



KINGDOM OF LAOS

BACKGROUND NOTES

Population: 2.9 million (est.)
 Capital: Vientiane (Administrative)
 Luang Prabang (Royal)

Strategically situated in the heart of the Southeast Asian peninsula, the Kingdom of Laos shares common borders with six other nations: on the north with Communist China (264 miles); on the east, substantially along the watershed formed by the Annamite Cordillera, with North Viet-Nam (1,018 miles) and the Republic of Viet-Nam (301 miles); on the south with Cambodia (366 miles); on the south and west with Thailand (1,090 miles, of which more than 500 are along the Mekong River); and on the northwest with Burma (147 miles). Laos is roughly shaped like Italy but, unlike Italy, does not have access to the sea. The total area is approximately 91,000 square miles, slightly less than Illinois and Indiana combined. A large part of the terrain, particularly in the north, is covered by dense jungle and rugged mountains, the latter sometimes rising more than 9,000 feet.

The climate of Laos is monsoonal, with three seasons. There are 5 months of heavy rainfall, from May through September. In October, when the rains start tapering off, a cool season begins that lasts through January. February through April is hot and humid. In April, the warmest month, the temperature at Vientiane normally ranges between 72° and 93°F., and in January, the coolest month, between 57° and 83°F. However, temperatures of 103°F. have been recorded in April and 39°F. in January. Humidity is high most of the year.

The flag of Laos consists of a three-headed white elephant, standing on five steps under a white parasol, against a red field. The elephant exemplifies the historic kingdom of Lane Xang—Land of a Million Elephants—and the three heads represent the three former principalities of Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champasak. The parasol symbolizes monarchy. The five steps represent Buddhism's five commandments against murder, theft, falsehood, adultery, and drinking alcohol.

THE PEOPLE

The people number about 2.9 million—an estimate, since no accurate census has ever been taken. This sparse population is spread unevenly, with the greatest concentration in the Mekong Valley and the tributaries of the Mekong River. The growth rate is estimated to be 2.4 percent annually.

