



# LAOS'S FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE: FROM 1975 TO 2000

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by

Vixayphongmany Alouni

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## **Abstract**

By the end of the Cold War, Laos's foreign policy has expanded and diversified its diplomatic relations with foreign countries around the world. After establishing the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the comprehensive picture of Laos's foreign policy change has portrayed an image of a small country being influenced by its neighbor, Vietnam. Both regional and external powers have played a crucial role in bringing the changes to Laos, yet it does not explain in detail how and why the changes happened. Given the presumptions of the existing scholars on the heavily influenced by those socialist countries, this thesis raises the question: Did Laos's foreign policy change? How did it change? And why did it change? This thesis argues that the changes in Laos cannot be explained simply as responses to the changes of the external powers, but it should be understood as calculated responses to the nexus between domestic and external factors. This argument counters the existing literature that overlooks the domestic changes inside Laos, and Laos's foreign policy is not just a reflection of its socialist partners. This thesis analyzes the evolution of Laos's foreign policy through a historical narrative. This thesis has made its utmost efforts to give detailed descriptions and analyze domestic and external impacts on the changes of Laos's foreign policy.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFP	Agent France Press
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
AGL	Allianz General Laos
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDNI	Committee for the Defense of the National Interest
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMEA/COMECON	Council for Economic and Mutual Assistance
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
CPV	Community Party of Vietnam
EU	European Union
FEOF	Foreign Exchange Operation Fund
FLF	Free Lao Front
GBC	General Border Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
ICC	International Control Committee
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JBC	Joint Boundary Commission
JC	Joint Commission
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JIM	Jakarta Informal Meeting
JNPC	Joint National Political Council
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LDCs	Least Developed Countries



LPLA	Lao People’s Liberation Army
LPP	Lao People’s Party
LPRP	Lao People’s Revolutionary Party
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NEM	New Economic Mechanism
OECE	Oversea Economic Cooperation Fund
PEO	Programs Evaluation Office
PGNU	Provisional Government of National Union
PKO	United Nations Peacekeeping Operations
POW/MIA	Prisoners of War/Missing-in-Action
PRC	People’s Republic of China
RLG	Royal Lao Government
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USOM	United States Operation Mission
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WTO	World Trade Organization
YSEALI	Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

### **1. Introduction**

The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive picture of the foreign policy of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). This study conducts an in-depth analysis of the changes and continuities in the foreign policy of Laos from 1975 to 2000. In addition, this study explores structural backgrounds in the international environment as well as the domestic politics behind the evolution of the Lao PDR's foreign policy since the establishment of the Lao PDR in December 1975. In doing so, this thesis argues that Laos's foreign policy changes are not a simple reflection of the international environment and that the national interests pursued by the Lao leaders were formulated by complex calculation within the nexus of the international and domestic environment. In other words, it aims to counter the often-expressed view in the existing literature, which says that Laos's foreign policy can be explained mostly by the move of its powerful neighbor, Vietnam.

This study explores the empirical evidence collected from primary documents, personal interviews, and secondary sources. This thesis discloses the discussions of the Lao PDR's leaders in conceptualizing and formulating Laos's foreign policy through different phases since the birth of the Lao PDR. This thesis explains the changes and continuities of Laos's foreign policy by examining both the external and internal factors. Without such examination, it argues, it is impossible to explicate why Laos sided with different countries in different periods. It is a story of difficulty struggle of a small country

burdened by a history full of destructive war and instability within a complex international politics involving the great powers and regional powers.

### **1.1 Literature Review**

Laos is landlocked country situated in the hub of the Greater Mekong Sub-region and of the Southeast Asia region. Since the establishment of the Lao PDR, many Western scholars have interpreted the Laos's foreign policy as something heavily influenced by those other socialist countries, like Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Although Western scholars have made numerous analyzes of Laos's foreign policy, their explanations often leave many issues unanswered. Dommen (1979) asserts that after signing the Friendship and Cooperation with Vietnam in 1977 "Laos has become a satellite of Vietnam... the puppet government in Vientiane applauds Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia and supports Vietnamese propaganda against China, in tune with Moscow's efforts to isolate the Beijing government in Southeast Asia." Stuart-fox (1996) also argues that there is "no clear analytical distinction existed between policies adopted despite the constraints imposed by Indochinese (predominantly Vietnamese) interests and those taken in furtherance of these interests. This was because Lao foreign policy was formulated to take account of both Lao and wider Indochinese (particularly Vietnamese) interests." Scholars like Gunn (1991), Neher and Marlay (1995), Jerndal and Rigg (1998), and Emmers (2005) also treated Lao foreign policy as being predominantly influenced by Vietnam. They posited that Lao relations had been determined mainly by Vietnam's actions and policies, thus viewing Laos as a subservient client-state of Vietnam (Neher and Marley 1995, p. 163).

Abuza (2003) and Pholsena and Banomyong (2006) analyze Lao foreign policy in the post-Cold War and the reasons behind Laos's ASEAN membership. Abuza (2003) argues that Laos would have never joined ASEAN, without Vietnam having done so first and Laos never takes a diplomatic lead to contradict or preempts Hanoi's position (Abuza 2003, p. 181).

As these authors pointed out, the influence of Vietnam is generally substantial. How could it be otherwise given geographic proximity, intricate history, and power difference? But as this thesis demonstrates, Laos made many diplomatic initiatives independent of the moves of Vietnam. The simple view that Laos always emulates Vietnam does not explain, for example, its normalization with China prior to Vietnam. This shortcoming of the existing literature does not fully explain why Laos chose to side with the socialist community during different phases of Laos's foreign policy and why Laos chose to formulate and implement its foreign policy under the concept of Lao national interests. This can be understood by examining the external and internal factors. Further, this existing assumption also creates a problem: If Laos is incapable of taking a diplomatic lead, how did Laos manage to maintain diplomatic relations with the US, Thailand, and China without Hanoi doing so first?

Thus, unfortunately, the strategy of Laos is often overlooked and has not been studied in detail by external observers. Hence, this paper attempts to fill the shortcomings of the existing literature by examining Laos's foreign policy change and continuity in economic and political dimensions by analyzing the transformation of the economic and political strategy of Laos since the mid-1970s, theoretically and empirically.

## **1.2 Laos's Foreign Policy Making Structure**

The goals and actions taken by the Lao government to implement its foreign policy can be explained by the key actors involved in the formulation of Laos's foreign policy. In formulating Laos's foreign policy, as this thesis demonstrates in the following chapters, Kaysone Phomvihane's thought played a crucial role in Lao diplomacy. The revolutionary life of Kaysone Phomvihane represents a combination of Marxism-Leninism associated with the patriotic and revolutionary movements in Laos, which he believed strongly that the success of the Lao revolution was to aim at the emancipation of nation, class, society, and people. Laos's foreign policy is significantly influenced by the Marxism-Leninism theory with "Kaysone Phomvihane's thought." The Politburos of the Central Committee of the LPRP always place importance on maintaining a moderate role by calculating the benefits and costs of each consequence. The Lao PDR is ruled under a one-party system, and the foreign policy decisions are decided in the Congress of the LPRP. In accordance with the regulation of the LPRP, the Politburos plays a dominant role in the decision-making process of Laos's foreign policy under the guidance of the General-Secretary of the LPRP. According to the National Constitution of the Lao PDR, the General-Secretary of the LPRP, the ruling party, also serves as the President of the Republic and the Chairman of the National Defense and Public Security Council, plays a more significant and influential role in the decision-making of both domestic and foreign affairs.

On the other hand, despite the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos acts as an information provider to the Politburos and the government of Laos, the Foreign Minister still takes a leading role in Laos's foreign affairs, serving as one of the Politburo members. Overall, the decision-making process is supposed to be made through collective decision-

making. Also, the changes in the leadership of the LPRP is not supposed to have a major effect on changes in Laos's foreign policy.

### **1.3 The Argument**

This thesis challenges the conventional wisdom on Laos's foreign policy. Laos's foreign policy changes are shaped by the confluence of both the external and domestic factors that helped the Lao leaders analyze the changing environment and shift their policies. Laos's foreign policy change is not a simple reflection of the changes in Vietnam or other countries in the socialist community. In other words, though a small socialist country, Laos's foreign policy is not a simple derivative of some other countries. Laos, a landlocked country located at the hub of the Greater Mekong Sub-region surrounded by countries with different socio-political systems, was invaded and occupied by old and neo-colonialists for many years. Therefore, external factors often have a dominant influence on Laos. But that does not necessarily mean that Laos simply follows the external factors. This thesis argues the complexity of the geostrategic environment in the region gives Laos room for its maneuvers. It is true that Laos has fewer resources and influence than those powers in the region. Still, with its limited resources, Laos was able to promote its interests through its diplomatic channels and maintain relations with the great powers. Laos effectively used its limited power resources and found opportunities to overcome the huge difficulties. Laos had to go through many territorial disputes with its neighboring countries, but Laos was competent in the diplomatic arena in order to pursue and protect its national interests.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Study**

In this thesis, the changes of Laos's foreign policy can be divided into five phases. In first phase of Laos foreign policy in 1975, after the establishment of the Lao PDR, the Lao government declared its foreign policy to follow and gave importance to the Non-aligned Movement (NAM). But by the beginning of 1980s, Laos's foreign policy change to a socialist-oriented one. Then in 1986, Laos began to change its foreign policy again to an open-up and cooperative policy. By the late 1980s, Laos shifted to expand and diversify by implementing a foreign policy of "peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation with all countries based on the principles of peaceful co-existence; respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit." Then, by the 1990s, Laos adopted a diplomacy of "multidirectional, multilateral, and multi-level cooperation, to create the favorable environment in implementing the country's two main strategic tasks."

#### **1.5 Methodology**

This study uses the historical narrative approach as the research methodology to understand the evolution of Lao foreign policy and Lao diplomacy since the birth of the Lao PDR. The timeframe for this research is conducted from 1975 to 2000. This study explores the empirical evidence collected from primary documents, personal interviews, and secondary sources.

First, the researcher collected most of the primary documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos, the LPRP Central Committee's Library, and the National Institute of Politics and Public Administration Library. To understand the nature of Laos's foreign policy or Lao diplomacy in general, it is best to understand the nature of the

history of Lao diplomacy. Moreover, it explains the nature of history from different perspectives from other foreign sources. Thus, as these documents I use have not been used by previous literature and they can shed new lights in explaining Laos's diplomacy.

Second, I conducted in-depth interviews with three outstanding former diplomats: Mr. Somsavad Lengsavath, a former Ambassador of Laos to Bulgaria, former Foreign Minister of Laos, former Politburo member of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and former Standing Vice Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, Mr. Phongsavath Boupha, a former Ambassador of Laos to China, former Vice Foreign Minister of Laos and former Minister to the President of the Lao PDR's Office, and Mr. Alounkeo Kittikhoun, a former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to the UN, former Vice Foreign Minister of Laos, former Lao ASEAN SOM Leader and former Minister to the Prime Minister's Office. All of the interviews were conducted face to face. The purpose of the interviews was to gain useful information and insights in finding the key findings to the unreachable questions that were unable to answer, such as fitting the existing literature gap.

Third, this thesis's secondary sources helped demonstrate the gap and provide useful data and information that was difficult to obtain. I consulted most of the literature made by Western scholars and journals and magazines such as the Asian Survey, Southeast Asian Affairs, and the Far Eastern Economic Review. Books and Newspapers by domestic scholars were also helpful in writing this thesis.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

### *Main inquiries*

**Did Laos change its foreign policy from 1975 to 2000?**



- How did it change? And why did it change?

#### **Phase one (1975-1982)**

- Why did Laos decide to align with the Non-Aligned Movement despite its goal of advancing to socialism?
- Why didn't Laos pursue a pro-Soviet policy immediately after the establishment of the Lao PDR?

#### **Phase Two (1982-1986)**

- How did the external developments in Cambodia force Laos to side with the Soviet Union?
- Why did Laos decide to pursue a socialist-oriented policy? And was it rational for Laos to side with the Soviet Union?

#### **Phase Three (1986-1991)**

- Why did Laos choose to change its foreign policy despite its stance with the Soviet Union?
- How did Laos manage to normalize its relations with China before Vietnam?

#### **Phase Four (1991-1996)**

- How did the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War affect the change?
- Why was Laos interested in joining ASEAN?

#### **Phase Five (1996-2000)**

- How has Laos view ASEAN membership as a strategic choice for its integration and diversification?
- How did Laos use ASEAN as a leverage to expand their relations with other dialogue partners?

Overall this thesis is organized into eight chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter II (Covering the Pre-1975 period) examines the background of Laos' domestic and international politics and how domestic politics played a crucial role in understanding the struggle for the LPRP to achieve independence. Chapter III (Phase One 1975-1982) starts with the analysis the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and explains how the new government strove to initiate its first five-point foreign policy, which gave birth to a new phase of Lao diplomacy in following the neutral and non-aligned stance in the international arena in order to have enough time to recover and heal its wounds from devastating wars. Chapter IV (Phase Two 1982-1986) investigates how Laos utilized the Soviet Union and Vietnam in advancing towards socialism and how its relations took a downturn with Thailand over the border disputes of the three villages in 1984. Chapter V (Phase Three 1986-1991) begins with an investigation into the economic transformation happening in the socialist countries, particularly in the Soviet Union and Vietnam, and the border dispute between Laos and Thailand in 1987. It explores the diplomatic normalization between Laos and China and how a small country like Laos used its diplomacy to help Vietnam restoring its relations with China. Chapter VI (Phase Four 1991-1996) examines the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist countries and how it affected Laos's foreign policy and diplomacy in diversifying its relations as revealed in its relations with ASEAN. The chapter also analyzes the signing and ratification of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Laos and Thailand and the first-ever state visit of the Thai King to the Lao PDR. It also scrutinized the importance of Laos and developed countries such as Japan, France, and the U.S. in expanding its external relations. Chapter VII (Phase Five 1996-2000) investigates how Laos became a full member of ASEAN in 1997 and used ASEAN and

a foreign policy leverage to pursue its national interest at the regional and international level. It also mentioned the rocky relationship between Laos and Thailand over the incident in Vangtao-Chong Mek International Checkpoint in 2000. Further, this chapter also discusses the enhanced relations between Laos and other countries and international organizations. Chapter VIII is the conclusion. It summarizes the findings and the answers to the research questions.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Pre-1975 Domestic and International Politics of Laos**

#### **2. Introduction**

Before addressing Laos's foreign policy changes, it is important to understand Lao diplomacy's basic history dated back in time linked to its history and national independence struggle. Since immemorial time, the Lao people's ancestors have fought to preserve their identity until the present, fighting for their own land, building their population, culture, and creating their own writing script that reflects their identity. Although the country was under the suzerainty and colonies of foreign countries for nearly 200 years, the ethnic Lao people were desperately fought against Siam from 1779 to 1893, under the leadership of King Anouvong in 1827, and the French from 1893 to 1953. Moreover, these resistance movements failed many times and were unorganized with no lessons learned and successes. However, it was considered a valuable lesson for future generations fighting against invaders' oppression.

From the beginning of the 1950s, the US intervened in Laos's internal affairs causing political and economic distress, then took advantage of the Indochina War by destroying the country through their Secret War on Laos's territory. Furthermore, the Cold War also influenced the domestic politics of Laos. It was shaped by the influence of two superpowers' foreign policy, and the Civil War in Laos itself was one of the major theaters for major countries to contest the political influence and intervene in domestic affairs. Therefore, to understand the changes in Laos's foreign policy after 1975 and the establishment of the new government on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1975 under the leadership

of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), it is crucial to understand how complex and challenging the birth of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).

## **2.1 Laos Under the French Administrative (1893-1954)**

During the French colonial rule in Indochina, France divided the area into five regions and territories: the Tonkin Region with Hanoi as the capital, the Annam Region with Hue as the Capital, the Cochinchina Region with Saigon as the Capital and the Cambodia Territory and the Lao territory. Laos was the fifth territory of the French Indochina, which was included officially by Paul Doumer, Governor-General of the French Indochina, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1899.<sup>1</sup> The French divided Laos's territory without considering any social and historical criteria or the Lao people multi-ethnic's national unity. The French succeeded in establishing over Vietnam and Cambodia by 1958 and 1863, respectively. From there, the French also sent their forces to over-run Lao territory. After that, they exerted pressure on the Siamese to recognize their right to the Mekong river's eastern part, and the territories on the left bank of the Mekong river belongs to the Kingdom of Laos. By 1893, the French declared Laos as part of their colonial possession in Indochina.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the French divided the Kingdom of Laos for the convenience of their rule. To perpetuate their colonial domination, the French played the game of "divide and rule." Sensing that the Kingdom of Luang Prabang was

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<sup>1</sup> Phonekeo, K. (2014). *Pavaset Lao Doy Nyor* [A Lao History in Brief]. Banthai Xouanpangna Press, p. 158 & p.164.

<sup>2</sup> France and Siam signed a treaty on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1893, renouncing from claiming the territory on the left bank of the Mekong river violated the fundamental right of the multi-ethnic Lao people. They did not consider the consequences of the people inhabiting there. However, the treaty was not ratified until the second treaty was signed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1907, and there has not been renegotiation of the border agreement since then. The 1907 agreement has always been used as legal evidence for Laos and Thailand until now.

stronger than Vientiane and Champassak, the French split Lao territory into two administrative parts. The first part, the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, was allowed to retain a form of feudal governance as a French Protectorate with the King as its head. Vientiane and Champassak were brought under direct French administration. Therefore, bringing the whole administration under the umbrella of French Résident Supérieur, based in Vientiane and working under the French Governor-General's control and guidance in Hanoi.<sup>3</sup>

The French did not devote resources to education, causing 96% of Lao people to be illiterate due to a limited number of primary and lower secondary schools, even in the big cities. Many students were also unable to obtain sufficient education and failed to pursue higher education. However, even in some big cities, those who attended high school also unable to graduate. Consequently, only a limited number of the population, members of the royal families, and those working in the French administration had the opportunity to study abroad in Phnom Penh, Hanoi, or Saigon. There was no university out of the whole country, and the French had set up only one “Centre National d’Etude Politique, Administrative et Juridique” (National Centre for Politics, Administrative and Judiciary Studies) in Vientiane to train administrators, secretaries, and French interpreters.<sup>4</sup> Also, the health sector was underdeveloped. The hospital was set up to serve only the rulers, leaving individuals to rely on occult, witchcraft, or traditional medicines.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the dissatisfaction bred by the French Administration, with its ethically distinguishable layers, can be measured to some degree by the outbreak of tribal revolts

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<sup>3</sup> Phonekeo, K. (2014). *Pavasat Lao Doy Nhor* [A Lao History in Brief]. Banthai Xouanpangna Press, p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 7.

in the first decades of the 1900s.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the outbreak of tribal revolts of Phor Kaduad from 1901 to 1903, the revolt of Ong Keo in 1907, the revolt of Ong Kommadam in 1910.

On the other hand, under the French Indochina, many aspects of economic, cultural, and social conditions in Laos lagged behind and were retarded compared to other regions. For instance, in the Lao territory and Tonkin area, the French encouraged ethnic groups, especially Hmong, to change their subsistence agriculture to cash crop opium farming. In particular, forcing these labors to depend on using and consuming opium, making the Hmong retarded to serve benefits and generate income for French. After that, the French began their opium monopoly in the country. According to Alfred McCoy (1972) *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, “At the beginning of the World War II Indochina’s 2,500 opium den and retail shops were still maintaining more than 100,000 addicts and providing 15% of all tax revenues. The French imported almost 60 tons of opium annually from Iran and Turkey to supply the vast enterprise...While smuggled Yunnanese opium might solve the addicts’ problem, the Opium Monopoly needed a more controllable source of supply. The only solution was to induce the Meo (Hmong) of Laos and northwest Tonkin to expand their opium production. And in 1940 the Opium Monopoly proceeded to do just that. This policy was a substantial success. Indochina’s opium production jumped from 7.5 tons in 1940 to 60.6 tons in 1944—an 800% increase in four years. This was enough to maintain an adequate supply for Indochina’s 100,000-

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<sup>6</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Star, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Hoover Press Publication, p. 10.

plus addicts and produce a steady rise in government opium revenues—from 15 million piasters in 1939 to 24 million in 1943.”<sup>7</sup>

During the Second World War, Indochina’s situation also took a new turn because France surrendered to Nazi Germany. This opened a way for the Japanese Army to occupy French Indochina with ease. Japan invaded Vietnam on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 1945 and then invaded Laos via Houaphanh and Xieng Khuang provinces. Another route that enters into Laos was through Nong Khai province, Thailand, where it clashes with the French troops at Thadeua, Vientiane. In the clashes, the French Army Commander was killed, and the French armed force was dispersed. After arriving in Laos, without any bargaining with the French, Japan launched a coup d’état throughout Indochina to overthrow the French on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, 1945. The French rulers and soldiers fled into the jungle and depended on the Chiang Kai-shek troops. However, some of the French were also captured by the Japanese.<sup>8</sup> The Japanese, during their four-months domination over Laos, restructured the French administrative machinery. There were two objectives behind this. The first was to demonstrate that the Japanese had emancipated the Lao people from French misrule, and would respect the traditions, customs, and aspirations of the Lao without interference in their internal affairs. There was even a case when a Japanese soldier charged with committing atrocities against Lao, was punished in public. Secondly, the Japanese appointed Lao officials of the French administration to occupy important positions.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Japanese military affirmed to “help Laos gain independence,

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<sup>7</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, pp. 77-78.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Boupha P. *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., p. 21.



and build the country under the framework of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.”<sup>10</sup>

In addition, after the start of the Second World War, when Japan invaded Indochina, it encouraged the Lao people to go against the wishes of the pro-French Lao King to declare independence from France. Since then, it gave birth to one of the Lao nationalism, Prince Phetsarath. Prince Phetsarath, the son of the Viceroy<sup>11</sup> Bounkhong, who played significant leading political and administrative roles in the Kingdom of Luang Prabang during the protectorate of the French in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, Prince Phetsarath did not receive his position as the Viceroy until 1941. After his return from France in 1913 as a graduate of the elite Ecole Colonial in Paris, he was given a variable position in the Civil Service such as the colonial administrator in the office of the Résident Supérieur and then later became the Indigenous Inspector of Political and Administrative Affairs. As an Indigenous Inspector, his first priority was to increase the number of Lao people in the bureaucracy by training and to promote Lao civil servants in place of the Vietnamese after its colonizing Indochina.<sup>12</sup> By the time he was promoted as the head of the Lao Civil Service and adviser to the French, he became the most powerful figure in the Kingdom. However, the internal conflict between the Royal and Vice-royal lines did not favor Prince Phetsarath because of the King of Luang Prabang. King Sisavangvong had the privilege to rule his Kingdom as the head of the Kingdom and was under a French Protectorate because the rest of Laos was ruled as a colony. The King has always appeared

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> In a traditional ruling hierarchy of Laos, the position of viceroy was virtual that Crown Prince or successor to the king. In the ruling structure, the top five positions were those of the King, Upahat (Viceroy), Ratsavong and Ratsabut (Ministers of the Right and Left).

<sup>12</sup> Dommen, A. J. (1985). *Laos: Keystone of Indochina*. Westview Press, p. 32.

himself as the King of Luang Prabang, but never as the King of Laos to the Lao people. Under his Kingdom, the King would have carried out his administrative force with his son's assistance, the Crown Prince Savang Vatthana, who then served as the Palace Secretariat. Consequently, as the conflict grew deeper between the King and Crown Prince and Prince Phetsarath on Laos's independence, the French's power started to decline due to the military triumphs of Nazi Germany in the 1940s. Therefore, this allowed the Japanese to obtain important concessions from the Vichy government in Indochina. With the assistance of the Japanese pressuring the King to declare independence on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1945, on the condition that the French no longer can defend the Kingdom under the 1898 Protectorate Treaty, it shifted the Lao people's position to both joyfulness and disappointment. Prince Phetsarath expected to unite the whole land of Laos, including all the Kingdoms, to be an indivisible country. However, when the King rejected his proposal on the Kingdom's unification, this continues to deteriorate his relationship with the King, who sought to return as a French Protectorate.

The impact of the Second World War on the Thai arena led to divisions and conflicts in its political circles and administration. Field Marshal Phibun Songkram, then Prime Minister of Thailand, decided to collaborate with Japan and accordingly, declared war against the allied forces led by the US and the UK. In reaction to this, Pridi Payomyong, the Regent to the King of Thailand, formed a Thai Seri (Free Thai) movement, which unified progressive and nationalist forces in Thailand to oppose the Prime Minister and fight for the freedom and sovereignty of Thailand. The people of northeastern Thailand called on Lao freedom fighters to form a “Seri Lao” movement to join hands with “Seri Thai” in order to get support from the US, which was then trying to penetrate Laos and Thailand. Encouraged by Lao nationalists in Vientiane and Thailand,

formed an organization with close relations with the “Seri Thai” movement. However, to avoid duplication of the Thai name, Lao nationalists decided on a variation and called themselves the “Lao Issara”<sup>13</sup> (Free Lao).<sup>14</sup>

In Asia, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1945, the Japanese government recognized the Potsdam Treaty, and unconditionally signed the letter of surrender. In Europe, the Soviet Red Army’s victory over Nazi Germany also led to the Germans’ surrender. Their victory has contributed to the liberation of Eastern European countries and gave a valuable lesson for the Indochinese people. These events paved the way for the Lao people and the Vietnamese to rise and fight for their independence. Under the Indochina Communist Party’s leadership, the Vietnamese people rose in Hanoi on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1945. Then, after their victory, the northern part of Vietnam was proclaimed as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, 1945.

On the other hand, in Laos, with their patriotic and enthusiastic spirit, the Lao people rose in the Savannakhet province on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1945, calling for national liberation and independence. Later it extended throughout the country. Therefore, the Lao people of various strata participated in rallies demanded to seize power from Japan and prevented the French from returning.<sup>15</sup> In Savannakhet, the central part of Laos, Kaysone Phomvihane<sup>16</sup> and his delegation met with the Japanese and demanded that Japan give

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<sup>13</sup> According to Stuart-Fox (2008), Lao Issara is the name given to the Lao independence movement opposing the return of Laos to French jurisdiction.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> After initially studying at the Lycee du Protectorat in Hanoi, Kaysone Phomvihane took up the study of law, and in 1942 he participated in the student movement against French colonialism. The Indochina Communist Party cultivated him, and in April 1945 he was sent home to Savannakhet to help take power from the Japanese. He was the Leader of the Lao People’s Party (LPP) in the First 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of the LPP, 1955, General-Secretary of the LPRP from the Second to the Fifth Congress of the LPRP, he was Prime minister of the Lao PDR (1975-1991) and President of the Lao PDR (1991-1992).

the authority back to Laos.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, at the Potsdam Conference of July-August, the US, Britain, and the Soviet Union, in the absence of de Gaulle, decided that the British and the Chinese nationalist forces would enter Indochina to accept the surrender of the Japanese forces there.<sup>18</sup> Later, after the defeat of World War II, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, 1945, Japan surrendered and gave 120 guns with ammunitions to Savannakhet's people, then immediately, the People's Armed Force of Savannakhet was established.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime, part of the French armed forces was preparing to stage a comeback into Laos with the support from the royals who reluctantly continued to cooperate with them, the Indochinese Communist Party was building up armed and political forces. Despite under the leadership of Party's Committee of the Lao territory, politicians, patriotic dignitaries, people from different strata and organizations that included the Vietnamese oversea and the Chinese oversea also participated. However, there was no unity among the participants. The process of taking over power from the foreign invasion caused a lot of political confusion because the situation was still shrouded in political, diplomatic, military influences in connecting with the Japanese troop's withdrawal. At the same time, the British military started to enter Laos and disarmed the Japanese military under the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel according to the Potsdam Treaty in 1945. However, in reality, the British troops secretly camouflage the French army to support and coordinate with the French commandos who had previously been active in Laos. This action was the same tactic that France and Britain had a joint plan to restore

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<sup>17</sup> Phomvihane, K. (1991). *The Son of the People*. The Social Science Commission of the Lao PDR, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Dommen, A. J. (1985). *Laos: Keystone of Indochina*. Westview Press, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Phomvihane, K. (1991). *The Son of the People*. The Social Science Commission of the Lao PDR, p. 27.

their colonial rule since the pre-World War II regime.<sup>20</sup> Also, previously, President Truman also assured General de Gaulle on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, 1945 that the United States would not oppose to the French Provisional Government's policy for reasserting its authority.<sup>21</sup>

Taking advantage of France's difficulties in Indochina, Kuomintang's 93<sup>rd</sup> Division, invaded Laos from the north, nominally to take charge of the surrendering Japanese and simultaneously to occupy the Lao northern provinces of Namtha and Phongsaly. The Kuomintang representatives arrived in Luang Prabang to seek the approval of King Sisavangvong to declare the independence of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang. Given the complexity of the situation, the Lao Issara's leaders, together with Prince Phetsarath, the Viceroy, and the Prime Minister of Luang Prabang, rejected Kuomintang's proposals.<sup>22</sup> They were of the view that the question of independence and national unification had to be resolved with the participation of the great powers. The Lao Issara, then the main political movement, in turn, submitted a proposal to the King of Luang Prabang, urging him to declare independence and national unification.

However, King Sisavangvong did not agree with the proposal and stated that Luang Prabang would maintain as a French Protectorate.<sup>23</sup> When the leadership of the Lao Issara was informed of this, they requested Prince Phetsarath, who was in Vientiane, to declare the unification of Laos on behalf of the Lao people on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1945 without recognizing any French rights in Laos and freeing Laos from any

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<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 31-32.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Hoover Press Publication, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> 3349. (1978). *Ironman of Laos: Prince Phetsarath Ratanavongsa*. (J. B. Murdoch, Trans.). In D. K. Wyatt (Ed.). Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. (n.d.), p. 37.

obligations to France. Panicked by these developments, the French asked King Sisavangvong to summon Prince Phetsarath to Luang Prabang and prevent him from making any political move. Meanwhile, the French declared that they recognized the sovereignty of the King over the whole of Laos. Under France' pressure the King took measures to dismiss Prince Phetsarath from the Viceroy and Premiership.<sup>24</sup>

The immediate outcome of this was that the People's Committee was hurriedly set up in Vientiane to elect national representatives with the aim of forming a government and preparing a draft Constitution. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1945, the Committee sent a letter to the King of Luang Prabang, requesting him to acknowledge to the current state of affairs, accept the draft Constitution, dissolve the old government and recognize the new government that would be formed in accordance with the proposed constitution. In the absence of any positive response from the King, the People's Committee requested Prince Phetsarath to be the head of the government, but the Prince declined to do so unwilling to act against the King although he agreed to be associated with the activities of the Lao Issara movement and the People's Committee through his advice and support. In Vientiane, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1945, the People's Committee held an official ceremony to announce the independence and freedom of Laos simultaneously hoisting a new flag in front of the residence of the Résident Supérieur. The tri-color flag consisted of two red stripes, one at the top and the other at the bottom, with a blue strip in between and a white circle at the center. After the establishment of the Lao PDR, this flag was adopted as the Lao national flag.

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<sup>24</sup> 3349. (1978). *Ironman of Laos: Prince Phetsarath Ratanavongsa*. (J. B. Murdoch, Trans.). In D. K. Wyatt (Ed.). Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. (n.d.), pp. 38-39.

The declaration of independence and freedom on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1945, after more than sixty years of colonial domination received the support of all Lao people and marked a watershed in Lao history. On the same day, the People's Committee also declared the unification of Lao territory and announced changes in the administrative system by adopting the Provisional Constitution of Laos. A new government consisted of 11 Cabinet Ministers. Phaya Khammao, former governor of Vientiane, as Prime Minister, three Princes from Phetsarath's royal line were included in the Cabinet, mutually distrustful groups. The People's Committee invited representatives of the people including officials, soldiers, police, businessmen, senior citizens and others to attend the meeting of the Representative Council, which co-opted 45 representatives to form a Provisional People's Council with Phaya Khoun Philavanh as its chairman.<sup>25</sup> The proclamation of independence by Laos was recognized only by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1945, but relations between the two countries did not develop owing to the threat posed to them by the French armed forces. The Provisional People's Council later passed a resolution deposing the King Sisavangvong eight days later, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, 1945. Ten days later, Prime Minister Khammao issued a decree to establish the Army for the Liberation and Defense of Laos and on the same day, he signed an agreement with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which acknowledged the existence of Vietnam Army detachment in Vientiane, Thakhek, and Savannakhet to protect unified efforts in struggling against the common enemy of Lao-Vietnamese independence.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Hoover Press Publication, p. 32.

From the beginning of 1946, the French reunited their forces in the southern part of Vietnam and Cambodia as they have done in their previous occupation of Indochina. However, this time the French did not invade Laos until their consolidation in southern Vietnam and Cambodia was complete. To facilitate such consolidation, the French concluded an agreement with President Ho Chi Minh on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1946, recognizing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, 1946, the French troops invaded Savannakhet province. Then, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 1946, they mobilized their troops and seize Thakhaek, Khammouan province which is one of the most strategic location. It is the connecting point between the north and the south.<sup>27</sup> However, due to the small number of Lao troops with no modern weapons in Thakhaek, they were unable to go against the French forces. Therefore, at the last minute, Prince Souphanouvong decided to cross the Mekong river by boat and fled to Thailand.<sup>28</sup> The other Lao Issara members also fled to Thailand to ensure their safety and survival. The Free Lao leaders knew the French was going to recaptured main cities of Laos, thus, proposed to King Sisavangvong to re-ascend the throne as the King of Kingdom of Laos in order to preserve the full monarchy.<sup>29</sup> However, the French then was revived in Laos by the end of May 1946. France gave semi-autonomous to the Kingdom of Laos under two categories, the French Union officials and the Lao officials. The French Union officials consisted of judiciary, finance, taxation, public works, middle and higher education and the French Union security forces. These revenues received from such services went to the Union's

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<sup>27</sup> This strategic point was under the direct command of Prince Souphanouvong and during that this time, was the largest battlefield and until today it has been engraved in Lao history.

<sup>28</sup> While crossing the Mekong river, the French troops used the spitfire fighter jet and shot at him.

<sup>29</sup> Before, King Sisavangvong only served as the King to Luang Prabang; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 43.



budget. On the other hand, Lao officials comprised of the King's guards, national armed forces, police force, Lao judiciary, national education, civil servants, ministries and agencies of the Royal Lao Government (RLG). After the French revamped the administrative structure, on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1946, King Sisavangvong issued a decree to hold an election to form a 44-member Constitution Drafting Council to be held in December.

The new Constitution of the RLG was adopted on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1947. This new Constitution did not define the rights and duties of the Lao citizens in any particular, although generally speaking, the Constitution of 1945 was more progressive than that of the 1947. The Constitution of 1945 was drafted with the participation of Lao officials and French advisors and specialists, unlike the Constitution of 1947 was more concerned with the Lao compliance of, and cooperation with the French administration. Most importantly, the 1945 Constitution declared the independence of Laos from France, whereas the 1947 Constitution unequivocally stated that Laos was part of the French Union.

While the Lao Issara members were still in exile in Thailand, spring 1948, the Thai military government of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram further accommodated France by ordering the Lao exile soldiers off Thai soil.<sup>30</sup> During 1948-1949, the Lao Northern Armed Force and the Lao-Vietnamese Joint Armed Force have also been actively building political bases, establishing strongholds, and organizing armed forces in two Northern provinces of Samneua and Phongsaly. While building political bases there, many patriotic Lao people were willing to join the revolution. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of January,

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<sup>30</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Hoover Press Publication, p. 36.

1949, Kaysone Phomvihane became an alternate member of the Indochina Communist Party (six months later, he became a full member on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July). On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, 1949, Kaysone, together with other companions, formed an armed force called the “Rasavong Brigade,” which later became the Lao People’s Liberation Army (LPLA). Therefore, recognizing the importance of this initiative, the Indochina Communist Party agreed to mark the day as the foundation of the LPLA.<sup>31</sup>

In the second half of 1949, the French government invited King Sisavangvong to visit France to sign the Franco-Lao Treaty in Paris on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 1949. This Franco-Lao Treaty recognized Laos’s independence only in form, not in substance since France continues to retain jurisdiction over the matters relating to Lao territories, the right to deploy French armed forces and bases, and protecting the Lao borders. Therefore, some of the ex-Lao Issara members saw that the French government’s recognition of the Kingdom of Laos in the French Union was a tactic aimed at governing Laos for its long-term interests.<sup>32</sup> The 1949 Franco-Lao Treaty thus, divided the members of the Lao Issara. Phaya Khammao Vilay decided to return back to Laos and cooperated with the French because the French administration ensured the safety of those who returned, and granted them amnesty. Therefore, the government of Lao Issara was dissolved on the 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1949.<sup>33</sup> Others like Prince Souphanouvong and ex-Lao Issara believed that Laos’s independence from the French Union was a farce because the French still enjoys critical rights within the country, so they decided to continue their resistance activity along the

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<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 47.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Hoover Press Publication, p. 37.

Lao-Vietnam border and inside the country.<sup>34</sup> While the Lao Issara continued their movement in the jungle, Prince Souphanouvong made his way to Tuyen Quang, Vietnam from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 1950 to convene the Congress of People's Representatives and established a Free Lao Front (Neo Lao Issara) and endorsed a 'Resistance government' of the Pathet Lao.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, Laos also gained international recognition. In 1950, the United States and Britain recognized the independence of Laos as well as other European and Latin American states.<sup>36</sup> In the regional context, the leaders of national liberation movement in Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia have also fought together under the Indochina Communist Party's leadership against the French colonialists to achieve victory. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1951, in order to garner greater support for the fight against France, the three Indochina nations decided to establish the Lao-Vietnam-Cambodia Alliance under the principle foundations of solidarity, mutual support, and assistance, respect of each other's sovereignty as well as enhance the cooperation between peoples and military relations in order to combat the common enemy, the French colonialists. At the Second Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party, in order to implement the resolution of the Congress, a treaty of Alliance was signed to show the strong solidarity of the three Indochinese countries in terms of political, diplomatic, and militaristic cooperation.<sup>37</sup> This Alliance was announced on March, 1951 to committed to struggle

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<sup>34</sup> Prince Phetsarath remained behind in Bangkok until 1956, three years before his death in Laos.

<sup>35</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 78.

<sup>36</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 32.

together against the French colonial power and the “American interventionists”.<sup>38</sup> In the same year, Souvanna Phouma formed his first government.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, as France continues to prolong its rule over Laos and to break the resistance movement, the French administration signed a new Franco-Lao Treaty on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, 1953. This administrative system was then recognized by the United States, Britain, and Thailand as the formal independence on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, 1953, and agreed to exchange their Ambassadors with the RLG.<sup>40</sup> The new Franco-Lao Treaty recognized the Kingdom of Laos as a fully independent and sovereign state, but had no substance, which removed all remaining qualifications for the independence of Laos and provided obligations for mutual defense.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, this treaty did not differ from the one signed in 1949.

## **2.2 The 1954 Geneva Accord on Laos**

In relation to the Indochina issue, France proposed to the U.S. to resolve the issue similar to the Korean issue and withdrew itself from the region seeking to keep its honor intact but it still wanted to protect its interest and benefits. This perspective, if we examine closely, shows that France was virtually out of options. In January 1954, the Foreign

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<sup>38</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Hoover Press Publication, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Prince Souvanna Phouma, the 9<sup>th</sup> son of viceroy Bounkhong, fought alongside with the Lao Issara government against the French and the Japanese at the end of World War II and established the Vientiane government in 1945. He formed the National Progressive Party and succeeded as the Prime Minister from 1951 to 1954 and served as the Prime Minister again under the Lao Neutralist Party following the coup of 1960. Then, he served as the Prime Minister from 1962 until the proclamation of the Lao PDR in 1975.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Hoover Press Publication, p. 49.

Minister's Meeting between the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and France in Berlin resulted in the agreement to organize a meeting on the Indochina issue in Geneva. Before the meeting took place, the Soviet Union and the PRC, both countries had coordinated diplomatically to ensure that the meeting would be organized as well as agreed in consensus to the perspectives provided by the Lao and Vietnamese delegation which was to be delivered to the meeting.<sup>42</sup>

From the defeat of the battle of Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1954 which resulted in driving the French colonialists to consider revising and amending their own policies as they were defeated in the War. This important event paved the way towards the organization of the meeting on Indochina at Geneva on the 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1954 which was attended by: Laos (RLG), Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, France, South Vietnam, PRC, United Kingdom, Soviet Union and the United States. In the Geneva Accord on Indochina in 1954, the independence, democracy and territorial integrity of Laos was officially recognized.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the political party of the Lao Patriotic Front was also officially recognized as a legal party to which it had strongholds in Samneua (now Houaphanh province) and Phongsaly province.<sup>44</sup> In order to compete with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State of the United States, saw Indochina as a battle field riddled with challenges for the United States foreign policy. As the French influence was diminishing in this region, the US thus directed a large amount of its military budget towards Indochina. Consequently, The

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<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 85-86.

