

THAILAND: AN AMERICAN DILEMMA

Joanne Kramer*

Just about a century ago, King Mongkut wrote to President Lincoln to offer some war elephants for the use of the Union Army in its campaign in what he assumed was a tropical Deep South. Lincoln politely refused the elephants, perhaps because he was reluctant to introduce an unconventional weapon system of this sort into the Civil War, lest the Confederates be provoked into countering with an even more stupefying escalation of their own.¹

The average American hears this historical anecdote usually as an elementary or high-school age student, as a part of his study of the American Civil War. For him it is, and remains, simply a laughable situation which has merely made the process of education less tedious. Yet, to the student of World Politics today, a full century after the incident occurred, it is more than that. It is an object lesson which, taking into consideration the present Thai-American relations, U.S. policy-makers would do well to take notice of. For King Mongkut's offer was not as ludicrous as one may be led to believe. He offered war elephants because in his nation and those surrounding him they were a valuable asset in war — and he assumed they would likewise be put to good use by Lincoln; he assumed that the Deep South was tropical also through what he must have considered logical assumptions. From his assumptions he came to the correct conclusion — his problem was that he started with faulty assumptions. And it is perfectly conceivable that the United States has done the same thing in the case of Thailand. As William Pfaff put it:

Our growing involvement in Thai affairs is far more a result of doctrinal assumptions in Washington and the momentum of government than a considered response to evidence of a problem. Thailand is in a vulnerable geographical situation and it is an ally; it reports trouble and our enemies issue threats against it; the response is to send missions and officials, and the 'raison d'être' of missions and officials is to do things and to recommend doing more.²

To determine the extent to which the United States has been guilty of mistaken policy, and how it should adjust in the crucial seventies, it is first necessary to examine the present situation in Thailand:

- (1) American presence — what it has been and is at present;
- (2) Communist activity — what the threat has been and is;
- (3) Trouble spots — other areas of danger in Thailand;
- (4) The Domino Theory — our "raison d'être" for being in Thailand, and its validity.

* Student at George Washington University.

Editor's Note: This paper was written in 1971 and does not include any recent changes.

¹ Charles J. V. Murphy, "Thailand's Fight to the Finish," *Fortune*, October 1965, p. 125.

² William Pfaff, "Another Vietnam?" *Commonweal*, Feb. 17, 1967, p. 550.

The American Presence in Thailand

Although trading partners for many years, close ties between the two nations were not made until after World War II (despite the fact that Thailand had been an ally of Japan). The United States was influential in gaining Thailand's admission into the United Nations in 1946, and this gesture was reciprocated five years later when Thailand sent 4,000 troops to fight in Korea. Soon Thailand became the recipient of American arms and aid, and a United States Military Advisory Assistance Group was established in Bangkok. The groundwork for containment in another Southeast Asian nation was laid, and was further solidified in 1954 with the ratification of the SEATO alliance. At that time American experts felt that Thailand was the key nation on the Southeast Asian peninsula and agreed that if it could be maintained as a strong and prosperous anti-Communist state, it could be used to check the growing North Vietnamese threat. The alliance suffered through a crisis during the outbreaks in Laos and the result of this was a change in the interpretation of the SEATO pact. Up to this point the United States had been committed to collective defense of Thailand by article 4, which declared that the signers (Australia, Great Britain, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines) "shall by *unanimous agreement* act to meet common danger."³ In March, 1962, however, American Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman issued a joint communique stating that "the obligation to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes . . . does not depend upon the prior agreement of all other parties since this treaty is individual as well as collective."⁴ This bi-lateral defense accord became the infamous Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which allowed the President to send troops — without Congressional control. Thus in May of 1962 President Kennedy sent 5,000 men to secure Thailand from the Laos threat. When Laos cooled in December much of that force remained. Soon American military bases and projects sprung up all across the land, in, the Army explained, "response to the growing threat to Thailand manifested in Communist aggression in Laos and South Vietnam."⁵

When in 1967 the Army brought all its forces together into the United States Army Support Command, it claimed its objective to be:

- (1) to act as the Army component in Thailand,
- (2) to provide logistical support to the Air Force,
- (3) to develop the logistical infrastructure of Thailand,
- (4) to participate in joint bilateral SEATO planning.⁶

It is in fulfilling objectives #2 and #3 that American presence in Thailand is most active, visible, and, to many, objectionable.

