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Authority: E9169
By: Alan Lipton Date: 10-10-2008

FILE DESIGNATION

A-335

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FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK
E.O. 11652:GDS
SUBJECT: TAGS: PINS - TH
SUBJECT: Counter-Insurgency in South Thailand
REF : Third Quarter of 1973
REF : Songkhla A-19, August 20, 1973

DATE: NOV 20 1973

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The Embassy forwards herewith the following American Consulate SONGKHLA report.

SUMMARY: During the months of July, August and September both the CT and the RTG continued to avoid armed encounters. This continued a pattern begun by the CT at least in March of this year and contrasts considerably with the level of CT activity in other parts of the country. In September, however, the level of CT activity did rise and on September 7 a clash occurred in northern Phatthalung resulting in casualties on both sides. On October 8 General San Chitpatima defended the RTA's non-aggressive posture claiming the time has come for political action, building on government successes in suppression last year. He claimed that as a result of this new political action more, higher-level CT cadre are defecting. The facts do not seem to bear out San's claims, however. Despite earlier RTG successes, the CT jungle apparatus remains intact, and the CT remain in control of sizeable numbers of trained, fully armed insurgents who continue to train, and survey targets. The CTO maintained a generally low level of activity during the period, engaging mostly in subscription work. The separatists-bandits, however, continued to maintain a fairly high level of activity and therefore have recently emerged as the most violent of the three insurgencies in the South. END SUMMARY

During the months of July, August, and September the CT have generally continued to avoid armed encounters with RTG security forces. This has been the CT pattern since March of this year and is in contrast to what has been happening in much of the rest of the country. However, on September 7 an estimated 20 insurgents clashed with an RTG security patrol in an area of northern Phatthalung Province, where no contacts have occurred since early this year. The contact resulted in three government

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WIA and one insurgent KIA. It is not clear who initiated the contact, but the fact that the CT did not withdraw may show either a renewed willingness to contest government security forces lacking since at least March, or perhaps an unwillingness to give up their newly regained, though extremely tenuous, toehold in an area from which they were previously driven.

[redacted] CT activity, while still low compared to last year, has shown a marked increase in the Far South over the last few months. However, it is still too early to say whether or not the CT have returned to the offensive. In another incident, reported by villagers, on September 10 approximately 13-15 insurgents raided an (illegal) gambling den in the Muang District of Phatthalung Province during the noon hour and conducted a forced agitprop session. The incident had the obvious (apparently successful) intent of focusing attention on the fact that this and other such illegal gambling operations exist either with the knowledge or under the protection of local police.

During the same three month period, the RTG has also continued to follow a very unaggressive policy. In August security forces were all but totally tied up with the visits of the royal family to many provinces of the South in conjunction with the opening of the new royal residence in Narathiwat Province. During the period of September 4-18, the RTA was out in some force with elements of the 4th Bn, 5th RCT which is normally located in Pattani Province, conducting a "show of force" training operation in Sungai Padi District, Narathiwat Province, and elements of the 1st and 2nd Bns of the 5th RCT, normally located in Chumphon and Nakhon Sri Thammarat provinces, conducting a "show of force" training operation in the Ban NaSan and Wieng Sa districts of Surat Thani Province and Tha Sala District of Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province. In all instances the RTG forces conducted psyops and avoided contact with the CT or other insurgent groups.

Mission officials in the South have generally taken the line that Major General San Chitpatima, (Commanding General of the 5th Military Circle and CSOR 4 and as such the commander of the RTG security forces in the South) and his forces have been following strict orders from higher headquarters in Bangkok not to take casualties to explain the lack of aggressive action on the part of the RTG. One might expect that if General San were not operating under such orders he would be undertaking aggressive operations.

However, during a conversation with General San on October 8, he told the Political Counselor and the Consul that the time for military suppression activities is past. He said that during last year's suppression campaign

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considerable inroads were made in "drying up the water in which the CT fish swim," He stated the time has come for the type of political activities in which he and his forces are now engaged and claimed that as a result he has been getting more, higher level defectors. Thus, General San is, at least apparently, in accord with the non-aggressive stance taken by RTG security forces and, indeed, defends the stance claiming better results.

