

The United States and Thailand

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The United States and Thailand

Alliance Dynamics, 1950–1985

R. SEAN RANDOLPH

To
my parents,
whose support and confidence
in me have never failed

and

With special thanks to W. Scott Thompson,
whose encouragement and advice made an invaluable
contribution to the conception and drafting of this work.

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Abbreviations

AACT	Academic Advisory Council for Thailand
AAT	Additional Assistance to Thailand
AID	Agency for International Development
AIR	American Institutes for Research
ARD	Accelerated Rural Development
ARPA	Advanced Research Projects Agency
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BPP	Border Patrol Police
CAL	Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory
CAO	Changwat Administrative Organization
CCPT	Chinese Communist Party of Thailand
CI	Counterinsurgency
CD	Community Development
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC	Commander-in-Chief Pacific
COMECON	Committee for Economic Cooperation
COMUSMACTHAI	U. S. Commander, Military Assistance Command Thailand
CPM	Civil-Police-Military
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
CSOC	Communist Suppression Operations Command
CTO	Communist Terrorist Organization
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DOD	Department of Defense
DOLA	Department of Local Administration
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ECA	Economic Cooperation Administration
ETO	Express Transport Organization
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FY	Fiscal Year
GRC	General Research Corporation
ICA	Integrated Communications System
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internal Defense Plan
IMET	International Military Education and Training
ISA	International Security Affairs
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JUSMAG	Joint U. S. Military Advisory Group

KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACTHAI	U. S. Military Assistance Command Thailand
MACV	U. S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MASF	Military Assistance Supporting Funds
MDAP	Mutual Defense Assistance Program
MDU	Mobile Development Unit
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIA	Missing in Action
MIT	Mobile Information Team
MMT	Mobile Medical Team
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MRDC	Military Research and Development Center
NARC	National Administration Reform Committee
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NIDA	National Institute of Development and Administration
NKP	Nakhon Phanom
NLF	National Liberation Front
NSA	National Security Agency
NSC	National Security Council
NSCT	National Student Center of Thailand
ODP	Orderly Departure Program
ORTC	Overseas Replacement Training Center
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
OSS	Office of Special Services
PGNU	Provisional Government of National Union
POL	Petroleum, oil, and lubricants
PP	Provincial Police
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSYOPS	Psychological operations
PSYWAR	Psychological warfare
R&R	Rest and recreation
ROC	Republic of China
RLAF	Royal Lao Air Force
RLG	Royal Lao Government
RO/USAID	Requirements office/U. S. Agency for International Development
RTG	Royal Thai Government
RTAF	Royal Thai Air Force
SA/CI	Special Adviser/Counterinsurgency
SCOOT	Support for Cambodia out of Thailand
SEADAG	Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group

SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SF	Special Forces
SG (CI)	Special Group (Counterinsurgency)
SLAT	Special Logistics Agreement Thailand
SGU	Special Guerilla Unit
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
SRI	Stanford Research International
STEM	Special Technical and Economic Mission
TDY	Temporary Duty
TNPD	Thai National Police Department
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHRC	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAF	United States Air Force
USIS	United States Information Service
USOM	United States Operations Mission
USSAG	United States Support Activity Group
VIST	Village Information System
VPT	Voice of the People of Thailand
VSF	Village Security Force

Preface

This book deals with the political and military relationship between the United States and the Kingdom of Thailand. While examining the entire post-World War II period, it focuses in particular on the years 1965 through 1976—what is being termed here the “Vietnam Era”—and the years immediately before and after. That era saw both Thailand and the United States intensively engaged as allies in all phases of the Indochina conflict. From relatively modest beginnings, Thai-American security cooperation expanded to the point where, at its height, Thailand harbored more than 750 U. S. aircraft actively involved in operations over Indochina and served as temporary home to some 50,000 American servicemen. The construction on Thai soil of major American intelligence installations and the launching from Thai territory of a wide range of covert operations led that country to become America’s major theatre intelligence base in Southeast Asia; Thai cooperation was also indispensable to the American program of military and political support for the governments of neighboring Laos and Cambodia. Simultaneously, Thailand served as the focus of a massive American economic aid program designed primarily to attack the roots of a festering domestic insurgency. Through these and other forms of cooperation, Thai-American relations developed into an arrangement of extraordinary intimacy.

This study will examine the underlying bases of that unique relationship. Its major questions are: What led Thailand, as a small power, to identify itself and its interests so closely with the United States; and what led the United States, as a great power, to develop in Thailand the types and scale of programs that it did? How could a small power, embroiled in the political and military maelstrom of great-power conflict, defend and assert its own interests? What are the levers that a small power has at its disposal to influence the actions of a greater one? And how does the inequality of power between two such states influence the quality and patterns of their relationship?

Underlying these questions is the theme of national interest and how it was perceived and pursued by each nation. During this period, as today, security considerations dominated the Thai-American relationship. The convergence and divergence of Thai and American security interests, resulting from changes in the international as well as domestic political environments in both nations, will be traced through the politico-military history of the period.

Viewed in its entirety, the story of this extraordinary period interweaves themes of idealism and self-interest, personal and institutional as well

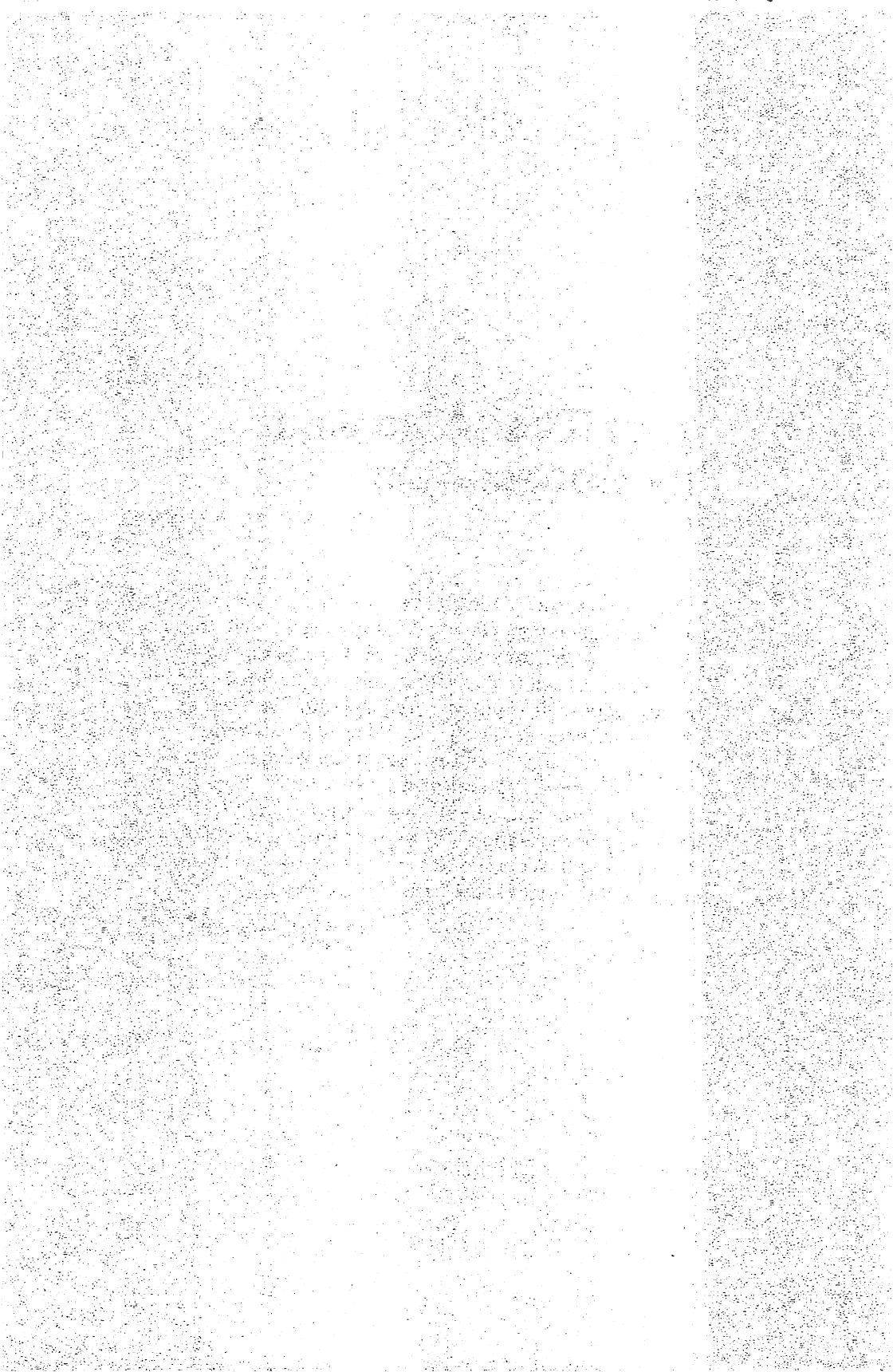
as national. Both nations have been affected by the experience. Though operating today within a different regional and global environment, the legacy of this era remains for both nations. It is a tribute to the enduring nature of this relationship that, despite the upheavals and changes that have occurred, Thai-American friendship today remains strong and vital. By seeing in this study more clearly where we have been, it will perhaps be easier to see where, in this troubled world, we are going.

Part I

Origins of Thai-American Security Cooperation

Being as we are now, surrounded on two or three sides by powerful nations, what can a small nation like us do? Supposing we were to discover a gold mine in our country, from which we could obtain many million cattie's weight of gold, enough to pay for the cost of a hundred warships and all the armaments from their countries; even with this we would still be unable to fight against them, because we would have to buy those very same warships and all the armaments from their countries. We are as yet unable to manufacture these things, and even if we have enough money to buy them, they can always stop the sale of them whenever they feel we are arming ourselves beyond our station. The only weapons that will be of real use to us in the future will be our mouths and our hearts, constituted so as to be full of sense and wisdom for the better protection of ourselves.

Mongkut, King of Siam (1867)



Chapter 1

The Early Years, 1818-1950

American relations with Thailand (then known as Siam) were generally superficial in the hundred-or-so years prior to 1945. Contact was minimal, as the two nations were distant not only in miles and culture but also in shared interests. In the early 1800s, the United States was an expanding trading power, and Thailand was making her first encounter with the mercantile nations of the West. The earliest Thai contact with Americans was thus commercial, as Yankee traders based in South China and Singapore penetrated the hitherto remote Kingdom of Siam. Following an early spurt around 1820, trade was hindered for a number of years until 1851, when King Mongkut assumed the throne and reopened the country to extensive trade with the West. In the years prior to the American Civil War, Thai-American trade expanded rapidly; and by 1858, U. S. commerce in Thailand was greater than that of any other country except Great Britain. With the Civil War, however, Britain and Germany eclipsed U. S. trade, which did not become significant again until after World War II.

Close behind the traders came the missionaries, and it was the missionaries who, in their own private capacities, were able to exert a very significant and often constructive influence on Siam's course in this transitional period. Though their religious efforts to convert the Thai people and court bore little fruit, they met with greater success in the field of technological and social advancement. The Rev. Dan B. Bradley is credited with opening the first medical dispensary in the country (1835), with efforts to control smallpox and cholera, with the introduction of the first printing press in Siam, and with the publication in 1844 of Siam's first newspaper. Americans also made substantial contributions in the field of education. Because of the constructive role played by the missionaries in the Kingdom's affairs, they attracted the respect of the royal court, and several Americans subsequently served as confidants and advisers to reigning or soon-to-be reigning monarchs. A prime example is the case of Mongkut, who before attaining the throne was tutored in science and English by Rev. Jesse Caswell, and by other missionaries in the fields of mathematics and astronomy. A perceptive and intelligent man already, Mongkut was influenced by these contacts in the development of his policy of modernization and his decision to open Siam to the West.

Diplomacy was the most critical arena for Mongkut and for other progressive Siamese monarchs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

for the independent existence of the Kingdom of Siam was continually threatened during this period by the colonial encroachments of France to the east and Britain to the west. By a slow and insidious process, both nations expanded their influence to the point of total control in Indochina and India-Burma, respectively. The Malay states to the south were eventually also acquired by the British. All that remained in the region was Siam—alluring, weak, and seemingly ripe for the plucking. If Siam was successful in maintaining her independence during this period, it was only because of her strategic position as a buffer between the burgeoning British and French colonial empires, and the consummate skill of her monarchs in simultaneously modernizing the nation and maintaining a delicate diplomatic balance on which Siam's political survival depended.

The first Siamese diplomatic contacts with the United States occurred in 1833, when Edmund Roberts concluded a commercial treaty with the King (the British had negotiated a similar treaty in 1826). Formal diplomatic relations were established in 1856 through the efforts of U. S. envoy Townsend Harris. Siamese-American relations were further advanced by a brief visit to Bangkok in 1879 of former U. S. President Ulysses S. Grant. He was received with great honor by King Chulalongkorn and the Siamese court, and the good feeling engendered on both sides led to an ensuing period of highly cordial relations, and ultimately to the upgrading of the U. S. diplomatic delegation from a Consulate to a Legation in 1882. The United States thus became the first power with a representative holding the rank of Minister at the Bangkok court. The Siamese reciprocated with a diplomatic mission to the United States in 1884.

Despite this growing closeness of relations, friction remained over the issues of extraterritoriality and fixed tariffs. Following World War I (in which Siam supported the Allies), negotiations were undertaken in Paris and later in Washington; and on December 16, 1920, a new Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation was signed by the two countries. Under its provisions, the United States surrendered all rights of extraterritoriality and granted complete fiscal autonomy to Siam. Complete equality of treatment was given the citizens of both countries. Under a further provision, it was stipulated that the treaty would become valid and tariffs could be raised only on the condition that "all other nations entitled to claim special tariff treatment in Siam assent to such increases freely and without the requirement of any compensatory benefit or privileges." This put considerable pressure on the other Western nations to follow the American lead, and the American treaty subsequently served as a model in negotiations with the European powers. The United States further contributed to the Siamese drive for judicial autonomy and international recognition by signing a treaty of extradition with Siam in December 1922. By these openhanded concessions, the United States took the lead among Western nations in demonstrating its goodwill toward Siam. In subsequent years, relations between the

two countries continued to be close, as increasing numbers of Thai students and officials came to the United States for study. The most illustrious of these was Prince Mahidol, father of the present King, who in 1927 began his medical training at Harvard Medical School. His coming was shortly followed in 1931 by a visit of the reigning King for medical treatment and observation of America's political system.

During these years, the United States played a unique role for the Siamese. American international assistance and American domestic advisers were sought out because of the United States's supporting role as a friendly, powerful Western nation perceived as having no major ambitions in the area and specifically no designs on Siamese territory. Even as early as 1856, it had been suggested to Townsend Harris on more than one occasion that the United States agree to serve as arbiter in the event of a dispute arising with other Western nations.¹ Americans were ideally suited to serve in advisory and other supporting capacities, as their respected and yet impartial status protected the Siamese from the suspicions of the contending European powers. The volume of American-Siamese trade at this time was small, which no doubt allowed the United States to act more altruistically and with more detachment than she otherwise might have. Siamese-American cooperation was likewise furthered by the general sympathy with Siamese aspirations felt among Americans residing in the country and by America's well-known anti-colonial sentiments. It was for these reasons that from 1903 to 1940 a post of foreign affairs adviser to the throne was created for and successfully filled by Americans. In 1925, the best-known of these advisers, Francis B. Sayre, was employed to carry out important and ultimately successful treaty negotiations with the European powers for the restoration of full Thai fiscal and judicial autonomy.

In sum, the United States played a unique and constructive role in the development of Siam throughout the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was, in fact, not a decisive role; yet the United States did make very real and substantial contributions to the advancement of technology, education, and social thought (through the communication of American egalitarian ideals) in Siam, and most particularly to the advancement of Siamese national aspirations.

Siam underwent a decisive political change in 1932. On June 24 of that year, a group of young army officers and civilians overthrew the absolute rule of the Chakkri dynasty in a bloodless coup. Under a compromise worked out with the coup leaders, the King agreed to retain the throne as a constitutional monarch. A parliament was established, which, however, was distinctly limited in its power. Authority purportedly rested with the cabinet,

¹ Townsend Harris, *The Complete Journal of Townsend Harris* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1959), pp. 111-12. See also p. 121.

but that body was essentially a creature of the coup “promoters.” This set the precedent for a fact of Thai politics which persists—though in muted form—even to the present day: the military faction that controls the army, and most importantly the Bangkok garrison, largely dictates the composition of governments, the role of parliament, and the constitution itself.

The ultimate locus of power was not immediately clear, however. The rising star of the 1930s was that of Lt. Col. (later Field Marshal) Phibun-songkhram, a young army officer and one of the original coup promoters. As his power and influence increased, so did that of the military faction in the ruling clique. Through the 1930s, civilian elements of the original coup group, led by the brilliant lawyer Pridi Phanomyong, continued to participate in the cabinet; by 1938, the military, represented by Phibun and the army, emerged triumphant.

Upon his assumption of the Prime Ministership in 1938, Phibun established a policy of militant nationalism patterned after the dictatorships of Japan, Germany, and Italy. The role of the military in national life was fortified and numerous programs of cultural and economic nationalism were instituted. As part of that program, the name of Siam was officially changed to “Thailand” (“Muang Thai” or “Land of the Free”) in 1939.

The United States had little role or influence in Thailand during these inter-war years. Owing to the Depression, the number of Christian missionaries in the country declined, while the growing spirit of Thai nationalism and the increase in government educational facilities reduced the demand for mission-supported schools. As the political climate changed following the 1932 coup, the role of American advisers also declined; with the retirement of Dr. Frederick Dolbeare in 1940, the tradition of appointing an American as principal foreign affairs adviser to the government ended. Political relations openly deteriorated as American business in Thailand suffered under the government’s program of economic nationalism.

The advent of World War II dramatically changed the character of Thai-American relations and presaged the development of a new working relationship. In the years between 1937 and 1941, the Phibun government had appropriated to itself many of the nationalistic trappings of fascism, while at the same time pursuing a closer relationship with Japan. On December 8, 1941, Japanese forces invaded the coast of Thailand and demanded the right to traverse the country en route to Burma and Malaya. Realizing that resistance was hopeless, and having failed to obtain a guarantee of American support (the United States did not consider an invasion of Thailand a *causis belli*), Phibun, not altogether unwillingly, chose to comply with the Japanese demands. Some weeks later, a military alliance was signed with Japan; and on January 25, 1942, the Phibun government declared war on Britain and the United States, a move no doubt designed to placate Thailand’s Japanese ally. In Washington, the response of the Thai legation was opportune. MR Seni Pramoj, then presiding over the Thai legation in Washington, chose not

to deliver the government's declaration of war, but rather announced that the true sympathies of the Thai people lay with the Allies and that his legation would henceforth be the center of a "Free Thai" resistance movement. In response, the United States agreed to ignore the declaration of war and to treat Thailand as "an enemy-occupied state."²

In the meantime, an underground Free Thai movement had been organized by Pridi Phanomyong (who was then regent to the throne) within Thailand itself. In 1942, the United States government offered to assist the Free Thai organization; and throughout the subsequent years of the war, the Free Thai cooperated closely with the United States through assistance to OSS agents operating in Thailand and by the provision of valuable intelligence on Japanese movements in Southeast Asia. By 1945, a pattern of cooperation had thus developed between the United States and Thailand which would carry forward into the post-war years.

In the closing days of the war, Phibun, under growing internal pressure and no doubt seeing the end of Japanese power in sight, resigned the premiership. With his resignation, the influence of the military faction in the government was temporarily eclipsed. Pridi, then the leader of the liberal civilian faction, immediately took steps to restore good relations with the Allies. Quickly he announced the return to Britain of territory in British Malaya which Thailand had annexed with Japanese encouragement, and moved to disavow the Japanese alliance. While Thailand's international stock was at a low ebb thanks to Phibun's cooperation with the Japanese, Pridi's efforts, coupled with sympathies developed through wartime cooperation, elicited a positive response from the United States.

The British in particular had suffered both militarily and economically from Thailand's cooperation with the Japanese. For this, Britain demanded compensation: the right to reorganize the Thai armed forces, the right to station military forces in Thailand, full compensation for property losses, and a monopoly of foreign trade. When the Americans learned of these terms, they immediately intervened and induced the British to reduce their demands. It was further felt, among other things, that a free and independent Thailand would serve as a model for other emerging states in Asia, and that the British demands would amount to a reassertion of a colonial-style dominance. The United States was already parting from Great Britain over the fate of the latter's colonies in Asia. In the end, American intervention and clever Thai diplomacy resulted in a peace treaty according to which Thailand retained its full sovereignty and Britain received compensation for property losses and a number of relatively minor economic benefits.

The United States continued to play a highly constructive role in Thailand in the immediate post-war years. On January 1, 1946, the United States

² State Department Document, "Postwar Status of Thailand," January 10, 1945 (mimeo), p. 5.

reestablished diplomatic relations with Thailand and supported its application for membership in the United Nations. A loan of \$10,000,000 was provided for the purchase of railroad equipment and for the rehabilitation of the nation's transport system. The U. S. also joined Great Britain in a number of commodity purchase agreements designed to increase Thai foreign exchange reserves. Crucial diplomatic support was provided by the United States for Thai efforts to restore good relations with the other major powers. American efforts were central in achieving Thailand's reconciliation with France, and in the negotiation of a first-ever treaty between Thailand and China. Modest amounts of financial and economic aid were also provided to the new liberal government.

By the end of 1947, the military felt strong enough to reassert itself on the political scene. On November 6, disaffected army officers joined with out-of-power civilian politicians to overthrow the government of Pridi and Admiral Thamrong Navasawat. The United States and other Allied powers exerted pressure to keep Phibun, "the man who declared war on the Allies," out of the government, thus enabling the civilian moderates of the Democrat Party to form a new cabinet. In April, however, the army chose to disregard any potential negative reaction and seized power outright. With the appointment of Phibun as the new Premier, the "golden age" of post-war civilian government was ended and Thailand entered an extended period of military rule which was to last, in various guises, until October 1973.

In May 1948, the United States extended recognition to the Phibun government. The relative rapidity of this move bespeaks a change in American policy and in the international climate which was profoundly to alter the tenor of American relations with Thailand. In the years following the end of the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union had passed from cooperation to conflict; and by the spring of 1948, international communism was looming ever larger as a menace in the thinking of American policymakers. At the time of the Army's coup in April, the United States was shoring up Greece and Turkey against communist advances, and was attempting the military and economic reconstruction of a Soviet-threatened Western Europe. In the East, momentum was swinging toward the communists in the Chinese civil war, and communist-inspired insurrections were beginning to infect many of the newly emerging nations of Southeast Asia. In this precarious environment, Thailand was an island of relative calm; and unlike her neighbors, just then emerging from colonialism, Thailand did not take a neutralist or anti-Western international position. Phibun, in fact, projected himself to the West as a staunch anti-communist (which he was), and this went far toward winning American and British support for his government. In this new climate, the means by which the Phibun government came to power and the former association of its leader with the Japanese were less important than its professed friendship toward the United States and its conservative and unequivocally anti-communist posture.

As the United States and Thailand entered the 1950s, both could rely in their relationship on an extraordinarily strong foundation of goodwill which had been built up by over a hundred years of constructive and positive American policy in Thailand. The United States had conducted itself in a genuinely benign and disinterested manner, thus encouraging many Thais to look to the United States for support and protection. The shift in American policy goals which occurred in 1948 set a new tone in Thai-American relations, and utilized that heritage of goodwill in the construction of a new formula that would underlie the succeeding era of expanding mutual security cooperation.³

³ For further detail on Thai-American relations in the pre-1950 period, see Frank C. Darling, *Thailand and the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1965).

Chapter 2

A Deepening Commitment, 1950-1964

The new Thai-American relationship that developed in the years after 1949 was to prove a significant departure from the past. Traditional Thai diplomacy had long been known for its pattern of “bending with the wind.” With a policy that was at once pragmatic (for a small power) and opportunist, Thailand yielded before the pressures of the dominant power of the region, surrendering diplomatic ground and territory to the extent necessary to retain intact the essential attributes of Thai independence. Above all, Thailand was not to be caught in the position of forcibly resisting a greater power, particularly where a graceful bow or side step offered a more practical alternative. In this manner, Thailand steered its way through the shoals of nineteenth-century European imperialism and avoided the yoke of colonial rule.

Against this traditional diplomacy of “noncommittance,” a new Thai foreign policy emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s: Thailand openly aligned herself with the United States and the “Free World” against the growing communist forces of the region. For a brief period after World War II, the Thais had flirted with the independence movements then gathering momentum around them. Close ties had been established with the Lao Issra (the Laotian party then resisting the reimposition of French rule), and limited financial assistance had even been given the Vietminh, who maintained a liaison office in Bangkok. By 1949, however, that initial attraction had turned to fear, as the growing power of the Vietminh and their communist association increasingly appeared to the Thai leadership as a new threat to the nation’s independence and traditional, conservative political order. In defense of that order, Thailand broke with its past by investing its future in an explicit and only slightly qualified alliance with the United States.

That alliance, at first informal, but later formalized in the Manila Treaty, has since then constituted the core of Thai-American relations. Out of that alliance has also arisen the principal theme that has dominated, for the Thais, their relationship with the United States—that is, the issue of the durability and reliability of the American security commitment. By so openly aligning themselves with the United States in the struggles of post-war Indochina, the Thais implicitly registered their belief that not only was the United States the only nation capable of protecting them against com-

munist aggression, but also that the United States would in the end prevail, on its own behalf and that of its allies. It therefore became a central objective of Thai foreign policy to obtain the firmest possible American guarantee of Thailand's security. Beginning in the early 1950s and continuing through the present, then, themes of security and of American credibility have dominated Thai-American relations.

DRAWING UP SIDES: THAILAND AND THE UNITED STATES ENTER THE COLD WAR

That America's relationship with Thailand would differ markedly from the past was recognized in Washington as early as 1945, when, in a State Department report on the "Postwar Status of Thailand," the "American interest in Thailand" was redefined:

Before the war the United States had little except cultural interest in Thailand. In the postwar world the United States will be concerned with the political, social and economic progress of Southeast Asia, which includes Thailand, and with the maintenance of stable conditions in that area.¹

The onset of the Cold War in the later 1940s further served to focus interest on Thailand as a friendly nation in an increasingly unstable region. On February 10, 1949, U. S. Ambassador Edwin F. Stanton wrote to the Secretary of State, emphasizing the need for a positive policy toward Thailand in light of the threat of global communism:

I do not need to emphasize the advisability and timeliness of establishing and implementing an affirmative policy regarding Siam in view of developments in China and the certainty that Communist activities and pressure will be greatly intensified throughout Southeast Asia and this country. It is not argued that this area is equally as important as Europe, but Communism being a global problem, it appears to us here to be both wise statesmanship and good strategy to take steps *now* before this area is completely dominated by Communism, to contain this threat and give support and encouragement to such countries as Siam which are not yet seriously infected.²

In the confrontation atmosphere of the late 1940s, the need for positive American action on behalf of allies and friendly governments appeared imperative. Already in Europe the United States had witnessed a communist insurgency in Greece in 1947, and both the fall of Czechoslovakia and the Berlin Blockade in 1948. Out of the American response were born both NATO (in April 1949) and the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (October 1949)—the MDAP being designed to appropriate arms, equipment, and military training for a worldwide collective defense effort. The fall of mainland

¹ "Postwar Status of Thailand," Department of State, January 10, 1945, p. 5 (mimeo).

² Memorandum No. 35, from Edwin F. Stanton, U. S. Embassy, Bangkok, to the Secretary of State, February 10, 1949 (mimeo).

China to communist forces in that same year came as a shock to Washington and intensified its focus on strategies for meeting the worldwide communist menace. Three weapons were immediately at hand: military assistance, economic aid, and the development of regional collective defense arrangements.

Particular attention was given by American policy planners to the problems of Southeast Asia. Behind the setbacks suffered in both China and Indochina, the hand of the Kremlin was seen to be at work. The role and objectives of Moscow, as perceived in Washington, were outlined in a National Security Council Staff Study (NSC 48/1) drawn up in June 1949:

Colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist activities, and it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin. In seeking to gain control of Southeast Asia, the Kremlin is motivated in part by a desire to acquire Southeast Asia's resources and communication lines, and deny them to us. But the political gains which would accrue to the USSR from communist capture of Southeast Asia are equally significant. The extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us; if Southeast Asia is also swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia.⁴

As the Indochinese crisis progressed, the prospect of a communist government in Vietnam drew the United States closer to open involvement in that country. The belief that a major French setback in Southeast Asia or elsewhere would also constitute a setback to American strategic interests had become an important consideration within elements of the American policy establishment. The die was cast by the accelerating movement of Hanoi into the Sino-Soviet orbit, manifested by Soviet, Chinese, and East European recognition of the DRV (Hanoi). In May 1950, American military aid to the French in Indochina began with an initial grant of \$10 million; in barely four years, that figure would reach \$1.1 billion, accounting for 78 percent of the cost of the French Indochina War.⁵

Intimately concerned with developments in its Indochinese neighbors and with its own military security, Thailand followed the lead of the United States by recognizing the French-supported Bao Dai government on February 28, 1950. Prior to that decision, Ambassador Phillip Jessup, in Bangkok for a conference of American ambassadors in the Far East, had conferred

³ Neil Sheehan, Hedrick Smith, E. W. Kenworthy, and Fox Butterfield, eds., *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 4. Note: the *New York Times* edition of the Pentagon Papers is referred to in this book, owing to its wider public availability. Where further specificity is required, reference will be made to the House Committee on Armed Services edition.

⁴ House Committee on Armed Services, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), Vol. I, Part I, p. A-55.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Part I, p. A-61; Part II, p. A-36.

with Phibun and privately urged him to recognize Bao Dai's State of Vietnam. This had aroused serious dispute within the Phibun cabinet. Foreign Minister Pote Sarasin, in particular, counseled against such a move, arguing that it was a mistake for Thailand to commit itself so openly in a struggle whose outcome was still so uncertain. Seriously split, the cabinet had decided to leave the decision to Phibun, who opted in favor of recognition. Phibun at the time was particularly eager to obtain an American security commitment for Thailand, and the military and economic aid that undoubtedly would go with it. Pote resigned in protest; soon after, the Vietnam office in Bangkok was closed.

This new Thai-American alignment received fresh impetus from the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. The overt North Korean invasion of the South, coupled later with direct Chinese participation, greatly intensified American concern over communist regional and global intentions and imparted a sense of urgency to American strategic thinking for both Northeast and Southeast Asia. In Washington, there occurred a stiffening of resolve that the communist challenge in both regions should be met firmly and decisively. In Bangkok, too, the Korean invasion produced a hardening effect which weakened what opposition still existed to a close association with the U. S. Following consultation with American Ambassador Edwin F. Stanton, the Phibun government offered to send 4,000 ground troops to aid the beleaguered United Nations forces; the Thai government also contributed some 40,000 metric tons of rice for Korean relief and supported important United States-sponsored resolutions in the United Nations directed against China and North Korea. The Thai offer to send troops was the first to come from an Asian nation, providing valuable grounds for refuting communist propaganda that the United Nations effort was only another manifestation of "Western Imperialism." It was almost certainly a part of Phibun's calculation that the United States would reciprocate with a major boost in military and economic aid. Whatever the intention, the Thai contribution to the Korean War effort went far toward cementing the bonds of friendship and cooperation which had been developing since 1945, and removed much of the taint still attached to Phibun from his prior association with the Japanese.

Phibun was correct in his expectation of increased American aid. In February 1950, he had approached American officials in Bangkok, expressing an interest in receiving economic assistance under the Point Four program. The Americans were receptive, and Thailand was included in the itinerary of an aid survey mission being dispatched to the Far East in the spring of 1950. The mission was to have two somewhat contradictory objectives: to recommend aid directed toward long-term development, and to recommend aid directed toward the shoring up of local governments against immediate communist pressures; emphasis was to be placed on quick-impact, high-visibility projects.

The Griffin Mission⁶ visited Thailand from April 4 to 12, 1950. The eight-day tour produced a recommendation that Thailand receive \$11,420,000 in technical and economic aid. The Mission took particular cognizance of Thailand's basic developmental needs. Aid was also seen, however, as having specific political value. The Mission expressed concern that Communist China might attempt to subvert Thailand through the local Chinese community (in fact, this was an unjustified fear, but one that corresponded closely to views held by the Thai leadership), or that it might attempt to seize Thailand's rich rice lands outright. ("There is also the great temptation presented to Communist China to obtain control of the largest exportable rice surplus currently being produced in Southeast Asia. This surplus may well be a compelling factor in communist strategy in view of famine conditions in China.")⁷ Thailand's rice exports, standing at 1.2 million tons in 1949, were assessed as being of major importance to the stability of food-deficient areas of free Asia such as Japan and India. The domestic political impact of American aid was therefore a prime consideration:

With respect to the proposed program, there is less economic urgency than political urgency. As a country that has come out solidly for the West, Thailand needs prompt evidence that its partnership is valued. . . .

. . . The danger might arise that the Thai, feeling themselves alone and believing a communist victory inevitable, might decide that wisdom is the better part of valor and attempt to come to terms with the Communists on superficially desirable terms. . . . Substantial American aid now would certainly lessen such a possibility.⁸

It is probable that Phibun's government subtly encouraged the Americans in that view. Even the Americans recognized that Phibun stood to gain personally from American support. ("The Government is rather firmly supported by its people. It should gain strength, of course, from aid program publicity.")⁹ The internal political effects of American aid were thus both anticipated and advanced.

The Griffin Mission's proposals for economic and technical assistance were implemented with the signing on September 19, 1950, of an "Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement" between the United States and Thailand, the first of its kind in Asia.

American economic and technical assistance was initially funded with \$8,000,000 provided by the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA).

⁶ Led by R. Allen Griffin, a former Deputy Chief of the China Mission under the Economic Cooperation Administration. Besides Bangkok, the Mission visited Saigon (March 6-16), Singapore and Kuala Lumpur (March 16-23), Rangoon (March 23-April 4), and Djakarta (April 12-22).

⁷ Samuel P. Hayes, ed., *The Beginning of American Aid to Southeast Asia: The Griffin Mission of 1950* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath Lexington Books, 1971), p. 226.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

By September of 1950, a Special Technical and Economic Mission (STEM) had been established in Bangkok, with fifty technical experts working in the fields of agriculture, irrigation, transportation, communication, commerce, education, and public health. Toward the end of 1951, the ECA was replaced by the Mutual Security Agency (MSA), and under this enlarged program Thailand was allotted \$7,000,000 in technical and economic aid. In addition to direct bilateral assistance, Thailand was awarded a loan of \$25,400,000 from the World Bank in October 1950 to assist in the rehabilitation of the country's transportation and irrigation network; this was the first World Bank loan to any nation in Southeast Asia.

The Griffin Mission was followed shortly by the Melby-Erskine Joint State-Defense-MDAP Survey Mission, which toured Asia assessing local military assistance requirements. Already in early 1950, President Truman had approved a grant of \$10,000,000 in military aid to Thailand. The Erskine Mission led to the signing on October 17, 1950, of a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement between Thailand and the United States, which provided that the United States would furnish Thailand with military equipment and "services, or other military assistance" as might be appropriate.¹⁰ Soon after the signing of the Agreement, arms shipments began arriving, the first in January 1951, followed by twenty-seven more in the next twelve months. The shipments included sufficient arms to equip ten army battalions, as well as fighter planes and modern naval vessels. To facilitate and supervise the training of the Thai armed forces and the distribution of military assistance, the United States established a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Bangkok. U. S. military assistance for the ensuing three years totaled \$4.5 million in 1951, \$12 million in 1952, and \$56 million in 1953.

The tightening of the Thai-American relationship and the extension of military and economic cooperation at this time were in large part a reaction to the emergence of Communist China as a regional power. Since the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, China had in the eyes of Washington policymakers replaced the Soviet Union as the chief adversary of the West in Asia. This was a perception shared by the Thais as well. Bombastic and strident declarations emanating from Radio Peking did little to lessen the apprehensions of Southeast Asian governments for their immediate security. In Washington's estimation, the Communist Chinese had three essential goals in Southeast Asia: the securing of Chinese frontiers through the establishment of nonhostile, pliable, and preferably communist buffer zones; the disengagement of the United States from the region; and the establishment of Chinese influence as paramount in Southeast Asia. These were viewed as

¹⁰ "Agreement Respecting Military Assistance Between the Government of the United States and the Government of Thailand," October 17, 1950, in *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, Vol. III, Part 2 (1952), 3 UST 2675.

part and parcel of a Chinese bid for leadership in the revolutionary movements of the underdeveloped world, and of Asia in particular. It was anticipated that the Chinese would attempt to advance these objectives not only by diplomacy and subversion but quite possibly by outright invasion; this impression had been strengthened by the experience of Korea. As John Foster Dulles expressed the prevailing view in 1953:

We do not make the mistake of treating Korea as an isolated affair. The Korean War forms one part of the world-wide effort of Communism to conquer freedom. More immediately, it is part of that effort in Asia. A single Chinese Communist aggressive front extends from Korea in the north to Indochina in the south. . . . There is the risk that, as in Korea, Red China might send its own army into Indochina.¹¹

The possibility of a Chinese Korea-style invasion, most probably knifing through Northern Thailand, was considered real in the 1950s and continued to haunt American and Thai policymakers as late as 1965.

Hindsight suggests that an open Chinese Communist attack on Southeast Asia was never actually in the cards. Chinese Communist support of indigenous subversive movements was a far more likely prospect. Chinese (or for that matter, Soviet) preeminence on the Asian landmass was perceived to threaten a number of vital American interests. As described in a National Security Council Policy Statement produced early in 1952, these included: the security of the U. S. position in the Pacific offshore island chain; access to the raw materials of Southeast Asia (such as rubber, tin, petroleum, and rice); and the economic and political stability of Japan.¹² Also explicit in American thinking was the concept later to become known as the “domino theory.” As formulated in the NSC’s 1952 Policy Statement:

The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to communist aggression would have critical psychological, political, and economic consequences. In the absence of effective and timely counteraction, the loss of any single country would probably lead to relatively swift submission to or an alignment with communism of the rest of Southeast Asia and India, and in the longer term, of the Middle East (with the probable exception of at least Pakistan and Turkey) would in all probability progressively follow: such widespread alignment would endanger the stability and security of Europe.¹³

French Indochina was perceived to be the linchpin in the domino process, and a successful defense of that area against Chinese invasion or Chinese-supported subversion was therefore considered vital to the defense of American regional and global interests.

¹¹ Address by the Hon. John Foster Dulles before the American Legion, St. Louis, Missouri, September 2, 1953, in *United States-Vietnam Relations*, Vol. IX, Part V, pp. 142-43.

¹² “United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia,” National Security Council NSC 124/2, 1952, *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 27-29.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The domino theory served as the conceptual basis for American support of the French war effort in Indochina in the early 1950s, and later for American support of Diem and other successor South Vietnamese governments. Thailand, as a friendly nation bordering French Indochina and, equally importantly, located in the geographic heart of Southeast Asia, came to play a central role in America's regional strategy. As a Free World "bastion" in Southeast Asia, Thailand would in succeeding years become the locus of major American interests and programs, and would become ever more deeply enmeshed in the global strategy of the United States and in the power struggles of neighboring Indochina.

A CONFERENCE AT GENEVA

The American position on Indochina hardened with the election of General Dwight Eisenhower to the presidency and his appointment of John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State in late 1953. Eisenhower had been elected, in large part, on a campaign charge that the Truman administration had been "soft on communism" and was responsible for the "loss" of China. Early on, it became clear that the Eisenhower administration intended to prevent a similar "loss" in Indochina. The domino theory was accepted with little or no alteration by the new Washington leadership and continued to provide the conceptual basis for American policies in Southeast Asia.¹⁴ At stake was nothing less than the momentum of the international communist movement, which threatened to swamp the former colonial areas unless it were stopped by firm American action.

To counteract the threat of communist encirclement on a global scale, Dulles proposed a policy of "massive retaliation" against the Soviet Union coupled with an increased reliance on "community deterrent power." Under this doctrine, local defensive forces were to be increased to the point where they would be capable of detaining communist forces long enough to permit the United States to undertake massive strikes against vital enemy targets. For Asia, this signified an increased reliance on local military power and an intensified American drive toward regional collective security arrangements.

In Indochina, meanwhile, the situation had become grave. Despite the growing level of American assistance, the French position continued to deteriorate through 1953. In September of that year, France, with American backing, made one last major effort to retain its hold on Vietnam. The failure of the Navarre Plan, which led only to a further series of military reverses, sealed the fate of French Indochina and ultimately led France to the Geneva conference table.

The Geneva Conference, which met from April 26 to July 21, 1954, ultimately produced two interrelated agreements: a bilateral armistice be-

¹⁴ See NSC 48/1 (1949), p. 18; NSC/64 (1950), p. 20; NSC/124-2 (1952), p. 27. See also NSC 5405, in *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Vol. I, Part II, p. A-51.

tween France and the Vietminh, and a multilateral final declaration. The Final Declaration of the Conference, signed on July 21, 1954, was most significant for the United States. In addition to endorsing the armistice, the Declaration further detailed provisions for the political future of Vietnam. Under paragraphs 6 and 7—the most important of the document—the military demarcation line dividing north and south Vietnam was to be provisional only, pending nationwide general elections two years later. It was those elections that would determine the political future of the country.¹⁵

The Final Declaration was endorsed by representatives of Great Britain and the Soviet Union (the two co-chairmen of the conference), France, Cambodia, Laos, and the Vietminh. The United States (which, though not a party in the agreements, was nevertheless a participant in the conference) withheld its endorsement. Instead, U.S. Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith issued a unilateral declaration on behalf of the U.S. government, stating that “the United States reiterates its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future and that it will not join in an arrangement which would hinder this.” The United States would, however, “refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb” the agreements, and “would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.”¹⁶ The United States was clearly displeased with the outcome of the conference, even though Smith acknowledged upon his return from Geneva that the agreements were “the best that we could possibly have obtained under the circumstances.” In the eyes of Dulles and Eisenhower, the Geneva agreements sanctioned the loss of further territory and further millions of human beings to international communism. The elections scheduled for 1956 would, it was foreseen, merely lead to the loss of the south by political rather than military means, making Vietnam the domino whose fall might lead to the eventual loss of all of Southeast Asia and possibly regions beyond. In meetings on August 8 and 12, 1954, the National Security Council described the settlement as a “disaster” that “completed a major forward stride of communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia.”¹⁷

The sharpness of the American reaction to the Geneva Accords was reflected in a key National Security Council Policy Statement dated August 20, 1954 (NSC 5429/2). In that Statement, concern was expressed that the

¹⁵ “Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference,” *Background Information Relating to Vietnam and Southeast Asia*, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, December 1974 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 217–19.

¹⁶ “Statement by the Under-Secretary of State at the Concluding Plenary Session of the Geneva Conference,” *Background Information Relating to Vietnam and Southeast Asia*, p. 220.

¹⁷ *Pentagon Papers*, p. 14.

communists had, through the Accords, “secured possession of an advanced salient in Vietnam from which military and nonmilitary pressures can be mounted against adjacent and more remote non-communist areas,” and that the communists had “increased their military and political prestige in Asia and their capacity for expanding Communist influence by exploiting political and economic weakness and instability in the countries of free Asia without resort to armed attack.” The Statement went on to make specific recommendations for various “courses of action” with respect to major regions and states of eastern Asia. With respect to China, the Council proposed specific steps designed to “reduce the power of Communist China in Asia even at the risk of, but without deliberately provoking, war.” In Southeast Asia, it was decided to “negotiate a Southeast Asia security treaty with the UK, Australia, New Zealand, France, the Philippines, Thailand and, as appropriate, other free South and Southeast Asian countries willing to participate” so as to “commit each member to treat an armed attack on the agreed area (including Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam) as dangerous to its own peace, safety and vital interests, and to act promptly to meet the common danger in accordance with its own constitutional processes.” Direct U. S. military intervention was to be considered “if requested by a legitimate local government which requires assistance to defeat local communist subversion or rebellion not constituting armed attack.”¹⁸

Thailand was to hold a central position in the new American strategy for the region. The same NSC Policy Statement included specific guidelines for American policy in Thailand:

- a. Provide military assistance sufficient to increase the strength of indigenous forces, thereby helping to control local subversion, and to make easier clear identification of instances of overt aggression.
- b. Provide economic assistance conducive to the maintenance and strength of a non-communist regime.
- c. *Concentrate efforts on developing Thailand as a support of U. S. objectives in the area and as the focal point of U. S. covert and psychological operations in Southeast Asia.*¹⁹

These three elements—the supply of military assistance for counterinsurgency and counterinvasion purposes, the supply of economic assistance to support the existing political structure, and the development of Thailand as a base for other U. S. operations in the Indochina theatre—were to prove the principal strands of American policy in Thailand from 1954 into the 1970s. As early as 1950, American policy planners had begun to view Thailand as an asset in the accelerating struggle with Asian communism, and

¹⁸ NSC 5429/2, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Vol. X, Part III, pp. 731-38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 738 (emphasis added).

had taken steps to support Marshal Phibun's anti-communist government materially. Only with the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords, however, did Thai-American relations come to be explicitly and intensively cast in the mold of security-related issues. From that point, the process of Thai-American security cooperation was to mushroom, first under the pressure of a deteriorating situation in Laos, and later (after 1964) in response to the military requirements of the Vietnam War.

AMERICAN AID, 1954-1960

Serious concern for the security of Thailand was aroused in both Bangkok and Washington by the extension of the Indo-Chinese War into Laos in April and again in December of 1953. Concern was further heightened by the announcement on January 31, 1953, of the formation of a "Thai Autonomous People's Government" in southern Yunnan, then the home of some 200,000 ethnic Thai tribesmen. Thai fears of China had already been intensified by Chinese involvement in the Korean conflict and by hostile propaganda attacks launched by both the PRC and the Soviet Union. The establishment of what was perceived to be a Chinese-controlled counter-government aroused intense concern in Bangkok that Yunnan would be used as a base for the subversion of Thailand proper. This concern was given further impetus by the sudden appearance of Pridi Phanomyong in Peking in July 1954. Pridi was referred to by Radio Peking as the "Public Leader of Thailand," leading the Thai government to believe that Pridi would be used as a puppet for the subversive purposes of the Communist Chinese. In reality, Pridi had little following left in Thailand, though the Chinese may well have intended to use him for all he was worth; nor was he likely to be able to lead the comparatively primitive Thai tribesmen of southern Yunnan in a subversive crusade. The Thais of China were themselves remote in geography, culture, and time from their Southeast Asian cousins. Nevertheless, given the sensitivity of both the Eisenhower and Phibun governments to any potential communist threat, the Thai security situation seemed perilous enough to warrant increased vigilance and stepped-up military aid.

On June 21, 1954, while the Geneva Conference was still in session, Thailand made it known that it would welcome U.S. forces in the country under certain circumstances. Soon after, on July 13, Washington announced that it would provide additional military and technical assistance for Thailand. Both actions were directly related to the perceived setback for the free world then in the making in the Geneva settlement.

American aid to Thailand in the years 1951-54 had generally been characterized by small-scale technical assistance projects, totaling \$31.2 million for the period. The largest portion of this funding was devoted to agriculture, transportation, communication, and power, as well as industry, mining, education, and public administration. In agriculture and public health, in particular, substantial progress had been made. Intensive U.S.-

sponsored experimentation and testing led to an improved variety of rice seed; the 15 percent increased yield produced by the new strain resulted in a reversal of Thailand's long-term trend of declining rice yields.²⁰ Assistance to the fisheries sector was largely responsible for a 25 percent increase in the fish catch between 1953 and 1955, and for the development in that same period of a domestic fish meal industry and the establishment of the first wholesale fish market in Thailand.²¹ In the field of public health, American efforts led to a fall in the malaria death rate by over half between 1950 and 1954. As a result of the malaria eradication program (1951-71), the number of deaths in Thailand attributable to that disease was reduced from 35,000 (19.4 percent of all deaths) in 1950 to 4,490 (2.0 percent of all deaths) in 1966.²² Also through the public health program, the number of provincial hospitals in Thailand was increased from twenty to seventy-one by 1955, one for each province; this was accompanied by a widespread modernization of medical equipment and facilities.²³ In the field of economic infrastructure, the small American program made a limited impact in highway, railway, and port development. One of the more significant projects in this area was the provision of assistance for the dredging of a deep-water channel to the port of Bangkok.²⁴

U.S. projects undertaken between 1950 and 1954 were thus generally small in scale and were directed principally toward economic development goals. A dramatic transformation in the nature of the American aid program took place in 1954, however, with the division of the technical and economic assistance program into two segments: "Technical Cooperation" and "Defense Support." Technical Cooperation encompassed most of the economic and other development programs that had been undertaken earlier in the 1950s; Defense Support, on the other hand, consisted of funding and supplies designed to develop and strengthen the Thai security structure, particularly through the construction of a nationwide infrastructure of facilities oriented toward military uses and through the provision of other forms of assistance intended to strengthen the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) political control of the countryside.

²⁰ Project 493-11-130-007 ("Rice Improvement"), *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary FY 1951-1972*, Program Office, United States Operations Mission to Thailand, Agency for International Development, March 1973.

²¹ Project 493-12-180-012 ("Fisheries"), *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary FY 1951-1972*.

²² Project 493-11-511-107 ("Malaria Eradication"), *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary FY 1951-1972*.

²³ Project 493-11-550-052 ("Hospital Improvement"), *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary FY 1951-1972*. See also J. Alexander Caldwell, *American Economic Aid to Thailand* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath Lexington Books, 1974), p. 41.

²⁴ Project 493-12-340-036 ("Harbor Development"), *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary FY 1951-1972*.

In 1955, the Technical Cooperation program was only half what it had been in 1951 (\$4.6 million as compared to \$8.9 million), while \$27.9 million had been added in Defense Support. While average yearly gross obligations increased from \$7.8 million in the period 1951-54 to \$36.0 million for the period 1955-59, almost no major new projects were begun in the latter period in the fields of public health or agriculture. Several activities in these areas were in fact phased out, particularly in the fisheries and irrigation sectors. The primary emphasis of America's economic aid program was decisively shifted from economic development to the development of a security-related national infrastructure. In the period 1954-60, the transportation sector received 46.9 percent of total U.S. assistance, roads alone receiving 33 percent, and air transport 9.8 percent; industry received 17.7 percent, education 8.6 percent, agriculture 8.4 percent, health 7.3 percent, public administration 3.5 percent, and police 1.5 percent.²⁵ This constituted a fundamental reorientation of the economic aid program, a process directly tied to the growing American concern with security in Southeast Asia following the Geneva Accords, and to the emphasis being placed by John Foster Dulles on military power and the expansion of local defensive capabilities.

Within the economic aid program, the transportation sector had particular security value. Between 1955 and 1960, USOM (the United States Operation Mission, the Agency for International Development's aid-disbursing arm) involved itself in virtually every major highway project in Thailand. Between 1951 and 1965, \$350,000,000 was spent on highway construction in Thailand, the greatest part in the period 1954-59.²⁶ American aid was supplemental to large expenditures made directly by the RTG for highway development, pursuant to a plan drawn up by USOM and the RTG for "a basic system composed of the minimum number and length of primary highways necessary for the economic growth and military defense of Thailand."²⁷ One of the most significant USOM projects was the "Friendship Highway," running from Saraburi to Korat, a major town in the Northeast. Built at a cost of \$20,000,000 (of which the United States provided \$13,600,000), the Friendship Highway was the first modern road to extend into the troubled Northeastern region. By increasing access from Bangkok to that area (the journey was shortened by 150 kilometers and several hours), completion of the highway had major security as well as economic implications.²⁸ Some years later, it would also provide a strategic access

²⁵ Caldwell, *American Economic Aid to Thailand*, pp. 166, 40.

²⁶ Projects 493-12-310-026, 493-11-310-027, 493-12-310-028, 493-12-310-029, 493-11-370-100, 493-12-310-101, 493-12-310-102, 493-12-310-105, *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary FY 1951-1972*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Project 493-12-310-102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Project 493-12-310-028.

corridor to American air bases in the region. A second major highway project, the Bangkok-Saraburi Highway (1957-65), completed the link between Bangkok and the Northeast by joining with the Friendship Highway; it also strengthened ties between Bangkok and the Northern provinces by tying in with the existing northern road network. The final major highway project of the period was the East-West Highway (1955-60), built between Phitsanulok and Lomsak in Northern Thailand. This was the first all-weather road linking the North and Northeastern regions of the country. This served not only to encourage commerce between the two sectors but also to tie the sensitive Northeast more closely to the rest of the nation. USOM aid to arterial highway projects continued until 1965, by which time Thailand was in possession of a skeletal national highway net.

Major attention was also devoted to the improvement of Thailand's air and railway systems. Between 1955 and 1960, a number of major USOM projects sought to recondition and modernize the Thai national railway system (which had been badly damaged in the Second World War). Modern traffic control and communications systems were provided, regional railway shops constructed, and large quantities of rolling stock supplied. Also, with the signing of the Geneva settlement, USOM funded the extension of Thai railway lines from Udon to Nong Khai, on the Laotian border. As Laos was and is highly dependent on Thailand for the transit of the greater part of its imports, and as the loss of North Vietnam to the communists had aroused American concern for the future of all Indochina, the extension of those railway lines and the provision of the necessary rolling stock to operate them no doubt served the purpose not only of relieving pressure on Thai facilities but also of tying Laos that much more directly to Thailand and the West.²⁹ USOM also contributed at approximately the same time (1959-61) to the reconstruction of the Korat-Nong Khai highway, the completion of which provided a parallel road route from Bangkok to the Laotian border (via the Friendship Highway).

More important than the railways, however, was the large-scale program of airport development generated by USOM in 1955. Beginning in April of that year, the United States launched a major construction program calling for the widespread grading, draining, and paving of concrete runways, taxiways, and aprons; construction of entrance roads; installation of lighting and electric power; provision of point-to-point communication for all airports, navigational aids, and air-traffic control facilities; and training in-country and overseas of Thai personnel in all phases of civil aviation. Construction and installation of all facilities was turned over to the U. S. Navy in September 1955 under the auspices of JUSMAG (the Joint U. S. Military Advisory Group). By February 1960, construction had been completed at Korat, Takhli, Udorn, Ubon, and Chiang Mai airports. In April

²⁹ See *ibid.*, Projects 493-12-330-030, 493-11-330-031, 493-12-330-032.

1961, a new control tower was completed at Don Muang airport (Bangkok), making that the most modern air traffic control facility in Southeast Asia, and other modern electronic equipment was installed at air facilities in Phitsanulok, Songkhla, Phuket, Chiang Rai, Lampang, Phrae, Nakhon Sawan, Mae Sot, Tak, and elsewhere.

According to former U.S. Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, the Northeastern Thailand airstrips constructed or modernized at this time were, among other things, intended to serve originally as post-strike recovery sites for U.S. B-47 bombers returning from strategic missions over China. Launched from Guam, and with limited fuel capacity and range, U.S. bombers would have required such strips in order to survive the long transit across southern China. Though longer-range B-52s subsequently made this role less important, the general decline in the security environment of Southeast Asia provided a further rationale for new base construction.³⁰ The military implications of these facilities were made explicit in USOM's program objectives: to "provide Thailand with a system of improved airports, located by both economic and military considerations" (P 493-11-370-103), and to "provide good civil airport facilities for domestic air carrier operation and the advancement of civil aviation in Thailand, as well as adequate air defense for Thailand consistent with U.S. policy and SEATO responsibilities" (P 493-12-370-037).³¹ It is worth noting that of the five principal facilities first completed, four (Korat, Takli, Udorn, and Ubon) were located in the Northeast, close to the Indochina frontier. Some years later, in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, all four of those bases (plus two additional sites) were to see extensive service in U.S. air reconnaissance, supply, and bombing operations over Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Airfield construction and improvement programs continued through 1971.

Other USOM projects, as well, were more or less explicitly directed toward military ends. From 1950 to 1963, a major effort was made to develop Thailand's telecommunications network, with the primary commitment of funds taking place between 1958 and 1963. The completed system was envisaged as having "private, commercial, civil government, police and military use."³² Economic aid funds were also assigned to projects with the designations: Naval Base Improvement (1955-60), Naval Recruit Training (1955-59), Military Training Facilities (1955-61), Volunteer Defense Corps Construction (1955-59), Military Hospitals (1955-60), Military Trucks (1955-61), and Military Training Facilities and Military Uniforms (1955-61). These projects were financed by USOM, but programmed and administered by JUSMAG.³³

³⁰ Interview, U. Alexis Johnson (Washington, D.C.: December 14, 1977).

³¹ Projects 493-12-370-037, 493-12-370-039, 493-11-370-103, 493-22-370-106.

³² Project 498-52-225-095. Also 493-11-220-020, 498-52-225, 095.

³³ Projects 493-11-020-078, 493-11-020-079, 493-11-020-080, 493-11-020-081, 493-11-020-082, 493-11-020-083, 493-11-020-084, 493-11-020-085.

One particularly interesting aspect of the American aid program was its support for the Thai National Police Department (TNPd). Since 1951, the United States had been providing large-scale aid to the TNPd through the Sea Supply Corporation, a cover organization for the Central Intelligence Agency. Sea Supply was staffed by professional paramilitary personnel, many of them former OSS agents in Thailand. While part of its aid was devoted to conventional police work, the greater part of Sea Supply's effort was involved in the development of a Thai counterinsurgency police capacity, particularly in the border areas. An elite wing of the TNPd, the Border Patrol Police (BPP), was an eventual outgrowth of the Sea Supply program.³⁴

In 1957, the CIA's police program ran afoul of Thai domestic politics. Up to that point, effective political power had been divided among three men: Phibun Songkhram, General Phao, and General Sarit. In the delicate power balance that resulted, Phibun lacked a strong institutionalized political base and therefore had to rely on his own prestige with both the Thai people and their American benefactors; Sarit and Phao's power bases were respectively the army and police. General Phao in particular had become immensely powerful, having transformed the Thai police into a private army of 42,000 men equipped with armored cars and an airborne assault capacity; the expansion in both numbers and equipment of the TNPd had been accomplished with American assistance. On September 16, 1957, Sarit moved against his political rivals, forcing both Phibun and Phao into exile. With the army faction clearly in control of the government, a move was quickly made to disband Phao's TNPd power base. Among the victims of the power shift was Sea Supply. Then housed in a building adjacent to TNPd headquarters, Sea Supply reportedly burned its records on the night of the coup and went into a protective low-profile stance.³⁵ The eclipse of the TNPd thus resulted in a major setback for America's police assistance program. Thenceforth, at the insistence of the new government, whatever police assistance the United States was allowed to provide was channeled through USOM, and for the next five years that aid was restricted to low levels. From 1957 through 1961, American assistance to the police (through USOM's Public Safety Program) did not exceed \$625,000 annually, with most of the material and training involved being devoted to traditional crime prevention and control functions.

This is not to say that after 1954 USOM's focus was exclusively security-oriented. Technical assistance funds, though comparatively small, did continue to flow to a number of primarily civil projects in such fields as electric power generation and public administration and education. One major focus in USOM's effort in this period was the creation of an Institute of Public

³⁴ Confidential interview (Washington, D.C., May 4, 1976).

³⁵ Interview, Mr. Samuel Kirshniah, Executive Editor, *Voice of the Nation* (Bangkok, July 14, 1976).

Administration (IPA) at Thammasat University. Once established, the IPA provided the first Master's level training available in Thailand in public administration—a badly needed service for a developing nation with a highly centralized bureaucratic structure. The Institute was subsequently reorganized into a new graduate school, the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA).³⁶ USOM further contributed to the streamlining of Thai government operations by providing assistance in modern fiscal management techniques. Studies, recommendations, and technical assistance were furnished in budgeting, auditing, and accounting, and over seventy-five Thai government officials were sent abroad for training. This resulted in a revision of the laws governing budgeting, auditing, accounting, and budget and tax administration; operational improvements in the revenue and tax systems; the organization and staffing of a central Budget Bureau; the introduction of a new government accounting system; and generally improved methods of financial organization.³⁷

The primary thrust of America's aid effort had, however, turned decisively toward security. This emphasis in the U.S. aid program was strongly supported by a series of resident United States ambassadors. The first of these was Edwin F. Stanton, who served from 1946 to 1953. A staunch anti-communist, Stanton's views are reflected in an October 1954 article in *Foreign Affairs* titled "Spotlight on Thailand":

Because of her geographical and strategical location Thailand, or Land of the Free (still known to many Westerners as Siam), is the heart and *citadel* of the region. . . .

What are the possibilities of saving the rest of Southeast Asia? A defensive alliance supported by an adequate defensive system is a commonsense approach to the situation. . . . Such a defensive system for Southeast Asia can best function if it is based on Thailand, which is wholly free from the taint of colonialism. Thailand's assent to that is, of course, absolutely essential; and it is equally necessary for the United States and the members of any Southeast Asian alliance that may be formed to undertake to defend Thailand. Thailand would rightly expect such a guarantee. . . . If Thailand's freedom and independence can be preserved, the heart and much of the body of Southeast Asia will have been saved.³⁸

Stanton was followed by Major General William J. Donovan, who was already well known in Thailand as the former head of the OSS. Donovan lobbied extensively with the Eisenhower administration for stepped-up military aid for Thailand, and it was owing in part to Donovan's efforts that the military assistance program to Thailand underwent its major expansion in 1954. Both the internal and external communist threat to Thai security

³⁶ Project 493-11-770-123.

³⁷ Project 493-11-750-121.

³⁸ Edwin F. Stanton, "Spotlight on Thailand," *Foreign Affairs* 33 (October 1954): 72-75 (emphasis added).

stood high in Donovan's mind, and he frequently addressed that issue both in Thailand and in the United States. Writing in the July 1955 issue of *Fortune* magazine, Donovan observed:

In the cold war struggle for Southeast Asia, the independent kingdom of Thailand occupies a position of unique importance—both to the communist and to the free world, with which Thailand is presently allied. To Red China, it is a tempting prize, for China needs rice, and Thailand's rice fields are among the most fertile in Asia. Moreover the conquest of Thailand, whether by invasion or subversion, would so expose neutralist Burma as to make its capitulation to communism almost inevitable. It would enable the communists to give direct support to their guerilla forces in British Malaya. If Thailand should fall, in short, all of Southeast Asia might be lost.

Fortunately for the U.S., however, Thailand will not be an easy victim. On the contrary, *it is the free world's strongest bastion in Southeast Asia*. Thailand, alone among the independent countries of this region, has wholeheartedly aligned itself with the West, and it welcomes U.S. support. And that support can be given without committing ourselves, as we did in Indochina, to the support of a colonial regime doomed by the rising tide of Asian nationalism.

. . . We have given the Thais arms and equipment. But sending arms is not enough; *we must also help strengthen the Thai economy so that it can better support a military establishment* that now takes 40 percent of the national budget. . . . The Thais clearly deserve effective support from the rest of the free world, and it is in our interest that such support is given.³⁹

Donovan was succeeded as ambassador by John Puerifoy in December 1954. Puerifoy had just come from a post in Guatemala, where he had achieved notoriety for his contribution to the downfall of the pro-communist Arbenz regime. He, too, was vitally concerned with the communist threat to Thailand, and his tenure saw the continued strengthening of the Thai-American military connection. Puerifoy's term ended with his death in an auto accident in August 1955, at which time he was succeeded by Max Bishop, a career foreign service officer. Bishop, like his predecessors, became a vocal proponent of Thai-American security cooperation. The efforts of these four ambassadors—Stanton, Donovan, Puerifoy, and Bishop—did much to advance the cause of American support for Thai security.

The Manila Pact of 1954 (and the organization it created, SEATO) was to constitute the ultimate embodiment of the Thai-American security relationship. In it, Thailand obtained the express commitment of American military support which had come to be, and to a large extent still is, a principal objective of Thai foreign policy. For the United States, it provided a vehicle by which further communist gains in Southeast Asia might be forestalled. While the purposes of both countries were thus served by the Manila Pact, certain important differences nevertheless remained. Though

³⁹ William J. Donovan, "Our Stake in Thailand," *Fortune* 52 (July 1955): 94-95 (emphasis added).

the Pact established a formal alliance mechanism, under what circumstances would that mechanism be called into play? And could the SEATO organization, by virtue of its membership and procedures, be relied on in an emergency as an effective guarantor of Thai security? The fluctuations in the late 1950s in the diplomatic and military relationship between Thailand and the United States, the two prime movers behind SEATO, would hinge largely on these questions. In the final analysis, the controversies of SEATO's first ten years reflected the significant differences of interest and viewpoint between the United States as a major power and Thailand as a lesser power in an environment of international conflict.

For a number of years, John Foster Dulles had considered the option of a collective security scheme for Southeast Asia. The military reversals suffered by the French in Vietnam in 1953 and 1954 had given new impetus to the planning for such an arrangement, a process sealed by the participation of Vietnam at the Geneva Conference of 1954. The guiding light of the process was Dulles himself. From September 6 to 8, 1954, eight nations—Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Great Britain, France, Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan—met to work out details of a treaty. The Manila Conference was notable for the absence of the so-called “neutralist” nations such as India, Ceylon, and Burma, which rejected the military emphasis envisaged by the United States.

Thailand, however, was attracted specifically by the military aspects of the conference. It had been for a number of years a major objective of Thai foreign policy to obtain a firm and explicit guarantee of Thai security from the Western powers, and most importantly from the United States. The failure to obtain such a guarantee in 1941 had been largely responsible for Thailand's rapid capitulation to the Japanese, and by 1954 it was painfully evident to the Thais that a neutralist posture could not effectively protect them against the oncoming communist tide. Such protection could only come from the United States. Early in 1954, Dulles had approached the Thai ambassador to Washington, Pote Sarasin, asking if his government would be willing to participate in a collective defense agreement in Southeast Asia. Sarasin relayed the message to Bangkok, and in two days received the reply that the Thai government would accept “unconditionally.” Negotiations ensued throughout the spring and summer of 1954, clarifying the role Thailand would play in such an arrangement.

