CHAPTER III
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RETURN TO GENEVA

The Pathet Lao - Neutralist Alliance

Souvanna Phouma started negotiating with the Pathet Lao after Kong Lae's coup. The Pathet Lao had strengthened their positions by a series of military moves, which included the capture of Sam Neua. The different branches of the United States Government had conflicting policies towards development in Laos. The new ambassador Winthrop G. Brown supported Souvanna's scheme for a coalition Government. The Defence Department and the State Department supported General Phoumi. J. Graham Parsons, former US Ambassador to Laos, was now heading the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs in Washington. He decided to put pressure on Souvanna by suspending the United States aid on 7 October 1960. Before this, the HLC was getting financial aid, whereas Phoumi was receiving military aid. Parsons, who as an Ambassador had done his best to oust Souvanna, met him on 10 October and persuaded him to break off talks with the Pathet Lao and reopen negotiations with Phoumi.1

Eisenhower later on wrote that Parsons' mission was a big

1 Lao Pressa (Vientiane), 22 October 1960.

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effort to force Souvanna in breaking off talks with the Pathet Lao. Souvanna did not agree with Parsons. In late October 1960, the State and Defence Departments agreed that Souvanna must go. Souvanna dropped Phoumi from the cabinet formally and sent Quinim to make negotiations with the Pathet Lao. Faced with suspension of American aid, and economic blockade by Thailand, Souvanna turned to the Soviet union. Diplomatic relations were established between the two countries. Aleksandr N. Abramov became the first Soviet Ambassador to Laos on 13 October 1960. Soon after this, the Pathet Lao and Souvanna concluded an agreement. Souvanna himself had flown to Sam Neua on 13 November to talk with Souphanouvong. The agreement stated that Laos would follow a line of peace and neutrality and there would be establishment of diplomatic relations with China and North Vietnam. A coalition Government would be formed. The Pathet Lao supported Souvanna's Government saying: "The armed forces of the former Pathet Lao fighting units will abide by the policies of the lawful government in order to win victory in the struggle against the Phoumi-Boun Oum traitorous

2 Dwight D. Eisenhower, Waging Peace (Garden City, 1965), p. 603. Eisenhower also wrote: "By October it appeared that Souvanna Phouma was either an accomplice or a captive of Kong Lao who himself was an accomplice of the Pathet Lao."

clique..."4 A new chapter in the history of civil war began after the neutralist Pathet Lao agreement. Kong Lae became the head of the National Military Committee which was created for joint military action of the Pathet Lao and the neutralists against Phoumi.

**Phoumi Gets Help**

Meanwhile Phoumi was building up his strength. He was able to bribe a large number of deputies and army officers in his support. The CIA and the PEO (Programme Evaluation Office) helped him in this object.5 At Savannakhet, the PEO was diverting the Thai-trained Laotian paratroopers to Phoumi instead of the Royal Laotian Army. Manned by American crews, aeroplanes were taking supplies from Bangkok to Savannakhet and Phoumi’s garrisons.6 These C-46 and C-47 planes were owned by Air America Company, which was under contact with the United States Government. In late 1960, the United States had supplied military assistance worth of sixteen million dollars to Phoumi. Thailand had put economic blockade against Souvanna’s Government causing

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shortage of rice and petroleum in Vientiane. Sarit's motive was the fear that Souvanna would make a deal with the Communists. He was helping Phoumi by rushing military supplies across the border. Souvanna turned to the Soviet Union for aid including military aid.

**The Policy of the Soviet Union**

The Sino-Soviet rift was increasing. At the Moscow Conference of eighty-one Communist parties of the world, China had accused the Soviet Union that it was not doing its duties to promote world revolution. After this, Khrushchev sought to "fend off Chinese accusations that he was reneging on his duties to support worldwide revolution and other Communist states in their struggle with the West". At the same time the Soviet Union was thinking that a say in the political-military position in Laos could be served as a bargaining point with the United States, with whom the Soviet Union was searching for an understanding. Khrushchev had delivered a major speech on 6 January 1961 about the wars of national liberation. He distinguished

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three types of war: world war, local war, and wars of liberation or popular uprisings. His main emphasis was on peaceful co-existence. The argument developed in this speech were in line with search for an understanding with the United States. 10 The Chinese were apprehensive about this.

The Soviet Union also wanted to have the support of North Vietnam in its quarrel with China. North Vietnam had not liked the Soviet move on 24 January 1957 to seat both the Vietnamese at the United Nations. 11 North Vietnam had embarked on an armed struggle in South Vietnam. This move was more with the line of China’s advocacy of guerrilla warfare than the Soviet Union’s effort of reaching an understanding with the West. The Soviet Union did not want that they should be charged by North Vietnam of betraying national liberation movements. Hence the support to the Pathet Lao, who were themselves closely allied with North Vietnam.

On the diplomatic front, the Soviet Union had protested against the United States. On 17 August 1959, it released a lengthy statement on Laos, where it charged the


11 Dommen, n. 6, p. 180.
United States:

The facts show irrefutably clear that it is not the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or the Chinese People's Republic, but the United States, that is introducing military equipment and material and also military personnel in Laos. The introduction of numerous military advisers into the Royal Army and the government machinery of Laos clearly shows who it is that is really interfering in the internal affairs of Laos. (12)

A Soviet commentator described the Soviet Union's role in the events of Laos as:

In this crucial movement for the Souvanna Phouma Government and for all of Laos, the Soviet Union decisively came to the defense of the Neutralist government and its prime minister, Souvanna Phouma... (enabling it) to carry out a policy of peace and neutrality, and consolidation of the patriotic forces for the struggle against the internal and external reaction. (13)

When Souvanna turned to the Soviet Union for supplies, it agreed. The Soviet Union started supplying rice and oil and from 4 December 1960 the Russian planes arrived daily with the supplies. Later on the Soviet Union started the

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military aid to the neutralist-Pathet Lao faction. On 11-12 December 1960 the Russian aircraft delivered three 105 mm howitzers, three heavy mortars and ammunition to Vientiane. The airlift to the Plain of Jars became a top priority for the Soviet Union. It flew at least 120 sorties to Laos during the period from 15 December 1960 to 3 January 1961.

The Policy of China

Sino-Soviet rift also was one of the major factors in determining the Chinese policy towards Laos. Chae Jin Lee rightly says: "It is a fact, rather than a possibility, that the strategists both in Peking and Moscow no longer could "make an assessment for a decision concerning Laos without seriously considering a possible response or attack from their respective counterparts". In February 1956 at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) Khrushchev had declared that the Soviet Union would "proceed further to improve relations, and co-operate with the U.S." According to him, the policy of peaceful

co-existence could avert a nuclear war. China considered the United States to be its number one enemy. China criticized the Soviet policies in Poland and Hungary. In June 1959, the Soviet Union abrogated the two-year old technical agreement in nuclear field. In September 1959 it adopted a neutral posture in the Sino-Indian border dispute. Increasingly, China was being isolated in the Communist camp. On 16 April 1960, the Chinese in an article "Long Live Leninism" criticized vehemently the policy of peaceful co-existence and the peaceful transition to socialism. The Soviet Union withdrew its technical personnel from China. At the Moscow Conference of eighty-one Communist parties of the world held in November 1960, the Chinese Communist Party was attacked and the delegates supported the Soviet Union in most of the issues. China gave more emphasis to its support of national liberation movements.

