a Vietnamese farmer has far less reason to worry that he will be replaced by a machine and not be given alternative employment. When farm machines come in Vietnam, as they must, they will be accompanied by a higher degree of concern for the human consequences of technological change.

Most Vietnamese today are prepared to credit their top leaders with diligence and sincerity, which is more than can be said in many other poverty-striken countries. Even some of the 'boat people' accept that Communist Party officials wish to raise per capita income, reduce scarcities and build a viable economy. Doubts centre on the methods used and the prospects for success. As suggested at the beginning, people now recognize that experience gained while winning a war is not necessarily transferable to winning the peace. Above all, they wonder whether the system is flexible enough to change to meet new conditions. Attention often focuses on middle-level cadres, who have the capacity both to dilute top-level initiatives and to ignore grass-roots sentiments. In a very real sense these intermediate officials, now in their late 40s and early 50s, can make or break Vietnam's future into the 21st century.

FOOTNOTES

1. Tiziano Terzani, *Giai Phong! The Fall and Liberation of Saigon* (New York, 1976), p. 294.
2. *Vietnam Courier* no. 2 (1981), p. 2.
3. *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 May 1981.
4. *Vietnam Courier* no. 2 (1981), p. 13.
5. 'Tinh Hinh Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh.... ', magazine supplement to *Saigon Giai Phong* 15 April 1977. *New York Times* 12 April 1976, 16 December 1976 and 31 May 1978.
6. *Doan Ket* (Paris), 17 May 1980.
7. Richard Ward, *Guardian* (New York), 19 July 1978.
8. Elizabeth Becker, *Washington Post*, 27 September 1979, quoting Dr. Le Vinh of the Economics Institute of Hanoi.
9. Promulgated as a resolution of the Central Committee's Sixth Plenum, which apparently met in August 1979. *Nhan Dan*, 9 October 1979.
10. Nguyen Huu Dong, '6e Plénum: Adaptions Conjoncturelles Ou Réformes Durables?', *Vietnam* (Paris) no. 2 (April 1981), pp. 41-60.
11. *Nhan Dan*, 11 and 13 March 1980.
12. *Vietnam Courier* no. 2 (1981), p. 14.
13. The most recent outside analysis of Vietnamese agriculture occurred at a five day seminar in the Netherlands in late September 1980, organized by the Institute of Social Studies, the Hague. See especially the papers by Christine White, Adam Fforde and Geneviève Lemercinier.
14. Brian Fegan, 'The Grim Reaper: A Decade of Harvest Increasing and Income Redistributing Changes in Central Luzon', unpublished paper, February 1981.

NATIONAL INTERESTS AND INTERNATIONAL DEPENDENCY IN LAOS

by MARTIN STUART-FOX

As the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) enters the decade of the 1980s, the country's leaders are faced with a major problem: how to promote nationalist goals given the circumstances of Laos' high degree of international dependency. In the political field, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) must defend its nationalist credentials in the face of overwhelming political influence exercised in Laos by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). Economically Laos is very largely dependent upon Soviet Bloc aid not only to finance its first five year development plan but also to meet budget deficits. Even in promoting the integration of the country's more than sixty different ethnic groups through the evolution of a new national identity, Lao authorities have to take into account the demands of Indochinese solidarity and proletarian internationalism. The balance in all cases is a fine one between nationalist interests and internationalist responsibilities as these are perceived by the LPRP hierarchy. This paper will examine some ways in which the Lao Party and government are attempting to preserve this balance.

The paper begins by outlining briefly the ideological assumptions of Lao communism, and goes on to examine (i) the strategic imperatives following from Laos' position in the international communist movement; and (ii) the country's foreign relations as a logical extension of the Lao-Vietnamese "special relationship". It then turns to internal affairs and discusses (i) political consolidation of power by the LPRP; (ii) economic development; and (iii) social integration and evolution of national identity, each in the light of the foregoing analysis of Laos' international dependency.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

(i) Ideological assumptions

The Lao People's Revolutionary Party sees itself as an orthodox, non-revisionist, Marxist-Leninist party. The LPRP recognises the historical, and present global strategic, importance of the Soviet Union as the *primus inter pares* among communist states, and looks to the USSR as the principal military and economic power leading the world socialist revolution. This paramount position accorded to the Soviet Union reflects the Soviets' own view of their role in leading the global socialist struggle against capitalism and imperialism. Thus the Lao accept the Soviet conception of the "three revolutionary currents" flowing at present in support of world socialism: the socialist bloc states, national liberation forces in the Third World, and socialist workers' movements in capitalist states.(1) The Lao themselves ascribe the success of their own revolution to the support received from these currents, aided, of

course, by the LPRP's own perspicacious leadership.(2)

The support received over the years from the international communist movement brings with it, however, its own responsibilities. Laos now stands, in the words of its leaders, as "the advance post of the socialist front in this zone of Southeast Asia".(3) As such the state and Party have both national and international responsibilities: national in building a strong and prosperous socialist state in Laos, and in protecting it against the desperate froces of imperialism (the United States) and international reactionism (China); international in thereby furthering the victory of socialism in its struggle to the end with capitalism. But the Lao believe they have an international role to play not only in their goal of building socialism in their own country, but also in defending socialism in all three states of Indochina, and in promoting the socialist struggle throughout Southeast Asia.

