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SUBJECT : The Effects of the Abolition of Parliament on Political Grievance Communication and Provincial Administration

REF :

SUMMARY: A major role of the southern MP in terms of the desires of his constituents was to draw attention to a region long neglected by the central government and to gain a greater share of development funds. In addition, as elsewhere, the southern MP did serve as a means of upward communication of popular grievances. Most provincial officials did not however, accept the argument that the MP's role included intervention into the administrative machinery. The average official very much resented efforts by the MP's to get involved in administrative matters in seeking solutions to the grievances of the electorate. As a result, the end of Parliament was greeted with considerable relief by most administrative officials. At the same time the MP's, while popular with the local population, never became so important as to be considered essential to the continued welfare of the ordinary citizen. The abolition of Parliament was readily accepted, and there is no evidence in the South of any growing public resentment over the lack of representative government.

The major means for communicating grievances remains the channel between the villager, the district officer, on upwards to the governor, and, if necessary, to Bangkok. While this channel often breaks down, there has been some definite improvement in communications between the government and

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people since the end of Parliament. The overall caliber of district officers and governors has significantly improved in the South during the last year, and there has been a marked effort to get regional and provincial police, army, and civilian officials out into the countryside talking to villagers on a regular basis. This effort, however, has not been carried out in an attempt to fill a vacuum left by the removal of Parliament. Rather it is the result of an evolutionary improvement in government administration which has been going on for a number of years and which has been accelerated in response to the threat of insurgency.

RTG officials charged with counter-insurgency programs are convinced that the abolition of Parliament contributed to the ability of the RTG to respond to the insurgency by removing a threat of unproductive interference by MP's. The RTG has carried out in the South a series of successful operations during the last year which have at least temporarily set back the communist progress in the region. RTG counter-insurgency programs have included a number of measures in dealing with insurgent base camps and the village infrastructure which might not have been possible under the scrutiny of a Parliament.

In the long term perspective, the lack of a legitimate opposition could eventually mean that some with legitimate complaints against the government might turn to the insurgents out of frustration. However, there is no evidence of this happening at this time. In the future much will depend on the ability of the government to continue to improve its programs of dealing with its population on a personalized basis.
END SUMMARY.

Political-Social Background

While the majority of the people living in the fourteen southern provinces can be classified as ethnic Thai Buddhists, the southern Thai have a distinctive agricultural basis, plus their own customs, dialect, and attitudes towards each other and the central government.[1] With a

1. This report is limited to a discussion of the ethnic Thai population in the South. The Muslim minority shows many of the characteristics of the southern Thai Buddhist, but there are a number of basic differences that will be treated in a separate report.

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...ary of economic independence based on rubber, the southern Thai is often described as a person who would prefer to be left alone and resents any intrusions into his life by the central government. He is convinced by long experience that contacts with the Thai government officials usually result in taxation, shakedowns, or some kind of interference in his daily life and recreation, without providing him any tangible benefit. He also resents the fact that Bangkok has always taken much more out of the region in taxes and profits than has been returned in social and economic benefits.

This results in a basic antipathy and opposition by the southerner to the Bangkok government and the Bangkok official. However, this has most often been demonstrated by independent acts rather than in organized political opposition. The South has not produced any significant anti-government political leadership nor important opposition parties.

The 1969 election did, however, demonstrate a tendency for the southerner to show his basic dislike for the government by voting for opposition candidates. In the province with the largest population, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, five Democrats were elected out of a total of six seats. This was one of the few places in Thailand where voters made their choice on the basis of party affiliation rather than personality. Songkhla, Trang, and Bhangnga also elected one Democrat each, and in several other provinces independents with anti-government biases won.

Despite this basic opposition there was also a separate trend which recognised that the MP's in the government party would be in a position to deliver more tangible results. Throughout the region a number of MP's running on the government (SPT) ticket were elected. Others, elected as independents later joined the government party for the benefits available, and the SPT ended up with a majority of the MP's from the fourteen provinces in the region.

<u>The Role of the MP from the South</u>

The southern Thai has long complained that he has no representation at the national level. None of the Ministers were from the South, and few southerners have ever risen to positions of national prominence. The southern voter seems to have hoped then that his MP's would speak for the region, giving him a needed voice in Bangkok. In the South this may have been the most important role of the Parliamentarian in terms of his constituents.

