

Soul-searching in Seoul

South Koreans generally are unhappy at the prospect of reduced US involvement in Asia and what this could mean for Korea. The Seoul government in the past has attempted to alleviate this concern by adamantly opposing any reduction of US troops in South Korea. Although the issue remains a highly charged one, there are tentative signs that the Pak regime now is beginning to adjust to a prospective cutback in US troop strength in the country, which presently stands at about 57,000 men.

Recent government-inspired press commentary suggests that President Pak may be adopting a more flexible line. An editorial in the government-owned Seoul *Sinmun* linked US troop withdrawal to assurances of "automatic" US intervention in the event of an armed attack from the Communist North, to the modernization of South Korean forces, and to US financing for the construction of a Korean small-arms factory. Other leading newspapers subsequently adopted a similar line. The English-language *Korea Times* carried

a long article emphasizing the need to build up South Korea's forces to compensate for any drop in US troop strength.

Prospects are, however, that any shifting of gears by Seoul on the troop issue will be reluctant and protracted. Pak can be expected to bargain hard for every US soldier taken out of Korea and to attempt to delay a cutback as long as possible. Recurring incidents such as last week's seizure of a South Korean patrol craft by the North Koreans will be used by Pak to strengthen his bargaining hand. Such incidents also provide the opposition an opportunity to accuse the President of neglecting the nation's security, a charge Pak wants to avoid in his campaign for re-election next year. For example, in an obvious ploy following this latest incident, Pak claimed that any reduction in US troop strength could invite a North Korean "miscalculation" that might lead to another war. ~~(CONFIDENTIAL, NO FOREIGN DISSEM)~~

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NOTE

Communist China: There is mounting evidence that selected chiefs of mission have been recalled to Peking for high-level consultations. The Chinese chargé to Burma returned last week, and the Chinese ambassadors to Pakistan, Sweden, France, and Romania returned apparently within the last two weeks. These consultations undoubtedly have been called to bring China's key representatives abroad up to date on developments in Indochina and to provide policy guidance; the envoys will probably also be instructed to follow up on Peking's recent diplomatic and propaganda offensive in Indochina. The meetings are bound to include briefings on broader foreign-policy topics. The gathering almost certainly does not mean that the Chinese are about to alter their strategy in Indochina. Rather, it is another good indication that Peking intends to press what it considers its current advantage in the situation. ~~(CONFIDENTIAL)~~

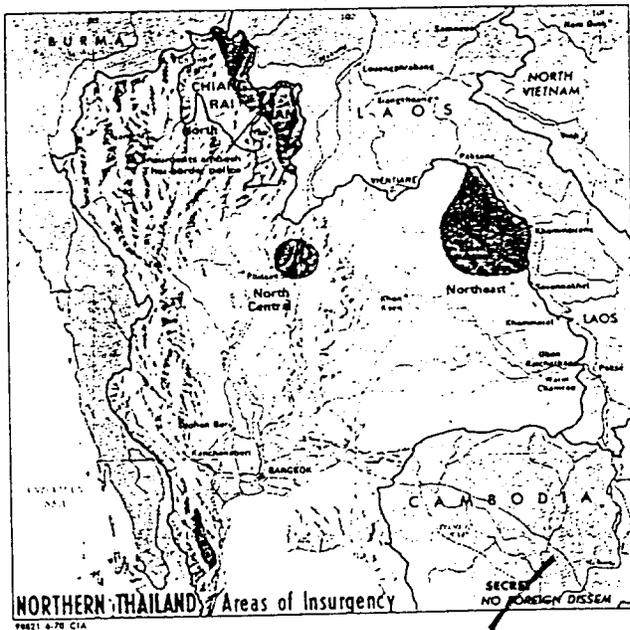
Thailand: *Insurgents Sock it to 'Em*

Government operations to dislodge tribal insurgents from traditional border strongholds in the north are meeting stiff resistance. The insurgents ambushed a road-construction crew operating in Nan Province near the Lao border late last month, killing five highway workers as well as five members of a border-police platoon providing security for the mission. Additional casualties were suffered when government forces subsequently attempted to recover abandoned equipment. The action occurred in the general area where the Communists thwarted an army sweep operation in early April, inflicting numerous casualties and destroying or damaging several helicopters.

The tough insurgent response to government efforts to re-establish a presence in this area is

further testament to the high value the Communists place on this sector, which they regard as "liberated" territory. By contrast, the government's performance, both here and elsewhere in the north—particularly in troubled Chiang Rai Province—is evidence that Bangkok continues to underestimate Communist strength and that it is not committing the necessary military resources to contain the insurgent threat.

The insurgents are also having some fresh success in the northeast, where their fortunes had been on the decline for the past two years. Assassinations, armed propaganda meetings, and other indicators of bolder insurgent activity have risen substantially in the past few months. More importantly, the Communists appear to be making some progress in strengthening their village support base, one of the primary objectives the insurgents set for themselves at their annual strategy sessions earlier this year.



Bangkok has taken other actions that could give the insurgents more freedom to maneuver. Some Thai army elements that had been playing a major role in combating the Communists in the northeast have reportedly been pulled out of counterinsurgency operations because of developments in neighboring Laos. In addition, recent Communist military advances in northern and western Cambodia are likely to deepen Thai concern for the security of its border provinces. Thai nationals of Cambodian origin are to be trained and sent to Cambodia. The over-all counterinsurgency program might suffer if the government becomes more deeply involved in aiding Cambodia. (~~SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~)