CONCLUSION
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National unity had been the main objective of Laos. Except in the fourteenth century when the Lan Xang empire was formed, the country had been divided into number of principalities. Thailand and Vietnam were the rival countries seeking to dominate Laos. This rivalry stopped for the time being, when Laos like Vietnam became a French colony. The emergence of the Pathet Lao added a new dimension to the conflicting relationship among the outside powers. With the Viet Minh support, the Pathet Lao fought against the French. The United States replaced the French after 1954 Geneva Conference as a global power interested in Indochina. North Vietnam and the United States became the major participants in the Lao conflict. The rift among the Lao leaders widened and national reconciliation became a complicated process due to external intervention. The agreements were signed but could not be implemented properly. Though Laos had other internal problems like ethnic diversity, backward economy and factionalism among the leaders making the national reconciliation process a difficult task, the foreign intervention particularly aggravated the Lao conflict problem.
The United States was the major interventionist power in Laos. In terms of destruction by bombing its record so far is unsurpassable. It dropped more than 1.6 million tons of bombs in a country, with whom it was not at war. The containment of communism was the rationale behind its involvement in Laos. Obsessed by the 'domino theory', the United States tried to check Communist advance in Laos. Laos became a Protocol state under SEATO. The United States tried to subvert the legally constituted governments in Laos. The pumping of millions of dollars in aid was intended to strengthen the Royal Lao Government (RLG) as against the Communists. The RLG military budget was solely dependent upon the United States. After 1963-64, the United States' action in Laos was linked up with its interest in Vietnam. Thus, Laos became a sideshow in the Vietnam conflict. An agreement in Laos was contingent upon ending the war in Vietnam. Therefore when the United States began to disengage from Vietnam and signed the Paris agreements in January 1973, an accord in Laos was in sight. The escalation of the Vietnam war involved the United States in the affairs of Laos. Apart from heavy bombing, the military aid to Laos increased. The nature of involvement was covert and emphasis was put on the CIA-directed clandestine army. Militarily, these actions were counter-productive as the territorial advancement of the Pathet Lao could not be checked. On the other hand, the morale of the
Pathet Lao increased. The Communist influence in Laos was seen by the United States as the major issue. It put a Red label on everything and did not look deep into the maladies that plagued Laos. A country did not become Communist merely because of the 'domino theory'. The more it tried to check the Communist advance, the stronger Pathet Lao became.

Besides the United States, North Vietnam was the other major power interfering in the affairs of Laos. It came into conflict with the United States, as both were committed to help their respective allies in Laos, and regarded the other's action in Laos as harmful to their interests in South Vietnam. Laos was an integral part of the North Vietnamese strategy to achieve the unification of Vietnam. The use of the eastern part of Laos was essential to send supply convoys to South Vietnam. Its involvement in Laos was facilitated by the fact, that both the Pathet Lao and the Viet Minh had fought anti-colonial war together. Both also shared the common belief in Marxism and Leninism.

The control of north eastern Laos including the strategic Plain of Jars was necessary as the western border of North Vietnam would become vulnerable with the presence of a hostile force there. In this, the North Vietnamese were reminded of their proverb, "If you open the lips, the teeth would catch cold". Apart from giving material help, the North Vietnamese gave advisory support to the party and
the army of the Pathet Lao. The North Vietnamese troops also
assisted the Pathet Lao in the actual fighting. It could
look with satisfaction that its support to the Pathet Lao
had not been in vain. The traffic through the Ho Chi
Minh trail went uninterrupted. The Pathet Lao emerged
stronger as it was in commanding position in the coalition
Government, and North Vietnam could look to their support
in future.

Thailand's major aim was to have a friendly
Government on the left bank of the Mekong river. Threatened
by the increasing Communist insurgency, it viewed with
concern any gain that was made by the Communists in Laos.
This concern was vitiated by the fact that the Thai
guerrillas were getting material support from North Vietnam
through the Pathet Lao, and were being trained in the camps
in the Pathet Lao-held territory by the North Vietnamese
instructors. The traditional hostility between Thailand
and Vietnam was superimposed in modern times with a new
factor in the shape of communism. The relations between
Thailand and North Vietnam deteriorated and the soldiers
from both the countries fought in Laos, even though there
was no formal war between them. Discouraged by the
ineffectiveness of the SEATO over Laos, Thailand began
to lean more heavily towards the United States. The United
States military build-up increased considerably and Thailand
became the rear base for American activities in Laos and Vietnam. It allowed the bombing of Laos from the American military bases in Thailand. The United States' military supply to the NLF was routed through Thailand. The Thai soldiers took part in the fighting in Laos and the pilots from Thailand sometimes used to fly the bombers. It looked towards the agreements on Laos with suspicion and helped the rightists in Laos to gain power as it did in 1961-62. Its objective in checking the Communist advance receded as the Pathet Lao continued to get stronger. As in earlier agreements, the Pathet Lao dominated the February 1973 Agreement on Laos.

Laos was not vital to the national interest of the Soviet Union, and therefore, it did not risk a confrontation with the United States over Laos. It wanted to accommodate with the United States' interest, as far as its policy towards Laos was concerned. Whatever support it gave to the Pathet Lao was with the objective of increasing its bargaining leverage with the United States elsewhere. Fear of Chinese criticism also prompted the Russians to increase their support to the Pathet Lao. The military help rendered to the Pathet Lao, and the neutralists under Kong Lao-Souvanna Phouma in 1960-61, was an exception rather than a rule. It was given for a short period, and was not confined to the Pathet Lao alone. The Soviet
Union continued to recognize Souvanna Phouma, and viewed that its interest was best served by supporting his government. Compared to North Vietnam or even China, it did not have much influence in the affairs of Laos. Its involvement was more diplomatic in nature than military. The Soviet Union generally preferred a middle course of action. Its contacts with the Pathet Lao were established more on the party to party basis than on a state-to-state basis. On the whole, it seemed, the Soviet foreign policy towards Laos depended on its relations with the United States and China. The desire to promote world revolution acquired a low priority.

