement in "regional rivalries." Since Peking will no longer be in a position to use Kampuchea to support the CPT, the Chinese will need to strengthen their control over northern Laos. This area is likely to become the principal arena for the ongoing Chinese-Vietnamese struggle, which in the short-term at least will replace Thai-Vietnamese competition. Alternatively Hanoi may decide it is in its interests to continue to compete, through the Lao, with Peking for influence over the Thai communist movement. Either alternative promises to exacerbate tensions between the LPRD and the CPT.

Time (Bangkok), January 30, 1977 (FBIS, February 1, 1977); for the Kampuchean border see Richard Nations, "Fighting For a Frontier Formula," *FEER,* July 28, 1978.

44 There have been reports, however, of Vietnamese being taught Thai in schools in southern Laos, and of a combined battalion of Vietnamese, Lao, and Thai guerrillas operating in northeast Thailand. Interview with Lt. Col. Thanit Wasaphuti, Deputy Chief of 2nd Army Region Intelligence Radio Bangkok in Thai, August 23, 1977 (FBIS, August 25, 1977). AFP Bangkok reported Kampucheans were also accompanying CPT guerrillas (FBIS, February 28, 1978).

45 *Bangkok Post,* February 7, 1976 (FBIS, February 9, 1976); later confirmed by Thai Deputy Defence Minister Lek Naeopmahi, *Bangkok Post,* September 8, 1977 (FBIS, September 8, 1977).

Lao Irredentism and Northeastern Thailand

There is one further factor that is affecting relations between the two parties which narrows the context of those relations still further, but which may shed additional light on the readiness of the Lao to risk a deterioration of relations with the CPT. (Given Thai dependency upon aid channelled through Laos, it is a risk the Lao perhaps feel they can take.) This factor hinges upon Lao ethnic and cultural ties with the northeastern region of Thailand which, since it once formed part of a greater Lao state, is the focus of Lao irredentism. Dreams of a greater Lao state have been nurtured to some extent by Lao of all political persuasions for some two hundred years, but there is reason to believe that the Lao left since the early 1950s has encouraged the dissemination of such ideas more actively than did the now vanquished Lao right.[46] It also appears that a radical Lao nationalist ferment is at work at least among lower level cadres of the LPRP. Whether or not a policy pursuing such claims would also coincide with Vietnamese long-term intentions is not at all clear; but the suspicion exists that the dismemberment of Thailand and creation of a Laos extending over both banks of the Mekong (and still under de facto Vietnamese hegemony) would fulfil Vietnamese ambitions to dominate the Southeast Asian peninsula.

It would not even be necessary for a communist government to take power in Bangkok. As Race notes: "What Viet Nam does need, and all it needs, is a relative weakening of Thailand by the truncation of its peripheral regions from the Central Plain."[47] That this would not be in Chinese interests is obvious. A strong Thai state to confine Vietnamese ambitions would be far better. The frequent Thai accusations that it is Vietnam's intention to annex part of the northeast, or set up a separate state here, deserve at least to be examined in the light of available evidence. If such is the Vietnamese-Lao intention, then it is certain to be strenuously opposed by the CPT as potential inheritors of the present Thai state, and must count as of considerable importance in affecting relations between the Thai and Lao communist parties.

Separatist sentiment in the northeastern (Isan) region of Thailand has given the government in Bangkok further cause for alarm. Even before the outbreak of people's war in 1965, suppressed political opposition in the region had sought an outlet in separatism. Partly because of the rightist orientation of military clique politics in Bangkok, but more as a result of the poverty and economic requirements of the region, Isan "oppositionism" has been predominantly socialist in content. This combination of socialism and separatism has led the Thai government not only to charge that the communist parties of the Indo-

[46] The point is made by Pierre Fistié, "Minorités ethniques: opposition et subversion en Thailande," *Politique étrangère,* 32: 3 (1967), p. 310.

