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ACTION
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M R 1	REP	AF
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1	CU 3	INR 5
4	P 2	IO 5
5	FBO	AID
10	S/P 1	G/PM 1
SR	COM	FRB
T	LAB	TAR
R	XMB	AIR 5
NY	CIA 20	NAVY 5
CO	USIA 10	NSA 3
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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XR DEF 9 US

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XR DEF 15 THAI-US

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CJN Action

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
FEB 8 30 AM 1968
RS/AN
ANALYSIS BRANCH

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE
(Department pass DOD)

INFO : SAIGON, VIENTIANE, DOD, FANCPAC
CG 7th USAF TON SON NHUT
CG 13th USAF CLARK AFB
Deputy CG 7/13th USAF UDORN

FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK

DATE: February 6, 1968

SUBJECT : Problems of "US Presence"

REF :

Action Assigned to EA/TB
Action Taken Noted
Date of Action 2/14
Office Symbol EA/TB
Officer O'Melveny

SUMMARY

We are in the midst of a renewed wave of Thai sensitivity to and concern over various aspects of the large US presence in Thailand, which we believe exceeds in intensity that experienced early in the 1965-66 buildup and which we judge may be more enduring and difficult to contain. The principal current points of stress are: 1) the public social behavior of US personnel; 2) the too-visible and too-audible concentrations of cheap entertainment spots in the much discussed "strips" occupying large segments to two main Bangkok thoroughfares and adjacent to each RTG installation housing significant numbers of US personnel; 3) the growing number of Amerasian children and escalating VD rates in areas near bases; and 4) competition with upperclass Thai for goods, services and facilities, with resulting price rises. The landlord/commercial group which is prospering from all this is understandably if regrettably silent.

The steady increase in the numbers of US personnel and the lengthening duration of our stay causes these and other factors to add up to a mounting malaise in upper levels of Thai society, where opinions count, over the total and particularly the potential impact on Thai culture and social cohesion. These local concerns have become inextricably interwoven with and intensified by annoyance and frustration over the too heavily advertised transgressions of the US press, thereby inhibiting public expression of more positive views.

Though we do not, thus far, see meaningful indicators of anti-Americanism, we are convinced on the basis of spontaneous comments as well as inquiries across entire range of Mission contacts that we are experiencing a loss

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of pro-Americanism in Thailand. Halting the erosion promises to be a difficult task, because it is occurring despite continuation of the outstanding disciplinary record of troops on R&R from Vietnam and of the efforts of military commanders in Thailand and all other Mission elements to deal with and, indeed, anticipate the social, economic and psychological problems associated with our presence. We are intensively reviewing current programs, to improve performance, and "brainstorming" to develop new techniques and devices; both are clearly necessary if we are to preserve the environment and working relationships in which US forces can continue without interference their vital Vietnam-related missions. On some matters, we will need and urgently seek Washington support. END SUMMARY.

* * * * *

Symptoms. It has become a rare day on which one does not find somewhere in the Bangkok press a news report or a commentary that reminds readers of one of the range of problems Thai encounter as a result of the presence of some 44,000 US military personnel and 12,000 civilians:

A report of a bar fight or a street accident involving US personnel is seldom followed up by a report of the results of investigation which, at least as often as not, find Americans blameless.

The Minister of Public Health reveals in a press statement that "most" of his Department's budget is devoted to combatting rising VD rates and appeals to US commanders at Thai bases for cooperation; the "US" and "VD" will predictably be remembered while the Minister's follow-on statement that he is in fact already receiving full cooperation will not.

The King has recorded his displeasure over unsightly conditions in the Pattaya resort area, including the direct role of US MPs in maintenance of order (though his displeasure would increase if their absence further compromised the rustic simplicity older Thai associate with the area).

A newspaper reports (incorrectly) that a joint Thai-US committee is preparing plans to confine all military personnel on leave in Bangkok to a single congested area of hotels/bars/nightclubs, and several other journals jump to comment favorably (while an American businessman who regularly entertains R&R troops in his home writes to the Ambassador to complain of the insult implicit in the idea of compulsory depravity).

A competitive press has discovered the unending lascivious appeal of stories about the adventures and tribulations of "hired wives"

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of servicemen, and the Interior Ministry has announced early formation of a special committee to solve problems involving Thai girls and "farangs," to preserve Thai culture and lend assistance to the "red-haired" children of foreign soldier fathers.

