CHAPTER V
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ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT: 1963-1972

Role of North Vietnam

As the year 1963 passed there was no sign of peace in Laos. The Laotians looked helplessly as Laos had been drawn into a conflict, where their interests did not count. Laos was overshadowed by the events in Vietnam. The United States was determined to stop the traffic along the Ho Chi Minh trail. As the war escalated, the trail became the main supply line for the North Vietnamese. It was through the trail that North Vietnam sent the weapons in the Tet offensive of 1968. The trail passing through eastern and south-eastern Laos assumed much more importance. In fact as early as 1959, the Viet Minh cadres of South Vietnam began to return along this trail to take part in the fighting against the Diem Government. Gradually the traffic, which was confined to political cadres along the trail saw the coming of supplies and soldiers. After the regular bombing of North Vietnam on 2 February 1965 and sending of the American ground troops to South Vietnam, there was regular infiltration of the North Vietnamese troops along the trail. For operating and keeping the trail open, there were troops from North Vietnam in Laos. Some of them did
the advising work for the Lao People's Liberation Army (LPLA) and particularly in northern Laos, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the LPLA fought against the Royal Laotian Army (RLA).

It is difficult to know the exact number of North Vietnamese troops in Laos. On 6 March 1970, the United States President Richard M. Nixon said about the growing number of troops from North Vietnam in Laos; around mid-1967 it was 33,000, in mid-1968 46,000, in mid-1969 55,000, and in 1970 it increased up to 67,000. 1 Then on the same day, the United States military attaché at Vientiane gave the figure as 42,000 which was 15,000 less than Nixon's figure for 1970. 2 The RAND Corporation authors mentioned that there were about 40,000 North Vietnamese military men serving in Laos. 3 Souvanna Phouma speaking in the National Assembly on 30 May 1968 said that there were about 57 combat battalions from North Vietnam. 4 A Pathet Lao defector, who was serving in the Plain of Jars told that

there were about 25 North Vietnamese battalions in Laos. A pro-Pathet Lao neutralist said that there were about 2,000 to 3,000 North Vietnamese troops in the Plain of Jars area. All the North Vietnamese operations in Laos were not troops. Some were performing support functions and there were girls, old men, and women working as porters in the trail area.

Whatever might be the number of troops, it was a fact that the North Vietnamese were supporting the Pathet Lao. From 1964, the HLG captured about 80 prisoners from North Vietnam. (Compared to it the United States had listed 200 Americans missing in action or becoming prisoners of war and 200 more killed.) In a foreword to the White Book about the North Vietnamese interference in Laos, Souvanna Phouma said:

For more than twenty years that country (North Vietnam)...considered the kingdom of Laos as a natural area of expansion for its political and

5 Author's interview with Lt. Col. Chansamone Inthavong at Nong Khiw Refugee Camp, Thailand, 23 May 1977. Most of the observers opinion was that each North Vietnamese battalion consisted of 300 to 500 men.

6 Noam Chomsky, At War with Asia (London, 1976), p. 169. A Royal Lao Army officer in charge of intelligence operation said that there were 4 battalions and 3 regiments for North Vietnam in 1969 in Laos. See, Lener and Zasloff, n. 3, p. 93. The same officer said in 1970 that about 30 battalions were operating in Laos in 1969-70. The French military attache put the North Vietnamese troops in Laos to 30,000. See Brandman, n. 2, p. 274.
ideological ambitions... From now on the world will be willing to admit that the Vietnam war also extends to Laos, and that this has been the case for the past 20 years, and that is escalating on a daily basis as a result of the ambitions of the Hanoi Government to see the kingdom of Laos one day become a satellite of North Vietnam and eventually serve as a base for further conquests. (7)

After the Tet offensive, traffic in trail accelerated when 17,000 trucks from North Vietnam operated along the trail. The North Vietnamese had captured the Phou Pha Thi base in 1962. This radar installation centre was a constant threat to them as from here the American bombers were directed to the Red River delta. In January 1969, the North Vietnamese foiled the attack on this base by the Meos. The North Vietnamese army helped the Pathet Lao in the ground wars.

