CHAPTER VI
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STEPS TOWARDS A SETTLEMENT

Politics of Escalation

The fighting in Laos was punctuated with peace proposals. In view of the continued fighting, the move towards negotiations appeared futile. Any proposal was followed by a new escalation or severe bombing. The pattern of politics of escalation was repeated. As Laos was linked to the Vietnam war, a settlement was not in sight unless there was a solution to the Vietnam problem. The Paris peace talks had started in 1968 to bring a negotiated settlement to end the Vietnam war. The progress made at Paris had its impact on the talks between the Royal Laotian Government (HLC) and the Pathet Lao. Alternatively, when the progress at Paris stalled, the talks at Vientiane did not yield anything. The task in Laos was made easier to an extent, because after 1954 Geneva Conference there had been agreements (like 1956-57 Vientiane agreements and 1962 Geneva Accords) resulting in the formation of coalition Governments.

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The beginning of the Paris peace talks had an immediate impact on Laos. Souvanna Phouma sent a letter to Souphanouvong in February 1969 through the Soviet Ambassador Viktor Minin. Minin took the message to Sam Neua, first going to Hanoi by plane and then travelling by road to Sam Neua and another Soviet official spoke to Souvanna about a possible settlement. Another move was made by Le Van Kien, the North Vietnamese Ambassador to Laos, in June 1969. China and North Vietnam had left only charge d'affaires at Vientiane after the Pathet Lao had taken the position that the coalition Government of 1962 had lost its validity. Hien returned to Vientiane after a lapse of four years. He wanted Souvanna to put pressure to the United States to stop bombing over Laos. To conciliate Souvanna, Hien said that Hanoi had regarded him as the Prime Minister of the coalition Government. Souvanna did not agree to the bombing halt as it was


4 The events in 1964 had destroyed the 1962 Geneva Accords according to the Pathet Lao. 20 Years of Lao People’s Revolutionary Struggle (n.p., Neo Lao Dak Sat Publications, 1966), p. 16.

directed against the Pathet Lao, who were fighting against the NLF. Later on he agreed to the bombing halt in the Ho Chi Minh trail area only, in return for the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese troops. But from the North Vietnamese point of view the cessation of bombing along the trail area was most important to allow the supply convoys to move to South Vietnam. The interdiction of the traffic along the trail area had been the major aim of the United States, so, the trail question, which was linked to the Vietnam war proved to be an obstacle for starting the negotiations. Just after the meeting of Hien and Souvanna, fierce fighting took place in the Plain of Jars area. On 6 February 1970 Souvanna proposed for neutralization of the Plain and himself wanted to go to Hanoi for negotiations. But, in the same month there was massive B-52 bombing on the Plain of Jars to deny control of it to the Pathet Lao. This 'politics of escalation' again thwarted the peace-proposal given by the Pathet Lao in March 1970, when there was a coup in Cambodia. The Central Committee of the Neo Lao Hak Sat proposed on 6 March a five-point formula for finding a political solution to the problem. The proposal said:

The "five points" advocate the respect of Laos' sovereignty, independence, neutrality, unity, and territorial integrity as provided

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6 Lao Press, 6 February 1970.
for by the 1962 Geneva agreement, and the end of US intervention and aggression in Laos, the implementation of an external policy of peace and neutrality for Laos... election to the National Assembly and the establishment of a government of genuine peace and national union... renunciation by the concerned parties to use armed forces in dealing with each other. (7)

The Pathet Lao had regarded the original coalition as invalid after the integration of the rightist and the neutralist forces by Souvanna. So, they demanded fresh elections. Another important demand was the end of the US intervention in Laos. On the same day, when the Pathet Lao had put forward the five-point proposal, Nixon stated that he had written to the Soviet Union and Great Britain for consultations among the Geneva signatories.3 The Soviet Union rejected the American proposal and (as the Pathet Lao had demanded) insisted that there should be consultations among the different factions of Laos. On 9 March 1970, Souphanouvong wired Souvanna giving details of the five-point proposal and expressed a desire to send

7 Central Committee of the Neo Lao Hak Sat, Nixon's Intensified Special War in Laos (n.p., Neo Lao Hak Sat editions, 1972), pp. 72-73.

a representative to Vientiane. But any talks for negotiations could not take place because of the coup in Cambodia nine days afterwards.