As of July, 1969 there were in Thailand approximately 60,000 men, 80% of whom were military and mainly there in connection with the war

³ Robert Buckhout, "Thailand: Where We Came In," *Nation*, Oct. 2, 1967, p. 308.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Zalin B. Grant, "What Are We Doing in Thailand," *New Republic*, May 24, 1969, p. 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*

in Vietnam. Much as the Viet Cong take advantage of Cambodia for a sanctuary, so do American troops use Thailand as a retreat, safe from the battlefields East. The more strategic use for which Thailand has been designated is as a base from which to launch air attacks against North Vietnam. Better than 75% of the B-52 bomber raids originate from one of seven major fields; and many smaller ones provide facilities for reconnaissance and other smaller-scale operations. The American military machine has grown so great in Thailand that her ports could not handle the continuous shipments of supplies, and the United States built its own port at Sattahip, at an estimated cost of \$40 million.

The other main activity of the Americans in Thailand, developing its "logistical infrastructure," has been military to the extent that military aid has averaged about \$60 million a year over the last several years, and along with providing ground-to-air missiles, the Army had organized and equipped several divisions of Thai soldiers. But by far the greatest effort has been in initiating and supervising the Thai counter-insurgency program. Army engineers have supervised intensive road construction to "open up" the Northeast, the area in which the greatest threat lies; Green Berets have been training antiguerrilla forces in both the Northeast and South; the C.I.A. has recruited a large group of Thais to act as an intelligence-gathering net; the Air Corps is using its helicopters and pilots to fly Thai soldiers into trouble spots; and A.I.D. has spent millions attempting to raise the bare subsistence level of many of the areas in Thailand.

If the United States remains in Vietnam, Thailand will continue, to remain vitally important as the sanctuary for America's war against Vietnam. Thailand would become even more strategically important as America's last defense foothold on Continental Southeast Asia. In short, no matter what the course of events in Asia, it seems likely that the United States is in Thailand to stay.⁷

Communist Activity in Thailand

The Communist Party of Thailand was founded in 1942, and was dominated from its inception by the Chinese. Officially banned from the start, it did all its work underground and was rarely heard from. Then, in 1964, it suddenly became publicly active. In October it addressed a message to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party calling for "a patriotic, democratic, united front to work against the Thai government and its American backers."⁸ On December 8, over a clandestine radio transmitter calling itself the "Voice of the People of Thailand," the "Thailand Independence Movement" announced its own establishment, and 5 days later its manifesto, calling for a "united front" against Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, was published by the official New Chinese News Agency. In January of 1965 the "Patriotic Front of Thailand" was proclaimed, and affirmed itself ready to cooperate with all Thais who love peace and

⁷ Maynard Parker, "The Americans in Thailand," *Atlantic*, December 1966, p. 58.

⁸ "How Secure is Thailand?" *New Republic*, May 1, 1965, p. 8.

democracy regardless of their political affiliation . . . (and) called for the overthrow of the Thanom government, the severing of ties with the United States, and the righting of ethnic, religious, and sectional grievances.⁹

And when, in 1966, Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi said openly "We hope to have a guerrilla war in Thailand before the year is out," he was merely making official and open what had been known for a long time.

Although this "guerrilla war" has not materialized as yet, Communist activity at present seems to be following the same pattern it did in Vietnam. It has taken the form of terrorism, aimed at assassinating local government officials and agents in the outlying provinces, and propaganda, which is passed out in village schools under the cover of nightfall.