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...is role, the southerner would expect his representative to ...ther take a strong opposition stance against the government drawing ...tention to its failures in the region, or work within the government party seeking to bring development funds back into the region. MP's of each inclination were equally popular with the voters. This was best seen in Trang which had two MP's; one, CHUAN Leekpai, a young, articulate Democrat who regularly denounced the government on the floor of Parliament; the other, PORN Sritrairat, a SPT faithful who modestly claimed credit for every cent of development money spent in Trang during his tenure.

Whether in an opposition party or with the government, the MP from the South did demonstrate a strong regional bias. They made up the only group to successfully organize themselves into a regional bloc which included both the opposition and the SPT MP's. The common denominator which made this possible was a desire to focus national attention on an area they believed to have been neglected, and to win a more fair balance between tax output and government input in the region.

In the final analysis, however, most observers would agree that the southern bloc of MP's was not particularly successful in its efforts to focus attention on the South. The Democrats from the South found their regional interests submerged by the party's concern with national issues. Southern complaints and demands emerged only when it would serve Democrat Party efforts to embarrass government leaders.

SPT MP's were no more successful. Only two SPT MP's (NOM Upramai, the Second Deputy Speaker of Parliament from Nakhon Sri Thammarat, and PRAMUAN Kulamart from Chumphon) ever gained anything approaching national prominence. The other SPT MP's from the South tended to be mediocre or worse. While they often did take credit for bringing development projects into the South, there was in fact no shift in government priorities or budget allotments which would indicate meaningful additional benefits to the South as a result of Parliament.

As elsewhere, southern MP's to some extent provided an additional line of communication between the government and the people and an independent means by which an ordinary citizen could seek a solution to personal grievances against the government. This was

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plementary to or even competetive with more traditional lines communication between the government and the governed.

Administrative Lines of Communication

In the South, as in the rest of the country, the most important means of communication between the citizen and the RTG has been that of the villager through his village headman on to the District Officer, then to the governor and eventually, if necessary, on to Bangkok. Under this system a complaint is supposed to rise to the level where officials have the authority to act. In theory, the Thai government should through this line of communication be aware of the desires and needs of its population. Occasionally this channel of information on popular attitudes and grievances does work remarkably well. Its failure is that it is completely dependent upon the calibre of the officials, and any one weak link can disrupt the system. Furthermore, the subject of a complaint, i.e. the guilty party, is often in the line of communication and thus able to filter out criticism that would reflect on his own ability. Even more important, some of the major problems fall outside the authority and responsibilities of the Department of Local Administration (DOLA) officials. For example, district officers and governors often get complaints about the police, but are seldom able to take meaningful action.

Complementary to the direct DOLA line of communication are the provincial and tambon, and municipal councils. Properly used the provincial council could be the eyes and ears of the governor. Council members are in a position to make suggestions to the provincial authorities on the needs and desires of Thai citizens. However, the councils have no real authority, and in the South members are often interested more in their own benefit. Much the same can be said about the tambon councils which only have access to the district officer, and have even less authority and influence. Neither the provincial nor the tambon councils are presently important in the upward communications of grievances.

Another DOLA channel of communications is the tambon reporter system. Under this program, which started only a few years ago in the Northeast, each khamnan appoints two reporters in his tambon who have the responsibility of reporting directly to the district officer on conditions within the tambon. While such a program would appear to have real

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...ential, it has not been realized. Many of those appointed have been friends or relatives of the khamnan. The district officers who have discussed the program do not indicate any enthusiasm over the results. As an example, the acting district officer in Khuan Khanun said that at the beginning tambon reporters were called into a meeting with the district officer once every month. However, as there was little gained from these meetings and the reporters complained about the hardships of having to make a monthly trip to the district headquarters, the meetings are now held once every three months.

Other Means of Communication and Political Action

While the above methods are all that is usually open to the village dweller, the urban population, especially that with wealth, does have other means of seeking relief for grievances. Any successful businessman will spend considerable time and effort developing personal relationships with a variety of government officials. Rather than seeking changes in laws or legal redress for grievances the businessman most often resorts to the payoff. In the South the relationship between the Sino-Thai businessman and the Thai government official is a fascinating example of symbiotic cooperation in which tax, lumbering, licensing, customs and a variety of other laws are largely ignored with economic benefits going to both the businessman and the RTG official.

What might be called the elite professors, teachers, civil servants, and the press have some access to public pressure in seeking solutions to their grievances. There are several weekly newspapers and one daily in the South. All have been used at times by local special interest groups interested in pushing their own point of view.