[47] Race, "The Future of Thailand," p. 323.

china states are at the bottom of the problem, but also that they have the active support of the CPT in their designs.[48] This is extremely unlikely, if only for the reason given above that it would not suit the Chinese and thus, given the links between Peking and the CPT, it would not suit the Thai communists either. In addition communists have seldom shown themselves less ardent nationalists in practice than the members of other political parties. And finally, while the CPT's fifth point in their ten-point short-term policy program of December 1, 1968 promised the "right of autonomy" to the "various nationalities," presumably including the Thai-Lao of the northeast, this is to take place "within the big family of Thailand."[49] Autonomy is not separatism, least of all in the context of communist parlance and practice.

What then is the basis for accusations of Lao designs upon the northeast? The Lao maintain they have an historical right to the region that goes back to the kingdom of Lan Xang established in the 14th century. Only the break-up of this state in the early 18th century into the separate principalities of Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champasak permitted the powerful Thai state of Ayutthaya to seize control of the Lao west bank territories. The long years of Lao rule, however, had ensured that the region remained Lao in both language and culture. The Thai sack of Vientiane in 1829 that led to the deportation of thousands of Lao to the Isan provinces only reinforced the Lao ethnic character of northeastern Thailand.

Modern Lao irredentist claims to the Isan region were stimulated by French attempts during the Second World War to encourage Lao nationalism as a foil against both the Japanese and their Thai allies. Researches into the *Annals of Lan Xang* revealed that the nominal hegemony exercised by the Kingdom of Lan Xang coincided with the geographical extension of the Lao race.[50] This area forms the present basis for Lao dreams of a greater Lao state. Playing upon these dreams has been a corresponding fear on the part of the Lao of being absorbed by Thai and thus losing not only their national, but also their cultural identity, something many Lao feel is less likely to occur if their principal ties are with Vietnam. Conversely, it should be noted, Thai irredentism sees Bangkok as the center of a greater Thai state including not only Laos but also areas of southern China and the Shan parts of Burma. The initial stage in its formation would be to retrieve those

[48] It seems inconceivable that the CPT would agree to set up a government in eastern Laos or northeastern Thailand with a view to eventual dismemberment of the country into four separate states—Isan, Lanna (north), Siam (center), and Pattani (south)—said to have been advanced by the PL as part of their 1971 policy platform. Van der Kroef, "Thailand: A New Phase in Insurgency," p. 615. See also *Dao Siam* (Bangkok), January 23, 1977 (FBIS, January 25, 1977).

[49] VOPT, January 6, 1969, quoted in Weatherbee, *The United Front in Thailand*, p. 68.

[50] Katay Don Sasorith, "Historical Aspects of Laos," in Rene de Berval (ed.), *Kingdom of Laos* (Saigon: France-Asie, 1959), p. 29. Katay was cofounder with Nhouy Abhay of the National Renovation Movement, which was largely responsible for the rebirth of Lao Nationalism in the 1940s.

areas under Thai hegemony before the arrival of the French, notably most of the present day Laos.

The Bangkok government has consistently charged that Lao irredentist ambitions have taken the form of encouraging Isan separatism. There is some evidence for this, but it is by no means the whole story. The curious thing about these charges of Isan separatism is the way they followed military coups and renewed repression. It is far more likely that *autonomist* (rather than *separatist*—the distinction is one that has usually managed to escape Bangkok) sentiments flowered as a result of the repressive measures instituted by each Central Thai military clique to seize power and the ending of any possibility of expressing Isan aspirations in the form of legitimate opposition in the political arena.

With the announced formation of the TPF on January 1, 1965, the bogey of Isan separatism became merged with overall communist strategy for Thailand in the eyes of the Thai government, thus confirming, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, the link Bangkok had always believed existed. All insurgents in the northeast were henceforth communists, partners in an insidious plot to destroy the Thai state. The insurgents were treated as foreign agents rather than as disgruntled Thai. With the communist victories of 1975 the fear was no longer of separatism but of annexation through invasion. As unlikely as this seems, such a scheme might well appeal to certain Lao even if effected with Vietnamese arms.

