CHAPTER II
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THE CRISIS

The Geneva Conference of 1954

The participants in the Geneva Conference were France, the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, China, Cambodia, Laos and both the Vietnams. The Soviet Union was anxious to give China the status of a major power and the conference "offered the means to demonstrate to the world the unity of the socialist camp and to demonstrate China the genuine efforts the Soviet Union was making to have the C.P.R. recognised as a great power." During the Conference Chou En-lai agreed with Anthony Eden that the possibility of a negotiated settlement in Geneva existed. Eden was assured that the Chinese Premier would persuade the Vietminh to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia and China would recognize the governments provided no American bases were set up there. V.M. Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, asserted that "a war of national liberation is being waged, not merely in Vietnam, but also


in Laos and Cambodia. The primary British interests were the security of Malaya and general stability of the region. It began to take more interests in the improvement of Anglo-Chinese relations than enlarging the fight in Indochina or prejudicing the Chinese of arriving at a settlement in Geneva.

France was in a weaker position at Geneva. The French delegate, Georges Bidault told Eden that he had very poor cards. He had one strong point, the Soviet Union's fear that China might invoke the Sino-Soviet pact if the Conference failed. France wanted the Vietminh to evacuate Laos and Cambodia. The Laothian delegation was led by Phoui Sananikone, who said that the "withdrawal of the foreign invader (Vietminh) would mean de facto the cessation of hostilities". The Pathet Lao representative did not succeed in becoming a conference participant and it was not recognised as a resistance government. It received official stature as "Pathet Lao Fighting Units"

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3 Ibid., p. 114.
4 UK, House of Commons, Debates, 529, 1953-54, col. 440.
(Uniteds Combattants Pathet Lao, UCPL). The major breakthrough at the Conference came on 16 June, when Chou En-lai agreed to separate the problems of Laos and Cambodia from that of Vietnam. 7

While the Conference was going on, the United States was secretly formulating the plans for establishment of an alliance. During the visit of Churchill and Eden to Washington on 20 June, a study group for a Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty was set up in secrecy. The clauses concerning Laos in the 7-point communique stipulated that the armistice -

3. Does not impose on Laos, Cambodia, or retained Vietnam any restrictions materially impairing their capacity to maintain stable non-communist regimes; and especially restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms and to employ foreign advisers.

4. Does not contain political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to communist control. (8)

These provisions afterwards left no hope for any national reconciliation. France became a party to this agreement after Dulles conferred with Mendes-France at Paris on 13 July 1954. There were lot of differences between the letter and

7 Eden, n. 5, p. 129.
8 Ibid., p. 133.
the spirit of this secret understanding and the Geneva accords. 9

The deliberations of Geneva Conference lasting from 8 May to 21 July were conducted not only in Geneva but also at meetings in various world capitals. Though India was not represented officially, V.K. Krishna Menon was acting as Nehru's emissary. India's role in the settlement was described by Nehru as positive neutralism. He said:

Indochina is an Asian country and a proximate area.....The crisis in respect of Indochina therefore moves us deeply and calls from us our best thoughts and efforts to avert the trends of this conflict towards its extension and intensification and to promote the trends that might lead to a settlement. (10)

At the Colombo Conference on 23 April 1954, Nehru had given a six-point proposal. These were complete independence for the Indochinese countries, non-intervention by the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union, and the end of the war. 11 Chou En-lai had the principles of Panchashila in mind while talking with Ho Chi Minh. China


11 Ibid., cols. 5531-2.
was interested "in implementing the tactics of peaceful co-existence through a settlement at Geneva that both the French and the Viet Minh could accept and that could enhance the stature of Communist China." 12 The unilateral declarations by the Governments of Laos and Cambodia that their countries would not join military alliances was taken note by the conference. Nehru said: "They wisely decided, more or less, though not in clear language, that the Indochina states should keep out of military blocs or alliances on either side, or in other words, remain neutralised". 13

There were six documents concerning Laos in 1954 Geneva Agreements. The Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Laos provided that except for certain French instructors and garrisons, foreign forces should be withdrawn from Laos within 4 months. The Pathet Lao troops 'pending a political settlement' (Article 14) were to regroup in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua. An International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICC) was to supervise the agreements. India (Chairman), Poland

and Canada were its members. The Declaration by the RLC concerning Article 3 of the Final Declaration said:

The Royal Government of Laos... Declares itself resolved to take the necessary measures to integrate all citizens, without discrimination, into the national community and to guarantee them the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms for which the Constitution of the Kingdom provides.... (14)

By another declaration concerning Articles 4 and 5 of the final declaration, the RLC pledged that it would not enter into military alliances and would settle "its international disputes by peaceful means so that international peace and security and justice are not endangered". 15 Article 12 of the Final Declaration said:

In their relation with Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, each member of the Geneva Conference undertakes to respect the sovereignty, the independence, the unity and the territorial integrity of the above mentioned states, and to refrain from any interference in their internal affairs. (16)

The weakness of the Conference was obvious. The wordings were vague, inexact and ambiguous. The word 'neutrality' was not even mentioned. Article 14 mentioning that the Pathet Lao troops 'pending a political settlement'

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14 Command Papers, n. 6, p. 41.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 9.
were to regroup was vague. After the withdrawal of foreign troops and regrouping of Pathet Lao troops, this became one of the key problems in carrying out the accords. The RLG was unhappy over the fact that the Pathet Lao had been given two provinces virtually amounting to a de facto partition of the country. The rights of the RLG in these two provinces, "pending a political settlement" was not clearly defined. The RLG would not ask for military aid or permit foreign bases. But it could do the same if its security was threatened. The conference did not define these circumstances clearly. Again, the Geneva Agreements did not prohibit the building up of local forces. The ICC, as the events unfolded became powerless as it had no competence to sanction. Of course, no agreement is full-proof. It provided temporary peace in the region and restored independence from the French colonial rule. The Geneva Agreements also provided the basis for a political settlement. When the conflict ensued later on, the contending parties' consensus was a return to the Geneva.

France was happy that war was over. Britain was optimistic. Eden stated on 21 July that the Geneva Agreements "are the best that our hands could devise. All will now depend upon the spirit in which these agreements are observed and carried out". Nehru characterized the

17 Command Papers, n. 6, p. 3.
agreement as a "truly negotiated settlement, where not any one of the belligerents, but peace, has been the victor. Laos and Cambodia both appreciated the agreements. South Vietnam was critical of it. Its amendment of the draft declaration was not incorporated. North Vietnam, though disappointed about the seventeenth parallel was satisfied. The Soviet Union stressed that the conference was a victory of national liberation forces and was happy over the fact that a communist state was set up without confrontation with the United States. China's southern frontier was secured and its international prestige increased. The People's Daily commented: "It (the Geneva Agreements) is an achievement of immense, historic significance, bringing joy and inspiration to all mankind". The United States at the plenary session did not join in the final declaration and took note of various ceasefire agreements and all paragraphs of the Declaration except the 13th. Badell Smith, its representative declared unilaterally that the United States would "refrain

18 India's Foreign Policy, n. 13, p. 402.
20 People's Daily (Peking), 22 July 1954.
from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the agreements "in accordance with Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations dealing with the obligation of members to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force...." On 21 July, President Eisenhower, commenting on the American role at Geneva, said that the United States was not belligerent and had "not itself been party to or bound by the decisions taken by the conference" and added that the "agreement contains features which we do not like".

