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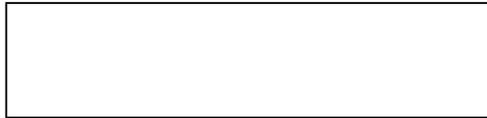
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MEMORANDUM FOR: Special Group (CI) Assistants

SUBJECT: Subversion in Thailand

FROM: Special Group Officer - CIA

There is attached a recent memorandum prepared by CIA's Office of National Estimates entitled, "The Threat of Communist Subversion in Thailand." In anticipation of the Group's consideration of Thailand at its 23 September meeting this memorandum may contain useful background information for Group Principals and Assistants.



Attachment:

ONE Special Memorandum No. 22-65, "The Threat of Communist Subversion in Thailand", 10 September 1965



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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: AUG 2007

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

10 September 1965

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 22-65

SUBJECT: The Threat of Communist Subversion in Thailand

SUMMARY

Thailand's chief vulnerability to Communist subversion lies in the northeast region, which borders on Laos. The Chinese have recently increased their efforts to encourage dissidence among poorly integrated minorities in this region, and the level of dissident activity, although still very low, has risen somewhat. Bangkok is responding with more vigorous security measures and efforts to remove economic grievances. The chances are good that the government will be able to stay abreast of the likely increase in Communist subversion. The outlook in Thailand would alter greatly, however, if the Communists achieved definitive victory in Laos or South Vietnam.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present Thai government is steadier and stronger than appeared likely at the time of Marshal Sarit's death in December 1963. Unlike South Vietnam, Thailand has long been a national entity and has a tradition of independence; it has never been colonized. The popularity of the King and Queen, the religious unity of the country, the relative prosperity of the economy, and the personal standing of Prime Minister Thanom combined with the ruthless strength of Deputy Prime Minister Praphat contribute to this stability. For these reasons, the country as a whole is less vulnerable to subversion than other parts of Southeast Asia.

2. On the other hand, the Thai government has long had problems in certain outlying regions, particularly the northeast region adjacent to Laos: ethnic diversities, chronically depressed areas, and insufficient rapport with the central government. These weaknesses offer opportunities for Communist exploitation.

II. THE COMMUNIST THREAT

3. Indigenous Communist groups in Thailand are small, illegal, and generally ineffective. Their activities inside Thailand are well below the level of active insurgency at this time. The North Vietnamese and Communist Chinese have been stirring up discontent in the northeast area for nearly a decade with only very limited success.

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4. The Chinese Communists are now beginning further steps, however, and their leaders have stated that guerrilla activities may spread to Thailand during 1965. Peking apparently now believes that the time is ripe for increasing its propaganda and subversive effort against the Thai government. In November 1964, the founding of the "Thailand Independence Movement" (TIM) was announced by the clandestine "Voice of Free Thailand" radio (located in Laos); and in January 1965 the "Thai Patriotic Front" (TPF) was similarly established. Subsequently, Peking announced the formation of various front organizations representing teachers, lawyers, and priests in support of the TPF. Apparently the TIM is intended eventually to become a Thai version of the Viet Cong, and the TPF is to serve as the political action arm, similar to the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam -- dominated by Communists but incorporating other political groups to give the appearance of a popular front. Other indicators suggest that the Chinese Communists are becoming interested in the preliminary steps leading toward an insurgency build-up against Thailand:

- (a) Peking has purchased large sums of Thai money in Hong Kong;
- (b) the study of the Thai language is being given priority in Peking's new Foreign Language Institute; and (c) on 9 August,

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Radio Peking invited Thai government officials, especially military and police, to make covert contact with the Communist front organizations.

5. So far, these front groups are essentially paper-organizations maintained by Peking. A few have some membership inside Thailand, but none has a substantial popular following. Little is known about their leadership but those front members identified to date are obscure personalities or exiled Thai "patriots" with little or no political following. These organizations are probably designed to serve as potential rallying points for the various small, discontented groups in Thailand.

6. The main thrust of the Communist effort in Thailand is directed at the rural population in the northeast provinces where the Communists are exploiting existing Thai vulnerabilities: the physical isolation of some areas along the Mekong River, the extended border with Laos, political remoteness from Bangkok, the alienation of certain minority groups, a depressed economy, and the presence of about 40,000 refugees from North Vietnam. This Vietnamese community has long been under the influence of North Vietnamese agents. Members of this community probably serve as contacts for covert Communist border crossing from Laos and are a source of intelligence and financial support for Communist efforts.

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7. In recent months, a number of village officials and police informants have been assassinated in the Mekong River provinces. Since late July, more vigorous patrolling by provincial police in this region has resulted in several clashes with small bands of armed Communists. These groups reflected good training and discipline, and Communist flags, arms, equipment, and documents were found in their camps. For some months there has been evidence of the smuggling of such materials into Thailand through Laos. Furthermore, the type of propaganda contained in the Communist leaflets and the timeliness of the broadcasts of the "Voice of Free Thailand" indicate the existence of an effective communications net and regular contact between the Communist Chinese and their agents in Thailand.

