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ASIAN
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DEC 6 8 AM 1971
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ANALYSIS BRANCH

FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK

SUBJECT : Press Concern Over Soviet Presence

REF :

DATE OF ACTION December 1, 1971

Action Office

Name of Officer

Two recent editorials in the English-language press here warned that Thailand must guard against Soviet espionage activities. The Nation on October 19 referred to several Soviet agents who have been active in Bangkok in the past, and called on the Foreign Ministry to assure that none of the 105 recently expelled from the U.K. is sent to Bangkok.

In a November 15 editorial, the Bangkok Post noted that Thailand is improving its relations with the Soviet Union as a balance to China, that the Soviets are interested in building economic inroads into Southeast Asia, and that the Soviets are concerned that "the vacuum created by America's abnegation in the region might too readily be filled by the Chinese." The Post said that Thailand must "ensure against the type of incidents which occurred in both England and Belgium recently in which even trade and Aeroflot representatives were expelled on charges of spying."

While cultivating comprehensive relations with both China and the USSR, the Post said, Thailand "must continue our special relationship with the United States....There is no doubt that Washington and Bangkok will continue on a course of close relations despite U.S. retrenchment from the region."

COMMENT. These warnings about Soviet spies are currently relevant because of Aeroflot's November 3 inauguration of service to Bangkok (Bangkok 14837), accusations in July and August that Soviet Embassy officials had attempted to subvert Thai students (Bangkok 10534), and the July departure from Thailand of two Soviet Embassy officers in connection with an espionage case involving an American serviceman (Bangkok 10219).

Enclosures: all in

1. Nation article of Oct. 19
2. Bangkok Post article of November 15.

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FORM DS-322 10-64

Drafted by:	Drafting Date:	Phone No.:	Contents and Classification Approved by:
POL:DCFerguson:bb	11/23/71		POL:LOttickering

Clearances: POMIL:Col.Lewis ECON:DSumption

GROUP 3-Downgraded at 12-year intervals, not automatically declassified.

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1966 O - 302-210 (258)

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THE SPY GAME

Ninety Soviet officials working in the Soviet Embassy and trade mission have been expelled by Britain and 15 more have been refused entry. These 105, according to the best knowledge of the British Government, have been engaged in espionage. Spies are not ordinary people but specially chosen for their intelligence and capability and trained through an intensive process of study and training before the KGB, the Soviet secret service, sends them out on assignments. A lot of money and a lot of time has been spent on them. They are valuable to their country because they represent an investment. And only the top people, tried and tested, are assigned abroad.

Therefore it is a logical conclusion that these 105 are top men who are a great asset to the Soviet Union. Are they back in Moscow now without any jobs? After all the training, which might include anything from languages to cryptography or microfilm photography, are they to be kept idle or employed as office workers in the Kremlin? It is obvious they cannot be since they are too valuable an asset abroad to waste their talents at home. When all this flap in London cools down, where are these 105 "diplomats" or "trade representatives" to be re-assigned? How many of them will be coming to Bangkok?

We do not want to impugn our security system or Foreign Office. Every country in the world obviously has its agents in Bangkok. Certainly the CIA and the KGB, but it is reputed that, in commercial intelligence, the Japanese service is better than the CIA and KGB put together. Even a small country like Burma, we are sure, has sufficient intelligence sources here to check whether Deputy Foreign Minister Sa-nga Kittikachorn was telling the truth when he said that former Burmese Premier U Nu has been escorted to the Laotian border without an entry visa.

Thailand has no long record of expelling spies. The only instance we recall occurred in 1959 when the Tass representative, Yuri Trushin, was expelled. Three months ago two Soviet Embassy officials here suddenly left under circumstances that still remain the grist for cocktail party chatter.

These 105, expelled from London, may have their names changed, get new passports, get a different status, may even grow a moustache or a goatee or shave off one if they already have it. But it is an odds-on bet they will be sent to various countries within the next couple of years. How good are the files in the Foreign Ministry to enable us to keep out these representatives of the KGB?

We would not ask this question, except for the fact that the Foreign Ministry has already goofed once. The instance we refer to is that of Vladimir Solomatin, an official of the Soviet trade delegation in London, who was accused of espionage and expelled by Britain in March, 1964.

[illegible] in Bangkok as the First Secretary for Cultural Affairs in the Soviet Embassy and remained here till the beginning of this year. Possibly the Foreign Ministry was aware of his past record and managed to keep a close watch on him. We hope so at least.

In the light of what has recently happened in Britain, it is necessary for the Foreign Ministry to update its files and keep tabs on any new Soviet "diplomats" with tarnished reputations who may be infiltrated in some guise or other into Bangkok.

With the new trend in geopolitics, there is no doubt that the Soviet Union is taking a great interest in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. What would be a more interesting spot for KGB men to work in Asia than Bangkok, the hub of all diplomatic and political activity in this critical region? Let us keep our eyes open. As it is Bangkok must have spies of every shade and colour. We don't want more.

THE NATION, October 19, 1971

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BANGKOK POST, NOVEMBER 15, 1971

CHANGING DIPLOMACY

IN THE midst of changing patterns of international relations it is noteworthy that Thailand is improving its relations with the Soviet Union as a balance to China's future role in Southeast Asian political, economic and social affairs. Peking's admission to the United Nations has brought about an entirely new ball game, and it is important for the Kingdom to respond to this event accurately.

First off, we must continue our special relationship with the United States, and at the same time cultivate comprehensive relations both China and the USSR. There is no reason that Washington and Bangkok will continue a course of close relations despite US disenchment from the region. Benefits accruing to Thailand grow out of investment and security while America guarantees itself against isolation from the centre of a region which has become increasingly important with each new change in world affairs. With Russia meanwhile, we have already signed a treaty of friendship and a trade mission visited Moscow earlier this year to gain some insights on trade opportunities there. Soviet ships make a port call in Bangkok and sales of fluorite to Russia balance out the market with Japan. It is well-known that the Soviets are interested in building economic inroads into Southeast Asia and that they are concerned that the vacuum created by US disengagement in the region might too readily be filled by the Chinese.

To ensure that there will be no diplomatic slip ups here, Russia has despatched an ambassador to Thailand who knows the area (he spent 14 years in Japan) and who has subsequently contributed much to the improvement of relations between Bangkok and Moscow.

It is all well and good that we have exerted more than modest measures to make economic inroads ourselves, yet we must simultaneously go ahead and improve our political relations to ensure against the type of incidents which occurred in both England and Belgium recently in which even trade and Aeroflot representatives were expelled on charges of spying. For no matter how good one particular ambassador may be in the performance of his diplomatic duties, all of his successes would be reversed should KGB elements be found to be operating here. If countries value the friendship of Thailand, then they must ensure that elements are not introduced which will militate against the objectives of trust and understanding. The recent changes in international affairs have ushered in a starting point for gaining universal detente. This is only possible if subversion of the kind reported in England and Belgium is not allowed to take place here.

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