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THE PROSPECTS FOR THAILAND, CAMBODIA  
AND LAOS TO RESIST PEKING-HANOI  
COMMUNIST DOMINATION IN THE 1970'S

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23 December 1970

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# STUDENT ESSAY

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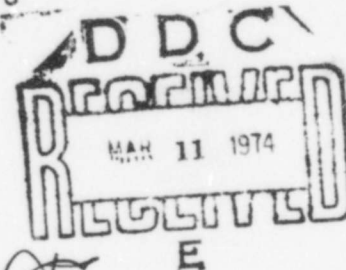
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## SUMMARY

This essay examines the potential of Thailand, Cambodia and Laos to remain viable, independent states, free from Peking-Hanoi domination in the 1970's. The preservation of vital U.S. interests - strategic, political and psychological - in Southeast Asia will depend largely on the magnitude of Peking-Hanoi backed communist insurgency in these nations and how well their leadership faces up to their significant internal problems. The essay concludes that Thailand, if current U.S. aid continues, has the internal resilience to resist a communist take over. Laos and Probably Cambodia, however, will likely fall under some degree of Peking-Hanoi communist hegemony.

THE PROSPECTS FOR THAILAND, CAMBODIA AND LAOS TO  
RESIST PEKING-HANOI COMMUNIST DOMINATION  
IN THE 1970'S

INTRODUCTION

The agony of US involvement in a bitter, frustrating war in South Vietnam has obscured the wider and even more critical issue of what kind of future lies ahead for other key nations of the Southeast Asian mainland. Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, the heartland of mainland Southeast Asia (see map, p. 21), are situated, like Vietnam, under the menacing shadow of a mammoth, though still disorganized, People's Republic of China (Communist China), which is pledged not only to a new brand of Communism, but also to the encouragement of "wars of national liberation" in support of its creed.<sup>1</sup> The type of future that these key Southeast Asian nations select, or are forced to accept, will significantly affect the capabilities of the US to achieve its basic objectives throughout all of Asia.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the future of Thailand, Cambodia and Laos and to assess the potential of these three key Southeast Asian mainland nations to remain viable and free from Peking-Hanoi domination in the 1970's.

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<sup>1</sup>Amory Vandebosch and Richard Butwell, The Changing Face of Southeast Asia (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. 6.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA'S OVERALL IMPORTANCE

There is, of course, much disagreement as to how vital are US interests in Southeast Asia. Critics of US involvement in Southeast Asia have pointed out (quite accurately, I believe) that neither the direct military value nor the potential economic benefits of this region to the US are significant enough to counterbalance the very high costs in men, material, dollars, and national unity required to preserve such interests.

The importance of Southeast Asia to the US, however, lies primarily in three areas. First, Southeast Asia, both the mainland and its associated water routes, is strategically important because it links Communist China with Australia, New Zealand, and Indonesia (map, p. 21). Domination of this area by a hostile Communist China could greatly increase current communist pressure not only on these nations but also on India. Second, the US has a definite stake in assisting the emerging nations of Southeast Asia to achieve economic and political stability in order to enhance prospects for peaceful cooperation throughout Asia. Southeast Asia has been compared with the pre World War I Balkans. As the political equilibrium of all Europe was dependent on the stability of the Balkans, so what happens in Southeast Asia may determine the political equilibrium of all Asia.<sup>2</sup>

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Robert Shaplen, Time Out of Hand (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 4.

Third, and perhaps most important, are the political-psychological factors involved in the current Communist Chinese-North Vietnamese effort to instigate "wars of national liberation" throughout Southeast Asia and establish thereby Communist regimes subservient to Peking-Hanoi direction. Drew Middleton, a prominent foreign news correspondent, has pointed out that:

Southeast Asia is the focus of a world struggle. If the free nations win with American help... then the nature of the struggle will change and the contest with Communism may well enter a less explosive phase.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, should this region fall to communist domination, the blow to US prestige in Asia, as well as in the rest of the world, would be severe and confidence among US allies in the validity of US Commitments to the defense of the free world would be strongly diminished.

