12 National Defence and Internal Security in Laos

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As the weakest country militarily in mainland Southeast Asia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic faces a number of unique problems in the fields of national defence and internal security. The experience of the Lao government since it came to power at the end of 1975 has demonstrated that both the country's defence and its internal security are dependent upon the state of relations between Laos' more powerful neighbours. Of these neighbours, only Burma did not provoke border conflict with Laos, or support insurgency against the Lao government, or station troops on Lao soil during the first five years of the new regime.

The reasons for the LPDR's geopolitical vulnerability are not hard to discover. To begin with, Laos is most strategically located. For Vietnam, control over Laos affords protection of the country's long western border and provides a possibility of extending Vietnamese influence further afield. For China, to exercise a dominant influence in Laos not only would permit Beijing to limit Vietnamese ambitions in Southeast Asia but would allow the Chinese to develop closer relations with anti-Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea and exert considerable influence in Thailand. For Thailand, Laos provides a possible buffer against Vietnamese expansion. Each, therefore, has much to gain by becoming involved in Laos' internal affairs.

The second reason for Laos' vulnerability has to do with the country's population. This is not only too small to act as a deterrent to foreign intervention but is split almost equally between lowland Lao and a collection of some sixty other ethnic minorities. In no other Asian nation, except Malaysia, does the culturally dominant ethnic group constitute such a small percentage of the population. This makes it all too possible for foreign powers to exploit ethnic differences and antagonisms. A further characteristic of the Lao population that tempts foreign intervention is that these ethnic groups extend across international frontiers. Whereas there are not much more than a million and a half ethnic Lao in Laos, ten times

that number live in north-eastern Thailand. There are more Hmong and Yao in southern China, and as many tribal mountain Tai in north-western Vietnam.[1]

Another reason for Laos' vulnerability has to do with the underdeveloped state of the nation's economy, the lack of adequate means of transportation and communication, and the regionalism this has encouraged, all factors that facilitate insurgency against the central Lao government. The mountains and jungles of Laos provide an ideal environment for guerrilla warfare, for it is difficult, given the terrain, to concentrate military forces in order to counter guerrilla action. If the insurgents have bases outside Laos' permeable borders, they are virtually secure from pursuit and can mount their raids with impunity.

No country harbouring guerrillas need fear the threat of Lao retaliation. Only when Laos has a powerful military protector, such as the United States was from 1954 to 1972, do neighbouring states have anything to fear in the way of retribution for their support of anti-government movements in Laos – and even then, they are all but immune. Vietnam, Laos' major protector since 1975, is less in a position than was the United States to threaten guerrilla bases beyond Laos' frontiers. The attraction of using such means as guerrilla activity to influence events in Laos is thus always present.

Throughout the war which continued on and off from 1954 to 1973, there was a *de facto* division of territory in Laos between contending forces which, with the exception of a strategic region such as the Plain of Jars, remained fairly static. In the north, in the provinces of Nam Tha and Phong Saly, Chinese influence was dominant. The west, from Sam Neua down to Attopeu, was Vietnamese-controlled, while along the Mekong valley, Thai interests were guarded by the American presence. The last five years have seen this division break down and Vietnam extend its influence in Laos, at the expense of both the Thai and the Chinese. Such is the strategic importance of Laos to both these countries, however, that each has been deeply concerned over its weakened geopolitical position, and each has turned to the alternative of surrogate military action in order to re-establish some of its lost leverage.

This in outline is the broad strategic environment influencing Lao defence and internal security over the five years from 1975 to 1980. The purpose of this paper is to examine Lao responses to perceived threats to the nation's defence and security during this period. The nature of early security threats facing the new regime will be assessed in relation to its inherent weaknesses. The structure and function of the Lao army and security forces will then be examined, together with the extent of military assistance received.

Defence against overt invasion will be briefly mentioned. The problem of internal security will be treated in relation to those organizations and insurgent forces opposing the present government, and the effectiveness of government counter-action will be assessed. Finally, an attempt will be made to analyze possible future developments likely to affect the defence and internal security of the LPDR.

Defence and Security Problems Facing the New Government

During the period from April to December 1975, between the fall of rightist governments in Phnom Penh and Saigon and the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Pathet Lao were faced with three interconnected problems: to disarm and neutralize former rightist soldiers and police; to counter attempts by those who had fled to Thailand and their supporters in Laos, to prevent the seizure of full political power by the Pathet Lao; and to prevent the Thai authorities from attempting to interfere in political developments in Laos, either directly or indirectly through assistance to Lao exiles in Thailand. In part, the decision taken by the Politburo of the LPRP, after a secret personal tour by Secretary-General Kaysone Phomvihane to assess the situation in the "Vientiane zone", to press ahead with the overt seizure of political power and abolition of the monarchy depended upon what was, from the PL point of view, a satisfactory security situation.

The first important development came with the flight of rightist Defence Minister Sisouk na Champassak to Thailand in May 1975. This left the Royal Lao Army in the hands of his PL deputy General Khamouane Boupha, whose authority, perhaps surprisingly, was soon widely accepted. Some officers crossed the Mekong, but many responded to the plea of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma to co-operate with the Pathet Lao.[2] This co-operation went as far later as voluntary agreement to attend political re-education seminars at Viengsai for what was expected to be a few weeks. Most of those who did attend did not return for more than five years.

The ease with which the Pathet Lao managed to neutralize the rightist armed forces and police reflected the fund of goodwill among the mass of the population for the concept of a coalition government. The civil war was over; the "eighteen-point political program" enjoyed widespread support; even most middle- and lower-ranking officers in the Royal Lao Army, men who had spent

their adult lives fighting the insurgents of the Lao Patriotic Front, were prepared to give the Pathet Lao the benefit of any lingering doubt and co-operate in building a united and socialist Laos. As a result of this goodwill, there was comparatively little breakdown of internal security through the activities of roving bands of dissident former soldiers or police. When opposition to the new regime did materialize, it was organized mainly from across the Mekong in Thailand.

The first reports of a Lao government in exile plotting to overthrow the PL-dominated coalition came in May 1975, almost immediately after the flight of leading rightist ministers.[3] The threat of a rightist uprising in southern Laos, backed by several thousand CIA-trained Hmong troops of General Vang Pao, who had been flown to Ubon in Thailand, led the Pathet Lao to send tanks and troops to occupy the towns of Pakse, Savannakhet and Thakhek, in violation of the terms of the ceasefire agreement of 1973. But the antics of a few discredited and corrupt former ministers lacking all popular support posed no real threat to the new order emerging in Laos.

What was more serious was that as the Lao government lurched to the left, the Thai became increasingly nervous. Early in July 1975, a series of incidents occurred in which shots were exchanged between Lao soldiers and Thai gunboats, culminating in an artillery and mortar duel across the Mekong. More such incidents occurred during August and continued in the following months, leading eventually to closure of the border in mid-November. The Pathet Lao blamed these incidents on collusion between right-wing refugees and Thai provincial military commanders, and claimed that an improvement in relations depended upon the return of Hmong and Lao rightist refugees to Laos.[4]

Any likelihood of repatriation of refugees vanished, however, with the trial in absentia in October 1975 of thirty-one prominent former rightists, six of whom were sentenced to death and the rest to prison or terms in re-education camps. This caused something of a sensation. Never before had a government in Laos taken such drastic action against former politicians, no matter how corrupt.[5] The move can be seen as reflecting increasing concern on the part of the Pathet Lao over possible reaction to the decision, by then already taken, to dispense with the coalition. It was felt necessary to discredit thoroughly any former leader who might be capable of mobilizing popular support against a new government.