Exactly how successful Communist terrorism has been is difficult to say. The number of deaths of government people has been used as a means by some to gauge their success, but in the case of Thailand this can have little significance. The Northeast, and the other outlying provinces where Communist terrorism is most present have long been the scene of terrorism and banditry — by non-Communists — and to discern who is responsible for who's death is at best difficult. It is just this situation which would enable a man like General Prapat Charusathien, Minister of the Interior, Deputy Prime Minister, Commander in Chief of the Army, and the man considered in the United States as the most powerful man in Thailand, to make the following self-contradictory statement:

There were very few activities in general of Communist terrorism this past week, but murder of innocent officials and members of Communist suppression groups was greatly increased.¹⁰

Perhaps the only way, then, to determine the success of the Communists in stirring up their revolution, is to see how successful they have been in recruiting men into their ranks and radicalizing the people — for it is only an "armed people's war" like that in Vietnam which can win Thailand for the Communists.

With this the case, it would seem that the Communists have been a failure — and may be doomed to such a fate. "The main effort of the insurgency in Northeast Thailand seems to have been a low-level, elementary, synthetic form of rebellion. Even the poorest Thais in the Northeast do not seem to have caught the spark of revolution."¹¹ Indeed, it is difficult to radicalize the people, for the Thai farmer and his family are not very susceptible to the Communist ways and the Communist message. They are individuals and traditionalists, and follow religious customs. Even if in debt, they do own their own lands; and although they can be coerced under threat of violence, they are slow to shift their allegiance. The Thai peasant does not

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰ Orville Schell, "Thailand: Privileged Sanctuary," *Atlantic*, Sept. 30, 1967, p. 19.

¹¹ Kenneth Young, "Thailand's Role in Southeast Asia," *Current History*, February 1969, p. 98.

offer a wide base for radicalizing the population. Nor does he offer a good supply upon which to draw for recruits. Since 1962 Thai men have gone through indoctrination in China and Hanoi at the rate of several hundred a month, yet the number of guerrillas at the present is only 3-4,000 at most, and the number is not increasing. A defected Vietcong Colonel stated that "the Thai communists (have) very little prospect of succeeding in Thailand,"¹² and based this in part, upon the fact that the Thai peasants who had been trained during the years 1962-64 were "under-motivated and under-educated, and could not be disciplined or become dedicated."¹³ Further, they refused to belong to any movement aimed at the murder of their King and Queen, killing of their Buddhist priests, and spreading violence throughout their land.

"Unless their effectiveness has been hidden, the Communist insurgents have little to show for their 'instant revolution'."¹⁴

The Problem Spots

If, then, the Communists have been unsuccessful in arousing support from the peasants, what are the basic problems which have caused such great concern? Basically, there are two. One is reform of government, the other the problem of the underdeveloped geographical areas and the minorities that inhabit them.

The big trouble spot — the place many feel will be the fuse to set off another Vietnam situation — is the Northeast. Long the scene of social protest and rebellion, today it is the target upon which the Communists have set their sights.

The problem concerns both the land and the people who inhabit it. It is a dry, flat plateau, in which about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the 30 million total population of Thailand lives in bare subsistence. Its soil is sandy and infertile, and during most seasons there is not enough water for either domestic or agricultural needs. The villages are not only poor, but totally isolated — even from each other. And during the rainy season what few roads there are become impassable, and provincial officials, responsible for great areas, are restricted to the few villages where there are good roads (for example, in Sakon Nakorn, considered to be one of the more "insecure" provinces, 40-50% of the villages are totally cut off during this period. With the great rise in population over the last few years, rice is becoming scarce and the farmers are going deep into debt. As it is, their average yearly earnings are only about \$40, while the average for the rest of Thailand approaches \$150. The Communists have been quick to seize upon this situation, and their promises include such essential items as money, land, tractors, schools, and hospitals.