The proposal of Souphanouvong on 12 June 1970 modifying complete bombing halt by partial bombing halt showed some prospects of starting negotiations. On 31 July 1970, Prince Souk Vongsa, the Pathet Lao representative came to Vientiane to have talks with Souvanna. Souvanna agreed to meet Souphanouvong after the meeting of delegates at Khang Khay. But the talks could not proceed as both the sides put conditions prior to starting of any negotiations. Bombing issue always played a central role in the negotiations and was a leverage in the hands of the FLC. Souk Vongsa had many rounds of talks with Souvanna’s representative, Pheng Phongsavan, the Minister of Interior. He departed for Sam Neua on

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9 Joint Publication Research Service, Translations on South and East Asia, no. 252, 3 April 1970, p. 11. On the same day, in an interview with the ‘Le Figaro’, Soth Pethreat, the Pathet Lao representative said: "...What we ask of Prince Souvanna Phouma is to tell the Americans that they must unconditionally stop all their shellings over the whole of Lao territory in order to create circumstances favourable to the starting of consultations between the three factions." Ibid., p. 13.

10 In reply to Souphanouvong’s proposal of 12 June, Souvanna said: "I once again inform you that my representatives are ready to meet yours to discuss all problems, including the question of bombing halt. I hereby propose Khang Khay as the place to meet each other." See, “Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma Replies to Pathet Lao”, Topical Reports (Bangkok), 7 July 1970, p. 132.
22 January 1971 blaming the PGC for sabotaging the talks. The National Assembly was viewing with concern the attempts by Souvanna to reopen negotiations with the Pathet Lao. It was dominated by the rightist generals. They attempted an abortive coup in December 1970. Another attempt by the rightist leaders to frustrate any attempts at negotiations was a proposal by Ngon Sananikone on 14 January. He wrote to Souvanna asking for a setting up of a defence community between South Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos against Communist aggression. Souvanna did not agree. But what the rightists had wanted, happened in February 1971, when South Vietnam invaded Laos without the knowledge of Souvanna. The invasion baulked the peace attempts. This incursion by the South Vietnamese and American ground troops was another example of 'politics of escalation'. Nixon on 7 October 1970 had called for widening of peace in Indochina. In "The New Initiative for Peace in Southeast Asia", Nixon called for a ceasefire in Indochina and said: "The U.S. has never sought to widen the war. What we do seek is to widen the peace." After four months he had agreed to an incursion on a massive scale of southern Laos.


Another reason for not reaching any meaningful solution was the obstructive role of the United States embassy at Vientiane. The members of political section as opposed to C. McMuntrie Codley, the ambassador were in favour of a lenient attitude towards the Pathet Lao. The head of the political section sent feelers to the Pathet Lao that the United States could agree to halt in bombing in return for a ceasefire; he was transferred after two weeks. The talks between the Pathet Lao and the NLF were resumed in May 1971. The National Assembly had shed its earlier hostile tone. Ten deputies moved a resolution calling for the opening of negotiations with the Pathet Lao. Souvanna agreed in the Assembly saying that he would enter into meaningful discussions with the Pathet Lao and there would be exchange of views for national reconstruction. Souk Vongsak had come back to Vientiane in May 1971. In June 1971, the Pathet Lao demanded cessation of bombing as well as

13 Charles A. Stevenson, The End of Nowhere, American Policy Towards Laos since 1954 (Boston, 1972), p. 237. A diplomat told reporters, "We are fighting a war here. The political section doesn't understand this. They keep making such ridiculous suggestions as that we should accept a widespread bombing halt." Ibid.

14 Author's interview with Princess Mme Stiplitz, daughter of Souvanna Phouma at Bangkok, 15 July 1977.

15 Lao Pressa, 12 May 1971.
ceasefire for starting negotiations. Souvanna in turn suggested a ceasefire around the Plain of Jars area. The Pathet Lao did not agree to this. In August 1971, Souk Vongsaak left for Sam Neua.

Climate of Understanding

In the international sphere, the rapprochement between the United States and the Soviet Union on the one hand, and the United States and China on the other, brought about a climate of understanding. This rapprochement led to the Paris agreements on Vietnam, and Laos did benefit from this. One commentator rightly remarked: "In accordance with the triangle dynamics, an understanding providing for US disengagement, reached between the United States and Moscow on the one hand and Peking on the other, took the wind out of the sails of the Indochina conflict." Agreements in international sphere reduced the level of conflict in Indochina. In their search for understanding, the Soviet Union as well as China lodged only verbal protests against the United

16 In the same month, Hanoi at a secret meeting with the US in Paris had given a proposal of ceasefire in Laos and Cambodia. See, Jay Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking’s Relations with Revolutionary Movements (New York, 1974), p. 173.