**SEATO**

In the same statement, President Eisenhower told that the United States was "actively pursuing discussions with other free nations with a view to the rapid organization of a collective defense in Southeast Asia in order to prevent further direct or indirect Communist aggression in that area". While the Geneva Conference was going on, the SEATO was initiated. The "united action" of the United States could not materialize. Dulles viewed that the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of the French could be filled up by the collective security. There should be

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23 Ibid., p. 2393.

collective defence against Communist aggression. The Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 August 1954 reviewed:

The clear purpose of the treaty should be to form a collective security arrangement to deter and, if possible, prevent any further extension of communist control, by whatever means, within the general area of Southeast Asia and the Southeast Pacific. 25

On 14 August the Department of State announced that there would be a conference at Manila at the level of the Foreign Ministers. The United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines and Pakistan attended the conference. Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam were put under special category. At Geneva, China was bent upon excluding the American presence from these areas. Chou En-lai was assured by Eden and Mendes-France that these states would not join the planned alliance. 26 In the Manila Pact (6 September 1954), a special Protocol added Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam to be protected by the treaty. Article IV was the core of the Pact. It stated:

Each party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the parties or against any state or territory


26 Eden, n. 5, p. 145.
which the parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agree that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. (27)

The United States promised to defend Thailand against the Chinese and the Vietnamese Communist threats from Laos. The anxiety of Thailand to secure its frontier along the Mekong involved Laos afterwards as it (Laos) was a Protocol state under SEATO. Thailand joined SEATO as it was suspicious of the Chinese designs. It would like to "avoid being left alone once more at the mercy of an overpowering enemy, defenseless and without allies." 23 The administration of Phibulsonggram joined SEATO in accordance with Thailand's policy of anti-communism. 29 The treaty assured the defence of Thailand against the possible communist threat through Laos. One author rightly said: "Upon the old conflicts of Siam and the Vietnamese was thus superimposed the modern confrontation of Communist China and the United States." 30

The Governments of the Soviet Union and North Vietnam condemned the attempts to involve South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the sphere of action of SEATO, which

27 Department of State, n. 22, vol. 1, p. 913.
were contrary to the Geneva agreements. They had also drawn attention to the incompatibility with the Geneva agreements of the attempts of certain foreign powers to interfere in the domestic affairs of South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and of attempts to impose agreements of a military nature on these countries. The 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos (since the concept of a neutral Laos was contradicted by its being a Protocol state of SEATO) stated, that the signatories were to "respect the wish of the Kingdom of Laos not to recognize the protection of any alliance or military coalition including SEATO".

**Implementation of the Geneva Agreements**

The cabinet crisis in the RLC following the assassination of Defence Minister, Koul Voravong stalled the negotiations between the Pathet Lao and the RLC. Koul was pursuing a policy of reconciliation towards the Pathet Lao. The Government of Souvanna Phouma had to resign. Dulles was suspicious of his neutralist policy.


Dulles sought "to improve upon the then Laotian Government, i.e. to see the succession pass to one more sympathetic to his opinion". 33 The new cabinet was headed by Katay Don Sasorith, a supporter of SEATO. Souvanna told about the incident at the plenary session of the Geneva on 14 June 1961:

Immediately after the conclusion of the Geneva agreements the Government over which I presided entered into negotiations with the Pathet Lao in order to reintegrate the combatants of this patriotic movement into the national community, but foreign interference into our internal problems compelled to resign. (34)

Katay was one of the leaders, who had expelled Souphanouvong from Lao Issara in 1948. He advocated, like many other southern Lao leaders, a close relationship with Thailand. 35 The wrangle between the Pathet Lao and the FLG started over the interpretation of Article 14 of the agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Laos. 36 The FLG argued that its sovereignty extended over the whole of Laos, hence it "must be able to re-position its administration in the


36 Article 14 said: "Pending a political settlement, the fighting units of 'Pathet Lao', concentrated in the provisional assembly areas, shall move into the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, except for any military personnel who wish to be demobilized where they are". See Command Papers, n. 6, p. 22.
provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, as an expression of its sovereignty. The Pathet Lao on the other hand argued that they should stay in the provinces as "the term province implies the totality of the territory within its limits and, if it had been otherwise, the wording would have been that the fighting units of 'Pathet Lao' would move into a zone within the two provinces." The ICC, which had moved to Laos in October 1954 faced with numerous difficulties like lack of communication facilities, housing problem and the rugged terrain of the countryside. It was also powerless to investigate the situation in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua. There was apprehension, as the NLG complained that some North Vietnamese officers were there in the two provinces. Defectors from the Pathet Lao were of the opinion that the North Vietnamese cadres were there. The negotiations continued but without producing any tangible result. In March 1955, the venue was shifted from the Plain of Jars to Vientiane. On 9 March both sides promised that there would be no

38 Ibid., pp. 70-73.
39 Dommen, n. 24, pp. 80-81.
hostile actions against each other. 40 The Pathet Lao made the HLG demand that Phong Saly and San Neua would be reintegrated, conditional upon a political settlement. The talks were broken off next month. Both the sides were thinking of a military solution. The Pathet Lao was unwilling to give up the independent base of operation. The HLG on the other hand was confident of its strength. The United States Operation Mission (USOM) had already opened its office in Vientiane on 1 January 1955 and officers from Royal Laoian Army (RLA) were being trained by the United States army officers in Thailand. Dulles back from his Southeast Asian sojourn reported on 8 March 1955:

In two of its provinces there are disloyal elements, supported by the Chinese and Viet Minh Communists. The Laos Government is seeking to reestablish control over its own territory. But it is worried lest, if it suppresses the Communists within, it will be struck by the Communists from without. I hope that worry is now allayed by their better understanding of the protective nature of the Manila Pact. (41)

While the negotiations between the HLG and the Pathet Lao were going on, Laos tried to win acceptance among other Asian states. The Afro-Asian conference at Bandung from 18 April to 24 April 1955 was a good opportunity.