Further evidence of the concern felt by PL leaders at this juncture can be found in statements and events during October and November. In the important "Document for Public Study" broad-

cast over Pathet Lao radio in October, one of the principal tasks of the people was "to participate in the attack against the enemy in all fields, everywhere and at all times" through increasing revolutionary vigilance. The United States was accused of colluding with Lao reactionaries in Thailand, to organize and promote "confusion and clashes" along the Thai–Lao border. Lao reactionaries were said to have organized "underground forces", to have hidden weapons and created disturbances to undermine the revolution. Another theme mentioned in this document, which was to recur frequently over the next few years, was the need to counter propaganda aimed at disrupting the "solidarity" between Laos, Vietnam and Kampuchea.[6]

In his speech marking the thirtieth anniversary of Lao independence in October, Kaysone again accused the United States and Thailand of "sabotaging" the coalition government. This was followed in November by a number of arrests of "spies", "saboteurs", and "rightists" in Vientiane and other Mekong towns.[7] The whole population was constantly exhorted to heighten vigilance to "preserve the newly liberated areas and every inch of our territory".[8]

This constant emphasis upon the need for vigilance against vaguely defined "enemies" accused of equally vague crimes created its own problems. By extending "reactionary propaganda" to include even legitimate differences of opinion expressed by those essentially sympathetic to the need for radical change in Lao society, the government increased the circle of its "enemies" to include an unnecessarily large proportion of the Lao educated class in the former rightist zone. This both resulted from and further promoted PL paranoia and had the effect of increasing the exodus of refugees.

By the time the LPDR was officially established in December 1975, the main outlines of the combined defence and security problem that would confront the new regime were already clear. The flight of thousands of refugees, both Lao and Hmong, across the Mekong to Thailand, where they languished in sprawling refugee camps, had produced a fertile source of potential recruits to carry out political and military activities against the Lao government. These exile groups and their sympathizers still in Laos were believed by the Pathet Lao to present a continuing threat to the internal security of the country. But PL reaction to this problem can be seen to have been exaggerated. During the brief existence of the coalition government there had been insufficient time to overcome distrust generated by years of warfare, and suspicion tended to exacerbate a situation that was not as serious as the Pathet Lao believed. For one

thing, the exiles were politically divided and demoralized. They lacked any effective organization and could generate little popular support.[9] Even after the declaration of the Republic, the majority of former civil servants were prepared to work with the new government. Only after policies aimed at the rapid socialist transformation of Lao society were introduced early in 1976 did disillusionment become widespread. Before that, however, a pattern of security controls had become established that proved difficult for the government to relax, despite its consolidation of political power. During 1975 and 1976, internal and external conditions combined to make PL perceptions of continued security threats to their regime to a degree self-fulfilling. The more who fled for fear of being arrested, the greater the possibility that they would organize resistance to the new regime; and the greater the need for greater security, the more people feared arrest. Perhaps this was inevitable, but in retrospect it can be argued that it would have been possible for the Pathet Lao to have pursued less divisive policies and thus maintain a wider cross-section of political support and reduce the outflow of refugees, had they been less concerned over a security situation that at all times they seem to have had well under control.

Lao Defence and Security Forces

One of the first priorities for the new regime during 1976 was to restructure its defence and security forces and improve their effectiveness in their new role. When the Pathet Lao took power, the Lao People's Liberation Armed Forces[10] consisted of regular forces organized under a central military command, together with regionally recruited units and local forces operating on a part-time basis at the village level as a people's militia. These three levels of the armed forces derived from the wartime structure of main force units and regional and local guerrillas. In 1975, when the LPLAF liberated the major Mekong river towns, soldiers were assigned police duties, though they lacked the necessary training. As the pace of political change quickened and the government became increasingly edgy over security, popular dissatisfaction was aroused over heavy-handed military controls, PL arrogance and the excesses committed by some guerrillas.

In a broadcast on 20 January 1976, marking the twenty-seventh anniversary of the founding of the LPLAF, the authorities outlined five principal tasks for the army in defending the nation against Thai reactionaries and exiled Lao counter-revolutionaries. The first

was to heighten vigilance in preserving peace and public order. The second was to raise political and ideological understanding in the armed forces, improve discipline and implement party policy. The third and fourth were to reinforce traditions of solidarity with the people and to raise the quality of the army through political and military study. Finally, the army was called upon to strengthen its organization and improve internal defence.[11]

The emphasis upon discipline, training and reorganization reflected difficulties encountered by the LPLAF in converting from a guerrilla insurgency to a national security force. Men who had been taught to think of urban-dwelling lowland Lao as their bitter enemies found it difficult at first to treat them as liberated brothers. Also the majority of young PL guerrillas brought in to keep order in the Mekong towns were members of highland minorities who had never before been confronted with the temptations of city life. They resented lowland Lao assumptions of racial and cultural superiority and were jealous of the wealth and living standards in the towns. Discipline on occasion broke down and there were an increasing number of incidents of looting and of disputes between soldiers and townsfolk, resulting in arbitrary arrest. These problems were linked to the rapid build-up of security forces, in order to counter presumed rightist plots and terrorist activities. New recruits lacked ideological commitment and training. As the army newspaper admitted:

> Violations of mass discipline constantly take place, thereby causing adverse effects for the security and tranquility of society. Such occurrences have been caused by various prevailing circumstances. This is because our armed forces have been through a fierce and complex war, and have so little time to improve and build themselves, while the number of new combatants keeps increasing with every passing day.[12]

The government admitted that "some guerrillas have abused their authority by threatening the people. Some claim to be guerrillas and then search people's houses and seize their property."[13] With the formation of a police force in the urban centres early in 1976, the roles of soldiers and police were progressively differentiated. *Sieng Pasason*, the official government newspaper, pointed out that while guerrillas had the right to check the identity of people, they could only detain them "pending notification of police officers".

