

LAOS

Buffer State or Battleground

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PREFACE

THIS attempt to relate the current problem of Laos to its historical sources originated in the period 1960-2, when I had the good fortune to spend nearly two years there. During this period, perhaps the most critical in recent Laotian history, I was able to observe political and military developments at close quarters, and to make the acquaintance of some of the national leaders. I returned to Europe with a great affection for this lovely land and for its charming people, affection which provided the impetus for a prolonged historical study. Part of the result is set out in the present volume, which was started in the leisure moments of a two-year appointment in Paris and carved into shape during my tenure of the Gwilym Gibbon Research Fellowship at Nuffield College, Oxford, in 1964-5.

My debt to the scholars of Indo-Chinese history, in particular to M. Georges Coedès, Professor D. G. E. Hall, and Mr. Donald Lancaster, will be obvious to those who know their works, even where it is not acknowledged in footnotes. I have been fortunate in the number of friends who have helped me with advice, information, patience, by lending me documents or finding me books, and in the Canadian, British, French, Indian, and Thai colleagues whose knowledge of Laos and sympathetic interest in its people have been a constant encouragement. In particular I thank Mr. John Shattock for the idea of writing about Laos, Dr. Saul Rose and Mr. G. F. Hudson for penetrating criticism and sound counsel, Mr. Stuart Simmonds for his generosity, his expert knowledge, and for allowing me to forget that I can read neither Lao nor Thai, Mr. T'ej Bunnag and Mr. Patrick Tuck for contributions from their own research, Mr. Guy Wint and Major General R. E. Lloyd for encouragement, sponsorship, and much forbearance, Mr. J. M. Addis, Major General F. J. C. Piggott, Mr. F. A. Warner, Mr. A. S. B. Olver, Brigadier C. I. V. Jones, Sir Anthony Rumbold, and Mr. W. A. R. Wood for reading and commenting on the typescript in one of its several stages, and my wife for doing so at every stage. I am also most grateful to Miss Julie Savage for doing most of the hard work on the Index.

Translations from the French are my own except where otherwise stated. The spelling of place names follows the pre-war map *Burma, Malaya and Indo-China*, published by John Bartholemew, which is still the best general map available, except where a different spelling is in current use. Here, and also in dealing with historical and personal names, my aim has been simplicity and ease of understanding rather than scrupulous adherence to a system of transliteration. I apologise to Thai and Indo-Chinese scholars if this has sometimes led me to take liberties with their history and languages.

Wheatley, Oxon.
August 1966.

HUGH TOYE

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ABBREVIATIONS

C.D.N.I.	Committee for the Defence of National Interests
C.I.A.	The United States Central Intelligence Agency
D.R.V.N.	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
H.M.S.O.	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
N.L.H.S.	Neo Lao Hak Sat; Laotian left-wing political party
P.E.O.	Programs Evaluation Office; the military section of the United States Operations Mission in Laos from 1958 onwards.
R.I.I.A.	Royal Institute of International Affairs
S.E.A.T.O.	South East Asia Treaty Organization
U.S.I.S.	United States Information Service

Note: British Command Papers are referred to by their Cmd. or Cmnd. numbers after their first appearance.

TO BETTY

INTRODUCTION

FOR over a thousand years the Indo-Chinese peninsula has been the scene of a conflict between the Indian-influenced kingdoms to the south and west of the Annamitic Chain, and the Chinese-influenced Vietnamese, pressing southwards with their colonists from the over-crowded delta of the Red River. It is not so much a matter of cultural differences, manners, and ways of thought, although after a millenium the yawning gulf that lies between the austere and self-contained civilization of China and the tolerant earthiness of Hindu cultures, adds an inevitable measure of mutual dislike to the antique fears and ambitions of thirty generations. It is a matter of land; the need for living space on the one hand and the fear of conquest and extermination on the other.