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Nehru in his private meetings with Pham Van Dong and Chou En-lai was assured that North Vietnam and China would not interfere in the affairs of Laos. On 23 April Chou En-lai said that China had no desire for interfering in the internal affairs of any country. Laos in the conference accused North Vietnam of indulging in illegal activities in Laos. However, both the delegates met in the presence of Nehru and Chou En-lai on 23 April. North Vietnam and Laos concluded an agreement:

First, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam considers that the settlement which is due to take place between the Royal Government of Laos and the "Pathet Lao", by virtue of the Geneva Agreements, is a question of internal order which the Royal Government of Laos and "Pathet Lao" are entirely free to solve in the best way possible in the higher interests of the country and people of Laos. Second, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Royal Government of Laos will develop and harmonize the good neighbourly relations which tie and should tie these countries to each other, within the framework of the Five Principles defined in the Sino-Indian Agreement of April 29, 1954. (43)

Katay was confident by the international sanction that Laos got. The Pathet Lao on 6 June 1955 asked for resuming political talks when the RLC troops moved towards


43 Lao Press (Vientiane), 26 April 1955.
Sam Neua. The negotiations continued and the election that was to be held in August 1955 was put off. The Pathet Lao wanted major electoral reforms like voting right to women and setting up of joint committees at administrative levels for free election, which led to the suspension of talks on 6 September. In the same month Katay visited India. He was hopeful of the coming election, where according to Katay the 'agents of Vietnam' would be defeated. In the joint communiqué, implementation of the Geneva agreements was stressed upon. In October 1955, under the initiative of Samar Sen, the IGC Chairman Katay and Souphanouvong met at Rangoon. Samar Sen proposed for an agreement based on the Geneva agreements. Both the sides reached an agreement on 11 October 1955 bringing about a halt to the fighting. The agreement did not mention the differences and there was no decision on establishing the RLC administration in Phong Saly and Sam Neua. Subsequently, discussions at Vientiane were terminated on 4 November. The Pathet Lao did not join in the election of 25 December 1955. No voting was held in Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces as the RLC was not in control there. Katay's National Progressive Party secured nineteen out of all thirty-nine seats in the Assembly. But he did not get the two-third


majority required for forming the Government. The two-third majority provision was changed to simple majority in 1956. Souvanna Phouma became the new Prime Minister after a ministerial crisis on 21 March 1956.

Vientiane Agreements

Souvanna Phouma gave first priority to national reconciliation between the Pathet Lao and the RLG. An amicable atmosphere soon developed after a decrease in the number of clashes between the RLG and the Pathet Lao. The Soviet Union helped Souvanna in his bid in spite of the opposition from the United States and Thailand. Souphanouvong came to Vietniane and the talks resulted in two joint declarations, one on 5 August and the other five days afterwards. Political and military joint commissions were set up to work out details of ceasefire, the integration of the Pathet Lao armed units into the RLA and the administration of Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces. It was also decided that the hostilities should end, the RLG would follow a policy of peace and neutrality, the Pathet Lao would recognize the authority of the RLG in Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces and the most important of all was the

46 *Command Papers*, n. 44, pp. 52-53.


48 The text is in *Command Papers*, n. 44, pp. 54-57.
formation of a National Union Government including the representatives of the Pathet Lao. The Neo Lao Hak Sat (NLHS), the political organ of the Pathet Lao was legalized. These agreements were called Vientiane agreements to commemorate the place where it was signed. The Vientiane agreements were in fact a series of agreements starting from 5 August 1956 Declarations to the Military Agreement on 2 November 1957.

A delegation headed by Souvanna visited China and North Vietnam in August 1956. The purpose of the visit was as Souvanna wrote afterwards, to establish friendly relations between Laos on the one hand and China and North Vietnam on the other. Sisouk na Champassak, who accompanied Souvanna, wrote that Souvanna wanted China and North Vietnam to promise non-intervention in the affairs of Laos. Souvanna was following a course of strict neutrality and he was not becoming pro-Communist. He did not allow Peking and Hanoi to open consulates when asked by the Chinese for the same. The joint statement of Souvanna and Chou En-lai on 25 August reflected the mutual promises both sides made:

49 The NLHS was set up on 6 January 1956 replacing the Neo Lao Issara.


The Government of the Kingdom of Laos declares that it is firmly resolved to carry out a policy of peace and neutrality, that it will not form any military alliance as long as its security is not menaced and that it will not allow the installation on its territory of any foreign military base, other than as provided in the Geneva agreements. The Government of the People's Republic of China affairs (sic) that it will respect and wholly support the aforementioned position of the Government of the Kingdom of Laos. (52)

Laos obtained this written agreement without recognizing the Peking Government. Souvanna was of the view that the Laotian neutrality would not be in balance if Laos recognized Peking without according diplomatic recognition to Formosa. China, by taking a pledge from the Laotian Government that it would neither allow foreign bases or join military alliances was showing concern for its (China's) security as it did when SEATO was formed. China had attacked SEATO for its aggressive design against China, which according to China was danger to peace of Asia and interference in Laotian affairs. Souvanna visited Hanoi in the same month. In a joint statement, both declared that they believed in peaceful co-existence. (55)

53 Souvanna, n. 50, p. 1325.
54 Chou En-lai, "The Present International Situation and China's Foreign Policy" People's China, 16 August 1956, pp. 3-8.
55 Dommen, n. 24, p. 96.
Laos told that it would not allow foreign bases in its territory.

The military situation in Laos improved after August 1956. On 31 October, an agreement was signed for implementing the ceasefire by the joint military committee. On 2 November 1956 an agreement on foreign policy was announced. It provided that the KMG would accept economic aid from all countries, diplomatic relations would be established with Communist countries and there would be no entering into military alliances of any kind. The agreement signed on 24 December 1956 for the Guarantee of Civil Rights said:

The Royal Government shall guarantee fully to all members of the Pathet Lao forces, persons connected with the Pathet Lao forces, and to the ex-participants of the Resistance throughout the country the use and exercise of all the rights which the Lao citizens possess with regard to democratic freedoms such as individual freedom, freedom to speak, write and publish, freedom of movement, freedom of association and meetings, freedom of belief and electoral reforms, envisaged in the Constitution of the Kingdom. (57)

On 23 December 1956 Souvanna and Souphanouvong issued a joint communiqué stating that a coalition government would be formed and supplementary elections would be held. The

56 Command Papers, n. 44, pp. 57-58.
57 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
...after the formation of coalition government, the administration as well as the fighting units in the two provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, be placed under the authority of the coalition government and recognised according to the normal pattern in the Kingdom. (58)

The agreements signed in 1956 reflected the spirit of cooperation between the two parties. But these documents were merely statements of intention and not action. On 21 February 1957 there was another agreement signed between the RLG and the Pathet Lao on the Electoral Law.

The Western Powers (specially the United States) were showing concern about increasing influence of Pathet Lao. Souvanna was conscious of the disparity of attitudes by the Western powers towards the Vientiane agreements. The RLG in a note to the United States, Britain and France said that the opposing views would hamper the task of implementing the negotiations. (59) In March, the Pathet Lao proposed for accepting economic aid from China. Katay, after returning from a tour from the United States was pointing out the excessive demands of the Pathet Lao. The United States was bent upon preventing the formation of a coalition government. Its ambassador to Vientiane J.

