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SUBJECT : A Thai Journalist's View of the Insurgency

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If the Royal Thai Government does not take drastic measures quickly to defeat the Communist Terrorists, most of Northeast Thailand will fall under Communist control, according to Theh Chongkhadikij, editor-in-chief of the leading Thai English language paper, the Bangkok Post. In the enclosed series of articles from the issues of May 21 and 28 and June 4, 11, and 18, Theh quotes one Thai intelligence officer as saying that the Northeast could be lost to the Communists in three years if the government does not make up its mind to win the fight and then go out and do so. Even if the National Executive Council does make up its mind to defeat the CT, Theh adds, "it may not be able to achieve a total victory because it is too late," but it could at least effectively contain the insurgency.

Theh is a well informed journalist who is a confidant of former Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman and other senior Thai officials. In his articles, he describes the insurgency in the Northeast and recommends steps the RTG should take to deal with it, which are both generally in accord with the views the U.S. Mission has presented to the RTG for some time.

Enclosure:

~~Separate Cover~~: Series of Articles

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The insurgency in the Northeast is more dangerous in the long run than that in the North, Theh says, because in the former ethnic Thai are the Communist target. In the North, he argues, the insurgents are mostly hill tribes which cannot gain control of the lowland Thai. COMMENT: In fact, recently there has been increasing Communist penetration of the lowlands.

The main factor responsible for the success of Communist subversion in the Northeast, Theh says, has been their exploitation of the poverty of the villagers. But, he adds, there have been other factors such as the misbehavior of local officials.

Government economic development measures in the villages during recent years have had some success, Theh writes. But he quotes one villager as saying that, because development has enabled the people to earn more, now they can use their surpluses to provide food and money to the CT. Nevertheless, he says there is a need for more development. For instance, he notes that dams have been built which supply electricity to Bangkok but that the villagers have not been benefitted. In fact, he says, some of them have suffered hardships when they were resettled after giving up their land to build reservoirs. He urges that canals be built to bring water from the reservoirs to the villagers for farming.

But development alone is not enough, Theh says. There must also be an effective and honest civil administration in the village. Bad officials can drive the people into the arms of the CT, he points out, and should be removed and not just transferred. The police should also deal justly with the people rather than favoring the wealthy and powerful.

Besides good officials, Theh goes on, the government must also provide protection for the villagers. This does not mean just sending the army in, he says, because that would virtually become a war between the government and the people. A civil, police, military approach is best, he states, because counterinsurgency operations have been most successful where there was close coordination and a functional division of labor among the three elements.

Theh also recommends that steps be taken to protect the air bases in the Northeast against sapper attacks because of the increase in U.S. Air Force strength in Thailand and the intensification of the bombing of North Viet-Nam. But he welcomes the fact that only Thai and not U.S. forces are involved in counterinsurgency operations,

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since he says the use of American troops would make it look as if the U.S. was fighting to keep the Thai Government in power.

Better intelligence is also necessary for CI, Theh says. He recommends that the RTG reduce the rivalries between different services in the collection of intelligence and that each service make its intelligence available to the others. The police Special Branch should also have more men and funds, he urges, to carry out its task of operating against leaders of the Communist Party of Thailand.

Better government propaganda is also needed, Theh continues. The regular propaganda that Communism is bad is useless, he says. Instead there should be positive propaganda by television and radio to inform the villagers of what the government is doing for them.

Better development, administration, security, intelligence, and propaganda will all require more money, Theh points out. As the U.S. phases out its aid, he says, Thailand will have to depend more on its own budgetary resources which means it may have to collect more taxes from those who can afford to pay them. Theh says that General Kris Sivara, Secretary General of the NEC, assured him that the NEC was taking the necessary actions to handle the insurgency. But the implication throughout his articles is that much more needs to be done.

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