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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN THAILAND STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

ARMY review(s) completed.

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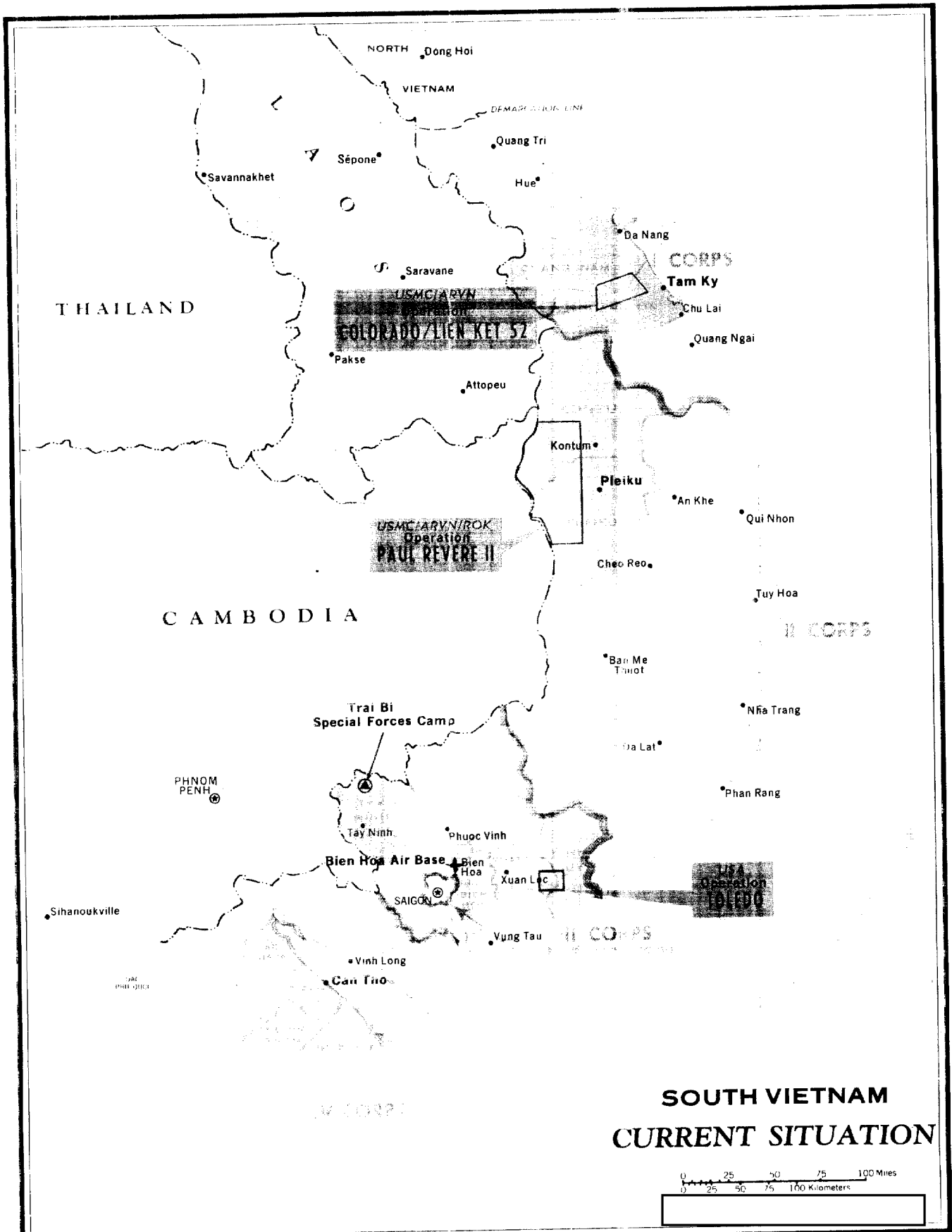
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V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi's difficulties in evacuating a large portion of the populace from the major cities and populated regions are highlighted in a party daily editorial (Paras. 1-4). Diplomatic relations established between North Vietnam and Syria (Para. 5).