The ability of the US to preserve these interests in the heartland of Southeast Asia during the 1970's will depend to a very large measure on the magnitude of the still somewhat ambiguous Communist Chinese-North Vietnamese threat within Thailand, Cambodia and Laos and; equally important, on how well the current leadership in each of these key nations faces up to the very formidable problems of developing national unity and responsive stable political processes, securing economic well-being, and eliminating social injustices.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Drew Middleton, America's Stake in Asia (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1968), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Butwell, Southeast Asia Today-And Tomorrow: Problems of Political Development (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1969), p. VIII.



## THAILAND

The nation which more than any other holds the key to the future of the heartland of Southeast Asia is Thailand. Thailand has committed itself to the West and is the only Southeast Asian mainland member of the US sponsored Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). In addition, US Military presence in Thailand, primarily in support of the war in South Vietnam, is significant - six US air bases, a total of 49,200 servicemen, and 292 million dollars in military aid (in 1968).<sup>5</sup> Further, if a viable regional grouping of non-communist Southeast Asian mainland nations were to be possible in the 1970's, Thailand would have to provide the cornerstone for such an organization.

The Communists have long recognized the significance of Thailand to the future of Southeast Asia. Many Communist defectors who have surrendered to the Thai government have claimed that the Peking-Hanoi Communist Movement believes that if Thailand can be toppled, a major goal of Peking and Hanoi will have been achieved, since the Communists would then be able to regionalize Southeast Asia into another socialist Commonwealth.<sup>6</sup> To put teeth into this objective, approximately 1,500 Thai Communist insurgents have been trained during 1967-1969 at a special school for insurgents located at Hoa Binh,

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Butwell, "Thailand after Vietnam," Current History, LVII (Dec 1969), pp. 339-340.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Young, "Thailand's Role in Southeast Asia," Current History, LVI (Feb 1969), p. 98.

a suburb of Hanoi. In addition, Communist China is giving wide dissemination to subversive literature and broadcasts which denounce capitalism and colonialism and call on the masses to revolt.<sup>8</sup> There is, in fact, considerable evidence to indicate that Communist China is playing a much larger and more direct role in stirring up guerilla activities in Thailand than it ever did in South Vietnam.<sup>9</sup>

Although there have been apparent attempts by Peking and Hanoi to coordinate widespread insurgency within Thailand, there are actually three separate and distinct insurgency movements within Thailand. The oldest is in the South where the Communist guerilla remnants of the 13 year old Malayan insurrection have taken refuge. There are an estimated 700 to 800 of these guerillas, mostly Chinese, operating in this area and it is alleged that three-fourths of the people who live in lower Thailand just North of the Malay border pay the Communists for protection.<sup>10</sup>

The second movement is in the northeast, which has historically been the depressed region of Thailand. It is also the region in which live some 40,000 Vietnamese who are believed generally sympathetic to Communist North

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<sup>7</sup>Carl T. Rowan, "Which will be the next Vietnam?" Readers' Digest (March 1969), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup>Philippe Devillers, "Impact of China on Southeast Asia and the Pacific," South Asia Crisis, ed. Margaret Grant (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1964), p. 151.

<sup>9</sup>Edwin O. Reischauer, Beyond Vietnam: The United States and Asia (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 194.

<sup>10</sup>Richard Butwell, Southeast Asia Today-And Tomorrow, p. 92.

Vietnam. There is considerable evidence to indicate Communist China, North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao (Laotian Communist Movement) have given wide support to the insurgent movement in this area through the Peking sponsored Thai Patriotic Front.<sup>11</sup> In the Northeast region alone guerillas have killed 100 government authorities and 160 villagers (as of early 1969).<sup>12</sup>

The most recent insurgency movement (initiated in 1968) has occurred among the 50,000 Meo hill tribesmen who inhabit the northern most part of Thailand.<sup>13</sup>

In summary, by mid 1969 there were an estimated total of 2,370 full time guerillas operating within Thailand;<sup>14</sup> insurgency affected at least 20 of Thailand's 71 provinces, occupied 10,000 Thai troops and had resulted in the deaths of 1,000 government troops, officials and villagers.<sup>15</sup>

Although the magnitude of this insurgency effort seriously threatens Thailand's nation building efforts, the Thai government has thus far been able to cope with it. Its success in the future, however, may depend on how well the current leadership solves Thailand's most significant internal problems.