States for its military action in Indochina. Reacting to this, editorial of the "Vłan Doan wrote in anguish: "The imperialists pursue a policy of détente with some big countries to have a free hand...to bully the small countries and stamp out the national liberation movement."

In the early 1970s, the process of rapprochement between China and the United States started growing. Until this period, the United States' aim had been to keep China out of the Indochinese region and its major cause of involvement had been containment of Communism. As early as March 1969, Nixon was conveying to China his interest in improving Sino-American relations. The Cambodian crisis in April 1970 stalled the progress in improvement of relations between China and the United States. Mao in conversation with Edgar Snow on 13 December 1970 said that between the "Chinese and Americans there need be no prejudices" and explained that Nixon would be welcomed to visit China as the problems between "China and the USA would have to be solved with Nixon".

18 Vietnam Courier, September 1972, p. 5.
incursion took place in February 1971, China only lodged a strong-worded protest to the United States. The People's Daily wrote that Nixon's statement that the US action did not present any threat to China was "an attempt to tie the hands of the Chinese people in supporting the Laotian people" and warned that China would not remain "indifferent to such rabid acts of aggression on the part of US imperialism". 21 An American table-tennis team visited China in April 1971. On 9 July 1971 Henry Kissinger went on a secret visit to China to have talks with Chou En-lai to prepare the way for Nixon's visit. 22 The Sino-Soviet rift had further widened after the Usauri river clashes in March 1969. Because of their conflict, both China and the Soviet Union wanted to improve relations with the United States. China did not attend the World Communist Conference in June 1969. Sino-Soviet rift was clearly manifest in the events of 1971 in the

21 Peking Review, 26 February 1971, vol. 14, p. 6. The members of the Politburo, Chang Chun-chao and Hsu Hsih-yu in their speeches said that the Indochinese situation was excellent and there was no menace to China. See, Taylor, n. 16, p. 171.

22 For details of this secret trip see, Kalb and Kalb, n. 19, pp. 243 ff.

Indian sub-continent. China criticized the role of India and the Soviet Union in the happenings over the then East Pakistan in late 1971. The emergence of Bangladesh and the support to Pakistan by China and the United States was viewed by the Soviet Union as "the first joint defeat of the USA and China in the struggle with the national liberation movement". After the announcement of Nixon's visit to China, the Soviet Union in October 1971 invited Nixon to visit Moscow. Nixon visited China from 21 to 23 February and the Soviet Union from 22 to 30 May in the year 1972. Both China and the Soviet Union while pursuing their policy of rapprochement with the United States realized that their relationship with it was more important than the events in Indochina. Moscow welcomed Nixon in spite of the United States' blockade of Haiphong and bombing of North Vietnam in May 1972. China merely protested the blockade and bombing. The impact of Sino-American rapprochement was

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24 The Chinese Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien said: "In the past few days, because the Indian Government, supported and encouraged by social-imperialism, has been carrying out subversive activities and military provocations against East Pakistan, the tension in the Sub-continent has been aggravated." Peking Review, vol. 14, no. 49, 3 December 1971, p. 29.

a contributing factor in the United States’ disengagement from Indochina. China gradually shed its revolutionary support, which was obvious in 1950s and 1960s. It paid only lip service to the cause of revolutionary movements in Indochina. Peking applied pressures on Hanoi in late 1972 to agree to a settlement and even threatened to cut off aid.26 When the agreement on Laos was signed in 1973, China welcomed it and did not criticize the United States unlike the Pathet Lao.27 The Soviet Union, whose influence in Laos, was not as much compared to the earlier period (1961-62), tried to bring about a settlement in Laos in 1972-73. There was a limited increase in military aid by both the Soviet Union and China in 1972; the aim of which was to prevent Hanoi to tilt to either side.28 This was done without disrupting their relations with the United States. When the United States resumed bombing in May 1972, China and the Soviet Union did not do anything to prevent it.

