

THE UNITED STATES AND THAILAND: POLITICAL AND
MILITARY COMMITMENT IN THE VIETNAM WAR

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PREFACE

This study is concerned with the analysis of the rationale of involvement of the United States and Thailand in the Vietnam War. The major objective was to investigate the commitments made between the two states which determined their pattern of relationships in the region as a result of the Vietnam conflict.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Since 1950, the United States' foreign policy toward the Southeast Asian countries has been based on the objective of containing communist states and political movements in the region. The containment policy has involved the United States in military conflict in Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia. Bilateral and multilateral alliances have been negotiated with states in the region to prevent the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union from expanding their political influence into the states along the communist perimeter. Under the influence of the United States, several Southeast Asian countries have developed their Asian policies around this series of alliances. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which became a basic instrument of the United States' policy in Southeast Asia, was a major creation in this regard. To Southeast Asian leaders, SEATO has represented an American defense commitment to the area as a whole which has served to deter China from political interference in the region.

After the defeat of the French in Vietnam, Indochina became a direct concern of the United States, since it was perceived that communist expansion of military force was in progress. The United States government assumed the "protectorate position" of the French when they left in 1954.

As the United States became more involved, there was a tendency of cooperation from other states in the region which indicated a willingness to join a regional effort against the Communists' aggression. American policy planners regarded Thailand as one of the few reliable states in an otherwise confused region. President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles seemed to view Thailand as an Asian "model" of a modernizing "freedom-loving" country; its leader, Phiboon Songkram, was considered to be a reliable friend who was ready to "stand up and be counted" on the side of the United States. "Thailand, if assured of United States guarantees of adequate performance, would probably permit the use of Thai territory and bases," declared a National Security Council "Action" paper dated April 5, 1954. Confidence was also expressed that Thailand could be depended upon to join a regional grouping which would give moral and some military support to the United States' military intervention.¹ The rise of a local communist guerrilla threat in the northeastern part of the country and fear of Chinese and Vietnamese expansion forced the Thai Government to seek a firmer American commitment to the defense of the region.

Following the establishment of SEATO, United States military leaders stressed the need for an appropriate mechanism to deploy American forces in support of friendly indigenous regimes in the area. The United States at first became involved in the Vietnam conflict with technical advisers and economic aid and later became a full military participant and the sustaining power in support of the South Vietnamese Government. Declining fortunes in South Vietnam during 1964 shifted United States-Thai relations toward a greater commitment to Thailand by the United States, which resulted in the use of Thailand as a major base area for military action

in Vietnam. The government of Thailand was asked to make an active contribution to the conduct of the war against North Vietnam by permitting the basing of America's principal attack forces on its territory. In 1967, this commitment of bases was supplemented in a significant way by Thailand's agreement to send ground forces into South Vietnam.

It was in this context that the United States evolved its policy toward Thailand. This study will investigate the major factors why the United States' rationale of involvement in the Vietnam conflict kept changing after 1954 and how Thailand fitted into this policy. An attempt will also be made to answer the questions: Why did the Thai government accept a role of military involvement in the Vietnam conflict, and why did the United States seek regional involvement by SEATO in the Vietnam war?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study will assert that the major objective of the United States toward Thailand was to escalate its political and military commitment in support of the South Vietnamese regime. Participation of Thailand was demonstrated by the Thai troop deployment and the agreement permitting the United States to use air bases in Thailand. By insisting that the commitment to the Saigon regime was binding under the Southeast Asian Defense Treaty and various bilateral economic and military assistance agreements with Thailand, an important rationale for United States action was provided. The United States assumed that these supportive activities under the various alliances gave it certain advantages in the conflict. This proposition is based on the efforts of the United States to increase Thailand's support for the United States'

military and diplomatic objectives in the area. For Thailand, a felt need to maintain its political stability through a military regime which required strong economic and military support from the United States forced the Thai Government to accept a role of military involvement in that conflict.

In order to test the hypothesis, it will be necessary to verify some implied premises. First, this study will attempt to show that the United States regarded Thailand as an important base area and ally in support of an escalation of United States military action in the war. Also, this study will focus upon the question of the rationale for Thai military participation in the Vietnam War.