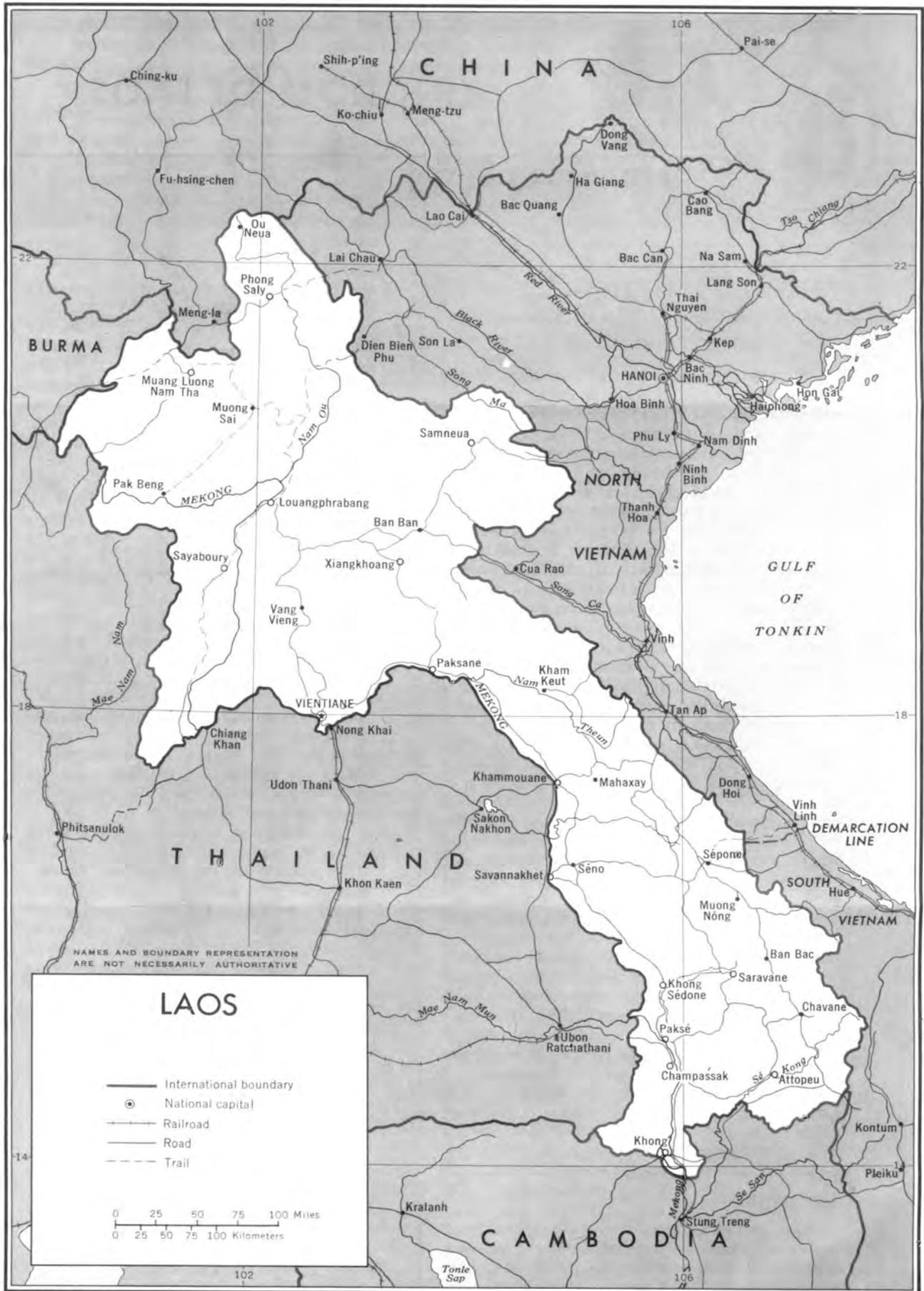
About half of the people are ethnic Lao—the principal valley inhabitants and the politically and culturally dominant group. The Lao are descendants of the Tai, a people who migrated from southwestern China, principally in the 13th century. Mountain tribes of Sinitic (Meo and Yao), Tibeto-Burman (Akhah and Lahu), and Tai ethnolinguistic strains are found in northern Laos. Many of these same tribes, as well as others of Indonesian or proto-Malay background (Lave and Nyaheum), inhabit central and southern Laos. The lack of common origin, customs, language, traditions, and beliefs among the various minorities hinders the political unification of the Kingdom. There are also influential minorities of Vietnamese and Chinese and smaller groups of Cambodians, Indians, and Pakistanis. More than a thousand French and other Europeans and Americans are in Laos, but few are permanent residents.

The predominant as well as state religion of the Kingdom is Theravada Buddhism, common also to Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and Ceylon. It is not unusual, however, to see spirit shrines in Buddhist temples. While the mountain tribes are principally animist, some of them have adopted Buddhism while retaining a measure of their old beliefs.

Lao, the dominant language in the country and the *lingua franca* among tribal groups, is tonal like others of the Sino-Thai family. Some textbooks have been developed in Lao for the primary grades, but French remains the principal language of secondary education. French serves as the second official language and is used commonly in government and commerce. Probably not more than 25 percent of the population is literate. Furthermore, the numerous tribal groups possess their own languages or dialects with no historic written form, and the Vietnamese and Chinese retain their own school systems.

HISTORY

In the mid-14th century King Fa Ngum united Laos, established his capital at Luang Prabang, and ruled an area that would today encompass not only Laos but also much of northeastern Thailand and the southernmost part of Yunnan Province of China. In the following century the Vietnamese began periodic incursions into Laos, a practice which persists to this day. By the 18th century Thailand and Viet-Nam had begun their competition for Lao soil.



In the early 19th century the Thai of Siam (now Thailand) obtained ascendancy over much of what is now Laos and retained their hold for the most part until France supplanted Siam in 1893. The Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1907 defined the boundaries of Laos as they exist today. The French technically treated Luang Prabang as a protectorate and directly administered the other principalities.

During World War II Japan did not take over full control of Laos until March 1945, and just prior to their defeat the Japanese persuaded the King of Luang Prabang to declare his kingdom independent. In September 1945 the Prime Minister of the "independent" government proclaimed the creation of the Kingdom of Laos, including the areas of Vientiane and Champasak, under the King of Luang Prabang. In October a provincial government formed by the "Lao Issara" (Free Lao) leaders "dethroned" the King because of his alleged loyalty to the French. In May 1946 French troops occupied Laos and recognized the sovereignty of the King of Luang Prabang over the entire country.