**Proposals for Negotiations**

Both North Vietnam and the United States, who were negotiating for a settlement over South Vietnam,

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26 Hinton, n. 23, p. 140.
28 Hinton, n. 23, p. 113.
encouraged the Pathet Lao and the KLC to reach an understanding. In the beginning of 1972, the Pathet Lao reaffirmed the five-point peace proposal of March 1970. They were in far stronger position as the Plain of Jars was under their control and two-thirds of the whole Laotian territory belonged to them. In July 1972, Souvanna agreed to the Pathet Lao's five-point proposal as the basis for discussions. The Pathet Lao and the neutralists (pro-Pathet Lao) agreed to send Souk Vongsak on 10 July to Vientiane. The Minister for Interior Pheng Phongsavan was the KLC representative. In September, the Pathet Lao dropped their earlier demand that cessation of bombing should be a pre-condition for talks—this was an important concessions by the Pathet Lao.

In October 1972, Le Duc Tho in a secret meeting with Kissinger at Paris put forward a draft agreement for


30 *Asia Research Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 3, August 1972, p. 1098. Souphanouvong wrote to Souvanna that Vongsak was being sent to "continue exchange of views with you on present urgent problems which preoccupy both our people". Ibid.

31 Author's interview with Sane Grancouvong, Director of 'Khao San Pathet Lao' (Pathet Lao News Agency) at Vientiane, 27 June 1977.
a solution to the Vietnam problem. While insisting on the American withdrawal and ceasefire, North Vietnam gave an important concession in not demanding a coalition Government in South Vietnam, and put forward the demand to institute a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord with a unanimity basis. This easing of tension at Paris Talks resulted in the beginning of first round of talks between the Pathet Lao and the NLF on 17 October 1972. Another favourable factor was the result of elections held on 2 June 1972 in the NLF-controlled territory. Only one-third deputies of earlier National Assembly could retain their seats. Most of the deputies belonging to the Sananikone and Champassak families lost in the elections – this reflected "war-weariness and corruption" in the NLF.\(^{33}\) The important difference between the two parties was over the nature of the Government that was to be set up pending the elections. The NLF wanted the restoration of the tripartite coalition Government of 1962.\(^{34}\) The Pathet


\(^{33}\) Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 21-23 October 1972, p. 255733.

\(^{34}\) The other demands of the NLF were the implementation of the 1962 Geneva Accords by all (especially by Hanoi), the dissociation of the Pathet Lao from the Indochinese front, and a ceasefire. Asia Research Bulletin, vol. 2, no. 6, November 1972, p. 1326.
Lao had maintained that the coalition Government had lost its sanctity by the incidents of 1964, when there was an abortive coup and integration of the rightist and the neutralist forces. They put forward the proposal of a new provisional coalition Government and in line with Hanoi’s proposal of 8 October 1972 for a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, the Pathet Lao demanded a Political Consultative Council. 35 The National Assembly was viewed as illegal by the Pathet Lao as they had not participated in the elections leading to its formation. The areas of agreement for both the parties were ceasefire and withdrawal of foreign military personnel. On 23 October Phoumi Yongvichit came to Vientiane to deal directly with Souvanna.

The negotiations between both the parties continued. But any progress seemed to be not possible due to the breakdown of talks in Paris. Both North Vietnam and the United States had agreed to sign an agreement on 31 October 1972. This did not materialize. 36 On


36 For details see, Kalb and Kalb, n. 19, pp. 354 ff.
11 November 1972 Phoumi Vongvichit left Vientiane as there was no progress in the talks. The Lao Lian Ambassador to Thailand Bhattana Vichit said that an agreement reached between the United States and the two Vietnams would speed up a peace settlement in Laos.\textsuperscript{37} However, on 12 December 1972 the Pathet Lao put forward its earlier proposal again and seven days afterwards, the FLC presented its proposal. The signing of the Paris agreements on Vietnam for Ending the War and Restoring Peace on 27 January 1973 speeded up the negotiations in Laos. This agreement contained provisions dealing with Laos and Cambodia. Article 20 said that the parties that signed the Paris agreements would "respect the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Cambodia and the 1962 Geneva Agreements on Laos", and "undertake to refrain from using the territory of Cambodia and the territory of Laos to encroach on the sovereignty and security of one another and of other countries".\textsuperscript{38} This Article also stated that internal affairs of Laos and Cambodia would be settled without foreign intervention.

\textsuperscript{37} Bangkok Post, 3 December 1972.

