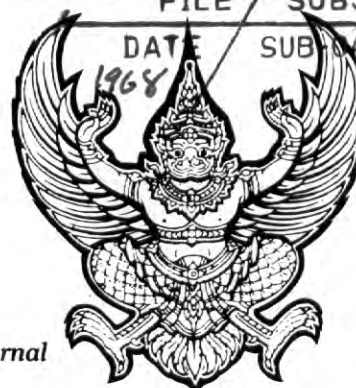


# counterinsurgency in THAILAND

by General  
Saiyud Kerdphol

Courtesy of *Asian Defense Journal*



**T**hailand is the most recent target of the communist internationals in South East Asia, although armed insurgency broke out as long ago as 1965. The decision to do this had been reached by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) some 5 years previously (in 1960), and I believe that this caused tremendous friction in the party between the hard-line and soft-line factions. The basic reason for this was that the soft-liners saw Thailand as an entirely different case from the former colonies of South East Asia, which were relatively easy to manipulate under the banner of national independence. Although they did not immediately achieve their aims, let us face the fact that their victories in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have been smashing ones that have radically changed the political and security structure of this region.

In Thailand, with its long independent history and strong institutions, the communists have found it very difficult to raise a plausible and convincing cause. Against this, however, they have achieved quite a well-knit and steady organization. It therefore follows that our counterinsurgency campaign must concentrate upon weakening the enemy's organization and preventing him from developing a strong cause. In these aims we must focus on the people as the target, because they constitute the vital factor in this kind of warfare.

I also agree with the expert view that realism, based upon all the relevant facts whether they are hard to accept or not, is essential to deal with communist insurgency in its early stages. Thus we have to use our own brains and knowledge, as well as to take all the relevant lessons from elsewhere into account, before we can finalize our approach and spell out our strategy.

In Thailand, our strategy is based upon the CPM concept, or civil, police and military cooperation. Under this strategy, produced in 1966, we have established three clear-cut aims, namely to:

- Stimulate a popular feeling toward the government, based upon sound policies and programs and also on good and honest administration by government officials.
- Stimulate will-power among the people to enable them to counter communist activities and operations of all kinds as well as promoting national unity.
- Suppress forcibly all communist terrorist forces and their supporting organizations.

Our fortunes under this strategy have fluctuated considerably over the past 11 years, owing mainly to varying

internal frictions and political pressures. For your better understanding, I would like to divide these 11 years into 5 periods.

## FROM MID-1965 TO THE END OF 1967

This was probably the most significant period of the counterinsurgency campaign in Thailand. There were so many lessons to be learned from it, and this turned out not to be the case. Let me first tell you of the good things that happened. The first and most important one was that insurgency was almost immediately recognized as the most serious national problem, for the first time since the CPT



Communist cadre conduct orientation for students.

was established in 1942. As a manifest of national concern, the then all-powerful Deputy Prime Minister personally took over responsibility for this problem. A combined CPM headquarters was established under him as the government executive agency to implement one strategy, one policy, and one plan for the CI campaign. This HQ, first called CSOC (the Communist Suppression Operations Command) and later ISOC (the Internal Security Operations Command), was authorized to direct and coordinate all the counterinsurgency activities of the government—civil and military. Definite and clear aims were formulated at the outset. The CPM concept was firmly established. A number of plans and programs were drawn up and im-

As General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., USMC (Ret.), the former Commandant, has recently written (in *International Security*, Fall 1976), "amphibious forces represent our only means of reaching the scene."

## HIGH TECHNOLOGY AND THE CORPS

What, then, of assertions that the advent of high technology weapons has eliminated the possibility of successful amphibious operations in to-



A variety of landing craft facilitates a rapid approach to the beachhead.

day's military environment? Marine planners reply, first of all, that amphibious operations have always been among the most complex and most challenging of all military operations, and express surprise that critics of the Corps have only recently discovered that fact.

Moreover, they argue, the alleged inability of the Marine Corps to function in a high-threat environment has been grossly exaggerated. The Corps, especially when sent into combat as a Marine Amphibious Force—an infantry force closely cooperating with a Marine air wing—is not as "light" as frequently alleged.

