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ANALYSIS BRANCH
DATE: June 23, 1972

SUBJECT: One Man's Views on the Thai Insurgency

REF: A Berresen

Attached is an end of tour report on the Thai insurgency prepared by Lionel Rosenblatt, who has spent the past year in the Embassy's Development & Security Section. This report does not necessarily represent the views of the Mission, and most officers concerned with the insurgency problem would disagree with some parts of it. However, in order that interested end-users might have the full flavor of the report, we are forwarding it as written. Mr. Rosenblatt would undoubtedly be the first to agree that it is in effect a "worm's eye view" of the Mission's efforts to support Thailand's counterinsurgency programs and that a number of actions are underway on which he is not fully informed.

One aspect of the report is, however, worthy of comment. This document reflects to a considerable degree the frustrations most of us feel in trying to get people from a different cultural environment (or for that matter, from our own) to do what we want them to do. It reflects also the problems of operating under ground rules which require that our efforts be strictly limited to supporting Thailand's own counterinsurgency programs. In short, we do not in any sense want to make this a U.S. operation. We can help and have been helping the Thais toward a more realistic appreciation of the problem. We have also been improving the coordination of the advice we give within

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the counterinsurgency sphere. But we believe that the carrot-and-stick approach we have been using is the best means to achieve our aims rather than the greater use of "leverage" which the author suggests. Nonetheless, Mr. Rosenblatt's perceptions are interesting and his views merit consideration.

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End of Tour Report on The Thai Insurgency

by Lionel Rosenblatt

I. SUMMARY

This report is divided into three sections - the first devoted to the insurgent threat in Thailand, the second to the Royal Thai Government (RTG) response and the third to the U.S. role.

Chief conclusions about the Thai insurgency and efforts to counter it are as follows:

1. The insurgent threat is growing steadily.

2. The RTG does not view the insurgent threat with real seriousness and has not demonstrated the leadership and organizational steps necessary to improve its counterinsurgency (CI) effort. Consequently RTG CI performance has at best slowed the potential rate of insurgent expansion but has failed to check the growth of the insurgency.

3. U.S. assistance has had only minimal impact in improving the RTG response to the insurgency, although in certain areas U.S. materiel assistance has been effective in improving RTG military capabilities. On the other hand U .S. assistance has reinforced a governmental elite which may be in style and internal political power configurations incapable of effective CI implementation. The U.S. has been reluctant to press the RTG harder on CI because of its Indo-China connected interests in Thailand, especially the air bases.

4. If present trends continue, the RTG will be faced within five years by an insurgency which demands very large-scale inputs to cope with. Costs in life and money will be very disruptive to the political stability and continued economic growth of the country.

5. Real improvement in RTG CI performance will not come easily and requires a profound change in the perceptions and method of operation of the RTG. For example:

a. The insurgent threat is not yet regarded with sufficient seriousness by the RTG leadership and thus receives insufficient command emphasis.

b. The RTG has tended to emphasize military suppression in its CI approach - albeit with little success. There is little stress on undercutting the political threat of the insurgency through improved government administration and services, elimination of government-caused grievances, improved opportunities for rural youth and political control at the village level.

c. The required accross-the-board improvement in both the military and political spheres of CI is seriously hampered by quarreling between political factions at the top level of the RTG, over-centralization of authority, poor training, especially at lower levels in all ministries and the military, and a bureaucracy which does not reward performance in any consistent fashion.

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Given these kinds of obstacles to effective CI, the limited use of U.S. leverage and the questionable influence the U.S. might have on the RTG leadership anyway, the wisdom of continued CI support to the RTG is open to serious challenge. In fact the most effective way in which the U.S. could jar the RTG into the kinds of sweeping changes necessary would be to rapidly disengage from support of CI in Thailand. Continued U.S. support will serve chiefly to reinforce an old order which will postpone real reform until too late.

II. The Insurgent Threat *

Insurgencies are hard to describe accurately from the standpoint of threat potential to a central government. Statistics tell only part of the story and are subject to certain flaws due to ambiguous data and faulty data classification. Perhaps the key statistic in terms of reliability and significance is that insurgent armed strength throughout Thailand (not including CTO) is now at least 4410-5050, up about 25% from September 1970. Armament has improved qualitatively and quantitatively.

