

**DETERMINANTS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF LAOS:  
A STUDY OF ITS RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURS,  
1975-1988**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the Degree of  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY*

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1993



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July, 16, 1993.

DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled "DETERMINANTS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF LAOS : A STUDY OF ITS RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURS, 1975-1988" submitted by PRADEEP KUMAR TIWARI in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge this is a bonafide work.

We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiner for evaluation.

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## PREFACE

Laos is a small land-locked country and shares the boundaries with china, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Burma. It came under the communist system in December 1975 and thereafter its foreign policy objectives were determined with a view to consolidate communist fraternity.

Though various factors i.e. history, culture, religion and geopolitics played significant role in determining Laotian foreign policy, but ideological factors dominated during 1975-88. The communist ideology indeed provided the underpinning to Laotian foreign policy during that period. Laos was close to Vietnam and the Soviet Union during 1975-88. It supported Vietnamese stand on Cambodia. However, it began to support the path of neutrality by the end of 1988.

The developments after 1986 in the erstwhile Soviet Union alarmed the communist world. Vietnam began to review its external and domestic policies & so did Laos. Laos entered into a new era by opening its market to the ASEAN and other western countries on the pattern of Vietnamese programme of 'renovation'. This shift in policy drove Laos to turn towards Thailand and the other non-communist ASEAN countries. All these developments have been studied in this dissertation. This study contains eight chapters, in which the determinants of Laotian Foreign policy particularly in

relations to its neighbours have been analysed.

In the first chapter an attempt is made to introduce the subject. This chapter thus analyses the meaning of foreign policy and the historical background of Laos.

The second chapter deals with the various determinants of Laotian foreign policy and shows how ideological factors became more important.

The third chapter analyses Laotian relations with Vietnam during 1975-88 and examines the genesis of Vietnamese influence over Laos.

Chapter fourth analyses Laotian relations with Thailand. Laos and Thailand shares common culture and ethnic bonds, because of which Laos always tried to maintain close relations with Thailand, but presently Thailand is more important for Laos because of trade and commerce.

Chapter five examines Laotian relations with China, Laos always wished to maintain good relations with China but when China began to support Khmer Rouge and destabilize regional peace, Laos supported Vietnam.

Sixth chapter deals with Laotian relations with Cambodia. It is also a tiny state and faced with similar problems.

Seventh chapter examines Laotian relations with Burma. It was tried to evaluate the problems posed by the opium growth in the "golden triangle" and how Burma and Laos tackle it.

The last chapter gives concluding observations.

First of all I would like to acknowledge my deep respect and gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Ganganath Jha. It was his superb guidance and encouragement which enabled me to complete my M. Phil. dissertation. At the same time, I am indebted to Prof. Parimal Kumar Das for his kind help and inspiring words. I am also grateful to other faculties in the centre, particularly the chairperson, Prof. K. Bahadur for his instant help and cooperation.

I must also thank my friends Sanjay Tripathi, Ajay Singh, Niraj Kumar Jha, Vinod Singh, Atul Singh, Arvind Singh 'Jhanna', Jafar, Deepak, Anand Gupta and Sanjay Bahadur, for their valuable help and moral support in writing my dissertation.

I also acknowledge the help of the staff of Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, Nehru Museum and Library, the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis Library and the Indian Council of World Affairs Library for their kind help and Cooperation.

## CHAPTER - I

### INTRODUCTION

Laos is a small land-locked country of South east Asia and it is faced with several constraints in the operation of its Foreign policy. In this study, an attempt has been made to analyze the determinants of Laotian foreign policy particularly in relation to its neighbours i.e., Vietnam, China, Thailand, Cambodia and Burma during the period 1975-88.

Before we trace the determinants it will be proper to understand the meaning of Foreign policy. In the international arena where Sovereign states interact, some sort of Foreign policy becomes inevitable for states. Foreign policy appears to be a series of responses made by the official decision-makers with respect to international conditions. Felliks Gross says that even a decision to have no relation with a state is a foreign policy, which implies that even not to have a definite foreign policy is also a Foreign policy. <sup>1</sup> Actually it is an exercise in the choice of ends and means on the part of the nation-state in an international setting. <sup>2</sup> This exercise involves two plains, on the first, i.e., the national plain, the community presents the resources, opportunity and limitations for the exercise of

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1. Felliks Gross, Foreign policy Analysis, New York, 1954, p.p.47-48

2. J. Bandopadhyay, The making of India's Foreign Policy, New Delhi, 1979, p.1.

Foreign policy; secondly, the international plain, a state seeks the adjustment of actions of the other states in its own favour.

Thus it can be said that the analysis of Foreign policy reveals a number of factors besides the international conditions which contribute substantially in the making of a foreign policy. Other sources i.e domestic sources of Foreign Policy are no less crucial to its content and conduct than are the international situations towards which it is directed.<sup>3</sup>

In order to understand Foreign policy of a 'given nation' it is equally important to comprehend the internal factors. The Foreign policy is decided and pursued by the official decision-makers, but they work within the parameters provided by the community, and they seek to influence the foreign policy of other states in their own favour and also adjust their own foreign policy to the international environment.

Laos is a tiny country on the IndoChinese peninsula in South-east Asia. Like a wedge at the summit of an arch, Laos occupies a key position on the map of Indochina.<sup>4</sup> Laos is surrounded by five neighbours; China in the north, Vietnam to the East, Thailand and Burma in the West and Cambodia on the Southern

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3. James N. Rosenau (ed), Domestic Sources of Foreign policy, New York, 1967, p.2.

4. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos' Keystone of Indochina, Westview Publication, Boulder & London, 1985, P.1.



border. The Southern half of the country lies between the Mekong River on the West and the Annamite chain on the east. In the north, the country is not encapsulated between well defined geophysical features, but constitutes part of the extremely mountainous land forms that extends all the way from Southern China across the northern Thailand and Burma and through which the Mekong River has cut its path.

The total area of Laos is approximately 91,000 square miles (235,690 square kilometers). It shares 2,131 Kilometers long border with Thailand. Laos has highly complex geographical feature where mountains and hills predominate. Although elevations generally decrease from east to west and from north to south, numerous plateaus and escarpments form distinct landscape feature.<sup>5</sup> Much of the land is steeply sloped to narrow river bottoms in which cultivation is possible. The mountains are densely forested for the most part. Along the Mekong River lie the Country's only alluvial plains, formed by the great River Mekong and its tributaries.

The ethnic diversity of the population of Laos makes nation-building a far more complex process than elsewhere in South-east Asia.<sup>6</sup> The people of Laos have different origins, languages, way of gaining their living, traditional way of life, and different

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5. Ibid, p.2

6. Hina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy, Laos: War and Revolution Harper & Row Publication, London, 1970, p.29

mental universes. The most reliable criterion for distinguishing ethnic group is Language. Thai language is spoken on the large scale. The language of Meo and Yao is of the Tibeta-Burma group. Vietnamese and Chinese languages are also widely spoken in Laos. Buddhism constituted a powerful buttress for the established social and political order in Laos. Religion of Meo and Yao is a mixture of animistic belief in spirits, the cult of the ancestors, and belief in survival of souls, their priest play an important role in social organization.

The culture and Society of Laos are recognised as distinct in southeast Asia, although they have strong roots in many nearby countries. Laos has its own spoken and written languages, unique music, architecture, handicraft, manners of dress, and popular customs.

**The Economy of Laos:** Laos is one of the world's poorest nations. Its per capita gross national product (GNP) estimated by the Laos People Democratic Government in 1983 was only \$98<sup>7</sup>. Laos' economy is based on agriculture due to lack of industries. 85 percent of Laos' economy is based on agriculture.

After independence in the view of U.S. strategic thinking Laos had assumed importance. The U.S. economic aid mission inaugurated a commodity Import Programme (CIP) designed to soak up

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7. Aurther J. Dommen, Laos; Keystone of Indochina; Westview Boulder & London, 1985, p. 137.

paper money and prevent run away inflation. A Foreign exchange operations Fund, with contribution from the United States, Britain, France, Australia and Japan, maintained the stability of the exchange rate of the Laotian currency. Some light industries was established in this period. U.S. private voluntary agencies went in villages and carried on small scale but effective efforts to improve agriculture, health and education. <sup>8</sup>

In 1975, when communist party came to power, the government announced that it planned to build a national and independent economy progressing towards Socialism. But the new government of Laos people Democratic faced an extremely difficult situation 1975, because of the large cut in aids and assistance by U.S. and Western countries. Laos now turned to Socialist countries for economic aids for its development. Soviet Union became the largest donor of aids and assistance. Vietnam was the second largest donor after USSR. After the closing of the Foreign Exchange operations Fund, the Soviet Union stepped in with a 32 million ruble loan to support the value of the Laotian currency Kip. In a parallel move, Vietnam made available 17 million dong to finance imports of food, medicine, consumer goods and other necessities. <sup>9</sup> International organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) were largely supportive of Laos's efforts to bring a

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8. Ibid, p. 139.

9. Ibid, p. 145.

measure to its economy. The Laos People Democratic Republic received a steadily increasing amount of foreign aid, principally from Soviet Union and East European countries. Vietnam, China, many of non-aligned states, various Western Countries (except the U.S.) and international organisations.

Laos was under French rule before independence. Towards the end of World War II, on March 9, 1945, the French Government was deposed by the Japanese forces. The Japanese 'persuaded' King Sisavang Vong and Prince Phetsarath to proclaim the independence of Laos on April 8, 1945. After the Japanese surrender of Laos in August, Phetsarath announced the reunification of Laos through the merger of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang and the four southern Provinces. But French once again came back to Indochina and King Sisvang Vong dismissed the Phetsarath's government. Shortly thereafter a Laotian People's Assembly convened in Vietnam under a provision of constitution and Lao Issarak (Free Lao) movement nominated a new Government headed by prince Phetsarath. Prince Souphannvong, half brother of Phetsarath was appointed defense minister. This government denounced all treaties with France and on Oct.20, deposed the king. The French once again had the King of Laos reinstated. In the wake of this development members of Laos Issarak fled to Thailand, where they setup a government in

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10. Aurther J. Dommen, Laos: Keystone of Indochina, Westview, Boulder and London, 1985, p.137.

exile in Bangkok. But soon there arose difference of opinion among them on the issue to take support of Viet-Minh. Souphanouvong advocated collaboration with Viet-Minh against French while Souvannaphouma and Phetsarat opposed it. Souphanouvong returned to North east of Laos to join the Viet-Minh and established firm contacts with the Viet-Minh. In August 1950 he announced the creation of a guerrilla organisation called the Phathet Lao (Land of the Lao) in North Vietnam. On Feb 6, 1950 the French transferred sovereignty to Laos.

Western countries like US and Great Britain recognised the Laotian Associated state under the Presidentship SouvannaPhouma, on the other hand Prince Souphanouvong formed a force with the help of Viet-Minh and found new allies among the hill tribes engaged in resistance to the Royal Laotian Government. On Aug 13, 1950 the first congress of the Peoples of Pathet Lao met in northern Laos and formed the Laotian United Front and a Provisional Resistance Government, headed by Souphanouvong to take over the duties of the Lao Issarak Government. The Pathet Lao, with the help of Vietnamese Communist had already moved its operational base to Lao-Vietnam border. In 1952, the Laotian Communist Party, The Laos Peoples Revolutionary Party (LPRP) was

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11. Ferala Ratnam, Laos and Superpowers, Tulsi Publication, New Delhi, 1980, p.17.

12. Nina Sa Adams & W. McCoy, Laos' War and Revolution, Harper & Row Publication, Boulder & London, 1970, p.40.

formed. Its cadres were trained by the Viet-Minh and almost controlled two North-eastern Provinces Phongsaly and Sam Neua, at the time when Geneva conference was deliberating about an Indochina settlement in the Spring and summer of 1954.

After Geneva accord a attempt had been made to form coalition government but after some time this coalition collapsed. In January 1959 a government under the presidentship of Gen. Phoumi Nosavam was formed and this government opened the way to a closer relationship with the U.S. The U.S. fully supported this government. Now the war was open between the Royal government Army supported by the US and the Pathet Lao supported by Vietnam.

The U.S. wanted to keep out Laos from communist influence, so pursued her goal through Thailand and was compelled to support it with both material and military assistance to Laos insurgency. <sup>13</sup> Thai government gave full support to this U.S. plan. It was therefore natural that the Laotian government which enjoyed American support should be headed by those who are acceptable to the Thais; such were the government of Katay Don savorith (1954-56), Phoui Sananikone (1956-57 and 1958-59) and Boun Quam (1960-62). From 1960 to 1964 Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, a dominant figure in Laotian politics, enjoyed very strong support from Thailand.

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13. Perala Retnam, Laos and Superpowers, Tulsi Publication, New Delhi, 1980, p. 28.

On the other hand, the Pathet Lao, under Prince Souphanouvong, established military control over all the important places by Jan. 1961, with the help of Viet-Minh. At this time the Americans agreed to second Geneva conference as proposed by the Cambodian Prince Norodom Sinhanouk<sup>14</sup>. In 1962 a coalition government was formed with coalition of 8 neutrals, 4 Pathet Lao and 4 rights, headed by Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma. But in 1963 Pathet Lao withdrew from this coalition government and this coalition government fell apart. Pathet Lao continued to hold half of the Laos, mostly a broad belt of mountainous terrain along the border of the two Vietnams. The war came to an end in Indochina with the signing of Paris accord on 27, 1973.

According to the stipulation of the Paris Agreement, a provisional government of National Union and a National Political Consultative Council were formed. But the military pressure exerted by the Pathet Lao continuously increased and in March 1975 fighting broke out between Pathet Lao troops and the Royal Laotian Government, which to an end with the victory of Pathet Lao.

Establishment of Laos People's Democratic Republic (LPDR)  
In Laos twentyfive years of national division and conflict came to an end in May-June 1975, when rights Political and Military leaders and their U.S. Support system were expelled from the

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14. Ibid, p.30.

country. In 1975 the fate of Laos took a new turn when the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) was established. Souphannouvong became the head of the New Government and Keysone Phomvihane, general secretary of LPDR became the Prime Minister of Laos People's Democratic Republic. Thus Laos became firmly established as a part of the communist world.

Despite the LPDR Government's commitment to the creation of a Marxist Socialist State, the transition to a Socialist planned economy had been slow. The government initially relied on adhoc measures to direct the economy. An interim Three-year plan (1978-1980) was introduced to prepare the country for a more complete 'Socialist transformation' within the framework of the country's first Five year Plan (1981-85).<sup>16</sup> By the time the five year plan was launched, however, government policy had undergone a significant change because of the introduction of economic reforms, in 1979. Faced with a worsening economy and in order to restore national unity and also under pressure from its two main creditors the USSR and the IMF, the ruling Laos People's Revolu-

15. Joseph J. Zascloft and Mac Alister Brown; Communist Indochina and US Foreign policy: Post War realities, Westview, Boulder & London, 1978, p.87.

16. Redlington, Stanleys; 'Laos in 1981; small pawn on a larger board' Asian survey, 22(1), January 82; p.89-90.



tionary Party (LPDR) introduced economic reforms. The new policies stressed the need for increased efficiency and production, and acknowledged the important role to be played by the capitalist sector of the economy during the transition to Socialism. The reforms were also clearly influenced by the more 'liberal' economic policies that Vietnam introduced in 1979. Restrictions on private trade were lifted, and joint ventures between the state and the private sector were encouraged. Despite the reforms, the performance of the economy during the first five year plan (1981-1985) period was mixed. While considerable progress was made towards the goal of food self-sufficiency and in up-grading economic infrastructure, the performance of other major sectors, notably industry, was well below target.

It was announced in 1985 that a new constitution was being drafted and that the LPRP would adopt it at the fourth party congress. The Fourth party Congress also witnessed renewed debate over the issue of the economic reforms programme as the more reform-minded leaders sought to overcome the continued resistance of the 'hardliners'. The LPRP general secretary, Kesoné Phomyvihan came out in favour of further reforms, including the widespread adoption of a new economic management mechanism for state enterprises (first introduced on an experimental basis in 1983) designed to provide managerial autonomy and financial

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17. Stuart, Fox Martin; "Laos: The Vietnamese connection", South East Asian Affairs, 1980, P.

independence. Then again 1987 also saw the introduction of a range of measures designed to promote both internal and external trade. Greater emphasis was also being given to Price reform in 1987, especially to the increased use of market mechanisms. Intense debate over the 'new thinking' and the 'new management mechanism' continued through 1987, but by early 1988 the reformers appeared to have gained the ascendance. However, resistance from lower level cadres remained a problem, while the acute shortage of cadres with appropriate managerial and technical skills represented a further barrier to the implementation of the reforms. As a result, top priority was being given in 1988 to the training of party cadres and to the reorganisation of the state bureaucracy. Another significant feature of 'new thinking' was the acceptance of an increased role of foreign investment.