Apart from performing combat operations with the Pathet Lao and operating in the Ho Chi Minh trail, the North Vietnamese also advised the LPLA and the People's

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Party of Laos (P' L). The lack of technicians and administrative personnel in the Pathet Lao cadre was supplemented by the North Vietnamese advisory group. Doan (Group) 959 located at Cia-lam near Hanoi served as the apparatus through which the Pathet Lao got their guidance and was headed by Nguyen Van Vinh, a member of the Committee of National Defence in the Ministry of Defence. Doan 959 had its main branch at Sam Neua and had branches in each province controlled by the Pathet Lao. Ten to fifteen North Vietnamese cadres were assigned in each province. The Pathet Lao got the advice of this group in decision-making, policy formulation, and economic affairs. For the military guidance, North Vietnam had a separate channel located at Son La for northern Laos and at Vinh for central and southern Laos. The Northwest Military Region at Son La, commanded by Colonel Vu-lap directed the military operations in the Pathet Lao controlled provinces of northern

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9 Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, North Vietnam and Pathet Lao: Partners in the Struggle for Laos (Cambridge/Mass, 1970), p. 107. Langer and Zasloff described the advisory function of the North Vietnamese after interviewing a defector, Senior Captain Mai Dai Hap. Hap was an advisor to the LPLA.

10 Langer and Zasloff, n. 3, p. 145. Mai son uk was appointed by the Lao Dong party to represent People's Party of Laos in Hanoi and was assigned to this group of 959. Bangkok Post, 23 February 1969.

11 Langer and Zasloff, n. 3, p. 147.
Laos and had military advisors, volunteers forces, and mobile forces in each province. The structure was same for the military operations in central and southern Laos. The advisors were called to headquarters once a year to get instructions for future course of action. Langer and Zasloff mentioned one such plan for 1966-67 as told to them by defector Hap.

The goals for the Vietnamese and Lao were laid out. We were to hold on to the zones already liberated, maintain control of the population there...organize and consolidate the popular guerrilla forces; develop secret political and military bases; and improve the strength of existing military units....The aim of the meeting was to assess our past aid operations in Laos and project future plans for 1966-1967. (12)

According to a North Vietnamese document left behind after the NLC attack during 1969 in the Plain of Jars, five advisors were assigned to the provincial committee of Xieng Khuanboun province and eleven to the provincial government.

One of the reasons for the North Vietnamese involvement in Laos was its concern for security. The North

12 Ibid., p. 160.

13 Edwin T. McKeithen, The Role of North Vietnamese Cadres in the Pathet Lao Administration of Xieng Khuanboun Province (Vientiane, USAID, 1969), p. 4. McKeithen mentioned that all important policy decisions were made by the North Vietnamese but "in such a way that the decisions appear to be the work of Lao officials".
Vietnamese did not want a hostile regime in its western flank. One Vietnamese Professor told that Laos and Vietnam were like lip and teeth, "if you open the lip, teeth will suffer". The soldiers of North Vietnam had sacrificed in the war in Laos. The same Professor told that for one Lao soldier killed in the war, four Vietnamese soldiers had died. Ho Chi Minh had told the Viet Minh cadres that hostile forces could not be tolerated on the borders of Tonkin. That is why North Vietnam had made its efforts to strengthen the Communist movement in Laos. Apart from material support that the Pathet Lao were getting, the leaders of the Pathet Lao had long association with the Indochinese Communist Party and the Lao Dong Party. The Pathet Lao leaders like Kaysone and Nousanak had spent considerable time in North Vietnam. The common ideology of Marxism and Leninism had also envisaged a close cooperation between the two countries. Both had fought against the French together. The common enemy, France, was replaced by the United States. Another factor that was responsible for the North Vietnamese involvement in Laos was the ultimate objective of the unification of both the Vietnamese. The unification had long remained the

14 Author's interview with Nguyen van Thu at Hanoi, Faculty of History, Hanoi University, 7 July 1977.
important goal in the minds of the North Vietnamese since 1956. To help the Viet Cong cadres, they had to send supply through the Ho Chi Minh trail passing through Laos. North Vietnam had not attacked the Mekong Valley area because it did not want to jeopardize its aim in South Vietnam. An attack on the Mekong valley would have risked the American and Thai intervention. In taking such a great risk, North Vietnam would have jeopardized the Paris Peace talks that they were undertaking with the Americans since 1968.