Despite the fact that the South has had a university for four years, students have not yet established themselves as an important political voice. They have concentrated their interests on campus issues not on national problems.

The MP as a Separate Line of Communication

A variety of citizens did go to MP's to ask assistance in pressing grievances against government officials or to seek justice denied by the Thai bureaucracy. As in other parts of the country, MP's would

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their connections with both local and Bangkok officials in seeking to help individuals or would try to bring pressure on administrative officials through threat of exposure.

Actual benefits to constituents in the South were probably not very great, especially among those living in rural areas. However, cases in which MP's tried to intervene in administrative procedures did multiply to the point where administrative officials very much resented this interference. This resentment was probably intensified by a belief that such complaints could be better presented through more traditional channels. Also, obviously a fear of being accused of malfeasance (either justly or unjustly) influenced official attitudes towards efforts by MP's to get involved in administrative problems. Accusations were often heard that MP's were concerning themselves with situations completely outside their area of responsibility. The MP's were also accused of using threats of exposure as a form of extortion in seeking personal rewards and benefits.

Many outside observers saw one of the most important roles of the MP being that of an independent source of information and something of an ombudsman. However, few within the government administrative organization would agree this was a legitimate role for the MP. Instead they believed he should have focused on making necessary laws, leaving them the responsibility of administering those laws.

Popular Reaction to the Abolition of Parliament

Largely as a result of this interference in administrative matters, most government officials reacted with favor and even enthusiasm to the abolition of Parliament. In justifying the coup in talks with Americans, RTG officials would usually claim that the action had to be taken because so many MP's were self-seeking, dishonest, corrupt, and interested only in their own personal aggrandizement. Unfortunately, these accusations were sometimes true. (However, the same can be said of an equal or even greater percentage of government administrative and police officials.)

There was then almost total agreement among provincial level administrators that the abolition of Parliament removed a real impediment to the effective functioning of local administration. No southern provincial officials saw Parliament as something that might have been of assistance to them in their administrative duties.

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At the time of the overthrow of the Constitution the reputation of parliamentarians had seriously deteriorated as a result of accusations of corruption, dishonesty, and self-seeking activities. In Pattani, SPT MP VILAI Benchalak was accused of diverting government funds allocated for the repair of mosques into his own pocket. Two MP's in Songkhla had reputations as hoodlums and extortionists. Other MP's in the South had not lived up to expectations. As a result of the reputations of a few of the MP's plus the failure of most MP's to provide any tangible benefits, there was no public outcry over the end of Parliament. The rural population did enjoy the attention given them by some MP's. But the MP's did not succeed in establishing a relationship with the ordinary citizen in which the citizen began to consider MP's as being essential for his continued welfare. In the year following the NEC takeover, there has been no indication in South Thailand of growing public resentment over the lack of representative government.

MP Activities following the Abolition of Parliament

Most parliamentarians readily, though not happily, accepted the NEC takeover. Several, in conversations with the Consul, have blamed their own colleagues rather than the RTG leadership for the loss of their jobs. Most ex-MP's returned to their previous occupations, taking up whatever profession they had followed prior to their election. Many opted to remain in Bangkok because of the better economic opportunities there.

Two southern MP's, both young, articulate critics of the government, CHUAN Leekphai from Trang and AM Rongngern from Phatthalung, chose to remain in Bangkok out of fear of possible reprisals should they return to their home districts. Each was under close surveilance following the NEC coup, and both feared that there would be unavoidable contacts with ex-constituents should they return home which could justify their arrest for political activity.

Those ex-MP's, probably about half, who are now living in the South generally have a social and political position very similar to the one which predated their election to Parliament. In a number of cases, those elected could have already been described as civic leaders. They were businessmen or professionals who had close relations with provincial government officials, were involved in a variety of social programs, active in local Lions or Rotary clubs, etc. The mayors of

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Surat Thani; SANGUAN Kanchanachitr, Satun; CHOOSRI Khonan; and Pongpol Adireksarn, THAWORN Chaisiriwan; were all elected to Parliament and continue serving as mayors of those three cities. NOM Upamai, the ex-Deputy Speaker of Parliament from Nakhon Sri Thammarat, KLAI Laorungmanee, ex-Democrat from Songkhla, and VILAI Benchalak, ex-SPT from Pattani are all practising lawyers in their provinces, have circle of contacts with those living in the urban area and with a variety of government officials. For example, Klai Laorngmanee is almost always invited to any social occasion hosted by local government officials despite his long alliance with the Democrat Party and a tendency to give impromptu political speeches when in a small group.

