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Folder Title: POL 23 Thai
Document Date: 11-01-1970
Document Type: Airgram
From: Amconsul Udorn
To: Amembassy Bangkok

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Subject:

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NND: 32849
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

Pol 23 Thai

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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Amembassy BANGKOK

INFO : Department of State, CHIENGMAI, SONGKHLA
~~Action assigned to~~

Action Taken

FROM : ~~Amconsul UDORN~~

DATE: November 13, 1970

SUBJECT : ~~Date of Action~~ ~~Insurgency~~

REF : **Action Office Symbol**

Name of Officer

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1970 DEC 5 PM 4 42
BUREAU of EAST ASIAN and PACIFIC AFFAIRS
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
RSIAN ANALYSIS BRANCH

Summary

For the last five years, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) has been unable to quell the relatively low level but persistent insurgency along the Buriram/Korat border. Recently, the ambush of a 10-man RTG patrol and the growing incidence of armed propaganda meetings in the area point out the terrorists' increasing willingness to take overt action. The arrest of nearly fifty suspected village supporters in the last several months and the recent defection of a high-level terrorist, however, indicate an upturn in the RTG posture which may shortly culminate in a sizeable suppression operation.

Scope of the Insurgency

Embassy Bangkok estimates the number of insurgents in Buriram and Korat at 80-100. Their area of operations includes the districts of Nang Rong and Lahansai in the southwest corner of Buriram, Khonburi district in the southeast corner of Korat, and occasionally further south in Watthana Nakhon and Ta Phraya districts of Prachinburi province. The capability to cross provincial and district borders is a considerable asset to the insurgents, particularly when they move south into Prachinburi, which is under separate Army, police, and Communist Suppression Operations Regional (CSOR) commands than are Buriram and Korat.

Group 4
Downgraded at three-year intervals. Declassified 12 years from above date.

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Drafted by: HYMLee:lcb 11/14/70

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Throughout 1970 the keynote of the Buriram/Korat insurgents has been consolidation and organization, and wider cultivation of village support. [redacted] the first six months of 1970 ended with an increase in insurgent strength and morale, and more instances of large-group activities. Lack of RTG pressure (see RTG Presence below) also resulted in a definite change in the attitudes of local villagers [redacted] who became less cooperative with RTG agencies and less critical of insurgents and their activities.

The tempo of insurgent activity increased over the summer. Bangkok's Composite Mission Statistics summary includes the following number of incidents for Korat and Buriram reported through the MACTHAI J2 system: March 4, April 2, May 4, June 5, July 9, August 17, and September 8. Although these figures include RTG-initiated clashes, the increase in incidents shows the propensity of the Buriram/Korat insurgents toward increased group activities that lead to clashes.

Geographic Description

Korat province (pronounced Khaw-raht, the shortened form of Nakhon Ratchasima, pronounced Nah-khawn Raht-chah-see-mah) is the gateway to the Northeast, located roughly 180 miles northeast of Bangkok. It is the country's third largest province in population. Khonburi district is some 35 miles southeast of Korat City. For 18 miles the major highway to Khonburi is asphalted and kept in good condition. The terminus is the town of Chokchai, another district seat. From Chokchai to Khonburi, the road degenerates to a 17-kilometer long, one-and-a-half lane wide, dirt track that is barely passable during the rainy season. (The Thai Highway Department is scheduled to start work on the Chokchai-Khonburi stretch in 1971.) Khonburi district has a population of 40-50,000, predominantly Thai-Lao with very few Cambodians and Vietnamese. The land is heavily forested and log-cutting is the major industry.

Buriram province (pronounced Boo-ree-rahm) is located east of Korat, and is connected to the latter by a major rail line into Buriram city and by a Highway Department road from Chokchai through Nang Rong district. The Buriram segment of the road is the first link in the highway connecting Korat with Buriram, Surin, Sisaket and Ubon provinces. The targetted date of completion is late 1971, but the present rate of progress indicates a completion date several years beyond 1971. Nang Rong is on the Korat border and is a large district with over 100,000 population. Nang Rong formerly included the area now under administrative control of Lahansai district, which has a population of 48,000. Nang Rong

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leads the province in rice production, and both Nang Rong and Lahansai are heavily forested. Lahansai is connected to Nang Rong by two separate all-weather laterite roads, constructed by Buriram's Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) team, and by Mobile Devebpment Unit (MDU) 16, the latter under army leadership.

History of the Insurgency

Historically the Buriram/Korat insurgency has been independent of the larger insurgency centered in Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Nakhon provinces. Emigrants from other parts of the Northeast, including Nakhon Phanom and Ubon, settled in the vicinity of Prakham village, Lahansai (TA9655) in forest and jungle land belonging to the RTG. Governed by civil servants banished to the Northeast for ineptitude or corruption in other locales, their resistance to this familiar brand of government led to the eventual establishment of the insurgency. There is evidence now that the local insurgency which grew out of Prakham is receiving support and guidance from Korat and probably Bangkok. (See Arrests below.)