(ii) Strategic implications

Of these three international tasks - the construction, defence, and promotion of socialism - the last has been played down by the Lao. Apart from a few explicit statements of support for "progressive forces" in Thailand following the Thai military coup d'etat of October 1976,(4) the Lao have been careful not to assist openly communist insurgents in Thailand. In fact under agreements reached in 1979 between Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanand and Lao Premier Kaysone Phomvihane, Thai guerrillas were deprived of bases in Laos.(5) The Lao were more prepared to take such steps after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and China's border war against Vietnam because of the pro-Chinese stance of the Communist Party of Thailand. The Lao position is that at present it is more important for the world socialist movement to consolidate its gains in Indochina than to press for new victories further afield.

The building and defence of socialism, however, faces special difficulties in all three countries of Indochina, not only because of the machinations of imperialism but also because of the hostility of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Since this hostility is directed primarily at the SRV, and since Vietnam is the major bulwark of socialism in Indochina, the Lao accept that they have a special international responsibility in assisting the Vietnamese to safeguard their own revolution. This Laos is in a position to do by ensuring the defence of Vietnam's western border, preventing the use of Lao territory for Chinese infiltration of mountain regions in Vietnam, and aiding Vietnamese suppression of Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge guerrillas in Kampuchea.(6)

The internationalist commitments of Laos to the construction and defence of socialism in Indochina are contained in the provisions of the Lao-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and its secret protocols. These permit the stationing of Vietnamese forces in Laos, nominally for the defence and protection of Laos, but equally for the defence and protection of Vietnam.(7) If a pro-Chinese government were to hold power in Vientiane,

it could, by concluding a pact with the PRC similar to the present twenty-five-year treaty with Vietnam, invite Chinese troops into Laos, promote tribal dissent in the SRV, and support anti-Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea. Not surprisingly, therefore, any threat to the pro-Vietnamese regime in Laos is seen by Hanoi as a threat to the security of Vietnam.

The defence of socialism in Indochina lies in the defence of its most exposed outposts in Laos and Kampuchea from threats from both China and Thailand. This double threat would be serious enough at any time, but when combined in a coordinated attempt to destabilise and undermine the Lao regime, the threat is all the more sinister and dangerous. This is how recent Thai and Chinese actions have been interpreted in Vientiane and Hanoi - as collusion of the worst kind aimed at destroying socialism in Indochina, socialism for which the revolutionary elites in both countries fought so long and so grimly.(8)

This Vietnamese-Lao interpretation of the reasons for continuing tension along the Thai-Kampuchean border and the sequence of incidents on the Mekong frontier between Thailand and Laos is based upon the support both China and Thailand are providing not only for the Khmer Rouge, but also for dissident Lao groups operating out of sanctuaries in Thailand and southern China.(9) The Chinese, so the Lao claim, have recruited some six to seven thousand guerrillas whom they are training in Yunnan. Most are northern Lao tribesmen (such as Hmong and Yao) who are then infiltrated back into Laos to act as anti-government *agents provocateurs*, but some are ethnic Lao refugees accepted for "resettlement" from Lao refugee camps in Thailand. The Chinese are also reported to have set up a political front, the Lao Socialist Party, to promote political opposition to the Vientiane regime, and the Chinese hand is also seen behind efforts to bring together resistance groups operating out of Thailand in a broad anti-Vietnamese front similar to the one Beijing has been promoting among Kampuchean resistance forces. Towards the end of 1980, the formation was announced "somewhere in southern Laos" of the Lao People's National Liberation Front dedicated to procuring "the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops, and the disbanding of the Vietnamese colonial administration: in Laos.(10) Soon after, Lao resistance groups in the far south of the country were reported to have linked up and to be coordinating operations with Khmer Rouge units in the Lao-Kampuchean border area.(11)

The burden of defence against Lao resistance forces appears to be falling increasingly upon the Vietnamese, yet both Lao and Vietnamese forces are spread thin. Morale is said not to be high in some Lao army units, especially at the regional level, and local defence militia have been known to come to a *modus vivendi* with guerrilla groups operating in their areas. Despite the need for improved security, however, a further build-up of Vietnamese troop strength in Laos might be counter-productive in that it could take on the appearance of a military occupation force in the eyes of the Lao peasantry; and thus would further undermine the nationalist credentials of the Vientiane

government.

Thus in the area of strategic defence, the Lao authorities find it necessary to balance internationalist commitments against nationalist considerations. The security and survival of the present government is the first priority, not only for the Lao authorities themselves, but also for the Vietnamese. Yet any more active and visible defence of the regime by Vietnamese forces threatens to provoke further resistance in the name of Lao nationalism.