The policy of multilateral involvement in the Vietnam conflict was designed by American policy makers in cooperation with its SEATO allies as a collective self defense action against the communist bloc. Its purpose was to contain the spread of communist influence in Southeast Asia, strengthen the status quo there and facilitate the rational use of regional resources. This proposition will be applied to United States involvement in Asian affairs and in the Vietnam War. Beginning with the SEATO conference and successive consultations between American officials and its allies, the United States sought to gain approval of its commitments in the Vietnam War. This action was successful in acquiring the support of Australia, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and Thailand.

Literature Review

Although many writings are available which analyze the Indochinese War and the role of the United States in that war, many of the studies have viewed the American involvement in the Vietnam War as a part of the

broader "containment of Communism policy of the United States." Little attention has been devoted to the analysis of the relationship of the United States and individual countries in the region in reference to the war. For example, Frank C. Darling in his book, Thailand and the United States, viewed the relationship in the context of broader aspects of American foreign policy and foreign aid. Since 1954, he writes, the United States looked increasingly to Thailand as one of the most secure bases for the military defense of the region. Darling stressed that American policy in Thailand was part of an overall strategy designed to promote the security and progress of the region.²

L. Edward Shuck viewed the nature of the Thai commitment to the United States as going far beyond the mere superficial diplomatic liaisons in which the Thai government long sought security while it was caught in conflicts between the greater powers.³

Russell H. Fifield's book, Southeast Asia in United States Policy, the author implied that an extremely important element of the United States policy in this period was the inability of the United States to escape responsibility for the region's security. This commitment is reflected in a system of bilateral and multilateral defense treaties covering much of Southeast Asia. The treaty area of SEATO was the broadest multilateral example in Asia and the Pacific.⁴ Thailand has served the United States' objectives in this area.

In the eyes of a veteran of fifteen years' service with the United States Government and two years in Thailand, Donald E. Nuechterlein in his book, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, sees the problems of the country through the eyes of the current leaders of Thailand, viewing their claims for the legitimacy of Thai influence (under the United

States' strong support) in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam as valid without question. This led him to make unsupported assertions about the necessity of the United States' support for Thai claims in Southeast Asia.⁵ In this regard, Bernard K. Gordon has made three important points: First, for several years Thailand had allowed the United States to develop a number of air bases on Thai soil for American Air Force missions. Second, Thailand itself had become the target of increasing Peking-supported subversion and the United States wanted to prevent further expansion of China's influence in the country and the possibility of a "new Vietnam". Third, Thailand had begun to play a very effective role in Southeast Asia's international politics, especially as a key promoter of regional cooperation.⁶ In his view, this was particularly important to American leaders who saw in Asian regionalism an important way to help small and weak Southeast Asian nations build an effective barrier against a resurgent China.

Methodology

The methodology of this study will be descriptive and analytical. Chapter I will provide a detailed description of American commitments to Thailand, which must take into account the time and circumstances when the commitments and means were used. Chapter II will present the background of United States-Thai relations during which time Thailand became an important base area and ally in the region in support of an escalation of the United States' military action in the Vietnam conflict. It will be concerned with the immediate post-war policy of the United States toward Thailand and the region. It will be shown that American commitments to Thailand have grown with the extension of the conflict in

Indochina. Chapter III will examine the specific relationships which evolved between the United States and Thailand over the political and military intervention in Vietnam. This chapter will attempt to show that the United States sought to escalate its involvement by massive use of force in the Vietnam War and regional involvement through SEATO. Chapter IV will discuss why the United States believed it necessary to commit itself to an intimate alliance with Thailand for mutual defense in this conflict. Thailand responded to the United States' commitments and contributed to the war in Vietnam by sending troops and providing bases for United States aircraft. A careful analysis of the reasons why Thailand was so important politically and strategically for the United States to carry on this war will be made. The last chapter will present conclusions concerning the role of Thailand in the United States' policy and how this provided a rationale for the United States' action.

This study will depend primarily upon materials gathered from official United States government sources, particularly the Department of States and Department of Defense bulletins, hearings and studies of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Public Papers of the Presidents, documents relating to alliances, international conferences and statements and pronouncements of the two parties concerned. Books, professional journals and memoirs will be utilized to provide additional insights.