Laos gained "independence" within the French Union in 1949, but France did not recognize Laos as a fully sovereign state until October 1953. At that time Laos reaffirmed its adherence to the French Union, but this relationship was dissolved upon the conclusion of the 1954 Geneva agreements. From 1954 to 1960 pro-Western or conservative governments held power, including the brief interval in 1957-58 of a coalition government which had some Communist ministers.

A Communist movement, originally disguised as the Free Lao Front (Neo Lao Issara) and later renamed the Lao Patriotic Front (Neo Lao Hak Sat—NLHS), was formed under North Vietnamese auspices in Communist territory in North Viet-Nam in 1950. The ostensible leader was, and remains, Prince Souphanouvong. The ranking Lao in the secret People's Party of Laos (Phak Pasason Lao—PPL) has apparently been Kaysone Phomviham, however. The PPL reportedly is responsive to the Lao Dong, the Vietnamese Communist Party in Hanoi.

Under the Geneva agreements of 1954, North Vietnamese and all but 5,000 French forces were to withdraw from Laos and other parts of what had been French Indochina. However, North Vietnamese forces continued to occupy substantial areas of the country. The NLHS, however, was permitted by the terms of these agreements to regroup in the two northern Laos provinces of Phong Saly and Houa Phan, pending NLHS reintegration into the national Lao community. Prolonged attempts at political and military integration failed. Following the collapse of the coalition government, the new rightist government imprisoned Souphanouvong and other NLHS leaders in Vientiane. After Souphanouvong's escape the NLHS resumed insurgency in 1959. The presence of a United Nations investigatory subcommittee in late 1959 restored an uneasy peace which existed until mid-1960.

In August 1960 a young paratroop commander in Vientiane, Kong Le, seized the capital in a coup. In an attempt to avert civil war among the non-Communist elements, Prince Souvanna Phouma, a former Prime Minister, was again called upon to form a government. Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, a leader of the conservative, anti-Communist faction, at first agreed to serve in the Government but soon reversed his decision and established a military headquarters in southern Laos from which he mounted a campaign to retake the capital. He recaptured Vientiane in December 1960, and Kong Le retreated with his troops to the northeast and joined forces with the NLHS.

In early January 1961 NLHS and Kong Le forces, supplied by the Soviet Union and advised and encadred by the North Vietnamese, seized the strategic Plain of Jars, where they established headquarters. By the spring of 1961 the NLHS appeared to be in a position to take over the entire country. To help counter this threat, the United States in 1961 provided tactical military advisers for the Lao Government forces.

Geneva Conference 1961-62. In its desire to help Laos, the United States thus was faced with three alternatives: the loss of Laos to the Communists; military intervention, involving U.S. troops and other outside forces; or abatement of the crisis through international and internal negotiations to achieve a neutral status for the Kingdom that would permit it to survive as a nation. Following discussions between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev at Vienna during the spring of 1961, the decision was reached that a peaceful settlement transferring the struggle from the military to the political domain was the most desirable of the possible alternatives. Bipartisan Congressional leadership was consulted on this decision. The United States thus participated in the 14-nation conference convened at Geneva in May 1961 which, after long and difficult negotiations, resulted in the signing of new Geneva agreements on July 23, 1962.* They provided certain international guarantees for the independence and neutrality of Laos.

On the internal level the three Lao factions—conservative, neutralist, and Communist—reached agreement in June 1962 on the formation of a Government of National Union under the premiership of Prince Souvanna Phouma. Kong Le's neutralist forces constituted Souvanna's principal military strength.

Of immediate importance under the 1962 Geneva agreements was the requirement that all foreign military personnel leave the country within 75 days of the signing, except for a small French training mission. Under the supervision of the International Control Commission

*The 14 participants who signed the protocol were: Burma, Cambodia, Canada, People's Republic of [mainland] China, Democratic Republic of [North] Viet-Nam, France, India, Laos, Poland, Republic of [South] Viet-Nam, Thailand, U.S.S.R., the United Kingdom, and the United States.