At the conference, the Thais endeavored to obtain the strongest treaty possible. Their preferred model for the new organization being formed was NATO; had the commitments embodied in the Manila Pact been patterned after those contained in the North Atlantic Treaty, American military action in support of any member under attack would have been automatic. The United States, however, approached the issue from a different perspective. Dulles, fearing a possible refusal by the Senate to ratify, balked at a NATO-type guarantee. Dulles also made it known that he opposed tying down

American troops in the area on a permanent basis; for this reason, he declined Thai proposals for the establishment of a permanent military command or a joint military force. As Dulles later explained it: "The United States' responsibilities were so vast and so far-flung that we believed that we would serve best by not earmarking forces for particular areas of the Far East, but by developing the deterrent of mobile striking power, plus strategically placed reserves."⁴⁰ Dulles was specifically concerned about the possibility of American forces being tied down in a ground war in Southeast Asia in circumstances that left the initiative to the enemy; his preferred option was armed resistance by local defensive forces, supplemented by American air and naval support. In this he was joined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who insisted that the United States not be committed financially, militarily, or economically to unilateral action in the Far East, and that U. S. freedom of action not be restricted.⁴¹

The key provisions of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, signed at Manila on September 8, 1954, are contained in Article IV, which reads in part:

Each party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the Parties or against any State or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereinafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.⁴²

In an understanding accepted by the other parties, the United States inserted above the final signatures of the participants language specifying that this paragraph would be interpreted as applying only to "communist" aggression.

For the Thais, the central issue in the Treaty's wording was the question of automaticity. In the event of either overt attack or covert subversion against Thailand, would the allied response be automatic, or would it be conditional? On this question, the key words of Article IV are: "Each party . . . agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes." By this passage, the United States was required to "act," but such action was only conditional, as it hinged upon a positive outcome of the member's "constitutional processes." The United States could, then, fail to act in defense of a Treaty member, owing to a negative decision by the Congress.

⁴⁰ Quoted in George Modelski, *SEATO: Six Studies* (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1962), p. 96.

⁴¹ *United States-Vietnam Relations*, Vol. I, Part IV, p. 3.

⁴² "Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and Protocol Thereto," *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, p. 22.

Article IV continues:

If, in the opinion of the Parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any Party in the treaty area or of any other State or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on measures which shall be taken for the common defense.⁴³

This paragraph refers specifically to the case of subversion, a major Thai concern at the time. Its language only specifies that “the Parties shall consult in order to agree on measures . . .,” hardly a hard-and-fast guarantee. The security commitment contained in the Manila Treaty was thus, to the disappointment of the Thais, far from absolute.

In a final treaty provision, the scope of the new collective defense arrangement was extended to the Indochinese states through a Protocol to the treaty which designated, for the purpose of Article IV, “the States of Laos, Cambodia, and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam” as falling within the area covered by the agreement. What this meant was that in the event of outright aggression against one of the Indochinese states, any treaty member whose peace and security was threatened could come to its aid in accordance with Article IV, Paragraph 1, provided that such aid was requested by the protocol state. In the event of subversion, Paragraph 2 would apply. Significantly, neither Article IV nor the Protocol was consistent with the Geneva accords.

When it came to organizational structure, the Manila Treaty was vague, calling only for the establishment of a “Council” to “provide for consultation with regard to military and any other planning.” Dulles early on attempted to avoid use of the term “SEATO” to designate the new organization, lest it be confused in structure or purpose with NATO (with its combined command and headquarters and all that that implied); but at the first Council meeting in Bangkok in February 1957, the designation Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was accepted. An elaborate organizational structure was subsequently developed, but one that was still less complex than and substantively different from that of NATO. Within that structure, supreme authority for military matters rested with the Council of Ministers, the Council’s authority being exercised in practice by biannual conferences of SEATO military advisers. Three committees were also established to deal with subversion, economic affairs, and information, cultural, educational, and labor activities.

From the outset, the United States was the core actor of SEATO. Dulles had personally been the driving force behind the Manila Treaty, and ultimate power and authority within the SEATO organization lay in Washington

⁴³ Ibid.

(though this did not prevent the Thais from exerting great pressure on Washington at various times). For the United States, SEATO served as a framework for deterring communist aggression in Southeast Asia, thereby at least partially offsetting the gains made by the communists in Geneva. SEATO was to constitute a defensive arc of Free World nations around the periphery of communist Asia. In the final analysis, Dulles succeeded in attaining his goal, a collective security scheme for Southeast Asia in which the United States retained a degree of flexibility not available through a NATO-style framework.

For Thailand, on the other hand, the final SEATO arrangements were less than ideal. The Thais had been seeking an ironclad guarantee of American support in the case of communist invasion or subversion; this they failed to obtain. Despite verbal U. S. assurances, the Thais were disappointed by the fact that they had exposed themselves to the ire of the communist powers without an airtight guarantee of U. S. support in return; Thai concern was also aroused by the failure of SEATO to establish a joint permanent military force in the style of NATO.⁴⁴ Doubts about the reliability of the American security commitment would continue to haunt Thai-American relations in the ensuing years.

Still, Thailand had reason to be satisfied with the Manila Pact. After considerable diplomatic effort, it had achieved its long sought-after defense commitment from the United States, formalized by solemn treaty, and the establishment of an apparatus for military consultation and cooperation. In subsequent years, Thailand would also benefit materially from American military and economic assistance provided through SEATO channels, and from the international prestige accruing from the American alliance.

Thailand was, in fact, SEATO's principal purpose for being. At the time of the Manila Pact in 1954, no other member state faced an immediate threat of either communist subversion or communist invasion. In any anticipated scenario, Thailand was the front-line state. For this reason, Thailand was to be, of all SEATO members, the most vocal, active, and involved through the 1950s and 1960s. It was also for this reason, and as a balm to Thai disappointment in the "softness" of the American treaty commitment, that SEATO headquarters were established in Bangkok in early 1954. The location of that headquarters in Bangkok constituted tangible evidence of allied and American confidence in and commitment to both Thailand and the future of a viable non-communist Southeast Asia. As a further concession, a Thai national, Pote Sarasin, was appointed the organization's first Secretary-General.

⁴⁴ In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense dated November 16, 1956, JCS Chairman Adm. Arthur Radford, speaking for the Joint Chiefs, recommended against specific U. S. force commitments for SEATO. *United States-Vietnam Relations*, Vol. X, pp. 1096-97.

Through the next ten years, SEATO was to be at the heart of Thai-American relations, directly reflecting the overriding security preoccupations of the era. At its outset, SEATO was warmly welcomed in Thailand; the Phibun government had reason to congratulate itself, and both the press and National Assembly echoed the government's satisfaction. With the first testing of the alliance, however, Thai disappointment was rekindled, as fundamental differences of interest and strategy emerged between Thailand and the U.S. In 1955, and through the next eight years, the durability of the Thai-American alliance was to be severely tested by events in Laos.

LAOS AND THE CRISIS OF SEATO

Laos has long been a source of critical concern for the Thais. Since the early eighteenth century, Thailand has dominated the area that today is Laos. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Laotian kingdoms of Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Champassak were at various times vassal states of Bangkok and were considered, in effect, to be part of greater Siam. Thai interest in Laos has been based not only on this symbiotic relationship but also on Laos's strategic position as a buffer between Thailand and Vietnam. In the pre-colonial era, Laos effectively separated the regionally powerful Thai and Annamese kingdoms and, while the significance of Laos to the Thais lapsed during that area's domination by the French, it dramatically increased with the *de facto* establishment of a communist state in North Vietnam in 1954.

Geography and ethnography are also critical elements in the Thai perception of Laos. Geographically, Laos shares a border of approximately four hundred miles with North Vietnam, and seven hundred miles with Thailand; the Mekong River is the principal dividing line along most of the Thai border, and is highly permeable to movement in either direction. The narrowness of Laotian territory dividing North Vietnam from Thailand, and the fact that in the north Laos divides the People's Republic of China from Thailand by only ninety miles, has since the mid-1950s led to intense Thai concern over the possibility of Chinese- or Vietnamese-supported subversion directed from Laotian territory, not to mention the possibility of outright invasion. For this reason, the Thai government has been extremely sensitive to the approach of any significant communist forces to the alluvial plain of the Mekong River (immediately fronting Thailand) and the population centers located there.

The Thai concern with Laos is also ethnic, owing to the fact that a large portion of the population of Northeastern Thailand is of ethnic Lao origin. These Lao-Thais share an ethnic identity with their cousins across the Mekong, including strong linguistic and cultural ties. This becomes highly significant in light of the fact that the Northeast is also the poorest region of Thailand, with a comparatively small portion of the nation's industry and infrastructure and a distinctly lower per capita income. The aridity of the

Northeastern climate has led to frequent drought conditions; and this, combined with a feeling of neglect by and hostility toward the central authorities in Bangkok, has historically made the Northeast the Thai region most prone to insurrection. The establishment of a communist state or of communist forces on the Laotian side of the Mekong has thus raised the spectre of a Lao-based, communist-engineered separatist appeal to the Lao-Thais of the Northeast, or of an extensive arms flow across the Mekong to communist Thai insurgents.

For these reasons, it was a central foreign policy goal of Thailand after 1954 to ensure the continuation of a friendly or genuinely neutral non-communist government on the opposite side of the Mekong. In defense of that interest, the government of Thailand developed in the 1950s, in conjunction with Sea Supply, a "forward strategy" in Laos, which called for the defense of Thailand inside Laotian territory, before communist troops could advance into Thailand proper. As will be discussed below, that strategy continued to receive consideration through the mid-1960s.

Specific Thai concern over the security of Laos was first aroused in April 1953, when a Vietminh invasion of Laos brought communist forces within a few miles of the Thai border, and again in December 1953, when communist troops seized the Laotian town of Takhek, located directly on the Mekong River. A similar communist thrust into Laos and Cambodia in early 1954 was cut short by the Geneva settlement. The awareness of an immediate communist military threat was, however, a major impetus behind the Thai enthusiasm for a regional collective security pact; with the signing of the Manila Treaty in September 1954, SEATO was to become the principal medium for the communication of Thai concern over developments in Laos, and an instrument which the Thai hoped to use in pursuit of a diplomatic "forward strategy" in that country. The response of the United States and SEATO to these pressures was to become for the Thais a primary barometer of the strength and reliability of the American commitment to the defense of Southeast Asia.

From the outset, the Thais were disappointed with SEATO. The first confrontation over Laos occurred in mid-1955, when the United States and other SEATO members declined Thai urgings to intervene on behalf of the existing government in Laos's ongoing civil war. The United States position was that intervention was impossible because the Laotian government had not specifically requested SEATO assistance; that was scant comfort to the Thai government, however, which began to fear that SEATO was perhaps only a paper alliance.

Thailand's attitude toward SEATO was also affected by a momentary thaw in the Cold War which occurred in the spring and summer of 1955. In that brief period, both China and Russia appeared to be backing off from a policy of global confrontation in favor of the new concept of "peaceful coexistence." Simultaneously, in the more relaxed international climate that

resulted, the phenomenon of “neutralism” began to sweep the states of Asia. Both developments reached their height in Asia with the opening of the Bandung Conference of nonaligned nations in April 1955. A participant in the Conference, Thailand was favorably impressed by the apparent moderation of the Chinese representative, Chou En-lai, and by the reassurances offered by Chou to the Thai representative, Prince Wan. Though a danger from China clearly continued to exist, Bandung and its immediate aftermath succeeded in easing some earlier Thai fears and in making the Chinese threat appear, at least for the moment, more remote.⁴⁵

In the new international climate that resulted, the role and protective mechanisms of SEATO seemed less compelling and were therefore opened to new criticism. The opening of informal discussions between Washington and Peking in August 1955 further enhanced this perception. A momentary loosening of the domestic political screws also made possible a more open criticism of SEATO in the National Assembly and the press. A number of leftist political parties became major vehicles for that criticism through platforms typically advocating anti-Americanism, neutralism, and a variety of domestic political reforms. Thailand’s official government policy remained one of support for SEATO, but the commitment was clearly less strong than before; and by late 1956, officials were generally defensive about the American alliance.

The new appeal of neutralism within official ranks was partially the result of a perception that the United States was not adequately rewarding Thailand for her participation in SEATO. One of the major motivations behind Thailand’s adherence to the Manila Pact in 1954 had been the expectation that SEATO would provide a new and potentially rich channel for American economic and military assistance. There had, as we have noted, been an increase in both categories of assistance subsequent to SEATO’s formation, yet obvious disappointment remained over America’s failure to fund some of the government’s more ambitious economic projects. Thai sensitivity on this issue was sharpened by the prevailing perception that American aid was being provided to such neutralist countries as India, Cambodia, Burma, and Indonesia, while Thailand, an ally, was taken for granted. What, many asked, was the value of an alliance in which nations critical of or politically remote from the United States were the recipients of lavish aid, while friends and supporters such as Thailand remained insufficiently rewarded or appreciated?

On balance, it must be observed that overall Thai support for SEATO remained strong. The leftist political parties, with their anti-American views, remained very weak; and despite a good deal of genuine concern and dis-

⁴⁵ For further information on Thai attitudes in this period, see David A. Wilson, “China, Thailand, and the Spirit of Bandung,” Part I, *China Quarterly* 30 (April-June 1967): 149-69; Part II, *China Quarterly* 31 (July-September 1967): 96-127.

illusion, official noises about neutralism were more than anything tactical maneuvers designed to attract greater American attention and, if possible, increased American aid. The strength of continuing support for SEATO is suggested by a public opinion survey taken from a cross section of Thai community, business, and government professionals in February 1957. It showed that 91 percent of those interviewed expressed attitudes generally favorable toward SEATO, while only 4 percent expressed hostile attitudes (5 percent were either poorly informed or declined to answer); 84 percent indicated they believed SEATO was a primarily peaceful (defensive) organization; 56 percent thought SEATO membership was beneficial to Thailand, and 31 percent thought it was neither beneficial nor harmful; only 10 percent felt it was of negative value.⁴⁶

Any tendency in Thailand to move toward a more neutralist position was abruptly terminated by the Sarit Thannarat coup of September 1957. The overthrow of Phibun and the powerful police director, General Phao, ushered in a new period of Thai-American solidarity. Thailand's commitment to SEATO was immediately reaffirmed by the new Sarit government, and all public opposition was effectively silenced by the dissolution of the National Assembly and the suspension of the Constitution. At the same time, Thailand's drift toward accommodation with Communist China was halted, and the ban on all trade with that country was reinstated. This cooling of relations with the Communist Chinese was in large part the result of a reversal of Peking's conciliatory stance of 1955-56. By the end of 1957, China had resumed a militant, aggressive international policy. Thai perceptions were particularly affected by the Chinese invasion of Tibet, by the increasing level of Chinese anti-Thai propaganda, and by the increased material support being provided by China to the Vietminh. Driven by these developments, and led by the aggressive anti-communism of Sarit, Thailand was by early 1958 giving strong support again to SEATO.

On economic grounds, at least, the Thais were given some new cause for satisfaction. The death of John Foster Dulles in 1957 brought with it a moderate shift in American strategy, as Dulles's strong emphasis on the expansion of allied military capacities was supplemented by a renewed awareness of the security implications of economic development. As stated by Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs Douglas Dillon at the Fifth SEATO Council of Ministers meeting:

The need for economic development is fundamental and would exist irrespective of the communist menace. . . . We must never forget that while the primary purpose of SEATO remains the collective defense of the area, the security we are striving for will have meaning only insofar as we make use of it to work for the improvement of living standards throughout the area.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ USIS (Bangkok), "A Study of Thai Attitudes Toward the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization" (SEATO, March 4, 1957) (mimeo).

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, April 11, 1959.

Responding to the development aspirations of its Asian members, SEATO began in 1958 a modest economic development program. Specific SEATO activities included an expansion of SEATO-sponsored scholarships and fellowships and the establishment in 1958 of a SEATO-supported vocational education project. By far the most ambitious development project, however, was the funding from 1959 onward of the SEATO Graduate School of Engineering (later renamed the Asian Institute of Technology). Establishment of the school was originally proposed by Thailand and accepted by the SEATO membership at the 1958 Council of Ministers meeting in Manila. Designed to serve all countries of the SEATO region, the Graduate School of Engineering (hosted by Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University) was administered by a SEATO-appointed Board of Management and funded principally by the United States.

The crucial issue in SEATO remained, however, Thailand's security, and from 1957 through 1963 the fabric of the alliance was repeatedly tested by the deteriorating situation in Laos. In the ebb and flow of conflict between rightist government and communist Pathet Lao forces in that country, Thailand consistently favored Western support of the rightists, fearing, as has already been noted, the establishment of a communist regime on its eastern frontier. By the same token, the Sarit government remained skeptical of the coalition governments periodically born of that conflict. In the opinion of the Thais, any neutralist government in Laos would be fundamentally incapable of resisting communist pressures without the active military and economic support of the West. The instability inherent in a coalition framework, particularly one that included communist participation, would in the absence of such support inevitably lead to the crumbling of the non-communist coalition partners and eventually the whole of Laos. The preferred Thai course was therefore one of strong support for an anti-communist Laos linked to both Thailand and the West.

The central question for the Thais, then, was whether the United States and SEATO would share that perception and project the firm policy proposed by Thailand. Vietminh advances in Southern Laos in January 1959 drew Thai calls for allied action, but these produced no substantive response. Renewed Pathet Lao and Vietminh attacks in June and July of that year, however, met with a stern warning from SEATO and with united action in the United Nations by SEATO's Western members. While the former incident caused further disillusionment in Bangkok, the latter brought some reassurance of SEATO's efficacy.

The overthrow in August 1960 of Phoumi Nosavan's rightist government by an obscure parachute battalion commander, Kong Le, once again thrust Laos into the international limelight. Phoumi's refusal to acquiesce in the coup and his establishment of a rival power center in Savannakhet placed the balance of power and authority in Laos in serious doubt, and once again drew calls from the Thais for active SEATO involvement. For

Thailand this was to be a crucial test of America's determination to resist the advances of communism in Asia. Within SEATO councils, however, sharp divisions once again appeared. Britain and France, in particular, were at odds with the Thais, as in their view Souvanna Phouma, whom Kong Le had chosen as Prime Minister, was the sole figure capable of pulling together all of the contending Laotian factions, and the only commonly acceptable solution was a genuinely neutral coalition of all non-communist forces under Souvanna Phouma's leadership.

The opportunity to form a broad non-communist coalition, however, foundered on the opposition of Kong Le, who held the balance of power in Vientiane and increasingly had come under Pathet Lao influence. This led Thailand to assume an even more militant position, charging that the Souvanna Phouma government was illegal and was intending to bring the Pathet Lao into the government as a prelude to a full communist takeover. In late September, Sarit issued a strong statement, declaring that if the situation continued to deteriorate to the point where Thailand was threatened, he would actively intervene. In that case, Sarit said, he expected "to receive the assistance and cooperation from friendly nations of the Free World, because fighting against the communists is a fight for the welfare of the whole Free World." Failing that, Thailand would "have to decide for itself, and defend the nation in every possible way without consideration of whether there will be help from any source or not."⁴⁸ As it was, other SEATO members did not consider the factional struggles of Laotian politics sufficient cause for intervention under the Manila Treaty, especially since at that time there was no evidence of foreign military intervention in Laos. With the failure of British- and French-supported efforts toward a coalition government and the failure of SEATO to bestir itself otherwise, the Thais once again began to openly express their dissatisfaction with the alliance.

By this point, however, the United States had increasingly come around to the Thai view. American alarm had in particular been aroused by the growing infiltration of Pathet Lao elements into Vientiane, a development that served to push Souvanna Phouma ever farther toward the left. Accordingly, U.S. aid to the Souvanna Phouma government was cut off and support was given to the conservative Savannakhet faction through the Central Intelligence Agency. From September 1960, the Phoumist forces received a large number of unmarked Air America flights ferrying military supplies from Bangkok; Air America's C-46 and C-47 transports also provided shuttle service between Savannakhet and outlying Phoumist garrisons. Some two hundred paratroops trained in Thailand were at this same time made available to Phoumi's forces.⁴⁹ According to a White House memorandum

⁴⁸ "Statement of His Excellency the Prime Minister on the Situation in the Kingdom of Laos," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bangkok, September 21, 1960).

⁴⁹ Arthur J. Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization* (New York: Praeger Press, 1971), p. 154.

dated June 19, 1962, Thai as well as Filipino “technicians” were involved at approximately this time in the American support effort inside Laos, apparently in paramilitary activity.⁵⁰ Also at approximately this same time, the U. S. established, with Sarit’s approval, a military training camp for Laotian-based Meo tribesmen, as well as a training program for members of the regular Laotian armed forces. What is most important to observe at this stage is the fact that the CIA’s support to the Laotian rightist forces constitutes the earliest involvement of Thailand and the United States, in a direct physical sense, in the conflicts of Indochina. The use of Thai soil for the training of rightist forces and the use of Thai facilities for the airlifting of vital supplies to those forces for the first time extended Thai-American security cooperation beyond the confines of Thai borders and into neighboring Indochinese territory.

In December 1960, Phoumi, equipped with U. S. arms, attacked and captured Vientiane, sending Souvanna Pouma into exile in Cambodia and Kong Le’s forces into the Pathet Lao-controlled areas of the North; both Thailand and the United States immediately endorsed the new regime. Up to that point, the Thai government had been highly displeased with America’s performance in SEATO; the United States, it was felt, was not facing up to the realities of the communist threat in Laos and was not giving sufficient recognition to the interests of Thailand as an ally. On returning from a UN General Assembly meeting during this period, Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman remarked: “The feeling is growing very strong that we are treated less favorably than those nations that are uncommitted. There is less attention to our needs, our requirements, and our security than if we had been by ourselves.”⁵¹ Within SEATO, the Thais made it clear that if the organization were unable to agree on measures to prevent the further deterioration of the situation in Laos, they wanted the unanimity rule amended to permit members to take unilateral action.

Thailand’s dissatisfaction with the United States and with SEATO had been temporarily assuaged by Washington’s decision to back the Laotian rightists in the fall of 1960. The root of Thai-American differences went far deeper than the immediate exigencies of Laos, however. More significant was the fundamental divergence of interest between Thailand as a small power and the United States as a major power. As a global power with worldwide concerns, the United States was required to plot its course through the Laotian crisis with a careful eye to the international implications of its actions, particularly those that might affect the perceptions of the Soviet Union and Communist China. Also, while American interests

⁵⁰ National Security Action Memorandum No. 1962, June 19, 1962, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, Vol. XII, Part VI, 463-64.

⁵¹ Daniel Berrigan, “Thailand Is on the Spot,” *The Reporter* 24 (January 19, 1961): 29-31.

were involved, American security was not directly threatened. Thailand, by contrast, was a front-line state; global power considerations were thus of little interest in circumstances where Thai security was perceived to be directly threatened. In the Thai view, then, it was imperative that every means be used to move the United States as far as possible toward Thailand's own militant stance. As Arthur Dommen describes it:

This Thai attitude toward the achievement of its own security, an attitude that has correctly been called "mature and cautious," quickly became one of the most important considerations in Washington's formulation of policy with regard to Laos. . . . When future Thai policy depended on the demonstration of U. S. ability and willingness to meet the challenge of communist expansion in Laos, Washington was under continuing compulsion to take actions disproportionate to the intrinsic strategic value of Laos.⁵²

The difference in perspective between Thailand and the United States was thus one of proportion. What was for Thailand an issue of immense consequence was for the United States only one piece of a far larger policy mosaic.

Whereas in September of 1960 the principal decision facing the United States was whether or not to back Phoumi, by the spring of 1961 Phoumi's situation had grown so critical that the decision now facing the United States was whether or not to send in American troops. North Vietnamese forces had begun to work actively with both Kong Le and the communists. Tension in the area was further heightened by the initiation of a Soviet airlift of supplies to the Pathet Lao.

As John F. Kennedy assumed office in January 1961, Laos remained the most pressing international problem on the American agenda. Kennedy's own inclination was to seek a neutral Laos through peaceful means, in a policy coordinated with the SEATO allies. Despite efforts at compromise, however, no general agreement was attainable. As the Phoumist forces continued to be driven back by the numerically inferior and not-so-well-equipped Pathet Lao, there was every appearance that, in the absence of intervention, communist forces would push to the banks of the Mekong. On March 23, in a televised news conference, Kennedy reiterated American support for a neutral and independent Laos, and issued a stern warning to the communists that "if these attacks do not stop, those who support a genuinely neutral Laos will have to consider their response. . . . No one should doubt our resolution on this point. We are faced with a clear threat of a change in the internationally agreed position of Laos."⁵³ The matter, Kennedy said, would be taken up at the upcoming SEATO ministerial conference. Tangible expression was given to Kennedy's warning by the dispatch, two days after his

⁵² Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, p. 68.

⁵³ *Department of State Bulletin*, April 17, 1961, p. 549.

news conference, of 250 U. S. marines to Udorn, in Northeast Thailand, to set up a helicopter maintenance facility for the ferrying of supplies to the Laotian rightists.

Yet, at the SEATO Ministerial Conference of March 26–27, stalemate once again occurred, as Thailand pressed for military intervention, and Britain and France opposed. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who represented the United States, later recounted that the Thai Foreign Minister had told him during the recent SEATO Conference that Thailand was like a “golden bell” that had to be protected from the outside. The Secretary said he was not sure the Foreign Minister was wrong.⁵⁴ Despite Rusk’s efforts to produce a strong communiqué, the conference produced only a mild warning to the effect that “if attempts at negotiation should fail, and there continues to be an active military attempt to obtain control of Laos, members of SEATO are prepared, within the terms of the treaty, to take whatever action may be appropriate in the circumstances.”⁵⁵

This new failure to act plunged the Thais into another period of dependency over SEATO. Discussion was raised anew inside the Thai government about the possibility of pursuing a more flexible, independent foreign policy. The question of neutralism once again surfaced, and Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman spoke of a policy of “Thai-ism” (involving continued participation in SEATO, but an expansion of ties with other Asian countries). Even Thanat, however, was forced to acknowledge that in the circumstances then prevailing in Southeast Asia a policy of true neutralism was not a truly viable option.⁵⁶

For the Thais, the fundamental question remained: how firm was the Kennedy administration’s determination to resist the pressures of communism in Southeast Asia, and what would the American position be when those pressures came to be focused on Thailand itself? The immediate difference which continued to separate the two governments was that the United States remained unable to accept the Thai government’s implicit view that for all purposes the defense of Laos was identical with the defense of Thailand.

The practical issue was momentarily resolved by the convening of the Geneva Peace Conference on Laos in May 1961. Out of this was produced a final settlement calling for a tripartite coalition under the premiership of Souvanna Phouma, including participation by the Pathet Lao. The deeper issue remained, however. U. S. credibility with its Asian allies, and Thailand in particular, had been badly damaged by its acceptance at the Conference of the one outcome that the Thais had most sought to prevent: the inclusion

⁵⁴ Department of State—Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: Laos, April 29, 1961, *United States–Vietnam Relations*, Vol. XI, Part V, p. 64.

⁵⁵ *Department of State Bulletin*, April 17, 1961, p. 549.

⁵⁶ “Thai Fears for Laos,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 16, 1963, pp. 369–70.

of the Pathet Lao in a coalition scheme. In May, Washington attempted to bolster sagging Asian confidence by sending Vice-President Johnson on a swing through Asian capitals. Despite verbal reassurances and promises of increased economic and military aid from Johnson, however, profound doubts had been rekindled in Bangkok over America's reliability. On his return, Johnson reported to Kennedy that "country to country, the degree differs but Laos has created doubt and concern about intentions of the United States throughout Southeast Asia. No amount of success at Geneva can, of itself, erase this. The independent Asians do not wish to have their own status resolved in like manner in Geneva."⁵⁷

In September, Thanat visited the UN General Assembly in New York, and while in the United States also spent several days in Washington conferring with American leaders. Discussion centered on Thailand's demand that the United States give a formal and unequivocal guarantee to defend Thailand in the event of imminent communist attack, independently if need be of the other SEATO members. Viewed in the narrower SEATO context, what the Thais were seeking was an affirmation of the right of individual member states to act without the unanimous consent of other members. In the meantime, to make their point the Thais reacted to a renewed Pathet Lao buildup in February 1962 by deploying units of the Thai army along the Laotian border without prior consultation with either the United States or SEATO.

Though Thanat failed to obtain the desired security guarantee on his September visit, the Thais had evidently succeeded in getting their message across, for in February 1962 Thanat was summoned to Washington to discuss with Kennedy and other high officials the issue of SEATO and Thai-American defense cooperation. Five days of consultations were capped by a 40-minute meeting between Thanat and Kennedy on March 6. Out of that meeting was issued a joint statement, known since as the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué, in which the United States gave Thailand the strongest commitment of defense support ever in the history of the two nations. The key paragraphs of the communiqué read as follows:

The Secretary of State reaffirmed that the United States regards the preservation of the independence and integrity of Thailand as vital to the national interest of the United States and to world peace. He expressed the firm intention of the United States to aid Thailand, its ally and historic friend, in resisting communist aggression and subversion.

The Secretary of State assured the Foreign Minister that in the event of such aggression, the United States intends to give full effect to its obligations under the Treaty to act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. The Secretary of State reaffirmed that *this obligation of the United*

⁵⁷ Memorandum to the President from the Vice-President, Subject: Mission to Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan, May 23, 1961, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, Vol. XI, Part V, p. 159.

*States does not depend upon the prior agreement of all other parties to the Treaty, since this Treaty obligation is individual as well as collective.*⁵⁸

Aside from the Manila Pact itself, the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué is the single most important document in post-war Thai-American relations. In it the Thais obtained much of what they had been seeking since 1954: an effective assurance of American assistance in the event of communist attack. By this statement the United States was freed to act in Thailand independently and, if necessary, without the prior agreement of the other SEATO members. Both Thailand and the United States thus circumvented that provision in the Manila Treaty which specified unanimous consent for SEATO actions. This requirement had been particularly troublesome for the Thais, whose more ambitious urgings in SEATO councils had been repeatedly frustrated by the opposition of France and Britain. As Thanat put it many years later, “the necessity [for the communiqué] arose from the paralysis which gripped the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. As SEATO membership was drawn from the four corners of the world, the feeling of solidarity and dedication to the cause of collective security was not shared equally by all the signatories. Those countries situated far away in another continent were reluctant to accept the burden of, and the commitment to, the preservation and maintenance of peace and security in this part of the world.”⁵⁹ The communiqué, by sharply focusing and narrowing America’s military commitment to Thailand, succeeded in creating a new community of interest between the two countries which had been lacking within the broader SEATO framework. In effect, it constituted a bilateralization of SEATO’s multilateral defense commitment, creating, on a *de facto* basis, an indirect bilateral defense agreement between Thailand and the United States.

The Rusk-Thanat Communiqué was warmly welcomed in Bangkok. In a nationwide television and radio address, Sarit proclaimed: “All of you will agree with me that it is not so easy to find such a sincere friend who is concerned about our own well-being as the United States.”⁶⁰ The agreement marked a turning point in the Thai government’s approach to the Laotian situation and was undoubtedly the critical factor in convincing Sarit to accept the coalition government proposed in the final Geneva settlement. On March 21, Averell Harriman, then Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, visited Bangkok. After meeting with Harriman, Sarit announced to the press that Thailand and the United States had reached agreement on their approach to the Laotian crisis. While the Sarit government obviously remained less than enthusiastic about the final Geneva settlement,

⁵⁸ *Department of State Bulletin*, March 26, 1962, p. 498 (emphasis added).

⁵⁹ Thanat Khoman, “The Enduring Ties,” in Hans H. Indorf, ed., *Thai-American Relations in Contemporary Affairs* (Singapore: Executive Publications, 1982), p. 47.

⁶⁰ *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* (Bangkok, February–March 1962), pp. 7–9.

the formal commitment contained in the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué, coupled with private American assurances of support, was sufficient to bring it into line with the American position.

Still, the military situation in Laos continued to deteriorate, as the rightists continued to balk at entering a coalition with the Pathet Lao, and as communist pressure on the Northern Laotian fortress town of Tam Na intensified. The situation reached a critical stage in May, when Phoumi's forces were sent fleeing from Tam Na across the Thai border, abandoning most of Northern Laos to the communists. In Thailand the reaction was sharp, bringing accusations that the Pathet Lao were deliberately violating the cease-fire and that the Soviets were unwilling or unable to restrain them. Acute concern again arose over the security of the Thai border area, with pressure mounting on the United States to take some action to meet the communist challenge. This time the American reaction was quick and forceful. On May 8, 1962, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Lyman Lemnitzer arrived in Bangkok, en route to Saigon, for urgent consultations with Thai leaders. At that meeting, agreement was reached on the temporary stationing of U. S. troops in Thailand. On May 17, a U. S. Marine task force of 1,800 men landed at Bangkok and proceeded from there to Udorn, located in Northeastern Thailand, twenty-five miles from the Laotian border; those marines were in addition to a 1,000-man U. S. Army battle group that had participated in SEATO maneuvers in April but had remained at the Northeastern city of Korat because of the critical Laotian situation. Later arrivals soon brought the U. S. military contingent to 10,000 men, including engineer and Air Force units, with more regionally located troops prepared to move if the situation warranted. Additional small troop contingents were provided by Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain.⁶¹

Both Thailand and the United States were careful to point out that this large-scale troop movement was defensively rather than offensively oriented (especially as the Laotian communists had not pressed their advantage by advancing to the Mekong).⁶² Thailand, in its official communiqué,

⁶¹ Information Office, Joint Task Force 116, "Background Information for the Press Concerning Joint Task Force 116, May-December 1962" (mimeo).

⁶² Nevertheless, in a Presidential meeting on Laos held on May 29, 1962, Kennedy had requested contingency planning for Laos calling for:

- a) the investing and holding by Thai forces with U. S. backup of Sayabouri Province (being that portion of northern Laos to the west of the Mekong River); and
- b) the holding and recapture of the panhandle of Laos from Thakhek to the southern frontier with Thai, Vietnamese, or U. S. forces.

It was directed that the planning be undertaken unilaterally and without discussion at that time with either the Thais or the Lao. National Security Action Memorandum No. 157, May 29, 1962, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, Vol. XII, p. 467.

declared that the joint operation was being undertaken due to "circumstances [in Laos which] constitute a threat to the Kingdom of Laos and the safety of the Thai people" and pursuant to the terms of the recently announced Rusk-Thanat Communiqué.⁶³ Subsequently, with the easing of tensions in the border area, all allied forces were withdrawn—the greater part in July and the balance by late November. It was decided, however, to maintain stockpiles of arms and military material at Korat, to be ready and available to SEATO forces in the event of a new communist threat.⁶⁴

It is interesting to note in passing that eleven years after the 1962 SEATO operation the issue was publicly raised of whose initiative had led to the temporary stationing of U. S. troops on Thai soil. In a 1973 article written in the Thai journal *Social Science Review*, Thanat Khoman claimed that the request to bring in American forces had originated with the United States government and that Thailand, in granting approval, had requested that a statement be issued to that effect. Thanat's contention runs contrary to the statement that was actually issued, which indicated that the Royal Thai Government had "invited" American military forces into the country, subsequent to "joint consideration" by both governments.⁶⁵ Confirmation has since been provided by an authoritative source that the initiative for the 1962 troop movement came from the United States rather than the Thais, though "we thought this was something that would be in their interest as well."⁶⁶ Washington's depiction of the facts was most likely motivated by public affairs considerations. At all costs, the general impression was to be avoided that the United States was unilaterally intervening in the Laotian situation; direct American involvement in the crisis would clearly be more palatable to both American and foreign audiences if it were undertaken at the invitation and initiative of a neighboring Asian state. Thanat, for his part, has interpreted the incident as an example of the manipulation of a small power by a greater one.⁶⁷

The strong American response to the Laotian crisis of May 1962, coupled with the new security afforded by the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué, had been highly reassuring to the Thais. Still, the ultimate objectives of both governments continued to differ markedly. While the Thais remained highly distrustful of any coalition or neutralization scheme that included the Pathet

⁶³ Communiqué of the Government, Office of the Prime Minister (Thailand), May 15, 1962 (mimeo).

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, June 20, 1964.

⁶⁵ USIS, "President Kennedy's Statement on Men Ordered to Thailand, 15 May 1962" (mimeo).

⁶⁶ Confidential interview (Washington, D.C., December 17, 1977).

⁶⁷ Interview, Thanat Khoman (July 21, 1976). It should be noted that at the time his 1973 article was written, Thanat had been ousted from the government and had assumed a position highly critical of the continuing American military presence.

Lao, the United States was prepared to accept such a scheme as the price of stabilizing the area. On June 12, 1962, agreements were signed joining Pathet Lao, Neutralist, and Rightist elements in a new coalition government headed by Souvanna Phouma. The following month, on July 23, the delegates of fourteen nations met at Geneva to sign the Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos, and a Protocol thereto. In that agreement, the signatories (including the United States and Thailand) agreed: to respect the independence and neutrality of Laos (declared on July 9); not to “resort to the use or threat of force or any other measure which might impair the peace of the Kingdom of Laos”; to “refrain from all direct or indirect interference in the internal affairs of the Kingdom of Laos”; not to involve Laos in any military alliance; not to invoke SEATO’s protective umbrella for Laos; not to introduce in any form foreign troops or military personnel, or foreign bases; and not to “use the territory of the Kingdom of Laos for interference in the internal affairs of other countries.”⁶⁸ Though Thailand had concurred with the United States in backing the agreements, very serious doubts remained in Bangkok as to the sincerity of communist intentions to respect their provisions. So far as the Thais were concerned, then, the United States had chosen, at best, an expedient means of washing its hands of the Laotian problem.

Despite the international agreements concluded in the summer of 1962, Laos was to continue to simmer as a hot spot in Asia for years to come, and both Thailand and the United States were to continue their involvement in that troubled country. American aid continued indirectly to the rightist forces through Air America (whose operations, as a theoretically civilian airline, remained legal under the neutralization agreements). Air America operated in Laos under contract to the U. S. AID mission in Vientiane, which in turn was responsible to the American mission in Bangkok. Its airlift, operating out of Thailand, enabled thousands of anti-communist Hmong tribesmen to remain outside the control of the Pathet Lao; by the summer of 1963, Air America was dropping forty tons of supplies a day in operations covering the whole of Laos. In this same period, the United States also carried out aerial reconnaissance over Laos in aircraft based in Thailand. The exposure of those flights by the New China News Agency forced State Department acknowledgment of their existence on May 21, 1964, and the revelation that the flights had been undertaken at the request of the Souvanna Phouma government. The extent of Thai involvement in Laotian air operations is further reflected in a June 1964 revelation by the *New York Times* that some of the pilots of American-supplied T-28 fighter-bombers operating over Laos were Thai nationals, and that in one case a journalist who inspected such aircraft at close range found its markings

⁶⁸ “Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos,” *Background Information Relating to Vietnam and Southeast Asia*, pp. 242-50.

reversible: Thai on one side, Lao on the other.⁶⁹ Thai territory was also being used for the training of military personnel, including pilots, of both the Centrist and Rightist Laotian factions. This joint Thai-American involvement in Laos expanded through 1964, paralleling the involvement of North Vietnam and serving in Souvanna Phouma's strategy as an offset to the North Vietnamese presence.

For both Thailand and the United States the Laotian crises had brought a new awareness of the problems of alliance, and particularly of the difficulties entailed in working through the SEATO mechanism.⁷⁰ At the root of those difficulties lay a fundamental divergence of interest between the United States, as a major power remote from the scene of confrontation and saddled with a myriad of complex international concerns, and Thailand, as a small front-line state campaigning on a single issue of immediate and overriding concern—its own security. If Thailand emerged from the Laotian crises disappointed in the American performance, she had nevertheless gained a great deal in the interim. Through the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué, the Anglo-French roadblock in SEATO had been effectively removed, and an explicit bilateral statement of defense support had been obtained from the United States. In Laos the United States was by 1964 actively involved, with Thai assistance, in the support and supply of both major non-communist factions. The strength of American interest in the area had been amply demonstrated by President Kennedy's commitment of troops to the Northeast in 1962. While the turmoil of 1958–62 had aroused deep Thai fears regarding the reliability of the American security commitment, both countries had nevertheless been drawn significantly deeper into an intensifying bilateral military relationship, a relationship that in the years to come was to involve the United States in a vastly expanded economic and security assistance program in Thailand, and both nations in an ever-deepening intervention in the Indochinese states. The Laotian crises of the late 1950s and early 1960s thus provided an experiential springboard for a unique and even more intense relationship as American attention shifted from the crisis in Laos to the emerging drama in Vietnam.

⁶⁹ Arthur J. Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, p. 275.

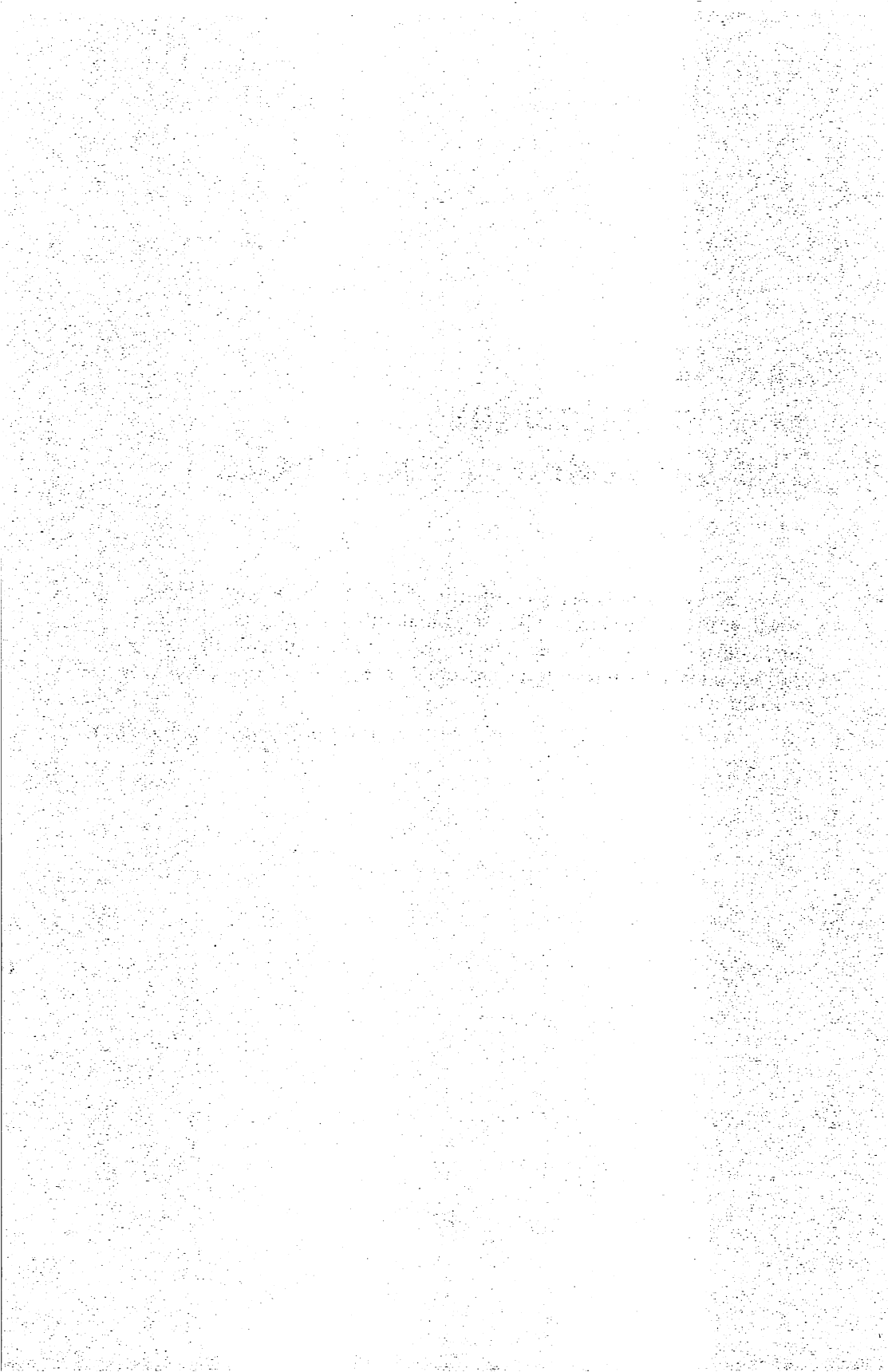
⁷⁰ For additional details on the role played by Laos in Thai-American relations through the early 1960s, see Donald E. Neuchterlein, *Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965).

Part II

War in Indochina: The Crocodile or the Whale?

Since we are now being constantly abused by the French because we will not allow ourselves to be placed under their domination like the Cambodians, it is for us to decide what we are going to do; whether to swim up-river to make friends with the crocodile or to swim out to sea and hang on to the whale.

Mongkut, King of Siam (1867)



Chapter 3

“Our Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier”

Even as the Laotian crisis simmered through the late 1950s and early 1960s, the deteriorating politico-military situation in South Vietnam began to assume an ever-larger place in the considerations of American policy-makers. The domino theory continued to dominate American strategic thinking on Southeast Asia. A direct causal relationship was perceived between the loss of any one state in Indochina to communism and the subsequent crumbling of the remainder of Southeast Asia. With the achievement of a relative equilibrium in Laos after 1961, attention was focused anew on South Vietnam as the key domino in the causal chain.

Input from an array of major Kennedy administration figures suggested that the stand against the communist tide should be made in Vietnam and possibly Thailand. In a discussion with leading defense and foreign policy officials on April 21, 1961, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara stated that in his evaluation the best place to stand and fight in Southeast Asia would be Thailand and South Vietnam.¹ Vice-President Lyndon Johnson, on returning from a goodwill mission to Southeast Asia in May 1961, reported:

The battle against communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination to achieve success there—or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defense on our own shores.

Vietnam and Thailand are the immediate—and most important—trouble spots, critical to the U.S. These areas require the attention of our very best talents—under the very closest Washington direction—on matters economic, military, and political.²

The prospects for a quick resolution of the Vietnamese problem were dashed, however, by the establishment of the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam on December 20, 1960, and by Hanoi's public announcement of support for the new organization six weeks later. During the following year (1961), the insurgency in the South was rapidly accelerated as the Vietminh assumed a preponderant role in the anti-government

¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Department of State, Subject: Laos, April 29, 1961, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, Vol. XI, Part V, p. 63.

² Memorandum to the President from the Vice-President, May 23, 1961, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, Vol. XI, Part V, p. 164.

resistance, and as increasing numbers of communists infiltrated from the North. In 1962, the United States began its military buildup in South Vietnam.

Immediately after the November 1964 elections, Johnson initiated an intensive month-long review of American policy options in Vietnam, out of which emerged a consensus for a two-phase expansion of the war. Phase I envisaged an intensification of air strikes in Laos as well as covert actions against North Vietnam; Phase II foresaw a sustained, escalating air campaign against North Vietnamese targets. The occasion for launching such a campaign was provided on February 7, 1965, when Vietcong guerillas bombed the American military barracks at Pleiku, killing eight and wounding one hundred and twenty-six. Twelve hours later, American jets, flying from bases in Thailand and South Vietnam, attacked targets in North Vietnam in what was officially termed a reprisal for the Pleiku bombing. Within the next five days, two further air operations were carried out in retaliation for specific Vietcong attacks.

Both the February strikes, labeled FLAMING DART, and the Gulf of Tonkin attacks of the previous August were described by the Johnson administration as limited responses to specific Vietcong acts of aggression. Presidential assistant McGeorge Bundy was in South Vietnam, however, when the Pleiku attack occurred. Bundy subsequently recommended to the President that, in addition to the retaliatory attacks, the U. S. should initiate Phase II of the military operations against North Vietnam. The fall of the Khanh regime the following week, coupled with the appearance that no U.S. measure short of bombing was capable of arresting the disastrous decline in South Vietnamese military fortunes, led to the decision of February 28 to bomb the North. Two days later, on March 2, 1965, the United States launched its first nonretaliatory strikes against North Vietnam.

Dubbed operation ROLLING THUNDER, the U. S. air strikes were at first described as necessary for the interdiction of supply lines from North to South Vietnam. On a much broader level, the American air campaign against North Vietnam was premised on the concept of "strategic persuasion," which theorized that through the application of progressively greater levels of force the United States would demonstrate its determination to defeat Vietcong aggression, would inflict such pain on the enemy as to convince him of the unattainability of his aims, and would thereby speed progress toward an acceptable negotiated settlement.

By a slow and incremental process, the United States thus engaged itself in an ever-deepening commitment to the survival of a free South Vietnam. Though that commitment tangibly manifested itself in the dispatch of approximately 600,000 U. S. ground forces to Vietnam, it is the air war against the North which is of more immediate importance to this study. Throughout the ensuing conflict, but most particularly in the air, Thailand was destined to play a major supporting role.

PRELUDE IN LAOS

The expansion of the American military presence in Thailand in the years 1964-65 occurred as a direct outgrowth of the mounting crisis in South Vietnam. The mounting of a major air campaign against North Vietnam, which was debated within the Johnson administration during 1964 and was foreseen in the Phase II recommendations of December of that year, required a secure, strategically placed, and extensive base from which to operate. Thailand, with its central location in Southeast Asia, friendly government, and peaceful countryside, was ideally suited to meet those requirements. From 1965 onward, it was to serve as a principal base for American reconnaissance as well as tactical and strategic air missions over Indochina.

To trace the origins of the American air presence in Thailand accurately, one must refer back to the Laotian conflict, on which all previous Thai-American security cooperation had been based. In the years since 1954, that conflict had provided the common ground on which the Thai-American security relationship had been built, and in every important sense it can be said that the Laotian civil war served as a dress rehearsal for the later and greater conflict that was to come in Vietnam. Thus, the years 1954-64 saw the stationing (albeit temporarily) of U.S. troops on Thai soil; the involvement of Thai nationals in military operations in Laos; the initiation of reconnaissance and offensive air operations from Thai bases directed toward Laos; the development of an extensive intelligence network in Thailand related primarily to the Indochinese conflict; the use of Thailand by the Central Intelligence Agency and U.S. government agencies for the logistical supply of Laotian forces; and the development of patterns of Thai-American security cooperation which were to carry on well into the 1970s.

Though the closing years of the 1950s had never witnessed an actual intervention by SEATO forces, both Thailand and the United States had at least indirectly been drawn into that conflict through the CIA's program of support for the Phoumist forces, starting in September 1960. The American decision to back the Laotian rightists subsequently led to other and more expanded forms of American support. Air operations, in particular, played a major role in the American effort. This required intimate Thai cooperation. It will be recalled that Thai-based air operations into Laos began in 1961 with the Air America airlift from Bangkok to Savannakhet. The expanded scale of American support, and the perceived need of the Thais to develop a greater local defense capability, subsequently led to the need for expanded air base facilities. Since the end of World War II, small units of the United States Air Force had been stationed in Thailand to assist the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) in such matters as aircraft control, communications, and training. U.S. interest in operating rights for American military aircraft dated back, in fact, as far as 1946, when it was officially suggested that an

agreement on interim operating rights for military aircraft “be obtained in a form which will afford the best possible basis for conversion to permanent rights.”³

Beginning in 1961, as a direct result of the worsening situation in Laos, the RTAF began a program of U. S.-assisted expansion; at the same time, U. S. air operations out of Thailand markedly increased. In April 1961, U. S. Air Force personnel began their operations in Thailand by establishing an aircraft control and warning system at Don Muang airport, seventeen miles north of Bangkok. The following November, the first U. S. reconnaissance flights over Laos were launched from Don Muang, under the code name “Able Mabel.” Initially flown by a temporary duty (TDY) unit of four RF-101s, the Able Mabel operation continued through July 1962, when all flights were halted in compliance with that summer’s Geneva settlement. Alleged violations of the Accords by the communists subsequently led to the resumption of Laotian reconnaissance flights in early 1963.

After Don Muang, the United States developed a second major air facility at Takhli, 130 miles northwest of Bangkok, in early 1961. Takhli initially supported F-100 Supersabres, and later F-105 Thunderchiefs.

A third major air center was soon developed at Korat, a regional center located in the heart of Thailand’s northeastern plateau. The first U. S. deployment to Korat took place in April 1962. The development of Korat into a major facility received its impetus from President Kennedy’s temporary deployment of 10,000 U. S. marines to Thailand at the same time. Those troops were withdrawn between July and December 1962, but the crisis in the meantime had revealed to SEATO planners a number of deficiencies in Thailand’s logistical infrastructure. As a result, Thai-U. S. discussions were initiated in the fall of 1962; and on March 19, 1963, the Special Logistics Agreement Thailand (SLAT) was signed, under which the United States agreed to provide the Thai government with locomotives and POL (Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants) cars, to be made available to U. S. and other SEATO forces in the event of a renewed emergency. The U. S. also agreed under SLAT to improve the Royal Thai Air Force Base at Nakhon Phanom, and to pre-position heavy items such as ordnance, engineering equipment, combat pipeline, and other military equipment at Korat. The material at Korat was intended to be available for immediate use, thus saving transport time in the event of an emergency. Equipment maintained in a state of constant readiness for deployment eventually included tanks, trucks, jeeps, bridge units, railway ties and rails, all varieties of guns, and ammunition. In 1965, more than 41,000 tons of equipment, valued at \$50

³ Outgoing Telegram—Department of State, to American Legation—Bangkok, August 13, 1946 (mimeo); see also Incoming Telegram—Department of State, from (U. S. Ambassador) Stanton, July 24, 1946 (mimeo).

million, were stored at Korat, enough to equip a full combat division.⁴ By virtue of its status as a major supply center, Korat became the base of the 7th U. S. Logistic Battalion.

In addition to its role as a logistical base, Korat also became a major air base. The development of Korat as an air facility was, however, an outgrowth of the demands of the Vietnamese war rather than of Laos. In July 1964, approximately five hundred persons were assigned to Korat to lay the basis for a tactical fighter operation; air operations began one month later. During the next year, U. S. aircraft based at Korat were to fly over ten thousand sorties against enemy targets.⁵

In compliance with the SLAT Agreement, another base was developed at approximately this same period at Nakhon Phanom (otherwise referred to as NKP), a town on the Laotian border, 350 miles north-northeast of Bangkok. U. S. personnel began arriving at NKP in November 1963 to begin construction of a 6,000-foot runway, with the first U. S. Air Force personnel assigned to the base arriving in early 1964. Nakhon Phanom initially housed search-and-rescue forces.

The following year (1964) saw a continued buildup of American forces in Thailand with the opening of base facilities at Udorn, located in the Northeast only forty-four miles from Vientiane and forty minutes flying time from Hanoi. Six F-100s were deployed to Udorn in March 1964; and in August, following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, these were augmented by eighteen additional aircraft. The new facilities at Udorn soon saw action when, in the spring of 1964, a sudden Pathet Lao thrust into the Plain of Jars threatened to establish communist forces on the east bank of the Mekong. In December 1963, a proposal had been made to deploy a special air warfare training unit (known as Project Water Pump) to Thailand for the purpose of training the small Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF). Department of Defense (DOD) and State Department approval was obtained for the project, and in February agreement was obtained from the Thai government. In conjunction with that deployment, the Thai government agreed to turn over a number of U. S.-supplied T-28 aircraft to the RLAF (for which they were later compensated).⁶ Training in bombing and strafing techniques took

⁴ Denis Warner, "The Ho Chi Minh Trail and Our Thai Buildup," *The Reporter* 34 (January 27, 1966): 26-28.

⁵ "History of the United States at Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base," *Deputy Commander, 7/13th Air Force, Thailand*.

⁶ Testimony of William H. Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad*, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 91st Congress; Part 2—Kingdom of Laos, pp. 369, 457, 516; p. 909 (declassified portion). (Hereinafter referred to as *Symington Hearings*).

place at Udorn, where the Laotian cadets were joined by a number of Lao-speaking Thais. On completion of the program, both Thai and Laotian pilots and their aircraft crossed over to Laos, where the Thai pilots engaged in combat operations in T-28s bearing Laotian, South Vietnamese, or occasionally no markings.⁷ Unlike the Laotian pilots involved, Thai pilots operating in Laos were under the direct operational control of U. S. Ambassador Leonard Unger through the Vientiane embassy's Air Command Center;⁸ the costs of supporting the Thai pilots in Laos were borne by the United States.⁹ The stepped-up air activity over Laos in 1964 and 1965 was considered to be one aspect of the ongoing program of covert pressure against North Vietnam.

The spring of 1964 also saw RTG agreement to the use of Thai bases for U. S. photoreconnaissance and search-and-rescue missions over Laos. American helicopters at Udorn were available for call for missions from the Embassy at Vientiane.¹⁰ On May 19, at the request of Souvanna Phouma, unarmed U. S. reconnaissance flights were initiated over Laos, flown by aircraft based in Thailand and in the Tonkin Gulf. On June 6 and 7, two U. S. naval reconnaissance aircraft were downed over Laos by communist anti-aircraft fire. That incident sparked a rapid escalation of American air operations over Laos. Immediately, President Johnson authorized the launching of "armed reconnaissance" flights composed of unarmed U. S. reconnaissance aircraft accompanied by armed fighter escorts. Though the escorts on those missions were under general orders to fire only if fired upon, liberal interpretation of those orders frequently led to attacks on targets of opportunity. As with previous Laos-related operations, armed reconnaissance and search-and-rescue missions based in Thailand flew with the approval of the Thai government.

The following fall saw a stepping up of air activity over Laos when, in October, United States aircraft began flying cover missions for RLAf aircraft striking targets along the infiltration route from North to South Vietnam. On December 14, the first U.S. strike mission in Northern Laos, other than those associated with armed reconnaissance, was launched; and in January 1965, the United States began, in conjunction with the RLAf, the active bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Air strikes in Northern Laos, which had totaled no more than twenty in 1964, subsequently rose to 4,568 in 1965 and 7,316 in 1966.¹¹ By the end of 1968, a total of 67,000

⁷ Charles J. V. Murphy, "Thailand's Fight to the Finish," *Fortune*, October 1965.

⁸ "Immediate Actions in the Period Prior to Decision," Outline for Assistant Secretary Bundy from Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green, November 7, 1964, *Pentagon Papers*, p. 305; also Cablegram from Secretary of State Dean Rusk to U. S. Embassy Vientiane, August 26, 1964, *Pentagon Papers*, p. 353.

⁹ *Symington Hearings*, Part 2—Kingdom of Laos, p. 409 (declassified portions).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 779 (declassified portions).

¹¹ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 712.

sorties were being flown annually from Thai bases against Laotian targets,¹² in 1969, that number rose to over 90,000.¹³

What is most noteworthy in the Laotian operations of 1964, for the purpose of this study, is the fact that at least half of the United States aircraft flying unarmed reconnaissance, armed reconnaissance, and strike missions operated, under agreements obtained by the U. S., from Thai bases (the balance being U. S. naval aircraft operating from carriers in the Tonkin Gulf).¹⁴ Thus, the initial buildup of American aircraft in Thailand in the early 1960s found its genesis not in the Vietnam War, but rather in the demands of the Laotian crisis (although the Laotian operations were in fact seen at one time as a means of increasing pressure on North Vietnam).

By 1964, then, Thai-American involvement in Laos had deepened considerably. In a draft position paper circulated among top-level U. S. officials in November 1964, it was affirmed that "Thailand will be asked to support our program fully, to intensify its own efforts in the north and northeast, and to give further support to operations in Laos, such as additional pilots and possibly artillery teams."¹⁵ Thai agreement to that proposal led to a program in which Thai nationals were recruited to serve as artillerymen and as "irregular" forces in support of the Laotian government. Those Thais who joined the irregulars were ex-military men who had theoretically resigned from the Thai military prior to entering service in Laos; in practice, however, recruitment was often made directly from the ranks of the Thai armed forces, and resignations were little more than formalities. By obtaining such covert Thai cooperation, the United States was thus able to provide direct military support to the Royal Laotian Government without placing itself in open violation of the Geneva Agreements.

Thai-American security cooperation found other roots in the logistics of the U. S. aid program for Laos, which necessarily involved transit rights over Thai territory. Thai cooperation was essential for such a program, as Thailand had long served as the principal channel for the flow of goods into and out of landlocked Laos. American military assistance to Laos began in 1962, the year of the Geneva Accords. Since those agreements required that all foreign troops, with the exception of a small French training contingent, be withdrawn from Laos, new and special organizational arrangements proved necessary to facilitate this program. The United States therefore

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 690 (declassified material).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 689.

¹⁴ Tactical air strikes in both Laos and Vietnam were carried out principally by carrier-based naval aircraft and by land-based Air Force aircraft, with the latter operating principally out of Thailand. From the early to middle 1960s, a ratio of 50 percent USN and 50 percent USAF can be taken as a rough rule-of-thumb for such strikes, with the exact mix varying somewhat over time and by region.

¹⁵ Draft Position Paper on Southeast Asia, November 29, 1964, *Pentagon Papers*, p. 376.

created an organization known as the Office of the Deputy Chief JUSMAG (Joint U. S. Military Advisory Group) Thailand, which was given responsibility as an integral part of the JUSMAG Thailand framework for managing the Laotian military assistance program. Though the Deputy Chief was considered to be a nonresident member of the U. S. country team in Vientiane, his authority was restricted to activities in Thailand. That authority covered such military assistance program (MAP) functions as training, programing, and technical assistance. Approximately one-third of the personnel under the Deputy Chief performed training supervision and logistic operations in various parts of Thailand. Specific training programs under the Deputy Chief's purview included pilot and mechanic training, and Lao training centers supervised by the Deputy Chief through the U. S. Military Assistance Command, Thailand (MACTHAI) and the Bangkok embassy's political-military section. To facilitate operations inside Laos, the Deputy Chief's office worked in conjunction with a special group established in the Agency for International Development's Vientiane office known as the Requirements Office, or RO/USAID. The function of this office was to maintain contact with the Laotian armed forces and to validate their military aid requirements; all requests for services, supplies, and training were funneled by RO/USAID to the Deputy Chief.¹⁶ The American missions in Thailand and Laos thus interacted on a close and regular basis.

Most U. S. material destined for Laos was landed at the Port of Bangkok, and in later years at the new deep-water port of Sattahip. From there, all surface cargo was moved to storage points in Thailand or directly to Laos by contract trucks under the ownership of the Thai Express Transport Organization (ETO), a Thai government-owned concern established for the transport of in-transit re-export cargo. ETO contracts with USAID/Laos dated back to 1953 and the inception of the Laotian aid program. From 1956 onward, ETO served, at the Thai government's insistence, as the exclusive carrier of land-borne U. S. military and other supplies bound for Laos. ETO's monopoly was widely reputed to be the source of the personal fortune of Air Vice-Marshal Dawee Chulyasappa, a prominent military officer who later, as Minister of Transport, held authority over the company.

Other Laotian support programs that flowed through Thailand included a program for the delivery of petroleum products, executed under contract by ESSO and Caltex, by which tanker trucks moved vital fuel supplies from the seacoast to dispatch points on the Mekong. Facilities were also established in Thailand, under the auspices of the Deputy Chief, for the maintenance and repair (under an Air America contract) of battle- and crash-damaged T-28 and H-34 aircraft from Laos. Air America and Continental Air Services, both operating from Thailand, were also responsible for the transport of substantial quantities of air cargo into Laos.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Symington Hearings*, Part 2—Kingdom of Laos, pp. 526–29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 528–33.

VIETNAM

Given its initial impetus by the conflict in Laos, the buildup of American military power in Thailand grew, in its most intensive phase, out of the expanding requirements of the Vietnam War. The demands imposed on both parties by that war would, through the balance of the 1960s and early 1970s, subject the Thai-American alliance to its ultimate test. From Thailand, the United States would require a vastly expanded basing system necessary for its air operations over Indochina, and the political and legal rights that would permit relatively unfettered use of that system. It would also require an expansion of its Thai-based intelligence capacity, and ultimately the participation of Thai troops alongside Americans in the Vietnamese fighting itself. In return, the Thais were to receive a substantially increased flow of American economic and military aid, as well as a more indirect flow of money and power into the coffers of prominent Thai political figures. Far more important in the Thai calculation, however, was the preeminent expectation that the United States would stay the course in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, and thereby demonstrate its ability and willingness to remain as the primary guarantor of Thai security. For both Thailand and the United States, therefore, the major questions running through the 1965-75 period concerned how each party could best affect the behavior of the other in order to achieve its objectives.

Ever since the fall of Diem in 1963, disillusioned American policymakers had been aware of the possibility that the Vietnamese situation might deteriorate into a major military campaign. In anticipation of that campaign (particularly through the planning period of 1964), and as a result of the saturation of limited base facilities in South Vietnam, large numbers of American aircraft began to be deployed to Thailand from 1964 onward. Thailand at that time offered an ideal base for American air operations directed against North Vietnam and Laos, since Thailand's geographical position offered ready access to both areas, the Thai government was receptive, and the political environment was relatively peaceful and free of the security problems associated with Vietnamese bases. By the end of 1964, approximately three thousand USAF personnel and seventy-five aircraft were located in Thailand.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 615. The utility of Thai bases in ROLLING THUNDER operations was described in one authoritative U.S. military report as follows: "Thai bases were used for strike aircraft from the outset of the ROLLING THUNDER program and for reconnaissance missions in Laos. This arrangement existed with the full consent of the Thai government. The use of Thailand-based aircraft for operations in North Vietnam and Laos helped relieve pressure on the already congested air bases in South Vietnam, introduced an added increment of flexibility into our air operations, and permitted sortie levels which otherwise would have taxed the capability of our resources." *Report on the War in Vietnam (as of June 30, 1968)*, Section I, Report on Air and Naval Campaigns Against North Vietnam and Pacific Command-Wide Support of the War, June 1964-July 1968, by Adm. U.S.G. Sharp, USN Commander in Chief Pacific, p. 19.