Another ex-Democrat MP who remains active and has some impact on local politics is ex-Democrat SURIN Masdit who continues to edit the second most important newspaper in South Thailand, Siang Rath. Surin reports that his position as editor has allowed him to maintain an extensive circle of contacts with both ordinary citizens and with government officials without risking charges of political involvement. According to Surin people still come to him seeking help in their relationship with the government. At times he can be of assistance through his contacts with officials. In other cases such complaints can be the basis of stories or editorials in his papers. Surin, however, is careful to avoid pushing criticism of the government too far. His opposition stance has mellowed considerably as he seeks to improve his own status under the present situation.

In Songkhla, ex-SPT MP Praphan Chanaphat, owns the largest drug-store in town, belongs to the Had Yai Lions Club, and has close friendships with a variety of government officials in both Songkhla and Bangkok. Recently, when Colonel NARONG Kittikachorn visited Had Yai, Praphan was directly involved with the arrangements and demonstrated he has some communication through that channel.

At least a few top leaders are keeping some contacts with selected ex-MP's, especially those who were members of the government party. For example, Air Chief Marshal DAWEE Chullasapya recently visited Songkhla, and the governor arranged to have a number of ex-MP's from various southern provinces grouped together in the front ranks waiting to greet Dawee. On arrival Dawee spent several minutes in a warm and cordial conversations with the men. (Some of these ex-government MP's in the South apparently had hopes--now dashed--of being named to the legislative body appointed after the provisional constitution was announced.)

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ex-MP's are then in a position to play a role as an extra line ommunications between the Thai citizen and his government. om time to time, a few do apparently use their contacts in ehalf of clients or friends. However, this activity is relatively imited in scope. Furthermore it is generally restricted to the urban populations.

The Quality of Government Since the NEC

The major line of communication between the Thai citizen and the government remains that through the district officer and the governor. The activities of the MP's and their apparent popularity may have helped convince some government officials of the need for better communication between the people and the government. There has been in the South an increased emphasis on contacts with the citizenry since the end of Parliament. One governor recently discussed at some length with the Consul the importance of democratic government in Thailand. His description of a democratic government, however, was one in which the administrative officials had good contacts with the people and were able as a result of those contacts to respond intelligently to expressed needs and desires.

In the last year there has been a concentrated effort in a number of provinces in the South to get district officers, governors, and others out into the villages making direct contact in an attempt to break down the basic distrust the southerner has of the government. These efforts have, however, tended to concentrate on the districts with serious security problems.

While there has been considerable improvement in the government's efforts at communication with villagers, it is debatable how much of this is really the result of the example of the MP's. It is more likely a natural evolution towards more effective local government which has been going on for years and has now accelerated in an effort to deal with an insurgency threat feeding on legitimate discontent. Much of the improvement in the calibre of government in South Thailand during the last two years is due to the appointment of a number of highly qualified men as district officers in several critical districts. Such appointments are a direct government response to the security threat and the improvements would have come about with or without a Parliament.

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In addition to the improvement in the calibre of district officers, there has been a significant effort made during the last year to get high ranking provincial and regional officials into the villages on a regular basis. Major General SAN Chitpatima, who is charged with directing counter-insurgency throughout the South, expends considerable time and effort in visiting villages and talking with ordinary people. He insists that regional and provincial police commanders and governors do the same thing. In fact he often invites such officials to accompany him on his trips. According to San, this gives the villager an opportunity to make a complaint to the top. That in turn encourages greater care and caution on the part of low level civilian and police officials who realize that any villager may be talking to a general or a governor in the near future. San claims that the increasingly frequent visits by regional police commanders to villages has had an impact in improving the behavior of the village and tambon policeman. While this program represents a definite improvement in the quality of government in South Thailand, it is not tied directly to the NEC rule nor the end of Parliament.

These increased efforts at opening line of communication between officials and citizens may, however, have helped to alleviate criticism of the removal of elected representatives from the political scene. Most villagers would prefer to talk to a general or a governor rather than a representative if given the choice. The fact that they are able to do so in increasing numbers probably means that the representatives are seldom missed.

As for the provincial and tambon councils there is no evidence that they have taken on increased importance since the end of Parliament nor has there been any discernable change in their functions. When one deputy governor was asked if the provincial councils had increased in importance since the end of Parliament, he said that Parliament had not been that important and that its demise did not leave any real vacuum to be filled by the provincial councils.

