# CASH AND VIOLENCE

## IN LAOS AND VIET NAM

By Anna Louise Strong

MAINSTREAM PAPERBACK

About—

# ANNA LOUISE STRONG

**ANNA LOUISE STRONG,** author of more than a score of books about the Soviet Union, China, and the Far East, is one of the fabulous figures of modern literary journalism in the tradition of Lincoln Steffens and John Reed. Covering a span of close to half a century, she has reported the continuing cycle of wars, revolutions and social upheavals that have transformed maps and altered the course of history. Born in 1885, in Friend, Nebraska, she went to Russia with the American Friends Service in 1921, bringing the first foreign relief to the Volga famine sufferers. Her book, **Tomorrow's China,** published in 1948, reported China's liberation as an event that "will surely stand in history with the victories of the American, French and Russian revolutions," and foresaw the epic of Socialist construction that would soon hurl that country from medievalism to the front rank of modern nations. In the course of many visits to the USSR, China, and Viet Nam, she met the foremost leaders of those countries face to face—Krushchev, Mao Tse-tung, Madame Sun Yat-sen, Ho Chi-Minh, Souvanna Phouma, Chou En-lai, and many more.

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by Anna Louise Strong

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

# Read While You Can

IT WAS CHRISTMAS WEEK of 1961 and I was asked for a foreword. The same radio that bore around the earth the hymns of "peace on earth" bore also the tramp of U.S. soldiers in Saigon streets, the first American casualties, the first mass slaughter of peasants by American "know-how" and "wonder-weapons" the Pentagon tests on the bodies of Vietnamese. These were annotated by Christmas carols and by the unctuous voice of Lyndon Johnson, proclaiming that America's strength lies not in material things, but in love of freedom and devotion to world peace.

Barely a week earlier Adlai Stevenson, reputed an intellectual and a liberal, berated with fervour Nehru's two-day conquest of Goa — which most Goans asked for and which cost less than ten casualties — as a use of "force and violence" which America always deplores and which might even undermine the foundations of the U.N. Yet, for seven years Washington has bought civil war in Laos and bloody suppressions in South Viet Nam, till it is claimed that Ngo Dinh Diem has killed 80,000 and crippled hundreds of thousands by torture in his jails. Adlai will not call this "force and violence" and "undermining the U.N." He will call it "American aid."

And since "American aid" has now grown into American-managed "real war," master-minded by the President's own military adviser, General Maxwell D. Taylor, no less a figure than Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, provides the excuse. In his White Paper of early December, he blames the unrest and guerrilla war of South Viet Nam on North Viet Nam, which, he alleges, sends arms and personnel into the South. Hanoi has always denied this, and claims that Dean Rusk's documents are forged. Personally, I am inclined to believe Hanoi. For Rusk, to clinch his case, alleged that the entire rebellion in the South was planned and launched by the "North Viet Nam Workers (Communist) Party" at its Congress in September, 1960. Now, I happen to know, from my trip to Hanoi in spring of 1961, of which I have written in this book, that, first, there is no "North Viet Nam Party," but a "Viet Nam Party," founded long before the time when Washington carved a separate state in South Viet Nam, and with a united membership from North and South still holding over. And second, the decision it reached in its Congress in September, 1960, was that the task of "liberating the South" must be done by the South alone, since if the North intervened with personnel or arms, this would break the Geneva Agreements and spread the war. The task of the North was therefore to build the economic base for the future united Viet Nam, to share with the South when the Southerners fought free.

I cannot guarantee that Hanoi will always thus abstain from sending armed aid to its compatriots in the South, for the Northerners have far more right to be there than Washington has to send both arms and personnel to fight a war eight thousand miles away. But, having caught Dean Rusk deceiving the American people in one important detail, I tend to doubt him on others. The CIA has skill in fabricating documents and Hanoi may be right in claiming these are forged.

But the matter goes further than Dean Rusk.

What is this blind madness that afflicts us, that causes not only the emotional insanity of the fall-out shelters but the intellectual condition in which "violence" is not "violence" when done by Americans, and "lies" are not "lies" when released by a "white paper," and seven years' slaughter in Vietnam and Laos is "American aid"?

It comes from the "cold war" in which we have been seventeen years nurtured, and which has grown from fever to frenzy, so that to outlaw Communists is proper, to "contain" Communists by jail or armed cordon is basic strategy, and to kill Communists a holy deed. From this it is a slight step to call any dark-skinned peasants "Communists" if they refuse to give their country's independence with both hands to America for a military base.

This is accepted in America and becomes second nature. But that way danger lies. For Americans are only two hundred million people, and the world has more than two and a half billion, few of whom share this American view. Unless Americans can learn to understand and consider some of the views of these billions, we shall bring down our own house and much of the world, for we are very powerful in destruction and dangerously misinformed.

Who knows in America that millions of people in South Viet Nam are protesting the American "intervention"? Who reads the appeals that go out to the world from individuals and organizations, from leading intellectuals, religious personalities, workers and women's organizations? There lies on my desk a moving appeal from the South Viet Nam Peace Committee, signed by an executive composed of leading persons of all faiths, high Buddhist priests, the chief priest of the "12 United Cao-dai sects," a Catholic, a Protestant, (the latter being chairman of the Autonomy Promotion of Minorities on the High Central Plateau). I quote only a few words:

"The ink on the Geneva Agreements was not dried when the Americans and Diem tried to rekindle war. Diem makes such massacres of the people as were never seen. We cannot restrain anger when we think of the treatment given our Saigon-Cholon Peace Committee, how eminent personalities, intellectuals, students, workers and toiling people were jailed and torturd in prison year after year . . . And now they expand it . . . into direct intervention by U.S. and SEATO troops. To cover their crimes they rave about 'Communists.' . . . The only aggression here is from the U.S.A. More than 3,000 U.S. military and thousands of Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers have their feet upon our country. The Americans and Diem are pushing our South Viet Nam into a sea of blood and fire."

Where will the Americans read the French-taught cynicism with which the neighbor nations in Southeast Asia judge us, as expressed in *Realités Cambodgiennes* (August 19, 1961): "The Americans have not the best intentions . . . What they essentially want is to keep the 'positions of strength' in Southeast Asia for an eventual conflict with China, or, even more, for a world war."

A little time is granted to Americans by the Kennedy Administration's own methods. To talk peace while acting war is one of its best techniques. As American troops arrive in Saigon, enter the zones of battle, kill and are killed, the American people are still assured by the Administration that "U.S. troops will not be sent . . . unless necessary." Kennedy does not yet call this a war. So I am still free to write and you to read the passionate cry of Vietnamese and the cool cynicism of Cambodians. When war is admitted, you will be free only to read Dean Rusk.

Read while you can; you may not long be able. For the sake of the millions in Laos and Viet Nam who want peace and independence even as you, and who see the U.S. military as the chief obstruction; for America's sake, since even America is not all-powerful and will go down if she tries to impose its will upon the world.

*Read while you can.*

Anna Louise Strong

## CHAPTER I

# Cash and Violence

✦

"I WISH THEY would find some other name for 'American imperialism,'" I remarked to a British novelist who was visiting Peking. "It comes up all the time in reporting the Far East. My American readers resent the term; they won't believe that the U.S.A. is imperialist. Even American Marxists, who accept the words, don't like to have you harp on it. It seems like prejudicing the case."

"Have you found a synonym?" smiled my friend.

"Sometimes you can be specific and say 'Pentagon,' or 'U.S. State,' or 'war interests,'" I replied. "American readers don't mind blaming these. But often you deal with a complex of forces, some open, some behind the scenes. There may be oil, and rubber, and acts of the State Department and moves of the U.S. Fleet, all intertwined with strands not easy to trace. There's nothing to cover it then but 'U.S. imperialism.' These words arouse in American readers the overtones of 'home' and 'mother.' They push it aside." Then, since my friend is successful in writing, I asked her: "What term do you use?"

She laughed. "I see your trouble with American readers. For me, a British citizen living in southeast Asia, no qualms exist. We have known imperialisms of many kinds for decades: British imperialism, French imperialism, Portuguese and Dutch and Japanese imperialism. Now, all over the South Pacific, we have American imperialism. When Americans spend half a million dollars to buy the Singapore election, we call it American imperialism. We do not shrink from the term."

"Did they win?" I asked in some curiosity for I had not heard of that Singapore election.

"No," she smiled. "The British were too clever. The pro-American candidates got exposed in the press. Americans are crude; they think they can buy anything with cash and violence. British these days are short on cash and haven't the strength they used to have for violence. The British used their brains!"

A few days later an Australian friend came back from the Bandung meeting of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Council, in April 1961, and told me of two middle-aged American women tourists he met. They were grumbling at the lack of Western conveniences all over the South Seas. They found Indonesia very backward. When they learned he was Australian they said Australia was a bit backward, too.

"We found your kitchens lacking in modern conveniences," they criticized.

The Australian grinned and let them have it. "Ladies," he said, "I don't know whose kitchens you saw in Australia; we have different kinds. But you should get wise to the way we look at Americans here. We don't mind your admiring your own kitchens but we don't want you fixing up ours. You seem to think God gave you the job of fixing the world.

"You bother folks all over the South Pacific. You trouble our politics in Australia and New Zealand, too. In lands with colored populations you are rougher. Just south of here, ten thousand or so armed rebels have been killing Indonesian peasants and burning their villages for years. They go under the name of Dar Es-salaam but the money and the weapons come from your oil interests. That's only one of the bloody wars you subsidize. . . .

"You pay for the bombing of peasants all over South Viet Nam; you finance armed invasion and assassination in Cambodia, bandit gangsters and secession movements in Burma, not to mention raids from Pakistan against Afghans, and the Quemoy war on the China coast. For six years you've paid for civil war in Laos. You should tell them that in the States."

The ladies shrank away and stared right through him afterwards, quite sure they had found a hard-core Communist.

Chit-chat like this is in the air of Southeast Asia. No one can check it all. The area is large and the nations in it many. The ways of American penetration are also many, and not all are announced. Official aid may be learned by research. But who will list the funds given by U.S. oil interests to Indonesian insurgents, or the deals made in Taiwan to send arms to Kuomintang bandits in Burma. Not even Congress may pry too much into the cloak-and-dagger jobs of the Central Intelligence Agency, though the press brags that it instigates raids, sabotage and even assassinations. To check these things is beyond the power of a single writer. It needs an international commission. No agency exists that has such power.

I shall not pause to check that Singapore election, but merely note that I heard it from three different residents of Singapore who said the money was proved to have come from Taiwan by New York Trust. Nor shall I document the collusion of U.S. oil interests with Indonesian rebels, but merely note that it gets into the press when a U.S.-made bomber is shot down and an American pilot named Pope is condemned by an Indonesian court for bombing Indonesian towns. My task is simpler. I shall take the case of Laos, with some side glances into the neighbors of Laos in Southeast Asia.

In Laos we have a case that can be studied. It is documented by reports to the U.S. Congress and by correspondents of many nations reporting from there for some years. It is illumined and brought to public attention by discussions of fourteen nations going on in Geneva in August 1961, as I write. I have spent months assembling data and supplemented it by a personal trip. I have facts that should be given to the American people for the sake of the peace of the world.

The record in Laos is one of cash and violence — cash given through the U.S. Embassy and violence organized by U.S. military advisers and agents of the CIA. For six years the U.S. ran Laos and paid its bills, supplying all costs of the Royal Army and most of the costs of the civil government, under-writing the Laotian economy. The record shows that the U.S. poured into Laos twice as much cash as the experts said Laos could absorb, and thus wrecked the currency, corrupted the officials, and doubled the cost of living. The U.S. bought for Laos twice as big an army as the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, in order to promote a civil war which prevented Laos attaining unity as a nation.

These things can be documented. And they are normal characteristics of much U.S. Military Aid.

Let us glance briefly at the pattern of American penetration into Southeast Asia. Economic ventures into the Far East go back more than a century, to the days of the famous "China clippers" from New England shipyards that raced to Canton. American capital was in those days as able and ruthless as any; many fortunes of America's first families derived from these Far Eastern ventures. But American capital was not yet strong enough to challenge the European imperialisms, and was chiefly occupied in developing the American continent. So, in the Far East, especially in China, Washington pushed the "Open Door" policy, demanding that any privileges given to other nations should be extended to America, too. This sufficed American capitalists until their powers were sharply expanded by two world wars.

America's expansion in force into the southwest Pacific began with the defeat of Japan in the second world war. One may note three stages, each taking about five years. In the first stage, in the 1940's, the U.S. took over the Japanese island bases and absorbed properties of Britain and France, its war-time allies. In the second stage, after the rise in 1949 of the Chinese People's Republic, USSR did not even take back all the territory lost by the Russian tsar in the first world war, while America, by taking the island bases and by the growth of her air and naval power, turned both the Atlantic and Pacific into "American Lakes."

Americans often boast that in the second world war America made "few territorial gains." They contrast this with the habit of old colonial powers, and especially compare it with the territorial gains made in East Europe by the USSR. They omit to note that the American power concentrated on an additional aim, the "containment" and, if possible, destruction of the new China. The third stage began with the Geneva Ageements of 1954, which speeded Washington's take-over of French interests in French Indo-China.

It was in 1943 that Henry Luce's magazine began to feature the "American century," expressing the view that the U.S. would dominate the world for the next hundred years. For already during the war it became clear that America was acquiring the possessions and interests of her allies. While the European and Asian allies suffered serious losses in wealth and man-power, America grew rich from the war. She also grew very powerful, for though British and other scientists helped produce the atomic bomb, Washington alone possessed it. America used this wealth and power to squeeze out, not only Germany and Japan but also America's allies from areas they previously controlled. Even self-governing dominions like Australia and New Zealand felt the pressure of American capital. But its dominance was much more pronounced in other areas which the European empires lost for a time to Japanese imperialism, and regained with American help.

Two peculiarities of this take-over should be noted. The first was that America, in taking over possessions not of an enemy but of allies, needed the excuse of a common war against a common foe, a war in which America "gave aid" to the public cause while America's capitalists acquired the other nations' wealth. At first this common enemy was Germany in Europe, and, in the Far East, Japan. After Japan's surrender, the enemy became "international Communism." The need of combining the "free nations" to fight Communism, became the theme song of Washington. In fifteen years of thus mutually "fighting Communism," Washington took over little Communist territory. The Communist territories grew tremendously, especially by the addition of China in 1949. But, through "mutual alliance" against the Communists, America took over the assets of her allies, especially of France.

It was Mao Tse-tung who called my attention to this process in August 1946, when I first met him in Yenan. The cold war had already begun. America had the monopoly of the A–bomb and used it to threaten the USSR. People everywhere worried about a possible third world war. I raised this question with Mao.

Mao replied that "the American reactionaries" undoubtedly saw the USSR as their ultimate foe and hoped eventually to destroy it but this was not their immediate aim. To attack the USSR was not easy; the road lay through France and Germany in Europe and through China in Asia. For the time being, the clamor about a third world war was largely a "smokescreen" to hide the American take-over of the power and possessions of Britain and France. Already America had become the dominant imperialist power in the Pacific. In China, where many European nations had formerly had spheres of influence, America, by financing Chiang Kai-shek, had become the single dominant foreign power.

The second characteristic of the take-over of power was that American domination followed a new form. The old form of colonialism was dead. The methods whereby European powers seized territories and sent out governors and civil servants to administer them could not survive the awakening nationalisms in Asia. American dominance was secured by buying native rulers and paying the cost of native governments, under terms which then permitted American capital to acquire properties and the American military to acquire bases. It was a method of cash and violence, rather than territorial ownership and administration.

This new form, which already is becoming known to the people of Asia and Africa as "neo-colonialism," not only suited the new stage of finance capital which America had reached. Its techniques and advantages had been developed in half a century in the Philippines. The seizure of these islands at the turn of the century was America's first imperialist conquest in the Far East. Americans called it "imperialism" quite openly in those days. A strong anti-imperialist movement in America opposed both the war with Spain by which American forces entered the Philippines (and also Cuba), and still more opposed the ruthless five-years war by which American troops suppressed the independence movement of the Filipino people. Mark Twain wrote one of his most scathing essays against this war of suppression. So strong was the resistance in the Philippines and the anti-imperialist agitation in America that American politicians were forced to promise the Philippines not only a future independence but that "every step taken in the islands" would be "preparation for that independence."

After half a century and many postponements, the Philippines were granted political independence, subject to certain agreements with the U.S.A. The American ruling class had learned in that half century a more efficient way of exploitation than that of the old colonial empires. Their needs, they saw, were power and profits. These could be had without the formal ownership of territory and without the complications inherent in the direct administration of foreign lands. Safeguards for American investments permitted American capital to continue to dominate the islands' economy. Agreements for American military bases gave to Washington all the needed military power.

There were even certain advantages in this method. American capital took its power and profits in the most direct manner, while the American voters hardly knew about it, and in any case had no way to interfere. American capital today collects its profits in the Philippines as readily as in any "possession" and far more readily than in territorial United States, where trade unions interfere. In any American military project in the southwestern Pacific, the Philippines show themselves as biddable as the peoples in any British or French colony ever were under British or French governors. And while this highly efficient exploitation continues under native rulers, whose chief interest is to hide the extent of U.S. exploitation from the native people, the American people are also ignorant of it, and are able to believe happily that America is anti-imperialist, because she "gave independence" to the Philippines, and because she occasionally "opposes" some gross exploitation by Britain, France, Portugal or Belgium, after which Americans either buy heavily into or acquire outright the local property and power.

This method of "cash and violence," rather than territorial possession and administration, often enables Americans to be hailed for a time by the native peoples as "liberators," as they take over the assets of the older imperialisms under a newer stream-lined form. The more experienced native peoples have already discovered its nature, and call it "neo-colonialism."

This "cash and violence" was the method used in Southeast Asia. That American capitalists were quite conscious of the merits of this new technique was shown when William Christian Bullitt, as U.S. ambassador to France, recommended it to France in the Indo-China war. He even gave the Philippines as an example in an article in *Life* magazine, December 1947. It was partly his advice that induced France to set up native governments in Indo-China such as the "State of Viet Nam," under Bao Dai, to oppose the government of President Ho Chi Minh, with which France had begun war. Similar "free" governments were set up in Laos and Cambodia. Their characteristics were that they gave French capitalists full access to wealth, and gave the French military full right to bases. Washington at once, to the annoyance of France, began to send direct "American aid" to these native governments. On May 8, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson announced U.S. military aid to the "State of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia."

Thus, even in aiding France, Washington prepared for the American take-over of power.

In the first years after Japan's surrender, Indo-China was a side issue for Washington. China, its exploitation and domination, was the main goal. In China, the European interests had been squeezed out during the war. the Japanese interest was lost by surrender, and America, by its four to six billion dollar loans to Chiang Kai-shek, had become the sole dominant foreign power. Treaties signed with Chiang gave American investors rights in every aspect of China's life. American capitalists expected to exploit China for profit for at least fifty years: it was on this that the claim to the "American century" was largely based. More than that, Washington expected to gain from a complaisant China the air and naval bases to complete the full encirclement of the USSR and even the man-power to use against Russia in a U.S.-led war.

This program was revealed in many documents, especially the famous report of Lt. General Wedemeyer.

Then America "lost China." The victory of the Chinese People's Liberation Army over Chiang Kai-shek was for America the great shock of the post-war years. American capital lost not only the exclusive exploitation of vast resources and industrious man-power with which to stave off depression for fifty years. It lost access to the entire Asian frontier of the USSR. The world concept of "containing Communism" within the USSR, where it might be atom-bombed to bits from bases in Iceland, Saudi Arabia, Sinkiang and Manchuria at once – was destroyed. "Communism" had broken out to 650,000,000 Chinese. With the inauguration of the Chinese People's Republic on October 1, 1949, the Soviet socialist camp had tripled its population and embraced one third of mankind.

Washington's policy at once became to encircle China, contain her, cripple her, destroy her if possible.

Three actions to that end took place in 1950. They were the Korean War,* launched by Washington in mid-summer; the "protection" of Taiwan announced by President Truman on June 27; and the treaty signed with France in Saigon in December, by which Washington assumed the major costs of the Indo-China war. These three actions are not usually connected in the minds of the American people, but in Asia they are seen as a three-pronged drive begun in 1950 against the new People's Republic of China. American penetration was no longer a mere take-over of properties from decaying empires. It was fiercely directed to the encirclement of China.

This explains the ruthless determination with which John Foster Dulles pushed France to fight to the bitter end in Indo-China and the rage he showed in Geneva, when France felt compelled to sign the peace. It was a war which the French were fighting but which Washington partly controlled. In April, 1961, I saw in the Revolutionary Museum in Hanoi a photograph of the signing of the Saigon Treaty and also examples of American weapons captured by the Viet Minh in the war.

* The American myth that the Korean War was started by North Korean aggression is too complex to discuss here. I refer the reader to I. F. Stone's excellently documented *Hidden History of the Korean War* for indications that Washington started it. This the view that Asia generally holds.

"We captured American weapons even before the treaty," the guide told me, "for America gave weapons to France from the start. But after the Saigon Treaty, America began to take control of the war."

Yet, Washington's control was never absolute. George Bidault, Premier of France in those years, later revealed* that Dulles had twice offered him the atom bomb for use in Indo-China and he had refused. It was openly known that Admiral Radford sent U.S. warships equipped with nuclear weapons to the Indo-China coast but the use of them was finally countermanded by President Eisenhower because neither France nor Britain were willing to expand the war in Indo-China and Washington could not fight it alone.

The third stage in Washington's penetration of Southeast Asia began with the Geneva Conference on Indo-China, in 1954. Here delegates from sixteen nations assembled for the dual purpose of turning the Korean armistice into a peace treaty which would permit them to take their troops home, and of settling the Indo-China war. Dulles went to induce them to send their troops to Indo-China and expand the war under American control. He had a draft plan and a time-table for the new intervention. The plan was SEATO, the South East Asia Treaty Organization, whose official announcement was delayed in deference to Britain, lest it antagonize Burma and India. The troops were to march by the end of May.

But the governments that had jumped into Korea so swiftly in 1950 at Washington's call, had been disillusioned. Britain and France said flatly they would not join a war in Indo-China. Even the normally obedient Philippines and Thailand evaded when asked how many battalions they would send. Only Australia and Syngman Rhee offered troops. The Korean War, by its methods and failure, had begun the decline of American world-leadership.

"One of the unforgettable scenes of the Geneva Conference," wrote Wilfred Burchett in *Up the Mekong*, "was the day when Dulles stalked angrily from the Conference Room, red-faced and furious." A telegram from London had given the final blow. Winston Churchill had assured the House of Commons that Britain would send no troops to Indo-China until the Geneva Con-

* *Duel at the Brink.* Drummond and Coblentz.

ference had the chance to effect a peace. Dulles' efforts to expand the war under the U.S. leadership had failed because of peace demonstrations in Britain.

The pressure of the French people also became a force for peace. A few days after the Conference opened, news came of the final disaster to the French forces in Dien Bien Phu. When, despite this news, the French Premier Bidault tried to evade the modest demands of the victorious people of Indo-China, a cabinet crisis in Paris deposed him and installed Mendes-France as premier, on a pledge to sign a swift peace.

The date of the signing is usually celebrated as July 20, though actually it was several hours after midnight in the early hours of July 21. Three independent, sovereign states emerged from that signing: Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos. All were presumably neutral, pledged not to allow foreign military on their territory. The American representative W. Bedell-Smith, refused to sign, but stated that the U.S. would "not use force or the threat of force to disturb the agreements."

From that moment, Washington's policy became to break the Geneva Agreements by any means short of an isolated American invasion, which the American people would hardly agree to, and which America could not win.

Dulles concluded the organization of SEATO in September, 1954, as the instrument of Washington's aims. Its aggressive aim against China and the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was shown by the fact that India, Burma and Indonesia refused to join it, and its only southeast Asian members were Thailand, the Philippines and Pakistan, all on Washington's pay-roll. Its purpose was emphasized by the quick adoption of a protocol taking "under its protection" Laos, Cambodia and South Viet Nam, all of which the Geneva Agreements had declared neutral. SEATO was thus announced as an instrmuent against the Geneva decisions.

Then, with the power of cash, Washington moved directly into Laos, Cambodia and South Viet Nam with "military aid" to the new governments, to break their pledged neutrality and bend them into a military base against China and North Viet Nam.

The Korean War, the take-over of Taiwan as a war base, and the rapid penetration of Indo-China were only part of Washington's plan to rig the new China with military bases from which it might be destroyed. Into every country of southeast Asia the

U.S. sought to enter, if possible to dominate, and otherwise to undermine. Two different cases may be noted. Thailand and Burma, both in southeast Asia and both important for Laos, too.

Thailand which, as long as Viet Nam is split, is the largest, most populous nation of the southeast Asian mainland, was easy picking for Washington. Under the former name of Siam, it had been left nominally independent by Britain and France as a buffer state between their empires. It sided with Japan in the second world war and thus was vulnerable to demands of the victors. It is a feudal monarchy with many competing noble families, all of whom are glad to serve the strongest, richest victor. Thailand quickly began to get American aid. In return she gave military bases, the use of her territory for manouvers, and the use of her capital Bangkok as headquarters for any American agency operating in southeast Asia for any illegal conspiracies against neighbor nations. Thailand is what Washington calls "reliable" and what Peking calls "a running-dog of U.S. imperialism."

Thailand premiers change fairly often, usually by violence plus U.S. aid. Cynics say there are so many hungry warlords that, when one is over-fed with U.S. bounty, the others gang up and push him aside. It may be more accurate to say that Washington seeks the most biddable "strong man." The present premier, Sarit Thanarat, seized power in October, 1958, arrested and killed opposing politicians, and took over state funds, properties and lands for private use. He has intervened militarily in Cambodia and Laos and helped armed conspiracies in Burma. He also suppresses the Thai people. These are the failings of his kind and will destroy him as Chiang Kai-shek and Syngman Rhee were destroyed. Meantime he gives Washington an excellent base for military actions anywhere in southeast Asia and survives for the time in the usual manner, by killing his enemies as "Communists."

Burma, a former British colony northeast of Thailand and Laos, became a case of the opposite kind. When, after the Japanese war, Britain gave Burma independence, the mild-mannered premier U-Nu was glad to accept American aid to repair the destruction suffered in the common cause. But when Washington imposed conditions that seemed to violate Burma's independence, Burma made a sensation in Asia by refusing American aid. Soon afterwards there was a greater sensation when Premier U-Nu, together with Premier Nehru of India, and Premier Chou En-lai of China, announced the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence," from which later grew the famous first conference of Asian and African nations in Bandung.

John Foster Dulles, to whom such neutralism was treason, began to undermine Burma. The country is Buddhist and feudal, with good intentions but not very strong. It contains several minority nationalities and these have grievances. They are encouraged from headquarters in Thailand next door to form secession movements.

In Burma's hilly hinterland Washington found armed forces ready to its hand. Several thousand armed troops of Chiang Kai-shek, defeated in China, fled into Burma in 1950 and lived by looting Burmese peasants. Under ordinary conditions they would soon have been dispersed by killing or inter-marriage. American aid through Thailand and then by plane from Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan enabled them to build a warlord base with airfields, arsenals and even a source of income, which they found in opium-processing and smuggling. They loot peasants, make alliances with dissident tribes and generally irritate the government of Burma. They are located on a sensitive border where four nations meet! Burma, China, Laos and Thailand, where they can quickly escape any attempt to capture them and where Washington can use them at any moment, throwing them across lonely and wooded frontiers.