As the size of the U. S. Air Force presence in Thailand changed, so too did its organization. As a result of the growing scale and importance of American air operations in Thailand, units there were assigned progressively greater identity of command and structure. USAF Thailand headquarters were established at Udorn; however, a direct working relationship was maintained with U. S. 7th Air Force headquarters in South Vietnam, which retained ultimate authority over all Thai-based air operations.¹⁹

The year 1966 witnessed the greatest expansion of American air power in Thailand of the 1960s. December 1965 and January 1966 saw Ubon, another northeastern site, added to the growing list of operational bases. Four squadrons of F-4C aircraft flew the first combat missions out of Ubon, and were responsible for the downing of the first enemy MiGs to be shot down over Southeast Asia. The 8th Tactical Wing was later deployed to Ubon, and within a brief six months—between January and June 1966—flew over ten thousand combat sorties; by the end of August 1968, that number rose to over fifty thousand. This high sortie level reflects both the rapid escalation of the air war over Vietnam and the intensity with which that war drew on Thai facilities. Continued deployments to Thailand in 1966 resulted in a year-end USAF presence of twenty-five thousand personnel and four hundred aircraft.²⁰

The capstone was placed on the buildup of U. S. air power with the basings in 1966 of B-52 strato-fortresses at U-Tapao Royal Thai Air Force Base, located south of Bangkok on the Gulf of Thailand. Construction on the airfield had begun in October 1965, and by July 1966 the new 11,000-foot runway was serviceable. The first aircraft to arrive were KC-135 tankers (which refueled fighter-bombers flying into or returning from combat). U-Tapao's raison d'être was, however, the giant B-52s. In January 1966, U. S. Ambassador Leonard Unger approached the Thais with a proposal to base B-52s at U-Tapao; and by the following March, Thai approval was obtained. On April 10, the first three B-52s—having taken off that same day from Guam and bombed a suspected Vietcong concentration west of Hue—touched down at U-Tapao. Within hours they were airborne again in the first Thai-based B-52 strike of the war.²¹ Aside from its strategic value, basing of the B-52s in Thailand proved a major financial boon to the United States. According to a 1967 Defense Department estimate, the flying of B-52 strike missions from Thailand rather than from Guam (as before) saved the U.S. bombers approximately 4,000 miles and \$8,000 per round-trip mission.²²

¹⁹ "History of the 7/13th Air Force," *Deputy Commander 7/13th Air Force Thailand—Fact Sheets and Histories* (undated).

²⁰ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 615.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 616.

²² *Bangkok Post*, January 16, 1967.

The deployment of B-52s to Thailand and the addition of other aircraft to existing in-country units caused the total USAF presence in Thailand to grow to 33,369 men and 527 aircraft during 1967. Those personnel figures remained stable through 1968, but by year's end additional deployments raised the total number of U. S. aircraft in-country to 600.²³

No specific figures are available as to sortie levels originating specifically from Thai bases during the 1965-68 period or thereafter. Journalistic reports varied from 1,500 sorties weekly²⁴ to 875 weekly (or 125 per day) in 1966.²⁵ Six out of the seven Thai bases supported combat operations (Don Muang was used mainly as a passenger and cargo transfer point), with most tactical missions originating at Takhli, Korat, Udorn, and Ubon. Over the three years prior to the November 1, 1968, unilateral U. S. bombing halt, F-105 fighter-bombers from Korat and Takhli delivered 90,000 tons, or 75 percent of all ordnance dropped on North Vietnam.²⁶ In all, approximately 80 percent of all U. S. bombing over North Vietnam during this period originated in Thailand.²⁷

In addition to combat missions, Thailand's bases also saw extensive use in Vietnam-related air rescue and reconnaissance operations. The two principal bases for these activities were Udorn and Nakhon Phanom. Udorn, in particular, specialized in aerial reconnaissance missions. Its camera-equipped RF-4C and RF-101 aircraft preceded and followed U. S. fighter-bombers into action, photographing the targets and recording in detail the results of each raid. Through these and other reconnaissance missions, vast areas of Indochina were mapped. Udorn also served as a base for the rescue of U. S. pilots downed over North Vietnam, and prior to 1970 accounted for the rescue of more than fifteen hundred U. S. pilots from communist territory.²⁸

The primary base for U. S. air rescue operations, however, was at Nakhon Phanom. As with Udorn, most rescues were carried out by HH-3 Huey helicopters ("Jolly Green Giants"), escorted by older Skyraider propeller aircraft (also based at Nakhon Phanom). NKP-based single-engine aircraft are also reported to have left for destinations in Laos and North

²³ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 616.

²⁴ *Washington Post*, August 19, 1966.

²⁵ *Time*, May 27, 1966.

²⁶ "History of the United States Air Force at Korat RTAFB," *Deputy Commander 7/13th Air Force, Thailand—Fact Sheets and Histories*; and "History of the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing, Korat RTAFB, Thailand," United States Air Force, August 1, 1974 (mimeo).

²⁷ *Time*, May 27, 1966.

²⁸ "History of the United States Air Force at Udorn RTAFB"; and "Resume of U. S. Air Force Activities in Thailand," in *Deputy Commander 7/13th Air Force—Fact Sheets and Histories*.

Vietnam, where crewmen rescued by Hmong guerillas were picked up at makeshift jungle landing strips.²⁹

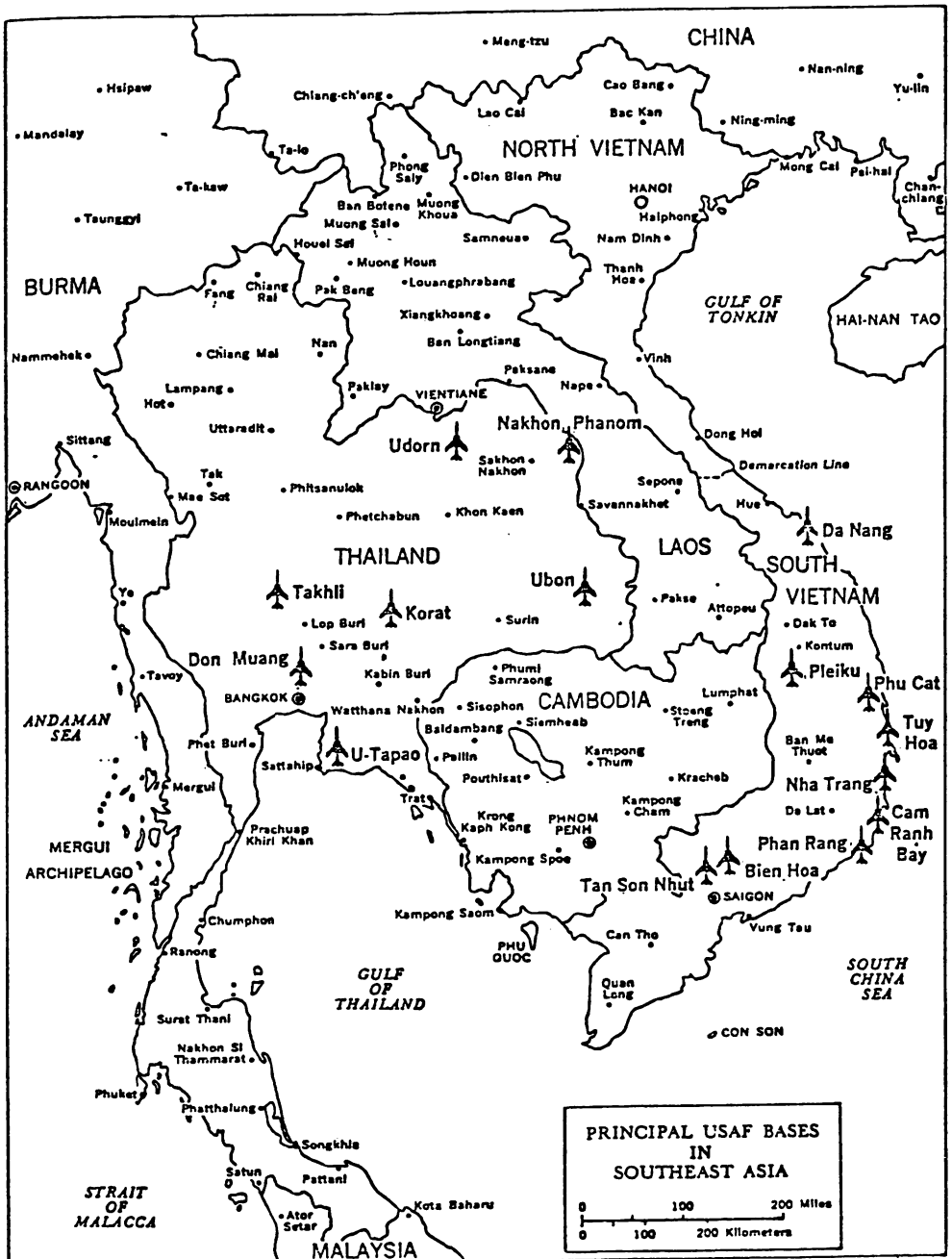
The extensive nature of this base network required a logistical infrastructure far beyond the capacity of the normal developing nation. Conveniently, the American aid program of the late 1950s and early 1960s had constructed not only basic air facilities in the Northeast but also a large part of the road network required to service them. To supply and service those bases, the United States also constructed a major deep-water port at Sattahip, on the Gulf of Thailand adjacent to the U-Tapao air base. Overcrowding and inadequate handling capacity at Klong Toey, the Port of Bangkok, had in the past led to costly delays of arriving vessels at the mouth of the Chao Phya River. Average waiting time for ships unloaded at Bangkok had risen from four days in September 1966 to fourteen days in March 1967.³⁰ These problems, and the anticipation of a major buildup of American air power in Thailand, led to development of Sattahip from what was once a small port (with a berthing capacity of one ship per day) into a sprawling complex housing berthing facilities for four deep-draft vessels and protected anchorage for six additional ships, 134,000 cubic feet of cold-storage area, transit sheds and cargo staging areas, over one million square feet of pier space, ammunition dumps, and tank farms for petroleum (particularly jet fuel) storage with a capacity of one million barrels. In 1967, a major highway was constructed linking Sattahip with Freedom Highway east of Bangkok; this provided a direct and rapid route for the transport of military and other supplies from the port to Korat and the Northeast, bypassing the Bangkok bottleneck. At its peak, Sattahip received three to four arriving vessels per week, accounting for over 90 percent of incoming U. S. military supplies.³¹

Thailand also lent its approval to the establishment of extensive communications and intelligence facilities throughout its eastern and northern provinces. One component of that network, a chain of listening posts known as the Strategic Communications Command, had notable stations at Chiang Mai, in the north, and Phu Mu and Phu Khieo, in the eastern Phu Phan Mountains. By far the most important listening post, however, was the Seventh Radio Field Research Station, known more popularly as Ramasun. Originally negotiated in June 1964 and January 1965, and staffed in 1966, Ramasun was the largest and most sophisticated facility of its kind in Southeast Asia, and in the world ranked second only to the mammoth U. S. facility in Augsburg, Germany. Aimed in the direction of Indochina, Ramasun's principal mission was the interception of communications and the monitor-

²⁹ François Nivolon, "Unbreakable Thais?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 18, 1968, p. 175.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Fact Sheet—Port of Sattahip (mimeo); *Bangkok Post*, May 31, 1968.



SOURCE: R. Frank Futrell et al., *Aces and Aerial Victories—The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia 1965–1973*, A. F. Simpson Historical Research Center—Air University, and Office of Air Force History, Headquarters USAF, 1976.

ing of communist troop and other military movements; the sensitivity of its equipment was such that it was said (in what was not too great an exaggeration) that Ramasun “could hear a pin drop in Pnompenh.” The uniqueness and importance of Ramasun is indicated by the fact that the station’s legal status was defined in the only extant written agreement concerning bases or other facilities signed between Thailand and the United States (all other facilities were covered by informal, oral agreements). That agreement, signed by Air Chief Marshal Dawee Chulyasappa and U. S. Ambassador Graham Martin, gave the United States government “unrestricted use” of the land and facilities for an indefinite period. It was drawn in English, with no Thai-language version. As a top-security installation, Ramasun was the only U. S. facility in Thailand never to have a nominal Thai commander, and for most of its operating life no Thai officials were allowed inside. Operation of the post was the responsibility of the U. S. Army Security Agency and the National Security Agency.³²

Another important intelligence facility was located at Lampang. Known as the Koh Kha seismic and satellite tracking station, the post was operated by a staff of approximately 150 military personnel, and functioned both as a tracking site for man-made satellites and as a listening post for the detection of Chinese nuclear tests.

In addition to these facilities, Thailand also lent indirect support to the American war effort through its role as a major Rest and Recuperation (R & R) center for American servicemen from Vietnam. The R & R program began in 1965 with a limit of four hundred personnel in-country at any given time; subsequently the limit was raised to a thousand, with an authorized in-country stay of five days. At its outset, the use of Bangkok as an R & R center was opposed by U. S. Ambassador Graham Martin out of a concern for the growing militarization of the U. S. presence in Thailand. Recognizing the untenability of that position, however (thanks to the increasing demands of the Vietnam War), Martin relented, while still attempting to keep the total numbers of incoming personnel to a minimum.³³ It was estimated in 1969 that visiting R & R servicemen spent approximately \$22 million per year in the Thai economy.³⁴

Base rights, intelligence posts, R & R privileges—all served the American war effort in Vietnam directly or indirectly. The question therefore follows of what motivated the Thais to cooperate with the United States so extensively. Though complex, the answer follows two basic but somewhat divergent lines. The primary consideration motivating the Thai government was undoubtedly a serious and overriding concern for the security of Thailand

³² See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 30, 1976, for full text of the Ramasun agreement.

³³ Interview, Graham Martin (Washington, D.C., May 20, 1976).

³⁴ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, pp. 623-24, 906-07.

against what was perceived to be the mortal threat of Southeast Asian communism. Faced with the concrete manifestation of that threat in both Laos and Vietnam, plus an apparently hostile neutralism in Cambodia, the Thai government chose to ally itself with the United States as the only outside power capable of redressing the regional balance. Consistently, as can be seen from the Thai-American experience in Laos, the Thais proved the most hawkish and militant of America's SEATO allies. The Thai government welcomed America's air raids against North Vietnam following the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Pleiku and Quinhon attacks, as well as the sustained air war launched by ROLLING THUNDER. (Commenting shortly after the first retaliatory raid against North Vietnam, Deputy Prime Minister Prapart remarked: "I sleep very well now. Before that I got up in the middle of the night thinking of what my American friends [would] do if the communists attacked us.")³⁵ The location of substantial American military power in Thailand served in the Thai view not only as a means of suppressing communism in Vietnam and Laos, but also as tangible evidence of an American commitment to the defense of Thailand itself. Accordingly, the Thai government pursued a policy that sought to elicit from the United States the maximum possible acknowledgment of such a commitment—be it verbal or material—and to influence the United States in the direction of a hawkish Vietnam policy.

Considerations of a more material nature also entered the calculation of some Thais. The massive presence of American military personnel in Thailand and the large-scale flow of material to the American bases meant not only an expectation of substantial American aid but also handsome profits for those in the Thai government who were appropriately situated. This was a normal prebend of power in much of Asia, where the powerful can expect to benefit from their position.

Though denied by American officials, the granting of base and other rights in Thailand almost certainly led to the expectation of *quid pro quos* from the United States. The nonexistence of written agreements makes documentation difficult, yet the give-and-take of the bargaining process is suggested in the only known document concerning base rights, the Ramadan agreement, Article I of which reads:

The government of the United States of America undertakes to provide equipment requested in the Armed Forces Security letter of 7 August 1964. Such equipment will be delivered to the Armed Forces Security Center in two shipments, the initial by 1 December 1965 and the final by 1 June 1966. In addition the Government of the United States of America undertakes to provide normal material support to four Signal Research Companies as may from time to time be mutually agreed by the two countries. If desired, training and advisory assistance will be provided. . . .³⁶

³⁵ Peter S. McGhee, "Thailand—Next Asian Domino," *New Republic*, July 3, 1965.

³⁶ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 30, 1976.

Further indication of a working *quid pro quo* is provided in the testimony of Deputy Secretary of Defense William P. Clements, given before a House committee on November 14, 1975. In requesting a grant of military aid for Thailand in the amount of \$28.3 million for fiscal year (FY) 1976, Clements observed:

We have significant national interest in maintaining certain base rights in Thailand. This assistance helps to maintain those base rights. It is preferred to a landlord-tenant relationship on a rent basis that might be more costly and not have the same connotation of mutual interest.³⁷

A similar observation was made in the Foreign Assistance Appropriations hearings for 1975, at which Vice Admiral Raymond Peet, Director of the Defense Security Assistance Agency, conceded:

We have a sizeable program in Thailand; but you have to look at it in two ways because, in a sense, it's tantamount to a *quid pro quo* for the cooperation they have given us in Southeast Asia—bases and so on.³⁸

Yet the principal motivation behind Thailand's association with the United States remained an overriding concern with the communist threat to Thai security. From the outset of the war in Vietnam, official Thai support for American policy was outspoken and unequivocal, as was the Thai government's defense of the American alliance. Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman served as an able spokesman for the Thai position:

The South Vietnam situation will remain the object of great attention and concern . . . for us in Thailand, because, if the communists were to succeed in South Vietnam, we would feel completely surrounded. The communists will not stop there, will not cease their conquest there, but will move on to other places such as Laos, Cambodia, and they will come to confront us on our border. So the situation in South Vietnam has a deep implication for us in Thailand. That is why we have been supporting the policy and the measures which have been taken by the United States.³⁹

I think what the United States has been doing in South Vietnam will go down in history as a courageous decision and a measure which will save not only South Vietnam but the whole of Southeast Asia from communist domination. In other words, Southeast Asia will owe its freedom to the United States and the American soldiers who are doing a good job in South Vietnam now.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Foreign Assistance and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1976*, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee, 94th Congress, 1st session, Part 4, p. 157.

³⁸ *Foreign Assistance and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1975*, Hearings Before a Subcommittee on the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, 93rd Congress, 2nd session, June 4, 1974, Part I, p. 1266.

³⁹ Foreign Minister Interviewed by Voice of America, *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* (Bangkok) 5 (October–November 1965): 202.

⁴⁰ *Collected Statements of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman* (Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Vol. I, p. 28.

Thanat's views at that time were similar to those of other high-ranking members of the Thai government. It is important to note, moreover, that the vast majority of politically articulate Thais held approximately the same views and could be accurately described as strongly anti-communist and pro-American. Realizing an identity of interests with the United States in the region, and supported by this broad consensus within the more politically aware segments of Thai society, the Thai government lent its full and open support to American policies and objectives in Southeast Asia.

Thailand and the United States thus found themselves deeply wedded to each other and to the prosecution of the Vietnam War. It was inevitable, perhaps, that given the scope of the mutual commitment and mutual contact which developed—from the in-country stationing of 50,000 U.S. military personnel, to R & R visits, military construction operations, intelligence-gathering activities, and all the necessary logistical support operations—the quality of the Thai-American relationship would be fundamentally altered. The traditional historical relationship that had existed until the early 1960s had allowed the United States to deal with Thailand from a position of benign detachment. Now, the ballooning of contacts and the multiplicity of problems posed by the logistics and politics of the American presence banished forever that distance which had hitherto allowed the Thais to view the United States as a disinterested benefactor and the Americans to view Thailand as a wholly admirable and worthy understudy. The development of immediate and pressing American interests in Thailand, and the expansion of the Vietnam War, expanded and intensified on both sides a set of sometimes coincident and sometimes divergent interests. Moved by considerations of national security, the Thai government was impelled as always to push the United States as far as possible toward militancy in Vietnam and toward an unequivocal commitment to Thailand's defense. In this sense, the provision of Thai territory for base and other facilities not only furthered the cause of anti-communist victory in Vietnam but also served to draw the United States ever more closely to Thailand itself. The affording of base rights to the U.S. also served as an indispensable counter in bargaining for American military and economic aid. In the hard-nosed world of give-and-take, the continuous American requests for more bases, more planes, and higher personnel ceilings were met by Thai counter-requests for appropriate *quid pro quos*, most commonly in the form of increased aid commitments. This, the Thais felt, was only appropriate, given that they had exposed themselves to the danger of communist retaliation by their cooperation with the United States.

For the United States, on the other hand, the establishment of the Thai base network placed an increased moral onus on Washington to defend or otherwise assist the Thais, though this was never formally acknowledged. Though the American use of Thai bases never actually extended the American commitment beyond what was explicitly stated in the language of the

Manila Treaty, the Thai purpose was in fact served (though never as fully as desired) by the multiple extension of ties and programs binding the two countries. The importance that Thailand and its basing policy assumed for the United States was acknowledged by U. S. Ambassador Leonard Unger in hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1969:

Ambassador Unger: I think that there is no question that over the years, say, four or five years, a particularly strong interest has been the permission that we were given for military reasons to use the bases in Thailand. There were other things as well, but it was primarily the use of the bases which made that area, that geography, of exceeding importance to us.

Now, this was not anything that raised a serious difficulty with the Thais, who were sympathetic with what we were trying to do at that time. But this did make Thailand and its geography in that sense of exceedingly great importance to the United States.

Senator Symington: Because we were in Vietnam?

Ambassador Unger: Because we were in Vietnam.⁴¹

Unger's statement not only suggests the importance that Thailand assumed for the United States but also the fact that Thailand was valued, during the Vietnam War, as much for the facilities it offered as for its intrinsic sake. The fact that the United States "wanted" something that Thailand had to offer placed the Thai-American relationship on a more pragmatic and self-interested footing than in the past. The primary American interest in Thailand during the latter 1960s and early 1970s lay in maintaining free access to Thai base facilities. American aid was therefore provided largely to protect the integrity of Thailand as a viable sanctuary for military operations against communist Indochina. It was not perceived to be in the American interest, however, to deepen the American defense commitment to Thailand beyond the language of the Manila Treaty or the Rusk-Thant Communiqué. This can be explained by a hesitancy to become further involved in Southeast Asia, a fear that the Senate might refuse to ratify a new bilateral pact, and the perception that American interests in the defense of Thailand were adequately met by the Manila Treaty. What this meant, in practical terms, was that a bilateral defense treaty between the United States and Thailand, such as then existed between the United States and the Philippines, was beyond the reach of the Thais.

THE WHEELS OF ALLIANCE

The convergence and divergence of these respective interests were played out in the decision-making processes in both Washington and Bangkok. Two major themes predominated. The first concerned the extent to which Thailand would or would not be integrated with Vietnam in a broad theatre concept for U. S. military operations in Southeast Asia. At issue was

⁴¹ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 855.

the identity of Thailand as an independent and unique area of American interest, as opposed to a mere (though important) appendage of the Vietnam conflict. Related to this was the question of American military involvement in Thailand, and the extent to which that presence would or would not follow the course earlier taken in Vietnam. The second major theme of the 1965-73 period concerned the return, in either aid or security, that Thailand could expect for its broad support for American policies in the region. The mechanics by which these themes were played out demonstrates the disparities of interest and of bargaining power between the United States and Thailand during this period.

United States military policy toward Thailand was, until 1967, a matter of contention among the different concerned government agencies, both in Thailand and in Washington. Initially, the split followed military/civilian lines, with the Department of State and the Pentagon lining up on contending sides. The first act of the debate occurred in 1966, when a major force deployment to Thailand was first contemplated. Debate centered on whether Thailand, with its own insurgency, could effectively serve as a secure base of operation for American aircraft. While a number of officials expressed doubts, the preponderant view was that no logical alternative to the Thai bases was available, and that in any event an American buildup at Thai facilities would serve as a demonstration of U. S. support for the Thais.

This dispute was quickly absorbed, however, into the general debate over troop ceilings for Southeast Asia. The Pentagon took the position that it was facing a severe space problem in Vietnam, and that with all available spaces filled, only Thailand was available for a sizable deployment; an undisclosed but high ceiling was therefore proposed for Thailand. The State Department, and most particularly Ambassador Graham Martin, took alarm at the Pentagon figure; for its part, State favored a much smaller military presence in Thailand. A large deployment, it was feared, would seriously affect Thai sensitivities, and could potentially damage Thai-American relations. In any event, the merger of Thailand with Vietnam as a theatre operation was said to be unwise, as the State Department was resisting at the time the view that the United States was fighting a Southeast Asian war per se. Thailand, it was asserted, should be dealt with as an independent entity rather than as an appendage of the Vietnam War.

Ultimately, Martin proposed his own ceiling figure as a maximum he believed Thailand could effectively absorb; though exact figures are unavailable, it is clear that the Martin figure was considerably below the Pentagon proposal. The final decision was left to the White House, which settled on a figure (again undisclosed) that was an exact compromise between the State and Pentagon figures. (Phased in by stages, the maximum authorized figure was over 45,000 in September 1967, and 48,000 in August 1969.) Though this did not entirely satisfy Pentagon planners, the troop limitations for Thailand were not excessively restricting, as temporary duty personnel

(TDY) could at any time be (and were) brought into Thailand for 30-, 60-, or 90-day periods without prior consultation with the Thai government. Within limits, this allowed the United States to have military personnel on duty in Thailand over and above the authorized ceiling, and added flexibility to the process of filling specific personnel needs.⁴²

The following year (1967), the State Department's view changed with the shift in mood that accompanied that year's major military push in Vietnam. The war was approaching its peak intensity, but general disillusion with the Vietnam experience had yet to become manifest in the United States. The feeling that had developed by that time (and one shared by the Thais) was that a maximum effort was required to win the war. In those circumstances, the great utility of Thailand as a war-fighting base came to outweigh all countervailing considerations. Thailand was thereafter absorbed into the strategic concept of an overall Southeast Asia theatre, and all but disappeared as a separate entity in American military planning.

Differences over policy traveled the distance between Washington and Bangkok, manifesting themselves in a festering dispute between Ambassador Graham Martin and the commander of MACTHAI, General Richard Stilwell. For some years previously, the United States had had stationed in Thailand a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), which in 1963 had been redesignated a Joint U. S. Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG). JUSMAG was concerned primarily with the administration of the military assistance program (MAP) and with the provision of U. S. military advisers. At the time of the large-scale deployment of American troops to the Northeast in 1962, a second designation, MACTHAI (Military Assistance Command/Thailand), was added, with responsibility for overall American operations in-country. At that time, however, MACTHAI was only a second hat, or area of responsibility, for the MACV commander (Military Assistance Command/Vietnam), who retained ultimate control. In 1965, MACTHAI was separated from MACV and established as a fully separate entity. Implicit in the decision to divide the two commands was the assumption that the war in Vietnam would, unlike operations in Thailand, be prosecuted outside the SEATO umbrella. The timing of the division corresponded with the rapid influx of American men and equipment into Thailand in that year and signified the recognition of Thailand as a major locus of U. S. activity; only Vietnam rated a similar Military Assistance Command designation.

The division of MACTHAI from MACV was not without opposition. U. S. Commander in Vietnam William C. Westmoreland resisted the loss of his "second hat" on the grounds that a unified command enhanced overall military coordination in the region. According to Westmoreland, the unified command had been originally designed to assure "one over-all commander in Southeast Asia should North Vietnam or Communist China turn to overt

⁴² Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 19, 1976).

aggression or should American forces become involved in Laos,” and it was clear that Westmoreland would have strongly preferred to have headed a single “Southeast Asia Command.” As it was, the granting of independent status to MACTHAI forced Westmoreland to deal on military policy matters affecting Thailand and Laos with Ambassadors Graham Martin and William Sullivan respectively, men who (in Westmoreland’s words) were “gifted and dedicated” but “lacked full understanding of military requirements and were reluctant to yield points that I considered crucial.” With the creation of MACTHAI, overall coordination of decision-making between Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos was pursued through CINCPAC (Commander-in-Chief Pacific) or through Washington, or less formally through irregular meetings of an informal Southeast Asia coordinating committee composed of the heads of mission of all three countries.⁴³

A further reason for the separation of MACTHAI from MACV lay in a growing awareness of Thai sensitivity concerning the increasing scope of American military activity in their country. In particular, the Thais were resentful of the fact that decisions intimately affecting Thailand were being made in Saigon, a remote location where it was difficult for Thai interests to be adequately represented. This point was strongly argued by Graham Martin on behalf of a separate MACTHAI headquarters. As Westmoreland later was to write: “Washington eliminated my command of the military assistance group in Thailand on Ambassador Martin’s theory that it was distasteful to the Thais to have military advisers in their country subject to a headquarters in another Asian country.”⁴⁴

Once given independent status, MACTHAI fell under the terms of the 1950 Military Assistance Agreement, which specified that any U. S. forces in Thailand under the Military Assistance Agreement would be regarded as part of the U. S. diplomatic mission, under the total supervision of the U. S. Mission Chief.

This point proved to be a source of considerable friction between Martin and Stilwell, who succeeded General Ernest Easterbrook as MACTHAI Commander in August 1965. At its base, the dispute was both personal and institutional. Martin was an extraordinarily strong believer in the intent of the Kennedy letter of 1961 which, addressed to all United States ambassadors in the field, designated the country ambassador as the direct representative of the President with full authority over all mission elements. Based on this authority, Martin viewed himself as “the President’s ambassador” rather than as a representative of the State Department, which status would have made him “simply the representative of another agency, the representative of another element of the U. S. interest.” In 1963, when

⁴³ William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 76-77.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Martin arrived in Bangkok, the prevailing concept inside the U. S. diplomatic establishment was the "country team." This approach posited a cooperative framework for all in-country representatives of U. S. agencies, but contained implicitly the notion that each agency was independently responsible to its Washington office. The "country team" concept was anathema to Martin ("I never permitted the phrase to be used in my embassy"), who preferred instead the term "mission elements"—over which he, as the mission head, held full authority.⁴⁵

Above all, Martin was concerned with the unification of "parochial" agency interests into an integrated embassy effort. Though nearly all agencies then operating in Thailand presented some resistance, Martin's particular nemesis was the military. (Martin, indeed, describes the "country team" as a "military concept" that implied that the military had unique and separate interests distinct from the broader elements of U. S. policy.) It was his belief that the U. S. military had bungled the situation in Vietnam, and that the same policies should not be repeated in Thailand. Accordingly, Martin resisted the application of military solutions to Thailand's insurgency problems.⁴⁶ Paradoxically, the establishment of an independent MACTHAI headquarters in Thailand strengthened Martin's hand in this matter, as MACTHAI then fell, at least technically, under the overall policy authority of the Ambassador.

This brought him into conflict with Stilwell. At the base of that conflict was the fact that Stilwell was, in his MACTHAI capacity, a military authority on the same level as Martin himself. As such, Stilwell had the right of direct and privileged communication with both his superiors and with the Thai military. Such independence was anathema to an ambassador with Martin's distrust of the military and insistence on unity of authority. When first assigned to MACTHAI, Stilwell had received terms of reference which afforded him considerable freedom of action. Fearing excessive independence on Stilwell's part, Martin personally journeyed to Washington to demand that Stilwell's terms of reference be altered. Washington agreed, and Stilwell was placed more directly under Martin's control. From that point onward, relations with Stilwell were poor. Disputes arose, in particular, concerning the proper American approach to the Thai insurgency, with MACTHAI pressing for more American support for the Thai military, expansion of the Thai counterinsurgency program, and more U. S. Special Forces in-country. Martin, though not wholly opposed to those moves, nevertheless felt that the Thai insurgency was at that stage more a police than a military program, necessitating a greater psychological warfare-paramilitary thrust. Assistance in such cases, not surprisingly, would have fallen more to the CIA than to MACTHAI. Martin's view generally prevailed. Though he eventually

⁴⁵ Interview, Graham Martin (Washington, D.C., May 20, 1976).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; and Confidential Interviews (Washington, D.C., April 29, 1977).

acquiesced in the importation of more Special Forces, an early decision to prohibit American personnel from riding in helicopters on Thai counter-insurgency missions was upheld in Washington, despite direct appeal from MACTHAI.⁴⁷

Other major disputes arose over intelligence reporting and U. S. troop deployments to Thailand. The former was a source of particular irritation. At that time, the U. S. mission was producing at least two intelligence estimates—one by the Embassy and one by MACTHAI. In its report, MACTHAI took a darker view of the Thai insurgent problem, while the Embassy tended to the view that, given the equipment and support, the Thais were capable of handling it. Given those differences, Martin wanted only one estimate to leave Thailand (his own), and attempted to suppress the MACTHAI version. This was resisted by Stilwell. Eventually the dispute was reduced to a conflict over principle (MACTHAI's right to report directly) more than substance. In the end, two reports were filed.⁴⁸

A second area of dispute concerned U. S. troop deployments to Thailand. Such decisions were taken in Washington, with implementation and negotiation with the Thais left to the Embassy. Whereas Stilwell saw his job as executing those directions (so as to facilitate the entrance of American forces), Martin was personally chary about the introduction of any American ground elements into Thailand. Stilwell believed that because of that reservation Martin was arrogating to himself the right to decide whether or not such deployments were appropriate, and was therefore dragging his feet in implementing Washington's directives.

Martin's mission was, as he saw it, to resist the militarization of American policy in Thailand and to prevent the Thai military from becoming overly dependent on the United States.⁴⁹ It is not surprising that the Thai military tended to favor both Stilwell and his approach, and applied pressure in Washington to have Stilwell's tour of duty extended beyond its initial two years. In July 1967, however, Martin finally succeeded in forcing Stilwell's removal.

The Martin-Stilwell dispute illustrates the issues facing American policy in Thailand in the 1964-69 period. At issue was the degree to which the military would influence U. S. planning in Thailand, and more implicitly, the extent to which American policy in Thailand would replicate the patterns established earlier in Vietnam. The momentum toward a "theatre concept" for Southeast Asia, in which Thailand would be functionally integrated with Vietnam, Laos, and (later) Cambodia for purposes of planning and strategy, was too great for Martin to resist. The years of Martin's tenure did, however, see a direct U. S. military role held to a minimum, a fact that subsequently benefited both countries.

⁴⁷ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 18, 1976).

⁴⁸ Interview, General Richard Stilwell (Washington, D.C., February 7, 1978).

⁴⁹ Interview, Graham Martin (May 20, 1976).

INTERESTS IN INTERACTION

The Thai half of the political equation showed a similar institutional split; in the Thai case, however, this was not so much a split over policy as over power. Throughout the 1960s, the Thai military was, as it had been with little variation since 1932, in firm control of the government. Effective political power remained the monopoly of a small number of top-ranking officers who occupied the highest governmental posts and, not coincidentally, the highest positions in the Supreme Command.

The reverse of this situation was that little real power was given to the civilian ministries, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Though the MFA was permitted to perform routine diplomatic functions, it was almost entirely precluded from a policymaking role. The most important function served by the Ministry during this period was the broadcast of independent-sounding noises which served notice on the United States that the Thais were not to be taken for granted, and also eased Thai sensitivities concerning the presence of foreign troops on their territory. But in matters with military implications, and particularly those affecting relations with the United States, the Ministry was all but excluded. This suggests the way in which Thailand's military leaders perceived the American relationship—i.e., in personal, hence military, terms. In matters of national security, all important decisions were reserved to the military. Significantly, the Ramasun agreement was negotiated by the Supreme Command and not the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the decision to permit American use of Thai bases—a momentous decision in Thailand's foreign relations—was (according to Thanat) taken without informing the Foreign Ministry.⁵⁰ Even Thanat, though his voice was heard in the cabinet, remained an outsider. Sitting in a cabinet comprised of generals, Thanat (a civilian) was given the honorary rank of Special Colonel. Though in one sense a mark of favor, the fact that Thanat was made no more than a colonel served the purpose of indicating his status as an outsider from the highest-ranking military councils. As recounted by a major (military) cabinet figure to a prominent American official, the pegging of Thanat at a conspicuously lower rank was fully intentional, "and we never promoted him."⁵¹

The interaction of these Thai and American power constellations was complex and often ambiguous. Within the American Embassy on Wireless Road, the Ambassador retained clear authority of command. While contact with the Thais of a procedural diplomatic nature was handled by the Embassy's political section, decisions and contacts of the highest level were frequently transacted on a personal basis between the Ambassador and

⁵⁰ Interview, Thanat Khoman (Bangkok, July 21, 1976). Thanat's assertion of ignorance in the matter of bases has, however, been contested elsewhere by officials who view his disclaimer as self-justifying.

⁵¹ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 18, 1976).

ranking members of the Supreme Command/cabinet. Below the ambassadorial level, operational authority centered on the Political/Military Affairs section, which linked the Embassy directly with MACTHAI and the Supreme Command. At the same time, cooperation of a daily operational nature between the Thai and American military establishments resulted in the development of a separate and direct military-to-military channel of communication on that level.

The nexus of Thai power on matters relating to the bases was the Supreme Command, a joint body of the Thai military services. The three dominant personalities in the Supreme Command (and simultaneously in the civil government) were Field Marshal (Prime Minister) Thanom Kittikachorn, General Prapart Charusthien (Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the Army), and Air Marshal Dawee Chulyasappa (Commander of the Air Force and Deputy Defense Minister). Thanom, Prapart, and Dawee each held 4-star rank in all three services. This fact reflects the complex balance of power within the Thai political structure at that time, in which authority and influence were so divided and counterbalanced that no single actor would be tempted to opt in favor of a coup. Each, however, had his own independent power base. Thanom was strong in the Supreme Command (of which he was head), held some influence with the Army, and possessed authority as the Prime Minister and senior member of the ruling circle. Prapart found his principal power base in the Army. Dawee's power rested principally on his connection with the United States. Dawee's operating base was the Supreme Command, and since the Americans dealt with the Supreme Command largely through Dawee, he served as the principal conduit through which American funds flowed to that body, and through it to the various branches of the Thai military. In this capacity, Dawee served as principal negotiator for many of the Thai-American agreements reached in that period.⁵²

Since members of the Supreme Command and the Thai military services commonly held both civil and military posts, the assignment of civil as well as military authority required a carefully calculated division of power. Thanom, who served as Commander-in-Chief of the Thai Armed Forces, also served as Minister of Defense; and Prapart, who was Commander of the Army, simultaneously held the post of Interior Minister (which theoretically gave him control of the police). An interesting aspect of this double and triple hatting system is the way in which political actors were called upon to execute seemingly incompatible policies in response to seemingly incompatible role requirements. The complexities faced by American officials in working with such a system is suggested by an incident, recalled by George Tanham, in which Prapart recalled approving the promotion of a young Thai officer which had crossed his desk as Interior Minister. A short time

⁵² Ibid.

later, the same promotion papers came across his desk as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and he disapproved them. Asked why he had followed this procedure, Prapart replied that the answer was simple: from the point of view of the Interior Ministry the appointment was desirable, but from the standpoint of the Army it was undesirable.⁵³

Inevitably, the intricacies of Thai politics affected the conduct of both political and military relations with the United States. The result was a smoothly functioning but poorly defined system that relied more on informal understanding than legal specificity.

Significantly, no formal written agreements exist which deal with the 50,000 men, 600 aircraft, and other supporting facilities that the United States maintained in Thailand during this period; no document exists as legal evidence of the massive American presence in Thailand save the Ramasun agreement (which because of the sensitive nature of the facility's equipment required special arrangements). Decisions concerning base rights, in-country personnel, and other matters were reached through a process of informal consultation, and generally on a case-by-case basis.

The system was a mutually agreeable one, however, and one that was particularly satisfactory to the Thais. For the United States military, the lack of written agreements avoided the problem of Congressional oversight; for the Thais, all written evidence that might suggest an impairment of Thai sovereignty by the presence of foreign bases was avoided. Contrary to the tendencies of legalistically conditioned Americans, the Thais were loath to put anything on paper; the fact that no formal legal recognition existed of the presence of foreign troops on Thai soil served a denial function for the Thais (i.e., if no legal document existed which said U. S. bases were in Thailand, it could in that sense be denied that any bases existed). More importantly, the Thai government held a highly pragmatic view of the American relationship. Military cooperation with the United States, in the Thai view, was based primarily on mutual interest. What need, then, of formal written agreements between friends? In any event, said the Thais, Thai-American military cooperation was taking place within the framework of the SEATO alliance; with that as a legal basis, all other matters could be defined as internal concerns requiring only mutual consultation. By such consultations (generally at the Ambassadorial-Supreme Command level), decisions were made affecting the disposition of tens of thousands of men and hundreds of millions of dollars.

As much as anything, the Thai government's preference for informal over formal arrangements afforded it unique flexibility in dealing with the United States, and to a lesser extent with its own citizens and with outside powers. Themselves loath to be tied down by ironclad commitments, the Thais preferred and sought flexible arrangements from which they might

⁵³ Interview, George Tanham (Washington, D.C., May 19, 1976).

more easily extricate themselves. At the same time, the working out of those decision-making processes was manifested in a number of unique and often tortuous arrangements.

One of these concerned the status of U. S. military personnel stationed in Thailand. In 1967, with the American force buildup well under way, the United States sought to negotiate a Status of Forces Agreement regulating the legal status of American in-country personnel. Experience with the complex legal problems affecting the rights of American servicemen stationed overseas had led the United States government to a prudent desire to clarify exactly whose law would apply in which sort of cases. Above all, the United States insisted that American personnel not be subjected to Thai law for offenses committed while on duty. The first round of negotiations failed, however. The Thais, for their part, wanted no legal agreement. One reason for this was no doubt their historic sensitivity to questions of jurisdiction, growing out of the capitulation treaties of the nineteenth century which permitted foreign consular courts on Thai soil.

A Status of Forces Agreement would no doubt have given American servicemen rights they otherwise would not have had under Thai law, thus reducing Thailand's sovereign jurisdiction. In the absence of an agreement, moreover, the existence of a legal problem concerning U. S. servicemen could be denied. Sensing the impasse, U. S. Ambassador Leonard Unger, who spoke Thai and possessed a keen awareness of Thai sensibilities, pursued a different track. Working with both the military and Thanat (in one of the few instances where the Foreign Ministry was allowed to enter into military-related matters), a mutually acceptable solution was worked out along peculiarly Thai lines. As most on-duty crimes charged to Americans were connected with traffic accidents, Thais were hired to do most of the driving. When more serious crimes were committed, the Americans would, by mutual agreement, quickly and quietly bundle off the offender for trial in the United States. No written agreement was ever drawn, yet the system worked smoothly.⁵⁴ As this case illustrates, in matters of political style the United States adapted more to Thai procedures than Thailand did to American. Painstaking deference was generally paid to sensitivities concerning Thai sovereignty; for the benefits that were ultimately gained, however, it was a small price to pay.

Questions of sovereignty inevitably arose in connection with the air bases. By mutual agreement, all bases used by the United States in Thailand were and remained throughout the war Royal Thai military installations. The Thai flag alone flew over all bases (except for ceremonial occasions, when both the Thai and American flags were flown), and each base operated under the authority of a nominal Thai commander (in contrast to the Philippines,

⁵⁴ W. Scott Thompson, *Unequal Partners* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath Lexington Books, 1975), pp. 29-30.

where U. S. bases were openly American). Thai military aircraft even used the bases to a limited extent. In a legal sense, then, there were no "American" bases per se in Thailand; the United States was merely permitted the use of Thai facilities that it had constructed. In this status, the United States expended some \$388 million between 1965 and 1976 on the construction and improvement of Thai facilities.

Another manifestation of the Thai government's preference for flexible arrangements was its refusal to admit publicly until March 1967 that American warplanes were bombing North Vietnam from Thai bases. Though existence of the bombing was common knowledge (the round-the-clock departure of bomb-laden aircraft was difficult to disguise), the Thais nevertheless had insisted on maximum secrecy. From an American viewpoint, this was hard to understand; for the Thais, however, it was not so bizarre: if the bombing from the Thai bases was never formally admitted, then in that sense it never took place. This not only served to ease the RTG's problem of publicly explaining the bases, but also provided the RTG with an "out" if confronted on the issue by North Vietnam or its supporters.

With the rapid expansion of the bases, the need also arose to devise arrangements for base perimeter security. In this context, the United States was above all concerned that the use of American personnel for perimeter security might lead to direct American involvement in military engagements (it should be remembered that most American personnel and planes based in Thailand were deployed exclusively for the purposes of the Indochina conflict, and were assigned no active role in Thai counterinsurgency operations). Fearing that escalatory potential, the United States, in conjunction with the Thai government, devised the Thai Security Guard Program. Instituted in February 1966, the security force consisted of five thousand Thai military reservists called into service by the RTG and organized into a regiment with the specific purpose of providing security for bases where U. S. personnel and property were located; to this the RTG added a cadre of regular officers and NCOs. The officers were assigned charge of individual base detachments, but operational control was given to the U. S. commander at each facility. The United States assumed the cost of salaries for all reservists and allowances for regular Thai officers; all monies were disbursed to the recipients through Thai rather than American channels, thus removing the United States government one step further. The use of Thai rather than American personnel resulted in significant financial savings;⁵⁵ more importantly, by using Thai security personnel the United States succeeded in avoiding beforehand any direct American involvement in combat situations that might have arisen from base assaults by local insur-

⁵⁵ The total cost for the Thai security force in FY 1970, for example, was \$4,340,000, compared to an estimated cost for equivalent U. S. personnel of \$36,720,000. *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 618.

gents or Vietnamese infiltrators. Despite that escalatory potential, no serious threat to base security was ever mounted, and only two attacks are recorded.⁵⁶

The in-country transport of military supplies and material was likewise left in Thai hands; as with Laotian supplies, all arrangements were handled through ETO. It was estimated that considerable savings could be realized by using ETO rather than U. S. military trucks. While that may have been true, a special audit of January 29, 1969, found that "costs submitted by ETO to support its proposals were substantially overstated," and that the Special Transportation unit of ETO, which handled all American business, showed a 50 percent profit margin, compared to a 5 percent margin for the balance of ETO's business. By 1968, all but 5 percent of ETO's business was with the United States government.⁵⁷

Inasmuch as the bases continued to be the property of the Thai government, their operation necessitated further arrangements designed to preserve the image of formal Thai control. The launching of continual flights of bomb-laden aircraft bound for Indochina presented particular difficulties. A solution was reached by mutual agreement (again through a process of informal consultation), establishing guidelines for the authorization of U. S. bombing missions. Under those guidelines, the U. S. Ambassador (Martin in the first instance) was to be informed of, and was required to authorize, all missions; no U. S. planes were permitted to fly from Thailand without a cable from the Ambassador, who in turn was required to inform the Thai government. At least theoretically, then, the Thai government was informed of all missions originating from its bases; in practical terms, however, notification often took place only as the planes were leaving the runway. As Martin put it: "It was a useful facade, but an absolutely necessary concession to Thai sovereignty."⁵⁸

Sensitivities over the possible infringement of Thai sovereignty in fact pervaded the Thai-American relationship. As a proud people with an unbroken history of independence, the Thais were above all concerned with the maintenance of their independence and with the image created before their own people and the world by the presence of large numbers of foreign military personnel on Thai soil. This concern underlay both the Thai desire to downplay that presence and the American willingness to concur.

As the Vietnam War intensified, however, the Thais were asked to increase their direct contribution to that military effort. Through 1967, the United States had succeeded in extracting Thai agreement to virtually every stage of the American buildup. It was a process that the Thais viewed with

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 765. These occurred in July 1968 and July 1969. The first incident resulted in two deaths, one Thai and one American, plus four Thai wounded; no casualties were reported in the second incident. Physical damage in both cases was minor.

⁵⁷ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, pp. 897-98, 905-06.

⁵⁸ Interview, Graham Martin (May 20, 1976).

some trepidation, but generally agreed to in exchange for some suitable *quid pro quos*. Until 1967, access to base rights had been the primary objective of American policy in Thailand. With the RTG's approval of B-52 rights at U-Tapao, that effort was capped. Subsequently, however, the United States sought an even more visible commitment from the Thais: the dispatch of Thai troops to fight in Vietnam.

Whereas the air bases had been developed purely for their strategic value, direct Thai involvement in the Vietnam fighting was sought for primarily political reasons. By that time, with growing pressure and criticism both at home and abroad, the United States needed to demonstrate that the war was indeed an allied endeavor, involving the participation of those states in the region whose interests were most directly affected. This above all required at least token support from America's Asian allies in SEATO. As described by Graham Martin: "The Thai sent the troops to Vietnam because they were requested to by the Government of Vietnam and by the United States. I think they made that decision in the full realization that it was increasingly uncomfortable for the United States to have the massive deployment of U.S. troops with far less contingents from other partners in the SEATO alliance. I do not believe that there was a firm conviction that the troops were actually all that important except for those reasons."⁵⁹

The RTG had been supplying military aid on a modest scale to the Government of South Vietnam since July 1964, when arrangements were concluded for seventeen Thais to fly and service Vietnamese C-47 transports; until July 1966, this unit functioned independently of American support. As an adjunct to this program, the Royal Thai Air Force also provided jet aircraft transition training to approximately twenty-four Vietnamese pilots. In August 1965, agreement was reached between the Thai and South Vietnamese governments for the furnishing of two ships to serve in South Vietnamese waters for anti-infiltration and transport operations. The United States lent two vessels for this purpose and trained some two hundred Thai crew members; the vessels entered service in February and December 1966. Concurrently, the aviation detachment was expanded to a strength of thirty-one.

With the continuing escalation of the ground war in Vietnam, discussions were entered into in late 1966 between the United States and the RTG over the dispatch of a Thai combat unit to Vietnam. Those discussions led to the announcement in January 1967 that Thailand would, at the request of the South Vietnamese government, send a ground combat unit to join the allied effort in Vietnam. The following July, the "Queen's Cobras," numbering 2,207 men, arrived for duty. By that time, however, the momentum of the war had accelerated further, the American public was demanding greater results, and more embarrassing questions were being asked about the

⁵⁹ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 905.

role of America's SEATO allies. Responding to those pressures, the United States requested an even larger commitment from the Thais.

The expansion of the Thai military force in Vietnam was opposed by Stilwell, who felt strongly that maximum political utility had already been obtained by the Thai regiment already in place, that the Thai army was too small and unsophisticated for such an effort, and that such a commitment would divert Thai attention from their own insurgent problem. Pressure from the White House, however, overruled his objections.⁶⁰

New negotiations were undertaken in the summer of 1967, with Clark Clifford and Maxwell Taylor visiting Bangkok in July. For their part, the Thais were hesitant to increase their military involvement without some corresponding sign of an increased American commitment in Vietnam. Taylor and Clifford, however, adopted the reverse of the Thai argument: that the Johnson administration was about to increase its troop commitment, but that domestic opinion required a correspondingly greater effort from America's Asian allies.

In the wake of Clifford and Taylor's departure, the Thais began an intensive campaign to strengthen their bargaining position. Bangkok newspapers with reputed government connections aired through the summer and fall what were said to be differences of opinion between the Thai and American governments over the prosecution of the war. Thanat joined in, suggesting that means other than troops existed for increasing Thailand's commitment to the war.⁶¹

Specific negotiations began in August between Ambassador Leonard Unger and Air Marshal Dawee, with the Thais maneuvering for the best possible deal. In their negotiating position, the Thais stressed two points. It was argued that a commitment of Thailand's best troops to fight in Vietnam would "weaken their capability to deal with the insurgency at home." The United States accepted that argument and agreed to assist the modernization of the Thai armed forces by increasing the FY 1968 and 1969 Military Assistance Programs from \$60 million to \$75 million. The Thais also argued that their decision to send substantial ground forces to Vietnam might lead to communist retaliation, "particularly from the air." The United States accepted that point as well, and agreed to deploy a HAWK anti-aircraft battery to Thailand and to train the requisite personnel.⁶²

Successful conclusion of the negotiations led to the agreement on November 9, 1967, that Thailand would, in response to a GVN request, increase its combat force in Vietnam to full division strength. The unit, officially titled the Royal Thai Army Volunteer Force in South Vietnam, or "Black Panthers," consisted of 11,000 men and, including administrative

⁶⁰ Interview, Gen. Richard Stilwell (Washington, D.C., February 7, 1978).

⁶¹ Thompson, *Unequal Partners*, pp. 82-85.

⁶² *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 625.

backup personnel, accounted for 14 percent of the Royal Thai Army's total strength at that time. A special training center for the Volunteer Force was established at Kanchanaburi (funded by the U. S.), where Thais drawn principally from regular army ranks were given six months of special training in Vietnam-oriented counterinsurgency tactics. American Special Forces personnel assisted in the Kanchanaburi program by advising on tactics and by training Thai instructors. The first Black Panthers were deployed to Vietnam in January and February 1969.

Why did the Thais agree to send a volunteer force to Vietnam? As a former director of training at Kanchanaburi and Chief of Staff in Vietnam describes it, the Thai government was motivated principally by security considerations: an overriding fear of China, plus a desire to fight Thailand's communist enemies as far as possible from its own borders.⁶³ While this was no doubt a major consideration, the Thai decision was almost certainly affected by two additional factors: the material *quid pro quos* offered by the United States, and the significantly greater pressure that the United States was capable of bringing to bear as a vastly more powerful ally.

Formation and deployment of the Volunteer Force resulted in concrete material benefits for the Thai government. While it was to assume the cost of base pay plus various standard allowances (hazardous duty pay, combat pay, transportation discounts, etc.), the United States agreed to pay those expenses related to the dispatch and maintenance of the Thai division in Vietnam. These included the costs of training prior to deployment (including the cost of construction of the Kanchanaburi camp), uniforms and individual issue items, overseas allowances, death and disability benefits, costs of quarters and rations, and a mustering out bonus. By mutual agreement, all equipment used by the Thai division in Vietnam was, on its return, to remain the property of the Thai government (the United States, in effect, agreed to fully equip a Thai army division). These benefits were in addition to the boost in military aid and the HAWK missile battery that the U. S. agreed to supply. In direct support alone, the U. S. subsidy for Thai forces in Vietnam totaled \$200 million for the period 1966-69.⁶⁴ An old Thai adage advises "Fill your jar while the tide is up," and American money and equipment were certainly in plentiful supply. The Thai could, however, claim with some justice that in the absence of increased aid the support of a full division in Vietnam would cause an inordinate drain on the resources required to deal with Thailand's own domestic insurgency. By sending troops to Vietnam, moreover, the RTG could hope to have some influence on the strategy and course of the war, and would at the same time gain valuable counterinsurgency experience for its own army. Despite some concern in

⁶³ Interview, Gen. Worawut Kosolyudh (Bangkok, August 8, 1976).

⁶⁴ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, pp. 624-26, 657, 842-44, 896-97.

official quarters over Thailand's deepening involvement in Vietnam, the troop commitment aroused very little domestic dissent, either in the press or the Parliament (though neither was wholly free to comment). A good deal of public pride, in fact, developed as a result of the Thai contingent's Vietnam performance.

Whatever bargaining took place, there was very little doubt as to whether Thailand would or would not increase its troop commitment in Vietnam. The only real question was how many troops would go, and how satisfactory a *quid pro quo* could be exacted in return. The RTG was fully aware of the consequences of refusing the American request. Despite its lack of enthusiasm, the potential loss of tens of millions in economic and military aid and the incurring of American displeasure dictated prudence and making a virtue of necessity. The inequality of the Thai-American power relationship thus dictated the pursuit of differing national objectives through differing strategies. Having cast its lot unequivocally with the United States, yet lacking sufficient power to independently affect the outcome of that struggle, Thailand would soon find itself in a position where its future security was increasingly dependent on the firmness and success of American's Vietnam effort.

Chapter 4

Security and Development

While the Royal Thai and United States governments were cooperating on an intimate basis in the military struggle for Vietnam and Laos, other forms of close cooperation were occurring within Thailand itself. Like Vietnam, Thailand was, from the mid-1960s onward, faced with the threat of a growing domestic insurgency. Though that insurgency posed no immediate threat to the Royal Thai Government itself, it was, like its Indochinese counterparts, communist-inspired, and as such constituted a potential threat to both Thai stability and to American interests in the area. To meet that challenge, the United States evolved, in conjunction with the RTG, a large-scale counterinsurgency effort designed to enhance the suppressive capabilities of the Thai government and at the same time attack the roots of insurgency by strengthening the bonds linking the Thai villager with his government. To those ends, the collective resources of all major U.S. government agencies in the field—the Joint United States Military Assistance Advisory Group (JUSMAG), the Department of State, the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Information Agency, and the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency—were focused in what was to be an extraordinary effort. The problems and questions raised by the experience of that effort are many. One of the most instructive concerns the difficulties encountered by the United States, as a foreign government, in attempting to put into effect counterinsurgency or other programs through the mechanism of another country's domestic political structure. A related area of inquiry concerns the process by which American policy was coordinated among agencies in the field, and how the policy thus decided on was coordinated with the counterpart agencies in the host government. Perhaps the most important question raised by the experience of American aid in Thailand, however, is to what extent and in what forms the United States, as an outside power, is capable of decisively influencing the structure and priorities of a foreign political system.

THE THREAT: COMMUNISM IN THAILAND

The launching of a large-scale and coordinated aid effort in Thailand was sparked by the resurgence of communist insurgency in Indochina in the early 1960s, and particularly by the prospect of a communist victory in South Vietnam. The presence of a small communist movement in Thailand, and the appearance of signs of incipient insurgency at approximately the

same time that domestic conflict was escalating in Vietnam, led to concern that a similar fate might befall Thailand. The threat of a communist-inspired civil war in Thailand, coupled with an awareness of the strategic importance of Thailand in Southeast Asia, thus led to a major American effort—military, economic, and psychological—to support and strengthen the Thai government.

Communism in Thailand dates to the 1920s, when Chinese and Vietnamese party representatives first made contact with their respective national communities in the country. From that early date, Thai communism found its principal support more among these ethnic minorities than among the Thais themselves. For a variety of reasons—historical, cultural, and economic—communism has had little appeal for the vast majority of Thais. The fact that Thailand was never colonized and never experienced a colonial war enabled the Thais to enter the post-war era without the bitter colonial legacy of their neighbors. This also permitted a continuity of leadership in Thailand, leaving in power a traditional elite solidly rooted in the nation's historical and cultural values. The availability of government positions to Thailand's educated class—which was ensured by the continuity of independent Thai governments throughout the colonial era—created an essentially pragmatic, conservative, educated leadership with a disincentive for revolutionary activity. Even outside the elite, prevailing Thai social and cultural values have historically militated against political activism and radical movements.¹

Economics has also served to frustrate communist ambitions. The abundance of fertile land in Thailand, and the fact that approximately 70 percent of Thailand's farm population has been composed of small freeholders, has minimized many of the rural problems that plagued Vietnam and Laos—indebtedness, landlord-tenant conflicts, and hunger and poverty. Until recently, the small scale of Thai industry also precluded the development of a significant urban proletariat. The emergence of an organized working class was forestalled by domination of the industrial sector by small family businesses. It was not until 1973, with its mushrooming of student and labor activism, that Thailand could claim to have a vocal or active labor movement.

¹ For a fuller discussion of the Thai sociopolitical system, see David A. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962); Fred W. Riggs, *Thailand: Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1966); John Embree, "Thailand—A Loosely Structured System," *American Anthropologist* 52 (1950); Jack M. Potter, *Thai Peasant Social Structure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Kenneth Landon, *Siam in Transition* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1949); Norman Jacobs, *Modernization Without Development* (New York: Prayer Press, 1971); David Morell and Chai-Anan Samudavaniji, *Political Conflict in Thailand* (Cambridge, Mass.: Delgeschlager, Gunn, 1981).

Another extremely important factor that has influenced Thai political behavior is the existence of a strong hereditary monarchy. Throughout Thai history, the King, currently drawn from the House of Chakkri, has been the object of an extraordinary reverence among the Thai people. Located at the theoretical pinnacle of the Thai social and political order, the monarchy has acted as a centralizing magnet for political sentiment among Thais of all political colorations. This conscious identification of the King with the state has served as a source of legitimacy for the central government, and remains a powerful, though potentially vulnerable, source of strength and stability in the Thai political system.

Despite these inherent obstacles, communism has been a fact of life in Thailand for almost fifty years. The first formal communist party in Thailand was the Chinese Communist Party of Siam, reportedly founded in 1931. The fact that this organization was explicitly Chinese suggests the narrow ethnic base of the early communist movement, as well as one of the principal reasons for its lack of appeal to most Thais. A new communist party, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), held its first congress in 1942. Though composed predominantly of ethnic Thais, the CPT initially appealed only to a handful of dissident politicians and intellectuals, and was in its early years never more than an ephemeral presence in the political system.

In 1961 and 1962, however, the CPT took steps to lay the groundwork for an open insurgency. The Third Congress of the CPT, held in or near Bangkok in 1961, passed a formal resolution declaring that armed struggle was the proper strategy for a revolution in Thailand. In March 1962, the same month as the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué, a clandestine radio station calling itself the "Voice of the People of Thailand" (VPT) began broadcasting. Based in the Pathet Lao-controlled region of Laos, the VPT attacked both the Royal Thai Government and its growing cooperation with the United States. Though no connection has been clearly proved, the fact that the Thai communist movement became conspicuously more active in 1961 and 1962 suggests a possible linkage with the escalating confrontation in Laos. This is all the more likely given the heavy Chinese influence in both of the Thai communist parties and the absence of any immediate domestic circumstances that otherwise might have led to an upsurge of revolutionary activity. The escalation of revolutionary rhetoric may in this case have been a Chinese vehicle intended to pressure Thailand, whose collaboration with the Americans in Laos was no doubt becoming troublesome.

During 1963 and 1964, the insurgency lay dormant; this was a gestation period, during which efforts were made to lay the preliminary groundwork for future political violence. Overt armed insurgency was launched in 1965. Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi is said to have stated to a foreign diplomat toward the end of the year that "we hope to have a guerilla war in Thailand before the year is out"² (a remark characterized by Foreign Minister Thanat

² *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 10, 1966, p. 235.

Khoman as “amounting to a declaration of war”³). Not long after, Liao Cheng-chih, chairman of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission of the PRC, announced that it was China’s unshirkable obligation “to support the struggle of the people of Thailand.”⁴ These statements, coupled with the strong connections between China and the CPT, suggest that the decision to launch the insurgency was initially made in Beijing.

Exactly why 1965 was chosen is less clear. One theory holds that China chose that date in response to the perceived threat posed by the American military buildup in Thailand. According to this theory, the insurgency was undertaken primarily as a means to deter Bangkok from maintaining or expanding its alliance with the United States.⁵ Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee several years later (in 1969), Graham Martin stated his clear belief that a direct causal relationship existed between the development of American air bases and the launching of the Northeastern insurgency.⁶ While considerable documentary evidence for this exists, the timing of the insurgency and the nature of Chinese support raise a number of questions. For example, anti-Americanism remained a major propaganda theme of the communist movement throughout this period, yet only two incidents of communist attack on American personnel or facilities are recorded, and the first of these not until July 1968.⁷ While a vigorous anti-American and anti-government military campaign might well have dampened American as well as Thai enthusiasm for a large American presence at an early stage in the buildup, both the timing and focus of early insurgent efforts were poorly suited to that purpose (significantly, base security was among the factors considered early in the decision to develop a Thai base network).

A second explanation is that the insurgency was more immediately intended to topple the existing Thai government and substitute in its place a communist regime. The gathering momentum of the Vietnamese insurgency may well have carried over into Thailand as part of an overall thrust toward the communist domination of Southeast Asia. The logic of this view is persuasive, although this raises another question of why Chinese support for the insurgency was not more militant or substantial than it was (despite a good deal of propaganda support, Chinese material and organizational support was never large).

Notwithstanding the resiliency of Thai society in general, ethnic divisions and regional and local inequities provided ample opportunities for

³ Thanat Khoman, Excerpts from NBC’s “Meet the Press,” May 9, 1965, *Collected Statements of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman* (Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Vol. I.

⁴ Denis Warner, “Thailand: Peking’s New Front,” *The Reporter* 32 (June 17, 1965): 32.

⁵ See Daniel D. Lovelace, *China and “People’s War” in Thailand, 1964–69* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, 1971).

⁶ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 892.

⁷ See above, p. 77.

communist exploitation. As a result, the Thai insurgent movement developed a strongly regional character. Those regions in which guerilla infestation has been most serious are the Far South, the North, and the Northeast.

Throughout its modern history (and today), Thailand has been dominated by Bangkok and the Thai culture of the central plains. From that region, with its Bangkok-based industries and its rich rice lands, political and economic power has extended outward to the more remote provinces. Religious (Buddhist) and ethnic homogeneity among the central Thais has further added to the centralization of wealth, culture, and influence in that region. In the Far South, by contrast, 80 percent of the population is of ethnic Malayan extraction and is Muslim by religion. Historically, most of these southern Thais have had little contact with or influence in Bangkok. Two major insurgent organizations operate in the South: a poorly organized Muslim separatist movement that seeks to sever the southern border provinces from Thailand, possibly uniting them with a greater Malaya; and the Communist Terrorist Organization (CTO), a well-organized, strongly-based group of Malaysian communists who have operated out of Thai sanctuaries since their expulsion by the British from Malaya in the late 1950s. CTO activities have been principally directed against Malaysian territory rather than against the Thai government. Its membership is composed primarily of Chinese, with a sprinkling of ethnic Malays; local support in southern Thailand has come principally from the local Chinese community. For these reasons, the southern insurgency for many years was not considered a major threat to the Thai government. Nevertheless, in 1965 the Thai and Malaysian governments established a joint headquarters at Songkhla, and have since then conducted limited joint operations against the insurgents. In 1968, approximately 500-1,000 CTOs were believed to be operating in the Far South.⁸

No major security problem existed in North Thailand in 1965, though some efforts at communist organization had been underway since the late 1950s. In the latter part of 1967, however, armed insurgency broke out in the remote and mountainous region immediately adjacent to the Laotian border. The northern insurgency has involved few ethnic Thais, but has found its support principally among the Meos, a hill tribe numbering some 50,000 in Thailand (with many times that number in nearby Laos). At its inception, the Meo conflict with the government was less political than cultural. The Meos have traditionally lived by "slash and burn" agriculture, burning off large tracts of forest to create fields for crops, then moving on when the land is exhausted. Government efforts to protect the nation's forest reserves have led to confrontation, as has official government dis-

⁸ Insurgent figures: Address by Lt. Gen. Saiyud Kerdphol, Director of Operations of the Communist Suppression Operations Command, to the American Women's Club of Thailand, September 24, 1968 (mimeo).

approval of opium production, the Meos' principal cash crop. These conflicts were effectively exploited by the communists. Cultural barriers to communication between the mountain-dwelling, tribal Meos and the lowland Thais, and the corresponding lack of integration of the Meos with the rest of the Thai nation, further exacerbated the insurgent problem.⁹ Approximately 150 active communist insurgents were believed to be operating in the far northern provinces of Nan and Chiang Rai as of 1968.