(ICC), consisting of political and military representatives of India, Canada, and Poland, all 666 U.S. military advisory personnel departed from Laos before the deadline of October 7, 1962. There have been no U.S. combat troops in Laos. Only 40 North Vietnamese civilian advisers were withdrawn through ICC checkpoints leaving about 6,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos.

After the Conference. Within a few months of the signing of the 1962 Geneva agreements, the Pathet Lao (the NLHS military forces now called the Lao People's Liberation Army—LPLA) began maneuvering, with North Vietnamese support, to subvert or eliminate Kong Le's neutralist military forces. Following the assassination on April 1, 1963, of the left-leaning Foreign Minister, Quinim Pholsena, minor skirmishing broke into open hostilities when the Pathet Lao attacked Kong Le's troops in positions the two forces had held jointly. These aggressive Pathet Lao tactics not only failed to destroy the neutralist forces but resulted in much closer political as well as military cooperation between the neutralists and the conservatives.

Before the outbreak of fighting in April 1963, the two NLHS ministers withdrew from Vientiane, leaving NLHS representation in the Government in the hands of the two NLHS secretaries of state of cabinet rank. By mid-1964 the NLHS secretaries of state had also left.

On April 19, 1964, following the failure of tripartite negotiations on the Plain of Jars among the leaders of the three factions, disgruntled military elements led by Generals Kouprasith Abhay and Siho Lanphouthacoul attempted to take over the Government by force. The United States and other foreign representatives, however, encouraged Prime Minister Souvanna to continue in office and resist the efforts to displace him. By April 23 the coup leaders had agreed to restore the Prime Minister and his government.

In mid-May 1964 the Pathet Lao took advantage of some dissidence within neutralist ranks and attacked in great strength Kong Le's forces on the Plain of Jars. This deliberate attack prompted the Prime Minister to seek additional military assistance. The United States continued, within the framework of the Geneva agreements, to supply military equipment and supplies for the Lao Armed Forces, and, at Lao Government request, initiated reconnaissance flights over Communist areas. By June 1964 the reconnaissance flights were accompanied by armed escorts authorized to fire back if fired upon.

The British, at the request of Prime Minister Souvanna, invited on May 26 the signatories of the Geneva agreements to begin consultations at Vientiane on means of restoring peace. The United States and several other signatories accepted the invitation, which the Communist states spurned. At the close of the consultations in June, the representatives concluded that the Pathet Lao, with North Vietnamese support, had initiated the attacks against the neutralists and that the deteriorating mili-

tary situation in Laos presented a grave threat to the peace of Southeast Asia. They recommended a cease-fire and withdrawal under ICC verification to positions held before the most recent fighting.

Efforts on the part of the three Lao factions to resolve their difficulties, in meetings at Paris during August and September 1964, likewise produced no basic concessions except a general agreement to continue talking. Low-level talks continued sporadically and abortively at Vientiane until 1966.

Events 1965-67. At Vientiane on January 31, 1965, Col. Bounleut Saycocie led some forces in a "demonstration," declaring that he wished to show that many professional army officers were not interested in politics but desired a truly unified general staff that would get rid of Gen. Siho as well as certain "bad elements" in the army. The "demonstration" provoked sporadic clashes between Fifth Region and police forces which finally erupted into open battle at Vientiane on February 3. Maj. Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, then Deputy Prime Minister, attempted to give the impression that he had the overwhelming support of the Lao Army. He stated that he had lost confidence in the general staff, in the Government, and in Souvanna and felt constrained to take charge of the situation. Second Military Region troops attacked Vientiane from the south in support of Phoumi. Gen. Siho's police, when faced with an ultimatum to disperse peacefully, fought back, resulting in considerable destruction in the city. The forces under Col. Bounleut somewhat belatedly rallied to the Government and played a major role in destroying the last police resistance. Gen. Phoumi has since lived in exile in Thailand.

The February fracas settled many military and political problems, but constitutional problems remained. The National Assembly elected in 1960 was coming to the end of its 5-year mandate, and the Government concluded, somewhat reluctantly, that regular elections could not be held because of internal warfare. Accordingly, a National Congress amended the Constitution, giving the King three options during times of crisis. The King selected the option of nominating deputies following popular consultations, and the Fifth Legislature, whose mandate was limited to 2 years, entered into session on August 18. The NLHS had been invited to participate in the selection process, but refused.