In their private discussions, Le Duc Tho assured Kissinger that a ceasefire in Laos would follow within twenty days. North Vietnam also agreed to take out all its troops from Laos. An agreement was in the offing in Laos. Souvanna Phouma had visited New Delhi. It was reported that Indira Gandhi making use of India's close ties with the Soviet Union persuaded Souvanna to expedite a settlement in Laos. Phoumi Vongvichit, the Pathet Lao representative came back to Vientiane on 3 February 1973. The United States wanted to stop bombing in Laos before the meeting of twelve-party conference on Vietnam at Paris from 26 February to 12 March 1973. It put pressure on Souvanna to sign an agreement and warned the rightists that bombing would stop by 25 February 1973. The rightists yielded to the United States' pressures as there would be no more of improving their military position without the help of American bombing. North Vietnam

39 Brown and Zasloff, n. 35, p. 261. Kissinger on 24 January said that there was understanding over "certain developments that happen with respect to Laos". Dawn (Karachi), 31 July 1973.

40 Hinton, n. 23, p. 165.


42 Hinton, n. 23, p. 166.
also pressured the Pathet Lao to propose immediate ceasefire. Some rightist leaders like Sisavat na Champassak made a last ditch attempt to foil the signing of an agreement but could not succeed. On 21 February 1973, an agreement on Restoring Peace and Achieving National Concord was signed by Phoumi Vongvichit and Pheng Phongsavan.

The February 1973 Agreement

The important provisions of this agreement were observation of ceasefire, withdrawal of foreign troops, establishment of a new Provisional Government of National Union and National Political Council of Coalition, neutralization of royal capital of Luang Prabang and the city of Vientiane and establishment of a coalition commission for implementation of the agreement. Article 1 stipulated that the 1962 Geneva Accords should be respected by the Lao factions, the United States, Thailand, and other foreign

countries. The military provisions included an observation of ceasefire, end of bombing, and prohibition of introduction into Laos of military personnel, troops and armaments and war material of foreign countries (except for the ones provided by the 1954 and 1962 Agreements). Within a month of the signing of agreement, the provisional coalition Government and a political council would be set up pending the elections. The members in the coalitions would comprise "representatives of the Vietslane government side and of the Patriotic Forces side in equal numbers". The composition of the political council would also comprise of equal number of members taken from both the sides. In both the cases, the principle of unanimity would be observed. The implementation of the agreement rested with both the parties, who would establish immediately "a Commission to implement the agreement with an equal numbers of representatives from each side". The ICC would help in this. The ICC set up after the 1962 Geneva Accords was retained. The whole agreement went into force from the date of its signing.

46 Ibid., p. 4.
47 Ibid., p. 6.
48 Ibid., p. 7.
49 Ibid., p. 9.
The agreement was an outright victory for the Pathet Lao. It bore a close similarity with their five-point proposal of 6 March 1970. The Pathet Lao's demand that Souvanna Phouma and his neutralists would be called the "Vientiane party" as they had merged with the rightists was met. The tripartite structure of the 1962 Geneva Accords was no more there. There were only the "Vientiane side" and "the Patriotic Forces". The neutralists who were with the Pathet Lao constituted the real centre. The demand of the Pathet Lao for a National Political Council of Coalition (NPCC), which was rejected by Souvanna earlier came into being. The NPCC would have control over the Provisional Government of National Union (PGNU). Even, in Article 1 the name of North Vietnam was not mentioned in observing the peace and neutrality of Laos, whereas the mention of Thailand and the United States was there.50 The NLC scored a point when the name of the United States was omitted from the agreement, while referring to the bombing in Laos.51 Luang Prabang and Vientiane was neutralized so that the Pathet Lao could station their troops there. The principle of unanimity in both PGNU

50 Ibid., p. 4.

51 Article 2(A) stipulated: "Foreign countries will cease completely and permanently the bombing of all Lao territory...". Ibid., p. 5.
and NPCC was conceded by the RLG. The Pathet Lao also
got their demand of maintaining separate zones of
administration before the elections. The Pathet Lao could
not but be happy. They summed up their achievements in
the following:

The NLHS led by Prince Souphanouvong has tire-
lessly led the Lao people in the struggle to
defend and build up the liberated zone which
covers two-thirds of the country with half of
its population, turning it into the bulwark for
the struggle to defeat the U.S. imperialists,
to let the Vietname government sign the
Agreement on Restoring Peace and Achieving
National Concord on Laos on February 21,
1973. (52)

The provisions of the agreement were violated as
soon as it was signed. It proved to be no boon for the
Laotians. After two days of the signing of the agreement,
the United States sent B-52 bombers over Pakse and
Xieng Khouang on the pretext of the North Vietnamese
troops attacking these areas. The rightists were sore
over this bipartite agreement. Phoumi Nosavan, the
exiled rightist leader was of the opinion that nothing
would satisfy the rightists except return to tripartism.
He branded the agreements as 'unconstitutional' and