In the field of foreign relations, a similar tension is evident between the requirement for Lao foreign policy to be related to the defence of Vietnamese strategic interests in the cause of international socialism, and the requirement for policy to further Lao national interests. The benefits of a more independent line *vis-a-vis* Thailand during 1979 have been referred to above. The benefits from a policy of neutrality in the conflict between China and Vietnam would probably have been just as considerable. But whereas an agreement which expelled pro-Chinese Thai guerrillas from Laos had Vietnamese blessing, the potential Chinese threat to Vietnam in the event of Lao neutrality in the Sino-Vietnamese conflict was too great to be accepted to Hanoi.(12) And as the Chinese threat was kept up, and expanded to encompass support for Thai-based Lao insurgents, so friendly Lao-Thai relations were forced to take second place to the overall defence of Indochina - even though this has led to border incidents, unilateral closure of the frontier by Bangkok, and economic disruption in Laos. Foreign affairs, as might be expected, thus stands as the area where the Lao regime has been least successful in maintaining a balance between national interests and international pressures. Lao foreign policy, after an earlier period of partial independence, now seems to be firmly linked, if not totally subservient, to that of Vietnam.

NATIONAL INTERESTS

(i) Consolidation of political power

Within not much more than a year of seizing power and establishing the Lao People's Democratic Republic in December 1975, the LPRP had consolidated its political power to the extent of no longer being in danger of being overthrown by an internal *coup d'etat*.(13) From late 1976 and during 1977 some security regulations, and administrative, social and economic controls were lifted. This, however, did not mean that the new regime was universally accepted by the Lao people. The larger problem of legitimation of the exercise of authority by the LPRP remained. A further consolidation of political control was required in terms of strengthening Party organisation, propaganda, and education, and in undermining and weakening the appeal of Buddhism as a competing legitimising order. Additional problems to be overcome included both regionalism and tribalism.

The structure of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party is similar to that of most other ruling communist parties. Theoretically the Party Congress, meeting every few years,

elects the Party Central Committee which in turn in plenary session elects members of the Political Bureau and the Permanent Secretariat. In fact the seven-man Politburo wields supreme power, and determines who will be appointed as members, or alternate members, of the Central Committee. Below the central organs of the Party stand the provincial, district and village committees, the lower levels of which, according to the principles of democratic centralism, are supposed to elect delegates to the next level up. In fact, once again, powerful figures at the province level usually determine the membership of provincial committees.

At the village level, the Party has worked hard to establish cells in every hamlet, though not always with success. During the drive for cooperativisation in 1978 and 1979, it was tacitly admitted that in some villages where cooperatives were supposedly being formed the Party had no representation.(14) Elsewhere the Party has had to weed out those who joined up in the early days of the revolution for motives of political expediency. Now it requires more than revolutionary fervour or the right social class background to be admitted to Party membership, but the Party has progressively strengthened its organisational base both in the rural areas and in the towns.

The Vietnamese closely monitor Lao progress in strengthening Party organisation. Lao cadres are trained in Vietnam in the techniques of Party administration and promotion. But at this level the Vietnamese presence appears not to be obtrusive. It is rather in the equally important field of propaganda that the Vietnamese connection impinges more noticeably upon Lao nationalist interests. In the fields of propaganda, information and the media Lao-Vietnamese cooperation is close and continuous. Ministerial delegations and journalists exchange visits, and technicians and cadres regularly attend courses in Vietnam. Even Deputy Minister of Propaganda, Information, Culture and Tourism, Ouneheuane Phounsavath, recently spent months at a school for high level cadres in Hanoi, undergoing intensive ideological education. Not surprisingly, Lao government and Party propaganda lays heavy stress upon Lao-Vietnamese solidarity and friendship. The Vietnamese are extolled for the assistance they gave to the Lao revolution, for their selfless economic aid to Laos at all times, especially when the Vietnamese have needed all the resources they can obtain, and for the protection Vietnam provides against the enemies of socialism. In local meetings and seminars, in the press and on the radio, and in frequent statements by government and Party leaders the crucial importance of the Lao-Vietnamese relationship is hammered home.