In January and again in June 1966, the National Assembly mounted separate interpellations of the Government, the second series continuing into September. Their sponsor introduced a motion of censure against the Government at the end of August, and the Assembly rejected the Government's budget in mid-September. Prime Minister Souvanna then asked the King to dissolve the Assembly. After consulting his Council, the King dissolved the Assembly as of October 7. Elections for the Sixth Legislature were held on January 1, 1967, when 142 non-Communist candidates competed

for the Assembly's 59 seats. The new Assembly, elected under normal constitutional provisions rather than the special ones that brought the Fifth Legislature into being, has a full 5-year mandate. The Sixth Legislature held its first session January 30, 1967. Although there are no sharply defined party alignments, a firm majority of the deputies were elected with the support of regional leaders, military as well as political, who in turn had pledged to support Souvanna Phouma.

North Vietnamese Aggression. Each dry season since 1964, the North Vietnamese—with decreasing assistance from about 50,000 Pathet Lao forces—have successfully attacked government-held strongpoints in Houa Phan Province (formerly Sam Neua), and each wet season Royal Lao Government forces have attempted to retrieve them. In March 1965, the North Vietnamese assaulted an officers' training school east of Savannakhet; student defenders with help from the Lao Air Force accounted for 200 enemy dead. In November, a similar attack was mounted against the Mekong River town of Thakhek, and again many North Vietnamese soldiers were killed and captured. In early 1968, North Vietnamese forces seized Nam Bac Valley, which the Government had retaken in the summer of 1966 after more than 6 years of Communist control.

During 1969 Communist pressure built up considerably and more government-held areas in northern and southern Laos were lost. In June, at the peak of the offensive, the neutralist base of Muong Soui, west of the Plain of Jars, was captured. This base had been in the Government's hands since before the 1962 Geneva agreements. During the summer a counterattack by government forces, intending to relieve this pressure by cutting the enemy's extended supply lines, caught the North Vietnamese forces by surprise, requiring them to abandon their hold on the Plain of Jars. They left behind huge stores of arms, ammunition, and other supplies cached on the Plain, along with tanks, armored cars, and artillery pieces, indications of their probable intention of launching a major offensive. During the final months of 1969 and in January 1970 Hanoi sent an additional 13,000 troops into Laos (for a total of 67,000 in that country) and rebuilt its stocks and supply lines. The North Vietnamese retook the Plain of Jars in February, recaptured Muong Soui, and thrust south toward the headquarters of Gen. Vang Pao, Commander of Military Region II, at Long Tieng. By late spring 1970 fighting had gradually stabilized in the north although a serious threat of renewed enemy action remained. In the south two Province capitals, Attopeu and Saravane, never before occupied by the Communists, fell on April 30 and June 9, respectively.

Internal Negotiations. Following the North Vietnamese decision early in 1968 to engage in negotiations at Paris leading to a possible settlement in Southeast Asia, the NLHS gradually worked out a similar program to attain its goals in Laos through political as well as

military means. In July the NLHS announced that the previous basis of a Lao internal solution—the tripartite agreements of 1961-62—was no longer acceptable and called for a solution to the Lao problem on the basis of the 1962 Geneva agreements and "realities of the present situation." Essential elements of the new NLHS position appear to be: (1) a willingness to engage in talks, provided certain military conditions are met; (2) an attempt to discredit the Prime Minister's credentials as a neutralist leader and head of the Government of National Union; (3) the touting of the dissident neutralists as a separate party succeeding Souvanna's neutralist movement; and (4) the forecasting of an important role for the King of Laos, probably as the authority for convening talks and giving force to the decisions reached.

These elements were apparent in the NLHS five-point proposal of March 6, 1970, for an internal settlement which called for withdrawal of all U.S. assistance to Laos, including an end to all U.S. bombing. In a reply dated April 9, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma proposed a cease-fire, immediate withdrawal under ICC supervision of all foreign forces, and a meeting of "all interested parties" to discuss their differences.