No single element in this picture has been responsible for the marked increase in edginess among the Thai about the presence of Americans--particularly those identifiable by their uniforms. But in their totality, the problems have become visible enough to enough Thai so that press reports feed personal anxieties, which lead to increasingly frequent conversations on these matters among Thai and between them and foreigners, and the babble of voices inspires further attention from public media. One notable vicious attack by Kukrit Pramote (EmbTel 7950 to SecState only) on Americans in general as "enemies" of Thailand is being broadly described by Thai in private as excessive. But it is significant that the rest of the press has largely refrained from taking issue with it, that university students are engaged in hot debate as to whether publication of the blast was good or bad, and that numerous sober subjects of the King and members of the culture Kukrit sought to defend are saying that despite exaggeration it is "good to have these problems aired".

Diagnosis. There is no question that Thai temperatures are rising higher than the objective facts of the situation warrant. (For policy purposes, however, it is the temperature rather than the facts that are meaningful.) This is so in part because unrelated or marginally related matters have become involved. The press (witness Kukrit) is beginning to find a basis credible to the Thai to link "impact" problems in Thailand with the emotionally charged issue of US press treatment of Thailand on which the Mission has been reporting heavily in recent months. Such linkage is particularly dangerous; it will be difficult to engage the Thai--official or unofficial--in efforts to minimize troop-community frictions if the comeback to any appeal for moderation becomes, "You mean you defend the right of Americans to attack our King?" Govt officials, particularly in MFA, are probably more disturbed than they would otherwise be because of linkage to the unresolved SOFA question--even though we doubt that any of our present problems would be dealt with very differently by the Thai even had they obtained their desired jurisdiction formula.

Moreover, the recent influx of primarily military Americans is unquestionably being blamed by the Thai for cross-cultural influences that had already been set in motion. Nightclubs and massage parlors have been viewed with benigh amusement by the Bangkok elite most of the time in recent decades, though it is true that these phenomena are relatively new to provincial towns. The Government TV station's preference for the least expensive (and hence not most rewarding) canned American serials and the popularity of contemporary American movies are not attributable to patronage by transient Americans.

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The generational gap is unquestionably looming as a concern of urban Thai, although it is not yet possible to measure trends that even foreign observers can sense. But the US presence is not responsible for the impact of mod fashions or the popular music that grates on conservative Thai ears. The rush toward English-language learning continues; it is based on sound desires to gain access to the business world of this cosmopolitan city and to the international life of the East Asian region generally. That it also provides in a wider opening for the appeal and adaptation of American cultural characteristics is an effect rather than the motive. The increased prosperity of a growing middle class is likewise only in part, and indirectly, a consequence of the US build-up. Those who complain about competition for dates or about the high prices of cars, entertainment and imported products are therefore protesting the limited availability to them of things totally unavailable until recently. But it is inevitable that present "pains" are increasingly blamed directly on the most discernible new element in the environment, and that is the US presence.

The current affliction of the Thai is, therefore, a general discomfort, uneasiness, and concern about the accelerating impact of Western culture in a primarily American mode on the still largely traditional Thai society. Leaders in the society are afraid that they are "losing control" of the rate of cultural change and, with the example of American urban and youth problems thoroughly exposed to their view through public media, it is difficult to provide reassurance.

The range of current concerns has perhaps been best articulated by Kukrit Pramote. The following paragraphs from a Siam Rath column of December 24, just two days before his irresponsible broadside attack referred to above, probably come close to reflecting the heretofore largely unexpressed views of many influential Thai; they summarize well our own diagnosis:

"A major problem Thailand is faced with at present concerns foreign soldiers, especially American, who are helping oppose communist aggression in Vietnam, as well as American military forces stationed in Thailand. Since these soldiers behave like American soldiers in general, especially in the case of soldiers on leave here from Vietnam, the Thai people feel that they seem to be everywhere, and this is making the Thai people feel fed up with their behavior. The exception is persons who are making good money from contact and relations with these American soldiers.

"It is very true that these American soldiers have come here for a good, not a bad, purpose, but their presence is also causing adverse results to the Thai people. For instance, a large majority are throwing Thai culture, traditions and customs, to the winds, and adapting the manners, behavior, and way of talking of American soldiers. The price of food has increased to a record high, because American soldiers are ordinary human beings and they have to eat like any other human being. American soldiers are apt to

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make love and behave in a disgraceful manner in public places, while the problems caused by "red-haired" babies, "kinky-haired" babies, "hired" wives, and temporary wives, are subjects that are being very strongly censured everywhere and all the time.