But the very intensity of this pro-Vietnamese propaganda risks producing an adverse reaction. Traditionally the Lao have never been close to the Vietnamese. On the contrary, relations between the two races were often strained during the period of French rule, as Vietnamese monopolised positions in the colonial administration in Laos. Lao attitudes towards both the Thai and the Chinese have always been more positive than their feelings towards the Vietnamese.(15) And though anti-Vietnamese sentiments in Laos

never reached the pitch of xenophobia they did in Kampuchea, under both Lon Nol and Pol Pot, Royal Lao government propaganda always pictured the North Vietnamese as having designs on Lao territory, and as intending to turn Laos into a colony of Vietnam. The extent to which the leadership of the LPRP had been prepared to serve Vietnamese interests has been a disillusioning experience for many Lao who saw the Pathet Lao guerrillas as embodying nationalist values. This has had the effect not only of increasing the flow of refugees, but of convincing a number of former Pathet Lao soldiers to join the anti-government resistance.(16)

While official propaganda dwells upon the positive aspects of Lao-Vietnamese relations, it tends to play down overtly nationalist sentiments. This compares with the chauvinism of Vietnamese propaganda as part of the Hanoi regime's attempt to stimulate nationalist determination to resist the Chinese threat. But just as Vietnamese nationalism easily takes on an anti-Chinese colouration, so Lao nationalism risks becoming anti-Vietnamese - and this the present Lao regime, and its Vietnamese mentors, have been careful not to let happen. Vietnamese political (secret) police are said to be training Lao agents whose job is to search out those responsible for spreading anti-Vietnamese sentiments. Already there have been a number of purges of Party members suspected of being pro-Chinese. An unknown number has been sent to re-education camps in Laos and Vietnam. Others have managed to cross into Thailand and make their way to China.(17) Even criticism of government economic policies risks being interpreted as pro-Chinese propaganda in Vientiane, and dealt with accordingly.

In consolidating its political position in Laos, the communist regime has been particularly careful in its treatment of Buddhism. Traditionally Buddhism has not only legitimised the traditional Lao socio-political order, it has also provided the only means of social mobility for the talented and ambitious excluded from access to political power. The Sangha (monastic order) represented an alternate hierarchy, both prestigious and influential, to any secular political order. As such it constituted a threat to the monopoly of political power and social control by the LPRP. Nevertheless the Party realised that Buddhism could be of potential value in gaining popular acceptance of the communist regime and its ideology. Thus the mistake was not made in Laos which occurred in Kampuchea, of persecuting the Sangha in order to destroy it. Instead Buddhists were incorporated into the political structure of the Lao state as a mass organisation on a par with others such as farmers', women's and youth associations.

In the early days of the new regime, a dual approach to Buddhism was evident. On the one hand, "progressive" monks were encouraged to propagate a popular form of Marxist-Leninism, and to teach its compatibility with Buddhist values; on the other hand, an active campaign was launched to discredit all aspects of Buddhism which conflicted with the Party's conception of the role Buddhism should play in the transformation of Lao society. Thus it was stressed

that the Buddhist goal of overcoming suffering was identical with the socialist aim of building a just and materially sufficient society. To do this, however, required the combined efforts of every citizen. Monks therefore were encouraged to work for their living, to grow their own vegetables and to perform such socially useful tasks as teaching literacy and caring for the sick through the use of traditional herbal medicines. At the same time, "wasteful" expenditure on offerings to procure spiritual merit was discouraged, and belief in Buddhist heavens and hells ridiculed as superstition. The Sangha hierarchy and monks who devoted themselves to meditation were criticised as social parasites. Finally the ornamental fans indicating high Sangha rank were symbolically broken, and a new Lao Buddhist Association was set up under the control of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Religious Affairs. Buddhism in Laos, while continuing to be tolerated, was thus brought into line with the requirements of the state.(18)

Buddhism has been systematically undermined in Laos to the extent that it can no longer threaten the political monopoly of the LPRP, but it has not been destroyed. Monks still walk the streets of Vientiane at dawn each day in silent lines to receive food offerings of cooked sticky rice from the faithful; they still study Buddhist texts as well as the works of Marx and Lenin. Part of the reason for this is that early controls placed upon the practice of Buddhism met with popular resistance, but another reason has to do with the relation between Buddhism and Lao nationalism. Buddhism has always acted as the central focus of a Lao national culture (in a way it has never done in Vietnam with its strong Confucian traditions). Many monks were sympathetic to the Pathet Lao because they saw themselves as nationalists opposing what they felt were the decadent cultural influences of the West on Lao youth and society. Thus in Laos today there are those who are acutely aware that if Lao socialism is to maintain a separate identity it must be imbued with Lao values - and that historically these values have been preserved by Lao Buddhism.

Brief mention must finally be made of the problems of both regionalism and tribalism encountered by the Party in consolidating political power. Before the arrival of the French, Laos consisted of three separate principalities, and even acceptance of the King of Luang Prabang as King of Laos after 1946 never overcame regional allegiances. Poor communications between provinces and with Vientiane has only exacerbated this problem. Nor has the pairing of Lao with Vietnamese provinces for purposes of aid and trade made it any easier for the central government to ensure that its authority is accepted by all provincial committees. However, some of the early problems arising from the failure of provincial Party leaders to apply central government directives do now seem to have been overcome.(19)

As for tribalism, more will be said about this below when the problem of national identity is discussed. Suffice it to point out that tribal loyalties run deep, and that the party has been notably ineffective in transforming society in the tribal areas. Considerable resistance has

been encountered to policies aimed at curtailing slash-and-burn methods of agriculture in order to conserve forests, and to resettlement of tribal peoples at lower altitudes where they could take up sedentary farming. Members of some tribes in northern Laos (for example, the Hmong and Yao) are with Chinese encouragement, in open revolt against the government. In fact it can be argued that the government's failure to harness tribal loyalties in the cause of a new Lao nationalism now presents the regime with the gravest threat to its authority and stability.