There had been charges against the North Vietnamese that they had wanted to conquer Laos. The KLC in its accusations against Hanoi had put this charge. Souvanna Phouma in an interview with Noam Chomsky said that North Vietnam wanted to colonize Laos as North Vietnam was overpopulated. Chao Sopasaisana, the Vice President of the National Assembly wrote that Laos was facing an aggression by North Vietnam, which weakened by the war had hope on a "federation it would obviously control". A factor

16 Souvanna said: "North Vietnam wants to colonize Laos with Vietnamese because their country is too overpopulated. It's obvious. Look at their flag with its five-pointed star. One is for Tonkin, one for Annam, one for Cochín China, one for Laos, and one for Cambodia." Chomsky commented: "He offered no other argument, apparently regarding this as conclusive. (Applying this reasoning to the American flag...)." Chomsky, n. 6, p. 179.

that lent credence to the belief that North Vietnam was intending to annex Laos was the record of a diary of a North Vietnamese major where it was written that the North Vietnamese troops in Laos were to be permanently settled in Laos and Hanoi had asked permission from the Pathet Lao to bring 20,000 families (dependents of the North Vietnamese troops in Laos) to Laos; the request was not granted by the Pathet Lao. But it was a fact that there were small settlements of North Vietnamese colony along the Laos-Vietnamese border.

Role of Thailand

Thailand wanted a friendly regime at Vientiane. The Thai concern for security greatly increased at the face

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13 Chomsky, n. 6, p. 173.

19 The author in conversation with the diplomats in Bangkok, Vientiane, and Hanoi got the impression that many North Vietnamese soldiers, who were crippled in the war were settling along the Laos-Vietnamese border. It was true that there were many Vietnamese settlements along the border. The ethnographic factor resulting in living together of the same tribal groups in both sides of the border was a contributing factor to this.

20 Thanat had said: "Our sole desire has been to see a free, united, and independent Laos, because under these conditions alone can Thailand feel secure from any threat to her own freedom and independence." Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand at the Geneva Conference on Laos (Bangkok, 1961), pp. 6-7.
of insurgency movement in north-eastern Thailand. Thailand viewed with concern the road-building activities of China next to its border, the rising Communist movement in Thailand with external support, and the war in Vietnam. Added to this was the presence of 70,000 Vietnamese refugees who had settled in north-eastern Thailand. To ward off these problems, Thailand found itself greatly involved in the Vietnam war. SEATO and the support of the United States were two of its main instruments. On 3 September 1963, the Thai Premier Thanom Kittikachorn said:

Let me reiterate; the Thai Government firmly adheres to the SEATO ideals and supports all of its constructive activities. It does so not for the sole purpose of deriving benefits from the Organization but in full awareness of its obligations and commitments as agreed to 14 years ago... This is the reason why the Thai Government has sent troops to help defend the Republic of Vietnam, a Protocol state of SEATO, against the forces or aggression from North Vietnam. That is the reason why it has allowed its allies to use military bases and military facilities in the country. (21)

There was an increase in the United States troops in Thailand, which reached up to 40,000 in 1972 including 10,000 doing counter-insurgency activities. Thailand got 26 million US dollars per year from the United States to meet the expenses concerning military activities in Laos.

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21 SEATO Record (Bangkok), vol. 7, no. 5, October 1963, p. 10.

became a sanctuary for the United States to start air war against Laos and North Vietnam. From the US military bases at Utapao, Khon Kaen, Taklee, Korat, Ubon, and Udorn in Thailand, bombing of Laos and North Vietnam was carried out.

The Chinese road-building in Laos was seen by Thailand as "part of the overall Peking's policy to support the so-called revolutionary wars in Thailand and other countries of Asia." Some of the Thai insurgents were trained in Laos by the Chinese and North Vietnamese instructors. The Meo tribes residing in Thailand also got their training in Laos. Souvanna said at Bangkok on 10 August 1968 that the CMLC was trying its best to prevent Communist infiltration to Thailand from the Laotian border.

The Thai insurgents received their supply of arms from the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese and there were networks


24 In 1965, the Thai Border Patrol Police came to know that 45 Meos recruited in Mae Sot were sent out of Thailand for training in Sen Neua province of Laos and Hoa Binh in North Vietnam. One of the leaders, "Serm", who was caught told that he had spent a year in Laos receiving training. Jeffry Race, "The War in Northern Thailand", Modern Asian Studies (London), vol. 3, 1974, pp. 95, 96.

of supply bases at Ban Houei Sai, Paksane, Pakse, and Dong Khan Thuong in Laos. In the province of Nong Khai in Thailand, there were many pro-Pathet Lao sympathisers of Lao origin, who were residents of Thailand. On 22 December 1967, the Royal couple of Thailand were involved in a rescue mission, when six Thai soldiers were wounded by guerrillas from Laos. This happened in the Nan province of Thailand, when the Meas accompanied by the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese troops crossed the Laotian border to Ban Chong Phra. In 1967-68, Communist insurgency movement was serious in the Nan province giving trouble to the Thai Government.