RTG Presence

The RTG response to the insurgency has been to station regular army, Border Patrol Police (BPP), and Provincial Police (PP) at the Korat/Buriram border. Under administrative control of CSOR 2 (headed by the Commanding General of Second Army (SRTA), General Phayom Pahulrat) this joint force is subdivided into three groups. The tri-district (Nang Rong, Lahansai, and Khonburi) area has been designated Target Area (TA) 11. TA 11A (Lahansai) has PP, BPP, Army (a reinforced platoon from the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) Police Special Action Forces (SAF) and Volunteer Defense Corps (VDC) members. TA 11B (Khonburi) has PP, VDC and an Army unit (also a reinforced platoon, from the 2nd Battalion, 3rd RCT). Nang Rong, designated TA 11C, has PP, VDC and Headquarters Company personnel of the BPP assigned to Lahansai.

The commanders of the platoons are subordinate to the District Officer of their respective districts. The platoon commanders serve as Deputy District Officers for Security. The chain of command, however, is longer as operations become more involved. For example, in order to arrest the 37 villagers on August 12 (noted below) the Lahansai District Officer (DO) received clearances from 1) the Buriram governor, who is head of the province suppression operations command; 2) the SRTA, which runs CSOR 2; and 3) the Communist Suppression Operations Directorate (CSOD) in Bangkok.

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Whatever the length of the chain of command, the RTG forces deployed in TA 11 have served more as reaction troops, and have left the initiative to the insurgents. Morale and pay may have dictated that posture more than anything else. The SRTA in early 1968 dispatched a battalion to fight the insurgency. Later that year the battalion was reduced to a company, and in 1969 to two platoons. The Buriram governor has been struggling since 1969 to keep those platoons from being withdrawn to their parent battalions. There is little indication that the personnel assigned to those two platoons have been rotated during the last year. The question of per diem also inhibits operations in TA 11. In locations such as Korat and Buriram where there is no CPM (a province-level Civilian-Police-Military apparatus that determines local operations), the CSOR must fund extended operations, such as military patrols, with per diem paid from the CSOR budget. Apparently the bureaucratic machinery in CSOR-2 is unable to fund continuing patrols for TA 11.

Arrests

A joint RTG force August 12 surrounded Hin Khon Dong village (TA411945) and arrested 37 suspected insurgent supporters. Preliminary interrogation took place at the Lahansai District Police Station, and a number of those arrested were later transferred to the Johore Police School in Korat. A considerable amount of documents was confiscated, mainly propaganda and copies of Mao's books. The Nang Rong Target Area force September 8 arrested ten more villagers at Chum Saeng village on charges of supporting the insurgents. Immediately after the arrests the number of incidents involving insurgents quickly dropped. Governor Surawoot Boonyanusart of Buriram speculated at that time that the insurgents did not want to do anything that would jeopardize or bring reprisals against those arrested.

Recent Incidents

A group of 20-30 insurgents October 24 ambushed a ten-man VDC unit that was on a clearing mission for a proposed visit by the Princess Mother's Mobile Medical Team. One police sergeant, five VDC, and one village volunteer were killed. The incident took place in the Chum Saeng area.

A few days later the insurgents held a forced meeting at another village in the same area. Villagers reported the insurgent strength at roughly 100, about half of whom were women, and well-armed. The Nang Rong District Police Chief believes that this large group was made up of the combined forces of Lahansai and Nang Rong, and that the Lahansai insurgents had moved out of their area due to the greater number of suppression forces in that district.

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Future Operations

Buriram Governor Surawoot called a meeting November 2 at Provincial Headquarters for all CSOD personnel. The governor reportedly then submitted a request to SRTA for reinforcements for the Nang Rong area. We learned November 10 that SRTA would conduct an operation in the near future using a reinforced company to hit at the insurgent leadership in the Buriram/Korat area. If the operation is carried out, it will be SRTA's first major operation since assuming a lower posture in counter-insurgency activities early this year. In line with RTG policy, however, it will be in support of an existing local operation or emergency, albeit a month after its occurrence.

[redacted]

Prognosis

With the resurgence of RTG interest in the Buriram/Korat insurgency, and with the impetus of recent events in favor of the government, this is a favorable moment for the RTG to come to grips with this gnat-sized problem. Based on past experience, the sustained SRTA interest needed to eliminate this trans-provincial insurgent group is unlikely to be forthcoming. If the operation comes off, a few insurgents will be netted and others will move into sanctuary, many villagers will be intimidated into reducing or concealing their support for the insurgency, and the problem will fester unresolved for years. We would be delighted to be proven incorrect in this analysis, however.

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