Premier U-Nu has many times complained about them in the Chamber of Deputies, in the Rangoon press, and directly to Washington, citing their looting, their opium-smuggling, their American arms. Washington can always disavow responsibility, for the connections are indirect through Thailand and Chiang Kai-shek. Yet, Washington can always use them for a small inducement such as a fresh supply of arms.

The first big clamor raised by Burma was in 1953. Washington disavowed responsibility but agreed to air-lift these Kuomintang remnants out of Burma to Taiwan. A publicized air-lift actually took place. Later it was found that KMT forces were stronger than ever. The aged and sick had been removed and new replacements sent. A United Nations commission that went to investigate was flatly told by General Li Tu-fu, one of the leaders: "The U.S. plans for Southeast Asia preclude the withdrawal of my troops."

At the end of 1960, the Burmese Army made a serious attempt to clean up these bandits. They penetrated the hills and found KMT fortresses, airfields, arsenals, opium factories and quantities of new American arms, marked with the clasped-hands of "U.S. Aid." They captured documents, including a treaty with the Shan States, a dissident minority, whereby KMT troops brought in arms for the Shans in return for a refuge on their territory. The Shans, if and when they gained "independence" from Burma, were to join SEATO. The complicity of Thailand as headquarters was also proved.

Again clamor filled the Rangoon press and again Premier U-Nu spoke to the Chamber of Deputies and protested to Washington and again an air-lift from Burma to Taiwan was arranged. But again, after the air-lift, a Chinese language paper in Hong Kong revealed that the air-lift had taken the sick and aged and also women and children of the families, thus freeing the armed men for new adventures. Some were still in Burma, some had gone into Thailand, but several thousand had gone into Laos, to stiffen the forces of Washington's "strong man," General Phoumi Nosavan, whose Laotians were becoming unwilling to fight.

These are two examples of Washington's penetration into Southeast Asia. Thailand complies, and becomes a tool. Burma seeks to be neutral and is undermined. And now we turn to Laos, a nation far weaker than either, who has a common border with both these nations.

CHAPTER II

# Land of the Lao

Three nations emerged from the break-up of French Indo-China in 1954: Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos. In the eyes of the West they were new nations for the French rule had blotted out their names, and even jailed local patriots for singing an old song or flaunting a map showing an ancient country. But among the people the memory endured of kingdoms that flourished long before the American continent was discovered. The oldest of these nations, Viet Nam, recorded history before the Christian era and had a legendary tradition for more than four thousand years. Even the youngest, Laos, was several times as old as the United States.

All of these nations have characteristics in common, which they share with other neighbor states. Geographically, they are part of Southeast Asia, a term normally used to include Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma and Malaya, and often extended to the island empire of Indonesia, further south. They all have tropical climate, humid, dominated by the southern ocean. They live by rice-growing. Historically, they all lay on the sea route between cultures of antiquity.

By climate and fertility this area became one of the earliest dwelling-places of man. The discovery of the Java *pithecanthropus*, or "ape-man," shows that even the predecessors of the human race lived there, and many relics of Stone Age cultures still remain. One notes the great stone jars, big as a man and weighing a ton or more, which give its name to the Plain of Jars in Laos, where they lie scattered in deep grass. Archaeologists differ about their origin and use. Some call them burial jars, others consider they were used for storing grain or wine for great nature-worshipping festivals, and others note that the jars, when struck, emit a variety of musical tones which are heard far away and which may have summoned leaders to ancient war councils. They point to a long-lost Stone Age culture of some extent.

Most of the population is believed to come originally from China, pushing south in prehistoric ages and also in historic times under pressure of conquests or of population growth. An early incursion from China established the first Vietnamese kingdom about 300 BC. The first revolt of the freedom-loving Vietnamese against foreign control was led in 39 AD by the two Trung sisters against the Han conquests. A temple in memory of these two national heroines still stands in Hanoi. Chou En-lai went there on his first visit to Viet Nam to lay a wreath in symbol of the New China's view of the sisters' revolt. Operas and songs still made of their heroic resistance usually omit the last battle in which the sisters were defeated and after which they drowned themselves.

An incursion from India, also before the Christian era, set up the kingdom of Funan where Cambodia stands today. Twelve hundred years ago it grew into the empire of the Khmr people, who produced the magnificent Angkor temples, still one of the architectural wonders of the world.

The Lao and Thai people came later: they are one stock. Formerly living in South China, they were pushed south by the Mongol conquest of Kublai Khan in the 13th century. They came in three migrations, one of which settled in Siam, or Thailand, another Laos, while a smaller group drifted into North Viet Nam as a minority nationality. The Lao and Thai peoples understood each other's language and can also talk readily with people in South China but not with all the people in the land of Laos to which they came.

In all of these lands there grew a feudal system in which rice-growing peasants tilled the lush bottomlands on the rivers and pushed still earlier aboriginal peoples into the hills to live on maize, dry rice, and sometimes on roots and bark. Petty kings and pettier nobles lorded it over the peasants and fought each other for lands and power. Religion came from India, first in the form of Hinduism and later as Buddhism, the prevailing religion today. In Viet Nam, Buddhism came via China, mixed with Confucian and Taoist thought.

China, for centuries the dominant power of eastern Asia, was the main source of commerce, handicraft and secular culture. Chinese merchant ships explored and traded with all these peoples for more than two thousand years. Adventurous Cantonese merchants even became petty kings and founded dynasties in these frontier lands. All of the kings, even in Siam and Burma, paid various forms of tribute to the Chinese Empire during most of the two thousand years. For these lands it was a long-distance tribute, going overland by convoy two to five years, proceeding on river barges and portages to the great court of the emperor, where kings of Burma and Siam ranked as third-grade mandarins, while petty kings of Laos were hardly county magistrates. From these trips the envoys would return with royal gifts from the emperor and often with Chinese handicraftsmen to embellish their southern palaces and cities. In all these nations of southeast Asia a fairly large resident Chinese population remains as merchants and artisans in cities.

Of all the nations south of China on the Asian mainland, Viet Nam* was — and is — the strongest, most populous and most advanced. This very long and narrow country holds the eastern slope of the range that forms the backbone of the Indo-China peninsula; it faces east into the Pacific and south into the southern seas. The sea gave Viet Nam a relatively healthy climate and access to the world by ships. Vietnamese were early ranked among the best mariners and ship-builders on the southern ocean. They furnished handicraftsmen and artisans to other nations. In Laos, where Chinese merchants and artisans carry on trade and small industry in the cities, Vietnamese replace them in smaller towns. Vietnamese comprise four-fifths of the population today of all French Indo-China.

Cambodia and Laos lie west of Viet Nam on the inland side of the long peninsular range; this divides them from Viet Nam. Cambodia in the south is a compact land of some five million people, most of them Khmers whose ancestors built the great temples at Angkor. Laos is less developed. Though 79,000 square miles make it slightly larger than Cambodia, it is land-locked, hemmed in on all sides by other nations. West of it lies Thailand, from which it is separated by the Mekong River. Cambodia bounds it on the south and Viet Nam on the east while at its northern and north-eastern edges lie China and Burma. Laos itself is a jungle of dense forests and tall mountains, full of wild beasts, reptiles and malarial mosquitoes with few roads of communication. Its isolated and hence backward population has been kept small by tropical diseases against which no local medical science existed, the prevalent treatment for everything being witchcraft. Decades of French occupation produced only one trained physician in Laos.

* I use the term Viet Nam as meaning the entire united country, since its division into two parts by act of the U.S. will historically be temporary.

Of its possibly three million people, only about half are even the Lao nationality, with a written language and a recorded history. The rest are sixty-odd tribes, most of them without a written tongue.

If you fly south from Hanoi in North Viet Nam towards Vientiane, the capital of Laos, or further south down the long, narrow body of Laos to Cambodia, you see little except steep, wooded mountain ranges, with here and there a clearing on a hill-top or a bright slit of green rice-fields on some river far below. On the westward edge of the land, wider valleys appear along the Mekong or some of its tributaries. Here is the rice cultivation, the populated area, the villages and occasional towns. Many of these towns have been capitals of small kingdoms. Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Savannakhet are, reading from north to south, such capitals and still important for history. They have always been subject to attack from the Thais across the river, for the Mekong gives access rather than protection.

The dominant Lao people, known specifically as the Lao Lum, to distinguish them from other nationalities in the land of Laos, record that they fled south from China in the 13th century, led by King Khum Boron who rode a white elephant "with beautiful black eye-lids and ears." A hundred years later, a Lao chieftain named Fa Ngum, made a fortunate marriage to a daughter of the Angkor kings and established the "Kingdom of a Million Elephants" to which name was sometimes added "and a white parasol." In his capital at Luang Prabang, he installed the Golden Prabang Buddha which is still the chief treasure of the royal house. The kingdom remained strong until the rise of Siam which, beginning as a vassal to the Khmer kingdom, grew in power until it threatened and occasionally invaded both the Khmer kingdom and the kingdom of the Million Elephants, as Thailand threatens and invades Cambodia and Laos today.

As the Lao Lum took over the lush river valleys they pushed earlier peoples into the hills. These were a Polynesian race known as the "Lao Theng," among whom there are many different tribes and groupings, but the Lao Lum called them all "Kha" or "slaves." Their slavery seems not to have been that of an individual slave to an individual master, but a racial slavery, which permitted any member of the Lao Lum to give orders to a Lao Theng. Taxes and feudal duties imposed on Lao Lum might be passed on by them to the Lao Theng, if these could be reached. Lao Theng were originally very numerous. A single tribe in southern Laos was said to have had some 300,000 members, but the Thai people conquered them in war, massacred most of them, kept some as slaves and sold others as slaves to the Lao Lum. Conditions of life among the "Kha" did not encourage population growth.

On the tops of the hills and the saddles of mountains, at elevations of about 5,000 feet, live tribes of another kind who go by the general name of the Lao Sung. The largest group is that of the Meo, who number possibly 100,000. These seldom become slaves. The lowland peasants could not catch them, even the French could not entirely subdue them. They were primitive, not given to Buddhism but to nature worship, living in part by hunting and in part by crude agriculture of the "slash and burn" variety. They would burn a stretch of woods, called a "ray," and push seed into the ground. In a few years, when the fertility of the "ray" failed, the people would move their village and make another "ray." That they thus destroyed valuable forests, including teak wood, was nobody's concern.

The Meo were mobile, warlike, killing beasts and men with cross-bows and poisoned arrows, and also by digging "animal pits" lined with spies under camouflage. They are honest and loyal to friends and to promises. The Pathet Lao relate that Meo villages have painstakingly returned on their own initiative to a passing detachment, a sack of grain they had "borrowed" years before. This scrupulousness makes them excellent allies. They present one serious problem to any progressive government. Their crop is opium which their women carry down to the lowland markets, often several days journey on foot. Trading it for salt, black cloth and iron for weapons, they quickly return to the hills for they do not easily endure the tropical heat of the lowlands.

Opium from these village markets makes its way, by legal and illegal channels, through Thailand or Saigon, to the world. Under the French, Prince Souphanouvong told me, the export of opium from Laos reached two hundred tons a year. "Two billion U.S. dollars at the selling end," he said. "A large export from a small country." Opium binds the Meo to the gangster chain of the international drug traffic. Yet, the Meo will not easily relinquish it. For a people so isolated, opium is the one profitable crop.

When the French invaded Southeast Asia in the late 19th century, it was in a race with the British for access to southern China, and especially to the mineral-rich province of Yunnan. The British advanced through Burma and the French through Indo-China, each picking up territory but leaving between them, as a buffer, the Kingdom of Siam. The French first conquered South Viet Nam and then struck into the rest of Viet Nam and west into Cambodia, exploring the Mekong River for an entry into Yunnan. They set up their capital for all of Indo-China in Hanoi, in North Viet Nam.

In Laos, there were at the time three kingdoms, with capitals at Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Savannakhet. All of them were vassals of Siam. France took possession by threatening the Siamese overlords with gunboats, and never even bothered to make treaties with the kings of Laos. In 1893, France forced from Siam all claims to Laos east of Mekong; in 1897, she gained two additional provinces west of the Mekong. In 1904, Britain and France signed a treaty whereby Siam became a buffer between the two advancing empires. Neither Britain nor France gained Yunnan, but both got mineral concessions there and each of them carved off pieces of Yunnan to add to British Burma and to French Indo-China, which made a border problem for China to settle today.

When the French invaders became aware of the riches of Indo-China, they began to exploit them. They advanced locally in Laos by making deals with local nobles or tribal leaders, giving arms to those who would collaborate, and helping these conquer local people who resisted. No resistance on a wide scale was possible in Laos, with its many nationalities and difficult terrain. So heavy, however, was the oppression by the French invaders that individual villages and tribes were forced to resist. They usually began by refusing to pay some prohibitive tax or labor levy. When the French sent troops to force compliance, the peasants ambushed the troops. An unequal war followed in which the French annihilated the local people by superior fire-power.

The first organized resistance was in 1901, eight years after the arrival of the French troops. It was led by a district chief of the Lao Lum, in southern Laos. The French crushed it in two years, manouvering easily against the lowland peasants.

The mountain tribes were harder to subdue. A revolt against the opium tax and the corvee labor began in 1918 among the Meo tribes in Sam Neua Province. Under a chief named Pao Hay, it spread to all the mountain tribes of the northern provinces. In four years of battle, the French were unable to suppress it. So they sent an agent to assassinate Pao Hay. After this, they massacred his disheartened followers by the thousands. The Meo are especially defenseless when a chief is killed, for they revere their chief, not as a human being, but as a Father-image, giver of fertility to crops and life to the tribe.

The largest, best organized resistance to the French in that early period came from the despised "Kha," the slaves. It began in 1910, with the Laval tribe of southern Laos, the largest tribe of the Lao Theng; it spread to all the Lao Theng people of Laos, and lasted twenty-seven years.

A chief named Ong Keo was the first leader. He met every French attack so successfully with ambush and poisoned arrows that the French finally resorted to treachery. They sent word through a lowland prince of the Lao Lum that they would negotiate with the Lao Theng to free them from all taxation. Negotiation had its known formality among the tribes. Ong Keo met the French resident, each bringing body-guards. Then each submitted to bodily search by the guards of the other, after which the guards withdrew, leaving the two chiefs face to face. The catch was that the head was never searched. So as soon as the French resident was left alone with Ong Keo, he drew a revolver from his hat and shot his opponent dead. According to Wilfred Burchett, the lowland prince who assisted in this betrayal was the father of the present Prince Oum.

Ong Keo's revolt was taken over by another chief named Komadon, who became an even greater leader. He developed a written language for the Lao Theng tribes and organized schools in which at least some members of the tribes might learn to read it. Thus he united the Lao Theng in all of Laos in resistance to the French. Not until 1937 did the French subdue him. For this they concentrated most of the French forces in Indo-China against the single isolated mountain fastness of Komadon in southern Laos, which they encircled for two years. They massacred all the villages around the foot of the mountain to cut off Komadon's supplies. Finally, they stormed his retreat with ground troops, airplanes, two hundred elephants and many wild Alsatian dogs. Komadon fell in battle but his many sons were captured. The French threw the small children down the ravines to die; they took three grown sons captive. One of these died in prison, the other two were released by the rising of all Laos against France in 1945.

The sons of Komadon promptly joined the anti-French resistance and became leaders in the Pathet Lao.

The supreme lesson learned from all these bloody defeats by the survivors was stated by Faydang, one of the Meo chiefs. "We had no program; we united the Lao Sung but never thought of the other peoples in Laos." It was also stated to Burchett by a son of Komadon: "We united the 'Kha' but we needed a wider unity of all the people of Laos."

To build this wider unity the Pathet Lao was born.

In the Second World War, the French permitted the Japanese to take over Indo-China without resistance. Siam became an actual ally of Japan. So, in August 1945, when Japan's defeat became clear, the peoples of Indo-China began throwing out the Japanese occupation and set up their own native governments. This began in Viet Nam, where a "Liberated Area" of six northern provinces was formally constituted on June 4, 1945. Hanoi was liberated from the Japanese on August 19, Saigon on August 25, and the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was proclaimed September 2 as an independent republic under President Ho Chi Minh. A new gold-starred red flag floated over free soil of all Viet Nam, from the borders of China to the southern tip beyond Saigon.

Cambodia and Laos followed quickly. On October 12, 1945, a provisional government was set up in Vientiane for Laos. It was composed of educated members of the ruling class. Among them were two brother princes who are still important. Prince Souvanna Phouma became Minister of Public Works. Prince Souphanouvong, his younger half-brother, whose initiative had been largely responsible for the new government, became Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of the new national army. Both princes had studied in France and had become engineers, hoping to use their talents for their country.

Souphanouvong, the youngest, had been in France in 1937, in the time of the Popular Front; he had studied the classics of the French Revolution and worked on the docks at Le Havre and Bordeaux, meeting Frenchmen unlike the French colonialists. On his return to Indo-China, he followed his profession of building roads and bridges and found work in Viet Nam, which like Laos, was ruled by the French from Hanoi. The young engineer whose work took him to mines and plantations, saw the savage exploitation of the colonialists. When Japan invaded, the young prince was impressed by the intelligence and spirit with which Ho Chi Minh organized resistance. He sought advice from Ho, who told him: "Seize power from the colonialists." Returning to Laos, the prince organized revolutionary groups of young intellectuals and prepared for the provisional government which took power in 1945. But his movement had a fatal weakness: he had given little thought to the peasants and still less to the hill tribes. His movement was confined to upper class intellectuals.

The French left Laos alone while they dealt with her stronger neighbors. With American and British help they came back into South Viet Nam and Cambodia and then played for time in Hanoi, by signing on March 6, 1946, a historic agreement which recognized the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam under Ho Chi Minh as an independent republic within the French Union, with its own parliament, finances and army. This treaty France broke on November 23 of the same year by bombarding the port of Haiphong from French warships, leaving 6,000 Vietnamese dead.

The French had used these interim months to take over Laos. From three directions their troops marched into Laos, and defeated Souphanouvong's army on March 21, at Thakhek, a strategic junction where the road from Central Viet Nam joins the north-south road to Cambodia. The French then massacred the population of the city. Prince Souphanouvong, who himself was seriously wounded in that battle, later described it to Burchett. The French bombed the city, dropping their first bomb into a crowded market place, and then machine-gunning the terrified people as they fled. Then the French infantry advanced.

"They behaved like savages," said the Prince. "As our troops retreated block by block, the French killed every person in the town. Little children were thrown into the Mekong. Hardly a person in Thakhek escaped; the city was wiped out. March 21 will be always remembered by us as a symbol of colonial savagery."

The Provisional Government of Laos fled into Thailand as a government-in-exile. Here it gradually fell apart. The French sought to buy its members individually and as a group. One of the first to desert to France was a minister named Katay, of whom more will be heard. Finally, in 1949, wishing to concentrate on subduing Viet Nam, France offered Laos "peace and independence," reserving for France the right to use the country as a military base. Prince Souvanna Phouma returned to Laos with several others on this basis, believing that this "half-independence" might grow. Thus France, from "free Laos," continued its war against Viet Nam.

Here Prince Souphanouvong's path diverged from that of his brother. As he lay convalescing from wounds, he analyzed the cause of his defeat in the light of the victories Ho Chi Minh was winning in Viet Nam. He had based his strategy on cities, where the superior weapons of France most counted. He had ignored the peasants and the tribes of the hills. From these hills messages came to the Prince where he lay wounded. The hill tribes, though ignored, had learned that a prince of the lowlands had fought heroically against the French.

"I would like to fight by your side against France," wrote Faydang, one of the great Meo chieftains.

Souphanouvong replied: "Organize your people. I shall return." Similar messages were exchanged with the sons of Komadon.

When his wounds healed, the younger prince came back to Laos, not to the towns but to the hills and woods. He found the remnants of his scattered forces still resisting from jungle bases. He found new allies: Faydang of the Lao Sung, and Si Thon, son of the murdered Komadon, of the Lao Theng. He sought out veterans of old revolts and organized them, each in his own tribe and all together building the "Neo Lao Otsala," the Liberation Front of Laos.

So, a few months after the French-supported "free Laos" was set up in Vientiane, another government, illegal, was organized in the hills. A secret congress was attended by chosen representatives from all sections of the people and all national minorities. It was the first Congress ever held in Laos where all nationalities met as equals. The Congress unaimously created the new "Liberation Front" as a nationwide organization, and set up a "resistance government" in which the Lao Theng "slaves" and the Lao Sung "savages" were allied with the Lao Lum in resistance to France. Prince Souphanouvong became chairman of the Liberation Front and premier of the new illegal government; Faydang, of the Meo tribes, and Si Thon, of the Lao Theng, became ministers.

Half a year later, an even wider unity was established. For a hundred years the French had played one nation of Indo-China against another. They were now using an alleged "free Laos" and "free Cambodia" as bases against Viet Nam. Yet, if Viet Nam fell to France, it was clear that neither Laos or Cambodia would long retain even a fiction of "freedom." So in March 1951, the resistance movements in Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia formed an alliance, through a meeting of delegates.

It was the Viet-Khmer-Lao Alliance that defeated France in Indo-China, and brought about the joint victory of the three formerly subject peoples. The Viet Minh was by far the strongest force in this alliance. It won the final decisive victory. But the contribution of the others was not negligible: in many actions they helped to turn the tide.

The most important victory in Laos took place in March 1953, a year before the final decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu for which it helped prepare. It occurred in Sam Neua province, the northeast province of Laos, which juts far into North Viet Nam and which Prince Souphanouvong descriped to me as "the hilliest and the poorest province of Laos." Here the forces of the Liberation Front of Laos, in correlation with the Viet Minh, struck at all the French posts in the area. At the same time, the guerrilla forces of the hill tribes sprang everywhere to life. Wherever the French turned, they were met by warriors pouring from the mountains. In a few weeks one fourth of Laos was liberated. The scattered hill bases became a liberated area of 20,000 square kilometers. A second offensive was launched later in the year in southern Laos in the old Komadon area. At the end of the year a third offensive, launched from Sam Neua's new base, liberated the big northwest province of Phongsaly.

Thus, in less than a year, half of Laos was liberated from the French by the same type of forces in the same type of unity that was later to liberate even greater areas in 1916.

By these battles the main French forces were isolated in northern Viet Nam at a place called Dien Bien Phu. Here is no space to tell of that historic battle. It was launched March 13, 1945. On May 7, after eight weeks of battle, that great French fortified area, on which, with the help of American military advisers, the famous Navarre Plan had based its "grand strategy" for the retaking of all French Indo-China, fell to the forces of Ho Chi Minh.

This confirmed the rout of the French armies in all of Indo-China and led to the peace conference in Geneva from which the modern history of Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos begins.

## CHAPTER III

# Americans Enter Laos

When John Foster Dulles' efforts to widen the Indo-China war into an international war under American leadership failed through the signing of peace in Geneva, July 20, 1954, his policy became to break the Geneva Agreements from within. Three nations had emerged—Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos, all pledged to neutrality and to permit no foreign bases or troops on their soil. In none of these nations had America any legal right; she had refused even to sign the treaties that created them. Washington's weapons were cash, military aid and SEATO, the new organization formed by Dulles in September, 1945, specifically for use in Southeast Asia.

Each of the new nations had its separate Agreement, tailored to its conditions. Viet Nam, by far the largest, whose revolutionary army, and the Viet Minh, accomplished the final defeat of France at Dien Bien Phu sat in Geneva as victor. It was recognized as a unified, independent, soveign state and it was expected that the Viet Minh would at once take over the capital at Hanoi and install the government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. The latter, under Ho Chi Minh, had operated nine years from the hills, and would now administer the northern half of the country. The French troops would retire south, to embark in Saigon for France, under the temporary administration of the French puppet government of Bao Dai. Within two years, by July 20, 1956, the withdrawals would be completed and nationwide elections were to be held, under control of the International Commission set up by Geneva, with representatives of three nations—India, Canada and Poland.

From these elections would be formed a united government for Viet Nam which was recognized throughout as a single and sovereign state.

Washington broke this Agreement rather simply. America's place-man, Ngo Dinh Deim, had already been installed in Bao Dai's cabinet. American aid now raised him to premier, and then got rid of Bao Dai. Long before the date for the nationwide elections came, Diem repudiated them and set up South Viet Nam as a separate state, which Washington recognized and supported with arms and cash. Diem had never signed the Geneva Agreements: neither had the United States. France had signed them, but France had gone home. Diem banked on Washington.

The people of Viet Nam, both north and south, felt cheated. Diem ruthlessly suppressed all persons and groups who opposed him, and in fact, all persons who had ever fought against France for independence. Washington gave him the means. The struggle goes on to this day and will be discussed in our final chapter.

Thus Washington got a second major base in Southeast Asia, a dictator bound by the needs of his own survival to serve Washington's aims, and hence a second "running-dog" for American policy. South Viet Nam, together with Thailand, became the two pivots of Washington's penetration, two large, populous militarized states, from which armed pressure could be quickly brought against neighbor nations, like Cambodia and Laos.

The pressure was at once applied to Cambodia. This small, compact state with the ancient culture of the Khmer kings who built the famous Angkor temples, is hemmed in by South Viet Nam on the east and Thailand on the west, with the weak Laos on the north. Southward it faces the ocean but Cambodia had no port, for Saigon had served as its outlet. Cambodia's ruler was Prince Norodom Sihanouk, educated in France, and pro-Western in outlook. He made at first no contacts with socialist nations but gladly accepted aid from America and France. France built him a port and Washington promised a highway to connect the port with his capital. America also helped finance his army. Sihanouk seemed safely tied to the West.

When, however, SEATO declared "protection" over the three new states in Indo-China—the immediate aim for which it was formed—Sihanouk rejected this protection, saying that it violated both the Geneva Agreements and the sovereignty of Cambodia. Washington brought pressure by delaying its aid. Sihanouk then showed himself a courageous neutralist and also one of the cleverest politicians of Asia. He made a trip to Moscow and got aid. Washington applied stronger pressure through Thailand and South Viet Nam in the form of economic blockade followed by military invasions. South Vietnamese troops moved in force several miles into Cambodia and set up new boundary posts. Sihanouk first asked the American Embassy to mediate, but when the answer was evasive, he recognized Communist China.

Washington then conspired seriously to overthrow Sihanouk by what was known as the Bangkok Plan, worked out by SEATO in Thailand, with $1,200,000 aid from Washington and a letter of blessing from President Eisenhower.* Gangster invasions from Thailand and South Viet Nam created "incidents" on both Cambodia's borders, including many kidnappings and burnings of villages and much disorder. With this was combined a traitorous plot inside Cambodia, including members of the prince's palace staff to overthrow Sihanouk by violence or assassinate him.