The victory of the Pathet Lao does appear to have given new life to Lao irredentism on the northeast. The 1973 cease-fire between Pathet Lao and rightist forces in Laos provided a brief opportunity for movement between the two zones of control, and some western journalists took the opportunity to visit PL controlled villages just across the cease-fire line. At political meetings support was whipped up for the PL by communist cadres reciting the historical crimes of the Thai and calling for a continuation of the Lao national struggle until "all" Lao were united.[51] Since the PL took over the government in 1975 this theme has reportedly been sounded in private conversation with communist cadres. The standard line is that any decision to "federate" with Laos would have to come from the people of the northeast themselves.[52]

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[51] John Everingham, personal communication, January 1977. Everingham reported visiting the village of Pak Hao a few kilometers south of Luang Prabang where he attended such a gathering. A frequent theme in conversations with lower level LPRP cadres was the eventual liberation of all Lao and their incorporation in a greater Lao state. See also Phra Mahacanla Tanbuali, *Sathaana Phra-Phuttha-Saasanaa nai Pratheet Saathaaranarat Drachaathipotai Prachaachou Laau* ("The State of the Buddhist Religion in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos"), (Bangkok: Khana Saasanikachon, 1977), pp. 90–91, where this Buddhist monk claims to have attended a number of meetings on the subject.

[52] Everingham quoted one Lao cadre as saying it had taken the PL thirty years to win half the Lao territories (i.e., Laos), and they were prepared to fight another thirty years to gain the rest (i.e., northeastern Thailand). This reflected the will of the Isan people.

There are some very good reasons why the PL may have deliberately chosen to exploit popular and widespread Lao irredentist sentiments in 1973. Their support lay largely with the tribal minorities in the mountainous east of the country. It was necessary to win over the lowland Lao.[53] Anti-Thai propaganda served the double purpose of distracting attention from Lao government accusations that the PL were merely creatures of the Vietnamese, and confirmed the PL's own claim to be good Lao nationalists fighting for independence and neutrality against American imperialism. But while the northeast of Thailand offers a tempting target for Lao expansionism and provides an external goal to inspire the lower echelons of the LPRP, it seems unlikely that at higher levels of policy planning such dreams are allowed to interfere with more realistic assessments of the success of such a venture in the present multipolar world of nation states.

Despite this, however, the CPT is apparently wary of the effect Lao nationalism may have on the Isan region. Cadres are quick to correct any dangerous tendencies towards pan-Laoism instilled into Isan trainees by their PL instructors. And if there is no evidence that on a higher party to party level there is any tension over the status of the northeast, yet it is indicative of the interest the question generates that senior Pathet Lao officials have felt it necessary categorically to deny that Laos has any claims on Thai territory.[54] For while Lao irredentism with regard to the northeast of Thailand on the grounds of history, race, and language may be fulfilling a useful internal role in Laos by generating a much-needed sense of national unity and purpose, the LPRP may yet come to lay too great a store by its own propaganda. Given altered circumstances and combined with the kind of ideological and geopolitical factors discussed above, Lao irredentism could further exacerbate relations between the LPRP and the CPT.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper, in analyzing the factors affecting relations between the communist parties of Laos and Thailand, has indicated that certain tensions do already exist. While these are largely due to an increasing ideological polarization between the two parties along the lines of the Sino-Soviet cleavage, two additional factors—Thai-Vietnamese rivalry complicated by Chinese-Vietnamese antipathy, and Lao irredentism—cannot be left out of account. Competition for influence over the Thai revolution as a result of both Sino-Soviet and Chinese-Vietnamese rivalry is generating tension between those involved. The firmly pro-Chinese position of the CPT Central Committee has not

[53] For an account of problems this posed for the PL, see Martin Stuart-Fox, "The Lao Revolution: Errors and Achievements," *World Review,* 16: 2 (July 1977), pp. 3–15.

[54] Interview with Souphanouvong, January 16, 1976, carried in *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 6: 1 (1976), p. 109.

prevented the Vietnamese from attempting to undermine Peking's hold on the party. The involvement of the Lao in carrying out this Vietnamese strategy has raised the suspicions of the CPT, especially in view of the effect Lao irredentism could have on northeastern Thailand.

To what extent these suspicions and tensions will affect the progress and direction of the Thai insurgency is impossible to tell. All that can be said is that the three factors analyzed in this paper will remain of key importance in determining the state of relations not only between the Thai and Lao communist parties, but also, in the event of a communist revolution in Thailand, between the respective governments of the two states.

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