Thailand and South Vietnam more difficult. But it was an exaggeration for the American strategists to argue that the fall of Laos to the Communists would lead to the fall of countries like Burma, Malaya or Indonesia and the entire region of Southeast Asia. It was on the basis of this false assumption that the United States sought to promote a pro-Western and anti-Communist Laos. It was not satisfied with a neutral Laos as provided by the Geneva Agreements of 1954.

After Laos emerged as an independent state in 1954, the United States sought to strengthen it economically and militarily. The protection of South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was extended to it when the Manila Pact was signed in 1954. From then onwards the United States supported a large army in Laos to enable the Royal Lao Government (RLG) to resist Communist threat. From 1958 to 1960 it encouraged the RLG to take strong measures against the Pathet Lao.

The Eisenhower Administration regarded the Pathet Lao as agents of Moscow, Peking or Hanoi. They were considered the spearhead of Communist aggressive aims in Laos. The Pathet Lao, however, were indigenous and drew substantial sustenance from the native soil. They had considerable support in the hill-tribes of north and northeastern Laos, though it is also true that they received a good deal of support from the North Vietnamese.

The United States policy of anti-communism provoked
the Pathet Lao and the Communist powers. North Vietnam and China regarded the presence of the United States on their borders as a danger to their security. Laos was situated on their borders and they wanted it to be within their own sphere of influence. They were opposed to the American bases which were so close to their borders. In the initial stage, both China and North Vietnam had supported a neutral Laos. At the Geneva Conference in 1954 and at the Bandung Conference in 1955 both the powers had expressed support for the Laotian neutrality and would have been probably satisfied with a neutral Laos. However, when the United States intervened on the side of the right wing elements thereby undermining the position of the Pathet Lao, North Vietnam and China responded by strongly supporting the Pathet Lao in their struggle with the right wing Laotian faction.

The Laotian people were generally of a peaceful nature. Uninterested in the Cold War, the majority of Laotians wanted only to be left alone. The Laotian leaders too preferred to keep their country non-aligned. Prince Souvanna Phouma, the neutralist leader who was the Prime Minister of Laos for most of the time since 1954 preferred a policy of national reconciliation and neutrality in foreign affairs. It was, however, believed that his neutrality leaned towards the West and informed Americans occasionally described him as mildly pro-Western.

More powerful neighbours of Laos, which had their own interests intervened in Laos; North Vietnam on the side of
the Pathet Lao and Thailand on the side of the right wing
contention and these in turn were supported by the major powers--
China and the Soviet Union and the United States respectively.
The situation in Laos, therefore, became quite involved and
the country was caught in the fierce Cold War struggle.

II

The United States took the momentous decision to make
the army the main instrument of its policy in Laos and to
support an army of 25,000 men. This decision was contrary
to the judgment of military authorities who believed that
Laos required only a small force to maintain internal
security, not a large army to fight aggression. The State
Department and Secretary Dulles insisted, however, that Laos
should have a large army. They did not expect the Laotians
to withstand aggression from China or North Vietnam, but
they were afraid of military action by the Pathet Lao, whom
they regarded as agents of Moscow and Peking. State Depart-
ment officials were influenced by Cold War considerations
which encouraged the policy of forming military alliances
around the periphery of Communist countries. Those in
charge of the Defense Department indeed had argued that a
Laotian army of any size would be of little help in furthering
the Mutual Security policy of the United States in Southeast
Asia. But the leaders in the State Department thought
that Laos should have an army that would offer initial
resistance to Communist aggression. This would publicize
the fact of Communist aggression and provide ground for outside intervention. The Defense Department finally acquiesced in the proposal of the State Department which wanted to maintain a large army in Laos for political purposes.

The Royal Lao Army, which was supposed to be the main "bulwark against communism," was an ineffective fighting force. Nobody in Laos believed that it would make any effective resistance if either the Chinese or North Vietnamese invaded Laos. And many wondered whether it could even effectively offer initial resistance.

The threat posed by the Pathet Lao was an internal threat and was mainly political in nature. To meet it, Laos needed an army trained in guerrilla warfare. But the army that the United States supported in Laos was a conventional army. So, when the Royal Lao Army faced guerrilla tactics, it could not cope with them. The army lacked the strength to fight the Communists internally. Against a much smaller force of the Pathet Lao, it could not put up any fight, as was evident in the fighting that took place during July to September 1958. It lacked both the will and capacity to fight the Communists. In fact, Laos lacked the potentiality of becoming militarily strong. As early as 1955, Senator Mike Mansfield had pointed out that Laos could not be turned into a "bulwark against communism". In his report on Indochina he significantly commented:

While Laos is located in the most strategic
area in Southeast Asia and is on historic route of invasion whether from the north, east, west, or south, the country itself is powerless to stop such incursions. Laos is sparsely populated, completely undeveloped in a western sense, and its way of life virtually unchanged over centuries of time. If there is to be successful resistance to a major Asian Communist drive into Southeast Asia over the Laotian invasion routes, it will not be carried out by Laos alone, no matter how much material assistance may be poured into the country. It will depend on the concerted willingness to support the independence of Laos by nations with interests in the region.