China did not want to have a direct military confrontation with the United States over Laos. Since it shared over two hundred miles of border with Laos, China viewed with concern the prospect of any foreign power having a


20 For details of Sino-Soviet rift in late 1950s, see Zagoria, n. 8, pp. 50 ff.

21 For the text of "Long Live Leninism", see *Peking Review* no. 17, 26 April 1960, pp. 6-23.
foothold in Laos. China applied a policy of 'assertive pressure' between 1958 and 1960. China viewed SEATO having aggressive designs against China and interfering in the internal affairs of Laos. It criticized vehemently the United States for its military aid to Laos. By a combination of propaganda, diplomatic efforts and communication with the PCC, China was highlighting the United States' 'aggressive' design. The agreement that Souvanna signed with the Pathet Lao on 13 November 1960 stressed the Chinese support for Souvanna's neutrality and establishment of diplomatic relations. Afterwards, on 7 October 1961, China established a consulate at Phong Saly and on 5 November a Chinese economic-cultural delegation came to Laos. In the increasing conflict in December 1960, China cautioned the United States and called for reconvening of the Geneva powers meeting. Its military journal Xung-tao Thong-ham said that the United States had supplied Phoumi 105 mm howitzers and M-24 tanks and the technicians from Thailand had come to instruct his troops.

The Civil War

In the beginning of December, Phoumi's forces began advancing towards Vientiane through Thailand. Hearing

22 Lee, n. 17, p. 50. Lee says that Chinese policy in Laos between 1954 and 1957 was that of 'peaceful co-existence' and from 1961 to 1962 was of 'policy of negotiations' at Geneva. Ibid.

of Phoumi's advance, Souvanna fled to Cambodia on 9 December 1960. He told angrily in an interview at Phnom Penh:

what I shall never forgive the United States for is the fact that it betrayed me. The Assistant Secretary of State (Parsons) is the most nefarious and reprehensible man....He and others like him are responsible for the recent shedding of blood in Laos. (24)

Souvanna had delegated his powers to General Sounthone Pathammavong (who also later on fled to Bangkok), the Army Chief-of-Staff. On 12 December 1960, the King announced that he had given governmental powers to the 'Revolutionary Committee' headed by Boun Oum and Phoumi. The Royal decree said:

(a) the government (Souvanna's) has not pursued the policy lines it promised,
(b) the government is incapable of assuring the security of the citizens,
(c) the government has allowed communist organization to usurp power...
(d) the government has broken itself by its own acts... (therefore) the Deputies have unanimously withdrawn the Assembly's confidence in the Souvannaphouma government, and condemn its component and policy. (25)

On 15 December, the King approved the formation of a provisional government. Boun Oum was the Prime Minister and Phoumi Nosavan was the Defence Minister. Fighting that

had broken out in Vientiane city between Phoumi's forces and Kong Lae's troops ended in the victory of the former on 16 December 1960. Kong Lae's troops evacuated Vientiane and retreated to the Pathet Lao stronghold, the Plain of Jars.

The 500-square mile Plain occupies a strategic position as the controller of the Plain is also the master of land communications in Laos. One road starting from Vientiane leads to Dien Bien Phu across the Plain and Luang Prabang. Another road runs across eastward to central Vietnam through the Plain. There is an important airfield also. Nearby the Plain, at Khang Khay the Pathet Lao-neutralist headquarters was set up. 26 Souvanna later on joined and resumed his position as Prime Minister in March 1961. The Soviet Union was supplying constantly to Kong Lae's forces through the airfield on the Plain. The Czech-made planes were bringing advisers and officers back and forth between Vang Vieng, Sam Neua, and Hanoi. 27 The Pathet Lao and neutralist forces were making considerable headway in military front. Seven Vietminh battalions, as alleged by Phoumi were approaching the Plain of Jars. 28

26 Thee, n. 10, p. 69.
27 Dommen, n. 6, p. 178.
28 Lao Prasea, 31 December 1960.
Military predominance was exercised by the end of February 1961 in Xien Khoupang, Sana Neua, and Phong Saly. The Pathet Lao had sweeping victories at Muong Sai, Kam Keut, Khommarath and Mahaxay. In the south, the Pathet Lao troops had occupied Tchepone and were controlling the eastern half of the road joining Savannakhet and South Vietnam's frontier. 29

In this civil war, apart from the Soviet Union, both North Vietnam and the United States were helping their respective allies. Sana Varna had sent goodwill mission to North Vietnam and had established post and telegraph communications with it. 30 From October 1960, the North Vietnamese were in the ranks of the Pathet Lao as 'stiffeners'. They were from the 335th Division of the North Vietnamese army. South Vietnam Government accused that 33rd Regiment, 230th Regiment and 673rd Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army were operating in northern, central and southern Laos respectively. 31 After January 1961, there were soldiers from 316th Division, 120th Independent Regiment, and 359th Frontier Guard Regiment. 32 Vi Van Sang, a soldier of the 325th Independent Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army was

29 Toye, n. 15, p. 168.


captured by Phoumi’s troops in March 1961 at Vang Vieng. The Eisenhower administration in early January gave Phoumi with ten AT-6 observation aircraft, each having a pair of 30-calibre machine guns and two 2.36 rockets. In spite of the American help, Phoumi’s troops were unable to fight the Pathet Lao. The new Kennedy administration was confronted with the decision—whether to intervene or not.

**Policy of Kennedy**

When the President-elect John F. Kennedy met Eisenhower on 19 January 1961, he accepted latter’s suggestion for intervening in Laos with force. According to the Pentagon Papers Eisenhower said that the US should go alone in it if its allies did not support the United States. Kennedy had questioned “as to how long it would take to put an American Division in Laos”. As early as 1956, Kennedy had taken the ‘domino theory’ of the Truman and Eisenhower administration for his own. Though he was prepared to intervene, Kennedy did not want to do so unless absolutely necessary. Khrushchev’s speech on “Wars of National Liberation”

33 Dommen, n. 6, p. 137.
36 Ibid., p. 1363.
37 Frances Fitzgerald, Fire in the Lake (Boston, 1972), p. 83.
was misread by the administration. Schlesinger had recalled: "The speech made a conspicuous impression on the new President, who took it as an authoritative exposition of Soviet intentions, discussed it with his staff and read excerpts...". Put the speech was totally misread. It was interpreted in cold war concepts.

A counter-insurgency programme was initiated focussing on Indochina. "A Programme of Action for South Vietnam" was presented for Kennedy by an inter-departmental task force comprising representatives from the Department of State and Defence, the CIA, the International Co-operation Administration, the United States Information Agency and the Office of President. Kennedy approved these in a meeting of National Security Council. The proposals as revealed by the Pentagon Papers (relating to Laos) was to "infiltrate teams under light civilian cover to Southeast Laos to locate and attack Vietnamese communist bases and lines of communications. Training of teams could be combined operation by CIA and US Army Special Forces".

The unconventional warfare in Laos by different American agencies is clear from another revelation by the Pentagon Papers, which said:

38 Schlesinger, n. 3, p. 282.

There are 154 Special Forces Personnel (12 teams) from the 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, N.C. attached to MAAG and providing tactical advice to PAL (Lao Armed Forces) commanders and conducting basic training when the situation permits. Nine CIA officers are working on the field with the Meo guerrillas, backed by two additional officers in Vientiane. (40)

The defeat of Phoumi raised the possibility of intervention in Laos. The then Director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Roger Hillsman had recalled that various proposals were put forward like landing of a division of marines on the Plain of Jars, despatching sixty-thousand troops to capture southern pan-handle of Laos and sending AT-6 planes with hundred pound bombs. 41 These schemes were dismissed. Keeping in mind the Korean war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not want to fight a limited war. The recommendation of the Joint Chief of Staff "was all or nothing" either go in a large scale, with 60,000 soldiers, air cover and even nuclear weapons, or else stay out. 42 On 23 March Kennedy held a press conference on Laos. 43 He said that the United States preferred a neutralized Laos but would not hesitate to intervene if necessary. In an obvious warning to the

40 Ibid., p. 135.

41 Roger Hillsman, To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy (Garden City, 1967), p. 128.

42 Schlesinger, n. 3, p. 310.

Communist powers Kennedy had taken steps for the movement of troops. The Seventh Fleet was moved into the Gulf of Thailand. American force was alerted in Japan and Okinawa; 500 mariners with helicopters moved to Udorn air base in Thailand and military equipments were stockpiled on the other side of the Mekong. At the SEATO Council meeting, it was declared that action might be taken unless the Pathet Lao agreed on a ceasefire. 44

