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A-203

HANDLING INDICATOR

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Authority: 728158
10-24-2008

TO : Secstate WASHDC
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CINCPAC

Date of Action 6/5/72
Action Office Symbol
Name of Officer

INFO : SAIGON, VIENTIANE, KUALA LUMPUR, CANBERRA, WELLINGTON, LONDON, RANGOON, HONG KONG

FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK

DATE: June 7, 1972

SUBJECT : Joint Mission Report on the Insurgency and CI Programs in Thailand, January-March 1972

REF : BKK 3186 (Jan Report)
BKK 5172 (Feb Report)

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SUMMARY: Insurgents in the first quarter of 1972 staged several dramatic attacks seemingly designed to publicize insurgent strength. Incidents ranging from the attack on a police force assigned to guard Field Marshal Thanom in the mid-south to an ambush on the main highway south of Nakhon Phanom illustrate this higher insurgent profile. Perhaps the most significant insurgent decision was to harass the RTA in Operation Phu Kwang when they had been expected to avoid contact with such a large force.

An analysis of Phu Kwang has been forwarded separately (BKK 6317). Although the large-scale effort to evict the insurgents from their base area closest to the central plains did not succeed in its tactical purpose, the operation initially showed a readiness to expend men and resources against the insurgency, although called off in late April without demonstrable effect.

In other areas of the North, insurgents continued to securely operate from their base areas attacking small RTG outposts and impeding RTG road construction. These military efforts are accompanied by organization work which has stressed increased recruitment, more propagandizing in lowland villages, and general erosion of RTG influence. For example, in Nan the CT are said to

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Drafted by: D/S:LARosenblatt:sh | Drafting Date: 5/31/72 | Phone No.: 506 | Contents and Classification Approved by: D/S:HMustakos

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be working toward recruitment of 3,000 new followers.

In the Northeast organizational work also proceeds. In Na Kae district, intelligence indicates that the CT have 3,000 village militia men in place in 124 villages.

During the quarter no significant RTG gains were recorded against this insurgent expansion in the North or the Northeast although several CPM operations have been mounted in the Northeast since then. In the South CSOR Commander, General Sant, has kept the insurgents off balance with seizures of camps and stepped up patrolling as well as operations against the CT infrastructure. Sant has been able to forge the CPM elements into an effective CI system, although police corruption remains a serious problem. Leadership of CSOR commanders in the North and Northeast could be much improved. Although there has been an increase in CI personnel and activity, much more effective action by all elements of the CPM team is required if the expanding insurgent capabilities are to be met. More command emphasis, better quality leadership at all levels, improved coordination, more vigorous implementation and better CI training are all required if RTG efforts are to be more successful. END SUMMARY.

I. INSURGENCY

A. <u>North</u>

The level of insurgent military and organizational initiative continued high throughout the quarter, despite the major RTG operation (Phu Kwang) in the tri-province area and increased frequency of RTG operations in Nan and Chiang Rai. Insurgent military action in Nan and Tak provinces brought work on the RTG's highly publicized road construction projects to a virtual standstill, diverting a substantial portion of the RTG suppression forces from other missions, particularly in Nan. Other military actions have largely been targeted against remote village security teams, police or RTA outposts. There was a marked increase in the frequency of insurgent use of the RPG-2 grenade launcher and 60 mm mortars in attacks on RTG forces. Additionally, insurgents employed for the first time the 12.7 mm (50 caliber) machine gun in the tri-province area and the 81 mm mortar, in Nan province. There is little doubt that new armament acquired over the past several years, but employed efficiently only within the past year, has greatly strengthened the insurgent hand in the North. There are reports [redacted] that the insurgents

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are regularly infiltrating large quantities of supplies, consisting of mortar and small arms ammunition, into the border areas of North Thailand by horse caravan. A trend which particularly alarms RTG security officials is the continued swelling of armed insurgent ranks. During the quarter, several insurgent groups of 50-100 armed men each were reported infiltrating into Nan and Chiang Rai provinces. Additionally, there are reports [redacted] that an insurgent recruiting drive and census among the hilltribe population in Nan province, aims at mobilizing 3,000 more part-time and full-time soldiers. According to the report, weapons to equip the new recruits are already prepositioned in the insurgents Phu Wae base complex in Pua District [redacted]