One of the most significant of these problems is the dominance of the military in directing the country.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Rowan, p. 96.

<sup>13</sup>Butwell, Southeast Asia Today-And Tomorrow, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup>Rowan, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup>Butwell, Southeast Asia Today-And Tomorrow, p. 96.

Closely associated with this problem is that of government succession, which has traditionally been handled by a coup d'etat as the seat of power within the military shifted. Between 1932 and 1968 there have been fifteen different governments in Bangkok.<sup>16</sup> Martial law has continued uninterrupted since 1958 (as of mid 1969).<sup>17</sup> The promulgation of a new constitution in 1968 and elections in 1969 were an attempt by the current military leadership to broaden its base of popular support. These efforts, however, fall far short of popular responsive government, as most of the power is still retained by Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. The second major problem Thailand faces in achieving national unity and political stability is the unassimilated ethnic and religious minorities. There are four million Chinese in Thailand (11.3% of the total population), approximately one million in Bangkok alone;<sup>18</sup> 800,000 Malay Moslems in the Thai Peninsula; 40,000 North Vietnamese in the Northeast, and over 50,000 Meo tribesmen in the North.<sup>19</sup> Neither the Moslem Malays nor the primitive Meo tribesmen feel any particular loyalty to the Thai Buddhists of Bangkok, and the Chinese and North Vietnamese offer a potent source for Communist Chinese-North Vietnamese directed Communist subversion. The third significant problem can best be summed up as a variety of flagrant social injustices which include widespread corruption among high military leaders,

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<sup>16</sup>

Shaplen, p.263.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 299.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 297.

<sup>19</sup>Vandenbosch and Butwell, p. 303.

neglect of rural areas in favor of the privileged few in Bangkok, and harsh police measures. These social ills were some of the bitterest issues in the recent Thai elections.<sup>20</sup>

Although these internal problems are a long way from being solved, Thailand, unlike Cambodia, Laos, or South Vietnam, has several significant internal advantages which aid its nation building efforts and improve its capability to resist communist insurgency. First, Thailand, which is 90% Buddhist, is strongly religious and the Buddhist church has given solid support to the Thai government's counter insurgency campaign.<sup>21</sup> Second, the Thai people, though somewhat apolitical toward their political leaders, are united in their respect and devotion to King Bhumidol Adulyadej, who possesses the white umbrella and social sword - the traditional symbols of divine kingship.<sup>22</sup> Third, there is little landlordism to create discontent among the peasants.<sup>23</sup> Fourth, Thailand has developed a basically sound growing economy.<sup>24</sup> Finally, as a belated recognition of some of the problems noted previously, the government has begun to move into rural areas to seek to solve problems and improve local government at the village level. Associated with these efforts has been the initiation of an

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<sup>20</sup>Clark D. Neher, Constitutionalism and Elections in Thailand, "Pacific Affairs, XLIII (Summer 1970), p. 249.

<sup>21</sup>Middleton, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup>John F. Cady, Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup>Middleton, p. 74.

<sup>24</sup>Young, p. 110.

effective civilian, police and military organization to combat insurgency in the rural areas.<sup>25</sup>

Primarily because of these significant internal factors, Thailand, provided adequate US moral and material support is maintained, should have sufficient internal strength and resilience necessary to defeat Communist insurgency, regardless of the final outcome in Vietnam. Should Thailand, however, find itself isolated in Southeast Asia with US support and prestige significantly diminished, it would be historically consistent with Thailand's past policies to "bend with the wind" and seek an accomodation with Peking and Hanoi.<sup>26</sup>

#### CAMBODIA

Cambodia, unlike Thailand, has attempted to maintain a "nonaligned" position in the East-West struggle. Until the coup in March 1970, which unseated Prince Sihanouk and installed right wing military leader Lon Nol, the premise behind Cambodia's "neutralism" has been that the nation's foreign policy should adjust to the existing international power structure.<sup>27</sup> Under Sihanouk "neutralism", at least until 1968, was definitely slanted toward Peking and Hanoi. In 1961 Sihanouk hailed the People's Republic of China as the only effective support and real

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Shaplen, p. 268.

