

AGAINST ALL ODDS: THE LAOTIAN FREEDOM FIGHTERS

by General Vang Pao

On behalf of the members of the United Lao National Liberation Front, the Laotian people, and the freedom fighters in Laos, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to The Heritage Foundation for giving me the time to share with you the life of the Laotian people and the Laotian Resistance Forces that are currently struggling inside Laos.

To make the situation and the struggle of the Laotian Resistance more clear, I would like to return to the early 1960s when North Vietnam openly intervened in the Laotian civil war against the Royal Laotian government on the side of the communist Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao was one of the elements created, controlled, and directed by the North Vietnamese. By the mid-1960s, the North Vietnamese had totally taken over the war in Laos, especially in the northeastern part of the country. At that time, three North Vietnamese divisions were sent to attack a Laotian ethnic minority hill-tribe, the Hmong, who live in northeast Laos. Even with these massive forces, the North Vietnamese did not succeed in winning the war. In the early 1970s, realizing they could not win by force, the North Vietnamese finally turned to political sweet talk and promised to bring peace, democracy, and prosperity to the Laotian people. After more than 20 years of war, the Laotians were tired and ready to accept any peaceful solution.

The Laotian people, especially the Hmong, strongly supported the United States throughout the Vietnam War from 1960 to 1975. I was Commander of Military Region Two. At any given time, I had 22,000 soldiers under my command and also about 450,000 civilians. In addition, I was in charge of the ten minority hill-tribes in Laos. My duties at that time were to stop the North Vietnamese from supplying war materials to the Viet Cong in the South by way of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which cut through Laos, and also to rescue downed American pilots. During those 15 years, the North Vietnamese tried to win by force many times, but they did not succeed. In stopping them, I was able to kill many North Vietnamese troops and destroy equipment worth a billion dollars. I lost 17,000 men, almost 10 percent of the total Hmong population. The Hmong sacrificed the most in the war and were the ones who suffered the most.

In January 1973, the Paris Agreement on Vietnam was signed and the Coalition Agreement in Vientiane, Laos was signed in February 1973. These Agreements were supposed to bring democracy, peace, and prosperity to the Laotian people. The U.S. government asked the Lao government to sign the peace treaty. American officials said the U.S. would guarantee the peace treaty, so the Lao government signed it. Unfortunately, the U.S. could not enforce the peace treaty since it called for the complete withdrawal of all foreign troops and advisors.

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Only a few months after the signing of the peace treaty, the Hanoi regime created a new holocaust in Laos by escalating brutalities against the Laotian people. The Hanoi regime rounded up and separated Laotian men from women, husbands from wives, old from young and sent them to different reeducation camps. Laotian women were taken away from their loved ones for the purpose of human reproduction with North Vietnamese men so that the new generation in Laos will be purely Vietnamese. Laotian men were taken away and forced to do heavy and dangerous manual labor. In addition, the Laotian people were poisoned slowly by toxic injections made to look like normal diseases. The Hanoi regime aggressors virtually have emptied Laos of her people through these inhuman terrorist tactics.

The Hanoi regime has also activated a second stage of the Vietnamization program by bringing more than 300,000 Vietnamese citizens to settle in the resource-rich areas of Laos. This is in addition to the 60,000 Vietnamese occupation troops already stationed there.

Since May 1975, more than 400,000 Laotians have fled their homeland by crossing the Mekong River into Thailand. Those who could not escape had no other alternative than to submit to their new master's orders. And for those who refuse to do this by moving deeper into the countryside and resisting the inhuman regime, the North Vietnamese try to find them and crush them completely. For example, in 1976 the Hanoi regime launched a campaign to eliminate the Hmong because they had been strong supporters of the United States during the Vietnam War. The Hmong also refused to submit to Hanoi domination. The Hanoi regime used every angle to cripple the Laotian soul and to crush the will of the people to resist, but unfortunately for them it back-fired. The more Hanoi oppresses, the more the Laotians resist. Consequently, as the days and years go by, the Laotian resistance multiplies ever more quickly.