On 17 April 1961, there occurred the attack of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs by a force of about 1200 CTA-trained refugees from Cuba. 45 The failure of the ill-conceived operation in Cuba was a source of humiliation for Kennedy. He determined -

not to permit restraint in Cuba to be construed as irresolution everywhere, transformed the corps of American military advisers in Laos, who up to the point had wandered about in civilian clothes, into a Military Assistance and Advisory Group, authorizing them to put on uniforms and accompany the Lao-tian troops. (46)

Once again, in the National Security Council meeting the question of sending American troops to Laos was discussed. Kennedy decided against sending of American troops. Schlesinger,

44 P. Corrine Phuankasem, *Thailand and SEATO* (Bangkok, 1972), p. 34.
45 Peter A. Poole, *The United States from FDR to Nixon* (Minneapolis, 1973), p. 65.
46 Schlesinger, n. 3, p. 314.
a close advisor to Kennedy wrote that Bay of Pigs Invasion had
made the President to remark: "If it hadn't been for Cuba,
we might be about to intervene in Laos". Fearing that the
adversaries would think him weak in this crisis also, the
task force at Okinawa was put on alert. The Joint Chiefs
of Staff alerted the Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Forces,
Admiral Harry D. Felt, to prepare to move "One American
combat brigade of 5,000 men with air elements to north-
eastern Thailand and another to Danang, on the South Vietnamese
Coast, as a threat to intervene in Laos". 43

Attempts to End Civil War

The attempts to bring an end to the Civil War in
Laos was going on. As early as September 1960, Prince
Norodom Sihanouk had proposed in September 1960 at the
United Nations the neutralization of Laos and Cambodia. He
was alarmed that the Communist countries would enter into the
conflict, and was of the opinion that the United States had
revived the civil war by interfering in Laos. 49 India had
strongly resisted the suspension of the RGC earlier but the
RGC supported by non-Communist powers had obstructed the

47 Ibid., p. 316.
49 Roger M. Smith, "Cambodia's Neutrality and the Laotian
ICC's resumption. The Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, thought that Souvanna Phouma could be relied on "to keep (Laos) out of the cold war, and in a more or less neutral position, and to bring the warring parties together". On 15 December 1960 Nehru in a message to Britain and the Soviet Union proposed that the ICC should be reactivated. But both the Co-Chairmen had conflicting views. On 19 December 1960, the British Foreign Secretary Lord Home said that Britain wanted the formation of a national union government in Laos, but it regarded the Government of Royal Laos as legal. The Soviet Union like India considered Souvanna as lawful Prime Minister. On 22 December 1960, the First Deputy Foreign Minister V.V. Kuznetsov in a note to Britain called for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference with the same composition as in 1954 and reactivation of the ICC. The note blamed the United States for giving help to Phoumi's troops, who were "resisting the legitimate Lao
Government headed by Prime Minister Souvanna Phoumi. Britain did not accept the proposal as it had recognized Phoumi's Government. China, North Vietnam and Poland supported Souvanna. France and Canada recognized Phoumi's Government. On 31 December 1960 the United States had already rejected India's proposal of reactivation of the ICC. The United States warned that it would "take the most serious view of any intervention in Laos by the Chinese Communists or Viet Minh armed forces or others in support of the Communist Pathet Lao." Eisenhower believed that the Soviet Union was trying to bring Laos under its domination. He overestimated the Soviet motive as the Soviets had not ruled out the possibility of a coalition Government in recalling the 1954 Geneva Conference. The effort by various parties in 1960 failed to bring any respite in the Civil War.

On 2 January 1961, Sihanouk proposed a second Geneva Conference (consisting of signatories of the 1954 Geneva Conference, the members of the ICC, Thailand, Burma

54 Ibid., p. 523. Emphasis added.

55 In a letter to the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference, Chen Yi, the Chinese Foreign Minister wrote on 22 December 1960 that China wanted the reactivation of the ICC and blamed the United States for the strife in Laos. Ibid., pp. 530-31.


57 Eisenhower had said: "We take most seriously this evidence (assistance to the Pathet Lao by North Vietnam and the Soviet Union) of an effort by the Soviet bloc to bring the Kingdom of Laos under its domination and control." Eisenhower, n. 2, p. 611.
and the United States) to negotiate a peaceful solution to Laos. The Communist powers agreed to it but the United States rejected. Britain in a letter to Sihanouk on 13 January said that the time was not ripe for a conference as the first step should be to halt fighting in Laos. Britain suggested the return of the ICC to bring a ceasefire, which reversed the earlier British policy of not reconvening of the ICC. On 21 January 1961, the British Government submitted to the Soviet Union the proposal that the Co-Chairmen should ask India for appointing a representative to go to the King of Laos and if the King agreed, the ICC should be reconvened. The Soviet Union in reply objected to the British proposal saying that the King had no executive authority and suggested that the ICC should meet at Delhi. The King, Savang Vatthana on 19 February himself gave a proposal that a neutral commission comprising of Burma, Cambodia and Malaya should come to Laos to stop foreign interference. It was alleged that the


59 The relationship between the ceasefire and convening of conference would assume much importance in May 1961.


proposal of the King was drafted by the United States. Cambodia replied that "the proposal had originated not in Laos but in Washington and that in any case, the efforts of such a commission would be wasted inasmuch as the Pathet Lao had not been consulted concerning it". The proposal was rejected by the Communist countries along with Cambodia and Burma. The meeting of Souvanna and Phoumi between 9 and 14 March at Phnom Penh was not successful as they could not resolve their differences. Moreover, the Pathet Lao denounced the negotiations.

On 23 March 1961 Britain sent a note to the Soviet Union saying that the two countries as Co-Chairmen of 1954 Geneva Conference should call for an immediate ceasefire, and should request Nehru to call the ICC to meet in New Delhi. The proposal also suggested the holding of an international conference. The previous day, the United States Secretary of State, Dean Rusk and the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Home had consulted each other in a telephonic conversation and agreed upon the final text. In the press conference of 23 March Kennedy had supported the British proposal. The British proposal drafted with close consultation

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63 Smith, n. 49, p. 20.
64 Central Office of Information, n. 62, p. 23.
65 Ibid., p. 24.
with the United States and Kennedy's statement of supporting the proposal "should be considered as a single diplomatic package". On 26 March Kennedy had met British Prime Minister Macmillan. Both issued a joint communique saying that both agreed that the British proposal "would pave the way for Laos to become the truly neutral country".

If it became necessary, Macmillan agreed to support Kennedy in case of a limited intervention in Laos. Khrushchev was put in a dilemma. There was on the one hand the consideration of a Communist solidarity and on the other, he did not want to take the risk of confronting war with the United States. At this stage, North Vietnam did not want a ceasefire as the Pathet Lao were winning against Phoumi's forces. North Vietnam thought that the United States would not send troops unless the Mekong Valley fell to the Pathet Lao. North Vietnam could agree to a conference if it was not conditional upon a ceasefire. On 4 April the Soviet Union in a broadcast in Vietnamese language only said that the conference was the important point and it would not demand ceasefire as a condition to conference. To the reply of 23 March note of Britain, the Soviet Union


68 Hilsman, n. 41, p. 131.

69 Domen, n. 6, p. 193.

70 Ibid., p. 194.
replied on 1 April that it agreed for a cessation of hostilities and holding of an international conference. But the Soviet Union did not agree that verification of a ceasefire should precede the conference. Moscow also insisted that Souvanna was the Prime Minister of Laos whereas Britain did not recognize Souvanna's authority. The United States called the Soviet note as a useful move for a peaceful settlement. But Kennedy said: "The first need is to bring the present fighting in Laos to an end." 71 The two Co-Chairmen continued negotiations. On 24 April 1961 Britain and the Soviet Union issued three joint communications. 72 A compromise formula was evolved; Britain did not insist that a verification of a ceasefire be a precondition for the conference and the Soviet Union agreed that ceasefire should precede the conference. The first statement addressed the "military authorities, parties, organisations in Laos" that an international conference would be convened at Geneva on 12 May and asked them to ceasefire before and send representatives to Geneva. The second agreement addressed to India asked for convening the ICC in Delhi. Copies were sent to Poland and Canada. The third message invited the following countries to the Conference, Burma, Britain,