In these circumstances, military aid policies which seek to do more than bulwark the security forces to the point where they can cope with armed minorities and stop occasional border sallies seem to me to be highly unrealistic. By the same token economic aid programs which attempt to move an ancient pastoral country overnight from the age of the oxcart to that of the airplane are equally unsound to say the least. Both in attempting to do too much, in my opinion, can do incalculable harm. 5

American support for the army merely made it a political factor and served to increase tension in Laotian politics. The army lacked political sense but had political ambitions. It participated in coups, exercised its influence in elections and was aligned with the right wing political faction which was anti-Communist. The Committee for the Defence of National Interests (CDNI) which had connections with army was a dominant force from the middle of 1958.

The United States instituted an elaborate aid programme in 1955. The emphasis, however, was on military aid. Eighty per cent of American aid went for the support of a large army. The Laotian economy could not absorb such a large amount and the result was high inflation. The commodity import programme which was introduced to absorb the large amount of cash grants was poorly administered and led to corruption and fraudulent currency exchanges. In fact, the American aid programme created a situation in which corruption, bribery and profiteering flourished in every field of Laotian public life. It destroyed the economic and political stability in Laos and demoralized the Lao society as a whole. In spite of all the American aid, the Royal Lao Government did not gain in strength and popularity. The aid programme not only failed in its objective to create political stability and popularity for the government, but it proved to be counterproductive. The Pathet Lao successfully exploited the shortcomings of the government and charged the Royal Government with corruption and indifference towards the plight of masses. For example, in their election campaign of May 1958, the Pathet Lao were able to carry on successful propaganda on this score. The American aid did not contribute to a minimizing of Communist influence in Laos, but only brought about an atmosphere in which the common people of Laos began to distrust American friendship. The Pathet Lao,
on the other hand, gained strength and popularity. Haynes Miller, the end-use investigator of the General Accounting Office, correctly concluded that "far from building up Laos as a bulwark against Communism, our policy may actually have served to strengthen the Communist position there."6

American aid made the Royal Government of Laos totally dependent on the United States. The United States made use of its aid to bring pressure on the Laotians. The aid was cut off three times during the Eisenhower Administration alone. The purpose of these suspensions of aid was mainly to bring pressure on Souvanna Phouma.

In 1958-59 the adverse effects of aid to Laos became obvious. Strong criticisms were voiced by members of Congress. However, despite their reservations on aid to Laos, both Democrats as well as the Republicans generally favoured the continuation of aid. There were several reasons for such a contradictory approach. There was a strong sentiment against Communism in the United States at that time and even the liberal senators and Congressmen firmly believed in the policy of containment. It was feared that the curtailment of aid would amount to abandoning Laos to the Communists. The aid was large in the Laotian context but in the overall perspective of the total American aid it was quite insignificant. When Congress agreed to

continue the aid programme, it could not have decided to
discontinue the programme in Laos alone. Although, it
cannot be documented it is quite probable that the Executive
Branch might have persuaded Congressional leaders, that aid
in Laos was serving American national interests quite well
and its termination was likely to hurt them. The executive
could have also assured the Congressional leaders that it
would do everything in its power to reform the administration
of aid in Laos. The executive must have argued that it
was not possible to make all the facts about the aid public.
As there was some sort of a consensus in relation to the
objectives of American foreign policy during this period,
it is possible that Congressional leaders might have accepted
these arguments. That is why probably Senators like
William Fulbright and Mike Mansfield favoured the continuation
of aid to Laos. Senators Mansfield and Fulbright were,
however, very critical of the Administration's lopsided
emphasis on military assistance. Fulbright thought that the
aid programme in Laos was a little out of balance.