By far the most security-sensitive area of Thailand, however, has been the Northeast, a region encompassing nearly one-third of both Thai territory and population. One aspect of the Northeastern equation has been ethnic, as most of the population are Lao-Thais, related in both origin and dialect to their cousins across the Mekong. The Thai government has been highly sensitive to the possibility of appeals to these Thais by Laotian communist propaganda. More important to the insurgent problem, however, have been the economic backwardness of the Northeast and the history of government neglect from which the region long suffered. An arid plateau, Northeast Thailand suffers from a serious lack of rainfall and has few natural resources. Transportation was until recently inadequate, and health conditions poor. Per capita income for the Northeast in 1965 was \$45, compared to an average of approximately \$100 for the rest of the country.¹⁰ Both government services and investment were minimal, and government contact with the rural villages sporadic at best. The relative economic deprivation of the region, coupled with this history of governmental indifference and a general weakness of central authority, made the Northeast the most insurgent-prone area of Thailand, a vulnerability aggravated by a long and highly porous border with Laos, over which men and equipment can flow freely.

It is small wonder, then, that the Northeast was chosen for the launching of the Thai insurgency in 1965. That year saw the first appearance of forced village propaganda meetings, and an accelerating frequency of political assassinations (generally of government informers, village headmen, schoolteachers, and other hostile government officials). The next year, 1966, witnessed a sharp upturn in such activity, with approximately 500 to 1,200 insurgents active in the area.¹¹ Of these, approximately 300 were believed to have been trained at a special guerilla training school located at Hoa Binh, North Vietnam. Despite some Sino-Thai participation, the majority of the Northeastern insurgents were believed to be ethnic Thais—in marked contrast to the case in the North and South. By 1968, the estimated number of in-

⁹ For further background on the security problems of Northern Thailand, see Thomas A. Marks, "The Meo Hill Tribe Problem in Northern Thailand," *Asian Survey*, October 1973.

¹⁰ Millard F. Long, "Economic Development in Northeast Thailand: Problems and Prospects," *Asian Survey*, July 1966, p. 355.

¹¹ "U. S. Involvement Rises in Thailand," *New York Times*, November 27, 1966.

surgents in the Northeast had risen to 1,700 to 2,000, supported by a base of approximately 10,000 village sympathizers.¹²

Despite this growth, the scale of the Thai insurgency remained small compared to either the Malayan Emergency of the 1950s or to the situation in Vietnam. The communists continued to lack a strong local base, were poorly organized and equipped, and were in no position yet to pose a direct threat to the government in Bangkok. It was a situation, however, which some members of the official American community viewed with concern and which threatened, if not dealt with effectively, to mushroom into an expanded and far more serious guerilla war.¹³

THE GENESIS OF AMERICAN COUNTERINSURGENCY PLANNING

Reports written at the time suggest that at least through 1964 the official American community in Thailand viewed the threat of a Thai insurgency with little sense of urgency; though the problems of the Northeast were recognized by some in Bangkok, on the whole they were viewed with complacency.¹⁴

The general sense of optimism concerning Thailand's internal security situation (Maynard Parker reported being told in a military briefing in Thailand in late 1965 that the principal threat to Thai security was from external invasion and that "we do not expect a guerilla war in Thailand")¹⁵ dovetailed with the substantial achievement of many of America's earlier development goals in Thailand. The period through 1964 had seen a highly significant expansion of Thailand's economic and transportation infrastructure, the achievement of noteworthy advances in the fields of health and agriculture, and the placing of the nation's economy on a reasonably sound footing. With the achievement of both economic progress and the political stability it was believed to bring, it was confidently predicted as early as 1961 that American economic assistance to Thailand could soon be entirely phased out. In 1964, U. S. economic aid reached a ten-year low.

American assistance to the Thai police forces, disbursed through AID's Office of Public Safety, was, however, maintained through the early 1960s, and even experienced some small expansion. AID, it will be recalled, had taken over assistance to the Thai police from the CIA following Sarit Thanarat's coup in 1957. Particular emphasis was given to northern Thailand, where American aid focused on enhancing the capabilities of the elite Border Patrol Police (BPP). In 1960, a leadership training school was developed at a

¹² Saiyud address.

¹³ For additional background on conditions in Northeast Thailand, see "Symposium on Northeast Thailand," *Asian Survey*, July 1966, pp. 349-80.

¹⁴ See Maynard Parker, "The Americans in Thailand," *The Atlantic*, December 1966; also Denis Warner, "Thailand: Peking's New Front," *The Reporter* 32 (June 17, 1965).

¹⁵ Parker, "The Americans in Thailand."

site known as Mae Rim Camp, where training was given to BPP personnel under the supervision of U. S. (AID) Public Safety Advisors. Mae Rim Camp also served later as the site of a special ranger-style training course conducted by U. S. Army Special Forces personnel.

Beyond its training function, U. S. assistance to the BPP also took the form of school, medical, and other supplies, and various forms of agricultural and livestock assistance useful in BPP civic improvement programs among the northern hill tribe villages. These assistance programs underwent expansion from 1960 through 1963, as did assistance to the Thai Provincial Police in both the North and Northeast.¹⁶

Despite this expansion of American security assistance in the years 1960-64, the overall level of funding for such programs remained small. The fact that assistance in the internal security field did not, like other AID programs in Thailand, contract is indicative of the new interest then being taken by the Kennedy administration in the problems of counterinsurgency, particularly as they related to Southeast Asia. In 1961, a body known as the Special Group (Counterinsurgency) had been established under the auspices of Robert Kennedy and Averell Harriman as a coordinating mechanism and ultimate court of review for the supervision of a global counterinsurgency effort. Comprised of the Secretaries of State and Defense, and the Directors of AID, USIS, and the CIA, the SG (CI) was the Kennedy administration's means of turning a concerted focus on the challenges of communist subversion in the developing world. In that effort, the State Department was assigned, in addition to its normal diplomatic and political functions, the role of coordinating the efforts of other government agencies; the Agency for International Development was expected to tailor its economic development programs to the bolstering of friendly governments against the threat of subversion; and the United States Information Agency, in addition to disseminating information about the United States to other countries, was now to assist those countries threatened by communist subversion in the techniques of psychological warfare.

In 1961, twelve developing countries, predominantly in Southeast Asia, were selected by the SG (CI) as likely targets of communist subversion; and in June 1962, U. S. agencies in the field were directed to draw up "Country Internal Defense Plans" in each country so-named, encompassing the totality of local U. S. internal defense support. Among the nations marked for attention was Thailand. Though under control, the insurgent situation there was considered potentially serious. Accordingly, an Internal Defense Plan was drawn up for Thailand by the U. S. mission in Bangkok. Though in other target countries the IDPs were frequently shelved or ignored, in Thailand the plan was to become a working document of the U. S. Embassy.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Briefing Book on North Thailand*, USOM (Bangkok, July 1962).

¹⁷ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., April 28, 1977).

The complacency that had characterized the official American community in Thailand underwent a dramatic reversal in the fall of 1963 with the arrival in Bangkok of Graham Martin. Immediately Martin, who viewed the insurgent situation with extreme concern, worked to communicate that concern to the rest of the American mission and to Washington. In 1963 and 1964, American assistance in the counterinsurgency field experienced modest increases. Planning cycles begun in those years ultimately bore fruit when, in 1965, the previously declining trend in American aid to Thailand experienced a sharp and dramatic reversal. Beginning in that year, American military and economic assistance began flowing into Thailand in large quantities, and with that a large number of American development specialists, academics, and military advisers.

There are a number of explanations for this sudden inflow of resources: (1) a desire to bolster the counterinsurgency capacity of the Royal Thai Government against what was perceived to be a generalized communist menace in Southeast Asia; (2) a desire to enhance the security of the region in which most of America's air bases had been or were soon to be established; and (3) an implicit *quid pro quo* for the accelerating expansion of American base rights in Thailand. Probably, all three considerations entered into American planning. Bureaucratic considerations also played a role, as program funds became readily available and positions and opportunities for new projects and organizations in the field proliferated.

Concern in American circles quickly focused on Thailand as the next country on Peking's insurgency timetable, and as possibly "another Vietnam."¹⁸ Speaking in March 1965, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green could point with alarm to "a growing and impressive array of evidence that Thailand may become an important target for the communists," and ask the question: "What is Thailand doing about this situation? What are we doing about it?"¹⁹

MILITARY ASSISTANCE

As a result of this new concern for Thai security, the United States undertook a major program of increased military assistance. The official rationale behind the military aid program was outlined by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee:

¹⁸ See Seymour Topping, "Next on Peking's Hit Parade," *New York Times Magazine*, February 20, 1966; Louis Lomax, *Thailand: The War That Is, The War That Will Be* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Daniel Wit, *Thailand: Another Vietnam?* (New York: Scribner's, 1968).

¹⁹ Marshall Green, "Thai Countermeasures to Communist Threat," *Department of State Bulletin*, April 5, 1965, pp. 489-90.

Thailand is a nation of major importance to the U. S. in Southeast Asia because of its size and strategic position on the mainland, its political stability, and its encouraging economic growth. Thailand faces an immediate and growing threat of subversion and insurgency, sponsored by Hanoi and Peking. By virtue of its geographical position, it is also exposed to the danger of attack from conventional military forces, and the threat of seizure by enemy forces of strategic areas in Laos along the Thai border.

In light of the growing threat posed to Thailand by both internal and external enemies, McNamara proposed a military assistance program for Thailand aimed at increasing that country's counterinsurgency capability.²⁰

The actual increase in military assistance which took place was in no small part the result of pressure from the Thais, who viewed with concern the escalating violence in Vietnam. Though not yet seriously alarmed by developments in their own countryside, RTG leaders did not hesitate to capitalize on both American fears (of spreading communist influence) and American needs (for military base facilities). In June 1966, Air Marshal Dawee, Deputy Defense Minister and Supreme Command Chief of Staff, told a visiting correspondent: "The United States had better put its military aid to Thailand on a war footing, if it doesn't want to see this country go the way of South Vietnam. . . . If you want to protect a patient, you have to protect him before he goes into a deep coma. If you wait for the coma, you can only go to his funeral."²¹

The American response was substantial. From a low of \$30.8 million in 1965, MAP/MASF (Military Assistance Supporting Funds) assistance rose to \$40.3 million in 1966, \$59 million in 1967, \$76.5 million in 1968, and \$73.5 million in 1969. American military assistance in this period, all of which was channeled through JUSMAG, accounted for a substantial though not preponderant fraction of the total Thai defense budget: 24.4 percent in 1965, 28.1 percent in 1966, 31.1 percent in 1967, 32.5 percent in 1968, and 28.6 percent in 1969.²²

Other military assistance provided the Thais included the advisory services of U. S. Special Forces personnel, who arrived in Thailand from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, in October 1966. Numbering some six hundred men, the 46th Special Forces Company was assigned three primary missions: (1) to provide counterinsurgency training to the Thai armed forces; (2) to act as senior advisers to the Royal Thai Army Special Warfare Center and to provide counterinsurgency training to the Thai Special Forces; and (3) to do "other tasks" as directed by COMUSMACTHAI (the U. S. MAC-

²⁰ USIS (Bangkok), "McNamara on Military Aid to the Far East," Release No. 559, April 21, 1966 (mimeo).

²¹ "Dawee: U. S. Must Hasten Military Aid," *Bangkok Post*, June 13, 1966.

²² *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, pp. 633-34.

THAI commander).²³ Though unspecified and undocumented, those “other tasks” included activities undertaken, according to one former Special Forces officer, “in support of the U. S. effort in Vietnam.”²⁴ In later years, the Special Forces also assumed responsibility for the training of the Thai expeditionary force to Vietnam.

The headquarters for the Special Forces in Thailand was established at Lopburi, adjacent to the Thai Special Warfare Training Center, where a joint training headquarters was subsequently organized. Special Forces were active both at the Thai Army Special Forces Camp and at Camp Narai, the Thai Airborne Battalion site, also located in the Lopburi area. Other Special Forces units were established at various counterinsurgency training centers around the country, including Trang (in the Far South), Nang Takoo (near Korat), and Nam Pong Dam (in the Northeast). Special Forces personnel were also located at the Thai National Police Training Center in Hua Hin, where Thai police forces received counterinsurgency instruction, and at Udorn, Ubon, and Chumporn, where Royal Thai Army personnel bound for duty in Vietnam received preliminary training prior to their assembly at Kanchanaburi. From 1967 through 1969, U. S. Special Forces provided field training to over 29,000 Thais of all the armed services, plus police and paramilitary units.²⁵

Unlike their counterparts in Vietnam, SFs in Thailand were assigned no combat role and were restricted in their training activities by what were planned to be stringent guidelines. According to those guidelines, at first informal but subsequently made explicit in 1968, no SF personnel were allowed to operate below the battalion level; nor were American personnel allowed to accompany their students in the field on training exercises, except into areas determined beforehand to be free of communist activity. They were allowed to give general advice, but were at least theoretically prohibited from formulating operational plans. SFs were, moreover, prohibited from carrying sidearms off-base.²⁶

In practice, these guidelines were less than watertight. To circumvent the prohibitions against U. S. advisers “carrying arms,” SFs in the field employed “gun bearers,” who carried their weapons and were always close at hand if needed. SFs, moreover, did occasionally accompany Thai units on patrol in insurgent areas, and did become engaged in firefights with communist elements. Though no SFs in Thailand are known to have been killed in action, some did lose their lives attempting to defuse mines.²⁷ In such

²³ Ibid., p. 632.

²⁴ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., November 17, 1977).

²⁵ U. S. Army, *46th Special Forces Company*, Thailand, Yearbook; also, *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, pp. 816-17, 629.

²⁶ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, pp. 638, 831-32; also, Graham Martin Interview.

²⁷ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., November 5, 1977).

cases, the remoteness of SF units and personnel from embassy or other non-SF supervision facilitated the relatively free hand most U. S. advisers enjoyed. Nevertheless, the guidelines proved effective in distancing the United States government from any official involvement in military engagements in Thailand, and from the related escalatory potential.

The problem of contact between American personnel and insurgent forces affected other American units as well, as some U. S. Army and Air Force personnel had in the early years of the buildup become directly engaged in civic action activities in the Northeast. Following the mission's promulgation of formal counterinsurgency guidelines in 1968, those activities, which typically included well-digging, road or school building, and medical care, were restricted to areas immediately adjacent to U. S. bases. The formal rationale for those restrictions was that extended American involvement in civic action programs would create an undesirable dependence on the part of the Thais, yet would not significantly affect the key counterinsurgency objective of cementing the relationship between the RTG and the local populace. Despite some internal complaints, the embassy request met with Air Force approval, and by 1970 the extended regional civic action program had been placed entirely in Thai hands.²⁸

These and other actions taken in compliance with the U. S. mission's counterinsurgency guidelines were predicated on the rationale that (as stated in the guidelines) "only the Thai can deal effectively with their own internal security problem. If the U. S. is to achieve its basic objective of helping the RTG develop its basic capacity for effective CI performance, U. S. personnel must not assume responsibility for taking action which the Thai could take for themselves." This was the basis of the U. S. policy of "training Thais to train Thais" or "training the trainers" (meaning that no U. S. advisory or other personnel were to become directly involved in the training of Thai troops or in operational military planning). The difference between the American counterinsurgency policy followed in Thailand and the course taken in Vietnam was acknowledged by Dr. George Tanham, former Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency at the U. S. Embassy, in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

Sen. Fulbright: It is fair to ask you to compare the approach to counterinsurgency programs in Vietnam and Thailand; is it the same?

Mr. Tanham: No sir. I think in Thailand we have put greater stress on trying to strengthen the local Thai government to do the job themselves and not try to do it for them.

Sen. Fulbright: Then, is it another way of saying that in Vietnam we undertook to do it for them?

Mr. Tanham: I think it would fit into that; yes, sir.²⁹

²⁸ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, pp. 839–40; also, George K. Tanham, *Trial in Thailand* (New York: Crane-Russak, 1974), p. 147.

²⁹ *Symington Hearings*, Part 2—Kingdom of Laos, pp. 840–41.

Both the perils of escalating American involvement and the efforts that were made to limit them are illustrated by another case, in which American helicopters and crews were used to ferry Thai military personnel to and from combat areas. In March 1966, ten CH-3C USAF helicopters were transferred from Vietnam to Udorn to provide airlift capacity for Thai troops involved in major communist suppression sweeps; these were later augmented by fifteen UH-1F ("Huey") helicopters. The airlift effort was undertaken at the initiative of Graham Martin, in anticipation of an expected acceleration of the insurgency. Martin strongly believed that, although the insurgency itself was a Thai affair, a delay while the requisite Thai helicopter pilots and maintenance personnel were trained would result in the loss of a full dry season, during which the insurgency might irreversibly imbed itself in the countryside. The assignment of U. S.-manned helicopters was made on the condition that they would be withdrawn not later than January 31, 1967, and that the Thais would in the meantime complete the training of thirty-eight helicopter pilots and two hundred and forty-three maintenance personnel as replacements for the Americans when the withdrawal date came; replacement helicopters would then be provided under the Military Assistance Program.

In the meantime, American pilots and aircraft ferried Thai troops to and from combat staging areas in what was referred to as a "taxi service"; Thai civil officials of the Accelerated Rural Development Program were also ferried into critical areas of the Northeast. Similar transport operations had taken place in Vietnam in the Fall of 1961 and had proven a major step in the escalation of U. S. involvement in that country. In Thailand, all craft were under strict orders to avoid combat situations and not to return enemy fire. Pilots were also under orders to deliver their Thai passengers only in the vicinity of the combat operation, never to the actual combat site itself. The airlift operation proved successful, and no U. S. personnel or craft were lost; to the relief of all, the Thai training program was completed on schedule and the helicopters withdrawn in January 1967.³⁰ The parallel with Vietnam had, however, been uncomfortably close and the escalatory potential ever-present. After all, in Vietnam, too, operational orders had been changed under the pressure of circumstances. In the case of Thailand, it was the determination of Martin and others in Washington not to repeat the mistakes of Vietnam that held the U. S. short of the brink of intervention.³¹

The United States approached the Thai insurgency on a number of levels—economic, political, and psychological, as well as military. The prob-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 838-39, 890-91, 902-03; also, *Department of State Bulletin*, February 6, 1967, p. 199.

³¹ Martin's desire to minimize direct American involvement is further illustrated by a parallel instance in which he prohibited U.S. personnel from riding in Thai helicopters during counterinsurgency missions. MACTHAI appealed directly to Washington, requesting rescission of the decision, but Martin's policy was affirmed. Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 18, 1976).

lems faced by the United States in these other areas proved to be of a different nature from those encountered in the military assistance program, for in them the United States was to become either directly or indirectly involved in an attempted restructuring of the Thai political system. Whereas in military affairs the United States could draw on the wealth of technology and experience at its disposal, in the political aspects of counterinsurgency the U. S. was in a far weaker position to decisively influence the outcome of the struggle. Challenges faced by the United States included the problems of effective planning (i.e., what was the correct strategy for counterinsurgency in Thailand?), of coordination (both within the American mission and between the U. S. mission and the Thai government), and of attempting to implement a program designed according to American priorities through the mechanism of a foreign government organized along frequently incompatible lines.

One of the first challenges faced by American planners was the basic reluctance of the RTG to adequately acknowledge the growing insurgent threat. The long-standing centralization of political, economic, and social power in Bangkok had produced in Thai officialdom a striking lack of interest in the affairs of the provinces. In addition, there existed in Bangkok a broad sense of complacency concerning the loyalty of the Thai people; it was commonly believed that the communist movement was a local Chinese phenomenon that could not appeal to a "true" Thai. This also explains a similar assumption by many in the RTG that the Thai government was capable of handling any domestic situation that might arise.³² The close association of Thailand with the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s had in fact been brought about by Thai government fears of external developments in Indochina rather than by fear of domestic revolt. This was an obstacle with which Martin, his successors, and other American representatives in Bangkok and the field were continually forced to contend.

Graham Martin's arrival in Bangkok in 1963 proved to be the catalytic event for American counterinsurgency planning in Thailand. Martin, who fully shared the counterinsurgency mind-set of the Kennedy administration, viewed the smoldering threat of insurgency in the Northeast with alarm and made every effort to convey his sense of urgency to the U. S. mission, to Washington, and to the upper echelons of the Thai government. His concern for the necessity of prompt American and Thai action stemmed from his belief that similar action in the early stages of the Vietnam insurgency might have forestalled the development of a large-scale conflict in that country and saved the United States its massive commitment of manpower and resources. A joint State-Defense-CIA survey team visiting Thailand in the spring of

³² For all the problems it caused American planners, this positive attitude was considered an asset by many in the U. S. mission. It therefore became necessary to walk a fine line between stimulating Thai concern for the problem and encouraging continued Thai confidence.

1966 confirmed Martin's analysis of the situation and supported his recommendation that American counterinsurgency assistance to Thailand be accelerated.

Martin thus became the prime mover behind the dramatic increase in U. S. military and economic assistance to Thailand which took place in 1965 and 1966. Under his direction, all elements of the U. S. mission were made to focus their attention on the problem of counterinsurgency. Most importantly, the U. S. economic assistance program was expanded and given a heavy security orientation; the U. S. Information Service (USIS) program was also expanded and its psychological operations (PsyOps) activities upgraded; and in-country research conducted under the auspices of the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) was given an expanded and sharpened counterinsurgency focus.

AID PROGRAMS

AID's program of assistance to the Thai government in the period 1965-70, though continuing a number of basic economic projects, was preponderantly oriented toward security objectives. Indicating this orientation, a 1965 USOM document divides the USOM/Thailand program into two distinct categories: "Counterinsurgency" ("First Priority") and "Nation Building" ("Second Priority").³³ Not surprisingly, the American effort was concentrated in the politically sensitive Northeast.

The formal rationale of the American aid program in Thailand was stated in a USOM paper titled "U. S. Aid to Thailand—U. S. Objectives":

Thailand is currently of enormous strategic importance in terms of U. S. national interests:

1. Thailand is located in the midst of the all-out struggle between Free World and Communist forces in Southeast Asia.

2. Thailand is formally committed to the side of the Free World despite its perilous location.

In this situation we seek to make this area less susceptible to Communist influence. We are persuading and assisting the Thais to establish programs and take measures which will develop the depressed areas, economically and socially, and to promote the ability of rural peoples to help themselves increasingly. We hope thereby to lead rural peoples to identify themselves with their government and look to that government for support and guidance.³⁴

USOM defined its objective in Thailand as being "to build a bridge between people and government," composed of building blocks linking popular demand for and government supply of services.³⁵ By assisting the

³³ USOM/Program Office, "USOM Thailand Program Goals and Projects," November 26, 1965 (mimeo).

³⁴ USOM, "U. S. Aid to Thailand—U. S. Objectives," undated (circa 1965) (mimeo).

³⁵ USOM, "The Strategy of the Thai/Aid Program," undated (circa 1965) (mimeo).

government in meeting villager demands, USOM hoped to encourage rural Thais in security-sensitive areas to identify themselves and their interests with the RTG rather than with the communist insurgents.

USOM's counterinsurgency program developed, to this end, two basic thrusts: security and development. Physical security fell under USOM's Public Safety Program, which had begun in 1957 with the Civil Police Administration Project. That project was designed to improve the effectiveness of the Thai National Police Department (TNPD), which was responsible for overseeing internal security throughout the Kingdom. From 1957 through 1964, U.S. aid to the TNPD totaled slightly over \$6 million. With the appearance of armed insurgency in 1965, USOM's police assistance program was quickly reoriented and expanded. Dollar funding increased to \$12 million in 1966 and \$17 million in 1967 (with basic equipment needs satisfied by earlier programs, funding declined in 1968 to \$13 million, and in 1969 to \$7 million). Over that same period, Thai counterpart funds equivalent to approximately \$27 million supplemented the USOM effort, as did significant additions to the regular TNPD budget.

From 1964 through 1969, TNPD manpower also increased, from 51,000 to 74,000; annual recruit training capacity was in that same period increased from 1,600 in 1965 to approximately 11,000 in 1969. The annual police budget, which stood at \$12.7 million in 1957, had by 1969 risen to \$62.5 million. Due to USOM's emphasis on rural security, police aid was channeled primarily to the Provincial Police and Border Patrol Police, which shared responsibility for counterinsurgency operations and rural law enforcement. Other assistance was provided to the Aviation and Marine Police divisions of the TNPD, the Bangkok Metropolitan Police (in its riot and crowd control capacity), and the Special Branch (Internal Security).

The Provincial Police (PP) is the largest of all TNPD elements, and is responsible for general police functions and rural security in all of Thailand with the exception of Bangkok and Thonburi provinces. USOM aid through the 1960s facilitated a rise in PP strength from 26,000 to approximately 42,000 men and focused primarily on communications, weaponry, mobility, and training. Approximately 16,000 police received in-service counterinsurgency training. CI training courses were included in the curricula of the Provincial Police's four recruit training schools, and each changwat (province) was provided with a training officer and two NCOs who had been specially trained as instructors. USOM also assisted in the equipping of fifty 50-man units known as Special Action Forces (SAFs), which were specially trained as quick reaction forces to respond to insurgent and other criminal incidents beyond the capacity of regular security forces.³⁶

³⁶ USOM, "A Brief History of USOM Support to the Thai National Police Department," USOM Office of Public Safety, August 1969 (mimeo).

A particularly significant Provincial Police program that received U. S. support was the Tambon Police Station program, which attempted to establish an expanded police presence at the village (tambon) level. Prior to 1965, the RTG had constructed only 150 tambon police stations throughout the country, of which only twelve were located in the Northeast. USOM programming called for the construction of an additional 854 stations through 1970, of which 499 were to be located in the Northeast and a smaller but significant number in the North.³⁷ Selection criteria for the location of tambon stations were: "(a) the existence or threat of communist terrorist activity, (b) a high rate of crime or banditry, (c) relatively high population density without benefit of nearby police protection, and (d) protection of vital installations such as air bases, ammunition and storage depots, and communications facilities."³⁸

Inasmuch as the Tambon Police Station program expanded the police presence in the countryside it was successful. From the outset, however, the program was plagued with difficulties. Whereas USOM's planners had predicated a large increase in the number of police stations on a simultaneous expansion in the ranks of the TNPD, the institutional rivalry of other elements of the Thai bureaucracy forestalled the commitment of resources necessary to produce that expansion. This, in turn, limited the rate at which the tambon stations could be built, and caused most of those stations that were built to be undermanned. While it had originally been planned that each station would be responsible for patrolling the area of its village cluster, the lack of trained personnel precluded counterinsurgency patrolling in strength and at the same time invited attack by local insurgents. The vulnerability of the tambon stations and their frequent destruction in fact tended to expose the government's vulnerability even further, thus negating much of their hoped-for psychological impact. These problems, coupled with the corruption and poor public image of the police personnel, led eventually to the suspension of the tambon police program, pending (as one embassy study described it) more effective management of existing police resources.³⁹

Whereas U. S. aid to the Provincial Police emphasized traditional police security functions, a noteworthy exception was the Border Patrol Police (BPP), a paramilitary unit assigned responsibility for the policing and patrolling of Thailand's 3,000 miles of extended border. The creation of the BPP was, as described in USOM documents:

³⁷ "American Assistance to Thailand, 1950-1970," *Thailand Development Report 5* (Bangkok: Ministry of National Development, April-June 1970): 1. Owing to a number of administrative difficulties, the program fell far behind schedule, and as of 1974 still had not been completed.

³⁸ USOM, "A Brief History of USOM Support to the Thai National Police Department."

³⁹ Robert F. Zimmerman, Eddie W. Schodt, and Richard J. Slott, "Twenty-five Years of Thai-American Mutual Cooperation, 1950-1975" (Bangkok: U. S. Embassy, March 1975), pp. 49-50.

an effort to gain and maintain a favorable government image with the remote area peoples inhabiting the border regions. The basic objective of the civic action program is to develop a community of interest among the border population which will give them a vested interest in supporting government agencies such as the BPP with voluntary intelligence on the movements and activities of communists or criminals in the critical border areas. Additional objectives are to develop relations between the Border Patrol Police and the local populations to the point that sizeable percentages of the population will engage in active and aggressive support of the Border Patrol Police or other government agencies in the event a serious insurgency situation arises.⁴⁰

In order to achieve these objectives, the BPP engaged in a unique combination of paramilitary, development, and political-public relations activity, in what was termed "an immediate impact security development program." BPP field units carried out security patrols, but more importantly engaged in a variety of local development and community relations activities designed to win the loyalty and allegiance of the local population. Since the BPP operated in areas not normally reached by government services or personnel, its units frequently provided the only government influence or presence in the area. To win the cooperation of the villager, BPP personnel engaged in such civic action activities as well-digging, animal breeding, road construction, agricultural assistance, health care, and teaching.

The object of all this activity was "not a marked increase in the standard of living, but a sudden and then continuing realization that cooperation with the government can result in positive, measurable gain." As envisaged by BPP/USOM planners, "the cycle is village projects, population commitment, improved reporting and isolating centers of anti-government activity, and the cooperation of the people in their eradication."⁴¹ USOM assistance to the BPP consisted primarily of weapons, vehicles, communications equipment, and training; from 1966 through 1968, U. S. SEABEE construction teams also worked in conjunction with BPP Development Platoons in rural areas.⁴² By recognizing the psychological aspects of insurgency and by placing major emphasis on the key variable of villager-government relations, the BPP achieved a considerable degree of success in building that bridge between the government and the villages which the overall USOM program sought to foster. Unfortunately, political constraints placed on BPP size and area of operation by rival elements within the Thai system, and errors of strategy by the Royal Thai Army, limited somewhat the effectiveness of the BPP as a counterinsurgency organization.⁴³

⁴⁰ USOM, "The Border Patrol Police: Concept of Operations," undated (mimeo).

⁴¹ USOM, "Border Patrol: Remote Security Development Program," undated (mimeo).

⁴² USOM, "Border Patrol Police: Remote Area Security Development Program," September 1966 (mimeo).

⁴³ For a more detailed discussion of American assistance to the Thai police, see Thomas Lobe, *United States National Security Police and Aid to the Thailand Police* (Denver: University of Denver, 1977).

Beyond the police, other major security projects supported by USOM included the Village Security Units, the Village Radio Project, and the Security Roads Program. The Village Security Units, which were funded from 1966 to 1971, were originally seen as a means of supplementing regular government security forces at the local level by the arming and training of villagers for their own defense. According to the USOM program description, the VSUs “were trained to serve as a link between their villages and the RTG.” They were trained in the “when-who-and-how” of calling upon appropriate RTG district officials for assistance to solve village problems. Based in their own villages, VSUs served as full-time paid employees of the Thai government, and, in addition to being provided with arms, were equipped with radios intended to provide ready emergency communication between the village and local RTG police and other security forces. USOM support for the VSUs consisted of five U. S. advisers who provided advice on organization and training, and material assistance in the form of arms and communications equipment.⁴⁴

The Village Radio Project, begun on a pilot basis in 1964–65, was funded by the U. S. from 1966 through 1970 to the tune of \$2.1 million. Through the project, over 4,600 radios were provided to the RTG to establish a communications network linking the district (amphoe) police headquarters with their respective tambons (villages) in security-sensitive areas, and to provide ready communication between civil government officials and local security forces.⁴⁵ As of 1970, the Village Radio System covered thirty-six of seventy-one provinces, with a primary concentration in the Northeast.⁴⁶

The Security Roads Program was in effect an extension of road-building projects under way since the mid-1950s. Under this program, a total of 310 kilometers of roadway and 114 bridges, evenly divided between the North and Northeast, were engineered and constructed by the United States at a cost of \$5.1 million, with the objective of “strengthening communications between the Thai government and the Thai people in remote areas of the North and Northeast and to improve the capability of the Thai security forces to reach those remote areas.”⁴⁷

Government penetration of remote areas was also enhanced by what were known as Mobile Development Units (MDUs). Begun at the initiative of then-Prime Minister Sarit Thannarat in 1962, the MDU program was a Thai concept that received U. S. military assistance in 1963 and USOM

⁴⁴ “Village Security Units,” Project 493-11-710-191.

⁴⁵ “Public Safety and Public Administration (Village Radio),” Project 493-11-710-185.

⁴⁶ *Thailand Development Report*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ “Security Roads Program,” Project 493-12-310-139, *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary*.

funding beginning in 1964. Operating under the supervision of the National Security Command (the organization under the Ministry of Defense responsible for counterinsurgency planning), the MDUs generally numbered 60–100 persons, both civilian and military. As a joint civil-military undertaking (though usually led by a military officer), the units operated in remote security-sensitive areas, where they carried out civic action and development activities and gathered intelligence for the NSC and other government agencies. The primary objective of the MDUs was to establish a constructive government presence where none had existed before, principally through the carrying out of informational, psychological, and other operations designed to provide a modicum of services and to impress upon the villager the central government's interest in his problems.

Typical MDU programs consisted of an initial stage of 45–60 days, during which quick impact village improvement projects were launched, medical clinics held, and movies and folk-plays presented, followed by a second phase lasting approximately one year, during which longer-term development projects such as road building were conducted. In theory, these activities would be continued until a more permanent government presence could be effected. Unfortunately, the limited scale of MDU operations and their ad hoc nature caused the impact of the program in any given area to be transitory. Nevertheless, as a Thai initiative, the MDUs deserved and received American support and did establish an early RTG presence in some areas prior to the arrival of longer-term programs such as ARD (see below). As of 1970, the MDU program was operational in twenty-three key changwats (provinces) nationwide. USOM assistance, which was supplemental to an already substantial RTG budget, consisted mainly of construction equipment, radios, pumps, generators, well-digging rigs, and farm implements, plus limited advisory assistance. Between 1964 and 1973, that support totaled approximately \$5.7 million.⁴⁸

USOM also provided assistance to a number of village-oriented development programs under the authority of the Ministry of Interior. Most important of these was the Thai Community Development (CD) program. A multifaceted effort, CD programs were aimed at improving local government institutions and capabilities in rural areas, and in particular at fostering a local-level political apparatus. Emphasis was placed on the stimulation and training of local leadership at the village level through villager involvement in a range of local development projects. Begun in 1957, U. S. support for the CD program included funding for CD activities; technical and advisory

⁴⁸ *Thailand Development Report*, pp. 4–5; also, “An Overview of USAID Participation in the Thailand Programs of Development and Security—End of Tour Report by Rey M. Hill, USOM Director,” USOM, August 1973 (mimeo). Also see RAC, *Counterinsurgency Organizations and Programs in Northeast Thailand*, vol. 5, pp. 17–30.

services; vehicles, audiovisual and office equipment, and light construction equipment; and training for a number of Thai personnel at schools outside Thailand.⁴⁹

The major thrust of USOM's security development program, however, occurred through the program known as Accelerated Rural Development (ARD). The U. S. AID mission was highly instrumental in the shaping of ARD. Preliminary discussions between Thai officials and members of USOM's Office of Rural Affairs in late 1963 led to the official launching of ARD in May 1964 with a U. S. grant of \$2.3 million. Originally limited to six critical northeastern provinces, by 1969 ARD was operating in all fifteen provinces in the Northeast, seven in the North, and one in West Central Thailand. The objectives of the program were to:

1. Increase income for rural people;
2. Strengthen ties between the Thai government and the people; and
3. Strengthen local self-government⁵⁰

ARD was essentially conceived as a counterinsurgency program:

The methods of accomplishing this have been through equipping and training a changwat administrative organization to plan, design, construct and maintain rural roads, village water facilities and other local public works in selected changwats and to coordinate the planning and implementation of various other local level developments. Changwats have been selected for ARD support on the basis of economic need and threat of insurgency. Therefore a basic underlying rationale for the ARD program has been to provide support for the government's counterinsurgency efforts.⁵¹

Specifically, ARD sought to strengthen local government by decentralizing many development functions to the local level and placing them in the hands of the provincial governor. Prior to the inception of ARD, the direct staff of a provincial governor had consisted only of a secretary and a driver; all other staff reported directly to their respective ministries in Bangkok. By increasing the manpower of Changwat Administrative Organization (CAO) both in quantity and quality, and by adding to the resources available to the provincial governor for local development purposes, it was hoped that ARD would increase resources from Bangkok for development and counterinsurgency activity. At the same time, a more efficient and capable provincial government was to secure the loyalty of the rural populace through

⁴⁹ RAC, *Counterinsurgency Organizations and Programs in Northeast Thailand*, vol. 5, pp. 37-62, 62-98.

⁵⁰ USOM, "U. S. Aid to Thailand—U. S. Objectives (Accelerated Rural Development Program)," undated (circa 1965-66) (mimeo).

⁵¹ "A Joint Accelerated Rural Development Office and PERM Team Effort: Some Planning Challenges for ARD," I. S. No. 5 (Bangkok: Office of the Prime Minister, May 1972), pp. 1-2.

small, rural public works projects designed to meet short-to-medium run development needs.⁵² In this aspect of its program, ARD was to have a central coordinating role:

Other Thai government agencies also carry out projects in the insurgency-related areas; but the task of systematically planning for the development of these selected security-sensitive areas rests primarily with ARD.⁵³

One aspect of ARD's rural development program was the Mobile Medical Team (MMT). Assisted by USOM from 1966 through 1970, the MMTs were a quick impact counterinsurgency program designed to extend health and medical services to remote areas, with an emphasis on ARD changwats not served by regular medical facilities. The provision of those services was based on the premise that "a man will feel gratitude and a sense of obligation toward the person who heals his diseases and in turn to the institution which that healer represents."⁵⁴ Each team was initially composed of three U. S. medical technicians and one Thai physician operating under the overall direction of a U. S. Medical Corps officer. Helicopter transport was provided by U. S. air commandos, and vehicles by USOM and the U. S. Army; drugs were jointly supplied by the army, embassy medical unit, and through ARD local purchase funds.⁵⁵ After March 1969, the U. S. Mission determined that the Thais were capable of carrying the program forward without the help of U. S. personnel. Thereafter, typical MMTs were staffed exclusively by Thais. The shortage of qualified Thai medical personnel and the concentration of Thai doctors in metropolitan Bangkok resulted in a continuing and chronic deficiency of staff. Nevertheless, through 1970 some thirty-three MMTs operating in nineteen changwats succeeded in treating over four million people.⁵⁶

ARD's primary emphasis was, however, on small construction projects. Major stress was placed on road construction as the necessary prelude to the introduction of more extensive ARD services. In the ARD concept, these roads not only opened up hitherto inaccessible areas to commerce and civilian use but also increased access to security-sensitive areas for Thai counterinsurgency forces. Through April 1970, ARD constructed 2,452 kilometers of all-weather roads, 1,468 kilometers of service track and access roads, 125 dams, 244 ponds, and 1,336 shallow wells (thus improving access to potable

⁵² USOM, Office of Field Operations, "USOM and ARD: The First Ten Years," September 1973, pp. 1-2.

⁵³ "Some Planning Challenges for ARD," p. 5.

⁵⁴ USOM, "Memorandum to USOM Mobile Medical Teams, from Captain Michael B. Kurtz," December 14, 1966 (mimeo).

⁵⁵ USOM, "Mobile Medical Teams," March 13, 1966 (mimeo).

⁵⁶ "USOM and ARD: The First Ten Years," p. 8. See also *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary*, Project 493-11-540-179.1.

water for both villagers and livestock). Construction activity, particularly of roads, continued at an accelerated pace in subsequent years.⁵⁷ USOM support for ARD's road construction program (which accounted for most U. S. expenditures) was focused primarily on the creation of new provincial construction and engineering capabilities. This consisted principally of heavy equipment (tractors, graders, trucks) in a unit package known as a "spread," which on delivery became the property of the changwat.⁵⁸ Through 1970, USOM funding totaled \$54.6 million.

Was ARD successful? Quantitative indicators suggest the answer is yes, although overall the results have been mixed. The resources and staff available to the provincial governors of ARD provinces for development purposes were dramatically increased. By 1973, changwat-employed personnel in the twenty-seven ARD provinces had expanded from less than one hundred to over five thousand, including for each province an Assistant Deputy Governor for ARD and trained planning, engineering, and medical staffs. By 1973, each changwat also possessed construction equipment valued at an average of \$1,200,000.⁵⁹ Physical conditions also improved in many rural communities. It was found, for example, that within two years of the construction of an ARD road the following pattern of events tended to occur along its route: (1) vehicular movement increased from an average of one vehicle per hour during daylight in the dry season to 12–18 per hour; (2) commercial and industrially-related traffic expanded rapidly; (3) annual land and business tax revenues for the changwat moved upward by an average of 1,000 baht per kilometer constructed; (4) government services flowing along the road increased substantially: post and telegraph business expanded between 300 and 1,000 percent; movement of "line agency" technicians increased by at least 200 percent; creation of new schools, midwifery centers, and other health care centers doubled and tripled in volume; and police patrolling and security-related actions expanded by over 500 percent.⁶⁰ ARD, furthermore, was highly instrumental in altering the regional distribution of Thai government expenditures. Whereas in 1962 approximately 36 percent of all government expenditures went to the Central Plains and Bangkok areas and 28 percent to the Northeast, by 1974 that proportion had shifted to 30 percent and 36 percent respectively. While ARD-funded activities accounted for only about 2 percent of total government expenditures in the region,

⁵⁷ *Thailand Development Report*, pp. 5–6.

⁵⁸ RAC, *Counterinsurgency Organizations and Programs in Northeast Thailand*, vol. 5, pp. 120–23.

⁵⁹ Orlin J. Scoville and James J. Dalton, "Rural Development in Thailand: The ARD Program," *Journal of Developing Areas* 9 (October 1977): 64.

⁶⁰ "Goals and Work of ARD's Research and Evaluation Divisions—Annex C (Significant Findings)," (Bangkok: Office of Accelerated Rural Development, Office of the Prime Minister), by James J. Dalton, Adviser to ARD (USOM, November 25, 1970).

the program stimulated an increased emphasis on the Northeast by other agencies.

Even with this scale of activity, ARD could only begin to address the security and development problems of the Northeast. Despite the accelerated pace of ARD's construction activities, it was estimated in 1977 that an additional 19,000 kilometers of roadway were required to link every village with a basic, all-weather road system. Moreover, the economic gap between the Northeast and the rest of Thailand remained wide, and educational levels comparatively low. While per capita income in the Northeast rose from \$50 to \$80 between 1962 and 1969, over that same period per capita income in the Central Plains/Bangkok area rose from \$150 to \$270.⁶¹

The success of ARD in decentralizing government decision-making and the extent to which indicators of economic development relate to counter-insurgency objectives also raise questions. Despite ARD's goal of government decentralization, 2,380 out of 6,300 ARD employees, or fully one-third, were located in Bangkok in 1973.⁶² Likewise, according to USOM Director Rey M. Hill, only 13 percent of USOM-sponsored Thai graduates who had been educated abroad in the field of agriculture between 1964 and 1969 actually chose to locate in rural areas; the vast majority elected to remain in the capital.⁶³ While some slow decentralization of actual decision-making authority and more genuine local planning did occur during the period of American aid, the termination of American support for ARD resulted in 1973 in a recentralization of authority in Bangkok. Though ARD continued to operate in the provinces, particularly in its construction capacity, decisions concerning program priorities shifted back to Bangkok rather than the governor/changwat level.⁶⁴ The failure of ARD to achieve effective decentralization was such that the U. S. Embassy could report in 1975 that "one of the original objectives of ARD was to facilitate decentralization of authority and resources to the provinces. In fact, however, decentralization hardly occurred at all."⁶⁵

A further question concerns the security impact of ARD roads. While road building was premised in part on the assumption that other ARD-supported services would follow, that goal was never fully realized, owing to inadequate expansion of the Thai budget to support those services. Furthermore, while roads afford rural villagers greater access to markets and greater freedom of movement, they also make those villages more accessible

⁶¹ Scoville and Dalton, "Rural Development in Thailand," p. 66.

⁶² Hill, "End of Tour Report."

⁶³ "Graduates Reneging," *Bangkok Post*, August 7, 1969.

⁶⁴ Interview, James J. Dalton (May 6, 1977).

⁶⁵ Schodt, Zimmerman, and Slott, "Twenty-five Years of Thai-American Mutual Cooperation," p. 49.

to officials and police who, by their corrupt behavior, can offset other positive counterinsurgency benefits. In a counterinsurgency sense, then, the availability of a paved road is no more important than the attitude of the officials who come by way of it; this was a problem not directly addressed by ARD (though aspects were addressed elsewhere by USOM's support for the Nai Amphoe Academy, a highly successful institution for the training of amphoe-level officials).

UNITED STATES INFORMATION SERVICE PROGRAMS

The United States aid program also directed considerable attention to the psychological warfare aspects of counterinsurgency. Major psy/war support was provided the Thais by the United States Information Service (USIS). The Thai government at first showed little interest in psychological operations; as a result, the task lay with the United States to convince the Thais to initiate programs in that field. To effect such a program, USIS established eleven provincial field offices which engaged in psychological operations at the provincial level and attempted to motivate provincial-level officials to do the same. A USIS adviser on psychological operations was also assigned to the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC).

Even more than USOM, the USIS program in Thailand was geared to develop support for the RTG among politically vulnerable elements of the Thai peasantry. According to a 1966 USIS document, USIS objectives in Thailand were:

- (1) Explain and win support for programs and activities designed to strengthen the security, development, independence, and unity of Thailand;
- (2) Explain and help counter the stepped-up communist threat to Thailand;
- and (3) Maintain and strengthen Thai confidence in the U. S. as a strong, reliable, and cooperative ally.⁶⁶

USIS had been involved in Thailand as early as the mid-1950s in what was known as the "PIT Program." PIT was essentially an informational effort carried out in those critical border provinces believed to be most vulnerable to communist infiltration or invasion. Designed to warn villagers against the danger of subversion and invasion, the program carried a heavy anti-communist message.

A similar program, though somewhat less ideological, was the Mobile Information Team (MIT), begun at the initiative of a USIS officer, Robert Lasher, in 1962. The principal purpose of the MITs was to create a link between the Thai government and the villages by providing simple services, information concerning government welfare programs, and an anti-communist political message; the teams were also a useful vehicle for obtaining information about subversive activities. A typical MIT was composed of 8-12 persons and normally included a representative of the Ministry of the

⁶⁶ USIS (Bangkok), "USIS Program in Thailand," December 15, 1966 (mimeo).

Interior (with which the USIS primarily dealt), a doctor, a veterinarian, an education officer, provincial officials, and a representative of the USIS. Teams most often visited a village for one or more days, during which time team personnel talked to local people about their problems, while a doctor dispensed simple medical services. In the evening, a political message was presented through the screening of a film (which was often a wonder to the villagers) on government activities or the narration of an anti-communist story. The job of the USIS officer on such missions was to tell the villagers about the United States and to provide an image generally supportive of the Thai government. Before leaving, a small development project was carried out in the target area, generally suggested by the team and carried out under its direction by the local populace.

On completion of a mission, a report was filed by the MIT with the Interior Ministry. On this occasion, the American team member often served as a catalyst or medium for the communication of the desired information to the Thai government. The required filing of reports by both the American and Thai team members enabled the American to lend extra support to the evaluation of his Thai counterpart, which otherwise might have been overlooked in the Ministry, owing to the reporter's lower rank. This parallel reporting mechanism also provided the appearance of Thai initiative, obscuring the fact that the team's recommendations were often more American in origin than Thai.

The MIT concept was sound. One problem, however, was in follow-up, as team contact with targeted villages was both brief and sporadic. By 1964-65, the system had begun to break down. Reports from the U. S. field officer began to be sent exclusively to U. S. sources rather than Thai, and Thai reports were reviewed only by Thais.⁶⁷ A survey taken in 1971 indicated that, as they were then being utilized, the MITs had become increasingly less effective. Movies were no longer the novelty to villagers they once had been, and most villagers were able by that time to obtain information from other sources such as radios. More importantly, the MIT visits had become perfunctory, with officials interested more in whether regulations were being observed than in the provision of information and services to villagers. Following a team's visit, it was reported that there was little or no follow-up to meet villager needs.⁶⁸

During its life span, the MIT program touched every province in the Kingdom. Over the period 1965-71, USIS allotted 58 percent of its \$26 million total program budget, or \$15.1 million, to the MITs. The program was terminated in 1971.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 21, 1976).

⁶⁸ Tanham, *Trial in Thailand*, pp. 104-05.

⁶⁹ Schodt, Zimmerman, and Slott, "Twenty-five Years of Thai-American Mutual Co-operation."

USIS also provided assistance, in a joint effort with USOM, in establishing a 50-kilowatt radio transmitter at Sakon Nakhon, in the Northeast. Known subsequently as Radio 909, the station was equipped with a radio transmitter provided and installed by U. S. Army engineers, with USOM and USIS jointly responsible for providing a senior adviser, training for Thai programers, and vehicular and production equipment. Once in operation, Radio 909 served as the Thai government's principal voice in the Northeast, in direct competition with Radio Peking, Radio Hanoi, and the VPT. Programs were designed, with American assistance, to publicize and support the government's security and development programs in the Northeast; many were broadcast in the Northeastern dialect. Among other things, the station encouraged villagers to provide intelligence on subversive activities in their areas; some success was achieved in this, as well as in a related effort to encourage communist cadres to defect. A 1969 survey indicated that Radio 909 had the largest audience of all stations reaching the Northeast. USIS assistance was also extended in the establishment of a second radio station, located in the North at Lampang, which broadcast similar messages in the major hill tribe languages.⁷⁰

In addition to these more visible forms of support, USIS provided major assistance in the areas of program design and advisory services. In 1966, USIS was producing forty-one hours of radio programming per week, consisting of 16 percent music, 19 percent news and commentary, and 65 percent other "message-type" programming. The predominant theme of USIS programs was security, development, and the communist threat to Thailand. USIS programs were also written for Thai television and scheduled in prime viewing time.

USIS maintained its own motion picture production unit in Bangkok, with an annual budget (in 1966) to produce forty reels per year. Films produced were "feature type, documentaries, or specials. All support the Post's psychological objectives." It was estimated that in 1965 USIS motion pictures were seen by as many as 20,765,000 people in Thailand (out of a total population of approximately 35,000,000). In the printed media, USIS produced a monthly magazine titled *Seripharb*, printed in 125,000 copies. "More than 50%" of the magazine's space was devoted to "articles and stories on security and development in Thailand, especially in the northeast." USIS also produced a series of four-color posters under the title *Communism and Freedom*. Printed in quantities of 150,000 each, the posters compared life in Red China and North Vietnam to life in Thailand. This "anti-communist" material was distributed to schools, temples, libraries,

⁷⁰ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 21, 1976); Tanham, *Trial in Thailand*, pp. 105-06; *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary*, Project 493-11-225-193; USOM, "50 KW Radio Station," Memorandum from J. W. Limbert, ADA/Sakol Nakorn, to Frank W. Sheppard, DAD/RA, August 19, 1966 (mimeo).

armed forces units, and village leaders, “with special emphasis being given to the areas where communist activities have been reported.” All tactical and anti-communist posters were reduced to a 5” x 7” leaflet format and reproduced in hundreds of thousands of copies for distribution among teachers, students, soldiers, and villagers.⁷¹

USIS personnel also served as advisers to U. S. military forces in the area, assisting in Civic Action and Troop Community Relations programs, and as advisers to a number of special Thai units in security and development matters. These included the MDUs, Special Operations Centers (special reinforced platoons assigned to limited, critical border areas and charged primarily with responsibility for gathering intelligence, as well as with civic action and psyops functions), the Border Patrol Police, Accelerated Rural Development Program, Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC), and special units of the Public Relations Department, Community Development Department, and other Thai government organizations.⁷²

RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Thailand was, in this period, also the focus of a massive American research effort devoted largely to the application of technology and the social sciences to the problems of counterinsurgency. This wide-ranging effort probed Thai society at a number of highly sensitive points, concentrating on information considered useful in countering the insurgent threat.

American social science research in Thailand found its earliest seed in a prescient 1950 article written by Lauriston Sharp, the father of modern Thai anthropology and at that time a professor at Cornell University. Writing in *Far Eastern Survey*, Sharp pointed out that the United States was fundamentally ignorant about Southeast Asia, and most particularly about what was happening at the village level. The lesson for U. S. policy, Sharp implied, was that in order to influence the course of change in Southeast Asia positively, it would first be necessary to penetrate the village in order to discover the true wants, needs, and attitudes of the villagers. “A government which hears and acts, whatever that government’s constitution,” Sharp wrote, “will have the support of these Thai farmers, and of all others like them in Thailand for years to come.”⁷³ As a pilot project, Sharp had conducted a “community study” in the Thai village of Bang Chan, located not far from Bangkok. Bang Chan subsequently became the site of an ongoing Cornell research effort, and the Bang Chan community study became the prototype for many similar academic studies in the years that followed.

⁷¹ USIS (Bangkok), “USIS Program in Thailand,” December 15, 1966 (mimeo).

⁷² Ibid.; also, Memorandum to SA/CI George Tanham from G. W. Murchie, Information Liaison, RTG, Subject: Open Arms Program, June 18, 1969 (mimeo).

⁷³ Lauriston Sharp, “Peasants and Politics in Thailand,” *Far Eastern Survey*, September 13, 1950, pp. 157-61.

The importance of the Sharp article lies in the fact that it suggested the application of social science research to political rather than purely academic ends; the effectiveness of American policy could be enhanced, it was said, by village-level field research into peasant attitudes and desires. Though the lesson was not systematically applied for some years, Thailand was in fact selected in the mid-1960s as a testing ground for the application of technology, and most particularly of social science techniques, to the challenge of counterinsurgency.

The harnessing of American intellectual and academic resources was in large part an outgrowth of the new counterinsurgency thrust that grew out of the Kennedy era and that received its initial direction from the Special Group (Counterinsurgency). One major product of that effort was Project Agile, a worldwide research program focused on the problems of counterinsurgency. Launched by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in 1961, Agile's stated purpose was to:

conduct R & D programs for systems to provide improvements in allied nations' capability to meet the threat of insurgency, and DOD [Department of Defense] capability to assist them in doing so with the particular goal of minimizing U. S. operational involvement. In particular, it will concentrate on such areas as counterinfiltration, local security, capability of small units in guerilla warfare, and specialized systems for specific related purposes.⁷⁴

Agile was administered by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), a division of the Department of Defense. Operating in Thailand through an ARPA field office established in 1961, U.S.-supported research was conducted under the auspices of the Joint Thai/U.S. Military Research and Development Center (MRDC), a mutual undertaking of ARPA and the Thai Ministry of Defense. Though some MRDC projects were in fact joint undertakings, most research was primarily American both in concept and execution.

According to Congressional testimony, ARPA objectives in Thailand were:

1. Working with the pertinent Thai researchers on a project to describe and design the most effective RTG measures to counter the insurgent threat;
2. Research counterinsurgency topics in response to ad hoc requests generated by the U. S. mission;
3. Help develop Thai Ministry of Defense capability to define, manage and perform military research, development, testing, and evaluation.⁷⁵

At its height in 1969-70, ARPA employed as many as five hundred anthropologists, political scientists, engineers, equipment specialists, and other researchers in its Bangkok office, with an annual budget of \$10 million.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Michael T. Klare, "Counterinsurgency's Proving Ground," *The Nation*, April 1971, pp. 527-31.

⁷⁵ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 632.

Including Thai military personnel, the complement of the Joint Thai-U. S. MRDC exceeded seven hundred. While some U. S. military personnel were assigned to the center, the majority of ARPA staff were civilian personnel supplied under contract by such organizations as RAND Corporation, Research Analysis Corporation (RAC), American Institutes for Research (AIR), General Research Corporation (GRC), Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory (CAL), and Stanford Research Institute (SRI). The U. S. counterinsurgency effort, through USOM, also drew on the general American academic community through the Academic Advisory Council for Thailand (AACT), a body of professional academics assembled in conjunction with the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group (SEADAG) of New York's Asia Society; Lauriston Sharp served as the first chairman of AACT. AACT was expected to aid USOM in the recruitment of professional research personnel and in the assembly of a directory of U. S. citizens having specialized knowledge useful to U. S. research activities in Thailand. AACT was also expected to organize conferences aimed "to provide the mission [i.e., USOM] with substantive recommendations on security and development programing as well as methodological advice on how to analyze the problem in the field" and to "provide reports on agricultural development and/or methodological problems dealing with security research."⁷⁶ AACT was also to "identify research that is being, has been, or will be conducted in universities, foundations, and other institutions that may relate to the developmental and counterinsurgency activities in Thailand."⁷⁷ In brief, by producing "coordination between the academic community of Thai scholars and AID,"⁷⁸ AACT was "to act as a think tank and data base for the mission"⁷⁹ in its counterinsurgency capacity.

Initially, Thailand had been chosen as a major research site because of its environmental features (which, as in Vietnam and many other insurgent-troubled areas, combine varied terrain features in a tropical climate), its relatively peaceful domestic situation, and the existence of an "incipient" internal security threat. ARPA research in its early years (1962-65) centered on the agency's traditional function of technology development, but with a marked emphasis on counterinsurgency warfare.

Beginning in 1966, ARPA's program was reoriented to give heavier emphasis to counterinsurgency research relating directly to Thailand; the production of ARPA's Thailand studies was rapidly accelerated. All research projects required the approval of ARPA's Washington office and as a practical

⁷⁶ USOM, "Relation Between AACT and the Research Division/USOM," Briefing Paper for Ambassador Young, undated (mimeo).

⁷⁷ Contract between AID and Regents of the University of California, dated September 1, 1968, reproduced in part in *The Student Mobilizer* 3 (April 2, 1970): 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ USOM, "Relation Between AACT."

matter were subject to veto by the embassy's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency; MACTHAI approval was also required. As a criterion for approval, all but a few of the projects undertaken by ARPA/Thailand had to be justified in terms of their contribution to the overall counterinsurgency effort.⁸⁰ The range of ARPA projects during its peak production period of 1965–69 was extraordinarily broad, ranging from jungle radio development to manuals for the identification of local vessels in the Gulf of Siam (popularly known as “Jane’s Fighting Junks”). ARPA researchers developed a combat ration suitable for use by the Thai armed forces and Thai National Police Department; compiled a directory of Thai highways suitable for use as emergency airstrips; developed a combat pack suitable for the needs of Thai infantrymen; studied terrain features affecting ground vehicle mobility in Thailand; developed magnetic sensors for surveillance of boats on Thai inland waterways; developed a similar system for the scanning of rural trail traffic; evaluated communications systems requirements for counterinsurgency forces in northeast Thailand; studied systems for the surveillance and control of insurgent traffic crossing the Mekong River into Thailand; studied village alarm and security systems for rural Thailand; and studied the vulnerability of Thailand’s electric power system to insurgent sabotage.⁸¹

As many as one-third of ARPA’s projects were within the broad field of social science research. The following projects suggest the range of ARPA interest in this area:

- Border Patrol Police Capabilities and Potentials for Counterinsurgency in Thailand (1966).
- Thai Law and Civil Administration in Counterinsurgency (1966).
- The Communist Terrorist Organization in Southern Thailand (1967).
- The Evolution of Successful Counterinsurgency Operations in Malaya (1967).
- Counterinsurgency Systems Manual—Northeast Thailand (1967).
- Communist Terrorist Logistics in Southern Thailand—A Quantitative Analysis (1968).
- Insurgent Support Denial Methods for Southern Thailand (1968).
- An Analytic Approach to the Estimation of Counterguerilla Capabilities (1968).
- Insurgent Organizations and Operational Patterns: A Primer for Northeast Thailand (1969).
- Socio-Economic Approach to the Political Integration of the Thai-Islam: An Appraisal (1969).

⁸⁰ Batelle Memorial Institute, Columbus Laboratories—Tactical Technology Center, *RDC-T/MRDC Reports Bibliography* (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, Contract No. DAAHO1-72-C-0982, ARPA Order No. 2209, July 1974).

⁸¹ *RDC-T/MRDC Reports Bibliography*.

- Village Leadership in Northeast Thailand (1971).
- The Impact of RTG Assistance and Communications on Defense-Related Attitudes of Remote Villages (1970).⁸²

ARPA produced maps of the names and approximate locations of Thailand's many hill tribe villages, as well as separate handbooks providing information concerning the geographical, cultural, political, and economic characteristics of the Meo and the Karen, two of Thailand's most important tribal groupings. Under one three-year program, the trail networks of Thailand's four northern provinces were mapped in detail and supplemented with administrative and environmental charts. ARPA also developed a course of instruction on the application of intelligence to operations in Northeast Thailand and an operational gaming curriculum for the RTAF War College. Under another contract, the Stanford Research Institute was commissioned to develop a "village data base" containing information on the size, location, geometry, economy, leadership, population characteristics, and proximity to police posts of all Thai villages, beginning with the Northeast. The information was to be incorporated in a "Village Information System" (VIST), which would computerize the data for easy reference by the RTG in its counterinsurgency planning. The VIST, however, was only partially completed before ARPA funding was terminated and the system was transferred to the Ministry of the Interior.

The concrete results produced by this massive ARPA effort (not to mention USOM's smaller but parallel research program) are debatable. One problem inherent in the U. S. research effort was the sensitivity of many of the topics proposed by American researchers. The reluctance of both Thai and American officials, military and civil, to open certain subject areas to the examination of outside investigators occasionally frustrated what might otherwise have been valuable research proposals. Another difficulty besetting the American research effort was that the volume of research was often justified as much by the availability of funding as by a demonstrated need or desire for such information on the part of the Thais. Much of what was produced was too voluminous or too technical to be effectively translated by ARPA's overextended translation staff, and much of what reached the Thais was seen only at the senior staff level, where it was often received with indifference. U. S. research input was most often accepted passively, as a concession to the peculiar American proclivity for data accumulation. Subsequent application was rare. Testimony by ARPA head Dr. Eberhardt Rehtin in 1971 acknowledged that "the results of past research have been mixed, with some projects (border zone security) paying off very well and the results of others (village security) not being implemented for a variety of non-technical reasons. . . . The core of the problem is the relationship of

⁸² Ibid.

the Royal Thai Government to its people. . . . This government-to-people relationship is inherently so political that it has proven generally impractical as a field of ARPA research producing implementable results.”⁸³ Owing in part to this realization, ARPA funding in Thailand was cut back from \$10 million in fiscal 1969 to \$4 million in fiscal 1970, and its traditional emphasis on military hardware research was restored.⁸⁴

PROBLEMS OF PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The problems encountered by ARPA in the design and implementation of its projects were shared by other U. S. agencies in the field. Despite the massive scope of the American counterinsurgency effort in Thailand, Thailand’s communist insurgency grew rather than shrank in the years after 1965. Why the U. S. counterinsurgency effort was not more effective may lie in part in its theoretical premise. USOM’s security program was explicitly predicated on an assumed direct relationship between economic development and counterinsurgency. As USOM Director Tracy Park observed in 1965:

Economic Development is, after all, one of the best counterinsurgency weapons we have. If we can develop among the rural people a friendship and loyalty toward their government, we shall have gone a long way toward making it possible for them to resist communist subversion attempts from outside.⁸⁵

It was generally believed that a large-scale infusion of economic resources from the central government would, by satisfying basic village demands for development services, bring the rural populace to identify itself with the central authorities. Villager loyalty was, in this sense, an economic variable, to be secured by a variety of economic development projects and administrative services designed to demonstrate the government’s interest and involvement in local affairs. This was one of the basic rationales of the Accelerated Rural Development program. One USOM document, titled “The Strategy of the Thai/AID Program,” describes the agency’s objectives as follows:

Objective—The objective of the Thai/AID program is to build a bridge between the people and the government.

The Bridge—The bridge between people and government must be constructed of a number of building blocks, representing on one side the demand for services and on the other side the supply of services.⁸⁶

⁸³ Quoted in Klare, “Counterinsurgency’s Proving Ground,” p. 531.

⁸⁴ For a detailed discussion of Project Agile and the U. S. counterinsurgency research program, see also Seymour L. Deitchman, *The Best-Laid Schemes—A Tale of Social Research and Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976).

⁸⁵ “Interview with Mr. Tracy Park, U. S. AID Mission Director to Thailand,” *The General Electric Forum* (April-June 1965).

⁸⁶ USOM, “The Strategy of the Thailand/AID Program,” undated (mimeo).

How appropriate was such a strategy to the objectives of counterinsurgency? Put differently, the issue is whether a direct relationship exists between economic development and villager loyalty. As late as August 1976, USOM Director Roger Ernst could acknowledge that "no link has been proven."⁸⁷ Plausible arguments have in fact been made⁸⁸ that economic development acts as a spur rather than an antidote to insurgency by increasing the awareness among villagers of their own deprivation relative to other segments of their society, and by encouraging villagers to expect and demand services or benefits which the government is frequently incapable of providing.⁸⁹

Disagreement existed within USOM itself concerning the course the aid program was taking. Writing in April 1965, John W. Limbert, an AID Area Development Adviser, complained of a confusion of ends in the Thai program: "The essence of the danger in mixing overall development and security considerations with counterinsurgency is that in overall development and security projects the immediate involvement of the people based on a felt need is not a realistic expectancy, while in counterinsurgency such involvement is an irreducible must." The mixing of long-range development goals with the short-range high-impact objectives of counterinsurgency, Limbert warned, could result in a dilution of the effectiveness of both.⁹⁰

Similar reservations were expressed by others at USOM.⁹¹ Two years later, in November 1967, the issue was again raised inside the agency when ARD Advisor James Dalton observed:

There is virtually no evidence available to support the commonly accepted theory that economic development can counter an insurgency. . . .

The notion that one ought to attempt to satisfy the villagers' expectations is probably sound, but are we justified in assuming that those expectations are primarily economic? I believe that the Thai villager is looking for a measure of security, of which economic security is just one aspect and is not necessarily at the top of the list.⁹²

This poses the question: If the goal of a program is to strengthen villager-government ties by meeting villager demands, then what is the nature

⁸⁷ Interview, Roger Ernst (Bangkok, July 14, 1976).

⁸⁸ See Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁸⁹ Communist terrorists were, of course, already encouraging dissatisfaction among rural Thais. Given the RTG's commitment to the modernization of the country, the real question was how to do so with minimal dislocation.

⁹⁰ USOM, Memorandum to Mr. J. Sheldon Turner, Assistant Director of Rural Affairs, from John W. Limbert, Area Development Adviser; Subject: Counterinsurgency and ARD; April 23, 1965.

⁹¹ USOM, Memorandum to Mr. T. Park, from Frank W. Sheppard, Jr., SD; Subject: Mr. Limbert's Memorandum on Counterinsurgency and ARD; May 6, 1965.