Militarily the insurgents have concentrated on small government units in rural areas as targets. RTG casualties (army, police, and local security forces) have increased from about 1,000 in 1970 to 1,500 in 1971. Assassinations increased from 118 in 1970 to 299 during 1971. Thus in terms of armed strength and cost in life to the RTG the insurgency has shown a distinct upward curve in recent years.

In addition to their growing military strength the communist terrorists (CT) are effectively organizing rural villagers. In the Northeast (the area of the country where the CT have demonstrated their best organizational effectiveness in Thai villages), the CT are believed to have some degree of control in at least 200 villages. While this is not by any means a significant proportion (less than 2%) of the total number of villages in the Northeast, it represents an effective start when compared to the lack of RTG political/security presence at the village level.

This lack of RTG control in the villages means that there is no obstacle to future expansion. Also as the threat is in diverse areas, with CT influenced villages in a wide range of locales, the fires are harder to put out. The

* The role of external support for the insurgency is not addressed in this paper. Armament and training are expected to continue to be provided by North Vietnam and China at a pace matching the Communist Party of Thailand's absorptive capacity. Thus external support plays a role in enhancing the capabilities of the expanding insurgency but is not basically responsible for the growth of the insurgency.

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number of districts countrywide in which there is some evidence of at least incipient insurgent activity has risen to 39 of 72 provinces and 230 districts and subdistricts, 25-30% of the total number of districts and subdistricts in the country.

Thus while the insurgents are not about to take over Thailand tomorrow, they are a growing military force and are widening their rural control apparatus at a rate which within the next five years will pose a critical problem for the RTG.

The rising military prowess of the CT is the most distinct short-run danger. Already large areas are effectively denied to RTG forces except in large numbers. Recently in Operation Phu Kwang the insurgents chose to harass the largest Thai CI operation to date, rather than falling back. Result: over 500 RTA casualties against a small number of CT casualties. CT mobility and small unit proficiency allows them a wide choice of small RTG targets in static locations. Assassination is used to undermine RTG influence in populated areas.

The most severe aspect of the insurgency for the RTG in the next five years will be the rising CT military threat. The cost of coping with the military problem could spiral much higher in the event that the insurgents begin to employ a "high profile" military strategy, e.g. harassment of key lines of communication, sabotage and terrorism in RTG controlled areas. The damage which the insurgents even at present numbers and capability could cause should not be underestimated. For example, the casualties in Operation Phu Kwang mentioned above were caused by a CT force of no larger than a few hundred which dwindled to 75 in the latter stages of the operation.

Behind their military screen insurgent organizing will continue. Although this will not have the same dramatic effect in the next five years as the military struggle, it poses the ultimate long run threat as a more viable, effective political apparatus in Thailand than the government itself. In sum, given present trends in insurgent military development, in five years they will possess the capability of sustaining large numbers of harassing attacks against the RTG in many areas of the country simultaneously over a long period of time. Add to this the extensive damage which could be meted out in sabotage and interdiction of lines of communication and the military shock potential for the RTG is quite apparent.

This projection is premised on a continued RTG response to the insurgency of marginal effectiveness. What hope is there for improvement in the RTG response?

III. <u>RTG Response to the Insurgency</u> *

The RTG response to the insurgency is marked by serious and fundamental

* Much of Sect. III parallels the findings in Blaufarb's <u>CI in Thailand</u>, ARPA, Dec. 71 (SECRET)

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weaknesses. Command emphasis on dealing with the insurgents is not sufficient. Lack of command emphasis shows up in many ways. The regional CI commanders in two of the three regions are less than satisfactory. Inducements and rewards for those engaged in CI work (military and civilian) are non-existent. While at the top leaders are often more interested in personal gain and advancement than in CI progress. Training for CI by army, police and development cadre has been uneven at best. Finally the resources devoted to counterinsurgency have been insufficient. Military and police expenditures for CI (as well as development expenses like ARD) are estimated to be no larger than about 5-6% of the Thai GNP.