8. In the other outlying areas of Thailand, Communist activity continues, but no appreciable step up has been discerned. In northern Thailand, the Communists are attempting to exploit migrant hill tribes (numbering about 200,000), an ethnic minority whose economic backwardness has long been neglected by Bangkok. Along the Thai-Malaysia border, an estimated 500-600 Malayan Communist guerrillas, remnants of the force defeated by the British in Malaya in the 1950s, emerge occasionally to perpetrate

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acts of violence and terrorism. Although this group is mostly ethnic Chinese, there is little evidence to indicate that they are directed or supported by Communist China. In Thailand's southern four provinces, separatist sentiment and activity on the part of the Muslim-Malay population has long been a preoccupation of Thai authorities. The extent to which these activities were merely banditry rather than organized political movements are unclear and reports of Indonesian and Communist Chinese involvement in separatist activities also lack confirmation.

9. There has been no significant Communist movement among the approximately three million ethnic Chinese in Thailand. In and near Bangkok, there is some evidence of a Communist effort to subvert influential Thai businessmen of Chinese origin by a combination of blackmail and appeals to traditional loyalties. The ethnic Chinese in Thailand, however, are better integrated into the community than most overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.

III. PROSPECTS

10. Military assistance from the US over the past fifteen years has changed the Thai armed forces from a group of loosely

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organized, poorly equipped units to forces that are fairly well organized, trained, equipped, and motivated.* These forces were originally trained almost exclusively for conventional war, however, and it is only recently that much attention has been given to the problem of conducting counterinsurgency operations. Progress in counterinsurgency training has enhanced Thai capabilities for effectively quelling dissidence and isolated incidents of insurgency before they become widespread throughout the country. The next several months may be crucial in testing these capabilities. We believe the Thai will prove fairly effective in countering the kind of small-scale dissident actions they are likely to face in the near future. Should they fail to do so, however, the Communists would be encouraged to expand their effort. The Thai military forces would probably be unable to handle a widespread insurgency which had gained momentum and was receiving extensive support from Communists outside the country.

*The Thai forces available to counter military and paramilitary threats are:

<u>Military</u>		<u>Paramilitary</u>	
Army	83,000	Border Patrol Police	6,300
Navy	13,900	Special Police	300
Marine Corps	7,700	Provincial Police	28,000
Air Force	18,600	Volunteer Defense Corps	21,000
	<u>123,200</u>		<u>55,600</u>

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11. Even at the highest echelons of the Thai government there is not a clear understanding of the nature and particular dangers of internal subversion. Thai leaders seem to be confused by the problem. At times they blame the Communists for all manifestations of discontent and at other times they close their eyes to actual subversive threats, especially those difficult or awkward to cope with. In addition, there is a tendency to point to the country's basically pacific and happy people and conclude that "it can't happen here."

12. Nevertheless, with considerable US urging and support, the Thai government has been devoting increasing attention to its internal problems. It is now spending almost 70 percent of its governmental revenues on economic and social development, designed at least in part to reduce vulnerabilities to Communist propaganda and insurgency. Despite heavy military expenditures, the Thai government has continued to give high priority to economic development projects over the past three to four years; among the most important of these are transportation, communications, utilities, education, and health projects. Joint US-Thai programs designed to demonstrate the interest of the central government in popular welfare -- the Mobile Development Units, the SEABEE

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Technical Assistance Teams, and the Accelerated Rural Development operation -- have had some favorable effect on those individual communities in which they operate.

13. In order to create a permanent base of national stability, however, the Thai government must accelerate measures which could eventually allow the present economically depressed and socially isolated areas to participate fully in national Thai life. Such a program would be difficult to implement because it would require a diversion of resources from other needs, including the armed forces, and some strengthening of Thai security forces is obviously desirable.

14. If these social and economic programs are pushed with reasonable vigor and accompanied by sustained police and military action to keep Communist inspired paramilitary movements from growing and gaining momentum, the chances of keeping the subversive effort in check are good. Even the North Vietnamese minority might be less vulnerable to Communist subversion if most of their genuine grievances were removed. The maintenance of order and government control would become much more difficult, however, if sizeable parts of the Lao bank of the Mekong became available to the Communists to use as bases from which to infiltrate Thailand.

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15. The Thais clearly recognize the relationship of the struggle in the Indochinese states to their internal security problem, and Thailand is making an important contribution to that war as an ally of the US. Bangkok has made ground and air bases available for US operations into Laos and North Vietnam, provided training and materiel to the South Vietnamese, and clandestine aid to Laos. They are likely to continue to cooperate in this way so long as the US acts forcefully to meet the Communist threat.

16. The Thai leaders and people are anti-Communist, nationalist, independent, and desire to stay that way. On the other hand, the Thais have a long history of accommodating to external political pressures believed necessary for national survival. Consequently, if the US were driven out of Indochina, the Thais would almost certainly conclude that the best hope for maintaining a national identity lay in neutralism.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:


SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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