⁹² USOM, "The Relationship of Economic Development to Counterinsurgency," by James Dalton, November 1967 (mimeo).

of those demands? Demands of an economic nature are inevitable, but in the Thai case tend to be highly personalized and not necessarily satisfied by macro-level projects such as roads, especially when the decisions affecting project selection are made in Bangkok or regional centers rather than in the affected province or district. The standing of the government with the local populace tends, moreover, to be undermined rather than strengthened when local projects carried out under official auspices are poorly planned and bring no lasting benefit to the community. This was the case with many RTG well-digging projects, which were undertaken according to set formulas devised in Bangkok rather than tailored to local ground conditions, and as a result proved to be dry. Villager demands for other government services—relating particularly to individualized health, livestock, and agricultural problems—can be met by economic development programs if those programs are pursued in a consistent, sustained manner. The problem with many USOM-supported RTG programs of this nature was their short-term, high-impact quality, which often failed to produce lasting, long-term effects; the basic problem in this case was one of sustainability.

A further problem lies in the establishment of a linkage in the villager's mind between the development project being carried out in his area and the actual concern of the government for his welfare. According to one USOM study made in 1966–67: "Villagers 'know about' programs, but in their minds there is practically no connection between 'programs' and the government's concern for their needs, problems, or opinions about how progress can be made. The survey of 1,200 respondents reveals an appalling gulf between official actions and intended and absolutely necessary results."⁹³ This, in turn, was largely a problem of administration, growing out of the inadequacy of local government structures, the indifference of local officials, and the lack of truly local consultation and decision-making.

Local identification with the central government can be developed through the encouragement of local self-government, undertaken in such a way as to foster a sense of responsibility and participation among the rural populace. This, in turn, is related to the critical role that meaningful communication plays in government-villager relations. The provision of physical security and limited government services will be inadequate to establish a strong sense of individual identity with the government if the individuals who represent that government at the local level are indifferent to the needs of the populace or use their position for excessive personal enrichment. This is not to say that all or even most Thai officials were corrupt, or that ARD roads brought no other material benefits to the villagers. Much government contact was no doubt beneficial and, as pointed out above, increased access to and within rural areas, tied those areas more closely to the rest of the nation, and increased the services and commercial opportunities available

⁹³ USOM, "RTG/USOM Programs—Northeast Thailand," undated (circa 1966) (mimeo).

to them. Nevertheless, the quality of government contact remained an area inadequately addressed or affected by American planning. Much of this was recognized by USOM's planners. At the same time, however, this was the one aspect of successful counterinsurgency which USOM, as an American agency functioning in Thailand, was least equipped to affect. Good intentions notwithstanding, the degree to which foreign advice and conceptual input were capable of influencing the traditional workings of Thailand's political system was limited.

As with any foreign aid program, this question of Thai interest in executing American initiatives proved to be a major factor affecting the success or failure of American efforts. Frequently, the problem was one of coordination of bureaucratic interests—in particular, the coordination of American programs with Thai, and of policies within the Thai government itself. In more than one case, the implementation of U. S. programs fell victim to interbureaucratic and interpersonal rivalries which American advisers and planners were poorly equipped to influence. This frequently resulted in a gap between American notions of how “things ought to be done” and the realities of the Thai political system.

Herbert Phillips has identified the core of the problem in observing that local officials:

resist foreign innovation in their administrative arrangements, and from their point of view, the resistance is quite justifiable. To them, a government agency exists not only to get a job done, but to provide the people in the agency . . . with status, power, and influence. To them, coordination with, as contrasted to domination of, other agencies is the first step in the relinquishment of one's own power and influence.

As Phillips points out, this problem of intrabureaucratic and interpersonal rivalry can be a serious factor in considering how best to administer an effective aid program:

American technical advice about administration is a political phenomenon, and one cannot divorce efficient administration from the political functions it serves. In Thailand the political system is identical with the Thai administrative system, so the advice that looks very good on paper and might work very well in a small city in Iowa, where the administrator can distinguish his political activities from his administrative activities, just makes no sense in Thailand where an administrator is first and last and foremost a political animal.⁹⁴

Coordination proved a challenge within the official American establishment itself. Through the early 1960s, individual agencies operating in Bangkok had each pursued their own program goals with little attempt at overall coordination. Beginning in 1964, an effort was made, at the direction of Graham Martin, to achieve greater coordination within the mission.

⁹⁴ Herbert P. Phillips, *Thai Attitudes Toward the American Presence* (Berkeley: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 1971), pp. 22-23.

Montcrief J. Spear, then Deputy Chief of Mission and Martin's right-hand man, attempted to achieve this informally through consultation and persuasion. In the summer of 1966, as the resources of nearly all American agencies were being brought to bear on the challenge of counterinsurgency, Graham Martin attempted to more formally unify American efforts by appointing a Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency (SA/CI), who was to act directly under his authority in all CI matters. Martin's choice for the job was Peer de Silva, a former Central Intelligence Agency official who had previously served as Special Assistant to the U. S. Ambassador in Vietnam and who shared most of Martin's judgments concerning the American experience there. De Silva was to function as the Ambassador's alter ego in all matters pertaining to counterinsurgency, with responsibility for coordinating the U. S. mission effort. As George Tanham was later to point out, however, "coordination" and "regulation" are two different matters.

With Martin's approval, de Silva established a mechanism known as the "Tuesday Group," a select group of 25-30 agency heads and key staff which met weekly to discuss and decide counterinsurgency policy. The SA/CI held no control, however, over budgets or personnel, which remained in the hands of the individual agencies. USOM and MACTHAI presented particular problems. In the case of MACTHAI, Martin and de Silva claimed ultimate policy authority based on the Kennedy letter of 1961,⁹⁵ while Stilwell claimed full operational authority over U. S. military forces under his terms of reference. Though Martin ultimately prevailed, the issue continued to smolder through 1968. In such cases, the Ambassador and the SA/CI were largely limited to the application of their personal influence, with the occasional assistance of pressure from Washington (which proved critical in the Martin-Stilwell dispute).

The SA/CI was also expected to serve as principal liaison with the Thais on counterinsurgency matters; all related contacts of U. S. personnel with their Thai counterparts were made by or cleared with the SA/CI, and all papers dealing with the subject were to cross his desk. De Silva thus became the main point of contact with the RTG's principal coordinating body for counterinsurgency, the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC). This requirement for clearance proved particularly objectionable to MACTHAI, which was thereby precluded from direct contact with CSOC. U. S. military officers generally resented this barring of unimpeded communication with their Thai counterparts, with whom they shared both many interests and a common technical language. In practice, it proved impossible to prevent such contacts, and informal discussions of military matters took place regularly. Despite the obvious weaknesses of his position, de Silva took his role seriously, meeting regularly with leading Thais and frequently intimidating his agency representatives into agreement. De Silva met on a weekly

⁹⁵ See above.

basis with General Saiyud Kerdphol, Operations Chief of CSOC, and frequently with Dr. Chamnan Yuvpurna, Director General of the Department of Local Administration (DOLA) and a close associate of General Prapart, who, among other things, was Commander of CSOC.

When Leonard Unger replaced Martin as Ambassador in February 1968, de Silva elected to leave; his replacement was Dr. George Tanham, who previously had been an AID Director in Vietnam. In order to enhance his authority within the mission, Tanham was given the rank of Minister. He continued the regular meetings of the Tuesday Group, supplementing these with small "executive sessions" attended only by agency heads; often held in resort settings, the executive sessions were intended to elicit more frank and open exchanges of views. In his capacity as SA/CI, Tanham encountered much the same problem as de Silva: a myriad of different agencies, each protective of its prerogatives and each with its own goals and interests, program definitions and budgets, and channels of communication and institutional loyalties. His approach to the challenge of coordination differed from de Silva's in that where de Silva had attempted to personally direct the counterinsurgency effort, Tanham tried "to get consensus," though admittedly along the lines he desired.⁹⁶ Tanham functioned as SA/CI until 1970.

If coordination of the concerned American agencies with each other and with their Thai opposites was difficult, coordination of the key Thai ministries was largely absent. Parochial interests in and rivalries between RTG line ministries and departments created major problems of coordination and program rationalization for USOM, in many cases diluting program effectiveness. By entering the world of Thai bureaucratic politics, USOM also encountered by definition the phenomenon of interpersonal and factional rivalry that has characterized the Thai political system in the modern era. By positing goals other than efficiency, the Thai political structure served to frustrate more than a few goals established by USOM in its drive for economic development, political decentralization, and the development of an effective counterinsurgency plan.

In some cases, USOM simply ran afoul of the economic interests of leading Thai politicians.⁹⁷ More often, however, the obstacles encountered by USOM were institutional. Three programs—the Thai Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC), the Village Security Force (VSF), and Accelerated Rural Development (ARD)—illustrate this institutional environment within which USOM operated.

The Communist Suppression Operations Command was formed in Bangkok in December 1965 with the express purpose of coordinating RTG counterinsurgency efforts. The CSOC concept had originated with American

⁹⁶ Tanham, *Trial in Thailand*, pp. 115-50.

⁹⁷ Interview, James C. Dalton, Senior USOM Adviser to ARD (Washington, D.C., May 6, 1977).

advisers who perceived the need for nonmilitary as well as military responses to the insurgent challenge, and for a special unit concerned exclusively with counterinsurgency coordination. Colonel (now General) Saiyud Kerdphol, a graduate of the U. S. Army Staff College, was selected as Director of Operations, with Field Marshal Prapart serving as commander. The theoretical concept on which CSOC was based was known as CPM, or Civilian-Police-Military. CPM postulated a joint counterinsurgency effort by all concerned agencies of the Thai government, including the civil bureaucracies (the Department of Community Development, ARD, and the Department of Local Administration [DOLA]), the police, and the military. Beyond its role of coordination, CSOC was to execute operations where necessary.

Subordinate CPM suppression centers were established by CSOC in seven critical northeastern provinces, with each unit headed by the provincial governor and a cadre of military, civilian, and police advisers. While CPM-1, the central regional coordinating unit, was directly assigned military units, provincial CPMs were supported primarily by police and village security forces. CSOC was given command and control of all police and military units under its authority.

Not surprisingly, CSOC benefited from extensive American advice and consultation. CSOC worked closely with the office of the SA/CI, which in addition to the weekly meetings held between the SA/CI and Saiyud also detailed a USIS psyops adviser to the unit. American advice within CSOC was tendered and received gingerly. The principal vehicle for such advice was a regular morning coffee break held by Saiyud, at which both Thai officers and American advisers informally discussed counterinsurgency matters. Through this device, the Thai staff absorbed both ideas and advice; sensitive to Thai national pride, Saiyud correctly perceived that American advice tendered directly would have been unacceptable to his staff.⁹⁸ (It should be noted that this indirect method of proffering advice was consistent with the view of the American policy establishment that the Thais ought to be led to decisions, but that decisions ought not to be made for them. Accordingly, ideas were often implanted through a process of suggestion described by George Tanham as the "Socratic method.")

CSOC proved, however, one area where American advice, despite wholehearted acceptance in some Thai quarters (notably Saiyud and his staff), was frustrated by domestic political factors. In October 1967, the army (through Second Army Forward, which had been CPM-1) unilaterally assumed full control of all counterinsurgency operations in the Northeast in what was felt by many to be an internal coup. Thereafter, the military appropriated to itself the dominant role in CSOC, overshadowing both the police and civilian elements. An emphasis on suppression rather than secur-

⁹⁸ Interview, Gen. Saiyud Kerdphol (Bangkok, July 22, 1976).

ity and a return to primarily military methods of dealing with the insurgent problem spelled, at least for the moment, the end in practice of the CPM strategy.

CPM foundered less for operational reasons than political ones. One factor undoubtedly behind its eclipse was the disagreement of the majority of Thai officers not under Saiyud's influence with his slow, civil-oriented approach to counterinsurgency strategy. More important, however, was the growing competition of certain officers of the Army General Staff (notably Chief of Staff, General Surakit Mayalarp) with Saiyud, whom they saw as building up a powerful politico-military network outside their immediate control. By allowing CSOC to deal directly with commanders in the field, an effective and dynamic CSOC was perceived as a threat to their own authority. Fearing a split within his army constituency, therefore, General Prapart authorized the transfer of full authority over regional counterinsurgency operations to the Royal Thai Army. The result was an emasculation of CSOC, which, though retained as an institutional framework, was largely bypassed in the years immediately following. Prapart's influence continued undiminished, owing to his unimpaired power base in the Army; Saiyud, however, was the primary loser and was allowed to retain his position largely because of his favored standing with the Royal Family and the American Embassy.⁹⁹

In the case of the Village Security Force (VSF), interagency rivalries succeeded in undercutting a major American effort. The VSF was another American proposal conceived among officials at the Embassy and at USOM who envisaged a program that would engage Thai villagers in their own defense and simultaneously engender a sense of participation in and identity with the government. As proposed in 1967, the VSF was to involve several thousand villagers, approximately ten in each village selected, who were to receive arms and training from the government for their own defense. It was expected that the village teams would have the backup support of district and provincial officials and quick-response support as needed from the Army and police.

The major problem was that the VSF was to operate under the Interior Ministry, which was then divided into two major but loosely related satrapies: the Police Department, under General Prasert (over whom Prapart, though Interior Minister, had little operational control), and the Department of Local Administration (DOLA), which is generally responsible for the local governance of all areas of Thailand outside of Bangkok, and was headed by a dynamic and ambitious Thai, Dr. Chamnan Yuvpurna, a close associate of Prapart. DOLA and Chamnan came out strongly for the VSF, and lobbied

⁹⁹ Partial references: Interview, Gen. Saiyud Kerdphol (June 22, 1976); Interview, Gordon Murchie (May 21, 1976); "Thai Feud Slows Drive on Rebels," *New York Times*, October 8, 1967.

intensively with USOM for its support. A successful VSF would have provided DOLA with an additional channel of influence at the local level, where previously the police had enjoyed a monopoly in matters of security.

Ranged against the VSF was, most importantly, General Prasert's TNPD. Village security was at that point under the exclusive authority of the police department; as a major paramilitary force not under the direct control of the police, the VSF therefore represented a major threat both to the organizational prerogatives of the TNPD and to the expansion of Prasert's personal power. With the exception of General Prapart, the Army was also against the proposal, fearing the possibility that VSF arms might find their way into the hands of insurgents or rival political groups.

Despite a number of dissenting views, the VSF was viewed as a first-priority project within the U. S. mission. Joint Thai-American committees continued to meet through 1968 to discuss the operational details of VSF planning. The pilot VSF program was in the meantime, however, proving less than successful. Arms were in fact finding their way into insurgent hands, and major problems of organization had arisen on an operational level. Most important was the failure of the police and DOLA to agree on a unified program. An open breach between Prapart and Prasert over control of the VSF led in June 1968 to the withdrawal of U. S. support for the program. Prapart was informed that until the Ministry could resolve its internal conflicts, no additional U. S. funding would be available,¹⁰⁰ although some support was continued for a smaller-scale compromise program.

USOM's principal bureaucratic difficulty arose from the fact that, with the greater part of its program focused on Thailand's rural areas, the American aid mission and its various subdivisions had developed a close working relationship with the Ministry of Interior (MOI), which was then headed by Prapart. In 1966, approximately four-fifths of American economic aid to Thailand was budgeted to projects primarily under the control of the Interior Ministry. This circumstance led to the belief among many Thais in other ministries that USOM was assuming the role of prime backer of Prapart. Though this was not intentionally the case, the perception was important to USOM's efforts to move its programs successfully through the Thai bureaucracy. Little enthusiasm could be mustered among competing ministries and departments for cooperation in programs that appeared to further the MOI's seemingly ambitious plans at their own expense.

These problems of interministerial rivalry are best exemplified in the case of ARD. In one sense, ARD was an attempt to circumvent the personal and organizational rivalries of Bangkok through a devolution of power to the provincial level, and through the establishment of an umbrella development agency outside the immediate framework of the main-line ministries.

¹⁰⁰ Partial references: Thompson, *Unequal Partners*, pp. 46-48; Tanham, *Trial in Thailand*, pp. 136-37.

At the end of 1964, Dr. Chamnan was made ARD chairman, which ensured both the participation of DOLA and the backing of General Prapart. Later, ARD was transferred to the Prime Minister's office, where, however, the chairman of the multiministerial council responsible for ARD was the Deputy Prime Minister, Prapart himself.

By its very nature, ARD was beset by bureaucratic problems. Main-line ministries through which USOM had formerly worked in its development programs—notably Agriculture and Education—were resentful of their loss of influence. At the staff level, some ARD officials were seconded from the MOI, where their loyalties and basic interests remained. Those officials who worked exclusively for ARD were ineligible for promotion outside of ARD, while the major development administration positions at the changwat level were filled by MOI appointees. First-rank civil-service positions within ARD were extremely limited; and given the nature of Thai bureaucratic relationships, interministerial transfer was extremely difficult. As a separate agency, therefore, ARD was incapable of providing opportunities for long-range career advancement.

Moreover, the fact that ARD sought to place greater power in the hands of the provincial governors aroused considerable bureaucratic suspicion, since provincial governors in Thailand are selected by and dependent for their tenure on the Interior Ministry. Not unnaturally, therefore, ARD was commonly considered by other ministries to be under the MOI, especially once Prapart himself assumed the chairmanship. This made circumstances less than ideal for the development of the broad cooperative framework on which the ARD concept so depended. This also served to frustrate attempts at coordination in the related fields of security and development, where a unification of authority over both could have tipped the political balance. Viewed in these terms, ARD's uneven record of achievement becomes more comprehensible. Not insignificantly, ARD was most successful in its road construction program, for while ARD was amply provided with its own construction equipment and personnel, in projects other than road-building it was dependent on the cooperation of other elements of the Thai civil bureaucracy.

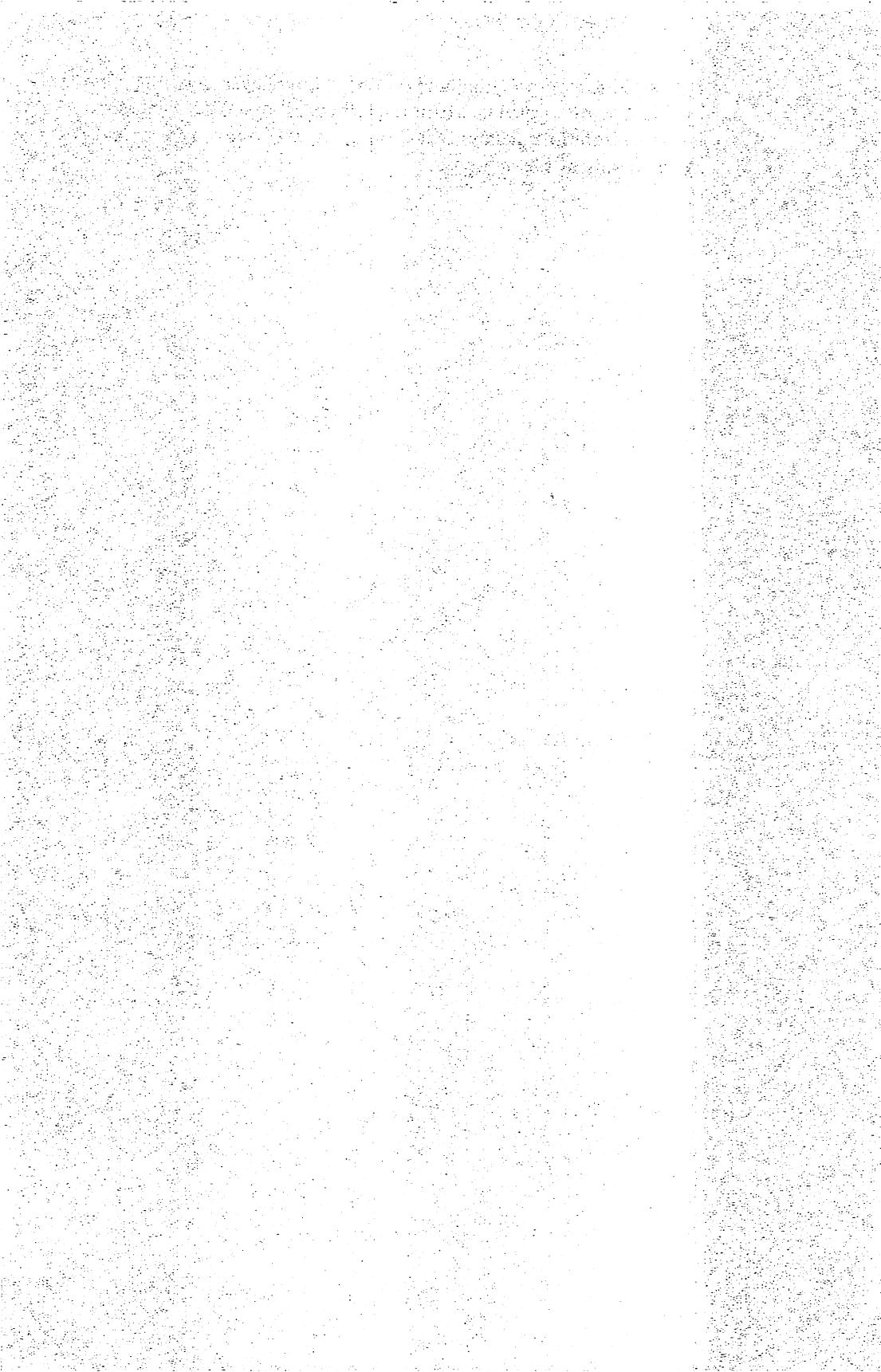
The institutional problems encountered by CSOC, the VSF, and ARD go to the root of the success or failure of the American counterinsurgency program in Thailand. Despite the catalogue of institutional and operational difficulties which surrounded the American effort, the U. S. aid program could claim, to its credit, a number of achievements. Though Thailand's rural insurgency continued to grow through the late 1960s and early 1970s, it might well have grown faster in the absence of American assistance. Unquestionably, the Border Patrol Police have made a major contribution to the Thai security effort, and the USOM-sponsored expansion of the TNPD permitted an extended and necessary government security presence in the

countryside. USOM-supported programs designed to improve the quality of local administration, such as the Nai Amphoe Academy, were to a considerable degree successful; and whether or not the idea firmly took root, Americans did succeed in communicating to some echelons of the Thai government the need to decentralize decision-making to the local level. That realization was to some extent operationalized by ARD, which placed significant new resources and authority in the hands of the changwat governors. It is also apparent that USOM's road construction and other economic development programs, though not on a sufficient scale to produce dramatic socio-economic changes, have in fact contributed in a meaningful way to the development of the Northeast and other target areas. Transportation, health, education, agriculture, and livestock have all seen improvement as a result of USOM programs, and Thailand's rural villages are now more effectively linked to Bangkok and the rest of the nation.

Viewed in terms of its formal objective of counterinsurgency, however, the results of the American research and assistance program in the years 1965-70 are less clear. If indeed the critical variables in a successful counterinsurgency effort are the availability of adequate security and the quality of the relationship between a government and its people, then quantitative indicators of resource allocation and economic growth should prove less indicative of a development program's accomplishment than the qualitative indicators of government structure, official attitudes, and the availability of effective channels of government-village communication. Though it was recognized within USOM that no American counterinsurgency proposal could be successfully implemented in the absence of full acceptance by the Thais, there was no way to force that acceptance. American technical advice was broadly welcomed, but advice on administrative organization was less so, and tended to be discarded when the wellsprings of American money with which it had been associated dried up. This resistance on the part of the Thais found its origin, in turn, in the failure of many American planners to take fully into account the likely effect of their proposals on the domestic political balance. Experience has proven that in a country such as Thailand, where administration and politics are so inseparable, the rationalization and coordination of administration are frequently less important considerations in the minds of planners than the political effect those programs may have on the local distribution of power.

The relationship between a government and its people, and the administrative patterns that are a part of it, tend to be an evolutionary outgrowth of attitudes and structures deeply rooted in the indigenous political culture, and as such not easily susceptible to outside influence, particularly when that influence is exerted in a concerted manner over only a short time span. As a result, American economic assistance was able to provide ideas, program designs, and physical and monetary support, but was unable to transform the

structure of Thai intragovernmental and government-villager relations. In the absence of such structural and attitudinal changes, much of American assistance in the counterinsurgency field could, as with most foreign aid efforts, be effective only at the margins.

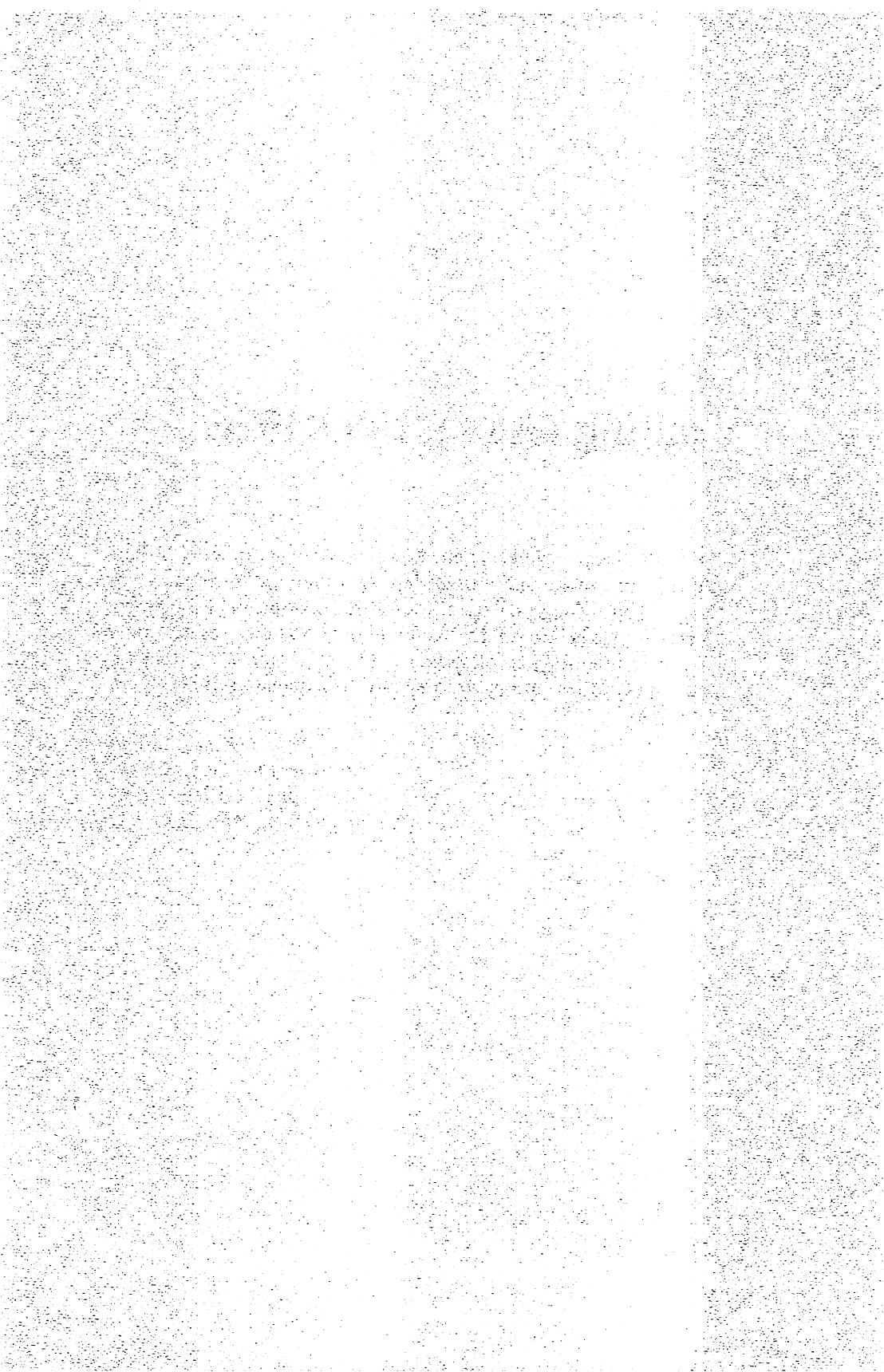


Part III

The Falling Curve, 1969-1976

The partners to the Treaty will carry out that treaty obligation only if their national interests are concordant with us, but not otherwise. There are many escape clauses, called by such names as “constitutional processes” and so on and so forth. So, we believe that we can rely only on ourselves, and only when our national interests are concordant with the national interests of others can we expect other nations to carry out, to implement, their obligation, not otherwise.

*Thanat Khoman,
Statement to the members of
the Foreign Correspondents’
Club of Thailand, August 19, 1969*



Chapter 5

Commitments Under Stress

If Thai-American relations had followed a generally upward-rising curve through 1968, 1969 proved to be a watershed year. That year marked the beginning of a period of growing strain between the United States and Thailand, as both governments responded, if reluctantly, to internal and external pressures arising from the continuing Vietnam War. At the heart of the issue lay a divergence of interest growing out of America's short-run military requirements in Southeast Asia and Thailand's long-run political needs. Those needs were to take on increased priority for Thailand with the passage of years and the growing certainty of the withdrawal of U. S. power from Southeast Asia. The story of the years 1969-73 in Thai-American relations is essentially one of how contending proponents of national interest struggled in both countries for the control of policy, and how the resulting policies either hindered or advanced the process of adjustment to the internal and external forces that were then forcing both nations apart.

With the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam, Thailand was to take on new importance as the primary base for residual American power in mainland Southeast Asia. Thai air bases provided the principal underpinning for whatever direct military clout the United States retained in Vietnam, as well as for American air and other operations in support of the anti-communist governments of Laos and Cambodia. Thai "irregular" forces were also called upon to play an increasing role in the Laotian civil war. In Washington, policy splits occurred between Henry Kissinger's National Security Council and Pentagon planners over the continued use of Thailand as a base for Indochina-related air operations and of Thai mercenaries in Laos. In Bangkok, a similar split was to develop between Thanat Khoman and the Thai government's military leaders over the extent to which the continued large-scale operation of U. S. military missions out of Thailand was either desirable or effective. One overarching question underlay the arguments of both sides: to what extent should or should not Thailand remain wedded in the future to America's war effort in Vietnam? At stake for the United States were a variety of tactical interests (e.g., continued access to those Thai facilities considered essential to American activities in Laos and Vietnam); at stake for Thailand was the continued flow of large-scale American aid, some economic but primarily military. More important for Thailand, however, was the critical problem of national survival.

The immediate problem lay in the apparent intention of the United States to withdraw its military power from South Vietnam. The threat posed to the Thais by such a withdrawal was acute. From 1950 onward, Thai foreign policy had been predicated on the American defense commitment embodied in the Manila Treaty and reiterated in the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué of 1962. Consistently throughout the preceding fifteen years, the RTG had sought reassurance of that commitment, and if possible its expansion. Based largely on that commitment, Thailand had abandoned its traditional policy of flexible, adaptive diplomacy in favor of an unqualified politico-military alignment with the United States against the emerging communist forces of the region. With Thailand so exposed, the prospect of a major American military withdrawal from South Vietnam presaged to many an eventual withdrawal from mainland Southeast Asia as well. The question this posed for the Thais was inescapable: given the trend of events in both South Vietnam and domestically within the United States, would the United States be either capable or willing to come to Thailand's defense in the event of a major communist threat?

The Thais first became seriously aware that there was a problem on March 31, 1968, when President Lyndon Johnson announced a partial unilateral halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and his own decision not to seek a second term as President. Major shock waves passed through the Thai government. Prapart, on learning of the bombing halt, declared: "The bombing must not be suspended but increased."¹ Leonard Unger, present with Thanat at a SEATO meeting at the time, reports that the Foreign Minister "went through the roof." Little more than a year before, Johnson, with whom the Vietnam War had been so identified, had assured the Thais, during a visit to Bangkok, of the unity of purpose of both nations in Vietnam, and of the firmness of America's intent to stay the course in that country. "Thailand can count on the United States to meet its obligations under the SEATO Treaty," Johnson had pledged. "The commitment of the United States under the SEATO treaty is not of a particular political party or administration in my country but is a commitment of the American people. . . . I repeat to you: America keeps its commitments."² A scant two months earlier, on January 20, 1968, Johnson had reiterated that pledge to the Thais in the same firm, unqualified terms.³ Now, with Johnson preparing to withdraw from the political arena, the old fears of American wavering and SEATO unreliability were resurrected. With Johnson gone, the validity of his promise would be put to the test: would the new American administration stand by Thailand as well?

¹ "A Change of Spots," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 12, 1969.

² *Department of State Bulletin*, November 21, 1966, p. 767.

³ "Johnson Renews Pledge to Thailand," *Bangkok Post*, January 21, 1968.

Speculation in Bangkok immediately centered on the probable policies of the next American President; the candidacy of Robert Kennedy was a source of particular concern. Reacting to the news of Johnson's pending abdication, Prime Minister Thanom expressed his belief that "if Robert Kennedy is elected, there could be a radical change in U. S. foreign policy which would mean the abandonment of Southeast Asia by America."⁴ Both Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, the latter of whom had visited Bangkok several times and was considered friendly to Thailand, were more highly favored. Through the remainder of 1968, the American election campaign was closely watched from Bangkok. Nixon's election in November was thus the source, at least at first, of great satisfaction within the Thai government. According to Thanom: "News of his election has given us confidence, since we know that he will not abandon Asia."⁵

Once in office, however, Nixon indicated that the policy of his administration would be significantly different from that of his predecessor. Realizing the political imperative of extricating the United States from Vietnam, Nixon announced early in his tenure that the subject of troop withdrawals from South Vietnam was "high on the agenda of priorities, and that just as soon as either the training program for South Vietnamese forces and their capabilities, the progress of the Paris Peace Talks, or other developments make it feasible to do so, troops will be brought back."⁶ Nixon anticipated no immediate withdrawals. On May 14, however, Nixon outlined in a nationally televised speech an eight-point plan for peace in Vietnam, which called for, among other things, withdrawal "of all non-South Vietnamese forces."⁷ The following month, on June 8, Nixon met with South Vietnamese President Thieu on Midway Island to announce the unilateral withdrawal of 25,000 American troops from Vietnam within the next two months.

Despite a public show of support, the Thai government was deeply concerned over the failure of the United States to consult with Thailand prior to its public announcement of withdrawals on Midway. Washington hastened to reassure the Thais of America's undiminished intent to stay the course in Southeast Asia. In March 1969, Nixon privately assured the Prime Minister of the firmness of America's commitment to Thailand, while Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Marshall Green carried the same message to Thanat.⁸ As an astute diplomat, however,

⁴ "Thailand Looks to Its Neighbors," *Bangkok Post*, April 2, 1968.

⁵ "Ministers Welcome Result," *Bangkok Post*, November 7, 1968.

⁶ "News Conference—January 5, 1969," in *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, p. 66.

⁷ *United States Foreign Policy, 1969–1970: A Report of the Secretary of State* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State Publication 8575, March 1971), pp. 356–60.

⁸ "U. S. Assures Thanom of Commitment," *Bangkok Post*, March 30, 1969.

Thanat had already dissected the conflicting signals emanating from Washington and had come to his own conclusions. The tentative American moves toward withdrawal from South Vietnam in the spring of 1969 and the increasingly strident attacks on America's Indochina policy then occurring throughout the United States belied the reassurances of America's politicians and diplomats, and indicated to Thanat the need to alter Thailand's political course so as to adjust in advance to the new realities forcing themselves on the region. As a result, Thanat, the father of the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué and architect of the Thai-American alliance, embarked on a new political tack: henceforth, he would publicly advocate the withdrawal of American military forces from Thailand and a limited rapprochement between Thailand and the communist powers of the region. Thanat describes the evolution of his thinking as follows:

In 1962, I thought that the U. S. presence was beneficial. When the U. S. involved itself in Vietnam, the U. S. government said, and we agreed to it, that it was for the purpose of stemming the aggressive communist tide. We agreed, and I advocated close cooperation with the United States because our objectives were similar. I did not want, and still do not want, Thailand to be swamped by communism.

But in 1968 the United States, for domestic reasons, was no longer able to pursue that objective. The turning point was the 1968 election. There was a change in policy—to a policy of “compromise and coexistence”—for better or worse, because it could not get the support of the American people—a change from resistance to communist expansion. It became obvious that the objective to resist, under which Thailand had joined with the United States, was no longer there. The objective was changed on the part of the U. S. It was not we who changed; it was the U. S. that changed. I felt that the presence of American forces in Thailand had lost its justification.⁹

Beyond the question of Vietnam policy, an accumulation of other irritants had lent credence to the growing Thai concern with the solidity of the American defense commitment. Developments within the United States had increasingly indicated that the support of the American people for the Vietnam War was wavering. Large-scale and repeated student demonstrations against the war had put its proponents on the defensive, and major American political figures, most notably in the U. S. Senate, were increasingly assuming a critical stance toward both the Vietnam War and American involvement in Southeast Asia generally. In September 1969, a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Senator Stuart Symington, opened a series of far-reaching hearings on the subject of “United States Agreements and Security Commitments Abroad.” Probing American military relationships with a large number of countries, subcommittee investigators examined American activities in Thailand through the summer of 1969; and from November 10 to 17, the full subcommittee turned its attention to the Ameri-

⁹ Interview, Thanat Khoman (Bangkok, July 21, 1976).

can security relationship with Thailand. Senator J. William Fulbright, in particular, assumed the offensive, asserting that the United States had no significant interest in maintaining defensive agreements with far-flung nations remote from the United States and its domestic concerns.

Committee members repeatedly probed administration witnesses on the extent of the American security commitment to Thailand and on the specific forms of assistance which that commitment entailed. Of particular concern to the Committee was a tentative joint Thai-American defense plan for Thailand which envisaged the use of American ground forces in the event of a major invasion by Pathet Lao or North Vietnamese forces. Known as the "Taksin Plan," the military agreement in question had originally been drawn up in the years 1964-66 as an outgrowth of the decision to undertake joint military planning within SEATO. The plan was comprised of two separate but related parts: "Project 22," an operational plan, and "Project 33," which covered the necessary equipment support. Under Project 22, American ground forces were to be deployed alongside Thai forces in the event of an invasion, with approximately two U. S. divisions operating in the North and Northeast. Overall authority would rest with the Thai Prime Minister, but with operational command falling to MACTHAI. Subsequent to its drafting, "P22" was the subject of bilateral meetings between Thai and American military officers.¹⁰

Having learned of the plan, the Symington Committee demanded access. Initially, however, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird refused, on the grounds (shared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff) that military contingency planning was no concern of Congress. Release of the plan was also opposed by the Thai government. Smarting from the rebuff, the Committee subsequently chose to regard the plan as a "secret agreement" which threatened to embroil the United States in another Vietnam. Under continuing pressure, administration witnesses repeatedly assured the Committee members that the plan was no more than a routine contingency procedure and constituted no binding commitment on the United States.

Not surprisingly, the Committee was unsatisfied with those explanations. Fulbright, in particular, remained unconvinced. Senator Jacob Javits, another Committee member, asserted that "the people ought to know everything that is knowable without impairing our security as to what we have been doing under these various agreements in Thailand on the theory that Thailand could very likely become another Vietnam."¹¹ On the floor of the Senate, Senator Frank Church charged that "the refusal of the Secretary of Defense to submit the plans to the committee is typical of the arrogant way the Pentagon has come to deal with Congress. On the one hand, the Presi-

¹⁰ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 7, 1976); interview, Gen. Kriangsak Chomanan (Bangkok, May 11, 1984).

¹¹ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 672.

dent assures the country that he does not intend to commit American troops to another Vietnam in Asia; on the other hand, our military plans for just such a contingency in Thailand are withheld from us.”¹²

By late summer, then, access to the plan had become a point of honor with the Committee. In point of fact, the Taksin Plan was a nonbinding planning document, the stock and trade of any functioning alliance. It had served as a convenient means by which to reassure the Thai government of the seriousness of the American commitment, but had little meaning in the real world of 1969, where U. S. forces were already overcommitted to Vietnam and where the Nixon administration was already on the political defensive over its Indochina policy. The existence of the plan, however, provided a convenient means through which the Committee could attack the administration and its Indochina policy and thereby pry loose those ties which in their view threatened to involve the United States even more deeply in Southeast Asia. By the summer of 1969, therefore, the Taksin Plan had taken on a significance more political than military.

Feeling the political heat, Laird attempted to assuage Committee concerns by declaring that “this particular plan was drawn in 1965 and as far as I am concerned does not have my approval and does not have the approval of this administration.”¹³ Separately, the Thais were informed that all such military planning was to stop. Laird, however, remained under continuing pressure to release the plan itself. A Defense Department offer to allow members of the Senate Foreign Relations, Armed Services, and Appropriations Committees to examine the plan at the Pentagon was refused on the ground that the circumstances would not allow Senators and their staffs to examine it in sufficient detail.¹⁴ Finally, Laird agreed to produce the plan for Committee members behind closed doors, after which the Committee pronounced itself satisfied. With the political battle over, Fulbright in fact was subdued, emerging from the hearing to remark only that there were no surprises in the plan despite some “interesting language,” and that whether or not the document constituted a commitment rather than a simple contingency plan was open to question.¹⁵

For its part, however, the Thai government was far from satisfied. The Prime Minister had asserted the view from Bangkok that Thai permission was required before the United States could legitimately release the document to either the public or the Committee. While sympathizing with the Thai position, State Department officials countered that in their view no such permission was required.¹⁶ Above all, the Thai wanted, as a sovereign right,

¹² “Pentagon Again Balks on Pact with Thais,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1969.

¹³ “Laird Opposes Contingency Plan with Thais,” *Washington Post*, August 22, 1969.

¹⁴ “Pentagon Again Balks on Pact with Thais,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1969.

¹⁵ “Secret Pact Shown to U. S. Senators,” *Bangkok Post*, November 9, 1969.

¹⁶ “Thailand and U. S. Differ,” *Bangkok Post*, August 1969.

to keep the details of Thai-American bilateral military planning away from the critical eyes of the Committee. Not surprisingly, then, the decision of the administration to release the text of the plan was taken as a breach of faith by the Thai government.

In addition to the Taksin Plan, the Symington Committee probed a wide range of sensitive topics affecting Thai-American relations, including the degree of American commitment entailed in the SEATO Treaty and in the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué, and the circumstances under which Thai ground forces were dispatched to South Vietnam. Fulbright, in particular, assumed a leading and generally caustic role in the exchange, alleging, among other things, that the Thai forces in Vietnam were “mercenaries” rather than volunteers.¹⁷ The Senate hearings and the charges made in them generated new strains in the Thai-American alliance. Thanat, counterattacking with extraordinary and undiplomatic vehemence against those in the United States whom he perceived as self-declared enemies of Thailand, later retorted that “Thailand refuses to recognize the jurisdiction and competence of the United States Foreign Relations Committee over the foreign policy of this country.”¹⁸

The criticism of Thailand which was taking place in the United States was attributable, in Thanat’s view, to “certain quarters in the United States, the press, particularly some elements of the New York-Washington axis media group, certain academic and congressional elements,”¹⁹ which, “as the struggle [for Vietnam] did not yield the expected results, . . . began to pour their bile to avenge their frustration on allied nations, such as Thailand. They crucified them for no other crime than that of faithfully cooperating with their country. . . .”²⁰ I think that if ever communist aggression were to be staged in Thailand, these people would be jubilant.”²¹

¹⁷ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 660. Questioned on this point, Nixon acknowledged that the United States was subsidizing the Thai expeditionary force in Vietnam, but went on to point out: “These are newly developing countries. They are unable to maintain their forces for their own defense. Therefore, we think that subsidy is correct. I can only say this: it seems to me it makes a great deal of sense. The Thais are in Vietnam as volunteers; and if they are willing to go there as volunteers, I would much rather pay out some money to have them there than to have American men fighting there in their place.” *Department of State Bulletin*, December 29, 1969, p. 619.

¹⁸ “The State of U. S.-Thai Relations and the Prospects for Their Future Development,” address to the American Chamber of Commerce (Bangkok, July 15, 1970), *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 9 (June-July 1970): 503-08.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Thanat Khoman, “What Does the U. S. Want in Vietnam?” *Collected Statements of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman*, Vol. VII (December 1970-April 1972), p. 13.

²¹ Interview given by Thanat Khoman to Harvey Stockwin of the *Sydney Bulletin* and *London Economist*, J. Cohn of Fairchild Publications, and Hilaire du Berrier of *American Opinion Magazine*, March 10, 1969, in *Collected Interviews of His Excellency Dr. Thanat Khoman, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand*, Vol. III (Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1969), p. 44.

So sensitive was Thanat and his Ministry to foreign criticism that rebuttals were issued on a tit-for-tat basis to negative reports in the American press (some of which were remarkably distorted and ill-informed). The ferocity of the Thai response to criticism in the United States, being so at odds as it was with Thailand's tradition of diplomatic subtlety, suggests a fundamental insecurity on the part of the Thai government concerning its security ties with the United States. Any criticism from the United States touched raw nerves with Thanat and other like-minded Thais. This sensitivity became all the more acute as the United States began to visibly withdraw from Southeast Asia.

THANAT'S VOLTE-FACE

From 1968 through 1972, Thanat assumed the leading role in the effort to extricate Thailand, at least partially, from the more overt bonds linking it both to United States policy in general and to the Vietnam War specifically. As a politician, Thanat undoubtedly perceived that long-term Thai interests required a fundamental alteration in his country's security relationship with the United States. He could look to the recent experience of other nearby Asian nations. One by one, the Western imperial powers had withdrawn over the years—the French from Indochina, the Dutch from Indonesia, and the British from Malaysia. In this broad historical process, it must have appeared that the same would happen with the United States, the last of the Western powers still present in force in Southeast Asia. It was against that unspoken background that Thanat implicitly strove to bring Thailand into the new pattern of relationships developing in the region. It is clear in retrospect that he sensed the departure of the United States from the region even before American policymakers would admit this could occur. Rather than leave the initiative to the United States on how and when it would depart, Thanat moved first.

In contrast to his political sparring, Thanat's policy for dealing with the anticipated American withdrawal was brilliantly calculated. Reading the shifting winds, he enunciated a new foreign policy based on three key principals: (1) the withdrawal of American military forces from Thailand, (2) the achievement of a rapprochement with the communist government in Beijing, and (3) the construction of a regional politico-economic framework capable of providing a counterbalance to expansive communist power.

Thanat had long been a proponent of a Southeast Asia regional organization, having played a conspicuous role in the founding of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Faced with what he perceived to be a declining willingness on the part of the United States to live up to its security commitments in the region, Thanat revived his concept of a "concert of Asia," which in the changed world of the 1970s would be capable of filling the vacuum left by the departure of American power. Thanat

referred to the entity he was proposing, which was political and economic rather than military in its concept, as "collective political defense":

A new direction has clearly emerged. The old concept of security based on military power and alliance, even if it may still be valid as far as nuclear and world powers are concerned, is likely to yield its place to a new concept of political security, or more exactly, a security founded on concerted and coordinated political actions, particularly in regard to smaller non-nuclear states. For the latter, now that the larger powers have already indicated their intention to relinquish or reduce their role and responsibility for overseas security, salvation lies in redoubling their national efforts and in working closely and systematically with those like-minded nations which share the same stake in peace and the secure well-being of the area.²²

Through the construction of such a united front of Asian nations, Thanat hoped to entice Beijing and possibly Hanoi into an attitude of coexistence and cooperation which force had been unable to compel. It is also clear from Thanat's remarks that SEATO was regarded as no more than a shell which, though still having its uses, was no longer a reliable source of military security. Short of disbanding the body, Thanat suggested, SEATO should be reoriented to serve as a "forum for political consultation."²³

Parallel with this multilateral approach, Thanat advocated the opening of an unprecedented dialogue with Communist China. If such a policy could be effected, the shift would be a radical one for Thailand, which for the previous twenty years had viewed the People's Republic as the principal foe and threat to Thailand's independence. The implication, unstated, was that Thailand was returning to her old policy of diplomatic independence and flexibility. As much as anything else in this period, it was important to Thanat that the image of Thai independence be restored. "Relations between Thailand and the United States," Thanat observed, "will evolve toward a more selective basis."²⁴

The third pillar of Thanat's policy complemented the other two: in a fundamental reversal of a half-decade of increasing military involvement, he asked that discussions begin looking toward the withdrawal of American military forces from Thailand. The Symington Committee hearings provided Thanat with a convenient vehicle with which to rationalize his demand: if the presence of U.S. troops in Thailand was causing tension in Thai-American relations, and if some misguided elements in the United States were fearful that U.S. troops might, despite both Thai and U.S. government assurances, become embroiled in a Vietnam-like conflict in Thailand, then the most effective way to ease those tensions and fears

²² Address of Thanat Khoman before the Board of Trustees of the Asia Society, February 24, 1970, *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 9 (February-March 1970): 347.

²³ Interview with Oliver Woods, *London Times*, May 1, 1969, p. 109.

²⁴ American Chamber of Commerce address, July 15, 1970, *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 9 (June-July 1970): 507.

would be to eliminate their source by withdrawing the forces in question.²⁵ Thailand, he claimed (misleadingly), had always held firmly to the belief that foreign troops should not become embroiled in another nation's internal wars.

Thanat's demand for the opening of withdrawal negotiations was in large part a reaction to President Nixon's announcement of the "Guam Doctrine" on July 25, 1969. He was making a virtue of necessity. Arriving on Guam from his historic meeting with the returning Apollo 10 astronauts, Nixon indicated at an informal press conference that, while the United States fully intended to uphold its treaty commitments in the Pacific (and here Nixon specifically referred to the American commitment to Thailand under SEATO), henceforth in nonnuclear military scenerios in Asia the United States would "furnish military and economic assistance when requested and as appropriate. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense."²⁶ American aid, in other words, would be supplementary, not primary, and in any event would not involve the use of American ground forces.

The enunciation of the Nixon Doctrine was fraught with major implications for the Thais. Would the United States abandon Thailand to its fate in the event of communist aggression? Nixon's specific reference to SEATO and Thailand in his Guam press conference was designed to allay those fears. Flying on to Bangkok from his Guam stopover, Nixon attempted to further reassure the Thais of the steadfastness of America's commitment to them. Arriving in Bangkok on July 28, Nixon observed that:

In returning once again to Thailand, I am deeply conscious of the fact that Thailand has a special interest in the strength of America's determination to honor its commitments in Asia and the Pacific. We will honor those commitments.²⁷

Speaking later the same day in a downtown Bangkok ceremony, he continued:

We will honor our obligations under that treaty. We will honor them not simply because we have to, because of the words that we have signed, but because we believe in those words, and particularly believe in them in association with a proud and a strong people, the people of Thailand. We have been together in the past, we are together in the present, and the United States will stand proudly with Thailand against those who might threaten it *from abroad, or from within*.²⁸

²⁵ "The State of Thai-U. S. Relations," as printed in the *Bangkok Post* of February 21, 1971, in *Collected Statements of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman*, Vol. VII, p. 22.

²⁶ *United States Foreign Policy, 1969-70*, pp. 36-37.

²⁷ *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 8 (June-July 1969): 430.

²⁸ *Department of State Bulletin*, August 25, 1969, p. 153.

In private meetings later with Prime Minister Thanom, Nixon reiterated his pledge. Thanom, in turn, indicated Thailand's full support for the principles contained in the Nixon Doctrine, adding that Thailand fully accepted responsibility for defending itself with its own armed forces. Thanom observed, however, that his country would require supplemental equipment from the United States; this Nixon promised to provide.²⁹

The occasion suited Thanat perfectly. Thailand, he asserted, had always accepted responsibility for its own defense, and had always agreed with the concept that local peoples bear primary responsibility for their own security and well-being (although this was, at the least, an exaggeration).³⁰ American troops in Thailand were related to the conflict in Vietnam. They were not then, nor had they ever been, involved in the suppression of Thailand's own insurgency. To prove the point, discussions on American troop withdrawals would begin immediately. As if to drive the point home, Thanat also announced—within hours of Nixon's departure from Bangkok—that Thailand wished to withdraw its 12,000 combat troops from Vietnam. Nixon, Thanat said, had urged the Thais to rely on their own defense resources to meet internal subversion, and Thailand's Vietnam force was now required at home to meet local defense burdens.³¹

For Thanat, the notion of limited withdrawals served two immediate functions. The removal of American forces would, in the first place, facilitate the rapprochement he was seeking to achieve with the People's Republic of China. At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, Thailand would demonstrate to the world her political, military, and diplomatic independence of the United States. This could be achieved without prejudice to Thailand's fundamental security because the withdrawals envisaged were in the first instance to be limited, and would involve the removal of only marginal elements unnecessary to the basic American force structure. The implicit American security guarantee provided by American forces would thus remain intact, but an important political point would be made.

The negotiations for withdrawal were good press for the United States as well. By 1969, concern was growing among many Thais over the large number of American forces in-country. In the fall of 1968, the RTG had proposed that any additional Americans being brought into Thailand be offset by the withdrawal of others already in place. Unger's agreement to the proposal had resulted in a de facto ceiling on the American troop presence,

²⁹ "We Will Stand on Our Own—Thanom," *Bangkok Post*, July 30, 1969.

³⁰ "Thai Foreign Policy in the Midst of a Changing World," address before the Thai Council of World Affairs, November 30, 1970, in *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 10 (October–November 1970): 76.

³¹ "Thailand Wants to Pull Troops Out of Vietnam," *Washington Post*, August 2, 1969.

which then stood at approximately 48,000.³² The actual withdrawal of some forces, on a limited scale, would ease those concerns and at the same time would reduce public pressure on Nixon at home.

On August 26, 1969, it was announced in a joint Thai-American statement that “talks to arrange for a gradual reduction of level of United States forces in Thailand consistent with the assessment of both governments of the security situation” would be held in the near future.³³ Soon after, on September 3, Unger and Thanat met to announce their agreement in principle on limited withdrawals; specified in their communiqué was the point that “the U. S. forces now stationed in Thailand have as their mission to protect the lives of American and allied fighting men in South Vietnam against the aggressors, rather than assisting Thailand in its internal defense against communist subversive activity,” and that the reductions being planned were consistent with that principle. Six days later, the political talks were followed by joint military consultations to determine the schedule for withdrawal. Simultaneously, however, Thanat began to pull back from his farthest position by indicating that Thailand did not intend to “drive out” the American forces from Thailand, and that if their presence was necessary to save the lives of U. S. troops in South Vietnam through bombings from Thai bases, they would be welcome to stay.³⁴ Some days later, Thanat further qualified his position by stating publicly that the majority of American forces stationed in Thailand would remain as long as needed to defeat communist aggression in Vietnam and Laos, and that only a “small number” would be withdrawn initially, mainly those forces not directly supporting the U. S. and allied troops in Vietnam.³⁵ On September 11, Thanat and Unger met again to review the results of the joint military group’s deliberations. This was followed by a joint statement, released simultaneously in Washington and Bangkok, announcing that approximately 6,000 U. S. military personnel would be withdrawn from Thailand by July 1, 1970. “The two governments,” the statement indicated, “will continue to evaluate the level of U. S. armed forces in Thailand in light of their assessment of developments in the Vietnam conflict.”³⁶

The 1969 withdrawal negotiations served as a pressure valve for the tensions that had begun to accumulate as a result of events in the United States and Vietnam. The fears of concerned bureaucrats and politicians on both sides of the Pacific regarding what had appeared to be an ever-

³² *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, pp. 767–69.

³³ USIS (Bangkok), Joint Thai-U. S. Statement, August 26, 1969 (mimeo).

³⁴ Theh Chongkhadikji, “U. S. Forced Withdrawal Talks Begin,” *Bangkok Post*, September 9, 1969.

³⁵ Theh Chongkhadikji, “Most GI’s to Stay Here for VN War,” *Bangkok Post*, September 9, 1969.

³⁶ USIS (Bangkok), press release, September 30, 1969.

mounting American presence in Thailand were allayed; in Thailand, in particular, a public impression had been created that the government had an independent policy of some sort for dealing with the Americans. The United States, at the same time, had retained intact the military structure required to carry out its mission in Laos and Vietnam. Actual withdrawals began shortly after the conclusion of the negotiations. Effected in several stages, the withdrawal of all 6,000 troops was completed by June 30, 1970, drawing the total U. S. troop presence in Thailand down to 42,000 from the previous September's high of slightly over 48,000.

With the completion of Phase I of the withdrawals, machinery was immediately set in motion to effect Phase II. A second round of joint military consultations was held on August 31, 1970, followed by a further meeting of Thanat and Unger on September 8. Out of that meeting came agreement for the withdrawal of an additional 9,800 military personnel by July 1, 1971. Through both unit deactivation and reductions-in-strength of remaining units, the goal was met on schedule, leaving approximately 32,100 U. S. military personnel in Thailand on May 31, 1971.

Beyond the issue of troop negotiations, Thanat was beginning to experience some success in his Chinese policy as well. The announcement on July 15, 1971, that President Nixon had accepted an invitation to visit Beijing bolstered Thanat's efforts. While it was shocking enough for Thai leaders that Nixon would actually venture into their archenemy's lair, what was even more disturbing was the fact that they had not been consulted or informed beforehand. As if to add salt to the wound, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, on his way to his secret meeting in Beijing, had stopped in Bangkok to reassure Thai leaders that the Thai-American alliance was on a sound footing and not subject to change. With the principal pillar of SEATO publicly seeking rapprochement with Communist China, the Thais could not help being impressed, if reluctantly, with the necessity of some sort of adjustment on their own part. "No matter from what angle one looks at it," one high-ranking military authority observed, "the Sino-American communique [i.e., the Shanghai Communiqué] constitutes a serious problem for our country. It calls for an immediate reconsideration of both defense plans and political concepts."³⁷ Thanat was authorized to continue his overtures.

No response from the Chinese was immediately forthcoming, however. It was not until early 1971 that the first signs appeared of Chinese interest in what the Thais had to offer. By October of that year, according to Ross Terrill, secret reciprocal contacts facilitated by the French (who had shortly before established full diplomatic relations with Beijing) had advanced to the point where the PRC was prepared to open talks leading to the establishment of formal state-to-state relations between China and Thailand. Osten-

³⁷ "Thanom's Middle Course," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 8, 1972, p. 12.

sibly, the Chinese were prepared to enter into such a relationship on the understanding that American troops would leave Thailand with the settlement of the Vietnam War, as Thanat himself had been claiming; in turn, Beijing was to pledge a policy of noninterference in Thailand's insurgent problem, consistent with Beijing's Five Principles of Coexistence.³⁸ On both major fronts, then—American and Chinese—Thai foreign policy in the fall of 1971 was on the brink of significant new departures.

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK: THE UNITED STATES REBUILDS

Any significant movement toward a major restructuring of Thailand's external relationships faced severe institutional and psychological obstacles within the political structure of the Thai government, however. As Thanat staked out new ground for his government, the pressures working against his policy approached the breaking point. That point was reached on November 11, 1971, when Thailand's ruling generals carried out what amounted to an internal coup against the Parliament and other rival political elements. As has happened more than a few times in Thailand's political past, the existing constitution was suspended, the Parliament dissolved, and the nation declared "secure" under the leadership of a new political grouping known as the "Revolutionary Party." In point of fact, the coup amounted to little more than an internal reshuffling of the existing hierarchy, with nearly all of the old faces from the previous cabinet resurfacing in the Revolutionary Party; significantly, however, Thanat's was missing.

There are many possible explanations for the November coup. Tension had been building within the government for some time, as opposition and dissident government MPs confronted Thanom in a legislative battle over the budget which threatened his government with parliamentary defeat. This was evidently too much for Thailand's conservative military leadership to accept from a Parliament lacking any sound political base. There are also indications that the coup may have been an outgrowth of factional struggles within the upper echelons of the government, with Prapart the principal engineer and beneficiary.³⁹

A second possible factor behind the coup lies in the discomfort felt by Thailand's military leaders with the new policy ground being staked out by Thanat and others of similar mind. Given the concentration of political power in the hands of Thanom, Prapart, and other military figures, it is

³⁸ Ross Terrill, "Reports and Comment—Thailand," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1972, pp. 10-14.

³⁹ For further details on the 1971 coup, see David Morell, "Thailand: Military Checkmate," *Asian Survey*, February 1972; and Michael L. Mezey, "The 1971 Coup in Thailand: Understanding Why the Legislature Fails," *Asian Survey*, February 1973.

obvious that Thanat could not have acted as he did without their approval or at least their acquiescence. At the same time, however, it seems equally clear that support for Thanat's policies within the cabinet was less than enthusiastic. By Thanat's own account, his military colleagues permitted his activities less out of agreement with his ideas than from fear of the logic of his arguments.⁴⁰ Given that fundamental ambivalence, Thanat was allowed to proceed only so far as the military authorities thought it in their interest.

By November 1971, apparently, that point had been reached. Threatened with loss of political control at the hands of an unruly Parliament, and ill at ease with the road down which Thanat was leading them, Thailand's military leaders opted in the November coup for the safe course: a return to traditional authoritarian politics and to the security of the American relationship. This, unfortunately, represented a fundamental misjudgment of American intentions in the region and of the changing nature of the Thai political climate. In both cases, the leaders of the Thai government were seeking in 1971 a retreat into a past that had become increasingly eroded and would soon become perilously insecure.

It is one of the misfortunes of this period that by 1969, and certainly by 1971, much of the idealism and goodwill had gone out of the Thai-American relationship. In earlier years, the American attitude toward Thailand had reflected what has been called a "diplomacy of admiration," a term that suggests the high regard in which Thai independence, culture, and diplomacy were held in official American circles. With the escalation of the war in Vietnam, the Thais had commonly been viewed and depicted as staunch, fighting allies who shared the American ideals of national independence, free enterprise, and individual liberty. Together, the United States and Thailand had been embarked on a crusade to prevent the submergence of those shared values by the onrushing tide of communist aggression. By 1969, however, much of that perception had changed. With the U. S. Congress growing more dovish by the day, Thailand's hawkish calls for a more vigorous prosecution of the Vietnam War met with scant welcome on the other side of the Pacific. Senatorial and other critics discovered new ground for criticism in the agreements, real and supposed, governing America's military involvement with Thailand. Some pointed with concern to the price demanded by Thailand for the support of its forces in Vietnam, suggesting that those forces were "Hessians" or "mercenaries"; others pointed with disapproval to the sizable contribution the United States was making to the Thai economy through its military construction and military and economic aid programs. On the public level, then, many Americans concerned with Southeast Asia began to suspect what others in the field had long been aware of: that with great sums of money to be made from the American

⁴⁰ Interview, Thanat Khoman (Bangkok, July 21, 1976).

presence, perhaps the Thais were not the noble and crusading idealists they had once supposed.

It is important to remember, in considering this, that American disillusion was not focused on Thailand alone. America's reevaluation of its relationship with Thailand was only one aspect of a more generalized malaise and frustration felt toward Southeast Asia as a whole. By 1969, the United States was, quite plainly, weary of the Vietnam War, disappointed with the results achieved in that conflict, and anxious for any plausible rationale that would allow it to extricate itself with a minimum of embarrassment and dislocation.

While the United States was so deeply immersed in the Vietnam fighting that little could be done to effect a dissociation there in the short term, other American programs in Southeast Asia could be dealt with more readily. In Thailand, by 1969, disillusion had overtaken the American aid program, leading to major cutbacks in the programs of all major field agencies. At the root of the agency cutbacks was a specific disillusionment with the counterinsurgency field. American forces in neighboring Vietnam had been conspicuously unsuccessful in their efforts to suppress the communist insurgency by force; while in Thailand, despite millions of dollars of aid devoted to counterinsurgency projects, the government effort to deal with the northern and northeastern insurgencies had also failed to achieve clear-cut results. Despite some fluctuation, the local insurgencies in all affected regions of Thailand had continued to grow steadily, if slowly, through the late 1960s, even as small armies of American military and development advisers had struggled with the problem in the field. By 1969, the counterinsurgency bubble, which had peaked in the years 1966-67, had deflated. Fear of deeper involvement in Southeast Asia, and failure to achieve the anticipated results, led to a decision on the part of the United States to get out of the counterinsurgency game.

The United States Information Service was the first major agency to quit the field in Thailand. Though USIS had generally welcomed the opportunity to do ideological battle with the enemy in the early 1960s, psyops operations in Vietnam and Thailand had been less than fully successful, and in 1969, under the directorship of Frank Shakespeare, the decision was consciously taken to remove USIS from the counterinsurgency arena; operations in Thailand were significantly cut back. USIS program costs in Thailand subsequently fell from \$2.9 million in FY 1970 to \$2.4 million in FY 1971, and \$2.1 million in FY 1972.

The Advanced Research Projects Agency, which had assumed the leading role in counterinsurgency research, decided, too, to abandon the counterinsurgency field. Though interest still remained within the agency, the Department of Defense was compelled to retreat, owing to growing Congressional pressure. Increasingly, criticism of ARPA's rural security research programs threatened to undermine funding for the agency's broader research

programs. The attack on the Defense Department's research program (and on social science research in particular) began in earnest in 1969, and was led by Senators J. William Fulbright and Mike Mansfield. Early criticism focused on DOD's conduct of what was termed "foreign policy research"—an area said to be more properly reserved to the State Department. In August of 1969, Fulbright successfully introduced an amendment to the FY 1970 Defense Authorization bill which reduced the Defense Department's research budget by \$9.5 million, including \$5 million cut from Project Agile.⁴¹ Shortly thereafter, Mansfield introduced a further amendment, which became Section 203 of the bill, specifying that:

None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act may be used to carry out any research project or study unless such a project or study has a direct or apparent relationship to a specific military function or operation.⁴²

DOD's social science and university research, Mansfield stressed, were the target. The immediate impact on this provision was to eliminate as much as \$10 million of DOD research projects.⁴³ Continuing pressure from Fulbright, Mansfield, and others in succeeding years convinced the Defense Department of the need to abandon its social science research program. Essentially an aberration in any event, counterinsurgency research was dropped in favor of a return to ARPA's more traditional function of weapons and systems research; Project Agile was gradually phased out. ARPA funding for Thailand, which had originally peaked at nearly \$10 million, fell to \$2.5 million in FY 1972 and to \$25,000 in FY 1973; the number of U. S. researchers under contract to ARPA, which had peaked at 192 in 1967, had by January 1972 dropped to only four. ARPA operations in Thailand were terminated in December 1972.⁴⁴

The experience in AID was similar, with the difference that AID had never been enthusiastic in the first place about the idea of harnessing development assistance to the plow of counterinsurgency. At the time it had been proposed, the counterinsurgency rationale had encountered wide resistance within the agency, based primarily on the objection that economic development was a difficult enough task by itself without the added and probably diverting job of propping up overseas regimes. Essentially forced on AID, therefore, the counterinsurgency objective was willingly relinquished in 1969, when AID priorities were reordered to emphasize the agency's more traditional economic development goals. AID's Public Safety

⁴¹ Department of Defense Appropriations for 1970, Report of the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Report No. 91-607, 91st Congress, 1st session (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 81.