Sihanouk's intelligence service was good. He arrested traitors at the proper time and got evidence, including quantities of American arms, many documents and the letter from Eisenhower. He then showed able diplomacy. He made an exhibition for the diplomats of twenty-two nations in which he exposed much of the evidence, including the American arms, but did not display the Eisenhower letter. He merely let Eisenhower know he had it, and that Eisenhower's attitude surprised and pained him. The long-promised and long-delayed highway was promptly built. It opened in August, 1959, with expressions of friendship from both sides.†

Sihanouk clearly learned diplomacy from France, adding to it a shrewdness inherited from the old Angkor kings. He exposed to the world the plots against him, but never directly insulted the rulers of powerful nations. Cambodia has become in Southeast Asia an example that bold neutrality pays. It has a fine port from France, a highway from America, a modern hospital from Moscow, a broadcasting station and sundry other industrial enterprises from China. It has won a reputation far beyond its size and strength as an

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* (footnote to Eisenhower letter) Reported by Malcolm Salmen, Australian correspondent in Southeast Asia, 1958-60, in his book, *Focus on Indo-China*, pages 262-265. The plot grew from a SEATO meeting in September, 1958, in Bangkok, and was organized by Sarit Thanarat, of Thailand, with assistance from South Viet Nam and several American advisers. Many high U.S. personages in the Far East were implicated. The traitor to whom the personal letter was sent by Eisenhower was Dap Chuon, a Cambodian warlord. It assured him of the full support of the U.S. in his efforts to overthrow the Cambodia government and reverse its neutralist policies. In February 1959, Sihanouk sent a personal letter to Eisenhower asking an explanation. The answer did not come until July, two days before the opening of the "Friendship Highway." It expressed "regret for past misunderstandings." Two days later the "Friendship Highway" opened.

† Two years later the "Friendship Highway" had already become a scandal. A UPI dispatch July 6, 1961, revealed that the road, originally estimated to cost $15,000,000, had already cost $30,000,000 and had been so badly constructed that already the rains had broken it to pieces so that Sihanouk could not travel by it to the port but had to go back to his capital and take a helicopter. A dispatch from the U.S. ambassador in Cambodia to President Kennedy June 25, warned that this symbol of friendship and of American engineering would become a joke in Cambodia unless quickly repaired.

independent nation, which makes its contribution to world peace.

But Sihanouk lives dangerously. He must follow with skill and daring a tight-rope path. Not long after the American-built highway was opened with mutual expression of friendship, a package from Hong Kong came addressed to the Queen of Cambodia; when opened in the palace, it exploded, killing a young prince and wounding several bystanders. It had clearly been meant to kill or injure either Sihanouk or his parents and was traced by evidence to one of the pro-American traitor gangs. A sensational paper in India tried to implicate the American Embassy in Cambodia and published incriminating evidence. But all Sihanouk himself said with exemplary restraint, printed in a Cambodian paper: "The bomb could only have been manufactured in a country with an extremely developed industry."

Sihanouk has long hoped that neighboring Laos would remain neutral "like Cambodia," and that Prince Souvanna Phouma would join him on that narrow path between imperialist domination on the one hand and the socialist revolution on the other. The fate of Laos is to him of great importance, for Laos is his neighbor to the north. Laos, he fears, may either be used by Washington to complete the military encirclement of Cambodia, or it may fall to the hands of the Pathet Lao, and encourage those forces which in the end overthrow princes. Sihanouk is no socialist; he wants to make reforms slowly and to remain a prince. But Washington's policy leaves him little alternative.

Laos is the weakest of the three nations of Indo-China, and most subject of them all to the conflicting pressures of its neighbors. We have seen that it is a landlocked country of tall mountains and thick jungles with poor communications, where three million people live split into sixty-odd tribes and nationalities that have never been fully unified. It is wedged between other nations that have sharply conflicting interests. America's two armed satellites, Thailand and South Viet Nam, press on its eastern and western flanks, Communist China and North Viet Nam border it on the north and northeast, while neutralist Cambodia and Burma border it on the south and northwest. The only safety for Laos, and perhaps its only chance of survival as a nation, lies in its being accepted as a useful buffer between mutually hostile states.

Robert Guillain in *Le Monde*, March 21, 1961, made an excellent summary. "In Geneva (1954) they had a reasonable idea for

Laos, that of a buffer state menacing nobody. The agreements had two aspects. First, reunification, by integrating the Pathet Lao into the national community. Second, neutrality, in which foreign troops should be withdrawn and Laotian troops should not exceed the number they had in 1954. France, as exception, kept a base of limited size in Seno to train the Laotian army. The enforcement was in the hands of the International Control Commission.

"America destroyed the neutrality policy," continued Guillain, "replacing it by a militant anti-Communist policy. This American policy produced in Laos a civil war in which the American policy failed."

Having no legal rights in Laos, as Guillain also stresses, Washington entered by financial aid, which included the full costs of the Royal Army and the paying of the deficit of the civil government. Since the Geneva Agreements forbade any foreign military personnel in Laos, except for the French base in Seno, American military advisers first entered as "employees" of the French. Later, they devised what Guillain calls "the bizarre name of 'Program Evaluation Bureau' in which even a brigadier general became technically a civilian. This permitted Washington to claim without laughing that there were no American military personnel in the Laotian Army," comments Guillain.

Three times in seven years Washington overthrew a neutralist government in Laos and brought to power a pro-American "strong man" to launch civil war against the Pathet Lao. The story occurs so often that it is hard to distinguish the record of different years. Various means were used to bring pro-American dictators to power, including the purchase of deputies, the police control of elections and even cloak and dagger assassination. Always the main force applied was American cash, controlling the payroll of the army and the government. As a U.S. government report stated, "the U.S. was virtually supporting the entire economy."* No government could stay in power in Laos if Washington withdrew or even delayed its aid. A two months gap in the payroll was usually enough to bring a government down.

Prince Souvanna Phouma all observers agree, was the man best suited to carry out the neutralist policy imposed by the Geneva Agreements. A prince of the royal family, educated in France,

* U.S. Aid Operations in Laos, *House Report* 546.

middle-of-the-road in politics and skilled in political compromise, he had been a minister in that first "national government" of 1945 which was so bloodily suppressed by French troops, and had gone with it into exile. But when France offered a compromise in a "free Laos," which nonetheless gave France military and economic rights, Phouma accepted the compromise. He was premier of the French-installed government in 1954. The task of reconciliation with the Pathet Lao was for him also a task of family reconciliation, since his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, was head of the Pathet Lao.

So in early September, 1954, six weeks after the Geneva Agreements were signed, the two princes met on the Plain of Jars, embraced to the plaudits of the onlookers, and agreed to the Geneva plan for national unity. Since the full implementation of this plan required many detailed discussions on coalition government, new elections and the unifying of the armed forces, and since the immediate task was to move the Pathet Lao troops north and send the Viet Minh troops home to Viet Nam, the date for the political conference was set for December 30, 1954.

Before that date arrived, and even before September ended, Prince Phouma ceased to be premier. An American-supported "strong man" named Katay was in power.

This happened by a cloak-and-dagger assassination which in Vientiane was generally attributed to the American CIA, though the expression of such suspicion was not healthy and conditions allowed no inquiry. What was known and admitted was that the Americans disliked Phouma's idea of negotiating with the Pathet Lao but wanted the Royal Army to invade the northern provinces and destroy the Pathet Lao. Phouma and his cabinet opposed this idea, partly because they felt bound in honor by the Geneva Agreement and partly because they did not think the Royal Army *could* destroy the Pathet Lao, which had so recently beaten the French. The Minister of Defense especially opposed the renewal of civil war. He was assassinated on September 19 by a man who came from Thailand. A charge of murder was framed on another neutralist cabinet minister but was later dropped for total lack of evidence. In the midst of the scandal, to which American financial pressure was added, Phouma resigned and Katay came to power.

The replacement of Phouma by an American-sponsored "strong man" became a pattern; it was to recur three times in six years.

Katay, the first instrument of U.S. policies, is worth a brief description, as the kind of man available and chosen for such work. He colaborated with France until the first national government was set up in 1945; then he briefly jumped on the band-wagon. When hard times came with the bloody defeat of the patriotic forces at Thakhek, Katay was one of the first to desert. He again served France until it became more profitable to serve the Americans. As his second wife he took the sister of Prince Boun Oum of Champassak, whose family had long collaborated with France. Both Katay and Boun Oum were rich, presumably through contraband opium sales which went to the world through Saigon with the connivance of Bao Dai.* Katay's wealth rocketed through his American connections and the measures he introduced as premier, by the inflation that came with dollar aid, and by shares given him in the new monopolies which his government sanctioned.

Katay was the man in power on December 30, 1954, when the Pathet Lao delegates came for the conference. He treated the delegates like prisoners, demanded that they dissolve their armed forces and all their political, women's and youth organizations and that they restore the brutal "tasseng" system of semi-slavery by the township headman, which they had long since replaced by direct election of village councils. When the Pathet Lao delegates demanded the observance of the Geneva Agreements, Katay began parachuting commando troops into the two northern provinces which had been assigned to the Pathet Lao in Geneva. In March, 1955, John Foster Dulles, after a SEATO meeting in Bangkok, dropped into Vientiane and had a talk with Katay. A few days later, the Royal Army launched a full scale attack on the two northern provinces, to liquidate the Pathet Lao.

These attacks by the Royal Army against the Pathet Lao went on for the rest of the year. So did the conferences. Seven times in ten months the delegates of the Pathet Lao came to confer with Katay; each time the conference was broken by Katay's delegates. The last talk was held in Rangoon between Katay and Prince Souphanouvong personally. This time a "cease fire" was signed, with details and positions. The following day, Katay launched his final and biggest assault, which had clearly been long prepared.

American advisers made the war plan and directed the cam-

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* Data from Wilfred Burchett, *Up the Mekong.*

paign from a base in Xieng Khouang Province, just south of the two northern provinces. U.S. transports dropped three battalions into Phongsaly Province, and Americans helicoptered troops to the tops of the mountains in Sam Neua Province in formations which were supposed to make triangles of territory in a long line which would then sweep the entire province. Soon they had a company to a mountain, a battalion to a triangle. But the companies couldn't connect. They could not even get down the mountain, because the villagers at the foot all fought for the Pathet Lao. Thirty-five assaults were made against Sam Neua Province in the five weeks after the "cease fire" was signed in Rangoon. All of them failed.

Wilfred Burchett visited those hills during the fighting and talked with the villagers. They were national minorities who for generations had been treated as "slaves" or "savages." Through the Pathet Lao they had become human beings with democratic rights. Old men told Burchett of the days when they had been taken on long marchers as forced labor, taking their own food with them and many of them dying of starvation on the way. Many had had their women taken at the whim of a lowland official.

"Those days are ended," they told Burchett. "We elect our own village committee new. We have our own defense forces in every village. We will never let them put us into slavery again."

In December, 1955, while the war was going on in the northern provinces, Katay held an election from which the Pathet Lao and its supporters were excluded. He won the election partly by police control and partly by spreading the story that Chinese and Vietnamese Communists had invaded the northern provinces and the Royal Army had gone to fight them and was winning the war against the invaders. This tale was to become the stock story of the pro-Americans in Laos.

The tale backfired. No Chinese or Vietnamese had invaded. The Royal Army had been sent against Laotian peasants and hill tribes of the north. When the men of the Royal Army, sent to defend their country, found themselves fighting Laotian peasants, the Royal Army lost morale. Gradually, they struggled down from the mountains and surrendered. The local village self-defense groups held them until Pathet Lao's regular forces could come. Soon after Katay won the election, it became known in Vientiane that he had sent two-thirds of the Royal Army to fight the peasants of the northern provinces and that the Royal Army was defeated. Katay was also involved in economic scandals. So, even though his supporters had won the election, the elected deputies refused to support Katay. After a prolonged cabinet crisis, Prince Souvanna Phouma again came to power.

Prince Phouma pledged again to negotiate peace with the Pathet Lao and to follow a neutralist foreign policy. The first round of Washington's attempts to make a militant anti-Communist base of Laos had failed.

The second premiership of Prince Souvanna Phouma began March 20, 1956, and lasted till May, 1957. He then resigned under a combination of pressures but when nobody else was found who could successfully form a cabinet, he was again asked to resume office in August and remained premier until July, 1958. Since there was no intervening incumbent, the period is usually referred to as a single premiership, though he was appointed twice.

The old routine was repeated. Again Prince Souphanouvong stepped from an airplane into his brother's arms and was cheered by the onlookers, this time in Vientiane. Again it was announced that the civil war would cease by negotiation with the Pathet Lao. But during this premiership some things were actually accomplished. Agreements were reached on a coalition government, on the combining of the armed forces, the return of the two northern provinces to the central government's control and the holding of supplementary elections. These agreements were then ratified by the National Assembly and became the basic law of the land. They are known as the Vientiane Agreements and, next to the Geneva Agreements, which they supplement, they rank as the charter of a neutral Laos.

A coalition government actually took office on November 19, 1957, with Prince Phouma as premier and with two representatives of the Patriotic Front in the cabinet, one being Prince Souphanouvong as Minister of Reconstruction and Planning. The Patriotic Front actually demobilized its armed forces, sending over 5,000 home, turning over 5,000 rifles, and sending the remaining two battalions, a total of 1,500 men, for incorporation into the Royal Army on terms that were agreed. The two northern provinces were actually returned to control of the central government.

The new elections were actually held in May, 1958. They were "supplementary elections" to add 21 seats to the assembly, making a total of 59 deputies. This was made necessary by the addition of two provinces and also by the introduction of woman's suffrage and other electoral changes for which the Patriotic Front had asked.

These 1958 elections were in several ways historic. In form they followed the democracy of the West, in that many candidates contested the posts. They were hotly fought. The U.S. Ambassador, J. Graham Parsons, became much concerned with the elections; he spent an estimated three million dollars on a rural relief program, called "Operation Booster Shot," whose admitted purpose was to make friends for America and prevent "the Communists" from winning the peasants' votes. Gifts of various kinds, from food to farm tools, were air-dropped widely in Laos, the only time that any U.S. aid went directly to peasants.

A new political organization also appeared, of extremely pro-American generals, officials and compradore capitalists, known as the "Committee for the Defense of the National Interest." It was headed by General Phoumi Nosavan, America's newest "strong man." With American aid and fascist techniques, it became an extra-legal force, terrorizing people in the election struggles. Seventy-one murders were attributed to it. When, in spite of all these efforts, the Patriotic Front and an allied "Peace Committee" won 13 of the 21 contested seats, this was deplored in the U.S. Congress as a "Communist victory."*

Perhaps the most surprising thing was that, after the election had so clearly supported the Patriotic Front, the National Assembly met, accepted the resignation of Prince Phouma, and elected as premier the pro-American Phoui Sananikone, who took power on August 15, 1958. The long-desired coalition government, which the people's votes had just endorsed, was over!

How could it happen? you ask. No American should ask it. Have we not seen, in our own advanced democracy, how often the voters elect a congress on a platform that the congress then does not fulfill? Why should we ask more of primitive Laos, where democracy is just beginning? Nonetheless, I did ask it of the woman deputy, Kham, whom I shall introduce more fully in the next chapter.

"What made the National Assemby go against the will of the voters? Was Sananikone legally made premier?"

"In form it was legal," she replied. "The Americans were paying

* *House Report* No. 549, page 48.

200,000 kip for a deput's vote. ($2,000 to $6,000, according to the exchange rate.) They also went to the deputies homes and threatened them. They withdrew aid from Phouma so that his government couldn't pay the army or civil servants and had to resign. They were very determined to smash the coalition government."

"Did the Americans pay for the votes directly?" I asked.

"They made the plans," said Kham, "and gave the money to their henchmen for it. Most of the deputies were paid in dollars, not in kip, because already the U.S. aid was smashing our currency and the extra printing of kip would make it worse."

Many details might be added to show that through the entire premiership of Prince Souvanna Phouma, Washington undermined him and finally brought him down. Even under the coalition government, troops of General Nosavan attacked villages and "mopped up" peasant areas of radical tendencies. The KMT bandits in Burma were encouraged to cross the frontier in raids on Laos. Pro-Thai elements in southern Laos were encouraged in plots to partition the country. The feudal ruling class of the lowland valleys opposed the giving of democratic rights to the "slaves" and "savages" as bitterly as the ruling class of the Southern States in the U.S.A. have for a hundred years opposed the giving of rights to the former "slaves." All these forces with, in addition, the occasional stopping of U.S. aid brought Phouma down.

Premier Sananikone was not himself a fascist, as was Nosavan's "Committee for Defense of the National Interest." He was a politician, known as the "Old Fox," a cover and a preparation for Nosavan and as far to the right as the deputies dared go. Under American direction, Sananikone openly broke the Geneva Agreements, dismissed from Laos the International Control Commission, jailed the leaders of the Patriotic Front, including Prince Souphanouvong, and declared civil war against the remnants of the Pathet Lao. But, being insufficiently fascist for Nosavan, he was overthrown in December, 1959 by a military coup d'etat. Three short regimes followed, increasingly dominated by Nosavan. Under one of them was held the April, 1960 elections which even *Time* magazine called "blatantly rigged."

These elections produced a National Assembly which the people of Laos have widely refused to recognize or obey. They also produced as premier T. Somsanith, who was openly Nosavan's man. But the people were angered by the endless civil war, corruption and ruin. Another revolt was due. It came in August, 1960, four months after the notorious elections of April.

The dreary record is exposed in a 964-page U.S. Congressional Inquiry, loaded with details of corruption and the waste of millions of dollars. An official summary, entitled "U.S. Aid Operations in Laos," was published as *House Report* No. 546.

Laos, says the report, became fully independent on January 1, 1955 by the Geneva Agreements of 1954. "Since Laos became independent the United States has supported the entire Laos military budget. . . . It is, in fact, virtually supporting the entire economy." (page 7) Military assistance, we learn, began at $471 million in 1955, and continued at "about the same rate," the bulk of it being for the cost of a 25,000-man army. Economic assistance "was small" —the "technical cooperation program averaged about a million and a half a year." The Royal Laotian Army was about twice as large as the U.S. military recommended. They suggested that 12,000 to 15,000 men would be enough. "But the U.S. State Department, under John Foster Dulles, insisted on 25,000 men, which was later raised to 20,000." The report suggests that the larger figure may have been fictitious—the money may have gone into corruption rather than into extra troops. In any case, to pay for this army, Washington poured into Laos twice as much cash as U.S. economists thought the economy would stand.

"Excessive aid grants," says the report (page 2), forced money into the Lao economy faster than it could be absorbed, causing:

1) An excessive Lao government foreign exchange reserve.
2) Inflation, doubling the cost of living from 1953 to 1958.
3) Profiteering and corruption.

We learn also that the money spent for the army, which was "intended to promote political stability," actually "detracted from that stability," that money spent for a "civil police program" . . . "may have had a negative effect," that in the road-building program "the part that is built is most unsatisfactory," that the extravagant houses built for U.S. military personnel, and costing $300 a month per house to maintain, were so placed in swampy ground that they are "inundated every rainy season."

The only American aid that was spent for the peasants of Laos, "who form more than ninety percent of the people," was "Operation Booster Shot," which the report admits was done "with an awareness of the coming elections." The operation itself was rather useful, and included "the digging of wells, the repair of schools, the dropping of 1,300 tons of food and supplies into isolated areas." "It apparently took an emergency," laments the report, "to evoke the only aid program that took account of the real needs of Laos. . . . When the emergency (the election) was over, the program was abandoned." Operation Booster Shot did not even succeed in "overcoming the Communist election slogans." The election was "a Communist victory," says the Congressional Report.

Seldom has so scathing an indictment of American foreign aid been made in a government report. Yet, from the standpoint of the Lao people, the U.S. report notes only the lesser evil. It laments the waste of American cash, and the orgy of speculation, profiteering and corruption this produced. It hardly notes the effect of the violence for which the cash had paid.

The unintended ruin of the economy was bad enough. But far more evil was the intended civil war, the killing of people and livestock and the burning of homes in the incessant "mopping up" of Laotian villages.

## CHAPTER IV

# The "Pathet Lao"

What is this "Pathet Lao" that Washington so seeks to destroy in all its forms, even at the cost of civil war in Laos for years? In the U.S. Congress and the American press it is called "Communist" or at least "pro-Communist," epithets loosely used in America. One's first surprise on meeting it is to find how little "Communist" it seems. Its foreign policy is "neutralism" and "friendship with all nations that want to be friends." Its domestic program stands for elected governments in villages, based on the equality of all nationalities and on equal women's rights. Its aim for Laos is expressed in honest government, the development of agriculture, industry and commerce, public health and schools.

When in April, 1961, I met Prince Souphanouvong, the creator and chairman of the movement, I asked him: "How can I most simply explain to Americans the meaning of 'Pathet Lao'?"

The Prince laughed and revealed a fact not generally known. "The name was given us by the French in the Geneva Conference of 1954. We marked our documents 'Pathet Lao' or 'Land of Lao,' to distinguish them from the documents of Viet Nam and Cambodia. The French began calling us 'Pathet Lao.' We let the name stick."

The official name of the movement was "Neo Lao Otsala," the "Liberation Front of Laos." It was a combination of nationalities, classes and organizations to fight for national independence from France. After independence was secured by the Geneva Agreements, the movement broadened into what is today called the "Neo Lao Haksat," or "Patriotic Front." Its widened aim became to heal the wounds of war by a coalition government, and build a prosperous Laos with democratic rights for all the people, and equality for all nationalities. I shall use the term "Patriotic Front" for the movement, and "Pathet Lao" for its armed forces, since it is the name by which they are now widely known.

The program of the Patriotic Front was given in some detail in its Election Platform in that historic election of 1958 which the U.S. Congress deplored as a "Communist victory," when the Patriotic Front and its allies won 13 out of 21 seats. Let us briefly note its three sections: political, economic and cultural.

The Political Section demanded the "consolidation of peace through a coalition government" . . . "to guarantee the democratic freedoms of the people: freedom of belief, of thought, of speech, writing and publication, of domicile, of movement, of association etc." . . . "Equality and mutual aid among the different nationalities, so that all may go forward together" . . . "Equality and equal rights for men and women."

The Financial and Economic Section demanded "an equitable tax policy," regulation of exports and imports to prevent currency devauation, a "long-term economic construction plan" for developing agriculture, industry and to "build a genuinely independent economy." It also demanded "respect for private property and the right of all persons to invest in and operate enterprises of construction and production." It seems a mild welfare program, milder than the Roosevelt "New Deal."

How mild and even primitive it was can best be seen from the "Cultural and Social Program." It proposed to "set up classes . . . to *gradually* liquidate illiteracy," to "set up primary and secondary schools and *gradually* universities," to "restore and develop the mutual culture," to "prohibit war propaganda, and propaganda for splitting the nation or making strife among the nationalities." It proposed to "develop departments of health to guide prevention and cure of disease" and to "organize social relief for the sick and needy."

Stop and consider! Here is a country for centuries a hot-bed of tropical diseases which kill off the population. When the French left, there was just one educated native doctor in the nation. Now at last a patriotic movement appears which promotes in its platform the idea of public health and public schools! If you ask why anyone should fight such a mild welfare program, I refer you to the "economic royalists" who fought Roosevelt and to the men in the Southern States of the U.S.A. who today fight integration. Clearly, the privileged feudal rulers like Katay, Boun Oum and Nosavan will fight bitterly against equal rights for "savages" and "slaves."

If you then ask why America should back these anti-democratic forces, I leave you to think over that question. It is Washington's customary policy and we shall discuss it later in this book.

The woman deputy, Kham Phang Bourha, who ran on that platform and told me she was the only woman deputy ever elected to the National Assembly in Laos, confirmed the nature of the program. A slim, energetic woman of thirty-eight in a pink striped waist and dark skirt, and a big black bun of hair dropping down her neck, she was no more radical than any spokesman for the American League of Women Voters. She wanted women's rights and "more schools for the poor," and she criticized those "lazy women" who bought cheap American textiles instead of weaving their own cotton goods in the good old way. She felt they undermined home industry and with it the independence of the nation.

"Of course our Patriotic Front is not Communist," she told me. Land reform was not much needed, because "our forms are democratic already." When she saw my surprise at this she hastened to add that at present the government was "very undemocratic and corrupt" and the village heads were appointed "from the top down" and abuse their power, but that the constitutional form, by which village chiefs and county chiefs are "recommended" from above and "elected" from below, "permit democracy if the people exert themselves."

"But the pro-Americans kill us for agitating," she said, and mentioned the seventy-one murders in the 1958 electioneering. She added that the April, 1960, elections were very much worse.

"Nobody but pro-Americans could vote in that 1960 election. The security police saw to it. They watched how people voted and argued with them; if the people showed courage and insisted on voting for our candidates, the police later took their ballots out." So, according to Kham, the form of democracy in Laos is not bad, but its practice leaves much to be desired. When I pressed further into the "rights of the people" by asking whether the minority nationalities got a chance at schooling, Kham said that the sons of their chiefs got a chance but not the ordinary tribe members. Her remedy was simple.

"We need more schools so that everyone who wants may go."

Prince Souphanouvong confirmed Kham's statement that the present task of the Patriotic Front is not concerned with either land reform or constitutional reform. He also told me that "the face of the entire province has been changed in Sam Neua" in the six months since the Patriotic Front resumed control. So I asked what practical changes the Patriotic Front made.

"Sam Neua is the most mountainous province in Laos," he replied, "and also the poorest. During our Resistance to France, we formed organizations among the peasants, encouraging them to elect their village governments. We set up a few schools and some work in public health. When we gave back the northern provinces to the central government, Nosavan appointed the governor, and the schools and public health closed down. Nosavan would not even let the peasants live near their own fields but herded them into places near military centers, under control. They were not allowed even to walk on the road to the next village without an official permit. Especially they were forbidden to trade at the border with North Viet Nam, where the peasants for generations have traded rice for salt. Our peasants starved for salt.

"Our first act when we again liberated Sam Neua in September, 1960, under the government of Prince Phouma, was to free the peasants from these restrictions. We let them go back to their villages, and travel on the roads and trade at the border with Viet Nam. We repaired roads, rice fields and irrigation canals that had fallen into disrepair under Nosavan. We repaired a few schools and again began some public health work. We have had time for only these very small reforms but these are enough to change the face of the province, for they give the people hope."

The prince added that very many changes were needed in the future to transform backward, impoverished Laos into a prosperous, modern nation. One of the serious problems was that of the extensive opium-growing, which the French occupation encouraged and which any progressive government must abolish but could not abolish at once. "It is the only cash crop of the —mountain villages," he said. "We warn them that there is no future in opium. But meantime we must try to find legal ways to handle their crop through the central government, until we can provide other crops on which their villages can prosper.

"National unity is our first need. Many other reforms will follow. At present we stress the democratic self-expression of the people. But as yet ye have not even removed all the corrupt administrators in Sam Neua, but only those who conspicuously oppressed the people."

These modest democratic achievements won such support by their sincerity and practical benefits that the people of Laos have rallied to the Patriotic Front with increasing strength. This is best shown by two spectacular events in 1959-60—the escape of the Pathet Lao Battalion Number Two, and the historic jailbreak of

Prince Souphanouvong and the patriotic leaders.