IV

During the Eisenhower Administration the United States
intervened actively in the politics of Laos. The United
States opposed the policy of neutrality that Souvanna Phouma
was trying to follow. It gave its support to the right
wing forces which had the support of the Royal Lao Army
and which professed anti-communism. The United States
especially supported the right wing leader, General Phoumi Nosavan and his organization, the Committee for the Defence of National Interests (CDNI). Souvanna Phouma believed in a policy of reconciliation with the Pathet Lao. He realized that they had to be reckoned with and accepted in the government. He negotiated the Vientiane Agreement in 1957, following which a coalition government, including the pro-Communist Pathet Lao, was formed. The United States opposed it because it believed that a coalition government which included the Communists would lead to a Communist takeover. During Congressional hearings in 1959, J. Graham Parsons, who had been Ambassador in Laos from 1956 to 1958, admitted, "I struggled for sixteen months to prevent a coalition." 7

The American diplomats within and outside the Administration considered the formation of such a coalition government as a setback to American objectives. The elections of May 1958 showed the popularity of the leftists and the Americans began to fear that in the next elections they might win a majority. Therefore, the American officials exerted pressure to frustrate the formation of a coalition government. Souvanna Phouma believed that the opposition of the United States led to the downfall of his coalition government in 1958.

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From May 1958 to December 1960, the United States actively sought to promote a strongly anti-Communist government in Laos. American support encouraged the Phoumi Sananikone government in 1958-59 to adopt more rightist policies and a stiff attitude towards the Pathet Lao. This provoked the latter and led to the resumption of civil war in Laos. The Pathet Lao attacks in the Sam Neua area in July-September 1959 were on a minor scale but these were exaggerated by the right wing forces which alleged that the Viet Minh had intervened in force. At first, the American press accepted these reports uncritically. During this period, the United States, especially the Department of Defense and the CIA strongly supported Phoumi Nosavan and the CDNI. This led to a series of coups and counter coups. Phoumi Sananikone's government was overthrown by the Phoumist group in December 1960.

The actions of the Eisenhower Administration--its support for the right wing group and opposition to Souvanna Phouma and neutralists as evident in election rigging of 1960, support for the Phoumi group, repudiation of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and the introduction of the Military Assistance Advisory Group--aroused dissatisfaction among the neutralists which was dramatically expressed in the Kong Le coup of August 1960. His aim was to establish a neutral Laos. The coup was a reaction to anti-Pathet Lao policies of the right wing government and American interference in Laotian affairs. In the fighting that
ensued the United States sided with the anti-Communist group under Phoumi Nosavan.

The United States not only provided considerable military and economic aid to Phoumi's forces which were in rebellion against the legal government of Souvanna Phouma but cut off the economic and military aid it had been providing to the Royal Lao Government. When Souvanna was in a difficult situation, he requested assistance from the Soviet Union. The Russians promptly agreed and began supplying aid in December 1960. Thus it was the unwise action of the United States that brought the Russians in the picture. In December 1960, the neutralist forces under Kong Le joined hands with the Pathet Lao forces and their combined strength was much greater than that of the right wing forces. By the end of 1960, the Soviet Union was as deeply involved as the United States. The Russian intervention seemed to be justified as it came in response to the request of the legitimately constituted neutralist government of Souvanna Phouma whereas American intervention looked like an imperialist intervention. Within a short period the neutralist-Pathet Lao forces had captured the strategic Plain of Jars region in northern central Laos and had gained control over the northern and northeastern regions of Laos. Almost half of Laos was under their control.

The decision of the Eisenhower Administration to support the extreme right wing group in Laos resulted in the polarization of political forces, but this went in favour
of the opposite group. At the close of the Eisenhower Administration the Pathet Lao-neutralist forces were in such a strong position that it seemed to the United States government that whole of Laos was in danger of being run over by the Communists. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., observed that "the Eisenhower administration, by rejecting the neutralist alternative, had driven the neutralists into reluctant alliance with the Communists and provoked open Soviet aid to the Pathet Lao."8

In an attempt to make Laos a strong, pro-Western, anti-Communist state, the Eisenhower Administration provided this small and primitive country aid totalling about 300 million dollars during the years 1955-60. Furthermore, it made a deliberate attempt to undermine Souvanna Phouma's neutralist government and intervened in Laotian political affairs to support the pro-Western right wing elements. In spite of this, the Eisenhower Administration failed to prevent the extension of Pathet Lao control over a large portion of the country. In January 1961, when Kennedy assumed office, a greater portion of Laos was under Pathet Lao control than in 1954, when the Geneva Agreements were concluded.

The attempt to make Laos an anti-Communist bastion was mistaken. A country like Laos could not be expected to

resist the physical and ideological encroachments of its powerful Communist neighbours. Laos was politically and militarily weak, and the Royal Lao Government was corrupt and inefficient. The Laotian political system was characterized by instability and rivalry among pro-western forces. There was an absence of a sense of nationalism among the people in general and the ruling elite in particular. The army was incompetent. It had no fighting spirit. The United States encouraged a military solution of the complex political problem when the right wing elements which it was supporting were incapable of fighting the Pathet Lao. At the same time, the United States itself was not in a position to intervene militarily in Laos.