The position of the two major minority groups which inhabit the area present the Communists with still more opportunities. At present living in the

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Northeast are approximately 40,000 Vietnamese, the remnants of an even greater number of refugees who fled from the French North Vietnam during the Indochina War. Ho Chi Minh claimed he could take no more back due to the present war, and they remain in Thailand. Not only unassimilated, but repressed and mistrusted, they represent excellent fodder for Communist activity. The other main minority are the Thai-Lao — ethnically and culturally related to the Thais, but also related to the Laotians and differing greatly in language from the inhabitants of their homeland. Although not directly discriminated against, these people, who represent 25% of the population of the area, are treated as inferior, as "country cousins."¹⁵ The Communists use slogans such as a "free and united Laos" to take advantage of the situation, and many fear that if these people were called upon to declare their patriotism, it would be to Vientiane, rather than Bangkok.

The South, along the Kra Isthmus, represents the second major trouble spot, and the problem is more religious than economic. The majority (80%) of the population of the Southernmost provinces is made up of Moslem Thai-Malays. The problem lies in the fact that the Buddhist Thais who live there, though the minority, are usually the officials, while the Malays are the peasants. The situation has been compared to that in Mississippi: "the Buddhists view the Muslims much as the whites in Mississippi see the black sharecroppers there."¹⁶ What makes it volatile is the presence in the Kra Isthmus of about 500 Malayan Communists, who fled to Thailand from Malaysia after their defeat in their "war of liberation" against Britain. They could conceivably act as the fuse for an already explosive situation.

The failure of Thailand to assimilate another minority group, the Chinese, represents a further problem. Although representative of no distinct land area, the Chinese in Thailand are numerically and economically the most important of the non-Thai ethnic groups. They came during the 19th Century's period of modernization in Thailand, and during the 20th Century they suddenly quit intermarrying with the Thais and the men began bringing wives from China. Assimilation slowed, and rising Thai nationalism caused severe tensions. This resulted in Thai attempts to limit the immigration of Chinese and to control those already there. But by this time the economic and commercial abilities and traditions of the Chinese, added to the traditional distaste of the Thais for non-agricultural pursuits, had placed them in a position of economic and financial power. The influence of Chinese nationalism (with the emergence of China as a world power) makes this group a powerful threat to Thai security.

An additional major problem the Thais must face is that of their government. One trouble, common among many of the governments that the U.S. is now supporting, is that of corruption. "The Thai bureaucracy is weakened by corruption so extensive that it has practically been systematized."¹⁷ Foreign companies can only get contracts if large kickbacks are provided, and

¹⁵ Daniel Wit, *Thailand: Another Vietnam*, p. 67.

¹⁶ Maynard Parker, "Squeeze Play in Thailand," *Reporter*, Aug. 11, 1966 p. 18.

¹⁷ Orville Schell, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

many generals have their own companies registered in their wife's names. Even the Peace Corps people in instances have run into trouble for their refusal to pad expense accounts for their Thai counterparts.

As costly as it may be (and it is costly: the last Thai "strongman," Field Marshal Sarut Thanarat, during the five years his regime received American aid, amassed a personal fortune totalling approximately \$150 million), the great danger lies in the government's failure to be truly representative. Regional interests, particularly the "insecure" Northeast and South, have no real legitimate channels, since all regional officials are appointed by Bangkok. These officials have tended to be from other areas, unfamiliar with their regions, and perhaps not even speaking the language — "and they look upon their assignment as a temporary exile from Bangkok."¹⁸ Further, on the national scale, as of 1967 there had not been a national election since 1957,¹⁹ all 240 members of the National Assembly were appointed by the leader of the Revolutionary Party from the ranks of the army, public service, and police, and all other parties had been barred eight years earlier.

Counter-Revolution

Although the best-known, most publicized (and in the case of the American C.I.A. the most infamous) aspect of counter-revolution is that of anti-guerrilla warfare, there are also others. The Thais realize this and are using them to combat the above-mentioned dangers.

