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ORIGIN ACTION

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AIRGRAM

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JAN 26 8 55 AM 1971
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ANALYSIS BRANCH

TO : Amembassy BANGKOK

INFO : Department of State, CHIENGMAI, PHNOM PENH, SONGKHLA, VIENTIANE, SAIGON

FROM : Amconsul UDORN DATE: January 8, 1971

SUBJECT : Northeast Thailand Quarterly Summary, October - December 1970

REF :

Action assigned to TB
Action Taken noted
Date of Action 1/28
Action Office Symbol TB
Name of Officer

CONTENTS:

1. Politics during "Kathin" Season.
2. Lao Coup Attempt.
3. Cambodian Border.
4. Visit of North & South Vietnamese Delegations.
5. The Insurgency.
6. Counter-insurgency.
7. New Second Army Commander.
8. New Police Region III Commander.
9. Completion of Sakon Nakhon - Nakhon Phanom Highway.

1. Politics during "Kathin" Season. Politicians took full advantage of "Kathin" religious celebrations in late October and early November to mend their political fences and make new contacts. Of particular interest were a swing through the Northeast by the head of the police, General Prasert Ruchirawongse (Udorn 146) and a visit by Deputy Prime Minister Praphat to Udorn (Udorn 147). Both actively sought the support of members of parliament and of the populace amid speculation over the possible retirement of Prime Minister Thanom during 1971.

2. Lao Coup Attempt. Lao Colonel Bounleut Saycocie and some Thai mercenaries were arrested by Thai authorities December 10 in Nukdahan

Group 4
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as they were about to cross the Mekong and try to seize control of Savannakhet (Udorn 159 & 160). Vientiane 8375 is an excellent wrap-up of the episode.

3. Cambodian Border. The Cambodian border area of Northeast Thailand settled into an uneasy calm during the last quarter of 1970. Although the enemy still controlled the districts on the Cambodian side from the Lao border to Anlong Veng, the RTG pulled back its regular army units and maintained a slim police presence along the border. In late December, North Vietnamese forces opened a new offensive, pushing through Anlong Veng west toward Oddar Meanchey. The RTG continues to watch the situation--although the Sisaket governor has put in effect his own provincial defense plan in lieu of regional support (Udorn A-2 of 5 January 1971).

4. Visit of North & South Vietnamese Delegations. After considerable stalling, the RTG finally permitted the North Vietnamese Red Cross Repatriation Delegation three one-day visits in mid-November to visit Vietnamese communities in the Northeast. The RTG carefully controlled the visits. A South Vietnamese Ministry of Information delegation was meanwhile permitted a 45-day jaunt to the same locations. (Udorn A-20)

5. The Insurgency. Again during this quarter the insurgents continued to improve their organization, both militarily and in terms of mass support. Village military units were expanded in parts of Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Nakhon provinces. One, and possibly two, "battalions" were created in mountain refuges in Nakhon Phanom-Sakon Nakhon-Kalasin provinces; although their strength was minimal. Outright attacks against government positions were few, but this was a conscious policy rather than an indication of weakness. Interestingly, the isolated insurgent group along the Buriram-Korat border was the most aggressive during the period and provoked the biggest government reaction (Udorn A-18).

This quarter was the harvest season, and the insurgents took advantage of the abundant opportunities to contact villagers in their fields, often helping them harvest their rice gratis. Quietly the insurgents' mass support base improved. A recent example was in Nam Som sub-district of extreme northwestern Udorn province--a remote area that is easy for the government to forget. When Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) officials revived a project to build a road to Nam Som (a road that would have been finished one or two years ago if a large share of Udorn ARD money had not disappeared into officials' pockets), they discovered that villagers in the area were so sympathetic to the insurgents that the road crew could not work safely. The government

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then conducted a sizeable suppression campaign in the area using a company of troops and units of the Border Patrol Police. It is doubtful, however, whether one week of force will do much to counter a year or two of soft-sell on the part of the insurgents.

6. Counter-insurgency. Our last quarterly report mentioned that most trainees in the Village Security and Development Unit (VSDU) program were not armed or paid (Udorn A-17). Three months later the VSDU men still are not armed or paid. The only somewhat positive development is that the RTG has suspended the training program; so at least no new trainees are coming back to the Northeast to this unenviable status. Two district strike forces, of Volunteer Defense Corps (VDC) men, led by Border Patrol Police non-commissioned officers, completed training and took up their posts in Nakhon Phanom and Kalasin provinces. This pilot program could grow into encouraging proportions. However on the negative side, it demonstrated lack of coordination among RTG agencies. One month after the teams arrived at their posts the Chief of Staff of Second Army Forward, who has principal operational responsibility for counter-insurgency throughout the Northeast, had not even heard of the existence of these teams.

7. New Second Army Commander. Second Army, which covers all of Northeast Thailand, got a new commander in late October. Maj. Gen. Phayom Phahulrat replaced Lt. Gen. Chamlong Singha (Udorn 144). Gen. Chamlong's moribund leadership and the distractions of Cambodia and Laos had brought Second Army counter-insurgency operations to a virtual standstill. Toward the end of this quarter, however, there were signs that under Gen. Phayom Second Army would again take a more active role. It initiated several operations, although on a smaller scale than the battalion-sized sweeps that were more typical of previous years. Actually the smaller operations, using long range reconnaissance patrol teams, hunter-capture teams, or a company or less of infantry should have produced results. American advisors have been urging such tactics for years. But the operations resulted in few contacts.

8. New Police Region III Commander. Police Special Colonel Chayasith Seksith replaced Maj. Gen. Sawaeng Hongnakorn as Region III Commander in December 1970. Col. Chayasith transferred from his position as Deputy Commander of Region 8. He returns to Korat at Regional Headquarters, where he was formerly stationed as Provincial Police Superintendent. It is still too soon to determine whether Col. Chayasith will be as forthright and cooperative with American military and civil officials in Korat, as was his predecessor.

Although Regional Commanders have limited power to direct the conduct of their province superintendents, they often can and do influence

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police attitudes toward Americans, which is particularly important in the base towns of Ubon and Korat covered by Region III.

General Sawaeng, who was promoted to an Assistant Commissionership in Bangkok, is highly regarded as a diligent, non-corrupt officer deeply concerned with improving the police image. In Korat he worked well with Thai civil and military officials, and should continue doing a good job in Bangkok.

9. Completion of Sakon Nakhon - Nakhon Phanom Highway. The US Army 809th Engineering Battalion completed the 90 kilometers of Route 22 between Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom during the quarter. Formal dedication of the highway by Ambassador Unger and Prime Minister Thanom is scheduled for January. The 809th phase down from some 1800 troops to 375 by the end of the quarter reduces the American military presence in Northeast Thailand.

BARNES