<sup>27</sup>David Murfel, "The Pattern of Southeast Asian Response to International Politics," Southeast Asia: Problems of United States Policy, ed. William Henderson (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1963), p. 83.

brother of Cambodia.<sup>28</sup> Under Sihanouk Cambodia recognized Communist China, North Vietnam, and the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong). Even as late as June 1969, after increasing evidence of Peking-Hanoi supported Communist insurgency within Cambodia, Sihanouk extended recognition to the newly proclaimed Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (successor to the National Liberation Front). Despite the rather ambiguous policy of Communist China toward Cambodia, Sihanouk insisted that Communist China would respect Cambodia's sovereignty since by doing so they would make Cambodia a show case of their respect for the principles of peaceful coexistence and would increase Communist China's prestige in the Third World.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, prior to the Lon Nol coup, Cambodia's relations with the US, South Vietnam and Thailand have been antagonistic. In May 1965, Sihanouk renounced all US military, economic and cultural aid, accusing the US of seeking to violate Cambodia's neutrality through the conditions imposed by the receipt of such aid.<sup>30</sup> Cambodia's relations with its more powerful neighbors, Thailand and South Vietnam, have been traditionally hostile. Such hostility extends back to the 12th century when the Khmer government (Cambodia) ruled most of Indochina including much of present Vietnam, Laos and parts of Thailand. Since that time, as her power declined,

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<sup>28</sup> Vandenbosch and Butwell, p. 232.

<sup>29</sup> Prince Norodom Sihanouk, "The Future of Cambodia," Foreign Affairs, XLIX (Oct 1970), p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Shaplen, p. 306.



Cambodia suffered continuous incursions from Vietnam and Thailand.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Cambodia acquiesced in a French protectorate over its kingdom in 1846 in order to prevent its extinction at the hands of the expanding Thai and Vietnamese.<sup>32</sup> Since the Geneva Settlement of the Indo-Chinese War in 1954, the specter of Cambodia caught in the traditional pincers of neighboring enemies, Vietnam (whether Communist or non-Communist) and Thailand, has clearly dominated Cambodian thinking. The war in South Vietnam has further exacerbated these fears. The North Vietnamese have used portions of Eastern Cambodia as both a supply base and a sanctuary for its forces in South Vietnam. Prior to 1968, however, Sihanouk generally played down such flagrant North Vietnamese incursions while sharply castigating any US or South Vietnamese infringements on Cambodian territory.

The comparative stability in Cambodia was broken in early 1967 when there was a significant Khmer Rouge (Red Cambodia) uprising along the Northwest border of Cambodia near Thailand (Battambang). By late February 1968, rebel bands, allegedly supported by Peking and Hanoi, were active in five separate areas in the West and Southwest of Cambodia.<sup>33</sup> Since the Cultural Revolution in Communist China (1966), the Communist Chinese have inundated Cambodia with propaganda and have indulged in widespread

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<sup>31</sup>Bernard K. Gordon, The Dimensions of Conflict in Southeast Asia (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 43-45.