The United States had financed the military intervention of the Thai troops in Laos, whose strength increased from 5,000 in 1965-66 to 10,000 in 1971 and 20,000 in 1972. The Royal Laotian Army had resented the presence of the Thai soldiers as they were getting

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26 Author's interview with Somboon Thirivasalamat, Deputy-Governor of Nong Khai, Thailand, 30 May 1977.


28 Author's interview with the editor of the Bangkok Post, Theh Chongkadikij at Bangkok, 12 July 1977.

higher wages than the FIA. The Thai soldiers were donning FIA uniforms and were incorporated into the ranks of FIA and Armée Clandestine (AC). The Thai artillery men had fought alongside the FIA at Muong Sai in June 1969. There were about 200 Thai artillery men and 500 security troops at Long Cheng, the CIA base. It was believed that Thailand had contributed 25 per cent of the total manpower of the AC and the long-term goal of Thai intervention was experience of the Thai soldiers in a guerrilla war in Laos that would raise their combat efficiency in fighting the same type of war in Thailand against the Communists in future. 30 The Thai Government had not admitted that there were Thai soldiers fighting in Laos. Propass Charusathira, the Deputy Premier said on 30 March 1970 that there were only Thai volunteers in Laos, who had gone on their own. 31 Vitoon Yaswas was the Thai volunteer’s Commander in Laos since 1964 and was working closely with the CIA. He had said that there were about 30 battalions of such volunteers working in Xong Lome,

30 Brantman, n. 2, pp. 245-6.

31 Propass said: “It is their (Thai volunteers) own business, it has nothing to do with the Government.... We are brother races. A Laotian living in Korat goes home to fight. He is not a Thai Army soldiers sent to fight there.” Bangkok Post, 31 March 1970.
Long Cheng and Pak Xong in Laos. The United States was giving 100 million US dollars per year to Thailand to support these volunteers. The Thai pilots were flying the T-28s in bombing the Pathet Lao areas. The Thai involvement went on increasing in 1970s. The Thai pilots began combat missions using the US aircraft in January 1972. The American combat troops that were withdrawn from South Vietnam came to the US military bases in Thailand to train the Thai volunteers and the Lao pilots in 1972. Thailand became increasingly involved in Laos, which grew out of its concern for security. Referring to the question of Thai security, Senator Fulbright said in the Senate hearings:

Well, I do not think it is our duty to protect the Thais. I think it is their

32 Bangkok World, 13 November 1973. General Vitoon said that the sending of volunteers did not violate the 1962 Accords as they had "Lao blood and shared the same feelings as the Lao people". According to the General, the volunteers were patriotic and anti-Communists. Bill Masion described the experience of a Thai sergeant who was in Long Cheng and with whom Manson spent a week. See Bill Manson, "A Volunteer Comes Home", Bangkok World, 2 October 1972. John le Carré, the novelist had described the character of a Thai Colonel, who fought in Laos. The Colonel said: "Sure, I got kids; need the money. I join PARU (Police Aerial Resupply Unit). Heard of PARU? The Americans ran it. They got it made. I write a letter resigning from the Thai police. They put in a drawer. If I get killed, they pull out the letter to prove I resigned before I joined PARU." John le Carré, The Honourable Schoolboy (London, 1977), p. 409.

duty to have created a government that appeals to their own people...why should they be so nervous about their security? They have been there (in Laos) a long time, a lot longer than the United States has been here, if it is not that they are conscious that this government is not very appealing to the people. (34)

Thailand and North Vietnam fought against each other in Laos. Conflict between the two was aggravated in the widening Indochina war. Thailand saw the North Vietnamese help to the Pathet Lao as a threat to the KLC and in turn North Vietnam looked the Thai help to the KLC as menacing to the Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao viewed the Thai involvement as a design in expansionism. Phoumi Vongvichit, the Pathet Lao leader wrote:

Thai expansionism was conceived by the Thai bourgeoisie after it came to power in 1932. Its aim is to unify all countries inhabited by Thai people (South China, North Vietnam, Laos and Northeastern Burma) into 'Greater Thailand' around a core formed by present Thailand. The immediate target of this expansionism is Laos. The Thai feudalists had conquered almost half of Lao territory and five-sixths of its population had been assimilated. The Thai bourgeoisie, although none too powerful, has major trumpcards at its disposal for the carrying out of its designs in Laos: territorial bases, community of race, knowledge of the country, language, culture etc.(35)