ARMY review(s) completed.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. A company of South Korean infantrymen, participating in Operation PAUL REVERE II in the central highland provinces of Kontum and Pleiku, established contact with an estimated company-size enemy force about 30 miles southwest of Pleiku town on 9 August. The Koreans, acting as a flank guard for US troops sweeping the rugged mountain terrain near the Cambodian border, held off the attackers until American armored units were moved in to assist. Artillery and flareship aircraft also supported the six-hour action which resulted in 170 enemy troops killed. Korean casualties were seven killed and 43 wounded.

2. In another action in the same area, one US company supported by tactical air strikes established contact with an undetermined size Viet Cong force. One American was killed and 15 wounded. Communist casualties are unknown. A total of 375 enemy troops have been killed since this operation began on 31 July.

3. One US Marine battalion, participating in joint US - South Vietnamese Operation COLORADO/LIEN KET 52, became heavily engaged today with a Communist force estimated at several battalions. The enemy force, armed with recoilless rifles and mortars, was dug in behind trees, hedges, and bunkers five miles west of Tam Ky in Quang Tin Province. Preliminary reports indicate 15 US Marines have been killed and 78 wounded. Viet Cong losses are not known; however, it is estimated that as many as 150 may have been killed.

4. Three battalions of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade began Operation TOLEDO, a search-and-destroy operation in Long Khanh and Binh Tuy provinces, on 10 August. The headquarters of the 5th Viet Cong Division, its two component regiments--the 274th and the 275th--and a Viet Cong artillery battalion are reported to be in the area, with a

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combined strength of 4,450 men.

5. The Viet Cong attacked the Trai Bi Special Forces Camp in Tay Ninh Province about 65 miles northwest of Saigon yesterday. The two-and-one-half hour action was supported by friendly artillery, tactical air strikes, a flareship, and an armed helicopter. Six South Vietnamese were wounded. Viet Cong casualties are unknown. Trai Bi opened on 24 June 1966 and has been subject to enemy probing attacks in an effort to test the camp's defenses.

6. Elements of a South Vietnamese regiment fought an enemy force of unknown size for two hours yesterday in an area about 30 miles southeast of Saigon in Bien Hoa Province. Four South Vietnamese soldiers were killed and four wounded. Viet Cong losses included 35 killed and three captured.

Attack on South Vietnamese Village by US Aircraft

7. A flight of two US F-100 Supersabre aircraft, under the direction of a forward air controller, today bombed a village about nine miles southwest of Can Tho, as requested by the South Vietnamese province chief. Ordnance expended on the target included CBU antimateriel bomblets, 750-pound general purpose bombs, and 20-mm. ammunition. Approximately 14 hours after the strike, the Tactical Air Control Center at the Bien Hoa Air Base was notified that friendly civilians had been in the area. A total of 15 civilians were killed and 182 wounded. The attack was apparently provoked by two Viet Cong platoons which took over the village and then fired at the forward air controller's light aircraft. The guerrillas reportedly held the villages at gunpoint during the air attack.

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Viet Cong Concerned About Lower Quality of Cadre

8. The Viet Cong in the VC province of Can Tho are reported to be concerned about the lowering of the quality of cadres and party members in the province. Viet Cong Can Tho Province is in the Mekong Delta, and consists of the GVN province of Phong Dinh, and parts of An Giang, Ba Xuyen, and Chuong Thien provinces.

9. In a recently obtained and probably genuine directive, Can Tho's party committee complained of the party cadres' "inability to cope with hardship," and ascribed "the drop in quality...(to) recent heavy recruiting, which resulted in members' putting too much stress on quantity...." The directive stated that "at present we have a number of comrades who have not been able to eradicate their bourgeois mentality.... When the going gets rough, they drag their feet."