On February 28, 1970, Prime Minister Souvanna called for consultations among the 14 signatories of the 1962 Geneva agreements to discuss violations. Despite strong support from the United States and the United Kingdom, the U.S.S.R. and other Communist signatories have not been responsive, and there is little immediate prospect for holding such consultations.

GOVERNMENT

Laos is a constitutional parliamentary monarchy. Under the December 1957 revision of the Constitution, originally promulgated by the King in May 1947, the franchise was extended to women. General elections normally are held every 5 years. Constitutional amendments passed in 1965 give the King other options during times of crisis.

The bicameral legislature is composed of a National Assembly of 59 members which wields the real legislative power of the country, and a less active King's Council of 12 elder statesmen appointed directly by the King, six upon Assembly recommendation. The King's Council can return for reconsideration legislation the Assembly has passed. A majority vote of the Assemblymen present overrides King's Council objections.

The Prime Minister is designated by the King in consultation with political leaders. The Prime Minister submits his proposed cabinet to the National Assembly for approval, a favorable two-thirds majority of Assemblymen present being required for investiture. Assemblymen who are candidates for ministerial posts may not participate in the vote of confidence for a new government. Members of the

Cabinet need not be Assemblymen. The NLHS recognizes neither the present nor the previous two legislatures and refused to participate in the national elections of July 1965 and January 1967.

The Constitution provides that the judicial power shall be separate and independent of the executive and legislative powers. In practice, the judiciary is the least vigorous branch of the Government.

Because of extreme factional strife and open fighting in Laos, the three principal Lao groupings—conservative, neutralist, and Communist—agreed in June 1962 to form a tripartite Government of National Union under the premiership of Prince Souvanna Phouma, with carefully balanced participation by the three factions. The Cabinet had 11 neutralists, four rightists, and four Communists. Although the formation of this tripartite government was extraconstitutional, the King invested it under article 15 of the Constitution.

In 1963 Communist cabinet members withdrew from Vientiane and from active participation in the Government of National Union, and others were designated to carry on their work. The Communist cabinet members retain their portfolios in name, the door has been left open for their return, and the tripartite government remains undisturbed at least in form. The Prime Minister has attempted without success to persuade the Communist ministers to resume active participation in the Government. He has also made other changes in cabinet portfolios from the 1962 roster, but the NLHS has denounced them as illegal.

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The intrinsic barriers to unity and a sense of nationhood described earlier have been increased by the internal and external Communist threat. Efforts to bridge the gulf between the Central Government and the people in the countryside have been handicapped further by the dearth of communications, particularly roads. Only a few thousand individuals, many of them French-educated, participate in government and politics; the bulk of the population is illiterate and politically passive. Popular identification with the country, the Government, and the Crown—although stronger than in the past—is limited, and regional and family loyalties continue to play a predominant role in domestic politics.

The Lao political situation is further complicated by more than two decades of international contention in Southeast Asia. The 1962 Geneva design for national reconciliation and territorial unification has been unworkable so far because of North Vietnamese and NLHS intransigence. The internal struggles persist. Today the Communists occupy perhaps half of the Lao territory. They also control about 25 percent of the Lao population, generally tribal groups inhabiting the rugged and sparsely populated uplands bordering Communist China and the two Viet-Nams. The populous Mekong

lowlands are under government jurisdiction, and there is considerable support for the central Lao authority among many of the upland ethnic minority groups, notably the Meo and Yao.

The departure of the NLHS from the tripartite government in 1963 reduced it to a neutralist-conservative coalition. The result has been the achievement of a substantial degree of political stability in government-held areas. Neutralist-conservative cooperation has grown, and in policy terms there is little distinction between the two. Political groupings in Laos generally consist of rather loose coalitions around personalities, frequently along lines of clan and regional loyalties.

The Lao Communist political organization—the Neo Lao Hak Sat (NLHS)—is neither strong nor deeply rooted in Laos; it is almost completely a creature of the North Vietnamese on whose support and direction it has become increasingly dependent. With substantial, even dominating, North Vietnamese help, the NLHS has retained firm control over the areas it occupies and has allowed only a few outsiders to enter on conducted visits.