In October 1986 the elderly Souphanouvong appointed Phoumi Vonquiehit, a vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers, to the post of Acting President, while Sisomphon Lovansay, formerly a Vice President in the Supreme People's Assembly replaced Souphanouvong as its President. In Fourth party congress of LPRP the Politburo was expanded from seven to 11 full members, with two alternate members.

Following the Promulgation of a new electoral law, a nation-

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18. Stuart Fox Martin "Laos in 1988: In Pursuit of New Directions", Asian Survey, 29(1), January, 89, P. 81-82.

al election committee began in April, 1988 to organize the first elections to be held in Laos since 1975. Laos always pursued a neutral foreign policy before the communist came to power. Laos provided equal importance to Thailand and Vietnam before 1975 and it was the major irritant in Lactian relations with the United States. The Western powers in collusion with Thailand supported a containment drive against Pathet-Lao, but all those endeavours failed. Similarly when Laos turned pro-communist and ignored non-communist in the region, that experiment also failed. The developments of the last few decades indicates that a neutral posture has been rewarding for Laos. But Laos is land-locked, it wants to have a passage either through Thailand or Vietnam. Therefore these two countries attract special attention in its foreign policy making.

In its external relations, the young republic has been chiefly concerned with obtaining economic assistance for its immediate needs and with developing its relations with its major supporters in the Socialist camp

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The victory of the Vietnamese communist in Indochina gave a strategic advantage to the Soviet Union in its goal of encircling

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19. Joseph J. Zasloff and MacAlister Brown, Communist Indochina and US Foreign Policy: Post war Realities, West view/Boulder, Colorado, 1978, P. 916.

china . Thus Soviet Union also increased its influence over Laos. The suspension of US aids and the termination of foreign exchange operations fund made Laos dependent on Soviet Union. Soviet Union became the largest aid donor to Laos. Soviet Union also provided Soviet technicians and advisers to Laos and helped Laos in building modern shape. The LPRP maintained closer relations with the communist part of the Soviet Union than with any other foreign communist party except Vietnam. Laos generally followed the foreign policy line of Vietnam which had been more closely linked to the Soviet Union than to China, although the LPDR had made an effort to maintain good relations with both Soviet Union and China, cautiously straddling the Sino-Soviet dispute. On the other hand Laos' relations with United States continuously deteriorated after the communists came to power in Laos. Laos followed the Vietnamese policy in relations with the United States. But United States maintained its Embassy in Vientiane after communist take over in December, 1975. Prospects for enlarging the slender dialogue between the LPDR and the United States hinge on development on both sides of the pacific.

Laos is much influenced with Vietnamese policies in making its own policies. With Vietnam, Laos maintained a close relationship after communists take over and the communist regime began to shape the Laotian policies similarly on the pattern of

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20. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos: Keystone of Indonesia, West View Boulder Colorado, 1985, P. 133.

Vietnam. The Laotian political system is somewhat similar to Vietnamese system. They are cooperating in security and economic fields. Laos signed a twenty-five years treaty with Vietnam on July 18, 1977. This treaty opened a new era in Laos-Vietnam ties. The treaty affirmed the "special relationship between Vietnam and Laos", and included economic and military provisions. The pledges of mutual assistance were largely one way. Vietnam offered Laos duty free access to the port of Da Nang and interest free loans to Vietnam over 1978-80<sup>21</sup>. The treaty also said that Laos and Vietnam would cooperate closely in increasing their capability of defense and protecting their independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity". The treaty legitimized the presence of Vietnamese troops who had been stationed in the country for many years. The two countries also agreed to build the vietnam-laos border into a border of Fraternal friendship", and later an agreement<sup>22</sup> was also signed to delineate the border. Vietnamese military engineers rebuilt the road network and constructed an oil pipeline from the Vietnamese sea coast to Laos interior. Thus Laos came more close to Vietnam than other neighbours during 1975-88 period for political, economic and security purposes. The Laotian Government planned to reduce the country's dependence on

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21. Grant Evans of Kelvin Rowley : Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina since the fall of Saigon, London, 1984, P. 67.

22. Ibid, P. 69.

goods transported through Thailand and increase the use of routes through Vietnam. Despite this fact that Laos is much more influenced and attached with Vietnam and other Socialist countries because of common political system, Laos cannot ignore the importance of Thailand in its policy-making. Thailand is still a major trading partner of Laos inspite of communist government in Laos. Besides ethnic, geographic, linguistic and religious similarities, Laos has been connected to Thailand through a common history. Laos shares a long border with Thailand. Relations of Thailand before 1975 were good but as communists came to power and Laos-Vietnam signed friendship and cooperation treaty in 1977, its relations with Laos began deteriorating. Behind these states relations lay an equally important situation involving communist party and Hanoi's strategy towards Thailand. <sup>23</sup> But Thailand quickly recognized the new communist government of Laos in 1976 and tried to establish new relations with Laos. The two countries have established Thai-Laos cooperation committees to sortout the various bilateral problems such as border disputes, refugees problems, illegal trade and smuggling problem.

In late of 1986, Laos began to restructure its policies and undertook the economic reforms policies. Thus by opting these policies Laos opened its market for foreign investment. This lead

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23. Aurther J. Dommen, Laos : Keystone of Indochina, West View, Boulder/Colorado, 1985, P. 131.

to a new prospects in Laotian economy. Laos is looking to west and ASEAN countries for their investment in Laotian market. Laos is particularly looking towards Thailand which is a buoyant economy. Thailand and other ASEAN countries are also willing to turn Indochina into a market place and want to make investment in Laos. The Thai enterprenurs are exploring possibilities to invest. These structural reforms open a new path for Laos to join the mainstream off the globalization of the economy.

Laos's relations with China have never had any serious problems. Despite Laos's closeness with Soviet Union and Vietnam it always remained friendly and respectful to China. Laos also recognized this fact that it could not afford to cast its lot definitively with the Soviet Union or Vietnam on issues affecting China. China has also played an important role in converting the Laotian state in modern shape. The Laotian government maintained a relaxed attitude towards its ethnic Chinese community and Chinese traders still dominate the free market in Vientiane. 24  
Laos has trade relations with China but the relations between the two countries ;are being explored and the prospects for bilateral relations are good.

Laotian relations with its other neighbours such as Cambodia and Burma are good and relaxed. Laos's relations with Cambodia and its role in Cambodian problem has been very interesting. Laos

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24. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood of War : Indochina since the fall of Saigon, London, 1984, P. 79.

recognized the Vietnamese backed regime of Heng Samrine in Cambodia when it was installed in January, 1979 by force of Vietnamese army. Laos established full diplomatic relations with the Heng Samrine government and supported the Vietnamese stand during 1978-88. Laos has signed a five-years agreement with this government in March 1979 in Phom-Penh, providing for economic, cultural and technical cooperation between the two states. <sup>25</sup>

Laotian are interested in Burma because of their common border and ties of culture and religion. Burma had always supported Laotian policy of neutrality. Burmese president Ne-Win visited Laos in 1979 and discussed the common land border issue. Both countries also emphasized the need for peace and stability between them. Being a landlocked country Laos remains always dependent upon one of its neighbours and Burma could be helpful to Laos in this matter. Laos needs Burmese seaports for its trade transportations. Laos and Burma have also combined border with Thailand which became a notorious drug-trafficking area, popularly called the 'golden triangle'. This is a major problem for both Laos and Burma.

Thus it can be seen that Laos has always suffered from external powers involvement in the past. After the end of U.S. domination in 1975, it came under the influence of communist Vietnam. After the end of U.S. aids and assistance, Laos had to

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25. Ibid. P. 190.



be dependent upon Soviet block. Soviet Union provided military assistance, China cooperated in Laos' modernization and Vietnam had its impact on almost every field of development in Laos. In December, 1986, Vietnam undertook a policy of structural reforms and it has opened its market for western investment. These reforms in Vietnam also had its salutary impact on Laos also. Laos also began to restructure its policies towards democratization and market economy and thus opened its market for foreign investment. Now at the end of 1988 Laos once again turned to West and non-communist ASEAN countries particularly Thailand. As Thailand is one of the most prosperous countries of ASEAN and willing to turn Indochina into a market place, it provides great prospect for Laos's economy to accelerate. Laos has also significant amounts of unexploited natural resources such as minerals, forest resources and hydroelectric power potentials<sup>26</sup> which it could trade in exchange for consumer and capital goods, technology and capitals from neighbours, ASEAN. In future the growth of the southern region of China, Cambodia, and Vietnam will create further opportunities for Laos to exploit its natural wealth and labour power.

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26. Ethance, Aruri & Kendrick, Richard, "South East Asian Security Complex and Laos: Trends & Prospects", Asian Profile, 18(4), Aug, 1990, P. 351.

## CHAPTER-II

### DETERMINANTS OF LAOS'S FOREIGN POLICY

Various internal and external factors play an important role in making foreign policy of any country. In the words of Rosenau, "...the external behaviour of a society stems from an extraordinary complex of sources, each source contributing something to the behaviour and no one in itself is sufficient to determine it.<sup>1</sup> The numerous factors for example as classified by Llyod Jensen are the determining factors in the making of foreign policy<sup>2</sup> and they are the following:

- (i) The human dimension of foreign policy;
- (ii) Social determinants;
- (iii) The decision making process;
- (iv) Ideology and historical traditions;
- (v) National power capabilities;
- (vi) Economic determinants;
- (vii) External and Systematic determinants, and
- (viii) Geographic determinants.

In a more concrete manner, size, geography, culture and history, economic development, technology, national organization and the role of press besides the external factors can be said to be the

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1. Mahendra Kumar, Theoretical Aspects of Internatinal Policies, Delhi, 1978, PP. 321-23.
2. Llyod Jensen, Explaining Foreign Policy, New Jersey, 1982, PP. 1-5.

main determinants of the foreign policy. However how and in what manner these factors determine the foreign policy of a state is difficult to decide.

Different domestic as well as external determinants have bearing on the decision making in foreign policy. However, foreign policy is never uniquely determined by any one factor or a set of factors, but is the result of the interplay of a large number of factors that affected circumstances. Some of these factors are relatively stable and have to be taken as given by the makers of foreign policy, and can, therefore, be regarded as more basic or unchangeable determinants of policy than others. Factors such as geography, economic development, political tradition, domestic milieu, international milieu, military strength and national character are considered as the basic determinants. But even the basic determinants of foreign policy, however, vary in importance according to circumstances, and it is impossible to lay down any general rule regarding the relative importance of each of these factors or a scale of priorities which the decision makers must permanently adhere to in the making their policy decisions.

The foreign policy of Laos since it came under the communist

3. J. Bandyopadhyay, The making of India's Foreign Policy, New Delhi, 1979, P. 28.

4. Ibid, P. 28.

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rule was determined by several factors and each of them was important. It is difficult to determine one single factor which determined Laos's foreign policy but ideological factor in general was the predominant variable influencing the foreign policy decision making.

If we examine the interplay of determining factors in the foreign policy of Laos, we find them fully operative. Hereby, we will analyse them one by one.

#### HISTORY, CULTURE AND TRADITIONS:

Laos has had a long common history similar to its neighbours like Vietnam and Cambodia. Indochina region which comprises of three countries; Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, was under same colonial rule and had common freedom struggle against French Colonialism. With common historical background these countries are still contributing with same affect in many developmental matters.

With Thailand Laos has a long traditional and historical relations. Both the countries (Laos and Thailand) were having common identity before colonial period.

Laos has a population of approximately three millions with various ethnic diversity. Population density is high in the narrow valley of middle Mekong, from Luang Prabang down to the Khong Falls at the Cambodian border. The home ground of the Laos

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4. Nina S. Adams & Alfred W. McCoy, Laos: War & Revolution, Harper & Row Publication, London, 1970, pp. 4-5.

people, a group of wet rice growers, oriented towards the Mekong, closely related in culture and language to the Thai of Bangkok area. More ethnic Lao live on the Thai side of the river than in Laos proper. The largest single group in Laos, the Lao Loum or low land Lao, numbers about 1.7 million<sup>6</sup>. They are Theravada Buddhist, as are the Thai and other Indianized peoples of South East Asia.<sup>7</sup>

The Lao of the left bank of the Mekong are ethnically identical with Lao of the right bank. The Laotian are, in fact, a branch of Thai race, which includes the people of Siam, the Shans of northern Burma, and substantial groups in Vietnam and China.<sup>8</sup> There are different minority groups of people in Laos. The largest minority group of people are the Lao Theung (Lao of the mountain sides). These included the large group of people believed to be descendants of the aboriginal inhabitants of Laos. Lao Theung live in wood houses on piles and cultivate upland rice, tobacco, and cotton. They are the principal minority of Southern Laos.

The Lao T'ai consist of a number of tribes who migrated into

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6. Ibid, P.5.

7. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos: Keystone of Indochina, West View Publication, London, 1985, P. 4.

8. Ferala Ratnam, Laos and Superpowers, Tulsi Publication, New Delhi, 1980, P. 8.

Laos over an extended period and who all speak the same language. The Lao T'ai believe in animism. Their spirits, or genies are called 'Phi'. The next most numerous minority group is the Lao Soung (Lao of the mountain tops). They are people who migrated from southern china relatively recently and included the Hmong (Known also as Meo or Miao) and the Yao (or Man).<sup>9</sup> The other important minorities of Laos are the Vietnamese and the Chinese.

Thus the language and culture of Laotians are closer to the people of northern parts of Vietnam, but ethnically they are closer to Thailand. These common culture, traditions, and ethnic diversity influence the foreign policy of Laos with a great deal. These domestic factors are not only affected internal policies but also operated on external level.

#### GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS IN LAOS'S FOREIGN POLICY:

Strategic location of land-locked Laos is very much affecting its foreign policy towards the neighbouring countries. The various neighbours such as China in the north and Vietnam to the east, Thailand and Burma in the West, while Cambodia in Southern border affects its foreign policy to a great deal. From strategic point of view Laos stands like a dagger pointing to Thailand's vulnerable north-eastern provinces. Its territory borders on two communist states; China and Vietnam; two neutralist States; Burma and Cambodia and democratic Thailand.

Laos is land-locked country having highly complex mountains

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9. Ibid, P.9

and hills. Much of the land of Laos is with uneven slopes and densely forested. This geographical situation creates a great difficulty in transportation. Laos has only five major roads.

The climate of Laos is highly seasonal. A south-west monsoon prevails from May till September. As dry season under the influence of north-west monsoon progress, rain falls more evenly and for more extended periods, with a peak in July and August. Water-flows of the rivers in the country follows a pattern dictated by this rainfall regime<sup>10</sup>. The Mekong entering Laos from the high Tibetan plateau in China, passes through deep gorges and enters a true plain for the first time in the Vientiane region. Farther south, it passes through narrow defiles before entering the Cambodian plain. Numerous rocky outcroppings and sand banks made the river virtually useless for navigation in Laos except by small boats.<sup>11</sup>

#### Land-locked Status of Laos:

The unique feature of Laos (being land-locked) determines the degree of Freedom available to Laos in various regional and international arenas.<sup>12</sup> Lacking access to the sea, except,

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10. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos :Keystone of Indochina, West View Boulder & London, 1985, P. 2.

11. Ibid, P.2.

12. Perala Ratnam, Laos and Super Powers, New Delhi, 1980, P.

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through Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese, Chinese or Cambodian ports, Laos, remains dependent on at least one of its neighbours for trade and transits. Due to the lack of seaports and major roadways Laos has always suffered with many difficulties in its transportations. This is the most important geophysical reason that Laos has to pay more attention in making her foreign policy towards its neighbour countries. Due to this reason also Laos has suffered many geopolitical conclusions in the past. It has passed through numerous crises each arising out of ambitious policies of its neighbours. Geographic conflict and hostility of its neighbours on occasions have precluded Laos from emerging a neutral, stable and strong state.

#### The Economic determinants in Laos's Foreign Policy

Laos is one of the most poor country in the world having extreme backwardness and lack of resources. The economic history of Laos, in the words of its Prime Minister Kaysone, has been one of "abject poverty and backwardness"<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless Laos has been rich in natural resources and possess great potential in agriculture, forestry, and water resources. Its mineral resources have been successfully exploited by the French. It has also rich timber resources. Laos is basically an agriculture based economy.

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13. Joseph J. Zasloft and MacAlister Brown, Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy: Postwar Realities, West View Boulder, 1978, P. 106.