> As for the confiscation and search of houses and properties and checks on taxes or confiscation of goods in markets, these are the direct responsibility of the police. State authorities are directly and strictly responsible, and the guerrillas have no right to become involved.[14]

In the countryside, the authorities admitted that the activity of regional forces and local guerrillas was "not yet in line with the requirements of the present situation".[15] Leadership and the strategy and tactics to be employed in maintaining security needed improving, while "a spirit of revolutionary enthusiasm", discipline and the effective application of party policies were also essential. As *Sieng Pasason* critically stated

> though the ranks of our local guerrillas have grown quantitatively, their quality, combat tactics and strategy are still inadequate and their combat experience is very limited. Local guerrillas in certain areas do not fully understand the enemy's nature. They maintain high vigilance when fighting breaks out, but when the situation returns to normal they become complacent, thus permitting the enemy freely to cause disturbances. Some local guerrillas even intimidate . . . the people, much to the people's consternation . . .[16]

In order to meet such criticism, the army issued an eight-point oath of sacrifice, discipline and service; an eight-point code of discipline stressing obedience, respect for people and property, and orderly conduct and behaviour; and a twelve-point "regulation concerning the Lao people" consisting of four "respects" (for all ethnic minorities, for popular customs and traditions, for Buddhist monks and for local administrative committees), four "don'ts" (don't intimidate the people, take property, destroy temples or take liberties with women) and four "helps" (help people earn their living, study cultural and political affairs, get medical assistance and defend the country).[17] All cadres and combatants were called upon to understand and acclaim "the ideological stand of the armed forces", to study the policies and resolutions of the Party Central Committee, draw lessons from self-criticism, "unite with the people" and accept the leadership and discipline of the Party.[18]

By the end of 1976, an effective police force had been established to maintain law and order in the major Mekong towns. At the American-built police academy at Don Noon, ten kilometres east of Vientiane, Soviet and Vietnamese instructors had begun training PL recruits. Not until the end of 1978 was an additional secret police organization set up under Vietnamese supervision.[19] Its principal duty was to identify dissidents in the 23 000-member LPRP, the armed forces and among the civilian population — that is, any who disagreed with the Politburo's pro-Vietnamese line and who expressed pro-Chinese or Lao nationalist sentiments that could be construed as anti-Vietnamese.

During 1976, five principles were applied in restructuring the

armed forces: unification of organization; standardization of manpower; systematic implementation of policies; standardization of political education and training; and standardization of logistics. The practical application of these principles was to ensure a similar system of administration and living conditions for all soldiers, and similar transport facilities, access to medical care, supplies and equipment for all commands. It was also to ensure that the Lao army could be integrated into the Vietnamese command and logistics structure where necessary. Army units were urged to improve performance by (a) drawing up a careful action program; (b) ensuring they had precise and correct reports; (c) promoting organizational vigilance and acting upon orders; and (d) maintaining strict discipline, punctuality and alertness.[20]

By the end of 1976, the Lao army had been effectively reorganized, with considerable Vietnamese assistance, and was steadily improving its defence posture by containing and reducing pockets of anti-government resistance. In his report to the annual joint sitting of the Supreme People's Assesmbly and Council of Government in February 1977, Kaysone Phomvihane, while stressing the continued importance of peace-keeping and national defence tasks, placed primary emphasis upon building an administrative structure and effecting the socialist transformation of Lao society.[21]

With the changing strategic balance during 1977 and 1978, the Lao authorities determined to use the armed forces as "a dictatorial force of the proletariat class, a sharp tool of the party and a core force of revolution".[22] Special emphasis was placed upon the need to improve regional and local self-defence forces. Increased efficiency of regional forces was seen as essential to "the strategic task of the revolution", for regional military work served as "a basis for the success of socialist construction" by turning provinces and districts into "strong combat units".[23] Local guerrillas clearly had most to learn, for too often they had failed to understand their role in suppressing counter-revolutionaries.

> They do not yet know how to distinguish friends from foes. In addition, some local guerrillas have even been bought off by the enemy, who has carried out deceitful schemes . . . [local guerrillas have] violated the rights and interests of the people. More seriously still, they have even touched [*sic*] the masses' rights of collective mastership, thereby creating an opportunity for the enemy to carry out deceitful propaganda, distorting facts with a view to impairing the prestige of our party and state.[24]

Reading between these lines, discipline at the local level among village militia had remained poor; and extortion, corruption and petty oppression were widespread. Efforts to change the attitudes

of local guerrillas were complicated by the fact that "some bad elements" had infiltrated local guerrilla ranks and "openly killed people in various areas and acted as lackeys of our country's enemies". This had given local forces a bad image and created the impression that fighting between the government and its enemies remained "complicated and confusing" and was "spreading to all branches of work."[25]

Part of the reason for this state of affairs stemmed from the widespread disillusionment and dissatisfaction that greeted the signing of the Lao–Vietnamese Treaty. This was widely interpreted as a capitulation to Hanoi. The border agreement was believed to have surrended Lao territory to Vietnam with nothing in return. The increased presence of Vietnamese troops was resented. Refugees, including some party members, began giving hatred of Vietnam as their reason for leaving Laos. By mid-1979, an estimated 2000 to 3000 former PL soldiers had either crossed to Thailand or joined the resistance.[26]

It is difficult to be accurate about the actual size of the LPLAF. Despite purges and desertions, a figure of 23 000 is too low and cannot include any regional forces.[27] The International Institute for Strategic Studies gives a total figure of 55 700 in 1980, made up of 46 000 in the army, 1700 in the navy and 8000 in the airforce.[28] The army figure, however, includes 11 provincial companies (presumably regional forces), 64 infantry, 4 artillery and 4 anti-aircraft battalions. No figure is available for local self-defence forces.

The army is equipped with M24 tanks surrendered by the former Royal Lao Army, as well as Soviet PT-76s. For the same reason, it boasts both American M113 armoured personnel carriers as well as Soviet BTR-40s. Its main fire power is made up of 75 mm, 105 mm and 155 mm howitzers, 81 mm and 82 mm mortars and 107 mm recoiless rifles. The standard infantry weapon is the AK-47. Of the navy's motley collection of patrol-craft only about a third are in commission, though new equipment is expected from the Soviet Union. The airforce has 34 combat aircraft, made up of a squadron of 10 MIG-21s, 20 old propeller-driven T-28s and 4 AC-47 gunships. It has both American and Soviet transport planes and helicopters.[29] The latest estimate of military spending is for the defence budget of 1979, which has been put at US$37.9 million.[30]

Military Assistance to the LPLAF: Vietnam and the Soviet Union

Laos receives most military aid from Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Vietnamese military assistance rendered to the Pathet Lao during the long revolutionary struggle and the close solidarity between the Lao and Vietnamese armies have been frequently acknowledged by the new regime.[31] Vietnamese forces remained in Laos throughout the war years. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, some troops began to be withdrawn. Many remained, however, to guard the Ho Chi Minh trail and to contain Hmong remnants holding out in the Phou Bia region, south of the Plain of Jars. Towards the end of 1976 and early 1977, a new Vietnamese troop build-up began in Laos, both in the south along the Kampuchean border as Vietnamese relations with that country deteriorated, and in the north to counter the possibility of a combined Hmong-monarchist insurgency backed by the new, staunchly anti-Communist military regime in Bangkok.[32] Before the end of 1977, Vietnamese troop strength in Laos had risen to 30 000, a figure that increased later to 50 000 or more, with fluctuations during the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and the border with China.[33] These forces are stationed in Laos under the provisions of the 1977 Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with Vietnam.[34] In addition to transport, construction and engineering units, they include combat units involved in border surveillance and the suppression of Lao insurgents, plus strategic reserve units.

In addition to building military camps to house their troops and constructing communications links, Vietnam is almost entirely responsible for training the Lao Army. Vietnamese advisers are attached to all levels of the command and logistics structure, and Vietnamese political cadres maintain tight ideological control over the LPLAF. Lao officers and specialist personnel attend training schools in Vietnam. Much of the equipment, clothing, small arms, ammunition, even when Soviet in origin, also comes from Vietnam. Only major items such as aircraft, tanks, trucks and artillery, together with instructors, have been provided directly by the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union has given Laos at least ten MIG-21 jet fighters,[35] Antonov 24 and 26 transports, civilian aircraft for Lao Aviation, which could be turned to military use, and a number of helicopters for the air force, and will supply river patrol-boats for the navy. Total provision of military aid has not been great, since so much American equipment came from the Royal Lao Army or can be supplied from Vietnam.