By all measurable accounts, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), substantially strengthened during the past year, has begun to seriously press expansion of its geographical and ethnic support base into the Northern Thai lowlands. Propaganda themes designed to appeal to the hilltribes are being replaced with themes directed towards poor Thai farmers. Despite the previously held belief by RTG officials that lowland Thais would be immune to penetration by Communist insurgents (primarily hilltribes), there is substantial evidence indicating significant insurgent success. Trade between lowland Thai villagers and insurgents is flourishing in most areas adjacent to insurgent mountain strongholds. In some lowland areas, insurgents have succeeded in thoroughly intimidating the local security forces. Lowland refugees, fleeing insurgent pressures, have appeared in Nan province. Several remote lowland valleys, contiguous to insurgent strongholds, have clearly become contested areas where RTG officials cannot visit without extraordinary security measures.

With few exceptions, the mountain areas along the Thai-Lao border from Chiang Rai to the tri-province are either under Communist control or lack RTG presence. Within these areas, the insurgents have established effective control over the hilltribe populations through village and tambol committees and village militia. Now the insurgents are employing TPLAF elements from their mountain strongholds in intensified efforts to eliminate RTG presence from remote lowlands and to gain control of the ethnic Thai population.

Available intelligence indicates that the insurgents have been particularly successful in contacting and establishing rapport with lowland Thai in several areas of Chiang Rai province. In Chiang Kham district at least ten villages have been identified as primary sources of supplies for insurgents operating from the Nam Sa stronghold. In Pong district, insurgent forces have repeatedly surrounded entire

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villages to purchase supplies and conduct lengthy propaganda sessions. In Pua district of Nan insurgents have blockaded at least nine villages in February and March for proposed meetings and purchase of supplies. [redacted] Of great concern is the fact that lowland villagers are showing growing willingness to deal with the insurgents who offer higher prices than normal for food and other supplies. Also, villagers seem to be listening to what the propaganda teams have to say.

On the CI side, Operation Phu Kwang, employing up to 14,000 RTA troops in the largest CI operation in Thai history, held most attention during the quarter. (For full details see: BKK 6317, [redacted]

Initially conceived as a 30-day training/operation exercise for Bangkok garrisoned central reserve forces, Phu Kwang was transformed into an extended operation after early warned insurgents succeeded in successfully frustrating and stopping repeated RTA ground maneuvers. Despite heavy support by artillery and air, judged good by U.S. advisors, RTA elements failed to cope with the combination of difficult terrain and insurgent resistance to achieve Thai stated objectives. After 90-days, including several periods of standdown and over 500 casualties, RTG called a halt to main offensive actions and began withdrawal/forces to fire support bases. [redacted] the insurgent view of Phu Kwang as a major psychological victory because they did prevent the RTA from penetrating their main base area at Hin Long Kla, backing up their propaganda claims that they are in Thailand to stay. This psychological gain will not only affirm the support of the hill people already under their control, but may also have a telling effect on the ethnic Thai population in the surrounding lowlands. Militarily, the insurgents proved to be a well-equipped, viable military force capable of countering superior RTG forces in sustained operations using effective guerrilla tactics. While the insurgent organization and activities in the tri-province area suffered disruption during Operation Phu Kwang, it will probably prove to be only temporary. Few, if any, important camps or villages were lost and the hilltribe population, upon whom the Communist depend for recruits and support, remains under effective control.

Elsewhere in the North, RTG continued to conduct frequent company-size or smaller operations. Despite the abundance of known insurgent target areas, these operations were mostly carried out in peripheral areas and resulted in virtually no contact and thus had

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little effect on the growing insurgency. Reports from Chiang Mai Consul, [redacted] consistently describe deteriorating security and public morale in most sensitive areas. Significantly, Operation Phu Kwang appears to have prompted RTG re-assessment of counterinsurgency planning and operations.

B. Northeast

Insurgent initiated activity in the Northeast was higher than February-March of last year. The RTG in turn stepped up the pace of its CI operations in the dry season during the first quarter, in response to the worsening security situation in several areas of the Northeast. CPM forces made relatively few contacts with enemy units, however, but rounded up a number of suspects. The CT bands generally stayed clear of the government patrols but inflicted some casualties on RTA and police personnel. There were continued reports of the expansion of the CT infrastructure in the villages in the Phu Phan mountain area.