Laos has not heavy industries. Due to lack of industries Laos cannot fully utilise its mineral and agricultural resources for its own development. In 1983, its percapita GNP was estimated by the government at only \$89. With such a bad economic situation Laos had and still has to depend on major powers. Before communist came to power in Laos in 1975 Laos was dependent on the U.S., Thailand and western countries. U.S. was the largest aid donor to Laos. The most expensive U.S. economic operation in Laos was refugees assistance, an estimated \$ 275 million in fiscal year 1973.<sup>14</sup>

After communists came to power in 1975 and the expulsion of U.S. aid by means of "Spontaneous popular demonstrations" against their offices and personnel in May 1975 deprived the Laotian government of the financial and technical core of its economy. The new government of the LPDR faced an extremely difficult situation when it took over the management of the country's economy in 1975. Now Laos began to look towards social Ist countries for aids and assistance for development of its economy. Soviet Union came as the largest aids donor and Vietnam was the second largest aids donor countries. Other countries which began to help Laos were China and East European countries. The LPDR received a variety of forms of project aid. For example, the Soviet Union has provided aid for the following Projects: the construction of a new town and airport at Phong Savane on the

14. Ibid, 108.

plain of Jars; the operation of the Phon Tiou tin mine, a high-voltage power line; brick and cement works; and road and bridge construction. <sup>15</sup> Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia have also given aid and contribution in the development of Laos. But Vietnam has the major economic and political influence on Laos' policies.

Laos opted for structural reforms in 1979 and 1986. It has been trying to liberalize and wanted ASEAN and western countries to make investments in its market. Laos is now again turning to ASEAN countries, particularly to its neighbour, Thailand which is one of the most prosperous country in the region. So Laos needs help of Thailand and other western countries in its economic developments. Now Laos gives more attention towards Thailand and other ASEAN Countries in its foreign policymaking. Thailand is still a major trade partner of Laos, Thailand is also of vital importance for Laos, because of Laos's traditional dependence upon trade in rice and other products across the Mekong River border and upon Thai ports and roads for overseas commerce <sup>16</sup>. Thus we see that because of its economic situation Laos still

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15. Aurther J. Dommen, Laos : the Keystone of Indochina, West View, Boulder, 1985, P. 146.

16. Joseph J. Zasiuff and Mac Alister Brown, Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy : Post War Realities, Westview Boulder, Colorado, 1978, PP. 118-119.

needs other countries help and this affect its foreign policy.

### IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS AS A DETERMINANT IN LAOS'S FOREIGN POLICY

It can be clearly seen that before 1975 Laos was pro-Thailand because the U.S. pursued her goals in Laos through Thailand. But after 1975 as communists came to power in Laos, it undertook the policy of socialism, nationalization and centralization. Ideological factors thus become predominant in Laotian foreign policy.

These ideological commitments which formed a combination of genuine patriotism with proletarian internationalism formed the basis of Laos's foreign policy goals, viz, militant solidarity with fraternal socialist countries, special relationship among Indo-chinese states, belief in non-aligned movement, support to the proletarian struggle and carrying on a joint struggle against the U.S. led imperialism.

Though the goal of militant solidarity with fraternal socialist countries jeopardised in the wake of growing sino-soviet rift, Laos developed a comprehensive allround relationship with Soviet bloc.

Ideology formed the basis of this relationship. Laos generally followed the foreign policy line of Vietnam, which had been more closely linked to the Soviet Union than to China. Although the Laos has made an effort to maintain good relations with both the Soviets and the Chinese.

The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) has an identical political bureau and party discipline like other communist party

systems. The LPRP directs and develops the policy of the Lao communist movement, unifies and disciplines party members, who are the leading force of Lao society, and maintains liasion with "Fraternal" parties abroad .

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The LPRP leaders do show tough oppositon to the bourgeois life, deep suspicion of those outside the revolutionary movement, ideological rigidity and zealous commitment to the revolutionary cause. They are self professed Marxist-Leninist, and the LFDR leaders had so successfully camouflaged their ideology that there was widespread speculation within Laos as to whether the revolutionary leadership was "communist" or "nationalist". Actually, the LPRP leaders are both communist and nationalist.

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Lao communism has a considerable impact of Vietnamese. Lao communists have frequently used concepts and slogans identical to those of the Vietnamese and adopted similar policies. The LPRP was guided and supported by Vietnamese communist in the past and still provides important guidance to LPRP.

IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS AS A DETERMINANT IN LAOS' FOREIGN POLICY

The Laotian communist leaders in Vietnam see foreign relations under a dual aspect one of these - the relationship between

17. Joseph J.Z. & M. Brown Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy: Post War Realities, Westview Publication, Boulder, 1978, P. 96.

18. Ibid. P. 92.

relationship between states - is a familiar type, involving the everyday work of diplomats and embassies, commercial trade, the negotiation of treaties and ultimatums, and the waging of war.

The other less familiar is equally important: the relationship between communist parties. <sup>19</sup> In States like Vietnam and Laos, the

attitude adopted towards the ruling communist party of a foreign country like the Soviet Union or China shapes the relationship that exists on a State level. The party of the foreign country is

judged according to its interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, the fundamental dogma of communists the world over, and according to the manner in which this dogma is applied to real-world situations. <sup>20</sup>

Thus, the relations between the Vietnamese communists and the communists of the USSR and China have experienced many ups and downs over the years. Since the leaders of the LPDR emerged as sole holders of powers in Laos, they have begun to establish a similar track record.

Sometimes a contradiction is apparent in such cases between the State to State relation and its party to party relation. The contradiction is only apparent, however, since the Marxist-Leninists what matters is the party's accession to power and the means to achieve them. <sup>21</sup> During 1975-1988, communist ideology had

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19. Arther J. Dommen, Laos : Keystone of Indochina, Westview, London, 1985, P. 119.

20. Ibid, P. 119.

21. Ibid. P. 120.

been pre dominant path of Vietnam during this period. Laos made very friendly relations with Soviet Union and East European countries. Party to Party delegations made regular visits during this period. Although Laos has generally followed the foreign policy line of Vietnam, it has made an effort to maintain good relations with China and the non-communist world also.

Many other important events took place in Indochina region during the period 1975-1988, which affected its foreign policy to a great deal such as the reunification of Vietnam in 1976, Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia in 1978, China-Vietnam war in 1979, and the conflict over the Spartlys in 1988 etc. But it did not deter Laos to pursue pro-vietnamese policies. In December, 1986 Vietnam undertook a policy of structural reforms and it has its salutary impact on Laos also. Thus we see that Laos is situated at such a vulnerable position that it has to pay equal importance to all its neighbours for its development and security purposes. But Laos generally associated itself with the strongest power in its neighbourhood against the other . As a small and weak state, Laos has frequently found that its destiny has been decided for it by the actions of more powerful states. Its strategic location in southeast Asia did not allow it to retreat into isolation. Laos has a dubious distinction of Sharing borders

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22. Perala Ratnami, Laos and the Super Powers, New Delhi, 1980, P. 60. with all the major states of the region- China, Vietnam,

Thailand, Burma and Cambodia involvement in their disputes was inescapable, though Laos itself had little to gain from other peoples' quarrels. Neutralism has always been a tempting option<sup>23</sup> for Laos politicians, but rarely one they could afford. So because of its geographic, economic, ideological and cultural traditions, Laos has to pay attention towards neighbouring countries, while deciding its foreign policy. If it does not get success to pay more attention towards neighbours, then that will not be good for Laos's development as Joseph J. Zasloft and Mac Alister Brown say, "...for all its inclinations towards independence, Laos will probably remain highly dependent upon the<sup>24</sup> actions of its more powerful neighbours."

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23. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War : Indochina since the Fall of Saigon,; London, 1984, P. 71.

24. Joseph J. Zasloft and Mac Alister Brown, Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy: Postwar Realities: Westview, Boulder, 1978, P. 121

### CHAPTER-III

#### RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM

Laos shares a 1,324 miles (2,131 Kilometers) long border with Vietnam. Lao-Vietnam friendship was based on the foundation of common border, history, and traditions. Both were under the French colonial rule. Common political system and ideology had been the most important factors in their great friendship since 1975. Both countries embraced communist system and were close friends of the Soviet Union. Because of geo-political considerations Laos thought it prudent to cultivate relations with Vietnam during 1975-1988.

The communist parties of both countries, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (:PRP) in Laos and Vietnamese communist Party (VCP) in Vietnam were offshoots of the Indochinese communist Party (ICP). Both parties had similar ideology and identical planning and they pursued the same means to achieve their object after 1975. Thus they were considered as the branches of one and the same entity. This fact imposes a particular perspective in considering Laos's relations with Vietnam. Identity does not preclude diversity but implies a unified control, at which the Vietnamese communists with their proven mastery of "Front" tactics, excelled. Thus the foreign policy of Laos hardly dif-

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1. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos : Keystone of Indochina, Westview Press, Boulder & London, 1985, P. 121.

2. Ibid. P. 121.



ferred from that of Vietnam and any LPDR initiatives actually harmed Vietnam; they were, on the other hand, unthinkable. So anxious were the successors of Ho-Hochi Minh to give substance to this special relationship that they actually introduced this term publicly several years before their seizure of power in Laos.<sup>3</sup>

In 1930 Indochina Communist Party (ICP) was founded by Hochi Minh in Vietnam. Since its founding, the ICP debated the question of its relationship to the revolution in each one of the constituent territories of Indochina - Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. In this continuing debate, the Laotians were at a disadvantage because the leadership of the party was Vietnamese from the beginning. Although the 1932 programme of the ICP called for the overthrow of the dyansties of Annam, Cambodia and Laos, not until 1936 was a party committee of Laos established to work for the furtherance of the national revolution there.<sup>4</sup> In 1945, the central committee of ICP announced the party's "voluntary dissolution", a decision motivated by the parpty's need to collaborate with a wide spectrum of other nationalist groups in opposition to the running French.

At its second Congress from February 11 to 19, 1951, the Indochina communist Party decided to split itself into separate

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3. Ibis, P. 122.

4. Ibid, P. 121.

parties of each country of Indochina. But no separate communist party for Laos existed at the time of this decision, and the leadership of the revolution in Laos was vested in a steering Committee of the alliance of the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, under Vietnamese control. After the establishment of the Lao people's Party on March 23, 1955, the leadership functions of the steering committee, in so far as Laos was concerned, were transferred to the Bureau of Lao affairs of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers Party (VWP renamed in 1976 the Vietnamese Communist Party). But Vietnamese maintained their control over the LPRP.

In 1949 Prince Souphanouvong inclined towards Viet-Minh and took charge of the military side of the Lao Issara movement. But in May 1949 he was expelled from the Government and he went to the liberated area of northern Tongking to join the Viet-Minh leaders. After the origin of Lao Patriotic Front (the Pathet-Lao), in October, 1949, the Lao Issara government was dissolved. In April, 1953, Prince Souphanouvong had established Pathet Lao headquarters in Laos itself; and later that year the French agreed to give the kingdom of Laos full independence. After the Geneva accord the power struggle continued between the Pathet Lao and Royal Government supported by U.S., North Vietnam supported Pathet Lao Government. North Vietnam provided Pathet Lao assistance and military cooperation in fighting with Royal Government. After a long time the signing of the Vietnam ceasefire agreement in Paris in January, 1973 made new negotiations possible in Laos.

A simple ceasefire agreement was reached on 21 February 1973. A coalition government was established in which Souvanna Phouma remained Premier, but the government included a Pathet Lao deputy Premier, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Phoumi Vongvichit, and a number of other leftist ministers. Prince Souphanouvong, who had returned to Vietnam, was made head of the Joint National Political Council, which was eventually to become the instrument of communist takeover.

The coalition government held power for about a year, during which it seemed that there might be a long and gradual transition towards a Laction form of Socialism. Following the communist victory in South Vietnam in April, 1975, events in Laos began to move more rapidly. In Mid April with the help of Vietnamese, Pathet Lao captured the power of Vietnamese. The final stage of the communist takeover came in December, when a national congress of people's representatives accepted the abdication of King Savang Vattahana and proclaimed the Lao people's Democratic Republic (LPDR) on 2nd December, 1975. The coalition government was dismissed, giving way to a regime in which the dominant role was played by the (communist) Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) with the help of the Vietnamese.

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5. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War, London, 1984, P. 16.

6. Perala Ratnam Laos and Super Powers, New Delhi, 1980, P. 142.

The Socialist revolution now began in earnest and involved both political re-educational of old elite and the mobilization of the masses behind new leaders. Economically and Politically the new regime sought to move closer to Vietnam.

A top level vietnamese party and government delegation, led by Vietnamese workers party (VWP) first secretary Le Duan and including a number of members of the Bureau of Lao Affairs, visisted Sam Neua, from November 2 to 6, 1973, and there introduced the phrase "special relationship". A joint statement issued on this occasion said: "The Vitenamese and Lao peoples take great pride in the special relationship between them". At this stage, Laotian attention was still focussed on the formation of the third coalition government and the LPRP had not yet emerged into Public View, blurring the significance of a statement issued in the name of a Laotian delegation in which De Duan's counterpart, was still described as "vice chairman of the NLHS Central Committee".

After the establishment of Laos people's Democratic Republic on 2nd December, 1975, Vietnam quickly recognized the new state. A government and party delegation led by Mr. Phomvihan visisted north Vietnam on February 5, 1976. A joint statement issued at the end of the visit said that the two cosuntries would strengthen

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7. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos : Keystone of Indochina, Westview, Boulder, London, 1985, P. 120.

8. Ibid, P.122.

their economic and cultural co-operation, would set up a joint committee for the purpose, and would cooperate in building a road from Laos to the Vietnamese coast, and that North Vietnam would assist Laos in training economic, financial, scientific, and technical experts. The statement welcomed "the brilliant achievements of the socialist countries", and said that "together with the fraternal socialist countries and the international communist and workers' movement, the two sides will do their utmost to enhance solidarity, mutual support and assistance in the spirit of Proletarian internationalism." <sup>9</sup> Following the reunification of Vietnam in mid 1976, a number of treaties on economic, cultural, scientific and technical cooperation between two countries were signed on August 31, 1976.

The close relationship between Vietnam and Laos was cemented in a Twenty-Five Years' Friendship Treaty signed in July, 1977 <sup>10</sup>. A Vietnamese delegation led by Mr. Le Duan, First Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and Mr. Phan Van Dong, the Prime Minister, paid an official visit to Vientiane on July 15-18, 1977. At the conclusion of the visit, Mr. Dong and Mr. Phonivihan

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9. Keesings Contemporary Archives, volume XXIV, 1978, P. 28769.

10. Mc Alister Brown & Joseph J. Zaslaft, "Laos 1977, The Realities of Independence", Asian Survey 18(2), February 1978, P. 172.

signed a treaty of Friendship and cooperation with the following

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provisions:

(1) Both sides would "Protect and develop the special Vietnam-Laos relationship" and strengthen cooperation and mutual assistance in all spheres".

(2) They would "cooperate closely in increasing their capability of defending and protecting their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity".

(3) They would strengthen their cooperation in agriculture, forestry, industry, communications and transport, the exploitation of natural resources and other economic spheres; assist each other in training cadres, exchange economic, cultural, scientific and technical experts; expand trade relations on a basis of special preferential treatment; expand scientific and technical exchanges and cultural cooperation; and increase contacts to discuss the implementation of cooperative plans.

(4) They would "build the Vietnam-Laos border into a border of fraternal friendship.

(5) They would "strive to strengthen the militant solidarity and cooperative relations with other fraternal socialist countries"; "Positively contribute together with the other socialist countries and the international communist movement to intensifying their solidarity and mutual support and assistance";

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11. Keesings Contemporary Archives, Volume XXIV, 1978, P. 28769.

"strengthen the military solidarity, lasting cooperation with and mutual assistance to fraternal Cambodia"; and "establish and develop relations of friendship and cooperation with the countries in this area".

(6) They would hold regular exchanges of views on problems arising from their relations and on international issues of mutual concern.

(7) The treaty would be valid for 25 years, and would automatically be renewed for 10 years on each occasion, unless one of the signatories gave a year's written notice of its intention to cancel it.

An agreement was also signed on July 15, in which Vietnam agreed to permit the use of the port of Da Nang as a dutyfree unloading area for goods bound for land-locked Laos. Other agreements signed during the delegation's visit delineated the frontier between the two countries, provided for Vietnamese economic aid and interestfree loans to Laos during 1978-80 and exempted Vietnamese and Laotian holders of diplomatic and service passports from acquiring entrance and exit visas. There was speculation that the treaty also ratified the presence of Vietnamese troops in Laos, Vietnamese military engineers rebuilt the road network and constructed an oil pipeline from the Vietnamese sea coast to the Laos interior .

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12. Mac Alister Brown & Joseph J. Zasloft, "Laos in 77 : The Realities of Independent", Asian Survey, February 18(2), 1978, P. 172.

