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PRISONER EXCHANGE

In a dispatch to this newspaper Henry R. Lieberman has described the Bastille Day exchange of prisoners in Vietnam. The French Union troops, survivors of a "Death March" from Dienhienphu, were, he says, "a ghastly contingent of emaciated, sal-low-faced men, living sacks of bones with festering sores, swollen feet and haunting, glazed eyeballs." Those who could eat wolfed whole loaves of bread ravenously. Many were not able to make the exertion. By contrast, the Vietminh prisoners returned by the French Union were, he says, "healthy-looking specimens" who got aboard the LSM under their own power. Under the guidance of their Communist leaders they refused to accept fresh uniforms and cigarettes and chanted Communist slogans as they went ashore.

The elements in such a story have become, unhappily, all too familiar. They are reminiscent of earlier exchanges, each of which has illustrated that there is a wide and deep gulf between the free and the Communist worlds. It is a gulf in essential behavior. It stems from widely different moral conceptions, chief of which is that concerning the value of human life.

The lot of the prisoner of war is not usually a happy one, but among civilized peoples there is an agreement that it need not and should not be made worse than it is. This is dictated by simple humaneness. The moral person does not cause suffering to others unnecessarily. The humane person seeks to ameliorate, not aggravate, suffering, even in an enemy.

Such concepts have no validity, however, when a dogma such as communism throws away all moral and humane values. It is not enough to say that life is held cheaply in Asia or that one might expect brutal treatment from Tonkinese irregular soldiery. Life is just as valuable in Asia as it is anywhere else, and the Tonkinese have been known for years as an essentially gentle and warm-hearted people. It is the Communist conspiracy, not Asia, that holds life to be of no value. It is the destruction of morals that makes gentle folk into brutes. This is the lesson of the Death Marches and the cruelty to prisoners and we will do well to keep it constantly in mind.

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Thailand Seen Key to Asia Defense

By Arnold C. Brackman

Special to The Christian Science Monitor
Ayutthaya, Thailand

Thailand, strategically centered in the heartland of Southeast Asia, is held by many to be the military pivot today upon which any common defense must turn if Communist encroachment in this region is to be checked.

Any reasonable doubt about Communist aims in this rich region of rice and rubber fades easily when reviewing this country's far-flung frontiers while standing here on the central, rice-growing plain of Thailand, a former capital site just north of Bangkok.

In the north and east is the border with Laos and Cambodia, two of the component states of Indochina. There Communist infiltration, backed by military victories against the French in Vietnam, continues daily. Only six months ago, a Communist-controlled Vietminh force succeeded in briefly entering and holding Thakhek, a Thai-Laos frontier town situated on the famed Mekong River.

Campaign of Terror

In the West, an independent and socialist Burma is in pursuit of remnant Communist bands which have openly waged a campaign of terror for six years in the hopes of overthrowing by violence the democratic government of Prime Minister U Nu.

And in the south, Communist bands from Malaya, forced to flee the country under British military pressure, have tried to take silent refuge inside the southern provinces of Thailand, exhausted by pursuit in Malaya.

Projecting the general situation just a bit further, as viewed from central Thailand, in the far north stands the Chinese Communist colossus with a million men or more on its southern border. And farther south, on troubled Sumatra, one of the keys to the stability of the Indonesian republic, Communist intrigues are disrupting the government's land reform program, hampering estate production and interfering with oil output.

In this disturbing situation, Thailand has today turned to

three basic courses of action to defend its historic position as a free and independent nation.

Mobilization Plans

The first, and most obvious, is to shore up its own defenses from within. The tempo in this direction is steadily increasing, concomitant with a deterioration in the nearby Indochina war situation.

General mobilization plans were completed last December. In recent months, too, Thailand's peacetime army of 45,000 men has been quietly increased to about 65,000 troops. There are now indications that a minimum force of 100,000 well-trained and well-equipped soldiers is the goal for the near future.

In April of this year, for the first time, a volunteer defense organization got under way. Its purpose is to develop a 100,000-strong home guard for local defense. Trained in the use of arms their weapons will be held in readiness at police posts for use in Minute Man style, the familiar guerrilla tactic of the American revolution.

Thailand's police, in essence a miniature army under the Interior Ministry, is also girding itself. This force of about 40,000 men includes, incongruously enough, paratroopers and armored units. One of its functions is border patrol, the Thais wisely keeping their regular army in the rear, thereby avoiding any possible "frontier incidents" with any of their neighbors.

Thailand, with a population of roughly 20,000,000 people, is in no position today to finance this defense by itself. Military hardware has always proven an expensive proposition, especially in these contemporary days of jet power, automatic weapons, and general inflation.

American Weapons

Thus, as a second course of action to maintain its independence and integrity, Thailand has freely turned to the United States for military aid and assistance. This is being carried out at present by a Joint United States Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG).

America is providing both

weapons and expert know-how to build up Thailand's armed

strength into a modern defensive force to deter internal and external threats.

A third course in their defense of sovereignty is strict adherence by the Thais to the spirit and letter of the United Nations. Open Communist aggression in Korea four years ago served notice upon the realistic Thais of future eventualities. Only a United Nations commitment—united action in the truest sense of the word today—can defend Thailand.

Drive for UN Action

The Thais seem to know this. Thus, they were one of the first countries in the world to dispatch troops into Korea after the United Nations entered the fray. Thailand, too, has maintained a strict embargo on the shipment of rice, rubber, tin, and wolfram to Communist China. And Thailand has become the southeast Asian regional headquarters for such United Nations organizations as

Thailand initiated last year the drive to get the United Nations to take action in Indochina. The big powers, alternately, have tried to avoid this move.

France rejected outright last year this type of "interference." The United States, anxious not to disturb a touchy ally, also proved reluctant to back the Thais, although this attitude changed recently at Washington. And in June of this year, after reviving the issue once again, the Soviet Union vetoed the Thai move in the Security Council to get a peace observation team into Southeast Asia.

But the Thais have not given up hope and expect to re-introduce the issue to the General Assembly soon.

Thus Thailand's policy today is based upon a practical marshalling of its own defenses, on American military and financial aid, and on pursuit of a United Nations commitment to defend it against "future eventualities"—a phase commonly employed in this country.



By a Staff Cartographer

Strategic Thailand faces Communist threat from Vietnam (1), and guerrilla infiltration from Malaya (2).

ECAFE, FAO, WHO, UNICEF, and UNESCO.

This may also explain why