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71 Department of State Bulletin, n. 67, p. 544.
72 The text is in Royal Institute of International Affairs, Documents of International Affairs, 1961 (London, 1967), pp. 572-4.
Cambodia, Canada, China, France, India, Laos, North Vietnam, Poland, South Vietnam, the Soviet Union and the United States. China supported the joint agreements of the Soviet Union and Great Britain. The Chinese Government said:

The Chinese Government fully supports the appeals of the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference to the parties concerned in Laos to ceasefire before the convocation of the International Conference and their appeal to the representatives of the parties concerned in Laos to enter into negotiations for concluding an agreement on question connected with ceasefire. (73)

North Vietnam also hailed the move of the Co-Chairmen. The United States supported the 24 April message but said: "As the United States had made clear in the past, the first essential step is that a cease-fire be put into effect prior to the convening of the conference. The United States will therefore, observe the situation on the ground in Laos very closely." (74) The ICC after having arrived in Laos sent to the Co-Chairmen its report on 11 May saying:


75 The ICC delegates were present on 11 May at Ban Namon, the venue of talks between the representatives of Phoumi, Souvanna and the Pathet Lao. The talks lasting for one hour was cordial. Hence, the ICC sent the report that ceasefire was in effect.
The Commission are satisfied that a general de facto cease-fire exists and such breaches as have been informally complained are either due to misunderstandings or to factors such as the terrain, the nature of disposition of forces, both regular and irregular, of all the parties. (76)

The Geneva Conference Begins

On 16 May 1961 the 14-nation conference opened at Geneva. The participants had assembled four days earlier at Geneva. The four-day delay was due to disagreement over two issues, cease-fire and the Laotian representation. Keeping in mind that the Viet Minh had defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, while the Geneva conference was going on; the United States demanded a cease-fire first. The IOC's information that a cease-fire was in effect resolved the first issue. Dean Rusk, the United States Secretary of State objected to the Pathet Laot's getting equal status with the two other factions. Phoumi Nosavong, representing Boun Oum-Phoumi Nosavong faction had refused to take his seat if Phoumi Vongvichit, the Pathet Lao delegate was given representation. Britain and the Soviet Union decided that any faction could sit in the conference, if sponsored by a country (other than Laos) attending the conference.77

Soviet Union sponsored Souvanna, the United States, the Vientiane Government, and China, the Pathet Lao. Phoui Samanikone boycotted the first session of the conference in protest against the seating of the Pathet Lao.

After the opening of the conference, Rusk said:
"Information from Laos indicates that rebel forces continue to attack in a number of localities.... An effective ceasefire is a prerequisite to any constructive results from our proceedings...." 73 On 27 May, the United States charged the Pathet Lao with over thirty violations of the ceasefire and obstructing the ICC. Four days later, Averell W. Harriman, its representative in the conference said that effective ceasefire agreement could not be achieved without cooperation from all the parties in Laos with the ICC. 79 The problem of ceasefire provoked heated debates with charges and counter-charges.

**Ban Padong Incident**

In late May and early June 1961 another problem was created by the battle around the slopes of Ban Padong, six miles south of the Plain of Jars. Ban Padong and the mountains to the south including 8,500 feet peak of Phu

73 Department of State Bulletin, 5 June 1961, p. 344.
79 Department of State, n. 74, p. 1013.
Bia were controlled by the Meos. The ICC in a report on 24 May described the flights of Air America to the Meo outposts as provocative. An autonomous 'Mee State' was promised to them in return of the help given to the anti-
Pathet Lao forces. The Pentagon Papers had revealed:

About 9,000 Meo tribesmen have been equipped for guerrilla operations, which they are now conducting with considerable effectiveness.... Command Control of Meo operations is exercised by the Chief CIA Vientiane with the advice of Chief MAAG Laos. The same CIA para-
military and U.S. military teamwork is in existence for advisory activities (9 CIA operation officers, 9 LTAC/Army Special forces Personnel, in addition to Thai PARU under CIA control) and aerial supply. (82)

Opium had provided the Meos primary source of income. The Soviet Union tried to take over the opium trade. The Polish ICC member Marek Thee said that through their commercial attache at Hanoi, the Soviets had sent fifteen tons of silver and three and a half million of clothes to be given to the Meos through Hanoi. Hanoi refused to do the

80 Thee, n. 10, p. 109.
82 The Pentagon Papers, n. 39, pp. 134-5.
83 Thee, n. 10, p. 112.
bartering and the deal was not successful. In the assault against the Meos, about five hundred Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese soldiers had participated. On 6 June Ban Padong was captured. Much hue and cry was raised at the Geneva Conference over this. The United States delegates walked out of the Conference for a week. The Conference was suspended for five days.

Khrushchev Meeting

The matter somewhat improved in Laos after the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting on 3 and 4 June 1961 at Vienna. The summit meeting had a healthy effect on the course of events in Laos, though it was temporary. In the meeting, Laos was the only area, on which there appeared some prospect of agreement. Both agreed that Laos should not become a major issue of confrontation between them. Kennedy said on 6 June 1961:

The one area which afforded some immediate prospect of accord was Laos. Both sides recognized the need to reduce the dangers in that situation. Both sides endorsed the concept of a neutral and independent Laos, much in the manner of Burma or Cambodia. Of critical importance to the current conference on Laos in Geneva, both sides recognized the importance of an effective ceasefire. (85)

84 Ibid., p. 114.

85 Department of State Bulletin, 26 June 1961, p. 993. Khrushchev had told Kennedy in Vienna that the Soviet Union "had no desire to assume responsibility in remote geographical areas." Schlesinger, n. 3, p. 333.
Different Varieties of Neutrality

Apart from the question of ceasefire, the delegates at the conference discussed the question of neutrality for the first two months in thirty-six plenary meetings. Between 16 May and 24 May there were policy speeches by different delegates constituting the first phase of the conference. Neutrality was one of the basic factors on which the Geneva agreements were based. The different delegates put forward a variety of definitions of neutrality. Dean Rusk outlined the American position for creating a neutral Laos addressing the Geneva delegates in the third Plenary Session on 17 May 1961. A neutral Laos (and not merely nonalignment with contending parties) from which the foreign military personnel would be excluded, creation of a strong IGC and the United States contributing economic and technical aid were his three-point plan. China insisted on the abolition of SEATO and emphasized the sovereign rights of Laos. The Chinese conception of neutrality, which literally means in Chinese language to 'stand in the middle' accorded "top priority to strict military non-alignment with either bloc-freedom from alliance, bases, or protection by alliance, and to political independence and the absence of external inter-

86 Models, n. 77, p. 9.
ference". The Laotian word for neutrality, 'penkang' also means 'to be in the middle', but there was no unanimity about the location of the middle. Souvanna advocated a settlement that would bring about the participation of the Pathet Lao, whereas Phoumi represented the military interests. Though there were divergent views about neutrality, everybody acknowledged that Souvanna alone could pursue a neutralist policy. The conference began to discuss in detail about the various provisions only when India at the thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth sessions produced a draft after the three factions of Laos signed the Zurich agreements. Then only the working phase (the second phase) of the conference began lasting up to 13 December 1961.

