

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Northeast Thailand

1. The nine provinces of northeast Thailand have long been a problem to the Bangkok government. Economic backwardness, geographic isolation, cultural and ethnic ties to Laos, and Bangkok's historically weak authority in the region, have provided fertile ground for Communist subversion.

2. Communist activity in the northeast has been noted since the end of World War II. It has been confined largely to recruitment, training and propaganda, and conducted on a relatively modest scale. An increase in the tempo of activity coincident with Communist gains in Laos, was noted in 1961, but stepped up government countermeasures, including widespread arrests, helped to keep it in check.

3. In the past few months, however, there have been indications pointing to the possibility of an increase in Communist subversion. These include the appearance of relatively sophisticated propaganda material, the surfacing of a new Communist front organization called the Thai Independence Movement, and an apparent increase in terrorism.

4. Communist propaganda and recruitment in the northeast is targeted at ethnic minorities including the Vietnamese community of some 40,000 and various tribal groups with close ties to Laos. Propaganda has sought to exploit the population's traditional animosity toward the central government and local functionaries, particularly the police. It has played upon latent separatist sentiment, holding out the prospect of reunification with Laos.

5. The principal Communist propaganda effort has been through the clandestine radio Voice of the Thai People. Since early 1962 the Voice has been broadcasting five daily programs from transmitters located along the Laos-North Vietnam border. The basic theme is anti-American. The "US-Thanom" clique is blamed for the northeast's poverty and for the corruption of local officials.

6. On 8 December 1964 the Voice announced the formation of the Thai Independence Movement. A manifesto of the new movement, calling for the withdrawal of US forces in Thailand, the overthrow of the Thanom government and the establishment of a neutralist regime, was carried by Communist China's New China News Agency (NCNA) five days later. Hanoi radio also took note of the new front.

7. The formation of a Communist front is not in itself unusual. There have been at least 15 front organizations reported operating in the country since 1960. Some of these have had apparently little more than paper substance. Some, such as the short-lived Thai Neutralist Movement, have put out propaganda remarkably similar to the "manifesto" of the new Thai Independence Movement. There is no evidence that the new movement has any organization in place in Thailand.

8. The attention Peiping and Hanoi have given to the latest front is unusual, however. The reason for this is not known. It may be part of an effort to unite the various fronts under one banner in anticipation of the promulgation of a new Thai constitution, scheduled for later this year, which might provide for early elections. It may signal, however, a new Communist subversion effort.

9. The formation of the Thai Independence Movement coincides with a reported step-up in Communist activity in the Northeast. Three apparently politically inspired assassinations in late 1964 punctuated a Communist campaign against government civic action programs.

10. The recrudescence of Communist activity appears to be largely limited to Nakhon Phanom Province, across from Thakhek in Laos. This province has long

been a center of antigovernment sentiment and activity. Unconfirmed reports indicate that there are as many as 200 guerrillas located in the hills of the province. Most of the guerrillas are reported to be members of the Soh tribe, a Lao ethnic group with a long history of disaffection. Government sweeps have failed to flush out any of the guerrillas and so far the dissidents have refrained from overt insurgent activity. A Mobile Development Unit has made scant progress in winning the loyalty of the disaffected population.

12. In the final analysis, the tempo and direction of subversion depends on Communist intentions. So far, the Communists have kept the northeast on the back burner, while husbanding their resources and building for the future. Any change in Communist strategy will almost certainly be related to the developing situation in the primary target areas of today, South Vietnam and Laos.