10. According to available information, the party waged an intensive recruiting campaign in the delta provinces to offset losses caused by an upgrading in 1965 of hamlet and village cadres for new Main Force units, most of them in III Corps.

11. The apparent deterioration in the quality of cadres in the delta may partially account for the gradually declining fortunes of the Viet Cong there--a phenomenon upon which most American advisers stationed there agree. At least one source, the newly appointed South Vietnamese Army III Corps commander, recently stated his belief that the Viet Cong may move additional troops to IV Corps to attempt to recoup their losses. If the judgments of US advisers on the spot are correct, the Viet Cong position in the delta may continue to decline in the absence of reinforcements.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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that at least seven Chinese foremen of the American-owned Vimytex Textile Plant had received threatening letters from the Viet Cong prior to the 30 July killing of another Chinese foreman. The seven foremen were accused of being United States - Vimytex "lackeys," and were served notice that they would be punished. Li Hsiao, the man slain on 30 July, had received a similar letter in March of this year. All of the foremen who received letters are described as pro-management and instrumental in preventing Communist-inspired strikes in the plant.

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two other Vimytex foremen received letters which, in addition to personal threats, contained the claim that Li Hsiao had been killed by the "People's Armed Forces," a clear reference to the Viet Cong. The parents of the two foremen also received Chinese-language versions of the "black hand" letters which contain internal characteristics suggestive of collaboration by Chinese Communist elements.

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Prime Minister Ky to the Philippines

3. Prime Minister Ky, currently on a good-will visit to the Philippines, indicated to reporters in Manila that he was not ruling out a course of winning the war by carrying out "a true social revolution in the South to build a free and prosperous South Vietnam." However, he explained that as a military man, he was more favorably inclined toward a fast military action, a course which would presumably include invasion of North Vietnam. Ky's statement was intended to represent a retrenchment of his position of a few weeks ago when he appeared to favor invasion of the North to bring about a quick military end to the war. Ky also stated that he welcomed Philippine President Marcos' recent call for an All-Asian conference to resolve the Vietnam war.

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4. Ky was received at the airport in Manila by President Marcos, and a crowd estimated at about 300 persons. Minor anti-Ky picketing was reported around the airport terminal, as well by some 40 Philippine students at the presidential palace when Ky arrived there to attend an official dinner in his honor.

Election Notes

5. The Central Election Review Council--the final authority on approving assembly candidates--has apparently finished its screening of 42 appeals, 23 submitted to it by local boards, 18 by individual candidates, and one by an individual voter. Preliminary reports indicate that a total of 739 candidates may be competing for the 108 seats in the national constitutional assembly in the 11 September election. Final posting of candidate lists will be on 12 August.

6. The Central Council in its screening task appears to have been fair in dealing with the cases it examined. Tran Van Tuyen, often a critic of the present government and the elections, has stated that he believes that the council did a "fair and reasonable job." In the various categories, the council rejected candidacies of three military aspirants and accepted three others; it also rejected the candidacies of two civil servants and accepted a similar number. Of the seven persons who were challenged on the basis of nonfulfillment of military service (draft), five were accepted as candidates and two were rejected. In the most controversial category, that of challenges based on political unsuitability, six were accepted and six rejected.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The difficulties faced by the Hanoi regime in implementing its program of evacuating a large portion of the urban population and creating some semblance of normal life among the displaced people were highlighted in a 7 August editorial in the party daily Nhan Dan. Stripped of its propaganda content, the editorial also revealed the regime's concern over possible civilian casualties resulting from the intensified US air strikes and strongly advised that civil defense measures including evacuation, building shelters, and relocating and reorganizing production facilities be undertaken "satisfactorily and urgently."

2. In the larger cities and populated regions, the paper argued that evacuation must be further accelerated in order to reduce human and material loss to the enemy. Possibly reflecting difficulties encountered in previous evacuation plans, the editorial insisted that evacuation must be positively planned, closely led, and that educational mobilization with concrete measures on organization, administration, and economy be undertaken.