The historical role of this conflict has long been recognized. Less clearly has it been seen that the ancient quarrel also underlies many of the modern problems of Indo-China. Amongst the most difficult of these problems is that of Laos, a country which has been cast in modern times for the role of neutral buffer state between Siam and the Vietnamese, the old protagonists who are now backed by the two sides in the Cold War. This study of Laos in its contemporary role shows how essential elements of the modern confrontation represent a renewal of the ancient conflict, and how the geographical and ethnic anomalies of Laos as formed under French rule, together with the traditional fears and ambitions of its neighbours, have prevented its establishment as a stable buffer state.

The book is divided into two parts: Part One outlines in two chapters the historical antecedents; Part Two deals with the development of the Laotian question from 1940 to 1964 in six chapters, the last of which considers in conclusion the conflicting interests which will have to be reconciled in a future Laotian settlement.

The long process of Vietnamese expansion southwards from the Red River delta to that of the River Mekong had resulted by the nineteenth century in a confrontation between Siam and the Vietnamese across a neutral buffer zone which stretched along the Annamitic Chain from Dien Bien Phu in the north to Cambodia

in the south. Cambodia paid tribute to both the Siamese king and the Vietnamese emperor. In the north traditionally neutral hill-states likewise acknowledged a dual suzerainty. In between lay the belt of territory bounded by the River Mekong and the Annamitic mountains; this was partly inhabited by hill peoples whom neither side had ever been able to subdue and had in part been depopulated as a defensive measure by Siam.

In the second half of the nineteenth century France extended her empire over Vietnam and, in spite of Siamese opposition, over the whole of the neutral zone. She based her imperial prosperity upon the vigour of the Vietnamese who were seven times as numerous as her Laotian and Cambodian subjects, and it was naturally in populous Vietnam that the main economic development took place. The logic of geography and population caused France to see her imperial problems from the Vietnamese point of view and to rule as a Vietnamese ruler might have done. She tried to solve the problem of over-population in the Vietnamese way, encouraged migration from Tongking into the less populous lands, subordinated the interests of Cambodian and Lao, and took what France and Vietnam wanted from the Siamese. In consequence the traditional fears, hatreds, and enmities of the Indo-Chinese peninsula were intensified and the circumstances in which Laos would one day be called upon to act as a buffer state were prepared.

The second part of the book opens with the French capitulation to Germany in 1940. Vietnamese nationalists already saw themselves as the natural heirs to French power and Siam was well aware of the danger which this Vietnamese ambition represented. The Siamese tried, with Japanese favour, to push their eastern frontier back to the former neutral zone. Laos gained, as a result of strong Siamese pressure, the beginnings of a national consciousness which gave rise to an anti-French independence movement after the Japanese defeat in 1945. It was however a Lao national consciousness and a Lao independence movement. The hill peoples of Laos, who made up more than half of its population, were still kept at arm's length. In 1949 the Independence leaders chose modified independence under the French rather than co-operation with the Vietnamese in continued resistance to them.

The Vietnamese rebellion against the French had by this time turned into the Indo-China War. The Communist leadership of

the rebels, the aid they received after 1949 from the Communist Chinese, and the intervention of Communist China in the Korean War, brought American help to the French in Indo-China and also to Siam, whose fear of a revival of Vietnamese power now began to appear in anti-Communist terms. The settlement of the Indo-China War at Geneva in 1954 and the establishment of a Communist state in North Vietnam led to the formation of S.E.A.T.O., by which the United States and its allies sought to base a firm anti-Communist position on Siam. The old struggle between Siam and the Vietnamese, now coinciding with the world ideological conflict, thus took its place in the Cold War.

Fundamental to the Geneva settlement of 1954 was the concept of a neutral Laos separating pro-Western Siam and the Communist world of North Vietnam and China, on the analogy of the nineteenth-century buffer zone. China exerted pressure on the North Vietnamese to withdraw their troops from Laos on condition that the Americans did not attempt to establish military influence there. Laos undertook to integrate the Pathet Lao movement, which the North Vietnamese had sponsored during the war, into the life of the country and to preserve strict neutrality.