The Pathet Lao armed forces were demobilized by agreement, signed November 2, 1957, by the two princely brothers. Within three months, by February, 1958, the Pathet Lao loyally and swiftly carried out its part. Of over 7,000 armed men, over 5,000 were sent home, and their arms turned over to the government, the remaining 1,500, in two battalions, were sent for incorpation into the Royal Army. Then came the famous 1958 elections by which the people supported the Patriotic Front with ballots but lost the premiership to American cash. By August 15, 1958, the pro-American Sananikone was in power.

Sananikone had no intention of accepting the Pathet Lao on an equal footing into the Royal Army with officer ranks preserved, as the Agreement read. How far he could go in breaking it he was not quite sure. So he left them in the Plain of Jars for a year while their condition steadily grew worse. They were given no military assignment. Their rice rations declined from 800 grams daily down to 400 grams, which hardly kept them in trim. Their officers' pay remained at the level of raw recruits. Medicines were inadequately supplied or not at all. Two hundred men fell ill with malaria and other preventable diseases for lack of medicine. One of them later told me: "We had swollen bellies, swollen legs and yellow skins."

"These battalions seem to have been interned," commented the *London Economist*, January 24, 1959. The *Far Eastern Review*, of Honk Kong, reported July 18, 1959: "They are virtually under surveillance." They were, in fact, hemmed in, being placed on lower ground and surrounded by other battalions of the Royal Army, several times their number, placed on high ground.

So many local people came to visit the popular Pathet Lao, that the battalions built a special reception house for them. Monks and peasants brought them food, medicines and cheer. Then the Royal Army forbade these visits. In February, 1959, the two Pathet Lao battalions were separated. Battalion Number One was moved to a camp not far from Luang Prabang, where it soon ceased to exist as a battalion. What happened there is not quite known. One story is that written orders to disarm were sent forged in the name of Prince Souphanouvong, and this caused dispute and demands to see Souphanouvong personally, at which the men were forcibly disarmed and put in a concentration camp. Months later, individuals and groups escaped to join the Second Battalion in the hills.

The Second Battalion made history. Details vary in different accounts but the basic story is clear. In the second week of May, 1959, they were ordered to go without arms and in small groups to an appointed place. One story is that they were to go "in only shoes and shorts"; another, that only the officers were to go, unarmed, to receive reduction in ranks. The assembly point was a barbed wire enclosure, surrounded by heavily armed Royal Army troops. The Pathet Lao commanders asked for a chance to confer with the leaders of the Patriotic Front. This was refused.

The demands caused disquiet not only in the Second Battalion but among the people. Monks and aged village leaders came to the Battalion to warn them: "Do not go to that place unarmed; it will be bad for you."

The Pathet Lao has a habit of democratic discussion; they considered the situation carefully. "We were not willing to fight the other battalions," one of them explained to me much later, "for this was against the Geneva Agreements and the peace of Laos. But neither were we willing to be destroyed, for we were the revolutionary armed force for national independence. We decided that the proper course was to escape the encirclement and return to our mountain base until we could confer with our political leaders. We had to take with us, not only the seven hundred and fifty armed men but nearly one hundred women and children, the families who were with the men."

To add to the difficulty, the Royal Army had tightened encirclement, until some of the encroaching battalions were as near as fifteen yards. They trained their guns on the Pathet Lao and fired shots "accidentally." But many men of these opposing battalions secretly helped the Pathet Lao. "The wife of an officer in one of those battalions brought us medicines and nylon waterproofs for the road," my informant said.

The commander of the Second Battalion called on the major who commanded the encirclement and said: "Tomorrow I will bring you the list of officers and ranks and take up the procedure for turning in the weapons. But it is our custom to discuss these things with our men, and the discussion will go better if you draw back these forces that are on top of us and give us some food for a good dinner." So the camps of the surrounding battalions No. 10, 21 and 23 were drawn back about a third of a mile and two cows were given the Second Battalion for a feast.

A football game was held on the battalion's playground on that afternoon, May 18, 1959, and drums prepared for festivities, while secret preparations were made for flight. At 7 p.m., when the camp was bright with moonlight and loud with drums and feasting, the first platoon left to scout the way due west across the Plain of Jars, the precise opposite of the way they eventually intended to go. The advance patrol came to a sentry box, less than a mile out and was hailed: "Halt, who goes there?" The commander firmly replied: "Battalion Number Two! Keep quiet if you want to live!" The sentry kept quiet. This happened again a mile further on, after which there were no accidents. Soon Company Three followed, in charge of the women and children. Everyone else remained in camp, noisily feasting.

When "lights out" sounded at nine p.m., the rest of the battalion put out the lights and at once left camp. They caught up with the women and children and kept on until dawn. The night grew dark and rain poured down and the children cried in weariness. They made only a little more than six miles but they reached the jungle at a village called Phu Hul where they rested under protection of trees and checked their numbers until all had arrived. Then they ate and turned south through the jungle and marched the rest of the day.

At Phu Hul they met a fortune-teller who told them: "You must go on now, but before long you will be back here again." In Laos fortune-tellers are believed. This one's prediction came true.

When the flight of the Second Battalion was discovered on the morning of May 19, all three encircling battalions went to hunt them in lorries, jeeps and armored cars, while Vientiane ordered out its two paratrooper battalions—the best fighters in the Royal Army—to hunt by planes. The Second Battalion continued its zigzag march through the jungles. Their first contact with the enemy came on the fifth day, when they encountered a small pursuing unit and put it to flight without revealing the direction of their march. On the sixth day they began to meet enemy units of considerable size. Some they fought and some they evaded, while with one detachment of the No. 10 Battalion they made a truce, and again went on their way by night.

On the fifth night, a woman gave birth and a platoon remained behind to care for her; but the next day the woman refused to take shelter in a village and insisted on continuing the march on foot, while the baby was carried by stretcher. They caught up with the battalion; both mother and child survived.

Despite pursuit by three battalions of ground troops and two paratrooper battalions, the Second Battalion of the Pathet Lao got away. It swung south and then east and finally reached its mountain base in southeast Xieng Khuang Province on the twenty-fifth day of the march, reporting casualties of two dead and four wounded.*

The news of this flight electrified Laos with what it revealed of the daring of the Pathet Lao and their support among the people and even among the enemy battalions. Premier Sananikone, under American advice declared war against the "rebel troops" and also cracked down on the political leaders of the Patriotic Front. But all over Laos, many former patriotic fighters, now threatened with arrest, fled to the woods and took the name of the Second Battalion, until there were unknown thousands in Laos under the name of the Second Battalion of the Pathet Lao.

Meantime sixteen men were arrested in Vientiane and put in a specially built jail. There was uproar in Laos about it, for seven of the men were deputies of the National Assembly and were supposed to have some kind of immunity, while one was Prince Souphanouvong, who had been Minister of Reconstruction and Planning and who was widely known as the leader who won the war for independence against the French.

The charges against these men were never made clear for the Royal Court never found grounds on which to try them. It was generally assumed that Premier Sananikone was angry at the escape of the Second Battalion of the Pathet Lao and was holding the leaders of the Patriotic Front while seeking proof of their complicity. They were put under house arrest in May and jailed in late Juy, 1959.

Because the prestige of these men was very high and Prince Souphanouvong was especially revered by the people, the first police unit ordered to arrest him refused to go. "This task is too great for us," they said. A military police unit was then ordered, but also refused. So the two recalcitrant police units were jailed as

* Most of the above account and also of the jail-break comes from a pamphlet by an army correspondent, published in Hanoi: *From Vientiane to the Plain of Jars*. Another account by Malcolm Salmon, in *Focus on Indo-China*, says that they reached their mountain base in thirteen days and that two women gave birth on the way. I have followed the least spectacular of several accounts, it is spectacular enough!

an example and an officer with a detail of fifty soldiers—the men ignorant of the task and the commander under threat—were sent to arrest the Prince.

The officer went down on his knees at a distance from the Prince, and approached on his knees and apologized for his errand but said he was "forced to invite the Prince to headquarters" and he "hoped the Prince would understand." The Prince "understood" and went to jail. So did the other sixteen.

A special jail was made for them from a row of army stables. Each horse-stall held a man, solitarily confined. A long wall was built to close the open side of the stalls, and this was penetrated at each cell by a door. Each cell had an opening high up for air and light and this was barred. Half of each roof was tin, the other half tile. When it was hot, the cells were like ovens; when it rained, the worn tiles leaked.

Outside the walled-in horse-stalls a firm fence of barbed wire was set, ten feet high, and outside this a second ring of barbed wire, six feet high, and outside this, a wall of tin, high enough so that the prisoners could see nothing of the outside world and nobody outside could see the prison. At the four corners of the jail-block four flood-lights were kept on night and day. One hundred guards were assigned to guard the prisoners in rotation; they had an entrance room in which to sit, but patrolled the area between the jail-block and the barbed wire on shifts. The entrance gave on a road where a motorized unit of the Royal Army had sentries with four tanks. The entire area was surrounded by the houses of the military police, including the residence of a U.S. adviser. It seemed adequately hedged in.

There were no conveniences in the cells, so three times a day, morning, noon and evening, the prisoners were taken from their cells under guard for meals and toilet purposes. The guards were forbidden to speak with the prisoners except to give orders. The prisoners were forbidden to speak to each other. No books or radios were allowed, no visitors, no contacts with the outer world except when official interrogators came to question each prisoner in his cell.

The jailing and the conditions led to wide protests. Many deputies spoke against it in the National Assembly. The Royal Court refused to try the case, saying there were "no grounds." The International Association of Democratic Lawyers sent people to Vientiane to protest. Even Dag Hammarskjold came to Laos and proposed a trial postponement. The government finally postponed it "sine die," i.e., indefinitely. And all this was so clearly illegal that people wondered whether a trial would one day be held and guilt or innocence judged, or whether, under sudden pressure, the prisoners might be taken out and shot.

The men in the jail planned for freedom. Their thought began from the first hour but at first nothing could be done. There was no contact between even two people. There were two sets of guards, the ordinary police and the gendarmes, the latter being accustomed to political and intelligence work. None of them spoke to the prisoners. There was no glimpse of the world outside and no news of it. A month went by; nothing at all occurred.

At the end of the month the guards were reduced. Whether this was because of outside protests, or because the prisoners were docile, or merely for economy was never known. The ordinary police were removed; the gendarmes remained, presumably more intelligent but more conscious political enemies. But now the guards were not under observation of another organization when they opened the door of a cell; a single guard or two might be for a moment alone with a prisoner. Moved by the high reputation of the prisoners and their excellent behaviour, some guards would exchange a polite word. Then a prisoner also would make a polite comment to a guard when nobody else was in earshot.

Gradually the prisoners learned which guards responded. Some guards had been monks, for it is the custom in Laos for young men to spend at least a few months in a monastery in late adolescence. Perhaps the character of the prisoners moved them, or the feelings of humanism induced by Buddhism. Other guards had sentiments of patriotism and respected Prince Souphanouvong. Whether from kindness or patriotism, some guards began to buy for prisoners some small necessities from outside the jail.

Two special actions were taken by the prisoners even before they established much mutual contact. When authorities came to interrogate a prisoner in his cell, the prisoner would speak up loudly and would proclaim his views on national unity and independence so that the guards outside might hear and realize that the jailing of such men was not in the national interest.

Then, in brief periods of exercise outside the cells, the Prince began to plant a garden between the jail-block and the barbed wire. The gendarmes furnished seeds and tools, willing to have the prisoners improve the jail. The prisoners got exercise and the guards got a neat-looking jail-yard. On Buddhist festival days the prisoners would ask the guards to take vegetables and flowers to the "pagoda" as a gift to the monks. And the monks would remember that these were good men, who should not be in jail.

As the jail routine relaxed, even slightly, the prisoners gained contact with each other. Then each undertook the "awakening" of particular gendarmes. Sometimes a guard, for being kind to a prisoner, would himself be given a short confinement "for relaxing the discipline." But other guards would visit the prisoners' families, and report their condition, and perhaps report also the radio news they heard outside the jail. Thus, the prisoners learned how the anti-imperialist movement was developing in Laos and in the world.

In ten months confinement, the prisoners "awakened" some forty gendarmes. Of these they picked those most interested to study politics in small groups, while other friendly guards would protect "the class" from interruption. So the Prince began to write the history of the fight for independence in the form of short, simple lessons; later he took the manuscript with him from the jail. During the classes, some of the gendarmes would become excited and want to rise up and overthrow the "pro-American government," and would say that the prisoners must escape to lead the people. Then the Prince would counsel patience and point out the difficulties, and test the gendarms by their response.

Finally they picked from the gendarmes the eight they considered the best, who would help their escape and go with them from the jail. With these they at last made plans. One thing to plan was how these eight might some time be together on the night shift.

Two of the eight were officers of the lowest rank, which we may call "corporal." They were named Udon and Chan Thavi and were the most intelligent of the men. With them the prisoners discussed detailed plans. One of the prisoners, a member of the executive committee of the Patriotic Front, worked out the outside contacts needed and the route they should take on leaving the jail. The two corporals made the contacts. The first outside contact was with the Buddhist pagoda to which the prisoners had sent vegetables and flowers. Here Chan Thavi had a cousin who was a monk. He arranged that this monk with four others would be the first to meet the prisoners and take them the first stage of the way.

The prisoners needed gendarmes' uniforms in which to escape, and wide white bands for their sleeves, to show that they were "on duty." They needed dry rations for the road and nylon waterproofs against the rain. The two corporals prepared all this. There must have been times when the prisoners wondered whether and when their plans might be suddenly betrayed.

At three in the afternoon of May 23, 1960, word came that the outside contacts were all arranged and five of the eight friendly gendarmes would be on duty that night. At once the other three gendarmes made arrangements to change places with other men on the night shift; these temporary exchanges could be made by mutual agreement and with a corporal's permission. Early in the evening, a man from outside was smuggled into the jail and hidden in one of the prisoner's cells. One account speaks of him as a liaison man, another account as a man from the wardrobe who arranged uniforms to fit. In any case, he was an addition to the eight guards.

At 8 p.m. the sixteen prisoners, the eight friendly guards and the extra man were alone in the jail. Then for the first time the plan of escape was made known to them all. Until then only the leading prisoners and the corporals knew the details. Now all were given the details and told it should be that very night. They went over the plans twice and all agreed. Then all withdrew to their places, the prisoners in their cells and the gendarmes on guard to wait until the surrounding camp should be asleep. And if, in those hours, any man weakened, all would be lost. But all had seemed happily surprised to learn how well the escape was planned.

The prisoners were told to rest, but one doubts if any slept. They could hear outside the officers' families talking on the verandas, for May was hot in Laos. They heard the two big dogs barking in the American adviser's yard where he seemed to be giving a party. But finally the sounds died down and the lights went out. Only the four big floodlights shone in the jail-yard.

At five minutes before midnight, the outer door of the jail opened, and after a moment closed. Twenty-five men in gendarmes' uniforms had issued through the door. They went casually, stamping their feet, as if on duty, for if anyone heard their passing, noise was less suspicious than stealth. They went under the bright flood-lights and into the road and past the headquarters of the armored troops. Nobody gave them hail. They did not trust the streets of Vientiane but turned quickly over a bridge and into the woods.

Here they waited in darkness, drawing back into the trees when they heard voices and saw flash-lights approach. Then Chan Thavi recognized the voice of his cousin, the monk. He had brought four other monks to go with the prisoners. Thirty men were travelling now, the sixteen prisoners, nine men from the jail and five monks. They split into three groups of ten because trails in the woods are narrow and dark, and thirty could not keep together on the way.

All of the prisoners found walking difficult, being in poor condition after ten months in jail. The Prince, being oldest, was weakest. His legs swelled and he fell many times. It seemed they had been hours on the road but, whenever they came to a place where they could look back, they saw the four flood-lights still shining and knew they must hasten their steps. They came to a village through which they had thought to pass quickly, but a Buddhist festival was being celebrated and the village was awake and alight. It was the Prince who then insisted that they go around the village in the dark. Here the woods were so thick that each man held the shirt of the man ahead, lest he lose the way.

Rain came on hard, and the waterproofs were all soaked through. Everyone was hungry. Now it was the Prince who encouraged them, though his legs were worse than the others and he fell often. Seeing his spirit, some of the gendarmes who had feared they might be overtaken and killed, now began to believe they would win through.

It seemed many hours but it was only four in the morning when their guides brought them to a place north of Vientiane, near Road 13, where a platoon of the Pathet Lao waited, thirty-six armed men, who would take them the rest of the way. And they also realized that their flight must be known in Vientiane now, when the new shift of guards came on.

The flight was indeed discovered at four in the morning, when the new shift of guards came on. Then Captain Kong Le, of the Second Paratroop Battalion, the crackerjack, of the Royal Army and especially praised by the Americans, was ordered out to hunt the escaped prisoners.

"I was in Luang Prabang celebrating my wedding day," he related later. "How could I hunt Prince Souphanouvong? I made excuses. I said I haven't enough men, for some are on duty in Paksant and some on training in Thailand. So they sent the First Paratrooper Battalion instead. But soon they got around to me again and I had to go. In Vientiane I met the First Battalion coming back and looking unhappy, saying they couldn't keep on. I myself had no enthusiasm and didn't hunt hard. Nobody wanted to hunt Prince Souphanouvong."

It was less than three months later that Kong Le himself made his famous coup of which we shall hear in the next chapter, that brought Prince Souvanna Phouma for the third time to power, and prefaced his third meeting with his brother prince. It was less than a year later that I myself was interviewing Prince Souphanouvong and hearing from his own lips the story of the end of the jail-break.

"I walked all the way to Sam Neua," he said. "It took me several months. Our Pathet Lao had demobilized in good faith and we had no armed forces but those of the Second Battalion. I organized each province as I walked through it. Rather I had to organize it to get through. By the time I reached Sam Neua, we had a skeleton organization all the way from Vientiane."

The Patriotic Front was at its lowest ebb in 1959-60, with its armed forces dispersed and its political leaders in jail. But a year after that jail-break they held three fourths of Laos and were meeting in Geneva with fourteen nations to discuss international guarantees. One could wish that President Kennedy understood that to use cash and violence against such forces is only to buy arms that the Pathet Lao would take over and to buy anti-American sentiments that last.

CHAPTER V

# Introducing Captain Kong Le

At dawn of August 9, 1960, the people of Vientiane awoke to find that their capital had changed hands during the night. The government buildings, army headquarters, post office, radio, airfield and other points of control had been seized between 3 and 6 a.m. by some six hundred men of the Second Paratroop Battalion under twenty-seven year old Captain Kong Le, hitherto unknown to fame. People at once poured into the streets by the thousands to ask what it was all about.

Kong Le's politics were still a mystery. He was known as the popular captain of one of the two parachute battalions, which, being by far the best troops in the Royal Army, were the ones always sent out against the Pathet Lao. He was dashing, sociable, favored by girls and by the American military advisers, who always hailed him jovially about the town and had sent him for special training to the U.S. Rangers School, in the Philippines. Power had changed hands three times that year in Vientiane. For whom was Kong Le seizing it now?

Kong Le soon went on the radio to tell them. "Dear compatriots," he said in a breezy way, "the aim of this revolution is to bring you tranquility, national harmony and cordial relations. We are disgusted with this civil war. It is against the moral principles of Buddhism. It is made by a handful of people for foreign money. If this killing of Lao by Lao goes on, there will be no more Laotians left.

"Soldiers, civil servants, students and workers, you must seize this excellent chance to fight for your freedom. We will advance in the path of neutralism. We will be friends with all nations in the world who wish to be friends. We will accept aid from anyone who offers it without conditions, but not from those who use it to provoke war among Laotians." He ended: "I suggest that everyone now clap and cheer!"

This happy proclamation struck an answering chord in the people's hearts. All morning students, monks, civil servants, soldiers and police came to Kong Le to offer support. Then peasants, whom Kong Le had apparently fosgotten to mention, also came from nearby villages. Soon everyone knew that Kong Le had been ordered to fly at 3 a.m. to "mop-up" another village of Pathet Lao sympathizers and had chosen to take Vientiane instead; that Premier Somsanith and his cabinet were in Luang Prabang where they had gone to consult the king about funeral rites for his predecessor and could not get back because Kong Le held the air-field while the road – one of those ill-made U.S. aid projects – was washed out in the summer rains. Realizing all this, people chortled, both in Vientiane and in informed circles in many lands at what seemed a Gilbert and Sullivan opera overturn. But Kong Le clearly held the town.

At noon, the captain called several prominent people to meet him in the premier's office, including a neutralist deputy named Chan Pao, with whom Kong Le had talked before. He told them modestly that he knew little of politics and he asked them what to do next. As a result of their advice, Kong Le was soon telling Laos by radio that his action was not against the king or the form of the state but against the corrupt administration, so he had been wrong in calling it a "revolution," since it was really only a "coup d'etat."

The "revolutionary committee," now renamed "coup d'etat committee," then went on the air and invited Premier Somsanith to return to Vientiane and give his resignation in person to the national assembly and also invited Prince Souvanna Phouma to become premier once again.

Within four days, a hastily summoned assembly accepted Somsanith's resignation. Premier Phouma, with a sense of protocol, refused to take the premier's post from Kong Le, but this technicality caused no delay. The king quickly appointed Phouma, and his new cabinet was ratified on the morning of August 17. The coup d'etat committee at once and without question turned over its powers.

Thus, legally yet with speed, Prince Souvanna Phouma became for the third time premier and, again for the third time promised to adopt a neutralist policy and to negotiate peace with the Pathet Lao.

Expessions of pleasure came from all over Laos. Provincial governors wired allegiance. Buddhist rallies telegraphed support. The Patriotic Front stated on August 20 that it had already received over a thousand letters with 33,000 signatures endorsing Kong Le's ideas. Prince Souphanouvong announced that he welcomed Prince Phouma's intent to negotiate peace.

The one sour note came from General Phoumi Nosavan, the ambitious military man already known as America's "strong man," who had been the power behind the overthrow of Phouma in 1958, and behind all the reactionary premiers since. At the time of the Kong Le coup, Nosavan was Minister of Defense and had gone to Luang Prabang with the rest of the cabinet. He did not return with them to Vientiane but flew to Bangkok, where he conferred with his uncle Sarit Thanarat, premier of Thailand, and doubtless also with American representatives there. He then went, not to Vientiane but to Savannakhet, capital of a former southern kingdom in Laos, and joined with Prince Boun Oum to announce a committee to overthrow the Kong Lee coup d'etat.

A headlined article with photograph in the *N. Y. Times* for August 18, described Prince Phouma as the new premier of Laos and a "pro-Western neutralist." The same issue stated that if General Nosavan should move against Vientiane, he would meet with no opposition from Washington. Thus, nine days after Kong Le's dawn adventure, it was made clear to the world that Prince Souvanna Phouma was the recognized premier but that General Nosavan intended to fight him and was able to count on the U.S.A.

Prince Phouma at first did not seem to take Nosavan's opposition seriously. He flew personally to Savannakhet on August 23, had a talk with Nosavan and returned to tell a press conference that everything was "well settled," since "the U.S. ambassador had assured him that Washington would not interfere in Laos." Said Phouma: "These assurances are sufficient for me." *Time* magazine, however, already noted that General Nosavan not only was rallying troops but had the king in Luang Prabang "under something like house arrest."

For several weeks Prince Phouma gave more attention to placating Nosavan than to any neutralist policy or negotiations with the Pathet Lao. It is common habit of middle-of-the-road politicians to take the support of the Left for granted and try to placate the Right. Phouma kept Nosavan in the cabinet as vice-Premier and Minister of the Interior. He sent Kong Le back to his job as captain and spoke of him slightingly when the people made him a popular hero. On August 29, Phouma met Nosavan in Luang Prabang and tried with concessions to dissuade him from the armed attacks he openly prepared.

None of this appeasement worked. Nosavan moved openly against the government in Vientiane with Thailand's help. By the end of August, Thailand blockaded Vientiane, keeping out food and gasoline, while Nosavan manouvered troops on Thai territory opposite the city. Armed clashes began in September and continued through the month. On September 13, Kong Le repulsed a probing attack by a small force of Nosavan's men. From September 16 to 19, a few mortar bombs were dropped into Vientiane from Thai territory across the river. On the 18th, the Thai high command prohibited civilian traffic on the roads of the area, reserving them for Nosavan's military operations. On the 21st, Nosavan sent two battalions against Paksane, a road junction ninety miles southeast of Vientiane, to which it commands the approach. Thai transport planes cooperated and delivered to Nosavan American arms of a heavy type previously unseen in Laos.

Then Kong Le defeated Nosavan's troops in Paksane in forty-eight hours of stiff fighting. He returned to Vientiane September 23 to display to the foreign newsmen the new American weapons he had captured. The French and British press were quick to note that Washington was implicated. Genevieve Tabouis, the well known commentator, said in *Paris Jour* (September 25) that "certain U.S. advisers are responsible for the present chaotic situation." "They support the counter revolution of Prince Boun Oum and General Nosavan." *Time* magazine cynically admitted later, in a much stronger statement (March 17, 1961): "Though the U.S. had recognized the Kong Le-Souvanna Phouma government, it soon shifted the bulk of its aid to General Phoumi Nosavan, who, the CIA explained, is 'our man.'"

When Phouma's six weeks' courtship of Nosavan had clearly brought nothing but war, the Patriotic Front began a courtship of Phouma. On October 1, it sent him an official reminder that the Partiotic Front had been waiting for some time for the promised negotiations. "Now that the king has decreed the expulsion of Nosavan from the government, we think the time has come to strengthen the country against the U.S. imperialists and the Phoumi Nosavan clique." They proposed that appeasement of Nosavan cease, that democratic rights be returned to the people – who were already throwing out Nosavan's local governors in the provinces – that a coalition government be formed and diplomatic relations set up with the USSR, People's China and North Viet Nam. The following day the Pathet Lao pointedly asked Phouma why he had taken no steps in his "neutralist policy," why he "persecuted the Youth Committee for Peace and Neutrality" and why he "excluded Kong Le from the Committee for Defense of Vientiane."

This sharp reminder brought results. Phouma began to rally the help available to him as a neutralist. On October 5, he signed an agreement with Burma to fly in food and gasoline. On the 6th, he declared diplomatic relations with the USSR. On the 7th, he announced that negotiation would soon begin with the Pathet Lao. The Soviet ambassador flew in from Cambodia and agreed to airlift food and gasoline into Vientiane and to give other assistance if needed. But Phouma's neutrality was still strictly formal. When the effervescent Kong Le greeted the Soviet ambassador at the airport with a paratrooper display, Phouma reprimanded him and put him under house arrest.

Washington's pressures increased. The U.S. State Department announced that the payment of army salaries was suspended, making official what during September had been merely "delay." J. Graham Parsons, an old enemy of Phouma's, who, as ambassador to Laos in 1958, had helped throw Phouma from the premiership, now flew into Laos October 12 as Assistant Secretary of State to discuss conditions for resuming U.S. aid. The chief condition was that no negotiations be held with the Pathet Lao. Phouma refused this condition, nonetheless delayed negotiations for a month. Meantime, the State Department announced that payments would be resumed. Some commentators held that, since Moscow offered aid, Washington could not afford to stay out. In Laos a more sinister reason appeared. In resuming army payments, the U.S. Embassy dealt directly with separate military districts. This not only was intervention in the internal affairs of Laos, but enabled aid to be sent direct by air-lift to Nosavan's men in different provinces.