⁴² PL 91-121, 91st Congress, S. 2546, November 19, 1969, p. 2.

⁴³ Deitchman, *The Best-Laid Schemes*, p. 423.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Program was terminated in FY 1973. By 1975, the transition of programs and goals was complete. In a statement provided to the Congress in June of that year, the objective of AID's program in Thailand was explained as being:

- to encourage Thailand's continued political and economic growth by—
 - helping the Thai mobilize their human resources while
 - reducing the economic disparities that exist among certain segments of the population and among various sections of the country.

Counterinsurgency was replaced by a strategy focused on improving the well-being of the rural poor, with specific concentration on (1) Food and Nutrition, (2) Population Planning and Health, (3) Education and Human Resources Development, and (4) Narcotics Control. Development assistance itself was shifted from grant funding to a mix of grants and loans.⁴⁵

The shift in AID policy corresponded with a general and continuous decline in the overall level of American economic assistance to Thailand, a trend that accelerated from 1969 onward. The decline was reflected in the rapidly falling number of Thai and American employees at USOM/Bangkok. From a high of 741 in 1968, the number of USOM personnel (Thai and American) plummeted to 210 by 1975.⁴⁶ From a peak of \$65.9 million in total obligations in FY 1967, U. S. economic assistance to Thailand fell by FY 1975 to a low of \$9.2 million.⁴⁷

The symbolic capstone to the U. S. exit from the counterinsurgency field was perhaps the departure of George Tanham in May 1970. Aware of the drift of American policy and sentiment, Tanham had come to the conclusion that he had accomplished all that he could under the circumstances. Following his departure, Tanham's position was downgraded from Minister to Counsellor (primarily because no replacement of sufficient stature could be found), and the title of his office was changed from Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency to Development and Security Section. The new head of that office was William Stokes, a foreign service officer who had served under Tanham but who lacked his authority and personal weight. Stokes was to report to the Deputy Chief of Mission, George Newman, who assumed the chairmanship of the Tuesday Group and inherited overall responsibility for Tanham's former functions; following Newman's departure, Unger undertook to chair the Tuesday Group personally. Stokes formed a low-level working committee for operations that carried on much of the work begun

⁴⁵ *Foreign Assistance and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1976*, Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 1st session, Part 2, pp. 564-74.

⁴⁶ "A Shift in Priorities," *Business in Thailand*, September 1975, p. 138.

⁴⁷ *Annual Financial Report, Cumulative Data as of June 30, 1975*, U. S. Agency for International Development, Office of Finance, USOM/Thailand, September 1975, pp. 1-3.

under the SA/CI, but for all practical purposes the American experiment in counterinsurgency was at an end.⁴⁸

WAIST DEEP: LAOS AND CAMBODIA

With the time-honored facades of moral crusading rapidly falling away, Thai-American relations were quickly reduced to their most pragmatic bases. With the withdrawal of American aid funds, complaints were increasingly heard from many Thais that what Thailand needed was technical specialists, not meddlesome generalists who interfered in domestic political concerns. Some American ideas that had met with particular resistance, such as the concept of bureaucratic decentralization, withered when no longer watered by substantial infusions of American financial support. To many Americans, it thus became evident that the welcome given American advisers and their advice had been closely related to the funds that had accompanied them.

On the military level as well, relations were reduced to their most fundamental terms. For the United States, with a declining military presence in South Vietnam, yet an undiminished need to retain intact its air power in Southeast Asia, Thailand offered a critical base from which to continue its air operations over Indochina. From the American perspective, the military slack left behind by departing American ground forces could be taken up by an increased reliance on American air support throughout the region. If anything, then, the value of Thai property rose in inverse proportion to the pace of American withdrawal from Vietnam.

America's growing need for Thai facilities was related not only to Vietnam but also to the requirements of Laos and, to an increasing extent, Cambodia. With the decline of American air activity over Vietnam, military missions over Laos had been increased. With the overthrow in 1970 of Cambodia's Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Thai-American involvement in that country also rapidly escalated. The intensive American utilization of Thai base facilities thus served to draw Thailand even deeper into the Indochina conflict just as the United States was in the process of withdrawing.

In Laos, fighting had, with brief exceptions, been continuous since the days of the First Indochina War, when the conflict in Vietnam had first lapped over its borders.⁴⁹ As permitted under Article 6 of the 1962 Protocol to the Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos, American military assistance had been provided the Royal Lao Government since 1964. Official American involvement in aerial activity over Laos had dated from February of that year. Bombing of Laotian territory along the Ho Chi Minh trail (in southern Laos) had begun in January 1965, with American air activity remaining at a

⁴⁸ Written comments, George Newman, August 29, 1977; also Tanham, *Trial in Thailand*, p. 150.

⁴⁹ *Symington Hearings*, Part 3—Kingdom of Thailand, p. 712.

high level thereafter. In 1964, U. S. planes had flown twenty strikes over northern Laos; by 1968, U. S. sorties for all of Laos totaled 67,000, with U. S. aircraft playing a prominent role in direct support of the RLG. American air activity over Laos continued at a high level through 1969 and peaked in 1970 and 1971, with U. S. aircraft flying 106,872 attack and 75,431 other missions the first year, and 95,495 attack and 91,069 other missions the second. Also, 8,823 B-52 sorties (or 70 percent of all B-52 strikes for Indochina) were flown over Laos in 1971.⁵⁰ In that year, 47 percent of U. S. tactical air strikes into Laos were flown from Thailand.⁵¹ The purpose of U. S. air activity over Laos, as explained by President Nixon on March 6, 1970, was (1) the protection of U. S. lives in South Vietnam through the interdiction of troop and supply movements along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and (2) reconnaissance and combat support requested by the Royal Lao Government.⁵²

The maintenance of that air effort, and indeed of the entire military supply program for Laos, was dependent on the intensive use of Thai facilities. In permitting their use, the Thais were motivated by special concerns distinct from those that allowed the use of Thai facilities and troops against North Vietnam. Whereas in the latter case it could be said that the Thais were acting in support of what were primarily U. S. objectives, in the case of Laos historical Thai ties to that country were involved, as well as the long-standing Thai concern over the consequences of a communist regime establishing itself on their long eastern border. For reasons of direct national interest, therefore, the Thais were willing to cooperate closely with the United States in Laotian operations.

Udorn and Nakorn Phanom were the primary bases for the Laotian support program. Both bases served as rescue centers for American, Thai, and Laotian airmen downed in missions over Laos and North Vietnam, and as departure points for the supply of remote Laotian outposts. Udorn, in addition to serving as the headquarters of the 7/13th Air Force and as the launch point for an undetermined number of bombing missions, housed the following units in their Laotian support capacities:

⁵⁰ *Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia: January 1972*, pp. 34-35.

⁵¹ The balance were flown from South Vietnam and from American carriers. In that same year, Thailand also accounted for 64 percent of all radical air strikes against North Vietnam. *Ibid.*, p. 36 (declassified material). The Thai Air Force was by that time no longer involved in combat sorties in Laos, the practice of having Thai pilots in Lao-marked planes fly out of Udorn having been stopped in late 1970. Thai Army and Air Force pilots were, however, earmarked to fly helicopter gunship missions in northern Laos in support of medical evacuation missions. *Ibid.*, p. 35 (declassified material).

⁵² "The Scope of U. S. Involvement in Laos," Statement by the President, March 6, 1970, in *United States Foreign Policy, 1969-70—A Report of the Secretary of State*, pp. 436-40.

1. The CIA installation responsible for the Thai “irregular” program in Laos. This facility maintained information on the Laotian order of battle, recorded information on Chinese road-building activity in Northern Laos, provided logistical and operational support to both Thai and Lao irregulars, and served as liaison with the Thai government unit (also located on base property) responsible for administering the Thai irregular forces in Laos.
2. The Deputy Chief/JUSMAG-Thailand, whose office administered the Defense Department-funded military assistance program for Laos.
3. Detachment One of the 56th Special Operations Wing, which was responsible for the training of Royal Lao Air Force pilots, forward air guides, and ground support personnel.
4. A helicopter detachment attached to the Office of the U. S. Army Attaché in Laos. Helicopter training of Laotian personnel—pilots, instructors, and mechanics—was conducted by a U. S. Army training team.
5. A Coast Guard unit operating the Loran navigational system, used to guide air strikes over both Laos and North Vietnam.
6. Air America and Continental Air, both of which operated on a (CIA) contract basis out of Thailand. Air America operations included the transport of personnel and supplies into and within Laos, performance of medical evacuation missions, and maintenance of all Royal Lao Air Force planes (except for C-47s, which were a Thai monopoly). As of January 1972, Air America employed 2,000 persons at Udorn—250 Americans, 150 Nationalist Chinese, and 1,600 Thais.⁵³

Nakhon Phanom, in addition to housing a large number of tactical and other aircraft, was the center of the “electronic battlefield”—the most sophisticated system of bombing then in existence. Near the base, in a large concrete blockhouse called “Task Force Alpha,” were housed two massive IBM-360 computers that received and processed signals from thousands of seismic and other detectors planted along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. From those data, base computers selected with great precision the exact site and timing of subsequent air strikes.⁵⁴ Air power of this nature, which increasingly utilized the capabilities of machines rather than men, underlay the feasibility of President Nixon’s “Vietnamization” program. The rapid mobilization and delivery of that air power would have been impossible, however, without the facilities made available by Thai cooperation.

⁵³ *Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia: January 1972*, pp. 12, 23, and 32 (declassified material).

⁵⁴ Michael Malloy, “The Death Harvesters,” *Far East Economic Review*, January 29, 1972.

Thailand was also enmeshed in the Laotian struggle in a more direct sense. Inside Laotian territory, Thai irregular forces were actively involved in military operations in support of the Royal Lao Government. By the winter of 1970, the military position of the Laotian government had again deteriorated sharply. Communist forces threatened the vital base at Long Thieng, leaving open the possibility of an imminent communist advance to the Mekong. Thailand's offer to send a volunteer artillery battalion to Laos to support the RLG (if requested to do so by the Lao government) sparked sharp dispute in Washington. The State Department, joined by other agencies, resisted the proposal, arguing that it constituted an unnecessary escalation and presented formidable military risks. These reservations were overruled, however, by Nixon, with the support of Kissinger. As described later by Kissinger: "[Nixon] was convinced and I agreed that to refuse the offer would raise doubts in Thailand about our commitment to its defense and might panic Souvanna."⁵⁵ Shortly after, on March 27, Thai artillery units joined Laotian government forces in a successful counteroffensive against the communist positions.

Thailand also fielded Special Guerrilla Units (or SGUs), irregulars composed of "volunteers" recruited inside Thailand by the Royal Thai Army for service in Laos.⁵⁶ Ostensibly operating under the overall command of the Royal Lao Army, the SGUs wore Laotian uniforms, and all Thai officers carried Laotian names and identity cards for the period of their service there. Pay, allowances, and training costs were paid out of the Defense Department's military assistance program and disbursed through the CIA liaison office at Udorn. Training was carried out at a number of sites in Thailand by a special detachment of sixty Special Forces personnel and by Thais under their supervision. As of January 1972, the United States was providing support for nineteen SGU battalions (numbering 6,812 men), with an additional 5,309 men in training in Thailand. As the result of a decision taken shortly thereafter to expand the SGUs, total SGU strength rose by September 1972 to 21,413.⁵⁷ The Thai units, particularly artillery, played a major role in the RLG's military operations through 1973.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 457. See also Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit, 1983), p. 170.

⁵⁶ While some "volunteers" were in fact just that, the officer and NCO cadre in the program were ordered to serve in SGU units just as they would be ordered to any other assignment. Service in Laos was considered to be good combat experience. *Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia: January 1972*, p. 19 (declassified material).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20 (p. 19 material declassified), 22-23, 32-33; Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Staff Report, June 11, 1973, 93rd Congress, 1st session; *Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973*, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁸ Thai forces refrained, however, from direct intervention in Laos. Faced with a deteriorating military situation, the RLG sounded out both the Thai and American govern-

In a similar fashion, Thailand was drawn into the emerging conflict in Cambodia. The process of political and military deterioration in Cambodia had begun on March 8, 1970, only two days after President Nixon's public disclosure of American operations in Laos. On that date, villagers in Svay Rieng province had demonstrated against the Viet Cong, who with the intensification of American bombing in Laos and North Vietnam had increasingly used Cambodian territory first as a staging area and later as a major logistical thoroughfare. On March 11, three days after the first provincial demonstration, government-sponsored demonstrations in Pnompenh destroyed the North Vietnamese and NLF embassies. On March 13, the government issued an ultimatum demanding the withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops from Cambodia within three days. A new wave of even more violent anti-Vietnamese demonstrations ensued in Pnompenh, followed on March 17 by armed conflict between Cambodian government and North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops near the Vietnamese border. The next day, March 18, Prince Sihanouk was formally ousted as head of state and replaced by a new government headed by Lt. Gen. Lon Nol and Prince Sisowath Matak.

From that point, events in Cambodia quickly snowballed, drawing the deeper intervention not only of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong but also of South Vietnam, the United States, and Thailand. On March 23, Sihanouk announced in Beijing the formation of a "National Liberation Army"; offers of support immediately followed from North Vietnam, the NLF, and the Pathet Lao. On March 27, South Vietnamese forces launched, with U. S. helicopter support and the approval of the new Cambodian government, their first major attack against Viet Cong strongholds in Cambodia; and on April 30, American and South Vietnamese troops attacked Vietnamese communist sanctuaries inside Cambodia in an operation intended "to protect airmen who are in Vietnam and to guarantee the continued success of air withdrawal and Vietnamization program."⁵⁹ Soon after, the United States announced its intention to supply the Lon Nol government with military assistance.

American assistance to Cambodia led to Thai involvement as well. The change of government in Pnompenh was warmly welcomed in Bangkok, which had long been at odds with Sihanouk and his brand of Cambodian neutralism. The Thai government, moreover, had much the same fears over Cambodia as it had for Laos—that is, a concern for the possible consequences of the establishment of a communist regime on its eastern border. (Cambodia had in recent centuries served, like Laos, as a buffer between Vietnam and Thailand. Military conflict over control of Cambodia had actually

ments in late 1971 about the possibility of obtaining the intervention of Thai regular forces. The request was refused by the Thais. *Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia: January 1972*, p. 5 (declassified material).

⁵⁹ "The Cambodia Strike: Defensive Action for Peace," address by President Richard Nixon, April 30, 1970, in *United States Foreign Policy, 1969-70*, p. 380.

erupted between the two states in the mid-nineteenth century, before a form of dual suzerainty was reestablished by gentlemen's agreement.) On May 28, 1970, Thailand formally recognized the new Lon Nol government. One immediate issue for the Thais was the question of military aid for Cambodia. Serious consideration was given within the cabinet to sending a Thai expeditionary force to Cambodia, but no troops were committed when the United States proved unwilling to foot the bill.⁶⁰ On August 3, however, Deputy Prime Minister Prapart revealed that Lon Nol and Thanom had reached an unwritten "gentlemen's agreement" that Thai troops could enter Cambodia at any time Thailand felt her security threatened by communist forces in that country.⁶¹ No regular Thai forces were actually ever sent, but an undisclosed number of Thai volunteers of Cambodian origin were trained and equipped with U. S. financial support to fight in that country.

United States funding also supported the training in Thailand of regular Cambodian armed forces personnel. During 1971, twenty-four Cambodian Army infantry companies numbering from 2,663 to 2,953 men were trained in Thailand. Between September 20, 1970, and March 30, 1973, a total of 5,790 Cambodian military personnel were trained in Thailand, some by U. S. Army, Air Force, and Special Forces personnel, but the greater part by the Thai Army and Air Force. A small number of Cambodian Air Force pilots were, along with Laotians, trained at Udorn by Detachment One of the USAF's 56th Special Operations Wing.⁶² As in the case of military assistance to Thailand, American instructors were limited by embassy directive to teaching teachers, as opposed to direct instruction of Cambodian personnel. An exception to this, however, was the U. S. program for training Cambodian Special Forces in unconventional warfare, in which U. S. Special Forces assumed a direct training role.

Thai facilities also played a major role in the American bombing of Cambodia. Through 1971, almost all U. S. air strikes in Cambodia originated in South Vietnam⁶³ (the exception being B-52 strikes flown from Thailand in support of the U. S.-South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia in May 1970, and in support of joint South Vietnamese-Cambodian offensives in January 1971).⁶⁴ With the withdrawal of American air and ground power from South Vietnam, however, Thailand assumed an increasing proportion of those strikes, to the point where, by 1973, Thailand (Ubon and NKP) was

⁶⁰ *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, p. 122.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶² "Flying into an Uncertain Past," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 11, 1974.

⁶³ *Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia: January 1972*, p. 33; *Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973*, pp. 31-33.

⁶⁴ "Thai-Based B-52's Hit Red Sanctuaries," *Bangkok Post*, May 2, 1970; "B-52's Back in Cambodia," *Bangkok Post*, January 15, 1971.

the sole base for the round-the-clock bombing carried on by the United States over Cambodia.

COVERING THE AMERICAN RETREAT

This was the situation in which Thailand and the United States found themselves at the dawn of 1972. The United States was in the process of drawing down its forces in South Vietnam, in pace with the progress of "Vietnamization" in that country. At the same time, however, the intensification of combat in neighboring Laos and Cambodia had led to increased Thai-American involvement in both countries. With the withdrawal of American power from South Vietnam, Thailand found itself in a position of growing importance as the primary launching site for both strategic and tactical American air strikes over Indochina. The substitution of Thai-based air power for the allied ground forces being withdrawn from South Vietnam was leading to a situation in which, in Ross Terrill's apt phrase, "Thailand started to become ransom to Vietnamization,"⁶⁵ for Vietnamization could only succeed with Thai-based American air power as its guarantor. As Congressional action made direct American intervention less and less feasible, and as the United States sought feverishly for ways to bolster the sagging regimes of Indochina, Thailand was to be asked even more than in previous years to provide the forces and air basing facilities which alone could hold the rear line for departing American power.

Though all Thai troops were withdrawn from South Vietnam by the end of 1972 (in keeping with President Nixon's "Vietnamization" program and with the desires of the Thai government), the Thai military presence in Laos was simultaneously expanded. Faced with a deteriorating military situation in that country, but unable to increase American involvement directly, Washington decided in January 1972 to expand the Thai irregular forces to their full authorized strength (Thai battalions in Laos had consistently been understrength). As a result of that decision, the total number of SGUs, which had stood at approximately 6,000 at the end of 1971, grew to 14,028 by the early summer of 1972, and to a high of 21,413 by September of that year. Though total numbers subsequently dropped, owing to decimation, desertion, contract attrition, and the absence of new recruitment after 1972, by April of 1973 Thai SGUs in Laos still numbered 17,330, divided between twenty-seven infantry and three artillery battalions. These were kept in place in Laos to increase the leverage of the Lao government in negotiations on foreign troop withdrawals.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Terrill, "Reports," p. 6.

⁶⁶ *Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973*, pp. 14-15 (declassified material on p. 15), 18.

Why should Thailand have increased its exposure to its enemies at the very moment when the ability and willingness of the United States to provide emergency military support were visibly declining? The fact that such an action was conceivably prejudicial to the long-term interests of Thailand was recognized in the Pentagon and elsewhere in the administration. Any deepening of Thai military involvement in neighboring countries, some argued, would be an unnecessarily provocative step that might negatively affect Thailand's long-term security and position in the region. Questions were also raised concerning the military effectiveness of the Thai units. These concerns were communicated by Defense Secretary Laird to National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger in a memorandum arguing against the SGU force increase. It is difficult to know what motivated Kissinger at the time, but it appears most likely that he was anxious to hold the tenuous fabric of the Laotian government together for as long as possible while he constructed a favorable negotiating scenario for Vietnam. Laird was overruled, and the SGU expansion was authorized.⁶⁷

In the air as well, Thailand's involvement in the Indochina conflict was visibly expanded in 1972. As the United States drew down its military presence in South Vietnam, American air power was increasingly transferred to Thailand, as the only secure base from which that power could be directed on a large scale in support of friendly forces in Indochina and against infiltration routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In April 1972, Defense Department sources had indicated that U. S. air power in Southeast Asia would in the future be concentrated in Thailand, and that an American air presence would be maintained in Asia "for many years to come."⁶⁸ In the fall of 1971, it was announced that the U. S. withdrawal from Thailand had been temporarily suspended by common agreement, owing to the increased need of the Laotian and Cambodian governments for U. S. air support; the protection of those countries from North Vietnamese aggression was, according to Thanat, "a mutual interest" of the United States and Thailand.

The suspension of the American withdrawal from Thailand was a prelude to a major policy reversal. In the spring of 1972, in response to a massive communist Easter offensive in South Vietnam, American air power in Thailand skyrocketed. American requests to dramatically augment the U. S. force presence in-country were readily acceded to by the Thanom government. Additional B-52s were flown in large numbers into U-Tapao between April and June. By May 6, ten squadrons of F-4 fighter-bombers had been ordered returned to Thailand.⁶⁹ In late June and early July, an additional 126 aircraft, including all fighter squadrons based at Da Nang and 8,000

⁶⁷ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 7, 1976).

⁶⁸ "U. S. May Center Airpower on Thailand," *Bangkok Post*, April 15, 1971.

⁶⁹ "U. S. to Reopen Takhli Air Base," *Bangkok Post*, May 6, 1972.

military personnel, were transferred from South Vietnam to Thailand in order to meet Nixon's Vietnam withdrawal schedule. All in all, U. S. air power in Thailand rose in the spring and summer of 1972 to the highest level ever: twenty-six tactical air squadrons, a dozen combat support squadrons, fifty-eight B-52s, and eighty-six KC-135 tankers.⁷⁰

One result of the sudden influx of American men and planes was a serious overcrowding at Thai facilities. This necessitated the reopening of the air base at Takhli, which had been closed in 1970, and the opening at Nam Phong (in May 1972) of a seventh base (a partially completed airfield that had originally been planned for B-52 staging but whose construction had been halted in 1968). Takhli became the base for F-111 tactical fighters, which in their eleven months of combat flying prior to the bombing halt of August 15, 1973, delivered more than 179,000 bombs over Indochina.⁷¹ Temporary home to 2,100 marines and three bomber squadrons, Nam Phong launched flights of F-4 Phantoms and A-6 Intruders on an average of one every fifteen minutes, day and night, through the spring and summer of 1972.⁷²

By mid-summer 1972, U.S. military strength in Thailand had risen from 32,200 (the number fixed by Thanat's Phase II ceiling) to more than 45,000 men plus 600 aircraft. Throughout the period of the American buildup, however, the Phase II ceiling officially remained in effect, as the additional American forces being brought in were, by mutual consent, considered to be "temporary." This arrangement grew out of an agreement (made at the time of the buildup) that the United States could bring in additional personnel up to the level at which the U. S. presence had peaked in 1968-69, a level of about 48,000. This, in the haste of the moment, avoided the necessity of negotiating a new ceiling.

Following the repulse of the communist Easter offensive, however, America's "temporary" forces remained firmly in place, the Thai government having acceded to a further American request to be allowed to maintain its air units intact as a guarantor of the Paris and Laotian cease-fire agreements and as vital support for the hard-pressed Cambodian government. Thai-based air power was subsequently used in the extraordinarily heavy bombing of North Vietnam which occurred on Christmas Day and New Year's Day of 1972 (operation "Linebacker"), during which Thai bases (and particularly U-Tapao) launched strike aircraft on a round-the-clock, day-and-night basis.

The denouement of the American buildup took place at approximately the same time as the Christmas bombing, when, on December 16, 1972, it

⁷⁰ "Thai/U. S. Relations," Department of Defense working paper, December 1972 (mimeo).

⁷¹ *Bangkok Post*, July 11, 1972.

⁷² "A Brief History of the F-111 at Takhli," U. S. Air Force, July 1974 (mimeo).

was announced in Bangkok that the Thai government had granted the United States permission to move its military headquarters for Southeast Asia to Thailand in the event of a cease-fire in Vietnam. That transfer occurred early in 1973 with the dismantling of U. S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) in Saigon. Simultaneously, the United States Support Activity Group (USSAG) was created, with headquarters at Nakorn Phanom. Officially billed as a mop-up command concerned primarily with establishing the fate of American servicemen still missing in action, USSAG in fact functioned as the command headquarters for American military activities in Indochina following the American withdrawal from Vietnam. Also known by the code name "Blue Chip," USSAG's main function was to oversee and coordinate American air activity over Indochina. Though active American bombing by that time was occurring only in Cambodia, USSAG continued its tasks of target updating, planning bombing missions, and running reconnaissance flights for the entire Indochina theatre. Other USSAG functions included the operation of an integrated radar system for plane direction and computerized bombing, and a sensor-monitoring facility known as DART—essentially a reduced version of NKP's electronic battle-field center.⁷³ With the establishment of USSAG, then, Thailand became in the truest sense of the word the last bastion of American power in mainland Southeast Asia.

Even with the repulse of the Vietnamese communist offensives of Easter and Christmas 1972 and the conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, Thai-based American air power remained intact to be used, as United States and Thai spokesmen explained it, to ensure communist compliance with the cease-fire agreements. In April 1973, one year after the Easter Offensive buildup, bases in Thailand still housed 419 U. S. strike aircraft, 56 B-52s, and 43 noncombat support aircraft, not including assorted aircraft based at Udorn related to U. S. military assistance to Laos. U. S. forces in-country numbered 44,000 personnel, of whom 36,690 were attached to the U. S. Air Force, and the remainder were associated with MACTHAI, the Deputy Chief/JUSMAG, SEATO, the U. S. Army Support Command/Thailand, and USSAG. Except for Germany, this represented the largest concentration of American forces in any country outside the U. S. at that time.⁷⁴

The expanded American air presence in Thailand from the spring of 1972 onward raises two major questions: (1) how was the massive American presence in Thailand justified, even after the Easter bombing had ceased and the Paris Accords had been signed; and (2) why did Thailand permit itself to be drawn deeper into the Indochinese conflict at the very moment when its

⁷³ Michael Morrow, "America's Bastion," *Far East Economic Review*, July 2, 1973.

⁷⁴ *Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973*, pp. 4-5.

sole protector, the United States, was visibly withdrawing? The answer to both questions lies in the makeup of the respective Thai and American governments of the time.

In the United States, the question of an appropriate scale for the American military presence in Thailand became the subject of a running, though low-key, dispute within the Nixon administration—with the Department of Defense and the White House, represented by three successive Secretaries of Defense and by National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger respectively, the principal antagonists. That dispute had first flared in January 1972, as already noted, over the question of increased Thai “irregular” involvement in Laos. Soon, however, the rapid buildup of American air power overshadowed all other issues. By the fall of 1972, that presence had become a source of concern to responsible officials in the Department of Defense. According to Department analysts, the American force structure in Thailand was top-heavy for the mission assigned it. The existing seven bases were overcrowded, overloaded with aircraft, and excessively expensive to maintain, while the aircraft on those bases lacked an adequate number of targets; in the absence of a force mission, morale problems were developing among the servicemen. At the heart of the DOD position was a question of management: the United States Air Force, it was asserted, could perform its mission in Indochina more efficiently and more effectively with fewer planes; under the circumstances, it was felt, two bases could be closed and their forces withdrawn without seriously affecting American theatre capabilities. These views were communicated to the Joint Chiefs in a memorandum from the Secretary of Defense dated September 1972. Since all such decisions required White House approval, the memorandum came before Henry Kissinger in his capacity as National Security Adviser to the President. Kissinger vetoed the plan.

The Defense Department persisted, however. Some months later, in February 1973, Secretary of Defense Elliot Richardson called (in a similar memorandum) for a reduction in force in Thailand, again on the grounds that an effective deterrent capability could be maintained with far fewer forces. Kissinger remained adamant, however, directing in a memorandum, dated April 6, that the Defense Department cease all further planning for a force drawdown in Thailand.⁷⁵

The passage of the Fulbright-Aiken Amendment, terminating American bombing of Cambodia after August 15, 1973, prompted one final DOD effort. With the rationale for American bombing in Indochina effectively removed by the Congressional ban, and with no credible mission left to the American men and aircraft still stationed in Thailand, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger proposed, in a further memorandum to Kissinger, a

⁷⁵ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., May 7, 1976).

reduction in the force level of the U. S. Marine air wing stationed at Nam Phong. No reply to that memorandum was ever received.⁷⁶ By that time, however, events had passed the United States by, leaving the decision on the future U. S. military presence in Thailand not in Washington but in Bangkok.

Kissinger's reasons for blocking DOD's plans are not difficult to find. Whereas the Defense Department was approaching the question of force structure from a military management standpoint (though the Defense position was not without its element of concern for Thai interests), Kissinger's perspective was highly political. Above all, he was seeking to maintain a visible, high-profile concentration of military power in Thailand as a deterrent to renewed communist aggression in Vietnam and Laos and as an indispensable support for the tottering government of Lon Nol in Cambodia. Thai-based air power, then, was to be the lever with which the United States could deter or beat back new or continuing communist aggression in Indochina—first, as a cover for “Vietnamization” and the American withdrawal from Vietnam, and later as a means of guaranteeing communist compliance with the Paris Peace Accords. In Laos and Cambodia in particular, American air power (and Thai ground support) was viewed as essential to prevent the collapse of the non-communist governments in those countries—a development that would have imperiled the settlement which Kissinger was then trying to construct in Vietnam. While this served American purposes in those countries, it nevertheless compromised Thai interests in the region. By permitting use of its forces and its territories for stepped-up attacks on nearby communist elements, Thailand inevitably exposed itself anew to communist wrath and retribution. As analysts in the Defense Department correctly perceived, the intensive utilization of Thai facilities stood as a bar to the adjustments Thailand would inevitably be forced to make to the new political realities created by the American withdrawal from Indochina. The question remained, when the United States had departed, would Thailand be left to stand alone?

It is fairly clear, then, what led the United States to its position. What, however, led the Thais to accept a position so apparently prejudicial to their long-term interests? The signs that the American commitment to Southeast Asia was fading were ubiquitous. Though the Nixon administration had attempted to maintain a brave front before its allies, the U. S. Congress had increasingly demonstrated its disinclination to support further U. S. military endeavors on the mainland of Southeast Asia—or anywhere else, for that matter. The landmarks of that process were a series of Congressional amendments and resolutions which progressively restricted the administration's freedom of military action on the Southeast Asian landmass.

Of most concern to Thailand was the Cooper-Church Amendment to the Defense Appropriations Act of 1970. Passed in the Senate on December 15, 1969, Cooper-Church stated that “in line with the expressed inten-

⁷⁶ Ibid.

tion of the President of the United States, none of the funds appropriated by this Act shall be used to finance the introduction of American ground combat troops into Laos or Thailand.”⁷⁷ As a follow-up to Cooper-Church, the Senate passed, on July 14, 1970, an amendment to the Armed Forces Appropriations Authorization Act of 1971 barring the use of appropriated funds for the support of Vietnamese “or other free world forces” in actions designed to provide military support and assistance to the governments of Laos or Cambodia.⁷⁸ With Cooper-Church barring the use of American ground forces in Thailand or Laos, and with the Fulbright Amendment preventing (theoretically) American support of Thai proxy forces in Laos and Cambodia, all that remained to the Nixon administration for the support of those countries was American air power. Operating out of Thailand, that lever continued to be used liberally through the summer of 1973, when it, too, was prohibited by the passage on July 1 of the Fulbright-Aiken Amendment. Terminating all U.S. funding “directly or indirectly” for combat activities by United States military forces “in or over or from off the shores of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia” after August 15, 1973,⁷⁹ Fulbright-Aiken in effect forced a total cutoff of the American bombing of Indochina, thus legally ending the mission of the approximately 450 aircraft and 45,000 U.S. military personnel then stationed in Thailand.

THE PRICE OF COMMITMENT

If a gap between illusion and reality existed for the Thais where American intentions were concerned, the United States government did not go out of its way to dispel it. The Nixon administration, in fact, continuously sought to bolster Thai confidence that America, if called on, would come to their nation’s aid. Vice-President Spiro Agnew, in a January 1970 visit to Bangkok, reaffirmed to Thanom in a private meeting that the United States intended to uphold its responsibilities under the SEATO Treaty and would continue to shield Thailand from communist aggression.⁸⁰ One year later, on January 7, 1971, Defense Secretary Melvin Laird reassured Thanom in another Bangkok meeting that the United States would keep its commitments to Asia and would make available to Thailand increased military aid through the 1970s.⁸¹

Two weeks later, on January 21, Nixon informed Thanom in a personal letter that the United States would stand by its commitment to Thailand; according to Thanom, Nixon’s letter indicated that United States coopera-

⁷⁷ *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, p. 574.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

⁸⁰ “U. S. Will Stand by Thailand,” *Bangkok Post*, January 5, 1970.

⁸¹ “Laird Promises Aid Increase,” *Bangkok Post*, January 8, 1971.

tion with Thailand would continue at the same level as it had to date.⁸² On July 6, 1971, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger assured Prime Minister Thanom that the United States did not intend to disengage itself totally from the region and would remain firm in its commitment made to Thailand under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.⁸³

Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific Affairs Marshall Green carried the same promise to Thai leaders during a March 8 stopover in Bangkok made shortly after Nixon's China trip.⁸⁴ In April 1972, as North Vietnamese troops poured across the Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), Nixon again assured Thanom by private letter that the United States would stand by Thailand.⁸⁵ In October 1972, that pledge was reiterated by Nixon to Thailand's newly appointed Ambassador to the United States, Anand Panyarachun. The United States, Nixon told Anand, intended to keep its treaty commitments to Thailand and to continue providing military and economic assistance to help Thailand maintain its stability and independence.⁸⁶ The following month, White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig carried a personal letter from Nixon to Thanom assuring the Prime Minister that the United States would continue its full economic and military support of Thailand.⁸⁷ Given the mood of the U. S. Congress and of the American public at the time, however, it is clear that (administration instincts notwithstanding) the United States would have been neither willing nor able to defend Thailand in the event of a serious threat to its security.

Nevertheless, the repeated assurances of support offered by an impressive array of responsible American officials did succeed in convincing many of Thailand's military leaders that the United States could indeed be relied on to stand by Thailand in the crunch. On February 24, 1973, General Kris Sivara, Deputy Army Commander-in-Chief, stated that: "The American presence will act as a deterrent against any major communist offensive in Indochina. . . . It also gives us a warm feeling of security."⁸⁸ Thailand's leaders seemed unwilling to believe that the United States would actually abandon Thailand and Southeast Asia to their fates. They were undoubtedly reassured by President Nixon's decision to mine the port of Haiphong and by his intensified bombing of Haiphong and Hanoi in December 1972. Their concern as to American intentions was also allayed, it appears, by the stiff

⁸² "Nixon: We Abide by Commitment," *Bangkok Post*, January 21, 1971.

⁸³ *Bangkok Post* (date uncertain).

⁸⁴ *Federal Affairs Bulletin* 11 (February-March 1972): 166, 167, 177-79.

⁸⁵ *Bangkok Post* (date uncertain).

⁸⁶ "Nixon Lauds Thais," *Bangkok Post*, October 3, 1972.

⁸⁷ "Haig Promises Thanom Full Support from U. S.," *Bangkok Post*, December 22, 1972.

⁸⁸ Theh Chongkhadikji, "U. S. Bases to Stay as Deterrent," *Bangkok Post*, February 25, 1973.

resistance being offered by the Nixon administration to the domestic peace lobby in the United States.

What Thanat had clearly seen several years earlier, Bangkok's generals were unable to perceive in 1972 and 1973. Or were they? As strong anti-communists, Thailand's military leaders naturally, and as a matter of national interest, were inclined to support any policy that would hold in check the communist forces of Indochina. This would account, in particular, for the Thai government's willingness to involve itself more deeply in Laos, where Thailand was perceived to have a continuing and overriding security interest. It is likely that the more perceptive among them did in fact understand that the United States was in a process of withdrawing from mainland Southeast Asia, and that the withdrawal from Vietnam was only one stage in that process. It is likely also that, as highly conservative military men, Thailand's leaders were ambivalent as to how to deal with that situation. Should Thailand continue to tie its security to the American defense commitment, or should the nation venture alone into the uncertainty of an attempted rapprochement with Thailand's longtime enemies? Thanom, Prapart, and the balance of the Thai military hierarchy remained wedded both philosophically and practically in 1972 and 1973 to the concept that Thailand's security was best assured by a close relationship with the dominant power of the region. In their perception, that power remained the U. S. Though evidence was abundant to indicate the declining validity of that perception, the predilections of Thailand's leaders strongly inclined them to follow the safer course.

Evidence suggests that material support accruing to the Thai military establishment may have also played a role in tipping the balance toward the United States—for the United States still held one trump card with which it could bargain to obtain the Thai concessions necessary to pursue its tactical objectives in Indochina. That bargaining chip was military assistance. Provided in large quantities and in a variety of forms, military assistance constituted the grease that kept the machinery of the Thai-American alliance running through the difficult years 1969-73. That aid was generally divisible into two major segments: appropriated program funds and supplementary Department of Defense add-ons. Under the allocation system then in effect, the total of add-ons could approach or even surpass the official program level. For several years, the program level for American aid to Thailand had remained at approximately \$60 million. It will be recalled, however, that under the 1967 agreement governing the dispatch of Thai combat forces to South Vietnam, the Department of Defense-funded military assistance program for Thailand was raised from its original level of \$60 million to \$75 million for both FY 1968 and FY 1969. Add-ons, including the cost of support for Thai forces in Vietnam, raised the total 1969 expenditure level to \$106 million. In FY 1970, the program figure for Thailand returned to \$60

million, but other supplemental allocations raised the level of actual expenditures to \$104 million. In 1971, when the program ceiling was again fixed at \$61.6 million, actual expenditures totaled \$89 million.⁸⁹ In 1972, as U. S. military forces poured into Thailand from both Asia and the United States, the level of U. S. military assistance soared. Again the program figure for DOD-funded military assistance was set at \$60 million, yet the actual level of assistance provided in 1972 more than doubled that figure. On top of the officially programmed \$60 million, there was added \$15 million in what was known as "Additional Assistance to Thailand," or AAT. This "additional assistance" was provided for in a March 1972 exchange of letters between Major General Andrew Evans and Air Chief Marshal Dawee Chulyasappa, in which the United States agreed to provide the Thais with an additional \$15 million in military assistance for 1972, on the understanding that they in turn would add to their military budget for 1972-73 an additional \$20 million to finance "specific mutually agreed means to improve the military readiness and capability of the RTARF."⁹⁰

Officially explained as a one-shot add-on designed to build up Thai forces to cope with the greater external threat posed by developments in Laos and Cambodia and by Thailand's own insurgency, the AAT program was in reality a vehicle for circumventing the restrictions imposed on U. S. involvement in Cambodia by the Cooper-Church and Fulbright amendments. Under those two amendments, the United States was barred from sending its own ground forces into either Laos or Cambodia, or from providing MAP financial support to Thai forces aiding the governments of those countries. In the face of those prohibitions, the AAT attempted to continue American combat support to Cambodia by indirectly funding Thai emergency forces. The \$15 million being provided by the United States was theoretically earmarked for the use of the Thai armed forces, with no formally stated relation to Cambodia operations. This aid was provided, however, on the understanding that the RTG would supplement its defense budget by a comparable sum, which would be freed by the American assistance from alternative uses; that increment, drawn in a legal sense from purely Thai funds, was to be used for possible Cambodian operations, including an upgrading of both air and ground forces designated for possible use in that country.⁹¹ AAT also included \$20 million in PL-480 funds, which acted as budgetary support to free Thai foreign exchange for Foreign Military Sales (FMS) purposes.

Other military assistance add-ons provided by the United States during 1972 included a special increment of \$4.5 million for helicopters and ar-

⁸⁹ *Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973*, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹¹ Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., May 7, 1976).

mored personnel carriers (promised the Thais by Vice-President Agnew on his visit to Bangkok in June 1972); a further \$6.5 million in helicopters, given in lieu of the Hawk missile batteries originally promised when Thai forces were sent to Vietnam (by 1972, it had been judged that the Hawks had become excessively expensive and were no longer suited to Thailand's defensive needs); \$1.7 million worth of equipment released to the Thais from the Overseas Replacement Training Center (ORTC), where Thai troops bound for Vietnam had been trained; \$13.6 million in "excess transfers"; and \$26.86 million in equipment used by Thai forces in Vietnam and turned over to them at the time of their departure.⁹² In the latter case, it had been agreed when Thai forces were dispatched to Vietnam in 1967 that those forces would be permitted, on their return, to retain their U. S.-supplied equipment. In fact, however, large-scale exchanges of used equipment for new were permitted, on a one-for-one basis, at U. S. depots in Vietnam some four to six months prior to the departure of the Thai forces. The difference in value between the new and used equipment, unaccounted for in official figures, resulted in an undervaluation of the equipment retained by the Thais. In the evaluation of one Defense Department analyst, the actual value of the equipment transferred to the Thai forces in Vietnam totaled closer to \$50 million than \$26 million.⁹³

The net result of these assorted add-ons to programed military assistance levels was that in 1972 U. S. military aid to Thailand totaled \$128.3 million (not including the excess value of Vietnam-related equipment), more than twice the value of the officially planned program. Calculated differently, U. S. aid may have risen as high as \$146.25 million.⁹⁴

In FY 1973, the programed level of military assistance dropped substantially, from an original figure of \$60 million down to \$35.8 million. As in previous years, considerable excess funding was added to the program figure, so that total U. S. military assistance was substantially higher. The search for additional excess was in fact the object of an "intensive" embassy effort. Nevertheless, the total amount of American assistance for 1973 remained considerably below the level of the previous year. This decline is largely explained by the fact that, beginning in FY 1973, U. S. Military Assistance Supporting Funds (MASF) were subsumed under the Military Assistance Program (MAP), which, falling under the Foreign Assistance Act, required Congressional approval through the authorization and appropriations processes. Beginning in FY 1973, therefore, the Thai military assistance program was subject to far more legislative control and scrutiny than in the past. Through the years of the Vietnam War, in fact, such scrutiny had been all but non-existent.

⁹² *Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973*, p. 9.

⁹³ Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., May 7, 1976).

⁹⁴ *Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973*, p. 9.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the rapid and large-scale augmentation of American military assistance to Thailand in the years 1970, 1971, and 1972 served in part as a means to placate Thailand's military leaders while the United States continued to utilize Thailand's military facilities. In both countries, then, policy was led by essentially tactical considerations.

ADJUSTMENTS IN BANGKOK: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

Eventually, Thailand's leaders did begin a slow process of readjustment. The necessity for some sort of accommodation with the future was impelled by three major developments. The first was President Nixon's visit to Beijing in February 1972—a development that indicated a dramatic easing of the hostility which had long prevailed between Thailand's closest ally and her greatest enemy; if Thailand chose to retain her militantly anti-Chinese posture, she would henceforth be alone. The second development was the signing of the Paris Peace Accords. Indications of a breakthrough had surfaced in October and November 1972, with the actual signing of the Peace Agreements taking place on January 28, 1973. At that point, no doubt could remain in the minds of Thai government leaders that the U. S. withdrawal from Vietnam would be complete and final. The third major development was a precipitous decline in U. S. military aid in 1973.

Signs of pending changes in Thai foreign policy first began to appear in the summer of 1972. In July, Boonchu Rojanastien, the influential director of the Bangkok Bank, made the following remarks in a widely publicized speech:

As Americans, you see us as corrupt, trafficking in drugs, full of bureaucratic red tape, alien bills, etc. On our part, we complain about your military bases, your hippies, your Americanization of our culture, your arrogance. But whatever dissatisfactions there are with each other—America has been the closest friend and ally of Thailand for the past 20 years. For the past 20 years you have served us well, and we have served you well. But the time, I think, of America being our closest friend and ally is coming to an end. Perhaps not of our own choosing, it's more of yours. When the time comes and we shall have to part, let it not be said that Thailand broke away, but rather that the national interests of both our countries made it undesirable for the United States to have exclusive rights over Thailand's relationship. But let us remain good friends. . . .

For example, we are grateful that the U. S. has given us a protective umbrella for many years. How can we now refuse your request to open up an air base, say at Takli? The Thai nature would allow this even if it were against our better judgment. Yet in giving in to such a request, we have virtually allowed the U. S. to bind us to her, and taken away the opportunity of greater flexibility in our foreign policy. The more you want to get out of Vietnam, the more you tie up Thailand. And when the time comes for you to withdraw, we will be blamed for "flexibility" again. Is this really fair to us?⁹⁵

⁹⁵ "Bend With the Wind," speech of Boonchu Rojanastien before the American Chamber of Commerce, Bangkok, July 1972, in *Thai-American Business* 4 (July-August 1972): 18-24.

Also in the summer of 1972, Thailand began a limited opening to China. In September, a Thai ping-pong team visited Beijing at China's invitation. Accompanying the team were its leader, Police Lt. Gen. Bhumpol Lohachala, and Prasit Karnachanawat, the Deputy Director of Economics, Finance, and Industry with the National Executive Council (the RTG's executive unit); officially acting as "adviser" and traveling in a "private capacity," Prasit met with Premier Chou En-lai and other high-ranking Chinese officials. While in Beijing, the Thais discussed with Chou the initiation of trade and cultural contacts. Prasit indicated to Chou that Thailand would continue to recognize the Republic of China (ROC) for the foreseeable future, and asked that Beijing cease its support of Thai insurgency. Chou is reported to have indicated that China would continue to support the valid aspirations of neighboring peoples, but did not question Thai recognition of the ROC or Thailand's ongoing military alliance with the United States. Following the Thai visit, Radio Beijing ceased its theretofore regular attacks on the Thai government.⁹⁶

In June 1973, an eighteen-man Thai ping-pong team paid a second visit to Beijing. At the same time, the Thai government began lifting trade barriers with China, began scaling down the level of official contact with the representatives of Taipei, and established telephone and cable links between Bangkok and Beijing. Thailand's leaders expressed no specific interest, however, in establishing full diplomatic relations.⁹⁷

At the same time, the Thai government also began a tentative effort to reduce the American military presence in Thailand. The question of limited withdrawals had been raised during Vice-President Agnew's visit to Bangkok in February 1973, but no specific results had been forthcoming. On August 17, 1973, two days after the termination of American air operations over Cambodia, Thai and American representatives met in Bangkok and agreed on the "gradual" reduction of U. S. forces in Thailand. A follow-up meeting of Thai and American military representatives one week later resulted in an agreement calling for the initial withdrawal of 3,550 U. S. military personnel and 100 aircraft.

Though the initiation of troop withdrawal discussions by the Thais was a clear indication of some rethinking on Thailand's situation, the fact that the initial force reduction was so small suggests that any move toward a major reduction of the American presence would be extremely slow and cautious. Only a short time earlier, Henry Kissinger had been quoted as saying that it would probably take from five to ten years before a "substantial" U. S. withdrawal from Thailand could take place; and Thai leaders had clearly indicated that while it was their policy to reduce the U. S. troop pres-

⁹⁶ "Thai/U. S. Relations," Department of Defense working paper, December 1972 (mimeo).

⁹⁷ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 24, 1973, pp. 26-27.

ence in Thailand to the minimum level necessary, they at the same time wished to retain a substantial American presence “to deter and suppress threats from the other side.”⁹⁸ In May, Prime Minister Thanom stated that Thailand would continue to make its military facilities available to the United States “so long as violations of the cease-fire and peace agreements continue to hamper a settlement in Indochina.”⁹⁹ Speculation at the time suggested that U. S. force levels would remain at 30,000–40,000 men and 300 planes for some time.¹⁰⁰

The hesitancy of the RTG’s realignment of its American and Chinese relations suggests a desire on the part of Thailand’s leaders to accommodate their country to its communist neighbors, yet at the same time retain the security of a substantial American presence. The irony of the situation in the fall of 1973 lay in the fact that the process of transition then under way had actually begun four years earlier in 1969. In late 1972, Thailand had stood at the brink of a transformed relationship with both the United States and China. The loss of those intervening years would prove a substantial burden both to American relations with Thailand and to Thailand’s relations with its neighbors.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, October 1, 1973, p. 16.

⁹⁹ “Thanom Firm on Continued U. S. Troop Presence,” *Bangkok Post*, May 15, 1973.

¹⁰⁰ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 1, 1973, p. 16.

Chapter 6

Indifference and Disengagement

A DIVERGENCE OF INTEREST

Thai-American relations underwent a major transition in the fall and winter of 1973, as the Thanom-Prapart government was forced from power and replaced by a new democratically-based civilian leadership. The policies pursued by that leadership differed significantly from those of their predecessors and hastened the disengagement of American military forces from Thailand. To an extent unprecedented in previous years, nationalism became a force in Thai foreign policy. The changed climate of Thai politics placed the United States, for the first time, in a role of responding to, rather than leading, local initiatives. Thus, Thai demands for an accelerated withdrawal of American forces from Thailand posed a fundamental challenge to American diplomatic flexibility: could the United States come gracefully to terms with the new Thai policies?

For Thailand, the major point of transition occurred in October 1973 with the overthrow of the Thanom-Prapart government. The Thanom regime had in fact been in trouble for some time. Rising inflation rates and a rice shortage in 1972 had drawn charges of economic mismanagement; and mishandling of a relatively minor political scandal (involving illegal hunting by high officials in the Thung Yai Game Reserve) in the summer of 1973 had badly tarnished the regime's authority and prestige.

What the Thai opposition had lacked in earlier years was an effective catalyst, a force that was capable of organizing and mobilizing political power on a large scale. By the summer of 1973, such a force had come into being in the form of the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT). Founded in 1968, it was only with the election of Thirayuth Boonmee as Secretary General in August 1972 that the NSCT began to function on a truly national scale. Over the next six months, Boonmee succeeded in transforming the NSCT from a loose organization of separate campus groups into an effective organ of student expression embracing over 100,000 members.

On July 10, 1973, the NSCT announced that the students would soon begin their own draft of a new Permanent Constitution (Thailand had been without a constitution since the coup of 1971), the final version to be released December 10. The confrontation that brought about the fall of the Thanom government began on October 6, when twelve constitutional activists—students, writers, and politicians—were arrested for distributing

pamphlets urging the early promulgation of a Permanent Constitution. On the morning of Sunday the 14th, an apparently chance encounter between students and soldiers led to violence, which soon escalated to a full day of bloody fighting between university and vocational students, on the one hand, and Thai military and police, on the other. The confrontation, which continued into the next day, left nearly eighty students and other protestors dead. On October 14, Thanom resigned as Prime Minister, to be replaced by Sanya Thammasak, a popular, widely respected jurist; less than twenty-four hours later, Thanom, Deputy Prime Minister Prapart, and Col. Narong (Thanom's son-in-law, a notorious and much disliked army colonel) fled the country for exile abroad.

There are several explanations for the fall of Thanom and Prapart. Clearly, the students were the principal actors in the crisis. It is equally clear, however, that the student movement alone, no matter how vocal or numerous, could not have toppled the military government. Their success proved in the end to be dependent on the implicit support of Bangkok's citizenry, to whom the existing government had come to appear inept, increasingly incapable of dealing with the problems facing Thailand, and unnecessarily brutal in dealing with its student opponents. Even more important, however, was the role of the King, who directed Thanom and Prapart to leave the country, and that of other high echelons of the Thai military who disagreed with Thanom's handling of the student problem and refused him the support necessary to maintain his position. Stripped of popular support, Royal acceptance, and critical military backing, Thailand's "Evil Trio" had no choice but to surrender power.¹

The turnover in Thailand's government in those heady days of October 1973 was, and could justifiably be, hailed by many as a triumph of the popular will and a mandate for a new political order based on more open, democratic principles. Though the final decisions at the last critical moments had been made by the King and by other high-ranking military officers, it was popular opinion, as galvanized by the vocational and university students, that had forced their hands. Henceforth, Thailand's government was to embark on new political and diplomatic paths. The direction they would take was to be dictated not only by the elite of Thailand's military establishment but also by new voices with fundamentally different perspectives: students, urban workers, farmers, journalists, and intellectuals. Inevitably, as Thailand's government and its political constituency changed, so would its policies.

SHIFTING GEARS

The October 1973 uprising in Bangkok brought about a major shifting of gears not only in the Thai government but also in the Thai-American alli-

¹ "Evil Trio" was a popular epithet applied to Thanom, Prapart, and Narong during the final days of the October crisis.

ance. The halting process of mutual disengagement which had tentatively begun some months earlier was rapidly accelerated as the new civilian government, spurred on by pressure from the now-powerful student movement, sought to shed much of the political and military deadweight of the former regime. Politicians and intellectuals who, though strongly conservative, had in previous years functioned outside the apparatus established by the military not unnaturally viewed the Thai-American alliance in a different light from their military predecessors. Most important among these, perhaps, were elements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who, long accorded a backseat role in the formulation of Thailand's foreign policy, were now in a stronger position to assert their views. In a major break with the recent past, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the years 1973-76 was allowed to play a leading role in the formulation of Thailand's policies toward the United States presence in Thailand and Thai-American relations. This, in turn, necessitated a major adjustment on the part of the United States, which throughout the preceding twenty-three years had leaned heavily on its military connections, effectively bypassing the Ministry on most major policy matters. From the Ministry's standpoint, that close association of the Americans with the military provided additional justification for an aggressive assertion of Ministry views. Later, in 1976, there occurred a determined attempt to break the U. S. Embassy/Ministry of Defense-Supreme Command axis.

The change of administration in Bangkok overlapped with a change of ambassadors at the U. S. Embassy. Appointed just prior to the October 14 uprising, the new ambassador, Dr. William Kintner, had formerly served with both the U. S. Army and the CIA, and more recently as head of the Foreign Policy Research Institute of the University of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately for Kintner, his stay in Bangkok was to be a stormy one. From the outset, his public image was hampered by his past connections with the U. S. military and intelligence communities—an association that aroused profound suspicion among Thailand's students and leftist intellectuals. His conservative views, coupled with a sometimes brusque personal style, led to further misunderstanding in some Thai quarters, which tended to identify Kintner with the old regime with which the U. S. had worked so closely. In point of fact, Kintner proved to be neither an apologist for the old regime nor a foe of Thailand's new order. Described by one high MFA official as "an honest, straightforward man—in an Asian context, a rough diamond,"² the difficulties of Kintner's years were less his own creation than a product of the turbulent politics of post-Thanom Thailand.

Almost immediately on his arrival, Kintner was faced with a crisis involving the Central Intelligence Agency. In December 1973, an American intelligence agent in Nakhon Phanom drafted and sent a letter to Prime Minister Sanya Dharmasakti which purported to be written by a Thai insurgent.

² Confidential Interview (Bangkok, July 2, 1976).

Offering a military truce in exchange for government recognition of “liberated areas” in the Northeast, the letter apparently was meant to sow confusion within insurgent ranks and to bring the reality of the insurgent threat to the attention of the new government (which up to that point had evinced little interest in the insurgent problem). The ploy backfired, however, when the letter was dutifully registered and posted by a local employee, thus allowing it to be traced back to the CIA. The revelation of the CIA’s lamentable adventure immediately brought a storm of protest from both the government and the student community. Thai sovereignty had been seriously infringed; this, it appeared, was a clear-cut example of the intolerable interference in Thai domestic affairs of which the United States was widely believed to be guilty. Thai students demonstrated, demanding Kintner’s recall, and journalists condemned American arrogance and deceit. On January 17, Kintner was called to Government House to explain to the Prime Minister the role of the CIA in Thailand. At that meeting, Kintner pledged to Sanya that he would do everything possible to prevent any U. S. interference in Thailand’s internal affairs; the CIA office from which the letter had been sent, he also indicated, had been closed and the agent responsible returned to the United States.³ Kintner’s assurances were accepted at face value, but the incident left a bad taste in the mouth of those already concerned with the broad scope of American involvement in Thailand.

On the international level, Thailand’s new civilian government faced two major policy challenges: an adjustment of Sino-Thai relations, and the devising of an acceptable formula for the reduction of the U. S. military presence in Thailand. In both areas, steps were rapidly taken to bring Thailand’s international relationships into line with the new realities of a democratic system and a Southeast Asia increasingly detached from American protection.

On December 21, 1973, Deputy Foreign Minister Chatchai Choonhavan arrived in Beijing for an official one-week visit, marking the first such visit by a Thai in two decades. During his visit, Chatchai met with Prime Minister Chou En-lai and obtained agreement from China for the sale of 50,000 tons of diesel fuel to Thailand at a “friendly” (concessionary) price. Soon after, on February 7, 1974, Thai Defense Minister Dawee Chulyasappa arrived in Beijing for another week-long visit in his capacity as head of Thailand’s Olympic Committee. Dawee, too, met with Chou and other government ministers in discussions ranging from sport to trade to Chinese support for Thai insurgents. Chou is reported to have informed Dawee that, since Thailand had reoriented itself along democratic lines, China no longer had reason to support Thai terrorists.⁴ At the same time, in New York, China and Thailand launched discussions concerning increased trade between the two countries.

³ *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 14 (January-March 1974): 30-31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 (January-March 1974): 43-45.

Shortly after the new year, Chatchai again visited the PRC, this time negotiating the sale to Thailand of an additional 75,000 tons of oil.

The culmination of this warming trend in Sino-Thai relations occurred on June 30, 1975, when Thailand's newly elected Prime Minister, Kukrit Pramoj, arrived in Beijing as head of an official government mission. The visit of the Thai delegation—which met with Mao, Chou, and other high dignitaries—was capped on July 1 by the announcement that Thailand and the People's Republic of China had agreed on the establishment of formal diplomatic relations. In the joint communiqué issued over the signatures of Chou and Kukrit, China acknowledged domestic Thai sensitivities by enjoining Chinese residents of Thailand to abide by the laws of Thailand and by abjuring the option of dual nationality for Thailand's Sino-Thai citizens. Also included in the communiqué was the statement that “the two governments agree that all foreign aggression and subversion on and all attempts by any country to control any other country or to interfere in its internal affairs are impermissible and are to be condemned”—an obvious reference to Thai concern over Chinese-supported subversion. Thailand, in turn, accepted Beijing's standard “anti-hegemony” clause (directed against the Soviet Union).⁵ The achievement of the Thai delegation in Beijing ended a 25-year chill in Sino-Thai relations and stood as a major milestone of Thailand's new foreign policy.

Thailand's civilian government also attempted to break new ground in its relations with the communist powers of Indochina. In the case of Laos, the road was cleared for a political accommodation by the removal between April 4 and June 4, 1974, of the approximately 4,000 remaining Thai “volunteer” forces (SGUs) from Laotian territory. The withdrawal of the SGUs was carried out in compliance with the cease-fire agreement leading to the establishment of a new coalition government in that country on April 5.⁶ In September, the last Thai prisoners of war were freed by the Pathet Lao; and in November, Foreign Minister Charunphan Isarangkun paid an official visit to Vientiane, the first official Thai-Lao contact since the formation of the coalition government. Thai-Lao relations nevertheless remained strained, owing to past Thai involvement in Laos, continuous overflights by U. S. reconnaissance aircraft, and border and trade difficulties.

Overtures were also made to the communist government in Hanoi; in the Vietnamese case, however, it was painfully evident who held the upper hand. Through 1974, Thai approaches to Hanoi were consistently rebuffed, with the North Vietnamese demanding the full withdrawal of American military forces from Thailand as a precondition for the opening of talks. The fact that Thailand had expelled its former military rulers appears to have

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 (July-September 1975): 68-70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 (January-March 1974): 50; *Ibid.*, 14 (April-June 1974): 35.

mattered little to the North Vietnamese, who persisted in referring to the new Thai government as "old wine in new bottles."

With the fall of Saigon to communist forces in April 1975, a new ground for dispute arose in the form of more than 175 South Vietnamese aircraft flown by fleeing Southerners to U. S. bases in Thailand. While fifty of the most valuable aircraft were immediately removed by U. S. personnel to offshore sites, the remaining ones that were still serviceable became an object of contention. Both the United States and Vietnam claimed ownership, with Bangkok asserting that the question lay solely between those two countries and did not involve Thailand. Not surprisingly, the Vietnamese rejected this view and laid full responsibility at the door of the Thai government. By the spring of 1976, all of the South Vietnamese aircraft were, by agreement with the RTG, either junked or turned over to the Thai military by the U. S. Embassy.⁷

Significant progress in the direction of a Thai-Vietnamese rapprochement was achieved when, from May 16 to 19, 1975, a delegation from the newly installed Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam visited Bangkok for official intergovernmental talks. Immediately thereafter, from May 21 to 29, Phan Hien, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DRV, visited Bangkok for a discussion of issues relating to the normalization of relations between the two countries. While it was acknowledged on Hien's departure that "a few outstanding questions remained between the two governments," considerable progress had been made in the talks, and a Thai delegation was invited to visit Hanoi at a mutually agreeable time to carry on the discussions.⁸ For over a year after that, little new progress was made, apparently because of the continued American military presence in Thailand. In the first week of August 1976, however, Foreign Minister Bichai Rattakul paid the return visit to the DRV, which culminated in an announcement of full diplomatic relations between Hanoi and Bangkok on August 6.⁹ The days of the Thai-American anti-communist crusade in Indochina were over.

CHANGING THE BALANCE

Simultaneously with its overtures to the communist powers of the region, the Thai government moved toward an accelerated withdrawal of American military forces from the country. The Thai rationale for this pol-

⁷ Confidential Interview (Bangkok, July 1, 1976).

⁸ *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 15 (April-June 1975): 56-58.

⁹ See *Bangkok Post*, August 7, 1976. It is worth noting that Bichai drew considerable criticism at the time for being too sycophantic and overly anxious for diplomatic relations with Hanoi (which, in fact, he was). To most observers, including the North Vietnamese, the weakness of the Thai negotiating position was painfully evident.

icy was explained by Foreign Minister Charunphan Isarangkhun in an address before the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand on January 16, 1974: "Thailand's future relations with the U. S. will have to be modified and adapted to changing circumstances. During the past decade the characteristic of our relations with the U. S. has been an emphasis on military cooperation. This needs to be adjusted to achieve a more truly balanced relationship."¹⁰ Owing to the declining American involvement in Vietnam, the U. S. was already in the process of withdrawing from Thailand at the time of the 1973 uprising. The policies of the new Thai government were designed to hasten that process and were to take it farther and faster than would otherwise have been the case.

To bring about a major withdrawal of U. S. military power from Thailand was in fact no small step, as over the years the large-scale U. S. presence had produced a number of major social and economic impacts. Without taking into account the impact of imported American goods used by U. S. troops, the scale of U. S. military spending in the Thai economy had been massive. According to a study made in October 1969, net U. S. military spending in the Thai economy totaled \$30 million in 1965, \$130 million in 1966, \$214 million in 1967, \$215 million in 1968, and an estimated \$170 million in 1969. Not included in those figures was U. S. Military Assistance (MAP and MASF) or USOM's economic assistance program. At the height of the U. S. military construction program in 1967, American military and associated contractors employed approximately 44,000 locally hired workers.¹¹

Thailand's impressive growth rate of 8 percent per annum during the 1965-70 period had largely predated the military buildup (from 1957 through 1964, Thailand's annual economic growth rate averaged 7 percent), and so cannot be directly attributed to the American presence. Compared to the size of the growing Thai labor force, which totaled at that time some 16,000,000 and was expanding at the rate of 450,000 annually, the number absorbed by the United States does not appear large. Yet, at its height, the U. S. military was the second largest single employer in Thailand after the Thai government itself. Moreover, the effect of the American presence tended to be highly localized, particularly in the towns and cities surrounding the several air bases of the Northeast and the Utapao-Sattahip complex. In two cities in particular, Ubon and Udorn, military spending almost equaled the total value of the local GNP;¹² and for the Northeast in general, George Viksnins has estimated that U. S. military spending accounted for as

¹⁰ "In the U. S. Orbit—for the Moment," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 18, 1974.

¹¹ Konrad Bekker, "SID Panel on the Impact of U. S. Military Spending," October 1, 1969 (mimeo).

¹² *Ibid.*

much as one-third of the region's gross domestic product.¹³ While the impoverished Northeast was clearly in need of additional economic inputs, the spending brought by American servicemen (outside of military construction) tended to be concentrated in service areas—tailors, samlor drivers, jewelry shops, bars, restaurants, and prostitution—and therefore of only transient value to the local economies. For these reasons, much of the economic activity brought about by U. S. military spending in the Northeast was not self-sustaining and faded quickly when U. S. military forces departed.

Even in its declining phase, the American military presence continued to pump millions of dollars into the Thai economy. In FY 1973, U. S. military forces in Thailand purchased over \$121.5 million worth of goods and services from Thai firms; in FY 1974, the figure was \$103.7 million.¹⁴ According to an analysis made by the National Economic and Social Development Council of Thailand in August 1975, the American military presence in Thailand at that time accounted for the employment of 100,000 Thais—approximately 50,000 directly and 50,000 indirectly—most of whom would face unemployment in the event of an American withdrawal. In addition, it was believed that some 14,450 nightclub employees, 13,815 samlor drivers, 10,000 “hired wives,” and 2,050 prostitutes would also seriously suffer.¹⁵ (It should be noted that by the time of the study the American presence in Thailand stood at only 26,000, or half its peak 1969 figure.)

While the economic impact of an American withdrawal would obviously be great, the Thai government was correctly convinced that the nation's economy was capable of continued growth without large American inputs. The adverse economic consequences of an American withdrawal were at least partially offset in the government's calculation by the mixed feelings with which many Thais viewed the continuation of a large American presence. Particularly among the more conservative Thais, that presence was perceived as bringing, along with its economic and security advantages, a number of negative impacts on the nation's cultural and social life. Most importantly, the large number of American servicemen stationed in-country or temporarily there on R & R had sparked a nationwide explosion of prostitution. With its large, opulent massage parlors lining the mile-long strip of Phetchburi Road, Bangkok had earned itself the reputation of “Vice Capital of the East,” and the city's prostitute population was believed to number nearly 10,000.¹⁶ In the countryside, both prostitution and the “hired wife”

¹³ George J. Viksnins, “United States Military Spending and the Economy of Thailand, 1967-1972,” *Asian Survey*, May 1973, p. 446.