But Laos as formed by the French was not a national entity. Nor was it either geographically or ethnically the same as the nineteenth-century buffer zone. Firstly, the dominant Lao people, while forming less than half of the population in Laos itself, were far out-numbered by the Lao in north-eastern Siam with whom they shared their history, language, and customs. Secondly, the frontier with North Vietnam ran through the territory of the formerly neutral hill peoples. On the Vietnamese side of the border these peoples had been largely conciliated by the subtler racial policies of the Communists; this affected their kinsmen on the Laotian side who resented Lao domination as they had always done. The peoples of Laos were thus much more likely to take the part of one or other of their two neighbours than to unite against them. Unless this tendency to division could be overcome—and it had already been exploited by the Vietnamese in the formation of the predominantly tribal Pathet Lao—Laos could not function satisfactorily as a buffer state.

Everything thus depended on the integration of the Pathet Lao into the Laotian national structure. This was partially achieved in 1957. Amid many misgivings and open Siamese and American

disapproval the Pathet Lao was admitted to a government of national union. When, however, it appeared at partial elections in 1958 that the process of integration had already allowed the Pathet Lao to obtain strong political influence throughout the country, the growing apprehensions of Siam and the United States caused the abandonment of the policy of reconciliation. The Pathet Lao resumed their rebellion. By the end of 1959 the United States was hardly less committed on the one side than was North Vietnam on the other. Laos had become a theatre of the Cold War.

As the issue was joined, Siam needed strong friends in Laos, the United States needed anti-Communist ones. With Marshal Sarit master of Siam, who could be more suitable for both roles than Sarit's kinsman Phoumi Nosavan? With General Phoumi rising to power, Siamese interests seemed secure against Vietnam, as well as those of the United States against Communism. Early in 1960 the General rigged the elections and emerged as virtual dictator of Laos.

There followed the neutralist *coup d'état* of August 1960. A month later Prince Souvannaphouma, who had negotiated the agreement with the Pathet Lao in 1957, began another attempt to create national unity. If the Siamese had been nervous in 1958, they were now thoroughly alarmed. Phoumi overthrew the prince's government with Siamese and American help. Russia came to the aid of the Neutralists. In the ensuing civil war the Neutralists, in alliance with the Pathet Lao who were more strongly backed than ever by the North Vietnamese, took control of most of the Laotian hill country. Phoumi's forces appeared incapable of stopping them. A cease-fire was arranged and a new Geneva Conference was convened in May 1961.

The attempt to achieve a settlement of the Laotian question by international agreement in 1961-2 appeared at first to have some hope of success. When the newly elected President Kennedy met Mr. Khrushchev at Vienna in June 1961, the two statesmen agreed that Laos should be neutral ground between them; none of the great powers wanted to fight a war over Laos. The acceptance of Laotian neutralism by the United States, however, redoubled the fears of Siam, who saw a neutral Laos as no barrier to the approach of Vietnamese power. In spite of all American diplomacy could do, it was not until June 1962, when S.E.A.T.O.

forces had been deployed on the Mekong as the ultimate reassurance for the Siamese, that General Phoumi could be induced to accept a neutralist régime. By this time the development of the Sino-Soviet dispute and of the war in South Vietnam had gravely prejudiced the prospects of the international settlement which had for months only awaited formal and unanimous Laotian assent.

The essentials of the Geneva bargain of 1962 were not dissimilar from those of the 1954 agreement in so far as they concerned Laos. Externally, the condition was that American and Vietnamese troops should be removed from the country. Internally the three factions needed to be kept in careful balance as they progressed towards integration. Neither of these conditions could be kept. On the one hand the North Vietnamese involvement in the South Vietnamese war had now reached a point where Laotian territory held by the Pathet Lao was constantly used for the passage of reinforcements from North to South Vietnam. This traffic was excluded by the 1962 settlement and its continuance was quite unacceptable to the United States. On the other hand the Soviet Union, in the stress of the dispute with the Chinese, terminated the airlift to the Neutralist forces which had enabled them to remain independent of the two extremes. Under the competitive pressures of left and right the Neutralist position crumbled. The coalition broke up. Partition by altitude, along much the same contour line of ethnic division that had limited direct Siamese authority before the coming of the French, was an accomplished fact in 1964 as in 1961.