"Since these American soldiers are stationed in, or coming on leave to, our country only temporarily, when they leavewe will be faced with the problem of eradicating the bad habits aped by the younger generation, and having to instil our ancient culture, customs and traditions, in them again.

"In the meantime, the government ought to plan measures to be put in force to remedy problems faced now and though expected results might not be obtained in full, it would help remedy them to some extent. It is, however, impossible to predict what our younger generation will become in the future; they might become out-and-out Americans because of the great popularity of the latter among the younger generation of today."

Remedies. Just as there is no single definitive cause of the incipient disease, so it is quite clear that there is no single remedy. We are quite satisfied, however, that preventive medicine is essential, that if the relationship of mutual confidence and support should deteriorate badly it would be virtually impossible to restore it while our substantial presence continues.

There are certain hypothetical remedies which are not practically available. The present situation would be dramatically improved, for example, if orientation programs for military and civilian personnel could be made so persuasive that no American ever touched a Thai female while in the open air, but we do not expect to attain this puritan Nirvana. A great deal of the public outcry could be stilled, though the real problems would not be solved, if military personnel could be removed from Bangkok and accommodated entirely in the provinces.

Because there is no single key to restoration of the relatively uncritical atmosphere with which we were blessed for so long, the Mission is reviewing all aspects of present efforts, on the economic, psychological and community-relations fronts, both to "pull up our socks" and to devise wherever feasible additional measures to lessen the abrasion at points of contact.

There are several respects in which the Thai themselves present obstructions. There have been past instances, for example, in which US military decisions to apply "Off Limits" regulations to particular entertainment places have been undercut by official Thai remonstrances, stimulated by commercial interests. We have repeatedly made plain our readiness to comply with any regulations decided upon by Thai authorities

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concerning relocation of the "strips," particularly in the U Tapao-Sattahip area, away from Thai communities or routes traveled by the King.

The problem of the strips is but one of the reasons we have been advocating for some time revival of meetings of the joint Thai-US Coordinating Committee, chaired by Gen. Kriangsak with Minister Hannah heading the US representation. Following a false press announcement that the Committee "has been studying" community relations problems, the Thai side did agree to a meeting, held on January 25. At this session the Thai reported that the RTG is in process of forming a/inter-ministerial coordinating center to deal with all matters related to allied troop presense. We believe this group, to be chaired by Marshal Dawee, should be helpful, but it was only by US pressure that we were able to get agreement to regular monthly meetings of the joint Committee.

A specific and welcome result of the January 25 session was Gen. Kriangsak's report that competing Thai interests have now resolved differences with respect to controls over entertainment facilities in the U Tapao-Sattahip area. Relocation actions are expected to begin within a month and to be completed ~~under Thai penalties for non-compliance~~ during a subsequent period of 90 days. The Mission pledged cooperation to the extent of declaring off-limits those establishments which remain in the areas to be proscribed by Thai authorities. This initial effort will provide a test for application of similar procedures in the vicinity of other bases, where the Thai have begun to make surveys.

It is our impression that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will play an increasingly heavy role on the Thai side in our joint efforts. Although its assertion of pre-eminent interest in such matters as customs privileges and other SOFA-related matters may present certain hazards, we believe it may be possible to bring MFA into position as an ally on some matters such as entertainment areas on which the military authorities have been slow to move.

Our efforts are therefore going forward on every related aspect of the problem. For example:

a) Base Housing - Programmed construction is being reviewed against planned deployments, and additional construction will be requested wherever predictable gaps exist;

b) On-Base Recreation Facilities - The recent approval for an initial installation of close-circuit TV or an equivalent system at U Tapao is, in the judgment of all here, an important step forward on the highest priority single requirement, and is greatly appreciated. Other facilities are being reviewed against foreseeable utilization, with a view to determining proper source of funds for additional facilities wherever appropriate;

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c) Orientation - Troop indoctrination efforts are improving as full-time civil affairs officers are being assigned to US-utilized bases; we will be seeking means of gearing Thai more fully into these programs to convey with maximum credibility the importance of deeper consciousness of Thai cultural norms.

We expect that some of the other measures devised to reduce the "weight" of our presence, and thus preserve the environment essential to continued fulfillment of the US Forces' mission, will require Washington support. These will be the subject of separate requests.

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