<sup>44</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 86.

Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)<sup>45</sup> was thus established by the US on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1954 in Manila, the Philippines, as a move to prevent and counter the domino theory or the advancement of communist forces. President Eisenhower declared that “Laos is the key that will open the door into Asia. If we lose Laos to the communists, it will result in putting unnecessary pressure to Thailand, Cambodia and South Vietnam which would lead to their fall to communism”.<sup>46</sup> The US Senate then ratified the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty in February 1955.<sup>47</sup> The Geneva Accord in 1954 had also stipulated and barred Laos from becoming a member of any military organization which is why the RLG did not have any direct relations with SEATO. However, SEATO still protects the RLG because the implementation of the relevant protocol specifies the boundaries of the organization, and the RLG was still under the protection of the French since it was also a member of the French Union as well as under the 1953 French Union Agreement. In addition, in 1950, the U.S. and the RLG have also signed a long-term agreement on economic and military assistance.<sup>48</sup>

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1955, when France loosened its grip on Indochina based on the spirit of the 1954 Geneva Accord, the U.S. on the other hand, quickly had the desire to fill the power vacuum. In order to legitimately intervene into the internal affairs of

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<sup>45</sup> SEATO is a military organization comprising of the U.S, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Philippines and Pakistan who were responsible for overseeing Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam.

<sup>46</sup> McNamara, R. (2017). *In retrospect: The tragedy and lessons of Vietnam*. Vintage, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, M. L. (1957). A critical appraisal of SEATO. *Western Political Quarterly*, 10(4), 929.

<sup>48</sup> In *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*, p. 63, “in order to reinforce its own principles of global governance and to counter communism, SEATO which was led by the US chose to use South Vietnam as a buffer state and deployed its troops in preparation for direct confrontation first and foremost with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. At the same time, it had also garnered additional support in terms of military force from Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and South Korea.

Laos, the U.S. then requested the congress for a budget to assist the RLG. As a consequence, the U.S. then established a committee called the United States Operation Mission (USOM) to Laos.<sup>49</sup> To elaborate, the RLG during that time was a government receiving financial assistance from the Exchange Operation Fund (to keep the exchange rate at 1 USD = 35 kip) and its army, that was the only army in the world, except for the U.S. army, entirely financed by the U.S. Government.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, according to this arrangement, it is clearly seen that the U.S. had a large influence on the domestic issues and on the RLG. The United States was able to interfere in any way it deemed with economic, military and political issues. If it did not see fit to the leader of the Vientiane right-wing, it could remove the individual in question immediately.

### **2.2.1 Establishment of the Lao People's Party**

One important event that occurred during this period was the organization of meetings and the announcement of the establishment of a new political party by the Lao communists. Pursuant to the resolution of the Second Congress of the Indochina Communists Party in February 1951, it was agreed that each country shall go on to establish its own respective party to further carry out each country's revolution. From then on, communists Vietnam and Cambodia established their own respective parties.<sup>51</sup> Laos was also preparing the necessary conditions to establish its own communist party. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1955, the First Party Congress was officially organized in Samneua

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<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 71; Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 90-91.

<sup>50</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 212.

<sup>51</sup> Ministry of National Defense Laos. (2015). *History of the Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Army 1945-2015 in Brief*, pp. 80-81

province.<sup>52</sup> The meeting was held for a total of 15 days. This historical Congress officially adopted foundation documents to establish the party with a consensus on the official name of the party which was the Laos People's Party (it was changed to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party later at the Second Party Congress in 1972). In addition, the Congress also adopted foundation policies. The immediate plan of action consisted of a 12-points policy and the Party's regulations presented by Kaysone Phomvihane. The Party's Political report emphasized that the immediate enemy of the Party was the United States, the French Colonialists, and their allies' lackeys, who violated the ceasefire agreement. Moreover, the Congress also adopted the general policy and responsibility of the party for the future which was to lead the Lao people to fight for independence of the nation and to make Laos a country with peace, independence, democracy, unity and prosperity.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, in compliance with the resolution of the First Party Congress and to broaden National United Front nationwide, the Second Meeting of the Free Lao Front (FLF) was also organized on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1956. The Meeting decided to change the name from FLF into Lao Patriotic Front (Pathet Lao), the Lao revolutionary movement led by the Resistance government. Moreover, the meeting also modified the contents of the patriotic politics program. In foreign affairs, the political program has affirmed that the country will follow a path of neutrality, forbidden foreign military base on Laos's soil for waging a war, and abstain from joining any military alliances in order to establish friendly relations with other countries in the world, particularly with the neighboring countries following the five principles of peaceful coexistence. Therefore, at the end of

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<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> Phomvihane, K. (1955). Political Report by presented Kaysone Phomvihane in the First Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP).



the meeting, the leaders of the Lao Patriotic Front elected Prince Souphanouvong<sup>54</sup> as its president.<sup>55</sup>

### **2.2.2 Implementation of the 1954 Geneva Accord**

During the implementation of the 1954 Geneva Accord, the United States supported the overthrow of the Souvanna Phouma government and the installation of Katay Don Sasorith,<sup>56</sup> a royalist, as the Prime Minister of the RLG who supported pro-American policies. After an initial agreement, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1955 the Royalists and Pathet Lao signed a joint agreement to cease military confrontation.<sup>57</sup> In the next 10 days, Prime Minister Katay ordered the attack on the two strongholds that belonged to Pathet Lao, Phongsaly and Samneua province. Afterwards, he also orchestrated a one-sided election in the ten provinces under the RLG control excluding Pathet Lao and the two provinces that belonged to them. Both of these actions were in direct contradiction to the 1954 Geneva Accords. The Pathet Lao thus sent a telegram to the Co-Chair of the Geneva

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<sup>54</sup> Prince Souphanouvong, the 12<sup>th</sup> son of viceroy Bounkhong, the youngest half-brother of Prince Phetsarath and Prince Souvanna Phouma, studied at Lycee Saint Louis and the Ecole Nationale des Pont et Chaussees in Paris. His resentment of French colonialism, compounded by personal rebuffs; his exposure to socialist ideas in France during the popular front. He returned to Indochina, and was assigned to work in Vietnam in the Department of Public Works. He began his career as an engineer, building roads in Vietnam and Laos. While the French were reoccupying Laos, he met with Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, 1945. Souphanouvong and other Pathet Lao leaders then founded the resistance movement. Later, served as a Prime Minister of the resistance government in 1950 and became the standing member committee of the LPP in 1955. Then he was elected as the President of the Lao Patriotic Front from 1956 and served as the first President after the establishment of the Lao PDR on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1975.

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 53-56.

<sup>56</sup> Katay Don Sasorith was the Finance Minister from 1951 to 1954 and became the leader of the Progressive Party in 1954. Then he served as the Prime Minister from 1954-1955.

<sup>57</sup> Boupha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., p. 51.

meeting and the International Control Committee (ICC) in order to voice its condemnation and protest of the aforementioned actions.<sup>58</sup>

In order to further achieve its plans to destroy communism, the United States had chosen to support Katay's government move to attack the strongholds of Pathet Lao and authorized its own and Thailand's military advisers to cooperate in the operations with the Royal Lao Army with the aim of scaling up the internal civil war within Laos.<sup>59</sup> Against this backdrop, the central committee of the Lao People's Party announced that it will stand true to peace, neutrality, national reconciliation and expand National Front as a strategy to stiffen its oppositions. Thus, from the election that was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December 1955, Katay was not able to retain his position of Prime Minister because he did not receive the majority vote. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1956, the Parliament issued its first vote of no confidence on Katay which resulted in his resignation as Prime Minister. The following day, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1956, King Sisavangvong designated Katay to reform his government but the Parliament once again issued its second vote of no confidence.<sup>60</sup> From then, King Sisavangvong<sup>61</sup> decided to designate Souvanna Phouma to form a new cabinet on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1956. Souvanna Phouma was thus chosen as the new Prime Minister who was in support of policies for national unity and proposed to negotiate with Pathet Lao.

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<sup>58</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 57-58.

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p.58.

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> King Sisavangvong was crowned as the King of Luang Prabang since 1904 and has been involve in Lao politics since.

Observing this, President Eisenhower expressed that he was against this negotiation and tried to garner support from the UK and France so that they can use measures to pressure Souvanna Phouma to abandon the notion of forming a coalition government that included Pathet Lao. At the same time, the US also cooperated with Thailand to impose economic sanctions against Souvanna Phouma's government by refusing to sell rice, fuel and other necessary commercial products to Laos.<sup>62</sup>

### **2.3 The First Reunification of Laos**

Amidst the above-mentioned constricting sanctions, Souvanna Phouma's policy and position did not budge and he still wished to form a coalition government. He thus asked Pathet Lao to incorporate their armed forces with Royal Lao Army. The U.S. and the west's pressure however were unrelenting and increased tremendously which thus resulted in the resignation of Souvanna Phouma on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1957. Then, Katay Don Sasolith was once again reinstated as interim leader but was still not able to retain his position because there was no support for him in the parliament. In the next three months Souvanna Phouma was thus reinstated as the head of the government.<sup>63</sup>

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1957, Souvanna Phouma paid an official visit to the PRC. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1957, he also paid an official visit to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. During both occasions, Souvanna Phouma announced that he would adhere to the peace and neutrality policy and strictly implement the 1954 Geneva Accords. Moreover, Pathet Lao also expressed its congratulations to the joint declaration between

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<sup>62</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 80-81.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p 59.

Laos-China and Laos-Vietnam. Graham Parsons, Ambassador of the U.S. to Laos, made clear that he had no confidence in the leadership and government led by Souvanna Phouma. After the negotiations were held, Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong of Pathet Lao achieved the First Reunification of Laos on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1957.<sup>64</sup> Yet, for the U.S., unity was acceptable, however, neutrality was not.<sup>65</sup>

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1957, the agreement of the First Reunification of Laos was officially signed. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, Souphanouvong formally announced that the two Northern provinces were handed over to the RLG. On the same day, King Sisavangvong, the Royal Council and the parliament organized a ceremony to welcome the Pathet Lao. Furthermore, the ceremony also announced the resolution of the parliament and the Royal Government of Laos in recognizing Pathet Lao as an official political organization that was legally established under the laws of the Kingdom of Laos. Then, a Coalition Government was formed with Souvanna Phouma as the Prime Minister. Amidst this atmosphere, the Pathet Lao resident representative opened its office in Vientiane on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1957.<sup>66</sup>

The Coalition Government then organized a nation-wide additional election on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1958, which was in line with the foundations enshrined in the 1954 Geneva Accords. For the first time, an open supplementary election permitted people from different races, classes, sex, creeds, and religions to vote. Four parties ran for the election, the Lao Patriotic Front (Pathet Lao) led by Souphanouvong, the Peace and Neutrality Party led by Kinim Pholsena, the Progressive Party led by Katay, and the Lao Huam

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<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 97.

<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 26.

Samphanh Party led by Bong Souvannavong. In this election, the U.S. Embassy has spent a lot of money to carry out a support to the Royalist right-wing candidates by using the “Operation Booster Shoot”<sup>67</sup> to support the government candidates. Before the election, the Peace and Neutrality Party led by Kinim Pholsena agreed with the Pathet Lao side that they would not send any candidates to compete each other in this election. Thus, for the first time, Pathet Lao had the opportunity to send 10 candidates to the polls and 9 of them were elected, and 4 were elected from the Peace and Neutrality Party, winning a total of 13 seats out of 21 seats.<sup>68</sup> Most importantly, Prince Souphanouvong from the Pathet Lao side received the highest vote in this round, making the outcome of the elections considered as a victory for the Pathet Lao and the Lao Neutralist Party. Prince Souphanouvong was elected as the President of the Royal House of Representatives. Perceiving Pathet Lao’s victory as a threat to its policies to counter communism, the U.S. thus tried to find new ways to destroy the 1954 Geneva Accords on Indochina, attempting to overthrow the government of the National Progressive Party of Souvanna Phouma by cutting the U.S. aid to Laos. From 1955 to 1958 aid from the U.S. was in total \$120 million USD, four times what the French aid to Laos eight years earlier.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, by cutting the aid to Laos, the government of Souvanna Phouma collapsed on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1958, resulting the end of the first eight-month-old Coalition Government.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The United States ran a rural aid program to influence the Lao people to vote during 1958 elections for those politicians the U.S. favored.

<sup>68</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 101-102.

<sup>69</sup> Haney, W. (1972). The Pentagon Papers and the United States Involvement in Laos. *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decision Making in Vietnam, Critical Essays*, 5, 252.

[http://legaciesofwar.org/files/The\\_Pentagon\\_Papers\\_and\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Involvement\\_in\\_Laos.pdf](http://legaciesofwar.org/files/The_Pentagon_Papers_and_the_United_States_Involvement_in_Laos.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 104.

In addition, when a right-wing government took office on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1958, the new Prime Minister, Phoui Sananikone<sup>71</sup>, under the Committee for the Defense of the National Interest (CDNI), declared, “We are anti-communists”.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, in order to silence his political opposition, Phoui Sananikone proposed to the King to send Souvanna Phouma to Paris as Ambassador of Laos to France.<sup>73</sup>

Then, during the beginning of 1959, Phoui Sananikone announced the implementation of laws to counter communism and issued a declaration that the 1954 Geneva Accords on Indochina that Phoui Sananikone himself participated to as a party will no longer be valid. Then, he notified Pathet Lao that their actions as a communist party was in direct violation with the Law. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1959, Phoui Sananikone ordered the encirclement of Pathet Lao Armed Forces that was prepared to reunify with the Royal Lao Army. Mobilized were the First Battalion that was stationed in Xieng Ngeun District, Luang Prabang Province and the Second Battalion at the Plain of Jars, Xieng Khuang Province.<sup>74</sup> The Pathet Lao Armed Forces that were encircled fought heavily to breach the encirclement by the Royal Lao Army. However, despite the First Battalion's loss, the Pathet Lao troops were able to return to its stronghold in Samneua

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<sup>71</sup> Phoui Sananikone was the education and health minister in the Royal Lao Government in 1947 and the President of the National Assembly from 1947 to 1950 while he was the Prime Minister from February 1950 to November 1951. At the same time, he also led the Lao Huam Lao Party and was influential in Lao politics until the Lao Third Coalition Government.

<sup>72</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 221.

<sup>73</sup> The duties of Lao Ambassadors in Washington D.C., Paris, London, and Bangkok represent the King only. The King has the ultimate right to select his representative to serve as the Lao Ambassador abroad, while the government has nothing involve. The basis to be appointed must have part of the noble lineage and must hold a former minister's position. Therefore, they are acting on behalf of the King, however, with no political content. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 33.

<sup>74</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 64.

province. At the same time, in 1959, the U.S. Department of Defense also created a special Programs Evaluation Office (PEO) to replace French support of the Royal Lao Army against the Communist Pathet Lao as part of the U.S. containment policy.<sup>75</sup>

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 1959, Phoui Sananikone ordered the arrest and imprisonment of the Pathet Lao Leaders including Prince Souphanouvong that joined the First Coalition Government. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1959, Kaysone Phomvihane, on behalf of the Pathet Lao, sent an official telegram to the Co-Chair of the 1954 Geneva Meeting on Indochina on the violation of Phoui Sananikone government.<sup>76</sup> The Pathet Lao filed a complaint on how the U.S. was going to take the Lao issue into the United Nations in order to interfere in Laos's internal affairs again. The official telegram also emphasized that the leaders of Pathet Lao should be released from prison and all military confrontations aiming to destroy Pathet Lao forces should ceased immediately. Towards this issue, the government of the Soviet Union issued a declaration to condemn the actions of the United States. In an attempt to cover up the use of the Royal Lao Army against Pathet Lao Armed Forces, Phoui Sananikone made a false report to the UN Secretary-General that Vietnamese troops were moving to the northeast of Laos, which also contained other information provided by the United States.<sup>77</sup> Both the RLG and the U.S. then proposed to the UN to send the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) to Laos to prevent any external aggression. Following the proposal, the UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, proposed the opening of the UN Security Council on September 7, 1959 to consider the

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<sup>75</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 93.

<sup>76</sup> Bopha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., p. 54.

<sup>77</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 87.

issue. The meeting adopted the Resolution 132 on “Questioning relating to Laos”<sup>78</sup> with a 10-on-1 vote, against from the Soviet Union. According to the Resolution, the Secretariat appointed a sub-committee, consisting of delegates from Argentina, Italy, Japan, and Tunisia, to examine the statement concerning Laos and traveled to Laos from 15 September to 13 October 1959 at the invitation of the RLG. Moreover, on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1959, the sub-committee reported that there was no aggressive military maneuver, but merely a series of combat exercises.<sup>79</sup> However, due to the unclear reports, the UN Secretary-General made a further visit to Laos in mid-November 1959 at the invitation of the RLG. In his visit, the UN Secretary-General only recommended the Lao government to take an independent, neutral and non-western approach.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the U.S. did not stop from intervening into the internal affairs of Laos.

During the 15-month rule of Phoui Sananikone, the government had been reshuffled a total of three times and during his tenure, the United States significantly accelerated their influence and power in supporting the RLG. This is because when the U.S. dislikes the RLG’s leadership, it would have sought to oust the person from his or her position and replace it with a new leader. At the same time, the rightists also announced to execute the Pathet Lao leaders, who were in prison. However, the international community demanded the Royal Lao Government to release them from prison and oppose to the execution. Therefore, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

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<sup>78</sup> United Nations. (1959, September 7). *Question relating to Laos*. United Nations Security Council Resolutions. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/132>

<sup>79</sup> Gettleman, M. E. (Ed.). (1970). *Conflict in Indo-China: a reader on the widening war in Laos and Cambodia*. Random House, p. 143.

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 87.



sought to resolve the crisis by launching a coup d'état<sup>81</sup> using General Phoumy Norsavanh<sup>82</sup> to organize a coup d'état on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1959 to pressure Phoui Sananikone to resign and installed Kou Abhay, President of the Royal Council, as the Prime Minister. As a result, the RLG organized another election of the National Assembly, without any representatives from the Pathet Lao side. The result of the election without the participation of Pathet Lao, General Phoumy Norsavanh, with the backup from the U.S. holds 32 seats out of 59 seats. From this victory, the committee announced the formation of a political party called the Paxasangkhom Party (Social Democratic Party) and on April 24, 1960, the party formed a government with Prince Somsanith replace Kou Abhay, as its next Prime Minister.<sup>83</sup> However, the Prime Minister of the RLG and their replacement occurred regularly but their policies to wipe out communists in the country remained intact.

On the other side, in early April 1960, Pathet Lao launched a new 10-point political program calling for the implementation of the 1954 Geneva Agreement and the two previously signed agreements, emphasizing neutrality policy, resisting foreign intervention, specifically by the United States and establishing diplomatic relations with all countries regardless of their social and ideological systems.<sup>84</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1960, Prince Souphanouvong and other Pathet Lao Leaders who were imprisoned in Phonkheng

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<sup>81</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 88.

<sup>82</sup> According to McCoy (1972), Colonel Phoumy Norsavanh was one of the bright young man the CIA picked to organize the right wing (Royal Lao Government). Back by the CIA, Phoumy became a cabinet Minister in February 1959 and a General several months later... Gen. Phoumy went on to plot coups, rig elections and help the CIA build up its Secret Army; in short, he became the major pawn in the CIA's determined effort to keep Laos' government militantly anticommunist.

<sup>83</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., p. 55.

<sup>84</sup> Gettleman, M. E. (Ed.). (1970). *Conflict in Indo-China: a reader on the widening war in Laos and Cambodia*. Random House, pp. 206-209.

Prison, Vientiane Capital, were able to escape the prison and returned safely to their strongholds.

In the same year, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1960, the RLG, including the Commander in Chief of the Royal Lao Army, and other high-ranking military officials traveled to Luang Prabang province to take part in the funeral of the King Sisavangvong. While the delegations were in Luang Prabang attending the funeral ceremony of King Sisavangvong, the Paratroop Battalion II led by Captain Kong Le organized a coup to overthrow the government of Prince Somsanith, who was supported by General Phoumy Norsavanh.<sup>85</sup> The Ambassador of Laos to France, Souvanna Phouma, former Neutralist Prime Minister, was then recalled from France to reassume his position as the Prime Minister. Souvanna Phouma, on 16<sup>th</sup> August, announced that he would end the simmering civil war by forming a neutralist government that would include representatives from left, right, and center. On this issue, Prince Souphanouvong of Pathet Lao expressed his support on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1960 towards peace, neutrality, and national unity; principles that were contained in Souvanna Phouma's declaration on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1960. Simultaneously, the Committee for Peace, National Unity and Solidarity was formed the next day. The Committee thus met and in consensus chose Prince Souphanouvong and Prince Souvanna Phouma as the Co-Chairs. The Committee consisted of four political parties: Pathet Lao delegation, Peace and Neutrality delegation, Captain Kong Le Coup delegation and the Vientiane Youth delegation. Furthermore, as Prime Minister of Kingdom of Laos, Souvanna Phouma also paid an official visit to Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) and

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<sup>85</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., p. 56.

PRC in order to emphasize that his government will adhere to the principles of peace and neutrality as well as request for their support.

Responding to this development, General Phoumy Norsavanh who had previously traveled from Luang Prabang (after attending the funeral ceremony of King Sisavangvong) to his home in Savannakhet province where he announced that he does not recognize the current government headed by Souvanna Phouma. The Pentagon then agreed to direct military budget through the CIA to support General Phoumy Norsavanh, who was seen as a barrier to counter communism by the U.S. “Perhaps not altogether unexpectedly, dozens of unmarked Air America transports began landing at Savannakhet loading with arms, soldiers, and American advisers and Laos was plunged into a three ways civil war. The CIA backed right wing was in Savannakhet, the Neutralist was in Vientiane and the leftist Pathet Lao was in the forest of Samneua province (the extreme northeast).”<sup>86</sup> At the same time, Phoumy Norsavanh was also supported by General Sarit Thanarat, the Prime Minister of Thailand who was his own relative.<sup>87</sup> During this period, the United States was engaged in intensive activities. Washington DC then sent J. Graham Parsons, the former Ambassador of the United States to Laos and currently the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State on East Asia Affairs, to officially meet with Souvanna Phouma. Souvanna Phouma then traveled to Savannakhet province in order to meet with the former members of Phoui Sananikone’s government namely General Phoumy Norsavanh in order to garner support from member of Parliament to agree on the adoption of the policy of neutrality in order to pave way for the establishment of a new coalition

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<sup>86</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, pp. 229-230.

<sup>87</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 72.

government. This meeting however proved to be unfruitful as the outcome had to be approved by King. Therefore, both Souvanna Phouma and Phoumy Norsavanh had to travel to Luang Prabang province to meet with the King. After two days of negotiations, the position of the RLG was reached. Seeing this unfold, Prince Somsanith thus resigned as the Prime Minister. Shortly after, the King nominated Prince Souvanna Phouma as the Prime Minister and General Phoumy Norsavanh as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs in which he then traveled to Savannakhet province and did not return to Vientiane. This was due to the accusations from General Phoumy's allies that he was unable to control the Ministry of Defense because of the role and the influence of General Kong Le inside the Ministry.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, Pathet Lao also urged the RLG to establish diplomatic relations and open embassies with the Soviet Union, the PRC and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and other socialist's countries in order to garner international support to weigh and prevent the actions of the United States to interfere with the internal affairs of Laos. Then, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1960, government of Souvanna Phouma established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. From then on, the Soviet Union government started to provide support to Souvanna Phouma to counterbalance the support provided by the U.S. to the RLG.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1960, an agreement struck between General Phoumy Norsavanh and Bounoum to establish a government lead by Bounoum Nachampassak, the Royal Inspector, as the Prime Minister and General Phoumy Norsavanh as the Deputy Prime Minister. Then, General Phoumy Norsavanh ordered the Central and Southern

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<sup>88</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 74.

Military forces together with the American and Thai military advisers as well as the armed force stationed in South Vietnam to attack and takeover Vientiane Capital and drive out the government that was formed by Prince Souvanna Phouma.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, after receiving the news that a government formed with Bounoum Nachampassack as the Prime Minister, Mr. Vasily V. Kuznetsov, the deputy foreign minister of the Soviet Union, sent an official letter to the UK Ambassador to the Soviet Union. In his capacity as the Co-Chair of the 1954 Geneva Meeting on Indochina, which states had to comply with the international recognition standard, one country can only have one government that will then be granted access to support and assistance from other countries. The USSR government believed that the UK is fully aware that the government of Souvanna Phouma declared that it should continue to carry out its role and responsibilities as the government that was established legally under the laws of Laos. The USSR then also emphasized that the formation of Bounoum's and Phoumy's government is illegitimate and contradicts with the existing Constitution of Laos.<sup>90</sup>

During this time, Prince Souvanna Phouma had to deal with tremendous pressure. Internally he had to deal with a coup staged on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1960 by Major Bounteng Insixiengmay in Luang Prabang in which the group voiced its support for Phoumy-Bounoum's group. He also faced threats from General Sarit Thanarat, the Prime Minister of Thailand as well as mounting verbal pressure from the United States. The armed forces of Phoumy- Bounoum had also been travelling from Savannakhet and had nearly arrived in Vientiane Capital. This continuously challenging predicament resulted

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<sup>89</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 92.

<sup>90</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 77.

in Prince Souvanna Phouma and the Ministers of the Neutralist factions' withdrawal from Vientiane and traveled to Phnom Penh, Cambodia on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December.<sup>91</sup> Several Ministers and members of Parliament had also sought refuge in Rangoon, Burma.<sup>92</sup> In response to this development, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong of Democratic Republic of Vietnam sent an official telegram to the Co-Chair and the Parties to the 1954 Geneva Accord to notify them on the confrontation with the use of force in Laos masterminded and orchestrated by the U.S. and Thailand. At the same juncture, the Soviet Union, the PRC, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Poland, India and other countries expressed their support of Souvanna Phouma's government as the legitimate authority.

Moreover, in order to support Souvanna Phouma, Prince Souphanouvong of Pathet Lao garnered support from its armed forces and the people to continue to stand strong in the fight to protect Vientiane Capital and the legitimate government of Souvanna Phouma. As the armed forces of Phoumy-Bounoum came close to Vientiane, fighting erupted between their forces and the joint forces of the Neutralists and Pathet Lao. The battle to protect Vientiane Capital lasted a total of seven days in which Phoumy-Bounoum was unable to achieve any sort of victory.<sup>93</sup> In order to avoid further damage to the Capital, Kaysone Phomvihane of Pathet Lao who was directly leading the forces in person discussed with Souvanna Phouma's side on the withdrawal of both their troops from Vientiane and moved towards the northern region, in order to fight and seize the Plain of Jars, Xieng Khuang province, successfully achieved at the end of 1960. From then on,

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<sup>91</sup> Gettleman, M. E. (Ed.). (1970). *Conflict in Indo-China: a reader on the widening war in Laos and Cambodia*. Random House, p. 149.

<sup>92</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 79.

<sup>93</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 92.

Pathet Lao coordinated with Vietnam to wrestle control of districts surrounding Xieng Khuang province so that they can develop them into long-term strongholds in the future.<sup>94</sup> At the same period, SEATO had organized a meeting in Bangkok. At this meeting, the U.S. had proposed to bring special forces from Thailand, Pakistan, Philippines and the U.S. Forces stationed in Okinawa, Japan, and redeploy them in the Plain of Jars, however, this proposal was ultimately rejected by France and the UK.<sup>95</sup>

Attempted to form a coalition government again, Pathet Lao also sent Phoumi Vongvichit to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to negotiate with Souvanna Phouma and form a legitimate government. From then, the Lao Neutralist Party agreed to allied with Pathet Lao. Later, Souvanna Phouma decided to return to Khangkhai, Xieng Khouang Province, Laos, and meet with the leaders of Pathet Lao. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1961, at Khangkhai, the Supreme Command of the Joint Allied Forces was established by the Joint forces of Pathet Lao and the Neutralists.<sup>96</sup>

On the other hand, as the Royal Lao Army suffered numerous defeats in various battles in the Northern region, the so-called Phoumy-Bounoum's government, which was supported by the U.S. behind the curtains, sent a representative to Phnom Penh in order to invite Prince Souvanna Phouma back to Laos and join the coalition government. This invitation was rejected by Souvanna Phouma who expressed that Laos is a neutral country and its coalition government must comprise of the various existing political parties which included Pathet Lao. However, Phoumy and Bounoum did not give up and continued to send its representatives as well as Phoumy Norsavanh himself to meet with Souvanna

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<sup>94</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 92.

<sup>95</sup> Gittleman, M. E. (Ed.). (1970). *Conflict in Indo-China: a reader on the widening war in Laos and Cambodia*. Random House, p. 152.

<sup>96</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., p. 57.

Phouma in order to sway him from Pathet Lao but ultimately these actions proved to be unsuccessful. Souvanna Phouma did not budge, refused to resign, and refused to participate in the Phoumy-Bounoum's government.<sup>97</sup> Since Prince Souvanna Phouma, in his capacity as the legitimate Prime Minister, had traveled to countries that recognized his coalition government such as Burma, India, the United Kingdom, France, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the PRC and the Soviet Union. During his official visit with the USSR in 1961, Souvanna Phouma, the Prime Minister of the Coalition Government, was welcomed and had the opportunity to meet with Nikita Khrushchev, the General-Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.<sup>98</sup>

On the side note, there was an organization of a total of four party meetings with the attendance of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of China, the Labor Party of Vietnam and Lao People's Party in Hanoi, September 1961. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss support and assistance to be provided to the Neutralist, Souvanna Phouma and Pathet Lao.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, at this time, Laos had two governments: Souvanna Phouma's Coalition Government located at Khangkhai, Xieng Khuang Province, and the newly formed Government by Bounoum Nachampassak as the Prime Minister which was established in Vientiane and also blessed by King Sisavang Vatthana. Both governments expressed their unrelenting loyalty to the King. The members of the Parliaments of Vientiane then convened a meeting and adopted a resolution to dissolve Souvanna Phouma's government. However, it was still recognized as the legitimate one by many other countries.

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<sup>97</sup> Bopha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., pp. 57-58.

<sup>98</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 83-85.

<sup>99</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 95-96.



## **2.4 The 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos and the Second Reunification of Laos**

As the situation and conflict in Laos spiraled out of control, President John F. Kennedy met with Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and Andrei A. Gromyko, the USSR Foreign Minister to discuss the civil war in Laos on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1961 in Washington D.C. After they've met, the Soviet Union and the UK, in capacity as Co-Chairs of the 1954 Geneva Meeting on Indochina, urged for a ceasefire between the three factions in Laos proposed to organize a meeting of 14 countries in Geneva with the purpose of revitalizing peace and neutrality in the Kingdom of Laos.<sup>100</sup> Against this backdrop, Pathet Lao agreed and expressed its support to the two Co-Chairs of the 1954 Geneva Meeting and was ready to attend the meeting in order to explore various options and solutions that will lead to the safeguard of peace in Laos. Furthermore, On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1961, the government of Souvanna Phouma established diplomatic relations with the PRC and cut relations with Taiwan which had a residence located in Bangkok, Thailand. Then, between the 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> of April 1961, Prince Souvanna Phouma, Prime Minister of Laos, Prince Souphanouvong, the President of the Pathet Lao received an invitation from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to pay an official visit at Hanoi in which both met with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong as well as President Ho Chi Minh. During this occasion, both countries signed agreements for economic and cultural cooperation and other areas of cooperation in which Vietnam will be providing support.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 91.

<sup>101</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 95-96.

From mid-1961 onwards, the three factions in Laos: Pathet Lao, the Neutralists and Phoumy-Bounoum's faction (Royal Lao Government) met regularly with one another on various occasions such as the Meeting at Hinheub (Vientiane Province), Namone Village Meeting (Vientiane Province), and Khangkhai Meeting (Xieng Khuang Province). The purpose of these meetings was to seek solutions to the conflict and safeguard peace in Laos. Through time, based on the recommendations proposed by the three political factions in Laos which consisted of Pathet Lao led by Prince Souphanouvong, the Neutralists led by Prince Souvanna Phouma and the Royalists led by Prince Bounoum Nachampassak, an agreement was made that sought to establish national unity. Thus, the international meeting on the situation in Laos was organized with the Soviet Union and the UK acting as Co-Chairs in Geneva on May 1961 with the attendance of 14 countries which consisted of: Laos, Cambodia, Canada, Burma, the PRC, Democratic Republic of Vietnam, South Vietnam, France, India, Poland, UK, Soviet Union, Thailand and the U.S.<sup>102</sup> At this meeting, Phoumi Vongvichit represented Pathet Lao, Kinim Pholsena represented the Neutralists and Bouavanh Norasing represented the Royalists. During the meeting, the delegates closely listened to the joint declaration issued by the General-Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, and President of the United States, John F. Kennedy. The declaration stated that the General-Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR and the President of the United States reaffirmed their support to Laos as a neutral country and its independence was to be governed by the government chosen and elected by the people.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, The USSR and the U.S. also

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<sup>102</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 91-92.

<sup>103</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 120.

supported the international agreement and ensured that Laos would remain neutral and independent. Both leaders recognized the importance of ceasefire that had been achieved. However, Namtha civil war has been an on-going battle for some time even though the declaration was released, in May 1962, the Royal Lao Army suffered a disastrous defeat, especially at Namtha, Luang Namtha province, the north-western part of Laos; thus, the Phoumy-Bounoum acknowledged their defeat and accepted the terms and conditions to negotiate with the Neutralists and Pathet Lao.<sup>104</sup>

On the other hand, the three princes who are representatives of the three factions in Laos were still meeting with one another for further discussion, namely: The Plain of Jars, Namone, and Hinheub. Afterward, there was an agreement to organize another meeting in Zurich, Switzerland, and it resulted in the signing of a joint declaration on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1962. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1962, all 14 countries and Laos signed an international agreement and a tripartite declaration on Laos's neutrality after a total of 14 months of negotiations.<sup>105</sup> The contents of the agreement consisted of establishing the Indian delegation as the President of the ICC on the Implementation of the 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos. The committee also comprised of members of the Polish and Canadian delegations. Moreover, with the agreement amongst the three factions/political parties to implement the 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos, the second Coalition Government was formed. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1962, the King officially expressed his support of the National Coalition Government which was led by Prince Souvanna Phouma as the Prime Minister and Deputy Ministers that represented Pathet Lao and the Royal Government side of

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<sup>104</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 122-123.

<sup>105</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 98.

Phoumy-Bounoum.<sup>106</sup> This second Coalition Government aimed to implement policies aiming to promote peace, neutrality, independence, unity, democracy and reconciliation on internal disputes as well as cooperation on foreign policy. The Coalition Government also then established diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1962.<sup>107</sup>

Furthermore, to implement the 1962 Geneva Accord, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1962, American military personnel and officials comprising 35 people withdrew from Laos as the first wave. The second wave was a total of 666 people which occurred on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1962 and on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1962, the Vietnamese Forces present in Laos had entirely withdrawn.<sup>108</sup> According to McCoy (1972), “although American Green Berets and military advisers were withdrawn by October as specified, the CIA devised a number of clever deceptions to continue its clandestine activities. All of the CIA operatives move to adjacent area of Thailand, but returned almost every day by helicopter or plane to direct guerrilla operations. Civilian Personnel (not cover by the Geneva Agreements) were recruited for clandestine work.”<sup>109</sup> As a result, the Coalition Government started implementing its roles and responsibilities beginning on November 1962 which many countries recognized and express congratulations. Afterward,

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<sup>106</sup> Bopha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT LTD., p. 62.

<sup>107</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 102.

<sup>108</sup> Haney, W. (1972). The Pentagon Papers and the United States Involvement in Laos. *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decision Making in Vietnam, Critical Essays*, 5, 265.

[http://legaciesofwar.org/files/The\\_Pentagon\\_Papers\\_and\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Involvement\\_in\\_Laos.pdf](http://legaciesofwar.org/files/The_Pentagon_Papers_and_the_United_States_Involvement_in_Laos.pdf)

<sup>109</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 109

diplomatic relations were also established with various socialist countries including Mongolia in 1962.

At the beginning of 1963, the Coalition Government of Laos embarked on a series of foreign exchanges to connect with its neighbors, with a delegation led by King Sisavang Vattana visiting Vietnam for the first time since the establishment of diplomatic ties and received a warm welcome. At the same period, Souvanna Phouma also visited the United States, France and Japan. During his visit to France, President Charles de Gaulle also suggested to Souvanna Phouma that Indochina's growing conditions should be followed by a peaceful path, as de Gaulle said. He knew that the U.S. had much influence in the region.<sup>110</sup> During the visit to the three countries, the counterpart also spoke to Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma to provide assistance to his Coalition Government. In addition, the operations of the Coalition Government were unimpeded for almost one year. Then the Military and Political Committee was established, aiming to unify the military and the government institutions. Still, this effort was cut short with the Royalists taking actions to sway the Neutralists members towards their side in order to isolate Pathet Lao. Furthermore, the Royalists also planned and murdered Kinim Pholsena, Minister of Foreign Affairs, representing the Neutralists on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1963. The political repercussions were even more serious than before and recrimination were immediate.<sup>111</sup> Due to the increasingly complex situation, the Pathet Lao and Neutralists Ministers, in order to ensure their own safety, decided to return to their respective strongholds. Then, Pathet Lao appointed Mr. Sod Phetsaly as their resident representative

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<sup>110</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 123.

<sup>111</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p.128.

in Vientiane who would continue to negotiate with the Royalists as well as station a company of military there in order to protect their interests. Moreover, the Royalists then utilized several political methods, and some groups tried to stage coups, which resulted in further increase of the interference of the United States in Laos. The Royal Lao Army, supported by the U.S. military, started a battle on the strategic locations held by Pathet Lao. As a result, Pathet Lao had to engage in an armed warfare, thus requested and received support from socialist countries in order to fight for the implementation of the 1962 Geneva Accords for Peace, Independence, Neutrality and Justice.<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, the RLG also established a “National Directorate for Coordination” gathered soldiers, polices, civilians under the command of General Syho Lanphouthakoune, General Phoumy’s protégé. The function of this organization was to be in charge of controlling and monitoring Pathet Lao and Lao Patriots.<sup>113</sup>

The members of the Coalition Government namely Khamsouk Keola, Heuane Mongkhonvilai from Peace and Neutrality Party of Kinim Pholsena left Vientiane Capital to Khangkhai, Xieng Khuang province. Souvanna Phouma then announced the deposition of these individuals from the cabinet. On this issue in particular, Pathet Lao understood that Souvanna Phouma had changed and abandoned his political roots and principles. In its view, Souvanna Phouma and the so-called Phoumy-Bounoum faction had on-going disputes, and that, therefore, Pathet Lao took advantage of the disputes for Souvanna Phouma to side with them. At the same time, the United States started to transport arms and military advisors into Laos once again. The government of the USSR, as a party and

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<sup>112</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 104.

<sup>113</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p.118.

Co-Chair of the 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos, heavily protested against the actions undertaken by the U.S. which was a direct violation of Article 6 of the above-mentioned accord.<sup>114</sup> Then, Prince Souvanna Phouma also proposed to the King to cut relations with the SRV and the PRC.<sup>115</sup> As a result, the Office of the Representatives of Pathet Lao was then threatened and condemned as dishonorable towards the ultimate goal of national unity.

From 1964 onwards, the United States and the Royal Lao Army started a special war using modern vehicles and engines of war to silence its opposition. During this time, the Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma leaned towards the U.S. during the Presidency of Lindon B. Johnson. He had given the green light for America to conduct a Secret War<sup>116</sup> in the country which were air raided by T28s, A1, F105 and B52, modern airplanes during that time, which flew in from the US military base in Thailand, South Vietnam and using US navy and air force jets to drop bombs on Pathet Lao's stronghold.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, aside from the United States Embassy, there were also the CIA, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), USOM, PEO and other organizations present in the country which were directing operations at areas controlled by the RLG. Moreover, the U.S. had also claimed that it was involved in the

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<sup>114</sup> United Nations. (1963, March 14). *Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos 1962*. United Nations Treaty Collection.

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20456/volume-456-I-6564-English.pdf>

<sup>115</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 104.

<sup>116</sup> According to Suthinithet (2010), from 1964-1973, as part of the Secret War operation conducted during the Vietnam War, the US military dropped 260 million cluster bombs – about 2.5 million tons of munitions – on Laos over the course of 580,000 bombing missions. This is equivalent to a plane load of bombs being loaded every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, for nine years – nearly seven bombs for every man, woman and child living in Laos.