Another point: since they are increasingly armed with new high-technology weapons themselves, it seems quite likely that the Marines could give a creditable accounting of themselves in almost any conceivable combat situation into which they might be thrust. Finally, as Lieutenant General Lawrence F. Snowden, Chief of Staff at Marine Corps Headquarters

(HQMC), likes to remind his listeners, it is the amphibious force which chooses the time and place of landing, and invasion planners are not likely to select for assault a position which appears impregnable.

All of the foregoing, and more, has relevance for the frequently heard suggestion that, given America's "declining role in Asia," the Marines should from now on be considered primarily as a reinforcement force in the event of war in Europe. First, it should be noted

that it is not, despite Vietnam, U.S. policy to concede a declining role in Asia—nor is it likely to be, given the economic and geopolitical facts of life which are in fact likely to mandate greater U.S. involvement in that part of the world. Second, as General Snowden also points out, the possibility of using the Marine Corps for reinforcing Europe in the event of a Russian attack has been discussed for many years; the only difference is that now the Corps has been directed to pay more attention to it. The Marines, he says, have been doing exactly that, and, in particular, have been carefully considering how they might best function in a high-armor, high-firepower threat environment of the sort which exists in CENTAG Europe.

One practical result has been that in recent years, Marine combat units have been acquiring TOW (tube-launched, optically-sighted, wire-guided) and Dragon anti-tank weapons at a steady rate. The Corps is also acquiring M-60 tanks and additional ar-

mored personnel carriers, and plans to test (at its Twenty-nine Palms base in California) the recommendation by the Haynes Board (a board convened in early 1975 under Major General Fred Haynes, then deputy chief of staff for research, development, and studies, and tasked by USMC Commandant General Louis H. Wilson "to evaluate manpower quality and the Corps' force structure") that a fully mechanized regiment be added to every Marine division.

Snowden and other Marine planners concede, however, that the Corps will never be able to match Soviet armored divisions either in firepower or in mobility. Hence, although senior USMC officials normally avoid saying so directly, they would doubtless prefer to plan for a Marine role, in the event of war in Europe, on NATO's flanks—where some commentators say NATO forces are even weaker than on the Central Front and therefore would be in greater need of reinforcement in any case. Hence, Marine units in recent years have engaged in more cold weather training, which will prove useful should they ever be called upon to reinforce beleaguered NATO units in the Finnmark region of Norway, and have also received extra training relevant for the often harsh terrain (but milder climate) of Turkey and Yugoslavia.

## SOVIET AMPHIBIOUS DEFENSES

For successful service even on NATO's flanks, however, the Marine Corps will have to consider how best to add more firepower to its combat units while not impeding the Corps' capacity for rapid movement by sea to crisis areas. The USSR is well aware of the Corps' formidable and well-deserved reputation in amphibious warfare, and has given considerable attention in recent years to perfecting techniques for defense against amphibious landings. As the noted military analyst G. H. Turbiville and others have pointed out, analysis of Warsaw Pact military exercises suggests that in the event of war in Europe substantial forces will be tasked to defend against expected attacks on the Pact's flanks, including amphibious landings in the rear of advancing ground forces.

The Pact military leadership appears

*(continued on page 36)*

plemented, to provide security and development for the mainly remote villages beset by the insurgents. These programs varied according to the different types of population target areas. In brief, they provided different approaches and measures for villagers in:

- (1) outer critical areas,
- (2) critical border areas, and
- (3) inner critical areas.

Under this new CPM approach of a comprehensive village security program, the armed forces of the government rendered military assistance in the villages and also struck hard at the terrorists' jungle-base areas.

As a result, in the Northeast (which was then the sole area of insurgency) the number of communist terrorists was reduced from 2,000 to 1,000. In addition, a number of key Communist Party of Thailand officials were either killed, arrested, or forced to surrender, and over 100 members of the CPT Central Committee and Cadre were rounded up in Bangkok and the provincial capitals.

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### FROM 1968 TO 1970

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After the government's success in the Northeast in 1967, the CPT had no choice other than to unleash its small reserves in other areas hoping to divert government efforts from the Northeast; and thereby to pull the government away from its successful village security and development programs to the aggressive but negative sweep operations that the terrorists so much enjoy. These operations invariably upset the people in the vicinity and induce them to join the communist cause. As the record will show, they were successful in this tactic.