The management of counterinsurgency is weak. On the security side there is a lack of a unified command and control for military efforts against the insurgency. Coordination (except in the South) is very poor among agencies with a military role against the insurgents. The Communist Suppression Operation Command (CSOC) which is supposed to accomplish CI coordination lacks the necessary top level backing within the RTG to perform this coordination role adequately.

On the political/development side a weak management structure is equally apparent. There is no coordinating mechanism to avoid duplication and competition among rural development agencies. No real strategy for creating a positive government presence in the village has been evolved. The increased road access to villages in the last five years has not led to expanded government services in any dramatic way. On the negative side, corrupt police, antiquated administrative procedures and insensitivity to villager problems are still prevalent and provide effective tinder for the insurgents. The RTG development inputs do not have any real impact on the political and psychological themes of the CT. Insurgent appeals will not diminish until the government manages to effectively widen opportunities at the village level and provides a participant role for villagers as citizens in Thai society.

The weaknesses in military, police and civil programs directed at the insurgency derive from two basic factors. First the RTG has in the last several years been unconcerned with the insurgency to the point of complacency. There are, at least, some signs that the Thai leadership is now more realistically assessing the threat but the level of RTG concern is not yet deep enough or wide enough.

One could reasonably ask why the RTG has not yet perceived the insurgency as the chief threat to its long run viability. The answer is not clear. It stems in part from the false (and often self-deluding) belief that the insurgency only is active with non-Thai ethnic groups, e.g. hill tribe, Vietnamese, etc. The strong U.S. presence manifested in the U.S. utilization of the critical air bases and the substantial U.S. military and AID support add to the RTG complacency. Even if the insurgent threat were viewed with greater urgency by the

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RTG, improved performance in CI would be problematical. The internal power balances of the RTG make difficult a truly coordinated approach to the insurgency. Also the direction in which the ruling elite would like to go in CI appears to be unworkable in the long run: increasing overemphasis on suppression (and underemphasis on building a better administrative response to rural problems), a propensity to favor heavy weapons instead of ground units, neglect of village security measures and a failure to take account of the negative impact of the RTG on a sizable percentage of the rural populace. Certainly the basic reforms necessary to create increased opportunities in rural Thailand and a positive, personal government presence are not now being given any meaningful emphasis.

Perhaps the biggest impediment to an effective RTG response is the Thai Government's life style. Corruption is rampant. Loyalty, and not performance, is rewarded. Positions of authority are sought for the perquisites of the office and its status, not as a base for action. Within the government service continued advancement is insured not by producing results but by maintaining ties with the appropriate political faction. None of these basic attitudes is changing among the senior leaders and it appears these professional norms extend to the officials below them in the power structure. Yet if this leadership life-style is not changed, an effective CI response (and effective government in general) is a pipedream.

Has the U.S. been able to improve the CI effectiveness of the RTG with its assistance and to what degree has the U.S. been able to influence the basic RTG attitudes and values described above? Finally has the U.S. presence reinforced an old regime not likely to make the basic changes necessary to effectively counter the insurgency?

IV. The Role of the United States

This section focuses on some of the problem areas in U.S. assistance to CI in Thailand and on the question of the long-run effects of U.S. CI support on the RTG CI posture. This is not to say that some U.S. assistance is not indeed serving useful short-term CI purposes.

A. Military Assistance for CI

1. The Context

There are three distinct reasons for supplying the RTG with military equipment - for protection from the external threat to Thailand, as a political gesture (both of support and in return for favors such as the use of Thai airbases) and for counterinsurgency. Judging military aid solely from a CI standpoint does not take account of the first two purposes. Yet since the insurgency appears to be a much more likely vehicle for Communist domination of

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Thailand than the external threat, CI efficacy should be the chief yardstick for U.S. security assistance. However, in fact U.S. military assistance has not been specifically geared toward CI but rather toward supporting the modernization of a conventional army (and to a lesser extent navy and air force). Thus although some equipment like assault rifles and helicopters have been useful in CI, other assistance such as aid to the navy or tanks for the army has not been CI relevant. Rather than drawing up a CI package of assistance we have assisted the Thai military modernization in a general way, presumably in the hope that this will be CI effective. In reality much of this assistance may be moving the RTA toward a conventional U.S. type army, a military posture which has proven to be ineffective in CI.