<http://legaciesofwar.org/resources/books-documents/land-of-a-million-bombs/>

<sup>117</sup> Boupha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT LTD., p. 73.;

Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 139.

region in a war against Vietnam and to counter communism but it did not reveal its activities carried out in the Secret War against Pathet Lao and the Lao people.

After the defeat of General Phoumy Norsavanh at Nakai Plateau, Khammouan province, central province of Laos, General Phoumy then served as a diplomat, summoned a number of foreign Ambassadors from the U.S., the Soviet Union, the UK, Canada, and India to discuss and accuse the Pathet Lao of violating the Geneva Accord 1962. Therefore, inviting the ICC to investigate and verify what happened on the ground. As for the Pathet Lao side, Prince Souphanouvong also sent a telegram to the Co-Chair of the 1962 Geneva Conference seek for solutions to solve the problem in Laos.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, Souvanna Phouma with his new perspective leaning to the right with the RLG, had succumbed to the pressure and heeded the request to restructure the Coalition Government by proposing to replace the Pathet Lao vacant seats with representatives from Royalists. Moreover, Souvanna Phouma stated that this was only a temporary measure and when Pathet Lao returned they will be given back their seats in government. That being the case, Pathet Lao urged to proposed new rounds of negotiations to preserve the Coalition Government. However, by then, the Royal Lao Army had broken the Neutralist Armed Force and merged the military in order to fight against Pathet Lao. Thus, Pathet Lao condemned Souvanna Phouma's action as an act of siding with the U.S. and the Coalition Government was dissolved at the end of 1963.<sup>119</sup>

After being appointed as the Minister of Defense, General Phoumy Norsavanh then requested the United Nations and SEATO to come to Laos in order to combat the

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<sup>118</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 105.

<sup>119</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 129.



communist regime.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, at the same time, General Phoumy engaged in trading not only of gold, and casinos, but also opium. McCoy (1972) noted that, “Opium trade was the most profitable of all ventures. General Phoumy opened a seedy, ramshackle opium den in Vientiane that could accommodate 150 smokers. Toward off any possible criticism from his free world allies, Phoumy had a sign hung over the entrance to his palace of dreams “Detoxification Clinic.” When a French Journalist asked Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma why this eyesore was allowed to remain open, he replied, “Feudalism is still with US. Although Phoumy abandoned his plan for fiscal independence from the USA, Gen. Ouane Rathikone, Commander in Chief of the RLA, continued to manage the Laotian Opium Administration with considerable success.”<sup>121</sup>

Even so, conflicts of interest and influence among the right-wing generals remained elusive. In this case, General Koupasith Abhay was one of the prominent generals in the 5<sup>th</sup> military region (control of Vientiane capital and central region). However, he was still under the influence of General Phoumy Norsavanh, the same feelings go to General Ouane as well. Therefore, these generals planned out to eliminate General Phoumy Norsavanh. According to McCoy (1972), “Although ostensible motivation of the right-wing coup of April 19, 1964, was to eliminate the neutralist army and make the Prime minister more responsive to the right wing, the generals seem to have devoted most of their energy to breaking up Phoumy’s financial empire. The coup began at 4:00 A.m. as General Koupasith’s troops seized the city, captured most of the neutralist army officers, and place the Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma under house arrest. There

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<sup>120</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 112.

<sup>121</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 223.

was no resistance and virtually no bloodshed. While the threat of a U.S. aid cutoff convinced Koupasith and Ouane to release the Prime Minister from house arrest, nothing could deter them from stripping Phoumy from power. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, Gen. Phoumy resigned his portfolio as minister of defense. That same day, the Ministry of Finances cancelled the import license for Sosimex Company, one of Phoumy's business, which has enjoyed a monopoly on the import of all alcoholic beverages. The Revolutionary Committee closed his gambling casino and the Ministry of Finance broke the Bank of Laos's monopoly on gold imports."<sup>122</sup>

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, 1964, the three factions in Laos agreed to hold a summit meeting in Paris, France, to discuss a peaceful solution for Laos. Represented from Pathet Lao was Prince Souphanouvong, the Chairman of the Lao Patriotic Front, Deputy Prime Minister of the Coalition Government. Represented from the RLG was Prince Bounoum Nachampassak and from the Neutralist was Prince Souvanna Phouma. At this meeting, the RLG announced that "there is no right-wing party in Laos because the right-wing party has joined the Lao Neutralist Party of Prince Souvanna Phouma."<sup>123</sup> However, the announcement was backed by the U.S. aimed to abolish the three-party principle consensus reached the Hinheub, the Zurich, and the Plain of Jars meetings, which considered to be the right basis to resolve the internal problem in Laos. Besides from the three princes meeting, there was also a side line meeting between Prince Souphanouvong from the Pathet Lao and Prince Souvanna Phouma from the neutral side.<sup>124</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>122</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 224.

<sup>123</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p.107.

<sup>124</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 108.

although the three princes agreed on some issues, such agreements were still in conflict with the interests of the U.S., making the meeting fruitless and unable to reach an agreement.

By 1965 the CIA created a Hmong army of thirty thousand men that guarded radar installations vital to bombing North Vietnam, rescued downed American pilots and battled Pathet Lao guerrillas.<sup>125</sup> Then, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1965, General Phoumy tried to recoup his lost empire by launching a counter coup, but he failed and sought for asylum in Thailand from then on. As a consequence, Koupasith and Ouane divided up what remained of Gen. Phoumy's financial empire. While Koupasith inherited most of the fallen general's real estate holdings, brothels, and opium dens in the Vientiane region, Gen. Ouane assumed full control over the opium trade in the northwestern Laos.<sup>126</sup> Later, General Ouane then brought to an end to the activities of the Corsican "Air Opium" charter airlines and refused to issue "Requisition Militaires," thereby denying access to the Corsican "Air Opium" charter airlines to all airports in Laos to put an end to all its illegal activities.<sup>127</sup>

In addition, there was also an internal conflict in the military circle related to the drug trafficking, the promotion of military personnel, the merger of the Royal Lao Army and Neutralist Armed Force, and the establishment of the National Army. On this issue, General Kong Le, the leader of the coup d'état on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1960, showed that he disagreed and objected to the merger because the Neutralists feared losing influence and

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<sup>125</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 224.

<sup>126</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 224.

<sup>127</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 246.

power. At the same time, Kong Le also feared that the armed forces merger would result in him becoming a subordinate of the Royal Lao military leaders. Before the 1960's coup d'état, he was only a captain and received the rank of General only after that event. Due to these reasons, General Thao Ma and General Kong Le agreed to cooperate in staging a coup d'état. On the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, 1966, General Thao Ma brought six T28 fighter jets flying from Savannakhet Provincial Air Force Base to Vientiane and dispersed into the 5<sup>th</sup> Region Army Office at Chinai Mo, fired at General Koupasith's House, fired at the Ministry of Defense at Phonkheng, and the Wattay Airport.<sup>128</sup> More than 30 people were killed, and dozens were injured from this incident. Then General Thao Ma and his troops flew back to Savannakhet.<sup>129</sup> Also, after the coup failed, both General Thao Ma and General Kong Le fled the country to Thailand and France, respectively.

On the other hand, in reality, the United States allowed the CIA to move freely during that period to divide and change political and military powers in Laos. The Royal Lao Army was thus able to dismantle the Neutralist Armed Force and sway them to join their ranks. However, there was a group of military, officials and civilians of the Neutralist who stood true to the ideals of Pathet Lao and continued to fight against the opposition on many fronts.

In response to the interference of the United States, on June 1965 the leaders of the People's Revolutionary Party, led by Kaysone Phomvihane, and Le Duan, the General-Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam met and exchange perspectives on

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<sup>128</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 138-139.

<sup>129</sup> Boupha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT LTD., p. 74.

how to continue with the war.<sup>130</sup> The Lao side informed Vietnam of its intention in the war which was revolution to counter interference, to protect its strongholds and to further expand these areas as well as develop them comprehensively in terms of politics, economy and militarily so that it can serve the long years of war yet to come. At the same time, Pathet Lao will continue to increase its political influence nationwide and internationally.

The Pathet Lao leaders, Kaysone Phomvihane and Souphanouvong had both carried out diplomatic activities by travelling to various socialist countries as well as attending international conferences organized by political organizations of different countries in order to seek and attract assistance to support the revolution and the incremental mission to protect Laos from foreign invasion. One significant event was the invitation extended by the government of Indonesia to Pathet Laos in order to attend the Second Asian-African Conference with various leaders from different countries such as: Sukarno (Indonesia), Josip Tito (Yugoslavia), King Norodom Sihanouk (Cambodia), Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam), Zhou Enlai (China), Kim Il Sung (North Korea). Furthermore, Souphanouvong had also written a letter continuously to the government of the Soviet Union and the government of the United Kingdom in their capacity as the Co-Chair of the 1962 Geneva Conference on the neutrality of Laos in order to report on the actions of the royalists who had violated the Geneva Accords.<sup>131</sup> This foreign movement was considered a success for the Pathet Lao side, which is recognized as an influential political force in Laos. Moreover, this was also supported under the Second Asian-African

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<sup>130</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT LTD., pp. 72-73.

<sup>131</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 106-107.

Conference expansion of the national liberation movement and national independence in Asia and Africa.

## **2.5 The Intensification of a Special War or a Secret War in Laos**

In April 1964, the Pathet Lao held its Second Congress and adopted a ten-point program that stressed the struggle against the US imperialists and defense of the liberated areas. One month after, the US raided the territories. The Pathet Lao labeled the American belligerent act as an “intensified Special War” and what the US Press later called the “Secret War” in Laos.<sup>132</sup>

In 1965, Pathet Lao and the Neutralists had a joint meeting in Samneua province, which resulted in the joint declaration of four principles and a five-point peace process to resolve the Lao civil war, which was: to fight for peace, independence, neutrality, and prosperity of Laos and the call for the Lao people to cooperate with the people of Vietnam and Cambodia to fight in the Indochina War together.<sup>133</sup> In the same year, the Indochina Summit was held between the three Indochinese nations under the chairmanship of King Norodom Sihanouk, which was aimed at strengthening and intensifying the relationship of the Indochinese countries.<sup>134</sup>

From 1966 to 1970, President Nixon issued a declaration on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1969, announcing that the U.S. would look for options to exit the War in Vietnam and the War in Indochina. However, this was Nixon’s tactic that aimed to further create complexity in

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<sup>132</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Hoover Press Publication, p. 126.

<sup>133</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp.118-119.

<sup>134</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 120.

the region so that Vietnamese will continue to fight with one another, and the same goes for Indochinese. The Americans had drawn up a plan to withdraw their troops because they were facing backlash from massive protests back at home to end the war. Therefore, Nixon used other tactics to wage war in Indochina and continued to conceal the secret war that he was engaged in that aimed to annihilate the Laotian and Vietnamese forces. However, through resilience, the Pathet Lao forces prevailed and were able to expand its foothold even further.<sup>135</sup>

In January 1968, Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces mounted a general offensive that swept Vang Pao mercenaries out of Samneua province. The key to the Pathet Lao victory was the capture of the CIA's eagle-nest bastion, Phou Pha Thi, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March. The U.S. air force built a radar guidance center on the top of this 5,680-foot mountain in 1966. "to provide more accurate guidance for all-weather bombing operations" over North Vietnam. Seventeen miles from the North Vietnamese border, Pha Thi had become the eyes and ears of the U.S. bombing campaign over Hanoi and the Red River Delta.<sup>136</sup> Interestingly, President Johnson announced a partial bombing halt over North Vietnam less than three weeks after the radar installation at Pha Thi was destroyed.<sup>137</sup> During the end of 1969, President Nixon executed a policy to destroy communist forces in Indochina by directing a massive budget to wage a special war. This was done by utilizing a combination of U.S. military forces, hiring mercenaries from

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<sup>135</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 108.

<sup>136</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 237.

<sup>137</sup> McCoy, A. W., Read, C. B., & Adams, L. P. (1972). *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. Harper & Row, p. 124.

Thailand, and Saigon, South Vietnam. They were deployed into Laos and the Indochina region at large.<sup>138</sup>

To address the growing forces of Pathet Lao, the United States and Royal Lao Army initiated a battle field called “Banhlop Koukiat” at the Plain of Jars, Xieng Khuang Province July 1969. The US Forces were joined by Vang Pao’s secret army and assistance from Thailand’s military combined with an air assault that dropped bombs on the area. In parallel, they have also sent their armed forces into combat to fight opposing forces in the central and southern regions. All of these actions were aimed to create difficulties for the Pathet Lao. This battle would go on for six months until 1970. The battle, however, was ultimately lost, with both sides suffering severe casualties. When the U.S. and the Royal Lao Army withdrew their forces, it took the opportunity to bring civilians living in Xieng Khuang to Vientiane.

On the other hand, the summit of the Indochina three Nations Conference was also held in 1970. The three nations reaffirm their solidarity between the armies of the three nations to defeat external aggression and fight back their country. The three nations were determined to strategically triumph over the Nixon’s tactics on “using the Indochinese people to kill their own people.” The meeting’s outcome has brought unity and solidarity of the three nations closer and heightened their relationship.<sup>139</sup>

## **2.6 New Five-Point Peace Process of the Pathet Lao**

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<sup>138</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 117.

<sup>139</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 126.



At the same time that the Pathet Lao was engaged in combat to expand its stronghold, it continued to be active politically and in foreign relations. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1970, the Pathet Lao designated a delegation to travel to Vientiane to communicate its five-point peace process to resolve the conflict in Laos and explain it to the RLG.<sup>140</sup>

These five-point peace proposal presented by the Pathet Lao on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, 1970. “1. All countries must respect the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, unity, and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Laos, based on the 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos. The US must stop their intervention and aggression in Laos, withdraw all their US troops, US military personnel, and advisers, including all their weapons and war material. Stop using their military bases in Thailand and Thailand mercenaries for their belligerent act against Laos. The US must stop using Lao territory for intervention and aggression against other countries. 2. Based on the 1962 Geneva Accord, the Kingdom of Laos refrains from joining any military alliance with foreign countries, from allowing foreign countries to establish military bases, and bringing in troops and military personnel into its territory. The Kingdom of Laos implements a foreign policy based on the five-peaceful coexistence and principles of the two Geneva Accords in 1954 and 1962 on Laos. 3. To respect the throne, to hold free and democratic general elections. To elect the National Assembly, set up a Provisional Coalition Government representing all Lao people and all ethnic groups, and build a peaceful, independent, neutral democratic unified, and prosperous Laos. 4. During the period from the day of the restoration of peace to the general elections for setting up the National Assembly, the parties concerned shall, in a spirit of national concord, peace, neutral, and mutual respect, hold a consultative political

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<sup>140</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 109.

conference to deal with all internal affairs of Laos and set up a Provisional Coalition Government. The parties concerned shall reach an agreement on establishing a security zone to ensure the consultative political conference and the Provisional Coalition Government proceed effectively, free from any attempts of sabotage by forces from inside or outside the country. 5. The unification of Laos shall achieve through consultations between Lao parties on the principle of equality and national accord. Pending this unification, no party shall use force to provoke or seize areas controlled by another. The pro-American forces must withdraw immediately from the areas they have illegally occupied and resettle the places to those forcibly removed from there with a reparation cost. Each party must pledge to refrain from discrimination and revenge against those who collaborated with another party.”<sup>141</sup>

The Pathet Lao also took this opportunity to meet with the diplomatic corps in Vientiane Capital. This action prompted the public, diplomatic, and the international community to express its support for the Pathet Lao and proposed that the Neutralist government of Souvanna Phouma should cease all hostilities and start the process of negotiations. The situation and atmosphere in surrounding countries of Laos had also begun to change. In Vietnam, the United States stopped all bombing operations in the North, and within the U.S. itself, large protests were going on that called for the end of the war in Indochina. From then onwards, the U.S. had to agree in negotiating with Vietnam in Paris as well as a step by step plan to withdraw its troops.

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<sup>141</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 118-119; Zasloff, J. J. (1973). *The Pathet Lao: leadership and organization*. The Rand Corporation, pp. 132-133.

In Cambodia, King Sihanouk was devoted to maintaining neutrality. He decided to prohibit American forces from coming into the country to suppress the Viet Cong, who was using the Ho Chi Minh Trail to travel through Cambodia into South Vietnam. This decision was in direct conflict with the United States policies towards Indochina, which is why the CIA orchestrated a coup d'état to overthrow King Sihanouk when he traveled abroad in 1970. The United States thus installed General Lon Nol as head of state, and King Sihanouk was given political asylum in Beijing. From then onwards, to show solidarity with King Sihanouk, the Pathet Lao leaders, the Front for National Liberation, and Solidarity of Cambodia, the Leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in cooperation with the PRC organized a meeting between three countries and four parties that were held in Guangzhou, China in 1970, which was attended by President Souphanouvong, King Sihanouk, Pham Van Dong of Vietnam and Nguyen Hue Tho from South Vietnam. This conference was to send a message and express solidarity with King Sihanouk to fight against America.<sup>142</sup>

Although the five-point peace process proposed by the Pathet Lao on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1970 was well-received, Souvanna Phouma was still implementing his policies for his agenda, which was to merge the Royal Lao Army with the Neutralist Armed Force to establish the national army. This move strained relations between the RLG and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the PRC, which resulted in the downgrade of diplomatic relations from ambassadorial level to the Chargé d'Affaires. This was because previously, both countries recognized Souvanna Phouma's neutrality, but with his change in stand, it would ultimately result in political and diplomatic repercussions. When

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<sup>142</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 110.

President Nixon was informed of the five-point peace process of the Pathet Lao, he then sent a letter to Alexei Kosygin, Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, and to Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, in their capacity as Co-Chair of the 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos. Based on these five-point peace process and principle, however, Alexei Kosygin refused to organize a conference to consult on the situation in Laos between the Parties to the 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos and had made a counter-proposal to the United States that “in order to revitalize and restore peace in Laos, the relevant parties of Laos must conduct their internal consultation for reconciliation.” Thus, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1970, Alexei Kosygin, the USSR’s Prime minister, made an official visit to the SRV.<sup>143</sup>

In the central part of Laos, during the beginning of 1971, the United States and the Royal Lao Army initiated another battle field called “Lamson 719” in order to infiltrate into Highway No. 9. This was the largest military action and move inside Laos and was for the purpose of destroying strategic routes for transportation that was used by the three Indochina countries.<sup>144</sup> This battle involved 40,000 troops deployed from Saigon, Thailand and the Royal Lao Army in combination with an additional 6,000 from the U.S. side. This battle aimed to wrestle control of Xepon District, Highway No. 9 and Dong Village along the Lao-Vietnam Border, Savannakhet Province, Vietnam’s Quang Tri Province from the Indochina countries as well as separate Indochina along two lines from North to South. This move however was predicted by the Pathet Lao and Democratic

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<sup>143</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 120.

<sup>144</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 144.

Republic of Vietnam who fought the invaders and won the battle which severely impacted the strength of the RLG.<sup>145</sup>

## **2.7 Sino-US Rapprochement**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1971, Zhou Enlai, the Premier of the PRC, traveled to Hanoi in secrecy in order to notify the SRV that the United States and China would be exercising a policy of rapprochement. Then, Kissinger traveled to Beijing. He had two goals: to consult with China about the Official Visit of President Nixon to China and other various issues of interests of both parties that can be tabled for negotiations. During the meeting between Kissinger and Zhou Enlai, the Premier stated that “Indochina’s situation is the most crucial issue for consultation between China and the U.S., Kissinger says the U.S. is also involved in Indochina and Taiwan. If the United States withdrew its troops from southern Vietnam, it would also reduce its two-third of U.S military forces from Taiwan.”<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, Zhou Enlai also said that “The People’s Republic of China sees the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam as the priority and the acceptance of the People’s Republic of China as a second priority member of the United Nations. China supports the seven-points peace process proposed by the temporary revolutionary government of Vietnam, which stipulated the withdrawal of all U.S. Forces from Indochina and set a deadline for the withdrawal of the air forces, military bases, and navy.”<sup>147</sup> Thus, Kissinger said that he would address this issue to the Vietnamese side at

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<sup>145</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT Ltd., pp. 77-78.

<sup>146</sup> Burr, W. (Ed.). (2002, February 27). [The Beijing-Washington Back-Channel and Henry Kissinger’s Secret Trip to China]. National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 66. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/>

<sup>147</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 131-132.

the Paris Conference. Furthermore, during President Nixon's Visit to Beijing, China on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 1972, the US and China issued three important joint declarations, also known as the Shanghai Communiqué. Both parties announced to work towards normalization and they will not seek to expand their influence and power in the Asia-Pacific Region, and agreed to broaden the understanding of the two people.<sup>148</sup>

## **2.8 The Third Reunification of Laos**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1972, the Second Congress of the Lao People's Party (LPP) was held in Samneua. The Congress unanimously agreed to change the name from the Lao People's Party to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party elected new Central Committee members, including seven Politburo members and the Central Committee also elected Kaysone Phomvihane as the General-Secretary of the LPRP.

The RLG, on the other hand, went on to lose other various significant battles in the north, central and southern regions in which it then had to accept the five-point peace process that was previously proposed by Pathet Lao. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1973, Vietnam and the U.S. signed the Paris Peace Accord to end the war and establish peace in South Vietnam. The VII Section of the Paris Peace Accord mentioned that Laos and Cambodia specifically in Article 20: a.) Parties to the Paris Peace Accord on the situation in Vietnam must strictly abide by the Geneva Accord on Cambodia and the 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos to which the parties must recognize the basic national rights of Cambodia and Laos namely: national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of these

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<sup>148</sup> Department of State [USA], The Department of State Bulletin, March 20, 1972, pp. 435-438. Japan's Foreign Relations-Basic Documents Vol. 3, pp. 529-535.  
<https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/docs/19720228.D1E.html>

nations. The Parties must also respect the neutrality of Laos and Cambodia. Based on these principles, the United States must start the withdrawal of its troops from Vietnam, starting from the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1973.

From its apparent defeat in various battles and the influence of the Paris Peace Accord between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the US, the pressure was mounted on the RLG. The RLG had to ultimately sign the peace accord in Vientiane on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1973 on the restoration, revitalization of peace and national integrity, and solidarity in Laos and the relevant protocols to the agreement between the representatives of Pathet Lao and the RLG. Moreover, in implementing the Vientiane Accord 1973 (Third reunification of Laos), the Provisional Government of National Union (PGNU) and the Joint National Political Council (JNPC) was established on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1973. These were the two highest coalition bodies and were adopted and recognized by the King. At the same time, these two bodies were also recognized as independent bodies and do not have to go through to the lower house, which was stipulated in the constitution.

Although they signed the Vientiane Peace Accord or witnessed the third reunification of Laos, the RLG did not give up in conspiring to overthrow the PGNU of Souvanna Phouma. The last effort by the United States was to push for General Thao Ma (who previously sought refuge in Thailand after failing to stage a coup d'état) to stage another coup d'état on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1973. He also undermined the peace agreements and completely took over power in Vientiane. However, this effort was thwarted with several countries taking preemptive measures to pressure the Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. to cease all activities, which included the Ambassador of the Soviet Union, United

Kingdom, France and the International Control Committee (India, Poland, and Canada).<sup>149</sup>

On November 1974, the People's Revolutionary Party organized the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Party in order to evaluate the implementation of the Vientiane Peace Accord of 1973 and identified the next road map for revolution intending to garner internal support from the people at all levels including workers and laborers, the general public, students and academia, government officials, military personnel, police, and local government officials from the Vientiane side so that they can see the reality, the mistakes and the true nature of the RLG. A campaign was also to be organized to disseminate the 18 points of political action program developed by the JNPC so that all relevant authorities and sectors understood the coalition government's political action program, which included domestic and foreign policies.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

During World War II, at the beginning of 1945, the French power was weakened and defeated by the Germans. Japan invaded Indochina, chased the French army to the jungle, and encouraged the Lao people to go against the wishes of the pro-French Lao King to declare independence. The Lao nationalists then formed a "government of Lao Issara" (Free Lao) under the leadership of Phaya Khammao Vilay and proclaimed its independence on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1945. After the Japanese government unconditionally signed the letter of surrender on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1945. The French who escaped to the jungle came back into the Kingdom of Laos with support from the royals,

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<sup>149</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 136.



who continued to cooperate with them and maintain as a French Protectorate. The Lao nationalists fled to Thailand to ensure their safety and survival. While the Lao Issara government's members were still in exile in Thailand, in spring 1948, the Thai military government of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram further accommodated France by ordering the Lao exile soldiers off Thai soil. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 1949, the French government invited King Sisavangvong to visit France to sign the Franco-Lao Treaty in Paris in recognizing Laos's independence. However, this Franco-Lao Treaty recognized Laos's independence only in form, not in substance. The Treaty divided the members of the Lao Issara. Phaya Khammao decided to dissolve the Lao Issara government in October 1949. Some Lao Issara members decided to return to Laos and cooperated with the French because the French administration ensured the safety of those who returned and granted them amnesty. Others like Prince Souphanouvong and ex-Lao Issara, on the other hand, believed that Laos's independence from the French Union was a farce because the French still enjoy critical rights. So, they decided to continue their resistance activity together with other Lao compatriots, like Kaysone Phomvihane, Nouhak Phoumsavanh, who were still fighting against French colonists in the Northeastern part of the country and along the Lao-Vietnam border. In 1950, the Congress of the people's representative was convened and decided to establish the Neo Lao Issara or Free Lao Front and endorsed a Resistance Government of the Pathet Lao. In the same year, the US and the RLG also signed a long-term economic and military assistance agreement.

In 1951, the leaders of the Lao resistance government, Vietnam and Cambodia, signed an Alliance agreement to fight against the common French enemy. In 1952, Laos began to take part in its foreign affairs. The French government signed a new Franco-Lao Treaty in 1953. This Treaty was recognized by the US, UK, and Thailand as the formal

independence of Laos on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1953. After the French were defeated at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, at the 1954 Geneva Accord, Laos's independence, democracy, and territorial integrity were officially recognized. As the French influence was diminishing in the region, the US thus directed a large amount of its military budget towards Indochina.

Consequently, SEATO was established by the US on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1954 as a move to prevent and counter the domino theory or the advancement of communist forces in the region. In 1955, The Lao People's Party was established to lead the revolution in Laos. In 1957, Laos' political parties reached an agreement to establish its first Coalition Government. However, the US did what they could in order to get rid of the Pathet Lao out of the Coalition Government by cutting the aid to Laos and cause the government of Souvanna Phouma to collapse after eight months and replaced him with an extreme rightist and pro-US, Phoui Sananikone. At the beginning of 1959, Phoui Sananikhone enacted laws to counter communism and issued a declaration that the 1954 Geneva Accords on Indochina that Phoui Sananikone himself participated in as a party will no longer be valid. Then, he notified Pathet Lao that their actions as a communist party directly violated the law. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 1959, Phoui Sananikone ordered the arrest and imprisonment of the Pathet Lao Leaders, including Prince Souphanouvong that joined the First Coalition Government. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1959, Kaysone Phomvihane, on behalf of the Pathet Lao, sent an official telegram to the USSR and the UK, Co-Chair of the 1954 Geneva Meeting on Indochina, to condemn the violation of the Geneva accord of Phoui Sananikone. The official telegram also emphasized that the leaders of Pathet Lao should be released from prison, and all military confrontations aiming to destroy Pathet Lao forces should be ceased immediately. Towards this issue, the government of the

Soviet Union issued a declaration to condemn the actions of the United States. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1960, Prince Souphanouvong and other Pathet Lao Leaders who were imprisoned in Phonkheng Prison, Vientiane Capital, escaped the prison and returned safely to their strongholds in Samneua province.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1960, the RLG, including the Commander in Chief of the Royal Lao Army and other high-ranking military officials, traveled to Luang Prabang province to take part in the funeral of King Sisavangvong. While the delegations were in Luang Prabang attending the funeral ceremony of King Sisavangvong, the Paratroop Battalion II led by Captain Kong Le organized a coup to overthrow the government of Prince Somsanith, who was supported by General Phoumy Norsavanh. The Ambassador of Laos to France, Souvanna Phouma, former Neutralist Prime Minister, was then recalled from France to reassume his position as the Prime Minister. The political situation worsened due to the intervention of the US supporting the newly formed government of Boun Oum-Phoumy in December 1950 to overthrow the government of Souvanna Phouma. Thus, in 1961, there were two governments in Laos. Finally, the National Assembly in Vientiane voted for a resolution to dissolve the government of Souvanna Phouma.

In 1962, the Geneva Conference on Indochina took place. The three princes who represented the three factions in Laos were still meeting for further discussion. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1962, the three princes organized a meeting and signed a joint declaration. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1962, all 14 countries and Laos signed an international agreement and a tripartite declaration on Laos's neutrality after a total of 14 months of negotiations. Moreover, with the agreement amongst the three factions/political parties to implement the 1962 Geneva Accord on Laos, the second Coalition Government was formed. On the

same day, the King also officially expressed his support of the National Coalition Government. Prince Souvanna Phouma led as the Prime Minister and deputy Ministers representing Pathet Lao and the Royal Government side by Phoumy-Bounoum. The Coalition Government lasted less than a year after the Royalists planned and murdered Kinim Pholsena, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who represented the Neutralists in April 1963.

From 1964 onwards, the United States and the Royal Lao Army started a special war in Laos using modern vehicles and engines of war to silence its opposition. As a result, Laos suffered the most in Indochina, with the most casualties of more than three million tons of bombs that were dropped. By 1965 the CIA created a Hmong army of thirty thousand men headed by Vang Pao that guarded radar installations vital to bombing North Vietnam, rescued downed American pilots, and battled Pathet Lao guerrillas. There was also an internal conflict in the military circle related to drug trafficking, the promotion of military personnel, the merger of the Royal Lao Army and Neutralist Armed Force, and the establishment of the National Army. Thus, General Koupasith Abhay and General Ouane Rathikhone staged a coup d'etat and overthrew the government of Chao Somsanith, which General Phoumy Norsavanh supported. In 1970, the three Indochinese countries organized a meeting to cooperate in fighting against the US. On the other hand, the US also announced that it would look for options to exit the War in Vietnam and the War in Indochina.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1970, the Pathet Lao designated a delegation to travel to Vientiane to communicate its five-point peace process to resolve the conflict in Laos and explain it to the RLG and diplomatic corps in Vientiane. In the central part of Laos, during the beginning of 1971, the United States and the Royal Lao Army initiated another

battlefield called “Lamson 719” in order to infiltrate into Highway No. 9. This was the largest military action and moved inside Laos and was to destroy strategic routes for the transportation used by the three Indochina countries. China and the U.S. rapprochement took place in the same year. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1971, Zhou Enlai, the Premier of the PRC, traveled to Hanoi in secrecy in order to notify the SRV that the United States and China would be exercising a policy of rapprochement. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1972, the Second Congress of the Lao People’s Party was held in Samneua. The Party Congress unanimously agreed to change the name from the Lao People’s Party to the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The RLG, on the other hand, went on to lose other various significant battles in the north, central and southern regions in which it then had to accept the five-point peace process that Pathet Lao previously proposed. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1973, Vietnam and the U.S. signed the Paris Peace Accord to end the war and establish peace in South Vietnam. By the end of 1973, the U.S. began to withdraw its troops from Vietnam.

From its apparent defeat in various battles and the influence of the Paris Peace Accord between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the US, pressure was mounted on the RLG. As a result, the RLG ultimately had to sign the peace accord in Vientiane on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1973. The Vientiane Accord was on the restoration, revitalization of peace and national integrity, and solidarity in Laos and the relevant protocols to the agreement between the Pathet Lao and the RLG. As a result, the third Coalition Government was formed. However, the road to independence was still unforeseeable since the US continued to support the royalists financially.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Conserving Neutrality**

#### **3. Introduction**

After fighting for nearly twenty years since Laos's First Reunification in 1954, the Lao people finally had the chance to establish a political change in the country. The Laos's Third Reunification, Vientiane Accord was signed on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 1973, which gave hope to the Lao people to obtain peace by implementing the agreement on the withdrawal of the Americans consultative bodies and military troops along with the Thai forces from Laos by April 1974. The Joint National Political Council (JNPC) and the Provisional Government of National Union (PGNU) were also created to revitalize peace, independence, democracy, unity and prosperity of Laos. The JNPC and the PGNU declared to use laws that guaranteed the citizens' democratic rights and laid out the rational political program in 18-points. However, despite the agreement was signed, many obstacles and hurdles continues to exist and carried on until the mid-1975 because the US continues to use its tactic to thwart and prolonged the implementation of the 1973 Vientiane accord.

This chapter will investigate how the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) fight for their independence and how the new government try to balance between its socialist partners in safeguarding and building the nation. So then, why did Laos decide to align with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) despite its goal of advancing to socialism? And why didn't pursue a pro-Soviet policy after the establishment of the Lao

People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)? These main questions will be explored in this phase of Laos's foreign policy change.

### **3.1 Establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic**

Laos's political situation began to improve in 1975. The Khmer Rouge occupied Phnom Penh in Cambodia on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1975. In South Vietnam, Saigon fell to Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 1975, which resulted in the disorganized withdrawal of the US troops from Vietnam. Thus, the peaceful environment became a good basis for the Lao Revolutionary forces to take the opportunity to prepare to seize power throughout the country as well. At the end of April 1975, the Pathet Lao's leading committee members implemented the LPRP Politburo orders. They invited the King of Laos, cabinet members of the PGNU, and members JNPC to officially visit Viengxay District, Houaphanh province, a stronghold of the Pathet Lao in order to divert them quickly from the movement of the Lao People's Liberation Army (LPLA) into the major cities. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, the Politburos of the LPRP met again in Viengxay, Houaphanh province, to assess the domestic and foreign political situation and issued a resolution to seize power in the whole country. Afterward, Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP, ordered all party organizations to use the three strategic strikes in order to combat and seize power: "the mass uprising, the pressure from the revolutionary armed forces, and the action by the enemy soldiers who had come over to the side of the revolution."<sup>150</sup> Then, from the beginning of May 1975, when the LPLA

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<sup>150</sup> Third Congress of the LPRP Document and Materials. (1984). *The Political report of the LPRP Central Committee to the Third Congress of the LPRP delivered by Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP*. Progress Publishers Moscow, p. 12.

came close to Vientiane, they began exerting pressure on the U.S. and the Thai to implement the 1973 Vientiane accord<sup>151</sup> and pressured them to withdraw their troop from Laos by May 1975. From then, the Royal Lao Army, which had already weakened, lost hope and motivation to fight.<sup>152</sup> The situation made the various Ministers and Generals feel unease, who then resigned and fled the country. At the same time in May, the three ministers namely Sisouk Nachampassak, Minister of Defense, Ngone Sananikone, Minister of Finance, Khamphay Abhay, Minister of Public Health together with two deputy ministers also resigned and fled the country. Besides, the royal rightist generals including Gen. Koupasith Abhay, the Commander of the Fifth Military Region including the Vientiane Capital, had also fled out of Vientiane.

Furthermore, the Pathet Lao had a discussion in early May with Souvanna Phouma, the Prime Minister of the PGNU, to hand over power to Gen. Khamouane Boupha (a member of Pathet Lao) the Deputy Minister of National Defense, to act as the acting commander in chief of the national defense force and acting Minister of National Defense in place of Sisouk Nachampasack, former Minister of National Defense, who already fled to Thailand. From then on, Gen. Khamouane Boupha issued a declaration on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 1975 and called for all rightist forces to cease all activities, lay down their weapons and arsenal, avoid confrontation, and replace all commanding officers of the right-wing forces with the Pathet Lao personnel.

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<sup>151</sup> Based on the 1973 Vientiane Accord, the American consultative bodies and military troops and the Thai forces on Laos's soil needed to withdraw from Laos by April 1974. However, they did not.

<sup>152</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 115



On the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1975, twenty-one organizations<sup>153</sup> comprising of the general public, the federation of students and academics, government officials, military personnel, and police totaling over one hundred thousand people paraded the streets in protest to condemn and criticize the actions of the Royal Lao Government (RLG). Further, they also called for action to punish those who were corrupted and asked for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to cease all its activities including United States Operation Mission (USOM) within Laos. The situation also forced the Americans to dissolve and withdraw the USAID organization, which in reality, was the brain of the colonial institutions (the parallel government of the RLG). Furthermore, they also called for eliminating the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), withdrawal of its consultants and experts from America present in Laos by the end of June.<sup>154</sup> This protest had erupted countrywide, and in all areas, that were governed by the RLG. However, some of the high-ranking officials of the RLG who did not flee were still planning to maintain its control in Laos. The mass campaign continues and protested to return the power to the people, dissolved, eliminated the old government, and established a new governing authority. Moreover, they also revealed and asked for justice for past leaders' wrongdoings and military commanders in the RLG.<sup>155</sup> At the same time, the infamous Gen. Vang Pao who worked for CIA had also resigned and left Laos on the US C-130 transport plane to Thailand on 14 May 1975.<sup>156</sup> By the end of May, the Pathet Lao had

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<sup>153</sup> The disseminating of the PGNU and JNPC's 18-points policy guidelines reflects both the PGNU's domestic and foreign policies. Therefore, this have deeply ingrained in the minds of the people to up rise against any form of US organizations and foreign troops on Lao soil.

<sup>154</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 161-162; Brown, M., & Zasloff, J. J. (1976). Laos in 1975: People's Democratic Revolution--Lao Style. *Asian Survey*, 16(2), 195.

<sup>155</sup> (1975, September 5). *Sieng Pasason Newspapers*.

<sup>156</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press, p. 160.

taken over all the provinces, and for the first time in Lao history, the country became under the control of a single unified force.<sup>157</sup> Then, the Joint Command of the military and police forces was dissolved by the Coalition Government in July 1975. Therefore, “By August 5, 1975, our people had largely removed the puppet administration in all the provinces and big cities. At a large rally held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1975, the People’s Revolutionary Committee of the province and the city of Vientiane was presented to the people of the capital. Essentially, this put an end to the existence of the coalition administration.”<sup>158</sup> On the other hand, the Pathet Lao also organized political seminars for the ex-military and police officers and high-ranking government officials of the old government of the RLG to understand the country's new changing conditions.

In the same year, after the relevant officials have collected sufficient evidence, a special tribunal was then proposed to set up on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1975 at Vientiane Capital Court. The Supreme People’s prosecutor then read charges against 31 individuals. It was then proposed that the court reviewed and considered punishing those who were guilty based on the code of military court of justice and the penal code and the severity of the crimes carried out by each individual. Six people were sentenced to death, namely Phoui Sananikone, Boun Oum Nachampassak, Gen. Vang Pao, Gen. Koupasith Abhay, Gen. Oudone Sananikone, and Gen. Thonglith Chokbengboun. The second category was to be imprisoned for life for five of them. The third category was to be imprisoned for a total of 20 years and these punishments were sentenced against 20 individuals. These

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<sup>157</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 142

<sup>158</sup> (1982). Third Congress of the LPRP Document and Materials. *The Political report of the LPRP Central Committee to the Third Congress of the LPRP delivered by Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP*. Progress Publishers Moscow, p. 12.

individuals, however, already fled the country. Therefore, the court pronounced judgment in absentia.<sup>159</sup>

In October 1975, the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the Second Congress of the LPRP was officially opened. Kaysone Phomvihane gave the specific direction of the revolution for the people all over the nation and proposed a series of measures for the abdication of the monarchy and the official proclamation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Thus, the Plenum adopted the proposal and agreed on several resolutions for governing the country in peace. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 1975, the JNPC and the PGNU embarked on establishing People's Councils and Administrative Committees at provincial, district, and municipal levels. Moreover, interim regulations on local elections were later announced on the People's Councils and Administrative Committees at provincial, district, and municipal levels' elections. From then, elections were quickly held by November 1975, and a new elected Councils and Administrative Committees were formed, replacing the old one. Afterward, the Pathet Lao then proposed to open a joint meeting between the JNPC and the PGNU in Viengxay, Houaphanh province, to prepare for the opening of the National Congress of the People's Representative to discuss and consider the future of the country. The joint meeting considered the changing environment and concluded that the proposals from people all over the country and their demands should be considered correct according to reality. The joint meeting then decided to send a delegation from both organizations: Prince Souphanouvong (JNPC) and Prince Souvanna Phouma (PGNU), respectively to meet with King Sisavang Vattana. Therefore, to respect the people's aspirations, the King

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<sup>159</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 128.

decided to abdicate from the throne by giving them (Souphanouvong and Souvanna) a letter of abdication signed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November, 1975.<sup>160</sup>

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, 1975, Prince Souphanouvong and Prince Souvanna Phouma, respectively representing the JNPC and the PGNU, declared to resign from both organizations and to dissolve the two above mentioned institutions of the old national administration to make it convenient for the improvement of the new suitable administration machinery and handed power over to the Congress of the People's Representative.<sup>161</sup> At the same time, on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1975, the National Congress of the People's Representative was officially organized under the Chairmanship of Prince Souphanouvong, President of Pathet Lao, at Kilometer 6, Vientiane Capital of Laos. The Congress was attended by a total of 264 representatives for the Lao people of all strata and ethnic groups and accompanied by Prince Vongsavang, the former Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Laos. During the first day of the meeting, Kaysone Phomvihane, the General-Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, in honor for the first time to officially represent the LPRP, delivered important political reports to the meeting which emphasized on the history of the revolution, and both domestic and international developments. Furthermore, he also delivered a statement on the direction of the long-term task in building the nation's development in the new era. In his speech, Kaysone also mentioned some of the changes in the political regime, and he stated that:

“Knowing the weak points of this archaic system about the people's lives and seeing the people's common aspiration, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1975, King Sisavang

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<sup>160</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 129.