The greatest amount of time, energy, and money is being spent in shoring up the two vulnerable geographical areas — the Northeast and the South. They have embarked on major programs of cultural, social, economic, and political integration and development, in an effort to incorporate the outlying provinces and their peoples into the Thai community — and to keep them from becoming rebels in a Communist revolutionary war. The main vehicle for doing this has been the MDU, the mobile development unit. The MDU, of which there are now several, with more being brought together, is a group of 120 people who travel in caravan style from district to district, mainly in the Northeast, and spend about three months in a village. Under the command of an army colonel, it includes doctors, engineers, and experts in sanitation, village administration, and agriculture — and all the equipment necessary for their stay. During this time they may do, depending upon the need, such things as building new schools, treating livestock, vaccinating the people, and building wells and irrigation ditches for them. The hope is that conditions can be improved before they get so bad that the Communist offers might become appealing. As for the minorities, efforts have been less economic than social. Programs have been started to teach Thai police and officials to speak the language of the area in which they work, in an attempt to ease friction. Further, efforts have been made at repatriating the Vietnamese in the North, and at providing the Muslims in the South with the necessary facilities for practicing their religion. Nobody really knows how successful all these efforts have been or will be. Yet at least it is a beginning.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The other major counter-revolutionary effort has been an attempt to reform the system of government. The Thais have been brought to realize the importance of this:

Unless the political system is actively popularized, the administrative system significantly modernized, and the bureaucracy committed to broad gauge development, controlled but successful development will not occur to the extent required. The result of this leadership failure will then be a steady weakening of societal stability, not just in regions like the North-east or South but throughout the whole country. In the long run, Thai national independence and well-being will be endangered.²⁰

A first step was taken on June 20, 1968, when a new constitution for Thailand was promulgated by King Bhumiphol Aduljadij — calling for “a constitutional monarchy and a democratic form of government.” The directive principles of state policy were to be:

a guarantee of Thailand's independence, the responsibility of the armed forces to safeguard independence or ‘suppress riots’; the promotion of education and research; the preservation of the national culture; the support of private economic initiative, the extension of social welfare for ‘the happiness of the people’; and the promotion of local government.²¹

Inocuous as these sound, the real core of the change (it was claimed) was made in the legislative and political provisions. Members of the House of Representatives were to be elected, not appointed. New political parties were allowed to form, and the Prime Minister and Cabinet would be appointed by the King from the party receiving the most votes. There have even been signs that long-standing bans on labor unions would be revoked.

However, the new constitution did not go far enough. New parties were allowed to form — but a new law, the Political Parties Act, put control of them under the jurisdiction of the Undersecretary of the Interior, who has the power arbitrarily to stop their activities if he feels them to be harmful. Further, membership in the Senate remains appointive, and when in July, 1968 the King appointed the first half of it, 90 of the 120 appointees were officers in either the army or the police. Indeed, a political dialogue has been opened up for the first time in many years — but whether this is enough is open for question.

The Domino Theory

We learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueller conflict...²²

Lyndon B. Johnson, July 28, 1965.

²⁰ Daniel Wit, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

²¹ Kenneth Young, *op. cit.*

²² Howard Zinn, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*, p. 85.

Some Americans have doubts that it is worthwhile for the United States to fight for Asians. They argue that Southeast Asia is the wrong place and this is the wrong time to fight. To them I say that 31 years ago Britain and France said the Rhineland was the wrong place. Then Austria. But when the struggle got to Poland, they had to fight. South Vietnam is the Rhineland of 1935. If we don't fight now, we'll have to do it later at a much greater cost.²³

Thanat Khoman, 1966.

The "domino theory" was first enunciated on April 7, 1954, by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Discussing the situation in Indochina at a press conference, he stated that its loss would "cause the fall of Southeast Asia like a set of dominoes."²⁴ Johnson believed this in 1965 — it is evident from his recent speech that Nixon believes it in 1970-71. Thus we are fighting in Vietnam; and thus we are building up Thailand. Yet regardless of the great faith that American leaders have in this theory, there are many, experts and amateurs alike, who take issue with it. The theory was founded upon the situation in Vietnam; it thus claims that much the same thing will happen in the other nations of Southeast Asia.