US Involvement

The main objective behind the United States aid to Laos was to exert a great deal of influence there. The Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, C. Douglas Dillon, testified that the policy of the United States was to "assist the Royal Laotian Government in reducing the internal Communist threat by the extension of economic and military assistance". 36 The United States, in its general policy of creating a pro-Western regime in Laos gave aid to enable the KLG to score victories over the Pathet Lao. The KLG depended on the United States for its survival. The emphasis of the United States was on military aid. From 1960 to 1972 the share of countries like Thailand, Laos and South Vietnam for combating internal threat rose from 6 per cent to 37 per cent of total for the forward defence areas. 37 In Laos, the United States' emphasis on military aid could be known from the fact that in the late fifties, Laos became the only foreign country where the United States supported cent per cent of the military


37 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Arms Trade with the Third World (Suffolk, 1975), p. 59.
budget. A memorandum from the State Department said that the objective of the aid was "not to finance the economy of Laos" but "for military budget support". 38

Apart from bearing the burden of the whole Laotian Army, creating a Programme Evaluation Office and Requirements Office, the United States increased substantially the financing of the clandestine army. Between the period from 1955 to 1963, the United States aid for military assistance was 152.5 million US dollars, 320.3 million US dollars for support to the NLC budget (mainly salaries of the army and civil administration), and 7.9 million US dollars for development grants and technical co-operation. Under Johnson administration the military aid went on increasing. During the first three years of Nixon, the military aid was one and a half times more than under Johnson's administration. In 1969 military assistance to Laos was 90 million US dollars, 39 whereas the NLC spent in the same year 13.7 million US dollars for the military purposes. So, the United States military aid

39 US Senate, n. 34, p. 526.
was about seven times more than the military expenditure of the MIG. In the year 1970-71, the military aid to Laos was 146.4 million US dollars. 41

The economic aid to Laos was given by the United States in two forms, the stabilization assistance for checking the inflation and the project assistance providing help in various fields such as agriculture, public health, education, refugee relief, and others. 42 Laos received the largest annual per capita aid from the United States out of the countries receiving aid from it. In the project assistance programme also there were provisions for military technical support, air support and civil police administration helping the MIG militarily. The scope of each activity and other obligations of the United States were negotiated each year in the Project Agreements, which were signed by the USAID director and the representative of the MIG. In the civil police project, thirty-four officers got their training in the United States and ninety in Thailand and Malaysia. 43 The American personnel in the

41 In the year 1971, the military aid was 162.2 and in 1971-72 it was 252.1 million US dollars. Kay Son and H. Nam, "Laos: Important Testing Ground for Neo-Colonialist War" in N.K. Vien, ed., U.S. Neo-Colonialism in South East Asia (Hanoi, 1972), p. 52.


43 US Senate, n. 34, p. 568.
Lao national roads project built and repaired roads to facilitate troops movements and connect the rural with urban areas.

Laos did not get benefit as the motive of aid placed more emphasis on strengthening the PLQ than alleviating the condition of common people. Even in the economic aid, military grant was predominant. For example, in the year 1963, out of the total 62.9 million US dollars project assistance, about 53 million US dollars went to military effort. The functioning of the USAID, the aid distributing agency, was another factor for misuse of aid. The rampant corruption among the Laotian elite resulted in the abuse of aid programme. One authority rightly said: "Practically every error that could be made in the American aid program to Laos was made." 44

As early as 1952, the US Committee on Foreign Operations had reported that the United States aid had been "the foundation of a series of development", which had detracted Laos from political and economic stability. 45 There were twenty-two criticisms of the American aid by this Committee. In another Senate Hearings, the Secretary


Military aid, without real social, economic development is not likely to throw a shield around a society which is being subjected to subversion and penetration from outside; the real defense of the nation is the stake which its citizens feel and what they have in their own country; this has been one of the things that is missing in some stages of the Lao problem. (46)

Though 85 per cent of population of Laos consisted of peasants, the bulk of American aid flowed to townsmen. Mainly the politicians, high officers and military personnel profited from the aid. The bad use of aid gave credence to the Pathet Lao propaganda that the masses were being neglected while a minority was being enriched. Through aid programme, the United States set up an administrative apparatus running side by side with the HLG administration. The USAID was the main instrument of this structure with departments parallel to the HLG bureaucracy. John A. Hannah,