3. To counter popular resistance to resettlement which has been evident during the past year, the paper called for the development in the evacuees of a "spirit of overcoming difficulty" and the promotion of a "spirit of unity and mutual assistance among the people in the resettlement areas." To preserve the "lasting character" of the evacuation, Nhan Dan proposed that the resettled people be restricted from returning to their old homes and that they be made to undertake productive tasks in the new areas as quickly as possible so that they might "adapt to the new circumstances."

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4. Outside of evacuation, the editorial pointed out that the "foremost, important work in preventing and fighting the enemy" was digging shelters and communications trenches and strongly recommended that "we should engage in production and carry out work only after there are sufficient shelters and communications trenches." All these efforts, Nhan Dan claimed in closing, were directed not only toward protecting the populace but "to create more conditions for fighting and achieving victories."

5. A North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry communiqué on 9 August announced that on 21 July the DRV Government and the government of Syria agreed to establish diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level. This announcement was the culmination of several months of effort by Hanoi to gain recognition from the new, leftist-leaning Syrian Government which has also recently recognized the North Korean regime. The establishment of a diplomatic post in Damascus brings to seven the number of nonbloc nations recognizing North Vietnam at the ambassadorial level. Hanoi's only other representation in the Arab world had been in the UAR following the closing of an economic and cultural post in Iraq several months ago.

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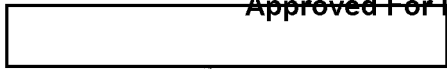
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN THAILAND: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
11 August 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM*

Communist Insurgency in Thailand:
Strengths and Weaknesses

Summary

The growth of the Communist movement in Thailand over the past two years has raised the specter of another protracted insurgent struggle in Southeast Asia. At the present time, however, the balance sheet in Thailand does not appear to favor the insurgents. An essentially stable socioeconomic situation and a long history of independent nationhood are key factors militating against Communist efforts to win popular support in the countryside. In addition, the military oligarchy in Bangkok, after a slow start, is now coming to grips with the insurgent problem and its counteroperations are gathering momentum.

Nonetheless there are soft spots in the Thai internal situation which have favored the Communists and which could prove to be increasingly troublesome over the long haul. Despite the important progress which has been made, there are still substantial underdeveloped and isolated areas which provide favorable ground for the Communists. The government's political machinery throughout the country remains extremely weak, and the military oligarchy does not appear to appreciate the contribution that government-backed political movements could make in fighting the insurgents.

In Bangkok, the Thanom-Praphat government is enjoying its third year of stable rule, but serious factional infighting, during which the counterinsurgency

*Prepared by the Directorate of Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates.

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effort would almost certainly suffer, could flare up with little warning. The present government's greatest weakness in meeting the insurgent challenge, however, is simply that it does not command substantial popular support.

The Communist movement in Thailand is still in the embryonic stage, despite the increasing number of insurgent incidents. It does not, for example, yet exhibit the tight discipline and effective structure that is characteristic of Communist organizations in the neighboring countries. The Communists also suffer from a severe shortage of experienced and dedicated cadres, which has limited their ability to expand into new areas. Despite these weaknesses, the insurgents are likely to step up recruiting, propaganda, and terrorism in the coming months.

In the final analysis, the insurgency will be limited less by the action of the Bangkok government than by the fundamental strength of the Thai nation.

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Internal Situation: Strength and Weakness

1. No country in Southeast Asia seems, on the surface, in a better position than Thailand to withstand the pressures of Communist terrorism and subversion. A combination of good fortune and astute leadership has, to a great extent, saved Thailand from the common economic and political maladies that plague its neighbors. Thailand's most tangible asset is its fundamental economic well-being--adequate land and no serious land tenure problem. Furthermore, spared colonization by a Western power, the Thais exhibit few of the anti-Western biases of other Asian peoples, and do not automatically give a sympathetic ear to arguments that the US represents a new "imperialist" menace.

