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TO : Department of State, Washington, D.C.

INFO : Amembassy Bangkok
Amconsulate Chiang Mai
Amconsulate Songkhla

Action Assigned to JB

Action Taken

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, TH
FROM : Amconsulate Udorn

DATE: April 17, 1973

SUBJECT : Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People in Northeast Thailand

REF :

Action Office Symbol

Name of Officer

SUMMARY

Senior Royal Thai Army and police officials in Northeast Thailand have recently told us that they are directing their counterinsurgency (CI) efforts primarily to winning the allegiance of the people, and putting less emphasis on the use of force to defeat the insurgents. The regional leaders know that the people are also the target of the Communist Terrorists (CT) and believe that the best way to defeat the insurgents is to deprive them of popular support. They argue that most of the people who have joined or supported the CT have been deluded and can be won back if the Royal Thai Government (RTG) shows its interest in them. The RTG will use force, they continue, only against the relatively few hard core CT in the Northeast who cannot be brought back into the fold by persuasion. This reluctance to use force, it is said, is based on the King's view that Thai should not kill other Thai. Examples of initiatives aimed at the people are: military psychological warfare operations, the Village Scout program which was begun by the Border Patrol Police (BPP) in the Northeast and is now spreading to other areas of the country, and the recruiting of Peoples' Volunteers by the Governor of Ubon Province. END SUMMARY

Thou Shalt Not Kill Other Thai

Senior Thai military and police officials in the Northeast in recent conversations have explained that the principal objective they are pursuing in counterinsurgency is to win the support of the people for the

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Drafted by: Jere Bacon-Kahn

Contents and Classification Approved by: Jere Bacon-Kahn

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RTG rather than to use force to eliminate the insurgents. Major General Nano Samitapintu, the Border Patrol Police Commander for Area 2 which covers the Northeast, stated that this approach is being followed because the King does not want Thai killing other Thai. This applies particularly to CT in the Northeast where the insurgents are ethnic Thai, unlike those in the North who are mostly Meo hilltribesmen.

Nano's deputy, Colonel Somkhuan Harikun, added that the BPP, like the insurgents, is girding for the long haul struggle to win over the people. In the short run, he expected that the RTG forces will continue to suffer casualties when attacked by the CT. But he emphasized that RTG policy is not to try to prevent such attacks by taking the offensive militarily against the CT but rather to go on the offensive politically to win over to the RTG most of the insurgents who are deluded by communist propaganda. Somkhuan and most other Thai officials at all levels believe that a real Thai will never become a true believer in communism, because it goes against his respect for the King and Buddhism.

Making Love, Not War

Major General Boonserm Ayuwat, Chief of Staff of the Second Army, which has responsibility for the Northeast, explained that an important objective of the recent Joint Training Exercise (JTE) 16 operation against insurgent base camps in the Phu Phan mountains was to increase the "friendly count" of people supporting the RTG rather than the body count of dead CT. Boonserm pointed out that artillery fire and air strikes into the mountains were intended more to induce the CT to defect to the RTG than to inflict casualties in them.

Boonserm and the other leaders believe that if the government can win over the villagers it will cut the links between them and the CT jungle forces, depriving the latter of supplies, intelligence, and recruits. Without support from the mass base, the argument continues, the CT will defect rather than face extended hardships in the jungle and will eventually wither away. Rephrasing the thoughts of Mao, whom the Thai leaders have all read, the hard core insurgents will become like fish out of the water. The Thai believe that this approach of fighting fire with fire by using Mao's doctrine against his followers will be more effective than using conventional military methods to try to defeat them.

Psyops

Among the measures used by the RTG to win over the people in the Northeast in recent years have been psychological warfare operations by both military and civilian teams. During Joint Training Exercise (JTE) 16,

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the RTG mounted a psyops program directed both at the villagers and CT in and around the area of operations. Second Royal Thai Army teams were reinforced by personnel from the Army psywar center in Lopburi and worked with teams from the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) civilian psyops offices in the provinces where JTE 16 took place. The program included aerial propaganda broadcasts and leaflet drops, medical civic action, and film showings and lectures about patriotism to the villagers.

The effectiveness of these operations was limited, however, because they lasted only a short time. During the exercise, a team would spend only a short time in one village before moving on to the next, and there was little follow up. After the exercise ended, funds and psyop personnel dropped back to the previous low levels. Some Thai military and civilian officials thought that such psyops operations were counter-productive because they raised the expectations of the villagers that the RTG would protect and support them, but after the exercise ended the army withdrew, leaving the villagers at the mercy of the insurgents.

Defectors

An example of the effectiveness of psyops over the long run has been the number of CT defectors who have turned themselves in in response to broadcasts by radio station 909, which was set up in Sakon Nakhon by the National Security Command with U.S. support. The station has built up its credibility in the Phu Phan area over a period of years.

