



What is the U.S. position on Laos?

1. Background

- Under the Geneva Agreements of 1954 all Vietnamese Communist forces were to withdraw from Laos, Cambodia, and South Viet-Nam. However, North Vietnamese forces continued to occupy substantial areas of Laos. By 1961 the North Vietnamese and Lao Communist troops (Pathet Lao) threatened to take over the country by force. To help counter this threat, the U.S. in 1961 provided tactical military advisers for the Lao Government forces.
- At Vienna in the spring of 1961, President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev agreed to seek a political solution. Fourteen nations including the U.S., the USSR, China, and North Viet-Nam, met at Geneva, and in the Geneva Agreements of 1962 agreed on a settlement guaranteeing the independence and neutrality of Laos.
- In simultaneous internal arrangements the 3 Lao factions—conservative, neutralist, and Communist—agreed to form a Government of National Union under neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma, the Soviet choice.
- The accords called for withdrawal of all foreign military personnel except for a small French training mission. The U.S. withdrew all 666 U.S. military advisory personnel, but North Viet-Nam left about 6,000 troops.

2. Communist involvement: Since the signing of the Agreement, Royal Lao Government (RLG) forces have been under attack by the North Vietnamese, and the Lao Communist forces, now called Lao People's Liberation Army (LPLA). The North Vietnamese troops in Laos, now numbering about 80,000, have taken over most of the military operations from the 40,000 LPLA forces. In addition, the North Vietnamese use Lao territory as a supply route and sanctuaries to support their efforts to take over South Viet-Nam; such violation of Lao territory is also a direct violation of the 1962 Geneva Agreements.

3. U.S. involvement: Our goal is to reduce American involvement, not to increase it. Our aid is requested, supportive, limited, and defensive.

Military Aid:

- U.S. air operations declined in 1971. We are using air power along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in eastern Laos to reduce the flow
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of supplies from North Viet-Nam to South Viet-Nam and thereby save American and allied lives. Lao civilians have long since departed from this area.

- The U.S., with air and logistics, supports South Viet-Nam in its efforts to halt the flow of North Vietnamese men and materiel through Laos into South Viet-Nam.
- We carry out reconnaissance flights in north Laos and fly combat support missions for Lao forces when requested to do so by the RLG. When there is a danger of civilian casualties resulting from these missions, the request must be reviewed in advance by the U.S. Ambassador to Laos. Such requests are approved only if it is determined that civilians will not be hit.
- There are no American ground combat troops in Laos.
- Under Article 6 of the 1962 Laos accords, which allows "the introduction of [such]...conventional armaments as the Royal Government of Laos may consider necessary for the national defense," and at Lao Government request, the U.S. since 1962 has provided military supplies.
- At the request of the RLG, the CIA equips, trains, and advises about 30,000 Lao irregular forces. These forces are in addition to a Royal Lao Army force of about 50,000.
- As extended attrition nearly exhausted the Lao manpower reservoir, and the North Vietnamese increased their troop strength and number of attacks, the RLG sought assistance from the Royal Thai government for volunteers to serve in irregular forces in Laos. These volunteers are recruited and trained in Thailand, but fight in Laos under RLG operational control.

Economic Aid:

- The U.S. has given bilateral aid to Laos since 1954. In FY '72, the Administration is asking for \$47.3 million. This is primarily to control inflation, support essential government services—including relief to about 304,000 Lao refugees uprooted by hostilities—and a limited amount of economic development.
4. U.S. policy: The U.S. supports a neutral, independent Laos within the framework of the 1962 Geneva Agreements. We are cooperating fully with all diplomatic efforts to arrive at full implementation of the 1962 Geneva Agreements. We continue to support the government of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma. We have repeatedly emphasized at the Paris meetings on Viet-Nam that a peaceful Viet-Nam settlement must also provide for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from Laos. At the same time we support the efforts of nations to resist outside threats to their independence. This is fully consistent with the Nixon Doctrine, the framework for U.S. efforts in Southeast Asia.

- FURTHER REFERENCES:
- . Senate Armed Services Committee Hearings on FY 1972 Military Procurement Bill, July 22, 1971, pg. 4259.
 - . Background Notes - Kingdom of Laos (Dept. of State pub. 8301).