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Seldom in the history of the world, so many countries have modeled at one point of time, in the affairs of a small country, as in Laos. After the Second World War, a chain of events pushed Laos into the vortex of foreign interference. The traditional conflict over Laos between Vietnam and Thailand, was renewed with vigour. The whole perspective of the Laotian crisis changed with the United States entering into the picture and with the emergence of a left-oriented movement in Laos. The objective of national unity has continued to elude its leaders. The aim of this study is to look into this problem and its external ramifications. Were the outside powers responsible for denying the Laotians an opportunity to solve their own problem? Why did the foreign powers intervene in Laos? How did the Laotians respond to this? Were they forced to accept outside help? This study is a modest attempt to find answers to these questions.

The First Chapter will be a study of the background to the conflict. The geopolitical location of Laos has put it in the cross-roads of conflicting interests. An ethnographical structure of the country is given. The racial composition created problems between highlanders and lowlanders, which were exploited by foreign powers. A historical survey of Laos is given.
so as to highlight the problems that it inherited in modern times. The emergence of the Pathet Lao and its alliance with the Viet Minh, changed the course of events in Laos. The chapter ends with the convening of the Geneva Conference in 1954.

The Second Chapter deals with the events up to 1960, when a neutralist coup changed the pattern of conflict in Laos. The quest for national unity continued even after the first Geneva Conference. Gradually the United States, North Vietnam and Thailand got involved in the affairs of Laos. The SEATO Protocol designated Laos as part of the territory covered by the agreement for security purposes. The 1956-57 Vientiane agreement between the Royal Lao Government (RLG) and the Pathet Lao could not end the hostilities. There was little progress towards national reconciliation. The United States began to bolster up the rightist faction and in the process subverted the legally constituted Government in Laos. Civil war became imminent.

Soon the civil war was internationalized, as the external powers backed up the contending parties in Laos. The Third Chapter deals with the international involvement in the civil war in Laos and the signing of the 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos. This period was of international significance. The events in Cuba, Berlin and Laos had
deeply affected the relationship among the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. These three powers got involved in the Laotian conflict and were on the brink of a war. Yet, they opted for compromise. This chapter deals with the nature and extent of foreign powers' involvement and also the reason for avoiding a direct confrontation over Laos.

The Geneva Accords of 1962 were not implemented properly. The coalition that was formed began to lose its substance after a rightist coup in 1964. In the neutralist camp, there was a two-fold division. One group aligned with the Pathet Lao and the other with the FNL. Both the United States and North Vietnam used Laos to further their own objectives in the Vietnam war. Laos had by then become a 'side-show' in the Vietnam conflict and the solution of the Laotian problem was linked up with the conclusion of the Vietnam war. The Sino-Soviet differences influenced the dealings of Peking and Moscow with Laos.

The United States began its air war on Laos and started the population relocation programme creating a large number of refugees. The International Control Commission (ICC) had become ineffective. The war in Laos escalated in a major way. The Fourth Chapter gives an account of the developments in Laos between 1962 and 1967.
The Fifth Chapter discusses the roles of North Vietnam and Thailand in Laos and their effect on the mutual relations. The HLG was dependent on foreign aid for its very survival. The United States, through a massive aid programme, created a dependent political and military structure. Laos suffered from American bombings, even when there was a bombing halt over North Vietnam in 1968. The ground war in Laos took a serious turn with the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos in 1971.

The Sixth Chapter deals with the negotiations for a settlement. The proposals for negotiations were marked by 'politics of escalation'; any proposal was followed by the outbreak of hostility. However, the rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the United States on the one hand, and China and the United States on the other, had a decisive impact on the peace talks in Laos. Only after the signing of the Paris agreements in January 1973, an agreement over Laos could become a possibility. The disparity between the capacity of the interventionists and the Laotians produced a patron-client relationship and the hapless Laotians saw their interests subjugated to the larger interests of the external powers. The Laotians had to implement the decisions concerning Laos, which were taken at Washington, Hanoi, Peking, Moscow and Bangkok.

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