More important has been the Soviet aid provided for the upgrading of communications and the construction of military installations. The Soviet Union has built a series of radar stations in the north and west of Laos, to provide early warning for Laos and Vietnam of Chinese or Thai movements. Apart from Vietnam's Wattay Airport, where the MIG-21s are based, the Soviets have constructed a large new base at Phongsavane on the Plain of Jars, 240 kilometres north of Vientiane, and are rebuilding the former French military base at Seno, near Savannakhet at the vital junction of Routes 9 and 13. Total figures for military aid given to Laos by the Soviet Union, or for the cost to Vietnam of maintaining troops in Laos, have never been made public.

Defence Against External Aggression

When the LPDR was established in December 1975, Laos did not face any immediate threat of external invasion. Vietnam, Kampuchea and the People's Republic of China were all fraternal socialist states. Burma was neutral, but friendly. Only Thailand viewed events in Laos with concern. But given the victory of Vietnamese armies earlier in the year, the presence of Vietnamese troops in Laos and American withdrawal from Indochina, there was never any likelihood that the Thai Army would intervene to prop up the political right in Laos — especially in view of the readiness of the Royal Lao Army to be integrated into the LPLAF.

During the first five years of existence of the LPDR, the new regime perceived two threats to the country's territorial integrity, both from neighbouring socialist states. The first was from Democratic Kampuchea during 1977 and 1978, as relations with Vietnam deteriorated and Laos became increasingly identified with Vietnam in Khmer eyes. The second was from China during its border war with Vietnam in 1979. Both threats are worth examining briefly.

After an initial period of relatively friendly relations between Laos and Kampuchea during 1976, the border situation began to reflect rising tensions in the region. Land communication came to a halt with the cutting of Route 13 by the Kampucheans, apparently a defence measure against possible retaliation by Vietnamese forces stationed in southern laos for Khmer attacks along the border with Vietnam. During 1978, an increasing number of incidents occurred along the frontier. Kampuchean

Ambassador to Laos, Sam Son, visited the border area to express his government's regrets over a shooting incident, but the flight of Khmer refugees into southern Laos kept border tensions high. After the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime, the Lao revealed that Kampuchea had seized "more than twenty Lao islands in the Mekong" and frequently violated Lao territory.[36] In response to these incursions, Laos quietly permitted Vietnamese forces to move into the frontier zone.

Already in early 1978 there were reports of Vietnamese troop movements through southern Laos in connection with fighting along the Kampuchean–Vietnamese border. These were strenuously denied by Vientiane. According to the official Lao news-agency *Khaosan Pathet Lao*, "it is the policy of the Lao Party and government not to allow any country to use Lao territory to invade another country".[37] Notwithstanding such assertions, when the Vietnamese did eventually invade Kampuchea in December 1978, a southward thrust was mounted from southern Laos. A token force of a thousand Lao troops was later reported to have crossed into Kampuchea in support of Vietnamese efforts to mop up Khmer Rouge remnants.[38] This change of policy was defended by a Lao spokesman on the grounds that "It was our duty to support [the Kampuchean people] during their uprising against the Pol Pot regime."[39] Since then relations between the LPDR and the Vietnamese-installed Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh have been most cordial, and Laos need no longer fear any threat to the country's territorial integrity from Kampuchea. Security problems have continued, however, in the border area due to the operations of Khmer Rouge and Lao insurgents.

The only other overt threat to Lao territorial integrity is alleged to have come from China during the border war with Vietnam. Until the end of 1978, Laos was able to maintain a balance in its relations with Vietnam and the PRC. Even during the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, and the early stages of China's border war against Vietnam, Laos was careful not to condemn China outright. What tipped the balance was an alleged threat of invasion by Chinese forces against northern Laos, which was first reported by the Soviet Union and taken up by the Vietnamese before, apparently, coming to the notice of the Lao authorities.[40] As it was, no invasion materialized, though Laos did accuse Chinese forces of crossing into Lao territory at two points to a depth of two or three kilometres and of occupying a Lao village. China replied that some border markers had been moved, and there the matter rested.

However, a threat of Chinese invasion has remained. The Lao

claim that Beijing is training a "division" of some 6000 to 7000 men (the "Lanna Division"), composed of Lao exiles and dissident tribesmen, for use against the government in Vientiane.[41] More importantly, Chinese forces conceivably could strike through Laos, if the PRC decided to teach Vietnam a "second lesson". In the event of such a Chinese invasion, the LPLAF could hardly offer much resistance. Defence of the LPDR would come from Vietnamese forces stationed in the northern provinces of Laos, in accordance with secret provisions incorporated in the Lao–Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation. Vietnamese forces thus in effect constitute Laos' first line of defence, thereby freeing the LPLAF to concentrate its efforts on maintaining internal security.

Insurgency and Security

By the end of 1976, the new regime was firmly entrenched. Internal security had improved; many refugees already had gone to France and the United States, and the Thais had not been giving much assistance to those who remained, in their attempts to promote an anti-government insurgency in Laos. Early in 1977, however, this picture began to change. In October 1976, a new and strongly anti-Communist government came to power in Bangkok following a military coup, only three months after former Thai Foreign Minister Pichai Rattakul's visit to Vientiane promised an improvement in Lao–Thai relations. A spate of incidents was recorded in late 1976 and 1977 involving Thai provocations in northern and southern Laos.[42] Laos responded by promising support for "the correct, just line of struggle of the Thai people in today's new circumstances"[43] and the scene was set for confrontation.

In March 1977, monarchist rebels captured and briefly held the village of Muong Nan, some 50 kilometres south of Luang Prabang. Prisoners captured when government forces retook the village directly implicated the ex-King and his son in anti-government activities. The government took no chances. Both were arrested and banished to Viengsai, near the northern Vietnamese border.[44] What convinced the government to act as quickly as it did was not simply the shock delivered by the realization that the resistance could mount such an operation but also fear that the rebels might obtain support from the Thai, and from those Hmong, former followers of General Vang Pao, still holding out in the mountains of Xieng Khouang.

In his speech to the Supreme People's Assembly in June 1976, Kaysone Phomvihane had spoken of "military bases" remaining on Lao soil. This had been taken as a reference to Hmong occupation of some high-altitude landing-strips previously used by the CIA.[45] LPLAF attempts, backed up by the Vietnamese, to close off the area and reduce the Hmong to submission during the latter part of 1976 had not proved successful. In 1977, therefore, the authorities decided upon a final assault, using artillery, aircraft and ground troops.