**Attempt at Coalition Government**

Until the three factions agreed to form a coalition Government, a settlement at Geneva would be of no use. Sihanouk was making efforts to bring together Souvanna, Boun Oum and Souphanouvong. The three leaders met at Zurich and signed a communiqué on 22 June 1961 forming a step towards future political negotiations. They in principle agreed to form a provisional coalition Government which would send a

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88 Lee, n. 17, p. 136.
89 Modelski, n. 77, p. 27.
90 Ibid., p. 9.
delegation to represent Laos at Geneva and in the foreign policy matters the leaders decided that Laos would neither allow foreign military bases, nor participate in military alliances and would apply the "five principles of peaceful co-existence". After Zurich agreement, the three factions could not agree to the composition of the cabinet. According to the AFP (Agence France Presse), Chief, Phoumi had told him at Vientiane in August 1961 that Souvanna, not being neutral, could not be acceptable as Prime Minister. At Ban Nam Phong talks on 14 August 1961, Phoumi came with a list of ten names for the post of Prime Minister. Each side continued to increase their strength with fresh supplies. On 29 August Kennedy approved the increase of mobile training teams in Laos to include advisors down to the level of a company, increase of support to the Meo and authorization of photo-reconnaissance. The Royal Laoian Army had been raised to sixty thousand men. It soon began to appear that "the course followed by Boun Oum and Phoumi Nosavan indicated an attempt to scuttle the negotiated settlement, presumably in the expectation that if general hostilities were renewed, the United States would have no choice except to throw its


92 Interview with Joel Henri, AFP Chief at Bangkok, 10 March 1977.


full support behind their faction". The Russians had given Kong Lao forty tanks by 1961 including artillery and armoured cars. The Soviet airlift was extended to Tchepone, near Laos-South Vietnamese border. The United States calculated that by August 1961, there were about 1,000 North Vietnamese combat troops in Sam Neua, 300 advisors to Pathet Lao troops, 300 security men and anti-aircraft gunners on the Plain of Jars. On 8 October 1961, the three factions met again at Ban Hin Heup. It was agreed that Souvanna was to be the Prime Minister. But there was discord over the distribution of portfolios. Vientiane Government did not want to relinquish the post of defence and interior ministries. The Co-Chairmen were sending messages to the three factions to form a Government and send a delegation to Geneva. Skirmishes were occurring and the ICC asked the rival factions to observe ceasefire very strictly. On 14 December, Boun Oum agreed that the two coveted portfolios should go to the neutralists. But just before the scheduled meeting of 22 December, Boun Oum retrieved by saying that the two portfolios should go to his faction. He said that the Zurich agreement was finished.

96 Dommen, n. 6, p. 212.
Second Phase at Geneva

Boun Oum's obstinacy was a setback to the Geneva Conference, which on 13 December 1961 at the forty-third Restricted Session had finalized most of the things. This was at the close of the working phase of the Conference. The closing phase constituted two meetings (31st and 32nd sessions) in January 1962 and five meetings (32nd to 37th) in July 1962. In its working phase, a procedural stalemate had developed at the Conference in July 1961 over the question of neutrality and international control. The Communist powers demanded that priority should be given to neutrality question whereas the Western powers took up the stand that international control was of much importance. The stalemate "was broken by a compromise between the British and Soviet Co-Chairmen under which the conference dealt first with the neutrality declaration, it being understood, however, that no agreement on any one point was binding until all issues - including international control had been agreed". On 14 September the conference broke into small groups. On the question of neutrality, it was decided that questions like composition of the Laotian government, general elections and

99 Modelski, n. 77, pp. 9 ff.

100 Central Office of Information, n. 62, p. 25.
distribution of foreign aid were internal matters of Laos and it should be left to the three parties to settle by themselves.101 Issues like withdrawal of foreign troops, joining alliances and ICC were external issues, so the Conference took up these matters. By 1 November the Conference approved a draft protocol on Laotian neutrality. China had objected to the majority vote in the ICC but later on withdrew. By December the delegates had resolved most of their differences and approved texts for Declaration and Protocol in the more or less same form as the documents took the final shape in July 1962.102

The United States Puts Pressure on Phoumi

The United States was not pleased with the breakdown of talks between the three factions. On 15 January 1961 the United States announced that Harriman and Georgi M. Pushkin, the Soviet delegate had decided that the two portfolios of interior and defence should go over to the neutralists.103 The United States was losing patience with Phoumi Narsavan-Boun Cen group. Difference of opinion was

101 One of the weaknesses of the Conference was that it did not take up these internal factors. Modelski says; “Students of International Relations on the other hand, know that in relation to a country whose status is about to be regulated by international agreement there is no inherent class of affairs which is labelled ‘internal and another international’.” Modelski, n. 77, p. 22.

102 Ibid., p. 11.

cropping up between the United States and its Viêtiane allies. Phoumi in order to retain American support announced that not only the Viet Minh troops but also Chinese and Russian troops were active in Laos in January 1962. The United States did not believe these false stories. On 7 January 1962 it suspended the cash grant of 4 million dollars (military aid was not discontinued) so that Phoumi would yield. Phoumi agreed to meet Souvanna to talk about the formation of a coalition government. The cash grant was resumed within 48 hours. But Boun Oum showed signs of wavering at the meeting held between 15 and 19 January 1962 with Souvanna. Viêtiane was becoming more intransigent. In February 1962 once again, the United States stopped the salary money that Phoumi used to pay to his army every month. Harriman said it was stopped “because we have felt that the Government was not negotiating in good faith for a coalition government”. The cutting off of aid continued for four months. The United States supply of military equipment continued uninterrupted, lest the Pathet Lao and neutralists take a stronger position. In spite of the cut off, Viêtiane did not change mind till the Nam Tha Crisis.

104 Ibid., 3 January 1962.

The Nam Tha Crisis

Nam Tha was a stronghold of Phoumi. It lies about six miles from the Chinese border, and eighty miles from the Thai border. Nam Tha was in the hands of Phoumi's forces at the times of ceasefire. The Pathet Lao territory was seven miles outside the territory of Phoumi's troops. The Pathet Lao mortared the air-field of Nam Tha in January 1962. Souphanouvong in a letter to the Co-Chairmen of the ICC on 29 January defended the mortaring of Nam Tha as it was being used by Phoumi's troops for probing into the Pathet Lao areas. Phoumi once again used Nam Tha as a base to probe into the Pathet Lao territory. He had put more than five thousand troops in Nam Tha. Phoumi had been warned by the United States military advisers against bringing troops to the area for fear of a Pathet Lao retaliation. Phoumi had alleged that there were Chinese and Vietnamese troops, which were dismissed even by the United States advisers. Colonel Edwin Elder, the Commander of the Nam Tha MAAG detachment said that there was no evidence that the Chinese or the Vietnamese assisted in the war. Phoumi had not

106 Toye, n. 15, p. 130.
listened to the American advice against the building up of Nam Tha garrison as he thought that the United States would be compelled to save his army. 109 It was believed that the CIA had prodded Phoumi to take this action. A twelve-member White Star team had helped Phoumi in reinforcing the Nam Tha garrison as he thought that the United States would be compelled to save his army. 110 It was believed that the CIA had prodded Phoumi to take this action. Hilsman, a member of Kennedy administration wrote that Phoumi believed that as in 1960, there would be a policy difference, where Phoumi could count on the support of CIA and Pentagon in opposing a coalition Government. 111 Skirmishes continued between Phoumi's troops and the Pathet Lao intensifying at the end of April.

On 3 May 1962 Muong Sing airfield, Nam Tha's supply base was captured by the Pathet Lao. Three days afterwards Nam Tha was abandoned by Phoumi's troops, who retreated in a hurry through Ban Hoei Sai Valley on to the Mekong river. They crossed to the other side of the Mekong in such a panic that Ban Hoei Sai was announced as having fallen to the Communists on 11 May 1962, whereas in actual fact there was no enemy within thirty miles. 112 Among the Phoumi's troops that

109 The Times (London), 16 May 1962.

110 Thee, n. 10, p. 235.

111 Hilsman, n. 41, p. 138. Schlesinger had written to Goldstein that Phoumi was encouraged by Americans in the field to resist the formation of a coalition Government. Goldstein, n. 66, p. 257.