The Pathet Lao were stronger both politically and militarily. They were a strong national force. They should have been given share in the government and the growth of Communist influence in Laos to a certain degree should have been accepted. The United States, by exerting its influence on behalf of the right wing elements and providing them with considerable military assistance, on the one hand contributed to their intransigence, and on the other provoked the Pathet Lao and their supporters. North Vietnam and China could not be expected to tolerate a strongly anti-Communist country on their borders. Such a policy could not succeed in a country with powerful Communist neighbours. The United States policy of polarization involved Laos' alliance with the Western powers, and
the attempted destruction of the left wing Pathet Lao. The extent of influence obtained by the United States in local affairs became repugnant to the Laotian people themselves.

The United States' attempt failed to achieve its objective. Its use of military power and efforts to dominate the political affairs of Laos made the Laotian people suspicious of the Americans; it made them turn towards the Pathet Lao, although they had no attraction for communism. The Pathet Lao became successful mainly because their political opponents, the right wing group and their supporters, committed grave errors in their political and economic strategy. The Communist threat in Laos was mainly an internal threat of political subversion. Had the United States decided to support the neutralists there would have been better chances of success. Economic measures to prevent Communist subversion might have proved more successful.

Situated between Communist and non-Communist states, Laos was eminently suited to be a neutral buffer state. In order to preserve its independence, Laos had to maintain friendly relations with its Communist neighbours. Internally the existence of rival political groups called for a neutralist solution. Most of the Laotians preferred a moderate policy. They were averse to involvement of Laos in the Cold War. A neutral coalition would have possibly reconciled the claims of the rival Laotian groups. A neutral solution would also have served the interests of various powers concerned. North Vietnam's and Thailand's
purposes would have been achieved. It would have satisfied China as well. Such a solution was available. Souvanna Phouma was a leader of stature and enjoyed a measure of popular support. In 1957, there were chances for the success of a coalition government but the United States destroyed it. In 1960, again when Souvanna Phouma was trying to build up a neutral government, the United States opposed him. In rejecting the neutral solution in order to make Laos an "anti-Communist bastion", however, the United States brought about a situation it wanted to avoid.

V

When Kennedy took office in January 1961, the situation in Laos was critical. The Administration was facing the prospects of being run over by the Pathet Lao. This critical situation in Laos was largely the result of the policy of the previous administration. The pro-Western group in Laos which the United States was supporting faced the prospects of defeat. Kennedy soon realized that the United States policy of making Laos strongly anti-Communist had failed and that the latter could not be developed into a bulwark against communism. He therefore came around to accept the principle of a neutral Laos.

The Eisenhower Administration had identified itself with only the militantly anti-Communist group. Despite the massive American economic and military aid, the Royal Lao Army was not able to stand up to the Pathet Lao. In
January 1961, if Kennedy had chosen to strengthen the position of the pro-Western elements, he could have done so only by introducing American troops.

The alternatives before the new Administration were: (1) total withdrawal from Laos, (2) a negotiated settlement, which would have meant a coalition government including pro-Communist elements and (3) a large scale military intervention. The choice before the Administration was extremely difficult. The United States could not abandon Laos because it was already deeply involved and its prestige was committed. The second course meant a retreat from the position of the previous Administration and recognizing Souvanna Phouma as Prime Minister. It was difficult to obtain a negotiated settlement in a situation in which the opposite party was winning. The third alternative—a large scale military intervention with American troops—was a hazardous course.

Kennedy felt that neutralization was the best policy for Laos. He did not favour American military intervention there. Such a course would have increased the possibility of a major armed conflict. Besides, the geographical position of Laos would have posed very complex logistics problems which would have made the task of effective military intervention very difficult. The President was urged to commit American forces but the Joint Chiefs of Staff, remembering the bitter experience of American troops in the Korean war, were reluctant to agree unless American troops
were to be committed in a large number and the President was willing to authorize the possible use of nuclear weapons in advance. Some of the military experts, General Douglas MacArthur, for example, felt that Laos was not the right place to fight a war.

In a special message to Congress on 25 May 1961, the President said:

Experience has taught us, that no one nation has the power or the wisdom to solve all the problems of the world or manage its revolutionary tides; that extending our commitments does not always increase our security... that nuclear weapons cannot prevent subversion; and that no free people can be kept free without will and energy of their own...  