CT military activity continued to spread outside their main base in the Phu Phans with a number of attacks on police and Volunteer Defense Corps posts in Na Klang district and Nam Som sub-district of western Udorn province and Lahan Sai district of Buriram. CPM forces reacted by conducting a sweep operation in Udorn in January which produced no contacts but picked up some suspects.

In the Phu Phan area a CPM cordon operation in January in Na Kae district of Nakhon Phanom rounded up about 60 suspected villagers. Responding to the increased government activity in the district, the CT inflicted 10 casualties on two RTA patrols which they ambushed in February. In the same month in neighboring That Phanom district, the CT for the first time laid an ambush on the main highway along the Mekong River, hitting trucks carring police and VDC who suffered seven casualties.

The RTG responded by launching a CPM operation of small unit patrols in That Phanom, eastern Na Kae, and part of Mukdahan district which was originally scheduled to last 30 days, but has since been extended a second month into May. The CPM forces rounded up a number of suspects, and over 70 villagers in Na Kae surrendered to RTG officials in March. So far there have been relatively few contacts with CT units, however. But the CT returned to the site of their February ambush on the main river road and in March just missed ambushing the Nakhon Phanom vice and deputy governors and provincial military advisor.

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In March the CT also ambushed police vehicles in Pla Pak and Kham Cha-i districts of Nakhon Phanom, killing five police in each incident. Some of the RTA troops used in the That Phanom operation had been withdrawn from these districts. With the RTA mainly engaged in patrolling in populated areas adjacent to the Phu Phans, it did not launch any significant operation against the CT main forces in their base camps in the mountains during the quarter. Second Army, however, launched a CPM operation in May against insurgent units in the Phu Sung Mountains on the border of Sakon Nakhon and Kalasin provinces. In an effort to obtain CI benefits from training funds, the RTA Third Division conducted training tests in Khao Wong district of Kalasin. No significant results were achieved.

Outside the Phu Phan area, four CPM operations were launched in April in western Udorn, southern Nakhon Phanom and northern Ubon, southern Ubon, and the tri-province area of Korat-Buriram-Prachinburi in recognition of the fact that the RTG could ill-afford to totally ignore these lower priority areas. Scheduled to last 60 days, they were based on intelligence provided to all CPM elements through Joint Security Centers and were planned jointly by CPM officers. The RTA is assigning to each area of operations one company which was not previously actively engaged in CI in the field.

Intelligence reports during the quarter indicated that the CT in the Northeast were obtaining more and better weapons such as more AK-47 assault rifles. Cartridges used for these weapons were found for the first time in the Korat-Buriram-Prachinburi area after the attack on the VDC post in Lakan Sai. There were also further reports that CT in the Phu Phans were equipped with mortars, although these have not yet been used in combat.

During the last half of 1971, 9-10 man units of the CPT Nong Bua Lam Phu Province Committee were sent to Laos to operate infiltration routes through Laos to North Viet-Nam. Weapons are transported into Thailand on these routes which are also used by CPT cadre traveling to North Viet-Nam. In November 1971 20-30 jungle fighters were sent along this route to North Viet-Nam for three years of training.

The continued expansion of the CT village infrastructure in the Phu Phan area was described in a report on Na Kae listing over 3,000 members of Village Military Units in 124 villages of all 11 communes of the district. And in Khao Wong sub-district and Kuchinarai district of Kalasin, 26 villages were reported to have been organized by July 1971 [redacted]

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Evidence of insurgent taxation of logs and indoctrination of wood cutters in Sakon Nakhon province is described in another report [redacted]. It appears the insurgents will also use these woodcutters as informants to warn of RTG movements in the area. Such organized insurgent taxation and proselyting activity is an indication of the effective local organizational work which has characterized the insurgency in the Northeast.

Another report [redacted] cited criticism for the first time of the Thai King and Queen by CT in two districts of Sakon Nakhon. Hitherto, the insurgents have been loath to attack the royal family which the villagers have traditionally venerated. RTG officials have often argued that Communism cannot succeed in Thailand because it conflicts with the allegiance of the people to the King and Buddhist religion.

C. Mid-South

Violence showed a marked increase in the mid-south with the highest levels of both RTG and CT activity recorded to date. RTG initiated incidents increased fourfold over last quarter or the same quarter last year. CT initiated military incidents doubled as compared with the same periods to approximately the same level as that of the RTG.