(ii) Economic development

Lao dependency upon international support is nowhere more evident than in the economic field. Revenue amounts to not much more than 40 percent of budgetary expenditure, leaving the country entirely dependent upon foreign finance for all development projects. In 1980 the Lao government budgeted for an expenditure of 2 012.2 million Banque Nationale kip,(20) with revenues of 857 million. Revised estimates by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suggested an expenditure of 1 700 million kip and revenues of no more than 700 million.(21) In either case the deficit was staggering. In 1979, the last full year for which figures are available, the current account deficit on goods and services to be made up by a combination of commodity and project aid, and technical assistance, was running at US$81.03 million.(22)

At the end of 1979 Lao's foreign debt stood at US$214.40 million, of which $182.71 million was in bilateral loans and $28.48 million to international organisations such as the IMF and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The remaining $3.21 million was in the form of credit advanced by suppliers. Debt servicing amounted to $3.30 million.(23)

These figures are sufficient to demonstrate the degree to which Laos is dependent upon international financial support simply in order to survive. But the extent of that dependency becomes even more evident when the possibilities for improvement are examined. In 1979 cash exports brought in a total of US$19.24 million, of which timber ($8.52 million), electricity ($6.13 million), and coffee ($4.12 million) were the main items. Tin, wood products and other exports were of negligible value, except for the cross-border barter trade with Thailand, both official and unofficial, which was running at $16.00 million per annum. In the first half of 1980 this latter item more than doubled due to the liberalisation of trade policies announced in the Party's Seventh Resolution of December 1979. By then private border trade was valued at double that of official trading.(24)

Apart from this increase in border trade, which was reduced in the second half of 1980 as a result of unilateral closure of the border by Thailand following shooting incidents on the Mekong, there seems little likelihood of any considerable increase in cash exports to help meet government expenditures, let alone to finance economic development projects. Timber, the major export earner, has only recently reached pre-1975 production levels, but there

is potential for growth. However, difficulties in extraction and poor means of transportation will keep production down. So too will internal insecurity, especially in the heavily forested northern parts of the country. Both communist bloc aid (from Vietnam and Czechoslovakia) and assistance from the United Nations has been channelled into timber production and into woodworking industries, such as a plywood factory. "Forestry co-operation" with Vietnam, however, is likely to mean no more than the provision of timber in return for Vietnamese commodity assistance in the form of consumer goods and light industrial products.

Electricity is probably a more promising export growth area in the long term. Laos already sells most of the electric power produced by the Nam Ngum dam hydroelectric station to Thailand. Production is at present in the vicinity of 110 megawatts, though this is likely to increase. Some increase in charges is also likely, though this has been resisted by the Thais.(25) But until new projects get under way, for example a proposed dam on the Nam Theun River east of Thakhek in Central Laos,(26) or even a dam on the Mekong itself, export income from electricity will remain limited.

Agriculture has been the first priority for the present government since it came to power. A series of natural disasters during 1977 and 1978 destroyed hopes of achieving self-sufficiency during the interim 1978-80 three year plan. Laos was forced to use up valuable foreign exchange to import thousands of tons of rice to meet deficits. But production has risen steadily since 1978,(27) and there is the possibility in the future that the country will become a net exporter of rice. So too is there the possibility of exporting industrial crops (coffee, tea, peanuts, soya-beans, etc.), though not in the short term in sufficient quantities to meet import requirements. Minerals too may in the future become an important source of revenue. The tin mines at Phou Tiou are now Soviet run, but production is low. Exploitation of iron ore and other mineral deposits pose enormous problems of extraction, and would be extremely costly to undertake.

From the above it is clear that Laos will be dependent on foreign aid for all development projects for the foreseeable future. This will be the case even if internal revenue collection and exports should increase to the extent of covering budget and balance of trade deficits - goals which seem well in the future. Thus Laos remains dependent upon the largesse of donor nations, for her ability to repay loans must remain extremely limited. The United Nations Development Program has funded a number of small scale projects, and among western and unaligned nations, Sweden has provided transport and road making equipment. But the bulk of development aid to Laos comes from the Soviet bloc, now that Chinese aid had been terminated. Recent projects include a sheep breeding station donated by Mongolia, small bicycle and shoe factories (East Germany), high voltage power cables (USSR), and construction of bridges (Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia). The Soviet Union will also build a 150 Kw radio transmitter. Vietnamese army construction

units are working on routes 13 and 9 to connect Vientiane to the port of Da Nang, thus making Laos less economically dependent upon Thailand for the transit of goods.