Significance

Whatever conclusions are drawn in Vietnam, there still is the question why Thailand was so acquiescent and available to the United States. For the manner in which the United States attempted to fulfill its

commitments and the means it employed in the war, whether political, economic or military or any combination thereof, may well determine the rationalization for the United States' objectives in the conflict. The significance of this study rests upon the relationship between a large power and a small state in the region of major conflict. How did the large power relate to the small state in that kind of situation? What inducements were offered? What contributions were expected? Perhaps it would reflect the complexities and dilemmas of American foreign policy in Southeast Asia: or perhaps there were some signs that a viable commitment could be developed and that it was necessary to risk an entangling involvement.

FOOTNOTES

¹Department of Defense, National Security Council Staff Study, "Action: No. 1074-A, April 5, 1954," United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, Vol. 9 (Washington, D.C., 1971), pp. 315-322, 329-330.

²Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 215.

³L. Edward Shuck, "Thailand: Groping Toward Neutrality," Current History (December, 1973), p. 258.

⁴Russel H. Fifield, Southeast Asia in United States Policy (New York, 1963), pp. 407-409.

⁵Donald E. Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia (New York, 1965), p. 160.

⁶Bernard K. Gordon, "Thailand: Its Meaning for the United States," Current History (January, 1967), p. 16.

CHAPTER II

THE UNITED STATES-THAI RELATIONS: THE UNITED STATES' POST WAR POLICY

After World War II the United States assumed a dominant position of power and responsibility over the entire Pacific area. During the past two decades American influence and power has penetrated Southeast Asia in a spectacular and decisive way. Accordingly, the United States has become extremely sensitive to political developments threatening the status quo in these areas now considered vital to its security interests.

American strategy and policies for Asia took into account the capabilities of the People's Republic of China and other countries of Asia, particularly those that were not under communist control but which might be presumed to be facing a potential communist threat. Opposition to the expansion of communist power in Southeast Asia required the expenditure of considerable American energy and resources.

After the Korean War, United States policies in Asia gradually developed along the lines of the "containment" doctrine so successfully applied to the Soviet Union in Europe after 1947 and later extended to Asia. George F. Kennan has described the containment policy as follows:

Balanced against this (the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union) are the facts that Russia, as opposed to the Western world in general, is still by far the weaker party, that Soviet society may well contain deficiencies which will eventually weaken its own total potential. This would itself warrant the United States entering with reasonable confidence upon the policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russian with alterable counter force at every point where they

show signs of encroaching upon the interest of a peaceful and stable world.¹

After the United States had adjusted in some measure to the Soviet challenge in Europe, the United States government began to view the problem of Chinese power in Asia in much the same light as that posed by Soviet power in Europe, as though both threats could be contained by similar responses.² In both Asia and Europe containment measures reflected a perceived need for complementary interaction between military policies and aid programs in order to prevent aggression by communist powers and foster the internal stability of the states in the area.³

The United States government, fearing that the People's Republic of China would forcefully extend its boundary and influence into Southeast Asia, took the lead to provide a deterrent. During the Korean Conflict, President Truman increased military assistance to the Philippines and to the forces of France in Indochina; he ordered the United States Seventh Fleet to patrol the waters between mainland China and Formosa.⁴ In August and September of 1951 the Truman Administration negotiated mutual defense treaties with the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand.⁵ It signed a similar pact with Japan, which gave the United States the right to maintain land, air, and naval forces in and about that country.⁶

There seemed to be no choice for the United States but to use military means to prevent changes in Southeast Asia that might endanger its interests. President Truman developed an Asian policy around a series of alliances aimed at the containment of the communist states.⁷ In addition to the earlier pacts, the United States signed treaties with the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, in 1951, and with the Republic of Korea in October, 1953.⁸ When the French Army in Indochina was defeated in 1954, Secretary of State Dulles believed that further

communist aggression in Southeast Asia was but a question of time.⁹ He also believed that what was needed was some sort of an alliance system for the region. The Southeast Asian Organization (SEATO) was negotiated in September of 1954.¹⁰ The treaty organization was to become a basic instrument of United States policy in Southeast Asia.