Border clashes between Vietnam and Cambodia which had occurred at intervals since 1975, developed into serious fighting in 1977 and on December 31, Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations with Vietnam. The War between Vietnam and Cambodia and the growing tensions between Vietnam and China presented serious problems in Laos. The government of Laos adopted a neutral attitude towards the conflict, although the tone of its statements was more favourable to Vietnam. It was also alleged that Vietnam had dispatched a division of troops to the north of Cambodia through Laotian territory, but it was categorically denied. LPDR officials attempted the role of intermediary on behalf of the Vietnamese, urging Cambodia, without success, to accept the Vietnamese negotiation proposals of February 5, 1978.<sup>13</sup>

LPDR, following the Vietnamese example, moved closer to the Soviet Union during 1978. Laos also adopted Vietnamese policy to maintain its relations with U.S. Laos, like Vietnam, had maintained that the U.S. should provide reconstruction assistance in fulfilment of its commitment under Art. 20 of the Paris Agreement which calls for help to "heal the wounds of wars".<sup>14</sup>

In early January 1979, when the Vietnamese invading forces installed the People's Republic of Kampuchia (the Heng Samrin

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13. Mac Alister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloft, "Laos 1978: The EBB and flow of adversity", Asian Survey, 19(2), February 1979, p. 99.

14. Ibid, p. 102.



regime) in Phnom Penh, the LPDR was quick to recognize it. Thus a clear cut alignment of the Lao people's Democratic Republic with its mentor, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), followed quickly in the wake of Vietnam's unacknowledged invasion of Kampuchea at the end of 1978 and Vietnam's struggle against the three week chinese counterblow in February, 1979.

As Vietnam's warfare with Cambodia and China made Laos more than neutral bystander, both Vietnam and Laos saw value in ameliorating relations with Thailand, as well as with the other ASEAN nations.

Laos always maintained a close relationship with Vietnam, despite Thai conjecture. The LPDR formerly recognized Vietnam's contributions by conferring its highest award in 1981 the National Golden Order, on Le Duan and by presenting "Order, Medals, insigna and certificates... <sup>15</sup> Vitenamese units...having contributed to the Lao revolution since 1976; in particular the LPDR wished "to bow in tribute to the souls of those Vietnames who <sup>16</sup> heriocally sacrificed their lives in Laos .

Vietnam had each year trained more than 1000 Laotian cadets and technicians, sent more than 900 experts to assist Laos and cooperated in an exchange of some 50 cadets of Central and Provincial levels since 1978. During the year 1982 Vietnam was

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15. Stanley S. Belington, "Laos in 1981, Small Pawn on a Larger Board" Asian Survey, vol. XXII January 1982, p. 90.

supporting more than fifty projects in Laos including the setting up of farms in non-productive areas, the repair and constructions of roads, the building of schools, hospitals, brick factories and administrative centres and the provisions of agricultural tools.

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Vietnam ranked behind the USSR as the second largest donor of aid to Laos; it was extensively involved in over 200 medium to small scale projects. In the course of 1988, Laos and Vietnam signed over 24 cooperation agreement relating to such areas as agriculture, culture, education, finance, forestry, ethnic affairs, Propaganda and training, Public health, scientific and technical training, social welfare, trade exchange, transportation and trade unions.

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In addition to the economic relationship, Laos and Vietnam consult, cooperate and coordinate with each other in a wide variety of areas, including party to party relations and military and security affairs.

An indication of the scope and intensity of this interaction can be measured by the exchange of delegations over the

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16. Rober Cooper, "Laos 1982 : A good year all round; South East Asian Affairs, 1983. P. 185.

17. Carlyle A. Thayer, "Laos in 1983: Pragmatism in the Transition to Socialism", Asian Survey, Volume XXIV, January, 1984, P. 54.

period November, 1982 - October, 1983. In the government-administrative areas, Laos dispatched six major delegations (vice ministerial rank or higher) to Vietnam and received eleven. Three military and five party delegations were sent and one military and five party delegations were received. The two most important delegations to visit Laos were a joint party state delegation led by Chiu Huy Man that attended National Day celebrations in December 1982 and a military delegation led by Defence Minister Van Tien Dung in January. An estimated 40,000-50,000 Vietnamese soldiers and 5,000 technical specialists were stationed in Laos during the year 1983.

Vietnam supported Laos in 1984 border disputes between Thailand and Laos. Vietnamese troops strength had been estimated to vary from 30,000 to 60,000 during the period from 1975 to 1985<sup>18</sup>. Vietnamese troops played the primary role in combating insurgency against the LPDR. They had undertaken security tasks, such as the guarding of access to airport perimeters, controlling of important road junctions, and patrolling sensitive areas. They had been assigned border patrol duties, sometimes carrying out visible military manoeuvres during periods of tension, on the Lao borders with Thailand, Kampuchea and China.

Laos and Vietnam with the help of Cambodia setup Indochinese

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18. Mac Alister Brown & Joseph J. Zasloff, "Laos: Gearing up for National Development", Southeast Asian Affairs, 1985, ISEAS Singapore, P. 195.

federation of "fraternal" friendship and cooperation. The foreign ministers of the three Indochinese countries have been meeting semi annually since 1980. At the January 1981 meeting, they nominated Laos to speak for their group, in effect presenting the Vietnamese position on the Kampuchean question to ASEAN. On 22-23 February, 1983, the top leadership of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia met in Vientiane for an Indochina summit conferences, the first such gathering since the end of the Vietnam war. It announced the formation in each of the countries of committees for economic cooperation, with each to be served by a permanent secretariat. The committees meet twice yearly and are charged with coordinating economic development in the three countries. Another set of Indochina wide committees was established in 1983, these to coordinate policies of the three national Mekong committees which are members of the International Mekong Committee.

A Vietnamese high level party and state delegation, led by Mr. Truong Chinh, the Chairman of the Council of State, visited Laos from May 22 to May 27, 1985.

A joint statement issued on the final day of the visit reaffirmed the determination of the two countries to consolidate their relationship, especially, in economic cultural, technical and scientific fields. In his own speech, however, Truong Chinh, while referring to the "model relations between Vietnam and Laos", was careful to place those relations within the context of "the solidarity alliance and allround cooperation among the three

Indochinese countries". It was reported that an agreement with Vietnam in February, 1985 initiating Joint exploitation of Laos forest in Savannakhet, Sarvane, Vientiane and Luang Prabang provinces. On January 24, 1986, an agreement on border delimitation and the planting of permanent border markers on the Vietnam-Laos border was signed by Gen. Phoune and Mr. Ngyuen co. Thach, the Foreign Minister of Vietnam. A joint committee to delimit the border had been established on July 25, 1978<sup>20</sup>. The Bangkok Post of December 30, 1986, reported that Vietnamese troops based in Laos had on December 26 shot dead 43 Hmong tribesman as they attempted to cross the Mekong river from Faksone province to Nang Khai (Thailand). Among tribesmen had maintained guerilla resistance against the Lao regime since 1975. A Vietnam radio broadcast, rejecting the charge on January 5, declared it as a "fabrication by certain soldiers in the Thai Army"<sup>21</sup>.

In April 1985, Soviet Union by the adoption of 'Perestroika', began restructuring of its economy. It deeply affected the other communist countries. In December 1986 Vietnam also undertook a

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19. Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos in 1985: Time to Take Stock", Southeast Asian Affairs, 1986, ISEAS, Singapore, P. 116.

20. Keesinge's Contemporary Archives, 1986 volume XXXII, P. 34620.

21. Keesinge's Contemporary Archives, 1987 volume XXXII, P. 35070.

policy of structural reforms and it had its salutary impact on Laos also. Vietnam's own new economic system had begun to follow the Soviet line. Laos also followed this line as LPRP General Secretary and Council of Minister's Chairman Keysone Phomvihane said, the USSR was proving correctness of Socio-economic "strategic reorganization" based upon "auto management principles".<sup>22</sup>

The fourth congress of Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) in 1986 announced its reforms policies. Under the so-called New Economic Mechanism (NEM), the Lao economy has been progressively decentralized and opened up to market forces like Vietnam. At the same time Laos has looked to the West, particularly to Thailand for increased private investment, transfer of technology and trade.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic took a long step in 1988 down the route of economic reforms at home and openness to the western bloc abroad. After more than a decade of failure, the leaders of the LPDR have at last recognized the impossibility of moving directly to Socialism "by passing the capitalist phase", and instead have become enthusiastic converts to "economic restructuring" and "the broadening of multiform economic cooperation with foreign countries".<sup>23</sup>

Despite the new Laos openness to the West, relations with

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22. Charles A. Joiner, "Laos in 1987: New Economic Management Confronts the Bureaucracy", Asian Survey 28(1), January, 1988, P. 102.

23. Martin Stuart Fox, "Laos in 1988: In Pursuit of New Direction", Asian Survey 29(1) January, 1989, P. 81.

Vietnam continued to be close and friendly. This cooperation continued in everything from "political work" in armed forces to economic planning and foreign policy, and on every level from twinned provinces and municipalities to national governments and ruling parties. Reports that Vietnam had significantly reduced its military presence in Laos in early 1980, were confirmed by western diplomats in Bangkok on May 26, 1988. The sources claimed that Vietnam had halved its military strength into about <sup>24</sup> 25,000 troops. But the oppressively close Laos-Vietnamese relationship which characterized the 1975-88 period seems to have eased. Kaysone himself now sees that Lao are much less willing to accept Vietnamese advice against Vietnam's own political and economic problems. Certain other developments in 1988 suggest a loosening of Lao-Vietnamese relations. On the economic front some border agreement with Vietnam have apparently not been reviewed as provinces prefer to trade more profitably with Thailand. A third straw in the wind was Laos relations to fall into line with Soviet Union when differences existed between Moscow and Hanoi. A good example of this was Lao endorsement of the Soviet contention that since the Afghan and Kampuchea problems share certain similarities, similar solutions may be possible a position Vietnam vehemently rejected. Despite this, however, Laos closely coordinated its approach to the Kampuchean problem with both Hanoi and Phom Penh.

24. Keesings Contemporary Archives, 1989, P. 36293, vol. XXXV.

## CHAPTER-IV

### RELATIONS WITH THAILAND

The relations with Thailand is of vital importance for Laos, because of ethnic, geographic and economic bonds. Thai and Lao people have shared a common ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage. For several hundred years of considerable portion of today's Thailand was an integral part of Laos, i.e. the Korat Plateau, or what the Thais regard as the northeast<sup>1</sup>. Today north-east Thailand is inhabited mainly by ethnic LaoLoum who speak Lao. Their recent historical experiences, however have been varied. Thailand was able to preserve its independences through a process of accommodation with the western colonial powers, whereas Laos came under the French Indochina system and was subsequently caught up in the communist struggle for Indochina. Despite their divergent experiences, the Thai and Lao peoples have somehow managed to maintain their traditional affinity and close cooperation. The political struggles in Laos were naturally a grave concern for Thailand, but the eventful political transformation have not altered the Thai perception of Laos as a close neighbour with whom Thailand desires to have strong ties.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos : Keystone of Indochina, Westview Press, Boulder and London, 1965, P. 129.

2. Sarasin Viraphol, "Reflection on Thai-Lao Relations", Asian Survey 25(12), December, 1985. P. 1263.



Before 1975, Thailand had a considerable influence on Laos' economy. Considerable intercourse in the economic sphere had also taken place, both in the specific bilateral context and in the multilateral framework of the work of the Interim Mekong Committee, established in 1957 under U.N. auspices and with a membership originally consisting of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and the former South Vietnam<sup>3</sup>. In bilateral trade, Laos has depended much on Thailand for the import of daily necessities such as food and other consumer goods. Laos is a land-locked country which utilizes Thailand as the most convenient conduit for its exports and imports. Thailand provides Laos with its main outlet to the world market. Before 1975 Thailand was the main trading partner of Laos. Over 1973-76, for example, 65 percent of Lao export were observed by Thailand, and goods from Thailand accounted for 98<sup>4</sup> per cent of Lao imports in 1973.

Thus Thailand is of vital importance for Laos because of Laos' traditional dependence upon trade in rice and other product across Mekong River border and upon Thai ports and roads for overseas commerce. In addition, Thailand has contributed to Laos'

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3. Sarasin Viraphol, "Reflection on Thai-Lao Relations", Asian Survey 25(12), December, 1985. P. 1264.

4. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina Since the Fall of Saigon, Verso Editions, London, 1984, P. 71.

technical development by offering expert training and other technical services. Under the framework of the Interim Mekong Committee, Thailand rendered valuable support to Laos, particularly in the development of energy resources and water transportation. Thailand has provided aid to the construction of Laos' Nam Nguem hydroelectric dam, and it has also been purchasing large chunk of its electricity production. The revenue from such purchases has significantly assisted Laos' national development. Furthermore, Thailand has helped Laos improve its shipping, shipbuilding, navigation and port facilities along the Mekong river, thus substantially upgrading Laos' communication and economic development of lower Mekong River Basin, which is sponsored by the Interim Mekong Committee .

Before 1975 the Bangkok government exercised considerable influence among Royal Lao Government (RLG) politicians as it had actively supported the RLG in the Civil War of Laos during the 1960s. It allowed the United States to use Thai Air bases for bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, permitted clandestine U.S. operations in Laos like CIA support for the Hmong irregular based in Thailand, and finally sent "volunteer" troops to fight on the ground . All this resulted in considerable anti-Thai feeling

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5. Sarasin Viraphol, "Reflection on Thai-Lao Relations", Asian Survey 25(12), December, 1985. P. 1264.

6. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos : Keystone of Indochina, Westview Press, Boulder and London, 1985, P. 130.

among the Pathet Lao. When the ceasefire was announced in 1973, it had at least 20,000 Thai military "volunteers" fighting in Laos against the communists.<sup>7</sup> The communist victory, therefore, abruptly reduced Bangkok's influence in an area it had come to regard as its own. Thailand imposed a blockade on Laos in late November, 1975, following numerous incidents along the Mekong River,<sup>8</sup> further heightened the strain. Thailand attributes the current difficulty in Thai-Lao relations to one major cause; the Vietnamese influence over Laos' policies. Since 1975 Laos external policies, and notably those concerning Thailand have been directed from Hanoi in spirit of the fact that the Lao people have continued to feel a close tie with their trans-Mekong cousins in Thailand.

With Laos' new regime, the Lao People Democratic Republic, was proclaimed in December 1975, the Thai government quickly accorded it formal recognition since Thailand regarded changes taking place in the regime to be Laos' internal affairs. Thailand reopened two Mekong River crossings on January 1, 1976. Since then rice has been imported in trade with Thailand. In June 1976 a

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7. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina Since the Fall of Saigon, Verso Editions, London, 1984, P. 71.

8. Mac Alister Brown & Joseph J. Zasloff, "Laos 1976: Flattering first Step toward Socialism", Asian Survey, 17(2), February, 1977, P. 112.

Thai Parliamentary group visited Vientiane. On August 3, 1976 after three days of hard negotiation the foreign ministers of both countries signed a promising communique in Vientiane.<sup>9</sup>

Thailand also agreed to open two additional river crossings, and Laos was to release every Thai national in its Jails.<sup>10</sup> Thailand also recognized the right of Laos to transit and port privileges in Thailand.

The military coup d'etat in Thailand in October, 1976 barely two month later not only froze further implementation of the agreement but also deepened the mutual suspicion and distrust between two countries. Thai coup was largely protested in Laos and hundered of Thai students who were also protesting Thai coup took shelter in Laos. The Laos People's Democratic Party not only condemned strongly this military coup but also objected any American military presence in South East Asia. This event laid a serious conflict between the two countries. Relations between Laos and Thailand were tense throughout most of 1977. On the Thai side, the rigidly anti-communist regime of Thanin Kravichien suspected that the Lao communists, together with Vietnamese would setp up support of the communist insurgency in the north and northeast of Thailand. On the other side Lao leaders charged that the Thai regime, with the help of the American imperialist, was

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9. Ibid, P. 114.

10. Ibid, P. 114.

encouraging insurgency within Laos in addition to blockading  
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commerce . The new Thai government of General Kriangsak Chama-  
nand following a military coup in October 1977, initiated a  
marked improvement in Thai-Lao relations. The new government, was  
more accomodating than its predecessors in its posture toward the  
communist Laos, although it still barred certain military sup-  
plies to Laos but restored most of the transit trade and lifted  
the prohibition on private commerce with Laos. In December 1977  
both countries announced the resumption of commercial air service  
between their two capitals. In 1978 Laos agreed to increase the  
sale of electricity to Thailand from the Ngam Num dam and the  
easing of local commercial traffic across the Mekong. By Decem-  
ber, plans were formalized for an official visit to Laos of Prime  
Minister Kriangsak of Thailand. But it was later postponed be-  
cause of several border incidents, including exchange of fire  
between the security forces of both countries. The state visit of  
Thai Prime Minister to Laos eventually took place in early Janu-  
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ary 1979 . The official communique hailed the atmosphere of  
"Friendship and mutual understanding" in whichs the talks were  
held and pointed to improve trade relations and avoidance of

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11. Mac Alister Brown & Joseph J. Zasloft, "Laos in 1977: The realities of Independence", Asian Survey, 18(2), February, 1978, p. 173.