General Boonserm said that few CT defected during JTE 16 because they were afraid of being shot by RTG forces in the field. He expected, however, that the number of defectors would increase after the exercise ended when army units withdrew to their base camps. This had been the statistical pattern, he explained during and after previous military operations. Since JTE 16 ended, the number of defectors has in fact increased, but the reasons for this are not yet clear.

Village Scouts

Another effort to win the allegiance of the villagers is the Village Scout program begun in September, 1971, by Col. Somkhuan, then Commander of BPP Region IV in the northern half of the Northeast. By January, 1973, over 28,000 villagers had completed five days of training in the program, and it had been extended to BPP Region III in the southern half of the Northeast as well as to other areas of Thailand.

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For the training, villagers including both men and women from about 16 to 40 volunteer to come together from several villages to a central location in groups averaging about 200 persons. The instructors who are BPP personnel, teachers, and other civilian officials teach them rudimentary scoutcraft and also instill patriotic ideals through such means as the scout oath, allegiance to the flag, and group singing. The emphasis is on unity, both among the inhabitants of different villages, who normally would have little contact with each other, and more importantly between them and the officials who demonstrate the government's interest in them. The instruction is interspersed with dancing and games full of fun, or sanuk, which is dear to the hearts of all Thai.

The BPP intention is to follow up the training by contacting the people after they return to their villages, particularly in order to obtain information about the presence of any CT there. This objective of the program has not been revealed publicly until the Governor of Sisaket province recently talked about it to the press, which infuriated BPP personnel. Even in insurgent infested Na Kae district of Nakhon Phanom province, the BPP has already trained several groups of Village Scouts, and it is now training more villagers living along the main Route 223 through the district in order to obtain intelligence from them which can be used to improve security on the road.

The King, who is the titular head of the Thai Boy Scouts, has taken a special interest in the Village Scout program and personally provides the neckerchiefs which the villagers receive on completion of the training. Because of the Royal interest and the popularity of the program, the BPP has been increasingly assigning more of its staff to work with the Village Scouts, which has left fewer BPP personnel free to carry out CT suppression operations. The Ministry of Interior has also begun to support the training, which has encouraged civilian officials from the level of the provincial governors downward to participate in it.

Peoples' Volunteers

The training of villagers as Peoples' Volunteers was begun by BPP Major General Wichien Kimautara when he was Governor of Surin province. He says that he got the idea from the communists in Cambodia who recruited the villagers into a number of front organizations. Wichien subsequently moved from Surin to become Governor of the neighboring province of Ubon, where he had police and civilian officials train 18,000 Volunteers in 1971 and 1972. (Over 2,000 more Volunteers were trained in Ubon but now live in Yasothon province which was split off from Ubon

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in 1972.) The Governor plans to train another 17,000 Volunteers in Ubon this year. His objective is to have 17 per village in every district of the province; in addition to these Peoples' Volunteers, 4,000 Village Scouts have already been trained in Ubon, and the province plans to train another 100,000 in the future.

Like the Village Scouts, the Volunteers include men and women 16 years old and over who are trained for five days in a central location near their homes. They differ, however, in that the Peoples' Volunteers are openly trained to use and to report information about the CT to the authorities. After they return to their villages, however, only a few of them have arms and these are only shotguns which they buy themselves.

Formerly the Volunteers paid for their own expenses during training. Last year, however, because of the popularity of the program, the Governor was able to induce the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) in Bangkok to provide the villagers per diem of 10 baht ($0.50) a day during the period of instruction.

Conclusion

These initiatives by RTG officials in the Northeast help bridge the gap between the government and the villagers. But sporadic psyops and short training courses are not enough to win the villagers' support. The authorities must continually follow up such programs to demonstrate that they have more than a fleeting interest in the people.

More fundamentally, the RTG must not only try to win the hearts and minds of the people but it must protect them against the CT. The villagers themselves, including the few who are lightly armed, are no match for the better trained and equipped jungle insurgents. And the RTG itself does not have nearly enough armed military, police and Volunteer Defense Corps forces to station on guard at every village threatened by the CT.

The most effective way to protect the villagers, as called for by the CI doctrine previously approved by the RTG, is for the army to force the CT jungle soldiers on the defensive by attacking their base camps in the mountains, while the police and paramilitary forces actively patrol around the villages to prevent the jungle soldiers from getting into them. The army and the BPP, however, seem to be deemphasizing these military responsibilities by concentrating on political programs aimed at the villagers. Partly because of their reluctance to kill insurgents as well as their desire to avoid casualties of their own, they have convinced themselves that the best CI policy is not to keep

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up the pressure on the GT in the mountain jungles but to remain in the lowland populated areas, holding to the defensive militarily while taking the offensive politically. Unfortunately such a policy leaves the jungle insurgents relatively unscathed to continue taking the offensive both politically and militarily against the many villages unprotected by the RTG armed forces.

BROM-KAHN

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