Together these events forced the government to rethink its security and defence policy, and led to the return of Vietnamese troops that earlier had been withdrawn. But another major factor in what became a continuing build-up of Vietnamese forces in Laos was the steady deterioration of relations between China and Vietnam. As fighting broke out between Vietnam and Kampuchea, Hanoi determined to tighten its hold over Laos, to prevent Beijing from increasing its influence in Vientiane. The 25-year Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation signed by Laos and Vietnam in July 1977 gave formal expression to the "special relationship" that had developed between the two countries. By that time, Vietnamese forces were heavily committed to fighting against the Hmong, countering resistance in central and southern Laos, and defending the Lao border with Thailand. Military intelligence then claimed to have identified elements of no fewer than six Vietnamese divisions in Laos, together with specialist construction and engineering units.[46]

In connection with this co-ordinated defence build-up, in May 1977 a high-ranking Lao military delegation visited the Soviet Union. This resulted in an increased supply of weapons and equipment for the Lao Army, improved communications and the arrival late in the year of the MIG-21s. In September, Lao Defence Minister, Khamtay Siphandone headed a military delegation to Hanoi for talks with Vietnam's Defence Minister, Vo Nguyen Giap, at which the "special militant solidarity" existing between the peoples and armies of Laos and Vietnam was once again extolled.[47]

Throughout 1977 and the first half of 1978, the Lao government perceived Thailand as posing the principal threat to the nation's security, because of aid provided by the Thai to Lao insurgents. Exaggerated reports appeared in the Thai press of victories scored by various Lao resistance groups. Every minor clash with government forces was greeted as heralding the imminent collapse of the Lao regime, which was claimed to be deeply divided into opposing factions.[48] Such reports revealed more about Thai propaganda than about Lao realities.

At about this time, a new Lao united front group, the "Free Lao National Liberation Movement", reportedly was formed to co-ordinate increased insurgent activity. This was led nominally by the brothers Iang and Sisouk na Champassak, with an executive committee said to include Generals Vang Pao and Kong Le, among others.[49] However, if it existed in anything but name, it proved no more effective than earlier attempts to overcome political factionalism and unify the various strands of anti-government resistance.

Disorganized and unco-ordinated though it remained, the Lao resistance eventually did begin to have some effect. In the far south, and particularly in the north, rebels were most active. In Oudomsai province, four hundred suppression drives were carried out during 1977, resulting in the deaths of sixty-five "enemy commandos, spies and exiled Lao reactionaries".[50] In July and August alone, clashes occurred on "dozens of occasions" in Nam Tha province, with 62 enemy killed, 31 wounded and 82 captured.[51] Regular patrolling took place along the Thai border with Nam Tha and Houei Sai provinces.

Towards the end of 1977, Lao and Vietnamese forces stepped up their attacks on the Hmong. Reports reached Thailand of massive losses inflicted by long-range artillery and aerial bombardment. There were also reports of the use of chemical and gas warfare against tribesmen in the Phou Bia region.[52] Some Hmong were reported to be still holding out in mid-1978, despite continuous Lao and Vietnamese ground and air attacks, but by then their resistance was all but broken.[53]

In summing up the internal security situation in March 1978, Kaysone Phomvihane related it to the position of Laos as "the outpost of socialism in Southeast Asia", which he called this "revolutionary monsoon region". The enemy, "imperialists and reactionaries", were using psychological warfare, sabotage and espionage in an all-out attempt to undermine the Lao revolution. This they were doing by exploiting "the remaining economic and cultural vestiges of neo-colonialism and feudalism". These schemes, however, had been thwarted by doubling the peacekeeping forces to create a "basically peaceful situation". Nevertheless, Kaysone went on to tell the nation that

> the building and strengthening of national defence and the people's peacekeeping forces constitute fundamental themes of the socialist revolutionary struggle in our country. These tasks are the most important political duties of all our people and soldiers.[54]

By mid-1978, a new internal security threat had arisen. Just as the change in government in Bangkok that brought General

Kriangsak Chamanand promised a new era in Thai–Lao relations, Vietnam's relations with both Kampuchea and China were sliding towards open conflict. Tension mounted along the Lao–Kampuchea frontier, while in the north, Hmong emissaries from groups still opposing the government were reported to have sought Chinese assistance.[55] For sixteen years the Chinese, through their road-building program in northern Laos, had cultivated friendly relations with the hill tribes of the region, some of which were southern extensions of larger groups in southern China.[56] The road network established Chinese influence in an area Beijing considered important for national security, including the provinces of Phong Saly and Nam Tha. Phong Saly had been under *de facto* Chinese control since before the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords, which designated the province as a PL regroupment area. It came as something of a surprise, therefore, when Radio Vientiane reported "suppression drives" against thieves and bandits in the province.[57]

Soon after, Kaysone charged that there was collusion between "the imperialists and international reactionists" in "inciting . . . division and trying to destroy inter-racial solidarity".[58] Hmong insurgents were reported to be wearing Chinese-style uniforms and carrying AK-47 rifles.[59] Beijing was asked to close down its unofficial consulate in the provincial capital of Oudomsai, and under protest eventually complied.

The Lao government reacted to what it saw as the Chinese threat by calling for increased defence preparedness. In June, the decision had been taken to push ahead with the rapid co-operativization of agriculture. This was done in the hope that by linking the formation of co-operatives with defence requirements, the economic transformation of Lao society could be promoted and national security strengthened.[60] The armed forces were warned, however, to be on their guard against "counter-revolutionaries and reactionaries" taking advantage of "the stage of socialist transformation and socialist construction, which is the most profound, violent, confusing and complicated period of class struggle".[61] A call for conscription also was linked to co-operatives, for "defending and building the country are two parallel tasks closely bound to each other".[62] Tactical training of army units was stressed — "when they are called to launch an attack they must win"[63] — and vigilance was constantly urged. Even more important in view of alleged Chinese support for tribal insurgents, the army was called upon to implement the Party's minorities policy. This consisted in encouraging villagers to give up traditional "slash-and-burn" methods of agriculture and, where possible, to relocate their villages in lowland areas suitable for irrigated rice farming. Troops

were warned that recently liberated tribesmen were still "influenced by an old way of thinking", and told that "our various armed forces must play an important role in aiding and motivating them to earn their living in a new, better way."[64] At the same time, the army was to maintain security through regular patrolling in mountain areas, to pursue and punish "reactionary chieftains" causing unrest and disunity among their people. It was a demanding mission for even the best trained and motivated army: it asked too much of poorly educated peasant soldiers, many of whom were themselves members of ethnic minorities.

In January 1979, Vietnamese forces took Phnom Penh and the Khmer Rouge returned to the jungle. Lao units mounted joint operations with pro-Vietnamese Kampuchean troops, to hunt down an estimated 5000 to 6000 Khmer Rouge in a 500-kilometre stretch of the Lao–Kampuchean border region.[65] In February, the Chinese attacked Vietnam. The Lao reacted cautiously; but in early March, Vientiane joined Moscow and Hanoi in accusations that Chinese forces also were threatening to invade Laos. A Lao statement accused the Chinese of "sowing trouble and discord among the multinational population [of Laos] . . . and struggling against the political line of the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic".[66] The Chinese were asked to withdraw all their construction workers from northern Laos, which they agreed to do. But Beijing added veiled warnings that "mounting discontent and opposition . . . to Soviet–Vietnam control" in Laos would lead to a new insurgency.[67] In May, the Voice of Democratic Kampuchea, probably broadcasting from Yunnan, revealed the existence of a new revolutionary movement, the Lao Socialist Party, dedicated to expelling the Vietnamese from Laos.[68] The worst of Lao fears seemed to be confirmed: the nation was faced with a new and dangerous threat to its security.