58 Ibid., p. 67.

59 Lao Presse, 25 April 1957.
Graham Parsons afterwards admitted in a Congressional hearings that he tried his best for sixteen months to prevent the formation of a coalition government. On 16 April 1957, the United States, Britain and France presented similar notes to the Laotian ambassadors in Washington, London, and Paris, showing their disapproval of the agreements signed with the Pathet Lao. The note of the United States stated:

The Government of the United States welcomes the firmness with which the Kingdom of Laos has resisted this (of the Pathet Lao) measure and is confident that the Royal Government will continue in its determination that the political future of the Kingdom of Laos shall not be dictated by dissident groups enjoying no constitutional status. (61)

The notes further said that the Pathet Lao was putting conditions on the NLO, which were contrary to the Geneva agreements. Negotiations were suspended and the UNC noted that the parties had faced difficulties of various kinds. In Vientiane, the National Assembly approved of the results but it was dissatisfied with "the protracted negotiations and the closeness with which Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong were associating themselves". On 31 May 1957 Souvanna resigned but again became Prime Minister on


9 August, when three successive attempts by the opposition to form the Government failed. Making his own stand clear, Souvanna said:

None amongst us nourishes the design of selling his country to foreigners wherever they come from, no one wants to sacrifice our old civilization, our religion, our customs and institutions on the altar of the East or the West. (63)

The Pathet Lao, while supporting the new Government, requested Souvanna to resume the negotiations. On 13 October the National Assembly by enacting a law guaranteed civil rights to the Pathet Lao as embodied in 24 December 1956 agreement. On 2 November 1957 a joint communiqué was signed between Souvanna and Souphanouvong. Both the parties agreed on the formation, by enlarging the present cabinet, of a Government of a large national union comprising previous members of the Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao consented to hand over all arms and ammunition to the RLG and the RLG agreed to appoint the Pathet Lao cadres in suitable posts. The Agreement on the Reestablishment of the Royal Administration in the Provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly' signed on 2 November 1957 stated that both


64 Ibid., p. 57.
the provinces would be under the RLG jurisdiction, elections would be held in there after three months, head of Sam Neua province would be a RLG official and the head of Phong Saly would be a Pathet Lao. The head of Phong Saly would be assisted by the RLG officers and the head of Sam Neua would be assisted by the Pathet Lao. The 'Military Agreement on the Integration of the Fighting Units of the Pathet Lao Forces into the National Army' was also signed on 2 November 1957. The agreement said that 1,500 troops would be integrated and the next 7,500 would return to civilian status. The soldiers would remain grouped in units till the details were settled. The units when fused would have the same proportion of officers as the RLA but would not be dispersed into various divisions of the RLA. They would enjoy the same rights as the RLA. On 13 November 1957, Souphanouvong formally handed over to the King the two provinces along with the troops, arms and ammunition and swore allegiance to him. The next day the Government of the National Union was formed. Souphanouvong was in charge of Economic Planning (placing him in charge of aid including the American aid), Reconstruction and Urbanism. Phoumi Vongvichit, a member of the Central Committee of the NLHS was in charge of Religion and Fine Arts. 4 May 1958 was scheduled to be the date for supplementary

65 Ibid., pp. 59-62.
66 Ibid., pp. 63-67.
elections in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua. The Pathet Lao had abandoned the tactics of armed resurrection in favour of national front.

The May 1958 Elections

At the beginning, the coalition started with a promising note. The attempt of the Laotian Government was appreciated by everybody, except the United States. By January 1958, the NLA had moved into the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua. On 13 February the Pathet Lao troops numbering about 1,500 were integrated into the NLA in the presence of the IGC. They were stationed at Xieng Ngeun and on the Plain of Jars. The remaining went back to their villages. Now the stage was set for the supplementary elections for 21 seats in the National Assembly on 4 May 1958. Parsons, the American Ambassador started a crash programme of rural aid, 'Operation Booster Shot' to woo the rural voters away from the Pathet Lao; which was described by a Congressional Committee:

67 Even Souvanna’s visit to Washington on 13 February 1958 could not allay the United States’ fear, though he told that Communist ideology was a danger to the free world. Two months after his visit, Walter S. Robertson, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, told that the Pathet Lao participation in the coalition might extend Communist influence dangerously in Laos. Department of State Bulletin, 23 April 1958, p. 701.

68 Command Papers, n. 68, p. 120.
Basically, this activity was a village aid program... The program took the form of more than 90 work projects, including well digging, erection of small irrigation and flood control dams, repair of schools... The program did not overcome the Communist election slogans related to the U.S. aid program of "governmental corruption", "government indifference", or "U.S. domination". (69)

But it was too late to counter the effective Pathet Lao propaganda. The tribal population of Phong Saly and Sam Neua provinces were anti-Lao and the Central Government was for them an oppressive instrument. The Pathet Lao had given good administration in those areas. The Pathet Lao were disciplined. They were also removing the unpopular village chiefs. The NLHS and its ally the Santiphab (peace) party presented a wide range of candidates including two princes, one woman and one kha mountaineer in contrast to the three anti-Pathet Lao factions divided more by family feuds than on any ideological overtures. The dissensions in the three factions, the 'Independents' of Phoui Sananikone, the 'Nationalists' of Katay and the followers of Souvanna benefited the Pathet Lao. Speaking of the corruption and factions in the Government, the right-wing leader Si Sounk na Champassak says:

Candidates who had been rejected for the sake of unity demanded to be reimbursed for their campaign expenses, which in some cases reached astronomical proportions: two or three hundred thousand kips, or even more. In contrast to the pettiness and rather sordid quarrels occupying the government factions, the two opposition parties (Nao Lao Hak Sat and Santiphab) had formed an alliance and were presenting a solid, disciplined front. (70)

The NLHS gained nine and its ally Santiphab secured four seats out of total twenty-one seats. In Luang Prabang, the NLHS got three out of four seats and Souphanouvong getting elected from Vientiane got the largest number of votes polled by any candidate. The NLHS and Santiphab got over half the votes cast. Souphanouvong was elected Chairman when the National Assembly was convened a few days later. The results of the election made the conservative politicians of Laos fearful. They along with the United States were afraid of the growing strength of the leftists. The United States showed its antagonism by doing away with the aid that crippled the Laotian economy. A Committee for Defence of National Interests (CDNI) was formed by right-wingers under CIA blessings. The CDNI, formed on 17 June 1958, urged the combating of Communist influence. Another

70 Champassak, n. 51, p. 62.
71 Lao Pressa, 19 May 1958.
party, Laotian People's Rally (RPL) was formed by Katay and Phouei Sananikone from among the Nationalist and Independent groups in the National Assembly. The RPL selected Souvanna to lead it and pledged to fight against communism. It seemed that Souvanna was trying to satisfy his critics who were charging that he was turning soft towards the Pathet Lao. He had even encouraged the formation of CDNLI. He was heading the RPL party. But the United States was not too pleased. It saw in the formation of a coalition government where Souphanouvong was in charge of an important portfolio, Souvanna's visit to Peking and Hanoi, and the result of recent elections that the country was becoming pro-left. Souvanna then dealt with the ICC, which was adjourned to the delight of the United States. He had written to the Chairman of the ICC on 20 March 1953 to terminate its activities on the date of the scheduled supplementary elections as the RLG considered that the supplementary elections of 4 May 1953 constitute the last phase of the implementation of the Geneva agreements of 20 July 1954 on the cessation of hostilities in Laos. Canada was in favour of the dissolution of the ICC, which was not shared by India and Poland. But

73 Martin E. Goldstein, American Policy Toward Laos (Cranbury, 1973), p. 119.

India changed its mind thinking that unilateral withdrawal of Canada would have an adverse affect. On 19 July 1958, the ICC was adjourned sine die with the Polish delegate opposing it.