The Vietnamese have also built a number of army camps, and military aid is another field where Laos is completely dependent upon outside assistance. The Lao army is trained and supplied by the Vietnamese with light weapons and equipment. Lao officers attend courses in Vietnam, and there is close coordination between the Lao and Vietnamese armed forces. The Soviet Union has supplied Laos with some heavier military hardware, including radar facilities and a squadron of MIG-21 jet fighters.

The success of Laos' first five year plan, to run in conjunction with those of the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) from 1980 to 1985, is also entirely dependent upon foreign aid. Not surprisingly, one of the five lessons which Laos would have to learn in implementing the plan was, according to the Lao Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane, to increase international solidarity with friendly socialist countries. He particularly stressed the need for close cooperation between the three states of Indochina, and with the Soviet Union.(28) While the emphasis in the plan has been placed upon agriculture and forestry, a doubling of industrial production is also foreseen. Also investment in construction work on infrastructure projects is estimated to rise by between 47 and 50 percent over 1980 figures by 1985, donors willing.(29)

But Lao's economic dependency does not stop there. The debilitating loss of perhaps as much as 80 percent of the country's educated technicians and civil servants as refugees abroad has left the government dependent upon the presence of foreign technical personnel. Hundreds of Vietnamese, Soviet and East European advisers are at work on everything from agricultural extension to construction projects. And the more Lao who flee across the Mekong to Thailand, most now on the grounds of continuing economic hardship rather than for political reasons, the more dependent the country becomes on foreign advisers if projects are not to collapse altogether. This vicious circle will be broken, the Lao hope, once the hundreds of young men and women at present studying abroad in Soviet bloc countries begin returning to take up positions at home. In the meantime, so desperate is the government that it has begun bringing selected groups of former civil servants back from reeducation camps where they have been held for more than five years, to reintegrate them into the civil service, often in responsible positions. Some who returned to Vientiane in this way have taken the first opportunity to cross to Thailand, but others have stayed to serve the communist regime.

The shortage of trained personnel in Laos and the low level of education of so many cadres of the LPRP have meant that decisions can often only be taken by senior officials. Even technical decisions have often to be referred to vice-ministerial levels. This bottleneck in decision-making has retarded aid projects and reduced administrative efficiency. It has also opened the way for foreign advisers to take decisions which would normally be the preserve of the Lao.

Laos' economic dependency has facilitated the progressive integration of the Lao economy into that of Vietnam. While the geographic location of major Lao population centres along the Mekong has meant that economic relations with Thailand have remained important, communications with Vietnam are steadily being improved. This must eventually lead to Lao economic dependency on Thailand being exchanged for dependency upon Vietnam. But over and above this structural change, Laos' economic dependency in general leaves the country open to the whims of donor nations. Essential projects may not be undertaken because they are not sufficiently conspicuous, or not of propaganda value. Decisions vital to Laos are taken by foreigners, for reasons other than the Lao national interest. And if the Lao object, or push for alternative projects, they run the risk of losing what the donor wishes to give. Thus at present, in the economic area as much as in any other field, Lao national interests risk being compromised by the country's continuing international dependency.

(iii) National identity

Through the accidents of history Laos today includes within its borders no more than 15 percent of that ethnic group which can be identified as culturally and linguistically Lao. Eighty-five percent inhabit the sixteen northeastern provinces of Thailand. The 15 percent of ethnic Lao (the Lao Loum) in Laos make up only just over half the population of the country. The balance comprises sixty odd different minority groups divided into three major divisions - the Hill Tai who speak languages closely akin to Lao; the Lao Soung (Lao of the mountain heights) including groups such as the Hmong (Meo) and Yao speaking Sinitic languages; and the Lao Theung (Lao of the lower slopes) speaking Austronesian languages. Traditionally these groups have been suspicious of any central authority, be it Lao or French. As for the Lao, they have despised the Lao Theung minority groups as Kha (a perjorative term meaning, literally, "slaves"), and generally looked down on the others.

During the thirty years of guerrilla warfare which the Pathet Lao waged against the former Royal Lao government, the Lao communist movement was particularly dependent upon the hill tribes for support. The Pathet Lao both exploited the resentment of the hill tribes against the central government, and more positively formulated a policy of national integration which drew them into the political life of the LPRD and its front organisations. None recognised better than the PL that much of the success of the revolutionary movement depended upon the strategic and tactical use made of mountain terrain and its tribal population.(30) Pathet Lao control of the mountainous northern and eastern parts of the country prevented the Royal Lao government from pursuing any policy of national integration, even had they wanted to. As it was, what popular support the government had derived entirely from the Lao Loum community. Even the Hmong who supported the government did so principally for the sake of their CIA subsidies.