The only bright spot for the Lao came with the agreement with Thailand "not to permit their territories to be used by anyone as bases for interference, threats, aggression, or to mount subversive activities from one against the other whatever form this might take."[69] Both sides followed up their commitment to make the Mekong "a river of peace" — the Lao by expelling members of the predominantly pro-Chinese Communist Party of Thailand from Laos;[70] the Thai by suppressing anti-Lao groups operating from Thailand. For Laos, the benefits were obvious. CPT cadres in Laos already were making themselves unwelcome through their criticisms of Vietnam and their encouragement of nationalist sentiments among PL cadres. In the light of deteriorating relations between Laos and China, the expulsion of Thai "Maoists" was a

small price to pay for reduced Thai aid to Lao rebels. Unfortunately for Laos, the replacement of Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak by General Prem Tinsulanond in October 1979 brought to power a regime in Bangkok prepared to take a much stronger stand against the Vietnamese presence in Kampuchea. As a result, during 1980 Lao relations with Thailand again took a turn for the worse, following the familiar pattern of increasing numbers of border provocations and renewed Thai support for Lao insurgents.

Chinese-Thai Collusion and Lao Security in the 1980s

The change of government in Bangkok was the last in a series of pieces that, fitted together, reveal the outline of the principal defence and security threat that Laos faces in the 1980s. In July 1979, the Central Committee of the LPRP abruptly decided to terminate the co-operativization drive. No reasons were given, but it seems clear that the program had generated far more peasant opposition than the government had expected and that popular discontent was being exploited by anti-government insurgents, to the detriment of the country's internal security.[71] At about the same time, new evidence came to light of Chinese aid to Lao tribal insurgents;[72] and the continuing purge of anyone suspected of harbouring pro-Chinese sentiments led to the flight of a number of senior LPRP cadres to China.[73] Lao suspicions of Chinese intentions were further aroused by China's offer to accept 10 000 refugees from Laos in Thai camps for resettlement in China. Although priority was reportedly given to ethnic-Chinese, numbers of young Hmong and ethnic Lao also volunteered to go, many in the belief that they would soon be back in Laos fighting the Vietnamese.[74]

In his report to the Supreme People's Assembly in December 1979, Kaysone Phomvihane claimed that "the international reactionaries have volunteered to become the vanguard counter-revolutionary forces in opposing the socialist countries".[75] Laos, Kaysone said, was engaged in a new "war of national defence".

> We are facing dangerous enemies who maintain a close alliance with various imperialist forces and other reactionaries as well as with the exiled reactionaries and reactionary remnants in the country. The enemies have colluded in implementing many subtle, brutal schemes and tricks. . . . They have combined schemes of spying and psychological warfare with schemes aimed at disrupting the unity of the country and at sowing division among Laos, Vietnam and Kampuchea. They have misled and bought off Lao cadres into serving them while infiltrating . . . our offices, organizations, enterprises and mass organizations with a view to sabotaging, destroying and controlling the economy, creating disturbances, inciting uprisings, carrying out assassinations and subversive activities in the country, putting pressure on and weakening our country in order to proceed to swallowing up our country in the end.[76]

"The acts of the Chinese side threaten the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political security of our country," Kaysone declared. China, the Lao government charged, has "massively financed, armed and supported the exiled Lao reactionaries to openly and brazenly sabotage and obstruct the peace and national independence of Laos."[77] And while early reports of subversion in the northern provinces and the breakdown in security may have been exaggerated,[78] by July 1980, a Lao People's Liberation Army was said to be operating against Vietnamese and Lao government forces in areas of northern Laos previously under Chinese influence[79] and the Lao were claiming that 500 Chinese military advisers were training 10 000 Lao insurgents in southern China.[80]

Increased insurgent activity in the north was matched by new efforts to co-ordinate Thai-based resistance forces. On 11 May 1980, at Vieng Keo (supposedly "somewhere in southern Laos"), a new anti-government resistance movement was formed: the "United National Front for the Liberation of the Lao People". Its aim was said to be to create a "great union for peace, neutrality and the total independence of Laos" to free Laos from *North* Vietnamese domination; its motto: "Laos will remain Lao." The President of the new Front was former Cabinet Minister, Impeng Suryadhay; and the Commander-in-Chief of the Front's military arm, "The Armed Forces for the Liberation of the Lao People", was former PL colonel, Boualien Vannasay, an ascetic guerrilla leader who had been fighting the Pathet Lao in southern Laos since before 1975 and who never went anywhere without his personal soothsayer.[81] Whether this Front proves any more effective than previous ones in bringing together the deeply factionalized Lao exile activists remains to be seen, but already there have been reports of Chinese assistance to the new Front, and of effective liaison with the Khmer Rouge in joint operations in the Thai–Lao–Kampuchea tri-border area.[82] This suggests that groups operating from both southern China and northern and north-eastern Thailand in the future may be in a position to co-ordinate their operations through the combined support of Beijing and Bangkok, in terms of both organization and arms.

For the Lao, as for the Vietnamese, proof of Chinese–Thai collusion aimed at the destabilization of Laos came with the incidents leading up to the Thai closure of the frontier with Laos on 3 July 1980.[83] The meeting between the foreign ministers of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea held in Vientiane on 17 July to discuss the Kampuchean question directly accused the Chinese of being "the motor stimulating the Thai side to commit acts of provocation on the frontier"[84] with Laos, a charge that subsequently frequently was reiterated. The Chinese were accused of "abusing" Thai territory to recruit military units, in conjunction with reactionary Lao exiles, to be sent to destroy the Lao revolution.[85] Chinese counter-accusations depicted Laos as no more than a satellite of Vietnam, occupied by Vietnamese forces. Laos was accused of having irredentist designs on the sixteen provinces of north-eastern Thailand. Both these charges were indignantly denied by the Lao authorities.[86] Partial opening of the frontier with Thailand early in September did not lead to a change of Lao attitudes. The Chinese continued to be seen as instigating tension between Bangkok and Vientiane. The Thai were seen as actors in a Chinese plot, and "the extremists of the right among the Thai holders of power" were lumped together with Pol Pot and his cohorts as "Satan and company", playing their part in furthering the policies of "expansionism and hegemonism", which "the Chinese international reactionaries" were directing against the three states of Indochina.[87]

The Lao government's reaction to the joint threat posed by Chinese and Thai hostility has been to emphasize its "special militant solidarity" with Vietnam. As the Lao always have maintained,

> this solidarity constitutes an overall strength for our two armies and has become a factor determining the successes of the revolutions in the two countries. It has become a factor for defeating all enemies.[88]

The combined threat from China and Thailand has led the Vietnamese to maintain their substantial presence in Laos. Vietnamese military manoeuvres have taken place along the Thai border and more Vietnamese advisers have been assigned to serve with Lao units. Ironically, therefore, Chinese and Thai attempts to force the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Laos by supporting anti-Vietnamese and anti-Lao government insurgents have had the reverse effect, at least in the short term.