Unfortunately a review of the facts does not seem to support San's claims. The steady stream of defectors/ralliers which began in the Far South last April continues. While still reasonably high, the numbers in the mid-South are down when compared to last year. Some of the defectors have been fairly high level. One of the most recent of these is Khiang Chaisiya aka Puang, a member of the previously reported but unconfirmed Songkhla/Satun Provincial Committee, who rallied in Patthalung Province in August. Most of the defections of high level cadre are known to have been initiated in advance of General San's new look and to have resulted from a number of other factors including hardship in the camps and attempts by the CT organization to enforce a rigid sexual moral code on its men. Of course, it should not be overlooked that the good treatment received by previous ralliers and the publicity given that good treatment undoubtedly played a role in creating the atmosphere which finally lead these people to rally.

General San's claim of having dried up "some of the water" while true, tends to overlook the situation which has evolved. Considerable success was achieved in cutting the links between the jungle apparatus and its village supporters. However, the jungle apparatus remained intact with only a few camps overrun or destroyed. The CTs were forced out of some areas such as Khuan Khanun District, Phatthalung Province, and Chawang District, Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province, but have successfully transferred their jungle apparatus to previously uncontested ground, such as in areas of southeast Trang Province and in central Phatthalung Province. In an effort to resolve its supply problem the CTs have reportedly taken to rice cultivation. It has recently been reported by [redacted] that the CT are tapping rubber in some areas of Phatthalung Province and are using the proceeds to purchase supplies.

Thus, the CT organization continues to control sizeable numbers of fully trained, armed insurgents. While hurt by last years suppression campaign, the CTs appear to have been at least fairly successful in moving into new areas and establishing new supply channels. CT units continue to train, continue to engage in mass base work, continue to survey targets for future attacks, and recently appear to have moved back into the Khuan Khanun District base area of Northern Phatthalung Province from which they were previously driven and have shown a willingness to defend their presence in the area.

The Malayan Communist Party Insurgents - CTO

The situation remained generally quiet in CTO areas during the third quarter of the year. Subscriptions were up overall, reflecting the much improved price of rubber on the world market. In one of the few acts of violence

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attributed to the CTO's during the period, on September 20, a taxi driver was assassinated on the Yala-Betong highway, allegedly for refusal to pay his "tax" to the CTO.

During the period of September 4-18 elements of the 4th Bn, 5th RCT conducted a "show of force" operation in Sungai Padi District, Narathiwat Province. This is the first time in six years that RTA elements have operated at all in this normally BPP area of operational responsibility. It is not clear whether this RTA operation, albeit one in which there was no contact, in a traditional CTO area means anything for the future or not. While in the area the 4th Bn emphasized psyops aimed particularly at the Malay, Muslim community.

Malay Separatists-Bandits and the Thai Response

The level of violence generated by desperate elements lumped under the heading of "separatist" cum "bandit" has remained at a constant level. This has resulted, given the low level of activity generated by the other two insurgent groups, in the separatist insurgency becoming the most violent insurgency in the South. However, the type of activities engaged in by these elements--kidnapping, extortion, highway robbery-make it virtually impossible to distinguish an ideologically motivated separatist act from an act of out and out banditry.

One particularly ominous note, on September 8 an AK 47 of Chinese origin was recovered in Maye District, Pattani Province. This is the first time that an AK 47 has been recovered from separatist forces. [redacted] the weapon was probably obtained through illegal, though normal, criminal channels. However, if it were to turn out that this weapon was provided to the separatists through some more regular supply channel it would represent a considerable upgrading of separatist weaponry. Furthermore, if such weapons were available in any number, it would mean that separatist forces could significantly outgun the BPP or regular police forces likely to be pitted against them in any given encounter.

As noted above, during recent "show of force" operations conducted by the RTA in Narathiwat Province, notable emphasis in psyops was put on appeals to the Malay Muslin population. However, such appeals contrast with what appears to be actual practices put into effect by province officials. During a conversation September 27, Narathiwat Governor Charoon Lokakalin, who interestingly is ethnic Vietnamese, with considerable pride told me how he had recently refused to allow a "separatist bandit" to give him self up -- rally -- because the man was "just a criminal". If such an attitude turns out to be typical of officials in the four Malay dominated provinces of the South, the chances of bringing an end to the separatist insurgency would appear dim indeed.

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