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THAILAND LOOKS FOR NEW APPROACH TO INSURGENCY PROBLEM

The Thai Army may temporarily discontinue its sweep operations against Communist-led guerrillas in the north.

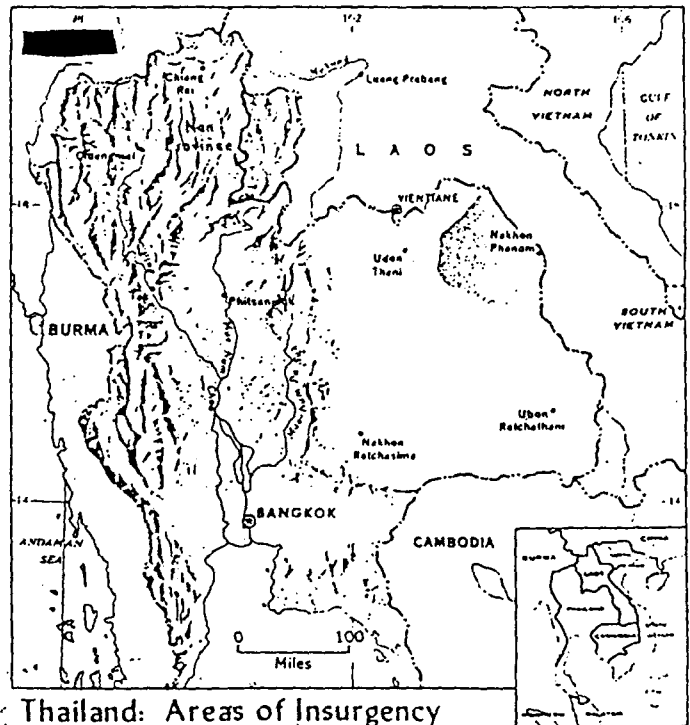
Senior army leaders have admitted to US officials that little progress has been made against the small but effective insurgent bands in Nan Province, and that they are reluctant to continue operations in the face of mounting government casualties. The estimated 200 guerrillas there have inflicted some 250 casualties on government forces since December.

The army leaders have also acknowledged that their efforts to deny the guerrillas a popular base by forcefully relocating tribespeople and destroying villages have exacerbated tribal tensions and may have opened the way for further Communist gains. Earlier reports indicated that many tribesmen had joined the insurgents rather than go to government resettlement areas.

The government now is seeking new approaches to the security problem in the north. Thai troops in the area will receive US Special Forces training and additional helicopters will be deployed to ease the severe mobility and logistics problem. In addition, Bangkok plans to develop a hill tribe security

force and to increase its assistance to tribal refugees. Thai officials are also trying to persuade the commanders of the Chinese Nationalist irregulars to settle their forces in the affected area.

Bangkok's reappraisal of the security problem is clearly overdue and these measures, if fully implemented, will enable the government to cope with the situation more effectively. A more far-reaching solution to the Communist threat in the north, however, would require a comprehensive government program of economic and social assistance to



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bridge the gap with the tribal people. As yet, there is no indication that Bangkok is willing to move in this direction.

Meanwhile, Communist activity in the northeast remains at a low level. Armed propaganda meetings, the major vehicle used by the insurgents for village-level recruitment, have almost completely ended, and harassment of government forces is also de-

clining. The eight-month decline in Communist activity in the northeast appears to represent a tactical response to the government's stepped-up security operations. There is no indication that the insurgents have been dealt a crippling blow, however, and it is probable that they are attempting to build up their village-level organization before taking the initiative again.