On 22 July 1958 Souvanna resigned following the normal procedure after an election. But his effort to form a new Government was not successful and on 6 August he announced his inability to continue as he was not successful in drawing the support of RPL and CDNI. It seemed that he could not distribute the portfolio according to the satisfaction of everybody. The CDNI had made Souvanna its target of attack because of his moderate policy. Souvanna, in an interview, said that he was forced to resign because of continued American opposition and that Parsons was held responsible for it. The United States had suspended aid to Laos w.e.f. 1 July 1958. Describing these developments, Souvanna said:

The policy followed by my government received full approval of the Lao people....However, this policy met with opposition of certain members of SEATO. The Government of National Unity with the participation of the Pathet Lao ministers which I succeeded to form, did not last long. Soon came an announcement threatening to cut our aid. Such pressures provoked my resignation. (77)

77 *Gouvernement Royal du Laos*, n. 34, p. 16.
Phoui Sananikone’s Policy

On 13 August 1953 Phoui Sananikone became the Prime Minister with CDNI backing. His cabinet included four CDNI members but the NLHS was not represented. Phoui said about his cabinet thus:

I have selected members of political parties who desire to oppose communist expansion in Laos to participate in the government. The policy of the government that I have formed is as follows: To oppose the threat of this dangerous ideology.... (78)

In contrast to the neutralist posture of Souvanna, Phoui was anti-Communist. In foreign policy there was a decisive shift. He approved the setting up of a Nationalist Chinese consulate in Vientiane. Diplomatic relations with South Vietnam were upgraded to embassy level. Phou’s action, however, displeased both China and North Vietnam. Souvanna later on commented that this was one of the earliest steps in the internationalization of the Laotian crisis. Then followed the mysterious skirmishes at Houng Lap near Tchepone. Both North Vietnam and Laos accused each other. It is, however, felt that North Vietnam might have launched


79 Phou said: “Hiss notion of neutrality does not imply a neutrality on the ideological plane; we are anti-Communists”. A.M. Halpern and H.H. Fredman, Communist Strategy in Laos (Santa Monica, 1960), p. 3.

30 Government Royal du Laos, n. 34, p. 16.
this attack to show its displeasure at Phou'i's anti-Communist policy. In January 1959, Phoumi Nosavan and two other CDMI members were inducted into Phou'i's cabinet. Phoumi, like Phou'i was also a strong anti-Communist. Phoumi was a relative of Marshall Sarit, who had assumed absolute power in Thailand on 19 October 1958. On 14 January 1959, Phou'i got permission to rule for one year without the National Assembly. The Pathet Lao had no representative in the Cabinet. The National Assembly had been adjourned where they had nine members.

**International Control Commission**

Souphanouvong called for the reactivation of the ICC, but Phou'i rejected the demand on the plea that the RLG had fulfilled its obligations under the Geneva agreements; hence the ICC had no authority over Laos. China, North Vietnam and the Soviet Union wanted the ICC to resume its work. The anti-Pathet Lao policy of Phou'i had prompted them to recall the ICC, lest the Pathet Lao would be in further trouble. The United States Government had also supported Phou'i's stand. Chen H, the Chinese Foreign


82 Command Papers, n. 63, p. 114.

83 A press officer of the State Department said: "Obviously the Laos Government considers the provisions of the Geneva Agreements have been complied with. We respect that determination." Royal Institute of International Affairs, Documents on International Affairs, 1959 (London, 1965), p. 254.
Minister had said on 13 February 1959: "Phou'i's statement was a grave act of unscrupulous violation of the Geneva agreement and forms a part of the U.S. imperialist plot of aggression against Indo-China." The Soviet Union charged that the United States was instigating the FLC to violate the Geneva agreements and called for the reactivation of the ICC, but the Soviet suggestion was rejected. Meanwhile, Phou'i was going ahead with his campaign against the Pathet Lao. The prospect of the Pathet Lao had been bright. They were seeking political power through the elections, which they won. The policy that the Pathet Lao followed, and which had been overlooked by the observer of the Indochinese scene was that they never declared a separate Government in their zone of occupation after the Geneva conference. Phou'i wanted to remove the cornerstone of their power, the armed forces. To Phou'i's ultimatum on 13 May 1959 the first battalion stationed at Xiang Ngeun Camp surrendered but the second one stationed at the Thong Hai Hin camp escaped. Souphanouvong was put under house arrest.

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85 Command Papers, n. 74, p. 135.
86 Interview with Souphanouvong at Vientiane, 20 June 1977.
arrest at Vientiane. On 22 May 1959 the NLUS was declared illegal. On 1 June 1959, the Pathet Lao issued a statement for convening the National Assembly, assurance of civil liberties, release of the leaders, and the resumption of the ICC, but the RLG rejected these demands. The Communist powers urged for the reconvening of the Geneva Conference. The subject of calling the ICC was discussed by Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, and Selwyn Lloyd, the British Foreign Secretary at Geneva. Lloyd said on 10 June 1959:

Laos is a sovereign independent state and a member of the United Nations. It would be inconsistent with the undertaking to respect its sovereignty, contained in the final declaration of the Geneva Conference, to seek to impose the return of the International Commission on the Laotian Government against their wishes. (83)

India was in favour of the ICC resuming its function as Nehru believed that the Laotian crisis could be "controlled" by it, if it was reconvened. But the ICC was not reconvened due to the opposition of the RLG.

The United Nations Mission

On 13 July 1959 the Pathet Lao started its military

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87 Halpern and Fredman, n. 79, pp. 71-72.
89 India, Lok Sabha, Debates, vol. 23, 2 April 1969, cols. 9238-41.
offensive in the province of Sam Neua. On 29 July 1959 the FLC issued a statement that the Pathet Lao "represent new elements entirely armed, equipped and stiffened (encadrés) by the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam". China and Soviet Union placed the blame on the FLC and levelled charges against the United States for interferring in the affairs of Laos. The United States said on 1 August that it "views with concern what may be a deliberate effort of insurgent elements, apparently backed by Communists from outside, to provoke a crisis in Laos, a sovereign nation and a member of the United States".

On 4 August 1959, Khamphan Panya, the Laotian Foreign Minister sent a letter to the United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, stating that since 16 July 1959 fighting had begun in Sam Neua province and accused North Vietnam of helping the Pathet Lao. On the same day, the FLC proclaimed a state of emergency in five provinces, Sam Neua, Phong Saly, Xieng Khomang, Khammouane and Savannakhet. It had earlier arrested Souphanouvong.

90 Royal Institute of International Affairs, n. 83, p. 261.
91 Ibid., pp. 261-5.
93 Department of State, n. 73, pp. 19-20.
Vongvichit, Singkapo, Sithone Komadam and other Pathet Lao leaders. China and North Vietnam opposed United Nations' involvement and instead asked for reconvening of the IGC. The Government of India also opposed to the United Nations intervention, as Lakshmi Menon, Minister of State for External Affairs, said on 10 August 1959:

The Government of India feels that any step taken in Laos should be in keeping with the Geneva Agreements. The machinery laid down by these agreements was that of the two Co-Chairmen and the International Control Commission. Any variation of the procedures laid down should be within this framework of the Geneva agreements and should have the approval of the parties concerned. (95)

On 4 September 1959 the RLG sent another message to the Secretary-General saying that North Vietnam was taking part in the attack and requested for despatch of an emergency force to stop the aggression. Exact information was difficult as the areas were inaccessible, fighting was sporadic, and secret in nature. The RLG also could not produce any evidence of the North Vietnamese involvement. Nevertheless, the event was exaggerated by the Western press. 97

94 The opposition came as both the countries were not members of the United Nations and did not want the involvement of the United Nations. Dommen, n. 24, p. 122.
95 Foreign Affairs Record, vol. 5, August 1959, p. 139.
96 Department of State, n. 92, p. 1228.
The United Nations Security Council met on 7 September 1959. The Soviet delegate Sobolev pointed out that the matter should not be placed before the Council and that it should be referred to the ICC. The UN Security Council, in view of Soviet Union opposition, decided to send an observation mission consisting of Italy, Japan, Tunisia and Argentina. The President of the Security Council Signor Ortosa said that the mission would enquire only, and that it should not make recommendations.