In the case of Thailand, this is clearly not so. For as Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore stated last December,

I don't believe that Thailand, for example, can be subverted and destroyed by the same processes which have undermined South Vietnam, because I think basically they are a different type of people. They are Thais and have a history of their own, a culture of their own. It is a culture which doesn't lend itself to guerrilla fanaticism, which is what is required for a successful guerrilla insurrection.²⁵

If the people are different, so are other pre-conditions:

Unlike . . . the formidable ranges of . . . Vietnam, the few, low hills of the Northeast provide limited cover and are indefensible against sustained assault. Without adequate security, it is unlikely that the Communists will be able to organize and train a 'main force' which is necessary if they are even to advance beyond the guerrilla stage.²⁶

Perhaps even more important than geography in expanding insurgency is the level of organization and the ability of the leadership.

In China and Vietnam the effective organization of the party, army, and administration on a territorial base was a tremendous achievement; there is no evidence that the Communists have reached anything like that stage. (Further), there is no sign that Thai Communist leaders

²³ Carl T. Rowan, "Thailand Fights for Freedom," *Reader's Digest*, September 1966, p. 220.

²⁴ Howard Zinn, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

²⁵ Alex Campbell, "The Future of U.S. Military Presence," *New Republic*, Apr. 5, 1969, p. 15.

²⁶ J. S. Girling, "Northeast Thailand: Tomorrow's Vietnam?" *Foreign Affairs*, January 1968, p. 394.

possess the experience, determination, flexibility, or understanding shown by either Mao Tse-Tung or Ho Chi Minh.²⁷

And even in the case of Mao and Ho, as long as they appealed on social and economic grounds, their parties remained weak. In China the invasion by Japan provided the Communists with the opportunity to vie with the Kuomintang as the outlet for the fierce nationalism which arose; in Vietnam France was the colonial oppressor — then America — and this enabled the Communists to mobilize support. Thailand, as has been stated earlier, has never been colonized. Its leaders have always had the ability to maneuver in such a way as to ally themselves with the dominant power in the area. Thus her enemies have been external, and remain so (Cambodia, Vietnam, and now China.)

And, finally, the sinequa non of successful insurgency, the breakdown of the existing regime, does not appear likely. Although a coup is an ever-present possibility in all the Southeast Asian nations (and thus, to the chagrin of American military advisors, the Thai regime keeps its best troops in Bangkok), Thailand has perhaps the best-staffed government in Southeast Asia. Also, despite the seemingly endemic corruption (which they are fighting to get rid of), they are highly patriotic.

There is another premise of the domino theory which is likewise dubious. It is that our presence is really helpful to the stability of the nations we are protecting. For

the United States armed forces do not really 'protect' any nation; only a nation whose stability and strength come from its own resources can really maintain its independence, and the presence of foreign forces undermines that stability and saps that strength.²⁸

The presence of American military forces in Thailand, those taking part in both counter-insurgency and bombing of Vietnam, has become the target for the anti-Americanism which is one of the spearheads of Communist propaganda. If the lack of an "internal" oppressor for the Communists to rally nationalist support against is one of the major pluses in Bangkok's battle, then the United States is playing just that role:

For all the new roads, for all the expert training by the Green Berets the United States' presence . . . has a tremendous negative impact that cannot be quantified on neat counterinsurgency charts. A top Thai general, asked what effect an American withdrawal would have on the counter-insurgency program, replied: 'An American withdrawal might help. It would give the Communists one less matter to exploit.'²⁹

It seems that Thais, then, have come to realize the liability of the present alliance, even if the American leaders have not. Thus Thanat Khoman, who in 1966 (see pg. 14) so strongly emphasized the need for America to fight

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Howard Zinn, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

²⁹ Zalen B. Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

in Asia, could three years later state that "I don't believe much in military alliances; in fact I consider them as practically things of the past, and Asians problems should be solved by Asians."³⁰

Actually, American presence has been harmful — for other reasons than giving credence to Communist charges that Thai governmental leaders are merely U.S. lackeys. For one, it has contributed to the entrenching of the military as the dominant political group (even more than is normal in a state whose culture and historical traditions make this group the most powerful). And secondly, and more important, in a land where stability in the past has been based upon the ability of the regime to mobilize nationalistic sentiment, and whose folk heroes were low-born heroes who overthrow foreign conquerors, American presence has "imperiled the plausibility of the government's claim to be the sole custodian of Thai national symbols and traditions."³¹

