

Observation no: 140

Country-year: 1967

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

While the neutralist party technically came into power after a military counter-coup, the neutralist regime represented by Souvanna Phouma was more of a conciliatory agreement between contesting power factions (including and most importantly the monarchy).¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

While in the middle of a Civil War, a series of military coups in 1959 and 1960 took place swapping various military officers as head of state within Laos.

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

No.

Souvanna Phouma, Prime Minister of Laos in 1967, was an architect and engineer. Though he joined a Laos resistance movement for a period of time, he did not serve in the Laos military.

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?

No.

While there are no formal requirements for military officers to share a particular ethnic or sectarian background, most senior officers come from the majority Lao Loum ethnicity (though there were notable exceptions from ethnic minorities that ascended to leadership positions within their territorial military region).²

¹ Geoffrey C. Gunn, "Laos," in Zakaria Haji Ahmad and Harold Crouch, Eds., *Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pg. 206.

² Geoffrey C. Gunn, "Laos," in Zakaria Haji Ahmad and Harold Crouch, Eds., *Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pg. 206.

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

The Royal Lao military was highly fractionalized by clan, region, and foreign affiliation (pro-U.S., pro-French, pro-Soviet . . .) and displayed no consistent ideological requirement for entry into the senior officer corps.³

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

Party membership during this time period was highly malleable and, though the neutralists technically controlled the government and the military, there was significant shifting of political affiliations within the military based on individual members' background and objectives.⁴

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

No.

I could find no evidence of extensive political education or ideological indoctrination, with the exception of CIA and U.S. military anti-communist training (which seemed to be applied only within certain segments of the military).

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

The Royal Laos military has been used to fight the communists (with U.S. support) since Civil War erupted in 1964.⁵

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

No.

³ Ibid, pg. 208.

⁴ Ibid, pg. 208.

⁵ Martin Stuart-Fox, *A history of Laos*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Despite a short coup in 1964, civilians technically governed Laos from 1962 to 1967 (albeit tenuously).⁶

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

The Royal Laos government, with heavy support from the United States military and CIA, utilized a paramilitary force that conducted clandestine operations against communist forces in the region.⁷

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

I could find no evidence of an internal intelligence apparatus, though the CIA was heavily involved in watching the Lao military.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

I could find no evidence of a purge of the officer corps from 1962-1967; during this time period, Souvanna Phouma attempted to combine the leftist army with the royal army and therefore this period can be characterized more as a period of disarray and confusion within the military order than as a purge of particular officers.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

No.

The factionalized nature of the Lao military did not lend itself to direct civilian and military forum and quite often the civilian government was not able to direct or communicate with commanders of the military regions.⁸

⁶ Gunn, "Laos."

⁷ Gunn, "Laos," pg. 202-203.

⁸ Fred Banfman, "Presidential War in Laos, 1964-1970," in Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy, Eds., *Laos: War and Revolution*, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1970), pg. 225.