The problem of Laos is for the moment overshadowed by the war in Vietnam. When that war is ended it seems likely that another attempt at a Laotian solution will be necessary. The book concludes with tentative definitions of the Siamese and Vietnamese interests which will have to be reconciled if a lasting settlement is to be achieved.

PART ONE

THE HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

CHAPTER I

Vietnam and the Indian-influenced States of Indo-China

WHEN the Geneva Conference of 1954 sought to end the war in French Indo-China, one of the basic assumptions made was that Laos would become a neutral buffer between non-Communist Thailand and Communist North Vietnam, and so help to prevent the clash between the Western world and the Communist bloc which appeared imminent. In the following seven years it proved impossible to secure the internal stability in Laos which was essential for its role as a buffer state. At the end of 1960 a civil war broke out in which factions in the country were favoured by Thailand and North Vietnam, backed respectively by the United States and the Soviet bloc. There followed a second Geneva Conference, which tried to establish the neutrality of Laos by international guarantee. This attempt also failed and Laos lapsed into a *de facto* partition between two groups supported on each side by the world power blocs.

The failure of Laos to act as a buffer state arose partly from divisions among its own people. Partly it sprang from political developments in the Indo-Chinese peninsula under French rule and during its decline. But before these matters can properly be examined it is relevant to ask why there should be a buffer state in this area at all. The answer to this question is not to be found simply in the modern ideological conflict. The roots of the problem lie in a deep mistrust between the Thai and Vietnamese peoples which has ancient historical origins.

The Ancient Quarrel¹

Two thousand years ago Chinese imperial power extended southwards along the Indo-Chinese coast well beyond the seventeenth parallel. In 111 B.C. China had annexed the independent kingdom of Vietnam, then centred in the lower valley of the Red River, where it was cut off from the River Mekong valley to the south-west by the formidable mountains of the Annamitic Chain. South of the Chinese borders were the Chams. The Mekong delta was inhabited by the Khmers, the Menam valley and lower Burma by their close relatives, the Mons. These non-Chinese peoples possessed a common civilization which they shared with the coastal and valley communities of Malaya and Indonesia.

In the early centuries of our era Indian influences, customs, and culture flooded into this little world. The reasons for and the manner of their arrival are a matter of debate, but that they did arrive is beyond dispute. Throughout the region, in what is now Indonesia, Burma, Malaya, Thailand, and the states of Indo-China, kingdoms arose which practised Indian religion, arts, and customs and whose sacred language was Sanskrit.

The earliest of these states of which we know emerged somewhere about A.D. 100 in the Mekong delta. The Chinese called it Funan. At its zenith Funan stretched from the Kra Isthmus in the west to Camranh Bay in the east. Beside it on the coast to the north grew up the kingdom of Champa, founded in A.D. 192 when a local official rebelled against his Chinese masters in what was then the southernmost province of the empire of China.

The virile, aggressive Chams eventually spread as far south as the Mekong delta and westwards into the middle Mekong valley. From the first, however, they were at odds with the Vietnamese, their even more vigorous neighbours to the north, whose sophisticated Chinese culture must have contrasted sharply with their own Indian manners.² In A.D. 939 the Vietnamese threw off the yoke of China and took up the conflict with the Chams on their own account. For Vietnam it was a matter of land, of population

¹ The principal authorities used for the early history of Indo-China are: D. G. E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (London, 2nd edn., 1964), G. Coedès, *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (Paris, new edn., 1964), and L. P. Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire* (Philadelphia, 1951).

² The struggle 'in its cultural aspect represented a struggle between Chinese and Indian influence'. Hall, *op. cit.* (1st edn.), p. 186.

pressure from Chinese immigration and from her own fecundity.³ The struggle went on for five more centuries up and down the narrow plain between the Annamitic Chain and the sea. Bit by bit the Chams were ousted or absorbed and their lands settled by the teeming Vietnamese.

Far back in the sixth century, meanwhile, Funan had given place to the kingdom which the Chinese called Chen La, from whose ruins there emerged three hundred years later the Indianized Khmer kingdom of Cambodia. The Khmer empire and its great capital of Angkor reached their zenith in the twelfth century when the Cambodians ruled not only the coastal provinces of Funan but also the hinterland, the Menam and Mekong valleys as far to the north and east as the Annamitic Chain. Early in the thirteenth century, however, Khmer power began to give way to that of the Thai peoples who, pushed in their turn by Chinese pressure, were now moving into this area from the north and north-west.