In mid-November, when serious armed action by Nosavan was clearly imminent with the support of Thailand and the U.S., Phouma resumed the neutralist actions Parsons had forbidden. On the 16th, his cabinet decided to seek economic and cultural relations with China and North Viet Nam. Phouma himself made plans to visit these countries in early December. Meantime, he flew to Sam Neua to confer with Prince Souphanouvong who, as he himself later told me, had barely reached Sam Neua after the famous jailbreak. On November 20, the two princes issued a "Joint Communique on

Peace, Neutrality and National Harmony," which declared a neutralist policy and cooperation between the government and the Patriotic Front. As a sign of this and of the approaching crisis, Kong Le was appointed commander of the Vientiane garrison on November 25.

It was high time. The U.S. press was declaring that "Washington will not permit these developments." The U.S. Fleet, already in the South China Seas, moved nearer to Laos and announced its "war-readiness." The Peking press, greeting Phouma's proposed visit, warned that Washington had twice overthrown him and intended to do it again. Local adherents of Nosavan seized the center of Vientiane in early December, when Kong Le was at the Paksane front, but Kong Le's prestige was such that he took the city back without bloodshed by his mere return. On December 9, instead of visiting China, Prince Phouma took refuge in Cambodia, awaiting the military decision.

General Nosavan launched an artillery attack on Vientiane shortly after noon December 13, and followed it with a full scale assault of troops, including regular armed forces of the Thailand army and also some troops from South Viet Nam. The battle, which was expected to last only a few hours, continued five days, for the citizens of Vientiane rallied to defend their city and Kong Le opened the arsenal to supply them. On December 15, Nosavan took the city center but did not personally enter until late on the 16th. Kong Le still fought from the air-field until the 17th. Then he retreated northward, accompanied by a considerable number of the citizens of Vientiane.

Washington's haste in recognizing the new regime was indecent. On December 15, before Boun Oum and Nosavan had entered the capital, the State Department press officer White told correspondents that America gave "full support to the anti-Communist government of Prince Boun Oum and General Nosavan." This was a full day before the chiefs of the new regime dared enter Vientiane and two full days before Kong Le and the remnants of Prince Phouma's government withdrew.

The first newsmen who entered Vientiane with Nosavan's forces, noted the "battered, smoking ruin" which Nosavan had made with U.S. weapons, heavier than ever seen before in Laos. *Time* Magazine later stated (March 17) that in taking the city, Nosavan had killed three times as many civilians as soldiers. This hardly endeared Nosavan's new regime to the people of Laos, most of whom already detested his oppressive local appointees. The sense of outrage spread when Kong Le revealed over the official radio, Voice of Laos, that among the prisoners he had taken were "Americans, Filipinos, Thais, South Vietnamese and Kuomintang soldiers," all fighting under Nosavan's banner against the capital of Laos. Nosavan, always unpopular, was clearly now a traitor who used foreign troops to take and ruin the national capital.

So in taking Vientiane, Nosavan lost Laos. If this was not at once clear, it became clearer when Kong Le's northward retreat offered the people an alternative. For Kong Le retreated in good order and with him went many people from Vientiane. When Nosavan, on entering the city, began to arrest and kill the people who had opposed him the numbers fleeing the city increased. Monks, students, civil servants to the number of several thousand travelled north from Vientiane in the last half of December. The Voice of Laos announced that 2,000 Buddhist monks left Vientiane for many parts of Laos, most of them following Kong Le north.

The largest organized group was the "Youth Committee for Peace and Neutrality," an organization of patriotic students that sprang up in Vientiane after the Kong Le coup. During the battle for Vientiane, Kong Le armed them. The youth, though inexperienced, fought heroically beside the experienced paratroopers. On the northward march, their numbers were increased by volunteers in the places they passed. They became the "Youth Battalion," led by a young patriotic prince.

Equally important was the northward move of Quinin Pholsena, one of those individuals who help turn the course of history. He was minister of Information in Phouma's cabinet. When Phouma fled to Cambodia in the confused conflicts before the artillery assault, many of his Ministers went with him and others fled to Rangoon, but Pholsena remained in Vientiane. On December 15, when Washington was prematurely recognizing Boun Oum, Pholsena announced that Phouma's government was still the lawful government, and that he, as senior cabinet minister, was acting premier in Phouma's absence. Having thus acted as premier in the last struggle for Vientiane, Pholsena went north with Kong Le, taking a considerable number of civil servants with him.

Radio appeals from Kong Le, the popular hero of the August coup, and Pholsena, speaking for the "lawful Phouma government," were quickly reinforced by support from Prince Souphanouvong and the Pathet Lao. Meetings in county towns began declaring support. On December 24, the garrison commander of Phong Saly Province, Colonel Kham Boupha, wired that he and his 12,000 troops were on Phouma's side. Prince Souphanouvong, who already controlled the adjacent province of Sam Neua, at once ordered all Pathet Lao forces in Phong Saly to cooperate with Boupha.

Thus began the new Patriotic Alliance, which included the old Patriotic Front and the neutralist government of Phouma. Its rising forces swept into the Plain of Jars in late December and took it on New Year's Eve. On New Year's day they took Xieng Khouang, capital of the north-central province of that name, in which the Plain of Jars is located. Quinin Pholsena moved the government in.

Those New Year's victories shattered any belief that may have existed anywhere in the world that the neutralist forces of Laos had accepted defeat. The *N.Y. Times*, of January 2, gave them a three-column front-page headline, and kept them on the front page several days. Robert Guillain, in *Le Monde*, spoke of Kong Le's "almost Napoleonic quality," in exchanging Vientiane for the Plain of Jars, and "putting to flight 13,000 of Nosavan's toops with his 400 men." This exaggerates. Kong Le's troops had already grown far beyond his original battalion, and they took the Plain of Jars in alliance with the Pathet Lao, whose forces were larger still.

But the importance of those victories can hardly be exaggerated. They halted the confused dismay that had followed Prince Phouma's flight to Cambodia, the dispersal of his cabinet and the fall of Vientiane. They gave Phouma's government a new capital, more strategically placed than Vientiane. Around it the people of Laos, outraged by Nosavan's deeds in Vientiane, rallied, beginning with the three provinces of the north.

The Patriotic Alliance, so long delayed in conferences, was consummated on the field of battle. It held not only a capital but the strategic key to Laos. For from the Plain of Jars the roads lead outward and downward into all the Laotian land.

Before we follow them into the three months' battles by which they took the greater part of Laos and brought a new conference to Geneva, let us seek closer aquaintance with Kong Le, this captain who took the nation's capital so breezily on an early morning and gave it up when the king named a premier he approved. For this youth whose actions bridged the gap between Phouma's hesitating government and the Pathet Lao is a better sample of the common folk of Laos than any of the French-educated upper-class or any other Laotian you are likely to meet. He is a "Kha," of the race for centuries called "slaves."

I spent an entire evenińg with him in April 1961. He was the most baffling man I ever interviewed. When I asked what he hoped for his own future, he replied: "I want to be a captain among my men." I asked: "Not a general?" He shrank from the word. "No, not a general," he said. He seemed to have a horror of generals. Yet, he already was a general in rank, though nobody called him that to his face. He was even more than a general. He sent out sound proclamations beginning: "I, Kong Le, Comander-in-chief of the Royal Armed Forces of Laos." Already, through alliance with Pathet Lao, his forces held half the country.

This was only one of the contradictions I found in Kong Le. When he came into the room where I waited for him, he was so diffident and unobtrusive that I took him for a janitor come perhaps to fix a window. This is a common mistake—at field headquarters he is often taken for his own sentry. They brought him forward and introduced him and I saw a very short, stocky man—only a trifle higher than five feet—with a bronzed skin. His hair was very black and bushy and tended to get out of place. He wore dark, nondescript trousers and a shirt open at the neck, without a tie or jacket—a peasant's garb. Yet, he was not in the field; he had come to town to meet several important people. He smiled ingratiatingly, like an embarrassed youth.

"I revere you like my own grandmother," was one of his first remarks, implying that he consulted his mother and grandmother. I felt in the remark not only courtesy but that he was really moved that a woman as old as I should be interested enough in Laos to travel so far.

This modest, deferential manner was, however, the manner that deceived many generals and by which, indeed, he survived. I learned this when I asked him: "Is it true, as an American paper says, that you discussed your coup d'etat with General Nosavan and he thought you would make it for him?"

Kong Le nodded. "Not only General Nosavan but all my four generals. I served under different generals, each in a different city, Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet. And to each of my generals I said: 'This is a rotten government and I shall overthrow it.

Now you are a good general and would make a good prime minister. What are your good ideas for Laos?' Then every general thinks he would make a good prime minister and that I am his man. And truly, I am his man, for I am only a captain and take his orders. But when he tells me his ideas for Laos, I see they are only for his own personal advancement, not for Laos."

This was when I realized that Kong Le was not the naive youth he appeared. Was he then a gay deceiver of generals? This also did not seem the case. Kong Le was seeking an answer to the problem that worried him, the endless civil war. He discussed it with generals, with politicians, with peasants and with his own soldiers. His diffident and cheerful manner saved him. For when he said: "I shall overthrow this rotten government," everyone took it for a joke. I began to understand his manner as that of the cheerful, joking deference behind which the Negroes of the American Southern States have for generations concealed their judgment on the ruling whites. There may also be in it a touch of Buddhist self-effacement learned in a monastery where Kong Le spent part of his adolescence. This manner is contradicted by another boyish braggart manner in which he tells tall tales, like an American college boy, and watches you sideways to see how much he can make you believe. I am sure that he has that side-wise grin whenever he writes: "I, Kong Le, commander-in-chief."

Kong Le told me that he was twenty-eight years old, and his father, a poor peasant in southern Laos, died when he was very young. His mother and grandmother brought him up. He sought education but this was not easily had by the poor. The village teacher, however, owed a debt to Kong Le's father and gave the boy instruction in return for labor. "I graduated at the head of the primary school," he said, "and got a Royal Scholarshop to the Savannakhet High School. I only stayed there a year for the scholarship was not enough for food."

For a time the youth entered a Buddhist temple and lived as a monk, as is common with Laotian youth. This probably strengthened ideals of neutralism and asceticism. Yet, still in his teens, he joined the army in the period after 1950, when France gave semi-independence to Laos, and used the King's army against the Pathet Lao. I asked how the soldier's life fitted his ideals as a monk.

Kong Lee replied that he saw the army as his way to an education. "And I thought somebody must make peace in Laos and it should be the King."

"Then you joined for your country's sake?" I asked

"I thought so," replied Kong Le. "But I also liked the uniform and the steady pay." Kong Le was clearly honest in estimating himself.

The youth was not happy when he found himself fighting the Pathet Lao. They had been a legend in his village and the peasants were always proud when the Pathet beat the French, but they were also fearful, because the French would avenge themselves on the nearest villages. Kong Le was glad when his inner conflicts were resolved by the Geneva Agreements in 1954. By this time he was twenty-one and a petty officer. Peace would now be made with the Pathet Lao, he thought.

"But then the Americans began coming and giving us a bigger and bigger army and still we kept fighting the Pathet Lao." Once the army "mopped up" Kong Le's own village and killed some old people he had known. His aversion to the civil war hardened.

When the coalition government was formed in 1957, Kong Le was again relieved. He tried to meet Prince Souphanouvong but did not find it easy. "My superior officers did not like the idea," he said, "and the Prince himself was very busy." Finally he got a very short talk with the Prince by going to his home. "Those few words I never forgot," said Kong Le. "After that, I knew that the Pathet Lao also wanted to stop the civil war and make Laos a neutral nation."

Meanwhile Kong Le advanced in his profession. He was an able and popular captain even before the Americans sent him to the Rangers School in the Philippines. He was also popular with the American advisers. "The Americans would do anything for me," he bragged. "We parachutists got big salaries but the Americans also offered gifts. They asked me: 'What kind of a car do you want? Maybe a kind of car not yet seen in Laos? Just tell us and we will get it.' "

In the end these gifts seem to have sickened him. He began to see in them the corruption that weakened his country. Even before the coup, he often took the high wages and the gifts and gave them away to poor people, influenced either by his ideals as a monk or by an inner conflict about American gifts. When he made the coup, his main attack was not against the Americans but against "those who are bought by foreign gold." At the time when I met him he was still said to be giving away uniforms in the Plain of Jars to ragged peasants who needed clothing. Once, they said, he took off his own trousers to give to a poor peasant and came back to headquarters in his underwear. These qualities endear him to the populace, the soldiers and the monks.

Hundreds of Buddhist monks, fleeing from Vientiane, come to see Kong Le and give him their blessing. Each ties a cotton thread around his wrist: each thread is a "blessing." Kong Le's wrists are festooned to his elbow with these "blessings"; they are gray with dirt but it is improper to remove them until they wear off. Kong Le also believes in his luck, in charms and in dreams. He told a correspondent whom he took to a dangerous spot: "My luck is enough to cover the two of us." He said to me: "Whenever I dream I see Prince Souphanouvong on a white horse, I know that day I shall win a victory."

Kong Le is popular with women; rumor said he had three wives and six children. Several wives for a man of his income would be quite proper in Laos, but I doubt the tale. I asked him obout the six children and he answered simply: "Only three survived," and I recalled the heavy infant mortality. He added: "They are with their mother; I am separated from them. For now I must think only of my country and of the independence of Laos." His manner moved me; I did not feel like asking about rumored wives.

He told me many tales about the coup d'etat, how he discussed it and how it came off. I am not sure that he always confined himself to precise fact. Kong Le's tales are very good tales; they may be a little better than fact. I think he tells them the way he likes to remember; the way the people tell legends. Kong Le's coup is history; already it begins to be legend. In our human race the truth of parable is much older than the reporting of fact. Kong Le's tales, I think, are the way the people of Laos will remember Kong Le's coup.

Before the coup, he says, he talked about it with many people. Among them was Chan Pao, the neutralist deputy whom he later asked for "political advice." Chan Pao told him: "Vientiane is not a well-defended city; it is four paper walls. The people hate the American intervention, the soldiers are discouraged, the generals want only to get rich. Five hundred determined men could take Vientiane."

"Was it from Chan Pao that you got the idea of the coup," I asked. Kong Le shook his head. "No, I got from him ideas of neutralism. It was the American text-books that showed me how to take a town."

He says that he once said to Prince Souvanna Phouma: "You are our rightful premier, but the Americans wont accept you. What are your good ideas for Laos? We have been in civil war for fifteen years." Then Phouma said: "We must be a neutral nation, friendly to all nations that wish to be friends. We must get rid of corruption. We must take the Pathet Lao into the regular army." And Kong Le replied: "This is exactly my idea. I'll overthrow this government and make you premier."

"Prince Phouma laughed because he did not believe me," says Kong Le. Did this conversation happen? Or is it what Kong Le dreamed?

Kong Le says that after that first talk with Souphanouvong, which gave him a true estimate of the Pathet Lao, he used to let the Pathet know when he was ordered to attack them, so that they might get away. Once, when he met in the hills near Savannakhet a Pathet Lao detachment that was hungry, Kong Le wired to the American advisers that he needed extra food. "The Americans would do anything for me. They dropped me supplies by parachute and I gave them to the Pathet Lao." This is already a folk tale. Is it fact?

Kong Le says that the reason he had only 600 men in taking Vientiane, though his battalion numbered 800, was that he discussed the coup with his men and asked how many wanted to join it. Six hundred voluteered, the rest waited to see if it would succeed and joined him afterwards. If this is true, the secrecy of those two hundred seems the biggest miracle of all.

Most priceless is the tale he told Ted Brake, the British correspondent. "My top American brass—I had ten American advisers in my battalion—went around with me that night when I gave orders for the coup. But he never learned enough Laotian to understand my orders. He thought I was organizing the expedition against the Pathet when I organized the taking of Vientiane." This is such bitter symbolic truth about American advisers that one wonders if it is also fact?

In the coup d'etat, says Kong Le, Company Three came in from the Paksane road and took the Phon Xan garrison, the Ministry of

Defense, the radio station, the power plant, the post-office and the bank. It seems a lot for one company to take in three pre-dawn hours, but it might have been. One platoon went to the homes of two reactionary generals and five men went down the chimneys and caught the generals before they were awake. In the city police headquarters, Kong Le says he had a friend, a lieutenant, who locked up the weapons beforehand, so that the three hundred police surrendered on demand, and many came over to Kong Le's side.

Any of these things could have happened. But could all of them have happened so smoothly in a pre-dawn period, in a town with 5,000 soldiers stiffened with American advisers? Yet, that Kong Le took the city is true. These or similar miracles must have happened. Kong Le gave me the key when I told him: "I still don't understand how you did it all so fast." Patiently he said: "The coup was very popular and I had friends in all the services. As soon as I told them at the airfield that we were overthrowing the government, the pilots just gave me ten American planes."

Those words seem classic! Those pilots with those planes had been taking Kong Le out to fight the Pathet Lao for years. They were fed up. This was the basic truth of the coup d'etat. Kong Le was better than a Napoleon. He was a youth expressing the people's soul and the people responded. Also he had "friends in the services" and the Americans had taught him to take towns.

What is Kong Le's future? I do not know, nor does he. He is young and with every day he is learning. Prince Phouma said of him to a newsman: "Kong Le is my man; he will obey me." I recalled then Kong Le's four generals. Kong Le, I think, is no longer anyone's "man." When Phouma was trying to placate Nosavan in Luang Prabang, Kong Le wired him: Don't let that traitor into your cabinet." Kong Le fights for Phouma as a neutralist premier. But his omen of victory is Prince Souphanouvong on a white horse. Kong Le's coup, arousing the people, united the two.

I asked Kong Le what message he wanted to send to Americans. He replied: "Tell them not to come and make trouble in Laos. No people like to be a colony. Even a little country like Laos likes to be independent and not dominated by foreigners."

I pass his message on.

CHAPTER VI

# From the Plain of Jars

New Year's Day, 1961, dawned auspiciously for the new patriotic alliance of Laos. On New Year's Eve, the united forces of Captan Kong Le and the Pathet Lao took the Plain of Jars, and on New Year's day they took Xieng Khouang, capital of the central northern province. Quinin Pholsena, acting in the name of Prince Souvanna Phouma, moved his government in. The official radio began to rally the country.

A clear statement of policy, announced by radio on New Year's day, called on all nationalities "to unite in the struggle for peace, neutrality, national harmony and unification," which for seven years had been the nation's chief problem. It declared that all nationalities would have equal rights, that "people's freedoms would be respected, all temples protected, all concentration camps abolished, all political prisoners released." The appeal gained point from the fact that these reforms had already been introduced in Sam Neua Province, where the Patriotic Front had been in control since September. There the peasants and tribesmen, who had been forcibly moved by Nosavan's appointees into "protected areas" under military control, were again free to live near their own fields, to travel on the roads and even to exchange rice for salt at the North Viet Nam frontier.

On the same New Year's Day, Pholsena and Prince Souphanouvong joined in a formal invitation to Prince Souvanna Phouma, who had fled to Cambodia in early December, just before the fall of Vientiane, to return and lead his government and army. They reported to him that they held the Plain of Jars, the capitals of the three northern provinces and important posts in many povinces.

These declarations rallied the people of Laos and heartened Phouma. In several localities the troops of the Royal Army, with or without their commanders, went over to the new center. In addition to the Phong Saly garrison, whose commander had declared for Phouma on December 24, some 2,000 soldiers in Sam Neua Province refused to fight the Pathet Lao, deserted their commanders and went over to the other side. On January 4, a prominent Meo Chief named Faydang called on the 100,000 people of his nationality to "unite against foreign aggressors." This was especially important because for more than a year the American CIA had been organizing pro-American groups among the Meo.

"Xieng Khouang can now serve as a base for liberating the entire country," declared Prince Souphanouvong on January 5 to a cheering mass-meeting in the new capital. Heartened by all this, Prince Souvanna Phouma, still in Cambodia, stated in an interview to Reuters that he was still the lawful premier of Laos and that "the Boun Oum committee will not last long, for it does not correspond to the aspirations of the Laotian people."

Repercussions from these New Year's victories were immediate and world-wide. In Vientiane, panic set in. Boun Oum's ministry of information at once claimed that seven Viet Minh battalions had invaded. Washington seized the charge and demanded that the United Nations intervene. President Eisenhower called an emergency conference on January 3 with the Secretaries of State and Defense, the heads of the CIA and the chiefs of staff, and alerted U.S. troops from Thailand to Hawaii. U.S. news agencies announced that the Seventh Fleet was moving nearer to Laos "with paratrooper battalions having atomic capabilities." Washington charged the USSR and North Viet Nam with complicity in the military operations because they had "air-dropped supplies from December 15 to January 2."

None of these charges were taken seriously outside the U.S. The British and French press noted that Moscow had begun its airlift at the request of Phouma when he was the universally recognized premier and had continued it under Phouma's vice-premier, Pholsena, and that it was "hypocritical" for Americans to condemn aid to Phouma, whom many nations still recognized, since America had given far more aid to Nosavan when he openly assaulted a government to which Washington's ambassador was accredited. On January 10, Moscow told Washington flatly that the Boun Oum regime was not a legal government, because it was "the product of foreign intervention."

As for the charges of Viet Minh invaders, a *London Express* correspondent flew from Vientiane to Bangkok to escape the Boun Oum censors, and cabled London that the Boun Oum group had "invented that tale." Later, the Boun Oum ministry of information admitted this. But from that time on, every victory of the patriotic alliance was given in Vientiane as a Viet Minh invasion, and even, at times, as invasion by Chinese and Russian troops, until foreign newsmen laughed at these charges as a joke.

An entertaining result of all these charges was that Washington suddenly realized that the Boun Oum regime, so hastily recognized on December 15, lacked standing in international law. "The first thing to do is to establish the legitimacy of the Boun Oum government," said a press dispatch from Washington in early January. So King Savang Vatthana was flown to Vientiane to summon the national assembly and pass a vote of confidence in Boun Oum weeks after Washington had recognized him. The socialist nations continued to recognize Phouma. Britain and France escaped the dilemma by saying that their ambassadors were "accredited to the king." The people of Laos were not impressed by acts of the assembly, which was known to have been produced by those scandalous April, 1960, elections under Nosavan's control.

The Plain of Jars, which thus became the base from which the patriotic alliance expanded, is a plateau some ten miles wide, at 4,000 feet elevation, surrounded by higher mountains in many of which live Meo tribesmen. We approach by air and see below us a long area overgrown with reddish grass and a few rows of Quonset huts. We land on a short stretch of perforated metal fastened to the earth; from it the plane runs swiftly into grass. Soldiers with bronzed faces under big hats, with vivid scarfs on their necks and red armbands, quickly unload the bags of rice into trucks which rumble away in the dust.

By location, the Plain dominates all northern Laos, commanding the north-south road from Vientiane to Luang Prabang and the east-west road to North Viet Nam. The French colonialists knew its strategic importance: scattered around the hills and in the deep grass of the plain are many old trucks and jeeps left from the defeat of the French army in 1954. There are newer signs of battle—smashed cartridges and shell cases, U.S. machine-gun belts and a discarded U.S. helmet lie in four inches of dust on the edge of a broken road.

Some trophies were worth collecting. A large number of American jeeps and trucks have been shoved into one place and cover at least an acre of land. They include ten-wheeled trucks with the GMC trademark and jeeps bearing the words "U.S. Army car." Not far away is the military post whose large warehouses are full of supplies. Boxes of ammunition piled ceiling-high are marked as shells for mortars "via Bangkok, Thailand." The boxes and the cars also bear the clasped-hands insignia of "U.S. Aid."

The present headquarters is miles away, a long, jolting ride by jeep. We ford several streams and finally stop suddenly between clusters of tall bamboo from which come strains of thin, high music. A path leads down through the brush and brings us to sentries playing bamboo flutes. Beyond them is a tent camouflaged by branches. Inside of it five men in faded unifoms are studying a map laid out on the ground. This, with a dug-out behind, is headquarters.

The five men are the National Military Council, combining the representatives of Prince Phouma and of the Pathet Lao. A rather formal gentleman called Colonel Huyuan wants you to know that he "has nothing in common with Communists" and "is not used to such temporary quarters." He was in charge of the Judge Advocate General's department in Vientiane when "the dollar-inspired invasion" forced him into this new alliance for the sake of the independence of his country.

Here also is Colonel Sigkapo of the Pathet Lao, a man in his fifties experienced in jungle battles. The Pathet Lao has no ranks and no wages but he has been given the title of "colonel" so that he may act on the military council. He has been explaining to Captain Kong Le that one must be patient with the Meo tribesmen.

Captain Kong Le is the third of the group. His men have caught three Meo sharp-shooters who were picking off from ambush the officers riding past in jeeps. The men want to "make an example" by shooting the "bandits." They have learned this from their old-style training. "Kill such a man if you catch him; if you can't catch him, then burn the nearest village, from which he probably comes." The Pathet Lao is a "People's Army" — it has a different method. They explain it to Kong Le; after some argument, he agrees. The three trembling Meo captives are given a short lecture on the unity of the people of Laos, and are then sent back to their village, each with the gift of a kilogram of salt. Salt is precious as gold in these hills.

Not far from headquarters is the village of Phongsavan, with a market place. Here is a medical center, mostly in tents, contributed by the North Viet Nam Red Cross. It is half for civilians and half for soldiers. One of the patients is a Meo sharp-shooter, captured because of a wounded leg. His wife and children have come to stay with him in the hospital, he has also his opium pipe and the hospital has to furnish his daily opium or he won't stay. It seems rather complicated. Ted Brake, the British correspondent, tells us that a Frenchman recently left Phongsavan. His business had been the export of opium which came into the village from the opium growers in the hills and went out to Thailand by small single-engine planes that landed on a special air-strip near the village. The Frenchman told Ted that the planes could also land in open fields in Thailand and hence could carry on illegal import. For four months of the year, after the crop came in, the village was crowded with this traffic, then it went dead till the next season. Nobody made the Fenchman leave. He left because it was clear that the new government would not allow this opium traffic any more.

The village, however, is still crowded. Hundred of people keep coming to offer support, chiefly young people and monks. The monks offer prayers and blessings for peace, the prosperity of Laos and the health of the patriotic leaders. The leaders and the men are all good Buddhists. The troops go into battle with blessings and prayers. hey also wear amulets on their necks as charms. There is a children's class in reading and writing, opened just after the liberation of Xieng Khouang.

Such is the area from which the patriotic victories spread.

The American advisers made plans to retake the Plain of Jars as soon as they knew Nosavan's forces had lost it. "The enemy can strike when and where it pleases from this Plain," said the *N. Y. Times* (January 10), noting that Nosavan was getting forces into position to retake it. On January 13, the *Times* reported that four U.S. planes given to Nosavan "ostensibly for observation," were attacking Kong Le's troops 65 miles north of Vientiane. For several days the *Times* ran columns about Laos, but finally admitted that the northerners were driving south. Many attempts by the pro-American forces to retake the Plain of Jars were not only repulsed but became new victories for the patriotic alliance of the north.

