Figure 5. Prince Souphanouvong speaking before the people of Sam Neua in November 1960 (copyright Bao Tang Cach Mang Viet Nam, Hanoi). From left to right: Chao Souk Vongsak, Kaysone Phomvihane, Kong Le and (standing) Prince Souphanouvong.

Vietnam.[89] In March 1961, in a bid to reinforce their position on the battlefield before a ceasefire came into effect, DRV and PL forces 'liberated' Salaphukhun, Kamkent, Laksao and Napo. In April 1961, with the support of 959, the PL took Nhumarath, Mahasay. At this time, Souvanna Phouma and Suphanouvong travelled to Vietnam and signed an agreement allowing them to send Lao officers and technicians to Vietnam for training.[90] On 3 July 1961, Hoang Van Thai, on behalf of the DRV's Ministry of Defence, and 'Kogk', on behalf of the LPRP's Supreme Military Council, signed a protocol to implement, as of 28 April 1961, an accord allowing the DRV to provide military assistance to the PL and the RLG represented by Souvanna Phouma.[91]

89 Bo Quoc Phong, *supra* note 34, at pp 131–133.
90 'Indochina is one battlefield', *supra* note 34.
91 'Indochina is one battlefield', *supra* note 34.

DRV forces did enter Laos during the Lao crisis. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in the crucial battle of Nam Tha. Not only would a victory help expand the neutralist forces' political base, but it would mark a much needed military victory before negotiations in Switzerland opened on the Lao crisis. Doan 959 asked for authorization to organize the attack on Nam Tha in late 1961 and received approval from the Vietnamese Politburo and the Pathet Lao. The PL used several of its best battalions, while Hanoi sent aid and six battalions from the 316th, 305th and 339th brigades. The Vietnamese air force also joined the Soviets in providing vital air transport, flying in almost an entire Vietnamese regiment to participate in the battle. Already in December 1960, the Soviet Air Transport Group had flown the 316th division of Vietnamese volunteer forces into combat in northern Laos and delivered weapons and supplies to the Vietnamese–Lao joint forces. The Soviets parachuted much needed supplies and arms to troops in faraway Laos. As one Vietnamese history put it:

> with the Air Force transporting troops and supplies to them quickly the Lao revolutionary armed forces and Vietnamese volunteer troops quickly expanded their attacks into many different theaters of operations. . .[92]

On 3 May 1962, the PL and the DRV troops attacked the post and took it in the following week. On 11 May 1962, President John F. Kennedy said he was ready to intervene in Laos.

The signing of the 1962 Geneva Accords reassured the Vietnamese that Laos would remain neutral. Most of the DRV's troops and Doan 959 cadres were withdrawn from Laos. The DRV covered itself by secretly leaving behind a handful of ranking cadres assigned to the General Military Commission of the LPRP. Most of the specialists, including Generals Le Chuong and Hoang Sam, returned to Vietnam. Only 49 of Group 959's specialists remained in Laos after the signing of the Geneva Accord on Laos.[93]

By way of conclusion

I have not talked much about how the PL saw their relationship with the Vietnamese during this period. Future research will need to take up

[92] *Lich su khong quan nhan dan Viet Nam (1955–1977)* (1993), Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Hanoi, pp 55–66.

[93] Bo Quoc Phong, *supra* note 34, at pp 145–146.

this important subject. To my knowledge, in contrast to the Vietnamese, the Lao have published very little on the matter, other than an official Lao history and a military history. It is hard to say how ranking and middle-level PL leaders viewed the overwhelming role of the Vietnamese in the building of their political and military structures. While Vietnamese historiography on Laos has lauded Ho Chi Minh's 1953 directives calling on cadres to help the Lao to help themselves and to pay attention to Lao sensibilities, the reality on the ground must have been very different. We get a glimpse of this in talks held in Hanoi between the LPRP and the VWP Central Committees in the difficult days of July 1961. On the Vietnamese side, we find the General Secretary of the Party, Le Duan, and Chu Huy Man, among others. On the Lao side were Kaysone, Souphanouvong, Khamtai, Nouhak and Khamseng, among others. In this meeting, Le Duan told Kaysone that though they had agreed on mutual guidelines and policy, 'there are still some shortcomings'. Le Duan assured his counterpart, however, that Marxism–Leninism was the 'foundation for agreement', although he conceded that it was 'difficult to have complete agreement in the way of looking at concrete problems'. These 'concrete' differences, Le Duan explained, could be solved through discussions and negotiations. Le Duan then looked back at the nature of Lao–Vietnamese relations during the previous years:

> Another shortcoming is that [our cadres] have not helped our friends to *strengthen their own machine*, therefore, they often undertake their work for them; sometimes [our cadres] undertake and finish the work without reporting it. Especially in regards to military matters, [our cadres] fear that if they did not do it, then there would not have been enough time to deal with the enemy. This does not mean that Laos does not keep up with the movement; it is the Vietnamese cadres who have not carried out thoroughly the principles in the relationship between the two countries. […] Reality has clearly proven that each country's revolution must be carried out by that country itself; no matter how active the help from outsiders is, it is still secondary.[94]

In his reply, Kaysone said that since the creation of the Lao People's Party the relationship had been 'very good', and the working relationships 'very close'. He lauded the work of Nguyen Khang, who had worked with the Pathet Lao in Phong Saly and Sam Neua. Since the switch to the armed line, Kaysone felt that sometimes the Vietnamese

[94] 'Excerpts of the content of a meeting in July 1961 between the two Central committee's delegations of the two Parties', in 'Indochina is one battlefield', *supra* note 34.

had undertaken the work instead of the Lao, and had not always paid 'attention to building hardcore cadres' for Laos. He also felt that Vietnamese 'help in building the [Lao] Party is also still weak'.[95] Le Duan explained that Vietnamese help to Laos was considered by the Vietnamese to be an 'internationalist task and also a task of the Vietnamese revolution as well'. He conceded that the two countries and parties were naturally different, but that they could work things out. As he put it in doublespeak:

> Because our two countries are two nations, and two nations mean two parties. Regarding big matters, in the relationship between the two governments, the two parties need to exchange ideas with each other in advance.[96]

Ho Chi Minh appeared next and assured Kaysone that in the 'new situation', it was crucial that they were honest with each other. He called for sincere and comprehensive discussions:

> But the decision is up to the Lao Party because the Lao revolution must be carried out by the Lao people themselves . . . no matter how much the help is, it will be only 10%, self strengthen will be 90%.[97]

In the end, however, the Vietnamese were running the show, and ranking PL leaders must have known it. If Hanoi was indeed sensitive to LPRP concerns, Vietnamese strategic interests and the rapidly unfolding nature of this next war for Indo-China made it hard to let the Laotians go it alone. By early 1963, troops in the Northwest Military Region of Vietnam were preparing to enter the battlefields of Xieng Khouang and the Plain of Jars. War was heating up in southern Vietnam at this time. The Vietnamese were desperately trying to push the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the western side of the Annamese Cordillera in a bid to supply southern Vietnam with arms and men through lower Laos. Moreover, they did not hesitate to enter Laos militarily in order to assure the supplying of southern Vietnam. In such circumstances, it would be hard for Laos, and later Cambodia, to remain neutral in this second war for Vietnam. The Vietnamese too contributed to the destabilization of Laos (and Cambodia).

[95] 'Excerpts of the content of a meeting in July 1961 between the two Central committee's delegations of the two Parties', in 'Indochina is one battlefield', *supra* note 34.
[96] 'Excerpts of the content of a meeting in July 1961 between the two Central committee's delegations of the two Parties', in 'Indochina is one battlefield', *supra* note 34.
[97] 'Excerpts of the content of a meeting in July 1961 between the two Central committee's delegations of the two Parties', in 'Indochina is one battlefield', *supra* note 34.

However, unlike the Khmer Rouge, who rejected all that was Vietnamese and extolled self-sufficiency to an absurd extent (they had no army to speak of), the PL may run the risk in future studies of being judged for having relied too much on the Vietnamese in their drive to take power. In other words, the price to be paid for their coming to power in 1975 was a disproportionate reliance on Vietnamese military, political and organizational techniques. However, compared with the Vietnamese and Chinese communist parties, state structures and armies, the PL remained weak both militarily and politically. In many ways, PL leaders relied on the Vietnamese and their force to stay alive, to build up their forces, their party, their control and, in 1975, to take power in the whole of Laos. On the other hand, communist Vietnam's view of its special role in Indo-China, for both ideological and security reasons, has made it hard for Vietnamese communists to 'let go' of Laos – mentally. This too tells us a lot about the Vietnamese vision of the world outside, their place in it, and about the Vietnamese themselves.