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A-7 NO.

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ANALYSIS BRANCH

TO : AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

INFO: DEPARTMENT OF STATE
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
AMCONSUL UDORN

FROM : AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

DATE: March 12, 1970

Action Assigned to IB
Action Taken
Date of Action III 120
Action Office Symbol IB
Name of Officer

SUBJECT : Self Help Land Settlement Projects in Waeng District, Narathiwat: Assets or Liabilities

REF :

SUMMARY

Two major Self Help Land Settlements in Waeng comprise half the population of the district. Settled by Thai Buddhists, the settlements are now providing support to the 10th Regiment of the CTO. The settlers live in poverty and are bitter over it. The settlements are understaffed and underfinanced and rather than stabilizing the border area, have added another negative factor to the political-economic equation.

END SUMMARY

Amphoe Waeng flush against the Kelantan and Perak borders, is perhaps the most crucial district in Narathiwat from a security viewpoint. Jungle and rugged mountains provide a haven for the 10th Regiment of the Communist Terrorist Organization. Lightly populated in comparison to its area, Waeng is the locus of two of the most important development projects in Narathiwat and indeed the entire Thai/Malaysian border area. These are the Self Help Land Settlements.

There are two such settlements in Waeng and together they total about half of Waeng's estimated population of 30,000. The settlements are alleged to have been conceived by Marshal Sarit as a means of leavening the ethnic Malay Muslim population of the border area with Thai Buddhists. These centers were to become loyal and dependable redoubts for the RTG. Such has not been the case as CAS has reported, probably because the same economic and social conditions that make the Muslims susceptible to communist

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Drafted by: CONSUL:JHKelly:bjm 3-7-70

Contents and Classification Approved by: CONSUL:JHKelly

Clearances: SA/CI: Col. J. Cleland

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exploitation affect the Buddhists in this manner. The GVN is not known to have obtained any of the Buddhist criteria but it is the other [illegible] that [illegible] on RVN security [illegible] in an ideal position to [illegible] on CAG activities; do not do so;

The first of the settlements was established in 1959 in Tambon Khoksi Tejoden in the Malayalan [illegible] area. The settlement is about 7,500 rai in size, of which the land is arable. New settlers [illegible] is regarded as completed. 475 families [illegible] each family receiving 25 rai [illegible] about 6 acres); 22 of the families are headed by army veterans, 20 are headed by [illegible] and the remainder are [illegible] from Northeast Thailand; population of the settlement is now estimated at 2,700. Even though the project is regarded as completed more than half the families do not have houses but live in [illegible] huts. Major crops are rubber, coconuts, fruits, and [illegible] rice;

The second and much larger of the settlements was established in 1963 in Tambon Namong west of Nadee town in [illegible] terrain. The area is about 93,500 acres of which one third is [illegible] for agricultural use. At present the settlement has 5,615 families totaling an estimated 14,000 people. Each family receives 15 or 10 rai (about 4 acres) depending on the [illegible]. 30 of the families are headed by army veterans. 527 are [illegible] from Northeast Thailand, 1,500 are [illegible] from the Northeast, Chiang Mai, Tak, and the Central Plain. The [illegible] have been allowed to settle. Major crops are [illegible]; bananas; and coconuts. Settlers also do some [illegible];

The most serious problem confronting the settlements is poverty. Officials estimate family income at about baht 400 per month. Assuming that families average 5 persons this works out to a per capita income of something less than US $80 per year. There are several reasons for this poverty:

1. Soil erosion; the rugged terrain was heavily forested. When the trees were cleared serious erosion resulted;

2. Poor agricultural techniques;

3. Lack of capital by project management (e.g., officials stated that they received no funds from the Public Welfare Department since last October);

4. High prices in the local markets. Chinese merchants there admitted freely that their goods for sale average 33% higher prices over the nearest large market town, Bungei Kelah;

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5. Lack of markets for crops raised on the settlements.

To administer the larger settlement the Public Welfare Department has assigned seven civil servants, who are assisted by 19 local hire laborers. Heavy equipment is deadlined much of the time for lack of spare parts or mechanical knowhow. (A similar problem hampers the Naeng Mobile Development Unit. When the reporting officer visited the NMU on March 3, he was told that its only two pieces of heavy equipment for road construction have been deadlined since last June).

The settlements have suffered a high rate of turnover among the settlers, i.e., many families have packed up and gone home. As explained by the settlement officials, each family receives Baht 300 for travel expenses when the application to settle is accepted. Upon arrival the family is given a plot of land and Baht 6,000 of which Baht 3,400 is earmarked for construction of a house. Turnover problems begin then as some families have taken a quick look around, grabbed the Baht 6,000, and flown the coop. Once the house is built and the land cleared, the family receives Baht 2,000 for tools and seeds. That is supposed to end the financial assistance. However supplementary grants and rice rations have been provided sporadically. Officials complain that settlers spend the money foolishly, gamble it away, or re-sell their tools or rice rations. All of this is no doubt true, but it must be equally true that plenty of local profiteers (including some officials) stand ready to separate the settler from his cash. The reporting officer was taken to the homes of three "model" settlers (good houses, well cared for land). All three said that even after 6 years at the settlement they had great difficulty making ends meet.

Most of the settlers seem to be quite bitter about their circumstances. During the reporting officer's visit to the settlement in Tambon Hamong, the Governor of Narathiwat held a public assembly followed by the distribution of old clothes and condensed milk donated by the Royal Family for the settlers. The Governor delivered a strong speech in which he noted that he was well aware that some of those present were supporting the communists. After the speech he invited questions from the crowd which numbered about 500. Three questions were shouted in bitter tones:

1. Q: "What is the RTG going to do about low rubber prices?"
   A: "There is no future in rubber; diversify your crops."

2. Q: "Why can't the government find a market for the pigs we raise?"

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A: "The government will work on it."

Q: "What is the government going to do for those of us who have enough to earn

A: "We have you with today. We will try to do something."

The crowd was visibly dissatisfied with the answers and the Governor declined to answer more questions.

Comment:

Conversations with officials and settlers, and personal observation lead to the conclusion that the settlers are living in poverty and are to the conclusion that the settlers are living in poverty and set here out about it. Officials hope that in the near future the Rooster will be able to produce enough crops to live better. Experience does not seem certain in the absence of agricultural Marketing and assistance for the settlers. The Buddhist island in Tawau, built at considerable expense, is becoming indistinguishable to a visitor of living conditions from the Muslim sea around it. As a result such groups are economically disadvantaged the PBG will have an uphill fight in its efforts to win out over the CPO. The latter may succeed using the Buddhists for support work and in line with the theory that this is a class struggle rather than a racial one. This may see the CPO Chinese and Muslim cadres leavened by a few Buddhists.

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