12. Martin Stuart Fox, "Laos: The Vietnamese Connection" South East Asian Affairs, 1980, ISASHA, Singapore, p. 203.

armed clashes along the Mekong River boundary as the main goals  
of the meetings<sup>13</sup>. Prime Minister of Laos Keysone was received in  
Bangkok on a return visit in April 1979 and he paid a courtesy  
call on the King. Both Prime Ministers agreed to make the Mekong  
a "river of peace" and committed themselves not to interfere in  
each others internal affairs. Thailand also agreed to open four  
more border checkpoints on the Mekong, improving the prospects<sup>14</sup>  
for an increase of trade. But year 1980 was the year of bitter  
experiences of border disputes between two countries. Several  
firing incidents took place at border in this year and one Thai  
Naval Officer was killed in an exchange of fire between a Thai  
patrol boat and LPDR forces. Thailand closed its border with  
Laos, in two separate steps at the end of July. The LPDR accused  
Thai ultrarightists as "stooges of imperialism (i.e. the U.S.)  
and international reactionaries (i.e. China)", "sabotaging the  
new regime in Laos" and "trying to strangle the young LPDR by  
closing the Thai-Laos border"<sup>15</sup>. Thailand made it clear that the  
border closure was designed to make Laos realize that it was more  
dependent on Thailand than Vietnam. The border closure lasted

13. Mac Alister Brown & Joseph J. Zasloft, "Loas 1979: Caught in  
Vietnam's Wake", Asian Survey, 20(2), February, 1980, P. 106.

14. Ibid, P. 106.

15. Stanley S. Bedlington, "Laos in 1980: The Portents are Omi-  
nous", Asian Survey, 21(2), February 1980, p. 103.

only about seven weeks. On August 28, Thailand announced the reopening of two important crossing points near Vientiane on "humanitarian" reasons. Despite the reopening of the two crossing points, Laos-Thailand relations had reached a low point and were unlikely to improve for the foreseeable future. This border tension continued upto mid year of 1981. In mid 1981, Thailand in a distinct policy shift, informed Laos of its intention to maintain the Mekong as a "River of Peace and Prosperity": as embodied in the joint Thai-Lao communique of January 1979<sup>16</sup>. Relations thereafter warmed appreciably. The National Committee on Thai-Lao cooperation was given a boost by the appointment of the Thai Army Supreme commander as a Vice-Chairman. In November 1980 LPDR foreign minister, Phoun Sipaseut visited Bangkok and stressed that his visit was designed to strengthen the 1979 Joint Communique.

The year 1982 had probably been the best in terms of Lao-Thai relations ever since the communists came to power in Laos. Thailand denied recognition to Phoumi Nosavan's 18 August declaration of an opposition "Government of Laos" and associated themselves from it within twenty four hours.<sup>17</sup> The Lao authorities were assured that Thailand would continue to recognize the

16. Stanley S. Bedlington, Laos in 1981: Small Pawn on a Larger Board, Asian Survey, 22(1), January, 1982, P. 88.

17. Robert Cooper, "Laos 1982: A Good year all round", South East Asian Affairs, ISEAS, 1983, Singapore, P. 184.

present government and would not allow a government in exile to be formed on Thai territory. Throughout the year, trade and aid continued. Goods continued to flow into markets and aid to projects in Laos. Most goods imported to Laos were from Thailand. In September, 1982, following a visit of Vientiane by a Thai trade team in August, Thailand shortened the list of 272 strategic items banned for export to Laos and instructed provincial governors to relax the ban on such essential goods as medicines, bicycles, batteries and vehicle spare parts.

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It was reported that Lt. Col James "Bo" Gritz, a retired Green Beret Special Forces officer and decorated Vietnam War veteran, had led two unofficial operations into Laos to obtain information about U.S. Servicemen, 2,500 of whom were still listed as missing in action. The first cross-border raid, mounted from Thai territory, took place on November 27, 1982 and second raid occurred in February 1983; which was reported to the Los Angeles Times in a letter from Lt. Col. Gritz claiming that he was in Laos and that he had found some prisoner-of-war identification.

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The Thai Government denounced both raids and was reportedly concerned that its recently improved relations with Laos might be

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18. Ibid, P. 184.

19. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Volume XXX (1984), P. 32637A.



upset by the use of the town of Nakhon Phanom in north-east Thailand by Lt.Col. Gritz as a base for his operation. Thai authorities issued order on February 2 to arrest any U.S. citizen attempting to cross the frontier into Laos. Shortly afterward on February 15 a man and a woman allegedly involved in Lt. Col. Gritz's operation were arrested in Nakhon Phanom for possessing illegal radio equipment<sup>20</sup>. The year 1984 saw an unprecedented sharpening of the border conflict between the Lao people's Democratic Republic and Thailand. The conflict with Thailand and its attendant diplomatic interchanges focussed on three villages along the upper border in one of the two sections of the 1,600 kilometer long border lying over land<sup>21</sup>. The three villages Ban Mai, Ban Klang, and Ban Sawang, with a combined population of about 1,800 Lao-speaking people, involved the land border where the western Lao province of Sayaboury met the northern Thai province of Uttaradit<sup>22</sup>. The LPDR claims the villages belong to Muong Thong Canton, Faklay district, Sayaboury province, Thailand claims that the disputed area covers 19 square kilometers, is part of Bangkok Sub district, Uttaradit province, and has a present population of 1,010 inhabitants.<sup>23</sup>

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20. Ibid P. 32637.

21. Arthur J. Dommen, "Laos in 1984 : The year of the Thai border", Asian Survey, 25(1), January, 1985, P. 114.

22. Kessing Contemporary Archives, vol. XXXI, (1985), P. 33662.

23. Arthur J. Dommen, "Laos in 1984 : The year of the Thai border", Asian Survey, 25(1), January, 1985, P. 114.

Thai military officials disclosed in late May 1984 that Lao troops had been involved in several border incidents over the previous two months. The dispute escalated on June 6, 1984 when Thai forces pushed the Lao troops out of three villages located in a hilly, isolated area of the border district about 180 kms west of the Laos' capital, Vientiane.<sup>24</sup>

These three villages are situated in mountainous terrain of considerable complexity. As Thai assert, this area, is a base of operation of Communist party of Thailand (CPT) guerrillas. At the end of 1983-84 dry season, a Thai road construction team came upon an armed LPDR presence in the three villages and skirmishing ensued. According to Thai sources, Lao troops had entered Thailand in March, 1984 in order to prevent the construction of a road passing close to the three villages. Lao troops clashed with a unit of Thai border police and rangers on April 15, and subsequently Lao troops occupied the three villages and installed a number of artillery pieces and anti aircraft guns.<sup>25</sup> Vientiane radio condemned as "an arrogant and open encroachment on Laos Sovereignty" the establishment of Thai military control in the three villages on June 6, and demanded that "the Thai ultra-right reactionary clique" withdraw its forces immediately.<sup>26</sup>

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24. Keesings Contemporary Archives, volume, XXI, 1985, P. 33662.

25. Ibid, P. 33662

26. Ibid.

A Lao delegation, led by Mr. Souban Salitthilat, Deputy Foreign Minister and vice-Chairman of the Lao-Thai Border Coordination Committee, had talks with Thai official in Bangkok on July and August. The Lao delegation demanded an immediate return of Lao citizens who were allegedly forced to move from the three villages into Thailand, and compensation for damage caused by Thai shelling. In support of their position the Lao delegation cited a border treaty of 1907 between France and Siam (Thailand), and a map produce by a France-Siamese border Demarcation Committee at that time, which was said to show the area of three vil-  
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lages as Lao territory. The Thai delegation emphasized its willingness to abide by the watershed principle but maintained that in this area it was not clear where the watershed line actually lay. Thai maps published in 1979 suggested that the area of the three villages was in Thai territory. In order to settle the dispute the Thai delegation proposed that the area be declared a "free zone" but Laos refused this proposal. In September 1984 a Thai team undertook a unilateral survey of the border area. During September there were a number of violent incidents in the disputed area including further exchanges of artillery rounds and small scale raids and skirmishes. Thailand also lodged a complaint with the United Nations over the attacks. On October

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27. Pheviphanh Ngasoyvathn, "Thai-Lao Relations: A Lao View", Asian Survey, 25(12), December, 1985, P. 1244.

2, 1984 speaking at the UN General Assembly, Air Chief Marshal of Thailand Siddhi announced that Thai forces would be withdrawn from the three villages in order to alleviate tension and to effect a peaceful settlement of the disputes. A Thai Foreign Ministry official announced on October 15 the complete withdrawal of Thai forces<sup>28</sup>. Lao calls for new talks on the problem were rejected by Thailand in November and December. The situation on border was tense and a number of clashes were reported by both sides during February and March 1985, although casualties were apparently minimal. At the same time, anti-Thailand rallies in cities and towns throughout Laos involving thousands of Laotians were staged by authorities. As part of publicity exercise, a note was sent to the U.N. Secretary General and Press conference were given by Lao envoys in Moscow, Hanoi, and New Delhi to propogate the new offer of conciliation to Thailand.

In July 1985, Lao Foreign Minister Phoune Sipaseuth addressed a note to his Thai counterpart suggesting that discussion on bilateral ties be taken up again by both sides. The Thai side responded favourably on this proposal. In August, 1985, Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila dispatched a special representative<sup>29</sup> to vientiane. In meetings with the Lao representative, the Thai envoy repeated Thailand's unfailing intentions for

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28. Kessings Contemporary Archives, Volume XXI, 1985, P. 33662.

29. Sarasin Viraphol, "Reflection on Thai-Lao Relations" Asian Survey, 25(12), December, 1985, P. 1266.

promoting relations with Laos in an appropriate and conducive atmosphere.

A Thai delegation visited Vientiane on July 29 - August 3, 1985 to discuss a number of bilateral issues, including the border disputes, and to participate in the 21st plenary session of the interim International Mekong Committee formed on January 5, 1978.<sup>30</sup> But talks ended in disagreement, Laos reportedly insisting on further negotiations at a national level, while Thailand maintained that the border issue had to be settled at a local level. A number of hostilities occurred during 1985 at the border, killing a number of soldiers and villagers from both sides. It is reported that Lao armed forces had crossed the Mekong river on February 1, 1986, and had launched a rocket attack on villages in Khemarat district resulting in the death of five people.<sup>31</sup> The attack was denied by the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

One of the other major problems between Thailand and Laos is refugees problem. This problem also time to time increases tension between two countries. Lao refugees begin streaming into Thailand following the communist takeover in March, 1975. In June

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30. Kissings Contemporary Archives, Volume XXXII, 1986, P. 34619.

31. Bangkok Post, February 2, 1986, Bangkok.

1985 more than 2,500,000 Laotians had crossed into Thailand. In the beginning Thailand opened its border to these Lao refugees along with other refugees from Indochina out of humanitarian concern. However, Lao government has accused Thailand of using these refugees to create unrest in Laos. On July 1, 1985, all asylum-seekers arriving in Thailand from Laos became subject to formal eligibility determination procedures. The aim of the procedures, carried out by Thai officials in the presence of observers from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was to determine who among new arrivals qualified for refugee status. The Thai interior Ministry announced on July 22 that 30 Lao national had been repatriated since the introduction of the new procedures.

According to UNHCR estimates, as of June 30, 1985 nearly 89,000 Lao refugees were accommodated in UNHCR - assisted camps in Thailand. In 1985 and 1986, Thailand tried to stop the refugees tide, screening some refugees, pushing others back, and unsuccessfully attempting voluntary repatriation programs.

Recent Thai-Lao conflicts stemmed partially from Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. But economic realities to common Mekong

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32. Mac Alister Brown & Joseph J. Zasloft, "Laos: Gearing up for National Development: South East Asian Affairs, 1985, ISEAS, Singapore, P. 198.

33. Kessings Contemporary Archives, volume XXII, 1986, P. 34619.

borders are inescapable. Large declines of Thai exports after 1983, leading to more smuggling, did not affect increased Laotian electricity sales to Thailand, stop joint hydrographic surveys, or prevent Vientiane from stressing Thai-Lao and Tibetan-Mongolian blood relations while denying Chinese lineage. Expanded trade in 1985 increased considerably by March, 1986. Laos exported more timber products and coffee to Thailand, and Thailand removed asphalt and a few other items from its strategic list. Also, Thai and Lao foreign ministers met in New York in September, 1986 to negotiate for greater trade and improved relations. In November 1986 LPRP's Fourth Congress also called for improved relations with Thailand. But the Thai-Lao border war remained continued Thailand accused and condemned Laos for assisting communist insurgents, packing Vietnamese army killing of Hmong, Sabotage, abductions, instructions, and shellings. In October, Thailand declared a military border alert due to an LPA build up. Clashes occurred, some attributable to lumber, refugees and cattle

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34. Charles A. Joiner, "Laos in 1986: Administrative and International Partially Adaptive communism", Asian Survey 17(1), January, 1987, P. 113.

35. Ibid, P. 113.

36. Charles A. Joiner, "Laos in 1987: New Economic Management Confronts the Bureaucracy", Asian Survey, 18(1), January 1988, P. 103.

smuggling, but other involved main forces conflicts. Heavy fighting broke out in late 1987 between Lao and Thai troops in a hill region where the Lao-Thai border was disputed. The clashes continued until February, 1988 and, on a number of occasions, threatened to escalate into a major conflict. The dispute constituted the most Lao-Thai Border incident since the formation of the LPDR in 1975. Talks were held in Bangkok on February 16-17 between General Sisavt Keobounphon, the Chief of the General Staff of the Lao People's Army, and Gen Chaovalit Yongchaiyat, the Commander-in-Chief of the Thai Army, where a ceasefire agreement was signed, calling for both countries to begin political talks to resolve the conflicts within 15 days. Both sides effected the ceasefire on February 19, 1988 and two days later they pulled back 3 km. from their line of contact<sup>37</sup>. Post-ceasefire political talks held in Bangkok on March 3-4, 1988 and Vientiane on March 17-18 ended inconclusively. However, this did not prevent the exchange of friendship visits between Lao and Thai military officers. The new elections, which were held in June, 1988 a new government under the leadership of Kaysone Phomvihane came to power again. In Thailand also the election of a new government was welcomed in Vientiane. But inability to agree even upon a modus operandi for delineation of their disputed common border was not permitted to interfere with burgeoning economic

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37. Keesings Contemporary Archives, volume XXXIV, 1988, P. 36292.



relations between the two countries. Thailand reduced from 273 to  
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30 the list of "strategic" goods that Thai companies are for-  
bidden to trade with Laos, friendship markets sprang up to facili-  
tate cross border trade, and Thai businessmen took advantage of  
new, relaxed regulations on foreign investment and joint ventures  
to invest in textiles, construction, transport, agriculture and  
tourism. In 1988 Laos was expected to import more than \$ 33  
million worth of Thai goods while exporting produce and electric-  
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ity to the value of around \$ 30 million.

Despite, these border disputes Laos wants more economic  
pacts with Thailand for its development. Laos has now adopted  
economic reform policies, which attract Thai investment in Laos.  
Thailand desires to invest more in Laos and Thai traders are  
exploring the possibilities for these investments. Thus it is  
clear that Laos was always dependent on Thailand due to its poor  
economic realities and common ethnic bondage. In spite of difficult  
political systems and conflict over the border disputes both are  
friends.

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38. Martin Stuart Fox, "Laos in 1988: in Pursuit of New Direc-  
tions:", Asian Survey, 29(1), January, 1989, P.84.

39. Ibid, P. 85.

## CHAPTER-V

### RELATIONS WITH CHINA

China the most powerful neighbour of Laos, is situated on the northern frontier. China and Laos share a deep cultural background. A large number of ethnic Chinese still inhabit in Laos and they are dominant force in Lao economy. About twenty thousand people of Chinese origin live in Laos, mainly in the towns<sup>1</sup>. China had a long back historical relations with Laos and most of the earlier history of Laos is found in Chinese writing and the first time Chinese archaeological record supplemented the knowledge about Laos to West. In earlier time Laos had good trade relations with China across the Mekong River.