<sup>161</sup> Kaysone, P. (1976). Political report presented by Mr. Kaysone Phomvihanh at the National Congress of the People's Representative in Laos. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 6(1), 115.

Vatthana voluntarily decided to abdicate handed all powers to our National Congress of the People's Representative, which will make decisions. He willingly agreed to be a citizen of the Lao PDR. He swore to sacrifice all his abilities in his life to take part in national work. We want to ask the National Congress to congratulate his unselfish and just act of the former King heartily. The national democratic revolution in Laos is completed. To further the revolutionary's result, to eradicate severe difficulties on national development, national prosperity, and progress, the Lao people's critical solution is to create a secure administration system from the central to the grass-root level. Concerning the need of the people, the JNPC and the PGNU formed according to the 1973 Vientiane Accord, once had earnestly participated in the task of restoring peace, the national concord. Now, they can no longer answer the new situation's aspirations and the revolution's new duties. This presented a conflict that had to result to create ways that would guarantee the revolutionary success in this early stage. The revolutionary tasks can be a function to the fullest extent, and the goal can be realized. Comprehending the circumstances mentioned above well on December 1, 1975, the President, Prince Souphanouvong, and the Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma, respectively representing the JNPC and the PGNU, declared to dissolve the two above mentioned institutions of the old national administration in order to make it convenient for the improvement of the new suitable administration machinery. The National Congress congratulates these intelligent politicians' decisions and hopes that these gentlemen will continue to participate the best they can in the national work.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Kayson, P. (1976). Political report presented by Mr. Kayson Phomvihane at the National Congress of the People's Representative in Laos. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 6(1), 115.

Moreover, at the National Congress of the People's Representatives in Laos on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, 1975, Kaysone also explained the meaning behind making Laos a country with peace, independence, democracy, unity, prosperity, and social progress. In his political report, he wrote, "**Peace** means that Laos succeeded in eradicating all internal or external enemies, it will not allow any reactionary power to destroy the tranquility of the state, good order, the application of labor for the construction of the nation during this time to make the country eternally prosperous, to render the well-being in the people's lives, implement peaceful and friendly relations with foreign countries. **Independence** means that Laos is free from any dependency upon foreign countries concerning politics, military, economy, armed forces, and the Lao people always hold vigilant spirit, immediately liquidate any sign of aggressive colonial power, and constantly safeguard the country. **Democracy** implies that all the people of all ethnic groups are the true owner of the country, society, participating in all national activities, serving as efficacious touch-stones for the people's democratic administration, democratic rights, and freedom guaranteed. **Unity** means solidarity among people of all ethnic groups, of all socio-economical strata, both spiritually and inactions, resist all offensive maneuvers of the imperialists and the reactionaries in order to build and protect the country. **Prosperity** means the people apply their labor forces to expand the economy and culture, making the living standard both materially and culturally of the people of all ethnic groups be improved successfully. The country has growing industrial bases, modern agriculture, modern forestry reserve, and progressive culture and sciences. **Social progress** means all citizens are educated, raise their level of education, expand their abilities in every way to participate in the tasks of defending the country. No threat of

exploitation from anyone is left over. The people will get the share according to the level of their sacrifices and their progressiveness.”<sup>163</sup>

After listening to the reports and acquiring an in-depth understanding the international developments and the actual situation of Laos on the first day of the meeting, on the second day of the National Congress of the People’s Representative, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, 1975, the Congress approved the voluntary abdication of King Sisavang Vatthana from the Throne, according to the abdication letter dated on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1975. This was a call from the Lao people’s aspiration and the demands of the changing social order. Then, the National Congress of the People’s Representative took unanimous decisions to abolish the Monarchic regime and proclaimed the Lao People’s Democratic Republic solemnly, approved the resolution on the national flag, national anthem, national emblem, and the official Lao national language. Furthermore, the Congress designated Prince Souphanouvong as the President of the Lao PDR. The Congress also approved the nomination of the former King Sisavang Vatthana as Supreme Advisor to the President of the Lao PDR. The Congress also established the People’s Supreme Assembly of the Lao PDR, consisting of 45 members with Prince Souphanouvong as the Chairman and four others as the Vice-Chairman. Then, the Lao PDR government was formed consisting of 39 members, which Kaysone Phomvihane served as the Prime Minister and four other Vice Prime Ministers. Moreover, the Congress also approved the nomination of Prince Souvanna Phouma as the Advisor to the new government. Finally, the Congress approved the Action Program of the Government of the Lao PDR, which sets out domestic and foreign policy, development

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<sup>163</sup> Kaysone, P. (1976). Political report presented by Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane at the National Congress of the People’s Representative in Laos. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 6(1), 116-17.

of the socio-economic, national defense, and national security. This Action Program aimed to make Laos a country with peace, independence, democracy, unity, prosperity, and social progress, participate with dignity in defending peace, independence of Laos, democracy, and social progress in Southeast Asia and the world. Therefore, the Government believed that this could be achieved by executing a foreign policy based on “peace, independence, friendship, and non-alignment.”<sup>164</sup>

### **3.1.1 Initial Foreign Policy Challenges**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1975, the Lao government adopted a five-point foreign policy program. The Lao government has set out the policy program as follows: “*First*, to condemn and resolute fighting subversive new American ploys in collusion with Thai reactionaries supporting Lao reactionaries and demand, the United States heal the war wounds in the Lao PDR. *Second*, to enhance and improve friendly relations and cooperation among the Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Strengthen its solidarity and relationship with other socialist countries. Moreover, Laos will also maintain and enhance goodwill and good neighborliness towards the Thai people. *Third*, to improve relations with the third world countries and continue maintaining diplomatic relations and expanding trade relations with all countries regardless of their social and ideological systems based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. *Fourth*, to support the struggle of the world's people, first to those in Southeast Asia, for peace, independence, democracy, and neutrality. Further, in demand of a complete withdrawal of American troops and bases in the region and fully participating in the Non-Aligned Movement

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<sup>164</sup> (1976). Documents of the National Congress of the People’s Representative, National Patriotic Front Printing House.



(NAM) activities against imperialist cliques. *Fifth*, to actively participate in the United Nations and other international organizations that Lao PDR is a member of to heighten the country's status and protect the Lao PDR's interest in contributing to the common struggles of progressive peace-loving peoples and governments.”<sup>165</sup>

On the diplomatic front, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the actual situation on the ground to the diplomatic corps in Laos. All diplomatic corps in Vientiane were not alarmed by the new government changes. This includes the U.S. Embassy, where the Ambassador Charles Whitehouse left for Washington D.C. on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, 1975, before the proclamation of the Lao PDR, to report the U.S. government about Laos’s political situation. However, the Charge d’Affaires ad interim was still on duty to monitor Laos’s situation. In contrast to Vietnam and Cambodia, the U.S. Embassies were closed down and withdrew their diplomats out of the countries. Other foreign embassies, including U.S., France, UK, PR China, Soviet Union, etc. and international organizations with residences in Vientiane have also expressed their desire to continue their diplomatic relations with the Lao PDR. Moreover, a prominent international organization like the United Nations (UN), recognized the newly replaced government of the Lao PDR in place of the name of the Kingdom of Laos. Laos became a member of the UN since the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, 1955. This significant event marked the beginning of a new era for the Lao people who suffered severe hardships for the last nearly 200 years when Laos became a colony under foreign countries (Siam (Thailand), France, and the US) and Laos’s people were divided into different parties who held conflicting views. However, after many

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<sup>165</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 133.

sacrifices and periods of difficulties in obtaining peace, independence, unity, and freedom, the country was reunified.

Laos declared to follow and gave importance to the NAM. There were several reasons for this decision. First, Laos's new leadership analyzed that the international community was engaged in an ideological war, i.e., socialism versus capitalism and conflicts between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC). In order for Laos to balance itself during the Cold War, Lao leaders declared to follow the path of neutrality and forbidden foreign military base on Laos's soil for waging war or as a transit point for weapons to invade and besiege other countries. Therefore, the formulation of peace, independence, friendship, and emphasis on the NAM into Laos's foreign policy was to show solidarity to the third world community. To elaborate, NAM's objective is to fight against imperialism, against both old and neocolonialism, and support the struggle for peace, national independence, democracy, social progress, and the justice of new international economic order. Particularly, during the Lao national independence struggle, the NAM expressed solidarity and support for the Lao people's struggle.<sup>166</sup> Second, "Choosing NAM was a tactic employed to show neighboring countries and other developed countries that Laos will stay neutral. Laos could play balanced diplomacy toward the Soviet Union and the PRC as well. This was also to avoid becoming a target for other rival countries and enemies of the revolution, who were scheming to intervene with internal affairs and destroy the relatively young Lao PDR."<sup>167</sup> Moreover, "to create a favorable environment for healing the wounds after decades of war and to improve the

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<sup>166</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 132.

<sup>167</sup> Kittikhoun. A. (2019, January, 14). Personal Interview.

living condition of the Lao people as well as to implement the two national strategic duties to defend and build up the country.”<sup>168</sup> Third, domestically, choosing the NAM also ensured that the Lao population, who did not fully understand the new government's policies, to be patient and trust the government and reduce the fear and panic. Therefore, setting out a policy of non-alignment was all done to avoid situations of people fleeing the country as well as eliminating right-wing, centered, and left-wing forces.<sup>169</sup>

In addition, suppose Laos was to choose a pro-Soviet policy immediately after December 1975; in that case, it may have caused a challenging situation for Laos. Laos had always been on good terms with the Soviet Union and the PRC during the democratic revolution before 1975. Serving as the permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC), the Soviet Union and the PRC provided Laos with valuable support and assistance, especially during the struggle for the Lao national independence. However, due to the Cold War, their relations deteriorated, causing Laos a dilemma. In other words, if Laos was to choose the pro-Soviet policy, it would have worsened the relations with China, who has helped Laos negotiate and implement the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords on Indochina and on Laos respectively. Therefore, the implementation of balanced diplomacy toward both the Soviet Union and the PRC was crucial for a small and landlocked country like Laos to establish such foreign policy to serve its national interest and survival.

At the early stage of implementing this foreign policy, Laos continues to confront many external challenges. These challenges included political and economic embargoes

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<sup>168</sup> Bouppha. P. (2019, January 16). Personal Interview.

<sup>169</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 132.

and military threat, mainly the former Vientiane rightist group supported by the United States and was based in Thailand, trying to undermine the Lao PDR.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, Thailand has been exercising a hostile policy toward Laos. It launched a campaign to motivate the Lao people to flee the country, provided support to those who had anti-Lao PDR intentions to redeploy them so that they can destroy the country from within. At the same time, there were also military confrontations at the borders.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, Thailand also closed its borders to withhold over 200 products and foreign aid that were coming through Thailand in which it labeled as strategic goods. On top of that, Thailand also hosted military bases belonging to the United States in its soil. As mentioned earlier, the US Ambassador left Vientiane, Laos, in April 1975 and was replaced by a Charge d'affaires en pied in August, meaning that the US downgraded diplomatic relations with the Lao PDR from then.

During the late 1970s, the United States and France were also engaged in schemes to undermine the Lao PDR by announcing increased quotas for Lao refugees, bringing them in with hopes of turning them to a force that can be used against Laos.<sup>172</sup> The US and other countries with similar foreign policy views also carried on an unfriendly policy toward Lao PDR. By 1976, the French government also supported the exiled Lao living in France waged a political campaign against the Lao PDR. French diplomats and professors actively urged Lao politicians, veterans, and former academics who used to study in France to oppose the Lao government policies openly. Thereby, the Lao government issued an order closing the French Cultural Centre and the Office of the

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<sup>170</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT, Ltd., p, 135.

<sup>171</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 134.

<sup>172</sup> Kittikhoun. A. (2019, January, 14). Personal Interview.

Military Attaché and requested the French government to recall its Ambassador and some of its diplomats. At the same time, in early 1977, the Lao government calls for a reduction in US diplomats and Embassy staff to five immediately. At the same manner, the United States limited the number of Lao Embassy staff in Washington, DC. By mid-1977, more than 300 Lao students, both graduates, and non-graduates in France volunteered to return to Laos to support the new government of the Lao PDR.<sup>173</sup>

In retaliation, the French government declared *persona non-grata* to several Lao diplomats based in Paris, leading to the recall of all to one Lao diplomatic personnel in late August 1978. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos (MOFA Laos) also demanded the French Embassy in Vientiane to do the same. As a result, diplomatic relations between the two countries deteriorated and was eventually suspended on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1978 without any official announcement.<sup>174</sup> Thus, the Lao government entrusted the Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) to look after its interests in Paris. In contrast, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Vientiane was entrusted to look after France's interests.<sup>175</sup>

Then, diplomatic ties between the Lao PDR and France were suspended for over three years from 1978 to 1981. Under such circumstances, there were members of the French Communist Party and the progressives who criticized the French government for halting the diplomatic relations between the two countries France and Laos, countries with historical ties. Later during the 1980s, the French authorities banned the so-called Lao government-in-exile movement in Perpignan. They took more than 300 Lao refugees who

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<sup>173</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 138-139.

<sup>174</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2019). *Laos-France Relations Document*.

<sup>175</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 139.

had previously protested in front of the Lao Embassy in Paris to investigate and advised them not to link any French name to the Lao PDR's anti-government movement.<sup>176</sup> At the end of January 1981, the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Lao PDR, with the French government's authorization, notified the MOFA Laos that the French government had an intention to resume diplomatic relations with Laos. Therefore, the French government proposed to the Lao government to authorize the Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to the UN to negotiate with the Permanent Representative of France to the UN to normalize the diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>177</sup> As a result, the two countries resumed their diplomatic relations on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, 1981.

### **3.1.2 Cambodia Crisis**

To combat France, the three nations, namely Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, fought shoulder to shoulder for freedom and national independence guided by the Indochinese Communist Party's leadership.<sup>178</sup> The three nations fought against the French colonialists, and after achieving victory over them, they also continued to fight against the US. Under the leadership of the Cambodian Revolutionary Party, Cambodia achieved victory. It released itself from Lon Nol, who was backed by the United States on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1975, and Laos achieved victory on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1975 and established the Lao PDR. Laos itself had hoped to continue to strengthen and expand its

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<sup>176</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 139.

<sup>177</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 139.

<sup>178</sup> The Indochinese Communist Party was established in 1930 during the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Congress of Communist International, which was held in Hong Kong and in 1955 the party was dissolved and each country went on to establish their own respective parties.

traditional relationship with its allies, who fought together against the old and neo-colonialists. The Lao PDR attached great importance to its bilateral ties with Cambodia in which both shared hundreds of kilometers in borders. Laos closely followed the country's situation. It was unfortunate that the Khmer Rouge, who guided the revolution in Cambodia, wrestled power from its own people and kept a tight grip over it. Furthermore, Pol Pot, a political leader who led the radical communist Khmer Rouge (the Genocidal Regime), then declared Democratic Kampuchea and put King Norodom Sihanouk under house arrest. Various embassies in Cambodia, including the Lao PDR Embassy, were relocated to one area. All movement to and from this location was only granted with the authorization of its Foreign Ministry.<sup>179</sup> Pol Pot then led the people to build a political foundation to serve the country's development by focusing on agricultural production, specifically rice. On the other hand, the Khmer Rouge considered the elites, capitalists, and academics as their enemies that needed to be re-educated or purged. During this period, Cambodia was heavily divided because Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, a former foreign minister and deputy prime minister of the Democratic of Kampuchea, carried out a campaign to stifle their opposition and those who were suspected of holding opposing views to their ideology and policies.<sup>180</sup> They were either executed in mass killings or relocated and forced to work in rural areas until death by exhaustion. At this time, governmental officials, soldiers, and Cambodia people in general who opposed the Khmer Rouge's policies fled the country to neighboring Vietnam, Laos, and elsewhere. Laos also took in more than thousands Cambodia refugees who fled the brutal Khmer

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<sup>179</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 149.

<sup>180</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 150.

Rouge.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, the Khmer Rouge also engaged in various acts of wrongdoing around the Lao-Cambodia border. However, the Lao people were not blind by their wrongdoings, but they chose to tolerate in order to avoid a confrontation that can escalate to military conflicts and border conflicts. Therefore, the Lao PDR tried to use diplomacy on numerous occasions to foster good friendship and cooperation between the two countries, to no avail.<sup>182</sup>

When the Lao PDR and Vietnam signed a 25-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1977, the Khmer Rouge criticized Laos for losing independence.<sup>183</sup> However, the Lao PDR denied this accusation. A Foreign Ministry official stated that “under Article II of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Vietnam and Laos provides that the two countries support and help each other mutually and cooperate closely in both countries' defense. That means that, if it is necessary for the defense of our vital interests, each can certainly ask the other for assistance.”<sup>184</sup> During this time, the relationship between the Lao PDR and Democratic Kampuchea persisted, albeit with little substance due to the Khmer Rouge's not cooperating with socialist countries. At the same time, Democratic Kampuchea was also engaged with border conflicts with Vietnam and grew suspicious that Laos was on Vietnam's side. Considering this, Laos had put in its utmost effort to protect and maintain its friendship with Cambodia's people; however, this feeling was not reciprocal. The Lao PDR extended an invitation to Deputy Prime Minister

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<sup>181</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 154.

<sup>182</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p.151.

<sup>183</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 149.

<sup>184</sup> Kamm, H. (1979, March 23). Laotian Aide Confirms Stationing of Vietnam Troops. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/03/23/archives/laotian-aide-confirms-stationing-of-vietnam-troops-laotian-concedes.html>



and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ieng Sary, for an official visit, only to be notified that he had prior engagements, which were just an excuse used time and time again.<sup>185</sup> In reality, the government policies of Democratic Kampuchea during that time were to distance itself from Laos, Vietnam, and the Socialist camp. Also, military conflicts between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam continued to escalate in terms of scale and severity, ultimately leading to both countries breaking off diplomatic ties with one another.

Afterward, the Lao PDR tried to channel its efforts through diplomacy once again. During the 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1977, President Souphanouvong and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR went on an official visit to meet with Democratic Kampuchea to improve the bilateral relations between Laos and Cambodia as well as to expand and strengthen traditional relations and cooperation between the Three Indochina countries.<sup>186</sup> During this occasion, President Souphanouvong requested a meeting with King Norodom Sihanouk, a request denied by the Khmer Rouge. The official visit and meeting were with Khieu Samphan, who was the chairman of the state presidium of Democratic Kampuchea. During the welcoming banquet, President Souphanouvong delivered a speech that reflected upon the traditional relationship between Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, who had fought shoulder to shoulder in order to achieve freedom and national independence under the leadership of the Indochina Communist Party. Furthermore, he also emphasized that the Lao PDR signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Vietnam to promote a policy of friendship and cooperation with neighboring countries, a good example of good international relations.<sup>187</sup> This part of the

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<sup>185</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 151.

<sup>186</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 178-179.

<sup>187</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 149.

speech addressed the Khmer Rouge's criticism mentioned earlier that the Lao PDR lacked independence. However, the Lao PDR's diplomatic effort failed in the end, and the Khmer Rouge concluded that the Lao PDR listened to and sided with Vietnam.<sup>188</sup> Therefore, under such circumstances, neutrality became virtually impossible.<sup>189</sup>

At the end of 1978, the military, officials and people of Cambodia who fled from the brutal executions and killings by the Khmer Rouge to the SRV and to Laos announced that they had come together to establish the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation. The Salvation Front then asked for Vietnam's support to provide military forces to be deployed in Cambodia and stop the genocide carried out by the Khmer Rouge. Then, the People and Armed Cambodia Revolutionary forces, with support from Vietnam's military troops, attacked and ousted the Khmer Rouge out of Phnom Penh on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1979, declared the establishment of the People's Republic of Cambodia and appointed Heng Samrin as its President. Afterward, they continued to conduct operations against the Khmer Rouge until it had to retreat to the Cambodian-Thai border.<sup>190</sup>

On the other hand, the Lao PDR sided with the socialist camp led by Soviet Union, who supported Vietnam in assisting the Cambodian People under the leadership of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation to end the genocide carried out by the Khmer Rouge, which ultimately led to the establishment of the People's Republic of Cambodia. This state was recognized by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries,

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<sup>188</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 149-150

<sup>189</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1996). *Buddhist Kingdom Marxist state: The Making of Modern Laos*. White Lotus Co., Ltd., p. 144.

<sup>190</sup> During the Khmer Rouge's retreat from Phnom Penh, it took members of the diplomatic corps as hostages except for Lao diplomats who were left at the capital.

including the Lao PDR.<sup>191</sup> However, this government was not recognized by many countries, including Thailand, China and the U.S. Moreover, releasing Cambodia from the grips of Pol Pot largely contributed to the protection and maintenance of peace at the areas around the border of Laos and Cambodia, which were riddled with conflict and confrontation during the Khmer Rouge's rule. The Cambodian People's victory over Pol Pot and Ieng Sary genocidal regime contributed to the revitalization of the traditional relationship between the three peoples of the Indochinese countries, namely Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Furthermore, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were heavily criticized and denounced by the international community. Pol Pot and Ieng Sary tortured and killed those who opposed their views during its rule, which consisted of millions of people.<sup>192</sup> At the same time, there were also opposing views on this issue, specifically from Thailand, who critically denounced Vietnam and the Lao PDR's actions. Moreover, Thailand also announced that the member states of the ASEAN and other large countries see this as an act of aggression and an invasion by Vietnam in Cambodia, which cannot be tolerated.<sup>193</sup>

### **3.1.3 Strategic Shift to Side with Vietnam and the Soviet Union**

These susceptible and challenging situations in the arena of external relations after establishing the Lao PDR necessitated that the LPRP and state leaders think of strategic alliances that could be a source of consistent support and help. Therefore, it was natural

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<sup>191</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 155-157.

<sup>192</sup> Mydans, S. (1998, April 17). Death of Pol Pot; Pol Pot, Brutal Dictator Who Forced Cambodians to Killing Fields, Dies at 73. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/17/world/death-pol-pot-pol-pot-brutal-dictator-who-forced-cambodians-killing-fields-dies.html>

<sup>193</sup> Boupha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT, Ltd., p. 139.

that special attention should be paid to enhancing foreign relations and continuing to regard these as strategic alliances. The LPRP and state leadership attached great importance to Laos's ties with other socialist countries such as Vietnam and the Soviet Union as well as the Eastern European countries, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Cuba. Mutual understanding with these countries resulted in a series of treaties of friendship and cooperation, joint communiqué, and other agreements to cement further their political, economic, military, and socio-cultural relations.<sup>194</sup> For instance, special attention was paid to intensify the joint military struggle, special solidarity, and all-round cooperation with the SRV and Cambodia as well as the Soviet Union and other socialist countries after attacks and economic sanctions by forces hostile to the Lao PDR.<sup>195</sup> In the Vietnamese journal, *Hoc Tap*, in November 1975, Kaysone Phomvihane also mentioned the revolutionary importance of the Lao-Vietnamese relationship: "The revolution[s] of the two nations-Laos and Vietnam-have special interrelationships and mutual influence. For the Lao revolution, the contribution of Vietnam is indispensable... The Lao people have the obligation of continuing to strengthen their solidarity with Vietnam so that those two peoples can continue to carry out their revolutions and continue to assist each other in defending and developing their countries."<sup>196</sup> On the other hand, Laos was granted an observer status by the Council for Economic and Mutual Assistance (CMEA/COMECON) in 1977 and signed Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation with Mongolia in 1979, Czechoslovakia in 1980, and the German Democratic Republic in

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<sup>194</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 151-152.

<sup>195</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT, Ltd., p. 140.

<sup>196</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1996). *Buddhist Kingdom Marxist state: The Making of Modern Laos*. White Lotus Co., Ltd, p. 197.

1982 as well as other joint communique and agreements signed with other socialist countries.<sup>197</sup>

In strengthening the relationship between the Lao PDR and the SRV in the new era, the Vietnamese delegation, headed by the Communist Party General-Secretary Le Duan and Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, was welcomed by the LPRP General-Secretary and the Prime Minister to the Lao PDR, Kaysone Phomvihane.<sup>198</sup> The two countries agreed to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and the Treaty on the National Border Demarcation between Laos and Vietnam on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1977. This treaty signing was based on a tradition of special relations, joint military struggle, and friendship between the two people that could never be undermined. In this atmosphere, the two sides reiterated the need to work together to protect and strengthen these unique relations and ceaselessly increase their mutual solidarity ties. They also reiterated the promise of long-term assistance based on internationalism, the principles of equality, respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, to formulate a policy and implement any changes, the LPRP ensured that the external environment was peaceful and suitable enough for the country to generate its domestic development. In reality, this cooperation was mainly design for security reasons, which was to “ensure that the neighboring country, Thailand, would not invade the country.”<sup>200</sup> This was a part of a strategic alliance during the Cold War to protect the independence and the state's survival.

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<sup>197</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT, LTD, p, 143.

<sup>198</sup> Simons, L.M. (1977, July 19). Vietnam, Laos Sign 3 Treaties Solidifying Their Ties. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/07/19/vietnam-laos-sign-3-treaties-solidifying-their-ties/f7eb9890-b47f-403a-bfd5-8a72de44e36b/>

<sup>199</sup> Based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

<sup>200</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

At the same time, both Laos and Vietnam strictly respected and strongly supported the independent and self-reliant foreign policies of each other.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, both sides agreed on the principle of protection of independence and national security while acknowledging that this was the duty of the people of one's own country. They pledged to provide support and assistance when the need arose. This was to strengthen their comprehensive and mutual relations. Moreover, both sides agreed to firm up cooperation to tighten national defense and counter efforts by imperialist and reactionary forces to destabilize either of the two countries. The Laos-Vietnam Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation is valid for twenty-five years' renewable for another ten years if neither side notifies the other of its intention to terminate it one year before its expiration the Treaty.<sup>202</sup>

### **3.2 Laos in Between Vietnam and China**

The Lao PDR and the SRV enjoyed a traditional and friendly relationship established since both countries fought the same enemy during the Indochina wars, France and the United States. Both countries also engaged with one another politically, explicitly working with each other in the Indochina Communist Party before eventually establishing their own respective parties in 1955. After achieving independence and establishing the Lao PDR, both countries then signed a friendship and cooperation agreement on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1977, which would be implemented for 25 years. The special relationship observed between Laos and Vietnam was something unique and hard to find elsewhere in the world because "Laos felt that the relations with Vietnam was like

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<sup>201</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam., & Lao People's Revolutionary Party. (2012). *History of Vietnam-Laos, Laos-Vietnam Special Relationship 1930-2007, Annals II 1976-2007*. National Political Publishing House, p. 48.

<sup>202</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs., pp. 148-149.

brother.”<sup>203</sup> The PRC on the other hand, was also a country that provided valuable support and assistance to Laos during the fight against the old and neocolonialists. Furthermore, China had also lent its support for Laos in various international forums such as the Geneva Conference on Indochina in 1954 and on Laos in 1962.<sup>204</sup> After the achievement of independence, Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP and Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, led a Party and government delegation for an official visit to China on two occasions in March 1976 and June 1977. At the visit, Laos expressed its utmost gratitude to the valuable support that the PRC had lent to Laos during its fight for independence and discussion the ways and means forward for cooperation in the future.<sup>205</sup> Taking this opportunity, the Lao PDR and the PRC signed several agreements to strengthen socio-economic development.

Amidst the genocidal regime of Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge, Laos and China’s traditional relationship and friendship were affected in which both had to follow different paths. After the SRV supported the Cambodia People to oust the Khmer Rouge and established the People’s Republic of Cambodia, China retaliated by deploying troops to Vietnam on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 1979 in order to pressure Vietnam to withdraw its forces from Cambodian soil. This act was seen by Thailand and its ally as teaching Vietnam a lesson, which heavily deteriorated the relations between both countries. In this Cambodian problem, while China sided with Thailand and the U.S., the Lao PDR, situated in-between and shared borders with China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand,

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<sup>203</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

<sup>204</sup> Bounvilay, S. (2011). *The Longevity and Stability of Laos-China Friendship*. National Publishing House, pp. 38-41.

<sup>205</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 148.

chose to side with the socialist camp, headed by the Soviet Union.<sup>206</sup> The socialist camp lent support to Vietnam and provided support and assistance to Cambodia's people to oust the genocidal regime of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and returned power to the people under the National Salvation Front's leadership. Cambodia was able to rebuild its country into the People's Republic of Cambodia. China and Laos relations were also impacted during this period because both sides were suspicious of one another, which resulted in both sides criticizing each other and ultimately deteriorated cooperation. Moreover, "it is believed that China ran a camp for anti-government Lao resistance near Kunming, where about 1,000 Lao, Hmong, and Yao ethnic are given basic guerilla training."<sup>207</sup> This, in turn, halted the implementation of cooperation projects in the Northern part of Laos, which have been signed-in agreements prior. Moreover, bilateral relations were also affected diplomatic relations which saw both countries reduce relations to the level of Charge d'Affaires for a total period of eight years from 1980 to 1988.<sup>208</sup>

### **3.3 Laos and Thailand Relations**

After Laos gained her national independence in 1975, Laos believed to have served as the 'outpost' of the socialist system in Southeast Asia based on the socialist ideology. Therefore, Laos became the focal point for encirclement and the target for the destruction from the hostile camp, the capitalist countries. At that time, the US military still had a presence in Thailand. Thailand continues to antagonize Laos by trying to

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<sup>206</sup> Boppha, P. (2019, January 16). Personal Interview.

<sup>207</sup> Chanda, N. (1982, March 26). A defector's designs: A senior Lao official now in China talks of resistance groups fighting against Vietnamese Domination of Laos. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 44.

<sup>208</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 152.



destroy the newly-born Lao PDR and proposing anti-communist propaganda to Southeast Asia. Therefore, trying to destroy and intervene Laos through politically, militarily, economically, and socially.

During 1976, the relationship between Laos and Thailand went under a great strain because of Thailand's insistence on abetting exiled Lao groups, which carried out hostile activities along the Lao-Thai border. The Thai government gave shelter to exiled Lao as well as permitted them to establish military training camps and arms provisions. Thus, in order to avoid such incidents, the Lao government ordered a restraint and did not retaliate by force by instructing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to arrange for diplomats and international organizations to visit the affected areas to see and understand the realities of Thailand's behavior. Although Laos and Thailand's relations were still under turmoil after establishing the Lao PDR, the Lao PDR tried to be patient and find ways to improve the mutual understanding with Thailand. In August 1976, the Lao Foreign Minister invited the Thai Foreign Minister Pichay Rattanakul to pay an official visit to Laos to discuss those relating issues. The two signed a Joint Communique based on the principles of peaceful co-existence and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.<sup>209</sup> Unfortunately, the letter and the spirit of the Communique were ignored. During the rigid anti-communist policy led by Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichian, from October 1976 to October 1977, the Thai politicians' hostility to Laos' new government of the Lao PDR continued to undermine Laos as they have done in the past and continued to support the exiled Lao royalists in order to disturb the security and order of the Lao people.

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<sup>209</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT, Ltd., p. 136.

In April 1977, these forces tried to seize the islands in the Mekong river of Sangkhi and Xingxu. Further, the most severe incident was the shelling at the Lane Xang Hotel, Vientiane capital city. At the same time, Thailand officially closed international border checkpoints, banning people's movement and imposing economic embargoes against Laos. The Thai government prohibited the export of 273 kinds of so-called "strategic" goods<sup>210</sup> and warned its people of the so-called threats of communism. However, the Soviet Union supported Laos in the dispute and regarded the border's closure as a Thai intimidation act. Further, during the blockade, the Soviet Union organized an airlift from Vietnam to Vientiane while the Vietnamese organized convoys of road transport vehicles to carry supplies until the blockade was lifted.<sup>211</sup> Hence, these incidents continued to cause the deterioration of Lao-Thai relations severely.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 1979, Prime Minister Kaysone paid a visit to Thailand and met with the Thai Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chomanand.<sup>212</sup> This visit culminated in the signing of two joint communiqué reaffirming the five principles of peaceful co-existence.<sup>213</sup> Those were "respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; respect for the right of each country to live without

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<sup>210</sup> These strategic goods include sugar, milk, medicines, baby products, etc. sent to Laos from different donor countries and international organizations.

<sup>211</sup> Buszynski, L. (1986). *Soviet Foreign Policy and Southeast Asia*. Croom Helm Ltd. p. 106.

<sup>212</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2019). *Laos-Thailand Relations Document*.

<sup>213</sup> For economic and financial reasons, many countries paid special attention to Laos's domestic and foreign policy, and the relations between Laos and Thailand has been strained continuously from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, in particular. Therefore, the Lao government was committed to easing tensions between the two countries through exchanged consecutive visits by both Foreign Ministers and Prime Ministers. The two concluded and signed a trade agreement in 1978. Then in 1979, the Thai Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chomanand visited Laos in January. In return, the Lao Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane also paid a visit to Thailand in April, just within 3 months apart. Each time of their visit the two signed a joint communiqué to create a better environment and strengthen the relations between the two countries.

external interference and threats; non-interference in each other's internal affairs including restraint from carrying out direct or indirect subversive actions against each other; settlement of disputes by peaceful means following the Charter of the United Nations and based on equality; restrain from force or threats of use of force and not allow one's territory to be used as a base for interference, threats, and aggression against the other country in any form or pretext."<sup>214</sup> As a result, both sides also agreed to make the whole stretch of the Lao-Thai border one of peace and friendship. Moreover, the two communiqué was also considered to mark the success of Laos's struggle on the political and diplomatic fronts to build good neighborly relations between the two countries that share a 1,835 km long shared border. However, despite the changes in Thai leadership, the two countries continued to use this two communiqué as the bases for their political and diplomatic activities with Thailand's new government to achieve the objectives of peaceful co-existence.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Following the collapse of the old government, the Royal Lao Government (RLG) and the neutral faction power played a minimal role in Lao diplomacy after establishing the Lao PDR. The impact of the civil war and the lesson learned from many attempts of the first and second reunification of Laos failed to form a coalition government for a long time, leaving Laos with no choice but to become neutral due to the Cold War circumstances. Although they were inclined toward the Soviet Union, the Pathet Lao still followed what Souvanna Phouma implemented the neutrality within the foreign policy of

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<sup>214</sup> Srithilath, S. (2011). *Lao-Thai Diplomatic Relations During the Cold War*. Sisavath Press.

Laos. At the third reunification, Souvanna Phouma, after resigning as the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of the National Union (PGNU) and forming a new government of the Lao PDR in December 1975, he was placed in a high position and served as the Advisor to the new government. After King Sisavang Vatthana abdicated, the National Congress also nominated him as the Supreme Advisor to the President of the Lao PDR. Thus, neutrality played a major role in Lao diplomacy at the beginning of forming the new government of the Lao PDR. Serving as the President of the Lao PDR was Prince Souphanouvong, who continue to play a big role in governing the country. Consequently, Laos implemented the Non-Aligned policy was due to the geopolitical fact of the confrontation between the US and the USSR and the conflict between China and the USSR.

The Lao leaders understood that the victory of the revolutions in Indochina, namely in Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, has contributed to the collapse of an important part of the US neocolonialist system. It has helped alter the alignment of forces in favor of peace, national independence, democracy, and socialism in the region and the world. After achieving independence, the Lao PDR styled itself as the front line of socialism in Asia and a target for dismantling and containment by opposing forces. During this phase, the Lao PDR had put in its utmost efforts to avoid military confrontation, promote friendship and capitalize on all opportunities to strengthen relations with neighboring countries to protect and maintain regional peace and stability. Moreover, to buy more time for itself to heal wounds suffered during the destructive war, to improve the livelihood and well-being of the people through implementing a two-pronged strategy: safeguarding the nation and promoting national development to progress towards socialism.

After establishing the Lao PDR in 1975, Thailand, with the US and some western countries' support, continued implementing unfriendly policy toward Laos. Thailand has always interfered in the internal affairs and imposed economic sanctions against the young Lao PDR. Moreover, Thailand also officially closed international border checkpoints and created armed provocation against Laos. Consequently, Laos has to seek security support to ensure its national independence. By doing so, the two countries, Laos and Vietnam, agreed to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and the Treaty on the National Border Demarcation on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1977. The Leaders of Laos also stressed the importance of the national interests, the interests of friendly Indochinese countries, and the overall interests of the socialist allies. However, consideration was also made to question whether policies were consistent with the Lao PDR's actual situation, the region, and the world at large. In reality, if a country had differences with or were aligned against the United States of America, then it would have to side with and rely on the Soviet Union or China, which were both members of the United Nations Security Council. During the Cold War, the tense conflict between the capitalist camp led by the United States against the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union. Therefore, it was in the best interest of Laos to side with the socialist camp and the choice of the leaders in order to protect its newly gained independence and the survival of the state.

There was also an ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and China. These global-scale issues affected Asia's situation and the Lao PDR, which shared borders with five countries in the region: China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. Within this context, the Lao PDR chose to utilize a balanced diplomacy policy toward the Soviet Union and China was to ensure that the country was able to protect its national interests and carefully maneuvered itself onto the international stage. Thereby, Laos made sure not

to lean towards pro-Soviet policy immediately after establishing the Lao PDR; Laos chose a non-align policy. Moreover, this implementation of Laos's foreign policy ensured it would not deteriorate China's relations, which had always provided Laos with valuable support and assistance, especially during the Lao national democratic revolution. As far as the Cambodia issue is concerned, Laos could not escape the situation that the Khmer Rouge had caused in Cambodia, its close neighbor and one of the three Indochinese countries fighting side by side against the old and neo-colonist. The situation of genocidal in Cambodia gave Laos no choice but to take side with the socialist countries led by the Soviet Union in supporting Vietnam in Cambodia problem, and this Cambodia issue also put Laos in an antagonistic position with the PRC. Thus, the beginning to the pro-socialist foreign policy of Laos began in 1979 when China attacked Vietnam to support the Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Advancing to the East**

#### **4. Introduction**

At the beginning of the 1980s, Laos went through a transformation in its foreign policy. The changing external environment at the beginning of 1980s were rapidly limiting the movement of Laos in the region. The intensity of the Cold War and the ideological conflict between the socialist camp and the capitalist camp was ever-increasing. The Soviet Union began to increase their presence and aid in the pacific by seizing the opportunity to increase its power and influence by deploying naval forces in the region and increase its assistance to Laos. The US also brought a détente of the late 1970s to an end and rapidly adopted a policy of “peace through strength” by building up the US military in order to fight against the socialist governments and escalate the Cold War. China, on the other hand, also took the advantage of the rivalry with the Soviet Union to strengthen relations with the West. Beijing continued its alliance with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in order to break the solidarity of the Indochinese countries. Thailand continued to impose its economic embargoes and closed crossing border points into Laos in order to restrict the number of strategic goods into Laos. At the same time, created armed provocation along the common border between the two countries. As a result, the foreign non-alignment policy was no longer beneficial for Laos to protect her independence and for the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) to survive.

In the Third Congress of the LPRP, held on from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 1982, the Party changed its foreign policy for the first time after announcing a foreign policy

that focuses on non-alignment for five years since the establishment of the Lao PDR. Second, the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held in 1982 stated that the Chinese foreign relations were based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. To elaborate, China had relinquished all issues related to ideology from its foreign policy. These changes have affected Lao-Chinese relations, prompting the two countries to launch a rapprochement in 1983 and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) proposal on the normalization of relations between the two countries subsequently. Third, this phase will discuss the three Indochinese Foreign Minister Meetings on finding a solution to the Cambodian issue. The three Indochinese countries' relations have also taken to a new height, reflected in the 1983 Indochina Trilateral Summit meeting held in Vientiane, Laos. Last, to examine Laos and Thailand's dispute over the three villages of Laos in late 1984. Since the negotiation failed to settle the border conflict between the two countries, the Lao PDR took the case to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in the same year. In light of this change, this chapter will first explain why the transformation from non-aligned policy to socialist-oriented policy. What were the important global and regional contexts that had a major influence on this policy change decision? Then, how did the external developments in Cambodia force Laos to side with the Soviet Union? Why did Laos decide to pursue a socialist-oriented policy? and was it rational for Laos to side with the Soviet Union?