112 Fall, n. 103, p. 339.
crossed to Thailand was General Bounleuth Sanichan, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Laojarian Army. Alarmed by the events of Laos in last three to four months, Thailand was moving its troops towards upper Mekong. On 13 February 1962 Thai troops were despatched to Nan Province bordering Nan Tha. After 1940, for the first time, the Thai troops had been deployed near the Laojarian border. 113

Thailand's Concern

Thailand wanted a friendly regime in Laos. Sarit had said:

If the situation in Laos or elsewhere develops to the point where it is obvious that it will inevitably become a danger to the nation, I shall have to fight in defence of it... I hope to receive the assistance and co-operation of friendly nations... even if we have to fight alone without help from anyone, it is something we have to do. (114)

It has been noted earlier how Sarit had helped Phoumi Nosavan, when the latter established the 'Revolutionary Committee' at Savannakhet. Sarit's hostility towards Souvanna was motivated by anti-Communism. SEATO had not been helpful to Thailand as in September 1959 and October 1960. The annual


meeting of the SEATO Council of Ministers came on 27 March 1961, when the situation in Laos was deteriorating. Thailand appealed to SEATO to intervene in Laos. Pakistan and the Philippines supported. Due to the French opposition, multinational intervention did not take place. When the Pathet Lao on 20 April 1961 came within ten miles of Thakhek town near the Mekong, Sarit declared that it was direct threat to Thailand’s security. 115 Thailand was sore over the fact that the United States was not taking a firm action in Laos. Even the visit by Vice-President Johnson to Bangkok on 16 May could not allay the fear of Thailand, though Johnson assured Sarit that the United States understood the concern of Thailand.

Thailand had joined the Geneva Conference with some reluctance. The representatives of Thailand had arrived seven days after the conference began. It was afraid that the Pathet Lao would be accommodated in the Laotian Government. Sarit did not look favourably at the talks that were being carried on by the three leaders at Zurich. He made a statement after Phoumi’s return from Zurich to Bangkok: “The Royal Laotian Government will make military preparation for any eventuality that may arise.... There is little likelihood of agreement in the current negotiations.” 116 Sarit was

115 Corrine, n. 44, p. 35.
speaking for Phoumi, whose anti-Communism he shared very much. In the north-eastern part of Thailand, Communist activity had been on the increase. A White Paper of the Thai Government said:

Assistance and support provided by the Lao Communists are considered significant because of the areas in Lao adjoining Thailand are under the control of the Pathet Lao. These areas have also served to facilitate the movement of Chinese and Vietnamese Communists in extending assistance and support to the insurgents in Thailand. (117)

Apart from the Communist insurgency, in the north-east areas of Thailand, which had been once under Laos, a separatist movement was growing in December 1961, the goal of which was to create a neutral Laos. Ninety-six members of this Pan-Lao movement were arrested.

Sarit was thinking of remodelling SEATO to suit Thailand's objective. On SEATO day (3 September 1961), he declared that SEATO should be fashioned "in such a way as to inject into it a new sense of purposefulness and dedications to make it an organisation composed of members who completely shared the same thoughts... who are ready to build up a


bastion against impending danger". Thanat Khoman, Foreign Minister of Thailand, signed an agreement with Dean Rusk on 6 March 1962. The United States declared unilateral defense guarantee. The Rusk-Thanat agreement spelled out that obligations under SEATO were "individual as well as collective". The United States Ambassador had declared that military assistance to Thailand would double 1961 allocation. In May 1962 the United States Military Assistance Command for Thailand was established. Like the close cooperation between the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese, there was increasing cooperation between Thailand and the United States.

The United States Sends Troops

The Pathet Lao had demonstrated their military superiority at Nam Tha. The United States charged the Pathet Lao with violating ceasefire. Apart from negotiating or military intervention, Kennedy said in a Press Conference on 9 May 1962 that there was no third course of action. The United States was becoming alert at the Nam Tha developments.

119 Bangkok Post, 3 September 1961.


There was collapse of Phoumi's army. Phoumi had said that Ban Hoei Sai had fallen into the Pathet Lao hands, which was immediately across the Mekong from the territory of Thailand. As noted earlier, there was no Pathet Lao unit within thirty miles of Ban Hoei Sai. There were different opinions in the United States administration regarding the course to be followed. The Pentagon, which was keen on preventing a coalition government, urged an all-out effort. It advocated American use of force including nuclear attack on China.

Discussing the political line, Hilsman said, "What we needed was a package of moves that would signal to the communists that if they continued on a military scale we would occupy the Mekong lowlands and the territory held by the Royal Lao Government up to the cease-fire line." The State Department representing political line advocated limited military intervention. Two authors discussing about the 'political' and 'military' line had said:

Hilsman's terms 'political' and 'military' provide an initial illusion of subtle manipulation versus heavy-handed intervention. Actually, both schemes called for an American military commitment greater than at any time since Korea. (125)

122 On 16 May in a press statement the RLC said that Ban Hoei Sai was all the time in their control. The earlier statement by Phoumi that it had fallen, was an error. Lao Press, 16 May 1962.

123 Hilsman, n. 41, p. 142.

124 Ibid., p. 143.

125 Mirsky and Stonefield, n. 107, p. 173.
The Pentagon was opposed to troop movements. But it agreed with the State Department in moving the Seventh Fleet, which moved into the Gulf of Thailand on 12 May 1962. After the meeting of the National Security Council on 12 May 1962, Secretary McNamara and General Lemnitzer, who had returned from Southeast Asia, supported the troop movements. On 14 May, one thousand US soldiers, who were in Thailand under SEATO exercises moved to Udorn, thirty miles from Laos border. On 15 May Kennedy announced that he was despatching 5,000 troops to Thailand. The United States was acting under the Thanat-Rusk agreement. Australia, Britain and New Zealand despatched token forces and Pakistan and the Philippines expressed willingness to take similar action. Kennedy in a news conference on 17 May said that the purpose of sending troops was to "help insure the territorial integrity of Thailand". At the same news conference, Kennedy said that Thailand had requested for the troops. Thailand had not asked the United States to send the troops, but agreed when the United States suggested.

126 Corrine, n. 44, p. 36.


128 The Times, 19 May 1962. Till 13 May, the United States had not received Thailand's consent. General Paul Harkins, the American military Commander in South Vietnam, persuaded Sarit to agree to troop's sending. Mirsky and Stonefield, n. 107, p. 174.
Kennedy had concluded his 17 May Press Conference saying that the United States policy towards Laos had not changed. Perhaps the United States thought that the show of force would deter the Communists. The American troops did not cross the Mekong. An outright victory by the Pathet Lao was not wanted by the United States. The Pathet Lao on their part did not violate the ceasefire in a major way. The crisis faded. On 1 July 1962, the marines sent to Thailand were withdrawn. But there remained 2,200 army troops and 1,000 air force men. Its number went on increasing later on due to fighting in Vietnam. From Vientiane, Phoumi’s group sent a telegram to Souvanna on 14 May 1962 asking for the resumption of talks for the formation of a coalition Government.

Plain of Jars Agreement.