The 1962 Geneva agreements provided for International Control Commission (ICC) investigations, undertaken by majority vote, in an effort to make the ICC a more effective policing instrument than it had been under the 1954 Geneva agreements. The Communists considered that the internal Lao arrangements, which provided for an NLHS veto on all important matters, would effectively prevent ICC actions to which they were opposed. This has not always been the case; a few meaningful investigations of North Vietnamese violations have been undertaken by majority ICC decision, and the results of the investigations have been forwarded informally to the Geneva conference cochairmen, the United Kingdom and the U.S.S.R. Communist China considers the ICC mandate expired, the NLHS and North Vietnamese hold that the ICC exists but cannot function, while the U.S.S.R. and Poland wish to keep it dormant for possible future resuscitation.

ECONOMY

An underdeveloped country with most of its natural resources unexploited or unsurveyed. Laos is further handicapped by its isolation from the sea. Some 85 percent of the people are subsistence farmers supplying the bulk of their own needs, even weaving their own cloth. Laos was once self-sufficient in rice. Now because of insurgency, a large share of its food needs have to be imported. Since almost all manufactured products also come from abroad, there is a serious balance-of-payments deficit. In 1968 the gross national product (GNP) was approximately U.S. \$202 million with a per capita GNP of \$72. In that same year imports amounted to about \$42 million, and exports were estimated at \$2.8 million, primarily tin,

timber, and coffee. Laos' major trading partners are Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Japan.

Forests cover about two-thirds of Laos; about 50 percent of the forest land has commercial possibilities if the costs of access can be worked out. The difficulties of internal transport pose a serious obstacle to economic development. There are no railroads in Laos; and the Mekong, while navigable by small craft and a potentially important transportation link, is interrupted by falls and rapids which prevent effective commercial use of several sections of the river. The road network is elemental, and frequently interdicted by blown-up bridges and natural calamities.

The budget for fiscal year 1970 anticipated expenditures of \$34.6 million, revenues of \$17 million, and a deficit of \$17.6 million. Approximately \$17 million was budgeted for military expenditures. This unbalanced fiscal condition is fundamentally caused by the need to meet North Vietnamese military aggression. In order to counteract adverse effects on the economy and monetary system of Laos by such large deficit spending, a number of foreign aid donor governments adopted in 1963 an International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommendation for a Foreign Exchange Operations Fund (FEOF). The FEOF sells U.S. dollars to maintain a kip open market rate that has remained at about 500 kip = \$1.00 since January 1964. Five countries—Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States—have contributed foreign exchange to FEOF. This unique program has kept inflation in Laos to an average of about 8 percent annually for 6 years.

The Agency for International Development (AID) maintains one of its largest overseas missions in Laos. U.S. economic aid during fiscal year 1970 was \$52 million and will remain at about the same level in FY 1971. The economic assistance program has three basic objectives: (1) FEOF is the principal instrument of the stabilization program; (2) development efforts are directed principally toward increasing agricultural production; and (3) refugee care absorbs a substantial share of the AID security budget.

For the immediate future, Lao development efforts will be limited severely as in past years by the country's task of coping with the dislocation caused by foreign invasion. More than 600,000 persons have fled from areas occupied by Communist forces. As of the summer of 1970, more than 250,000 people were still in refugee status. A disproportionately high percentage of men serve in the armed forces which contributes greatly to the manpower shortage.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Lao foreign policy derives from the 1962 Geneva agreements. Laos undertook to establish diplomatic relations with all nations, starting with its neighbors, on the basis of

equality and respect for Lao independence and sovereignty. Laos renounced any intention of the use or threat of force that might impair the peace of other countries, as well as any interference in their internal affairs. The Lao Government simultaneously declared that it was the will of the Lao people to protect the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, unity, and territorial integrity of Laos. It therefore appealed to all states to refrain from any actions inconsistent with these principles.

In pursuit of its stated desire for friendly relations with all states, the Lao Government established and maintains diplomatic relations with its neighbors and all other signatories of the 1962 Geneva agreements. Laos is a member of the United Nations and several of its specialized agencies and participates in several nonmilitary regional and international organizations, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC), and the Mekong Committee. Laos formally excluded itself from the protective umbrella of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) by stating in the Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos (which is incorporated in the Geneva agreements) that it would not recognize the protection of any military alliance, including SEATO.