#### **4.1 Transformation from Non-Aligned Policy to Socialist-Oriented Policy**

In 1982, Laos went through a transformation in its foreign policy. The international environment was in turmoil, particularly the tension between the Soviet Union and the US. The US sought to end the growing socialist governments elsewhere



by granting aid and support to the Khmer Rouge and increased its encirclement of the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Laos. At the Third Congress of the LPRP, the Party strongly stated that the US was “forced to leave Laos. The US imperialists used Thailand as a beachhead to send their agents into our country, restoring and establishing ties with the counterrevolutionary gangs and underground reactionary elements. The latter had organized riots and hundreds of various incidents and disturbances. They tried to induce our citizens to leave the country, conducted subversion among national groups and national minorities in Laos, and kept us from living a normal life.”<sup>215</sup> On the other hand, China also took advantage of the rivalry with the Soviet Union to strengthen relations with the Western camp. Beijing continued its alliance with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in order to break the solidarity of the Indochinese countries. Another statement was also made, “They tried to use our country as a bridge between China and Kampuchea, where Pol Pot and Ieng Sari, their stooges, were in control, and, operating from there, to exert pressure on and subjugate Vietnam. In early 1979, they stationed army corps near our borders, threatening Laos with aggression. Working hand in hand with US imperialists and extreme right-wing reactionary forces in Thailand, the Chinese nurtured and trained thousands of reactionary Laotian émigrés, used the reactionary Maoist forces in the region, and conducted a series of variegated subversive acts against our country.”<sup>216</sup> As for Thailand, it continued to create armed provocation along the Laos-Thailand borders,

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<sup>215</sup> Third Congress of the LPRP Document and Materials. (1984). *The Political report of the LPRP Central Committee to the Third Congress of the LPRP delivered by Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP*. Progress Publishers Moscow, p. 14.

<sup>216</sup> Third Congress of the LPRP Document and Materials. (1984). *The Political report of the LPRP Central Committee to the Third Congress of the LPRP delivered by Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP*. Progress Publishers Moscow, p. 14.

impose its economic embargoes, and closed crossing border checkpoints into Laos in order to restrict the number of the so-called strategic goods into Laos.

Having realized the very complex international situation characterized by the confrontation between the two camps, socialist and capitalist, and understood the enemy's true nature and cunning, and perceived that the foreign non-alignment policy was no longer beneficial for Laos to protect her independence. Thus, at the Third Congress of the LPRP in 1982, the Party decided to set forth a Look East Policy to follow the path of socialism with the support from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. The Party changed the foreign policy to peace, independence, friendship, and socialism, with the extension of committing to relying for support on the Soviet Union and other fraternal socialist countries, on Vietnam and Kampuchea.<sup>217</sup> The transformation from a non-aligned policy to a socialist policy has caused Laos to lean toward the Soviet Union by styling itself as one of the frontline states engaged in the battle between socialism and capitalism in Southeast Asia. The important global and regional contexts that had a major influence on this policy change decision were mainly external factors. From the interview of the former Foreign Minister Somsavad, "The Soviet Union was responsible for helping Laos set its first five-year socio-economic plan from 1981 to 1985. It was a top priority for Laos to secure economic aid from the Soviet Union. Also, Laos changed its strategy based on analyzing the on-going situation between the two rival blocs, the Soviet Union and the United States."<sup>218</sup> Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos then took the initiative to set up seminars on changing the new foreign policy. All diplomats were

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<sup>217</sup> Third Congress of the LPRP Document and Materials. (1984). *The Political report of the LPRP Central Committee to the Third Congress of the LPRP delivered by Kayson Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP*. Progress Publishers Moscow, p. 13.

<sup>218</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

required to participate in the seminar to build a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the Marxist-Leninist theory and understand the new concept of “Looking East Policy.”<sup>219</sup>

In this transformation, the Party continues to strengthen its relations with Vietnam and Kampuchea. The political report of the Third Congress of the LPRP stated that, in fighting against the collusion of the US and China, "we must exert all efforts to preserve peace in Indochina and Southeast Asia and ensure favorable international conditions for defending and building up the country."<sup>220</sup> Thus, the US and China's collaboration took Laos's relations with the Soviets and Vietnam to new heights by fully joining the socialist community. The Soviet Union instituted trade agreements and an increase of economic assistance to Laos. From 1981 to 1983, trade with the Soviet Union increased more than 3.5 times over the 1976-1980 period.<sup>221</sup>

Active cooperation and assistance from the socialist countries also helped build the material and technical foundation for building socialism. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union always provided maximum aid to Laos. For instance, The Soviet Union's assistance to Laos took a variety of forms. As many as 1,500 Soviet political, economic, and military advisers plus their dependents reside in the LPDR, a total of around 5,000 Soviet citizens. In terms of military aid, the Soviets has supplied Laos with artillery pieces, mortars, and other light weapons for the army and with MIG-21 jet fighters, Antonov 24

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<sup>219</sup> Kittikhoun, A. (2019, January, 14). Personal Interview.

<sup>220</sup> Third Congress of the LPRP Document and Materials. (1984). *The Political report of the LPRP Central Committee to the Third Congress of the LPRP delivered by Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP*. Progress Publishers Moscow, pp. 46-47.

<sup>221</sup> Thayer, C. A. (1984). Laos in 1983: Pragmatism in the Transition to Socialism. *Asian Survey*, 24(1), 53

and 26 transport planes, and helicopters for the Air Force. It also provided civilian aircraft for Lao Aviation.<sup>222</sup>

**Table 1. Economic Trade and Aid from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) to Laos, 1976-1990 (US\$ million)**

	1976-1980	1981-1985	1986-1990	Cumulative
Exports	93	226	282	600
Imports	-	11	58	69
Loans with no interest	93	214	223	530
Other loans	14	104	67	185
Total loans	107	318	290	715
Donations	16	20	12	48
Projects equipment/material	-	99	64	163
Technical assistance	-	25	15	40
Total projects	30	124	79	233
Total Aid	153	462	381	996

**Source (Vorapheth, 2015)**

Aside from the hefty assistance from the Soviet Union, the socialist community also provided infrastructure assistance to Laos. For instance, from 1984 to 1988, the

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<sup>222</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1986). *Laos: Politics, Economics and Society*. Frances Pinter (Publishers), London. p. 184.

Soviet Union and Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia helped build Road Number 9 and bridges that provide access to the Vietnamese sea as a substitute transportation route from Thailand and to avoid economic embargoes.<sup>223</sup> In other words, in order to avoid the disproportionately high costs of transportation of goods through Thai territory.<sup>224</sup> Also, agricultural communes in Laos were developed with assistance provided by the Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Mongolia, and Cuba. From the 1980s, the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic, Poland, and other socialist countries also granted scholarships to over a thousand students each year to help human resources development in Laos.<sup>225</sup> Laos worked in close tandem with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries of Eastern Europe to firmly set on the path of socialism, regarding them as strategic allies in the nation's defense and development. Importantly, the socialist community accepted Laos as an ideological member and rendered assistance for its socio-economic development. From then, General-Secretary of the LPRP, Kaysone Phomvihane, often paid visits to and spent holidays in the Soviet Union almost every year and continuously had regular informal meetings with the Party and state leaders of the Soviet Union and other countries in the socialist community.<sup>226</sup>

On the diplomatic front, the close relations and interaction with the Soviet Union was also manifest in the exchange of visits of Party and state delegates as well as representatives of mass organizations at different levels in which, among others, was participation in sectoral meetings.<sup>227</sup> Facing the change in leadership from Brezhnev to

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<sup>223</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2019). Laos-Russia Relations Document.

<sup>224</sup> Thailand continued to economic blockade against Laos since the Lao People's Revolutionary Party took over.

<sup>225</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 152.

<sup>226</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

<sup>227</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

Andropov, Kaysone Phomvihane was concern about the changing environment. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1982, General-Secretary Kaysone Phomvihane left Laos for a “rest” in the USSR and did not return until the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, nearly four months later. Kaysone met with General-Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and then remained after his death to witness the Andropov succession.<sup>228</sup> The Lao leaders also led a delegation to attend Brezhnev’s funeral and attended the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. The turbulence and the uncertainty of the change inside the Soviet Union generated worries and tensions for the Lao leaders since the Party has changed its foreign policy to a socialist-oriented one. The Lao leaders watched carefully at the changes of the Soviet Union. Three major Soviet delegations visited during the same year: The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee in November 1982, the Soviet Armed Forces political commissars in November, and the CPSU Central Committee General Department in March 1983.<sup>229</sup> In return, the LPRP’s cadres also visited the USSR in May, July, and September of 1983.

This exchange of visits was to demonstrate the multi-sectoral cooperation with Party and state organs from the socialist countries and befriended many communist and worker’s parties, including national liberation movements of different countries and demonstrating solidarity in their struggle, as well as support for each other in the international forum.<sup>230</sup> Therefore, throughout the difficult years in which Laos tried to revitalize itself after the wars of foreign aggression and in the protection and development

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<sup>228</sup> Thayer, C. A. (1984). Laos in 1983: Pragmatism in the Transition to Socialism. *Asian Survey*, 24(1), 57.

<sup>229</sup> Thayer, C. A. (1984). Laos in 1983: Pragmatism in the Transition to Socialism. *Asian Survey*, 24(1), 57.

<sup>230</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 152.

of the country under these strategic alliances had energized and remained an essential external factor boosting the efforts of the LPRP and the government of Laos in the exploitation of its potential for achieving greater success in the socio-economic development of the country resulting in raising the living standards of the Lao people multi-ethnic.

#### **4.2 Laos and Vietnam Relations**

On the other hand, the “special relationship” with Vietnam rooted back to the birth of the communist party founded by Ho Chi Minh in the 1930s. The ‘Thirty-year struggle’ gained independence, and both countries respectfully shared a long history and a common revolutionary cause. General-Secretary Kaysone Phomvihane has also recognized on many occasions that Vietnamese comrades were crucial in bringing the Lao communist party into power. He mentioned that “Our country will forever remember the deeds of our fallen Laotian heroes, of Vietnamese volunteers and other soldiers-internationalists who gave their lives for the national liberation of Laos and discharged their lofty and noble internationalist duty.”<sup>231</sup>

During the 1980s, an increasing number of exchanges between two high-ranking officials, the LPRP and CPV, continue to commit to strengthening their bilateral relationship. In particular, senior LPRP cadres, almost without exception, attended courses on advanced theoretical Marxism-Leninism at the Nguyen Ai Quoc school in Hanoi. At the same time, Vietnamese instructors were also instrumental in developing

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<sup>231</sup> Third Congress of the LPRP Document and Materials. (1984). *The Political report of the LPRP Central Committee to the Third Congress of the LPRP delivered by Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP*. Progress Publishers Moscow, p. 15.

courses at the Party and State School for Political Theory in Vientiane, attended by all middle- and upper-level Lao cadres.<sup>232</sup> This assistance was evidence of preserving the long-lasting and stable friendship between the two countries.<sup>233</sup> On the security front, it is believed that the increasing amount of Vietnamese troops was stationed in Laos was in protection for the hostile act coming from Thailand. That being the case, Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane pointed out that “Vietnamese have sacrificed their lives for Laos not only during the war but also ‘in noble internationalist duty in defense’ of Laos-meaning fighting insurgents.”<sup>234</sup>

On the economic front, Vietnam also provided much economic assistance to Laos. Under the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation Article Four, the two sides confirmed mutual aids in the economy, technology, education and training, exchange of economic, cultural, scientific, and technological experts, as well as to extend their trade relations under a special preferential status.<sup>235</sup> From 1975-1985, Vietnamese aid has totaled US\$133.4 million to finance some two hundred economic projects.<sup>236</sup> Vietnam also ranked behind the Soviet Union as the second-largest donor of aid to Laos. It is extensively involved in over 200 medium-to small-scale projects, including the construction of boats for use on the Mekong, a cement factory, a gypsum mine, a limestone grinding plant, an oil pipeline survey, irrigation projects, serum production, and

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<sup>232</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1996). *Buddhist Kingdom Marxist state: The Making of Modern Laos*. White Lotus Co., Ltd, p., p. 199.

<sup>233</sup> Bouppha. P. (2019, January 16). Personal Interview.

<sup>234</sup> Chanda, N. (1982, May 28) ...and here are the latest Soviet soccer results, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 27.

<sup>235</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam., & Lao People’s Revolutionary Party. (2012). *History of Vietnam-Laos, Laos-Vietnam Special Relationship 1930-2007, Annals II 1976-2007*. National Political Publishing House, p. 48.

<sup>236</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1986). *Laos: Politics, Economics and Society*. Frances Pinter (Publishers), London, p. 176.



a brick factory. Moreover, in 1983, Laos and Vietnam signed over 24 cooperation projects.<sup>237</sup>

#### **4.3 The Indochinese Foreign Minister Meeting and The Indochinese Summit**

In January 1980, Cambodia invited high-level delegations from the Lao PDR and Vietnam to attend the event to commemorate the first anniversary of establishing the People's Republic of Cambodia and overthrowing the Khmer Rouge. In parallel, the Foreign Ministers of the three Indochinese countries also met with each other for the first time officially. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1980, the three countries issued a joint statement reflected the situation within Cambodia. The three Foreign Ministers agreed to meet twice a year to discuss regional and global issues and decide on activities to support the People's Republic of Cambodia's role in the domestic and international arena to free her from external imposed embargoes and isolation.<sup>238</sup> The Three Foreign Ministers also renewed their fundamental proposals to help Kampuchea fight against the Pol Pot clique and other Khmer opponents.

In early 1981, the three Foreign Ministers also proposed conducting meetings between the Indochinese countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plus Myanmar to increase collective understanding, trust, and confidence. At the same time, the three countries also issued a joint statement based on the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution No. 25\6 that they will not attend the International

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<sup>237</sup> Thayer, C. A. (1984). Laos in 1983: Pragmatism in the Transition to Socialism. *Asian Survey*, 24(1), 54.

<sup>238</sup> At the Foreign Ministers Meeting of the Three Indochinese countries. (1982, July 9). *Sieng Pasason Newspapers*.

Conference on Cambodia. As well as to not recognize the representative of the Democratic Kampuchea, whose regime has already been overthrown.<sup>239</sup>

The Lao PDR used diplomacy actively, and its Foreign Minister visited a number of Southeast Asian countries to discuss the Cambodian Issue. In the 36<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGA held in 1982, the Foreign Minister of Laos, on behalf of Indochinese countries, proposed seven principles that will lead to the protection of peace, stability and promote cooperation in Southeast Asia. This proposal was well-received.<sup>240</sup> The People's Republic of Cambodia and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) also jointly agreed to the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces in July 1982 on the basis that Thailand shall not be used to arm the Khmer Rouge in the future. Later, to show sincerity, Vietnam stated that it would unilaterally withdraw its troops after seeing the People's Republic of Cambodia's capability to protect itself.<sup>241</sup>

The Cambodian People's victory over Pol Pot and Ieng Sary's genocidal regime contributed to the revitalization of the traditional relationship between the Indochinese countries' peoples. The three Indochinese countries' relations have also taken to a new height, which reflected in 1983 the Indochinese Summit meeting. The Summit had unanimously issued a joint statement that sets out the guiding principles of their relations. These guiding principles include: strengthening the solidarity and cooperation between the three countries, aiming to help each other build socialism and safeguard the nation, and contributing to maintaining peace and stability in Southeast Asia and in the world. All issues arising from the three countries' relations will be resolved through dialogue

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<sup>239</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 157.

<sup>240</sup> Bedlington, S. S. (1981). Laos in 1980: the portents are ominous. *Asian Survey*, 21(1), 89-90.

<sup>241</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp.157-158.

based on respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual understanding, and respect for each other's interests.

What is more, in the next four to five years, after seeing that the Khmer Rouge could not wrestle back power, Thailand and the ASEAN Member states supported the establishment of the exile coalition government between Sihanouk-Son Sann and the Khmer Rouge. They tried to expand their role and influence by directly negotiating with Vietnam to withdraw its troops without the People's Republic of Cambodia's inclusiveness. At the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Indochinese Foreign Minister in 1985 and 1986, Vietnam submitted a withdrawal plan for its military forces from the People's Republic of Cambodia, which would be completed in 1990. This policy statement valuably contributed to reducing stress and tension, which also paved the way for further negotiations. In parallel with this development, the Summit between the Soviet Union and the United States and between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) also took place in 1985 and 1986, respectively, which further reduced tension in the international community and facilitated progress on negotiation of Cambodian issue. Afterward, the Coalition Government submitted eight proposals, and ASEAN also proposed an action plan consisting of 12 proposals that were merely a repetition of their previous foreign policy statements. Moreover, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement also resulted in a resolution to leave the Democratic of Kampuchea seat vacant, which further weakened the Coalition Government's position in exile.<sup>242</sup>

The 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Indochinese Foreign Minister in the middle of 1986 at Vientiane Capital further emphasizes that they shall strive to protect the People's

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<sup>242</sup> Qureshi, Y. (1983). THE SEVENTH SUMMIT OF NON-ALIGNED NATIONS. *Pakistan Horizon*, 36(2), 48

Republic of Cambodia and continue with negotiation efforts to address the situation in Cambodia.<sup>243</sup> At the meeting, the three Foreign Ministers underlined the importance of Southeast Asia's peace and security. "Southeast Asia must ensure the security of the three Indochinese countries. It must ensure that the people of Cambodia decide the destiny of their country solely on their own terms. As for the question of the withdrawal of troops, the three Indochinese countries tried to prevent the international bodies from using or intervening in Cambodia's internal affairs. Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia all agreed that they would not make any new proposals and recommendations. They will continue to negotiate bilaterally and multilaterally to achieve their common goals actively."<sup>244</sup> The People's Republic of Cambodia also continued to execute policy for national solidarity, which is negotiated as a group excluding Pol Pot and Ieng Sary. At the same time, Hun Sen also met with Sihanouk in Paris and Beijing.<sup>245</sup> Afterward, Sihanouk then returned to Beijing and resigned as the Head of the Coalition Government, and Son Sann also sent a representative to meet with Hun Sen.

#### **4.4 Laos and China Relations**

During the 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party held in 1982, it stated that the Chinese foreign relations were based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and China had relinquished all issues related to ideology from its foreign policy. With this change, the PRC was able to reconcile and foster better relations with countries around the world and significantly reduce tension with the major powers as well

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<sup>243</sup> (1986, July 2) *Sieng Pasason Newspapers*.

<sup>244</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 162.

<sup>245</sup> Boupha. P. (2019, January 16). Personal Interview.

as promote the use of negotiations. This environment was to reduce tension proved beneficial towards the bilateral relations between Laos and China. Despite the on-going complex situation in Cambodia, accusations and criticism of each other carried out by both sides, which was quite common in pre-1983, had also gradually disappeared. Trade around the borders and relations were also improving progressively. On the occasion of the celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Lao PDR held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1985, Kaysone Phomvihane, then the Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, delivered a statement which also reflected upon the relationship of Laos and China. In the statement, he stated “We have always paid special attention to the longstanding friendship which links us with the Chinese people to whom we extend sincere gratitude for their support and assistance to the cause of the liberation of our fatherland and the struggle against the Americans. We hope the relations between our country and the PRC will return to normalcy, on the basis of mutual respect of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in each other’s domestic affairs, non-aggression and peaceful coexistence.”<sup>246</sup> In 1983, China and Laos started to negotiate on revitalizing their diplomatic ties through the Lao PDR Embassy to the PRC. Appointed as the Ambassador of the Lao PDR to China at that time, Mr. Bouppha said that, “based on the Five Peaceful Coexistence of China’s independent foreign policy, the Lao government was willing to open up and arrange talks at governmental level in order to negotiate the welcoming of the new policy as well as restoring the relationship between the two countries.”<sup>247</sup> However, the Lao government had to observe the international situation, particularly the

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<sup>246</sup> Department of Press Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (1985, December 2). *Speech by Comrade Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party Central Committee, Chairman of the Council of Ministers at the Grand Rally in Celebration of the Tenth Founding Anniversary of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic*, Vientiane, Laos.

<sup>247</sup> Bouppha. P. (2019, January 16). Personal Interview.

relations between China and the Soviet Union, before proceeding to the next step. Thus, there was not enough room for the Lao government to maneuver instead of stalling the diplomatic relations until the Sino-Soviet Summit Meeting took place in 1986.

The Lao government continued to halt various projects in the northern part of Laos, believed that the Chinese have set up a network to support the Lao resistance. It was estimated that a battalion of ethnic Lao and minority peoples had already been trained in a school in Yunnan province. Some of these Chinese-trained commandos are believed to be responsible for occasional acts of sabotage and ambush Laos.<sup>248</sup> Therefore, Laos was still suspicious of China in colluding with Thailand in training the exiled Lao opponents. As a Lao official said, “China continues to support and train Lao reactionaries. It seems they also cooperate with Kuomintang remnants [in Burma] to engage in acts of sabotage against Laos. if true, this will show China’s reactionary character.”<sup>249</sup>

#### **4.5 Disputes Over Three Villages: Laos vs. Thailand**

The border conflict with Thailand in 1984 had a severe effect on the relationship between the two countries. Ever since the Lao PDR establishment, constant misunderstanding and problems exist, specifically, continual border issues. However, Laos managed to coexist despite all the disputes. During this period, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1984, the problem landed on a shared border where the Xayabouly province of Laos meets the Uttaradit province of Thailand. Both are located in the northern part of their respective countries. The dispute took place in the following three villages: Ban Mai, Ban Kang, and

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<sup>248</sup> Chanda, N (1983, August 11) United we stand: a growing Soviet presence in Southeast Asia counteracts a fear of China among ASEAN countries. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 24.

<sup>249</sup> Chanda, N (1983, August 18) Condour and confidence: A Lao official explains Hanoi’s hardening stance on Cambodia and indicates a desire for fresh bilateral initiatives by the US, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 15.

Ban Savang, with a population of 1,200 engaged primarily in farming and cross-border economic transactions.<sup>250</sup> The three villages are situated in mountainous terrain of considerable complexity. Several small creeks flow seasonally in the vicinity, adding to the difficulty of tracing the watershed in detail.<sup>251</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup>, the Thais asserted that Lao troops intruded four miles into Thailand attempted to hold up construction of feeder road which is planned to link Sa district of neighboring Nan province with Bo Bia, pass through or close to the three disputed villages on its path south. Furthermore, the Thais had initially described the road as strategic and a key infiltration route for the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) guerrillas.<sup>252</sup> However, the Lao official denied those accusations. As mentioned in the Deputy Minister of Laos' Foreign Affairs interview, Mr. Soubanh Srithirath, in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* magazine, responded, "I would not like to comment on that. What I can say is that when Kriangsak Chomanan was the Thai Prime Minister, we had signed a communique by which Thailand promised not to support any group against Laos. We promised not to support the Pro-Chinese CPT. On our part, we have driven out all the CPT members. None of the Thai nationals who came to Laos in the wake of the October 1976 coup [in Thailand] remains here. But the Thai government is increasing its support for the exiled reactionaries who come into Laos to attack us. This could be harmful to Thailand"<sup>253</sup> In other words, Laos did not intend to attack the Thais first due to the communique signed in 1979 and the Treaty of the Franco-Siamese joint

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<sup>250</sup> Srithilath, S. (2011). *Lao-Thai Diplomatic Relations During the Cold War*. Sisavath Press.

<sup>251</sup> Dommen, A. J. (1985). Laos in 1984: The year of the Thai border. *Asian Survey*, 25(1), 115.

<sup>252</sup> McBeth, J. (1984, July 5). Co-existence falters: Bangkok and Vientiane forces clash following a dispute over their land border in the mountains. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 16.

<sup>253</sup> McBeth, J. (1984, July 5). Co-existence falters: Bangkok and Vientiane forces clash following a dispute over their land border in the mountains. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, p. 16.

border commission signed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1907. The Thai troops were armed to the teeth, trespassed the Lao territory without permission from the Lao government, threatened the villagers to leave their houses, and forced them to move and stay on Thai soil. The Thai troops warned the villagers about their safety if they did not do as they were told.<sup>254</sup> The Lao authority believed that one of the reasons why the Thai troops entered Lao territory without permission was the abundance of timbers and other natural resources in Xayabouly province.<sup>255</sup> Nevertheless, both sides claimed the villages, the Lao PDR based on the 1907 French map delineating the frontier. Thailand based on an American aerial survey map conducted in 1978 purporting to locate the villages on the Thai side of the watershed which officially constitutes the border.<sup>256</sup>

In addition, both countries continued to claim the three villages and were at odds with one another, turning border issues into a diplomatic incident. Amid the chaos, third-party Vietnam joined the situation, being accused of its “special relationship” with Laos was not merely an observer but an interested party to the confrontation over Ban Mai.<sup>257</sup> In the 25-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, Article 3 stated that “on the principle that safeguarding independence and national security was the work of the people of both countries, the two sides pledged to support and cooperate with one another to reinforce the defense capacity, preserve independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and defend the people’s peaceful campaigns in order to fail all schemes and acts of sabotage by foreign imperialists and reactionary forces.”<sup>258</sup> Likewise, “Thailand has long hosted

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<sup>254</sup> Srithilath, S. (2011). *Lao-Thai Diplomatic Relations During the Cold War*. Sisavath Press.

<sup>255</sup> Xayabouly province is well-known for teak plantations in the northern part of Laos.

<sup>256</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge University Press., p. 190.

<sup>257</sup> Dommen, A. J. (1985). Laos in 1984: The year of the Thai border. *Asian Survey*, 25(1), 117.

<sup>258</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam., & Lao People’s Revolutionary Party. (2012). *History of Vietnam-Laos, Laos-Vietnam Special Relationship 1930-2007, Annals II 1976-2007*. National Political Publishing House, p. 47.



American bases on its territory in order to sabotage and violate the sovereignty of Laos anytime they want.”<sup>259</sup> On top of that, the Lao government remained annoyed by the restriction of the so-called ‘strategic goods’ prohibited by Thailand and the refugee problem. Since the negotiation failed to settle the border conflicted between the two countries and Thailand did not withdraw its troops from the villages requested by the Lao authorities, the Lao PDR brought the case to the UNGA on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October and to the UNSC on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1984.

However, at the UNSC, Thailand saw the conflict between the two countries as being intervened by a third country (Vietnam), aiming to diverting the world’s attention to Cambodian territory’s annexation and linking it to the Cambodia issue. After a long reply by both parties, the Thai Foreign Minister, Siddhi Savetsila, informed the United Nations (UN) that in order to restore peace and resolve the question of the three villages, the Thai government decided to move their troops out of the three villages in question. Nevertheless, the Lao delegation proposed to the UNSC to keep the three villages issue on its agenda. If tensions escalate again, it would ask the Security Council to reconvene.<sup>260</sup> Since then, the three villages' issue was quietly disappeared, and Thailand had stopped raising the three villages incident to renegotiate with the Lao PDR. Notably, the Thai authority did not want to lose its reputation in pursuing an expansionist policy that lacks legitimacy. Even the Thai media also criticized the Thai government for its ambiguous behavior.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Kittikhoun, A. (2019, January, 14). Personal Interview.

<sup>260</sup> Srithilath, S. (2011). *Lao-Thai Diplomatic Relations During the Cold War*. Sisavath Press, p. 149.

<sup>261</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p.141.

In reality, the border along the Xayabouly and Champasack provinces connecting to other provinces of Thailand are familiar areas of major powers. This was because these provinces' ownership was transferred between France and Thailand interchangeably and had witnesses consisting of major powers. During the early 1940s, the Government of France was threatened by Japan and was pressured by Fascist Germany. Thus, it had to sign an agreement between France and Thailand on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1941 in Tokyo. This Tokyo agreement stipulated that France shall agree to handover Xayabouly and Champasack provinces and some provinces of Cambodia (a total area of 70,000 square kilometers) to Thailand.<sup>262</sup> On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1946, during the conclusion of World War II, an agreement was reached in the Meeting of the Alliance of Victors of the World War II in Washington DC for France and Thailand to sign an agreement that would terminate and supersede the previous agreement signed in Tokyo on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1941. This meant that Thailand had to relinquish all the land that belonged to France previously.<sup>263</sup> Therefore, this portion of land was quite a familiar topic for the major powers, and it was difficult for them to refuse that Laos was not the rightful owner of the three villages.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

At the Third Congress of the LPRP in 1982, the Party set a new direction to adopt a foreign policy of “peace, independence, friendship, and socialism.” During this period of phase two of Laos’s foreign policy, the country continued to face an underdeveloped economy and technical infrastructure after long period of destructive wars. Worst still,

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<sup>262</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 23.

<sup>263</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 170.

the country continued to deal with regional and international political turmoil. It struggled against the multifaceted sabotage activities of hostile forces, mainly from Thailand and the Western camp. To elaborate, the US took advantage of the Cold War to encircle Vietnam and Laos in the region.

Lao leaders' intention to transform its non-aligned policy into a socialist-oriented policy resulted mainly from external factors, especially the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the US. Having realized the very complex international situation, understood the true intention of the enemy, Laos perceived that the policy of non-alignment was no longer beneficial for Laos to protect her independence. Thus, at the Third Congress of the LPRP in 1982, LPRP decided to set forth a "Look East Policy" to follow the path of socialism with the support from the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries, on Vietnam and Kampuchea with the foreign policy of "peace, independence, friendship, and socialism." The transformation from a non-aligned policy to a socialist-oriented policy has caused Laos to lean on the Soviet Union heavily by styling itself as one of the frontline states engaged in the battle between socialism and capitalism in Southeast Asia. From 1981, the Soviet Union instituted a bilateral trade agreement outside of those socialist communities. The Soviets began to increase their aid to Laos in order to counter the influence of the West in the region. The Soviet Union was responsible for helping Laos set its first five-year socio-economic plan from 1981 to 1985. It was a top priority for Laos to secure economic aid from the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Laos continued to strengthen its relationship with Vietnam by sending cadres to continue their political studies in Vietnam and having Vietnamese troops stationed on Lao soil to protect Laos from Thailand's hostile act. No less than the Soviet Union, Vietnam also ranked second as one of Laos's largest donors.

At the Indochinese Foreign Minister Meeting, the three countries agreed to meet twice a year to discuss regional and global issues and decide on activities to support the People's Republic of Cambodia's role in the domestic and international arena to free her from external imposed embargoes and isolation. The Indochinese Foreign Ministers also renewed their fundamental proposals to help Kampuchea fight against the Pol Pot clique and other Khmer opponents. The three Foreign Ministers believed that Southeast Asia must ensure the security of the three Indochinese countries. Therefore, Cambodians are responsible for their own country's destiny. As for the question of the withdrawal of troops, the three Indochinese countries tried to prevent the international bodies from using or intervening in Cambodia's internal affairs. In reality, the international community's main concern was focused on how to withdraw Vietnamese forces and how to dismantle the Khmer Rouge. The three Indochinese countries' relations have also taken to a new height, which reflected in 1983 the Indochinese Summit meeting. At the Summit, they had unanimously issued a joint statement that sets out their relations' guiding principles.

As far as the relations between Laos and China were concerned, under the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence of China's independent foreign policy after 1982 was proved beneficial towards the bilateral relations between Laos and China. Accusations and criticism of each other carried out by both sides, which was quite common in pre-1983, had also gradually disappeared. Trade around the borders and relations were also improving progressively. In 1983, China and Laos started to negotiate on revitalizing their diplomatic ties. On the Tenth Anniversary of the Lao PDR held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1985, Kaysone Phomvihane, then the Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, delivered a speech that reflected upon the relationship between Laos and China. However, the Lao government had to observe the international situation, particularly the détente between

the great powers as well as the relations between China and the Soviet Union, before proceeding to the next step. Since Laos was still suspicious of China in colluding with Thailand in training the exiled Lao opponents. Thus, there was not enough room for the Lao government to maneuver instead of stalling the negotiation for their diplomatic normalization until the Sino-Soviet Summit Meeting took place in 1986.

As it is always, Laos and Thailand's relationship remained problematic and stalled as a border skirmish broke off took a toll on their relations. In 1979, Laos and Thailand signed the 1979 communique to maintain peaceful coexistence relations between them. However, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1984, the Thai troops, armed to the teeth, trespassed into the Lao territory and occupied the three villages in Laos's Xayabouly province. Due to the abundance of timbers and other natural resources in the province, the Thai troops accused Laos of claiming the territory based on the American aerial map survey conducted in 1978 rather than the 1907 French map delineating the frontier. The two failed to solve the issue, thus, Laos brought the case to the UNSC. The Thai side continued to link the incident to the Cambodian issue and accuse Laos of cooperating with a third country (Vietnam) to fight against the Thai troops. Nonetheless, at the UN Headquarters in New York, the Foreign Minister of Thailand, Siddhi Savetsila, informed the UN that in order to restore peace and resolve the question, the Thai government decided to move their troops out of the three villages in question. Yet, the Lao delegation proposed to the UNSC to keep the three villages issue on its agenda. Since then, the three villages issue were quietly disappeared, and Thailand had stopped raising the three villages incident to renegotiate with the Lao PDR.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Market-Oriented Foreign Policy**

#### **5. Introduction**

In this phase of Laos's foreign policy, the chapter will discuss Laos's foreign policy changes from a socialist-oriented to an opening-up policy. Why did the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) decide to change its foreign policy despite its stance with the Soviet Union? And how did the external and internal factors play a part in this phase? The chapter will investigate why Laos underwent an economic transformation from socialist planning economic to a market-oriented one. It will also address Laos's foreign relations with important neighboring countries such as Vietnam, China, and Thailand. These foreign relations play a crucial role in Laos's diplomacy and how their relations impact the changes. Laos and China's rapprochement will then be examined through high-level meetings and scrutinize Laos's crucial turning point and Vietnam's relations with China. How did Laos manage to normalize its relations with China before Vietnam? Then, the paper will discuss the Laos and Thailand relations from turning the battlefield into a marketplace and the problem of Lao exiles in Thailand under the new phase of their relations.

#### **5.1 Socialist-Oriented Policy to an Opening-up Policy**

From 1986 Laos pursued a pragmatic foreign policy under a comprehensive reform of the opening-door cooperation and New Economic Mechanism (NEM) (*Chintanakan Mai*). The Lao leaders drew lessons from contemporary issues by revising the country's external relations by following regional and world contexts. After the Soviet entered a

new arm raced with the US, the Soviet Union strained its relationship among the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, causing social instability and economic stress. The Soviet Union's economy underwent a depression due to economic production under the centrally planned socialist model causing the economy to stagnate. Not only because of the economic stagnant of the Soviet Union that caused the sluggish pace of production center, but also because of the Western conspiracy of “peaceful change” used by the US and the Western countries against the Eastern European socialist countries. This uprising caused the Eastern European countries to oppose the ineffective central planned socialist model of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the harsh domestic conditions were also accompanied by the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. With the arrival of Michael Gorbachev, the internal and external policies of the Soviet Union started to change. Under these circumstances, the Soviets began to pursue rapprochement with the West and China. At the same time, Gorbachev also implemented the *perestroika* and *glasnost* strategies. On the other hand, China also attempted to balance between the US and the Soviet Union. This change was because of the limit of China-US strategic relations and the Reagan administration's harsh anti-socialist governments, which gave China concerns to continue US-led dependent policy. Also, Gorbachev's reform and changed approach toward China encouraged China to reconcile with the Soviet Union.

Domestically, the LPRP held its Fourth Congress from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1986 and announced its official change in both economic and foreign policies. Previously, Laos's foreign policy model emphasized ideological considerations. Now, it turned slowly to an openness policy to correspond with a market-based or market-oriented one. The new era of Lao foreign policy began. The ground-breaking change from a mechanical application of the Soviet-style socialism to open-door cooperation and

development with other capitalist countries created a conducive environment for the country to broaden its external relations that generated its domestic growth.

### **5.1.1 Socialist Planning Economy to Market-Oriented Economy**

In 1986, the significant shift in Lao foreign policy took place when the country first reformulated its national strategy under the economic transformation of the “new thinking” or the NEM. This change was meant to overcome the harsh economic reality of pursuing a path toward socialism, notably, the socio-economic and political difficulty that presented a threat to the state. Amidst the complicated situation faced by the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) implemented its new domestic policy at a relatively fast pace emphasizing ownership, independence, and development. In all Central Committee Meetings, the Party analyzed the domestic and international situation, observe strategy and tactics utilized by their opponents, and evaluate if that is indeed the case. “The Party was keen on changing any policies that were detrimental to the country immediately.”<sup>264</sup> The idea of changing the economic strategy first took place at the 7<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee Meeting of the Second Congress of the LPRP in December 1979. The Party attached great importance for structural transformation and was aware that it needed to take ownership of improving domestic policies and mechanisms.<sup>265</sup> However, due to the pressure from external environment, the Lao PDR could not completely dissolve the private sector. “This was a practice observed by other socialist countries. It had yet to enforce any measures to

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<sup>264</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

<sup>265</sup> The Lao Academy of Social Science. (2011). *25 Years of The New Changes in the Lao PDR (1986-2010)*.



confiscate the assets of the investors and businessmen because the situation on the ground was actually the opposite.”<sup>266</sup> Thus, the Lao government continued to use them to promote business activities, whether for personal production or as shareholders with the public sector.

In 1981, the government implemented a grass-root level policies which reflected the Politburo’s resolution, reference No. 41/1981 emphasizing that the LPRP operated under a people-centered mandate which is a long-term strategy and vision employed by the Party.<sup>267</sup> On the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1985, on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Lao PDR, Kaysone Phomvihane, the General-Secretary of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party and the Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, delivered a speech which also reflected on the domestic policy of the country as follows: “to fulfill all those tasks, we must resolutely abolish the mechanism of centralized bureaucratic subsidies and actively implement a new management mechanism, give share and give mastership right to region and grass-root levels, implement profitable economy and conduct socialist business, harmoniously coordinate the three interests (State, Cooperative and Workers) improve the machinery and mode of work aiming to promote productivity, quality and efficiency, transforming the country’s socio-economic situation positively, strictly implement thrift in all sectors, avoid the waste of the state and people’s property. We must arouse the mass continuous revolutionary movement.”<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

<sup>267</sup> Phomvihane, K. (2005). *Selected Work of Kaysone Phomvihane* (Vol. 4). National Institute of Politics and Public Administration, p. 370.

<sup>268</sup> Department of Press Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (1985, December 2). *Speech by Comrade Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party Central Committee, Chairman of the Council of Ministers at the Grand Rally in Celebration of the Tenth Founding Anniversary of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic*, Vientiane, Laos.

### 5.1.2 Necessity to Economic Transformation

The Fourth Congress of the LPRP was held from the 13th to the 15th of November 1986. The Party Congress evaluated and reviewed the need to revise and redefine the transitional guidelines set out in the Third Party Congress to be consistent with the real domestic condition and pragmatic.<sup>269</sup> As for the internal factors, the Party Congress indicated that, during the transitional phase, Laos just came out of colonial and monarchical society, which economically was still in small-scale production and heavily depended on nature and in a stage of self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the production capacity was at its lowest level after decades of devastated wars, and per capita was low with technology backwardness. The failure of the economic plan related to the socialist centralized bureaucratic subsidies model was the major problem, particularly the planning and implementation, the mistake in rushing to nationalize enterprises, including those incapable of managing. Moreover, the urge to move towards socialism and resolve the questions of “who will win?” in the confrontation between socialist and capitalist development paths, etc. If these mistakes are not modified, it would have led the economy to stagnant and underdeveloped.<sup>270</sup> Therefore, listed as one of the 20 Least Developed Countries, this has profoundly affected the country's development to get out of poverty, innovate, and determine the appropriate forms, methods, and steps to develop. To get out of these situations, it was inevitable for Laos to go under an economic transformation,

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<sup>269</sup> The Lao Academy of Social Science. (2011). *25 Years of The New Changes in the Lao PDR (1986-2010)*, p. 23-24.

<sup>270</sup> The Lao Academy of Social Science. (2011). *25 Years of The New Changes in the Lao PDR (1986-2010)*, p. 18.

including the new transformation in Party leadership practice, change in management, and particularly in the new economic thinking.<sup>271</sup>

As for the external factors, the rapid global and regional change affected the development of the country. The developed countries used the advantaged science and technology to prosper their development. For the socialist countries, despite their capability in developing their own country, they were facing many difficulties and were unable to support Laos the way they did during the 1970-80s. Most of the socialist countries were in the midst of an economic and political crisis. During 1985-1986, some socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) have transformed their socio-economic direction by using the Perestroika and Glasnost, and Doi Moi policies, respectively.

