

In skimming rapidly over Proschan's piece with its innumerable quibbles my attention was suddenly caught by his discussion of the Pathet Lao radio broadcast of May 6, 1975 on his pages 6 and 7. He puts forward an interpretation of the meaning of that broadcast which had never occurred to me. It bears close examination.

He maintains that the threat contained in the broadcast is directed against the "Vientiane ultrarightist reactionary clique," not against the Hmong special forces. When I read the full text of the broadcast in the FBIS files a couple of years ago, there was not the slightest doubt in my mind that the threat was directed against the Hmong special forces. And even from the excerpts cited by Proschan on page 6 I think any reader of English would conclude that this was so. I don't have the full text with me now, but consider the following:

--The phrase "We can wipe them out any time" clearly refers to the Hmong special forces. Whether this is a threat or not is, I suppose, debatable. If I were a Hmong, I would certainly take it as a threat, or at least a not very reassuring augury of what my future holds.

--This same group of people are obviously the object of the "very specific" threat (Proschan's words) contained in the subsequent statement that "the Patriotic Armed Forces must exercise our right of self-defense and duly punish or wipe them out." This is so because Sisouk Na Champassak, the Sananikone, and other prominent lowland Lao officials by May 1975 hardly constituted a threat against which the "Patriotic Armed Forces" had to be mobilized; these individuals had been maneuvered into a position where they no longer had any effective command over anything, and in short order could be expected to flee across the Mekong, which most of them did. The Hmong special forces, on the other hand, were something entirely different. A constituted, battle-hardened military force under resourceful and capable leadership, operating in a friendly environment with popular support, the Hmong special forces did constitute a continuing threat to Pathet Lao control. Indeed, the title of the broadcast, "The U.S.-Vang Pao Special Forces Must Be Completely Cleaned Up," cannot be interpreted as meaning the "Vientiane ultrarightist reactionary clique," for if that clique was the intended target of the broadcast, the title would have said so.

--The Hmong may not have been mentioned as such in the broadcast (for obvious political reasons of the Pathet Lao), but the name of Vang Pao, their leader, in the title of the broadcast makes it clear that the threat is to the Hmong and the Hmong only.

--The most convincing evidence of the existence of a threat against the Hmong lies in your interviews of Hmong who actually heard this broadcast and took it to mean they were threatened, personally and as a group. (Proschan cannot deny that the

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broadcast occurred.)

So in conclusion, I would say that on the basis of both the documentary evidence and the interview evidence Proschan's interpretation of the meaning of the broadcast is not only novel but also mistaken. The rest of his argumentation is very likely equally fallacious.

Please note also that he is wrong when he says on page 2 that your book was not reviewed in any scholarly journal: the review by Alfred McCoy in The Journal of Asian Studies.

I think it is important to bear in mind, when dealing with an individual who makes so much out of evidence and the treatment of it in historical writing, that we are dealing here with a regime that is so secretive about its actions, not to mention its policies, that it has never published a word about how it came to power or how it treated its defeated enemies after victory (e.g. the seminar camps, the treatment of the king); has never indicated the possibility of any amnesty for those who opposed it; has never spelled out the procedures for reintegrating those of its citizens who fled abroad (in contrast to the foreign officials who find themselves today caught up in this process and who therefore must find some explanation for it, legal, rational, or otherwise); and continues to shield its ruling party behind the mantle of legality of what we in the West usually refer to as governance. The only historical accounts to have emerged from this regime in almost 20 years are tales of military exploits by the valiant Patriotic Forces against the imperialists and their valets. The only rationalization by a top party leader of the party's ascendancy is a jargon-filled little book by Kaysone published in Moscow in 1980 in which the only sure things that I could find was that the party justified the use of violence against its opponents and the party was always right. In these circumstances, disquisitions by American academics on the treatment of historical evidence regarding the LPDR have, to say the least, an Alice in Wonderland character to them. The danger is that this opens the way to the re-writing of history by those who have an interest in doing so, to the detriment of those of future generations who will have no way of knowing better.

Thank you again for the copies of documents from the American Embassy.

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