China supported Laos' freedom struggle against French colonial regime. The Lao-Issara were able to conduct affairs on their own, with the help of Chinese forces, to capture Luang Prabang<sup>2</sup>. Pathet Lao's cadres had been trained in Peking. Since the Vientiane regime had done little to establish a national education system, many Pathet Lao cadres received their first education in Party schools, and if they went on to higher education, they went to Peking<sup>3</sup>. Pathet Lao nationalism was also greatly influenced with China.

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1. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos : Keystone of Indochina, West View, Boulder & London, 1985, P. 6.

2. Ibid. P. 37.

3. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina since the fall of Saigon, Verso edition, London, 1984, P.27.

China tried to maintain friendly relations with Independent Laos after Geneva agreements in 1954. In 1959 when civil war was broken out China gave all indirect and moral support to Pathet Lao but abstained from direct intervention. While giving verbal support to the Pathet Lao against the Phoui Sanamikone government at the resumption of civil war, Peking had been cautious enough not to arm a movement that it saw as being effectively dominated by Hanoi.<sup>4</sup> But there was no proof of Chinese aid to Pathet Lao, though china did made it plain that its Indo-China policy aimed at the creation and maintenance of a zone of peace, consisting of countries serving as a buffer states and observing strict neutrality. The Chinese communists were not directly involved in the battle of Sammeuva. Peking strongly backed Souvanna-Phouma in his effort to restore the coalition government. China charged Laos with "Plotting with the US imperialist to disturb the peace of Asia".<sup>5</sup>

By agreemeent with the latter, Chinese Army engineers constructed road in northern Laos to link the kingdom with southern China'. These roads had little bearing on the war in Laos but had great strategic importance for China's relations with guerillas operating in Thailand.<sup>6</sup>

4. Aurther J. Dommen, Laos : Keystone of Indochina, West View, Boulder & London, 1985, P. 126.

5. rald Ratnam, Laos and the Super Powers, New Delhi, 1980, P.31.

6. Arthur J. Dommen, Laos: Keystone of Indochina, West View, Boulder and London, 1985, P. 126.

China thus always wanted Laos to become a communist country. China was anxious that Laos should not become a western outpost, because China was concerned about frontier security as its border was adjacent to northern Laos. If Laos was in favour of the western bloc, there was danger on the political level and China felt that their national interest were in danger.

Thus China never wanted to play a dominant role in Laos and tried to maintain good relations with Laos before 1975. Thus Laotian relations with China have never had any serious grievances.

The Chinese leaders watched rapid U.S. withdrawal from Indochina in 1973-75 with caution but in December, 1975 when Laos people's Democratic Republic was established China quickly recognized it. One of the first foreign policy tasks of LPDR in 1975 was to stake out a new form of neutralism in relation to the Sino-Soviet dispute. The task fell to Phoumi Vongvichit, who said in 1975: "At present there are several countries which cannot get along with each other. However, they can get along with us. This is because we have used correct diplomatic means.... My policy is to win more friends while decreasing the number of enemies....as a friend. I hope that you two will be able to get along sooner or later. I side with neither you nor him..."

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7. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina since the fall of Saigon, Verso edition, London, 1984, P.76-77.

Although Laos has generally followed the foreign policy line of Vietnam during the period 1975-88, which has been more closely linked to the Soviet Union than to China, the LPDR has made an effort to maintain good relations with both the Soviets and the Chinese, caustiously straddling the Sino-Soviet dispute. Laos had to recognize that it cannot afford to cast its lot definitel<sup>8</sup>y with the Soviets or Vietnam on issues affecting China.

China was one of biggest doner country of socialist bloc after the withdrawal of U.S. assistance to Laos. Chinese also provided assistance, continuing their road-building activites in the Northwestern region of the Laos.

After visiting Moscow in February and March 1976 for the Soviet Communist Party Congress, Mr. Phomvihan led a government and party delegation which visited China on March 15-24, 1976 and was received by Chairman Mao Tse-tung. An economic and technical agreement, under which China would grant Laos an interest-free<sup>9</sup> loan, was signed. Mr. Phomvihan thanked China and other fraternal socialist countries for their aid to Laos. A Chinese trade delegation visited Vientiane in October, 1977, brining with it 24

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8. Joseph J. Zasloff & Mac Alister Brown, Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy: Postwar Realities, West View, Boulder, Colorado, 1978, P. 118.

9. Kessing's Contemporary Archives, volume XXIV, 1978, P. 28766.

tons of Chinese aid, including food and textiles. An agreement on the Chinese Loan to Laos was also signed. However, relations between China and Laos become strained during 1977 as the clashes had occurred between Vietnam and Cambodia. Laos adopted neutral attitude toward the conflict, although the tone of its statements was more favourable to Vietnam. Laos welcomed Vietnamese peace proposals, though were rejected by Cambodia. On the other hand China supported Cambodia against the aggressions of Vietnam. Thus the war between Vietnam and Cambodia and the growing tensions between Vietnam and China presented serious problems for Laos. During 1978, the LPDR sided with the Vietnam but continued polite diplomatic relation with Cambodia and China. The strain in Lao-Chinese relations, however, were evident in reduction of the Chinese aid programme. Upon completion of a 286 kilometer road system, the Chinese did not undertake a new portion of the road. It appeared that they did not intend to complete the important segment between Nam Bac and Luang Prabang which would link northern Laos, bordering on China, to the southern part of the country. The Chinese complement of 15,000 soldiers and workers, which had served as the road construction teams, was reduced to 1,000 to 2,000, engaged largely in road maintenance. The Chinese

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10. Mac Alister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloft, "Laos 1978: The EBB and Flow of Adversity", Asian Survey, 19(2), February, 1979, pp. 99-100.

11. Ibid. P. 100

continued to service aid projects in the north, such as Cotton production and textile mills. An agreement was signed between the China and LPDR in June 1978, permitting Chinese over flights to Cambodia.

Relations between Laos and Cambodia became increasingly strained from March 1979 onwards, and led to a number of incidents on their border. In 1978 the Lao government attempted to maintain a neutral attitude towards the controversy between China and Vietnam. Although Hanoi radio alleged on August 30, 1978, that Gen. Yang Fao, former commander of the Pro American Neo forces in Laos, had visited Peking. President Souphanouvong of Laos declared in a speech on October 12, 1978 year that the rumour "Lao traitors in exile" were supported by China and that China would attack Vietnam and then Laos were "very wicked and dangerous propaganda". Spread by "the imperialists and the international reactionary forces".<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December, 1978, the establishment of Heng Samrin's Government on January 8, 1979, and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam on February 17, 1979 made it difficult for Laos to remain neutral. Having recognized the new Cambodian government and called for the withdrawal of the Chinese forces from Vietnam while at the same time attempting to retain good relations with China, the Lao

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12. Kessings Contemporary Archives, Volume XXVII, 1981, P. 31222.

government was, however, forced to modify its attitude to China by the Soviet Union and Vietnam.

A statement issued by the Soviet Government on March, 2, 1979, referred to reports of "a Concentration of Chinese troops" on the Lao border, and declared that "the threat of Chinese intervention is now also looming over the Lao people".<sup>13</sup> Vietnam alleged that many Chinese troops had been moved to the border and accused China of "preparing an aggressive war against Laos". In a joint emergency meeting of Council of Ministers and the Supreme People's Council on March 6, 1979, the Lao government declared that China had deployed several divisions of regular troops in the areas adjacent to the Lao border and had carried out military exercises. The Lao statement demanded that China should "halt the deployment of troops along the Lao border, immediately cease all acts threatening the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Laos."<sup>14</sup> However, China denied these charges and a Chinese memorandum handed to the Lao Ambassador on March 10, 1979, described the Lao government's statement of March 6 as "Fantastic Fabrications concocted out of thin air".<sup>15</sup> Chinese

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13. Ibid. P. 31222.

14. Geoffery G. Gunn, "Foreign Relations of the Lao People's Democratic Republic: The ideological imperative", Asian Survey, 20(10), October, 1980, P. 997.

15. Kessings Contemporary Archives, volume XXVII, 1981, P. 31223.



also alleged that the suspension of the agreement on road construction was a step taken by Laos government under the pressure of Vietnam. But Lao government again on March 15, 1979, alleged that China was still sending troops to the border and two battalions of Chinese troops had entered Laos. But Laos also wished the dispute to be settled by peaceful means. In a letter presented to UN Secretary General in April, 1979 who was then visiting Hanoi, the acting Foreign Minister of Laos said that Chinese troops were still occupying a village in northern Laos. The Foreign Minister rejected Chinese allegations that 40,000 Vietnamese troops were moving towards the Lao-Chinese border.

Although, both Lao and foreign sources continued to report during 1979-81 that anti-government guerillas operating inside Laos and were being trained and armed by China, no border incidents were reported. The situation apparently deteriorated in May, 1981, at a time when an exceptionally tense, situation existed on the Sino-Vietnamese border. Both Laos and China alleged each other. By mid-1979 the Chinese Embassy in Vientiane had to divest itself of military personnel and limit its staff to twelve that was to say, it was placed on a par with the U.S. mission in Laos.

From this time onwards the propaganda war between Laos and

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16. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina Since the fall of Saigon, Verso edition, London, 1984, P. 192.

China had become increasingly maledictory and spiced with fewer hints of former good times. Yet the rhetoric had not been marked by the bitter invective that passed between the Vietnam and the China. The quarrel with China was not of Laos' making, and Chinese pressure on Laos was directed at Vietnamese dominated "Indochina bloc" rather than at Laos as such. In July 1980, because of its ongoing confrontation with Vietnam and subsequent need to support Thailand, Beijing adopted and increasingly harsh propaganda line. China firmly supported Thailand in the shooting incident on the Mekong river and blamed Laos for the event and linked it with direct Vietnamese instigation because of Hanoi's "wild ambition" to annex north eastern Thailand as part of a greater Indochina.<sup>17</sup> Beijing pointedly warned the LPDR that it must rein in before it is too late", emphasizing that if Vientiane continued to provoke its neighbours and serve Moscow and Hanoi "it was bound to eat bitter fruit". On November 26, 1980 Radio Beijing commentary immediately prior to the LPDR's National Day, China darily warned the LPDR that "it has brought a tiger into its home" by allying itself too closely with the SRV.<sup>18</sup> Beijing also accused Vientiane to send its troops to fight in Kampuchea and tried to roil Lao-Vietnamese waters by suggesting

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17. Stanley S. Redlington, "Laos in 1980: The portents are Ominous", Asian Survey, 21(1), January, 1981, P. 107

18. Ibid. P. 107

that tensions had led to fighting between Lao and Vietnamese troops. China, however, continued to stress its essential friendship for the Lao peoples, who, it claimed, had many grievances against LPDR leadership.

Sino-Lao relations continued to deteriorate and serious armed clashes were reported on the Sino-Lao border in 1981, and on 16 September, Peking Radio proclaimed that Vietnam had colonized Laos and turned it into a base for its anti-China operations, but that the Lao people were resisting vigorously: "At present the flames of anti-Vietnam guerilla warfare of the Lao people are blazing up and they are attacking the aggressors everywhere..."<sup>19</sup> It was also reported that the Chinese-backed insurgency in Laos occurred during 1981. Laos government also alleged China for guerrilla warfare in Laos but it appeared to be ineffective.

During 1982 the relations between Laos and China were normal. But following the sixth conference of Foreign Ministers held in HoChi Minh city from 6 to 7 July, 1982, Laos as the Spokesman for the three Indochinese states, issued statements condemning the trouble making of the imperialist "the US as leader as well

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19. Grants Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina since the fall of Saigon, verso edition, London, 1984, P. 193.

as "reactionary elements in Beijing's ruling spheres...." Vietnamese troops at the invitation of the Loatian government was present in considerable number in the north of the country. It was stated several times during 1982 that they would remain there for as long as there exist any threat to Laos from China. However, there was decrease in tension between Laos and China than it was in one year ago.

During the course of 1982, several groups of China trained guerillas, surrendered to the Loatian authorities. At the third party congress held at November 1982, Kaysone accused China of pursuing a path of "expansionism and hegemonism" in South East Asia and labelled China "the most dangerous enemy of our people". He charged the Chinese were "colluding with U.S. imperialist and ultra-rightest reactionaries" for sabotage inlaos. Kaysone expressed perfunctority, a willingness "to develop normal relations with the people's Republic of China on the basis of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, no interference in each other's internal affairs..."<sup>21</sup>

Despite having a serious confrontation with China Lao

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20. Mac Alister Brown & Joseph Zasloft, "Laos: Gearing up for national development", South East Asian Affairs, ISEAS, 1985, Singapore, P. 197.

21. Robert Cooper, "Laos ;1982: A good year all round", South East Asian Affairs, ISEAS, 1983, Singapore, P. 184.

government had maintained a relaxed attitude towards its ethnic Chinese community. In 1983, Chinese traders still dominated the free market in Vientiane. A Chinese school continued to operate, but the Maoist literature that had been available in Vientiane bookshops in 1980 had disappeared. In the northern provinces, the government had made no serious attempt to bar border trade and other contacts with Southern China. Thus Laos' trade relations with China continued during the political conflicts and both countries wanted to maintain normal relations during 1983.

Laos's relationship with China entered a new ambivalent stage after 1984. The northern colossus remained officially "hegemonist", border incidents continued, and the training of insurgent Laotians in Southern China persisted. But Chinese-Soviet "normalization talks" in 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev's (the former USSR President's), "Pacific initiative" and Moscow's pressure on Laos and Vietnam to improve their relations with China had blurred the formal Soviet "line" concerning Indo-<sup>22</sup>china. This new changed policy of USSR towards China made a great impact on Laos to normalize its relations with China. The reorganization of the Soviet foreign Ministry with the aim of achieving closer relations with China, and South east Asia in-

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22. Charles A. Joiner, "Laos in 1986: Administrative and International partially adaptive communism", Asian Survey, 27(1), January, 1987, P. 113.

cluding Japan were important to Laos' political and economic future.

Presumably Moscow's actions were pertinent to the LPRP's Fourth Congress in November, 1986 calling for improved relations with China. A visit by Liu Shuging, the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister, to Laos in late December, 1986 marked the first high-level diplomatic exchange between Laos and China since the deterioration in relation in 1979 when Laos sided with Vietnam in the Sino-Vietnamese conflict.<sup>23</sup>

Direct official talks with China, pressures for Laos-China reconciliation by USSR foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze during his visit to Laos in March, 1987, and China's own New Economic system emphasis were inadequate to ease Vientiane-Beijing estrangement. However, Kamphai Boupha, the first Deputy Foreign Minister of Laos, visited China on November 24-30, 1987.<sup>24</sup> On the final day of the visit it was announced that both countries had formally agreed to restore friendly relations and exchange Ambassadors. The Deputy Foreign Minister of Laos, on his return to Vientiane stated that the Chinese side had promised to refrain from supporting "Lao reactionaries in exile in their anti-Lao government activities". In late May 1988 Lao and Chinese Ambassadors were posted in Beijing and Vientiane respectively. The exchange of Ambassadors and the reports of withdrawing Viet

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23. Keesings Contemporary Archives, volume XXXIV, p. 36292.

24. Ibid P. 36292.

nameese troops ;from laos gave a new dimension to Lao-China relations. The LPDR sought frfriendly relations with China and a long, warmly-worded telegram welcomed China's national day. Withdrawing of Vietnamese troops, announced by Vietnam in 1988 also helped to cease normal relations between Laos and China. Most Vietnamese troops had been quitely withdrawn from northern Laos. A significant increase in the volume of cross border barter trade had already been reported with China's Yunnan province. 25

Economic relations also improved after the normalization of relations between both countries. Relations between the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and its Chinese counterpart, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were also restored after 1979 and thus after nearly ten years of low edged relations between two countries; both countries came together to normalize their relations in all fields.

Thus China never had any serious difference in relations with Laos except in 1979, when Laos favoured Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia and also favoured Vietnam during Vietnam-China War. But both countries never broke bilateral, economic and trade relations. China never intended to take military action against Laos except pressurizing LPDR by Politico-diplomatic means to steer a more neutral course between the Socialist Republic of

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25. Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos in 1988: In Pursuit of New Directions", Asian Survey, 29(1), January, 1989, P. 65.

Vietnam, USSR and China. However, the continuation of politics by other means i.e. war fought out in the homeland of the minority peoples inhabiting the strategic Yunnan (PRC) - Vietnam-Laos tri border region was the final precipitant in the chain of events leading to an impasse, but never an actual diplomatic break, in Sino-Lao relations.

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26. -Geoffery C. Gunn, "Foreign Relations of the Lao People's Democratic Republic: The Ideological imperative", Asian Survey, 20(10), October, 1980, P. 994.