<sup>32</sup>Butwell, Southeast Asia Today and Tomorrow, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup>Shaplen, p. 335.



subversive activities.<sup>34</sup> Communist insurgency in the Northeast of Cambodia, where the Communists are attempting to arouse the hill people against the government, is considered more serious than the more widely publicized insurgency in Northeast Thailand. In addition, there is clear evidence that the Pathet Lao are stirring up trouble along the Cambodian-Laotian border.<sup>35</sup> Sihanouk also has accused the Communist Chinese sponsored Thai Patriotic Front of supporting insurgency in Cambodia.<sup>36</sup> Since Sihanouk's ouster (March 18, 1970), insurgency has flared up throughout Cambodia, supported by approximately 40,000 North Vietnamese troops.<sup>37</sup> As of mid November 1970, the North Vietnamese and Communist insurgents controlled in excess of one half of the country, although the Lon Nol government still controlled most of the 6.6 million population.<sup>38</sup> Sihanouk, in exile in China, heads the National United Front of Cambodia and has embraced Peking and Hanoi aid to reestablish himself in Cambodia.

Complicating the serious insurgency problem facing the current anti-communist Cambodian regime is the fact that during Sihanouk's tenure one man rule substituted for the creation of institutions which might have provided a framework for national unity and continuity. As a result, there is as yet no strong alternate focus for

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>35</sup>Butwell, Southeast Asia Today-And Tomorrow, p. 123.

<sup>36</sup>Rowan, p. 99.

<sup>37</sup>"Reds Ready For New Push in Indochina?" US News and World Report, November 30, 1970, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

national identification to the personal prestige of Prince Sihanouk, who remains the only link with Cambodia's traditional monarchy. (After the abdication of Sihanouk and the death of his father, Cambodia has been a monarchy without a monarch).

A second significant problem, another legacy from Sihanouk, is the growing level of regional discontent due to capital oriented policies and readiness of the government to overlook excesses of provincial officials.<sup>39</sup>

Another factor is the growing number of youth enrolled in universities and technical schools from which there is little hope for meaningful jobs.<sup>40</sup> Frustration among this group could add more fuel to the current insurgency.

Finally, it must be recognized that in Cambodian eyes communist ideology does not appear in the same light as when viewed by Western eyes. Sihanouk, who is not a Communist, has stated that :

In the eyes of the people who are continually exploited by... dictatorships which owe their strength solely to American protection Communism can only be... a deliverance.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of the propaganda which infuses this statement made by Sihanouk while in exile in China, there is a sufficient kernel of truth to provide clearer insight into the difficulties of combating insurgency while

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<sup>39</sup>Milton E. Osborne, "Post Vietnam-The End of an Era in Southeast Asia?" International Affairs, XLV, (April 1969), p. 225.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Sihanouk, p. 5.

political and social problems go unsolved. Yet to solve these problems in the midst of full scale insurgency is a monumental task.

Whether Cambodia, lacking many of the internal advantages of Thailand, can remain viable and independent of Peking-Hanoi domination without massive US aid to include intervention will depend to a great extent on the outcome of the Vietnamese War. At present Cambodia has done better than expected. Its untrained Army has been increased by a call for volunteers from 35,000 in March 1970 to almost 140,000 in November 1970.<sup>42</sup> In addition, traditional hostility to Vietnam (North or South) mitigates against the North Vietnamese gaining great support in the rural areas. However, Cambodia lacks essential armament and continued US military aid in the quantities required is questionable in the wake of the recent Cooper-Church Senate resolutions which attempt to limit US aid to Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.

Should North Vietnam succeed in unifying all Vietnam under Communist rule, it appears unlikely that Cambodia could long endure the increased Communist pressure that would follow unless the US intervened. Even should South Vietnam remain viable and non-communist, Cambodia's future outside the Communist orbit is extremely doubtful.

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<sup>42</sup>"Cambodia," Time, September 23, 1970, p. 29.

## LAOS

In contrast to Thailand and Cambodia, Laos lacks a historical past as a nation. In some ways it is more a collection of tribes than a nation. Whereas in Thailand and Cambodia there is one ethnic group overwhelmingly predominant (82% Thai in Thailand; 95% Khmer in Cambodia), in Laos ethnic diversity is much more extreme (Lao 50%, Khmer 25%, Thai 12%, Leo 10%, others 3%). (See p.22 ). As a direct result of this ethnic diversity as well as the relatively primitive level of development (37% of Laotian population is illiterate)<sup>43</sup>, nationalism is a much weaker force in Laos than in either Thailand or Cambodia, and prior to World War II was almost non-existent.<sup>44</sup>