47 The rightist leader Sisok na Champassak wrote: "Corruption and extortion in the customs, banking, foreign trade, police and other administrative departments were commonplace. Black market deals in American aid dollars reached such proportions that the Pathet Lao needed no propaganda to turn the rural population against the townpeople. The Chinese, of Hong Kong and Bangkok and a few Lao officials profited from the American aid, while the poor Lao for whom it was intended stood by helplessly." Sisok na Champassak, Conflict in Laos (New York, 1961), p. 64.
the Director of the USAID, in an interview on 7 June 1970 said that money meant for development programme was appropriated for military purposes and confessed that the USAID was being used as cover for CIA:

Well, I just have to admit that this is true. This was a decision made back in 1962 and by administration from now until then, and it is the only place in the world that we are. I don’t like the way that CIA cover, but we have had people that have been associated with the CIA and doing things in Laos that were believed to be in the national interest, but not routine AID operations. (43)

The USAID budget was 45 million dollars. This was the second highest per capita aid programme, next to South Vietnam. Another US programme for "supporting and mainting" the NLC was the United States Information Service (USIS). 49

The USIS was busy in projecting the image of the NLC than the United States. The United States had created a political and military structure in Laos, which was fully dependent on it. But, even after pumping so much of aid, the NLC operated "at relatively low effectiveness at both the national and local level". 50

43 "An interview with Dr. John A. Hannah", in Adams and McCoy, eds., n. 2, p. 403.

49 For details see, US Senate, n. 34, pp. 536-8.

50 Ibid., p. 569.
Some of the agencies of the United States were also involved in the opium racket. Opium was Laos’ most unofficial profitable export. The Meo tribesmen were the major opium cultivators. The CIA encouraged this trade as the Meos were the backbone of its clandestine army. The Air America planes were involved in the transport of opium trade. Carl Strock wrote that he had seen “American crews loading T-28 bombers while armed CIA agents chatted with uniformed Thai soldiers and piles of raw opium stood for sale in the market”. There was also close collaboration between the CIA and the RLO officials in marketing the opium.

**Fight for Supremacy**

From the year 1968-69, the war in Laos escalated in a big way. When the United States stopped bombing North Vietnam in October 1968, it diverted the air-power to Laos. The aim was to destroy the civil society of the Pathet Lao and give maximum air-support to the ground forces of the Thai irregulars, the Meos, and the RLA. After 1968, there was emphasis on the ground war culminating in the attack of southern Laos in 1971 by South Vietnam.

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increased bombing and the ground war was a prerequisite for the success of Nixon doctrine. Domestic dissent in the United States was increasing over the Vietnam war. This was partly due to a large number of deaths of the American soldiers. The Nixon doctrine meant that the United States would honour its treaty commitments, give military and economic aid, and the ally of the United States would "assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower (i.e., essentially, ground troops) for its defense". In the war between 1969 and 1973, both the NLF and the Pathet Lao tried to gain quick victories. With the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam and the events in Cambodia in 1970, commitment to their respective Laotian allies by the United States and North Vietnam went on increasing. Both made use of Laos to further their objectives in Vietnam; one trying to unify the other part of the country and the other bent upon preventing it. A settlement was not possible in a situation, where both the United States and North Vietnam were locked in.

Laos bore the main burden of air war. Apart from the cost, the magnitude of the bombing could be known from the fact that in a country of 91,000 square miles, each square mile got seventeen tons of bombs and on a per capita

basis, each Laotian received six-tenths of a ton of bombs. The bombing, which was accelerated after complete bombing halt over North Vietnam in October 1968 went unabated.

In June 1969, G. McMurtrie Godley was appointed as the US ambassador in Laos. He was an open advocate of bombing and military involvement. Both he and the CIA station chief had 'military proclivity', and were known as members of Congo Club. Xieng Khouang was bombed severely in April 1969. The HIC took over the town but after a month evacuated due to the Pathet Lao offensive. In the 1969 offensive, there were eleven battalions of the North Vietnamese troops armed with the Chinese AK-47 rifles and the Pathet Lao used PD-76 tanks given by the Soviet

54 Walt Rasey, "The Pentagon Papers and the United States involvement in Laos", in Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, eds., The Pentagon Papers: Critical Essays, Senator Gavel Edition, Boston, 1972, vol. 5, p. 280. The cost of the bombing in 1971 was 1.4 billion US dollars. See: Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Laos: April 1971, Staff Report, Cong. 92, Sess. 1, Washington, 1971, p. 3. The nature of bombing was also grotesque. Jack Anderson quoted a former US Air Force sergeant: "In one case there was a guy in the Plain of Jars area who was crawling away after they'd hit a village with 500 pounders. So they dropped a 250 pounder on him. This blew off one leg. He was still moving so two planes went in and dropped out personnel bombs and they got that one guy crawling away". Washington Post, 12 February 1972.