The most important such victory, after the taking of the Plain of Jars itself, was the victory at Xala Phukhun, the main junction where Highway No. 13, between Vientiane and Luang Prabang, meets the east-west road to Viet Nam. The "Voice of Laos" claimed that Nosavan threw in twenty battalions here, including Thai and KMT troops, with modern U.S. equipment, including 18-ton tanks and AT-6 fighting planes. Nosavan's forces, driving north from Vientiane and south from Luang Prabang, reached Xala Phukhun on February 4, and bragged that they would take the Plain of Jars within three days. A month later they were still fighting; they had launched three offensives and all had failed. Then in March some of Nosavan's men began to "cross over" to the patriotic alliance. Kong Le reported that fifty officers and men "crossed over" between March 8 and 10. Xala Phukhun was taken March 10 by the patriotic alliance. Following this, two companies of Nosavan's men, further south in Vang Vieng, also "crossed over" after burning their trucks. Reuters had already noted (March 7) that the northern alliance had "retaken in one week the territory that Nosavan's troops had taken in eight weeks."

The increasing replacement of Laotians by Thai and KMT troops in Nosavan's army was noted by Jean-Emile Vidal in *L'Humanité* (March 13), reporting the fighting in Xala Phukhun. "Entire units of them have come in. We hear commands in the Thai and Chinese languages. This is not so much a civil war as an invasion under American orders with the complicity of Prince Boun Oum."

Vidal also noted that the patriotic alliance grew stronger daily with new volunteers. "Groups of young people arrive, after walking days and nights through jungles. They demand arms to fight the rebels." Vidal was impressed by the admiration felt for the Pathet Lao, even by Kong Le's trained paratroopers. "These men, recruited and trained for 'mopping up' the Pathet, are learning with surprise the wisdom and ethic of a people's army. They learn that the first principle is to protect the people, that they must stop shooting pigs and chickens which they find a short distance from villages, and must pay for things they take. They were not taught this in the American commando schools in Thailand and the Philippines. This new ethic, learned from the Pathet Lao, is transforming the soldiers of the paratroop battalion.

"As for the young peasants who come to join the forces of Kong Le or the Pathet Lao, we have stopped counting them," adds Vidal.

The months of war increasingly exposed to the world the extent of American participation. On January 9, the first 20 Americans had been among the killed and wounded, while prisoners included "dozens of officers and men from Thailand, South Viet Nam and the Philippines." The American press even boasted of participation. Jack Raymond wrote in the *N. Y. Times* (Jan. 8): "Whatever success the Boun Oum government has can be attributed to . . . a special U.S. unit headed by a colorful West Pointer." He named John

Arnold Heintges, a brigadier general, listed in official army registers for the past 22 years, through 1958, who then went to Laos as a "civilian" to help organize the Laotian army.

An air-force lieutenant named Boun Sot "crossed over" to the northern side in late January and gave by radio the story of American aid to Nosavan from as early as August, 1960, only eleven days after Kong Le's coup. Boun Sot had been sent to Bangkok to bring back sixty U.S. army men and ninety tons of ammunition for Nosavan. Three U.S. officers had "worked at Nosavan's side." The U.S. had made a secret agreement to bring in 15,000 troops from outside Laos. Thousands of well armed troops had arrived in Savannakhet in December, including Thais, South Vietnamese, Filipinos and Kuomintang men. The upper officers were all Americans.

The arrival of thousands of KMT troops to join Nosavan's forces was reported by the "Voice of Laos" on February 23. These were part of those KMT remnants that had troubled Burma for eleven years, which the Burmese Army had routed and which Washington had promised to air-lift to Taiwan. Three thousand of them, however, had entered Huoi Sai Province of Laos and been met by Nosavan's chief of staff and the U.S. military attache. These agreed to allow the KMT to establish airfields for further import of supplies and troops. Two battalions already occupied the capital of the province while others had gone to strengthen the KMT units in Luang Prabang. Wherever they went, they plundered raped, burned and killed.

Some of the AT-6 planes given by Washington to Boun Oum were shot down over the northern areas and documents found on dead or captured pilots gave further proof of foreign participation in the war.

One of the clearest revelations came March 13. Three American AT-6 planes flew over a place called Muong Than in Xieng Khouang Province, where they shot off four rockets and strafed villages. Two of them were brought down. The markings on the planes and the documents on the bodies of the crew showed that the planes, U.S. made, were part of the Thailand air-force. The pilots wore regulation Thai airforce uniforms. Vouchers in the pockets of one of them showed that he had filled up with oil at a Thailand airforce field a few days before he flew over Laos to bomb. He had a map showing targets all over northern Laos.

This was foreign aggression in any man's language. It justified the claim of the patriotic alliance that they were defending the independence of their country against invasion by foreign enemies organized by Washington These facts began to penetrate, both to the people of Laos and of the world.

In the last week of February Prince Souvanna Phouma flew into Laos and held a conference with his cabinet, the leaders of the armed forces and the representatives of the Pathet Lao. His government officially congratulated the alliance forces for their victories and declared its intent to "liberate the entire country." He asked for aid from friendly countries and set up a committee to receive it. The two princely brothers issued a joint statement calling for an international conference "to end the armed intervention of the U.S. and its satellites."

Then Prince Phouma returned to Cambodia and soon thereafter set out on an extended tour of foreign nations to explain the situation in Laos and promote the idea of an international conference on Laos.

The demand for such a conference had begun in December. Soon after the fall of Vientiane, the USSR, as one of the two co-chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indo-China, stated that the Geneva Agreements were being grossly violated in Laos and urged that the nations that had made those Agreements in 1954 should be again convened to consider how to establish peace. This idea was endorsed at once by the socialist nations but opposed by Washington. On January 1, the same day that the new patriotic alliance in Laos took the Plain of Jars, Prince Sihanouk, of Cambodia, suggested that the former Geneva Conference be enlarged by including Thailand and South Viet Nam, as neighbors of Laos, and India, Canada and Poland, as members of the International Commission which had been set up by Geneva to enforce the Agreements. The proposal by Sihanouk, quickly endorsed by the socialist and then by the neutral states, was the proposal which Prince Phouma's trip was designed to promote.

Washington objected to such a conference, because any conference would clearly discuss American violation of the Geneva Agreements by seven years of military aid and by the more flagrant recent intervention that had installed the Boun Oum regime. Washington proposed instead that a small commission of three nations, either three neutral neighbors of Laos, or the three members of the International Control Commission, should go to Laos to establish a "cease-fire." That Washington should suggest this was a bit ironical for it was by American pressure on Premier Sananikone that the ICC had been expelled from Laos in 1959, lest it interfere with the U.S. military aid. But now with India already in the Western orbit, Washington saw in this ICC, where India and Canada would make a majority, an instrument to control the Pathet Lao.

So Prince Souvanna Phouma, strengthened by the victories the new alliance was winning in Laos, set out to promote for Laos and for his host, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, the Conference of Fourteen Nations. He flew to Hong Kong in mid-March, thence to Burma, India, the United Arab Republic, France, Britain, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, China and North Viet Nam. Wherever he went, he spoke more bluntly about the facts of life in Laos than he had been known to speak before.

"The poisonous situation in Laos," said Prince Phouma in Calcutta, "is due to foreign intervention."

When asked what nations were intervening, he replied: "The United States, Thailand, South Viet Nam and the Kuomintang on the one side and Russia, which came in later because of the other intervention on the other side." Two days later in New Delhi he qualified his mention of Russia by saying: "There is no direct intervention by Russia; she only sends arms," and added that none of the "Communist nations," Russia, China or North Viet Nam, had sent any armed forces into Laos. On March 27, he stated in an interview to *Le Monde* in Paris: "The foreign intervention comes from the Americans, the Thais and the South Vietnamese. I have no proof of any foreign intervention on the other side, except for some Soviet aid I asked for as head of the legal government. I have not seen a single Vietminh soldier during my stay on the Plain of Jars."

Prince Phouma also made it clear on his tour that no "commission" of three nations could guarantee peace in Laos. They had not the power. Only a conference of major powers could handle the root of the trouble, which was the intervention by the United States.

By the time Prince Phouma returned to Laos and Cambodia at the end of Apil, his tour had been crowned with success. The Conference of Fourteen Nations had been decided upon, the place had been set at Geneva and the date for May 12th.

A press conference by President Kennedy at the end of March threw sharp light on the situation in Laos and, on the the way brought out sharp British and French disagreement with Washington. Kennedy exhibited maps to show "the communist menace in Laos." He charged that the Pathet Lao "had turned since August to a new and greatly intensified military effort."

The *Guardian* in London at once noticed that Kennedy was using "false history" and that it was not the Pathet Lao but Nosavan who began the fighting in August. Kong Le had made a bloodless coup, installing the neutralist premier Souvanna Phouma. Phouma had successfully negotiated peace with the Pathet Lao but it was Nosavan who had launched civil war.

*Le Monde* in Paris criticized Kennedy from a different angle. Kennedy's maps, it said, showed the patriotic alliance holding only the three northern provinces. Actually, said Robert Guillain (March 24), the Pathet Lao, with Kong Le "who has become their ally," hold not only the three northern provinces but "areas all over the country." "In the south, the authority of the cities no longer controls the countryside. The countryside belongs to the Pathet." He added that the Boun Oum regime, even in the south, only controlled "the great north-south highway from Vientiane to Paksane but on al the east-west roads the Pathet is installed."

Washington's only answer to the increasing collapse of Nosavan's forces was to increase American military intervention and military display. At the end of March, 450 new "technicians" arrived in Vientiane to assemble the new helicopters the U.S. had been sending. In north Thailand, a new base was set up at Udorn for "advanced operations." In April, it was announced that American advisers in Laos would put on military uniforms as a new "U.S. Military Aid Group." This was a brazen defiance of the Geneva Agreements of 1954, to which Washington had thus far paid lip service by dressing its military advisers as civilians. At the end of April, barely two weeks before the Geneva Conference was called, Washington sent to Boun Oum six C-150 turbo-prop transports, announcing that these would carry four times what the previous transport planes carried. Officers "crossing over" in April told the Patriotic Alliance: "The Americans have taken complete command of Nosavan's forces. They no longer trust Nosavan's appointees but put their own men in charge, including Thais and Filipinos."

Meantime, "the largest military exercise ever staged under SEATO" was held in the South Seas — "just a jet-hop from troubled

Laos," said the UPI. Manila reported that more than 100 aircraft, 60 warships, 6,000 troops and 20,000 naval personnel from six SEATO countries took part. The U.S. mobilized the airforces of the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea and Thailand in a "flying brothers exercise" at the U.S. Clark Base in the Philippines. The world press noted that Washington was "intensifying its intervention" just before the Geneva Conference.

All over Laos, in March and April people were rallying to support the patriotic war for independence against American intervention. The "Voice of Laos" claimed that 430,000 people had attended patriotic rallies in the past four months. A single meeting in Sam Neua, on March 15, in which Prince Souphanouvong reported the military victories, brought out 10,000 people, one twelfth of the population of the Province. Delegates came from all the minority nationalities, some of them walking seven or eight days to the meeting.

It was soon after this that I myself met Prince Souphanouvong for an evening's interview on the changes in Sam Neua Province, the policies of the Patriotic Front, the military victories and the future plans.

The Prince is a solidly built man and he makes an impression. Bronzed and muscular from outdoor living, with very black hair clipped close, he came briskly into the room in an ordinary civilian tan suit with a tan and red necktie flowing free. His manner was confident and without exaggeration. His words were clear, indicating long experience in politics and battles, and a quick, keen analysis of each new event. He spoke English correctly but slowly, so the talk was mainly in French. But the Prince quickly picked up English questions, and seemed to check carefully his translator's words.

Most of what the Prince said has been used in earlier chapters of this book. Finally we came to the question of the Conference of Nations and Washington's refusal to attend until a "cease-fire" was established and "verified" by the International Commission. What had the Prince to say?

"Why is the United States demanding a 'cease-fire' just now?" he asked. Then, flashing a smile, he continued: "You are a journalist and to you the reason must be clear. Our patriotic forces are winning; the enemy forces are disintegrating. Those who are losing want to negotiate.

"For us it is a big concession to negotiate, for we are winning But since our basic policy is internal peace, we have declared that we are ready for any talks that will help establish peace in Laos. But we want to feel sure that what we are getting is a permanent peace. We think the U.S. wants only temporary cease-fire in which to strengthen their disintegrating forces and prepare for a bigger attack. They use beautiful words but what are their actions? They parachute troops into new areas to widen the war. They bring in new, heavier weapons and helicopters for wider troop transport. They set up new bases in Thailand for quicker invasion. They issue through SEATO the war threats of eight nations. They stage big war manoeuvers off Borneo. The U.S. Fleet keeps close to our borders, uttering threats.

"This is not the spirit of peace that the U.S. shows, but the spirit of invading war. Neither their past actions nor their present actions are directed towards peace. If the beautiful words of President Kennedy about peace and neutrality are sincere, if the Americans really want peace, neutrality, unity and independence in Laos, then we can come to agreement with them. But in view of their actions, we must doubt them and be vigilant.

"In our view," the Prince concluded, "the Conference of Fourteen Nations is the correct and reasonable way."

## CHAPTER VII

# Geneva and Beyond

Floodlights illumined the council chamber as the delegates walked into the Palace of Nations overlooking the Lake of Geneva where so many world conferences are held. Most of the delegates came early as camera-men from all the world snapped pictures. But Dean Rusk, U.S. Secretary of State, stalked right through to his seat at the council table, as if wishing to avoid contact with anyone from China.

Washington, knowing that the conference was bound to produce many attacks on American actions in Laos, had tried to avoid it by manouvers which would take more space than they are worth. The most amusing was a small flurry in mid-April when King Savang of Laos rebuked Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia for having proposed this "humiliating of Laos before foreign powers." Sihanouk promptly withdrew from the Conference with apologies, whereupon everyone, including King Savang, had to beg him to come back.

More serious was the attempt to widen the war by large-scale SEATO action. This was blocked by Britain and France, who, according to Guillain, in *Le Monde*, "told the United States without any politeness that they would not join in military operations in Laos." It was no secret that Britain, France and Cambodia all preferred the pro-Western neutralist government of Prince Souvanna Phouma and blamed the United States for General Nosavan's armed onslaught, the chief result of which had been to force Phouma into alliance with the Pathet Lao. This alliance was now winning so thoroughly that the neutralism all Laotians wanted, which all nations now verbally acclaimed, was likely to be less pro-Western than before.

What finally brought Washington to the conference was, as Prince Souphanouvong had told me, the need of a "cease-fire." Nosavan's pro-American forces were collapsing—they wanted time to reorganize. The patriotic alliance wanted a conference of nations to protect the neutrality of Laos against American intervention. Washington's price for such a conference was that it be preceded by a "cease-fire" verified by the International Control Commission. Since neither side trusted the other, the "cease-fire" and the conference had to be called at about the same time.

This was done with some precision. On April 24, 1961, Great Britain and the USSR, the two co-chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference, sent invitations to fourteen nations to confer in Geneva May 12 on "the settlement of the Laotian question." On the same day, they appealed to all parties in Laos to stop shooting and asked the ICC, whose members were already gathering in New Delhi, to go to Laos to check. Within two days, Captain Kong Le and the Pathet Lao leaders had called for a cease-fire conference in Laos. The Boun Oum group ignored their call but issued a similar one of its own. On May 3, at 8:00 a.m., the shooting stopped on all fronts. By May 11, the ICC had visited all the headquarters and cabled Geneva that a *de facto* cease-fire existed since May 3.

Despite the almost miraculous speed with which the warring sides responded to the call of the two co-chairmen, Dean Rusk who reached Geneva May 10, found reasons to delay the conference four more days. He wanted the "cease-fire" more formal, and he wanted to exclude the Pathet Lao from the Geneva Conference, and accept only Boun Oum delegates to speak for Laos. Since Boun Oum's regime had refused to attend at all, and Thailand and South Viet Nam also delayed, the conference was held up. This petulant action back-fired, for the Western press representatives spent this time at press conferences of China and the Pathet Lao.

Impatient pressures from many nations forced the conference to open May 16, at 6:00 p.m. Prince Sihanouk made the opening speech. Around the table sat representatives of twelve nations: Burma, Cambodia, Canada, the People's Republic of China, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, France, India, Poland, the USSR, Great Britain, the U.S.A. and Laos, which so far had two delegations — from Phouma's government and from the Patriotic Front. Thailand and South Viet Nam were en route. Boun Oum still refused to take part.

Washington's opposition to seating the Pathet Lao also backfired. It caused wide discussion in which the world's press had noted that the Pathet Lao, with Phouma, held two-thirds of Laos, the *West German News Agency* even put it "three-fourths of Laotian territory." Sihanouk had wired from New Delhi en route: It is not possible to have a government in Laos without the Pathet, for it has become the strongest force in Laos." So the Pathet had been seated by general consent.

"It is almost impossible to disguise the magnitude of the defeat the U.S. and its allies have suffered in Laos," said *U.S. News and World Report.* Dean Rusk and the American delegation had the difficult task, not only of disguising this defeat, but of trying to gain in Geneva what they had lost in Laos on the battlefield.

Washington had, in Geneva, an unstable predominance of numbers. Six sided with the West, four were in the socialist bloc, while three were neutrals, any of which might side with the West on specific issues since neither India, Burma or Cambodia wanted to see Communist influence increase. Majority vote did not operate, for all the nations were sovereign and their adherence to any decision could not be compelled. The conference could only proceed by unanimity. A nation could walk out, as the U.S. had done in 1954. It could force a recess by refusing to attend, as the U.S. did several times at this 1961 conference. But there were limits to that kind of behavior. Not even Washington could afford to hold up the conference indefinitely if the others wanted to proceed. It was soon seen that Britain, France and Canada, while supporting Washington generally, were often impatient with Washington's tactics. Only Thailand and South Viet Nam, when they arrived, were willing to be echoes of the U.S.A.

The four socialist delegations supported each other like an efficient team, each taking appropriate part. Gromyko, Foreign Minister of the USSR, gave the two basic proposals for which the socialist camp then fought, and which became their contribution to the final agreement. North Viet Nam gave intimate knowledge of Southeast Asia, and Poland of the ICC. Chen Yi, Foreign Minister of China, with a large delegation, meticulously assembled every weakness in the Western arguments and every fact presented by the delegates from Laos, and welded these together about once each ten days into a block-buster, demolishing Washington's case. He organized his material with such logic, buttressed it with such unassailable facts, and expressed it with such clarity that, point by point, he won the neutral nations and even at times, some support from the West.

This forced Washington into isolation and finally into concessions. Yet, this had to be done so irrefutably as to give Washington no excuse to break away. It was ironical that it was done by the nation which Washington refused to admit existed.

After the opening speech by Prince Sihanouk, the socialist nations made the first move. Chen Yi outlined at the opening session the history of Laos since the 1954 Geneva Ageements, noting that three times a neutralist government under Prince Souvanna Phouma had been overthrown by pressures from Washington. "The question of Laos is not isolated," he declared. "The peace of Southeast Asia is involved." The U.S. had turned Thailand "into its main military base," had "prevented the peaceful reunification of Viet Nam," had armed the remnant KMT troops against the security of Burma, and had subjected Cambodia to sabotage and military menace through "member states of SEATO." He declared SEATO to be "the principal tool of the U.S. for enroaching on the sovereignty of Southeast Asian nations." and hence "the root cause of tension."

The following day Gromyko, for the USSR, made the first concrete proposals. He also noted that "guns would not have started speaking in Laos" had not the United States "organized a revolt against the lawful government," but he quickly passed to the "favorable conditions" that "now exist for peaceful settlement" in that "all nations have expressed consent to restore the status of Laos as a neutral state." The task of this conference is therefore to reach agreement on "respecting the neutrality of Laos." One must distinguish between internal questions and international questions. Internal questions such as the coalition government, the elections, the reorganization of the armed forces, could not be discussed here without "grave interference in internal affairs." But, since Laos had often declared its wish for neutrality, this conference must agree on the international conditions to protect that neutrality.

Gromyko then offered two documents for discussion: a joint "declaration" recognizing and defining the neutrality of Laos, and an "agreement" on the withdrawal of all foreign troops and on the powers of the International Commission in supervising this. The chief point was that all foreign military personnel was to be withdrawn "within thirty days." The entire American military set-up would have to get out.

When Dean Rusk took the platform he would not oppose a "neutral Laos," for President Kennedy had declared that the U.S. "unreservedly supports an independent and neutral Laos." So Rusk defined "neutrality" in a new way. Gromyko and the other speakers has taken the word in its common meaning, i.e., that Laos should join no military alliance and permit no foreign military bases or operations of foreign troops on its soil. Rusk declared that "neutrality must go beyond the classical concept" and must provide "safeguards against subversion from within." This should be done by "strengthening international control." Rusk also suggested that all aid to Laos be given and administered "by an organization of neutral nations."

At once the two Laotian delegations, the socialist nations and some of the neutrals attacked Rusk's proposals. Was Laos not a sovereign state? Of what was Laos guilty that it should be thus deprived of normal sovereignty and made a ward of some international commission, as if incompetent to handle its own affairs? Were foreign powers to control, not only foreign intervention but all the political thinking of Laos, and the sources and uses of all foreign aid?

Thus, at the start the issue was made clear between the two positions. This difference remained and sharpened with the weeks that passed. The aim of the USSR and the socialist states was to remove foreign military bases and personnel from Laos. This meant the U.S. advisers and their thousands of Thai, South Vietnamese and KMT troops. It also meant any Russian, Chinese or North Vietnamese if such were found, but so far none had been proved. It might or might not mean the removal of the French military bases permitted by the 1954 Geneva Agreements; this was a matter of consideration.

Washington's contrary aim was to increase foreign control over Laos through ICC. The aim was not, at first, openly stated. It appeared through actions. For weeks the American delegation tied up the conference with demands for better policing of the "cease-fire" and more equipment and powers for the ICC. Opposing speakers quickly noted that to increase the powers of the ICC before the conference had determined its duties was "putting the cart before the horse." But not until a month had been filled with delays and recess over the ICC, its powers and equipment, did the American delegation present a general program in even partial form.

In mid-June, Averell Harriman, who had replaced Dean Rusk as head of the U.S. delegation, declared that Washington was willing to withdraw all its military personnel from Laos as soon as a proper "system of control" was set up. He outlined what he meant by "proper system" in ten articles, which he added to a protocol submitted earlier by France. These articles were Washington's contribution to the Geneva Conference.

By these articles (*N. Y. Times,* June 21), the ICC was to be given "unrestricted access with its own transportation to any part of Laos," without permission of any Laotian authorities. It was to set up "operating centers" at all major points of entry and the chief communications centers within the country. It was to be given within thirty days full lists of all armed forces, regular and irregular, with their location and equipment. It would freeze the quantity and type of armaments in Laos and the strength of the armed forces. An additional proposal was that all economic aid should be channeled through a committee of neutral nations.

It is hardly surprising that other nations in Geneva saw in these proposals, not the "potection of neutrality" but an "international overlordship." "The U.S. tries to make the ICC a state within a state," said the Soviet press. "Neutrality does not mean international trusteeship," declared Quinin Pholsena on behalf of the Phouma government.

Since the ICC was composed of three nations, which India and Canada would be erpected to side with the West, it appeared that what Harriman really said was: "Washington will withdraw its military personnel as soon as Laos gives India and Canada full control over all the armed forces in the country and also over all economic aid.

Two events from outside broke into the discussions, which should be noted. The first was the "Padong affair," which occurred in the last week of May.

Padong is a village of Meo tribesmen in the mountains of Xieng Khouang Province, important because it has an air-strip that commands the Plain of Jars. Fighting broke out here at the end of May and lasted more than a week. The U.S. Delegation forced a four-day recess in the conference with its demand that the ICC be sent to Padong at once. The delegates from the patriotic alliance of Laos replied that the area was entirely inside their territory that they were protecting the local people against "imported bandits," and that this had nothing to do with the general "cease-fire." The American press, while charging that the Pathet Lao was "breaking the cease-fire" with artillery in Padong, gloated over the "American twin-engine transports, flying daily over pro-Communist territory" and "braving gun-fire to supply 10,000 husky Meo fighters." (AP, May 27.) This was an example of the exultation with which the U.S. press greeted American armed intervention while demanding of everyone else a strict "cease-fire." The terse report of the ICC from Laos that flights over hostile territory were in themselves considered provocation, was not even noticed in the U.S. press.

When the Pathet Lao had finally restored order in Padong, details of the affair were given in Geneva by the delegates from Laos. The Padong area, they said, had been entirely under the Phouma government in Xieng Khouang Province some time before the "cease-fire" was announced on May 3. After the "cease-fire" was in force, the U.S., beginning with May 11, had air-lifted troops, arms and U.S. military personnel to Padong and to several other places far in the rear of the territory of the patriotic alliance. These American-led commandos raided villages, impressed young men into their forces and tried to set up a base in the Padong area. Local villages organized for self-defense and called on the provincial government for help. Help was sent; order was restored. Casualties numbered ten; "10,000 husky Meo fighters" existed only in the U.S. press. Many prisoners had been taken including some American officers.

This report was supported by an AFP dispatch, on May 31, that a U.S. helicopter, carrying U.S. military personnel to Padong, had crashed on landing, killing two U.S. pilots and wounding several members of the U.S. military advisory group, who had been flown to a hospital in Bangkok. The Padong affair had apparently been a CIA operation, an example of the new "guerrilla strategy" announced by Kennedy. By the time it had been discussed in Geneva by Laotian, Russian, Chinese, Polish and North Viet Nam delegates, little was left of Washington's demands for "cease-fire" or even of the reputation of the United States.

As talk about Padong died, Geneva's attention turned to the arrival of Prince Souvanna Phouma and Prince Souphanouvong from Laos. They were met at the airport by most of the delegates and gave a conference to 150 newsmen who commented on their "confident attitude." Prince Phouma claimed that his government was "backed by 90 percent of the people of Laos" but should be enlarged by adding representatives from the two other political forces, the Patriotic Front and the Boun Oum group. He added: "The ICC is useful but should not be supra-national."

The two princes then met with Prince Boun Oum in Zurich, on June 19, in what was afterwards known as the "conference of the three princes." Harriman's proposals, made June 20, lay before them. After barely four days discussion, the princes startled the world by anouncing on June 22 that they had reached agreement on the political program for the future coalition government of Laos and also on the immediate tasks. They signed a joint communique at a ceremony before the national flag of Laos. The Boun Oum delegation then took its seat in the Geneva Conference, which it had refused to attend for seven weeks. The Thailand delegation, which had left the conference two weeks earlier, also returned. The representation at Geneva was complete for the first time.

The joint statement of the three princes became a watershed for the Geneva Conference. From Washington, Dean Rusk noted that the princes rejected the protection of SEATO and replied that SEATO would protect them anyway. A study of the statement showed that the princes rejected more than SEATO. They rejected Harriman's entire plan, though without mentioning his name. They declared that they would form a provisional government with representatives of all three "political forces" and this government would "execute the cease-fire . . . apply democratic liberties . . . realize the unification of the armed forces." It would "demand the withdrawal of all foreign military personnel . . . would not take part in any military alliance . . . nor accept the protection of any military alliance, nor permit any foreign military base . . . or foreign interference in internal affairs." It would "build amicable relations with all countries"—in the first place with "neighbor countries"—and accept "direct and unconditional aid from all countries."