The Glasnost and Perestroika reform under Gorbachev impacted Laos as a country as it decided to pursue socialism. Laos heavily relies on the Soviet's economic aid. Thus, paving the way for Laos also to implement reform. However, the reforms in the Soviet Union did not have a major effect on the New Economic Mechanism that could be a lesson for Laos. This was because the economic environments in Europe and Asia are different. In other words, the Soviet Union and Laos's economic development are the total opposite. Therefore, Laos, at its lowest economic development, can only learn so much from the Soviets. Also, the methods and approaches to the economic reform of the Soviet Union and Laos were different.

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<sup>271</sup> The Lao Academy of Social Science. (2011). *25 Years of The New Changes in the Lao PDR (1986-2010)*, pp. 18-19.

At the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in December 1986, Vietnam launched a comprehensive reform of Doi Moi in transforming their economic and foreign policy. The reform was to change the economic mechanism and economic management, maintain political stability, gradually improve the people's living standards, and lay the foundation for developing the country. These changes have brought great success to Vietnam in many areas. Laos and Vietnam had been side-by-side and struggled against old and neo-colonialism for their national independence and built a special relationship since then. After establishing the Lao PDR, Laos and Vietnam signed in 1977 a 25-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Then, the special solidarity and comprehensive cooperation between the two countries had further developed.

As far as Doi Moi is concerned, in the late 1980s, Vietnam embarked on a new Doi Moi reform from a centrally planned socialist economic model. With the changes in the Soviet Union and neighboring countries, Laos began its economic reform at the same time as Vietnam. Laos and Vietnam are the special solidarity and comprehensive cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, there is no doubt that the Doi Moi and the New Economic Mechanism of Laos are similar due to their similar conditions and peculiarities characteristics. As close friend and neighbors, it is common that Laos and Vietnam often observe and exchanges lessons. The period of the new economic mechanism from 1986 to 1996, a total of ten years, was characterized by heightened economic cooperation. This period was also an era of promoting the two countries' economic development to which both parties have agreed to an extensive and comprehensive partnership. Laos and Vietnam signed several agreements for economic, trade, investment, and other areas of cooperation. From then onwards, both parties also consulted and jointly organized plans of cooperation together.

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in December 1978, launched the Reform and Opening-up policy. Many socialist countries were interested in China's opening-up policy. In Laos, the Lao leaders observed and studied the changes from many countries in order to take those lessons to be in line with the conditions and peculiarity of Laos in pursuing its New Economic Mechanism. Despite the deteriorated relations between Laos and China during the 1980s, Laos as a closed neighboring country still indirectly observed and followed the changes happening in China. In Vientiane, the Chinese Embassy publicized its lessons and achievements in implementing its opening-up policy. At the same time, the Lao Embassy in Beijing also reported the changes and opening-up policy of China to the Lao government. However, Laos and China did not directly exchange lessons and experiences on the reform until 1986, when Laos and China held government-level talks to normalize their diplomatic relations.

These transformation processes in socialist countries had directly impacted Laos, therefore encouraging Laos to transform. Thus, Kaysone Phomvihane and other Lao leaders recognized the necessities of internal and external economic changes, decided to pursue a comprehensive economic transformation, and adopted a Resolution at the Fourth Congress of the LPRP in November 1986. Laos has transformed its economy and adjusted its foreign policy to emphasize national interests and pragmatic policies and a real substantial goal in transitioning to socialism, a new foreign policy of peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation.

### **5.1.3 Important Economic Transformation and Achievements**

In addition, the Fourth Congress of the LPRP ushered in a change in Laos' domestic policy that was much more comprehensive. In designing the key policies of the country, Laos continued to consider several factors, namely the internal situation of the country and the new era of development, the lesson learned from other friendly countries as well as measures to promote structural changes of the economy and mechanisms to implement and manage it. LPRP also continued to encourage development at the grass-root level, emphasized national defense and security, ensuring political stability and social order. The important changes towards the economy included: "1) change from centralized economic subsidies and use new mechanisms, namely market-oriented economics. 2) make use of the relationship between products-currency and promote an economy with an emphasis on trade and products. 3) make use of all sectors of the economy. 4) make benefits for the state, cooperatives, and workers. 5) vertical and horizontal management of the various sectors of the economy, and 6) expand economic cooperation with all countries."<sup>272</sup> Thus, this policy was crafted with the intention of creating tangible benefits for the people of Laos and was well received by the public and proved instrumental in promoting economic growth, increase production and distribution of products, facilitation in the creation of businesses as well as the reduction of poverty and improving the livelihood and well-being of the people. The new measures also increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1990 at an average rate of 4.6%. Agriculture production was enhanced, and the industrial sector was also developed. It was therefore stated in the country's political report in 1990 that in the last five years there was tremendous development and

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<sup>272</sup> The Lao Academy of Social Science. (2011). *25 Years of The New Changes in the Lao PDR (1986-2010)*.

accelerated progress.<sup>273</sup> In detail, the table below explains the implementation comprehensive economic reform of Laos starting in 1987.

**Table 2. Timing, Sequencing and Comprehensive of the Reform Program in Laos<sup>274</sup>**

Policy area	Date of introduction	Implementation
<i>A. Trade liberalization</i>		
Quantitative import restrictions	1987-88	Eliminated
Quantitative export restrictions	1988	Partly eliminated
Import tariffs	1988	Reduction
Export taxes	1988	Removed (export profit tax instead)
<i>B. Stabilization policy</i>		
Fiscal policy		
Tax reform	1988-1989	Totally new tax system
Control of public expenditure	1988-1989	20% reduction in number of civil servants
Monetary policy		
Money supply	1988	imperfect control (stricter control since 1990)
Credit to the public sector	1988	credit demands accommodated (stricter control since 1989)
Exchange rate policy		
Devaluation	1987	huge
Unification of exchange rates	1986-87	complete since 1987
Flexible exchange rate	early 1988	
<i>C. Deregulation and Systemic Reforms</i>		

<sup>273</sup> Phomvihane, K. (2005). Selected Work of Kaysone Phomvihane (Vol. 4), pp. 371-372.

<sup>274</sup> Bourdet, Y. (1992). Macroeconomic stabilisation under transition in Laos. *Communist Economies and Economic Transformation*, 4(4), 541.

Public enterprises		
Autonomy and rationalization	1985-90	partial (but on-going)
Privatization	1898	partial (but on-going)
Foreign investment	mid-1988	ongoing liberalization
Agricultural sector		
Cooperatives	1980-85	abandoned
Liberalization of internal trade	mid-1987	complete since 1988-89
Financial sector policy		
Financial liberalization	1988-1989	incomplete (but on-going)
Redefining role of state		
Legal reforms	1990	(property, commercial and inheritance laws)
Institutional reforms	1991	(centralized tax and treasury administration)

**(Source: Bourdet, 1992)**

On the other hand, the LPRP considered Lao foreign policy a top priority at the Fourth Congress of the LPRP. The outcome of the Fourth Party Congress held in November 1986 transformed Lao foreign policy from peace, independence, friendship, and socialism to peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation in broadening its external relations. In this Party Congress, besides emphasizing all-rounded cooperation between Laos and socialist countries, the Party also committed itself to widen its external relations with developed countries and international organizations based on each other's independence, sovereignty, and mutual advantage.<sup>275</sup> The shift in Lao foreign policy can be seen through its ability to pursue an independent relationship with the Soviet Union separately from

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<sup>275</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT, Ltd., p, 146.



the bilateral relations the Soviet Union has with Vietnam. Some countries used to accuse Laos of being closed its door for relations with other countries. “The Lao PDR did not close any doors on itself; there were only ill-willed countries that sought to create a blockade around Laos.”<sup>276</sup> Certainly, the Lao PDR continued to implement an open-up foreign policy to establish relations with all friendly nations around the world without distinguishing between socio-political regimes. It had also put in its best efforts to dismantle the blockade installed by its opponents.

## **5.2 Laos and Vietnam Relations**

In the late 1980s, Vietnam embarked on a new Doi Moi reform from a centrally planning socialist economic model. Both the Lao and Vietnamese leaders understood the failure of the Soviet-style economic model and embraced economic reform incentives. With the changes in the region and neighboring countries, Laos began its economic reform at the same time with Vietnam. Both countries continued their consultations through official visits from the highest to the lowest leadership level. The period of the new economic mechanism from 1986 to 1996, a total of ten years, was characterized by heightened economic cooperation. This period was also an era of promoting the two countries' economic development to which both parties have agreed to an extensive and comprehensive partnership. Laos and Vietnam signed several agreements for economic, trade, investment, and other areas of cooperation. From then onwards, both parties also consulted and jointly organized plans of cooperation for five years together. Investment from Vietnam to Laos had also grown exponentially. From January 1989 to December

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<sup>276</sup> Bouppha. P. (2019, January 16). Personal Interview.

2014, Vietnam invested a total of 414 units with a total value of investment about US\$ 3.1 billion.<sup>277</sup>

### **5.3 Laos and China Relations**

The relations between China and Laos heavily depended on the external environment in the Southeast Asian region. During the Cambodia Crisis, China strengthened its cooperation with the Khmer Rouge to sabotage Vietnam and Laos in order to break the solidarity among the Indochinese countries. Laos sided with the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) countries headed by the Soviet Union in supporting Vietnam in the Cambodian problems. As mentioned in the previous phase at the Third Congress of the LPRP, the Party emphasized enhancing and improving relations with its neighboring countries, particularly in putting effort to normalize relations with China. Laos took the initiative to normalize its bilateral ties with China since 1982, stated at the Third Congress. About China, “we persevere in our efforts and will do all we can to maintain and consolidate the neighborly friendship between our people and the Chinese people with resolutely opposing the hostile policy of the reactionary clique in the Peking ruling circles. In the interest of peace in Southeast Asia and in the world, we are ready to normalize our relations with the People’s Republic of China.”<sup>278</sup> After the China’s independent foreign policy declared in 1982, Laos and China started their negotiations through diplomatic channels in 1983 before leading up to the talks at the government level, and “this process was coordinated through the Lao embassy

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<sup>277</sup> Investment Promotion Department Ministry of Planning and Investment. *Foreign & Domestic Investment Projects by Country 1989-2014*.

[http://investlaos.gov.la/images/Statistics/rpt\\_Invest\\_Summary\\_Country1A\\_1989-2014.pdf](http://investlaos.gov.la/images/Statistics/rpt_Invest_Summary_Country1A_1989-2014.pdf)

<sup>278</sup> Thayer, C. A. (1983). Laos in 1982: The Third Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. *Asian Survey*, 23(1), 86-87.

to China.”<sup>279</sup> However, the rapprochement with China was unachievable from 1983 to the third quarter of 1986 due to the following reasons. First, the influence of the Soviet Union in Laos at that time. Second, the exiled Lao opponents in Thailand remain to operate across the Mekong river from Thailand and in training camps in China. China was accused of funding and supporting the Lao insurgents, especially training the ethnic groups (Hmong and Yao) and the Lao exile reactionaries.

After the Sino-Soviet Summit meeting in 1986 and the ease of tension and détente in the world, it has helped facilitate and paved the way for Laos and China to normalize their relations. In the Political Report of the Fourth Congress of the LPRP held in November 1986, the General-Secretary Kaysone Phomvihane’s pointed out that “Towards China, we always have affection, and care for our friendship with the Chinese people; we always affirm that we would uncompromisingly strive for maintaining this friendship. China is a great power, one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, with responsibility for peace and security in Southeast Asia, Asia-Pacific and in the world. We hope that relations between our two countries would be normalized by respect for each other’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, of non-interference into internal affairs of one another, of non-aggression, of equality and mutual benefits, and peaceful coexistence.”<sup>280</sup> After the adoption of the new political thinking and economic reforms, diplomatic normalization with its northern neighbor China was the priority of Laos. In Vientiane, the Lao PDR welcomed in 1986 a Chinese delegation led by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs to engage in negotiations aiming to improve the

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<sup>279</sup> Bouppha. P. (2019, January 16). Personal Interview.

<sup>280</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 192.

bilateral relations between both countries. Shortly afterward, the Laos' Deputy Foreign Minister also traveled to Beijing in 1987, which led to the return to normalcy and revitalization of the diplomatic relations between Laos and China. Both countries also unanimously agreed to appoint an Ambassador to be posted at each other's capital in June 1988, demonstrated a very positive note after eight years of deteriorated relations.<sup>281</sup> Ambassador of Laos arrived in Beijing two weeks prior to the arrival of Chinese Ambassador in Vientiane.

The Lao leaders believed that normalizing relations with China was a top priority to create a peaceful environment for her country to develop, particularly what was happening in the Eastern European socialist countries that gave Laos concerns about the cost to continue a Soviet-dependent policy. The Lao leaders were also aware of Beijing's intention in normalizing relations with Laos, using Laos to influence Vietnam. However, that wasn't the main concern for Laos as far as the special relationship between Laos and Vietnam has been very strong and normalization diplomatic relations with China is for the national interest of Laos. Moreover, the Lao leaders were also aware that China secured relations with Laos was for their security concerns in the region. Beijing knew that closer ties with Laos would also challenge its ties with its traditional relations, such as Vietnam and Thailand. However, despite any presumption from neighboring countries, Laos did not hesitate to normalize relations with China because the external factors of the changing condition in the Soviet Union would lead to the state's survival. The Lao leaders analyzed that the shortage of aid from the Soviet Union comes with political and economic instability, which eventually was detrimental to the state.

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<sup>281</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 162-163.

A significant breakthrough in the rapprochement between Laos and China was the official visit to China from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1989 of the Lao delegation led by Kaysone Phomvihane, the General-Secretary of the LPRP, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Lao PDR, five months after the Tiananmen Square incident. During the visit, Kaysone Phomvihane met with Deng Xiaoping, the senior leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Jiang Zemin, the General-Secretary of the CCP, Yang Shang Kun, President of China. Li Peng, Prime Minister of China and other Chinese leaders.<sup>282</sup>

During his visit, Kaysone Phomvihane discussed four considerable cooperation with China and four agreements were signed together as follows: on Consulate, visa exemption, temporary border regulations, and cultural exchange.<sup>283</sup> These signed agreements proceeded successfully as both Laos and China are ready to rekindle their friendship officially. Also, one of the primary purposes behind-the-scene of this visit was to discuss the possible improvement of China and Vietnam relations. Laos, as a small neighboring country, tries to mitigate the tension between its two big neighbors, China, and Vietnam, by utilizing its strategic diplomacy. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1989, Kaysone Phomvihane paid a courtesy call on Deng Xiaoping, the senior leader of the CCP. The two leaders spoke on how to deal with the on-going regional situation, particularly on the settlement of Cambodia issue. The two discussed many issues ranging from multilateral ties to bilateral ties and how to restore the relationship between China and Vietnam to normal. However, as for China, Deng Xiaoping said that “if Vietnam wants to improve their relationship, they would have to withdraw all its troops from Cambodia first before we

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<sup>282</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 191-195.

<sup>283</sup> Bounvilay, S. (2011). *The Longevity and Stability of Laos-China Friendship*. National Publishing House, p. 44.

can negotiate.”<sup>284</sup> Therefore, Laos, using this opportunity to act as the mediator and provides an additional path of diplomatic directions and contacts for its neighbors. As a small state with no such influence in terms of capabilities, however, it is argued here that the strategic nature of the opening-up policy effectively prepares for Vietnam to improve its relationship with China. Moreover, the ‘special friendship relationship’ signed with Vietnam in 1977 did not preclude Laos from pursuing its own national interests, as many scholars had assumed. Laos, on the other hand, remains diplomatic ties not only with the CMEA countries but also with other western developed states, nor it prevented the country from accepting foreign economic from non-socialist states.

Laos played a role as a mediator between the two neighboring countries through active diplomatic efforts to forge peace and prosperity in the region and hope to extend its position in Southeast Asia. By doing so, Laos showed the determination to pursue its own diplomatic channel and foreign policy to secure its national interest. This purposely served the national interest of Laos in creating a conducive environment for the country to implement her two-strategic policy of safeguarding and developing the country. If China and Vietnam continue to antagonize each other, Laos would have difficulty positioning itself between them since both are strategically important neighbors to Laos. The Lao PDR needed to act as a mediator in helping the two neighbors to normalize their diplomatic relations. Thereby, it caused less complication for Laos to implement its two national strategic duties. This explained why Laos did not just quietly follow her neighbor’s foreign policy. To sum it up, “the reason why China and Vietnam relations renovated was because of the visit of Kaysone Phomvihane.”<sup>285</sup> “The results of the

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<sup>284</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

<sup>285</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

meeting between Kaysone and his Chinese counterpart did not only firmly normalize their bilateral diplomatic relations, but it also helps China and Vietnam to renovate their diplomatic relations as well as the renovation of China relations with the State of Cambodia.”<sup>286</sup> This was the basis of the tradition of friendly relations, mutual support, and assistance, which marked their relationship in the new environment. Since then, Laos and China have exchanged delegations at various levels, strengthening their friendly ties and cooperation.

After Kaysone Phomvihane left from Beijing to Laos in October 1989, he then left for Vietnam to meet with the Vietnamese leaders on how to normalize relations between Vietnam and China. Kaysone informed Vietnam that China was ready to normalize relations with Vietnam only if Vietnam would withdraw troops in Cambodia. However, at the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Indochinese Foreign Minister in 1986, Vietnam submitted a withdrawal plan for its military forces from the People’s Republic of Cambodia, which would be completed in 1990. Thus, the visit of Kaysone Phomvihane contributed to a secret summit meeting led by the Communist Party of Vietnam leader, Nguyen Van Linh, and China by the Chinese Communist Party leader, Jiang Zemin, in September 1990, where top leaders of both sides held a meeting in Chengdu, China.<sup>287</sup>

If Laos did not help Vietnam and China normalize their relations, their relationship might not have been restored immediately. Plus, if China and Vietnam continue to antagonize each other, Laos would have difficulty positioning and

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<sup>286</sup> Bopha, P. (2020). *Diplomacy at the Top level*. Institute of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos, p. 65.

<sup>287</sup> Sun, L. (1990, September 19). Leaders of Vietnam, China Held Secret Talks. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/09/19/leaders-of-vietnam-china-held-secret-talks/493bfd0-e5a3-44d6-9af2-d811bca2c93e/>

maintaining itself between the two powerful neighbors since both are strategically important neighbors to Laos.

#### **5.4 Turning the Battlefield into a Marketplace**

Despite the similarities in language, customs, and cultures, Laos and Thailand could not easily achieve understanding and confidence. This might be due to historical reasons relating to the two countries. Before the Lao PDR and the Kingdom of Thailand entered a period of peace, the two countries had been involved in armed clashes from June 1984 to November 1988 over the three villages and Borten in Xayabouly province, Laos. However, in order to build peace and a stable region conducive for domestic development, the foreign policy transformation in the late 1980s demonstrated a willingness to establish relations of good neighborliness by holding talks with the Thai government to settle the dispute through a peaceful means. In the statement of the opening ceremony of the 12<sup>th</sup> Indochina Foreign Ministers' meeting in 1986, Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane reaffirmed that the Lao government would "do its utmost at the national level as well as regional level to foster mutual understanding and confidence with the Kingdom of Thailand in order to normalize their mutual relations in all fields."<sup>288</sup> The two countries shared land borders and borders along the Mekong River from the north to the south of 1,835 km. The relations between Laos and Thailand continued to change based on Thailand's ruling political party and military leaders' policies.

In 1987, a new round of border clashes erupted as the Thai troops stormed Nabor Noy village, Bor Tene District, Xayabouly province adjacent to Thailand's district of

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<sup>288</sup> (1986, August 19). *KPL Lao News Agency*, p. 6.



Sarttakarn (Thailand called it Ban Rom Kao). In this case, all kinds of weapons were used, including modern warships. The Thai began mounting increasingly massive artillery bombardments and airstrikes against the Lao troops.<sup>289</sup> This incident took place during the government of General Prem Tinnasuranonda (1981-1988). The clashes between the two armies in the conflict zone lasted for two to three months, and it became a topic throughout the world. The two sides attacked and accused each other in various ways. Many countries, including major powers, have called on both sides, as neighbors, to negotiate a peaceful solution. Western diplomats in Laos, who were closely following the news, confirmed to a Thai reporter from the Daily News, News Paper, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 1988, who interviewed: “Diplomats in Vientiane said that the clashes of Ban Rom Kao enabled Laos to rise as a prominence country in Indochina that is capable enough not to be helped by anyone.” Moreover, an Agent France Press (AFP) correspondent from Vientiane reported that “most diplomats believe that the conflict between Laos and Thailand in the case of Ban Rom Kao allowed Laos the opportunity to show the world that a country in Indochina has a military capacity of no less than Thailand, and able to stand firm against the Thai military.” Diplomats in Vientiane also commented that “there is no evidence that this fight was supported by Vietnam or any other country since the fight started on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1987 and reports that Vietnam was behind in helping Laos were untrue.”<sup>290</sup>

After the general election in Thailand in 1988, General Chatichai Choochavan won the election and became the Prime Minister. He then adopted a policy of normalization

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<sup>289</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1989). Laos in 1988: In pursuit of new directions. *Asian Survey*, 29(1), 84.

<sup>290</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 142.

with the three Indochinese countries by transforming ‘the battlefield into a marketplace.’ Based on its open-door policy, the Lao government welcomed Prime Minister Chatichai’s visit to Vientiane from 24<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 1988.<sup>291</sup> Issues and tensions were then addressed and reduced when General Chattichai Chounhavanh became the Prime Minister. The two countries also agreed upon building the first bridge over the Mekong River between Vientiane and Nongkai.<sup>292</sup>

Thailand agreed to cooperate in developing communication networks, electric power, agriculture and promote a joint venture to produce goods for exportation. Both sides agreed to establish Lao-Thai and Thai-Lao Joint commissions at the governmental level to be the mechanism that enhances the relationship in various fields according to the policies of both governments. Further, the two countries also agreed to support the Lao-Thai and Thai-Lao Friendship Association establishment in both countries. Both consulted about the Lao refugees in Thailand in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Also, to further enhance their cooperation, both sides agreed to establish a post of Military Attaché in the Embassy of both countries.<sup>293</sup>

In the same year, 1988, the Lao government also adopted and promulgated a Foreign Investment Law for the first time since 1975. To elaborate, the economic transformation of the 1986 New Economic Mechanism induces the Lao government to enact a new liberal investment code, allowing 100% foreign ownership for 15 years or

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<sup>291</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 199-200.

<sup>292</sup> Gunn, G. C. (1990). Laos in 1989: Quiet Revolution in the Marketplace. *Asian Survey*, 30(1), 85.

<sup>293</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 187.

joint ventures with a minimum of 30% foreign capital.<sup>294</sup> Since then, Thailand has continuously ranked number one among all foreign investors.

**Table 3. Laos' Trade Partners, 1987<sup>295</sup>**

**(In US\$ million)**

Country	Exports	Country	Imports
PRC	9.7	Thailand	40.7
Thailand	5.4	Singapore	19.1
France	2.1	Japan	17.2
Singapore	2.0	USA	3.1
Japan	1.4	Sweden	2.4
England	1.1	Indonesia	2.1
USA	0.9	FRG	1.9
Australia	0.7	Switzerland	1.9
Sweden	0.4	Italy	1.1
Hong Kong	0.3	France	0.7
Others	2.4	Others	18.4
Total	26.4	Total	108.6

**Source (Ngaosyvathn, 1990)**

<sup>294</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1989). Laos in 1988: In pursuit of new directions. *Asian Survey*, 29(1), 82.

<sup>295</sup> Ngaosyvathn, P. (1990). Lao-Thai Trade: An Aggiornamento through Trial-and-Error. In *Southeast Asian Affairs* (pp. 163-180). Routledge, p. 165.

This was the starting point where Laos tried to restore its relationship with Thailand; likewise, Thailand also welcomed the statement of Kaysone Phomvihane. Moreover, the improvement brought the two countries to discuss mutual interests, particularly on improving trade relations through shared borders. The two countries had exchanged visits by high-ranking officials and a high-level technical team to discuss other matters.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, the Thai delegations paid a visit to Laos's Deputy Foreign Minister, Soubanh Srithirath, the largest Thai delegations to visit Vientiane since the deterioration of the two countries in 1979. Laos is a landlocked country heavily dependent on significant imports through Thailand, particularly basic goods such as asphalt, bicycles, medicines, barbwire, and certain heavy machinery.<sup>296</sup> Thus, the restricted strategic goods problem of 273 items from Thailand became an immediate issue. The Thai delegation, led by the Deputy Foreign Minister Arun Panupong agreed to reduce the strategic goods down to about sixty items, including opening more river crossings to trade and control smuggling. The visit led to the signing of a joint communique establishing the principles of maintaining friendly bilateral relations.<sup>297</sup> In 1989, the relationship between the two countries drastically changed. Thailand lifted a 14-year ban on the export goods to Laos and goods in transit to Laos, which were designated as "strategic goods."<sup>298</sup> Simultaneously, the Lao government had also pushed for the revitalization of good bilateral relations with Thailand since the signing of a joint

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<sup>296</sup> Meng, N. S. (1987). Laos in 1986: Into the Second Decade of National Reconstruction. In *Southeast Asian Affairs*, p. 190.

<sup>297</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 199-200.

<sup>298</sup> Ngaosyvathn, P. (1990). Lao-Thai Trade: An Aggiornamento through Trial-and-Error. In *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 163.

communique in 1979 to ensure peace, friendship, and good cooperation. This ultimately resulted in moving from distrust and conflict, which characterized the relationship between the Lao PDR and Thailand during that period, towards an era of expanded cooperation in many different areas.

Another important issue between Laos and Thailand relations was the problem of the Lao exiles in Thailand. In 1980, the UNHCR had invested more than 2.5 million USD in a development project in eight different provinces in Thailand.<sup>299</sup> Those who fled the country stayed at a humane deterrence camp throughout the provinces of Thailand, particularly the Napo camp and Nong Khai camp near the Lao-Thai border. With the cooperation of the US and Thailand, they implemented a screening program for asylum-seeker. Many hill-tribe people, especially the Hmong ethnic group, tried to enter Thailand illegally to seek asylum and assistance. By the end of 1986, the screening process had already begun. The Thai authorities denied any access of the Hmong and insisted that the Hmong were purposely circumventing the screening program and entering, instead, through organized smuggling rings.<sup>300</sup> In March, the local Thai officers removed thirty-eight Hmong from camp and returned them to Laos.<sup>301</sup>

Worst still, the refugees camp in Thailand, there were the foreigners and the local Thai officials, who allow some of the exile people to enter and exit the camp freely in order to keep in touch with the former Royal Lao Army that was still operating at Sikhiu Camp next to Kolad province. Some disguised in the Thamkrabork caves of Saraburi

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<sup>299</sup> Robinson, W. C. (1991). *Laotian Refugees in Thailand: The Thai and US Response, 1975 to 1988*. In *Laos: Beyond the Revolution* (pp. 215-240). Palgrave Macmillan, London, p. 232.

<sup>300</sup> Robinson, W. C. (1991). *Laotian Refugees in Thailand: The Thai and US Response, 1975 to 1988*. In *Laos: Beyond the Revolution* (pp. 215-240). Palgrave Macmillan, London, p. 230.

<sup>301</sup> Robinson, W. C. (1991). *Laotian Refugees in Thailand: The Thai and US Response, 1975 to 1988*. In *Laos: Beyond the Revolution* (pp. 215-240). Palgrave Macmillan, London, p. 230.

province to prepare to trespass into Laos and caused social unrest. In other words, the Thai authorities used its territory as a training ground for soldiers and spies. They sent them into Laos in order to disturb the tranquility and order of Lao society.<sup>302</sup> These problems often caused conflicts between the Lao government officials, the UNHCR, and the Thai officials working on these issues. The Lao government perceived the UNHCR as an organization that tends to cover up or violate the rules they have set out for the refugees. Also, the UN officials did not have a thorough inspection.

Despite the Thai government's cooperation with the UNHCR in following their humanitarian policy, the Lao government also believed that some Thai officials in charge of the refugee affairs were seeking material benefits in practice. Not only Lao people who fled the country asked to be displaced at the third country, but there were also several Thais who disguised themselves as Lao exiles to go through interviews and be resettled in the third country. Such actions made a significant impact on the UN humanitarian law and the Lao PDR's reputation. Due to such forgery, upon arrival in the third countries, there was a thorough inspection of the host country, and many fake refugees were imprisoned under the receiver countries' laws.

Therefore, "15 years after 1975, there were more than 300,000 Lao people or about 10% of the Lao populations (more than 3 million at that time), left Laos and had settled in the U.S., France, Europe, Canada, Australia, and other third countries."<sup>303</sup> However, some people were left in the refugee camp in Thailand. Some individuals or families also wanted to return to their home country. In fact, the new government of the

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<sup>302</sup> Srithilath, S. (2011). *Lao-Thai Diplomatic Relations During the Cold War*. Sisavath Press, p. 22.

<sup>303</sup> Srithilath, S. (2011). *Lao-Thai Diplomatic Relations During the Cold War*. Sisavath Press, p. 9.

Lao PDR had allowed at least 100 refugees to return home each year based on their own willingness, safety and have no hostile behavior or verbal act against the new government.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Laos adopted a foreign policy of peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation to broaden its external relations intending to creating favorable conditions for the nation's development under the NEM adopted by the LPRP to replace the previous subsidized central command system. In other words, Lao recalibrated its foreign policy to overcome the economic difficulties and pave ways for regional and international economic integration in order to take advantage of the foreign resources such as investment and aid, capital, and technology to foster the new economic transformation, as well as to strengthen its legitimacy. The changes were also brought by the 'new political thinking' of the Soviet Union and the outcome of the Soviet-US Summit in 1985 and the Sino-Soviet Summit meeting in November 1986. These Summits were a significant turning point leading to relaxation and détente in the world. These events also encouraged the development of the existing tendency of dialogue on issues such as Cambodia and other matters of particular relevance to Southeast Asia.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist countries resulted in the international status quo's end. The balance of forces favors western countries with confusion and uncertainty in the international community. During this period, it was seen that the West, led by the United States, used its positional advantage to strongly and openly trying to dismantle the countries around the world that were in the socialist camp. However, some socialist countries, such as China and Vietnam, achieved success in transitioning their economy with high economic growth rates and political

stability despite the Western conspiracy of “peaceful change” strategy applied by the US and western countries toward them.

The economic transformation of the 1986 NEM in Laos induced the Lao government to enact a new liberal investment code, allowing 100% foreign ownership for 15 years or joint ventures with a minimum of 30% foreign capital. Laos and Vietnam implemented their economic reform at the same time. Thailand, on the other hand, has always been a crucial trading partner to Laos since trading has primarily been determined by Laos and other bordering countries’ geographical contiguity. The bilateral relations between the two countries have drastically changed throughout the late 1980s, particularly reducing the number of restricted items of “strategic goods.”<sup>304</sup> Thus, the rapprochement between the two countries had expanded its commercial exchanges benefited from the initiation of the Thai foreign policy to change the battlefield into a marketplace.

In terms of diplomatic relations, the Lao PDR continued to execute a foreign policy to establish relations with all friendly nations around the world without distinguishing between socio-political regimes. Laos normalize its relations with China in 1988. Laos resumed its political and economic ties with China with a notable exchange of ambassadors and increased trade volume. The behind-the-scene talk between Kaysone Phomvihane and Deng Xiaoping gave an impetus for China and Vietnam to restore their relations. Laos showed the determination to pursue its own diplomatic channel and foreign policy to secure its national interest, thus enhancing its status in regional affairs and explaining why Laos did not just quietly follow her neighbor’s foreign policy. Due

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<sup>304</sup> These goods were composed of 273 goods in transit from Thailand.



to the confluence of internal and external factors, Laos has adjusted its foreign policy to place greater emphasis on national interests and pragmatic policies and a substantial goal in transitioning to socialism.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Increase Friendship and Reduce Enemies**

#### **6. Introduction**

This chapter will first analyze the perception of the Lao leaders on the drastic change in the world situation during the late 1980s to early 1990s and the Western conspiracy of “peaceful change”. How did the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War affect the change? The second part will discuss the Fifth Congress of the Party of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The third will examine the solution of the Cambodian civil war, the peacemaking process, and its impact on Laos’s foreign affairs. The latter part of this chapter will explore and analyze the bilateral relations between Laos and neighboring countries. For example, the relations between Laos and Vietnam. The signing of the Peace and Cooperation Treaty between the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Thailand. The visit to Laos for the first time of the King of Thailand, and the ratification of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of the Lao PDR and Thailand in 1994. The relations between Laos and China, the first visit of Kaysone Phomvihane as the President of the Lao PDR to China, and the increased economic assistance from China. The enhanced relation between Laos and Japan and lastly, the diplomatic normalization between Laos and the US. The last part will discuss the diversifying relations of Laos and integrating into regional cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and why was Laos interested in joining ASEAN?

## **6.1 The Drastic Change of the External Environment**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist countries resulted in the collapse of the bipolar status quo. The world situation changed drastically after the end of the Cold War. The United States became the single leader in a unipolar world. The international relations were full of uncertainty, setbacks, and was facing many new challenges. The West, led by the US, used this opportunity to dismantle the remaining socialist countries and pursued the Western conspiracy of "peaceful change" toward them. Issues ranging from political and socio-economic affairs to human rights issues were a matter of bargaining and binding conditions. The West continued its economic blockades on Vietnam, suspended military sales and visits to China due to the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

However, in the face of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Europe allies' breakdown in the late 1980s, the Lao leaders considered the Western conspiracy of peaceful change as a routine strategy exercised by the Western countries against its remaining socialist opponents. In the event of the Tiananmen Incident, the Lao leaders supported the action taken by the Chinese government to safeguard their sovereignty. Five months after the Incident, Kaysone Phomvihane, General-Secretary of the LPRP, led a high delegation to pay an official visit to China. This visit demonstrated that the Lao government supported the Chinese policies on this issue. Nevertheless, as preventive measures to this peaceful change, the LPRP set up workshops and seminars to discuss and analyze the Western conspiracy of peaceful change used by the West against China during the Tiananmen Incident, as well as to analyze the collapse of the Soviet Union and other Eastern Europe socialist countries. At the same time, the LPRP and the Lao government also reminded Lao people to be cautious and understand and be highly vigilant against the Western

conspiracy of peaceful change. The LPRP also used these events as case studies and as a lesson learned to prevent a similar future incident. Therefore, in the face of this situation, the LPRP was determined to continue implementing the Resolution of the Fourth Congress of the LPRP in 1986 and change according to the changing environment, meaning to increase cooperation with foreign countries, especially with Vietnam and China, to create a conducive environment in order to protect and develop the country based on the peculiarity and actuality of Laos.

## **6.2 The Fifth Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party**

From the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1991, the Fifth Party Congress of the LPRP was organized as scheduled amidst an atmosphere of confusion in the international community. The Congress reviewed the implementation of the reforms of the past five years from 1986 to 1990. In each area of the socio-economic situation, the shortcomings and lessons learned were reviewed, in particular. Further, the Congress also confirmed that “now we are in a period of continuing and expanding the regime of the People's Democratic, the building of primary factors to advance to socialism step by step.”<sup>305</sup> The Congress had identified a future direction for common objectives: “Continue implementing the new transformation policy, strengthening national consensus and solidarity of working-class and intellectual community to follow the party leadership and policies. Furthermore, policies were also aimed at promoting economic development in various sectors in order to strengthen the productive capacity of the subsistence economy, which will ultimately lead to the achievement of raising the livelihood of the people in

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<sup>305</sup> (1991, April 2). Fifth Lao People's Revolutionary Party's Congress. *Alounmai Magazine Special Edition*, p. 24.

terms of material and cultural values, and the development of the Lao PDR towards ensuring peace, independence, democracy, unity, and prosperity.”<sup>306</sup>

At the Congress, under the leadership of Kaysone Phomvihane, the Party showed its intention and commitment to continue implementing a foreign policy of ”peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation with all countries based on the principles of peaceful co-existence; respect for each other’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit.”<sup>307</sup> To implement this policy, the Lao PDR expanded its relationships and cooperation to encompass the spheres of economics, science, and technology and emphasized promoting mutual assistance and benefits. At the same time, it had also contributed to promoting international peace, national independence, democracy, and social progress.<sup>308</sup> Moreover, the Fifth Party Congress also achieved a high-level consensus in identifying the new policy of the LPRP for the new era by developing a new economic mechanism and restructuring the political system. The Congress emphasized that “this restructuring is not a shift from the original political regime but an internal restructuring to ensure the people’s democracy and identifying the roles and responsibilities of each component of the political regime.”<sup>309</sup>

In addition, in implementing the Second Plenum’s outcomes of the Central Committee Meeting of the Fifth Party Congress, the Second Legislature of the National

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<sup>306</sup> The Lao Academy of Social Science. (2011). *25 Years of The New Changes in the Lao PDR (1986-2010)*, p. 25.

<sup>307</sup> (1991, April 2). Fifth Lao People’s Revolutionary Party’s Congress. *Alounmai Magazine Special Edition*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>308</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p.189.

<sup>309</sup> Lao People’s Revolutionary Party Central Committee. (1997). *History of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party in brief*. LPRP Central Committee Publishing, pp. 267-268.

Assembly officially met for its Sixth Meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1991. There was an adoption of the Lao People's Democratic Republic's first Constitution after 16 years of its proclamation of the Lao PDR. On the same occasion, the National Assembly also unanimously approved nominating Kaysone Phomvihane as the President of the Lao PDR and Khamtay Siphandone as the Prime Minister. The National Assembly nominated these two leaders to lead and implement the new economic mechanism, ensure success in socio-economic development, and increase the Lao PDR's role in the international community.<sup>310</sup>

In 1991, the western countries had declared that the Cold War had ended, and it was the period in which the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist countries dissolution. The Cold War was a product of the confrontation between two political regimes: capitalism and socialism. In the same year, despite the Eastern European socialist countries had collapsed, socialism remained. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and eastern European countries, the international situation continued to change rapidly. The United States became the sole significant power globally, and foreign relations between countries had their shares of opportunities and newly emerged challenges. Amidst this situation, the Party and government of the Lao PDR were still committed to its new comprehensive economic transformation policy. They strengthened its implementation of the Fifth Party Congress foreign policy on peace, independence, friendship, cooperation and continue to create an environment conducive to defending and building up the country following its specificity and Laos' actual situation.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 181.

<sup>311</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 190-191.

### **6.3 Laos and Cambodia Problem**

The summit meeting between superpowers in 1985 and 1986 contributed to improving the relationship between Laos and neighboring countries. For instance, the normalization of diplomatic relations between Laos and China in 1988 after eight years of hiatus. At the same time, after the new government of General Chatichai Choochavan was resulting from turning the battlefield into a marketplace policy also improve the Lao-Thai relations. Tensions between Cambodia and Thailand have also eased after the second meeting between Prime Minister Hun Sen and Norodom Sihanouk, who was proposed to be assigned as the President of the Supreme National Council, which became a good starting point for resolving the Cambodia Problem. In June 1988, the UN Secretary-General appointed a UN Special Envoy to Cambodia to meet and coordinate with the four Cambodian concerned parties and the Indochinese governments and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders to discuss comprehensive action plans and solutions to the Cambodian civil war. In July, Indonesia hosted an informal meeting on the Cambodian issue in Jakarta called Jakarta Informal Meeting “JIM”. Representatives from Laos, Vietnam, and ASEAN states were also invited to the meeting. In February 1989, JIM 2 was held again to consider the role and duties of the International Commission for Control and Inspection during the transitional period. In July, parties within Cambodia met in Paris before the International Conference took place from the 30th of July to the 30th of August 1989, with representatives from 18 countries (excluding Cambodia) and the UN Secretary-General. France and Indonesia co-chaired the Conference. The Conference endorsed the UN’s role in overseeing, controlling, inspecting, and implementing various details of the agreements during the transitional period.