Union in 1961-62. Muong Soi fell to the Communists on 27 June 1969. This was the last NLF stronghold on the Plains of Jars. Godley himself planned next month to take it back with tactical air support and the troops led by Vang Pao. This was not successful. In the month of August the Plain of Jars was captured by the NLF with the help of Thai irregulars and the Meo troops led by Vang Pao. Khang Khay was also severely bombed. There was a Chinese Cultural and Economic Mission at Khang Khay. By introducing the Thai mercenaries, the United States not only violated the 1962 Geneva Accords but also its own laws. In a Senate session Stuart Symington said that the United States was paying for mercenaries in Laos, "despite legislation which, by letter as well as intent, was designed to prohibit any such practice". After taking the strategic Plain of Jars, the NLF scored quick victories in the year 1969. With the air support, the clandestine army comprising of mercenaries and Vang Pao's troops captured Muong Phine on Route number 9 joining it with Tochepone along the South Vietnamese border. In 1969, the

57 US Senate, n. 34, p. 402.

58 Congressional Records, 3 August 1971, p. S12931. This was without the authorization of the Congress. The information was withheld until the reporters knew it. Ibid., 4 October 1971, p. S15763. Talking about the secrecy, Symington said in the Laos Hearings: "It is becoming evident that we are doing everything, you might say, except talk about it, this war in Laos". US Senate, n. 34, p. 505.
secrecy surrounding the United States operation in Laos was revealed due to journalist enterprise and the Senate Hearings. The critics of the Vietnam war in the United States looked at the Laos operation as another attempt by the administration to conceal and get involved in a larger war. According to Stevenson: "Many senators saw that alleged military necessity was mother of intervention. First advisers, then team leaders, then aircraft, then tactical support, then strategic bombing - it was Vietnam all over again."

In 1970 there was an attempt to take the Plain of Jars by the Pathet Lao. Vang Pao had pursued a 'scorched earth policy', as threat to the Plain from the Pathet Lao was imminent. In January, 231 North Vietnamese were killed and two were taken as prisoners by the NLF. Despite the saturation bombing by the B-52 bombers, the Plain fell into the hands of the Pathet Lao. Nearly 50 battalions of the Meo troops along with the Thai irregulars and American advisers retreated from the Plain and Xieng Khouang area.

59 Stevenson, n. 55, p. 227. In an opinion poll, 57 per cent were for sending the US military advisers, 19 per cent for sending troops, and one-third opined to stay out of Laos even at the risk of a Communist takeover. Ibid., p. 233.

60 "Losses suffered by the North Vietnamese Aggressors in Laos During January", 'Khao Pacham Van', Vientiane, 26 February 1970, pp. 6-7; published in Translations on South and East Asia (Washington), JPRS, no. 255, 27 April 1970, pp. 11-12.

61 'Quan Doi Nhan Dan', Hanoi, 15 June 1970, p. 2; published in Translations on South and East Asia, no. 266, 2 September 1970, p. 25.
Meanwhile Sihanouk had been deposed in a coup by General Lon Nol on 13 March 1970, which added a new dimension to the Vietnam war. The bonds among the revolutionary movements of Indochina was further strengthened. On 21 April 1970, Le Duan announced the formation of an Indochinese united front. A summit conference of the Indochinese peoples was held in southern China on 24 April. It was attended by Pham Van Dong representing North Vietnam, Sihanouk as head of the National United Front of Kampuchea, Souphanouvong from the Pathet Lao, and Nguyen Huu Tho representing the Provisional Government of Republic of South Vietnam.