The more Washington studied this statement, the less Washington liked it. The three princes, in the name of the sovereignty of Laos, had taken for the future government of Laos all tasks of the formulation of a cease-fire, the unifying of armed forces, the acceptance of foreign aid and the general definition of neutrality — which Harriman had wished to give to the ICC. They had rejected Harriman's entire system of "controlling Laos."

This, I think, was the real turning-point in Geneva. The three princes of Laos, representing all three political factions, rejected control of the internal affairs and armed forces of Laos by the ICC. Even Prince Boun Oum rejected the control which Harriman demanded. After such rejection, the dominance of Washington over

Laos, lost on the battlefield the previous spring, could not be regained in Geneva.

Washington, of course, did not accept defeat. Harriman flew to Washington, quickly followed by General Nosavan. After conferences with the State Department and the Chiefs of Staff, Nosavan then returned to Laos to strengthen and increase his armed forces and to sabotage what the three princes had proclaimed. Harriman came back to Geneva to continue the battles of diplomacy, which are suited to the rainy season, until the ending of the monsoon in October might permit full use of Nosavan's troops.

When Harriman assured newsmen in early September that "fighting will not resume in Laos after the rains," this was meant to soothe the American people and did. But those who had carefully followed events knew that Harriman's words should be tagged like the fly-leaf of novels: "Any resemblance to any real character or event is unintended and coincidental." The same tag belonged on President Kennedy's statement that he wanted "an independent, neutral Laos," and on Harriman's frequent and comforting assertions that the U.S. was ready to withdraw its military from Laos "as soon as proper control is set up."

Washington had not the slightest intent of permitting "an independent neutral Laos," in the normal meaning of those words. Dean Rusk had defined "neutrality" to include the prevention of "subversion," i.e. thought-control in Laos by a foreign commission. Harriman was demanding powers for the ICC over the armed forces that would enable it to liquidate the Pathet Lao. Every step of the way to an "independent, neutral Laos" was being fought by the Kennedy regime as ruthlessly as it ever was by John Foster Dulles, but with greater flexibility and wider variety of means.

Harriman would not stalk out of the Geneva Conference as Dulles had done in anger in 1954, a move that discredited Washington while permitting the Geneva Conference to proceed. Harriman's method was to put the conference on ice, letting it keep on at a slower pace and in smaller committees, listing his demands for ICC control in a dozen forms with different committees in the hope that, through exhaustion or inadvertence, some of it might get through. Harriman himself flew to Laos and Rangoon to dicker with Boun Oum and Souvanna Phouma on the future government of Laos, while checking on Nosavan's armed strength.

The proposals made by Harriman to Prince Phouma of course "off record," and what pressures or inducements were offered were still more concealed, but the Western press reported without contradiction that, while Harriman still wanted Boun Oum as premier, he "might accept Phouma as premier" if Phouma let Harriman name eight of his sixteen cabinet ministers and kept Pathet Lao out of any important posts. These demands shocked the socialist countries into protests about "infringing the sovereignty of Laos" but were taken in the West as normal Washinton routine.

Prince Phouma flew back to Xieng Khouang and Harriman flew to Vientiane; no agreement had apparently been made. Phouma, in fact, was powerless to agree to such dictation by Washington; none of his supporting strength in Laos would have gone along. Phouma, and Harriman both knew this; Harriman's aim was to weaken, and if possible split, Phouma's alliance with the Patriotic Front. Whatever Phouma did, the demands of the people of Laos for an "independent, neutral Laos," would keep on.

The extent of the victories gained by the patriotic alliance in the previous spring was indicated by a minor technical detail in a mid-September report of the negotiations at Na Mon, in Laos. Both sides had announced "cease-fire" on May 3, and this date had been confirmed as de facto by the ICC. But no formal "cease-fire" agreement had been achieved in four months discussion, because the Nosavan forces tried to put the formal "cease-fire" date back to April 25. They had clearly been badly routed and lost in those eight days much territory which they sought to get back through the talks. They had desperately needed that "cease-fire" to rebuild their strength.

They had done it now, with much aid from Washington. The U.S. military, after years in which their presence in Laos had been camouflaged under civilian titles in deference to the Geneva Agreements of 1954, chose to go on a formal military footing in the very months of the new Geneva Conference, and increased their numbers under the new title "American Military Advisory Aid Group." They used the four months to reorganize General Nosavan's Laotians, to train them in Thailand, to stiffen them with more American and Filipino "advisors," and with soldiers from Thailand, South Viet Nam and the Kuomintang remnants who had come into Laos from Burma, all equipped with greatly improved arms.

Increasing numbers of Thai and KMT troops were reported crossing the Mekong into Laos in August. The *Voice of Laos* complained that more than twenty battalions of Nosavan's troops, including 3,000 Thais and 3,000 KMT men, were now at the various fronts and were "mopping up" villages and making probing attacks into the "liberated areas." The Savannakhet group denied these charges but there was contributory proof. In early September, a warrant officer deserted from Nosavan to the Phouma forces and reported that he had worked in the "Liaison office" in Vientiane, and that this office was run by a U.S. major-general and six U.S. officers as first assistants, plus 13 Thai officers, 16 Filipino officers, five South Vietnamese officers and five KMT officers, all handling the influx of their nationals and transferring them to the different fronts. Most of the troops, he said, passed through Vientiane at night to avoid notice.

The strongest proof of the new build-up was the September 10th military display in Vientiane, announced as the biggest military display ever made by the Royal Laotian Army, at which General Nosavan bragged that his troops were now in position to take back all the territory they had lost the previous spring. This made clear that the largest army ever seen in Laos, the best trained and by far the best equipped, was ready for war at the end of the rains if Washington should give the word. Nosavan added that "once started, the civil war in Laos will become internationalized."

A few days later the Hanoi radio announced that the government of North Viet Nam had agreed to supply Prince Souvanna Phouma with technicians, workmen and materials to build a new capital for Laos at Khang Khay, a small town in Xieng Khouang Province, with good road connections near the airfield on the Plain of Jars. It seemed that the two brother-princes, Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong, both competent engineers, were choosing a new capital for Laos, nearer to the center of the country, closer to its many nationalities, in open hills at 3,500 to 4,000 feet elevation where work could go on efficiently throughout the year even in tropical Laos. It is a good site for national unity and economic development; it is also the best site any capital of Laos ever had for defense against Thailand, for all those lowland capitals along the Mekong—Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Savannakhet—are easily raided from across the river.

It seemed the two engineer-princes had decided that Laos would not let Harriman pick its cabinet ministers but would choose its own path of independence and neutrality, in a capital suited to economic development in peace and defense in war. Soon afterwards it was learned that Prince Boun Oum had agreed to meet them for a conference on a coalition government in a suitable and central site. But many things can yet happen before, or even after, a coalition government is formed.

Will Washington resume war in Laos? Enlarge it, "internationalize" it as Nosavan boasts? It has long been internationalized by the presence of U.S. and Filipino officers. Will these be withdrawn or will war be further internationalized by SEATO intervention, as Nosavan and the premier of Thailand hope? Will it expand even towards a third world war?

Nuclear bombs will not, I think, be used in Laos. They would cause international scandal and have few practical results. Even H-Bombs could get lost in those hills and deep ravines. Laos offers few targets for H-Bombs, as the Kennedy regime has learned about many countries. A Korean type war is not excluded, and might be longer than the war in Korea. If Washington withdraws, it is only to South Viet Nam and Thailand to await developments in Southeast Asia. Even a coalition government under Souvanna Phouma and recognized by Washington, need not prevent the CIA adventures with the Meo tribes or provocatory raids by Thai and South Vietnamese troops. Washington has for eleven years recognized neutralist Burma, yet assists armed provocations and tribal secession movements against her. Will a neutral Laos be exempt?

It is time the American people awoke to the knowledge that for six years their government has subsidized civil war in Laos, has three times overthrown a neutralist premier and that even now, under sweet words of "protecting neutrality," Washington prepares a bigger war which it may or may not unleash, in which Laos might be only a pawn but a pawn Washington does not easily let go.

## CHAPTER VIII

# Washington Has Many Wars

"That Washington crowd is the greatest threat to man's survival that our human race has ever faced," said a well-known British novelist to me in August, 1961, on the beach at Peitaiho. I was startled to hear such sharp judgment from a Briton. Chinese are more restrained. But few people I meet in the Far East or in Southeast Asia would disagree.

Our planet seethes with more than twenty wars already, some smouldering, some flaming. Algeria, the Congo, the Cameroons, Angola, Cuba, Laos, South Viet Nam, Indonesia are only the more conspicuous places where battles have occurred within the year. One should add intermittent wars like the shooting off Quemoy, and unfinished wars where no peace was ever signed, like Germany and Korea. If you take tribal wars, as in Africa, India and Burma, you easily double the count to forty, while the armed gangster battles of the CIA are beyond count. The old order of our world seems in chronic war, like a third-stage syphilis, in which some sores get patched, while others erupt. No one should be surprised at each new war as a startling exception; wars are endemic in this stage of dying imperialism. The difficult task for man's survival is to find ways to bring mankind through this era of chronic war-sickness without letting it flame into worldwide nuclear war.

The United States, as the strongest, richest capitalist nation, is involved in most of these wars, in some directly, in others through agents. Washington's "military aid" to despots who suppress their people, is oil that feeds the war flames all over the earth. This has been true for years. The Kennedy Administration shows already in its first year some new and dangerous characteristics:

1) It is more reckless and extravagant in arming more areas;
2) It produces more kinds of war and more war provocations;
3) It divorces more fully the word from the deed.

John Foster Dulles seems now by contrast conservative. He held that the U.S. could not fight all over the world and since, in his view, the troubles came from the "international Communist conspiracy," his policy was to blame Moscow and "deter" Moscow from starting trouble on the earth. His scheme failed partly because

Moscow also got the Bomb, with perhaps an even better delivery system, but more because the theory was wrong. The Communists aren't making the wars.

Stalin's theory was sounder. Starting from the fact that imperialism is the root cause of war in our present epoch, his last work on *Economic Problems of Socialism* deduced that, despite the cold war clamor, actual wars are most likely to start, not between world capitalism and the Socialist bloc, but between different imperialist nations competing for power and profit, and especially between imperialists and the people they suppress. Mao Tse-tung expressed the same idea to me in Yenan in 1946, as I stated in the first chapter of this book.

These are the wars we are now seeing. Washinton is involved in most of them, for American monopoly capital seeks power and profits all over the earth. Washington fights mainly against the nationalist liberation movements, as in Laos or Cuba. Wherever Washington sends "military aid" to a despot to suppress his people Washington is already promoting a probable civil war which may spread. In the Congo the war that began against Lumumba's nationalism, grew into a complex war of Washington against Belgian, British and French interests for copper. But, so far, though Washington always fights in the name of an "anti-Communist crusade," it has not actually taken on any state of the Soviet bloc.

Washington prefers to fight indirectly, using Asians against Asians, Africans against Africans, Latin Americans against Cuba, and, in a pinch, the United Nations against Koreans and Congolese. This is nothing new in imperialism; it was always the preferred method. It is especially necessary for Washington because we American people are not bred to militarism; we are quickly violent and belligerent, but when we recognize militarism, we are against it. To some extent this is true of all peoples; only by stage-managing can they be led into waging aggressive war. But Germans and Japanese are bred for centuries to respect the warrior and obey him and both these nations have recently lost territory which their ruling class wants back. So Washington develops Germany and Japan as its war-arms, Germany for Europe, Japan for the Far East, and keeps Americans for the present out of the actual preliminaries and actions of war. This, of course, will not last—already the draft of Americans is being increased.

Already under Eisenhower and Dulles, the U.S. piled up more death in more forms than the world ever saw, enough to destroy mankind many times by poisons, germs and nuclear bombs. But nuclear bombs are found quite useless for most of the wars the Kennedy regime expects, which are local wars against nationalist revolutions. So, while keeping and even expanding the nuclear stockpile, Washington plans also for local wars and even guerrilla wars. Three kinds of wars, and all on an extravagant scale! Actually three-and-a-half kinds, if we count those "paramilitary" activities of the CIA which the Pentagon expects to take over and which certainly rate as a half-war. Never in history, not even under Hitler, was so much cash poured out for international armed gangsterism and assassinations and the overthrowing of governments under camouflage, as is today at the disposal of the CIA.

Yet, this vast mechanism of slaughter has an inner weakness which grows even as its power of destruction grows. It must continually deceive the world and especially the American people or they might act to stop it. Long since, it was accepted that politicians make promises which they do not fulfil. Under Kennedy, this divorce of the word from the deed has become a system. Seldom has any government anywhere been so caught in the act, and the denial of the act at the same moment, as was the Kennedy regime in the Cuban invasion. Every increase in means of mass slaughter increases the need for expert lying and increases the vulnerability of Washington to any words of truth. But not until the American people rise up to stop it, can we expect Washington to turn from this ruinous path.

The "big leap" in the war budget which even Eisenhower thought excessive, whereby the Kennedy regime, in an artificial hysteria over Berlin, added over seven billion dollars to war preparations in the first half of 1961, was felt in the Far East as a rush of militarization in Japan, South Korea, Okinawa, Taiwan, South Viet Nam, Thailand and the China Seas. Only half a year earlier, the strong peace movement in Japan turned out over twenty million peace marchers, overthrew Premier Kishi and prevented Eisenhower's visit to Japan. This anti-war movement in Japan was counted on to prevent any dangerous militarization, like that in West Germany, where no such popular peace movement exists.

Offers from Kennedy have changed this picture. It is understood that his talks with Premier Ikeda in early summer of 1961 provided for Japan's militarization on a nuclear basis, for six Japanese ports to be put at the disposal of U.S. nuclear submarines like Polaris, and for a North Pacific Treaty Organization, parallelling SEATO in the South Pacific, with Taiwan and South Korea as members but with Japan as the main force. Japan will be arsenal for wars both in the North and South Pacific Japan's general trade penetration into the South Seas at the expense of France and Britain, will reveive the blessing of American capital.

The advantage to the war parties of both nations is obvious. South Korea and Taiwan have both shown signs of being unstable as bases for Washington against China and the USSR. South Koreans overthrew Syngman Rhee by revolution, and might turn eyes towards reunion with the North to stabilize their very unsound economy. Taiwan, either under Chiang Kai-shek or after his death, might feel the tie with mainland China. Who is more interested in keeping these areas in order than the Japanese militarists who ruled them for decades and would like to control them again? American boys who died to break Japan's rule in the Pacific may turn in their graves or be put to sleep again by the assurance that U.S. capital now holds dominant interests in Japan.

Washington counts on the Japanese people's need for food and foreign markets to chain the strong peace movement by the lure of profitable employment in war industries as the U.S. trade unions were chained. Washington might guess wrong. War interests usually despise and undervalue the people's will and Washington takes little account of the way the Japanese people still feel about Hiroshima or the way the people in Korea and Taiwan still feel about Japanese rule. But economic forces are strong, and the drive for militarization gets impetus from the increased spending of Washington.

Similar militarization advances elsewhere. Okinawa and Taiwan bristle with new modern missiles and echo with "war-games" directed against mainland China. Intrusions by U.S. planes and warships into China's territorial air and waters have also somewhat increased; Peking sends "serious warnings" to the world by radio, and the 172nd "serious warning" of American warlike "intrusion" (since 1958) was issued in mid-September. If Russians or Chinese made similar intrusions every week into American air and waters, they might long since have been taken as cause for war.

Vice-President Lyndon Johnson's well-advertised early summer tour of Southeast Asia poured "military aid" into many lands. Thailand, Washington's base for military intrusion into Laos, Burma and Cambodia, boasted of getting $50 million extra for 1961, this "extra" being more than the total Laos ever got in a year. Thailand at once began organizing 30,000 guerrillas in its northeast provinces opposite Laos, a new force which by itself is bigger than the whole Royal Laotian Army ever was. If Laos falters in accepting Harriman's definition of "neutrality" as letting Washington nominate half the Laotian cabinet, Thailand's premier Sarit Thanarat has long been drunk with dreams of conquering Laos and maybe a bit of Cambodia, as Thailand did in history before.

But how stable is Sarit Thanarat? Or was that Paris commentator right who said in late, 1960 that Boun Oum could not hold Laos unless he got the help of half the Thailand army and if Thailand sent that much of its army, then Thailand would fall! Thailand has "neutralists" too!

The conflict in South Viet Nam has been described by a U.S. correspondent as "the longest war now going on in the world and perhaps the bloodiest." It is a conflict misrepresented in the American press, which paints it as a "communist conspiracy" directed from Hanoi in North Viet Nam, and even supplied by Hanoi with arms and tropos. Actually, it is a seven year-old attempt by Ngo Dinh Diem, one of the world's most unpopular dictators, to subdue the people of South Viet Nam in Washington's interests. The people resist. The conflict grows bloodier because Washington ever more lavishly gives cash and arms to Diem. Hanoi denies any armed participation and despite Diem's frequent charges against Hanoi, no such participation has been proved.

When I myself went to North Viet Nam, in April 1961, I was still influenced by the picture in the U.S. press and wondered just how far Hanoi "intervened" in the South. I imagined that "hit-and-run" raids over the 17th Parallel, the temporary dividing-line set up in 1954, might take place from both sides. I learned, on the contrary, that the Parallel is a double line with a demilitarized zone between, each line patrolled by guards from the opposite side. Hardly a cat could get through. Armed struggles in South Viet Nam do not take place over the Parallel, but all over South Viet Nam, and especially near Saigon, Diem's capital, about as far as possible from Hanoi.

North Vietnamese are indeed deeply involved emotionally in their compatriots' struggle in the South. Even strong men turned away to hide tears when they gave me the estimates that Diem had killed over 77,000 people and jailed or tortured over 527,000 in these seven years. "Every day they cut off somebody's head with an axe. Every day they tear out some peasant's bowels to frighten his neighbors," one man exclaimed with emotion. His own wife and children were in the South and he had not been able to hear from them for years.

There are thousands of such men in the North who came from the South in 1954 in the "regrouping" ordered by the Geneva Agreements, expecting to join their families in a few months, and certainly not later than the 1956 "nationwide elections," decreed by the Geneva Agreements, to reunite the land. At first they could exchange postcards with their families through the International Control Commission, but as Diem's persecutions increased, even a postcard from the North might cause a family's arrest. All contact stopped and now they do not know if their wives and children are alive or dead.

There are also thousands of children whose parents sent them North for safety in the first year of Diem's persecutions, when the ICC still gave help to those who wished to cross the Parallel. Most of them came in Polish ships, arranged by the Polish members of the ICC. They are cared for in special schools. I saw hundreds of fine-looking girls between eight and fourteen years in such a school in Haiphong. I could not ask much about their families for those who were old enough to remember them, at once began to cry.

One girl of fourteen tried to tell me and when she broke down, her teacher gave me the story. She had been eight years old in a Southern village when a neighbor woman ran to say: "Your mother sends word to get on the Polish ship; Diem's police are coming and she is joining your father in the brush." The neighbors helped the girl to the ship, and she has never heard from mother, father or village again. She only knows that her parents are both "resistance fighters" against Diem—if they still live.

One would not be surprised if people, thus suffering, should demand expeditions to "liberate" the South. What is truly surprising is that the Lao Dong (Workers' Communist) Party, passed a resolution in late 1960 that no armed help from the North should be sent. The Lao Dong Party is a Party of both North and South, in which Northern delegates are regularly elected while Southern delegates, now in the North, hold over from elections prior to 1954.

This resolution was passed unanimously at a time when Diem, with American aid, was trying to break up the villages that resisted him, herd the peasants into "resettlement zones" behind barbed wire, bombing and strafing whole areas where peasants refused these deportations. The resolution stated that "the liberation of the South" must be done by the people living in the South, while the task of the people in the North is to build a strong economic base for the prosperity of the future Viet Nam, to be shared with the South when the South wins freedom.

All the men from the South whom I met now in the North were working hard on economic tasks which were planned for future needs of a united Viet Nam. They explained: "The North must not send armed aid, for this would break the Geneva Agreements, which are the international recognition of Viet Nam as a united, sovereign nation. Besides, it would widen war in Southeast Asia which we must never do." They said: "The people in the South are as good fighters as any in the North. They will be able to win free!" They convinced me that the North does not need to intervene.

It was a man from the South who cannot now go home and whose name must not be given lest it endanger his friends and family, who summed up the struggle best for me. "Viet Nam," he said, "is one nation. So have we been for more than a thousand years. In 1945, we made one, united revolution; in 1946, we held one nationwide election, and set up a parliament that chose our President Ho Chi Minh. Under him, we made a united resistance to France for nine years until we won. In 1954, our independence and territorial integrity was recognized in the Geneva Agreements; the 17th Parallel was a temporary line for demobilizing forces and sending the French troops home. The date for a general election for a united government was set for July, 1956, by treaty with France.

"Then America stepped in with Ngo Dinh Diem and took the southern half of our country for a military base and a colony. And now the same people who resisted France resist America.

"In resistance to France, we people of the South were not different from the Northerners. We created many 'liberated areas' into which the French were never able to come. We held four entire provinces along the central coast of Viet Nam, with 150 miles of railway, which in nine years the French were not able to take. We also had strong liberated areas in the delta around Saigon, and in many other places where our local 'People's Power' was supreme. Beside these, we had what were called 'guerrilla areas,' where the French troops came by day but dared not come by night.

"The peasants in the 'liberated areas' were happier, despite the warfare, than ever in their lives before. For even though the French planes sometimes bombed them, yet they elected their own village and country governments, set up schools to teach people to read and write, and made women equal with men. They took a million acres of land from the French and their collaborationists and distributed this land to the poorer peasants. For the first time in their lives these people owned their own land, ate their own rice, created their own government and defense and were free!

"There were perhaps two million people who for five or more years enjoyed such freedom. There were another five million people in the 'guerrilla areas' who enjoyed freedom for shorter times and had to fight for it more. Now Diem comes to subdue such people, to appoint their governors and county chiefs, to persecute all who ever fought for freedom, to take away their lands and give them to his friends or to American bases! Of course they resist!

"We fought the French nine years and now the Americans six years, and we will fight till we get all of Viet Nam free. But it is hard that in all the years of French imperialist suppression the decent people of France never knew about it, and now in the years of the American imperialist suppression, the decent people in America are not allowed to know!"

We saw in our third chapter how Washington installed Ngo Dinh Diem in the dying French puppet government of Bao Dai, financed his rise and then financed South Viet Nam as a separate state. Diem's persecutions of all who had fought against French imperialism began with his first day of power. The struggle at first developed slowly because everyone expected to get rid of Diem by the "nationwide elections" which the Geneva Agreements decreed. When Diem succeeded in cancelling these elections his repressions against the people grew. Not only did he appoint their governors and county chiefs and persecute all opposition but he ordered the seizure of the lands the peasants received in the Resisance, and gave them to his followers or to U.S. bases. The peasants, who for years had tilled the land, resisted this.

By 1959 Diem's plan, made with his U.S. advisers, was to break up the "liberated areas" and resettle the peasants in new places, many of them near the U.S. bases where the peasants might serve as labor power and give logistic help. Diem called these places "prosperity zones" but the peasants called them "concentration camps"; they were surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by troops. It was the technique Japan used to suppress Manchurian peasants and Britain used to suppress revolution in Malaya. When peasants resisted deportation, Diem staged "combined operations" against the rural areas, with regular troops, commandos, armed police, artillery and planes converging to destroy the villages. Two thousand such operations, it was charged, were launched by Diem against the peasants in 1960. Washington supplied the planes, the bombs, the napalm.

These actions aroused resistance not only from peasants. City workers, intellectuals and even capitalists organized and held meetings against Diem. In late 1960, these forces all formed the South Viet Nam National Liberation Front, with a flag, a publishing house and many publications. The flag resembles that of North Viet Nam with the difference that North Viet Nam shows a gold star on a red field, while the Liberation Front has a gold star on a field horizontally divided, red above and blue below. The enthusiasm it aroused was said to be wide.

This flag flies over large areas. It floats over meetings of 20,000 that organize new branches. It is led in demonstrations in which several counties take part. The Liberation Press Agency claims that by September 1961, the number of villages liberated from Diem was 1,100 of the 1,290 villages in South Viet Nam proper (96 percent) and 4,000 of the 4,400 hamlets of South Central Viet Nam (90 percent). Diem, of course, does not accept this. But over large areas, Diem failed to collect more than one third of the taxes in 1960. The Liberation Press claims that more than 11,000 of Diem's civil servants and more than 50,000 of his troops have deserted Diem and "gone over to the people."

Many gruesome details of the tortures and mutilations inflicted by Diem's special commandos on peasants are reported by the Liberation Press which will be omitted here—people in the West would only shudder and not believe. I shall, however, mention the "mass poisoning" at Phu Loi concentration camp near Saigon, in which it was alleged that a 'poison meal' was given to the 6,000 inmates and that 1,000 of them died and hundreds were very sick. The details are circumstantial and North Viet Nam took them seriously enough to ask the ICC to make an investigation, an investigation Diem refused to permit. The Nazis maintained "extermination camps," and Ngo Dinh Diem has as bad a reputation as they.

What kind of demonstrations do peasants make under such conditions? At first the women and children just sat down in the road in front of their village, to keep the trucks and troops from killing the men and deporting the families. Then protest marches took place. Some of these were fired on, but kept marching. On September 29, 1960, for instance, seven thousand peasants went to a provincial capital south of Saigon to protest the deportations. Sympathizers inside the city joined them until 45,000 people converged on the governor's mansion. He dispersed them with troops and with casualties. On the following day, the entire provincial city staged a "market strike" in protest.

A resettlement center was being built on the high plateau, in an area of national minorities. On May 21, 1961, five villages went to the center to demand compensation for the land taken from them for the center, and for the buildings they had owned on the land. Diem's police fired on them, killing five, wounding twenty-two. Thereupon the people from 64 villages turned out in a mammoth demonstration with drums, gongs, liberation flags and placards demanding that Diem resign and that the Americans get out of Viet Nam. Former soldiers who had deserted Diem took part in this march.

Two startling maps are shown in a small pamphlet entitled *July 20*, published by the Liberation Front. One map, entitled *Policy of Terror*, shows 32 "liberated areas" where peasants maintain self-rule in defiance of Diem. They are scattered all over South Viet Nam; they seem to fill the map. Special marking shows "areas especially bombed"; most of the 32 are thus marked. The other map, entitled *South Viet Nam, Base of U.S. Imperialism*, shows 57 military airfields—the French had only six—and 11 naval bases. It also shows a net-work of strategic highways all over South Viet Nam, connecting southern Laos with highways in Thailand, with "agricultural resettlements" near the highways and airfields to furnish labor. What vast sums were spent by the U.S. taxpayers for this strategic net-work to dominate Southeast Asia against its own people and against China! Do American people really want it that way?

The first armed seizure of a provincial capital was announced

September 26, 1961, by the Liberation Press, from which I quote and condense. In a city called Phuoc Vinh, 50 miles northeast of Saigon, the provincial governor, Major Nguyen, was a "famous butcher," discredited not only by "uninterrupted raids against villages" but by "more than one hundred killings by his own hand." The provincial jail was "permanently packed to capacity" and "a new large raid was being prepared."