De facto political division of the country until 1975 effectively limited any moves towards national integration, even on the part of the Pathet Lao. Thus the new regime has discovered that considerable opposition to their policies has come from the

Lao Loum, not only from members of the middle class (mainly government servants and army officers) who fled to Thailand, but also from the peasantry (against controls over petty commerce, taxation, and cooperativization). (31) Only gradually did the present government come to see that the relaxation of economic controls and the ending of the co-operativization drive were important in gaining wider popular support among the Lao Loum. Equally important are attempts to raise living standards for the hill tribes, and an end to forced resettlement, in order to defuse any division between the tribes and yet another predominantly Lao Loum government in Vientiane.

But if national integration is to be effective it must be based upon the search for a new national identity, one which will not depend upon a cultural tradition confined to the Lao Loum. The basis of such an approach is being laid by historical studies purporting to show that Laos has always been inhabited by Lao - understanding by Lao all those who live in Laos, irrespective of ethnic affiliation. This circular approach can be used to defend the Lao right to their country in the face of both Thai and Vietnamese claims and encroachments, but it does risk running counter to the Vietnamese emphasis upon Indochinese solidarity, and perhaps to longer term Vietnamese ambitions. The Lao authorities must thus move carefully in attempting to ensure that the "new socialist man" which the regime hopes will emerge through the socialist transformation of Lao society (32) will be recognizably and identifiably Lao, and not some pale provincial replica of "Vietnamese socialist man".

Moves in this direction at present are along two lines: through education, and through culture. A real effort is being made to ensure universal primary education and adult literacy on the one hand, and ethnically mixed schooling with equal opportunities for higher studies for all ethnic groups on the other. But here again, in syllabus development and teaching, the same tension between the newly developing nationalism essential to a new national identity and Indochinese solidarity is evident. In the field of culture an interesting stress is apparent upon Lao traditions, of all ethnic groups. Tribal handicrafts are encouraged. Buddhism is no longer suppressed as it was particularly in 1976. The new Lao National Revolutionary Museum begins with a floor devoted to traditional culture. And the new war memorial to those who died in the revolutionary struggle is in the form of specifically Lao Buddhist stupa. These may be small points, but together they add up to a willingness on the part of the communist regime to promote a national identity that will be distinctively Lao.

CONCLUSION: MAINTAINING THE BALANCE

The present leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party is acutely aware of the nation's role in the world communist movement. There are good ideological reasons in Marxist theory, as well as historical reasons stemming from the Lao experience of international support during their revolutionary struggle, why they should accept the responsibilities this entails. In addition, however, recognition of the position of Laos at the frontier of communism in Southeast Asia enables the Lao authorities to

argue that it is in the interests of international communist solidarity to construct and defend socialism in Laos. In effect this is to use international responsibilities for national ends. But for the Lao there is an inherent danger in such a move. The Soviet bloc countries of Eastern Europe are far away, but Vietnam is a neighbouring state. If Vietnam were to assume sole responsibility in assuring the construction and defence of socialism in Laos, then there is a grave possibility that Lao national interests would be sacrificed to those of Vietnam.

To avoid such a fate, the Lao revolutionary elite which now runs the country has been obliged to face the challenge of maintaining a precarious balance between internationalist (Vietnamese) demands for Indochinese solidarity, and Lao nationalist interests. Three areas where the tension between these two is evident are in political consolidation of power, economic development, and the forging of a new Lao national identity. In all three areas international dependency places pressures upon Lao national interests, pressures which Laos finds it extremely difficult to resist. Nevertheless there is evidence that the Lao authorities are increasingly aware of the need to maintain a balance. Even Kaysone, long identified as being strongly pro-Vietnamese, stated in his speech marking the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic that "in the present world, there exists no model indicating the way to progress towards socialism for a small, economically backward country newly emerged from the trials of a long and brutal war".(33) No longer, perhaps, does Indochinese solidarity entail for Lao communists the necessary acceptance of Vietnamese guidance and advice, with the implication these have of continuing Vietnamese domination. Political consolidation through the legitimation provided by popular acceptance and support, and the need to evolve a new Lao national identity in which all ethnic groups may equally share, have both forced a recognition of the need to balance nationalist interests against international pressures, especially in the light of Laos' unavoidable economic dependency. But this is not a new problem. Previous Lao governments faced a similar challenge - and failed to meet it. The price of their failure was political demise: but the ultimate price of failure for the present government could be national extinction.

FOOTNOTES

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1. Kaysone Phomvihane, *La Révolution Lao* (Moscow: Editions de Progrès, 1980), pp. 45-46.
2. *Documents sur le 25e Anniversaire de la Fondation du Parti Populaire Révolutionnaire Lao* (Vientiane: Editions en Langues Etrangères, 1980), passim.
3. Kaysone, *La Révolution Lao*, p. 184.