52 Neo Lao Hak Sat, Laos News (Hanoi), no. 32, 18 July

bombing in whole of Indochina in February 1973 was
70,000 tons. See Noam Chomsky, The Backroom Boys
(Suffolk, 1973), p. 156.
'pacific coup d'état'. 54 The General Director of National Defense Ministry, Oudone Sananikone said that the agreement had nothing to do with military questions and "the Viertiane army must continue its old task". 55 Souvanna was under constant pressures from the rightists, who opposed any negotiations on the formation of PCNV and NPCC. The twelve Foreign Ministers International Conference on Vietnam that had met at Paris on 26 February 1973 stated that the parties would "respect the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Cambodia and Laos". 56 Negotiations for implementing the political provisions of the Agreement started in March due to diplomatic pressures from the Soviet Union and the United States. 57 It was agreed that the Pathet Lao would hold the portfolios of Finance and Foreign Affairs and the FLC would get the Ministries of Interior and Defence. Then there was agreement over the portfolios, sporadic skirmishes stalled the progress towards implementing the political provisions. Sisouk na Champassak said that the


55 *Laos News*, n. 52, p. 15.


57 Hinton, n. 23, p. 167.
335th regiment from North Vietnam was trying "to push" from the north of the Plain of Jars to Pakse in southern Laos. On 16 and 17 April 1973, the B-52 bombers were bombing Thaton Thavien area. North Vietnam, violating the provision of Article 20 of the Paris Agreement on Vietnam, was sending arms and ammunition to South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia. However, conclusion of the Joint Communiqué on Paris agreements on 13 June 1973 between the United States and North Vietnam opened prospects for negotiations in Laos. The communiqué stated that the provisions of Article 20 of the Paris Agreement regarding Laos and Cambodia "should be scrupulously implemented". The rightist side drew comfort from the statement of Phoumi Vongvichit on 7 May 1973 that the Pathet Lao had withdrawn from the Indochinese front. He said: "We decided to disengage because our goal had been attained" and each Indochinese state would "now solve its own problem independently and separately". On

19 July 1973, Phoumi Vongvichit met Souvanna. A draft agreement concerning the political provision of the February agreement was approved on 27 July 1973. The draft stipulated that Souvanna was to be the Prime Minister, Souphanouvong as senior Deputy Prime Minister, and Pheng Phongsavan as Junior Deputy Prime Minister. 62 There were to be five ministers from the Pathet Lao, five from the HLC and two ministers to be chosen by both the sides. The NPCC would organise elections to the National Assembly and the President of the NPCC would be a Pathet Lao and Secretary-General from the HLC. But the draft agreement could not be signed until 14 September 1973 due to various developments.

In the coup ridden history of Laos, another coup took place on 20 August 1973 led by General Thao Ma and Bounleuth Sayoccie. 63 Phoumi Nosavan, who was in exile in Thailand denied any involvement in the coup and blamed that Sisouk na Champassak, Secretary of Defence, Chief of Army Staff General Boumpone, and General Kouprasisith Abbay, Deputy Chief of Staff master-

minded the coup. It was beyond doubt that extreme rightist elements were behind the coup, who wanted to prevent the signing of the draft agreement. After the coup, the Pathet Lao leaders demanded strict security measures for their personnel at Vientiane. The coup failed and General Thao Ma was killed. Populists fled to Thailand. The United States and the Soviet Union put diplomatic pressures and the draft agreement was signed on 14 September 1973. On 5 April 1974, the provisional government was formed. The Pathet Lao were in stronger position with two-thirds of the area and half the population under their control. They tipped the balance in their favour afterwards. On 2 December 1975, the Pathet Lao formed the new regime, Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) after the unification of Vietnam in April 1975.


65 Author's interview with Nouphanh Sitphusay, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs at Vientiane, 12 June 1977.

66 Brown and Zasloff, n. 35, p. 263. The Thai Ambassador to Laos, Wikrom Nilmart said that it was probable that some superpowers "such as the Soviet Union had plotted or backed the recent peace agreement between the Pathet Lao and the Laotian Government in the forming of the coalition government." Bangkok World, 20 September 1973. It was also reported by the UPI that the Soviet military attaché Colonel Vladimir Gretchanine mediated the peace agreements. See, Asia Research Bulletin, vol. 3, no. 5, October 1973, p. 2155.