The sub-committee of the Security Council visited Laos between 15 September and 13 October 1959. In its report of 4 November 1959, it declared:

1. All four periods of military action were guerrilla in character.

2. Certain hostile actions must have had centralized co-ordination.

3. Practically all witnesses (forty out of forty-one) stated that the hostile elements received support from territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam consisting of mainly equipment, arms, ammunition, supplies and the help of political cadres.

The same emerges from the official Laotian documents submitted and from some of the material exhibits. (99)

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99 Ibid., p. 31.
The Sub-committee could not find any evidence of crossing of the frontier by North Vietnam. So, the question whether the DRV had committed aggression could not be substantiated. The HLG also failed to produce any North Vietnamese soldier. Phoumi afterwards said that the Sub-committee was reluctant to charge against North Vietnam because of international repercussions, especially with respect to the Soviet Union.

The arrival of the Sub-committee had reduced the scale of fighting in Laos. Seeing the benefit of the UN’s presence, Hammarskjöld decided to visit Laos. The Soviet Union, however, did not approve of the visit. One commentator observed:

He wanted to find out whether their (Russians) protest was indeed for record, to assuage Chinese feelings rather than to intimate any withdrawal of confidence. He tried to get Dobryin to give him some kind of lead, but Dobryin left him on his own. (101)

Hammarskjöld thus visited Laos between 12 and 19 November 1959. He urged Phoumi to follow a policy of neutrality and get rid of hawks. The UN’s role in economic development of Laos was reviewed. Edouard Zellweger of Switzerland was

100 Dommen, n. 24, p. 124.

appointed as a special consultant to the Secretary General for co-ordinating UN activities in Laos. But the effect of the UN on the stability of Laos was minimal. The Secretary General's emphasis on neutralism was also successful in the short run only. 102

Phoumi Nosavan's Putsch

Meanwhile, in Lao politics, a battle was raging over between the leaders of the RPL and CUNI, the latter insisting on a more tough policy towards the Pathet Lao. 103 Phoumi blamed Phoumi for the failure of August incident, which ended in a fiasco. There was personal difference between Phoumi and Kamphan Panya. On 15 December 1959, Phoumi reshuffled his cabinet dropping Kamphan Panya, Sisouk na Champassak, Phoumi Nosavan and General Sounthon, all CUNI members. 104 The tenure of the National Assembly was to expire on 25 December 1959. On the same day, the troops of Phoumi occupied Vientiane. Phoumi's support was weakened by the death of Katay, the President of the RPL. He submitted his resignation on 30 December 1959. Phoumi, who had been promoted to the rank of a Brigadier-General was helped in the coup by Sinh Ratanasamay, Ouan Bantikone,


104 Goldstein, n. 73, pp. 155-6.
Souvanna Pathamavong and Amkha Soukhavong; all army officers. The National Assembly was dissolved. The Western powers were concerned that a military regime might be interpreted as the end of the Geneva agreements; hence the ambassadors of the United States, France, Britain and Australian charge d'affaires on 4 January 1960 met the King advising him not to allow constitutional process abrogated. 105 Kou Abhay was chosen as Prime Minister by the King. Still Phoumi dominated the Government. His ministry of National Defence would be controlling eighty per cent of the Laothian budget. The election held on 24 April 1960 was thoroughly rigged and farcical. The educational qualification of a candidate was raised so that many NLHS candidates could be barred. The electoral districts were changed to stop the Pathet Lao influence. Most of the Pathet Lao leaders were still in jail. There was widespread bribery and corruption. Souvanna called the election a sham (triquées). 106 A candidate voting for himself together with a dozen member of his family could not get any vote. In an another area of the Pathet Lao stronghold, the Communist candidate got four votes compared to CDNI getting 13,139 votes. The Pathet Lao did not win any seat. The CDNI won

105 Dommen, n. 24, pp. 128-9.
106 Souvanna, n. 50, p. 1325.
34, the FPL 17 and the independents 8 seats. Phoumi formed a new party called Paksa Sangkhom (Social Democrats) out of the elected deputies of CDNI and its supporters. Tia Somanith, a former FPL man switching over to the Paksa Sangkhom was named as Prime Minister. Phoumi was minister of National Defence. The first decision of the new Government was to put Souphanouvong and others on public trial, but on 23 May 1960 they had escaped. The events between Souvanna’s resignation and the April election took Laos to extreme right. There was no NLHS representative left in the capital. Had not Phoumi and Phoumi pursued a course of bland hostility towards the Pathet Lao that made national reconciliation impossible, the ensuing conflict might have been avoided. Even the RAND Corporation authors say:

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the NLHS was itself very reluctant to break with the government and to return to the conditions that had characterized the period before the Vientiane agreement of 1957. This reluctance was based not so much on the possible parity of military power as on the relative advantage in continuing to operate as a legal political organization. (108)

Again, as the events would show, the Laotian problem was getting internationalized. The United States was getting involved in the affairs of Laos deeply. The

107 Smith, n. 62, p. 552.
108 Halpern and Fredman, n. 79, p. 40.
ELC's anti-Communist policy was drawing the Soviet support to the Pathet Lao. The United States policy of containing communism was making it too deeply involved in the affairs of Laos.

The United States Policy

All the while, the United States administration saw the situation in Laos as part of Communist drive for world domination. The international 'Communist conspiracy' theory was given free rein. DULLES had called Laos an "out post of free world". Laos was included in the containment strategy against communism as first line of defence against North Vietnam and China. The day after Geneva Conference DULLES said:

whether this can be stopped at this point, and whether Laos, Cambodia and the southern part of Vietnam, Thailand, Malaya, and Indonesia can be kept out of Communist control depends very much on whether we can build a dike around this present loss. (111)

Neutralism was denounced by the American policy makers. It was viewing with concern the neutralism of Souvanna. NIXON, the Vice President in Eisenhower Administration said

that no sympathy should be shown to that brand of neutralism making "no moral distinction between the Communist world and the free world."\(^{112}\) According to Eisenhower, neutralism has been defined thus:

> There are some who have believed it possible to hold themselves aloof from today's worldwide struggle between those who uphold government based upon human freedom and dignity, and those who consider man merely a pawn of the state. The times are so critical and the difference between these world systems so vital and vast that grave doubt is cast upon the validity of neutralistic argument. \(^{113}\)

Another factor in the involvement of Laos had been Thailand. The United States commitment to Thailand put it "under a continuing compulsion to take actions disproportionate to the intrinsic strategic value of Laos."\(^{114}\) Thailand was judging the commitment of the United States by the steps that Washington was taking against the spread of communism in Laos.