2. Thailand also has significant political assets. For one thing, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences are not paramount issues in the political life of the country, although they do exist. The few elements--Malay-Muslims in the four southern provinces, and Shan, Karen, and small tribal groups in the west and north--who are not in the mainstream of Thai communal life could not provide the basis for a Communist take-over. Moreover, Thailand, an independent political entity since the 13th century, has grown accustomed to running its own affairs. Its sense of independence and nationhood rests not on Western ideas, but rather on its own experience and history. A sense of Thai nationality affects the thinking of the great majority of the population, even in the traditionally isolated and long-mistreated northeast.

3. The coterie of high-ranking military officers who have ruled Thailand since 1932 has provided general internal stability, continuity in foreign policy, and unusually competent economic guidance. Autocratic without being despotic, conservative without being reactionary, the ruling oligarchy has held a firm grip on the governmental apparatus while avoiding the doctrinaire mistakes and crippling mismanagement which have been prevalent in other Southeast Asian countries.

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4. Despite its over-all strengths, however, Thailand does have significant problems and weaknesses which make it somewhat vulnerable to a Communist-led insurgency movement. Despite rapid economic progress, the country is still substantially underdeveloped. Large areas in the north, northeast, and south of Thailand remain physically isolated from Bangkok. Within these areas, communication is poor, the road system rudimentary. There are also deficiencies in the governmental apparatus which hamper counterinsurgency activities. The police, a key element in the security picture, have been underpaid and undersupported by an unsympathetic and politically jealous army leadership in Bangkok. Police units have been forced to live off the peasantry, leaving in their wake distrust and ill will toward the government.

5. The political structure in the countryside has been equally weak. Largely ignored by Bangkok, lacking good local leadership and adequate financial and moral support, some provinces in the northeast have been run in the past as the personal satrapies of provincial officials. Below the provincial and district level, government machinery is almost nonexistent. The relative ease with which the subversives have been able to establish themselves in some areas, and their ability to bring blocks of remote villages under their control, suggest that the monthly visit of district officers or the selection of headmen in individual villages is no substitute for a permanent and coherent governmental presence. Bangkok's neglect and the absence of any government-inspired political movement have left the Thai farmer in a state of political ignorance. His identification with the government is nonexistent, his nationalist sentiments unexploited.

6. This political passivity suited the leaders in Bangkok well enough until the Communists began "educating" and--most importantly--organizing in the countryside. Even then, however, the oligarchy did not face the issue squarely. Its inclination was to assume that economic development would ensure resistance to Communist blandishments. If more roads were built, if more wells were dug, if, in short, the government did things for the people, they would be loyal.

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7. But the results of centuries of economic neglect could not be corrected overnight. Moreover, the assumption that relief of economic deprivation is the key to counterinsurgency is open to some question in Thailand. The Communists have made some of their most significant gains in the northeast in areas where the economic situation is relatively good. While the well-meaning military leadership organized and deployed development and propaganda units into the countryside, while it brought village leaders into the capital to get acquainted, the Communists were busy doing what Bangkok failed to do. They went into the villages and organized at the grass-roots level. They set up a series of bogus labor, farmer, and youth fronts designed to appeal to groups that had never received systematic attention from the government. This was a slow business, and not always very successful, but the Communists made the effort. They understood, moreover, what the government apparently did not: that people could be motivated by ideas, that an ideology could be a very persuasive force in controlling people.

8. There are several areas of potential instability and political dissidence that could seriously affect Thailand's ability to meet the insurgent threat. Although the military oligarchy has experienced several years free of serious factional infighting, the present government's stability rests on an alliance maintained by Prime Minister Thanom and Deputy Prime Minister Praphat. Both men have quietly isolated and reduced the power of rival generals, but rivalries and jealousies among the military leaders are still important and there is no institutional framework for an orderly transfer of power. The coup as a device for political change in Bangkok has not been exercised for nine years, but it would be a mistake to assume that it has passed from the Thai scene. The death of Thanom or Praphat, the emergence of significant policy or personality differences among the top leaders, or a grab for power by junior officers could inaugurate a protracted period of political dislocation during which the counterinsurgency effort would inevitably suffer.