The outlook for Laos, therefore, is for increased insurgency as both the Chinese and Thai bring further pressure to bear on Vietnam to limit its ambitions in Indochina. The Lao government in the 1980s is faced with a double security threat: from the Chinese-backed "Lao Socialist Party" and its military wing, the "Lao People's Liberation Army", in the north and from the Thai-

supported "United National Front for the Liberation of the Lao People" and its "Armed Forces for the Liberation of the Lao People" in the south. Whether this will lead to a serious escalation of fighting, to the point where the security of the present Lao regime is threatened, depends largely upon great power relationships in the region. If China and the Soviet Union negotiate some kind of understanding, or if Vietnam adopts a less overtly pro-Soviet position (in response perhaps to Chinese agreement on a solution to the Kampuchea problem acceptable to Vietnam), then Laos may avoid being embroiled any further in the third Indochina war. If not, insurgent groups operating out of both China and Thailand seem likely to ensure that the defence and internal security of the country will remain the first priority of the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic for some time to come.

Notes

1. For tribal population figures see Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey and John K. Musgrave, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), p. 236 and tables pp. 255-57. Also see Lee Yong Leng, "Race, Language and National Cohesion in Southeast Asia", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* II (1980): 122-38.
2. *NYT*, 24 May 1975.
3. *FEER*, 30 May 1975.
4. *NYT*, 30 October 1975.
5. *FEER*, 30 October 1975.
6. *JPRS/TSEA*, no. 592, 4 November 1975, p. 43.
7. *Bangkok Post*, 9 November 1975; *FEER*, 19 December 1975; Radio Pathet Lao, 10 November 1975 and 13 November 1975 (*FBIS*, 13 November 1975).
8. Radio Vientiane, 25 November 1975 (*FBIS*, 26 November 1975).
9. For some of these early resistance movements, see *AFP*, 2 February 1976 (*FBIS*, 3 February 1976); 26 February 1976 (*FBIS*, 26 February 1976); 27 April 1976 (*FBIS*, 30 April 1976); and 29 May 1976 (*FBIS*, 3 June 1976). See also for summaries of the security situation, *NYT*, 7 October 1976; and *Le Monde*, 2 December 1976.
10. The name was changed from the Pathet Lao Armed Forces immediately following the founding of the LPDR. Radio Vientiane, 8 December 1975 (*FBIS*, 9 December 1975). Radio Vientiane broadcast a history of the LPLAF on 17 and 18 January 1976 (*FBIS*, 21 January 1976) in which Kaysone Phomvihane was given credit for founding the first army unit on 20 January 1949, the "Latsavong" brigade of the "Issara" (freedom) army.
11. Radio Vientiane, 20 January 1976 (*FBIS*, 22 January 1976).
12. Radio Vientiane, 4 May 1976 (*FBIS*, 11 May 1976).
13. Radio Vientiane, 26 February 1976 (*FBIS*, 27 February 1976).
14. *Sieng Pasason*, 5 June 1976 (*JPRS/TSEA*, no. 658, 20 August 1976).
15. Radio Vientiane, 5 January 1976 (*FBIS*, 12 January 1976).

16. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, 26 March 1976, broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 26 March 1976 (*FBIS*, 2 April 1976).
17. Radio Vientiane, 7 February 1976 (*FBIS*, 10 February 1976).
18. Radio Vientiane, 26 January 1976 (*FBIS*, 30 January 1976).
19. *FEER*, 24 August 1979.
20. Radio Vientiane, 9 August 1976 (*FBIS*, 17 August 1976).
21. Kaysone Phomvihane, Speech to the Annual Joint Session of the Supreme People's Assembly and Council of Government, February 1977, broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 17-20 March 1977 (*FBIS*, Special Supplement, 11 April 1977, p. 11).
22. Radio Vientiane, station editorial, 24 January 1978 (*FBIS*, 25 January 1978).
23. Radio Vientiane, 27 April 1978 (*FBIS*, 1 May 1978).
24. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, 15 August 1977, broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 15 August 1977 (*FBIS*, 17 August 1977).
25. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, 7 January 1978, broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 7 January 1978 (*FBIS*, 10 January 1978).
26. *FEER*, 24 August 1979.
27. According to "a senior Lao Communist defector" only 12 000 men in the 23 000 Lao Army had weapons (*FEER*, 24 August 1979). Refugees reported that concern over the loyalty of the army due to widespread anti-Vietnamese feelings led to a reduction of troop strength to 20 000, organized in independent battalions only, to prevent any coup attempt (*Le Matin* (Paris), 20 November 1979; *FBIS*, 7 December 1979). However, the accuracy of such reports must be considered doubtful.
28. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1980-1981* (London, 1980), p. 72. This compares with a total figure of 49 000 in 1978, made up to 46 500 in the army, 500 in the navy and 2000 in the airforce, given in Gregory R. Copley (ed.), *Defense and Foreign Affairs Handbook* (London: Copley & Associates, 1978), p. 306. This would suggest that Laos has been building up its naval and air strength, while army numbers have remained static. It might be pointed out that if a figure of 60 000 is adopted for the number of Vietnamese troops in Laos,the country has one of the highest ratios of soldiers to civilian population anywhere in the world, i.e. 1:30, a figure that does not include police or para-military security forces.
29. If figures for military aircraft remaining in 1978 are compared with figures for 1980, it will be seen that of those left by the Americans and handed over by the Royal Lao Army in 1975, fewer each year are still flying. Of 63 T-28s in 1978, only 20 were serviceable in 1980. UH-34 helicopters had declined from 42 to 10. Cf. *Military Balance 1980-1981*, p. 72, with *Defense and Foreign Affairs Handbook*, p. 306.
30. *Military Balance 1980-1981*, p. 72.
31. See, e.g., Lao military attaché Chanmien Bounleut, writing in the Vietnamese army paper *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, January 1978 (*FBIS*, 23 January 1978).
32. Mixed Lao–Vietnamese battalions reportedly were formed in 1977 for operations against Lao insurgents. See *AFP*, 9 June 1977 (*FBIS*, 10 June 1977). Vietnamese security forces moved into Pakse mid-1977 (*FEER*, 8 December 1978).
33. The figure of 30 000 was used early in 1977; *AFP*, 28 January 1977 (*FBIS*, 31 January 1977). The figure had risen to 50 000 by 1979. See *FEER*, 24 August 1979; *NYT*, 24 November 1979.
34. For example, at Sala Phou Khoun, 200 kilometres north of Vientiane. See *AFP*, 19 April 1976 (*FBIS*, 21 April 1976).
35. This figure is given in *Military Balance 1980-1981*, p. 72. Earlier reports said that Laos had received more than one squadron. See *AFP*, 13 October 1977 (*FBIS*, 14 October 1977). The USSR may have made up losses of two jets that crashed on training flights.
36. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, *KPL/BQ*, 30 January 1979, p. 5.
37. *KPL*, 17 January 1978 (*FBIS*, 17 January 1978).
38. *Facts on File*, 30 March 1979, p. 229.
39. *NYT*, 23 March 1979.
40. For a discussion of these events, see Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos: The Vietnamese Connection", in *Southeast Asian Affairs 1980*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies/Heinemann, 1980), 191-209.
41. Reiterated to the author in an interview with a spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Vientiane, 4 December 1980.
42. See, e.g., Radio Vientiane, 20 and 25 December 1976 (*FBIS*, 21 and 27 December 1976); *AFP*, 23 February 1977 (*FBIS*, 24 February 1977).
43. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 11 December 1976 (*FBIS*, 14 December 1976).
44. *FEER*, 25 March 1977. The government later claimed that as early as December 1976, plans for a right-wing coup had been uncovered, which had led to a Lao request for Vietnamese military assistance. See *FEER*, 2 December 1977.
45. As many as 7000 Hmong were reported to be still holding out. See *AFP*, 2 February 1977 (*FBIS*, 3 February 1977). See also *Le Monde*, 2 December 1976.
46. *AFP*, 11 and 19 July 1977 (*FBIS*, 12 and 22 July 1977).
47. Radio Vientiane, 12 September 1977 (*FBIS*, 13 September 1977).
48. Typical of such reports were those appearing in *Ban Muang* (in Thai), 6 February 1977 (*FBIS*, 7 February 1977); and in *Morning Express* and *Nation Review* (both in English), 9 February 1977.
49. *Bangkok Daily Times* (in Thai), 20 April 1977 (*FBIS*, 26 April 1977). This too may have been a figment of Thai imagination.
50. Radio Vientiane, 11 January 1978 (*FBIS*, 12 January 1978).
51. Radio Vientiane, 13 September 1977 (*FBIS*, 14 September 1977).
52. Numerous reports on the use of gas against the Hmong were brought together in a report for the US Senate entitled, *Reports of the Use of Chemical Weapons in Afghanistan, Laos and Kampuchea* (Washington, 1980), pp. 31-101.
53. *Bangkok World*, 22 June 1978 (*FBIS*, 23 June 1978).
54. Kaysone Phomvihane, Speech to Annual Joint Session of the Supreme People's Assembly and Council of Government, 2 March 1978, broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 6 March 1978 (*FBIS*, 17 March 1978, p. 24).
55. *AFP*, 29 June 1978 (*FBIS*, 30 June 1978).
56. Cf. George V. H. Moseley, *The Consolidation of the South China Frontier* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 156-57, where it is pointed out that China's minorities policies sought to appeal to neighbouring peoples.
57. Radio Vientiane, 15 May 1978 (*FBIS*, 16 May 1978).
58. Quoted in *FEER*, 18 April 1978.
59. Nayan Chanda, "A New Threat from the Mountain Tribes", *FEER*, 1 October 1978.
60. Cf. Kaysone Phomvihane, Speech to the First All-Lao Congress on Cooperativization, 24 April 1979 (*KPL/BQ*, 3 May 1979, pp. 12-13).
61. Radio Vientiane, 29 June 1978 (*FBIS*, 30 June 1978).
62. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 19 August 1978 (*FBIS*, 21 August 1978).
63. Radio Vientiane, 28 September 1978 (*FBIS*, 6 October 1978).