In accordance with its continued policy of neutrality and independence, the Lao Government has formally and publicly denounced North Vietnamese aggression, which has taken two forms: use of Lao territory to further the war in South Viet-Nam and support of the Lao Communist movement through attacks in Laos. Consistent with the provisions of the 1962 agreements, Laos has sought military supplies for self-defense as well as economic assistance for self-development.

U. S. POLICY

The United States firmly endorses the efforts of the Lao Government to preserve its independence and neutrality and considers that the full implementation of the 1962 Geneva agreements offers the best method to obtain these objectives. The United States continues to support the government of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and is cooperating fully with his diplomatic efforts to restore these agreements. The United States has 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.

Confronted with continuing outside aggression, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma has called on the United States at various times since 1962 to assist his government in preserving Lao neutrality and integrity. In 1963 when North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces attacked neutralist forces and occupied and fortified the area of the Ho Chi Minh trail in southeastern Laos, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma requested American aid in the form of supplies and munitions. This assistance was

provided in accordance with the Lao Government's right under the Geneva agreements to seek help in its self-defense. In 1964, to meet Communist escalation on the Plain of Jars and the Ho Chi Minh trail, the United States responded to Lao Government requests by increasing training and logistic support and initiating certain interdiction flight missions against the invaders.

All U.S. aid is requested, supportive, limited, and defensive. U.S. air power continues to be used along the Ho Chi Minh trail in southeastern Laos to reduce the flow of supplies from North Viet-Nam to South Viet-Nam and thereby save American and Allied lives. Reconnaissance flights continue to be carried out in northern Laos. The U.S. Air Force also flies combat support missions for Lao forces when requested to do so by the Royal Lao Government. There are no American ground combat troops stationed in Laos. Of the 1,040 Americans there, military and civilian, 320 are engaged in a military advisory capacity, and 323 are logistics personnel.

The United States began giving economic aid to Laos in 1946 and since 1955 has substantially assisted Laos in maintaining its independence in the face of external and internal Communist pressure. Economic assistance alone totaled \$695 million through June 1970. This is given primarily to control inflation, support essential government services—including relief to more than 250,000 Lao refugees uprooted by hostilities—and a limited amount of economic development. The United States is also a major contributor to regional projects benefiting Laos. It has pledged half the funds for the \$31 million Nam Ngum Dam on a tributary of the Mekong River.

PRINCIPAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Chief of State—King Sri SAVANG VATTHANA
Crown Prince—VONG SAVANG
Inspector General of the Kingdom—Prince BOUN OUM na Champassak
President of the King's Council—OUTHONG Souvannavong
President of the National Assembly—PHOUI Sananikone
Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Veterans' Affairs, and Rural Affairs—Prince SOUVANNA PHOUMA
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of National Economy and Planning—Prince SOUPHA-NOUVONG (absent)
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of National Education, Fine Arts, Sports, and Youth—LEUAM Insisiengmay
Minister of Finance, Acting Minister of National Economy, Delegate of Minister of Defense—SISOUK na Champassak

Minister of Information, Propaganda, and Tourism—PHOUMI Vongvichit (absent)
Minister of Interior and Social Welfare—PHENG Phongsavan
Minister of Justice and Acting Minister of Planning—INPENG Suryadhay
Minister of Post and Telecommunications, Public Health, and Acting Minister of Information, Propaganda, and Tourism—Prince SISOUMANG Sisaleumsak
Minister of Public Works and Transport—NGON Sananikone
Commander-in-Chief, Lao Armed Forces—Maj. Gen. OUAN Rathikoun
Chargé d'Affaires ad interim to the U.S. and the U.N.—LANE Phathamavong

Laos maintains an Embassy in the United States at 2222 S Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

PRINCIPAL U. S. OFFICIALS

Ambassador—G. McMurtrie Godley
Deputy Chief of Mission—Monteagle Stearns
Director, U.S. AID Mission—Charles A. Mann
Public Affairs Officer (USIS)—Keith E. Adamson
Army Attaché—Lt. Col. Edgar A. Duskin
Air Force Attaché—Col. Hayden C. Currie
The U.S. Embassy in Laos is located near Black Stupa Circle, Vientiane.

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