To the extent that U.S. military assistance reinforces the power and prestige of the ruling elite, it serves to delay the kind of administratively fresh approach that is needed in CI - promotion of officers based on performance rather than politics, decentralization of operational planning and implementation, coordination with the police and civil authorities, improved small unit capabilities, and independently mobile companies and battalions.

2. Military Equipment

Military equipment is provided to the RTG according to a long established formula - army 50%, air force 36%, navy 14%. Assistance to the navy would seem to be completely irrelevant to both CI and the external threat. Some of this naval assistance has gone to the marines but they have not participated at all in CI, in part presumably, because they are not trusted politically. Of the assistance to the air force only a small proportion has been CI relevant. The F-5 and A-37 are not generally viewed as useful in CI.

Much of the materiel provided to the army has been largely of a conventional nature -tanks, tracked vehicles, heavy artillery. Future plans are for increased development of the air-mobile mode.

3. O+M Costs

One of the key issues in U.S. assistance to the Thai military is the proportion of assistance which should be devoted to operations and maintenance (O+M) expenses as opposed to new investment items. Presently the former are about 60% of the MAP budget for Thailand. Since there is no shortage of military hardware for CI, I feel that purchase of new items should cease, unless a serious CI need arises for a new investment item. At the same time a schedule should be drawn up whereby the RTG assumes a greater burden of the O+M costs on a progressive basis.

Unless O+M costs increasingly fall on the Thai, serious irrationalities in U.S. military assistance will remain and Thai self-sufficiency postponed.

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For example the Thai at present do not fully utilize their productive capacity for ammunition. Heavy U.S. funding for ammunition has dampened any incentive in this regard.

O+M costs which are not CI relevant should be eliminated entirely. For instance high levels of MAP expenditure for heavy artillery ammunition should be curtailed. This can always be increased if a direct, external attack is deemed likely.

4. Military Training + Advice

Much of the training given to Thai military officers has not been CI oriented and much of the advice given to the RTA in-country is not valid from a CI standpoint. For example Mission acquiescence in the RTA planning of Phu Kwang - a terrain oriented operation which incredibly enough was not coordinated with the civil or police authorities.

B. Public Safety (Police)

Much as with military assistance Public Safety is more than a CI program. It has law enforcement aspects and is a symbol of U.S. support to the RTG as well. The result is that often "cop-on-the-beat" thinking prevails at the expense of CI related assistance. For example the U.S. initiated tambon police station approach certainly did not take account of the lucrative targets for the insurgents in the dispersion of small police units in a large number of tambons.

The key problem in the police, and one which is widely known, is the problem of corruption. While we all know corruption to be an accepted lubricant for the creaky mechanism of government in Asia, police corruption is particularly virulent because the police are supposed to enforce laws and because they as a group have the greatest opportunity to bilk the small, average guy. Thus although it does not seem unduly wrong for an underpaid police sergeant to charge or rake-off for various services, the effect on the victim is more pernicious than a multi-million dollar scandal at the heights of power. One of the problems mentioned to me most often by rural Thai I have spoken with is the pervasiveness of petty police corruption and a related lack of concern with enforcing social justice.

Granted that the problem is difficult to solve and that the U.S. alone cannot clean up the TNPD. However, continued provision of assistance to a police force which is not taking vigorous steps to attack the problem is tantamount to supporting the corruption on which the rural insurgency feeds. At the very least future assistance should be strictly conditioned on real efforts toward a more honest police force. Perhaps the U.S. should demand a police salary raise as a first prerequisite for future assistance, although such a move would undoubtedly provoke pressure for an economically unfeasible pay raise for all government employees.

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C. Development Assistance (ARD)

ARD more than the military or the police is supposed to be specifically CI oriented. The concept is one of providing roads and improved services in rural areas to strengthen the relationship of the government to the people and undercut the insurgency.

