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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

POL 18 THAI

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~~A-39~~ A-3 NO.

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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Amembassy BANGKOK

INFO : Department of State, CHIENGMAI, SONGKHLA, VIENTIANE

Action Taken

Date of Action

FROM : Amconsul UDORN

Action Office Symbol

DATE: January 16, 1971

SUBJECT : Nakhon Phanom through the Eyes of its Governor

Name of Officer

REF :

Introduction

Governor Yong Na Nakhon gave embassy and consular officers a frank briefing on the problems of his province at Nakhon Phanom January 12. He pointed out that the capital is 983 kilometers from Bangkok, the farthest for any province in Northeast Thailand. He also stressed Nakhon Phanom's lengthy configuration which makes for a 237 kilometer border with Laos along the Mekong. The significance of the briefing lay in the governor's interpretation of his province, a viewpoint which reflects his ardent Thai nationalism, his inflexibility, and his lack of corruption.

Problems. Governor Yong said he had three principal problems: a long and porous border with Laos, Vietnamese refugees, and insurgents. He pointed out the difficulties of patroling the Mekong, and the location of Lao Peoples' Liberation Army (LPLA) and North Vietnamese units at three points on the opposite shore. He says that Red China, whose principal local satellites are the LPLA and the North Vietnamese, has Nakhon Phanom as its primary Thai objective.

Vietnamese. Ninety percent of the 10,200 Vietnamese refugees in the province are pro-North Vietnamese and have no loyalty to Thailand. They

Group 4
Downgraded at three-year intervals.
Declassified after 12 years.

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In Out

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receive their orders directly from Hanoi and from the North Vietnamese Embassy in Laos. They have their own government and army and are both an economic and security danger to the province. Viet Nam has made that citizenship or are in alien status, and it... [illegible] freely, transmit to Bangkok the 5-100 baht tax per man per year that the Vietnamese refugees pay to the cadre who control it. A large scale money collecting drive began about 9 January 1967 for the purchase of weapons for North Viet Nam. Contributions range from 10,000 to 50,000 baht, and some Vietnamese have sold property in order to meet the requirement.

The governor also contended that Vietnamese youth were flocking from Phanom for Uthen in order to sabotage the airbase there. He said Vietnamese regularly deal in arms transfers from Laos to Thailand, particularly at Ban Phaeng district. He stated that North Vietnamese have orders to kill off top Thai officials in Nakhon Phanom should the NVA seize Savannakhet and Thakhek, the two provincial capitals across the river.

Insurgents and Tactics for Handling them. To handle his [illegible] problem, some 600 jungle insurgents, the governor uses the [illegible] of suppression and persuasion. The majority of the insurgents are uneducated, and are thus attracted to the cause by [illegible] such as offers of money and position, which are never fulfilled. [illegible] week with the insurgents, the recruit feels he can no longer [illegible] his village in safety.

The governor tries to get close to the people by extensive field trips. He has visited all ten districts and sub-districts, plus several cantons, including two excursions to Dong Luang, the canton of Renu district which may be the most insurgent-infested in the country.

By stressing the true American role, the governor attempts to counter the insurgent propaganda theme that the US has seized Thailand's [illegible] which falsely seems to justify the insurgents' presence in Thailand. He recently put four insurgent corpses on display [illegible] to illustrate to the people that although the insurgents are Thai [illegible] have a Red Chinese star on their cap, are decorated with Chinese medals and carry Chinese weapons.

Because of his tactics, the governor feels he is meeting some success in insurgency success. He cited two recent examples where five members of a Village Military Unit (VMU) and 35 village supporters from a single village had turned themselves in. Subsequently, 10 another village five members of the VMU and 55 supporters had aligned themselves with the

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government. He cited another recent incident in which an insurgent and four members of the VMU in Mukdahan turned against and killed four insurgents.

The governor contended that communism got started in Nakhon Phanom because the RTG was good-hearted. It let Ho Chi Minh stay there before World War II. It allowed the Free Lao, including Souphanouvong, to use Nakae during the war. Another reason was that government officials were understrength, and could not get close to the people. Current government presence is about 70% of the authorization. If it could be raised to some 80-100%, as he had already requested, there would be no more insurgent problem. He would have the staffs in each district split in half, one remaining behind in headquarters to offer services to the people who came there, and the other to go out into the villages to carry services to the people.

Other devices that would improve the government's position would be improved armaments for village defenders. American supplied weapons were not the equal of enemy arms. He would like to expand Volunteer Defense Corps (VDC) strike forces to each district, and have some of them armed with M-16's and M-79's. The rest should have automatic carbines and grenades. Grenades were in short supply throughout the province.

In the final analysis, the insurgents were not as much of a problem as the Vietnamese refugees.

Comment. Governor Yong, an Army major general with long experience in the Inspector General Corps, came to Nakhon Phanom province for his first civilian administrative assignment in mid 1970. His uncorrupt image (he says he recently refused a 160,000 baht bribe from the Vietnamese to lay off his campaign against Vietnamese control of pork trading) contrasts favorably with that of his crooked predecessor. He moved swiftly but awkwardly to reduce Vietnamese economic influence in the province. He has also traveled much more extensively than his predecessor and to many more remote areas. He has antagonized at least one of the Nakhon Phanom members of parliament who petitioned in vain for Yong's recall. He has greatly improved local Thai/Lao relations, thereby tamping down the inflammatory disputes that had traditionally arisen between the two neighbors. He is a sincere man, forceful, and hard-working, but less flexible than the average Thai.

He seems convinced that the North Vietnamese intend soon to seize Thakhek and Savannakhet, a move that is undoubtedly in their long-range timetable, but not logically imminent. The Vietnamese refugees have

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become almost an obsession with him, but he does not consider that the Vietnamese "problem" is largely a Thai creation. Many feel that if the Thai government had not grouped the refugees in selected locations where the North Vietnamese cadre could gain control over them, they would have dispersed and been absorbed in the genial sponge of Thai society in much the same fashion as the Chinese. When asked why Vietnamese could go all the way to Ubon to sabotage an airbase when there was a base one nearby, the governor replied that the security was too tight at Nakhon Phanom for them to make headway.

The governor was telling only a half truth when he mentioned that insufficiency of government officials was a cause of the insurgency. The attitude and behavior of those who have been on the scene has also properly been the explanation. The governor realizes the need for quality as well as quantity, however, and announced his intention to transfer the ineffective Nakae district officer. Unfortunately the candidate he has in mind as a replacement is likely to create more problems than his predecessor. What Nakae really needs is the volunteered service of the best and bravest district officer in the country, a psychological warfare genius, a full and dedicated government staff and adequately armed village defense and strike forces to deal with the hard core.

Tong's comments on armaments are echoed throughout most of the insurgent infested areas of the Northeast. When faced with AK-47's, village defenders armed principally with Springfields and rationed drastically in ammunition are psychologically defeated before the battle gets under way. Few local officials understand, however, that the RTG has thousands of US-donated weapons in its warehouses, and that there is central government reluctance to give villagers sophisticated arms.

BARNES

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