

THAI OPERATIONS AGAINST INSURGENTS HAVE MIXED RESULTS

Communist insurgents in the critical northeast area apparently are being hard pressed by army operations.

Despite some monthly variations, statistical indicators show that over-all Communist activity in the northeast has levelled off well below the highs established in early 1967. In addition, defectors and captured documents reveal that army sweeps have forced insurgent bands to move out of base areas, have disrupted their supply sources, and have undermined insurgent morale. One high-level Communist document, for example, has revealed that long-standing problems of leadership and recruitment are being severely aggravated by government operations.

The picture in the northeast is not entirely favorable, however. Although army operations have put strains on the Communists, the guerrilla bands are still intact, their casualties have been low, and they are still able to avoid contact with superior government forces. In addition, one unforeseen consequence of the government's military operations appears to be that the Communists are making a greater effort to remedy their organizational weakness in the villages.

The government's village security program recently received a sharp setback when the police refused to sign a US-sponsored

agreement providing for the training and arming of villagers.

The government, meanwhile, still has its hands full with tribal insurgents in the northern provinces. In recent weeks, the guerrillas have become more aggressive and for the first time have struck army truck convoys. Although the northeast remains the key area for the Communists, it is increasingly clear that the north has also become a major target.

Bangkok may also be faced with a growing problem from the activities of the Malaysian Communist guerrillas based in southern Thailand. On 17 June guerrillas ambushed a Malaysian police unit across the border and killed 16 policemen. Kuala Lumpur now is seeking greater cooperation from Bangkok in improving joint border security operations. In response to a Malaysian request, senior officials of the two countries are meeting this week in Kuala Lumpur to discuss more effective tactics.

Bangkok is expected to respond to Malaysia's request by increasing security forces in the area while avoiding the politically sensitive issue of independent Malaysian operations on Thai soil. Should the guerrillas step up their cross-border activities, however, the Thai will come under increasing Malaysian pressure to overcome their complacency toward this security problem.