At the end of 1967, the Royal Thai Army was suddenly and unexpectedly ordered to take over the operational responsibility for countering insurgency from CSOC. Since then, CSOC has become an administrative and planning agency with very limited influence on operations. At the same time, the 2d Army was ordered to take over the CSOC CPM Advanced HQ from the Northeast at Sakon Nakhon. The emphasis henceforth was to be on military operations of the Vietnam style. Thus, the whole village security program in 11 target areas in 7 provinces covering about 200 villages was neglected.

In the North, the 3rd Army was ordered to launch military suppression operations, including indiscriminate use of bombs and napalm, against some 300 hilltribesmen, mainly Meos, led by between 10 and 20 lowland Thais. This action was taken without heed of the advice given by the CSOC on the CPM approach based on the valuable lessons from the Northeast, as spelled out in the book called "Solution to the North". As a result, a few hilltribe terrorists were killed but these operations produced a large number of hilltribe refugees and many innocent tribesmen were killed and injured in the operational areas. The end result has inevitably been that the number of insurgents in the North has grown from 300 in 1967 to nearly 2,000 by the end of the 2d Period (1970).

In the South, I mean only the Mid-South, covering 6 provinces, namely Surat Thani, Nakon Sri Thammarat, Trang, Pattalung, Songkla, and Satul, there were about 400 communist terrorists in 1968. They started their armed insurgency here some time after the Northeast but due to

the unwillingness and lack of understanding of the southern military area commander, very little effort was made to deal with local insurrectionist activities which allowed a growth of up to 1,100 terrorists by the end of 1970. This alarming growth rate of the terrorists permitted the Communist Suppression Operations Command to get in the picture by volunteering a general from a less significant post in Bangkok to replace the southern military area commander. This general, who agreed with the CPM concept, introduced a village security program of the "0910 Type" into the communist-infested areas. Later, he succeeded in convincing the villagers to form Volunteer Anti-



Thai Border Police on patrol.

Communist Groups within their own villages as the government popular base, supported by the Village Security Teams and Army Strike Forces.

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### FROM 1971 TO OCT. 14, 1973

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It is very fortunate that after 3 years' experience, the Army learned the adverse lessons from the strictly military approach to the problem. Throughout the Second Period, the military sweep operations contributed only to the statistics of clashes, killed, and wounded into the counterinsurgency campaign in Thailand. After this, the Army had little choice other than to fall back to the Communist Suppression Operations Command's Civil Police and Military approach, and this enabled the CSOC to introduce belatedly the CPM Plan 1415 (1971-72) for the terrorist hotbed in Na Kae, Nakon Phanom; Plan 1617 (1973-74) for the communist stronghold in the Tri-Province area of Pitsanulok, Petchabun, and Loei; and Plan 1718 (1974-75) for the insurgents' base in the mountainous areas between Udon and Loei provinces. Also, the long range program of developing the combined rural security manual was achieved which later gave birth to the *Aw Paw Paw* (APP) [Volunteer Development and Self-Defense] program. The APP program was designed to cope with intelligence estimations that the Thai insurgency would probably come to a critical period in 1977 or 1978. That is why the program was

planned on a 5-year basis to win over communist-influenced villages, numbering around 4,000-5,000, starting from 1974 at 1,000 villages each year. But the unexpected incident of 14 October 1973 delayed the whole program.

From our statistics, however, the comparison between the Second and Third Periods shows that the insurgency in the Third Period was much more under control. By the end of this period, there were about 6,500 armed insurgents, divided into 2,400 in the Northeast, 2,100 in the North, 400 in the Central area, and 1,600 in the Mid-South.



Communist terrorist equipment and propaganda captured in Nakorn Sri Thammarat Province.

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### FROM OCT. 14, 1973 TO OCT. 6, 1976

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After the student uprising succeeded in the overthrow of the government, there were 5 governments until October 1976: 2 were appointed governments and 3 were elected. Without stable government, counterinsurgency cannot be effectively implemented but, even in the political conflict with the communists, an elected government in any democratic process must be in a better position than any other—in the long term.