Casualties inflicted by each side increased proportionally. Thus the CT inflicted twice as many casualties (C-P-M) on the RTG (100 plus) as they did last quarter or the same quarter last year. For its part RTG forces reported killing four times as many CT as in either of the same two quarters of 1971 (25-30).

When taking into account probable CT wounded (not reflected in the current reporting system) total CT casualties for the quarter may well be on the order of 60 or more.

Thus the CT initiated about the same number of military incidents as the RTG, but inflicted twice the number of C-P-M casualties on the RTG as they suffered themselves. Part of the difference is accounted for by CT assassinations (up threefold to 19). However most of the difference in casualty rates is due to the CT's pattern of selective attacks/ambushes/harassments against weak or isolated RTG forces. In comparison the RTG's chosen approach is one of penetrating and occupying CT sanctuaries before they can harden them into "liberated areas". Thus, the RTG forces while strategically on the offense are often on the tactical defense in actually engaging with the enemy.

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The RTG's sustained offensive this quarter far surpasses any earlier efforts and is achieving results. Under General Sant, the CSOR-IV commander, a C-P-M team effort has been forged in the south to a degree unknown in the rest of the country.

The RTG forces are operating on a basis of a new policy of occupying CT base areas for protracted periods (more than a month) and searching out their organizational infrastructure. CT base camps are still being destroyed (at least 8 this quarter) but they are no longer the main goals of operations as in the past. The new policy is having good effect. The CT "masses development" activities are being disrupted, their organizational infrastructure harassed (240 suspects detained in one 3-month operation alone), their forces dispersed and scattered to new areas.

In conjunction with operations, the RTG is taking some limited initiatives in the areas of psyops, civic action, and administrative services in an attempt to increase rapport with civilians who had grown increasingly restive under the burden of CT taxation and conscription. While its unclear how much real effect these efforts have had, they may have been instrumental in the CT's striking twice at Mobile Development Units during the quarter. Most importantly, however, it is unclear if the CT will be able to return to their former base areas and extract a price in blood from the villagers who have cooperated with the government.

While the government forces definitely have the initiative in the mid-south and are punishing the CT as never before, the RTG is unlikely to make any permanent gains until it resolves the major grievance in the region - rampant police corruption. Informed American intelligence analysts report that civil, military and even police officials throughout the area openly acknowledge that provincial police corruption and abuse is "out of control." Consul Songkhla quotes an important RTG judge - "the root problem is the corruption of the provincial police who neither deserve nor have the confidence of the people."

Unlike the BPP, the provincial police often act like, and are received as oppressors of the people. Although provincial officials are aware of the problem they seem somewhat baffled in reaching for a solution. Changwat police commanders are often culled from the dregs of the force. Governors are generally powerless to confront the police chain of command which runs up to the center of power in Bangkok. Despite his own great concern, General Sant's influence is limited

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because the police constitute the major CI forces under his command and the Police Region 8 commander, although a personal friend and active in CI operations, has a shady reputation himself.

Despite their best efforts,the armed CT in the mid-south were not able to intensify their offensive activity in proportion to the massive initiatives of RTG armed forces. Formerly the CT initiated twice as many military incidents as the RTG. This quarter the CT were only able to roughly match the RTG forces in initiating contacts. Moreoever, the CT have been forced to back off from their attempts in the beginning of the quarter to mount high profile attacks and ambushes, successfully inflicting a large number of casualties on the RTG. Thus most CT military incidents in January alone (68) reflected the bloody intent of the CT effort and exceeded government casualties suffered in either the preceding quarter or the same quarter last year. In the succeeding two months the CT were still active militarily, but under continuous RTG pressure they shifted emphasis to less damaging harassments by fire and low level ambushes. RTG casualties dropped 65% from January to February.

Nevertheless the CT have not retired to lick their wounds. CT initiated incidents of all types for the quarter totalled 70 as compared with 28 last quarter and the same quarter last year. Total incidents in which the CT are known to have employed violence (military engagements, assassinations, kidnappings) is double the number recorded in the preceding quarter or this quarter last year.

