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FROM Amconsul SONGKHLA

E.O. 11652: GDS

SUBJECT: TAGS: PINS - TH
Counterinsurgency in South Thailand - October 1973

REF:

DATE: November 30, 1973

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By: Albert Lipton NARA, Date: 2011

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SUMMARY: CT activity in South Thailand showed a marked increase in October continuing an upsurge begun in the Far South in September. However, activity has still not returned to 1972 levels. Predictions for next two months are for a generally low level of military activity due to rainy season and rice harvest. CT activities in South were highlighted during October by attack on police station in Surat Thai Province, reports of expansion into Ranong Province, and by reports of considerable masswork, including meetings claiming credit for overthrow of Thanom government and pointing to American troop withdrawals as evidence of "declining influence of Western imperialism in SEA." Defections continue, apparently giving further evidence to disarray among Phatthalung-Trang CT leadership. On RTG side 5th RCT was officially divided during the month with the creation of the 5th and 15th RCTs, each with two battalions and with areas of operations corresponding to current police area divisions. However, in spite of improvements which division might bring about, BPP Region 9 commander is critical of RTA and plethora of organizations with CI responsibilities generally for lack of results. A majority of officials contacted in the South appear to take a positive view of change of government vis-a-vis the insurgency predicting more defections, more popular support for government, and seeing exit of Thanom and Praphat as a blow to communist propaganda. Some have privately commented, however, that publicity given to high-level corruption could assist CT propaganda efforts. CTO in late October staged successful ambush of RTG security forces, in which eight people including a village chief were killed. The ambush appears to have been in retaliation for death of one of their supporters at hands of a local policeman. This ambush does not appear to represent a change in CTO policy of not actively engaging RTG security forces in armed encounters -- except in retaliation or when

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forced to do so by RTG security forces. Separatist and bandit activities were at a low level. END SUMMARY.

CT ACTIVITIES

1. Insurgent activity in South Thailand has shown a marked increase during the month of October, continuing an upsurge begun in the Far South in September. However, insurgent activity has still not returned to the 1972 levels. Despite this recent upsurge, however, predictions for the next two months are for a generally low level of insurgent activity, consistent with past years, because of the rainy season and insurgent involvement in the rice harvest.

2. In the Mid-South there was a considerable increase in the number and magnitude of military incidents (in Surat Thani and Nakorn Sri Thammarat provinces) showing a renewed willingness on the part of the CT to seek out and engage RTG security forces in armed conflict. The most notable military incident occurred on October 29 when an estimated 30 to 50 insurgents overran a lightly defended Province Police station in Ban Tha Chi Subdistrict of Ban Na San District in Surat Thani Province. After killing one policeman and wounding two of the five defenders and seizing eight weapons and one FM-5 radio, the insurgents set fire to the station and adjacent living quarters and withdrew. The main purpose for the attack appears to have been to get weapons Perhaps an equally important secondary purpose was to kill or capture the station police chief -- they failed. The Ban Tha Chi police chief is held in high public esteem because of his reputed honesty and efficiency. He has also reportedly been instrumental in several defections. The successful CT attack on this police station points up a perennial police problem -- the manpower shortage in the rural areas. Of the 30 policemen assigned to the station, 17 were on TDY in other locations and six were on leave, leaving only the five defenders at the time of the attack.

3. However, perhaps more significant than the increase in military activity are reports that the CT have expanded their operational area into Ranong Province, which has heretofore received little attention from the insurgents. [redacted] the BPP have received reports

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from villagers that the CT have been conducting armed proselyting in Ban Fang Hin of Kapoe District -- which sits astride Route 4 the main North-South highway -- in Ranong Province. [redacted] Reports received in September of 1972 indicated CT intent to expand into Ranong, but this is the first reporting of armed CT proselyting in the province. However, whether this indicates a lack of CT activity or only a lack of intelligence is unclear.

4. In the Far South CT activities continued at the higher levels which began last month, highlighted by a series of minor armed conflicts with RTG security forces, initiated by the CT but involving only small numbers of insurgents, and a noticeable upswing in the level of mass work. Very little insurgent activity has been noted in Songkhla Province, however, withmost of the activity in Phatthalung, Trang and Satun Provinces.

5. [redacted] the CPT Northern area leaders (North Phatthalung) have started to hold village meetings in an effort to stimulate support for the insurgency. One example occurred on October 24 near Ban Bang Lo village in northwest Khuan Khanun District when 35 insurgents sealed off the village for approximately two hours. At the meeting the insurgents took credit for the mid-October demonstrations which resulted in the ouster of the Thanom government and labeled American troop reductions in Thailand as "another indication of the declining influence of Western imperialism in Southeast Asia", in consonance with the Announcement of the Communist Party of Thailand of October 16, 1973, which has been monitored here over the Voice of the People of Thailand.

6. Defections continue. In the Mid-South the number of defectors rose from 2 in September to 7 in October -- none of whom, however, had held significant positions in the CT organization. In the Far South, however, initial interrogations indicated that two women defectors from Phatthalung may prove significant. One, allegedly a party member and military commander of a CT company from one of the Phatthalung camps, told an interrogator she had defected because of unwelcome sexual advances from another camp members. Her complaint

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was that this act was in contradiction to party tenents that women were equal to men and to be respected. This defection, if it turns out to be the real thing, would tend to indicate that the problems which have affected the CT leadership over the last few months concerning the CT moral code which have already resulted in the defection of several high level cadre continue.