4. See, for example, commentaries in the Lao Party journal *Sieng Pasason* broadcast over Vientiane Radio on 1 and 11 December 1976 (Foreign Broadcasts Information Service, 8 and 14 December 1976).
5. For texts of these agreements see *Khaosan Pathet Lao*, Bulletin Quotidien, 8 January and 5 April 1979.
6. *Facts on File*, 30 March 1979, p. 229.
7. For the published text of this Treaty see Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Canberra, *Vietnam News Bulletin* no. 27, 3 August 1977. Also Nayan Chanda, "Laos, Vietnam: Best of Friends", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 July 1977.
8. For an expression of this position see the Joint Declaration by the Foreign Ministers of Kampuchea, Laos and Vietnam carried in *The Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 10 (1980), pp. 477-480.
9. For a detailed discussion of Chinese actions and intentions in Laos, see Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos in China's Anti-Vietnam Strategy", *Asia Pacific Community*, no. 11 (1981), pp. 83-104.
10. *Beijing Review*, vol. 23, no. 43, 27 October 1980, p. 11.
11. John McBeth, "Squeezing the Vietnamese", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 December 1980.
12. For a discussion of these events see Martin Stuart-Fox, "The Vietnamese Connection" in Leo Suryadinata (ed), *Southeast Asian Affairs 1980* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies/Heinemann, 1980), pp. 191-209.
13. In March 1973 the government arrested ex-king Savang Vathana who, since his abdication had been living in Luang Prabang, on charges of being in contact with pro-monarchist rebels who had earlier briefly occupied a village south of the town. See John Everingham, "Royalists Rankle the Regime", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 March 1977.
14. See *Sieng Pasason*, 15 June 1979 (Joint Publications Research Service, South and East Asia Report no. 835), 10 August 1979, p. 56.
15. See the survey published in P-B. Lafont, "Images Laotiennes", *Revue de Psychologie des Peuples*, vol. 21 (1966), pp. 472-488.
16. As many as 3 000 former Pathet Lao soldiers may have deserted. See John McBeth, "Laos: The Government Under Guard", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 August 1979.
17. See Frances L. Starner, "A Crisis of Leadership", *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, no. 73 (June 1980), pp. 28-30.
18. These developments have been treated at length in Martin Stuart-Fox and Rod Bucknell, "Politicization of the Buddhist Sangha in Laos", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, forthcoming.
19. For an account of earlier problems see John Everingham, "A Struggle in Microcosm", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 April 1976.
20. The exchange rate for the Banque Nationale kip is officially pegged at 10 to the $U.S., but a rebate of 40 percent is given (the figure at the end of 1980) for international transactions, thus bringing the effective rate to 14 to the $U.S. On the black market at the same time the rate stood at between 20 and 22 to the $U.S.
21. International Monetary Fund, *Lao People's Democratic Republic Recent Economic Developments*, restricted report SM/80/174, 22 July 1980, pp. 21-22.
22. Ibid., p. 29. Continuous budget and current account deficits have led to chronic inflation and an unstable monetary situation in Laos. In five years there have been three forms of currency in circulation and three devaluations.
23. Ibid., p. 35.
24. Ibid., p. 30, table 18. A translation of the text of the Party's Seventh Resolution can be found in Foreign Broadcasts Information Service, 18 January 1980 and special supplement 8 February 1980.

25. For the current state of negotiations see Marcel Barang, "Laos: Electric Sales", *South* no. 3, December 1980.
26. Michael Morrow, "Changing the Course of the Mekong", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 September 1975.
27. For complete information on rice production in Laos for the years 1978 to 1980, see Asian Development Bank, *Economic Report on Lao People's Democratic Republic*. Restricted report no. LAO: Ec-4, May 1980, p. 98, appendix 22. Also pp. 46-51.
28. Kaysone Phomvihane, Eighth Resolution of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, special issue of *Sieng Pasason*, 14 January 1981.
29. Ordinance no. 408 of the Council of Ministers of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 28 November 1980, *Khaosan Pathet Lao*, Bulletin Quotidien, 29 November and 1 and 2 December 1980.
30. That the post-1975 program of tribal integration has not been as effective as had been hoped has been due to the failure of the government to meet expectations for improved living standards among its supporters, or to convince its former enemies among the Hmong and other tribal groups of the genuineness of its stated policy of national reconciliation. For a discussion of the role of hill tribes in the revolutionary wars of Indochina, see Gary D. Wekkin, "Tribal Politics in Indochina: The Role of Highland Tribes in the Internationalization of Internal Wars", in Mark W. Zacher and R.S. Milne (eds), *Conflict and Stability in Southeast Asia* (New York: Anchor Press, 1975), pp. 121-147.
31. For a discussion of this opposition see Martin Stuart-Fox, "The Initial Failure of Agricultural Cooperativization in Laos", *Asia Quarterly* no. 4 (1980).
32. To be effective via the "Three revolutions" - in the mode of production, in science and technology, and in culture and ideology. The third of these aims is to produce "a new socialist man". On these three revolutions in Laos, see Kaysone, *La Revolution Lao*, pp. 200-210.
33. Kaysone Phomvihane, Speech in celebration of the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2 December 1980. *Khaosan Pathet Lao*, Bulletin Quotidien, 3 December 1980, p. 8.