Kennedy questioned the commitments made by the previous administration. He was of the view that there was no military solution to the problems of Laos. He was more realistic and did not believe that Laos could be developed into a "bulwark against communism." Laos was not worth fighting for. The right wing Laotians, whom the United States had been supporting, had proved incompetent and lacked popular support.

In formulating his foreign policy, Kennedy had to take certain domestic political factors into account. He believed that military intervention in Laos would have been highly unpopular, although the American people would have supported

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it in the end. The Republicans would have charged the Democrats with again involving the country in a Korean-type war. A war in a place like Laos would have made the Democrats unpopular and affected their chances in elections at both the state and the national level. He did not think that Laos was worth a major war. The United States would not have gained anything by military intervention. He also felt that the military means would be ineffective. Consideration of the international repercussions of American military intervention also influenced his decision. The French were bitterly against military intervention and the British were very reluctant. President Kennedy, therefore, concluded that military intervention was not feasible.

In order to resolve this difficult problem Kennedy was willing to make concessions to the Communists. He believed that a government acceptable to both parties could be established. Kennedy, therefore, chose the path of negotiations and decided to achieve the goal of an independent and neutral Laos--free from outside Cold War pressures and ruled by a coalition government including the Communists. Kennedy thus accepted the only viable solution. It was clear to him that such a course would not be popular, for it meant abandoning the previous policy of American support to the right wing forces and supporting Souvanna Phouma as the Prime Minister. But the alternatives were even more dangerous.

The United States therefore accepted in March 1961 a ceasefire and a conference which might lead to neutralization.
But Kennedy insisted on a ceasefire before the negotiations. He was aware that if the fighting continued, all of Laos would fall under the control of neutralist-Pathet Laos forces before the conference began.

Although Kennedy did not favor military intervention in Laos, he was determined not to abandon Laos and not to permit a Communist takeover of the country. He was not prepared to accept any "visible humiliation" over Laos which even in his thinking remained a key domino, whose fall would have jeopardized American interests in Southeast Asia. Besides, United States prestige was committed.

Kennedy felt that to bring about a neutral solution, he would have to threaten military intervention. He concluded that the Communists would agree to a neutral Laos only if they were convinced that any other course might not be in their interests. So he kept up the posture that the United States would intervene in Laos, if there were no other way to save the country. This posture was conveyed by his statement at the televised news conference on 23 March 1961, by an order for American advisers to put on their military uniforms, and by sending American troops to Thailand.

The Bay of Pigs failure had a deep impact on his position on Laos. After this incident he decided more definitely not to intervene directly in Laos. He feared humiliation and failure. The decision was partly due to the fact that if he could not intervene in Cuba to fight communism, how could he justify intervention in Laos. At the same time,
he did not want to appear weak and indecisive. He was afraid he might lose credibility with Communist powers.

Kennedy regarded the Russians as the key to the Laotian situation and sought their cooperation for the neutralization plan. He rightly concluded that the Russians would agree to a negotiated solution, since they had no major national interest at stake. Kennedy's policy was based on the assumption that the Russians were capable of restraining the Communists in Southeast Asia. This did not turn out to be true. As a result of the Sino-Soviet split, Soviet influence was gradually declining in Southeast Asia. In 1963, he found that the Soviets could exercise very little influence over the Pathet Lao. In April 1961, the Russians did agree to negotiate and Kennedy was able to bring about a negotiated settlement of the Laotian problem. The result was that Communist takeover of the country at the time was prevented.

Kennedy's posture of diplomatic persuasion combined with a show of force must have influenced Khrushchev to accept the idea of another Geneva Conference. It is possible that Khrushchev did not see any point in getting involved over Laos, particularly when he believed, as he told Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, "Why take risks over Laos? It will fall into our laps like a ripe apple." Yet another possibility is that Khrushchev may have thought that Laos was not really important.

American support for neutralization, however, came too
turn to the United States for aid. At Muong Phanh, Kong Le continued to maintain his control, and the Pathet Lao did not try to destroy his small force. They hoped to use the renewed tension to obtain advantageous terms in the political struggle. Negotiations did take place between the representatives of the three factions from 27 April to 4 May 1963; but on 3 May an ICC helicopter was destroyed, and each side charged the other of creating this incident purposely to sabotage the negotiations. The talks finally broke down because the Pathet Lao did not want to confine the discussion to the question of ceasefire but insisted on discussion of the wider issues, such as restoration of unanimity for all government decisions.

The Failure of the ICC

The fighting in the Plain of Jars was a major test of the Geneva Protocols. It showed them to be too weak, particularly when one party wanted to be obstructive. When fighting occurred in the Plain of Jars in April, the situation was so serious that a fixed inspection team with freedom of movement on the Plains was necessary. On 8 April 1963, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma had made a request to the ICC to send an ICC team to the scene of

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69 Simmonds, n. 43, p. 682; World Today, n. 43, p. 288; and New York Times, 7 May 1963.