After midnight towards morning of September 18, "the people's self-defense forces infiltrated" the city, "annihilated 1,700 commandos" and held the city several hours. Among those killed were the governor and vice-governor and the chief and vice-chief of the security police. Some 33 "patriotic detainees" were rescued, including five who had been sentenced to death. "All weapons and military equipment" of the garrison was "captured by the people, including 400 fire-arms, among them being heavy machine-guns and 105mm howitzers, five armored cars recently brought from Malaya and several tons of ammunition from 'U.S. aid.' " "The people's self-defense forces gave medical care to the wounded enemy, who were later released together with the other captured troops." A Diem commando unit, "which tried to encircle the people's forces from outside, was intercepted and routed."

This, of course, is war. It is also the language of war in which a force of commandos can be "annihilated" though many of its individuals are later "realeased" and given "medical care."

Many serious writers in the West realize that Ngo Dinh Diem and his American backers are losing. The British Journal, *The Economist*, stated May 7, 1961, that the Vietnamese peasants had so successfully fought the agricultural resettlement plan that the original plan of the U.S. advisers for 115 settlements had been cut to 85, of which only 42 had been built, and of these the peasants had destroyed 28. Tens of thousands of peasants had freed themselves from these settlements and gone back to their villages, only perhaps to find them destroyed.

Walter Lippman whote in early May, 1961: "Diem still holds cities but all but lost control of the countryside." He added: "Our man is extremely unpopular, being both reactionary and corrupt." Lippman felt that Washington should abandon "the entire Dulles system of protectorates in Southeast Asia," as unnecessary for American defense and prohibitive in financial and moral costs.

It seems incredible, after such comment, that Washington decided to remove, not Diem, but the Vitnamese people. Vice President Johnson rushed to Saigon, made a joint statement with Ngo Diem and agreed to increase military aid apparently without limit. Senator Johnson cheered him on by saying, May 14, that the U.S. "must pay whatever price is necessary to hold South Viet Nam." Diem's regular army already numbered 150,000, and was supplemented by armed militia, civil guards, commandos and special police. The regular troops would now be increased by numbers which grew as they were mentioned, the civil guards were to be trained into "regulars," and by September a total of 370,000 "military effectives" were being contemplated for Diem to command. All educated youth between 23 and 35 were ordered to report within a month for feverish training as officers for this new army. At the same time, the latest weapons were ordered; *Newsweek* revealed, August 14, that the Pentagon would send to South Viet Nam "Some of its latest, most wonderful weapons."

All this was publicized as a "special plan" which President Kennedy himself had approved, with a special high U.S. representative to run it. Guerrilla tactics were now to be pushed. The first new samples arrived in the form of 1,200 Kuomintang soldiers, introduced June 11 by the Voice of America as highly trained "specialists." The Liberation Press reported that they were indeed "specialists" in looting, raping and killing by frightful mutilations. *Time* Magazine said on August 4 that Americans "still think the agrovilles a good idea and agree to finance the construction of at least 115 of them in 1962." "Agrocvilles" are "resettlement camps" which the peasants have been fighting for more than a year. Washington has incredibly decided to remove, not Diem, but the Vietnamese people!

Meantime, under U.S. advice, Diem's troubled regime increases war provocations against North Viet Nam by land, sea and air. Though no proof has yet been given of any armed participation by Hanoi in the conflicts of the South, *Time* magazine, August 4, 1961, exults that U.S. trained guerrillas are being sent through Laos by what *Time* calls "the Ho Chi Minh Trail," to raid villages in North Viet Nam. On august 5, Hanoi officially protested to the International Commission in Saigon that 30 of Diem's patrol boats had intruded into Northern territorial waters where they had quarrelled with fishermen and stolen their boats. Hanoi "urgently requested" the ICC to "correct this." On July 2, a U.S. plane belonging to

South Viet Nam intruded more than 250 miles into North Viet Nam where it was shot down. Documents, objects and testimony of survivors, exhibited in Hanoi July 19, indicated that the plane brought commandos trained by U.S. advisers for guerrilla war in North Viet Nam, on a plan worked out by the U.S. Military Advisory Aid group in Saigon. This is the "guerrilla tactics" for which the Kennedy regime has shown such high enthusiasm.

This is the way America "lost" China. This is the way Harriman is losing in Laos. This is the way Kennedy will lose South Viet Nam. This is the way monopoly capital will lose the world!

All over the earth nations are rising up for liberation – this is the geat drive of our age. Most of them are technically backward; in most of them there are American investments, in most of them Washington seeks bases and offers "military aid." The "aid" goes to a despot, for no patriot sells his country's independence. The despot oppresses the people harder, for they seek more life than profits on investments allow. The people rise up against the despot and he runs to Washington for backing. And Washington is caught in another war–on the losing side.

How often must history prove that a greatly oppressed people will overthrow a despot and a greatly united people can win on their own soil even against superior arms? It was proved in Russia; it was proved in China; it is being proved in Cuba, in Laos, in Viet Nam. It was proved one hundred and ninety years ago in thirteen small colonies that became the American United States. It will be proved many times more!

Will these struggles for national independence and liberation widen to a nuclear war and annihilate mankind? Not unless imperialism wins. If Western imperialism could pile up cheap victories as the Nazi-Fascists did before the Second World War–Ethiopia, the Rhineland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, France, and the Norway sweep–it might gain strength, as Hitler did, to launch war against the socialist states. But today's victories run the other way. The old colonialism is nearly dead and even the new colonialism of cash and violence meets defeat after defeat. Meantime the victories of the rising nations wear down imperialism, which is today's most dangerous source of war. They do not even offer targets for H-bombs. Physically, Havana was a perfect "target," but an H-bomb on Havana would have lost Latin America and shattered the United States!

Man walks today on a knife-edge path between abysses. The USSR will not start the bomb-dropping, having no need, and shunning the retaliation it would bring. The Pentagon will not start it as long as the USSR has equal retaliatory power. The victories of the rising nationalist nations may produce much chaos, but they do not produce H-bombs. As I write these last lines on the last day of September, word comes of the Syrian revolt against Nasser, of Kurdish disorders in Iraq, of Baluba tribesmen in Katanga who fight both Tshombe and the United Nations. I know that to many Western friends this seems an increasing chaos which threatens to engulf mankind. I also know that to all of these nationalist forces – even perhaps to the tribesmen – it seems that they fight, not only for their own liberation but for the peace of the world. I think they are right. Theirs is the "chaos" of emerging life that tangles the dying "order" so that it may not loose the Bomb!

Meantime the new order – unentangled by any need of profit or by any foreign military bases – grows. Chaos is not an end, but a beginning. The end must be world order. Only as one world – the human race – can men go forth into the universe on the new quest that now begins. This unity cannot be built on cash and violence. It must be built on recognition of the sovereign will of even the backward peoples, on friendly aid given without bases and without political conditions. It must take form in a Council of Nations that express mankind in a much fairer proportion than the United Nations has yet done.

Nor can World Unity be dominated by capitalism, which creates division. If the Socialist nations remain strong and united, as I think they will, they may be able to lead humanity over this difficult transition. For this they will need clear vision and unusual restraint. What I have seen of these qualities in China in these years, in which she has been most vilely slandered, has given me personally a faith in the survival of man. Here is no place to reassure the troubled West about China, but only to urge that for their own faith in survival, they understand well before they judge. Washington's worst crime against the human race may be that it has kept China's voice eleven years from the councils of mankind.

How many more wars will Washington fight? As many as the American people permit! The Pentagon sets no limits to the taxes it can spend and young men it can use. Monopoly capital sets no limits to the wars on which it profits. No one can invade the U.S.A. or make it go abroad. But until the American people stop it, Washington will have wars all over the world.

CHAPTER IX

# A War The U.S. Cannot Win

Events in Laos and Viet Nam moved into a new stage in the last months of 1961. This book, already in type, was held for a postscript by the tramp of U.S. soldiers in Saigon streets, by the first American war casualties, by the break-down of the "three princes' conference" in Laos through Boun Oum's refusal to parley, and by all the other events that grew from General Maxwell Taylor's October mission. A widening war threatened to engulf all Indo-China and even all Southeast Asia, a war that would bring untold misery to millions, but which the U.S. cannot win.

Laos was put on ice the last half of the year while Washington gave attention to South Viet Nam, a much better military base from which Laos, if "lost," might be retaken. In Geneva, the representatives of fourteen nations were left to grind on without undue obstruction and painstakingly achieved their Declaration of Neutrality for Laos, and the Protocol to safeguard it internationally in time to recess for Christmas. Lacking were only two items: an agreement from SEATO to refrain from "protecting Laos," and the promised "coalition government" in Laos to which the agreement should apply. This still delayed because Boun Oum and General Nosavan, encouraged by Harriman, continued to demand half the cabinet posts and especially the ministries of defense and internal police. Washington had meantime been building Nosavan's army to an estimated 50,000 men, by far the largest, strongest, and best equipped armed forces Laos had ever seen. These kept in trim by frequent "mopping-up" of villages, provocatory airflights over the northern territory, and even two assaults on the two northern strongholds, Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang. The people of Laos kept hoping that these were mere desultory disorders which the promised "coalition government" would cure.

South Viet Nam meantime needed attention. Though Washington had spent nearly two billion dollars in seven years to make this area into a separate state serving as an American military base in Southeast Asia, this effort, which violated both the 1954 Geneva Agreements and the desires of the Vietnamese, was failing. Even the Western press declared that most of the countryside no longer obeyed Ngo Dinh Diem, America's man. Intervention through SEATO was blocked by the unwillingness of Britain and France to commit troops to what might be a costly, protracted and even unsuccessful war, which even if successful, would advantage only America. Washington therefore sought more direct and forceful intervention, both to bolster Diem's decaying regime and to take control of it, while preparing some new puppet.

As early as April, 1961, President Kennedy and sundry senators were saying that South Viet Nam "must be held at any cost." The cost was clearly reckoned in the wasted billions, and not in the lives of Vietnamese, some 80,000 of which were said to have been wasted by Diem already. Cost in American life must be considered; no American government could easily convert the American people to the casualties of another Korean War, for an aim that interested them as little as the conquest of distant Viet Nam. There were some preliminary warnings that "even U.S. forces might be sent if necessary to prevent South Viet Nam from falling to the Communists." But the intervention was carefully planned to keep American casualties low, with Americans supplying material, "know-how" and direction, but most of the actual fighting done by Asians.

There occurred thus the following sequence. First, a visit by Vice-President Lyndon Johnson in May, then the "Staley Plan" in June, then the work of many "commissions of experts," said to be thirty in all. These led up to the visit of General Maxwell Taylor in October, which was followed by the steady and planned arrival of U.S. armed forces. As each new contingent found its place in the clearly prepared plan, the assurances were repeated that "U.S. forces will not be sent, unless necessary."

Lyndon B. Johnson, landing in Saigon May 11, 1961, brought a letter from President Kennedy which, according to the U.S. press, promised Diem to increase the Vietnamese armed forces with great speed. On May 13, Johnson and Diem signed an "eight-point program," some details of which have been given in the preceding chapter. Diem's "military effectives" were to be increased to 370,000. all educated youths between 23 and 35 to be conscripted as officers of this new army. The Pentagon would send its latest "wonder-weapons" designed for guerrilla war. The Army Engineers would come to build roads, air-strips and other installations. Additional U.S. military personnel would come both to train troops and to share command. This was all announced as a "special plan" which

President Kennedy had personally approved and for the organization of which a new high U.S. special representative would be sent.

Southeast Asians saw this as a new military deal by which Washington took more direct control. As a Cambodian paper put it on August 15: "The Americans are taking into their hands the fate of South Viet Nam."

The most publicized of the many commissions of experts that followed was the "Economic and Financial Mission" under Dr. Eugene B. Staley. It came in June and, after a month's work, presented to President Kennedy, in a report an inch thick, a "plan to pacify South Viet Nam in 18 month." This included, according to the *Washington Post* (Aug. 1), a rapid rise in South Viet Nam's armed forces to a possible 500,000 men. Economic measures included a big increase of those compulsory "resettlements" which the peasants were already fighting. By new techniques, learned from the British concentration camps in Malaya, and by new forms, such as "strategic villages," confined by bamboo fences electrically wired and guarded by watch-towers, Staley expected to move 800,000 peasants to places under control. He also planned a "sanitary belt," a third of a mile wide, along the entire border with Laos and Cambodia, from which all people should be removed, all houses and crops destroyed, to make a "No-man's land" between South Viet Nam and her neighbors. No conqueror in history made a No-man's land so big, but Washington plans on a big scale!

Some of the "wonder-weapons" were reported in *News-Week*, August 21. There are light machine-guns, suited to the small-sized Vietnamese. New types of transport planes can land in farm fields at the front. "Night-vision" devices make it possible to shoot men in jungle darkness. A "microjet rocket," barely an inch long, fired from a plastic tube no bigger than a drinking-straw, has a range of several hundred yards and can pepper an area in clusters.

"The deadliest little weapon I ever saw," enthused *News-Week*'s guerrilla expert. Viet Nam was to become a testing-ground for the Pentagon's fascinating new techniques!

Raids against the peasant population were reported between May and November at almost two per day. The smallest "mopping up" now used a battalion of soldiers; in some cases, fifteen battalions mopped up an area six by nine miles square. The French Journal *Tribune des Nations* reported August 9 that, since the coming of the additional U.S. advisers, "the repression of people's demonstrations has reached unprecedented violence; at the very gates of Saigon the troops fired point blank into a crowd, killing 20 persons." The great Mekong flood which that summer inundated large areas of the delta was used by the Staley Plan operators to force peasants out of the area into concentration camps. New items appeared of peasants clinging to high ground for refuge, who were machine-gunned from the air where they awaited relief.

Economic measures of the Staley Plan such as special taxes were quickly put into effect. It is not clear whether these speeded or merely reflected the economic collapse. "The purchasing power of the people has dropped by half in a single year," reported the *New Delhi Times*, Sept. 24, and added that in some places the price of rice had tripled.

"To intrude into North Viet Nam is also a very good tactic," said a Diem cabinet minister to an AP correspondent, Sept. 11. "We are capable of doing it. Wait and see." We saw in the preceding chapter that already, on July 2, a U.S. plane belonging to Diem was brought down far inside North Viet Nam and was found to be carrying spies and commandos. By the year's end, the *N. Y. Times* correspondent was gloating (Jan. 1) over "increasing effectiveness" of guerrilla activities north and west of Hanoi—in North Viet Nam, near the China border—and saying that "such activity is a function of the U.S. Army Special Forces," and that they had been at it for months. At the same time, Washington was "unofficially warning" Moscow (AP, Dec. 10) that North Viet Nam would be bombed unless it stopped helping the guerrillas in South Viet Nam. North Viet Nam's participation in the conflict was not yet admitted and not clearly proved, but Washington's participation and leading role was advertised. This open brag of already invading a non-belligerent country, combined with a threat to bomb it, shows effrontery surpassing Hitler's.

With this background, General Maxwell D. Taylor arrived in Saigon Oct. 18, as the "high representative" Lyndon Johnson had promised, to organize the "special plan" Kennedy had approved. Taylor was a former U.S. Chief of Staff, commanding the U.S. forces in Korea towards the end of that war, and is now President Kennedy's special military adviser, known as the promoter of the theory of "Regional War" which he would now have a chance to organize. In leaving Washington, he assured the press that the U.S. would be "extremely reluctant" to commit U.S. troops and would do so only "if necessary." His visit to Saigon was prefaced by a conference in Bangkok (Oct. 3-6) of SEATO military advisers, where it was stated that if the U.S. sent troops they would be accompanied by troops from other SEATO countries. Taylor brought with him a "team of 11" high military officers to make a seven-day survey and to plan with precision for the troops and material that should come.

A few hours after Taylor's arrival, the Diem regime declared a "State of Emergency" throughout South Viet Nam, mobilizing the entire army, conscripting all sections of youth and all civil servants, and requisitioning all doctors, chemists and engineers. Six days later, on Taylor's third talk with Diem, the latter gave him a 16-page denunciation, which declared that North Viet Nam was master-minding and directly aiding the entire anti-Diem campaign. This was meant to justify the "State of Emergency" and any other measures that might follow. General Taylor's authority, however, clearly went far beyond Diem, and would supersede Diem if necessary. For Washington already considered other candidates for power, because of the unpopularity of Diem.

General Taylor's arrival was at once seen in all Viet Nam—and in all the world—as beginning a far more serious American intervention, the direct preparation for armed participation in all kinds of war. Protests at once broke out from the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam, and from all the many affiliated organizations, workers, women, intellectuals, religious bodies, peace committees and the like. They were echoed and supplemented by North Viet Nam, by Peking, by Moscow, by many organizations around the world. Little news of them reached the United States. But some of these appeals will go down in history, side by side with speeches, like Lincoln's at Gettysburg, for their eloquent and passionate voicing of the people's hope.

One notes the Appeal addressed by the National Assembly of North Viet Nam, to the Assembly of the United Nations, then sitting in New York, and "to all the parliaments of the world," for its clear call for human rights. One notes the rally of 30,000 people in the public square in Hanoi, which appealed "to people of good-will throughout the world." Those appeals from Viet Nam, both north and south, were more fervent than all the world's appeals to heaven that went out in Christmas week. They were not addressed to heaven but to the world's people, but they were signed by representatives of all religious faiths: Buddhists, Cao-daists, Catholics, Protestants, in both North and South Viet Nam.

I have briefly given, in my *Foreword*, some words from the Peace Committee of South Viet Nam. I must add here a few extracts from the *Manifesto* issued by the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam on the day of General Taylor's arrival because this appeal will be historic in its voicing of a nation's demand. It appealed to the two co-chairmen of the Geneva Agreements, and to the International Control Commission, then sitting impotently in Saigon, to "expel the Taylor mission as illegal aggression." It appealed to the United Nations General Assembly "to condemn the United States for illegal intervention." It said, in part:

"The life of the South Viet Nam people is full of misery. Since the conclusion of the Geneva Agreements in 1954, the U.S.-Diem clique has massacred and tortured the people, poisoning, disemboweling, plucking out eyes and livers. Yet, for years we have struggled by peaceful means for our vital human rights. To these lawful demands Diem replies with guns and guillotines!

"To protect our lives and our families, we people of South Viet Nam were forced to rise up and defend ourselves with knives, with hoes and with weapons captured from the enemy. Unable to suppress the people of South Viet Nam, the U.S.-Diem clique now prepares to intervene with troops from the U.S. and from SEATO. This dreadful venture threatens to make South Viet Nam a shambles; it threatens to expand to North Viet Nam; it threatens Cambodia, Laos and all Southeast Asia.

"The South Viet Nam National Liberation Front calls upon all men and women, governments and organizations of good-will throughout the world, to sternly hold back the dark designs of the U.S. imperialists and their puppet Diem, and compel them to cease from their bloody expansion of war. We solemnly declare that if they do not thus desist, the South Vietnamese people will take all forms of struggle to oppose them and carry on a war of resistance against the aggression until victory . . . We will call for help from all people and governments of the world!

"The demand of the South Vietnamese people is clear: we struggle for national independence, against foreign agression, for freedom, democracy, peace, neutrality and re-unification with full confidence."

The machine of the Pentagon rolled on, taking no notice. The plans of General Taylor were not at once publicized but soon the results began to appear . . . They were noted in later protests by official organs, such as this from Hanoi to the two co-chairmen, at the end of November:

"The U.S. has introduced a contingent of the U.S. Airforce, of hundreds of officers and men and a great number of planes of all kinds: jet planes, bombers, reconnaissance planes, transports and armed helicopters . . . The U.S. Airforce has participated in raids since November 1 . . . The U.S. Airforce makes daily reconnaissance flights over South Viet Nam . . . Many warships of the U.S. 7th Fleet are cruising off our coast . . . U.S. Navy personnel have gone to Cap St. Jacques to prepare further landings of the U.S. 7th Fleet . . . Bases are being readied for fighting units of the U.S. Army, including engineers, signal corps, communications and logistic services . . . U.S. military experts urgently push expansion of air and naval bases and huge radar systems in Saigon and Tourane."

These charges of armed intervention were soon confirmed by boasts in the American press. "Saigon hotels are jammed with U.S. officers of Army, Navy, Airforce and Marines," said *Time* magazine (Nov. 24). "Bien Hoa airfield, 20 miles from Saigon, receives a steady stream of Globemasters that unload tons of electric generators, radar equipment, trucks and Quonset huts. A U.S. ground crew of 200 lives near by in tents to service the planes and take charge of the 24 U.S. transports and fighter-bombers scheduled to come for the South Viet Nam government. Cruising offshore is the U.S.S. Princeton, with 1,300 combat-ready marines.

"In the weeks ahead . . . more and more U.S. activities will become evident as a result of the visit of General Maxwell Taylor."

The arrival of the big helicopters was the event of early December. On Dec. 11, the U.S. cruiser *Core* docked at the foot of a main Saigon street to unload some 40 big troop-carrying helicopters and 400 U.S. soldiers to fly and service them. Correspondents noted that this arrival was not reported to the International Control Commission, whose duty was to prevent all such importations as "illegal," and that officials were embarrassed when asked for comment. But crowds of people came from all over Saigon to watch the helicopters unloaded. They were to remain under U.S. command while rushing Vietnamese troops to far-flung fronts. Casualties, said the correspondents, would doubtless increase.

Through Christmas week, I listened by radio to the first American war casualties, in a shot-down helicopter, in a truck blown up by a landmine. The Pentagon's official releases were still punctilious in calling them not "combat troops" but "combat-supply." But by Jan. 5, all America heard the televised report of NBC correspondent Robinson:

"Like it or not—admit it or not—we are involved in a shooting war in South Viet Nam. We have our airforce in combat operations. Our rangers and special forces are in hand-to-hand combat in jungles and on the delta in Mekong. American troops in battle uniforms fully armed are killing and being killed. American officers are in full command of military operations . . . Our active military participation is on the increase." The South Vietnamese troops of Diem, explained Robinson, were "inefficient or unwilling. Our participation stems from this." He added that U.S. officials in Saigon told him: "We must win this war even if we have to attack military North Viet Nam."

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In Laos, the rising war-fever killed the long-awaited "three princes conference," promised in June in Zurich, and delaying ever since. It collapsed in Christmas week on Boun Oum's flat refusal to parley. Prince Souvanna Phouma, whom the king had asked to form the "coalition government," and Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the Pathet Lao, the strongest political force in Laos, had gone to Vientiane at Boun Oum's invitation and, when he failed to meet them, they called on him to ask when the designated conference would begin. He told them the agreements he had signed in Zurich and Hin Hop were cancelled and there was no use of meeting any more. Washington official comment disowned Boun Oum's action, but the *London Times* commented that Boun Oum would hardly have acted without American approval. Some knowledgeable Americans in Peking thought the American approval and pay might now be coming direct from the U.S. military and the CIA, bypassing the U.S. Embassy, as Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor once bypassed the Japanese ambassador in Washington. But Rewi Alley and I, hearing the news together by radio, were chiefly relieved that Souphanouvong got away from Vientiane without being assassinated. We thought he risked a good deal by going to that city, for

Boun Oum's father betrayed an earlier patriot leader to assassination by the French, and the CIA is strong in Vientiane and boasts proficiency in such deeds.

The warring leaders were back in their own territory; it seemed likely that at least some further test would be made by war. This remains true even if the princes now meet again; as long as Washington manages war in South Viet Nam, this will affect Laos too. This was confirmed by a "high U.S. official," quoted in *U.S. News and World Report* (Jan. 8): "It's clear the Communists are going to have to be fought somewhere if we are going to keep them out of Southeast Asia. It might be better to fight them in Laos than in South Viet Nam." He mentioned the 50,000 troops of General Nosavan, nearly twice as many as before and much better trained and equipped, and added: "We have also a 'fire brigade' of Thais and U.S. troops waiting in Thailand ready to take over Southern Laos."

Thus, the American "high officials" apportion the wars to Southeast Asian nations, sending guerrillas into North Viet Nam, invading and partitioning Laos, without the slightest regard for the will of peoples or for any so-called "international law." Partition would suit Boun Oum, who wants to be king of Southern Laos, instead of only a "prince."

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What is likely to happen now in Southeast Asia? I discussed it on New Year's Day of 1962 with several American "old-timers" who have watched Washington's ways in the East and who saw how America "lost" China. We came up with this:

American imperialism, militarily and economically, is the strongest the world has seen. But internally it is unstable, for it rises in an epoch when imperialism is already discredited, and its rulers cannot even hold their own people except by fantastic deceits. Its peak of world power was in 1950, when Washington was able to take the United Nations into the Korean War under U.S. command. From that time, its power diminished through its conduct of the war and its defeat. Today, America can hardly even take SEATO into Viet Nam.

If American imperialism persists in conducting a war in Viet Nam, its defeat will be worse than in the Korean War. Americans came to Korea fresh from the anti-fascist world victory; they could still convince many Koreans that they came as liberators from the old enemy, Japan. The Vietnamese are under no such delusion; America came as the ally of France, the former suppressor, and continued the suppression, blocking the national unification that Viet Nam won at Geneva. All Vietnamese will combine against American intervention. Already Diem's troops are "unwilling"; this "unwillingness" will grow. Hence, despite the smooth duplicity with which General Taylor slips the troops in gradually, the demand for U.S. combat troops will rise if Washington continues this war.

The Vietnamese will suffer horribly; they will be massacred by thousands. But the Vietnamese will win. First, because they are tough people. They won their independence against Japan and France. South Vietnamese are seasoned by twenty years of war.

American intervention will weld North and South again as they were against France; it will break down whatever compunctions remain in Hanoi. The Vietnamese, united, will call on the people and governments of the world for aid. If they need it, they will get it. Neither Hanoi nor Peking will seek to enter the war for they do not wish to spread it. But Washington already threatens to bomb Hanoi; and China cannot permit Viet Nam to be destroyed. If Americans H-bomb Hanoi, they will lose Southeast Asia by it. If they H-bomb China, they will lose all Asia. Terror is no longer a stable base for power.

Lastly the Vietnamese will win because the American people have no stomach for this fighting; they know in their souls that theirs is an evil and aggressive war. When the Vietnamese call on the world against America's aggression, the American people will begin to press on their leaders to quit. The sooner they do this, the more will they save in Asia some reputation for decency and common sense, and the better their chances will be for future business and friendly relations on the Asian continent.

Whether Communists come to power in Laos, Viet Nam and Southeast Asia, will not be determined by American arms but by the people of Laos, Viet Nam and Southeast Asia. Washington cannot prevent this except by wiping out all the people and to do so is impossible without losing the world. China's wisdom or folly will have more influence on these choices than Kennedy's "special plan" or Taylor's "regional war." For Americans do not belong here, while China has been an influence here for centuries, through handicraft, culture and conquest, in war or peace. Today China has not a single soldier in Southeast Asia; in this Peking shows sense.* China will get further with gifts of rice-transplanters and textile factories than Washington with bombs.

* In fact, China has no soldiers anywhere outside her borders, but I confine my statements here to Southeast Asia because there is no space to take up the Indian border charges by Nehru. Nehru's demands are flimsy and go beyond any border Britain ever had or demanded officially. China has not gone at any time beyond the old traditional border and has at all times stood ready to negotiate but Nehru efuses.