On 7 June 1962 the talks were resumed between the Laotian leaders on the Plain of Jars. After debating for five days about the allotment of portfolios, a formal agreement was signed on the composition of a Coalition Government. The 19-member coalition consisted of four Pathet Lao, four rightists, seven Khang Khay neutralists and

129 Department of State, n. 127, p. 1094.

130 Australia, Department of External Affairs, Laos, Select Documents on International Affairs, no. 16, April 1970, p. 109.
four Vientiane neutralists. Souvanna Phouma was to become the Prime Minister having the portfolio of defence. Phoumi Nosavan and Souphanouvong both became Deputy Premiers. Two Khang Khay neutralists had got the portfolios of Interior (Pheng Phongsavan), and Foreign Affairs (Quinim Pholsena). All decisions regarding the ministries of defence, interior and foreign affairs would be unanimously approved by leaders of the three groups. It was stated that the provisions of Zurich communiqué would be strictly adhered to. In simple arithmetical terms it seemed that the Pathet Lao and Khang Khay neutralists had reasons to be satisfied. They dominated the coalition. But the problem was that of their moving to Vientiane. On 23 June Souvanna Phouma took office as head of the coalition Government after Phoumi tendered his resignation officially. A single delegation from Laos headed by Quinim Pholsena went to Geneva. The other members were Phoumi Vongvichit, Ngon Sananikone and Bounthong Voravong. The Geneva Conference resumed its meeting on 2 July 1962.

Why Geneva?

In the Laotian Crisis, it seemed that China, the Soviet Union and the United States were on the point of getting involved in a war. But they opted for compromise. The
motives for accepting compromise on Laos need to be discussed. By 1962, the strategic considerations of the Soviet Union and China were divergent over Laos. The Soviet Union was trying to have an 'accommodation' with the United States as is evident at the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in Vienna. The Soviet Union saw Laos in the context of its search with the United States, whereas China was following a policy of struggle. China was not yet talking of pursuing a policy of detente with the United States. The Sino-Soviet rift also was widening. Russia's views about world future were divergent from that of China, which was demanding an uncompromising political opposition to the United States. The Soviet Union had welcomed Kennedy's accession to the Presidency whereas China had denounced. China and the Soviet Union were having diametrically opposite views about dealing with the United States, which was reflected in their attitude towards Laos.

Khrushchev strongly opposed a militant line on Indochina. In his speech on 6 January 1961 on the "Wars of National Liberation", he had said: "Mankind has arrived at the stage in history when it is able to solve problems... We have always proceeded from the desire to

maintain and extend friendly relations with all peoples for the benefit of peace in keeping with the principles of peaceful coexistence." 133 He said that Communist countries should support national liberation but should not internationalize it. The Soviet Union favoured supporting the Pathet Lao but not as extensively as that of China or North Vietnam. When the British wrote to the Soviet Union on 23 March 1961 about ceasefire, Khrushchev was caught in a dilemma between supporting the Pathet Lao and avoiding a conflict. He chose the latter. The United States military build-up in South Vietnam was increasing. 134 Moscow took the build-up seriously and was prepared to show concessions. Alexander N. Abramov, the Soviet ambassador to Laos in November 1961 asked the Pathet Lao to show a flexible attitude in forming a coalition government, to which General Le Chung, head of the Vietnamese Aid Committee at Khong Khay, replied that Moscow had no right to interfere. 135 The Polish delegate in the ICC Manek Thee recollected:

The Neo Lao Hak Sat, Abramov maintained, was also too suspicious about the role of the National Assembly and the position of the King; a correct approach would demand greater efforts to gain the sympathy of the King and less intransigency toward the National Assembly. (136)

133 *Communism - Peace and Happiness for the Peoples*, n. 9, pp. 389, 391.

134 After General Maxwell D. Taylor, Kennedy's military advisor visited South Vietnam in October 1961, the US Military Assistance Command was created.

135 Thee, n. 10, p. 167.

136 Ibid., p. 194.
According to Thee, in its letter to the Communist parties of Laos, Vietnam and China, the Communist party of Soviet Union in March 1962, indicated the "unwillingness of the Soviet Union to join with its allies in an active Indo-Chinese policy to defend their basic national interests". 137

In the crisis of Nam Tha, the Soviet Union did not interfere. Moreover, the Soviet Union was interested more in the affairs of Europe. Its policy in Laos was to strengthen its bargaining position in the affairs of Europe vis-à-vis the United States. The Soviet Union's help to the Pathet Lao in 1960-61 was more of an exception than a rule as will be evident in its policy after 1962.

Compared to the Soviet Union, China was advocating for a militant policy. Chen Yi, its foreign minister had said on 4 April 1961: "If SEATO really does send troops of the SEATO member nation to take part in the civil war of Laos, and if the Chinese Government is requested by the legal Government headed by Souvanna Phouma, we will not remain idle". 138 China had to support the Pathet Lao as the victory of rightists would mean another pro-US Government in its southern border. Suspicious of the Soviet Union's effort

137 Ibid., p. 243.

138 New China News Agency, 4 April 1961. At the time of Nam Tha crisis, China warned that it would "firmly oppose U.S. imperialist armed intervention in Laos" and would not tolerate "military bridgeheads directed against this country (China)". Peking Review, no. 21, 25 May 1962, p. 11.
of accommodating with the United States and its reluctance to provide nuclear weapons to China, it (China) viewed with concern the military bases of the United States in Taiwan, Japan, Korea and the Philippines. Yet it could not risk a war with the United States. Domestic condition like weakness in the economic front after Great Leap Forward movement was there. Hence, it was suggesting a policy of dual tactics in Laos, local military operations coupled with continuing political negotiations. It was advising the Pathet Lao to take a tough attitude. Yet, China did not rule out the possibility of the coalition Government. Its attitude to Geneva Conference was made clear in March 1961 in a classified document, stating that victory could be obtained only by political and military struggle by the Pathet Lao. China was thinking that tactical neutralization of Laos would have its strategic impact on Burma and Cambodia and thus ultimately on South Vietnam and Thailand. This neutralization in Laos would ward off pressures to be brought on Burma and Cambodia by the United States. The Chinese in a sense were thinking on the lines of an inverted

139 At Khang Khay, the new head of the Chinese Economic and Cultural Mission was a former general of Korean War, Li Chun. Ho Wei, its ambassador to Hanoi was asking the Pathet Lao to take tough attitude towards Phoumi. See Thea, n. 10, pp. 197-8.

140 This document, "Politics" containing references to developments of the early 1960s fell into the hands of the United States. J.D. Simmonds, China's World (Canberra, 1960), pp. 74, 80.
'domino theory'.  The Chinese Red Army in their 'Military Papers' said: "The Laotian revolutionary strength is greater now (1961) than before and there is a strong desire to have a government that wants peaceful neutrality. If we support this government we are actually supporting the revolutionary strength". Going to the Geneva would be advantageous for it; apart from the recognition of the Pathet Lao, the conference might lead to a settlement in South Vietnam. SEATO's protective umbrella over Laos would be also removed. Following the dual revolutionary tactics, 'Nam Tha' had to be followed by a political negotiation. According to the People's War, military strategy had to be guided by political thinking.

Eisenhower had opposed the inclusion of the Communists in the Laotian Government, while trying to create a pro-Western regime in Vientiane. Though Kennedy wanted that Communists should not have a dominant role, he was prepared for a coalition Government. Phoumi's army had fared very badly. The United States was prepared to go to Geneva not due to any concern for neutrality in Laos. It wanted to bide for time so that in future the rightists could conduct struggle from an advantageous position. As Bilsman, a member

141 Ibid., p. 30.
142 Cheng, n. 23, p. 122.
143 Lee, n. 17, p. 165.
of Kennedy administration admitted: "We all understood perfectly well that (it) was just the starting gun... If we had... used the negotiations as an excuse to withdraw from Laos... we in effect would have been turning it over to the communists." Kennedy did not want an outright victory of the Pathet Lao, that is why he applied force as in Nam Thai crisis. He was applying coercive diplomacy so that the Pathet Lao could not have more territorial gains. This type of diplomacy points "upon the focusing enemy's will rather than upon negating his capabilities". The diplomacy of Kennedy was flexible; the object of his sending the troops after Nam Thai crisis was to know the future course of action of the Pathet Lao and agree the Pathet Lao to negotiations. It is difficult to conjecture what course the United States would have followed, had the Pathet Lao not responded to ceasefire. Probably, the United States would have ordered its troops to cross the Mekong to check the Pathet Lao advance. The Pathet Lao's not breaking the ceasefire was a favourable factor.