The Chinese policy towards Laos was also closely related to its relations with the Soviet Union and the United States. Apart from it, China viewed with concern any development near its southern border that would pose a threat to its security. The formation of SEATO, the United States military build-up in Laos, Thailand, and South Vietnam were seen by the Chinese, as a threat directed against itself. China also did not want that the Soviet Union should have greater influence with the Pathet Lao than China. Therefore it wanted to limit the Soviet designs in Laos. Through the road-building activities, the Chinese made their presence felt in Laos. When the Pathet Lao were stronger, it even favoured a neutral Laos in
1961-62 to limit the foreign influence. Favouring a dual tactics of military operation and political negotiation, China advised the Pathet Lao to come down to the negotiating table, when the time was opportune. With the Sino-American rapprochement in 1970s, China ceased to object to a limited American presence in Indochina. By then the Soviet Union had become its enemy number one. It merely protested against the US-supported South Vietnamese incursion of Laos in 1971. Unlike the Pathet Lao, China welcomed the 1973 February Agreement on Laos without any criticism of the United States.

The conflict in Laos was marked by the failure of the peace-keeping machinery in Laos. The International Control Commission (ICC) was given a limited authority. Moreover, its effectiveness was very much reduced by the fact that its working reflected the divergent aims of foreign powers in Laos. Canada's policy in the ICC was favourable to the PLG, and it was supported by the Western powers, more particularly by the United States. Supported by the Communist countries, Poland was well disposed towards the Pathet Lao. The ICC could not proceed in its peace-keeping task, unless there was some sort of understanding among its members. Caught between the two extreme positions, the Chairman of the ICC, India, sometimes sided with one or the other, according to the
exigencies of the situation. India's role was also in tune with its influence in world affairs in general. India's good offices were sought to solve the crises in Korea, and Indochina in 1950s. The 1954 Geneva Conference, the Bandung Conference of 1955, the working of the IGC in Laos in 1955-60 - all marked India's leading diplomatic role in the world affairs. But in 1960s, after the Sino-Indian border crisis, the Indian influence began to wane. This hampered the working of the IGC. After Poland's withdrawal in 1964, the IGC gradually became dysfunctional. It gave occasional reports without the Polish member's signature. When the war in Laos escalated in mid-1960s, the IGC became a silent spectator.

In the continuing foreign intervention, the performance of the FLC and the Pathet Lao were completely different. The FLC leaders who were engaged in business alliances neglected the economic development of the country. Its political behaviour was prompted by the desire to serve personal interests. The political parties were formed not on any particular programme, but revolved round individuals. Depending on the United States aid for its survival, the FLC became subservient to it. It allowed the USAID mission to make inroads in every department of the government and the mission was being referred jocularly as the 'Second Prime Minister' of Laos. The elite could not
enlist the support of the population. In the military field, despite continued air-support and having an army solely financed by the United States, the KLC failed miserably. It steadily lost territory to the Pathet Lao, and in 1973 the KLC was only controlling the areas around Vientiane, Luang Prabang and the Mekong valley. The weakness of the KLC was exploited by the Pathet Lao to the maximum. It was not difficult to point out the shortcomings of the Government to the common people. Unlike the KLC, the cause of the ethnic minority and rural poor was never neglected by the Pathet Lao. The Neo Lao Hak Sat, its political organ, was cohesive and its leaders did not defect to the KLC side in spite of allures. Working in adverse conditions, the Pathet Lao leaders built up the "Pathet Lao movement." With able guidance from their North Vietnamese comrades, they fought well in the battle field and also developed an identical political style. In 1973, their strength was reflected from the fact that they had control over two-thirds of the country, and half the population. As is generally believed, the Pathet Lao movement was not a projection of conflict within the Royal family. Sounheanouvong and Souk Vongsak were the only two leaders from the Royal house. The leadership was dominated by men like Kaysone, Vongvichit, Sithone, Faydang and others who did not belong to any royal family.
It was true, that both the NLF and the Pathet Lao accepted foreign help, but the difference was in the manner of their functioning and the utilization of the aid. The Pathet Lao strived hard to achieve national unity and had also drawn a large section of the neutralists to its fold.

The net result of the outside intervention was the prolongation of the conflict in Laos. The gulf between the internal factions in Laos widened, and the freedom of choice got restricted due to outside intervention for the belligerents in Laos. The foreign powers seldom bothered about the interests of their allies. The NLF and the Pathet Lao could not arrive at any mutual solution because of the involvement of the external powers. The problem of Laos remained unsolved and there was a de facto balkanization of the country into two parts. National reconciliation could not be achieved. A solution to the Laotian conflict was in sight after the neutralization of Laos in 1962. But the gradual linkage of Laos with the Vietnam war made the solution of the Laotian problem dependent upon the outcome of the conflict in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the indiscriminate bombings by the United States thoroughly devastated Laos. The external powers respected the agreements by violating its provisions. A "hands off" policy by the foreign powers could have spared Laos many of its problems.