However beyond the provision of roads (on a very expensive basis 3800 kms of roads have been put in since 1966 in ARD provinces), ARD has not been successful in either putting in improved government services on its own or coordinating an improved response to villager problems from other government agencies. Some effective coordinating mechanism to insure operational dovetailing is required regardless of the future status of ARD and CCARD (the coordinating committee). It might be asked, however, coordination toward what end? Although there are general goals for rural development (like increased rural loyalty) working objectives of rural development in support of CI have been ill defined on both the U.S. and RTG sides. Should the target be raising villager income or should the goal be improved administrative and social services? Should villages already influenced heavily by the CT be targetted or should areas in which the CT are just beginning to organize be targetted?

Thus in CI related development some very basic planning objectives need definition. This will require research as to the impact on the insurgent appeal of specific kinds of development and evaluation of present programs against this.

Beyond goals (and regardless of their content) a much improved mechanism for providing greater rural opportunity is required. The link from amphoe to tambon and village is weak and fragile and has not been fortified by ARD (which did strengthen a Changwat Administrative Organization). How to create this link in a way in which the real local aspirations are given a voice is a difficult task. An initial requirement would appear to be a drastic decentralization of authority (including budget and local authority over line agency activities) to the Nye Amphoe.

The U.S. role in this kind of reform might start with an insistence that better evaluation processes be built into future development programs which USOM supports. This would enable realistic feedback for both the RTG and USOM, focussing problem areas for attention. Proposed expansion of ARD with all its present problems should not be financed by the U.S.

D. Reporting on the Insurgency and CI

The Embassy's reporting on the insurgent threat has been accurate. However I feel that reporting of counterinsurgency progress has generally overemphasized the positive and underplayed the weak over-all response of the RTG

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to the insurgency. The reporting seems not to focus on the serious long-run deficiencies of the NEC which is the key obstacle to improved performance in CI and in other fields as well. Perhaps there is some reluctance to dwell on the negative because of possible repercussions in Congress for U.S. assistance programs in the future. However, the effect of a credibility gap would be far graver.

E. Future Options for U.S. Security and Development Assistance

Option 1. Eliminate U.S. Security and Development Assistance to Thailand -

As noted in Part II of the paper, the chief impediments to positive movement in CI stem from the Thai political system, the rigidity of the ruling elite, the lack of incentives to civil servants and soldiers, and above all a military regime intent chiefly on its own narrow and short-run self-interest.

If this is, indeed, the most serious barrier to change, continued U.S. support will only serve to reinforce the political power of a military dictatorship incapable of effective CI implementation. Thus although U.S. assistance may upgrade Thai performance marginally in the short-run, it postpones meaningful change without which in the long run the insurgents will take over.

Under these conditions and in light of the fact that U.S. influence cannot hope to substitute for effective Thai leadership, the U.S. ought to withdraw from its CI assistance and advisory roles. In so doing the U.S. may well provide the galvanizing jolt necessary to at least get the present RTG leadership moving. This cessation of assistance may also force the present leadership to share power with men who are more dedicated to fighting the root causes of the insurgency. It should be noted that a withdrawal from the CI assistance scene now will be infinitely easier for the U.S. than later when the threat is greater.

Although I favor it, I recognize that a cessation of U.S. assistance is unlikely given the criticality of the air bases to the U.S. There will also be those who will argue that stopping security assistance would constitute abandonment of the Thai to the Communists. In reality we would be providing a constructive opportunity for internal change while there is still a chance to stem the insurgency.

Option 2. Assistance Conditioned on Performance -

As I recognize that Option 1 is not likely to be followed, an alternative should be suggested as well.

A suggested general approach is continued U.S. assistance but on a rationalized basis, contingent upon real improvement in RTG CI performance.