The American means for combating communism in Laos was to support the leaders who would best serve the interests of the United States and strengthen the NLF by massive military and economic aid.\(^{115}\) The United States

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112 *Department of State Bulletin*, 16 July 1956, p. 94.
114 Dommen, n. 24, p. 68.
115 The details of American aid programme have been provided in Chapter V.
was pledged when Katay became the Prime Minister. Souvanna
did not welcome SEATO’s protection. Katay tried to have
close association with the United States and declared that
Laos was covered by SEATO. In January 1955, the United
States Operation Mission (USOM) was set up to administer
aid programme. In July 1955, by a series of exchanges,
the United States and the VLN agreed to promote the defence
of Laos. As the usual Military Advisory Assistance Group
(MAAG) could not be sent to Laos under the Geneva agreements
of 1954, a Programme Evaluation Office (PEO) was set up.
The PEO was in fact a military mission staffed by the
United States armed forces, whose military ranks were
removed for the time being. 116 The PEO was controlling
the 25,000 strong Lao army, which (the RLA) was getting
eighty per cent of the total United States aid to Laos.
A Congressional investigating Committee said:

U.S. support of a 25,000-man army, of the
entire military budget, and of segments of
the civilian economy is, in fact, based on
a political determination, made by the
Department of State contrary to the
recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of
Staff. In Laos, the only country in the
world where the United States supports
the military budget 100 per cent, military
judgements have been disregarded. (117)

116 General John A. Heintges, Chief of the PEO from 1953 to
1961 called the PEO as a similar organization like
MAAG. See, Senate, Committee on Armed Services,
Military Cold War Education and Speech Review Politics,
Hearings before the Special Preparedness Subcommittee,
2371. Silvio O. Conte, a senator who visited Laos in
1959 said that the PEO were ex-mariniers and army men.
House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations,
Operations Appropriations for 1962, Cong 87, Sess 1,

117 House of Representatives, n. 63, p. 8.
The major motive for supporting the army was that the RLG would be effective in overcoming the Pathet Lao. Several army officers and two hundred policemen were trained in Thailand. Katay had allowed the United States to pursue its containment policy in Laos. The United States, as described earlier did play a role in bringing down the Government by Souvanna Phouma, who was trying to accommodate with the Pathet Lao. The CNLI was formed with the backing of CIA, whose advisor John Hazey was very close to Phoumi Nosavan. The United States fully supported Phoumi's statement of 11 February 1959 stating that the RLG had fulfilled its obligations under the Geneva agreements and could no longer consider itself bound by the limitations on foreign aid. Soon arrived American rifles, grenades, machine guns and wireless equipment. The United States increased its military aid to "help improve the mobility of the Royal Lao Army and to otherwise help give that small nation better means to withstand", what was described as "even more clearly to be an extensive Communist design to disrupt and subvert Laos". The PEO received additional military advisors, strength of the Laotian army was increased to 29,000 and military aid

118 Department of State Bulletin, 22 August 1959, p. 300.
120 Department of State, n. 92, p. 1227.
augmented to 30 per cent more. One private group called, "American Fliers for Laos" headed by an officer in the United States Air Force Reserve, Major Clifton L. Speer was organized to go to Laos. The United States also established a training mission of about 100 persons to instruct the Laotians for the use of machinery supplied by it.

The State Department was backing Phoumi Sananikone. But CIA found Phoumi Nosavan more pliable. The CIA and the PEO advised him to stage a coup against Phoumi, when he began to reshuffle the cabinet. In choosing Phoumi, the CIA played another repetition of its old theme: the army had been found the only organization capable of promoting national unity and leading the way towards modern development. Phoumi gladly stage-managed the election of April 1960 with the help of the United States. A Foreign Service officer of the United States observed that CIA agents were distributing money to village chiefs at the time of election. The holding of such elections in Southeast

121 Toye, n. 30, p. 129.
125 Hilsman, n. 72, p. 122.
Asia was a favoured policy of the United States, parallel between this and elections in South Vietnam were obvious.

Co-operation between Laos, Thailand, and the United States was going on well. The United States had built three new air fields in north-eastern Thailand, which were within easy range of Laos. Helped by the United States, Thailand and Laos were maintaining close military and economic co-operation under the auspices of the SEATO. Most of the United States aid supplies were passing through Thailand to landlocked Laos. Various United States agencies were helping to develop close Laos-Thai relations. Under the United States sponsored scheme, 120 out of 128 Laotian students that were going abroad, went to Thailand. Transport and communication facilities were improved between the two countries, which was a part of the United States sponsored communication network in Laos, Thailand, and South Vietnam. The United States also built supply depots and ferry ramps on both sides of the Mekong. Thailand was used as a rear base by the United States for its policies in Laos.

**North Vietnam's Role**

As the P.L.C. was backed by the United States, so

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127 *House of Representatives*, n. 69, pp. 42-43.
also the Pathet Lao had North Vietnam as its ally. It had been dealt earlier how the Communist movement in Laos was dependent upon the Viet Minh. After the Geneva Conference, Ho Chi Minh said:

The adjustment of military areas is a temporary and transitional measure to realize the armistice, restore peace and progress towards national unification by means of general election. . . . North, Central and South Vietnam are integrant (sic) parts of our territory, our country surely will be unified. . . . (123)

But Vietnam remained divided and there was no country-wide elections in July 1956 as stipulated in the Geneva agreements. Laos was strategically vital to North Vietnam. The northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua controlled by the Pathet Lao were of immense help as agents could be sent to South Vietnam through those areas. North Vietnam also reacted to the formation of the SEATO and the United States aid to South Vietnam. The Pentagon Papers said: "Without US aid in the years following, the Diem regime certainly and an independent South Vietnam almost as certainly, could not have survived. . . . South Vietnam was essentially the creation of the United States." The

123 Statement by President Ho Chi Minh after the Geneva Conference (Hanoi, 1955), pp. 3-7.

129 Pentagon Papers, n. 21, p. 25.
mountain terrain adjoining the northern provinces of Laos and North Vietnam was suitable for guerrilla warfare. The same hill tribes living on both sides of the border, also played a major role in North Vietnam's infiltration to Laos. The Pathet Lao was heavily dependent on aid from North Vietnamese. The PLG's serious allegation that the North Vietnamese troops were participating with the Pathet Lao in the summer campaign of 1959, came on 4 August 1954, when its foreign minister complained to the Secretary General of the United Nations. The fact-finding Sub-committee of the United Nations could not produce any evidence of direct North Vietnamese aggression but reported that the Pathet Lao had got various types of support. But the Sub-committee's not finding any North Vietnamese troops did not rule out the possibility that they were not there; the North Vietnamese would have time to vacate Laos.