## CHAPTER-VI

### RELATIONS WITH CAMBODIA

Cambodia has a special friendship with the Laos, as it shares common border with Laos to the South. Laos and Cambodia are tiny states of Southeast Asia and have shared long historical experiences under the French Colonial system. Both the countries have had close relations and have similar traditions, customs, and cultures. The unique feature in their relations is that both countries had ; same experiences before independence and have also experienced foreign involvement in their countries after getting independence.

Laos and Cambodia were under the same colonial power got independence simultaneously. After getting independence became the land of power struggle of super powers. After signing of the Geneva accord, both countries Laos and Cambodia adopted the policy of neutrality as cornerstone of their foreign policies.

The French made Cambodia the part of Indochinese Union which included Tonking, Annam, Cochinchina, Laos, and Kwang Chowwan. Thus from here the fate of both countries Laos and Cambodia was decided by the common colonial power and after the Japanese occupation in Indochina in 1941, Cambodia and Laos suffered the same fate as Vietnam.

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1. P.C. Pradhan: Foreign Policy of Kampuchea, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1985, P. 6.

The post 1949 period was most critical period for Cambodia as well as Laos. The rise of vietminh in Vietnam infused radicalism and entire Indochina came under its impact. The Khmer radicals started developing close links with the Pathet Lao of Laos and the Lien Viet Front of Vietnam. Thus radicalists of Laos and Cambodia came together under the influence of Vietnamese radical nationalists. They decided to set up a Vietnam-Khmer-Lao alliance and appealed to the people of the three countries to coordinate their efforts to defeat Colonialism.<sup>2</sup> France at last made a joint declaration of Independence for Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

During the final stage of Geneva discussions, Cambodia and Laos demonstrated that it was possible even for a small state to pursue an independent policy even at a conference dominated by the Great powers. Both countries received valuable support from the western countries for its efforts to oppose the claims made by the Vietminh on behalf of the dissident movements of Cambodia and Laos and to get them rejected, as also to resist the demands advanced by the Vietminh for certain territories which had long formed part of the two states.<sup>3</sup>

Cambodia got independence under the leadership of Norodom Sihanouk, who adopted the policy of neutrality. He also wanted

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2. Ibid. P. 12.

3. Perela Ratnam, Laos and Superpowers: Tulsi Publication, New Delhi, 1980, P. 18.

Laos to adopt a neutral policy. In the autumn of 1960, Sihanouk visited New York to take part in the spectacular general debate at the 15th session of the U.N. General Assembly. In his speech before the General Assembly he proposed the Cambodia and Laos should be turned into a neutral zone under a joint guarantee by the western powers, Siam, and South Vietnam on the one hand and the Soviet Union, China, and North Vietnam on the other hand. <sup>4</sup> He reiterated this proposal at the non-aligned conference in Belgrade in September 1961. He made it clear that his aim in mooted the proposal was "simply to make the two blocs recognize the usefulness of a series of countries whose neutrality they would accept and guarantee."

In reality it was Laotian crises of 1960-61 that made Sihanouk plead with the world powers to guarantee the neutrality of small nations. He had national survival in mind when he advocated a speedy resolution of the crisis in Laos. The reason behind this speedy resolution of the Laotian crisis was that Laos was a vital buffer between Cambodia and the world of Red China and economist Vietnam and if Laos turn communist, Cambodia with an army of just 25,000 would find itself in the uncomfortable situation of having

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4. P.C. Pradhan, Foreign Policy of Kampuchea, Radiant Publication, New Delhi, 1985, P. 66.

to share a long border with the communists . In early August 1959 he had expressed concern lest the civil war in Laos explode into an international conflict and invited the major powers to consider the possibility of making Laos a "neutral tempon" led by a government in which all political factors were represented. His proposal, however, was ignored by both blocks. His proposal before UN for neutralization of Laos and Cambodia received no support from either bloc. When the Laotian crisis took a serious turn during the period 1960-61, Sihanouk once again tried to induce the great powers to take constructive steps towards restoration of peace in Laos. He called for an international conference in Laos "For the threefold purpose of preventing the country's partition, finding means for the restoration of peace, and enabling Laotians to choose a policy for their government to follow".<sup>6</sup> This proposal for a conference was immediately supported by the communist bloc. The response of the United States, however, was non comittal.

In 1962 the major powers met at Geneva and agreed on the Sovereignty of Laos. Sihanouk welcomed this agreement and claimed full credit for his own country for the resolution of the Laotian crisis. He realised that international agreements like the declaratin of Laotian neutrality were an effective means for

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5. Ibid, P. 67.

6. Ibid, P. 67.

defending the peace and Sovereignty of neutral states like Cambodia. Laos supported Sihanouk's proposal for an another international conference with a view to providing Cambodia with the same benefits of arrangements for international protection that had been granted to Laos. In November, 1964, Laos was invited to attend an Indo-Chinese conference in Phnom-Penh. The Indo-Chinese people's conference met at Phnom-Penh, the capital of Cambodia in March, 1965. It was attended by representatives from Cambodia, Laos, North and South Veitnam. All these countries agreed to give neutral status to Cambodia.

In year 1970 Sihanouk was ousted from power by a military coup d'etat led by General Lon No 1 supported by the United States, Sihanouk called for an armed liberation struggle against the Lon No 1 regime on 23 March, 1970. At the same time Prince Souphanouvong, leader of Pathet Lao in Laos, stressed the need for a "united front of the Vietnamese, Cambodia, and Laotian people to oppose U.S. imperialism and its Indo-Chinese lackeys". The Indo-Chinese struggle against U.S. imperialism assumed a new vigour when, in the last week of April, 1970, the leader of North Vietnam, PRG of South Vietnam including the leaders of Laos and Cambodia held a conference to discuss how best they might intensify their struggle. This conference known as the summit conference of the Indo-Chinese peoples, took place in an area bor-

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7. Ibid, P. 151.

dering Laos, Vietnam, and China on the initiative of Norodom Sihanouk. It was attended by Souphanouvong, President of Lao Patriotic Front. The leader decided that there should be full cooperation between the liberation fronts of the three countries of Indo-China. On 3 May, 1970, the central committee of the Lao Patriotic Front energetically condemned the U.S. action in a statement.<sup>8</sup> Sihanouk in Peking formed a Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea (FUNK). The Royal Government of Sihanouk was recognized by many countries along with Laos and North Vietnam. Royal government pursued a policy of friendship, militant solidarity and cooperation with Laos and Vietnam in common struggle against American imperialism.

The foreign policy of Kampuchea witnessed significant fluctuating trends after the year 1975. As Popot group came to power in 1975 after the removal of Lon-No 1 regime, these followed a makedly visible Pro-Peking and anti-Vietnamese cum anti-Soviet Policy, which affected Laos also. As Laos was much influenced by the Vietnamese policies, the relations between Cambodia and Laos became deteriorating. Border clashes between Vietnam and Cambodia, which had occured at intervals since, 1975, developed into serious fighting in 1977.<sup>9</sup> These events furhter widened the division in the communist world. The government of Laos, which

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8. Aurther J. Dommen, Laos: Keystone of Indochina, West View, Boulder, 1985, P. 90.

9. Keesings Contemporary Archives, Volume XXIV, 1978, P. 29275.

has common frontiers with Vietnam, Cambodia and China adopted a neutral attitude towards the conflict, although the tone of its statements was more favourable to Vietnam.

Although Lao relations with Cambodia remained outwardly friendly, despite the military clashes during 1977 between Vietnam and Cambodia. Cambodia provided small amounts of aid to Laos during the year in the form of rice, salt, and dried fish.<sup>10</sup>

The Laotian President Souphanouvong made an official visit to Cambodia in December, 1977. He emphasized the peaceful agreements between Cambodia and Vietnam. Laos categorically denied on January 16, 1978, a Japanese press report that Vietnam had dispatched a division of troops to the north of Cambodia through Laotian territory, stating that Laos "always persisted in the policy of solidarity with Vietnam and Cambodia.

The Laotian Prime Minister, Keysone Phomvihane, sent identical letters on January 18, 1978 to the Vietnamese and Cambodian governments expressing his earnest desire that they would "make joint efforts to settle the disputes at an early date by holding negotiations on the basis of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity."<sup>11</sup> The Laotian

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10. Mac Alister Brown & Joseph J. Zasloff, "Laos in 1977: The realities of Independence"; Asian Survey, 18(1) January, 1978, P. 172-73.

11. Keesings Contemporary Archives, Volume XXIV, 1978, P. 29275.

government also welcomed on February 7, 1978, the Vietnamese peace proposals, which were rejected by Cambodia.

But during the public speeches neither Lao nor Cambodian spokesman mentioned the wartime slogans of "Indochinese Solidarity". Rather, the Cambodians used Souhpanouvong's visit to stress their friendship with the Laos, in contrast with their animosity towards the Vietnamese. In a radio broadcast welcoming the Lao delegation, there was little doubt that the Vietnamese were targeted along with other enemies: "The Cambodian and Lao peoples are brothers who have shared weal and woe, share their characteristic politeness and honesty and have similar traditions, customs and cultures.... for two countries have continually enjoyed good relations to the dissatisfaction of the enemies - the colonialist, imperialist, aggressors, expansionists, and annexationists." <sup>12</sup> At a banquet honoring the Lao delegation, Cambodian President Kheiv Samphan proclaimed that his country "would resolutely prevent any foreign country from stationing forces on its soil" and added an only slightly veiled warning that Lao soil must not be used as a base for Vietnamese forces to launch attacks against Cambodia.

The belligerence of Phnom Penh made the neutral stance of Laos increasingly difficult to sustain. The Vietnamese peace

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12. Joseph J. Zasloff & Mac Alister Brown, Communist Indochina and U.S. Foreign Policy: Post war Realities, West View, Boulder, Colorado, P. 117,.



proposals put forward on 5 February, 1978, were welcomed by Vientiane, but their rejection in Phom Penh ensured the final divergence between the two countries. By mid year a joint statement by Kaysone and Souphannavong said "we support Vietnam's stand for the settlement of differences" through negotiation, a course Cambodia still rejected.

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In mid 1978 several Lao soldiers were killed in firing from Cambodia and the Cambodian ambassador in Vientiane, Sam San, visited the border area and saw the bodies. He expressed regret over the deaths 'caused by mistake'; but the incidents continued. Yet Lao soldiers were instructed not to return the fire so as not to aggravate the situation and thereby embroil Laos in a costly conflict. Meanwhile Laos was increasingly viewed as Vietnamese puppets by the Pol Pot regime. Thus Laos had a bitter experience in relations with Cambodia during Pol. Pot regime because of Cambodia-Vietnam clashes and Laos slightly favoured Vietnam, however, it gave neutral posture during conflict.

But after Heng Samrin came to power in January, 1979, the foreign policy of Cambodia became out and out a Vietnamese-dominated foreign policy that called for cooperation among Indo-Chinese states and friendship with the Soviet Union. Heng Samrin

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13. Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War: Indo-China since the fall of Saigon, Verso edition, London, 1984, p.

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government was supported by Vietnam. Laos was the second country to recognized. Heng Samrin government. The new government in Cambodia once again restored the traditional friendship and solidarity among the Indochinese countries and reestablished friendly relations with Laos. On March 22, 1979, Souphanouvong, the President of LPDR and Heng Samrin, representing the newly installed People's republic of Kampuchea (PRK), signed declarations denouncing the "holders of reactionary power in Beijing" and cautioning the "greater Han Chauvinists" not to perpetrate acts against the Lao People. <sup>14</sup> A five year accord on economic, cultural, scientific, and technological cooperation had been signed between LPDR and the PRK. The exchange of ambassadors between LPDR and PRK also took place.

The friendship among the three Indochinese countries became close in 1980, when the foreign ministers of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia met in Ho chi Minh City in February, 1980. The three Indochinese countries presented themselves as a political and economic bloc. While the foreign policies of the LPDR and the PRK had been closely aligned with those of the SRV, and the government had been bound together by treaty of friendship; they now issued a joint communique stressing the identify of their views

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14. Geoffrey C. Gunn, "Foreign Relations of the Lao People's Democratic Republic: The ideological imperative", Asian Survey, 20(10), October, 1980, P. 1002.

on international problems'. China was described as the most dangerous enemy of the Indochinese people. While China, the USA and other reactionary forces maintained their hostility towards the Indochinese states, the presence of Vietnamese troops in Laos and Cambodia was 'very necessary' for their defence.

Politically, for instance, the three Indochinese foreign ministers met in Vientiane in July, 1990 to draw up joint proposals for settling the Kampuchean problem. The ensuing communique stressed a development that became obvious during the year -- the tendency of the Indochina countries to equate themselves a regional bloc to countreact the growth of ASEAN on the International scene. <sup>16</sup> The foreign ministers of Kampuchea, Laos and Vietnam, following their meeting on 28 January, 1981, proposed to the ASEAN countries the holding of a regional meeting between them and Indochina states to discuss problems of mutual concern in the interest of peace, stability, friendship and cooperation in South East Asia. In October 1981 on the eve of the meeting of the U.N. General Assembly, the Foreign Minister of Laos made a seven point proposal for regulating relations with ASEAN States in his ad

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15. Grant Evans & Kelvin rowley, Red Brotherhood at War: Indochina since the fall of Saigon, Verso Edition, London, 1984, P. 197.

16. Stanley Bedlington, "Laos ;in 1980: The portents are ominous", Asian Survey, January, 1981, P. 105-6.

dress at the U.N. The conference of Foreign Ministers of Kampuchea, Laos and Vietnam held on 17 February, 1982 reaffirmed these proposals.

In 1983 the consolidation of the trilateral strategic alliance among Laos, Kampuchea, and Vietnam, was taken to new heights by the convening of the first ever summit of government leaders, originally scheduled for December, 1982, the summit was reportedly postponed pending the outcome of Sino-Soviet talks. Instead, a preliminary meeting of deputy foreign ministers and planning officers met on December 9-10 to map out the summit agenda. In early February specialists met in Hanoi to consider economic policy. The summit itself was convened in Vietnam from February 22-23. Two major issues dominated the proceedings: policy on Kampuchea and regional economic cooperation. This summit was dealt with in a four point declaration and was followed in April by the convening in Phnom Penh of an extraordinary meeting of foreign ministers from Indochina. This was followed by the seventh regular meeting of Indochinese Ministers for Foreign Affairs in Phnom Penh in July.

The major guidelines for the LPDR's foreign policy were set at the Third Congress of the LPRP. Special solidarity with Kampu-

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17. P.C. Pradhan, Foreign Policy of Kampuchea, Radiant Publication, New Delhi, 1985, P. 209.

18. Carlyle A. Thayer, "Laos in 1983: Pragmatism in the Transition to Socialism", Asian Survey, 24(12), January, 1984, P. 56.

chea and Vientiane and all round cooperation with these countries was the main feature of the foreign policy of LPDR. Relations between Laos and People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) were reinforced by the visit of four important PRK groups: a National Assembly delegation led by Chea Sim in November, 1982, a military delegation led by Defence Minister Bou Thang in January, 1983, a party Propaganda and Training Board delegation in January and a Political Department delegation of the PRK Armed Forces led by its head, Meas Kroch in April, 1983. These delegations increasingly developed the more friendship relations between both countries. There were a number of pacts take place and also increased in trade relations between Cambodia and Laos.

Laos and Kampuchea reportedly reached an agreement on joint operations against anti-communist resistance movements in their border area. In addition, both sides, negotiated the repatriation of 2,000 Khmer refugees from Southern Laos.

In 1982, Laos supported the Heng Samrin government call for the formation of a coalition government of Kampuchea. Following the agreement for the formation of a coalition government of Kampuchea. Following the agreement for the formation of a coalition government of Kampuchea, the Foreign Ministers of the three Indochina states, after their meeting on 7 July, 1982, made a

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19. Ibid, P. 58.

territory of some countries in the region particularly Thailand. These forces had constantly restored to the policy of divide to rule and driven the ASEAN and Indochina states into a state of confrontation.

Laos and Kampuchea reportedly reached an agreement in the three Indochinese plan for economic cooperation. The three Indochinese planning directors coordinated plans for 1986-90, and in June 1986 the three nations agreed to assist the world wide life fund in preserving an endangered DX, the Kouprey.

Laos continued its effort to solve Kampuchean problem. Being an Indochina "Fraternal junior partner" greatly limited Laos's flexibility in diplomatic and international economic arenas, overriding everything was its associated with Vietnamese "volunteers" in Cambodia. Laos joined Cambodia and USSR in an Hanoi sponsored Cambodian Reconciliation policy, a policy adjustment unacceptable to China, the U.S. and Thailand.

In a significant move to resolve the political impasse with regard to the Kampuchean conflict, Indonesia hosted the Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) which convened on July 25, 1988 marked the first face to face talks between the four Kampuchean factions since the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnam. Several other

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23. Charles a Joiner, "Laos in 1987: New Economic Management Confronts the Bureaucracy", Asian Survey, 28(1), January, 1988, P. 102.

countries including Lao were also invited in this meeting. Laos actively participated in JIM to solve Kampuchean problem.