In 1976, Hanoi again played its dirty tricks by telling their Laotian puppet government under Mr. Kayson to say that the Laotian people were no longer capable of governing their own country. In essence, the puppet government of Laos asked the Hanoi regime to come and help govern Laos. A 25-year contract was signed in order to blind the world community to Hanoi's wily intention of domination.

For the above reasons, the Laotian people are deeply aware that their race is in danger of extermination by a devious and wily imperialism. Now the Laotian people from all ethnic backgrounds are rising up in an unprecedented burst of patriotism to open an all-out struggle against the North Vietnamese occupiers. The Laotian Resistance has called upon all Laotian leaders, inside Laos as well as those who are in resettlement countries, to unite in order to drive the Hanoi invasion troops out of Laos.

In response to the intolerable situation in their homeland and to the call of their people, many Laotian leaders gathered in 1981 to form the United Lao National Liberation Front, the ULNLF. The purpose of ULNLF is to exercise the right of all Laotian people inside and outside of the country to resist the oppression of the Hanoi regime.

The objectives of the United Lao National Liberation Front are:

- 1) To mobilize all Laotian people, inside as well as outside of Laos, to overthrow the puppet regime imposed on the Laotian people by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam;
- 2) To fight the expansionist policy of Socialist Vietnam and its territorial ambitions in Laos and in Southeast Asia;
- 3) To mobilize support of world public opinion in favor of a democratic and peaceful Laos, protected by solid international guarantees;
- 4) To combat Hanoi's regional expansionism by promoting a new structure of stability and peace in Indochina based on the absolute respect of the fundamental national rights of all people living in the region, as stipulated by the Geneva Agreement of 1954 on Indochina, of 1962 on Laos; and of the Paris Agreement of 1973 on Vietnam, and of the 1973 agreement in Vientiane on Laos.

These activities are possible because the Resistance has received so much cooperation from the civilian people and from Pathet Lao nationalists who have come to reject the Hanoi regime. The Laotian Resistance troops have established a large network inside Laos and have been able to attract many former high-ranking Pathet Lao military officers to join the Resistance struggle.

The Laotian people want to remind the American people and the American government, and the world community at large, that Laos is no different from the Cambodian situation. Laos has been oppressed, dominated, and occupied the same way as Cambodia.

The Hanoi regime and its puppet governments in Laos and Cambodia face many troubles: the Lao and Cambodian resistance movements are growing and Hanoi's own economy is crumbling, with an inflation rate running as high as 500 percent and widespread corruption. The Hanoi regime also has been isolated from the world community since its invasion of Laos and Cambodia and its hostility toward neighboring countries. For example, Hanoi has provoked the People's Republic of China by maintaining heavily armed troops along the border and by periodic aggression across the border. In addition, Hanoi has crossed the border into Thailand but was pushed back by the Royal Thai army. Time after time, Hanoi has proved itself to be a war-hungry regime.

But I think it is not yet too late to do something. I am here to plead with the American public and the American government to assist the Laotian people to push the Hanoi invasion forces out of Laos in order to regain our freedom. The Laotian people are sure that with moral, political, and financial support from the world community--especially from the United States, People's Republic of China, France, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, Japan, ASEAN, and other Western allies--the Laotian Resistance will be able to drive the Hanoi invasion troops out of Laos.

In conclusion, this is not a war waiting to happen. This is a struggle going on day after day right now against foreign domination that has been in control since 1975. When the Laotian Coalition government fell, the Resistance effort was limited at first, while some

Laotian citizens waited to see how good or bad the new system would be. When they found out, they began to join the liberation movement. Now the entire country is preparing for revolt against the Hanoi imperialist occupiers.

After eleven years of struggle without any help from the outside world, the Laotian people have proved themselves to be dedicated and committed to the full success of this noble mission. However, assistance is really needed to complete the task. The Laotian Resistance has proved that it deserves to be recognized and to receive enough financial support to fulfill the goal of freeing its homeland.

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