In a joint declaration on 27 April, they stated:

At this historic moment, the Summit Conference of the Indo-Chinese Peoples urgently calls on the three peoples to strengthen their solidarity, fight with heroism and tenacity and defy all hardships and sacrifice with the firm determination to defeat American imperialists and their lackeys.... (62)

The closing of the Cambodian ports to ships coming from the Communist countries greatly hampered the delivery of war material to South Vietnam. The military of both Cambodia and South Vietnam closely collaborated along with the United States to haunt for the Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. The South Vietnamese-American incursion (to be

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repeated in Laos after ten months) into Cambodia in April-May 1970 had its repercussions in Laos. Southern Laos assumed much more importance in the Vietnam war. The Communist control was solidified in the Laos-Cambodia-South Vietnam border. In southern Laos, the provincial capital of Attapeu and Saravane fell into the Communist control, which facilitated the supply to South Vietnam and Cambodia. The Laotian rightist generals were happy over the South Vietnam-United States incursion into Cambodia. 63 The loss of Attapeu and Saravane increased the rightist pressure to Souvanna like the pressure in the year 1964 on him. Again there was an abortive coup originating in southern Laos in December 1970. Like the 1964 coup, the United States supported Souvanna, who had to bow to the rightist pressures. The rightist generals welcomed the South Vietnamese invasion over Laos in 1971 to cut the supply routes. Souvanna was not consulted before the invasion.

As a part of the Vietnam war, invasion of Laos had been a favourite theme in the minds of American policy makers. In 1967, the United States ambassador in Saigon had given proposal of a "thrust into Southern Laos cutting off the Ho Chi Minh Trail so Communist forces to the south would

wither away." The earlier South Vietnamese incursion to Cambodia made the task easier. Just after the invasion of Cambodia, a South Vietnamese Senator said that similar move might be carried out against southern Laos. The February 1971 offensive involved 20,000 South Vietnamese troops and 9,000 US troops. The campaign known as 'Dewey Canyon 2' (later on changed to 'Lam Son 719') was marked by the air-support. The battle lasted for forty-five days. The main theatre of the operation was on the Route No. 9 joining Savannakhet and Tchepone along the Laos-South Vietnamese border. The invasion failed. The South Vietnamese troops were badly beaten. The objective of cutting the trail could not be achieved and the traffic along it went on unabated. The

64 Quoted in Jaha Mahajani, n. 22, p. 266. This proposal of Ellsworth Bunker could not be carried out in face of the Tet offensive in 1968.

65 Chomsky, n. 6, p. 142. The various objectives of this incursion were "to cut the Ho Chi Minh trails, to destroy NVA caches, to prevent the NVA from stabbing into the northern provinces of South Vietnam, to buy still more time for Vietnamization." Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, Kissinger (London, 1974), p. 176.


67 This was in spite of support by 2,000 planes, 1,000 tanks and 2,000 trucks apart from the US military advisors. See, On the Highway 9 Front (Gia Phong Publishing House, 1971), p. 12. There was 45 per cent casualties, 3,300 killed, 5,200 wounded, and eight South Vietnamese battalions were put out of action. Frances Fitzgerald, Fire in the Lake, the Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam (Boston, 1972), p. 416.
failure of the South Vietnamese troops showed that it was not ready to take over a ground combat role from the Americans and because of this there was disillusionment over Nixon Doctrine. The Laotian invasion, which was intended as a threat to the North Vietnamese did not check the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao offensive on Pakse, Luang Prabang and Long Cheng. In December 1971, the Plain of Jars was taken back by the Pathet Lao. The Plain kept on changing hands between the Pathet Lao and Vang Pao's troops. After taking the Plain of Jars in December 1971, the Pathet Lao seized Som Thong and assaulted Long Tieng. With the control of Bolvens Plateau, Tha Teng, Paksong, and Ban Nhik; the Pathet Lao were in stronger position in 1971.

There was severe fighting in 1972. The pattern was same; the NLF with the help of clandestine army and the United States air support would attack the Pathet Lao stronghold only to be repulsed by it later on. Sometimes the same place would change hands several times as in the

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rainy season the NLF would advance and in the dry season the Pathet Lao would gain victory in battlefield. On the Plain of Jars area, fighting was most devastating. The bombing as well as the ground wars produced refugees, whose number went up to 300,000 in 1972. The Pathet Lao scored an important victory on 12 January 1972, when the CIA base at Long Cheng was overrun. The Route No. 13 joining Vientiane with Pakse was attacked by the Pathet Lao. The bridges were destroyed along this road and the town of Khonesdona lying north of Pakse was taken on 5 May 1972. General Abhay personally directed a campaign ('Black Lion') to take it back in June but could not succeed. The North Vietnamese used military planes for the second time (first was when the Phu Pha Thi radar base was captured) on 11 October 1972 on a NLC stronghold 13 miles north of the Plain of Jars. However, the military activity diminished towards late October 1972 because of progress at Paris peace talks.

69 Zasloff, n. 56, p. 75.
72 United Press International Despatch (Vientiane), 11 October 1972.