The Governors' Relationships to the Central Government

While there has been an evolutionary improvement in the relationship between the provincial officials and the citizenry, relationships between the southern governors and the central government appear to have undergone little, if any change during the last year. Governors must still follow traditional budgetary procedures in seeking increases for

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ments to meet demands for construction of roads, local develop-
projects, etc.

Furthermore there is no evidence that special lines of communication have any increased importance in bringing grievances to the attention of the central government. Such channels as those opened up by Colonel Narong Kittikachorn have tended to concentrate on problems in other regions, and have not focused on the South.

The one new line of communication between provincial officials and Bangkok which has opened as a result of the NPO takeover and which has been used to some extent by southern officials is that circumventing the judicial system. During the last year police officials have sent a few criminal cases to the NPO for consideration, and both Songkhla and Krabi have had public executions. In both cases the executions did prove popular with the local citizens. In Songkhla large crowds had, prior to the NPO decision, paraded through town in support of the executions.)

The Effects on Counter-Insurgency

Most officials, including CSOR 4 Commander Major General San Chitpatima, believed that some MP's were unnecessarily interfering in effective government counter-insurgency operations. The Democrat Party in late 1969 pushed the insurgent situation in the South onto the front pages following the visit of several MP's to the area. This resulted in considerable criticism of the government's ability to deal with the insurgency. This happened when San was just taking command of counter-insurgency in the South and was in the process of developing a CI program that has since been put into operation with some success. While this program has stressed the concept of joint civilian, police, and military (CPPM) operations with an emphasis on improved government, it has also included military attacks against terrorist base camps as well as strict police measures in dealing with recalcitrant CT's in the villages. Democrats and even some SPT MP's criticized these military aspects of the program claiming the insurgency could not be solved solely by improvements in government administration. While San agreed that such improvements were necessary, he was also convinced that harsher methods were required against hard core supporters, and that political pressures initiated in Parliaments were preventing him from carrying out needed programs.

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and others charged with the command of suppression operations believe that the abolition of Parliament did directly contribute to the RTG's ability to deal with the insurgency in South Thailand. During the last year, the RTG has pushed a series of successful operations which have at least temporarily set back communist programs in several critical areas of the South. In Chawang, Ron Phibun, Ban Nasan districts, and parts of Phathalung provinces, the government has succeeded in destroying the communist village infrastructure and turning populations previously under CT influence back to the government. This program has emphasized the importance of benevolent government with better communications between the villager and the RTG officials. As indicated earlier in this report, there has been a marked improvement in those areas in the calibre of government and the lines of communications with the ordinary citizen. However, the CPM programs have also included some relatively severe methods in dealing with both CT jungle camps and the communist infrastructure in the villages. General San is himself convinced, and probably correctly so, that some of his more successful suppression programs would not have been politically feasible if Parliament had continued to exist and interfere in RTG operations.

However, while the abolition of Parliament did have a favorable impact on the operational aspects of counter-insurgency, the long term effects in a broader perspective are not so certain. As indicated earlier in this report, the Southern Thai does have a natural tendency towards opposition to the government. Parliament, with its opportunities for a legitimate expression of discontent may have served as a safety valve which has now been shut off. At the present time, the man who is sufficiently aroused to take some action opposing the government has no place to go except to turn to criminal acts or the Communist Party. However, to date such dissatisfaction does not seem to have played a significant role in enlistments into jungle terrorist organizations. While the communists do use themes criticizing local RTG shortcomings, most people seem to joing the jungle forces either on the basis of personal relationships with those already in the party structure, or as a clash with some authority in a dispute over land registration, gambling, liquor, illegal slaughter of livestock, forestry laws, etc.

The lack of an alternative political line of action combined with continued frustrations in dealing with the government bureaucracy could supposedly eventually lead to increasing recruitments into communist support organizations.

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This, however, is still speculation. There is not yet any evidence in South Thailand which would support the argument that the lack of a Parliament will eventually contribute to the growth of communist organizations. For the time being it is important that the government successfully convince the southern villager that it is interested in him and trying to develop programs to deal with his legitimate grievances. Failure by the government to do this would contribute directly to the insurgents' appeal. In that case, the lack of an independent communication channel for grievances could accelerate the process of alienation which eventually leads to tolerance and then outright support of insurgents by villagers.

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