¹⁴ Schodt, Zimmerman, and Slott, “Twenty-five Years of Thai-American Mutual Cooperation” (U. S. Embassy Bangkok, March 1975), p. 36.

¹⁵ “Nearly 100,000 Thais Will Be Unemployed After Withdrawal of U. S. Troops,” *Daily Time* (Bangkok), August, 1975; translated in *Current News and Comment Translation*, USIS (Bangkok).

¹⁶ Paul Avery, “Trouble in Thailand—Too Many Americans,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (Sunday Punch Section), September 1, 1968.

phenomenon flourished in the immediate vicinity of the American bases. Indicative of the situation in those areas is an orientation booklet intended for American servicemen arriving at Camp Ramasun: Of seventy-one commercial establishments listed on an attached map of the city of Udorn, twenty-seven are described as “bars” (with such rare names as “My Love,” “Mona Liza,” “Happy Hooker,” “Flower,” “Playmate,” and “Happy”), seven as “massage parlors,” and twelve as “hotels.”¹⁷ The sight of thousands of American servicemen (as well as Germans, Scandinavians, and other tourists) strolling in Bangkok and other cities with their arms around Thai girls aroused considerable resentment in some quarters. It did not matter that in the vast majority of cases it was Thais who owned the bars and brothels which profited from the servicemen’s business, or that many of the clients of those bars and massage parlors were themselves Thai; what did matter was the blatant commercialization of the “industry” and the indiscreet public display of sexual affection by large numbers of foreigners. From this, many Thais were led to conclude that the American presence was damaging to Thai culture and therefore undesirable.

While resentment at that level was usually restrained and seldom voiced, other voices both inside and outside the government actively pressed for a rapid American withdrawal. Well to the left, the students of the NSCT found cause for concern in the close relationship that had existed between the American embassy and military and the now-despised Thanom regime. The remaining American bases, as the embodiment of that relationship, thus became the new target of student demands. Within the government itself, the campaign for withdrawal was pushed by liberal elements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the Ministry could by no means be considered anti-American (most Ministry personnel, like others in the Thai bureaucracy, were actually ambivalent on the American question), its perspective was considerably broader than that of most of Thailand’s military leaders. A resurgence of Thai nationalism in the months following October 1973, coupled with the exigencies of Thailand’s international position, made the case for an adjustment of the American link compelling.

AMERICA GOES HOME: THE FIRST PHASE

With the unilateral halt of U. S. bombing over Indochina in August 1973, the large American military presence in Thailand had lost its previous *raison d’être*. Far from an asset, therefore, American bases and servicemen came to be viewed as a liability, most particularly to Thailand’s attempted rapprochement with its expanding communist neighbors. During 1974 and 1975, a succession of civilian-led governments entered into negotiations with the United States for an accelerated withdrawal of American forces.

Laotian leaders, apparently following North Vietnamese leadership, had already made clear to the Thais that the continued presence of American

¹⁷ 7th RRFS (U. S. Army), *Welcome to Camp Ramasun*.

forces in Thailand constituted a major obstacle to good Thai-Lao relations. Bangkok's efforts to upgrade its relationship with Hanoi had met with the same response. Replying to a Thai overture in late 1974, Hanoi had stated its terms:

Thai authorities have sold out Thai independence and sovereignty, turned Thailand into a U. S. military base and compelled Thai youth to fight as mercenaries for the United States in its war of aggression in South Vietnam and Indochina. . . . With such a hostile policy toward Vietnam and Indochina, it is unrealistic for the Thai administration to talk about improving relations between the two countries.

[An end to] Thai collusion with the U. S., in its policy of aggression against neighboring countries, is the fundamental condition for the establishment of friendly relations between the two countries.¹⁸

The fact remained that as the new Thai government began its first full year (in January 1974), the level of U. S. military activity in and out of Thailand remained high. The total U. S. military presence then stood at 35,000 men and 600 aircraft. Despite the Congressional ban on military or paramilitary operations by the U. S. in or over Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia, U. S. reconnaissance missions over Indochina continued.¹⁹ At Udorn, where MACTHAI's "training and logistics detachment" was based, U. S. support for the government of Cambodia continued under the acronym SCOOT ("Support for Cambodia Out of Thailand"). At that time, slightly more than 400 of the 850 personnel attached to MACTHAI were involved in training programs for the Cambodian Air Force.²⁰ More importantly, nearly all of the approximately \$300 million of U. S. military aid to Cambodia per year was being funneled through Thailand. Vital supplies of rice, sugar, oil, and weapons flowed to Cambodian sources via trans-Mekong barges or U. S. C-130 transport planes; through the summer of 1974, C-130 flights out of Thailand averaged approximately three per day. In late September, C-130 operations were turned over to a civilian contractor (Bird Air) in what was termed "an effort to further reduce the presence of U. S. military personnel in Cambodia."²¹ A private airline on contract with the CIA, Bird Air continued to utilize U. S. Air Force C-130s, spare parts, fuel, and maintenance services; crews, however, were civilian, composed of both Thai and American nationals.²² By March 1975, Bird Air was flying thirty missions daily, using twelve C-130s. Airlift (to Pnompenh) and airdrop (over combat zones)

¹⁸ "Thais' Delusions of Diplomacy," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 15, 1974, p. 28.

¹⁹ "U. S. Jets Continue Reconnaissance Sorties," *Bangkok Post*, February 14, 1974.

²⁰ Robert Kaylor, "Thai-Based U. S. Advisers Centre on Cambodia," *Bangkok Post*, September 5, 1974.

²¹ "Civilians to Take Over Airlift," *Bangkok World*, September 28, 1974.

²² Tad Szulc, "Trail of Deception: Our Mercenary Air Force in Cambodia," *New Republic*, March 13, 1975, pp. 10-12.

operations continued until the fall of Cambodia to communist forces in the spring of 1975.

Efforts to reduce the size of the American presence began soon after the Sanya government came to power. On February 22, 1974, it was announced that agreement had jointly been reached on the withdrawal of 300 U. S. Special Forces; the departure of those forces for Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, on March 25 closed the door on a 14-year period of training and advisory assistance by SF units in Thailand.

On March 29, 1974, it was jointly announced that agreement had been reached on the withdrawal of an additional 10,000 U. S. servicemen, beginning the following May.²³ The withdrawal sequence was to be phased through the remainder of 1974. On May 15, the drawdown began with the flyout of three B-52s from U-Tapao, the first to be redeployed out of Thailand since the original arrival of the B-52s in 1967. By the end of May 1974, a total of fifty-one U. S. aircraft had left U-Tapao and Korat for destinations in the United States.²⁴ By June 30, most American military advisory posts with Thai combat units had been abolished, though advisers remained at the staff level at Thai military headquarters; by that date also, all Air America operations out of Thailand were terminated.²⁵

In July, Thailand moved to further restrict U. S. military activity by formally asking that the United States end its reconnaissance flights over the Indian Ocean from U-Tapao. The reason for the request, Foreign Minister Charunphan reportedly explained, was that such flights contravened Thailand's support for the UN resolution declaring the Indian Ocean a Zone of Peace; they undermined ASEAN'S declaration of Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality; and they were not covered by the 1967 Thai-U. S. agreement governing the use of U-Tapao. Kintner reportedly assured the Thai minister that the United States would do nothing to violate Thai wishes, and the flights were accordingly halted.²⁶ On July 12, the last F-111s flew out of Takhli (to Korat), effectively ending U. S. air operations from that base; Takhli was formally closed the following September. By the

²³ USIS (Bangkok), "U. S. Force Reductions Questions and Answers," March 29, 1974 (mimeo).

²⁴ USIS (Bangkok), "First B-52's Re-deployed from U-Tapao," Press Release No. 53, May 16, 1974.

²⁵ Robert Kaylor, "More Changes Planned in U. S. Withdrawal," *Bangkok Post*, May 5, 1974.

²⁶ "In the U. S. Orbit—for the Moment," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 18, 1974 (Focus, p. 3). At the time of the Thai request, Kintner journeyed personally to Washington to ask the JCS for some concession to the Thais (such as sharing information gained from the flights) which might enable the U. S. to continue its Indian Ocean missions. According to Kintner, however, the JCS were unwilling to grant such a concession. (Interview, William R. Kintner, August 11, 1977.)

end of 1974, the U. S. military presence in Thailand had been reduced to some 25,000 U. S. personnel and 350 aircraft.

The departure of the Americans was viewed with mixed emotions within the RTG. Differences began to surface in particular between the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as to how the Americans should be handled. In mid-September, Deputy Defense Minister Bua Sirasap stated that though the Thai military approved of a reduction in the size of the American presence, it did not favor a complete withdrawal. According to Sirasap, "it is a fact that for the sake of national security we want American forces to continue being stationed here. We do not want them to be completely withdrawn because it would be impossible for us to remain without friends. It is a fact that American military forces which are stationed in Thailand are no danger whatsoever to our country. What is of greatest importance is that the situation outside Thailand is not very trustworthy yet. Should American forces be completely withdrawn, there is no question but that danger would menace us."²⁷ Soon after, on September 24, it was reported that the Foreign Ministry's position on U. S. troop withdrawal conflicted sharply with that of the Defense Ministry, and that "strong argument" had arisen in cabinet meetings on the matter. With the military's influence still muted, the dispute was for the time being resolved in favor of the Foreign Ministry.²⁸

The withdrawal process accelerated during 1975. In January, nationwide elections—the first in four years—were held for a new National Assembly. Out of those elections there emerged a highly fragmented Parliament in which representation was divided among twenty-one different parties. Seni Pramroj, leader of the Democrat Party, attempted to form a coalition based on his party's plurality in the House. On becoming Prime Minister on February 13, Seni declared in his first governmental policy statement that: (1) Thailand wished to maintain friendly relations with all friendly countries, regardless of governmental systems; (2) Thailand would advance step-by-step toward full diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China; (3) Thai-U. S. relations would in the future be governed by the new Permanent Constitution; and (4) all U. S. troops would eventually leave Thailand. No detailed timetable for the withdrawal was specified, however.²⁹

Seni's government was short-lived. On March 6, only eight days after assuming office, Seni fell following a vote of no-confidence. In the political

²⁷ "American Military Forces Must Remain: The Situation Is Not Trustworthy," *Prachachart*, September 18, 1974; translated in *USIS Translation—News Report*, USIS (Bangkok) (mimeo).

²⁸ "Defense Ministry and Foreign Ministry Differ on U. S. Troop Withdrawal," *Thai Rath*, September 24, 1974; translated in *USIS Translation—News Report*, USIS (Bangkok) (mimeo).

²⁹ *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 15 (January–March 1974): 38–40.

jockeying that followed, his brother and political rival, Kukrit Pramoj, emerged at the head of a new coalition that took office on March 16. Like Seni, Kukrit was firmly rooted in Thailand's conservative/aristocratic tradition. He was at the same time, however, prepared to move more rapidly on the American issue. In his first statement of national policy, on March 19, 1975, Kukrit announced that his government would go beyond the general goals proposed by his predecessor and take steps to bring about the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Thailand within one year.³⁰

This time limit on the American withdrawal immediately placed new and greater strains on the negotiating process. The one-year deadline came as a surprise and was taken as an ultimatum by the U. S. Embassy. Negotiations which had up to that point been pursued in a flexible, relaxed manner were henceforth conducted in a pressure-cooker environment. Further pressure was added by the collapse of South Vietnam in March and April 1975. The resentment caused in American circles by the withdrawal deadline is reflected in remarks made at the time by Secretary Kissinger. Responding to an interviewer's question on the Thai position, Kissinger observed: "Basically, as we observe our policy around the world, it is important to understand that the United States does not do favors to other countries by being in an alliance with them. Nor do other countries do us favors by being our allies. If other countries want us to withdraw our troops, we will, of course, withdraw them."³¹ One month later, on June 24, Kissinger repeated his warning: "No country should imagine that it is doing a favor by remaining in an alliance with us. No ally can pressure us by a threat of termination; we will not accept that its security is more important to us than it is to itself."³² Though the Secretary's remarks reflected difficulties then being encountered over base rights in Turkey, Greece, and the Philippines, Kissinger clearly had Thailand in mind as well.

THE MAYAGUEZ AFFAIR

The supercharged atmosphere in which the final negotiations were conducted was further burdened by the negative repercussions stemming from the U. S. handling of the *Mayaguez* incident. The attitude demonstrated by the United States toward Thailand and its facilities in that affair clearly indicated that only minimal adjustments had been made by American policy-makers in their customary approach to Thai affairs. The infringements of Thai sovereignty which occurred provided evidence to many that the United States continued to regard Thailand as a client state rather than a truly equal and independent actor.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³¹ USIS (Bangkok), "Kissinger on U. S. Forces in Thailand," *Official Text*, May 7, 1975 (mimeo).

³² "Sharp Warning to U. S. Allies," *Bangkok Post*, June 25, 1975.

In May 1975, Thai-U. S. relations were already under strain, owing to the apparent failure of the United States to adequately consult the Thais on a number of critical occasions. In the closing days of the Cambodian War, the Thai government had ordered the United States to cease its shipment of war materiel from Thailand to Pnompenh (which was commonly done by trans-Mekong barge); though the U. S. stated its willingness to comply, doubts nevertheless persisted as to American good faith. Another sensitive point concerned the massive exodus of Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese refugees which inundated Thailand in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of those countries; the Thais had insisted that all of the refugees be moved out of Thailand within one month, but American performance was falling far short of that mark. Thai irritation had also been aroused by the secret removal to the USS *Midway* in early May of a large number of "high-value" aircraft flown into Thailand by fleeing South Vietnamese in the closing days of the Vietnam conflict.

These were no more than minor irritants, however, compared to the *Mayaguez* affair. In the early morning hours (EDT) of May 12, 1975, the U. S. merchant vessel *Mayaguez* was intercepted and seized in international waters off Cambodia while en route from Hong Kong to Sattahip. The American response was quick, for the previous month had witnessed the fall of both Cambodia and South Vietnam to communist forces—a development that was perceived as a severe political defeat for the United States and a serious blow to American pride and morale. The seizure of the *Mayaguez*, therefore, offered a ready-made opportunity for the United States to reassert its national will and power before the world. Within hours of the attack, reconnaissance aircraft from U-Tapao were ordered to maintain constant surveillance of the captured vessel, pending the arrival of U. S. surface vessels from Subic Bay. An immediate concern to U. S. policymakers was the possibility that the crew of the ship, which had been taken to the nearby Cambodian island of Koh Tang, might be transferred to the mainland, from which it would be more difficult to secure their release.

On the morning of May 13, signs were detected that the Cambodians were attempting to move their captives to the mainland. U. S. attack aircraft based in Thailand responded with operations which by day's end left three Cambodian patrol craft destroyed and three others damaged. That evening, at 8:30 P.M., U. S. Marine Corps units in Okinawa were alerted to be ready for movement to Thailand.

That same day, Kukrit, who was unaware of the strikes taking place, invited U. S. Chargé d'Affaires Edward Masters to a meeting at Government House. Masters was informed of the Thai government's mounting concern that force might be used to secure the release of the *Mayaguez*. Kukrit explicitly stated that the Thai government did not wish to become involved in the affair and did not wish Thai territory to be used in connection with any action that might be taken by the United States against Cambodia. This was

a point of particular concern to the Thais, as the RTG was at that point attempting to work out a new *modus vivendi* with the Cambodian government. Masters and his colleague, Political Counselor Thomas Barnes, reassured Kukrit that the United States would take no such action if it were against Thai wishes. Neither Masters nor Barnes knew that an American operation was already under way, since the Embassy had not been informed of either operational or future plans. Returning to the Embassy, Masters and Barnes cabled the information to Washington. Only then were they informed of Washington's plan. With that knowledge came the order that the information not be conveyed to the Thai government.³³

In point of fact, plans were then being laid for even more active military intervention. At an early stage of the incident, serious consideration was given to the use of U. S. Air Force Security Police from Thai bases in a possible recovery operation. As infantry-trained personnel used principally for base protection, the Security Police were, according to an Air Force spokesman, "the only combat-trained troops we had in Thailand or anywhere nearby."³⁴ All U. S. bases in Thailand were reportedly informed of the impending action on May 13, and certain units were placed on an alert footing. All of the available heavy helicopter assets of the 7th Air Force were likewise ordered to U-Tapao. As originally planned, the Security Police were to move against the ship early on Wednesday, May 14, with U. S. marines from Okinawa and Subic Bay available in a standby capacity. The plan was abandoned, however, when a U. S. helicopter carrying Security Police from Nakhon Phanom (one of three bases participating in the operation) to U-Tapao crashed shortly after takeoff, killing all aboard. The crash caused a several-hour delay while other security forces were assembled. By the time a new operation could be mounted, the backup contingent of 1,000 marines had arrived at U-Tapao and was substituted for the police. The first marines had arrived at U-Tapao at 9:45 A.M.³⁵

When, early on the morning of the 14th, Kukrit learned that U. S. marines had been brought into Thailand without prior consultation (as had hitherto been the custom), Masters was again summoned to Government House. In that second meeting, the Prime Minister strongly protested the marine presence and delivered to Masters an aide-mémoire stating that, unless the forces were withdrawn, good relations between the two countries would suffer "serious and damaging consequences."³⁶ The United States was given twenty-four hours to move the marines out of U-Tapao.

³³ Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., May 13, 1976).

³⁴ "U. S. Confirms *Post* Story," *Bangkok Post*, May 23, 1975.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; general interviews; and J. M. Johnson, R. W. Austin, and D. A. Quinlan, "Individual Heroism Overcame Awkward Command Relationships, Confusion, and Bad Information Off the Cambodian Coast," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1977, pp. 24-35.

³⁶ *Foreign Affairs Bulletin* 15 (April-June 1975): 69-70.

Once again, however, Washington had already taken independent action. At approximately 5:00 P.M. (EDT, 5:00 A.M. Bangkok time), the National Security Council had taken the decision to begin military operations for the recovery of the *Mayaguez* and its crew. That step was taken with the knowledge that any such action from Thai soil had been expressly prohibited by the Thai government. Nonetheless, within fifteen minutes of the decision, U. S. helicopters carrying two hundred marines lifted off from U-Tapao for Koh Tang island, 195 nautical miles away. Accompanying the marines was an escort of F-4 Phantom and A-7 fighter aircraft, plus C-130 gunships dispatched from Udorn and Korat.

The successful recovery of the *Mayaguez* and its crew was, despite the considerable casualty count, a major psychological boost for the United States. The forceful demonstration of American will and power was for many Americans a reassuring, if minimal, balm to the psychological wounds of the Indochina experience. For the Thai government, however, the American recovery operation posed serious problems. The recent and sudden installment of victorious communist governments along the entire length of Thailand's eastern border had redoubled the pressure on the Kukrit government to achieve some sort of accommodation with the new communist powers in Southeast Asia. The continued use of Thai facilities for offensive military operations against those countries therefore seriously compromised what was for the Thais a priority policy objective.

The Thai government's reaction was predictable. In a protest note dated May 20, the RTG expressed its deep concern over the handling of the *Mayaguez* affair, which, it charged, had "seriously impinged upon the national sovereignty of Thailand." For that reason, it had been decided that "a review of all aspects of cooperation and commitments existing between Thailand and the United States is essential and shall be undertaken immediately. This review shall also extend to the arrangements for the use of military bases and facilities in Thailand by the United States, pending the complete withdrawal of United States military forces from Thailand by March 1976 in accordance with the declared policy of the Royal Thai Government." It was also announced that the Thai Ambassador was being recalled to Bangkok for consultation.³⁷ In the capital, leftist students staged three days of stormy demonstrations at the gate of the American Embassy.

Washington's response was restrained and mildly apologetic, but conceded little ground. Several days after the incident, on May 19, a diplomatic note was delivered to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chatchai Choonhavan,

³⁷ "The Mayaguez Affair—Facts Concerning the Thai Government's Protest," RTG Press Release No. 13, in *The Seizure of the Mayaguez*, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on International Political and Military Affairs of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 1st session, Part 2, June 19 and 25, and July 25, 1975 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 237.

stating that “the United States regrets the misunderstandings that have arisen between Thailand and the United States in regard to the temporary placement of marines at U-Tapao to assist in the recovery of the *SS Mayaguez*. . . . The United States government wishes to express its understanding of the problem caused the Royal Thai Government by these procedures and wishes to repeat its regret. The policy of the United States continues to be one of respecting the sovereignty and independence of Thailand. The unique circumstances that have led to the recent turn of events do not alter this traditional relationship and are not going to be repeated; the Government of the United States looks forward to working in harmony and friendship with the Royal Thai Government.” Attached to the note was a brief account of the events related to the recovery operation.³⁸

Statements at home were more candid, however. Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger observed that “we took a response under the circumstances that was firm and judicious. It accomplished the objectives. This has been—including an element of good fortune—a very successful operation and I would not change it.”³⁹ The most revealing response, however, came from Secretary of State Kissinger, who explained in a news conference in Washington on May 16 that:

In the course of this decade, it may be that a pattern of action has developed that made us assume that our latitude in using these bases was greater than the current situation in Southeast Asia would permit the Thai government. And therefore, insofar as we have caused any embarrassment to the Thai government, we regret those actions.⁴⁰

Consistent with the statements of other American officials on the subject, Kissinger refused to concede the incorrectness of America’s action. While acknowledging that “the Thai government finds itself, in general, in a complicated position after the events of Indochina, quite independent of this recent operation,” Kissinger went on to point out that “they have to understand that we, too, have our necessities.” Pressed further on the question of prior consultation, the Secretary ventured the explanation that “the assumption was that we were in an emergency situation in which, on occasion, we have acted without having a full opportunity for consultation, and it was therefore thought that within the traditional relationship it would be a measure that would be understood. In any event, it would have presented massive problems either way.”⁴¹

³⁸ “Text of a Diplomatic Note Delivered by American Chargé d’Affaires Edward Masters to the Foreign Minister of Thailand, Chatchai Choonhavan, in Bangkok, May 19, 1975,” in *Seizure of the Mayaguez*, Part 2.

³⁹ “Excerpts from Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger’s Interview on ABC-TV—Issues and Answers, Sunday, May 18, 1975,” in *Seizure of the Mayaguez*, Part 1, p. 109.

⁴⁰ “Press Conference Held by Secretary Henry Kissinger Regarding Mayaguez Rescue, at Washington, D. C., May 16, 1975,” in *Seizure of the Mayaguez*, Part 1, p. 90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Kissinger's final observation provides a significant insight into both the motivations and the mind-set behind the Ford Administration's handling of Thailand in the *Mayaguez* affair. Kissinger, for example, spoke of dealing with the *Mayaguez* problem within the terms of Thailand's "traditional relationship" with the United States. In the eighteen months that had elapsed between the expulsion of Thanom and the *Mayaguez* incident, however, the Thai government had made clear on repeated occasions its determination to alter the basis of its relations with the United States. In other words, the "traditional relationship" that had permitted the United States to operate largely unhampered from Thai facilities had in the Thai view ceased to exist.

The "traditional relationship" had changed in another sense as well. During the peak period of Thai-American security cooperation, much of the more important business between Thailand and the United States (particularly business that pertained to military matters) had been conducted on an informal basis through direct channels linking the U. S. Embassy and MAC-THAI to the Thai Supreme Command. Civilian elements within the Thai government (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) had been consulted or included only in peripheral matters. When, on May 14, the decision was taken to bring in U. S. marines from Okinawa to U-Tapao, no prior notice was given to Kukrit or to any other ranking member of the government. At approximately 3:00 A.M. on the morning of the 14th, however, the U. S. Embassy informed General Kriangsak Chomanan, then Deputy Supreme Commander and chief point of contact between the Embassy and the Thai Supreme Command, by telephone of the impending rescue operation. Kriangsak received information at that time of the transfer of marine units from Okinawa to U-Tapao, and granted his broad approval.⁴² Assuming that an effort to consult with the government would inevitably draw a negative response, Kriangsak subsequently made no attempt to contact either Kukrit or the Foreign Ministry.

What is most significant about the exchange is that the United States elected to circumvent the directives of the elected Prime Minister, Kukrit, relying instead on an informal go-ahead from the Thai military. Equally significant is the fact that the military was informed of the American operation even before the government itself.⁴³

Kissinger's admission that consultation with the Thais "would have presented massive problems either way" also suggests the considerations faced by American policymakers. What emerges from the evidence is the intention of the Ford Administration to execute a military rescue operation,

⁴² Confidential Interviews (Washington, D. C., October 30, 1977; Bangkok, May 11, 1984).

⁴³ Kissinger is reported to have remarked at approximately this same time that the military was still "where it is at" in Thailand. (This was subsequently denied by State Department sources.)

Thai sensitivities and desires notwithstanding. Given this approach, the question of consulting beforehand with the Thai government would in fact have presented serious obstacles. Had the United States asked Kukrit for permission to import the marines, two scenarios would likely have resulted: (1) Kukrit could have requested time to consult his cabinet on the question—a procedure that would have taken more time than the United States was willing or able to spare; or (2) he could have refused outright—in which case the United States would probably have proceeded anyway. The choice for Washington, given the pressures of the moment, was thus between infuriating the Thais by failing to inform them, and infuriating them (probably more) by initiating consultative procedures and then ignoring the results. In the end, the former option was chosen.

Also interesting, though not unprecedented, is Washington's failure to inform even the American Embassy in Bangkok of the impending *Mayaguez* operation. Discussions with Administration officials intimately involved in the incident suggest two possible explanations.⁴⁴ On the one hand, it is possible that (as Administration officials liked to suggest) the failure to inform the Embassy was an oversight, resulting from the pressures of a crisis-related decision-making environment. While such an oversight could conceivably occur, it seems highly unlikely, given Kissinger's presence (as Secretary of State) at all major NSC meetings, and given ongoing Embassy communications and involvement in the affair. A more plausible explanation, and one that is strongly implied by knowledgeable authorities, suggests that Washington's failure to inform the Embassy of American actions was, like its failure to inform the Thais, the result of a conscious policy decision. A recovery operation performed over the objections of the Thais would have inevitably placed the Embassy in a highly embarrassing position. By keeping the Embassy in the dark, therefore, the American chargé was left in a position in which he could honestly (and convincingly) disclaim any knowledge of the operation when summoned before Thai authorities, and thus be spared the necessity of a conscious deception. This tactic salvaged the diplomatic face of the Embassy.

Though diplomatic damage of uncertain proportions had been caused by the *Mayaguez* affair, it was the assumption of the United States government that such damage would be minimal. In any event, the positive repercussions of a successful recovery operation were judged to easily outweigh any negative considerations presented by the Thais. From the Thai perspective, however, the *Mayaguez* affair was more serious. More than anything else, the manner in which the United States had dealt with Thailand during the incident suggested an American conception of its Thai ally based more on past than on present circumstances. The United States had acted from necessity, and Kriangsak had acted out of friendship and support for the

⁴⁴ Confidential Interviews (Washington, D. C., May 13, 1976; Bangkok, July 1, 1976).

United States. Yet, Thai sovereignty had been seriously and knowingly breached, and the jurisdictional authority of the Thai government had been conspicuously ignored in a manner that underlined the unequal nature of the Thai-American "partnership." While the long-term effects of the incident would not be great, the *Mayaguez* experience left a bitter aftertaste in the mouths of many Thais, adding further tension to an already high-pressure negotiating environment.

Further discussions on American troop withdrawals had been held prior to the *Mayaguez* affair, in January and February 1975. However, no new withdrawals had been authorized, owing to the critical situation then prevailing in South Vietnam and Cambodia. Following the resumption of joint deliberations in April, it was announced on May 5 that agreement had been reached on the reduction of U.S. troop strength in Thailand by an additional 7,500 men by the end of June. By subsequent agreement, an additional eighty-seven aircraft were to be withdrawn during the same period. During the month of June, twenty-nine F-111 fighter-bombers—the last in Indochina—left Thailand for bases in Guam and the United States. In the same month, the final sixteen B-52s stationed at U-Tapao departed for the United States. By June 30, the withdrawal phase announced on May 5 was complete.

Further changes took place during the summer. On August 15, the office of the Deputy Chief/JUSMAG, which had administered the U.S. military assistance program for Laos from Udorn, was formally closed. This step was taken in compliance with the policy of the Laotian PGNU (Provisional Government of National Union), which stipulated that all U.S. military personnel be withdrawn from Laos and that the U.S. military assistance program for Laos be terminated.

Later, on September 3, a new round of withdrawals was announced, reducing the authorized troop presence by an additional 3,000 men by October 31. In conjunction with that withdrawal sequence, the American presence at Nakhon Phanom air base was formally terminated in mid-September. On November 14, a further reduction of 5,000 men and seventy aircraft was announced, to be withdrawn by January 31, 1976. On December 15, the last U.S. combat aircraft at Korat were flown out; and on February 29, the U.S. presence there formally ended. On December 16, the last U.S. combat aircraft in Thailand—ten F-4s—departed from Udorn; U.S. facilities there were closed and turned over to the Thais on January 31. On March 2, the U.S. Army facility at Camp Samae San, located near U-Tapao, was also closed and turned over to the Thais. Excluding Samae San, the United States had by that date turned over more than 3.76 billion baht (approximately \$200,000,000) in facilities and equipment, ranging from aircraft hangars and repair depots to hospitals, power plants, and waterworks.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ USIS (Bangkok), Press Release No. 75, March 1, 1976 (mimeo); USIS (Bangkok), Draft Press Release, undated.

WITHDRAWALS IN FORCE: THE FINAL PHASE

The final phase of the U. S. withdrawal process was, in contrast to all previous phases, a contentious one. The departure point for the new round of talks came with the announcement by the Thais, on November 14, 1975, of a new negotiating sequence. The Thais referred to the planned withdrawal of all U. S. "combat forces," rather than all U. S. "forces" per se. The distinction was an important one, for it left the door open for a residual U. S. military presence in Thailand of a noncombatant nature. The "rationale and advantages" to the United States of maintaining a residual military presence in Thailand were described in a mid-1975 Defense Department paper as follows:

- Provides a staging base for WRM [War reserve material] logistic storage in support of PACOM [Pacific Command] requirements.
- To conduct reconnaissance/surveillance missions.
- To support airlift missions, linking the Pacific with the Middle East.
- To support intelligence functions.⁴⁶

"The Department of Defense," the paper continues, "believes that we should be prepared to withdraw all forces if that is what the Thai really want us to do; however, . . . we should also be willing to maintain some residual level that would be mutually beneficial to both countries." The Embassy was offered assurances from the Thai government that the phrase "withdrawal of U. S. forces" indeed referred only to "combat forces," and that an "appropriate" residual presence would be welcome. That same month, Foreign Minister Chatchai visited Washington for discussions with Kissinger on future Thai-U. S. relations. As a result of their meeting and the ongoing negotiations in Bangkok, the U. S. believed by late November that it had obtained firm agreement to a residual U. S. military presence. This was to include 3,000 U. S. military personnel assigned to U. S. intelligence installations at Ramasun, Kokha, and Doi Inthanon, and other USAF personnel based at U-Tapao. The latter were to have handled regular transit as well as other landings of U. S. military aircraft en route from Subic Bay to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁷ After the final negotiating session of 1975, held on September 29, all appeared to augur well.

Soon after, however, American prospects deteriorated. On January 12, Kukrit created a new political equation by a surprise announcement that parliamentary elections would be held the following April 4. Faced with critical defections from his unstable 17-party coalition, and with an imminent vote of no-confidence inspired by his brother/opponent Seni, Kukrit evidently hoped to emerge from the elections with a strengthened majority in the House of Representatives and a stronger political base. The scheduling

⁴⁶ "U. S. Force Presence in Thailand," Department of Defense (undated—apparently summer 1975) (mimeo).

⁴⁷ Confidential Interview (Bangkok, July 6, 1976).

of national elections, however, also placed new pressure on Kukrit to produce politically salable results. Evidently believing that his political future depended on his successful handling of the Americans, Kukrit attempted to create political capital from the troop withdrawal issue by posing himself as a nationalist David against the American Goliath.

The politicization of the withdrawal issue raised the public controversy surrounding the American presence to new heights. On the left, many publicly expressed their suspicion that a full American withdrawal would not take place; the residual JUSMAG presence then under discussion was a focus of particular concern.⁴⁸ Left-wing and right-wing students divided on the issue, with the NSCT maintaining its public pressure on the government for full withdrawal, and military-supported vocational students coming to the defense of the American military. Former Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman strongly attacked the Kukrit government's position, and in particular its unilateral March 20 withdrawal deadline. The United States, Thanat pointed out, was "still . . . the only global power capable, if it wants, of resisting further expansion and encroachments by the new imperialistic group," and the government's planned expulsion of the Americans "may indeed be detrimental to the security of Thailand as well as the stability of this region of ours." "It is my firm and considered opinion," Thanat continued, "that . . . the departure of certain elements of these forces should be delayed and some form of foreign military presence should be maintained until such a time when the prospects of peace in this part of the world become assured. This postponement and delay are intended to serve Thailand's and Southeast Asia's interests. Our sovereignty will not be impaired; if anything it will be strengthened and more effectively protected."⁴⁹ Thanat's strong stand represented another surprising flip-flop from the man who had first engineered the creation of a large-scale American military presence in Thailand, and had later become the most outspoken advocate of its withdrawal. To many, Thanat appeared guilty of self-serving posturing at the worst, or of inconsistency at the very least.

Thanat's observations do suggest that he still continued to place some credence in the ability of the United States to defend Thailand against her enemies—a somewhat different position from that of only a few years earlier. Most particularly, the former Foreign Minister was concerned that the American military presence had been unilaterally terminated by Thailand in response to North Vietnamese pressures, but that no equivalent *quid pro quo* had been obtained by Thailand:

⁴⁸ "It is Not Believed the U. S. Will Completely Withdraw Its GI's," *Thai Rath*, February 1, 1976; Suthichai Yoon, "Withdrawal of American Troops: The Deception of Figures," *Prachachart*, February 20, 1976; "Students Feel Suspicious Why JUSMAG Will Remain in Thailand," *Prachathipatai*, February 15, 1976, translated in *Current News and Comment Translation*, USIS (Bangkok) (mimeo).

⁴⁹ Thanat Khoman, "Are We Chasing Mirages?" *Bangkok Post*, March 14, 1976.

North Vietnam should also rub their hands with satisfaction to be served gratuitously on the platter something it had been clamoring for for a long time. It did not have to provide any quid pro quo which this country has sought to obtain, namely the assurance of noninterference and nonintervention into our internal affairs in the odious form of support and assistance to the insurgents in the border areas.⁵⁰

However feeble a device, it is clear that Thanat viewed the presence of American forces as Thailand's sole ace-in-the-hole in its dealings with its communist neighbors:

U. S. troops here were an asset for negotiations. My idea was not to keep foreign forces here forever, but to delay their removal till we have negotiated both with the United States and North Vietnam.⁵¹

Thanat's was not the prevailing Ministry view, however. His perspective contrasted most particularly with that of his former secretary and protégé, Anand Panyarachun, whose return to Thailand in January 1976 further complicated the negotiating picture. While Ambassador to Washington, Anand had been well known for his critical views and for his belief that Thai-American relations had—at least since 1967—been excessively close and overly militarized. Though more “pro-Thai” than “anti-American,” Anand was, on assuming his new position as Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs (Thailand's ranking foreign service position), to play the leading role in the final round of base negotiations.

Anand's return to Thailand coincided with a sudden and unanticipated hardening in the Thai negotiating position, though by his own account the fundamental decisions had already been taken in the Foreign Ministry prior to Anand's arrival.⁵² The “bomb” came on February 4, when U. S. Ambassador Charles Whitehouse met with Anand and Foreign Minister Chatchai in the first negotiating session of 1976. At that meeting, Anand dismissed the previous (oral) understandings reached with Chatchai as “casual conversation,” and instead presented the American representatives with a list of “Seven Principles” to which United States agreement was required “as the basis for any possible future cooperation.” These were:

- (1) American facilities and personnel shall be subject to Thai jurisdiction unless exempted by specific agreements between the Royal Thai Government and the United States Government;
- (2) These facilities and personnel shall in no way be used to threaten or interfere with the national sovereignty of any other country;
- (3) In keeping with the spirit of mutual cooperation and interests, reports on the activities involving these facilities, including information and data derived from such activities, shall be communicated directly to the Royal Thai Government;
- (4) On-the-job training programs shall be launched with the view to the rapid replacement of American personnel operating the facilities by Thai personnel;

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Interview with Thanat Khoman (July, 1976).

⁵² Interview with Anand Panyarachun (Berkeley, California, March 29, 1985).

- (5) American personnel authorized to operate facilities in Thailand shall not exceed the number agreed by the Royal Thai Government;
- (6) These authorized American personnel shall enjoy such privileges as are accorded to technical experts from other countries; and
- (7) Agreements pertaining to such cooperation shall continue for the duration of not more than two years, but shall be renewable or may be terminated earlier by either party giving advance notice.⁵³

The presentation of the Seven Principles came as a shock to the Embassy, which perceived them as an ultimatum. Whitehouse, who personally believed that the Seven Principles were a creation of Anand and did not reflect the more important views of the Supreme Command and the Prime Minister, cabled Washington requesting an immediate response. Five days later, on February 9, working committees met to discuss the issue. At that time, the Thai side made it clear that (1) the March 20 deadline was very important to the Thai government; (2) the 1950 Military Assistance Agreement was no longer acceptable as the basis for a U. S. military presence in Thailand outside of JUSMAG; and (3) a speedy American response was imperative. Despite this warning, and despite repeated urgings from Whitehouse, the Department of State was slow to reply. Sixteen days later, on March 3, Whitehouse approached Anand with a tentative American response that focused largely on minor points such as the continuity of American duty-free privileges. Anand at that time reassured Whitehouse that the points of American concern presented no serious obstacles to a successful agreement; he remarked at the same time, however, that in the absence of an agreement the U. S. would be required to withdraw from its Thai facilities.⁵⁴

Up to that point, negotiations had been on a private diplomatic level. On March 9, however, in a move to bring greater pressure on the Americans, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly released the text of the Seven Principles. At the same time, it publicly disclosed that negotiations for a residual American presence were under way, but that any such presence required prior U. S. agreement to “a set of general principles” proposed by the Thai government as “prerequisites to safeguard the national interests of a sovereign state.” Failing U. S. agreement, it was said, all American forces would be required to withdraw.⁵⁵ This maneuver enraged the Embassy and brought on a redoubling of public pressure on the Kukrit government to hold to its position. The problem was exacerbated by the extremely slow American response. Public suspicion that Washington was stalling in the hopes of

⁵³ “Government Announcement on the Withdrawal of U. S. Military Personnel from Thailand,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs—Department of Information, Press Release No. 47/2519, March 20, 1976 (mimeo).

⁵⁴ Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., July 20, 1977).

⁵⁵ “Government Announcement on the Withdrawal of U. S. Military Personnel from Thailand,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs—Department of Information, Press Release No. 38/2519, March 9, 1976 (mimeo).

renegotiating after the scheduled April 4 elections, and that it was conspiring with the Thai military to overthrow the Kukrit government, was heightened by two serious coup scares during that period.

As time grew short and the Embassy still lacked negotiating instructions, Whitehouse grew desperate. Finally, on March 11, the State Department responded with a message that was short and blunt. In a cable of the same date, the Embassy was instructed that "Anand's 3 March statement that all previous U.S.-Thai agreements lapse is unacceptable," and was directed that Whitehouse set up a meeting with Kukrit to determine "who is speaking for the RTG." Whitehouse thereafter attempted to arrange such a meeting, but was rebuffed; a meeting with Chatchai on March 15, however, reaffirmed the solid Thai insistence on Principle 1 (dealing with legal jurisdiction over U.S. personnel). Chatchai took pains to emphasize that the most pressing question of the moment, thanks to the upcoming elections, was not the number of troops but the matter of jurisdiction. Later the same day, Kukrit, responding to a telephone call from Whitehouse, indicated that although he understood the U.S. position, if the U.S. could not accept Principle 1, then there was no alternative but withdrawal.

The issue of most concern to both sides, and embodied in Principle 1, was the extent to which American military personnel (technicians and possibly others) remaining in Thailand would be subject to the jurisdiction of Thai courts. The same issue carried over into Principle 6, which accorded U.S. personnel the same privileges as other foreign technicians, but no more. In combination, these provisions appeared to mean that American personnel, in the absence of specific exceptions, would be subject to Thai courts of law. In the American view, this was unacceptable. Though American servicemen had always been subject to Thai law for offenses committed while off-duty, offenses committed in the line of duty were considered to fall within the American legal domain. This was, in fact, standard procedure in other U.S. Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA), but had been handled in Thailand on an ad hoc basis, since no formal written SOFA agreement had ever existed. The United States would have preferred to retain the existing arrangements; failing that, however, legal status of a higher order than that offered by the Thais was considered essential for the remaining U.S. personnel.

On March 17—three days before the March 20 deadline—the first substantive American proposal was offered. In a telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy, it was stated that the United States could accept Principle 1, providing the RTG would accept a modification in Principle 6. That modification would have extended to U.S. personnel the privileges and immunities of "administrative and technical staffs of foreign embassies" as defined by the Vienna Convention. (Such wording implied a degree of immunity less than that given "diplomatic agents" but more favorable than that extended by many SOFAs.) At that point, the differences between the Thai and American positions had been narrowed down to Principle 6—the balance of the Seven Principles being acceptable to the U.S.

The American proposal was presented by Whitehouse that morning. By late afternoon, Anand had returned with a counterproposal for Principle 6, which read: "These authorized personnel shall enjoy such privileges as are accorded to technical experts from other countries, and shall enjoy immunity from criminal jurisdiction regarding offenses which, in the view of the RTG, are committed in the exercises of their official duties." With this language, there was to be associated a Memorandum of Understanding to the effect that the RTG and the U. S. Government would conclude within three months new agreements concerning the exact privileges and immunities to be accorded U. S. personnel, and that in the interim such personnel were to be accorded "the privileges and immunities customarily accorded under international law to the technical and administrative staffs of foreign embassies."

The Thai proposal was cabled to Washington, which replied that: (1) three months was too short a period to devise more detailed agreements, and that a longer one should be sought, and (2) that the determination of what constitutes "official duty" should not be unilateral but decided by "mutually agreeable procedures." Anand's response returned to the level of general principle, asserting that though the Thais were willing to allow the continuance of certain American functions in Thailand, it was nevertheless essential to affirm the paramount position of Thai courts.

On March 19—one day before the deadline—the final American proposal was transmitted to Bangkok. The United States, it was stated, could accept all the language negotiated up to that point, and would accept (under protest) the three-month negotiating period, but found it necessary to insist on the following wording for Principle 6: "The RTG and the USG will conclude a new agreement specifying the privileges and immunities to be accorded to U. S. personnel connected with facilities in Thailand." The Principle was to be interpreted as described in the accompanying Memorandum of Understanding. This final American proposal failed to make the requisite concessions to Thai jurisdiction, but rather proposed a *status quo ante* solution. Falling short of the minimum objectives set forth by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was rejected outright.⁵⁶

Thus, by March 20 no agreement had been reached on a mutually acceptable basis for a residual U. S. military presence in Thailand. Accordingly, following a morning cabinet meeting, it was announced that the United States had four months to remove all 4,500 remaining U. S. military personnel from Thailand and that Ramasun and other key communications installations were to be closed within that same period.⁵⁷ The only U. S.

⁵⁶ Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., July 20, 1977).

⁵⁷ Ramasun and the other U. S. listening posts in Thailand were governed by the 1964 Agreement Respecting Radio Communications Research and Development Activities in Thailand, and the 1965 Agreement Respecting the Establishment, Conduct and Support of Radio Communications Research and Development Activities in Thailand. Both agreements terminated on March 20.

military personnel permitted to remain were a maximum of 270 advisers attached to JUSMAG and responsible for the administration of the U. S. military assistance program. According to the official Thai statement: "The negotiation between the Thai Government and the United States Government was conducted in a friendly spirit and with full understanding of each other's wishes and problems. However, it was not possible for the two Governments to reach agreement on the principles, which the Thai Government considers to be of vital importance, by March 20, 1976."⁵⁸ Asked what had led to the failure of the negotiations, Kukrit observed that the main point of disagreement had been "the question of jurisdiction over technical personnel: the U. S. wanted them to have diplomatic privileges. . . . We had to decide: do we want 4,000 American ambassadors in Thailand?"⁵⁹

Later that same day, the Embassy issued a statement pointing out that the United States had "negotiated in good faith regarding a residual non-combat U. S. military presence that would serve mutual U. S. and Thai interests. We have been prepared to meet the conditions of the RTG for this continued presence, while also asking for consideration of the special problem of the status of our military personnel. The status, rights, and privileges which we sought during the negotiations for our residual military presence were those encompassed in the Standard Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs) in force wherever our military elements are stationed around the world. However, the RTG has not been able to agree to these terms and has asked our remaining forces to be withdrawn. We plan to begin this withdrawal immediately."⁶⁰ Protestations of continued amity to the contrary, the failure of the residual force negotiations constituted a low-water mark in Thai-American relations. As the United States prepared to pack its bags, closing a 26-year chapter in Thai-American relations, U. S. Ambassador Charles Whitehouse summed up U. S. feelings in the final curt observation that "we don't stay where we are not wanted."⁶¹

⁵⁸ "Government Announcement on the Withdrawal of U. S. Military Personnel from Thailand," Ministry of Foreign Affairs—Department of Information, Press Release No. 47/2519, March 20, 1976 (mimeo).

⁵⁹ Norman Peagam, "We Don't Stay Where We Are Not Wanted," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 2, 1976, p. 11.

⁶⁰ USIS (Bangkok) "U. S. Embassy Statement on Conclusion of Thai-U. S. Negotiations," Press Release No. 103, March 20, 1976 (mimeo).

⁶¹ Peagam, "We Don't Stay," p. 10. Interestingly enough, Kissinger appears to have comprehended the Thai position quite clearly. His analysis was given in a news conference held four days after March 20:

The basic situation in Thailand is that, with the collapse of our efforts in Indochina, the Thais, who were loyal allies during the war and who relied on the United States, are looking for a different angle.

And if you look at Thai history, Thailand is the only Asian country, the only country in South Asia, that was never colonized and that managed to maintain its

THE RESIDUAL FORCE NEGOTIATIONS: WHAT WENT WRONG?

In the final analysis, the breakdown of the February–March 1976 talks was due less to substantive differences than to a failure of communication and mutual understanding. It is important at the outset to identify the bureaucratic constituencies involved in the negotiating process. On the Thai side, the future status of U. S. military personnel in Thailand was a matter of prime concern to two principal groupings: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Supreme Command/Ministry of Defense. Each had distinct interests. Throughout the entire 26-year span of U. S. military involvement in Thailand, the Embassy had operated in nearly all military-related matters through contacts with the Supreme Command rather than through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Though this pattern of communication was a natural outgrowth of the fact that the most important decision-making authority rested with the Thai military, it nevertheless had the effect of excluding major civilian elements from what otherwise would have been their natural role in the decision-making process. Added to this was the fact that even with the transition of Thailand from military to civilian rule, the U. S. Embassy was unable wholly to break free from its traditional patterns of contact and communication. As one result, it failed to fully perceive the fundamental shift of power which had occurred and may well have believed (until too late) that the Thai military would not permit the negotiations to reach their final impasse. Liberal elements in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (led by Anand) in particular had been forced to play a secondary role in matters pertaining to the American presence, and were by the end of 1975 determined to exert the authority of the Ministry so as to break the U. S. Embassy/Supreme Command linkage. In that process, they hoped to make the shift of power from military to civilian forces irreversible.

independence by careful adjustment to dominant trends. Now, their assessment of the present situation is that the dominant trend in Indochina, in that part of the world, is North Vietnam, and that it must be counterbalanced, if it can be counterbalanced at all, by the People's Republic of China. It does not reflect hostility to the United States. The leaders of Thailand we know are basically well disposed toward the United States.

It is their assessment that the risks they would run by maintaining significant American military forces there are greater than the benefits that would come from them. And it illustrates what Senator Tower said earlier: A foreign policy decision has a multiplier effect. If we want to maintain our defense far from our shores, other countries must have the conviction that the United States is relevant to their problem. If that does not exist, they will not run what seems to them an unnecessary risk. That is the real structure of what is going on in Thailand. And which of the various factions dominate is really less important than their perception of the lessons of Vietnam.

“Questions and Answers Following Address by Secretary Kissinger in Dallas, Texas, March 24, 1976,” *Department of State Bulletin*, April 12, 1976, p. 468.

The Thai Supreme Command, on the other hand, had a clear-cut interest in maintaining intact some form of residual U. S. military presence, and with it an amicable basis for future relations with the United States. At stake was the continuation of U. S. military assistance to Thailand. More importantly, Thai military leaders found strong cause for concern in the events of neighboring Indochina, and with the threat posed by the new communist governments arrayed along Thailand's eastern borders. In the one year following the (spring 1975) fall of the Indochinese states to the communists, as many as 70,000 Laotian refugees had fled into Thailand, bringing with them stories of repression which inevitably raised grave fears among many Thais; similar stories and tales of horror were brought by Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees. In the eyes of the Thai military, a residual American presence, no matter how small, constituted at least a minimal U. S. guarantee of Thailand's security against communist invasion.

Washington, too, had its bureaucratic constituencies. On one side of the equation was the National Security Agency (NSA), which strongly wished to maintain access to Thai intelligence facilities, joined by some elements of the Office of International Security Affairs (ISA) of the Defense Department. The military services were also anxious to retain access to Thai facilities. On the other side of the fence were the legal affairs offices of the Defense Department and (most importantly) the State Department, both of which were primarily concerned that any arrangement made with the Thais not set an unfavorable precedent for SOFA negotiations with other countries; the assurance of adequate legal protection for U. S. military personnel remaining in Thailand was another direct concern. Throughout the working levels in both Washington and Bangkok, it was perceived that continued close and amicable relations with Thailand should be maintained to the maximum extent possible.

The outcome of the final phase of the troop negotiations was largely decided by these contending bureaucracies. In Bangkok, it was the Foreign Ministry that prevailed. Ever since the toppling of the Thanom government in October 1973, the military in Thailand had been in a state of political eclipse; and while the military chafed, the influence of civilian elements inside the Thai government was resurgent. Restored to a position of strength, the ranks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appear to have been consolidated by the return to Thailand of Anand in January 1976. Kukrit himself seems to have left his options open until March 11, at which point (apparently for electoral reasons) he sided with the MFA against the military.

Still, the outcome might have been different had the military been unequivocally united in its opposition to the Ministry position. Though dormant, the military nevertheless remained an extraordinarily powerful force in Thai politics, with far greater potential clout than the Foreign office or any other Ministry. For two reasons, however, the military's in-

fluence was diluted. On the one hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, though perhaps anti-military, was not anti-American. As one senior Ministry official at that time put it: "In terms of the major powers, the Thai people still trust the United States as their best friend."⁶² A view prevailed throughout the Thai government—shared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Supreme Command, and the Cabinet alike—that the American connection (including American military forces) should be retained; what was being sought by all parties was a politically acceptable basis for a retained American presence, consistent with the new post-1973 political environment and the international pressures then converging on the Thai government. Had the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not joined that consensus, it would have found itself in a far less defensible position.

The other factor militating against effective military influence was the lack of unanimity within the military's own ranks. The recent unification of Vietnam under communist leadership and the undisguised withdrawal of American power and interest from Southeast Asia provided convincing evidence of the need to downplay confrontation with the region's communist powers and to move toward some sort of practical accommodation. Ever since the fall of South Vietnam in April 1975, Thailand had been on the political defensive. This, too, tended to strengthen the MFA's position.

In Washington, the contest of bureaucracies was won by the legal staffs of the Defense and State Departments. In part, the negotiating failure that followed was attributable to the application by the United States of legalistic responses to substantive issues. On a more philosophical level, it was traceable to a lack of perception and, most importantly, interest. One problem faced by the United States was informational. According to one U. S. official intimately familiar with the final negotiations, Embassy reporting received by the Defense Department in February and March 1976 did not adequately reflect the internal power shifts then taking place within the Thai government. The United States was therefore caught unprepared for the RTG's presentation of its Seven Principles on February 4, and was even after that incapable of effectively analyzing the full significance of the Thai negotiating position.⁶³

The failure of the United States to interpret Thai political developments accurately helps to explain its subsequent failure to respond more substantively to Thai initiatives. Thai sensitivity on the question of "jurisdiction" was real and could easily be linked with long-standing Thai national interests. As with other issues, however, the Thais were at least as much concerned with appearance as with substance.

In 1976, the Thai government was particularly concerned with correct appearances. Throughout the previous twelve years, Thai military coopera-

⁶² Confidential Interview (Bangkok, July 1, 1976).

⁶³ Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., July 20, 1977).

tion with the United States had been extraordinarily close and had functioned smoothly in the absence of formal written agreements. With the transition to civilian rule in 1973, however, the political equation under which the Thai government operated substantially changed, requiring some real concession to the pressures of a newly politicized public. The Seven Principles were created by the RTG in response to those pressures, but it is probable that, given a formal American bow to Thai sensitivities, U. S. operations might have continued much as before.

This is all the more evident when one examines the language of Principle 1, establishing the supremacy of Thai jurisdiction. In the wording of that principle, "American facilities and personnel shall be subject to Thai jurisdiction *unless exempted by specific agreements between the Royal Thai Government and the United States Government.*" The latter phrase is the key, for it provided the loophole which, once general American agreement had been obtained, would have most probably removed the American personnel in question from Thai jurisdiction. According to a high MFA official closely involved with the negotiations, the United States negotiators were repeatedly reassured that if only the United States could agree to that general principle, then all could be worked out to the satisfaction of the United States in later and more detailed discussions. The Ministry even went so far as to offer to write out for the Americans the maximum they would give in those later discussions.⁶⁴ The United States, however, failed to respond,⁶⁵ due largely to opposition within the State Department.

Within the U. S. mission itself, differences over how to respond to the Thai initiative led to sharp, and occasionally bitter, disagreement. Kriangsak, speaking on behalf of the Thai Supreme Command, repeatedly urged U. S. MACTHAI Commander General Harry Aderholt to accede to the Ministry demands, if only to break the impasse that had developed. Like the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kriangsak assured Aderholt that the specifics of any agreement could be worked out to the satisfaction of the United States in later agreements. At the Embassy's "country team" meetings, Aderholt presented this view. His advice and that of the military ran contrary to the prevailing mission view and to the mood in Washington. As a result, Aderholt was accused of dropping off the "team," and of usurping Embassy prerogatives.⁶⁶

The United States instead persisted in its concern over legal ramifications. Consistently, Washington argued over the formal terms of the arrangement, while Anand and the Thai team, both puzzled and exasperated, argued

⁶⁴ Confidential Interview (Bangkok, July 1, 1976).

⁶⁵ The American position, according to Embassy officials, was that if the United States had agreed to the principle, this would have prejudiced the outcome of any subsequent negotiations (Confidential Interview [Bangkok, July 6, 1976]).

⁶⁶ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., October 30, 1977).

that given the history of informal and amicable relations between the U. S. and Thailand, all that was needed for an equitable solution of the issue was American agreement to paper principles needed by the RTG for purposes of public consumption.⁶⁷

The negotiations were further complicated by the lethargy of American bureaucratic processes, which led to critically slow responses. For over a month, the question was handled at low and medium government levels, with great deference to the wishes of the State Department and DOD legal affairs offices. It was not until March 10, apparently, that things began to move. By that time, however, it was almost too late, as the Thais had already gone public on the issue and Kukrit had evidently made his decision to side with Anand. The Defense Department, with its assets in Thailand at stake, might have pressed State for more speed in the matter (DOD had produced a legal position in reply to Whitehouse's February 4 cable within one week), but suffered from a similar lethargy at the senior working level.⁶⁸

Beyond the question of bureaucratic procedure and communication, however, lies a deeper, perhaps ultimate, explanation for the failure of the 1976 residual force negotiations. All of the problems discussed up to this point were symptomatic of a fundamental and painfully evident decline in the quality of the Thai-American relationship. It is worth recalling that in the final round of negotiations on March 20, little of substance remained separating the two sides. The only major point remaining to be settled concerned the question of unilateral versus mutual determination of official duty status. Past history suggests that in normal times this would not have proven a major obstacle to agreement. The months of February and March 1976 were not normal times, however. By March 19, the passions and maneuverings of diplomatic confrontation had obscured the substantive issues to the point where posturing outweighed the end product. More to the point, the Thai offer to negotiate detailed and mutually acceptable agreements, following American acceptance of the general principle of Thai jurisdiction, was based on implicit mutual trust, as had been the majority of the arrangements that had governed Thai-American relations through the previous twenty-five years. The failure of the United States to accept that offer suggests that by the spring of 1976 that trust-based as it had been on mutual confidence and common perceptions of interest—had largely vanished. With it, the quality of the Thai-American alliance had been eroded. One suspects that had the United States retained greater interest in either Thailand or Southeast Asia, the channels of communication might have been kept open. As it was, that interest had declined to the point where the United States was unwilling to make those adjustments

⁶⁷ Confidential Interview (Washington, D.C., July 20, 1977).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

necessary to retain its influence and capabilities there. For the United States, then, distrust was compounded by indifference.

The indifference of the American policy establishment was, according to officials involved in the final negotiations, manifested in a way that contributed to the negotiating failure. The attitude of the Secretary of Defense (and his Office) was, by these reports, ambivalent at best toward the question of a residual American presence in Thailand. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia and the Pacific, Morton Abramowitz, was particularly conspicuous in his reluctance to push the matter. Thus, though direct DOD interests were involved, no concerted effort was made by the Department to secure them. A similar situation existed at the Department of State, where the attitude toward the negotiations varied from lethargic to hostile.

The reasons for this indifference no doubt varied. In some cases, it appears that the officials involved saw little benefit to be gained from a residual U. S. presence in Thailand. In other cases, the negative attitude of U. S. officials (particularly at State) can be attributed to a general malaise with Southeast Asia (and, more broadly, with foreign involvement per se), and a desire to terminate American involvement in that area.

The Thais, for their part, shared responsibility for the failure of the talks. It is very likely that, given a few more weeks, U. S. and Thai negotiators could have reached a mutually satisfactory agreement. The placing of a rigid March 20 deadline on the talks, however, denied both sides that critical margin of time. Kukrit further complicated efforts to reach an agreement by his decision to publicize the Seven Principles at a time of pending elections. By so doing, he unleashed forces of popular pressure which he lacked either the ability or the will to control, thus forcing the Thai government into a harder position than it might otherwise have taken.

Musing in his embassy office some months later, Charles Whitehouse observed: "It's the end of an episode, not a watershed."⁶⁹ Whether or not it was a watershed, it was indeed the end of a 26-year episode that had seen Thailand serve as America's principal Asian ally in the ongoing Indochina conflict. After having walked together through the Vietnam Era, Thailand and the United States would henceforth approach the future along different paths.

PACKING UP

On April 4, 1976, national elections were held in Thailand. To the surprise of nearly everyone, Kukrit was defeated in his bid for reelection. Seni and the Democrats emerged from the election with a landslide margin, enough to establish a new coalition based on only four political parties.

⁶⁹ Interview with Charles Whitehouse (July 1, 1976).

Observers interpreted the election, which witnessed the near-elimination of left-wing parties from the Parliament, as a swing to the right symptomatic of the voters' desire for a return to calm and stability after eighteen months of political turbulence. Kukrit's own defeat occurred in a district of Bangkok (Dusit) with a large military population, and was interpreted as a sign of military dissatisfaction with his withdrawal policy.

Seni, who assumed office on April 20, immediately suggested that the door to the Americans might be reopened. On April 5, the day after his election, Seni remarked in an interview that he would "seriously consider" a shift in his brother's order that the Americans withdraw. "The withdrawal issue," he suggested, "was the key to Kukrit's defeat."⁷⁰ On May 15, Whitehouse presented the new Foreign Minister, Pichai Rattakul, with a set of proposals calling for continued American operations at Ramasun, to be manned, at least in part, by Thai technicians. This was a significant departure from past practice, in which virtually no Thais had been permitted to work at Ramasun. Pichai described the American proposals as "quite interesting," but pointed out that the conditions set by the Kukrit government for a residual U. S. military presence still stood, and that "not one word about jurisdiction was mentioned" in his meeting with the Ambassador.⁷¹ No results were produced by this final exchange, as shortly thereafter the Seni government, fearing adverse public reaction, finally and firmly closed the door on the U. S. military.

Some negotiation continued into the summer of 1976 on minor points. The Thai government formally asked for the electronic intelligence equipment remaining at Ramasun (the most sensitive of which had already been removed). The Thais also asked for a network of sixteen communications sites known as the Integrated Communications System (ICS), and for approximately 15,000 tons of bombs and other ammunition then being stored at Korat. As a concession, the U. S. was granted refueling and emergency landing rights at Takhli, for the use of military flights between Guam and Diego Garcia.⁷²

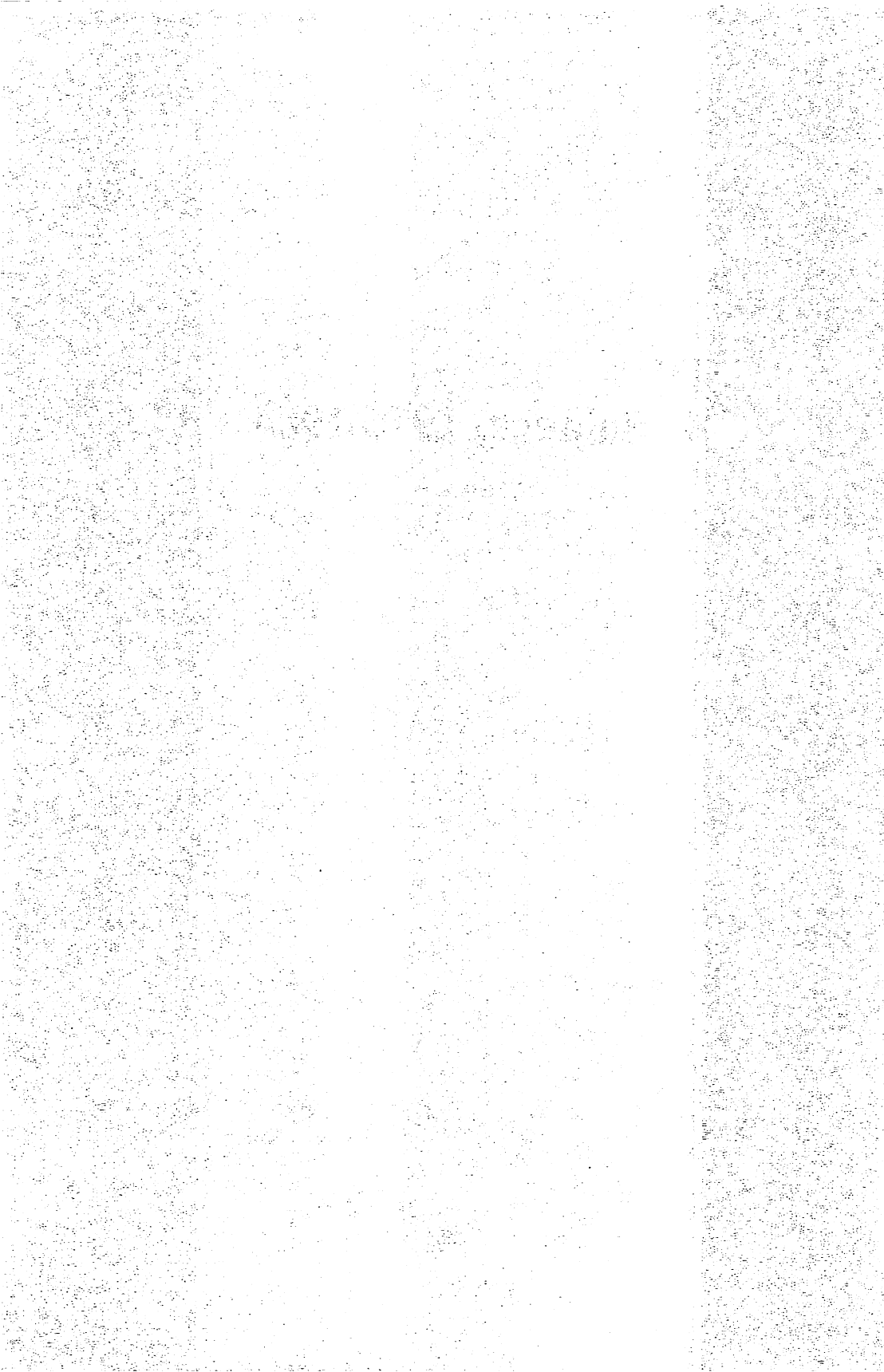
On June 20, 1976, the radio research facility at Ramasun was formally closed. On July 15, the deep-water port at Sattahip was turned over to the Thai government. And on July 20, U. S. MACTHAI offices in Bangkok were closed. Thus, the United States met the Thai government's four-month withdrawal deadline. From that date on, only 270 military advisers attached to JUSMAG remained of the former U. S. military presence in Thailand, which at one time had numbered nearly 50,000.

⁷⁰ Lewis M. Simons, "Bangkok Weighs U.S. Offer on Spy Base," *Washington Post*, May 15, 1976.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² "U.S. Planes to Use Takhli to Refuel," *Bangkok Post*, June 6, 1976.

Part IV
A New Balance, 1976-1984



Chapter 7

Readjustment and Restoration

On October 6, 1976, Thailand's military forces seized control of the government, following a bloody confrontation between leftist and rightist students at Thammasat University. Following the surprise return of Marshal Thanom from exile in Singapore on September 19, activist students had mobilized to demand his expulsion. When, on October 6, students on the university grounds allegedly fired on police, police and rightist students laid siege to the campus. In the ensuing violence, at least forty-two persons were killed, over two hundred were injured, and thousands arrested. That evening, a military group calling itself the National Administrative Reform Council (NARC) announced that it was assuming control of the government.

The NARC moved swiftly to consolidate control. Prime Minister Seni Pramoj was placed under house arrest, the 1974 Constitution was abolished and all political parties banned, and strict censorship was imposed. The most visible figure in Thailand's new military leadership was Admiral Sangad Chaloryu, a recently retired Thai Armed Forces Supreme Commander. The power behind the scenes, however, was General Kriangsak Chomanan, then the Deputy Supreme Commander. Named by the NARC to replace Seni as Prime Minister was Thanin Kraivichien, a Supreme Court justice known for his personal integrity, royalist leanings, and militantly anti-communist views.