Important as this may be, it is not the reason for the sudden change. Rather, it is only "as hopes of a decisive military victory in Vietnam have faded (that) the Thais have shown increasing uneasiness about the implications of huge American military installations on their soil."³² For the Thais, more than even many Americans, realize that the future continuance of an American military presence in Southeast Asia is highly questionable. They understand that the more humiliating the situation becomes in Vietnam, the less willing the United States will be, despite encouragement to the contrary, to put itself on the line for their sake. Their greatest fear is North Vietnam — its power, its ability to organize political movements, and its historic tendency towards territorial expansion. They realize that once the United States has abandoned Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese will turn on them with vindictiveness.

The Thai alternative? In line with their long-standing tradition accommodation with the paramount power in Asia, they are turning towards Red China. Exactly what they have in mind, it is too early to tell. But it is obvious to them, if not to us, that they have less to fear from China than from Vietnam. And this brings up a third criticism of the domino theory — that the Communist Chinese are the masterminds and controllers of all the Southeast Asian revolts, and that any nation turning Communist will come under their domination. We have seen it disproven in the case of North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh, despite receiving all the Chinese aid he could get, kept his nation, to a large degree, independent of China. That Thailand would turn to China for protection against Vietnam is further proof of that independence.

Thailand had found what it hopes to be another alternative: "Regional Cooperation." Realizing that it could never defend itself from a Chinese or North Vietnamese armed attack, the Thai leaders are hoping that by working together, the Southeast Asian nations could present a united front which

³⁰ James Avery Joyce, "Thai Foreign Minister Suggests New Course," *Christian Century*, July 2, 1969, p. 908.

³¹ Robert Buckhout, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

³² Alex Campbell, *op. cit.*

would inhibit attempts at both outright attack and subversion. Thus Thailand has been the motivating force in joining the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia with it in ASEAN, the "Association of Southeast Asian Nations."

Exactly how much success Thailand can expect from its two possibilities, it is impossible to say.

Towards a New Foreign Policy

History has shown that revolutions are brought on from within, not from without. Thus the Thai government's fears of North Vietnamese export of revolution are uncalled for. What they should fear, however, are themselves, and the inability they have shown in the past to fulfill the needs of their people. Today this is the key to the future of Thailand. The present regime will stay in power if it can provide its people with a better way of life than can the Communists. If it cannot, it will fall — to its citizens, rather than a foreign nation. The American military machine is fodder for Communist propaganda. It should be immediately and completely withdrawn. What should be done concerning other aspects of our presence, however, requires more subtle decision-making, and centers around the question of our "national interest." (In my definition of "national interest" I side with the liberal school and do not see Southeast Asia as an area key to our security.)

It is the belief of the present administration that it is in our "national interest" to make sure that no more of Southeast Asia goes Communist. It is for this reason that they are fighting a war in Vietnam and at the same time fortifying Thailand. The Thais, as stated before, are beginning, however, to raise objections to military presence. They have found a way, they feel, to get rid of it, yet still maintain their security. "Regional Cooperation" could likewise be the American answer.

If the United States continues to work with Thailand and Indonesia and the other countries in the area of economic and social development and leaves to them more and more of the initiatives of their security from within their own regional family as they put it together, the structure of Asian power can be gradually increased and the spread of American presence in Southeast Asia can be decreased.³³

This policy would enable the United States to pull out its troops, its counter-insurgency forces, and virtually all its non-diplomatic personnel. It would enable us to shift responsibility to where it belongs — to the Asians, and it would be they who could determine where it can best be used to secure their own safety.

If Thailand is unable to use our money, our advice (long-distance) and the support of her local allies to conduct the necessary reforms, then we cannot, and must not, consider ourselves responsible. Regardless of what the present policy-makers may be doing, our "national interest" does not demand a non-Communist Thailand. Our days as "guardians of the gate" are gone.

³³ Kenneth Young, *op. cit.*, p. 111.