The CT have responded to RTG offenses by partially dispersing their forces into new areas, for instance Trang, Satun and perhaps elsewhere. Generally the dispersed CT forces have laid low in these new areas, but they can be expected to start aggressive "masses development" activity among the local population. At the end of the quarter for the first time the CT engaged in overt military activity in northern Surat Thani where they overran a local police station in Kanchandit district and assassinated the village chief in one coordinated attack. The RTG suffered 2 civilians killed, 1 civilian and one policeman wounded, along with losing an unknown number of weapons.

The CT have intensified their campaign of eliminating through selective assassinations low level security personnel and villagers suspected of aiding the government. Targeted assassinations (almost always successful) resulted in 19 low-level RTG supporters being killed - a threefold increase over last quarter or the same quarter last year. Most of the assassinations were concentrated in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

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In the same vein the CT have attempted to tighten their control over villagers in the contiguous districts of southern Surat Thani and northwestern Nakhon Si Thammarat. (Wang Sa, Ban Nasan, Prasaeng and Khian Sa (Surat) and Chawang (Nakhon Si Thammarat). Since March 17 the CT have forced the people in numerous villages to hand over their personal weapons. The CT collected more than 164 villager weapons (mostly single-shot shotguns) in a campaign running into April. The purpose of this effort may well be twofold: first, to deny the villagers the means with which to protect themselves against further CT encroachments; and second to arm a possible increase in CT jungle forces. Despite the fact that the CT have pressured up to 90 youth (male and female) into military training, we tend to give greater weight to the first rationale presented since single-shot shotguns are not effective military weapons.

CT efforts to disarm the people, conscript youth and extort taxes appear to have been a gross miscalculation on the part of the Communists and may severely undermine their long-term goals in the area. One attempt to totally isolate 12 villages in Chawang district (Nakhon Si Thammarat) resulted in a massive exodus of hundreds of villagers fleeing to government controlled areas. (Government reaction has been strong but since the details are unclear and impact uncertain this will be covered next month.)

The CT have badly bungled in their maladroit, heavy-handed attempts to enforce population control in the area. Sources highly critical of the government in the past new echo official claims that CT tactics are losing them the support of the people. One generally critical opposition ex-MP and newspaper editor reported to Consul Songkhla: "Most rural Thai, especially those over 30 with families, now oppose the CT even in CT controlled areas like Chawang. This is a new development. Originally the people were often neutral, curious, or even supported the CT out of opposition to government authorities. However, CT taxes and conscription are turning the people away from them ... it is becoming clear that the CT are not for the people. However, in CT areas the people have to cooperate out of fear. In the past RTG forces occupied areas temporarily then the CT came back to inflict reprisals on villagers who had collaborated with the government." With this new development, and the new RTG strategy of protracted operations, the question is will the RTG forces in combination with indigenous village security groups be able to prevent the CT from returning to extract reprisals?

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D. Far South

Government forces in the Far South have taken two CTO and four CT camps without opposition. However, in general the government has been more active against bandits and Muslim separatists than against the Communists. A 1,000-man operation was mounted in February against bandits and separatists, followed up in April by deployment of most provincial police strike units (Special Action Forces) in an anti-bandit posture. In April the 5th RCT started an operation to clear the small but active CT band which had forced the opening of the Hat Yai International Airport to be rescheduled from mid-April to mid-June. The operation against this CT force, which is in a position to threaten the major cross roads of Thai communications in the region, will continue for at least a month.

CT activity remained light during the quarter with the most notable incident being the harassment of a VST post in Ban Wang Pha, Songkhla. The CT harassed the post at half hour intervals three times one night in January, apparently hoping to lure the defenders out into a prepared ambush. They were unsuccessful. Reports indicate the possible formation of a new 25-man CT unit in Na Thiwat district, Songkhla. They are believed to be concentrating on low-level agit/prop activities.

The CTO are still concentrating on re-establishing their bases and developing support groups in northern Malaysia. It is now clear that the CTO have withdrawn farther south toward the border and handed over part of their former area of operations in Songkhla to the CT. Several assassinations and armed propaganda recruiting meetings were conducted largely in the Betong salient of Yala which thrusts into Malaysia. The most significant CTO activity took place in Sadao district of Songkhla where they attacked or harassed BPP operations bases and police posts on at least five separate occasions. Although the CTO did not inflict great casualties on the police in these attempts, they did register their reaction to RTG operations which had destroyed two of their base camps in January.