The Thais had hitherto figured in Champa and at Angkor as prisoners of war, slaves, or barbarian allies from the outer fringes of civilization. Syams, they were called, the name of the Thai group which was settling in the north of the Menam basin. The great bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat show a detachment of them in the Khmer army, their curious dress and unmilitary appearance contrasting sharply with that of the business-like Khmer legionaries. The Chinese had known this ancient people as early as the sixth century B.C. Chinese records often refer to them as the barbarian folk south of the Yangtse River. They were to be found near Lake Tali in Yunnan, across that great upland where the Red River, the Mekong, the Salween, and even the Irrawaddy, flowing close by on neighbouring courses, gave easy access for their raiders to the rich deltas of Burma and Indo-China.

The Thais came under Chinese suzerainty early in the Christian era but made many attempts to assert their independence and never received the stamp of Chinese civilization that so marked the Vietnamese. In the ninth century they twice raided China by way of the Yangtse valley, raged down the Red River to sack Hanoi, and even conquered parts of the Irrawaddy delta. As time went on small groups of them settled among the Khmers, Mons, and

³ Charles Robequain, *The Economic Development of French Indo-China* (London, 1944), pp. 34-35.

Burmese. At the end of the eleventh century the Thai-Syam state of P'ayao appeared between the Mekong and Menam rivers in the far north of modern Thailand. While raiders still ranged far and wide, other Thai settlements to the south and west of Lake Tali began to form themselves into new independent states, among them the twelve Thai-Lu states known as the Sipsong Panna.

Unlike the southward drive of the Vietnamese, the spread of Thai rule did not involve large movements of population any more than did the Norman invasion of England or the growth of the Khmer empire. What happened was that, after a certain amount of Thai settlement, a Thai ruling class seized power in the centres concerned and a restricted Thai middle class followed. The original inhabitants adopted the language and some of the customs of the new rulers; intermarriage blunted still further the edges of racial difference and gave the new states ethnic as well as political reality. The further south conquest and assimilation went, the larger were the indigenous populations encountered, and the weaker the Thai ethnic element in the resultant mixture. Hence, in part, the difference today between the Thai of Bangkok, the Lao of Laos and north-east Siam, and the hill-Thai of the Laos-Vietnam border.

The process was not always peaceful, but few battles are recorded. In its story of the origins of the Sipsong Panna, the chronicle of the pagoda of Chom Yong in the eastern Shan States gives an example of the sort of thing that may have occurred.⁴ It tells of Phya Ngam, chief king of a group of seven non-Thai kingdoms on the upper Mekong. There were Thai communities in several of these kingdoms but they were subject to the non-Thai rulers whom they called Khas. One day the ruler of the Thai state of Xieng Hong who was also subject to the Khas, called together his four sons. 'The Khas are our masters', he said, 'it is shameful for us to suffer their yoke.' Sonanta, his second son, replied, 'Give me five hundred men and I will deliver you.' Sonanta took the five hundred men and with them offered his services to Phya Ngam. He was welcomed and allowed to build a fortified settlement of his own where, from time to time, Phya Ngam would visit him. At length he invited the king and his suite to a great dinner. Three sorts of wine were served, the first one good, the second strong, the third poisoned. 'The whole country

⁴ F. Garnier, *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine* (Paris, 1885), p. 400.

was subdued', says the chronicler. The ruler of Xieng Hong sent his other three sons to govern neighbouring principedoms.

Early in the thirteenth century the Mongols began their conquest of China. A great surge southwards of Thai migration followed. In the Menam valley two Thai-Syam chiefs combined to defeat the Khmer regional commander and established the kingdom of Sukhothai. Fresh impetus came from the Mongol annexation of Tali in 1255. Thai-Shan principedoms took over much of the territory of the Pagan kingdom of Burma, overthrown by Kublai Khan in 1287. Thai-Lao princes came southwards to Luang Prabang⁵ in the Mekong valley. The Thai prince of Xieng Sen pushed steadily against the Mons on the upper Menam and in 1297 founded Chiengmai.