Laos, like Cambodia, has attempted to follow a non-aligned policy. Unlike Cambodia, however, Laotian neutrality was given international sanction at the Geneva Convention of 1954, which ended the Indochinese War. According to these 1954 agreements, the Laotian Communist Forces (Pathet Lao), which participated in the Indochina War, were to be integrated into a coalition government with non-communist elements. Laos was to abjure any agreements with other nations, if such agreements included military objectives.<sup>45</sup> These agreements, however, quickly broke down and fighting reached a critical stage within Laos in 1961, primarily as a result of the pressure exerted in Laos by North Vietnamese using Laotian territory

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<sup>43</sup>Arthur J. Sommen, Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup>Butwell, Southeast Asia Today and Tomorrow, p. 49.

<sup>45</sup>Vandenbosch and Butwell, p. 204.

for infiltration routes into South Vietnam.

The Geneva Convention was reconvened in 1961-1962 to once again attempt the neutralization of Laos and the defuzing of the fighting. The Geneva accords of 1962 reconfirmed Laotian neutrality and established under the neutralist Premier, Prince Souphanna Phouma, a coalition government of neutralists, right wingers (led by Prince Boun Oum), and communists (Pathet Lao - led by the third prince, Souvonouphong). The Geneva Accords also directed the withdrawal of all foreign military forces and advisors (except for minor exceptions). In accord with these agreements, the US withdrew approximately 700 military advisors including the very effective "White Star" Special Forces teams; North Vietnam, in contrast, withdrew only 43 civilian advisors.<sup>46</sup> The coalition cabinet once again did not prove viable and by the end of 1962 the Pathet Lao, aided by North Vietnamese forces, resumed large scale insurgency which has continued to the present with varying degrees of intensity.

Until 1963 the fighting was to a large extent inconclusive. Fighting a basically conventional war, the Communists made significant gains in the dry season and then were forced to relinquish large portions of these gains during the wet season when government forces supported by US air strikes counterattacked. Since 1963, however, the communist offensives, almost entirely made up of North Vietnamese forces, have increased in intensity and been maintained throughout the year. Currently

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<sup>46</sup>Shaplen, p. 430.

(as of November 1970), the North Vietnamese are estimated to have 100,000 troops in Laos.<sup>47</sup> The North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao dominate more than half of the country; however, like Cambodia, the government still controls most of the population.<sup>48</sup>

In the face of this formidable insurgency threat, Laos also has significant internal problems which exacerbate the difficulties involved in combating insurgency.

First, Laos is sparsely populated by a collection of tribes without a national history and without strong ties of loyalty to the central government. <sup>Second,</sup> traditional hostility exists between the diverse ethnic groups, especially between the lowlanders and mountain tribesmen, which complicates establishing a viable unity.<sup>49</sup> Third, Laos, which lacks a stable economic base (its per capita annual income of \$63 is one of the lowest in Asia - p. 22) must depend, to a great extent, on external economic aid.

Because of these factors the future of Laos, to perhaps an even greater degree than that of Cambodia, depends on the outcome of the Vietnamese War. There is presently little to prevent North Vietnam from militarily crushing government forces in an all out campaign. What possibly delays them is their preoccupation with the war in South Vietnam. Should North Vietnam succeed in unifying all Vietnam under a Communist regime, there is little likelihood, short of some form of international or US intervention, that Laos could remain outside the Communist

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<sup>47</sup> "Us News and World Report," p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Butwell, Southeast Asia Today-And Tomorrow, p. 191.

<sup>49</sup> Cady, Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia, p. 139.

orbit. Even without a clear cut North Vietnamese victory in South Vietnam, the continual pressure exerted by North Vietnam-Peking-Lao forces may force the neutralist government, as a minimum, to find an accommodation with Hanoi and Peking.