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To do this requires a change in U.S. attitudes and modus operandi, before any effect on the RTG will be achieved:

a. Much greater stress on problem identification is needed. We like to talk about programs not problems. Real improvement will begin only after better definition of the problems and a greater will to attack them. Some recent improvements in this area appear to be taking shape.

b. Much greater communication with the RTG is desirable on these problems. This is not with the aim of jamming a solution down the RTG gullet, but rather with the view of making the RTG aware of U.S. perceived problems and engaging them in a dialogue as to appropriate solutions. All too often our advisors fail to do this and spend their time tinkering with "their" (U.S.) programs.

c. A good approach would be to start by aiming at the elimination of negative problems, i.e. those RTG and U.S. actions which have a negative effect in CI. Police corruption and abuses, inefficient administration of presently offered RTG services, the failure of the RTG to provide adequate resources for CI in some areas, unnecessary MAP hardware are all examples.

d. Make clear to the RTG that future assistance will be conditioned on improvements in its performance. Judiciously use U.S. influence to improve CI implementation. Naturally this approach will be difficult to inaugurate in light of the special favors the RTG is providing for U.S. Indochina activities. Nevertheless a start could be made away from the present situation where the assistance levels, and not rational use of assistance, are the chief concern.

More specific program recommendations are summarized below. The suggestions are not new and each would involve a difficult implementation process. Many of these have been described earlier in the paper.

(1) D/S -

The Development and Security Section (D/S) of the Embassy as the Ambassador's staff for monitoring and coordinating CI activity should be the focal point and spark plug for the American CI effort. It is hampered in fulfilling this role because it lacks sufficient authority over independent U.S. agencies. Instead the section reacts to crises of the moment and the time remaining is devoted to routine insurgency reporting and coordination. Such progress as is made on major matters often is more lip-service than genuine agreement on new approaches.

D/S has been of little influence on CI programs, taking a backseat to U.S. agency Chiefs. Recently the section was belatedly brought into the review of the proposed MAP program; hopefully this portends a greater role in other U.S. assistance areas.

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If the U.S. is to improve its CI assistance to the Thai, coordination and planning within the Mission should be vested in a more powerful body than D/S as presently constituted. The inclination to vigorously pursue appropriate CI measures, to strongly coordinate, and to take exception to improper plans or actions is a direct function of the authority which is being given the section. Presently that still appears to be very low.

(2) MAP -

(a) All non-CI investment should be eliminated and only critical CI related items should be provided.

(b) O+M costs should be progressively switched to the RTG.

(3) ARD -

Expansion to the South (presently under consideration) should not be permitted using U.S. funds. Rather the RTG should try to improve the services which have until now not been provided in the wake of its roads.

(4) Local Security -

Training and equipping of local security forces should be greatly improved.

(5) Public Safety -

(a) Police corruption should be targetted as a critical problem. (There are indications that this is being planned.)

(b) Police should assume a heavier CI role.

(6) General (RTG) -

(a) Greater decentralization of authority - civil and military.

(b) Increased personal incentives for government employees and reduced corruption and graft at all levels.

(c) Better training and motivation for all CI personnel - military and civilian.

(d) Greater emphasis on the political and economic aspects of CI.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented two options for the U.S. CI role in Thailand. One urges complete withdrawal of CI assistance and involvement in the belief that

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the U.S. cannot help to bring about needed reforms and that its continued presence postpones such reforms. Only through a cataclysmic event such as an aid cut-off is there a chance for real change in CI. I favor this option because I feel that the alternative of trying to influence the Thai toward improved CI is basically futile. To me the most evident and yet the most crucial lesson of Viet-Nam is that no matter how much the U.S. would like to see domestic reform in a foreign country (and this is what improved CI really is) there is little hope for change unless the host government is so inclined. For us to be more concerned with the Thai insurgency than the RTG itself is the clear sign that there is really no constructive role for U.S. assistance.

Yet if we are to stay on in CI assistance (for political reasons or in the hope of progress) it is critical to try to rationalize our role and use our influence in a useful manner. In the absence of such an approach continued U.S. assistance is self-delusive and serves only to buttress an old order unresponsive to progressive government. Buying time in the short run while sowing the seeds of long-run instability and revolution has long been a characteristic of U.S. foreign policy in underdeveloped nations. It is my hope that in Thailand this policy will be changed soon - soon enough to afford the United States a long-run role in Thailand, as well as improved government for the Thai people.

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