The Communist Suppression Operations Command was left to survive from strong and continued attacks, from the students' and labor leftist groups, the Communist Party of Thailand, and its front organizations, and by misled rightists, including members of parliament and some members of the Cabinet as well. In addition, the name of CSOC was changed to ISOC (Internal Security Operations Command) in order to fit the current situation. I believe that the Communists' strategy was to concentrate their efforts on eliminating ISOC at all costs, hoping that without it the government efforts in countering insurgency would fail.

May I conclude that as a net result at the end of the

Fourth Period the CPT infrastructure and its front activities expanded tremendously in the capital city and in urban areas. This reached such a critical level that the rightists had very good reason to react vigorously, leading to the collapse of the elected government, and the takeover by the Military Reform Council on 6 October 1976. As for the armed insurgents in the rural areas, their fortunes depended very much upon the leadership from the Army Area (as the Regional ISOC). While the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Armies continued successfully with their programs, the 4th Army withdrew from the field for no known reason, and allowed the terrorists to rebuild their organization and strength, with the result that they constitute the most active and formidable regional problem today.

Finally, statistics at the end of this period showed that the overall strength of the insurgents had grown from 6,500 in 1973 to over 9,000 by the end of 1976, with 4,000 in the Northeast; 2,300 in the North; 450 in the Central area; and 1,800 in the Mid-South.

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### FROM OCT. 6, 1976 TO PRESENT DAY

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After the takeover following the bloody events of 6 October we have seen a strongly anti-communist and relatively stable government. In counterinsurgency matters there has been a firm policy of continued military operations, particularly in the South where "search and destroy" has been the order of the day.

Although no one can argue that such operations are not required from time to time—to facilitate and complement "soft" measures of village security and development—we all know that they are only a part of the answer. Our target must always be the insurgent mass support base in the villages without which the movement—both the political organization and the guerrillas—must die on the vine. Thus, when I still see operations orders specifying "kill CT" as the only objective, I feel a little sad that some of our field commanders still have much to learn. Against this, however, we do have commanders with competent able staffs who fully understand the social, economic, and political dynamics of insurgency. Such commanders are achieving great success in fostering programs involving villagers in their own security and development, using military forces in close support only when needed.

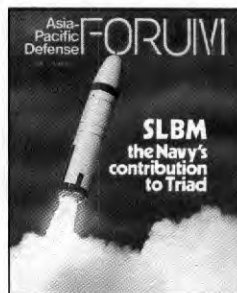
In addition, the Ministry of Interior has at last put its shoulder to the wheel and is rapidly forging ahead with the *Aw Paw Paw* program. This program got off to a bad start, not only because of the October 1973 revolution but owing to lack of top political support and encouragement, and also because relevant agencies of government refused to get involved.

In the present mood of the rural people, shuddering from the brutalities and privations of Cambodia and Laos, the *Aw Paw Paw* program now has every chance of success. It will, however, still need support from the top levels and I trust that the government will realize this as it gains experience of the limitations of using force alone.

To sum up, there are now good grounds for cautious optimism in our counterinsurgency campaign, and this would be much the more so if only we could get everyone thinking alike on a common approach. Let us hope that this will prove to be the case. □

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The F-15 Eagle is an all-weather fighter. See pages 2-8.

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# TACTICAL AIRPOWER

by Major General James B. Currie



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This statement by Major General James B. Currie, U.S. Air Force, was presented to the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress.

Since World War II, Air Force tactical airpower has provided the United States with a significant military capability. U.S. defense policy during these past 30 years has been, and continues to be, to meet

threats to the United States and to its allies as far forward as possible. Tactical airpower, using aerial refueling, can deploy rapidly over long distances and is uniquely suited for the task of responding to a wide range of military operations. Forward deployed, these forces provide a peacetime presence that assures allies of our nation's support and presents our enemies with a credible deterrent. The quick movement of tactical airpower during crisis situations has served the cause of

peace by preventing what might be imminent conflict. There are many examples of deterrence that have taken place over the past three decades.

Tactical airpower is a powerful hedge against uncertainties concerning the timing and location of a possible future conflict or confrontation. Whether war should begin suddenly or after a period of tension, the Tactical Air Forces will bear the brunt of combat operations and will suffer the inevitable