Meanwhile Sukhothai, which had absorbed much Khmer territory to the south and east, began to decline. In the middle of the fourteenth century power passed to two new kingdoms, the Thai-Syam kingdom of Ayuthia on the lower Menam, and the Thai-Lao kingdom centred at Luang Prabang, forerunners of the modern states of Thailand and Laos.⁶

The Thais have been called the world's best diplomats. Certainly they are marvellous assimilators, for they have the graceful gift of making the manners or culture they borrow appear to arise out of their own genius. At Sukhothai they had had easy access to the capitals of their neighbours, the Mons and the Khmers, and it was here between A.D. 1250 and 1350 that the characteristics of Siamese civilization had been elaborated. From Cambodia, says Coedès:⁷

The Siamese assimilated political organisation, way of life, writing and a great many words. Siamese artists learnt what the Khmer artists had to teach them and transformed it according to their own genius, under the strong influence of their western neighbours, the Mons and the

⁵ The modern name, which dates only from the sixteenth century, is here used to avoid complication. For a discussion of the town's various names see: G. Coedès: 'A propos des anciens noms de Luang Prabang', in *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême orient*, XVIII (1918), pp. 9-11.

⁶ Again, although the ancient kingdom was called Lan Xang, the modern word Laos is used throughout. To avoid confusion with the generic sense of the word *Thai*, *Siamese* and *Siam* are used for the Thai people of the lower Menam valley and for their country, which is now called Thailand.

⁷ Op. cit., pp. 402-3.

Burmese. From the latter the Siamese took their legal traditions, of Indian origin, and also Ceylonese [Theravada] Buddhism together with its artistic traditions.

Meanwhile, of course, other Thai peoples continued to inhabit the upland regions of Yunnan and Tongking from which the Siamese had come, their character being moulded somewhat differently over the centuries by the influence of their Chinese and Vietnamese neighbours.⁸

As they learnt so the Siamese fought. From Ayuthia their pressure on the Khmers continued until the great walled city of Angkor Thom was besieged and sacked in 1431. As soon as the Siamese had departed the Khmer crown prince procured the assassination of the Siamese governor and was crowned in the ruined capital. Angkor was however no longer considered a safe centre for the kingdom; it was evacuated in 1432, the Khmer court moving eventually in 1434 to Phnom Penh which is again the Cambodian capital today.

Over the next hundred years peace between Siam and Cambodia never lasted long. The Siamese raided a passive Cambodia at intervals until 1540. During most of the four decades which followed Siam was fighting for her life against the Burmese conqueror, Bayinnaung. Cambodia took her revenge, carrying the war again and again deep into Siam. The Siamese recovered after the death of their Burmese oppressor in 1580 and from 1594 there was a Siamese garrison in the Cambodian capital. The weakening of Siam in the early seventeenth century led the Cambodians to reassert themselves and fight off a Siamese invasion in 1622. Siam nevertheless continued to look to the borders of Cambodia for booty, and for slaves to satisfy the continued demand for labour in her vast under-populated lands. Unlike the Vietnamese, the Siamese did not colonize: they never had the people to spare.

The Vietnamese, having long ago extinguished all but the name of freedom in Champa, were by now also encroaching upon Cambodia, using the methods of forceful colonization they had employed against the Chams:

Exiles, deserters and other vagabonds infiltrated into the country. In time their numbers enabled them to form colonies, the inevitable

⁸ See L. P. Briggs 'The Appearance and Historical Usage of the terms Tai, Thai, Siamese and Lao', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1949, p. 61.

prelude to annexation. Thus in 1658 the provincial governor of Tran-bien occupied the colony of Moi-Xui under the pretext that the King of Cambodia had violated the Vietnamese frontier. When King Ang Chan resorted to arms he was defeated and captured and sent in a cage to Hué. There, on paying homage as a vassal, he was liberated and escorted back to his capital. His two brothers, however, refused to accept the situation and set themselves up as joint kings. In 1673 the inevitable succession dispute gave the Vietnamese an opportunity to intervene effectively and install two tributary rulers, one as king at Udong [the latest Cambodian capital], and the other as second king at Saigon.⁹

Before the end of the seventeenth century Cambodia was once more under Vietnamese suzerainty after a brief reassertion of Siamese influence, but in 1714 a further succession dispute brought the Siamese back again. Thus, in the ancient conflict of Chinese-influenced Vietnam with the Indianized peoples, the first clash had occurred with Siam.