9. Another potential source of political unrest involves civilian groups which are not satisfied with the present government. Although the articulation of political opinion in Thailand has been discouraged by

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the government, there seems to be a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the military establishment and its reluctance to prepare the way for orderly political change. This attitude is especially prevalent among intellectual and student groups in the capital. The dissatisfaction probably also reflects the influence of a somewhat left-of-center civilian political movement which has competed unsuccessfully with the military establishment since the 1932 revolution. Although the military government pays lip service to notions of political representation and popular consent, it has grown accustomed to running things without interference. The oligarchy's unwillingness to promote an institutional framework for a more democratic political structure--a "new" constitution which provides for free elections has been in the writing for eight years--reflects its insensitivity to the need to develop broader popular support and participation.

The Developing Insurgency

10. The Communists opened their campaign in the northeast, and on a smaller scale in the south of Thailand, in the early part of 1964. By the end of the year, and coincident with stepped-up propaganda from Peking, Hanoi, and the clandestine Voice of the Thai People, politically inspired murders were being carried out by the insurgents in Nakhon Phanom Province. The assassinations were the keystone of the Communist effort to build and extend small and isolated bases in the northeast. Specifically targeted against police informants, the murders were meant to strengthen the security of the subversive operation by limiting the intelligence available to the government. At the same time, by intimidating villagers and government representatives alike, by impressing the villagers with the strength of the insurgents and the impotence of the government's security apparatus, the Communists hoped to create a favorable psychological climate for the extension of their influence.

11. This tangible evidence that the Communists were active in the countryside, coupled with the scare propaganda out of Peking and Hanoi, motivated Bangkok to mount its first major sweep operation in early February 1965. Inadequately planned and poorly

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executed, the operation was most noteworthy in underlining deficiencies that must be overcome before a suppression campaign could be effective. In mid-1965, government security forces began for the first time to mount businesslike patrols and security sweeps in isolated areas. These sweeps precipitated a series of small skirmishes as security forces began to flush the insurgents from their camps. Although these clashes did little more than keep the insurgents off balance, they did convince Bangkok that the subversive threat was important enough to warrant restructuring the counterinsurgency apparatus.

12. The insurgents, however, were also busy. There was a step-up in the assassination of government officials in Nakhon Phanom Province and an upsurge in other insurgent activity there. Moreover, by mid-1965 the insurgency was spreading into adjacent provinces. Much of the increase in insurgent activity was actually a response to stepped-up government sweeps which not only led to an increasing number of contacts between government and insurgent forces, but also caused the Communists to conduct more terrorism against villagers who had assisted the government. The insurgents may also have concluded that, for reasons of morale and tactics, they had to take some of the initiative from the government. In late 1965, the insurgents mounted their first small attacks against government armed police forces. These fledgling efforts were followed up in 1966 by a series of better planned and executed attacks against police patrols and, for the first time, against Thai Army regulars.

13. Despite the increasing number and size of insurgent attacks, however, the initiative is still the government's. In some ways, moreover, the insurgents may be in a weaker position today than they were a year ago. Their tenuous hold on the population has been seriously weakened by the increased government physical presence in isolated areas. In addition, the Communist internal apparatus has probably been severely disrupted by the capture of small but critical numbers of cadre.

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Other Insurgent Problems

14. The Communist movement in Thailand is still in an embryonic stage despite the bellicose statements out of Peking and Hanoi and the increasing number of incidents in the south and northeast of the country. This can be seen in the movement's apparent lack of adequate command structure and professionalism, both of which are highly developed in the Communist movements of neighboring countries. The Communists apparently have not yet developed a mechanism for coordinating activities in the field with what appears to be the central party leadership in Bangkok.

Moreover, insurgent bands in separated areas are not yet working in unison, although some liaison among them does occur.