64. Radio Vientiane, 21 December 1978 (*FBIS*, 22 December 1978).
65. *AFP*, 19 March 1979 and Radio Vientiane, 19 March 1979 (*FBIS*, 20 March 1979). Also *NYT*, 23 March 1979.
66. *KPL/BQ*, 7 March 1979, pp. 1-3.
67. *Beijing Review*, 16 March 1979 and 6 April 1979. Also *New China News*, 11 April 1979.
68. Voice of Democratic Kampuchea, 17 May 1979 (*FBIS*, 18 May 1979).
69. *KPL/BQ*, 8 January 1979, p. 12 (unofficial translation).
70. Cf. John McBeth, "A Battle for Loyalty in the Jungles", *FEER*, 8 June 1979.
71. See Martin Stuart-Fox, "The Initial Failure of Agricultural Co-operativization in Laos", *Asia Quarterly* no. 4 (1980): 273-99.
72. Radio Vientiane, 12 June 1979 (*FBIS*, 13 June 1979); *FEER*, 29 June 1979.
73. Frances L. Starner, "A Crisis of Leadership", *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, no. 73 (1980): 28-30; *FEER*, 14 December 1979.
74. Personal communication.
75. Kaysone Phomvihane, Speech to the Supreme People's Assembly, 26 December 1979, known as the Seventh Resolution of the LPRP Central Committee; broadcast over Radio Vientiane, 27 December 1979 (*FBIS*, 18 January 1980, p. 23).
76. Ibid. (*FBIS*, Supplement, 8 February 1980, p. 1).
77. Radio Vientiane, 6 March 1980 (*FBIS*, 7 March 1980).
78. Cf. report carried by *AFP*, 12 December 1979 (*FBIS*, 12 December 1979).
79. *FEER*, 25 July 1980.
80. *AFP*, 7 December 1979 (*FBIS*, 7 December 1979).
81. A "National Pact of Support and Solidarity" was promulgated on 14 December 1980, to further the Front's objectives.
82. *FEER*, 19 December 1980.
83. The Lao traced these developments from 14 August 1980, when the Thai began repatriation of Khmer refugees. See *Sieng Pasason* editorial, carried in *KPL/BQ*, 22 August 1980, p. 5; also *KPL/BQ*, 4 August 1980, p. 4.
84. *KPL/BQ*, 18 July 1980, p. 2. See also the Declaration of the three foreign ministers, *KPL/BQ*, 19 July 1980, p. 15.
85. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, carried in *KPL/BQ*, 19 July 1980, p. 8.
86. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, in *KPL/BQ*, 22 July 1980, pp. 6-7.
87. *Sieng Pasason* editorial, in *KPL/BQ*, 20 September 1980, p. 4
88. Radio Vientiane, 23 December 1979 (*FBIS*, 28 December 1979).

13 Laos and Vietnam: The Anatomy of a "Special Relationship"

Carlyle A. Thayer

Introduction

The emergence of Communist regimes in Kampuchea and Vietnam in April–May 1975 set the stage for the Lao People's Revolutionary Party's seizure of power later in the year.[1] The creation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a Communist state, signalled the end of Laos' traditional role as a buffer between Thailand and Vietnam. Within months of assuming power, a high-level LPRP–LPDR delegation visited Hanoi and proclaimed Laos' close solidarity with Vietnam. According to the text of the Lao–Vietnamese joint communique:

> The two sides greatly rejoice at and are proud of the splendid development of the special relationship which has closely bound the Vietnam Workers' Party with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, and the Vietnamese people with the Lao people . . .
>
> The two sides are deeply conscious that the more each party and each people maintain their independence and sovereignty while respecting the independence and sovereignty of the other, the closer and more durable the solidarity and co-operation between the two parties and the two peoples will be.[2]

In July 1977, a high-level delegation representing the Vietnam Communist Party and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam returned the visit. While in Vientiane, the two countries signed a number of agreements, including a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation, which placed the Lao–Vietnamese "special relationship" on a more formal footing.

Developments since then have led many observers to conclude that Laos has severely compromised its independence. Terms such as "puppet government",[3] colony,[4] satellite[5] and dependency[6] have been used to describe Laos' subordination to Vietnam. Senior Lao party and government officials deny this view. Khamphay Boupha,