There had been a clash of equal moment a little earlier in the kingdom of Laos. In 1700 a pretender who had promised homage to the Vietnamese was placed by Vietnamese arms on the Laotian throne. Although the kingdom now broke into three, the portion which remained under Vietnamese suzerainty far outflanked the Siamese in Cambodia. The power of Vietnam had crossed the Annamitic Chain and reached the Siamese frontier.

The Kingdom of Laos

To understand how the situation had arisen and the nature of the conflict that now existed in Laos, it is necessary to trace in outline the history of the Laotian kingdom from the time when it emerged from legend as a confederation of Thai-Lao states in the fourteenth century.¹⁰ Tradition says that the Lao people originated in the valley of Dien Bien Phu, whence part of them migrated to Luang Prabang, driving the earlier inhabitants, who came to be

⁹ Hall, *op. cit.* (2nd edn.), p. 399. Robequain, *op. cit.*, p. 65, also discusses what is known of the process of Vietnamese colonization.

¹⁰ The only existing history of Laos is: P. Le Boulanger, *Histoire du Laos français* (Paris, 1931), which is based on Laotian annals, some of which are available in *Mission Pavie, études diverses*, vol. II (Paris, 1898). Mahasila Viravong's *History of Laos* (U.S. Joint Publications Research Service, 1958) is a collection of documentary material but not a systematic history.

Singkapo to make contact with the new government and had promised co-operation.³¹ Accordingly, at the beginning of October, the prime minister announced the opening of talks with the Pathet Lao in Vientiane on 11 October, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

These moves, coming so soon after the reoccupation of Sam Neua by the Pathet Lao, albeit in the name of Prince Souvannaphouma, caused profound disquiet in Washington. On 7 October the United States suspended financial aid to Laos³² and five days later Mr. Parsons arrived in Vientiane. He made it 'unmistakably clear that the resumption of American cash-grant aid to Souvanna Phouma's government depended on the attitude Souvanna Phouma took towards pending political questions, most urgent of which was the negotiations with the Pathet Lao',³³ already in progress.

Prince Souvannaphouma refused to break off his talks with the Pathet Lao, nor did he accept Mr. Parsons' other suggestion that the government be moved to Luang Prabang. The arrival of the Russian ambassador designate with an offer of Soviet help on 13 October, however, made it impossible for Parsons to apply decisive pressure even if he had wished to do so, and he left unscathed on 14 October. 'I would have liked to meet Mr. Parsons,' said the smiling Russian, 'but he left in such a hurry.'³⁴

Three days later the American ambassador was able to persuade

³¹ Burchett, *The Furtive War* (New York, 1963), p. 188. The contact point was about twenty miles north of Vientiane. The Pathet Lao had been broadcasting support for Prince Souvannaphouma since 24 August when their station opened.

³² There was some confusion between various U.S. authorities on the suspension of aid, which was announced by a military spokesman and then at first denied by the American embassy in Vientiane. The immediate reason for the action may have been the belief that some of the arms (from stocks provided by U.S. aid), distributed by Kong Lae for the defence of Vientiane against Phoumi in August, had found their way into Pathet Lao hands and that the U.S. was thus indirectly arming Communists.

³³ Dommen, *op. cit.*, p. 159. R. M. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 64, states that Parsons threatened the termination of U.S. aid unless the talks were broken off. The State Department denied this. Schlesinger, *op. cit.*, p. 298, says Parsons applied 'intense pressure on Souvanna to forsake neutralism, accept Phoumi and make Laos a bastion of freedom again'.

³⁴ B. B. Fall, 'Reappraisal in Laos' in *Current History*, XLII (Jan. 1962).