15. The Communists also suffer from a severe shortage of experienced and dedicated cadre. Not only has this limited their ability to expand into new areas, but important functions such as weapons training are neglected because competent instructors are not available. One remedy, of course, would be an input of non-Thai cadres, and there have been reports that the insurgents in the northeast were expecting help from "Vietnamese friends" in early 1965. There has been no subsequent information, however, to indicate whether such help was received, or whether the Vietnamese were to come from North Vietnam or from the Vietnamese community located in the northeast. Non-Thai cadres could provide technical assistance, but they would be less useful in performing political work. A better solution would be to train more Thai cadres, and there is some evidence that an increasing number of Thai are being sent to Communist China and North Vietnam.

16. Another significant weakness of the Thai insurgency movement is that the Communists have thus far been unable to generate large-scale popular support for

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their cause. One reason is poor motivation and lack of ideological fervor, even among the cadres. [REDACTED]

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17. The insurgents do appear to have an adequate source of supplies to meet their current needs. To speak of "infiltration routes" in the present Thai insurgency context, as various Thai leaders have done, is to reveal either a faulty appreciation of the dimension and nature of the insurgency or a callous opportunism. At this stage in their development and probably over the next several years, the insurgents have no need of significant outside material assistance. The insurgents have experienced some shortages in training manuals and propaganda materials, but these can be either produced locally or brought in with a minimum of difficulty. The Communists are also emphasizing the utility of locally acquired weapons. Cadres have been trained in Communist China in the use of US weapons, and the brisk traffic in US weapons across the Mekong from Laos could provide the insurgents with a significant source of arms.

Prospects

18. Despite significant weaknesses the insurgents are likely to step up recruiting, propaganda, and terrorism in the coming months. They will also continue to resist government security sweeps, and an increase in Communist-initiated attacks is probable as the insurgents attempt to take the initiative from the government.

19. Peking and Hanoi view the Thai insurgency in the wider context of their Southeast Asian policies, and they may substantially increase support for the Thai insurgents in the coming months to demonstrate the risks which cooperation with the US entails. Such support would probably involve training more Thais and providing financial and material assistance, but North

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Vietnamese cadre might also be introduced to improve the guerrilla capability of the insurgents.

20. The Communists' success in extending their areas of influence, however, will depend to a great extent on the government countereffort. US-supported programs initiated over the past several years are beginning to bear fruit. Better trained police recruits are taking their places in field units. Improved communications, feeder roads, and an expanded use of helicopters are opening the countryside to quick reaction by government forces.

21. The government in Bangkok, moreover, is for the first time genuinely aroused to the insurgent threat. Effective measures have been taken to get the counterinsurgency effort on a professional footing, even though the realities of Thai politics continue to impede a truly integrated effort among various police and military units. The military oligarchy also is becoming more sensitive to the political aspects of the insurgency problem, but progress here continues to be slow. In the final analysis, the insurgency will probably be limited less by the action of the Bangkok government than by the fundamental strength of the Thai nation.

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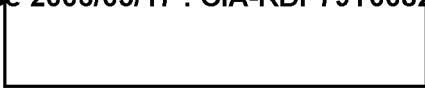
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11 August 1966

The Memo on the Communist Insurgency in Thailand:

1. This paper discusses the Thai insurgency question from a perspective which emphasizes the importance of the Thai internal situation in meeting the Communist challenge. The memorandum treats materials and developments beyond the scope of recent NIE on the same subject.

2. The memorandum points out:

a. the key role played by the relatively stable Thai internal situation in combatting the insurgents;

b. Thailand's many assets which diminish the threat of a strong insurgent movement;

c. the neglect of the countryside by the ruling military oligarchy and deficiencies in the government's machinery and performance, which could prove troublesome in coping with the insurgents;

d. the Communists will continue to make some gains, but are not likely to pose a serious threat to government control over significant areas in the near future.

3. It is recommended that this memorandum be given routine internal and external dissemination.



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