In subsequent weeks and months, the ranks of the civil and military bureaucracies were purged; among those affected was Anand Panyarachun, who was relieved of his posts as Permanent Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Acting Foreign Minister and suspended from the civil service. At the same time, Thanat Khoman reemerged as a civilian adviser to the government on foreign affairs. On December 12, it was announced that, like Thanom, Prapart and Narong would be allowed to return from exile.

The October coup put an abrupt end to Thailand's latest experiment with democracy. Several factors lay behind the coup. Primary, perhaps, was a desire on the part of the military to regain its political primacy and restore the integrity of Thailand's eroding political structure. In reasserting its control, the military could count on a preponderance of public sentiment which had accumulated as a result of the worsening instability in the intervening years. Noisy and disruptive student demonstrations had lost the student movement much of the sympathy it had gained through the events of 1973. Unrest and lawlessness had seemingly become rampant. These domestic

difficulties were compounded by external pressures. Thailand's insurgency had continued to grow, and hostile powers ringed the country's eastern and northern frontiers. The immediacy of the security threat was brought home by the flood of refugees and tales of horror originating from nearby Laos, Vietnam, and Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia).¹

In the face of these mounting difficulties, Seni and the badly divided Parliament had increasingly appeared inadequate to the challenge. The military was also seriously disturbed by the policy line being struck by Seni's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pichai Rattakul. A former businessman, Pichai devoted much of his energy to achieving a rapprochement with Thailand's communist neighbors. His efforts in this direction included official and well-publicized visits to all three Indochinese communist capitals. The problem for many Thais lay not so much with Pichai's policy as with his style. While an adjustment of Thailand's relations with its neighbors was widely supported, Pichai's visibly anxious approach conveyed the impression of a Thailand that was weak and insecure, and of a leadership that was inordinately naive. Whether from the external or the domestic standpoint, then, in the eyes of Thailand's military and much of its populace the civilian leadership had proven incapable of protecting either Thailand's domestic stability or its external security.

In the year that followed, Thailand's politics remained highly polarized. Thanin turned his attention to the problems of economic development and waged an aggressive campaign against both corruption and the narcotics trade. His efforts in the latter area were applauded in the United States and drew a personal letter of appreciation from President Jimmy Carter. The circumstances of the October coup, however, and Thanin's rigid inability to tolerate dissent also served to force large numbers of students, intellectuals, and politicians into the countryside and the arms of the communist insurgency. In that period, the ranks of the CPT's jungle forces rose by approximately 4,000, of whom some 2,000 were believed to be urban refugees. Domestic tensions were also aggravated by conflict between the Thanin government and both the press (due to censorship) and the labor movement (which remained active despite an official ban on strikes and unions).

Another immediate result of the October 6 coup was a marked worsening of relations between Thailand and the Indochinese communist states. Vietnam's official daily *Nhan Dan* bitterly attacked both Thailand's new military rulers and the United States, charging that "U. S. neocolonialists do not want to remove their dirty feet from the mainland of Southeast Asia" and that the officers of the NARC were "all known to be working for the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency under instructions from the U. S. State

¹ The term *Kampuchea* refers to the Democratic People's Republic of Kampuchea (DP-RK), the new name given Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975. Both names are used interchangeably.

Department.”² Similar attacks were issued by the Soviet and Laotian news agencies, and border clashes with Laotian and Cambodian forces increased.

In the face of these developments, the new Thai government attempted to reestablish closer working ties with the United States. Thanat, in an interview given shortly after the coup, remarked that he was “afraid that the United States is no longer very much interested in Southeast Asia,” but that the new government “can and should help improve relations between our two countries.” While a return to “former circumstances” in which the United States maintained a massive military presence in Thailand was “out of the question,” Thanat remarked, there were still some specific areas in which closer military ties might be achieved: “Thailand still has some advantages to the United States—for example, temporary use of our air bases.”³

For the moment, however, the tide of events was still flowing in the opposite direction. On June 20, 1977 (pursuant to a decision taken in September 1975), the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was formally disbanded. Long in a state of internal disarray, SEATO had been dealt its fatal blows by the American opening to China and by the communist victories in Indochina. Despite the demise of the Treaty Organization, the Manila Pact on which it was based remained in force. The ambiguity of that commitment, however, was reflected in the remark of a senior State Department official that while “the United States does stand by its commitments, . . . the Carter Administration, I’m sure, would make its own judgment depending upon the specific circumstances.”⁴ According to a SEATO source, Thanin made quiet inquiries, soon after coming into office, about the possibility of SEATO being revived, “but it was too late.”⁵

INTERREGNUM

The United States was in fact still caught up in its own process of readjustment. Disillusion with foreign military involvement—and with Southeast Asia in particular—weighed heavily on U. S. policy. The new administration of President Jimmy Carter strongly reflected this turn inward. Foreign policy was initially reoriented away from the “Realpolitik” of power politics associated with Henry Kissinger, toward a more moralistic, populist approach.

In an address before the Western Governors’ Conference in June 1977, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke asserted that events in Asia had disproved the domino theory,

² “Thai Move Toward U. S. Seen,” *Washington Post*, October 7, 1976.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Lewis M. Simons, “SEATO’s Flags are Coming Down for the Last Time,” *Washington Post*, June 29, 1977.

⁵ *Ibid.*

and that the United States had formulated an effective new policy—"one which does not return us to the inappropriate level of earlier involvement in the internal affairs of the region, and yet does not constitute a confusing and destabilizing 'abandonment' of Asia."⁶ In the first two years of the Carter Administration, that policy was focused on three major themes: human rights, the normalization of diplomatic relations with Vietnam, and support for ASEAN.

Human rights became a factor in U.S. relations with several non-communist countries in Southeast Asia in 1977 and 1978. Thailand, along with Indonesia and the Philippines, was criticized for human rights abuses. In January 1978, State Department Coordinator for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Patricia Derian visited several Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand; and on June 30, 1977, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Robert Oakley testified before the House Subcommittee on International Organizations on human rights in Thailand. Though criticizing the continued detention without due process of persons arrested during the October coup, Oakley's testimony was notably restrained. "A state of emergency cannot justify the commission of violations of human rights," Oakley stated. At the same time, however, recognition was given to the underlying conditions that had precipitated the October coup, and considerable credit was given the Thai government for its humanitarian response to the problem of Indochinese refugees.⁷ Ultimately, the Carter Administration's human rights policy had little impact on either Thailand or U.S.-Thai relations.

The Carter Administration's human rights policy was criticized in its early stages, however, for its focus on the non-communist countries of the region, while failing to address far worse conditions in the communist nations of neighboring Indochina. Indeed, one State Department document observes that "it is difficult to locate instances of U. S. officials speaking out during 1977 and 1978 on Vietnamese responsibility for the human rights violations in Vietnam and Laos during that period which contributed substantially to the flight of refugees from those countries."⁸

⁶ "Address by the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Before the Western Governors' Conference, Honolulu, June 16, 1978," in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1984), p. 681 (galley).

⁷ "Statement by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the House Committee on International Relations, June 30, 1977," in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980*, pp. 848-59.

⁸ Neal H. Petersen, "Policy of the United States with Respect to Southeast Asia, 1977-1980," Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, Research Project No. 1224-CC, March 1980 (unclassified), p. 5.

One probable reason behind the Carter Administration's initial reluctance to condemn human rights violations in Laos and Vietnam was possibly the negative impact such action might have had on the Administration's drive to normalize diplomatic relations with Hanoi. At a news conference on January 31, 1977, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance stated that normalization would be in the interests of both nations. On February 16, President Carter indicated that when the United States received a proper accounting for American soldiers missing in action (MIAs), he would favor Vietnam's admission to the United Nations and the normalization of diplomatic relations. Soon after, a Presidential commission headed by Leonard Woodcock visited Hanoi to discuss MIAs and other matters; and on June 29, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance declared in a major address before New York's Asia Society that the process of normalization had already begun.⁹ Normalization talks were subsequently held in Paris, but stalled due to Hanoi's insistence that the U.S. agree to reparations as a precondition to diplomatic relations.

Washington's obvious desire to normalize relations with Vietnam led, among other things, to some concern in non-communist Southeast Asia that the United States was more interested in its relationship with Vietnam than in strengthening its ties with ASEAN. This led several nations, including Japan, Singapore, and Australia, to urge Washington to express clearer public support for ASEAN and to more fully recognize its importance. As a nonmilitary, nonconfrontational economic grouping, ASEAN in fact fit well with the new Administration's principles and objectives, and support for ASEAN soon became a central facet of American policy in Southeast Asia. Strengthening of U.S. ties with ASEAN and its members was subsequently identified by Vance in his Asia Society address in June and by numerous other spokesmen as a major objective of U.S. regional policy. The first formal U.S.-ASEAN joint meeting took place in Manila in September 1977, with the dialogue continued in Washington the following year. Though short on concrete results, these early exchanges carried considerable symbolic importance and set in motion what would soon be an established process of consultation.

In Thailand, the U.S. reaffirmed its commitment under the Manila Pact as interpreted in the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué, and new support was extended in such areas as narcotics control and refugee assistance. The latter problem in particular assumed large proportions for both the United States and Thailand. As of August 1977, five hundred boat refugees were fleeing Vietnam each month, and another twelve hundred per month were arriving

⁹ "America's Role in Asia," Address by the Secretary of State Before the Asia Society, New York, June 29, 1977, in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980*, p. 674.

overland in Thailand. This tide increased dramatically in 1978 and reached crisis proportions in 1979. Spurred by Vietnamese policies aimed at the control of private commerce, persecution of ethnic Chinese and Hmong tribesmen, and restrictions on personal and civil liberties, the monthly number of refugees leaving Indochina rose by January 1978 to fifteen hundred by sea and three thousand by land, and by August 1978 to a total of six thousand per month, of whom half were Laotian tribesmen and the rest Vietnamese boat people. This exodus peaked in May 1979, when 65,000 persons, predominantly boat people, fled Indochina. All overland refugees, and many boat people, sought refuge in Thailand.

The United States reacted quickly and with compassion. In an address in Honolulu on May 10, 1978, Vice-President Walter Mondale observed:

The promotion of wider observance of human rights is a central objective of the Administration's foreign policy. In Southeast Asia, there is no more profound test of our government's commitment to human rights than the way in which we respond to the rapidly increasing flow of Indochinese refugees who deserve our admiration for their courage and our sympathy for their plight. . . . No single country can manage this problem alone. Given our legacy of involvement in Vietnam, we bear special responsibilities, and we are prepared to meet them. The United States must take the lead in developing a broader international effort to handle the refugee problem.¹⁰

Acting on that commitment and on the growing threat to the stability of first-asylum countries such as Thailand created by the increasing refugee burden, the United States announced on July 5, 1978, that refugees rescued at sea by U. S. vessels would be admitted to the United States if they could not find sanctuary elsewhere. On August 15, the Administration indicated that it would seek a special admission of up to 50,000 refugees each year, of whom half might be Indochinese. During 1977, fifteen thousand Indochinese were paroled into the United States; in 1978, twenty-two thousand; and an augmented parole of an additional twenty thousand was announced in December 1978.

The United States's new ambassador to Thailand, Morton Abramowitz (who arrived in August 1978), worked actively to engage the attention of both Washington and the Thais on the refugee problem. Arriving at the height of the boat people crisis, he perceived three basic challenges: (1) to stop the outflow from Vietnam; (2) to provide where necessary for the resettlement of those who could not return; and (3) to provide for the welfare of those who for the time being would stay in Thailand. Abramowitz pushed hard on all three fronts, and his and other efforts led to the convening, on July 20-21, 1979, of the Geneva Conference on Refugees and Displaced Persons, at which Vietnam agreed to the institution of an orderly

¹⁰ W. Z. Slany, "U. S. Policy on Refugees, 1977-1980," Office of the Historian, U. S. Department of State, Research Project No. 1224-B, June 1980, pp. 4-5.

departure program (ODP) for those wishing and qualified to leave. The Embassy pressed hard for domestic U. S. resettlement slots and resources for refugee support as well. The lead thus provided by the United States in resettlement ultimately encouraged other countries to further open their doors to the still-growing tide of persons fleeing Indochina. From that point onward, the United States was to serve as the linchpin of the international resettlement effort for Indochinese refugees, and thus as an essential element in Thai refugee policy. In turn, a sustained high level of U. S. refugee offtake from Thailand was to become the key to continued Thai willingness to accept new refugee flows.

On October 20, 1977, Thailand's political direction changed again when, in an unopposed coup, Thanin was ousted as Prime Minister by an internal military coup. Thanin had proven too inflexible and reactionary even for Thailand's conservative and order-conscious military. In the eyes of many, his political dogmatism and hard-line foreign policy had deepened societal cleavages at home and worsened relations with Thailand's communist neighbors.

Thanin's passing was not widely mourned. General Kriangsak Chomanan emerged as his successor at the head of a government composed primarily of technocrats. The only civilian holdover from the Thanin cabinet was Foreign Minister Upadit Panchariyangkun. A pragmatic and flexible officer, Kriangsak moved quickly to heal the breaches that threatened to divide Thai society. In foreign affairs, he also acted to repair relations with the Indochinese states. Shortly after coming into office, Kriangsak declared Thailand's intention to be on good terms "with all countries, regardless of ideology,"¹¹ and relations with both Laos and Vietnam subsequently improved substantially. In September 1978, Vietnam's Premier Pham Van Dong pledged in Bangkok that Vietnam would not support insurgency in Thailand "directly or indirectly."¹² In May 1978, Kriangsak also visited China, a move that was reciprocated by Teng Hsiao-p'ing the following October. Thai-Kampuchean relations, however, remained strained, as raids on Thai border villages by both Khmer Rouge and Kampuchean based CPT guerillas continued.

WATERSHED

The political, military, and diplomatic climate of Southeast Asia changed fundamentally when, on December 25, 1978, Vietnamese forces launched a massive invasion of neighboring Kampuchea. The invasion took

¹¹ Richard Nations, "Thailand: Back in the Game," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 10, 1978, p. 21.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 24.

place against a backdrop of steadily worsening Sino-Vietnamese relations caused by the large-scale expulsion of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam and increased political polarization within Indochina—with China strongly backing the Khmer Rouge, and Moscow backing Vietnam. Vietnam's entry into COMECON in June 1978 and the conclusion of a Treaty of Friendship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union the following November had put the seal on the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance and heightened concern in Beijing that Vietnam would become a base for Soviet power in the region and thus a major threat to China itself. With the invasion of Cambodia, however, Sino-Vietnamese relations moved from sharp disagreement to an open breach. By January 7, Vietnam's expeditionary force was in control of Pnompenh. Rather than confront Vietnam frontally, the Khmer Rouge regime of Premier Pol Pot withdrew to the mountains of the Southwest along the Thai-Cambodian border to continue a guerilla struggle.

The immediate and most important result of these events was a rapid hardening of the lines of confrontation between China, Thailand, ASEAN, and, to a lesser extent, the United States on one hand, and Soviet-supported Vietnam on the other. From that point onward, Thai and ASEAN diplomacy has remained heavily focused on the continuing Kampuchean problem.

Cambodia has historically (since the decline of the ancient Khmer kingdom) served as a buffer between Thailand and Vietnam. With Vietnam's seizure of Pnompenh and the approach of Vietnamese troops toward the Thai border, that critical buffer disappeared and Thailand was projected into the unenviable status of a "front-line state." With its fundamental security at risk, Thai foreign policy coalesced around the twin objectives of preventing the consolidation of Vietnam's hold on Kampuchea and maximizing Thailand's sources of essential external support. Thereafter, Thailand's interaction with China, the United States, and its ASEAN partners rose dramatically.

Bangkok's resulting cooperation with China and its support for resistance elements in Kampuchea did not go unnoticed in Hanoi. In sharp propaganda attacks, Bangkok was repeatedly accused of hostile collusion with China. This subsequently became a major Vietnamese theme, with Hanoi charging Thailand with serving as Beijing and Washington's tool to weaken Vietnam and "sabotage peace in Southeast Asia."¹³ Militant Chinese hostility toward Vietnam and repeated assurances of Chinese support for Thailand, however, provided an important offset and served to underline the increasingly important role that China was coming to play as a major guarantor of Thai security. This occurred as Thailand took on new importance for Beijing as a critical counterweight and bar to further Soviet-Vietnamese expansion to the south.

¹³ See Paul Quinn Judge, "Three-pronged Pincer," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 24, 1984.

On February 17, 1980, Chinese forces launched a limited invasion of northern Vietnam in an effort to draw Vietnamese troops away from Kampuchea and to "punish" Vietnamese aggression. Though the military results of the fighting were ambiguous, Beijing in later months repeatedly held out the threat of a "second lesson" should Vietnamese aggression go too far. Direct assurances of Chinese military support for Thailand were also offered during a visit to Beijing by Thai Foreign Minister Sitthi Savetsila in August 1980. The resulting strategic realignment constituted a major and in some ways ironic shift from the situation only ten years earlier, when China had been perceived as the principal security threat to Thailand, and the United States Bangkok's sole security guarantor.

Despite their ever-closer relationship with Beijing, the Thais perceived, however, that an exclusive reliance on China was undesirable—a view shared by their ASEAN colleagues. Despite the tactical alignment between the two countries, a historical Southeast Asian distrust of China continued to color Thai thinking. What, many asked, would the Chinese attitude be when the momentary advantages of cooperation in Kampuchea someday disappeared? ASEAN and the United States thus continued to figure prominently in Thailand's policy: The former as a framework for long-term regional growth and security and as the primary vehicle for diplomatic pressure on Hanoi, and the latter as the ultimate guarantor of Thai security and a critical political counterweight to China.

Largely dormant since its founding in 1967, ASEAN had taken on new significance following the U. S. withdrawal from South Vietnam. Spurred by the fall of Indochina and fearing the extension of communist pressure southward, the five ASEAN states had strengthened their internal consensus at the first ASEAN summit conference in Bali in 1976. In the ASEAN view, one key to the future survival and growth of the non-communist states of the region lay in the collective strength afforded by increased political as well as economic cooperation. With the consolidation of Vietnamese power in Indochina, this objective took on new urgency.

The extension of armed Vietnamese power into a neighboring state (Kampuchea), no matter how reviled its government, catalyzed the ASEAN states around a common political goal: The prevention of a consolidated Vietnamese control in Kampuchea and the restoration of a neutral, non-aligned government in that country. As the front-line member facing Vietnam, Thailand's security interests quickly became those of ASEAN as a whole. On January 12, 1979, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, assembled in Bangkok, jointly called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Kampuchea. On November 14, ASEAN successfully moved a resolution before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA Resolution 34/22), calling for "the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea," and urging "all states to refrain from all acts or threats of aggression and all

forms of interference in the internal affairs of states in Southeast Asia.”¹⁴ Severely embarrassed, Hanoi lashed out at ASEAN and at Thailand in particular. Ignoring the resolution, Vietnam issued thinly veiled threats to the effect that if Thailand and its neighbors continued their present policies they would face “problems,” possibly including Vietnamese support for internal insurgencies.¹⁵

As a bordering state, Thailand felt the effects of the Cambodian struggle most directly. The most immediate impact came in the form of massive numbers of refugees. Already burdened with large numbers of Vietnamese, Laotians, and Hmong, beginning in April and May 1979 Thailand also became the destination of tens of thousands of Cambodians. During the summer and fall, between 500,000 and 600,000 Cambodians moved to the Thai border. On June 10, the Thai army, fearing a situation it could not control, forced 42,000 Cambodians back into Kampuchea, during which process many were killed or injured by land mines in the area they were made to enter. Though strongly criticized in the United States and elsewhere in the West, the Thai action served to dramatize both the seriousness of the refugee situation and Thailand’s problems in coping with it.

Startled by the loss of life which had occurred, U. S. and international attention was galvanized in support of a more substantial refugee relief effort. By late fall, as many as 150,000 Cambodians were in camps in Thailand, with perhaps 200,000 more located just across the border. Because of their ordeal and the shortage of rice in Kampuchea, most were in a severely weakened condition and mortality rates were high. Food distribution was commenced by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNICEF. In the face of massive international concern, Kriangsak declared an “open door” policy under which Thailand granted refuge on a temporary basis to Cambodians successfully entering the country. Under the terms of the new policy, such persons, though permitted to remain in Thailand, were not granted formal “refugee” status, but were expected to eventually return to their homeland. In the next seven months, some 170,000 “new Khmer” crossed the Thai border, to be placed in UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) holding centers. The generosity of Thailand’s gesture brought diplomatic praise for Bangkok and new international recognition for both Thailand’s difficult situation and the continuing problems in Kampuchea that had caused it. No less important, it served to restore an intense focus by the American public on the problems of Southeast Asia following an extended period of disinterest, and a new awareness of the importance and centrality of Thailand to that region. It also brought the Thais a very

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly Resolution adopted November 19, 1979, in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980*, pp. 811-12.

¹⁵ Nayan Chanda, “Hanoi Ponders Its Strategy,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 7, 1979, p. 21.

real longer-term risk of a burdensome and potentially destabilizing permanent refugee presence on Thai soil. Discussion of a possible "Palestinian-style" situation became increasingly common.

Once again, Bangkok turned to the United States for support. Strong assurances from Washington that Thailand would not be left to shoulder the refugee burden alone had led to the suspension of Bangkok's policy of forced repatriation the previous summer. On October 24, President Carter pledged \$30 million to assist Cambodian refugees entering Thailand and indicated his support for Congressional efforts to provide an additional \$30 million. From November 7 to 19, Rosalyn Carter visited refugee camps in Thailand at her husband's request, on a mission to identify ways to increase relief supplies and support for relief programs. As a result of that visit, Carter on November 15 directed the allotment of an additional \$6 million to international relief efforts in Kampuchea. Carter also instructed the State Department to review refugee resettlement procedures so as to expedite admissions to the U. S., and to consult with the Thai and international agencies on improving contingency plans for an anticipated movement of 250,000 additional Cambodians into Thailand. The monthly allocation of refugee admissions to the United States from Thai camps was simultaneously raised. On November 14, a refugee assistance authorization bill was signed into law which provided \$60 million (\$30 million outright and \$30 million standby) for refugee programs. By April 1980, the U. S. contribution to Cambodian relief since October totaled \$87 million.¹⁶

Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea proved to be, in fact, a watershed not only for Thailand but for the United States. After a period of drift, Washington was called upon to reassume a major role in support of regional security. Renewed U. S. interest in the region was welcomed by ASEAN, whose members perceived Vietnam's Soviet-supported juggernaut as a direct threat to Thailand's security, and hence their own. As one well-placed Thai observer commented, "ASEAN was now more apprehensive of U. S. neglect than of excessive U. S. involvement."¹⁷

Vietnam's thrust into Kampuchea, taken together with its generation of refugees and its growing association with the Soviet Union, served to challenge earlier assumptions in the Carter leadership concerning Vietnam and raised grave new doubts about Hanoi's long-term intentions in the region. This occurred even as it appeared that U. S.-Vietnamese differences over war reparations might be overcome. Holbrooke and Vance's drive for normalization with Hanoi had already been in trouble with White House National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who considered it a "policy diversion"

¹⁶ "U. S. Policy on Refugees, 1977-1980" (U. S. Department of State), pp. 16-17.

¹⁷ Sarasin Viraphol, "Thai-American Relations in the Post-1975 Period," in William Warren and Wiwat Mungkandi, *A Century and a Half of Thai-American Relations* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1982), p. 143.

that threatened to disturb delicate U. S. negotiations with the Chinese. In Brzezinski's view, such an initiative would prejudice U. S. efforts to restore full diplomatic relations with China (which were then gathering momentum), as it would likely be interpreted in Beijing as a "pro-Soviet, anti-Chinese move."¹⁸

Following signals of new flexibility in the summer of 1978, Vietnamese diplomat Nguyen Co Thach stated in a meeting with Hollbrooke on September 29 in New York that Vietnam was prepared to drop all preconditions and to proceed toward the full normalization of relations. Although agreement was reached in principle that U. S.-Vietnamese normalization was a mutual objective, a direct U. S. response was deferred. In the meantime, however, such discussions were being quickly overtaken by events, as the continuing crisis of Vietnamese refugees and other issues seriously eroded the political atmosphere essential for further progress. Following the invasion of Kampuchea, and in part as a result of the firm reaction of Thailand and its ASEAN partners, any further planning for the normalization of U. S. relations with Vietnam was suspended. On March 3, 1979, Vance, pointing to Vietnam's demands for reparations, its inhumane policy toward refugees, and its invasion of Kampuchea, acknowledged that "it is unlikely that we will be establishing relations with Vietnam in the near future."¹⁹

Thailand now became a prime focus of attention. In his news conference of January 17, 1979, President Carter stated:

We are very interested in seeing the integrity of Thailand protected, the borders not endangered or even threatened by the insurgent troops from Vietnam in Cambodia. We have joined in with almost all other nations of the world in the United Nations in condemning the intrusion into Cambodia by Vietnamese forces. This obviously involves the adjacent country of Thailand. . . .

The Soviet Union has expressed their support for Vietnam, as you know. And in our efforts, along with others in the United Nations, we have warned both the Vietnamese and also the Soviets who supply them, against any danger they might exhibit toward Thailand.²⁰

On February 4, 1979, Kriangsak traveled to Washington. During his visit, he pressed the Thai case for a clearer U. S. commitment to Thailand's defense, and in particular for increased U. S. military assistance. He also sought—and obtained—U. S. agreement to work closely with ASEAN in its pursuit of a political solution in Kampuchea, and a firm U. S. commitment to provide additional assistance to permit Thailand to cope with the growing

¹⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), pp. 228-29.

¹⁹ "Reply of the Secretary of State to a Question, March 3, 1979," in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980*, pp. 866-67.

²⁰ "Reply by the President to a Question at a News Conference, Washington, January 17, 1979," in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980*, p. 851.

problem of Kampuchean refugees. On his departure, a joint communiqué was issued which read in part:

The President stated that the United States supports the integrity of Thailand both in terms of the historic U.S.-Thai friendship as well as our interest in Thailand as a stable, secure, and peaceful nation in Southeast Asia with an important role in regional peace and cohesion. He confirmed the continuing validity of U.S. commitments in the Manila Pact.

Within the context of an ongoing military assistance program, the United States will expedite items of military equipment already ordered by Thailand and has increased military credits (FMS) [foreign military sales] for 1979. The United States will consider sympathetically new Thai requests.²¹

U.S. military sales credits for Thailand subsequently underwent a modest increase, from \$30 million (FY 1979) to \$36 million (FY 1980). This was more than matched by a dramatic increase in Thailand's overall level of military expenditure. From 1978 to 1979, defense expenditures rose from \$737 million to \$942 million, resulting in a surge in the level of arms imports from 1979 to 1980 from \$120 million to \$320 million.²²

Significant quantities of U.S. arms began flowing into Thailand by the summer of 1979. Beginning in early 1979, the Army Staff at the Department of Defense was "endlessly" engaged, as one participant put it, in a search for military items available for expedited delivery to Thailand.²³ This process continued through 1979 and 1980, and was furthered by Abramowitz's active lobbying of both the State and Defense Departments on behalf of both new sales and Thai requests for accelerated deliveries.

Washington's desire to support the Thai militarily stemmed not only from a desire to strengthen Thai defenses against possible attack but also from a lingering concern that a weak or isolated Thailand, confronted by a bellicose and more powerful Vietnam, might retreat to a softer, more accommodating policy toward that country.

One prominent example of the kind of deliberations that took place in Washington concerned the sale of M-48 A5 tanks, perhaps the most significant military sale of this period and an important political symbol to the Thais. Kriangsak had early in 1979 requested the sale of the M-60 tank as a replacement for the older Korean War vintage M-41. That request was denied, based on a determination by JUSMAG that the M-60 was not appropriate to Thai logistical conditions. Kriangsak, however, countered with the proposal that the U.S. "loan" the Thai forty-six M-60s for training and morale purposes, and as a signal to the Vietnamese. Washington's response, as formulated by Holbrooke and supported by Abramowitz, was reportedly

²¹ "Policy of the United States with Respect to Southeast Asia," pp. 13-14.

²² *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1971-1980* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1983), pp. 68, 111.

²³ Interview, Col. Jean Sauvageot (Washington, D.C., September 20, 1983).

that a loan of tanks would not be possible from the United States, but could be arranged from Israel. The price to the Thais, however, would be the granting of landing rights at Bangkok for Israel's El Al airlines. Kriangsak, placed in a dilemma, balked: though sympathetic to Israel, Thailand was too vulnerable to the disruption of Arab oil supplies to safely comply.

Washington thereafter proposed that Bangkok alter its request from the M-60 to the down-scale M-48 A5 tank. It was then found, however, that no M-48 A5s were technically available, as the U. S. Army was itself some 2,000 main battle tanks short of the "prudent risk" level and nearly 5,000 short of its authorized acquisition level. Officers responsible for readiness on the Army Staff therefore opposed the transfer, while others were prepared to support the sale in the event of a formal acknowledgment and report to Congress (as required by the Arms Export Control Act) that such a sale would result in a "significant adverse effect" on American combat readiness. Notwithstanding the legal issues raised, the Army was overruled by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), largely as a result of pressures generated by Abramowitz and the State Department. After coming to a head in April, the issue was catalyzed in May by a short and terse but effective cable from Abramowitz, stating that he would be meeting with Prem (the new Prime Minister), that Prem would raise the issue in a meeting the following day, and that future Thai cooperation with the U. S. could be expected to advance or stagnate depending on the response. Immediately, the decision was made to provide the tanks by whatever means necessary; no finding of "significant adverse effect" was made.²⁴

By contrast, a running dispute between CINCPAC (Commander-in-Chief of U. S. Forces in the Pacific) Adm. Maurice Weisner and Abramowitz points to the limits of U. S. policy in this period. Beginning in late 1978, and particularly after Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea, Weisner attempted to restore a limited U. S. military capability at U-Tapao. His proposal was to send six to eight aircraft to U-Tapao every six months for air exercises, either unilaterally or jointly with the Thais. After ten days, the planes were to be withdrawn. The objective was to demonstrate U. S. interest in Thai security and to manifest a U. S. willingness to stand by its commitments. Kriangsak approved of the exercises. Through most of 1979 and until Weisner's retirement in the late fall, however, Abramowitz successfully opposed the plan. In his view, the domestic sustainability of the American commitment to Thailand was questionable, and to have returned U. S. military aircraft to Thailand might have prompted the Thais to an unwarranted reliance on an uncertain U. S. response. It might also have encouraged the Thais in their deepening engagement in Kampuchea. Leery

²⁴ Ibid.; also Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., September 23, 1983); Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., November 12, 1983).

on both fronts, Abramowitz held CINCPAC at bay, and in the resulting stalemate the plan was abandoned.²⁵ The gap between Washington's public statements and this more tentative interpretation of America's role and policy in the region. As often in the past, therefore, U. S. credibility and leadership continued to be questioned in Bangkok.

During the remainder of 1979, the United States also continued its support for ASEAN's efforts to achieve a political settlement in Kampuchea. In July, Cyrus Vance became the first U. S. Secretary of State to attend the annual meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers, setting a pattern that has since been maintained with more or less regularity. Speaking in Bali (Indonesia), Vance stated: "Southeast Asia is important to the United States and to our security, and we see our cooperation with ASEAN as vital to the peace, prosperity and stability of Southeast Asia. . . . We are committed morally and by treaty to support the ASEAN states."²⁶ Vance went on to reaffirm U. S. support for the integrity of Thailand and America's commitment to continue its cooperation with ASEAN in dealing with the Indochinese refugee crisis.

On September 21, the United States supported a successful ASEAN effort in the UN General Assembly to preserve the accreditation of Democratic Kampuchea (the Khmer Rouge) as the legal representative of Kampuchea. The U. S. made clear at the time, however, that this action did not constitute an endorsement of the Khmer Rouge, but rather signified rejection of a regime (Heng Samrin) imposed by Vietnamese force and which itself was guilty of human rights abuses against the Khmer people.²⁷

The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan on December 25, 1979—one year to the day after Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea—severely shook what hope remained in the Carter Administration for U. S.-Soviet détente and further galvanized ASEAN policy on Kampuchea. Fearing the growing shadow of Soviet expansionism, and no less importantly fearing a weak American response, ASEAN opinion increasingly welcomed a higher U. S. profile in the region.

In an interview with *U. S. News and World Report* on December 31, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski observed:

[Vietnamese] efforts to consolidate control over that country—Cambodia—can easily create frictions and then conflicts with a neighbor—Thailand. The geographical scope of the initial act of aggression could thereby be enlarged. . . . The United

²⁵ Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., September 23, 1983); Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., September 24, 1983).

²⁶ "Statement by the Secretary of State Before the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Conference, Bali, Indonesia, July 2, 1979," in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980*, pp. 693-96.

²⁷ "Policy of the United States with Respect to Southeast Asia, 1977-1980," p. 19.

States has certain obligations to Thailand. China has expressed great concern about Vietnamese aggressiveness. There are the makings here of a potential clash which would be of concern to the international community. This is why not only Vietnam but its sponsors should exercise the greatest degree of self-restraint on this matter.²⁸

In a written message accompanying his State of the Union address on January 21, 1980, President Carter made the same point:

We have taken all prudent steps possible to deter Vietnamese attacks on Thai territory by increasing our support of the Thais, and by direct warnings to Vietnam and the U.S.S.R.²⁹

As the year went on, Washington attempted to project a new image of firmness in the region. Speaking to ASEAN's concerns, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke declared: "America has ended its period of drift in this region. We are and we will remain a Pacific power and an Asian power."³⁰ When asked during a press conference in Singapore how the U. S. would demonstrate its commitment, Holbrooke replied: "I don't think we should go around proving ourselves all the time. It gets a little tiresome after a while. U. S. commitments should be viewed as valid until proved otherwise."³¹ Holbrooke went on to observe that "as tensions grow in the area included in the Manila Pact, some who are involved have expressed renewed interest in it," and that from his point of view the Pact remained a valid commitment of the United States.

Many, however, remained unconvinced. With the renewed interest on both sides in a higher American profile in Southeast Asia, there also came a revival of old questions concerning the strength and durability of American commitments. Thai officials were pleased with the new statements from Washington linking Soviet aggression in Afghanistan with Vietnamese expansion in Kampuchea, but were disappointed that U. S. military aid to Thailand remained only \$40 million, as compared to \$400 million at that time for Pakistan. As put by one Thai official, it was not just the money, but rather the degree of U. S. commitment which caused doubt: "What we want to hear from the Americans is that any attack on Thailand would be considered an attack on the vital interests of the U. S. But so far they have refused. The talk that the Manila Pact is still alive is not enough."³² While

²⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁰ Rodney Tasker, "A Useful Role for Superpowers," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 29, 1980, p. 12.

³¹ Susumu Awano-hara, "A Friend in Deed," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 22, 1980, p. 8.

³² Nayan Chanda, "A Bid to Hold the Middle Ground," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 7, 1980, p. 27.

welcoming the revival of U.S. interest in the region, doubt also remained about the permanence of Washington's new line. One high-ranking Thai diplomat observed: "U.S. policy has been like a pendulum. When [the Americans] were fighting in Vietnam it looked as though they were going to be here. Then suddenly they are gone. Now they say they are coming back again, but for how long?"³³

These larger tensions were paralleled on a lesser scale by fissures in Bangkok. While government-to-government relations between the United States and Thailand remained close, the personal relationship between Abramowitz and Kriangsak had become increasingly strained. Much of the problem lay in Abramowitz's personal style, which frequently irritated Thai sensitivities. Assertive by nature, the Ambassador was viewed by many in Bangkok's elite as being aloof and often high-handed. This perception, to a large extent, appears to have stemmed from a stiffness on Abramowitz's part which fit poorly with the more relaxed, personalized Thai style of doing business. The root of the problem lay deeper, however. Many in Thailand continued to harbor a basic distrust of the Carter leadership. Holbrooke's earlier attempts to normalize relations with Vietnam had first inspired that distrust, and suspicion remained that this objective had not been fully abandoned. As a result, Abramowitz was identified with Holbrooke and was perceived in key Thai circles as both excessively preoccupied with Indochina, and Washington's real or imagined priorities there, and insufficiently sensitive to Thai concerns. The problem of Indochinese refugees proved a particular source of friction. Though the refugee issue in fact proved a major catalyst for once again attracting American attention to Thailand's concerns, Kriangsak and others more often perceived Abramowitz's strong focus on refugees as coming at Thailand's expense.

In the fall of 1979, reports circulated that Holbrooke had been sounding out both Malaysia and Singapore regarding a possible accommodation with Vietnam over Kampuchea. In fact, both Vance and Holbrooke had retained their desire to normalize relations with Vietnam, the situation in Kampuchea notwithstanding. According to Brzezinski, this had led to a "sharp discussion" at a Presidential breakfast on May 18, at which Vance had forcefully argued that American neglect of Vietnam was driving Hanoi into the hands of the Soviets, and with the Security Adviser retorting that the Soviets and Vietnamese were promoting their own interests and that the U.S. should not rush to embrace Vietnam at a time when it was suppressing Cambodia and when U.S. relations with China were still unsettled. In July, Vance returned to the White House with a proposal for American-Vietnamese talks on Kampuchea, but was deflected again by objections from Brzezinski.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 416-17.

Any such softening of American support for Thailand and ASEAN, if true, threatened to undermine Kriangsak's carefully constructed Cambodian strategy. In Kriangsak's view, a Vietnamese-dominated power bloc in Indochina would both threaten Thai security interests directly and produce an inevitable and highly undesirable confrontation with ASEAN. His response entailed a two-pronged approach, one hard-line and the other considerably more flexible. On one level, Kriangsak attempted to keep Thailand's channels to the Vietnamese leadership open, suggesting that a reasonable long-term accommodation in the region could be worked out if only Hanoi would show the requisite flexibility. For this line of approach to succeed, however, Kriangsak also needed a parallel, more visibly hard-line option. This entailed a strong ASEAN policy of opposition to Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea, backed by the United States. Realizing that U. S. public opinion precluded any direct U. S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, Kriangsak nevertheless viewed strong U. S. political support for ASEAN's policy as essential. Any unilateral U. S. move in Hanoi's direction would thus have seriously undercut the Thai position.

Tension peaked early in the new year. In February, Kriangsak considered writing to President Carter to officially request Abramowitz's recall, but was dissuaded from doing so.³⁵ Sensitivities in the Ministry were also offended when Holbrooke, who was visiting Bangkok at the time, attempted to influence the selection of the new Thai ambassador to Washington. The denouement of this process occurred on February 13 in a meeting with Kriangsak attended by Holbrooke, Abramowitz, and (CINCPAC) Admiral Robert Long. In that meeting, disagreement surfaced between Kriangsak and Holbrooke, who in his presentation hinted at a possible U. S. move toward recognition of Hanoi. Such a move, coupled with concessions in Kampuchea aimed at the recognition of Heng Samrin, would in Holbrooke's view have served to wean Vietnam away from the Soviet Union (an objective that had taken on new life in the wake of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan). In Kriangsak's view, however, this would have conceded Kampuchea to Vietnam, and for only a dubious strategic advantage. Though it was perhaps not immediately apparent just how deep a gulf of perception and policy had arisen, the point was clear to Kriangsak, who was deeply angered. Two weeks later, the Kriangsak government fell, beset by a variety of problems. In Kriangsak's own view, however, at least one of those reasons was the perceived loss of American support for his government, produced by diverging Thai and American policies.³⁶

³⁵ Confidential Interview (Washington, D. C., November 12, 1983).

³⁶ Richard Nations, "Removing a Block on the Road to Hanoi," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 4, 1980, pp. 8-10; Interview, Richard Nations (October 7, 1983); Comments, Gen. Kriangsak Chomanan, November 4, 1983; Suthichai Yoon, "Kriangsak, Abramowitz: How Did Relations Sour?" *The Nation* (Bangkok), January 14, 1981.

Kriangsak was replaced as Prime Minister by General Prem Tinsulanond, a respected officer widely known for his personal integrity. His new cabinet included as Foreign Minister Air Chief Marshal Sitthi Savetsila, a holdover from the Kriangsak cabinet who only weeks before had replaced Upadit Pachariyankun. During the preceding year, Thailand's foreign policy had in large part been personally conceived and run by Kriangsak, who had increasingly turned to Sitthi (the Secretary General of the National Security Council and a Minister without portfolio) for advice. Sitthi's appointment as Foreign Minister, which had been long expected, closed that gap and consolidated what was already a close working relationship. A man of integrity with a solid grasp of national security issues, Sitthi's retention by Prem ensured both continuity and firmness in Thailand's foreign policy. It also led to a hardening of Thai policy toward Vietnam, as continued intransigence in Hanoi led to the gradual abandonment of Kriangsak's two-track approach. Under Sitthi's guidance, Thai cooperation with China, as well as with the United States and ASEAN, increased, and new emphasis was placed on pressuring a Vietnamese withdrawal.

On June 23, 1980, Vietnam put America's commitment to the test by launching an armed incursion from Kampuchea into Thai territory adjacent to the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet. Evidence indicated that the Vietnamese move, involving several hundred troops, was premeditated. While launching a vigorous counterattack which forced the Vietnamese to withdraw, Bangkok also appealed to the United States and ASEAN for support. From a public relations standpoint, the Vietnamese attack could not have been more poorly timed. Fighting commenced only three days before the opening in Kuala Lumpur of the Thirteenth ASEAN Foreign Ministers Conference, a session also attended by the new U. S. Secretary of State Edmund Muskie and by the Foreign Ministers of Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It also followed repeated pledges by Hanoi that it would respect Thailand's sovereignty and territory.³⁷ In Kuala Lumpur, the ASEAN Ministers issued a communiqué jointly condemning Vietnam's move as "an irresponsible and dangerous act which will have far-reaching and serious consequences and which constitutes a grave threat to the security of Thailand and the Southeast Asian region."³⁸

The most important effect of the invasion, however, was a gelling of ASEAN unity on the Kampuchean question and an increased identification

³⁷ In May 1980, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach declared that "Vietnam or Indochinese Nations is or are prepared to give all assurances and guarantees, international and bilateral, to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of Thailand." Quoted in Nayan Chanda, "The Making of a Bloc," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 30, 1980.

³⁸ Derek Davies, "Victory for the Hardline Hawks," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 4, 1980, p. 12.

both of ASEAN interests with those of Thailand and of Vietnam as a major regional threat. The incursion also provoked an immediate response from the United States. On June 28, Muskie stated before the Conference that:

We have seen new assaults on the territorial integrity of Thailand by a government in Vietnam that has demonstrated again disregard for the most basic tenet of international life—respect for the sovereignty of other nations. . . . We stand behind the independence, security, and territorial integrity of Thailand. That support is based on our historical friendship and our conviction that a secure Thailand is a force for regional peace and cohesion. . . . Let me assure you today that as a result of the recent developments on the Thai-Kampuchea border, we intend to step up our assistance to Thailand.³⁹

Soon after, on July 1, the United States announced an immediate emergency airlift to Thailand of small arms and artillery (M-16 rifles, 106mm recoilless rifles, and 105mm Howitzers). It was also announced that the United States would shortly begin expediting surface shipments of small arms and artillery and would move ahead with the accelerated delivery by sea of thirty-five M-48 A5 tanks. Though arriving too late to affect the military situation, this gesture was intended to provide an important psychological boost to the Thais. In fact, because of the persisting lack of confidence in Washington's strength of purpose, the psychological effect on the Thais was small. This was all the more the case as the shipments in question did not constitute new support, but rather the accelerated delivery of equipment already contracted for. Nevertheless, as a symbolic gesture the U. S. response was appreciated, and its swiftness served clear notice on Vietnam of American support for Thailand's security.

³⁹ "Statement by the Secretary of State Before the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, June 28, 1980," in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980*, pp. 696-97.

Afterword

Thailand and the United States: Into the Eighties

The inauguration of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in January 1981 in its own way marked a turning point in American foreign policy. The new administration came into office determined to end the vacillation and uncertainty which had marked U. S. policy in the preceding years. In its view, the perception of declining U. S. power and will and of growing Soviet strength had led to a dangerous weakening of America's global position and a continuing crisis of confidence among America's friends and allies. The new administration therefore set as its chief global priorities the restoration of American military strength, the checking of further Soviet expansionism, and the reinvigoration of American alliances and political relationships worldwide.

Subsequent U. S. policy in Southeast Asia did not constitute a fundamental reversal of earlier policy, however. For the United States, as for others in the region, this had already occurred in December 1978 with Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea. Starting then, the Carter Administration had begun a process leading to the reluctant abandonment of its hopes for normalization with Vietnam and an increasing alignment with the toughening policies of ASEAN. The events that would propel the United States in new policy directions had, therefore, already been set in motion.

As a result, the policies pursued in Southeast Asia by the new administration did not for most purposes differ greatly from those of the previous two years. U. S. support for the security of Thailand was reaffirmed. In addition to public and private assurances by President Reagan, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, and other senior officials, the U. S. commitment to honor its obligations under the Manila Pact was publicly reaffirmed by Secretary of State Alexander Haig in his statement before the annual meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers in Manila, on June 20, 1981.¹ Strong support was also reaffirmed for ASEAN's policy toward Kampuchea, and ASEAN itself continued to receive major attention as the linchpin of American policy in Southeast Asia and the principal anchor for long-term regional stability and progress. Nevertheless, a real, if primarily perceptual, change had occurred.

Reagan's election was welcomed in Bangkok. The military in particular looked forward to the prospect of increased military support, while Thai

¹ *Department of State Bulletin*, August 1981, pp. 17-20.

officials across the board were hopeful of expanded political and economic support as well. To Bangkok, the new President's strong belief in the need to resist Soviet expansionism carried with it the implicit promise of an even stronger American commitment to Thai security and of an even more resolute opposition to Vietnamese policy in Kampuchea.

Continuing tension along the Thai-Kampuchean border reinforced the need for support. In June 1981, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Vo Dong Giang warned of a possible new strike into Thailand if Bangkok were to proceed with a planned repatriation of 90,000 Khmer refugees, and at the same time announced that Vietnamese forces were now authorized to cross into Thailand in pursuit of resistance forces. At approximately the same time, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach publicly dismissed the suggestion that Thailand had any security interest in Kampuchea, while ominously referring in the same discussion to "the sixteen provinces of Laos currently under Thai administration" (a reference to Thailand's sensitive Northeast region).²

The Thais were not disappointed with the new tone of American policy. Testifying on March 24, 1981, before the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Michael Armacost declared:

Thailand's continuing independence, territorial integrity, and stability is central to the stability of Southeast Asia and to the unity of ASEAN. Our commitment to Thailand under the Manila Pact has been repeatedly voiced by U. S. leaders, including President Reagan. Our willingness to provide tangible evidence of U. S. concern for the security and stability of Thailand, ASEAN's "frontline state," would be seen by Thailand, by its ASEAN colleagues, and by others as an important demonstration of U. S. credibility.³

A new emphasis on the need to maintain confidence in the United States was echoed elsewhere.⁴ In line with this policy, FMS credits to Thailand were increased from \$36 million in 1980 to \$53.4 million in 1981 (a Carter budget year), \$74.7 million (plus \$4.5 million under the Military Assistance

² John McBeth, "Hanoi Blurs the Focus," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 12, 1981, p. 12.

³ *Foreign Assistance Legislation for Fiscal Year 1982 (Part 5): Hearings and Markup Before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 97th Congress, 1st session, *Economic and Security Assistance in Asia and the Pacific*, March 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 31; April 6, 1981 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1981), p. 91.

⁴ See "Statement of Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs John Holdridge Before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee, March 30, 1982," in *Foreign Assistance and Related Programs Appropriations for 1983: Hearings Before a Subcommittee on the Committee on Appropriations*, House of Representatives, 97th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D. C., 1982), Part 4, 271.

Program [MAP]) in 1982, \$76 million (plus \$14 million MAP) in 1983, and \$94 million (plus \$5 million MAP) in 1984. Over the same period, funding for International Military Education and Training (IMET) more than doubled, from \$760,000 to \$2.2 million. Development Assistance from 1980 to 1984 experienced a relatively modest increase, from \$20.8 million to \$26.6 million. Total U. S. aid packages (including FMS, ESF [Economic Support Fund], MAP, IMET, and DA) rose from \$62.76 million in 1980 to \$69.39 million in 1981, \$107.3 million in 1982, \$117 million in 1983, and \$132.8 in 1984.

The rationale behind the American program of military support for Thailand was stated by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Armitage in Senate testimony in June 1982:

Thailand continues a gradual military modernization given day-to-day impetus by events along her eastern border. When Thailand's Prime Minister, Prem Tinsulanond, came to Washington last October in a very successful visit, President Reagan, noting Thailand's status on the front lines, reassured him of this country's firm adherence to the security guarantees we gave Thailand in the 1954 Manila Pact. We have backed these assurances with foreign military sales and the provision of military training (IMET), both at expanded levels. By this assistance, we play a major role in upgrading Thai forces.

We do not expect that Thailand can become a military match for the Vietnamese, who, after all, have the fifth largest military force in the world. But we are certain that, if pressed, the Thai Armed Forces would give a good account of themselves in the event of invasion on their homeland. In slowing down a Vietnamese assault, they would buy the time for Thailand's friends to come to her assistance.⁵

At the same time, support for ASEAN and its policy toward Kampuchea was intensified. This included strong and consistent support for the settlement formula proposed by the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK)⁶ and continued cooperation with ASEAN to retain the Kampuchean seat at the United Nations held by Democratic Kampuchea. In September 1981, Vietnamese efforts to oust the Khmer Rouge from the Kampuchea seat were for a third time decisively defeated in the General Assembly (179 to 36, with 31 abstentions)—a margin even greater than in previous years. The following month, on October 21, the General Assembly adopted by a vote of 100/25/19 an ASEAN resolution that reiterated its

⁵ "Statement by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Armitage Before the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 8, 1982," in *U. S. Policies and Programs in Southeast Asia, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, U. S. Senate, 97th Congress, 2nd session*, p. 10.

⁶ An ASEAN initiative, the ICK was held from July 15 to 17, 1981, under a UN mandate. Attended by ninety-three nations (seventy-nine as regular attendees and fourteen as observers), it called for a negotiated settlement to the Kampuchean problem, based on the withdrawal of foreign troops, Khmer self-determination through free elections, and security guarantees for states in the area.

call for the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces and for Khmer self-determination and endorsed the decisions of the International Conference on Kampuchea. When, on June 22, 1981, a coalition government was successfully formed (at ASEAN's prodding) among the three Khmer resistance factions (former Premier Son Sann's KPNLF, forces loyal to Prince Norodom Sihanouk, and the Khmer Rouge), American moral, diplomatic, and humanitarian support was extended to its non-communist partners.⁷

The U. S. commitment to refugee resettlement has also remained strong, though overall numbers entering the United States fell with the decline in overall numbers fleeing Indochina and changes in the composition of refugee populations. As of mid-1981, Thailand continued to receive the greatest number of refugees of any nation in Southeast Asia: 3,300 by land from Laos and 2,500 by boat from Vietnam per month, plus a smaller number from Kampuchea, resulting in a camp population of nearly 250,000. Concerned with a possible buildup of refugees (or a failure of camp populations to decline) which might imperil Thai willingness to grant first asylum—a fear the Thais have not been reluctant to encourage—U. S. acceptance rates have been held at a high level (see table). This has not prevented periodic swings of mood or perception in Bangkok between confidence and anxiety, as fluctuation in U. S. acceptance of Indochinese refugees has fueled fears that Thailand might be left with an essentially unabsorbable residual. A workable balance between politically acceptable refugee intake rates in the U. S. and an offtake rate adequate to maintain Thai confidence remains, therefore, an important component of current U. S.-Thai relations.

U. S. readiness to assist Thailand in the event of crisis was again put to the test in January and April 1983, when Vietnamese attacks on Khmer resistance camps and refugee settlements spilled over the border. The United States responded with the expedited delivery to Thailand, by sea and air, of Redeye ground-to-air missiles and new-model 155mm extended-range howitzers drawn directly from United States military inventories. In addition, the United States made available an immediate grant of \$1.5 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for emergency medical care and other humanitarian assistance to the victims of the fighting.⁸ The rapidity of this response (the material in question was moved on April 9, within two days of Prem's request) demonstrated politically as much as militarily the American intention to stand behind Thailand in the event of a clear threat to its security, and reassured Thai leaders that U. S. support could be relied upon when needed. Though difficult to evaluate, it may also have helped to forestall further Vietnamese aggressiveness.

⁷ U. S. support for the resistance was, however, limited to nonmilitary aid. This was a source of disappointment to Thailand, as well as to Singapore and Malaysia.

⁸ "U. S. Military Assistance to Thailand, Department of State Statement, April 8, 1983," *Department of State Bulletin*, June 1983, p. 20.

THAILAND INDOCHINESE REFUGEE ACTIVITY

	Total Arrivals 4/75-9/83	Total Reductions 4/75-9/83	Voluntary Repatriation	Other	RPCs*	Residual Population
			<i>Boat People</i>			
Viet	74,778	25,237 (to U. S.) 18,480 (to third countries)			21,920	9,278
			<i>Land Refugees †</i>			
Khmer	223,840	48,733 (to U. S.) 52,817 (to third countries)	42	40,896‡	52,097	62,206
Hmong	129,045	51,913 (to U. S.) 20,705 (to third countries)	478	285	188	48,562
Lao	156,098	70,191 (to U. S.) 36,108 (to third countries)	1,784	1,000	16,311	19,738
Viet	25,089	7,559 (to U. S.) 10,162 (to third countries)	-	0	7,322	624
Total	608,850	341,905	2,304	42,181	97,838	140,408

SOURCE: Document No. 0107f, RP/RAP, U. S. Department of State (1983).

* Refugee Processing Centers, transit centers where refugees already approved and accepted for resettlement are held for processing and training prior to their arrival in the U. S. or third countries.

† In addition to refugees physically present in Thailand, approximately 210,000 displaced Khmer were in concentrations along the Thai-Kampuchean border, receiving relief supplies while awaiting the return of more favorable conditions in the interior.

‡ Recorded voluntary relocation of Khmer to the Thai-Kampuchean border.

Since 1981, Washington has also shown less reluctance to manifest its support for the Thais by direct military cooperation in-country. Joint Thai-U. S. military exercises have been expanded with the objective of upgrading Thai defensive capabilities. Since 1982, the centerpiece of this program has been the annual Cobra Gold exercise. In December 1982, for the first time since the Vietnam War period, U. S. Air Force aircraft and crews were sent to Thailand to provide advanced combat training for Thai Air Force units that were to participate in subsequent exercises over the Philippines (Cope Thunder 1983). Bilateral logistical planning has been undertaken with the objective of improving the Thai logistical system and aiding overall Thai armed forces modernization. That planning was formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding signed in October 1985 by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond establishing an agreed framework for logistical assistance to Thailand in times of military tension. In return, Thai cooperation has been extended in a variety of areas supportive of U. S. interests.

Thailand continues to rely heavily on the United States as a principal guarantor of its security, both in the direct sense (e.g., arms supply and more direct emergency support) and as a counterbalance to Soviet and to some extent Chinese influence in the region. Speaking to the problem of growing Soviet/Vietnamese military power in Southeast Asia, Thai National Security Council Secretary General Prasong Soonsiri has observed: "We would like to see more of the U. S. government. We consider them a stabilizing factor. Everybody would like to forget the Vietnam War. All right. But don't go away."⁹

For the Thais, increased U. S. military aid and new and expanded joint exercises are perhaps matched in importance by broader changes in the United States's global posture. Greater readiness in Washington to meet directly a range of challenges from the Soviet Union and the enlarged capability of U. S. forces worldwide have enhanced the United States's overall credibility as an ally. Whereas in earlier years (e.g., 1980) U. S. material support had stood either in isolation or against a backdrop of perceived weakness, the firmer U. S. global posture of the early 1980s has lent U. S. military assistance new significance in the perception of many Thais. As a result, increased credibility has been attached both in Bangkok and in Washington to American security commitments.

As Thailand and the United States entered the 1980s, then, both nations found themselves on ground that was at once old and new. After a period of intensive mutual engagement during the Vietnam conflict, Bangkok and Washington had drifted apart in its aftermath. Internal adjustments in both countries to changing domestic and international political environ-

⁹ Karen DeYoung, "New Arms, Troops Expand Soviet Military Role in Southeast Asia," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1983, p. A34.

ments had led to momentarily divergent, but perhaps necessary, paths for what had for many years been two extraordinarily close allies.

As one authoritative commentator has observed, however, Thai-American relations have, "as if in a time warp, snapped back" to their earlier warmth.¹⁰ It is an indication, perhaps, of the enduring quality of the Thai-American relationship that the adjustments of the 1970s have been made successfully, and that the bonds linking Thailand and the United States have emerged from the experience strong and intact. Thai and American interests have again converged—largely premised, as they have been historically, on mutual security concerns. For the Thais, this is security in the most direct national sense, while for the United States, security remains fixed in a global context. As a result, an inescapable ambiguity in the relationship remains.

Nevertheless, the relationship which exists today differs from that of a decade before. The current security linkage between the United States and Thailand appears firmly rooted in the domestic political realities of both countries and so has achieved greater political sustainability. While the Thais continue to seek the strongest possible security guarantee from the United States, a working recognition now exists that the U. S. role must remain limited. American respect for Thai nationalism has increased, and the U. S. Embassy's range of contacts in the Thai government and society has been significantly broadened. In contrast to earlier periods in the 1950s and 1960s, when support for democracy in Thailand was not given high priority, the United States has also demonstrated a stronger interest in the strengthening of democratic processes as a key to longer term stability.

Yet, as a global leader, the United States clearly has responsibilities that can be avoided only at severe cost. Thailand continues to look to the United States for the political and diplomatic support needed to maintain its integrity in the face of external pressure and for military support both on a sustained basis and in the event of a clear security crisis. On both levels, the United States in recent years has amply demonstrated its commitment.

Trade and economic relations, though still clearly secondary to security and political issues, have assumed new importance in the Thai-American relationship, as Thailand's sustained record of economic growth (together with that of ASEAN as a whole) in the 1970s and early 1980s has propelled it toward the ranks of the middle-income countries. Average GNP growth through this period has exceeded 7 percent. The United States is Thailand's second largest trading partner (after Japan), and it can be expected that Thai-U. S. business relationships will continue to expand in the coming years, stimulated by a growing economy and a generally favorable business climate. The signing in Washington of a Thai-U. S. bilateral Science and

¹⁰ Interview, H. Eugene Douglas, Ambassador at Large and U. S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs (Washington, D. C., June 17, 1984).

Technology Cooperation Agreement in April 1985 suggests another promising direction in which future Thai-U.S. economic collaboration may be developed.

United States concessional or grant economic aid to Thailand has, as a parallel development, stabilized over the past decade at a relatively low level. While budgetary constraints in the United States have been influential, more important has been a shift in Thailand's needs, as the Thai economy has matured. In the spring of 1985, the U. S. economic assistance strategy for Thailand was restructured, with primary emphasis being placed on assistance in science and technology development and on industrial development and employment in rural areas. Both are considered directly supportive of Thailand's new priorities for export expansion. At the same time, former U. S. aid and development projects continue to bear fruit. The major highway systems developed with U. S. assistance in the 1950s and 1960s have emerged as vital economic as well as political corridors. The former U. S. naval facility at Sattahip (turned over to the Thai Navy in 1976) is today a significant container port for civilian cargoes; and the Asian Institute of Technology (formerly the SEATO Graduate School of Engineering) hosts students from throughout the Pacific in programs geared to specific Asian technological needs. Of perhaps the greatest significance, however, are the tens of thousands of Thais trained or educated abroad with United States assistance who now serve in key positions throughout Thailand's military and civilian leadership. This human element continues to serve as an indispensable bonding agent in the Thai-American relationship.

Overall, these factors—human, economic, and technological— are indicative of the broadening base and diversification of the Thai-American relationship.

Thailand, for its part, has proven again its adaptability to changing political climates and has emerged from the turmoil of the 1973-80 period in a position that is, if anything, enhanced. Its successful record as the primary country of first asylum for Indochinese refugees has done much to enhance Thailand's international prestige and reputation. Through a combination of suppression, a well-conceived amnesty program, and most importantly the severe damage caused to the Communist Party of Thailand by the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, Thailand's communist insurgency has been effectively brought under control.¹¹ The U.S. security guarantee, though

¹¹ Beginning in early 1979, large numbers of students and others who had fled to the jungles after the October 6, 1976, coup began to defect. This process, and the disintegration of the CPT itself, culminated in mass defections of cadre to government forces in the 1982-83 period. Between October 1982 and September 1983, over 2,000 CPT personnel surrendered, while another 950 returned at official invitation or requested government protection; as a result, the scope and effectiveness of CPT operations have been severely reduced, particularly in the Northeast. Despite this highly positive trend, two points of

still ambiguous, remains intact and subject to regular reaffirmation by successive U. S. leaders. Relations with China have been placed on a cooperative basis, with China acting, at least in the near term, as a primary security guarantor. Most importantly, perhaps, Thailand has been successful in building and strengthening vital ties to its neighbors in ASEAN, a process that has enhanced both Thai influence and security. The emergence of ASEAN as a mechanism for political as well as economic consultation and coordination has proven a major asset in building not only increased coherence among the non-communist nations of Southeast Asia but regional stability overall.

This identification of Thailand with ASEAN, with the United States playing a strong and necessary, but modulated, role in support of both, indicates the evolutionary rather than discontinuous fashion in which the Thai-American relationship has grown. As a result, the partnership that exists today is an increasingly balanced and mature one, premised on a realistic appraisal of domestic and international conditions and on an enduring heritage of friendship and shared national interests.

concern remain: one is the question of how many of those defecting have acted from a desire to conserve CPT strength rather than from a genuine change of heart or ideology. More significantly, a number of dissident CPT cadre who favor Vietnamese leadership and strategy over that of China have left Northeastern Thailand for Laos, where Vietnam has provided assistance and allowed them reestablished training and other bases. Known generally as the "Pak Mai," or "Green Star," these guerillas enjoy little support in Thailand and have, so far, only limited effectiveness. Nevertheless, their continued existence and access to Vietnamese support leaves open the possibility of a renewal of communist guerilla warfare in the countryside and/or terrorism in the cities in the future.

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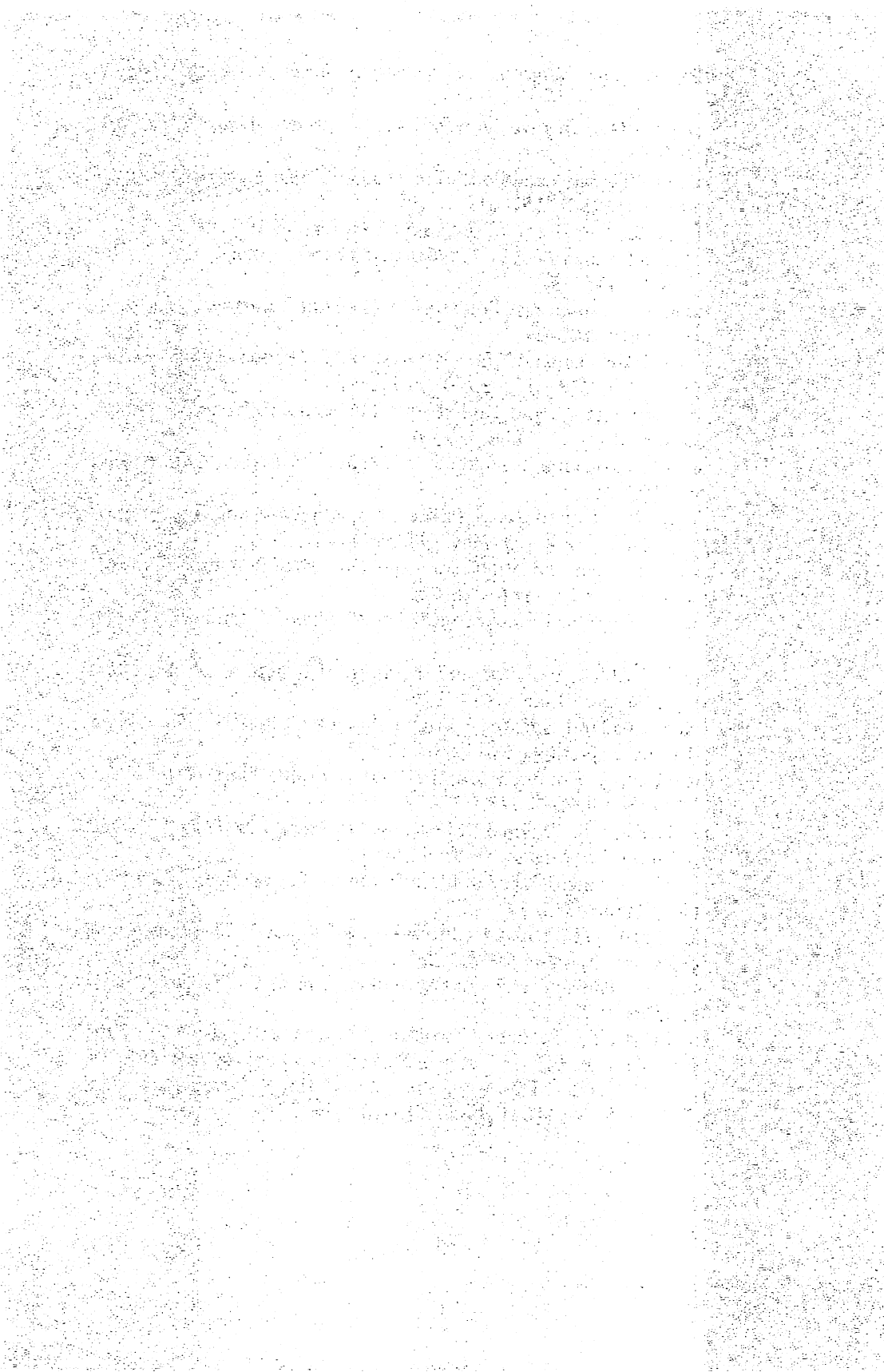
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