### CONCLUSION

The United States is a Pacific Power. Its interests cannot be delineated by drawing a line through a chain of Pacific islands or announcing that its interests stop at the Western Pacific periphery. On the contrary, the US has very significant strategic, political and psychological interests in preserving mainland Southeast Asia free of Communist domination. The loss of this key area to Peking-Hanoi domination would seriously reduce US prestige and influence throughout Asia and would almost inevitably result in reducing US capabilities to achieve many of its current and future objectives in Asia.

The threat posed to this region by Communist Chinese-North Vietnamese supported insurgency threatens the stability and continued independence free from Peking-Hanoi domination of not only South Vietnam but also such other key Southeast Asian nations as Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. This threat can be expected to increase in the 1970's; the rate of increase, however, will be influenced by how successful these key nations are in solving their internal problems, and how successful North Vietnam eventually will be in attempting to communize South Vietnam. Of the three key southeast Asian nations examined in this essay, Thailand is the most crucial with respect to preserving vital US

interests in Southeast Asia. If Thailand can remain a viable, independent nation maintaining its current close ties with the US, US interests can probably be adequately maintained in Southeast Asia regardless of the final status of South Vietnam. Thailand, because of strong internal cohesion, appears to have the best chance of maintaining its stability and resisting, with continued US moral and material aid, Communist insurgency. Should the US, however, reduce its ties and leave Thailand isolated, it can be expected that Thailand will seek an accommodation with Peking and Hanoi unfavorable to US interests.

Cambodia and Laos have much less favorable prospects for remaining viable, independent nations outside the communist orbit. Lacking many of the requirements for internal cohesion and unity, Cambodia, and to an even greater extent, Laos are pawns to the struggle in Vietnam. Should North Vietnam succeed in communizing South Vietnam, it is almost inevitable that Laos and probably Cambodia will fall to some form of Peking-Hanoi hegemony. Even should South Vietnam remain a viable non-communist state in the 1970's, Laos and Cambodia have a very uncertain future.

To preserve US vital interests in Southeast Asia, the US must continue to maintain strong ties with Thailand, to include continuing vital military and economic aid, while encouraging the Thai government to continue effective nation building. With respect to Cambodia and Laos every effort should be made through political measures such as the United Nations or a reconvening of the Geneva Convention to defuse the insurgency in these nations and establish



authentic neutrality. Finally the US must continue to support and assist in developing viable Southeast Asian regional groupings (with Thailand as a cornerstone) whose goal is cooperation in nation building which will develop natural resistance to internal insurgency.

*John F. Roehm Jr.*  
JOHN F. ROEHM, JR.  
Colonel, FA



## SOUTHEAST ASIA

GENERAL STATISTICS: THAILAND, CAMBODIA AND LAOS

Country	Area (Square Miles)	Pop. in Mil- lions	% Pop. Increase (Annual)	GNP (Mil- lions \$)	Annual per Capita Income (\$)	Major Religious Groups (%) of Pop.)	Major Ethnic Groups (%) of Pop.)
THAILAND	198,455	33	3.3	4434	137	Buddhist 90 Moslem 3	Thai Chinese Malays 82 10 4
CAMBODIA	69,898	6.6	2.7	875	140	Buddhist 90	Khmer (Cambod) Vietnamese Chinese Monta- gnards 35 7 5 2
LAOS	91,428	2.9	2.4	189	68	Buddhist 38	Lao Kha Thai Meo 50 25 12 10

<sup>50</sup> Butwell, Southeast Asia Today - And Tomorrow, pp. 245-247.

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(Author believes Western Capitalistic oriented economic patterns have proved inapplicable in Southeast Asia and that these nations are likely to turn to communist or socialist patterns; further, he sees eventual Communist Chinese hegemony in this area as inevitable).

4. Butwell, Richard. Southeast Asia Today - And Tomorrow: Problems of Political Development. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969.

(An excellent background in the problems facing political stability in individual Southeast Asian nations).

5. \_\_\_\_\_ "Thailand After Vietnam," Current History, LVII (December 1969), pp. 339-343; 368-369.
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(Excellent for a historical background and general description of the specified nations - Forms an excellent basis for a more detailed study of specific areas of interest within the four nations).

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