In the early 1990s, the 18 participating countries met several times, most notably the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) held high-level meetings in New York and Paris. In February and June 1990, the four Cambodian parties held informal meetings in Jakarta and Tokyo, respectively. To reach a consensus on a comprehensive political solution in Cambodia, the five permanent members of the UNSC, the UN Secretary-General, the Co-chairs of the Paris International Conference, the participating countries, and the four parties of Cambodia held several meetings in Jakarta, Pattaya (Thailand), Beijing, and New York. These meetings were to exchange views, agree, and adopt the agendas and contents of all relevant documents. Then, the Second Paris International Conference was held to sign an Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1991 with the participation of 19 signatory countries. The Final Act of the Paris Conference on Cambodia agreed to set up three committees. The First Committee dealt with military matters (four parties of Cambodia). The Second Committee dealt with the question of international guarantees, co-chaired by Laos and Malaysia. The Third Committee with the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons and the eventual reconstruction of Cambodia, co-chaired by Japan and Australia. The reconciliation of the Cambodian people resulted from joint international efforts to bring peace back to Cambodia and peace in Southeast Asia and the world.<sup>312</sup>

After Hun Sen and Sihanouk met in Paris and Beijing, Cambodia's four concerned parties agreed to settle their domestic problems. Laos also changed its foreign policy on the Cambodian issue to become more pragmatic and sided with the international

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<sup>312</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 162-164.



community to further follow up on the Cambodian civil war. After 19 countries signed the Paris Agreement on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1991, Laos considered what has happened in Cambodia so far as their internal affairs. As one of the signatory countries, Laos agreed to comply with the Paris Agreement and respect the Cambodian people's self-determination.

#### **6.4 Laos and Vietnam Relations**

Based on the historical reality, Laos and Vietnam fought shoulder to shoulder during French Colonialism and American neo-colonialism. This relationship resulted in a Laos-Vietnam relationship that continued to expand and strengthen, characterized by traditional diplomatic ties, friendship, special solidarity, and comprehensive cooperation. After the declaration of national independence, both countries utilized its existing friendship and cooperation treaties signed by both countries since the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1977 as a foundation for future cooperation. These treaties were signed at the same time both countries concluded and signed a border treaty. All these documents are important politically, demonstrating the success of Laos and Vietnam's proactive diplomacy, which was consistent with international law.

Also, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1990, Laos and Vietnam signed a boundary regulation treaty. From 1991 to 1995, the two countries' various agreements stimulated and promoted goods' exchange rapidly during the first period.<sup>313</sup> On the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1997, Laos and Vietnam also signed a protocol and an additional boundary regulation treaty in which both countries have agreed to establish a mechanism for cooperation. This

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<sup>313</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 184.

mechanism designates that a meeting should be regularly organized in order to discuss and take stock of border management activities between the two countries.<sup>314</sup>

## **6.5 Laos and Thailand Relations**

Although the relationship between Laos and Thailand before the 1990s has always been problematic, their relationship has improved through economic and trade activities after the opening-up policy. In connection with the discussion in the previous phase, the Lao and Thai governments made three arrangements to deal with important bilateral issues. In May 1991, the two countries set up their first Joint Commission (JC) for Lao-Thai cooperation co-chaired by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. This JC was to be in charge of economic, scientific, cultural, and other cooperation. The second was a General Border Commission (GBC) along the Lao-Thai borders to be chaired by the Ministers of National Defense was set up in August 1991. This GBC is responsible for confidence building in monitoring and maintaining security along the common borders and ensuring that undesirable incidents affect their relations. Third, a Joint Boundary Commission (JBC), which the Ministers of Foreign Affairs again co-chair, was established in September 1996. This Lao-Thai JBC's key function is to deal with border dispute settlement and boundary demarcation with the 1907 French-Siamese agreements' help. According to the Lao-Thai Joint Declaration issued on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1988, Laos and Thailand agreed to establish these three commissions during the official visit of General Chattichai Chounhavanh. These three establishments have helped the two governments and peoples to succeed in their attempts to enhance their relations.

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<sup>314</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p.183.

From the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1992, Kaysone Phomvihane conducted an official visit to the Kingdom of Thailand as the first President of the Lao PDR. This visit was to build a good relationship with Thailand and the Thai government in a new era as good neighbors by proposing a constructive idea to create good relations as neighboring countries with the King of Thailand. Later the King agreed to the proposed initiative and allowed the two governments to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. In February, President Kaysone Phomvihane assigned Prime Minister Khamtay Siphandone to pay an official visit to Thailand to sign a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Anan Panyachun, the Prime Minister of Thailand, after a coup overthrew the government of General Chattichai Chounhavanh.<sup>315</sup> The two parties did not only sign a historic treaty, but it was also the highest legal document between the two nations. In this Treaty, Article I mentioned that “This Treaty’s objective is to promote lasting peace, friendship, and cooperation between the two brotherly peoples-Lao and Thai for their mutual benefit.” Also, Article II sets out the fundamental principles of relations, these respecting for “national independence, sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of one another, respect for the right of each country to choose its own political and social system without any external interference, subversion or pressure and peaceful settlement of conflicts or disputes based on equality and justice by the Charter of the United Nations.” The Treaty also deals with cooperation in other fields. It underscored the need to maintain the peace and security of the two countries and others in the region and expand international relations without discrimination concerning their

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<sup>315</sup> Bopha, P. (2020). *Diplomacy at the Top Level*. Institute of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pp. 65-66.

political and social systems.<sup>316</sup> On top of that, this Treaty's importance lies in the fact that it would remain in force in perpetuity except when one of the two parties inform the other in writing its intention to terminate it twelve months before the actual termination. In November 1992, the King of Thailand appointed the Crown Prince and Princess Sirindhone to attend the late President Kaysone Phomvihane's funeral, the Lao PDR's first ruler since 1975. Also, Princess Sirindhone herself has officially and personally visited the Lao PDR many times to study Laos's customs and culture.<sup>317</sup>

In April 1994, the King of Thailand conducted an official visit to the Lao PDR for the first time. Both countries ratified the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on the 8th of April 1994 at the King of Thailand's visit to Laos. This visit had a historical significance because never before had a King from Thailand visited Laos. The King of Thailand had not traveled out of the country for more than 27 years. Still, he officially visited the Lao PDR and attended the inaugural celebration and opening of the first Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge I.<sup>318</sup> The bridge was built with Australian grants to both countries for the promotion of cooperation in the sub-region. Further, the King of Thailand also attended the Houai Xon-Houai Xoua agricultural project's handing-over ceremony, a Royal project presented to Laos during Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane's previous visit to Thailand. Hence, efforts to improve Thai-Lao relations can be seen in other overtures by the Royal Palace to the Lao PDR. After this important milestone, Laos and Thailand's bilateral relationship had continued to be improved and heightened. Moreover, economic cooperation, trade and investment, and people's movement from both sides of

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<sup>316</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT, Ltd., p. 154.

<sup>317</sup> Bouppha, P. (2002). *The Evolution of the Lao State*. Konark Publishers PVT, Ltd., p. 154.

<sup>318</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p.192.

the Mekong River continually increased and expanded. Mutual assistance and support were also increased, such as support for constructing the passenger building and airport control tower phase I for Luang Prabang International Airport, supporting the education sector, health, human resource development, and other various projects. Further, this had also resulted in more investors from Thailand going to Laos, making Thailand the largest investor in Laos during that time.<sup>319</sup>

## **6.6 Laos and China Relations**

Since the normalization of the diplomatic relations between the two countries in the late 1980s, both Laos and China have exchanged delegations at various levels and strengthened their friendly relations and cooperation. In October 1991, the Prime Minister of Laos, Khamtay Siphandone, made an official visit to China to meet his counterpart, Prime Minister Li Peng, to sign a Treaty of boundaries. In return, Li Peng made a visit to Laos at the end of the same year. In April 1991, Kaysone Phomvihane paid an official visit to China for the first time as the President of the Lao PDR. On the 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1992, Qian Qichen, Chinese Foreign Minister, also visited Laos. The two governments surveyed and demarcated the border in 1993 and completed the essential demarcation in the same year, including 47 border demarcations. In June 1995, President Nouhak Phoumsavanh paid a visit to China. Other leaders of the Lao PDR, like the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly, and ministers from various ministries, also continued visiting China to enhance their relations. China has provided grants and soft loans to Laos for agricultural and industrial development. China then ranked fifth among

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<sup>319</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 200.

foreign investors in Laos. According to table 1, China increased its investment in hydropower projects in Laos, accumulated over 600,000,000 million USD.

**Table 4. Total FDI from China to Lao PDR 1989-2009 (Mar)**

No.	Sectors	Projects	Value of Investment (US\$)
1	Electricity Generation	9	623,204,400
2	Agriculture	51	108,296,394
3	Mining	55	166,578,335
4	Industry & Handicraft	78	320,799,160
5	Services	36	126,690,376
6	Trading	22	17,416,303
7	Construction	12	16,970,300
8	Hotel & Restaurant	18	7,263,714
9	Wood Industry	11	36,819,600
10	Banking	0	0
11	Telecom	2	800,000
12	Garment	10	11,957,000
13	Consultancy	7	1,450,000
	Total	311	1,438,245,582

**Source: Vongsaysavanh, 2009 and Department of FDI Promotion, MPI, 2009. Cited in Oraboune, S., 2010.**

### **6.7 Laos and Japan Relations**

Like other countries in Asia, Laos's goal was to strengthen political cooperation in parallel with identifying the potential to expand further economic cooperation that will result in mutual and tangible benefits. The two countries Laos and Japan established diplomatic relations in 1955. Since the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Lao Foreign Minister paid his first official visit to Japan in early 1980, seeking further

development assistance for constructing a river port and agriculture projects.<sup>320</sup> From then, Japan had been a good partner to Laos. After the opening-up policy in 1986, Japan became more active in providing assistance to Laos. From the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1989, the Lao Prime minister, Kaysone Phomvihane, paid the official visit to Japan and met with Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu. Laos took the initiative to learn from Japan how to strategize its marketing strategy to enhance and strengthen its market. Kaysone noted lessons from the visit on Japanese Marketing and learned that “The Japanese knew how to segment their market, therefore, know how to strategize their products in order to meet the needs of goods around the world.”<sup>321</sup> The two sides have continuously supported each other and committed themselves to boost their cooperation between them. In 1992, as a part of a road map to visit the first capitalist country after the Cold war, it was the visit to Japan. Mr. Kaysone and Mr. Somsavath discussed the road map together in order to enhance and strengthen diplomatic relations with Asian countries.<sup>322</sup> Japan then invited President Nouhak Phoumsavanh to pay an official visit to Japan in the same year.

From the year 1993, Japan began to provide assistance to Laos, and increasingly in the following years. Laos received a total of 28,874 million USD of grant and 13,970 million USD of technical cooperation in 1993.<sup>323</sup> Japan reconstructed bridges along the National Road Route 13, which helped Laos expand its economic and trade cooperation with neighboring countries. Moreover, it has contributed to the upgrading of the living conditions of the Lao people to trade their economic goods and import and export by land.

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<sup>320</sup> Japan became the first country to visit, and it was a part of the road map in opening up.

<sup>321</sup> Phomvihane, K. (1997), *Selected Works of Kaysone Phomvihane* (Vol. III), National Institute of Politics and Public Administration, p. 311.

<sup>322</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

<sup>323</sup> Phraxayavong, V. (2009). *History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts*. Mekong Press, p. 189.

Prime Minister Khamtay Siphandone paid an official visit to Japan in 1995. During the visit, Prime Minister Murayama spoke with Khamtay and said, “The government of Japan will continue to assist the Lao PDR at the forefront.”<sup>324</sup> In 1995, Laos received assistance from Japan in a total of 101,100 million USD.<sup>325</sup> According to Bourdet (1997), the biggest bilateral donors have been Japan, Sweden, France, Germany, and Australia. Japan is the largest with annual assistance of some US\$ 50 million, followed by the European countries and Australia.<sup>326</sup>

## 6.8 Laos-US Relations

The animosity and antagonism towards the US for neo-colonizing Laos and sided with the Royal Government of Laos fighting against the Pathet Lao could not be put aside easily. After establishing the Lao PDR in 1975, the diplomatic relations between the two countries were downgraded to the Charge d’Affaires level, as already mentioned in phase one. A lingering issue between Laos and the US has been the accounting for soldiers Prisoners of War (POW)/Missing-in-Action (MIA). In July 1981, the US government acquired the information about the MIAs with the statement, “A proper accounting for American missing in Laos as a consequence of the Vietnam War is the principal bilateral issue in our relations with Laos.” The Lao PDR has officially treated the accounting for MIAs as part of its overall relationship with the US, and it looks for reciprocal US actions.<sup>327</sup> Before 1982, US sent many delegations to visit Laos, but Laos had no much

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<sup>324</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 193.

<sup>325</sup> Phraxayavong, V. (2009). *History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts*. Mekong Press, p. 189.

<sup>326</sup> Bourdet, Y. (1997). Laos in 1996: Please Don't Rush!. *Asian Survey*, 37(1), 76.

<sup>327</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985* (Vol. 1). Hoover Press Publication, p. 265.



information to give to the US since Laos still had very limited resources to spend on that issue. Plus, from the late 1970s to the first half of 1981, both sides were too busy with the Cambodian problem. The greatest difficulties of the Lao government after the long period of the war of destruction were how to convince the Lao peoples that were victims of the US bombings from the Indochina War and the Secret War in Laos to cooperate in searching for MIAs. It destroyed the peoples' lives and property of people in each province where the US dropped bombs. It was very hard for them to accept the situation after the US bombed and killed their families. Thus, they were not ready to cooperate with the US in locating the Missing-in-Actions. As far as the government is concerned, from the end of 1975 to 1982, Laos was not ready to fully cooperate with the US. The Lao government tried to link an increased effort to locate MIAs and the provision of US economic assistance. In this connection, Laos maintained that the US should fulfill Article 20 of the Paris agreement to help "heal the wounds of war." It interprets to mean the grant of US aid without strings.<sup>328</sup>

In September 1982, Laos had a desire to improve relations with the US. The US also started to change its attitude. In October, Daniel O'Donohue, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, visited Laos, and shortly after, the US donated medical supplies to a local Lao hospital. Later in February 1983, Lao PDR officials in Vientiane met with officers of the US Department of Defense Joint Casualty Resolution Center to discuss, for the first time, the specific case of missing servicemen. Laos also welcomed the US delegations and reduced the control over the movement of the US embassy staff in Vientiane. However, in 1983, their relations received a setback due to the secret mission

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<sup>328</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985* (Vol. 1). Hoover Press Publication, p, 264.

of a former Green Beret, Lieutenant James (Bo) Gritz privately entered the country of Laos to recover the MIA remains and information of alleged US POWs in Laos. Thus, it delayed their rapprochement between the two countries.

From 1984 to 1985, the Lao leaders were in a transitioning period from socialist policies to the opening-up policy. The Lao leaders were more concerned about the new economic transformation of Perestroika and Glasnost of the Soviet Union and Doi Moi of Vietnam. At the same time, the Lao government was busy preparing for the Fourth Congress of the LPRP. Given the fact that the rapprochement with the US was a low priority for Laos at that time, Laos was also a low priority for the US. Thus, progress in the rapprochement between the two countries was slow. The US was also in a domestic crisis, and external issues in the Middle East and Latin America were more important in their agenda. At the press conference in Singapore in July 1984, Secretary of State George Shultz said, "I'm afraid that the prospect of normalization of US-Laos is so far away it is really fruitless to speculate about it."<sup>329</sup>

In March 1985, Richard Childress, a member of National Security Council staff, and Ann Mills Griffiths, executive secretary of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, visited Laos to discuss with the US Chargé d'Affaires, Theresa Tull, on improving relations with Laos. From the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, Childress and Griffiths visited Laos again.<sup>330</sup> Notably, the Laos-US rapprochement's main focuses were the American MIA and clearing Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). The US government policy was strongly influenced by the pressure

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<sup>329</sup> Brown, M., Zasloff, J. J., & Staar, R. F. (1986). *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985* (Vol. 1). Hoover Press Publication, p. 266.

<sup>330</sup> Dommen, A. J. (1986). Laos in 1985: The Year of the Census. *Asian Survey*, 26(1), 116.

exerted by the families of MIAs and their supporters, particularly in Congress.<sup>331</sup> In 1985 for the first time, Laos permitted the US to investigate the crash site of the US aircraft. The aircraft was an AC-130 Spectre gunship of a type used during the war over the Ho Chi Minh Trail carried 16 Americans; two crewmen were blow out the cargo door and survived the crash.<sup>332</sup> Further investigation and excavation of the site continue were carried out in the late 1980s.

In February 1988, a number of the remain of the American servicemen were handed over to the US Embassy, and in May, the US continued its cooperation through several exchanges of visits. In January 1989, the US State, Defense, and Commerce Departments visited Vientiane, and during the middle of the year, Laos also received an 11-member US trade delegation. In the same year, the US, for the first time since 1975, committed funds to a development project in Houaphanh province.<sup>333</sup>

The relationship between the two countries continued to improve in 1990. High-ranking officials of Laos visited the US in early October. The Lao Foreign Minister, Phoune Sipaseuth met with the Secretary of State, James Baker, and discussed the first US-assisted aid project since the establishment of the Lao PDR. The US provided Laos with one million USD to the 51-km road project northern Houaphanh province. Another concern of the US to pursue rapprochement with Laos was over opium production in Laos. In 1990, the US allocated US\$ 8.7 million for a crop substitution programme involving hill tribes and capacity building among Lao drug law enforcement officers.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Thayer, C. A. (2010). US rapprochement with Laos and Cambodia. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 443.

<sup>332</sup> Dommen, A. J. (1986). Laos in 1985: the year of the census. *Asian Survey*, 26(1), 116.

<sup>333</sup> Gunn, G. C. (1990). Laos in 1989: Quiet Revolution in the Marketplace. *Asian Survey*, 30(1), 87.

<sup>334</sup> Thayer, C. A. (2010). US rapprochement with Laos and Cambodia. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 444.

In January 1991, the US signed in Vientiane a Memorandum of Understanding on narcotics control with Laos.<sup>335</sup> In the same year, an American firm, Hunt Oil, became the first company to invest in southern Pakse, Champassack province. The Lao leaders in the background also hoped to grant a most favored nation trade status in improving relations with the US. In addition, to address some of the legacies of the past conflicts, Laos was heavily bombed by the US during the Indochina War and the Secret War under a covert operation. Laos cooperated with the US on the MIAs issue in order for the US to clean up the mess they made in removing and disposing of UXO. The Lao leaders needed to safeguard the rural people from being injured and killed by the UXO and open up land for agriculture development for the well-living of the Lao people.

On the other hand, the situation surrounding Laos from late 1988 was a very good atmosphere. For instance, Laos's diplomatic relations with neighboring countries improved tremendously. In 1988, Laos and China normalized their diplomatic relations. Thailand improved relations with Laos by transforming the battlefield into a marketplace. A new Laos liberal investment law was also introduced in the same year. In 1991, the Paris Agreement on the settlement of the Cambodian civil war was signed by 19 countries, including Laos, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October. In February 1992, Laos and Thailand signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. In the same year, Laos became a signatory to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and became an observer state to the ASEAN. In connection with Laos's development with the neighboring countries, the U.S. also had intentions to improve relations with Laos in order to cooperate on POW/MIA project. Thus, there is no reason for the US to delay the normalization process of its

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<sup>335</sup> Gunn, G. C. (1991). Laos in 1990: Winds of Change. *Asian Survey*, 31(1), 92-93.

diplomatic relations with Laos. On the 12th of November 1992, President George W. Bush announced its intention to appoint an Ambassador to Laos. Full diplomatic relations were upgraded in 1992, with both Ambassadors appointed in each capital.<sup>336</sup> On the 6th of August, 1992, the U.S. President appointed Charles B. Salmon, Jr., former Chargé d’Affaires a.i., to be U.S. Ambassador to the Lao PDR.

From 1992 on, the Lao government continued its good collaboration with the U.S. in humanitarian concerns, such as locating MIA and UXO. A delegation of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia continued to visit Laos throughout the 1990s. In August 1994, the U.S. assisted a special training course on defusing unexploded ordnance in Xieng Khuang province. The project received US\$10.6 million in financial support from the Mennonites (long-time NGO in Laos).<sup>337</sup> In January 1995, the new U.S. Ambassador, Victor L. Tomseth, was posted in Vientiane.

The two countries also conducted other small-scale cooperation—for instance, the narcotic drug control projects funded by the US. The projects’ objective was to reduce the production of opium by growing another crop under the name of cash crop substitution project. The US government also offered scholarships to Lao students, such as Fulbright scholarships, Humphrey scholarships, undergraduate exchange programs, American Research Institute scholarships, Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI), and more. Further, there was other bilateral cooperation in the field of environment, law enforcement, cultural protection, and medical cooperation. According to Stuart Fox (1997), “The United States gives very little aid to Laos, even though a study showed that

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<sup>336</sup> U.S. Department of State. *Laos*. <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/laos/>

<sup>337</sup> Dommen, A. J. (1995). Laos in 1994: Among Generals, among Friends. *Asian Survey*, 35(1), 89.

unexploded American bombs have killed or wounded 11,000 Lao since the bombing stopped in 1973. The U.S.-Laos relations will, however, receive a boost when, as was expected by the end of 1997, Washington grants the Lao PDR most favored nation status.”<sup>338</sup>

## **6.9 Diversifying Relations with ASEAN States**

Amidst this atmosphere of continued fluctuation, it was apparent that strengthened cooperation was important to increase each group of countries’ role and influence for future negotiations. This, in turn, resulted in increased importance attached to cooperation for development, which was consistent with the Lao PDR’s foreign policy that stresses the importance of “peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation.” Gradually as the regional and international level situation improved, it created a favorable environment for the Lao PDR to utilize the potential of the modern era to contribute to the country’s main strategic missions. In the early 1990s, Laos’s stance towards ASEAN underwent an adjustment due to the poor economic development, loss of aid, and the international system’s changing. Simultaneously, good relations with the socialist countries remained the same with the new qualities in line with the changing world conditions.<sup>339</sup> In November 1995, Laos and South Korea also established diplomatic relations.<sup>340</sup>

To implement the opening-up policy, Kaysone Phomvihane, the President of the Lao PDR, continued to emphasize regional integration in order to increase foreign activities in the international arena such as ASEAN, the UN, and others. At the 25<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1), p. 79.

<sup>339</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp.191-193.

<sup>340</sup> Bourdet, Y. (1996). Laos in 1995: Reform Policy, Out of Breath?. *Asian Survey*, 36(1), 93.

ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Manila in July 1992, the Lao Foreign Minister Phoun Sipraseuth and Deputy Foreign Minister Somsavad Lengsavath attended the meeting. At the opening address of President Ramos of the Philippines granted the observer status to Laos and Vietnam.<sup>341</sup> As an observer state to ASEAN in 1992, Laos has started paying special attention to the region's issues and tried to be an active participant in this increasingly regional integration. Simultaneously, with the growing process of regionalization and globalization, the country cannot afford to ignore that regional cooperation is crucial for its future development. According to Mr. Somsavath (2019), "To enhance our neighboring countries' relations, we must seek regional cooperation with Asian countries, particularly ASEAN countries. I spoke with Mr. Kaysone about becoming an ASEAN member, and it was best for Laos to be a party to the regional community and use the platform as a bargaining power. We must approach our neighboring countries in order to diversify our relations. It is better not to lean one side since the Soviet Union no longer existed. Joining ASEAN would connect Laos with regional partners through regional institutions such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). Thus, we must use a pragmatic approach in order to develop our country."<sup>342</sup> This milestone symbolizes its determination to pursue its own interests without having a partner to protect it. Even though Laos has been weak in economics, this allowed the country to expand its relations with neighboring countries and potential donors and investors outside of the region.

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<sup>341</sup> "The World and Japan" Database. *Joint Communique 25<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting Manila, Philippines, 21-22 July 1992.*

<https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/asean/19920721.D1E.html>

<sup>342</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

Another regional framework was the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Laos at this stage was still a small economy and did not intend to approach or acquire a membership since entering ASEAN was a bigger concern to Laos. Also, another regional framework was the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). ARF established this important security dialogue platform in 1994. Laos had in mind that gaining access to ASEAN would also create a platform for Laos to expand its dialogue partners in various fields. Laos became a member of the ARF at the inaugural meeting of the ARF held in Bangkok on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1994. This was a milestone for Laos to become more familiar with international norms and practices.

On a diplomatic side, Lao diplomatic relations and international cooperation were very active. Since the open-up policy in the late 1980s, public and private partnerships have expanded into various sectors. The government has opened up opportunities and facilities for Lao and foreign businesses to invest. The government has become more active in foreign affairs. For instance, a special delegation led by the Lao President Kaysone Phomvihane and Prime Minister Khamtay Siphandone visited several friendly countries, such as Vietnam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, China, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Australia, Japan, and Singapore.

Moreover, in exchange, leaders of the countries mentioned above also visited Laos. Lao diplomatic relations and mutual understanding with major countries were also improved tremendously after the opening-up policy. Among the major countries, the diplomatic relations with European countries, especially France, Britain, and others, have been normalized and restored. They have also been supportive and cooperative with Laos, recognizing its role in the new era.



## **6.10 Conclusion**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and other eastern European socialist countries resulted in a world dominated by the United States, which was advantageous for the West. This group of countries has used this advantageous position to dismantle the remaining socialist countries in the world with various methods and tactics, including economic cooperation, economic embargoes, human right issues, democracy, interfering in China's internal affairs such as Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, etc. and stifling China's economic growth. Economic blockage and close ties with Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Also, the West relied on scientific and technological superiority through economic cooperation and used them as a tool to interfere in the internal affairs of the small countries. During this phase, Laos's leaders understood that the world's situation continued to change in a complex way with obstacles making it challenging to find opportunities to create a conducive environment for the development of the country. It was apparent that the world still lacked peace with many forms of conflicts expressed through race, religions, interests, and interfering in each other's internal affairs.

Overall, the trend was a struggle for peace, national independence, social progress, and regional and international cooperation. Consequently, the emergence of a unipolar world creates a world mixture of uncertainty, pragmatism, interdependence, regional cooperation, and solving conflicts in peaceful solutions. Therefore, after the end of the Cold War, the Lao foreign policy has changed to peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation. Laos continued to reaffirm its position for open cooperation without distinguishing between different socio-political regimes. Still, it must be based on the foundation of respect for independence, sovereignty, equality, and mutual benefits.

From 1991, Laos accomplished diversifying its foreign relations and expanding external relations with neighboring countries. At the Fifth Congress of the LPRP, Laos adopted its first Constitution after the proclamation of the Lao PDR. Laos strengthened its opening-up implementation by enhancing relations the western countries. This was to create a conducive environment to safeguard and build the country in the new era. As the successor of Kaysone Phomvihane, Khamtay Siphandone had touched upon the issue of independence in foreign policy and the importance of devising a suitable foreign policy that serves the needs of the nation. “We must reaffirm our position on our own terms, strengthen ourselves, and utilize the potentials existing within the country in order to achieve progress and success in implementing our foreign policy.”<sup>343</sup> Therefore, the Lao PDR shall continue to closely observe external developments, draw on others’ valuable insights and experience, avoid a one-size-fits-all approach, and define its own position. From political independence, the country needs to also move towards economic ownership.

Laos became more active in involved in regional affairs. Laos took part in settling the Cambodian Problem and was one of the signatories to the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1991. Laos relations with Vietnam continued to grow positively in the political and economic field more extensive and comprehensively through several agreements signed from 1991 to 1995. Laos and Thailand relations have improved tremendously after the opening-up policy from both sides and the signing of the historical Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, through the exchange of visits of high-ranking officials and the Royals’ visit. In 1994, Laos and

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<sup>343</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 204.

Thailand opened their first friendship bridge with the help of Australian grants. People's movement from both sides of the Mekong River continued to increase and expand. The two countries also agreed on several hydropower projects for Laos to send out electricity to Thailand.

On the other hand, since the diplomatic normalization of China and Laos in 1988, the two countries continued to strengthen their relations through economic means. China started to invest in hydropower projects and provided grants and soft loans to Laos for agricultural and industrial development. Another crucial partner in East Asia was Japan. Laos has attached great importance to securing assistance from Japan since Japan was the first donor to Laos. Japan has been assisting Laos in socio-economic development, contributing to its infrastructure development and human resources. Japan helped reconstructed bridges along the National Road Route 13, which helped Laos expand its economic and trade cooperation with neighboring countries.

Diplomatic normalization with the US also played an important role in Laos's diplomacy. The relationship between Laos and the US has never been easy. The hatred and antagonist feeling Laos have towards the US was not easy to put aside. The diplomatic relations between the two countries have downgraded since 1975. Most of the issues Laos dealt with the US were under the MIA/POWs projects. Their rapprochement started in 1982 when the US changed its attitude by sending Daniel O'Donohue, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, to visit Laos. However, in 1983, a secret mission undertaken by a former Green beret took a downturn in their rapprochement. It took 17 years for Laos and the US to upgrade and normalize their diplomatic relations from 1975 to 1992.

On a regional and international level, Laos became a member of the Bali Treaty and attained an observer state in 1992. Laos was ready to open up and deepen its relations

with ASEAN member states by taking the approach to integrate into regional integration and acquire an observer state before applying for full membership in 1997. At the same time, Laos also became a member of ARF in 1994. This demonstrated the ability of Laos to diversify its relations with neighboring countries, potential donors, and investors outside the region. The Lao government ensured it would lay a good foundation for socio-economic development by improving relations with friendly countries and many aid-providing countries.

## Chapter Seven

### A Landlocked to a Land-linked Country

#### 7. Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, and the subsequent loss of the Soviet Union's development assistance, impacted a change in Laos's foreign policy. The new international environment in the 1990s significantly affected Lao diplomacy and its position in the region. Throughout the first half of the 1980s, Laos made very little progress in opening its relations with neighboring countries. Before the 1990s, Laos's strategy was to side with the Soviet Union in supporting Vietnam on the Cambodia issue, believing that Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was simply a tool for US imperialists. However, after the new international environment of the easing tensions and détente after the US-Soviet Summit in 1985 as well as the Sino-Soviet Summit in 1986, Laos began its opening-up policy in 1986. This open-up policy has given Laos room to maneuver in economic and diplomatic ties with its neighbor, particularly the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the ASEAN states. The rapid changes in the external environment had created both advantages and disadvantages and favorable opportunities for Laos's development. In 1996 at the Sixth Party Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), the Party adopted a diplomacy of "multidirectional, multilateral, and multi-level cooperation, to create the favorable environment in implementing the country's two main strategic tasks."<sup>344</sup> Thus, regional integration became more important for Laos after becoming an observer state of

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<sup>344</sup> 70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015, p. vii.

ASEAN in 1992. Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, being the first country from Indochina to join the organization and then followed by Laos in 1997. Then, how has Laos view ASEAN membership as a strategic choice for its integration and diversification? How did Laos use ASEAN as a leverage to expand their relations with other dialogue partners?

### **7.1 The Sixth Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party**

On the other hand, the Sixth Party Congress did not only mention the change in Laos's foreign policy direction but also discussed the importance of socio-economic development. The Party Congress recognized the achievements of the socio-economic development from 1991 to 1995 and pointed out its shortcomings. To elaborate, the government: "reaffirmed the policy plan for the multi-economic sectors, multi-stakeholders, and multi-organizational economic structure development, emphasizing the need to ensure all economic sectors' legal equality, and operate under the state's governance through market mechanisms, both cooperatively and competitively. To also reaffirm the policy plan to restructure the agro-forestry connected with industry and services, take agriculture and forestry as the basis, the industry as the center, and promote service in the direction of modernization step by step."<sup>345</sup> Moreover, the party also set out guideline continuing to support the socio-economic development in the region in order to align production capacity and exploit the potential production in the region and to continue to improve and enhance the state management in the principles of rules of law and the policy tools that include planning tools as the primary. Furthermore, to continue developing and improving the monetary policy to attract domestic and foreign investors.

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<sup>345</sup> The Lao Academy of Social Science. (2011). *25 Years of The New Changes in the Lao PDR (1986-2010)*, p. 26.

The Party Congress also reaffirmed its commitment to transform policy containing two economic objectives: a growth rate of 8 to 8.5% over the 1996-2000 periods and an increase in average per capita income from US\$360 in 1995 to US\$500 by the year 2000.<sup>346</sup> In particular, the meeting set a goal to bring the country out of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by 2020 by raising the people's material and cultural well-being.

## **7.2 Laos and Vietnam Relations**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1996, the Vietnamese and Lao Inter-Governmental Committee met at their 18th meeting on Economic, Cultural, Scientific, and Cooperation. Both countries agreed on a five-year (1986-2000) comprehensive cooperation plan and agreed on economic, cultural, scientific, and technological cooperation and, in particular, in strengthening their political cooperation. In strengthening their all-rounded cooperation, Laos and Vietnam enhanced their cooperation through the two governments. It consisted of engaging in activities to counter and prevent narcotic drug trafficking along the borders of both countries, permit to open border markets, and promote the exchange of goods and cooperation on infrastructure development. Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of both countries also agreed to host the Foreign Minister's Friendship Meeting in rotation, aiming to promote the consultation and exchange of perspectives on all relevant issues, sharing experiences and good lessons learned on regional and international issues. Furthermore, bilateral cooperation had also expanded to other areas such as national defense and public security to strengthen human resources development for the military

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<sup>346</sup> Bourdet, Y. (1997). Laos: The Sixth Party Congress, and After?. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 145.

and police force. One of the important highlights was the cooperation for searching and sending the remaining Vietnamese troops who have lost their lives during the war back to Vietnam.<sup>347</sup> Therefore, after the Sixth Party Congress of the LPRP, the two political parties, the LPRP and Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), agreed to implement the agreements. The two governments also continued to implement the existing policies in cooperating on overall economic and social sectors.

### **7.3 Laos and Thailand Relations**

Laos and Thailand relations in the new phase was continued under an economic and trade relations. The Lao-Thai Electricity Trade Agreement helped improve the relations between the two countries. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, 1996, Thai Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa visited Laos and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on developing electricity in Laos. Under this Lao-Thai MOU on electricity's development in Laos, the two governments signed two MOUs, first in 1993 and the second one in 1996. The two sides cooperated in developing the hydropower sector and were to supply approximately 7,000 megawatts of electricity by 2015. The two countries also cooperated in other areas such as communication network, road number 11 construction, and other friendship bridges across the Mekong River.<sup>348</sup> In addition, Thailand also reduced the remaining number of banned goods imported from Laos. However, the trade balance between the two countries was always heavily weighted in favor of Thailand because Laos had to import consumer goods from Thailand (nearly 80 percent of total Lao

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<sup>347</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 182-185.

<sup>348</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 201.



imports). In contrast to Laos, exports to Thailand were minimal. In January 1997, the Princess of Thailand paid an official visit to Laos to enhance its mutual understanding and strengthen its ties.

In June 1997, the Thai Prime Minister General Chavalit Yonchaiyudh also paid an official visit to Laos to enhance its mutual understanding and strengthen its ties with Laos. In return, the Lao Prime Minister Sisavath Keobouphanh also paid an official visit to Thailand in the same year. During Prime Minister Sisavath visits, both sides signed the Treaty of Extradition on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1999 by the duly authorized representative of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and the Kingdom of Thailand.<sup>349</sup> From the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2000, the new Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai also visited Laos. The high-ranking official from both sides paid many visits. However, the leaders of Thailand made more visits to Laos due to the Thai government's frequent changes. Thus, it was normal for the head of the Thai government to make a visit to its neighboring country. Yet, given the Lao-Thai relations' sensitive nature, although both sides made great efforts to overcome their difficulties and settled many issues satisfactorily in a spirit of cooperation and compromise, new problems and thorny issues arose. Three serious incidents rocked the bilateral relationship.

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<sup>349</sup> Whereas Article 20 paragraph 1 of the above-mentioned Treaty provides that this Treaty is subject to ratification; the instruments of ratification shall be exchanged at Vientiane, and this Treaty shall enter into force thirty days after the exchange of the instruments of ratification. In conformity of the right and the authorities stipulated in the Article 53 Point 11 of the Constitution of the Lao PDR dated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1991, the President of the Lao PDR, having considered the aforesaid Treaty, confirms and ratifies the above-mentioned Treaty. The whole articles stipulated in this Treaty shall be completely respected. The Instruments of Ratification of the Lao PDR was signed by Khamtay Siphandone, President of the Lao PDR, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1999. Later, the Instruments of Ratification of the Treaty on Extradition between the Lao PDR and the kingdom of Thailand signed in Bangkok, on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1999 was exchanged in Vientiane on 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2001.

First, Laos protested the violation of its air space by Thai aircraft. Second, there was an outrage when Thai police locked up four Lao women in a cell with Thai male prisoners who raped them repeatedly.<sup>350</sup> Third, in July 2000, another incident happened. Robbers and perpetrators by a group of thirty-four Lao citizens and Thai miscreants were armed with warfare weapons crossed from the Chong Mek (Thailand)-Vangtao (Laos) border checkpoint Champassack province of Laos and Ubon Ratchathani province of Thailand. At the Vangtao checkpoint, these perpetrators threatened to shoot and looted foreign exchange shops, duty-free shops, border patrol offices, customs offices, and many more. They held staff and construction workers' hostage. In this situation, the Lao police told the perpetrators to release the hostage, weapons and surrender. However, these perpetrators did not obey the order and shot at the Lao authorities, causing the Lao polices to fire back in self-defense. Therefore, six of them were shot dead on the site, including two Lao people. The remaining perpetrators returned to Thailand, and all 28 of them, including 17 Lao people, were arrested by the Thai authorities, and the warfare firearm carried by them. To elaborate, there were the three AKA Soviet automatic rifles, one B40 Chinese heavy firearm, one M16 American automatic rifle together with other material and money. The Thai authorities also arrested them on two charges, first for illegal immigration and second, possessing warfare weapons.<sup>351</sup>

These incidents seriously affected Lao-Thai relations coming as they did after the Prime Minister of Thailand's visit to Laos in late May 2000. Although the Prime Minister

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<sup>350</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1), 79.

<sup>351</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 243.

of Thailand pledged that the Thai government would not allow anyone to use its territory to disturb the Lao PDR's peace, security, and order, the incident still happened.

#### **7.4 Laos and China Relations**

To strengthen and enhance the ties between Laos and China, many visits to Beijing started to increase. After the financial crisis in 1997, the Lao Foreign Minister Somsavad Lengsavath left for Beijing in August 1997 first to negotiate about the financial aid package that would help stabilize the Lao Kip currency. Second, to agree on building a large Lao National Cultural Complex in downtown Vientiane.<sup>352</sup> In the same year, the two sides also established a Committee for Economic and Trade Cooperation to assess the interests of short and long term cooperation. In 2000, the two heads of state exchange visits. From the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 2000, the General-Secretary of the LPRP, Khamtay Siphandone, paid an official visit to China. In return, four months after, Jiang Zemin, the General-Secretary of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and President of China, visited the Lao PDR from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 2000. On this occasion, the two governments signed six important documents on cooperation projects.<sup>353</sup> These visits also led to the signing of the Lao-Chinese Joint Communiqué, the broad scope of which covers all aspects of long-term cooperation in political, economic, cultural, and other fields. Thus, their political relations for the past decades have improved through exchanges of high-ranking delegations. However, from the year 2000, their relations grew tremendously in the field of economic and investment.

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<sup>352</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1), 79.

<sup>353</sup> Bounvilay, S. (2011). *The Longevity and Stability of Laos-China Friendship*. National Publishing House, p. 7.

Subsequently, from 2001 to August 2007, according to the Lao Committee for Planning and Investment, US\$ 1.1 billion of Chinese investments were approved.<sup>354</sup>

## **7.5 Laos and Japan Relations**

Under the enhanced cooperation between the two countries through the transport infrastructure assistance from Japan, Japan provided more support to develop the Lao PDR. From 1995 to 1998, Japan assisted Laos in renovating Vientiane Airport. Serving as the largest bilateral donor after the Cold War, the Japanese government agreed to open a JICA Representative Office in Laos in 1996. Since then, the amount of assistance and economic cooperation has grown steadily, and more Japanese wholeheartedly volunteer to assist Laos. Laos continues to compete for grants in aid and loans from the Oversea Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) to create facilities to attract Japanese investment. From 1997 to 2000, Japan continues to support Laos in the transport infrastructure by constructing the Pakse Mekong Bridge (inside Laos) in the southern part of Laos. In 1999, Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino visited Laos to enhance its mutual understanding and strengthen its ties with Laos. From 1999-2000, Japan also assisted Laos in constructing the New Seththirath Hospital. As tangible evidence, it can be seen that Japan was heavily supporting and assisting Laos through transport infrastructure, and this has facilitated trade and regional connectivity for Laos. In January 2000, Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi also paid an official visit to Laos. In the same year, Prime Minister Sisavath Keobounphanh also visited Japan to attend the funeral ceremony of the late former Prime Minister Obuchi. From 1997 to 2003, Japan provided grant to

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<sup>354</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (2009). Laos: the Chinese connection. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 145.