North Vietnam voiced its resentment at the adjournment of the ICC as it would give the PLG an upper hand. The Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ung Van Khiem said at a press conference in Hanoi on 31 May 1953:

Peace in Indochina is indivisible...the three international commissions should continue their activities as long as the political problems are not completely solved in the three countries. In the present situation in Indochina, the winding up of the activities of the ICC in one country, Laos for instance, without taking into account the settlement of the political

130 Goldstein, n. 73, p. 155.
problems in the other two countries, would have dangerous repercussions on the effective implementation of the Geneva agreements and on the activities of the ICC as a whole. (131)

The motive of Hanoi was clear as regards the ICC. For North Vietnam, the major problem had been the reunification of the country. The Government of South Vietnam had refused to discuss this problem even two years after the proposed election. Hanoi stepped up its guerrilla activities. At the Third National Congress of September 1960, Le Duan declared that the south would play a direct role in the task of reunification. He said:

The South must play a direct role in executing the task of liberating the South from the domination of the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen....The Socialist revolution in the North and the national people's democratic revolution in the South belong to two different strategies, but since they have an immediate common goal—the achievement of national reunification—they are closely connected, and influence and encourage one another in their simultaneous progress. (132)

After three months, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) came into existence. Laos became more closely interlinked in Hanoi's task for reunification.

Apart from giving material help to the Pathet Lao, North Vietnam was playing important role in their various

organizations. It had been described in Chapter I how the Pathet Lao army was formed with the element of Vietnamese assistance. As the war engulfed the whole Indochina in 1960s and 1970s the role of the Pathet Lao army became important in providing a supporting role to the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The defectors from the Pathet Lao army gave the idea of presence of North Vietnamese advisors. There were six Vietnamese advisors in each battalion, three Vietnamese advisors in each company and two in each platoon. There was a Vietnamese military mission in each of the Pathet Lao-controlled provinces. In developing the Pathet Lao army, the NVA had given training, supply of weapons and ammunition. The Pathet Lao army's tactic was of the people's war for defeating an enemy. General Giap's doctrine and military experience guided them. The North Vietnamese exerted a strong influence in the semi-secret Phak Phason Lao (People's Party of Laos, PPL), which was officially proclaimed on 22 March 1955.


Modelled closely after the Lao Dong Party of North Vietnam, the PPL was the body controlling the broad-based NLF.

In South Vietnam, there was also People's Revolutionary Party established formally in January 1962 controlling the NLF. The members of the People’s Revolutionary Party along with the PPL had close links with the Lao Dong Party. Most of the PPL men had been members of the Indochinese Communist Party and it had a Central Committee of twenty members, the Secretary-General being Kayson. As formerly believed there was no third party called Phak Khon Ngan (Labour Party) whose members were joint members of the Vietnamese Workers’ Party. In May 1959, North Vietnam gave more help to the PPL, the date coinciding "with the plenum of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, held in May 1959, at which Hanoi decided to increase its contribution to the insurgency in South Vietnam".

Kong Lao's Coup

Events moved fast in Laos. Captain Kong Lao led a coup on 9 August 1960. This 29 year old captain of the Second Paratroop Battalion was irked over the corruption and American interference in Laos. Coming from the Lao-Teng tribe, he knew well the contempt of ethnic Lao for the tribal

137 Langer and Zasloff, n. 134, p. 96.
138 Zasloff, n. 134, p. 15.
minorities. His ideas were the true reflections of the problems that plagued Laos. He said: "I oppose corruption and persons who live on the sweats of others." Phoumi Vongvichit, the ex-minister in Phoumi's Government and a Pathet Lao leader commenting on the coup said:

The coup d'état staged by a section of the Royal Army in Vientiane on August 9, 1960 enlisted warm support from other army units, police brigades and the urban people... This event had a certain impact on the Lao People's struggle. Since then, the situation in Laos has been evolving in favour of the revolution which took advantage of the occasion to shift over to the stage of partial counter-offensive and recorded many military and political successes. (140)

The Pathet Lao proposed the setting up of a coalition government and helped to spread the coup in various provinces. The coup drew attention to a central factor in the Laotian politics that there existed in Laos a genuine struggle between competing groups which can be called, right, centre, and left. Souvanna Phouma was recognized by both the right and the left as adopting a neutralist posture. Kong Lae had declared:

We want our government to be truly neutral. We will accept diplomatic relations with all countries. I hope that the Government will lead our country to the path of neutrality. That means a government that will incline


neither toward the free world nor the Communist world. (141)

At Kong Lae's insistence, the National Assembly on 13 August 1960 passed a unanimous motion of no confidence against the Somavithi Government and approved the cabinet of Souvanna Phouma. 142 No member of the NLHS was included. But Quinim Pholsena (leader of Santiphob Party) who had formed an alliance with the NLHS was made Minister of Interior. On 17 August, Kong Lae declared the coup at an end. Souvanna's neutralist Government received a good deal of popular support.

Phoumi Nosavan had flown to Bangkok. Marshall Sarit had refused to recognize the new Government. Phoumi set up a 'Counter Coup d'etat Committee' operating at Savannakhet. On 12 August the new Savannakhet Radio (the United States had supplied the transmitter) started broadcasting against the danger of Communist subversion and the pamphlets dropped over Vientiane on 16 August announced the formation of the 'Counter Coup d'etat Committee'. 143 There was also movement of troops from Savannakhet towards Vientiane, Souvanna, in order to avoid a crisis flew to Savannakhet and met Phoumi. Negotiations began at Luang Prabang six days

142 Smith, n. 62, p. 552.
143 Dommen, n. 24, pp. 147, 161.
later. After prolonged negotiations, the cabinet was expanded. On 30 August Phoumi and Quan Rattikone were included in the cabinet. Phoumi had the post of Interior Minister and Quinim Pholsena was moved to a minor post, the Ministry of Information. Quan Rattikone was Minister of Defence. On 31 August the Assembly ratified the new Government. Kong Loe, who was watching the situation carefully opposed the inclusion of Phoumi and others in the new cabinet. On the same day he broadcasted a strong protest but withdrew after Souvanna’s persuasion. Phoumi, who had gone to Savannakhet on 31 August to attend personal business did not return to Vientiane. The reason for his not returning might be the broadcast by Kong Loe and he was advised by his supporters to oppose Kong Loe with arms. 144 The Counter Coup d’etat Committee was revived on 5 September 1960 after consulting Sarit, who had put an economic blockade against Souvanna’s Government. Phoumi had rejected his cabinet post in the ministry of Souvanna due to the pressure of CIA and some United States military officers stationed in Laos. 145 On 10 September 1960, under Phoumi’s direction, a ‘Revolutionary Group’ was formed, whose nominal head was Prince Boun Oum of Champassak, half brother of Souvanna. Boun Oum declared that Souvanna’s Government was

144 Ibid., pp. 150-51.
illegal and charged that it had opened Laos to the North Vietnamese aggression. He proclaimed himself as head of the Government.

The situation in Laos was becoming a three-sided struggle. Each side had an army also. To the left there was the Pathet Lao, Boun Oum-Phoumi Nosavan faction represented the right and in the centre stood Souvanna with his neutralist followers. Fighting soon broke out and the civil war was imminent. There were talks between the Pathet Lao and Souvanna to fight jointly against the troops of Phoumi. Upon the internal quarrels, there was international rivalries. The civil war would soon get internationalized. Each side drew outside support, and the external support aggravated the conflict.

146 Ibid., 12 September 1960.