The first military attack by Muslim separatists against RTG forces took place in February when a well-armed force fired into a police station in Narathiwat for three hours. RTG officials in the area are growing increasingly concerned about a possible eruption of Muslim separatist activity. Changwat civilian officials express open frustration about inability to control the abusive and corrupt police who are alienating the Muslim community.

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E. Central Thailand

When compared with other areas in Thailand, Central Thailand remained relatively inactive. However, insurgent activity was on the rise in both the eastern and western wings of the area. The most spectacular incident (although perhaps not attributable to local CT) occurred during the early morning hours of January 10 when an estimated three unidentified sappers infiltrated the Royal Thai Air Force Base at Utapao, Rayong Province, and inflicted minor damage to three USAF B-52's. One infiltrator was killed.

In the east central region, reports continued to be received of an estimated 10-20 CT/man group attempting to organize local villagers in Kabin Buri District, Prachinburi. In the west central region reports were received that CT may be moving into the Sang Kla Buri District, Kanchanaburi and organizing some of the local villagers and giving them arms training. If true, these CT are likely responsive to direction from the Northern Regional Central Committee and this activity may be an attempt by the CT in Tak Province to extend their area of operation and influence. The CT in the west central region, primarily in Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and Prachuab Khiri Khan continued to send out patrols of 5 - 30 armed CT, possibly on show-of-force missions. In the past six months both the size and frequency of these CT patrols has increased. CT in this western area conducted three ambushes. On 8 January an eight-man hunting party from Bangkok, probably thought by the CT to be a VDC patrol, was ambushed in Pranburi District, Prachuab Khiri Khan. All eight were killed. On 19 and 20 February, BPP PARU patrols were ambushed by an estimated 20 CT in Hua Hin District. Seven were killed and two wounded.

II. Other Counterinsurgency Related Activities

A. Police

BPP - The BPP has been detached from the Provincial Police and its commander promoted to Commissioner level. He will be directly responsible for all police CI operations. The establishment of a single line agency to conduct police CI operations is a sound organizational step.

Police Casualties - Police casualties in the first quarter of 1972 were 209, up from 169 in the last quarter of 1971. In March, however,

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police casualties were relatively low as police/CT clashes dropped to 45.

National Police Intelligence/ Operations Center (NPIOC) - The NPIOC, staffed by BPP, PP, Special Branch, and Police aviation officers, has been established in Bangkok as a collation and analysis center for insurgent intelligence and as a command post for providing operational order to all elements of the police.

Problem Areas - Shortage of police manpower and assault rifles are key problems affecting their CI capabilities. Further clarification of roles and missions vis-a-vis the police, military and civil elements is needed.

B. ARD

It appears that ARD will be transferred soon from the Prime Minister's Office to the Ministry of Interior as an independent department. There were indications earlier that the NEC was inclined to amalgamate ARD into the Department of Community Development (CD), with some of the equipment going to the Department of Public Works as well. It is hoped that coordination between ARD and CD and ARD and DOLA will improve after ARD is in the Ministry of Interior.

C. Community Development

There are indications that the Department of Community Development is contemplating expansion of its activities in insurgent sensitive areas. It appears that CD is prepared to integrate economic and social development with a local self-defense capability in selected insurgency sensitive villages. NEC approval is now being awaited for this scheme.

D. ARD Roadbuilding and the Relationship of Roads to Counterinsurgency

A recent USOM mini-survey shows that vehicle registration has increased dramatically in three of the original six ARD changwads - Udorn, Ubon and Loei. The exact impact of more roads on the increasing number of vehicles is, of course, impossible to isolate and no control figures for non-ARD changwads are presently available. Consul/Udorn reports that road construction has brought about influxes of new settlers in at least two districts of the Northeast. Also some roads clearly assist in facilitating operations against the insurgents. However, most ARD roads are laid out with reference

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not only to security guidelines but also with reference to population density and other socio-economic factors and thus do not necessarily have a direct security impact. Also the building of roads may result in higher bus fares as larger bus companies move in and may facilitate an increased police presence which often is engaged in enforcement of unpopular laws and is frequently corrupt. In short the consequences of new roads for counterinsurgency are difficult to fully assess, although the positive would appear to outweigh the negative.

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