146 Ibid., pp. 6, 23.
for the United States' coming to the Geneva talks. Another factor that motivated its policy for a compromise was that SEATO members were not unanimous in intervening Laos. The British Premier in his meeting with Kennedy had said that Britain was not opposed to a neutral Laos. The Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting at Vienna in June 1961 was also another favourable factor for a compromise solution. Both the United States and the Soviet Union understood that Laos was not a vital area of interest worth risking a global war.

Two other factors that might have influenced the decision of Kennedy to accept the Geneva agreements were: (i) the United States Embassy, especially its Ambassador, Brown, as opposed to the Department of Defense believed that a compromise formula was the realist solution, and (ii) increase in Viet Cong's activities in South Vietnam requiring more troops and attention of the United States.

North Vietnam as well as the Pathet Lao's attitude also favoured for peaceful solution to the Lao-centric crisis. North Vietnam saw that the Pathet Lao were stronger as compared to the time of 1954 Geneva Conference, numerically, strength wise and area wise. North Vietnam could send its cadres to South Vietnam through the north-eastern provinces of Laos, which were controlled by the Pathet Lao. It was not yet prepared for a large-scale confrontation with the enemy because its general to command a sector
retaliation was in the minds of the North Vietnamese planners. The Pathet Lao as well as the North Vietnamese opted for compromise because of combination of various factors like landing of the United States troops, Soviet pressure, political gain at a conference table and lack of strength and supply to seize the whole of Laos. The Pathet Lao changed its tactics from armed insurrection to national front as they did in 1954 Geneva agreements and 1956-57 Vientiane agreements.

Modelski has commented that the two basic and three preliminary conditions must be present for a compromise settlement. All these conditions were found to be present in the Laotian situation in 1961-62. The basic conditions according to him are stalemate and redistribution of aims. Stalemate in the battlefield was restored when the United States sent its troops to Thailand in the Nam Tha crisis. The Pathet Lao agreed to negotiate. The second basic condition that is redistribution of aims, was present in Laos. It was to the middle faction, where both Phoumi's groups and the Pathet Lao made concessions. The


148 Goldstein, n. 66, pp. 233-5.
distribution of portfolios was made easy by the presence of the neutralist group. Souvanna Phouma was acceptable to both the parties. The three preliminary conditions according to Modelski are identity of the parties, the duration of the conflict and existence of contacts between the parties making communication easy. In Laos, the identity of the parties were well known. The conflict between the Pathet Lao and the rightists were of long duration. Quick victory was unlikely for both. The contending parties were also maintaining communications between themselves like the Zurich talks and other meetings that had been discussed earlier. The presence of the ICC and the Co-Chairmen also made the communication between the parties easier.

Provisions of the Geneva Accords

The Conference which had resumed its work on 2 July 1962 presented two documents on 23 July, a Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos and a Protocol to the Declaration of Neutrality on Laos. The new coalition Government had on 9 July 1962 issued a statement on neutrality patterned after Vientiane agreements of 1956-57 and the Zurich communiqué. The Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos took note of this statement by the PGC. The PGC had pledged in its statement that it would establish diplomatic relations

149 For the text see, Central Office of Information, n. 62, pp. 50-55.
with all countries and apply the five principles of peaceful co-existence. It would not resort to threat of force, allow foreign interference in its internal affairs, enter into any military alliance, allow any country to use Laotian territory for interfering in the internal affairs of another country and recognise the protection of any alliance including the SEATO. The United States did not want the particular reference to SEATO but was compelled to yield by the pressure of Communist countries. The phrase "not allowing any country to use Laotian territory for interfering in the internal affairs of another country" was not in the original declaration. Keeping in mind the North Vietnamese infiltration to South Vietnam through Laos, the United States wanted the inclusion of this phrase.

The Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos looked nearer to the Soviet Draft proposal submitted to the Conference on 17 May 1961. The Soviet Draft was exhaustive compared to the French draft of 23 May 1961. The French Draft was supported by the Western powers, mainly the United States. In the French draft, neutrality was not mentioned except that it took note of the Laotian

150 Ibid., p. 50.
151 Modelski, n. 77, p. 33.
Government's Declaration voluntarily proclaiming its neutrality. Gradually, the Soviet draft was accepted with its stress on respecting the sovereignty and neutrality of Laos. The United States' argument that in the Declaration, unification of the three armies should be included was not taken into account. It was left to the LGC as it was internal affair of the Laotian Government. In the final Declaration, the signatories proclaimed that:

(a) they will not commit or participate in any way in any act which might directly or indirectly impair the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, unity or territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Laos.

(b) they will refrain from all direct or indirect interference in the internal affairs of the Kingdom of Laos.

(f) they will respect the wish of the Kingdom of Laos not to recognise the protection of any alliance or military coalition, including SEATO.

(i) they will not use the territory of the Kingdom of Laos for interference in the internal affairs of other countries. (153)

The Protocol to the Declaration of Neutrality on Laos containing 20 Articles dealt with the withdrawal of foreign troops, roles of the IGC and the Co-Chairman. 154

152 Thee, n. 10, pp. 293-4.
154 Ibid., pp. 52-55.
The introduction of foreign troops and military personnel were prohibited. These were to be withdrawn not later than thirty days after the ICC had notified the HLC that the ICC's inspection teams were present at the point of withdrawals of the troops in Laos (Article 4). Article 5 said that the French military installations were to be handed over to the HLC. If the HLC considered it essential, the French might leave a limited number of military instructors.

Nine articles dealt with the ICC. The Communist powers were not interested in arming the ICC with more powers as the Pathet Lao were stronger militarily. The Western powers were interested in giving more powers to the ICC as it could check infiltration by the North Vietnamese cadres in Laos. There was compromise in the final draft. Article 9 stated that the ICC would 'supervise and control' the ceasefire in Laos but the execution of the ceasefire remained with the three parties of the HLC. This provision was close to the Soviet Draft Protocol of 17 May 1961 than the French Draft Protocol of 6 June 1961. The French draft had stipulated that the ICC would have unrestricted power to supervise the ceasefire. The French proposal of keeping fixed ICC teams to keep track of foreign troops as it was there in the provision of 1954 Geneva

155 Ibid., p. 53.
Conference was not included in the final draft. In the voting procedure also, the Communist powers realized their goal. In 1954, the ICC had needed a majority vote except concerning violations, which threatened the resumption of hostilities. The ICC had majority vote in 1962 only in procedural questions and questions related with ‘initiation and carrying out of investigations’ (Article 14). The same article said:

The Commission functions as a single organ of the International Conference for the Settlement of the Laotian Question, 1961-62. The members of the Commission will work harmoniously and in cooperation with each other with the aim of solving all questions within the terms of reference of the Commission. Decisions of the Commission on questions relating to violations... of the ceasefire referred to in Article 9, conclusions on major questions sent to the Co-Chairmen and all recommendations by the Commission shall be adopted unanimously. (157)

The western powers got the demand of majority vote in matters relating to the initiating of the investigation of ceasefire by the ICC (Article 15). Article 15 said that Canada, India and Poland (the members of the ICC) would pay the salaries of their respective nationals, who were members of the delegation. 158

157 Central Office of Information, n. 62, p. 54.
158 Ibid., p. 55.
Unlike the 1954 agreements, the role of the Co-Chairmen were institutionalized. A close rapport was established between the ICC and the Co-Chairmen. According to Article 8 of the Protocol, the works of the Co-Chairmen (Britain and the Soviet Union) were to receive reports from the ICC, to circulate reports on important information to the members of the Conference and to supervise the working of the Protocol as well as the Declaration of the Neutrality. The Co-Chairmen also might make suggestions to the ICC "exercising general guidance". It would also present a report for terminating the ICC after consulting with the IOC and the RLG "if the Royal Government of Laos so requests, and in any case not later than three years". (Article 19). 160

159 Goldstein, n. 66, p. 265.