70 Simmonds, n. 43, pp. 682-83.
conflict for investigating the situation.\textsuperscript{71} After discussions with General Kong Le, Souvanna Phouma announced on 23 April that all the opposing factions had agreed that the observer team should be stationed at Muong Phanh, the area under Kong Le's control. The Pathet Lao, however, did not cooperate.\textsuperscript{72} They argued that the installation of the ICC teams on the Plain of Jars would be a violation of the Geneva Agreements.

The ICC proved ineffective in dealing with the situation in Laos. Not provided with fixed inspection teams and adequate authority to investigate an alleged violation of the Agreements, the ICC could not take any effective action. It could not exercise any significant influence on the course of events in Laos. Supervision and control were impossible without agreement and cooperation among the parties to the agreement, and the ICC could not compel such behavior.

The machinery set up by the signatories of the Geneva Agreements was unable to function properly because of the differences among the members. Members of the ICC differed on reports to the co-chairmen regarding important questions such as the attack on the ICC helicopter, bombardments and Air America supply flights. The Soviet Union based its position on the minority reports presented by the Polish

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., and Dommen, n. 6, p. 246.

representative of the ICC, and it unilaterally published a number of drafts that placed the responsibility for violations of the Agreements on the United States and its Asian allies. The British, on the other hand, published and circulated to members of the conference sets of documents presenting its own version of the questions. The breakdown of the Geneva machinery was thus complete. Neither the ICC nor the co-chairmen agreed on any vital question. 73

U. S. Reaction to the Renewal of Fighting

In April 1963, it appeared that the Geneva Agreements were on the verge of collapse. The United States felt that there was no satisfactory way of dealing with the renewal of civil war. The Secretary General of the United Nations, U Thant, suggested on 11 April 1963, that the Geneva Conference be reconvened to consider the Laotian situation. But Great Britain and the United States were opposed. The U. S. State Department commented on 12 April that it was unnecessary to reconvene the Conference, as it had already set up adequate machinery to supervise Laotian peace and neutrality. 74 Averell Harriman, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and Chief U. S. delegate to the Geneva Conference, said on 14 April 1963, that President Kennedy


74 Stebbins, n. 3, p. 183; and New York Times, 13 April 1963.
had decided not to become involved in the Laotian conflict; that there were no plans to commit American troops; and that military supplies would not be sent unless requested by the Laotian government. This statement, however, was qualified by Under Secretary of State George Ball, who said on 16 April that the United States did not reinforce its troops in Thailand; however, he could not rule out the possibility that American troops might be sent to Laos. 75

An appeal to the Soviet Union and Great Britain, the co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference, for diplomatic action seemed somewhat more promising to the United States. The Soviet Union had been uncooperative thus far. The Western powers also doubted whether the Soviet Union could exert any real influence over the Pathet Lao in view of its own differences with China. However, the United States made repeated appeals to the Soviet Union. 76 The Soviet response to these appeals by the United States and Britain was clearly evasive. The Soviet Union appeared merely to be echoing the North Vietnamese and the Communist Chinese in accusing the United States for the worsened situation in Laos. 77

Another alternative for the United States was to make

75 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, n. 41, p. 19595.
77 Ibid.
a strong show of force by itself and its allies. But the United States found little enthusiasm for this course at the annual meeting of the SEATO Council which took place from 8-10 April 1963. The Council was willing to do no more than express support for Laotian independence and neutrality.78

The fighting in the Plain of Jars continued through April, and the Pathet Lao advance put the neutralists in a situation of real danger. The United States, therefore, decided to act unilaterally. On 22 April 1963, it was learned that the United States government had ordered the Seventh Fleet to the South China Sea and approved plans for 3,000 troops to take part in the SEATO maneuvers in Thailand in May.79 But despite these moves indicating American readiness to intervene President Kennedy was unwilling to risk deeper involvement. Two days later he announced that he was sending Under Secretary Harriman to Moscow to deliver a personal message and discuss the precarious situation with Foreign Minister Gromyko.80

On 26 April 1963, Harriman had long talks with Khrushchev and Gromyko. A communique' issued on the same day reaffirmed the two governments' full support for the

78 Department of State Bulletin, n. 76, pp. 643-44.
Geneva Accords of 1962. On his return, Harriman said that he thought he had succeeded in his aim, which was to convey to Khrushchev the importance which President Kennedy attached to the maintenance of a free and independent Laos. Harriman went on to add "it is neither the Russians nor the Chinese Communists, but rather the North Vietnamese, who are putting the Pathet Lao into aggressive actions." Khrushchev gave Harriman only general affirmation of the Soviet support for the Geneva Agreements but he indicated that he could no longer restrain the Pathet Lao and would not try to do so.