7. In a more negative development concerning defectors, however, an informant of a Thai security service reports that Northern area insurgents are directing village core members to re-establish contact with a select group of CT defectors, who had allegedly rallied with prior CT knowledge and consent, and order them back to active duty with insurgent operating units. [redacted] If the report is true, it would appear that the CT have been at least partially successful in resolving the food shortages which brought about the policy of planned defections in the first place.

RTG FORCES: A REORGANIZATION AND A COMPLAINT

8. On 8 October, the Fifth RCT was officially reorganized into two understrength Regiments -- the Fifth and Fifteenth Regiments. The Fifth Regiment remained at Haat Yai and retained two battalions of its original four -- one battalion located at Haat Yai and the other at Pattani. The newly organized Fifteenth Regiment is located at Nakhon Si Thammarat and took over command of the other two battalions -- one battalion at Nakhon Si Thammarat and the other at Chumpon. Both Regiments are expected to cadre and activate a third battalion. The new CO for the Fifteenth RCT is Special Colonel Prichan Chawiphat, who was previously assigned to the Songkhla Military District headquarters. This reorganization could be helpful in that RTA areas of operations will now coincide with police regions and should allow for easier coordination. Furthermore, it will give each RCT commander a more easily manageable TAOR. However, at the same time it introduces yet another level of command into the South. In this regard, on November 7 BPP Region 9 commander Police Colonel Wichai Wichaithanaphat complained to me that there are too many forces involved in counterinsurgency, resulting in poor coordination and also in poor results. In a predictably partisan manner he stated that the RTG should give more support to the BPP and allow them the lion's share in CI operations. In fact, the BPP together with

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the police bear the greatest burden in suppression activities already. Wichai was critical of the RTA, which he said does "nothing" and of the CSOC organization, which he said "spends too much money with too little results." He was particularly critical of placing provincial governors -- "can you imagine the Songkhla governor leading troops?" -- in command of CI forces. Indeed, aside from the BPP, Wichai's only praise was for the Village Boy Scout Program, which he said has been very useful in denying support to the CT.

THE CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT AND THE INSURGENCY

9. In spite of the increase in CT activities and apparent expansion of their area of operation, Major General San Chitpatima, military commander of the South, remains optimistic. [redacted] San said he is convinced that he has the upper hand and over the long term will continue to erode the strength and effectiveness of the CT organization. He said the change in government has made no change in his CI plans in the South, but that it may serve as a catalyst for many CT to rally. However, he emphasized that this factor is only one of many which he believes are pushing them to rally. Region 9 BPP commander Police Colonel Wichai Wichaithanaphat on November 7 tended to support San's views concerning catalytic effect of change of government. Wichai also added that the exit of Thanom and Praphat will deprive the CT of their major propaganda theme.

10. In a trip through Satun, Trang and Phatthalung Provinces on November 5 and 6, the consulate GSLE Had Daoruang found virtually unanimous approval of change of government from officials with whom he talked, who claimed to have observed a demonstrable increase in support for the government. The Deputy Governor of Phatthalung, Montri Tra-ngan, told him of meetings in Khuan Khanun District in which CT leader Suporn Onruang had told villagers the CT were responsible for driving Thanom and Praphat from the country. However, Montri claimed the people know very well why they had to flee the country and, therefore, did not believe the communist propaganda. However, some officials appear to be of two minds. [redacted] some Thai officials concerned with counterinsurgency in Region 9 have privately expressed their concern that the Sanya government may be aiding the insurgency in the breech by allowing public

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disclosure of high-level corruption, apparently, thereby giving credibility to past CT propaganda.

CTO STAGE AMBUSH IN SADAO

11. After a considerable period of little apparent activity by the CTO, on October 31 a CTO force ambushed a police convoy in Sadao District of Songkhla Province killing 8 persons including a village chief, a special branch officer from Sadao, and 6 policemen. However, in accordance with past CTO activities, the ambush appears to have been staged in retaliation for actions taken against the CTO. [redacted] a young Chinese man believed to have been a CTO supporter, was killed by a policeman in a drunken fight. Also, on October 28 earlier in the month, a BPP company made contact with an estimated 35 man CTO group in Yala Province which resulted in the death of one CTO. However, the Yala incident seems unlikely to have triggered the Sadao ambush given the conflict between the Eighth CTO Regiment in Sadao and the other two CTO regiments in Yala and Narathiwat. Given the retaliatory nature of this ambush, it cannot be taken as a sign that the CTO plan to change their policy of not initiating armed enounters with RTG security forces. However, if any of the three CTO regiments were to change this policy, it seems likely that the Eighth Regiment would be the first to do so as it is the Eighth which has had documented instances of cooperation with CT units in Songkhla Province in the form of training, however, and not in military operations and which has the highest percentage of Thai recruits.

SEPARATISTS AND BANDITS

12. The month of October has seen little noticeable activity by separatists or bandits. Indeed, only five instances of police conflict with bandits were reported in Region 9 -- the Far South.

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