Thus Laos being a member of Indochinese federation played an active role in solving the Kampuchean problem. As Laos being a neighbouring country of Cambodia, it always wanted a peaceful and stable solution for Kampuchean problem. Laos knows that a peaceful and stable Cambodia would always be helpful in developing good relations between the two countries.

## CHAPTER-VII

### RELATIONS WITH BURMA

Laos and Burma share a common border of 238 kilometer (148 miles). Burma is situated to the west of Mekong River border of Laos. Laos has ancient links with Burma. Burma dominated northern Laos for the sixteenth century and is of great importance in politics of Luang Prabang and Vientiane as well.<sup>1</sup>

Laos and Burma share common history, culture, tradition, ethnicity and religious. Burmese minority live in Loatian hilly areas and speak Tibeto-Burmese language. Buddhism is dominant religion in both countries. Both countries were ruled by different colonial powers. While Burma was colonized by Britishers, Laos was under French rule. But culturally both countries remained close to each other.

Laos and Burma have along the border of Thailand a common area which is famous for opium growing and known as the 'golden triangle'. This area is famous for opium growing in the world and a common problem for both Burma and Laos. In Laos and Burma, as in Thailand, the opium is grown massively and exported outside.

In terms of total output, the various Meo groups are easily the largest producers of opium in Laos. In July of 1967 a small opium war erupted in Laos. One of the Shan rebel groups which had

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1. Nina S. Adams & Alfred W. McCoy, (ed), Laos : War & Revolution, Harper & Row Publishers, London, 1970, P. 55.



began using opium sales to finance its decade old fight for independence against Burmese government, decided to bring its opium into Thailand via Laos rather than by the more usual and direct route straight across the border from the Shan states in Burma.<sup>2</sup> During 1960s, the influence of opium and the millions of dollars involved in its trade dominated the policies of the Country. During the Indochina war, opium from Laos played a keyrole in financing the operation of Viet Minh and in Burma the money from opium were used in insurgency against the Burmese government. Later Burmese government sought the U.S. support to prevent illegal trade and cropping of opium. The opium trade can best be understood not as a single trade sphere, but as two distinct trade spheres, meshing with each other between both countries at certain key points. In the highlands, opium was used both for currency and consumption. Debts were paid with it, rice was bought with it, and it was acceptable tender in most hill vil-  
lages from laos to Burma during 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup>

Burma has always had cordial relations with Laos. After getting independence both countries announced to adopt policy of neutrality in their foreign policy. Laos was quickly recognized by Burma after the establishment of newly independent Royal Government of Laos on August, 16, 1954, and a year later the two

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2. Ibid, P. 323.

3. Ibid, P. 324.

states established diplomatic relations. Although there was no appreciable legal commerce between the two, the opium trade that originated in the Poppy fields of the "golden triangle" - shan state, northern Thailand, and northwest Laos - brought Burma and Laos together in a way that was bound to create difficulties. Burma wanted the trade curbed to keep the product away from its own society. The "golden triangle" became a major center for the supply of the illegal world of narcotics trade and was impossible for any one government to control it. The illegal trade remained an uncontrolled problem in the relations of all nations involved.

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4. Josef Silverstein, Burma: Military rule and the Politics of Stagnation, Cornell University Press, New York, 1977, P. 186.

Series of the Laotian governments, which were formed including the first in power after the conclusion of the first Vietnam war, had shared Burma's attachment to the policy of neutrality. While Burma's foreign policy freely adopted and applied according to national interest, Laos's was restricted by the terms of the 1954 Geneva Agreement and limited by the conflicting power interests of intervening foreign states, including the unsolicited protective shield offered by the Protocol of the South East Asia  
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collective Defense Treaty.

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5. Ibid P., 186.

In April, 1961, Burma accepted an invitation to participate at Geneva in a fourteen nation international conference for the settlement of the Laotian question. Thus Burma was always concerned about Laotian problems.

Generally, relations between Burma and Laos had been good, in contrast to Burma's relation with Thailand during 1970s. But there was some confusion over the U.S. involvement to use Burma as a base in struggle against North Vietnam and the secret war in Laos.

Burma established its diplomatic relationship with Laos in 1975. President of Burma Ne Win's first visited Laos from 22 to 24 October, 1979. The security along the 248 kilometers common land border was the main issue of talks between the two countries. Ne Win's speech delivered at the banquet given by Souphanouvang on 22 October emphasized that nations should refrain from activities that might prove to be detrimental to others. He said "on Burma's part also, we wish to have relations of peace and amity with all nations especially with our neighbours. That wish has consistently guided our endeavours." Ne Win laid special stress on preserving national independence and the territorial integrity of nations which had once been under the heel of foreign powers. He said "when the peoples of Burma and Laos were

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6. Aung Kin, "Burma in 1979: Socialism with Foreign aid and Strict neutrality", South East Asia Affairs, IEAS, Singapore, 1980, P. 110.

under foreign domination, unable to shape their own destiny, they suffered innumerable hardships and deprivations in all areas of life".

In the Joint communique issued on 24 October, 1979, the Burmese government attached great importance to its border with Laos. Both Burma and Laos agreed to make further efforts for a "true and durable peace along their common border" in order that it would become "an important factor for promoting mutually beneficial cooperation" for fostering the common interest of both countries and for promoting peace and stability in the region.

Ne Win tried to bring home the fact that Laos must preserve its independence in order not to become a pawn in the big-power game. It should be noted that Ne Win's first visit to Laos came only a few weeks after Burma withdrew from NAM in protest against pro-Soviet moves. After years of determined efforts to maintain a delicate balance between China and Vietnam, Laos still increasingly came under Vietnam-Soviet influence. Till 1979, Burma tried to strike a balance between Moscow and Beijing, but gradually inclined towards China.

Burma tried to maintain a good relationship with Laos despite its closeness to Vietnam. Burma occasionally gave rice, Paddy seed and salt to Laos as a token of friendship and Lao official

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7. Ibid, P. 110.

frequently stop at Rangoon on their way to and from Moscow or other capitals.

Foreign Ministers of Burma Lay Mounng visited Laos in September, 1980 on his way to Thailand. In addition to other brief stopovers in Rangoon, the Lao Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Phoume Sipaseuth, visited Burma in June, 1981.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Laos and Burma both maintained their friendship during 1975-88 despite their closeness to Vietnam and China respectively. While Laotian policies were much influenced by Vietnamese Socialists ideas, Burma was influenced by Chinese policies during these years.

Being a land-locked country Laos has to be dependent on any of its neighbours for a passage to sea ports. Burma proved very useful ally to give access to its sea ports. Laos gave importance to the Burmese ideas regarding Indochina region because Burma wanted to maintain good relations with all the countries of Indochina including Laos. Both countries felt that it was necessary to maintain peace and stability in whole south east Asia region for their progress and development, hence made joint endeavours to maintain peace and stability in this regions.

As both Burma and Laos are the small countries of south

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8. Rober Cooper "Laos in 1982: A good year all round", South East Asian Affairs, IEAS, Singapore, 1983, P. 187.

east Asia region and they feels that it would be helpful in their interest to make the south East Asian region peaceful and neutral. Both countries have time and again made efforts to solve Cambodian problem

## CHAPTER-VIII

### CONCLUSION

The various factors which are important in determining the foreign policy of Laos have been history, culture, traditions, religion and geopolitics. They have indeed played significant role in shaping the course of foreign policy, but ideological factors had dominated the course of foreign relations during 1975-88. As a communist country the ideological factors of communist fraternity influenced the Laotian foreign policy more than any other factors. It was apparant that the prevailing ideological moorings of the communists, who came to power in 1975 were more important. Thus Laos patronised the Marxist-Leninist parties of its socialist neighbours and mentors like Vietnamese Comrades and Chinese Comrades were given importacce.

As a successor of the Vietnamese communist Party and the Indochinese Communist Party LPRP chose similar path and the same ideology. VCP had a major contribution in Laotian freedom struggle and in establishing the communist regime in Laos. So it was natural that Laos was associated more with Vietnam. Laos had generally followed the foreign policy line of Vietnam, which had been more closely linked to the Soviet Union.

The close relations with Vietnam had its roots in history as it had fought together with Vietnam for their freedom struggle. On both Party and government levels, Laos and Vietnam, continued to show the complete identity of purpose and action characteristic of a single seat of decision making. Laotian relations with

Vietnam became more close when in July 1977 a 'Special Friendship Treaty' was signed by both countries for a period of twenty years. Thus Vietnam had given a special status of friendship to Laos, which prevailed upto 1988. With the signing of twenty-five years treaty of trade, defence and military cooperation Laos made a strong pact with Vietnam to protect its territorial integrity. Laos also invited Vietnamese troops in the country to secure its border against the possibility of chinese attack. As Laos is a tiny state with a long and virtually indefensible border with Thailand and China, it was needed that Loatian government itself had a strong interest in military cooperation with Vietnam. The treaty legitimized the presence of Vietnamese troops who had been stationed in the country for many years. It was the presence of the troops that was regarded as the main proof of Vietnamese domination over Laos. The treaty also provided duty free access to the port of Da Nang and interest free loans to Vientiane. Vietnam was the second largest aid donor country after the USSR to Laos during 1975-88.

Laos had always favoured Vietnamese policies on Vietnam-Cambodia conflict and Vietnam-China War. However, initially Laos tried to balance its relations among these countries but ultimately set its tone in favour of Vietnam. Laos had also followed Vietnamese line in solving Cambodian problem. Thus Vietnamese domination clearly showed in all aspects of Laotian policies during the period 1975-88.



Although Laos had generally followed the foreign policy line of Vietnam, which had been closely linked to the USSR than China, the LPDR had made an effort to maintain good relations with both the Soviets and the Chinese, caustiously straddling the Sino-Soviet dispute. Laos had recognized the fact that it could not afford to cast its lot definitively with Soviet or Vietnam on issues affecting China.

From 1975 to 1978 the LPDR links with China were cordial but distant. But as soon as Laos signed 'Special Friendship Treaty' with Vietnam, the distance between the two countries began to increase. When the conflict between Vietnam and China came to the surface, Laos initially tried to keep distance in the same way as it had over the Vietnam-Cambodian conflict. But as all the disputes became interlocked so the Laos eventually had to shift its position. Laos had set its tone in favour of Vietnam more and accused China to be an imperialist. On the other side Peking reacted strongly, accusing Moscow and Hanoi of trying to 'Poison relations between China and Laos'.

After that LPDR's relations with China increasingly strained after 1979. In the beginning of 1980 Vietnam succeeded to enforce Heng Samrin government in Cambodia, which was immediately recognized by Laos. This event was analysed as the failure of Chinese strategy in Indochina region. As Laos supported Vietnamese policy on Cambodian issue, its relations with China continued to deteriorate. Tension prevailed on Sino-Lao border in 1981, and Peking radio proclaimed that Vietnam had colonized Laos and turned it

into a base of its anti-china operations. However, Laos categorically refuted these charges. There were also reports of Chinese backed insurgencies in Laos. But Laos tried to maintain good relations with China. In 1988 the exchange of ambassadors between the two countries and the announcement of Vietnamese troops withdrawal from Cambodia and Laos helped to cease the tension between both countries. China also helped Laos to achieve its modern shape. Bilateral trade also flowed between two countries during 1975-1988. Thus it can be seen that Chinese had never any serious grievances with Laos, but China had always discontention with Vietnamese domination over Laos during the period 1975-88.

After the establishment of Vietnamese supported Heng Samrin Government in Cambodia, Vietnamese polices in Indochina got dominant position in the region. Vietnam had thus succeeded in its basic strategy of resisting Chinese posture. It had created a viable ally in Cambodia and consolidated its close relationship with Laos. This regional alliance of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam was underpinned by substantial material support from the USSR and this Soviet commitment placed a further constraint on Chinese actions against the Indochinese states.

Laos forged special relations with Vietnam and extended its cooperation to the latter on the issue of Cambodia. Its stand on Cambodia was to oppose rebel groups and support the pro-Vietnam regime. Initially Vietnam and Laos had good relations with Khmer Rouge, but as the Pol Pot regime came under the influence of

China, Cambodia-Vietnam relations began to deteriorate. Thereafter Vietnam-Cambodia border clashes began in 1977. Laos tried to maintain a balance between the two countries and also emphasized to solve the problem between Vietnam and Cambodia through reconciliation, but could not succeed. When Vietnam overthrew the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia and installed Heng Samrin regime in its place, Laos quickly recognized the new regime. There after Lao-tian relations with Cambodia developed under the shadow of Vietnam. Both countries became a close friend of Indochinese fraternity. Laos always tried to solve Cambodian problem and it was seriously involved in every important meeting related to Cambodian peace talk. Laos has also bilateral trade relations with Cambodia during 1975-88.

Laos had managed to keep its relations cordial with non-communist countries also. Thailand was of vital importance for Laos, because of Laos's traditional dependence trade in rice and other products across the Mekong River border and upon Thai ports and roads for overseas commerce. Thai-Lao relations began to improve ever since 1975.

Following the military coup in Thailand in October, 1977, which ousted Thanin, the new government of General Kriangsak Chamanand initiated a marked improvement in Thai-Lao relations. Although it barred certain "strategic" military supplies, it restored most of the transit trade to Laos and lifted the prohibition on private commerce with Laos. The Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak's policy was to maintain some Thai influence in Vienti-

ane to counter balance the Vietnamese influence. However, the solidification of an Indochinese bloc of States over 1979, and then the fall of Kriangsak in February, 1980, made it increasingly difficult for either state to isolate bilateral issues from regional one. Thus a mid June 1980 shooting incident on the Mekong border was linked to a Vietnamese incursion across the Cambodian border into Thailand and led the Thais to close their border with Laos. The Thai purpose of the closure of Thai-Laos border was to make Laos realize that it was more dependent on Thailand than on Vietnam.

During 1981-82, in a distinct policy shift, Thailand wanted to maintain a peaceful and coordinate relations with Laos. Year 1982 saw a remarkable change in Thai policy towards the Laos and had probably been the best year in term of Thai-Laos relations since the establishment of LPDR. Throughout the year the Thai trade and aid goods continued to flow into markets and projects of Laos. But in 1984 there was an unprecedented sharpening of the border conflict between the Laos and Thailand over the three village disputes, which are situated at the Laos-Thai border.

Other major problem between the two countries was refugees problem which was tried to be resolved by both countries. However, LPDR had always wanted to maintain normal relations with Thailand because of its own economic realities. The trade relations between the two countries were continued during the period 1975-88 and Thailand was the largest trade partner of Laos.

In 1985-86, Thailand adopted liberal attitudes towards Laos and the bilateral trade increased considerably. In the fourth Congress of LPRP in November, 1986, it was called for 'improved relations' with Thailand. The adoption of new economic policies in Laos and announcement of the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and Laos led to the improvement in relations between Laos and Thailand. Both countries also agreed to settle the border dispute by negotiation in 1988. Circumstances prevailed over Laos to turn once again to Thailand. Because of Vietnam's own poor economic conditions and a large cut in aid from Soviet Union, Laos needed Thailand for aid and assistance, and so it invited Thailand and other ASEAN countries for investment in Laos.

As Thailand is one of the most important countries of ASEAN, Laos saw great possibilities for its own development. Thailand also wanted to make its market in Indochina region and it found Laos most appropriate country for investment as Laos is full of natural resources.

Laos' relations with Burma were merely concerned with border issues as both share a common border. Both the countries were concerned about their common border security problems during the period 1975-88. Burma also helped Laos with a small aid of rice and salt.

Thus as a small, weak and land locked state, Laos had frequently found that its destiny had been decided by the political developments in the region, particularly the bordering states

during 1975-1988. Its strategic location in South-east Asia did not allow it to retreat into isolation. Laos had a dubious distinction of sharing border with all the major states of the region- China, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma and Cambodia. Involvement in their disputes was inescapable, though Laos itself had little to gain from other people's quarrels.

So it can be concluded that the foreign policy of land-locked Laos after 1975 was dictated by the conjunctural interaction of all largest states in the surroundings of Laos. Given the long and close working relationship with Vietnam it was not surprising that Laos supported it when march of events finally forced a choice.

Laos is trying to introduce democracy and market economy in its political system. It has invited the cooperation of the non-communist world in its programme of nation-building and expressed support for the ASEAN concord of amity and cooperation.

Though communist ideology provided the motivating spirits in the conduct of its foreign policy till the end of 1980s but presently peace, freedom and neutrality are the guiding principles. It is trying to support the ASEAN views more than any single country in the region. It indeed gives equal importance to Thailand, China and Vietnam.

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