Laos over 400,000 million USD.<sup>355</sup> After entering the 2000s, the exchange of high-level delegations has further strengthened ties between the two countries.

## **7.6 Laos into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**

As discussed in phase three of Laos's foreign policy, the Fourth Congress of the LPRP decided on market-oriented economic and foreign policy policies to broaden its external relations with neighboring countries. The LPRP developed these policies at a time when there was a conflict in Southeast Asia. Cambodia experienced an internal conflict that had repercussions for its neighbors in the region and the international community. When the Indochinese countries defeated the US in the mid-1970s, Thailand and other ASEAN countries established diplomatic relations with Vietnam. This was the writing of a new page in history that aimed to improve relations with countries in the region and promote tangible benefits for all countries' development. The five countries that established ASEAN consisted of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The foreign ministers of these five countries signed a joint declaration on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1967. This significant event was also attended by representatives from the Kingdom of Laos, the Kingdom of Cambodia, and South Vietnam, who were there as observer countries. The Bangkok Declaration, initially and in reality, was the founding countries' expression to reaffirm their solidarity to counter and fight the so-called communist danger. This declaration aimed not only at Indochinese countries but also to counter and silence the communist uprising in their own respective countries.<sup>356</sup> However,

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<sup>355</sup> Phraxayavong, V. (2009). *History of Aid to Laos: Motivations and Impacts*. Mekong Press, p. 189.

<sup>356</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 202.

to avoid the assumption of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) role, ASEAN gradually changed its policies to suit the international trends. Therefore, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of 1976, the head of states or head of governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation Southeast Asia in Bali, Indonesia.

One of the important foundations the treaty was the six basic principles governing the party's relationship to the treaties stipulated in Article 2.<sup>357</sup> In general, this treaty reflected the United Nations Charter's spirit, the 10 Principles of the Bandung Conference in 1955, and the 1967 Bangkok Declaration. The 1980s was a period of intense diplomatic efforts exerted by the ASEAN member states and the Indochinese countries to address Cambodia's situation. Aside from looking for solutions to address Cambodia's political situation, ASEAN also tried to persuade the Indochinese countries to become a party to the Bali Treaty to further increase understanding among countries in the region. At the same time, during the late 1980s, the major powers reached an important agreement to reduce tension, military force, nuclear weapons and promote scientific and technological achievements for cooperation and economic development. During this period, the conflicting parties in Cambodia had also understood and agreed to sign the Paris Peace Accords, which paved the way for Indochinese countries and ASEAN to move closer to understanding, trust, and confidence.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern socialist countries also resulted in the collapse of the bipolar status quo. During this period, the west, which the United

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<sup>357</sup> Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia*. <https://asean-aipr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Treaty-of-Amity-and-Cooperation-in-Southeast-Asia-1976-TAC.pdf>

States led, used this opportunity to dismantle the remaining socialist countries around the world. In reality, it was apparent that there was still an absence of peace, security, and real stability in the international community. There were other existing conflicts in an arms race, international terrorism issues, border issues, internal political issues of many countries, racial and religious conflicts, and many more. These problems have caused considerable damage to people's lives, and properties have resulted in large-scale displacement of people and refugees. However, after the Cold War, peace, stability, and cooperation developed and emerged. Despite the different socio-political regimes, the struggle to maintain each country's economic interests, group of countries, and the region exists.<sup>358</sup>

Amidst this atmosphere of continued fluctuation, it was apparent that strengthened cooperation was important to increase each group of countries' role and influence for future negotiations. This, in turn, resulted in increased importance attached to cooperation for development, which was consistent with the Lao PDR's foreign policy that stresses the importance of "peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation." Gradually as the regional and international level situation improved, it created a favorable environment for the Lao PDR to utilize the modern era's potential to contribute to its main strategic missions. Thus, in implementing the opening-up policy, the Lao President, Kaysone Phomvihane, in conformity with the rights and authorities stipulated in Article 53 Point 11 of the 1991 Lao constitution, Laos decided to become a party to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia or Bali's Treaty in 1992. The reason behind the applying for an observer state to ASEAN was because "Laos wanted ASEAN to accept

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<sup>358</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 224.

that Laos is also changing its direction to improve and expand her relations with neighboring countries in the region based on the external changing condition.” Moreover, “the Lao leaders believed that it was best for Laos to be a party to the regional community and use the platform as a bargaining power with other big or group of countries, thus it was inevitable for Laos to apply to ASEAN.”<sup>359</sup>

This implementation helped Laos integrate into regional integration and increase foreign activities in the international arena, such as the United Nations (UN) and others. Laos attained an observer state to ASEAN in 1992.<sup>360</sup> Laos spent five years studying ASEAN, which it saw as a regional organization with those founders who had wished to unite all Southeast Asian nations. Recognizing the clear objective of ASEAN and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation following the United Nations’ principles and reflecting the reality and the aspiration of the peoples of Southeast Asia, therefore, became one reason for Laos to apply for ASEAN as a full member to the Association. During five years of ASEAN’s observer status, Laos joined in ASEAN’s various activities and processes and demonstrated its intention to become the ASEAN member state. This intention was favorable amongst many current member states. They also supported Laos in various aspects to achieve the conditions set forth to become an ASEAN member. Later, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1996, the Bali’s Treaty was ratified by the Lao government.

Before Laos became a member of ASEAN in 1997, ASEAN leaders began their visits to Laos. President Suharto of Indonesia led the way in February 1997, followed by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore in March. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun

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<sup>359</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

<sup>360</sup> Bouppha, P. (2020). *Diplomacy at the Top Level*. Institute of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p. 69.



Sen also paid a visit in April when it anticipated that Cambodia would join ASEAN in July and Thai Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh visited Vientiane in June. By July 1997, Laos became a member of ASEAN on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1997 together with Myanmar. As the General-Secretary of the LPRP and Prime Minister Khamtay Siphandone of the Lao PDR addressed the nation on Lao Television. At the same time, Foreign Minister Somsavad Lengsavath was a guest of honor at a gala ASEAN night.<sup>361</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs celebrated its membership by establishing the ASEAN Department. A series of seminars and workshops were also held to train all diplomats and civil servants. In particular, English language courses were crucial in developing their knowledge of understanding ASEAN affairs. This important milestone signifies a new accomplishment for the Lao PDR in expanding its relationship with the ASEAN member states and increasing its role in the region. Moreover, it has reflected the implementation of foreign policy to promote friendship and cooperation in the region.

Furthermore, high-ranking official visits continue to visit Laos. Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet in August, and President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines in October. Agreements on agriculture, health, narcotics control, and cultural exchange were signed. Singapore has opened its embassy in Vientiane, and Brunei followed suit.<sup>362</sup> Although Laos is determined to join ASEAN, ASEAN also wanted Laos to be one of its members. This was because of the growing relationship between Laos and China for the past couple of years. After the Cambodian crisis, many ASEAN countries were regarded China as a threat to the region's stability. Therefore, to limit the Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese

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<sup>361</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1), 75.

<sup>362</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1), 78.

influence, ASEAN also adjusted Lao's foreign policy in the region's direction as the best way to avoid the hindrance of being a land-locked country.<sup>363</sup>

After officially becoming an ASEAN member state, the Lao PDR "proactively contributed to the organization's overarching goal and purpose and was engaged with ASEAN politically, economically, and technically. Laos contributed to expanding the relationships between ASEAN and its dialogue partners, which resulted in creating tangible benefits for the countries at all levels. One of those benefits mentioned above was the increase of friendly relations and the reduction of enemies. At the same time, Laos was also able to strengthen its role, influence, and its own reputation on the international stage. Economic integration with the region and the world at large also represents an opportunity for the Lao PDR to strengthen political relations and diplomacy, which will create an environment that facilitates the establishment of the basic and important foundation for the nation's protection and development. The international community and countries in the region had also recognized the importance of cooperation without distinguishing between socio-political regimes and respect of Laos' national sovereignty. Confidence and trust were also strengthened, resulting in foreign investment in the country and economic cooperation between ASEAN member states. Obstacles of trade, commerce, and investment were reduced, which paved the way for free trade, ultimately leading to achieving development progress and ensuring economic stability. All the tangible benefits also contributed to the development of the Lao PDR's Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) sector because it allowed them to access the present in ASEAN's various markets. Furthermore, it also presented the opportunity to improve

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<sup>363</sup> Bourdet, Y. (1996). Laos in 1995: Reform Policy, Out of Breath?. *Asian Survey*, 36(1), 93.

the transport sector's integration with its ASEAN neighboring countries, further promoting trade, services, investment, tourism, and people's movement within the region."<sup>364</sup>

Also, integrating into a regional organization, transportation from mainland Southeast Asia to maritime Southeast Asia is now a priority in developing the countries. Land routes through Thailand, Vietnam, and the southern part of China are important ways to increase trade. Bridge and road construction are now priorities, with aid donors and international lending institutions concentrating on infrastructure development.<sup>365</sup> Aside from its relations with close neighboring countries on the mainland, the Lao PDR also had good bilateral relations with each ASEAN member state regarding political, socio-cultural, and economic cooperation. The Lao PDR had also established an economic, technological, and socio-cultural cooperation committee with each country to promote and strengthen the quality and comprehensive cooperation.<sup>366</sup>

According to Somsavad Lengsavath (2019), "since the end of the Cold War, our strategy was to have better relations with all countries in the world without socio-politic discrimination, particularly with neighboring countries in the region. The accession into ASEAN was something Laos has considered since the opening up policy from 1986. However, due to the external environment and the limitation of our foreign policy at that time, we were unable to establish a comprehensive relationship with other ASEAN countries. Thus, the end of the Cold War had pushed Laos to seek more friendship to expand its voice in the international arena by joining a regional organization like ASEAN.

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<sup>364</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 208- 209.

<sup>365</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1),77.

<sup>366</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 227.

This has helped Laos enhance its role or have a bigger impact on the international platform to deal with other developed countries. For instance, as a small country like Laos, it is not easy to express or negotiate with bigger countries. Therefore, to be able to advance our interests at international meetings, we could use ASEAN as a platform to hold talks or meetings conveniently.”<sup>367</sup> Moreover, “in joining ASEAN was to ensure political stability and national security to create a favorable environment to protect and develop the country’s socio-economic. The membership to ASEAN in 1997 seems to be a suitable atmosphere for Laos in line with the regional and global trend that seeks to develop strategic cooperation, connective and cohesive strategies to benefit economic cooperation as a priority.”<sup>368</sup>

Initially, Laos studied the advantages, difficulties, and challenges in joining ASEAN, particularly in line with the government’s policy and the party. It can be seen that the Lao PDR has many challenges to prepare for the ASEAN members, such as the differences in socio-political and administrative regimes, levels of economic development, cultural diversity, language, religion, and so on. At the same time, ASEAN has previously been cooperating with various dialogue partners with different political regimes and different political beliefs. Thereby, there is much cooperation that needs to be addressed with dialogue partners. Also, Laos found it difficult to proactively stance on sensitive issues that deals with its strategic allies, such as the territorial issues in the South China Sea. Therefore, Laos can use the ASEAN platform to deal with unreachable issues.

On the other hand, economic readiness and human resource development were still low, particularly English as the ASEAN’s official language. As a new member, Laos

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<sup>367</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

<sup>368</sup> Kittikhoun. A. (2019, January, 14). Personal Interview.

still lacks experience in various activities, particularly in negotiations for assistance and cooperation. In terms of economic integration, ASEAN integration will inevitably affect Laos's obligations, especially the liberation of ASEAN trade and services that could hinder Laos's economy's readiness in the field of investment and open free trade and service. Since ASEAN required all ASEAN member states to reduce tariffs on all imports and eliminate all trade tariffs from ASEAN countries after 2015.<sup>369</sup> Thus, Laos did not need to rush to join ASEAN because it will lead to an economic downturn and lose its confidence in exchange for membership to the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). Also, Laos was given until 2008 to meet AFTA requirements to reduce tariffs on most goods to below 5%.<sup>370</sup>

## **7.7 Laos and France Relations**

The Lao-French diplomatic relations were suspended from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1978 until they became normalize on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1981. There are many reasons why France took the option of renormalizing its relations with the Lao PDR., which have been suspended for more than three years. The following reasons also explained why Laos and France had been engaged in strengthening their relations and put aside the past animosity. The first reason is historical ties between the two countries make the two countries special partners. The second, France, like other former colonial powers, is still wants to mark its presence in its former protectorate and colony, on the other hand, to counterbalance power with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Laos. In

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<sup>369</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2009). *History of Lao Diplomatic Relations*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 217.

<sup>370</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1), p. 76.

addition, France made efforts to keep Laos within the so-called Francophone group of countries. As far as Laos is concerned, while rebuilding the country after the founding of the Lao PDR, and during the 1980s, the relations between Laos and Thailand deteriorated terribly in all aspects. Thailand imposed economic sanctions on Laos, blocking all the so-called strategic goods coming into the country including the assistance from foreign countries to Laos. They also closed all the crossing borders, worsening the relationship. The Thai armed forces continued to provoke Laos until the late 1980s as mentioned in previous Phases. After France signaled a desire for improved relations with Laos by reducing and resolving their unfriendly actions, and facing the above-mentioned difficult relations with Thailand, Laos also needs to be friendly with every country including France, who has historical ties with Laos. In 1980, Laos and France were on the road to normalize their relations.

In 1988, France agreed to put Laos on the list of priority countries to provide aid, and a year later, the two countries signed an agreement to promote and protect each other's investment. In 1991, Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane attended the Fourth Francophony Summit in Paris and paid an official visit to France. At the Summit, he met with French President Francois Mitterrand. France also strongly supported Laos's candidature to be a member of the organization, and later in November 1991, Lao PDR was admitted to the Francophone Organization.

In April 1997, President Khamtay Siphandone visited France, where he met President Jacques Chirac. France has been fighting to keep Laos within the so-called Francophone group of countries, even though English was by far the preferred foreign language for young Lao. As a former protectorate, France is one of the major aid donors, trading partners, and investment capital sources. During this visit, President Khamtay also

met with representatives of several French companies with economic interests in Laos.<sup>371</sup> Since then, the two countries have exchanged visits at both the official and various levels between ministries, the National Assembly, and the capital city. From 1996 to 2000, the Lao-French relations improved over time through the exchange of visits and participating in the Francophonie activities. Then, at the beginning of the year 2000, the French began to invest in the Nam Theun II hydropower project. According to Stuart-fox (1998), the Nam Theun II was “the largest of the hydro-dams is the Australian-French-Thai-Lao joint venture to build the 681 Mega Watt Nam Theun II dam on the river of the same name in central Laos. The project, which has strong government support, will cost US\$ 1.5 billion and is expected to be funded by the World Bank.”<sup>372</sup> Moreover, France also invested in private investment in the Allianz General Laos (AGL) Insurance Company and the French-Lao Cooperation Bank. Therefore, with the normalization and improvement between the two countries, Laos also exports its goods to France, including beer, coffee, textiles, etc. In return, Laos imports goods from France, such as the ATR airplanes and airbus airplanes. Since 2000, France has continuously provided Laos’s assistance in developing its agriculture and forestry, such as rural development, irrigation development, job creation, and further strengthening its trade in the Lao coffee sector.

## **7.8 Laos and the European Union**

The Lao PDR and the European Union (EU) established their ties in 1987 after Laos’s foreign policy opening in 1986. The two partners culminated their relations and agreed on many cooperation fields after Deputy Prime Minister Somsavad Lengsavath

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<sup>371</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1), p. 78.

<sup>372</sup> Stuart-Fox, M. (1998). Laos in 1997: into ASEAN. *Asian Survey*, 38(1), p.77.

visited in 1997. The two sides have established projects for rural development and urban development. Thus, the Lao PDR has received assistance for clearing unexploded ordnance, irrigation, and refugee repatriation. Politically, the two sides have established mechanisms to discuss and exchange information annually, including good governance, human rights, and the rule of law.<sup>373</sup> Also, the EU has extended the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) terms to garment import from the Lao PDR. From 1994 to 2001, the two partners have cooperated in 14 projects, which accumulated over 49 million Euros.<sup>374</sup> In diplomacy, the Lao PDR established several Lao embassies and consulates abroad, including the Lao Embassy in Belgium in 1998, to be responsible for the relations with other European Union countries. It reopened the Lao Embassy in the United Kingdom after the United Kingdom closed its embassy in Vientiane due to economic difficulties in 1982. The Lao PDR followed suit to closed its embassy in London in 1985. Although the two countries did not have embassies in each other's Capitals, they continue to maintain good relations and exchanges throughout the years. Subsequently, when the Lao PDR had the honor the host the 9th Asia-Europe Meeting or ASEM 9 in 2012, the United Kingdom saw the role the Lao PDR played in the international area, had the United Kingdom show its intention to reopen its embassy in Vientiane from then.

## **7.9 Laos and the United Nations**

Laos became a member of the UN in 1955, under the Kingdom of Laos. After establishing the Lao PDR in 1975, in implementing its consistent foreign policy in each

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<sup>373</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 258-259.

<sup>374</sup> Ministry of Foreign of Affairs Laos. (2019) *Laos-EU relations Document*.



period, the Lao PDR was able to play its role in the international arena. The Lao PDR continues to support and contribute actively to the UN activities.

The Lao PDR has been a party to various international conventions in all areas and has accessed international conventions within both its bilateral and multilateral framework. From the year 1996, the Lao government emphasized promoting the foreign policy of peace, independence, friendship, and mutually beneficial cooperation, resulting in the Lao PDR portrayed itself as a reliable and responsible partner in the international community. Later, by implementing the multidirectional, multilateral and multi-level diplomacy and implementing the principles of respect for independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, resolving conflicts peacefully, and upholding the fundamental rights under the international law of all the UN member states, the Lao government, and the UN are proactively working together on improving the socio-economic development of the Lao PDR, in the field of poverty reduction, in particular.

The United Nations Development Program has played an important role in organizing a Round Table Meeting to encourage countries and international organizations to continue assistance to the Lao PDR, which has become an important contribution to socio-economic development. For the first time, Laos hosted the Seventh-Round Table Meeting in Vientiane in late November 2000, contributing to the multilateral donor community's changing attitude.<sup>375</sup> Many countries and international organizations also announced their support of priority projects for 2000-2001, amounting to 386 million US Dollars. Subsequently, over the past two decades, this development has improved successfully. The poverty rate had reduced tremendously, from 46 percent in 1992 to 23

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<sup>375</sup> Bourdet, Y. (2002). Laos in 2001: Political Introversion and Economic Respite. *Asian Survey*, 42(1), 113.

percent in 2012.<sup>376</sup> Therefore, the Lao PDR has always been actively involved in the UN's mission to raise its profile and recognition in the international arena and implement its foreign policy to create more friendship and reduce enemies to create a favorable environment in order to safeguard its national interests. At the same time, to preserve both regional and international peace and security and economic cooperation.<sup>377</sup> Laos also has relations with other developed and developing countries. Apart from those mentioned above, as one of the LDCs, the Lao PDR was aware that in order to improve the socio-economic development, it was necessary to seek assistance and cooperation from other countries and international organizations, including international financial institutions and non-governmental organizations.

## **7.10 Conclusion**

The Sixth Congress of the LPRP was very significant for Laos' economy. The Party Congress set out a comprehensive economic transformation and developed and improved the monetary policy to attract foreign investment. The Lao PDR set up a goal to bring the country out of the LDCs by 2020 by raising the Lao people's material and cultural wellbeing. In foreign affairs, the LPRP Congress decided to continue pursuing a foreign policy of peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation. Moreover, the Lao diplomacy also adapted the direction to multidirectional, multilateral, and multi-level cooperation. These adaptations essentially contributed to creating a favorable

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<sup>376</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, pp. 281-283.

<sup>377</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Laos. (2017). *70 Years of Lao Diplomacy 1945-2015*. Institute of Foreign Affairs, p. 284.

environment for implementing Laos's two main strategic tasks, safeguarding and developing the country.

During this period, the international environment has eased the tension for Laos to improve its ties with foreign countries. First, Laos and Vietnam's relations had expanded to other areas such as national defense and public security and strengthening human resources development for the military and police forces. Second, Laos and China ties have been restored to normalcy, which led the two countries to exchange visits frequently from the head of state to high-ranking officials. These visits expanded the growing long-term cooperation in the political, socio-economic, and investment fields more comprehensively. Third, although the frequent exchange of visits and joint statements between Laos and Thailand have strengthened their bilateral ties, many issues have yet to be settled. From signing the electricity MOU in 1993 and 1996, the two countries have expanded their economic and trading field. This cooperation generated and improved their ties. Fourth, Laos and Japan relations were redesigned to enhance the already good bilateral cooperative relations. The Japanese government agreed to set up a representative office of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Vientiane in 1996, making Japan the largest donor in Laos. Fifth, in 1997, the Lao PDR was admitted as a full member of ASEAN. This ASEAN membership presented the opportunity for Laos to improve the transport sector's integration with its ASEAN's neighboring countries, which will further promote trade, services, investment, tourism, and people's movement within the region. ASEAN membership reflected Laos's open-up policy. It helped widen its cooperation to increase friendship and reduce enemies, enabling it to expand its relations with ASEAN member countries and ASEAN dialogue partners, turning Laos from a landlocked country into a land-linked country. Sixth, after

the normalization of the Laos-France relations, in the year 2000, France started to invest in Laos through a joint investment with other countries in the Nam Theun II hydropower project with a total amount of US\$ 1.5 billion. Seventh, as for the Laos and EU relations, after Deputy Prime Minister Somsavad Lengsavath visited the EU, the two sides have enhanced and expanded their cooperation in many fields. The Lao PDR opened its Embassy in Belgium in 1998 to be responsible for the relations with other European Union countries. Since then, bilateral relations with the EU have grown rapidly. The EU also extended the Generalized System of Preferences terms to Laos's garment industry to export its products from the Lao PDR to Europe, which later contributed to promoting Lao textile exports and creating jobs for the Lao people.

Eighth, under Laos and UN cooperation, Laos has contributed to the United Nations' work. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has helped Laos in many ways to reduce poverty in line with Lao government policies. The UNDP has also played an important role in organizing a Round Table Meeting to encourage countries and international organizations to continue assistance to the Lao PDR, which has become an important contribution to socio-economic development. For the first time, Laos hosted the Seventh-Round Table Meeting in Vientiane in late November 2000, contributing to the multilateral donor community's changing attitude. Many countries and international organizations also announced their support of priority projects for 2000 and 2001, amounting to 386 million US Dollars.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusion**

#### **8. Conclusion**

This thesis is an analysis of the evolution and the historical process of Laos's foreign policy change since the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) in 1975. As a landlocked country located in the hub of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, Laos shares borders with five countries on the mainland Southeast Asia being sandwiched from Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, China, and Myanmar. Laos's foreign policy has often been portrayed as a reflection of its relationship with its stronger neighbor, Vietnam. This thesis is an attempt to prove that the evolution of Laos's foreign policy is not just another foreign policy of a small state but has its unique characteristics.

When it achieved independence in 1975, the Lao People's Democratic Republic was confronted with many external challenges, mostly from Thailand and the Western camp. Laos attempted to strike a delicate balance between the socialist and capitalist camps by aligning with a larger group of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). After decades of a devastating war, Laos was in need of creating a favorable environment to have enough time to heal wounds of the war, improve the Lao people's living conditions, and implement the two national strategies to defend and develop the country. However, the task was not easy. Then, how did the Lao leaders laid the groundwork for its foreign policy? Did Laos's foreign policy change? How and why did it change?

After the establishment of the Lao PDR, the national leaders set out a five-point foreign policy to declare its statement to implement a Non-Aligned policy by changing

its foreign policy to stay neutral between the two camps, capitalism vs. socialism. Many exiles opposing the new government of the Lao PDR were supported by Thailand and other Western countries. Thailand gave shelter to the exiled Lao, permitted them to establish military training camps, and let them make incursions in Laos. At the same time, the U.S. military base still had a presence in Thailand. Facing this situation, Laos decided to align more clearly with the socialist country to protect her national interests and safeguard the newly gained independence. Therefore, in 1977, the Lao PDR signed a 25-year Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

However, why did Laos decide to align with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), despite its goal advancing to socialism? And why didn't Laos pursue a pro-Soviet policy after the establishment of the Lao PDR? The reasons why the Lao PDR chose not to side with the Soviet Union immediately or explicitly declare its commitment to implement a pro-Soviet policy was due to its good relationship with China. During the struggle for Lao national independence, the support and assistance from China played a significant role in helping Laos negotiate and implement the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords on Indochina and on Laos, respectively. After China attacked Vietnam in 1979 to support the Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot, in the aftermath of Vietnam's encroachment on Cambodia in 1978, Laos decided to side with the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) countries headed by the Soviet Union to support Vietnam to safeguard the Cambodia people from the genocidal Pol Pot regime of the Khmer rouge. From then on, Laos and China took a different stance.

In the early 1980s, the changing external environment was rapidly limiting the movement of Laos in the region. The Soviet Union began to increase their presence and aid in the Pacific by seizing the opportunity to increase its power and influence by

deploying naval forces in the region and increase its assistance to Laos. The US also brought a détente of the late 1970s to an end and rapidly adopted a policy of “peace through strength” by building up the US military in order to fight against the socialist governments. China, on the other hand, also took the advantage of the rivalry with the Soviet Union to strengthen relations with the West. Beijing continued its alliance with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in order to break the solidarity of the Indochinese countries. Thailand continued to create armed provocation along common border between the two countries. Moreover, Thailand also continued to impose its economic embargoes and closed crossing border points into Laos in order to restrict the number of strategic goods into Laos. With these external developments, was it rational for Laos to side with the CMEA countries headed by the Soviet Union?

In 1982, the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) formally clarified its alignment with the Soviet camp at its Third-Party Congress. The Lao leaders analyzed that the non-aligned policy was no longer beneficial for Laos to protect her independence and for the survival of the new government. It was a top priority for Laos to secure economic aid from the Soviet Union to set its first five-year socio-economic development plan from 1981 to 1985. At the same time, Laos needed security support from Vietnam to protect Laos from Thailand’s hostile act. The external developments in Cambodia also forced Laos to lean closer to the Soviet Union and Vietnam. Laos knew that diplomatic normalization with China would take time. Thus, there was not enough room for Laos to maneuver instead of stalling the negotiation until the Sino-Soviet Summit Meeting took place in 1986. However, why did Laos choose to change its foreign policy in 1986 despite its stance with the Soviet Union?

By 1986, the Soviet Union and Vietnam has started to transform their socio-economic direction by implementing Perestroika and Glasnost, and Doi Moi, respectively. These changes in the Soviet Union and Vietnam stimulated Laos to transform its socialist planned economy to a market-oriented one. In fact, there was an attempt to implement economic reform in Laos as early as in 1979. Nevertheless, due to unfortunate external and internal factors, Laos had no choice but to wait for the relaxation and the détente between the two superpowers. The changes and turbulence during the mid-1980s have impacted the image of Laos as a small country simply following others. With the new economic and foreign policy change and after the Sino-Soviet Summit in 1986, the Lao PDR strived and achieved in normalizing diplomatic relations with China in 1988. But, how did Laos manage to normalize its relations with China before Vietnam? In fact, the visit of the General-Secretary Kaysone Phomvihane to Beijing in October 1989 to fully normalize relations with China was a diplomatic strategy of Laos. Laos used that opportunity to act as a mediator and provided an additional path of diplomatic directions and contacts for Vietnam. The improvement of the diplomatic relations between Laos and China, together with the opening-up policy of Laos, has effectively prepared Vietnam to restore its relations with China. This purposely served the national interest of Laos in creating a conducive environment for the country to implement her two-strategic policy of safeguarding and developing the country. If China and Vietnam continue to antagonize each other, Laos would have difficulty positioning itself between them since both are strategically important neighbors to Laos. The Lao PDR needed to act as a mediator in helping the two neighbors to normalize their diplomatic relations. Thereby, it caused less complication for Laos to implement its two national strategic duties. This explained why Laos did not just quietly follow her neighbor's foreign policy.



After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the external environment has created a favorable condition for Laos to expand and diversify its relations with other foreign countries. Then, how did the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War affected the change? And why was Laos interested in joining ASEAN? Laos became more active in involved in regional affairs. Laos ensured that its foreign policy cooperated with open arms based on respect for independence, sovereignty, equality, and mutual benefits. Second, Laos took part in the Paris conference settling the Cambodian Problem in 1991, and in 1992, Laos signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Thailand. In the same year, Laos also became a party to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and an observer state to ASEAN. Third, the Lao leaders believed that it was best for Laos to be a party to the regional community and use the platform as a bargaining power. Fourth, joining ASEAN would connect Laos with regional partners through a regional institution such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), ASEAN Regional Forums, and other ASEAN's offspring. By November 1992, The Lao PDR and the US normalized their diplomatic relations after a 17-year hiatus, although it was not easy for Laos to put aside what the US did to Laos.

By the mid-1990s, Laos was very eager to join ASEAN as a full member. How has Laos view ASEAN membership as a strategic choice for its integration and diversification? How did Laos use ASEAN as a leverage to expand their relations with other dialogue partners? Laos was granted a full membership to ASEAN in 1997. This opportunity paved the way for Laos to stand as one of the major partners in expanding and fully integrating into the regional community. It has helped Laos enhance its role in expressing and negotiating with other countries at the international arena and increasing friendship by turning the landlocked country into a land-linked country. The ASEAN

membership was in line with the regional and global trend that seeks to develop strategic cooperation, connective and cohesive strategy to benefit economic cooperation as a priority. On the other hand, Laos used ASEAN platform as an advantage to deal with bigger dialogue partners.

Furthermore, Laos also became diverse in its relations within the region. Laos expanded its relations with countries in other continents, international organizations, international financial institutions, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). By 2000, the Lao PDR established diplomatic relations with 109 countries worldwide compared to 44 countries in 1976. At the same time, Laos has opened its embassies and permanent missions in 24 countries, one of which is the Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to the United Nations in New York and five Consulate Offices. Notably, this was to raise its role in the international arena to gain recognition and increase other countries' confidence in Laos. Moreover, the opening-up policy was also reflected by the exchanging visits of various high-level delegations and different regional and international organizations. Many countries and donors have also provided assistance to Laos in developing its socio-economic. Through widening and expanding international relations from the late 1980s with other countries has followed the path and objectives of Laos's foreign policy of peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation by increasing friendship and reducing enemies. This policy has dramatically changed the diplomatic environment from tensions to cooperating with mutual benefits in line with protecting and developing the nation.

The interaction between the internal and external factors of Laos's foreign policy that we are aware of is that implementing one country's foreign policy is the continuous process of its domestic policies to be materialized as much as possible. In other words,

Laos's foreign policy is the extension of its domestic policies. Therefore, the Lao government considered its domestic affairs as its first priority based on the country's realities, specificities, and national interests. However, at the same time, Laos also considers external factors to make domestic and foreign policy accurate and in line with the regional and global conditions.

On the other hand, the lesson other developing landlocked countries can learn from Laos is to maintain a neutral stance towards any arising problems as much as it can to safeguard its independence and gain all-rounded benefits to developing the country. Laos tried to uphold its neutral foreign policy before the establishment of the Lao PDR until 1979 when China decided to attack Vietnam over the Cambodian problem causing Laos with no choice but to side with the CMEA countries headed by the Soviet Union. However, this foreign policy did not last long because Laos knew that in order to survive peacefully, Laos had to pursue a friendly and cooperative foreign policy with its neighbors as much as possible, thus without hesitant, Laos open-up its economy and diplomacy in 1986 to maintain and preserve the neutrality within its foreign policy. Also, on the economic front, because of its hindrance of being a landlocked country, Laos tried to change the crisis into an opportunity by changing it into a land-linked country. This was through the trans-regional corridor (North-South corridor from Kunming to Bangkok via Laos. The East-West corridor from Da Nang of Vietnam through Laos to Thailand and Myanmar. The Mekong Friendship bridges between Laos and Thailand, and China-Laos High-Speed Railway) by integrating itself into regional institutions. Therefore, these are some points other developing landlocked countries can learn from Laos.

### **8.1 Divergent Policies from Vietnam**

After establishing the Lao PDR, Laos continued to maintain a neutral and non-aligned foreign policy to heal the wounds of war and buy time to develop the country. On the diplomatic front, all foreign embassies in Vientiane continued to maintain their diplomatic relations with Laos, such as the major powers, the US, France, and the UK. The US Embassy in Laos was opened, while the US Embassy in Vietnam was shut down.

In 1976, while Vietnam maintained its good relations with France, the Lao government slowly decided to suspend its relations with France. The latter's government supported the exiled Lao living in France to wage a political campaign against the new government of the Lao PDR. Further, French diplomats and professors actively urged Lao politicians, veterans, and former academics, who studied in France to oppose the Lao government policies openly. By 1977, the Lao government issued an order closing the French Cultural Centre and the Office of the Military Attaché and requested the French government recall its Ambassador and some of its diplomats. As a result, in 1978, Laos and France relations deteriorated and were suspended. The Lao government thus entrusted the Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to look after its interests in Paris.

In 1989, after Kaysone Phomvihane formally traveled to Beijing to fully normalize relations with China. At the visit of Kaysone, the two leaders, Kaysone and Deng Xiaoping spoke on how to deal with the ongoing regional situation, particularly on the settlement of Cambodia issue. The two discussed many issues ranging from multilateral ties to bilateral ties and how to restore the relationship between China and Vietnam to normal. However, as for China, Deng Xiaoping said that "if Vietnam wants to improve their relationship, they would have to withdraw all its troops from Cambodia

first before we can negotiate.”<sup>378</sup> Kaysone acted as the mediator in trying to provide contacts and additional diplomatic channels for Vietnam to restore its relations with China after what had happened in Cambodia. Despite the level of success was minimal, a small country like Laos was competent enough to use diplomacy to restore relations between its two big neighbors.

In 1997, Laos became a full member of ASEAN, different from the year of Vietnam. However, this does not mean that Laos decided to join ASEAN after Vietnam to wait for Hanoi to make a move first. As explained in chapter seven, Laos studied the advantages, difficulties, and challenges in joining ASEAN. Economic readiness and human resources development were still low, particularly English as the ASEAN’s official language. In terms of economic integration, ASEAN integration will inevitably affect Laos’s obligations, especially the liberation of ASEAN trade and services that could hinder Laos’s economy’s readiness in the field of investment and open free trade and service. Therefore, the readiness of the country was crucial to Laos rather than bandwagoning on with its neighbor. As a full member of ASEAN, the Lao PDR also takes a different stance on Vietnam’s South China Sea issue. As a landlocked and non-claimant state, the Lao PDR attached great importance to maintaining peace and stability and promoting cooperation in the region, including the South China Sea. The Lao PDR viewed any differences in the South China Sea should be settled by peaceful means through constructive dialogue and consultations, according to international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

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<sup>378</sup> Lengsavath, S. (2019, January 7). Personal Interview.

## **8.2 Unique Characteristics of Laos's Diplomacy**

In this study, this thesis has sought to respond to several research questions related to how Laos's foreign policy has changed over the past decades. The main aim of this study was to address the lack of research evidence on how and why Laos's foreign policy had changed through different phases. This thesis has portrayed the unique characteristics of Laos and its foreign policy. Geography and history play an important factor contributing to the source of intervention and vulnerability. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Laos has been under suzerainty and colonized by foreign countries for nearly 200 years. However, Laos, situated at the hub of the Greater Mekong Sub-region and the center of mainland Southeast Asia, is rich with natural resources and competent in achieving independence after a long period of time fighting against foreign invasion: Siam, France, and the US. Laos pursued its domestic and international goals and presented its unique identity in exploiting diplomacy to enhance its role at regional and international platforms. It is ruled by a one-party system yet still offered an effective foreign policy to pursue its national interests and maintain relations with bigger powers. The unique personality of the Lao leaders also played a role in the changes in Laos's foreign policy. Through a collective decision-making process and the result of a united resolution of the Party Congress, Laos's foreign policy is considered one of its unique characteristics.

Moreover, Laos portrayed a different behavior and reacted to regional affairs by exercising a neutral and friendly diplomatic approach to overcome and achieve its goal. Laos has always tried to maintain neutrality within its diplomacy. However, due to external pressure and domestic factors, Laos had to adapt and change to fulfill its national interests to safeguard its independence and develop the country. Laos, categorized as a small state, landlocked, and least developed country, it is obvious that Laos has fewer

resources and capabilities compared to its neighbors. However, it has accomplished to attain and achieve its goal of maintaining friendly relations with its close neighbors, despite the constant disruption. Overall, Laos's foreign policy has a unique characteristic which demonstrated that it managed to liberate its country and transfer power to be ruled by a one-party system peacefully without bloodshed. At the same time, Laos maintained diplomatic relations with bigger powers such as China, France, Japan, Russia, the UK, and the US, which is a rarity in the history of the world revolution.

### **8.3 Limitation of the Study**

This thesis has addressed the gap in the existing literature on Laos's foreign policy and its diplomacy. It provided an extensive historical narrative of how and why Laos changed its foreign policy and stressed the importance of how domestic and external factors had shaped its policy. This paper analyzed how the domestic and external factors impacted the foreign policy changes throughout each phase of Laos's foreign policy and why the Lao leaders chose to implement these changes. Further, this thesis has also argued that in order to understand the evolution of Laos's foreign policy, we should study and investigate not just from the external viewpoint of the changes but also examine the domestic politics of Laos. However, this thesis has not given full explanation to many important developments because of the shortage of primary sources. It has made utmost efforts to give detailed description of decision-making of important decisions but many of my description may not cover the full story. In order to make a fuller explanation on the planning and internal debates of Laos's foreign policy, additional interviews with policymakers and archival research are desirable. But this thesis at least filled the gap of

empirical evidence that have been lacking in the existing literature of Laos's foreign policy.

To conclude, this thesis decided to end in the year 2000 because this thesis has covered an extensive period of Laos's diplomacy before 1975, leading up to the Lao PDR's independence in December 1975. The major turning changes took place from 1975 up to the end of the Cold War or the collapse of the Soviet Union. After the end of the Cold War, Laos's foreign policy has demonstrated more continuity within its foreign policy in keeping a friendly and cooperative policy, particularly enhancing its relations with its closed neighbors and other significant partners.



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## Appendix

### **Party Congresses of The Lao People's Revolutionary Party**

1 <sup>st</sup> Party Congress	March 22, 1955
2 <sup>nd</sup> Party Congress	February 3, 1972
3 <sup>rd</sup> Party Congress	April 27-30, 1982
4 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress	November 13-15, 1986
5 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress	March 27-29, 1991
6 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress	March 18-20, 1996
7 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress	March 12-14, 2001
8 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress	March 18-22, 2006
9 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress	March 17-21, 2011
10 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress	January 18-22, 2016
11 <sup>th</sup> Party Congress	January 13-15, 2021

### **General-Secretaries of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and Military Leaders of The Lao People's Democratic Republic**

Kaysone Phomvihane	1955-1992
Khamtay Siphandone	1992-2006
Choummaly Sayasone	2006-2016
Bounhang Vorachit	2016-2021
Thongloun Sisoulith	2021-

### **Presidents of The Lao People's Democratic Republic**

Souphanouvong	1975-1986
Phoumi Vongvichit (acting)	1986-1991
Kaysone Phomvihane	1991-1992
Nouhak Phoumsavanh	1992-1998
Khamtay Siphandone	1998-2006
Choummaly Sayasone	2006-2016
Bounhang Vorachit	2016-2021
Thongloun Sisoulith	2021-

### **Prime Ministers of The Lao People's Democratic Republic**

Kaysone Phomvihane	1975-1991
Khamtay Siphandone	1992-1998
Sisavath Keobounphanh	1998-2001
Bounhang Vorachit	2001-2006
Bouasone Bouphavanh	2006-2010
Thongsing Thammavong	2010-2016
Thongloun Sisoulith	2016-2021
Phankham Viphavanh	2021-

### **Significant Diplomatic Relations of The Lao People's Democratic Republic**

Laos-Thailand	1950-
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Laos-France* <sup>379</sup>	1951-1978, 1981-
Laos-US* <sup>380</sup>	1955-
Laos-Japan	1955-
Laos-Cambodia	1956-
Laos-Soviet-Russia	1960-
Laos-China* <sup>381</sup>	1961-
Laos-Vietnam	1962-

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<sup>379</sup> Terminated French assistance and followed by diplomatic altercation in 1978, then resumed in 1981.

<sup>380</sup> Reduced ambassadorial level to chargé d'affaires in 1975 then upgraded to ambassadorial level in 1992.

<sup>381</sup> Reduced ambassadorial level to chargé d'affaires in 1979 then upgraded to ambassadorial level in 1988.