The Russians did not use their influence as co-chairman of the Geneva Conference to press for observance of the Agreements. They no longer seemed interested in Laos. Probably they were occupied with more important matters. But it was obvious that the rift between the Soviet Union and China was widening. It seemed the Russians had lost influence over the Pathet Lao, now that they were in open conflict with China. The Soviet Union now gave less support to the Communists in their conflict with the United States. It therefore exercised less influence over the North Vietnamese


and the Pathet Lao.\textsuperscript{84}

American officials were happy when the fighting subsided at the end of April and the co-chairmen issued a joint call for a ceasefire at the end of May 1963.\textsuperscript{85} At first United States policy makers emphasized the legal provision of the Geneva Agreements and the ICC as the instrument for enforcement. Although they were fully aware of the presence of the North Vietnamese advisers in Laos, they were slow to call it a violation of the Agreements. In February 1963, Secretary Rusk had said rather mildly, "we are not convinced that the agreements are being loyally supported by the Pathet Lao and the regime in Hanoi."\textsuperscript{86} Only when fighting in April threatened Kong Le's position on the Plain of Jars did the United States charge "a serious violation of the ceasefire" which endangered the implementation of the Agreements. But the United States only called for "prompt and effective action" by the co-chairmen, U. K. and the U. S. S. R., and the ICC.\textsuperscript{87}

When the U. S. found that efforts to get action by the ICC and the co-chairmen were not having any effect, it


\textsuperscript{86}Department of State Bulletin, vol. 48, 4 March 1963, p. 312.

\textsuperscript{87}Tbid, 24 April 1963, p. 486.
shifted its efforts to the forces within Laos. American planes increased their airdrops of weapons and supplies. In June the President decided to send more reinforcement. T-28 aircrafts were sent to replace the older T-6 aircraft supplied in 1961.88

This military assistance was given by the United States at the request of Souvanna Phouma, who appeared to have become convinced at this time of North Vietnamese unwillingness to abide by the Agreements. By May 1963, there was clear evidence of North Vietnamese involvement in Laos. On 6 June 1963 Souvanna for the first time accused the Pathet Lao of using weapons and soldiers from North Vietnam.89 On 24 June he stopped the military budget funds to the Pathet Lao.90

Throughout May and June, sporadic fighting continued in Laos. Meanwhile, on 30 June 1963, after the co-chairmen issued an appeal for peace, Souphannouvong agreed to hold talks. A number of meetings took place during July and August to discuss the question of providing security for the Pathet Lao leaders. But no definite or lasting agreement was reached. No further progress was achieved till the

88 Department of State Bulletin, vol. 49, 30 September 1963, p. 500; and Dommen, n. 6, p. 249.
end of the year 1963.91

Military activity in the Plain of Jars subsided during August, but the Americans feared the revival of fighting as the Monsoon drew closer to end. In late October, the United States reported that the North Vietnamese had been supplying the Pathet Lao with fresh arms in direct violation of the Geneva Agreements. However, there was no evidence that the Soviet Union was providing fresh supplies. Probably it had reduced its aid to North Vietnam as it came increasingly under the Chinese domination. Intermittent fighting on the Plain of Jars continued among the Laotian factions throughout the remaining part of the year. Efforts by Souvanna Phouma to negotiate a ceasefire were unsuccessful but the level of fighting was on a small scale. It was clear by now that the conflict in Laos could no longer be viewed in isolation. There could not be a settlement in Laos as long as the war in Vietnam continued.92

The success of the Geneva Agreements depended on cooperation among the Laotian factions. But such cooperation did not come. Both the extremes, the right wing and left wing elements in Laos, continued to maintain the position they had held before the Agreements of 1962 were concluded. They refused to concede any reduction in their territories or armies. The result was that the coalition government

91Simmonds, n. 43, p. 682.
92Stebbins, n. 3, p. 185.
broke down just ten months after the Agreements were made. After 1962, the United States considered the Laos question less important. The focus of American policy in Southeast Asia became Vietnam. Laos was linked with Vietnam by this time. It was important to both North Vietnam and the United States for their objectives in Vietnam. Both the sides therefore continued to violate the Geneva Agreements. But as Laos was secondary, there was no resumption of full-scale hostilities in Laos. The settlement in its broader sense was maintained although technical provisions of the Agreements were violated. Consequently, no major international crisis occurred after 1962.
Chapter VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

After the rise of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and the traumatic experience the United States had in the Korean war, American policy makers were greatly alarmed at the prospect of further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. They believed that China intended to dominate the region and that such a development was likely to endanger the security of the United States. Therefore, after 1954 the United States pursued a policy of containment of communism in Southeast Asia. The Eisenhower Administration was determined to prevent any further expansion of communism in the area and adopted a policy of firm opposition towards the entire Far East. Secretary of State, John F. Dulles, aimed at forming an alliance of anti-Communist states around the periphery of China. It was within this general policy framework towards Southeast Asia that the United States applied the policy of containment to Laos. The United States viewed Laos in the context of its strategic and political interests in Southeast Asia in general and in Thailand and South Vietnam in particular.

Underlying this policy was the assumption that Southeast Asia was an area of great importance to the United States.
American policy makers, however, assumed this importance; they were not able to demonstrate it with concrete evidence. The economic value of the region for the United States was slight. The region was not of much military significance either. During the Second World War a hostile Japan had occupied the entire area but this development did not directly endanger the United States militarily. In case of a major war between the United States and China, neither of them would have been in any significantly advantageous position because of its control over Southeast Asia. The real importance of the region to the United States was psychological and political. In any calculation of international balance of power, the domination of Southeast Asia by China would have given it considerable advantage. The importance of the region increased in the context of the Cold War.

Actually, as Senator Mike Mansfield (Dem., Mont.) observed in his Commencement Address at the Michigan State University in 1962, interests of the United States in the area were limited.¹ They were neither vital nor essential. A number of eminent Americans rejected strongly the idea that the entire Southeast Asian region was of vital importance to the United States. Among them were noted

political leaders and public figures like Senators Mike Mansfield, William Fulbright (Dem., Ark.), and Walter Lippmann. The military threat posed by China was exaggerated by American diplomats who believed that the Communist challenge was primarily military and could be met primarily by military means.

United States policy in Southeast Asia from 1950 onwards was based on the "domino theory" which suggested that, if any one country in the region came to be dominated by the Communists, Southeast Asia and perhaps eventually all of Asia would be lost. Both President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles were firm believers in this theory, which postulated a very high degree of interdependence among the countries of the region. This widely held theory, however, did not rest on a rational foundation. Neither was it based on historical experience. As Hans Morgenthau has pointed out the success or failure of communism in any particular country depended on many factors. The developments in a neighbouring country might just be one factor among many. Although North Vietnam and part of Laos became Communist, no other Southeast Asian country did in 1950s and 1960s. According to Morgenthau, Indonesia or Burma might have become Communist without making any ideological impact on Indochina.² Furthermore, there was no evidence to indicate that either

China or North Vietnam had any intention to overrun the entire region in the near future. Moreover, it was wrong to believe that the countries of Southeast Asia had no will or strength to defend their own independence.

A Communist victory in Vietnam or Laos would not have immediately led to the Chinese aggression of other countries of Southeast Asia. This would have created greater danger for the neighbours of North Vietnam--Laos and Cambodia--because the Communists did want to establish some kind of dominance over all of Indochina. But there was no reason to believe that other countries of Southeast Asia would have faced imminent danger, had Vietnam or Laos fallen under Communist control.

The Eisenhower Administration believed that because of its strategic position Laos was the "gateway to all of Southeast Asia." Its fall, the Administration felt, would have led to the fall of all other countries of Southeast Asia and eventually endangered the security of the United States itself. Such a belief was mistaken. It was unlikely that the fall of Laos would have seriously affected the entire region and the security of the United States in any significant way.

According to Roger Hilsman, Laos was strategically important owing to the fact that it was situated astride the potential route over which the Chinese power could be
projected southward to dominate Southeast Asia. The possibility of the Chinese moving into Southeast Asia through Laos, however, was very little. Full of mountains and jungles, and with poor network of roads and communications, Laos could not be an important route for invading Southeast Asia. Laos was excellent as buffer or barrier. It would have been extremely difficult for China or North Vietnam to supply the Communist forces operating in Laos across the jungle covered Annamite mountains. It was less difficult for SEATO to supply Laotian forces from Thailand, on the other side of the Mekong.

The reason why Laos was important was because it offered political opportunities. Because of its geographic location between the Communist and non-Communist countries, Laos had a special significance in the politics of the region. In the Cold War struggle, whichever party obtained control over it, gained an advantageous position. If the Communists gained control, it would have greatly facilitated their designs in the area. Similarly, if the United States secured control over Laos, it could have facilitated American objectives in the area. Conversely, its fall to the Communists would have made the defence of neighbouring

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