The organization comprised the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand.¹¹ It was signed at a time when Communist China was making strong in-roads into Southeast Asia and when anti-colonialism was rampant. The common denominator for membership was an evaluation of the communist threat to national security coupled with a conviction that collective defense was the best way to deal with the menace.¹² It is important to recall the essential terms of the treaty in Article IV, paragraph 1:

Each party recognizes that aggression by means of arms attack in the treaty area against any of the Parties or against any state or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agree that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. Measures taken in this paragraph shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations.¹³

In an understanding approved by the other signatories, the United States declared that its obligations under the article applied only to "communist aggression".¹⁴ SEATO was, therefore, intended to be the backbone of the United States defense structure in Southeast Asia. However, Secretary Dulles suggested that the United States would not maintain forces in the countries of the region for the purpose of deterring aggression, but would develop a mobile striking force that could respond when needed.¹⁵

Actually the organization had little real strength. The Asian members possessed only limited conventional weapons and were militarily weak.

The European members were withdrawing from the region and could not be realistically depended upon to make major contributions. The burden for maintaining the status quo or controlling changes in practical terms rested upon the United States.¹⁶

SEATO was but one of a number of responses to the 1954 settlement of the war between the French and the Vietnamese. It provided a legal rationale for much of America's freedom to maneuver in the region. Many gave the organization credit for making some communist states recognize the danger involved in committing overt aggression. During the 1950's and most of the 1960's, much attention was given to the problem of subversion. However, SEATO had difficulty defining the problem, much less coping with it. Its most effective capabilities were oriented toward deterring direct military attack.

To the United States, Southeast Asia was to become a cordeon sanitaire against the Chinese communists.¹⁷ United States policy in Southeast Asia, and Indochina in particular, evolved from reliance upon the major European powers (France and Great Britain) in the region to direct involvement. It was in this context that the United States evolved its policy toward Thailand.

Thailand was increasingly concerned over the expansion of communism in Southeast Asia. The intrusion of communist influence accelerated Thailand's quest for security through arrangements with the great powers. She became a major ally of the United States in the context of United States-Indochinese policy.

Thailand was politically oriented toward the West prior to World War I, especially the United States and Great Britain. Relations between United States and Thailand rested on a long and cordial basis. The first

treaty ever negotiated between two countries was made in 1833 by the Thai King, Rama III, and Edmond Roberts, a diplomatic envoy sent to Southeast Asia by President Andrew Jackson. For over a century American Protestant missionaries had entered Thailand in small numbers and initiated reforms in education, medicine, and technology. At the beginning of the twentieth century King Chulalongkorn had employed advisers from the Harvard Law School to assist the kingdom in abolishing extraterritoriality and other "unequal" treaty restrictions. Throughout this era good-will was created and many friendships were formed. The Thai often looked to the United States for moral support in their struggles with the British and the French, and many Americans voiced their admiration for the only small country in Asia to remain independent from European colonial rule.¹⁸

Leaders of the Thai revolution in 1932, while paying lip service to democratic aspirations, eventually decided, after witnessing the ascending star of Japan in East Asia, to cultivate Tokyo's support in preference to that of the United States and Great Britain. The prospects of liquidating French power in Indochina after 1940 afforded a tempting opportunity for Thailand to recover territories lost to France between 1893 and 1907. Bangkok occupied two French-held enclaves on the right bank of the upper Mekong River in 1940, and later accepted Japanese "mediation" of additional claims to extensive segments of Laos along the same valley, plus three Cambodian provinces adjacent to Thailand. Other territories in Northern Malaysia and along the Shan State border with Burma were added by Thailand with Japanese approval during the course of World War II.

American influence in Bangkok reached a low point in 1942, when the Thai government, responding to further Japanese demands, declared war on both the United States and Great Britain. America's mild reaction to the

Thai declaration of war was conditioned in part by the refusal of the astute Thai ambassador in Washington, M. R. Seni Pramoj, to deliver the declaration on the grounds that it was unrepresentative of Thai public opinion and therefore of dubious validity. By cooperating with Pramoj and the emerging "Free Thai Movement", Washington was able in time to establish useful intelligence contacts reaching into Bangkok itself. When the war in the Pacific turned against the Japanese, a changing of the guard in Bangkok from Phibun to Pridi brought leaders of the Free Thai Movement to power, thus strengthening plans for Thai-American cooperation in the post war period. How useful this connection might have proved in the event of an attempted Allied military conquest of Thailand was never to be tested, but, because of it, Washington felt justified in opposing punitive sanctions proposed by the British after the war. Bangkok's declaration of war was ignored and Thailand's entry into the United Nations was supported by the United States government.¹⁹

Thailand's success after the war was due to the United States, whose post war policies in Southeast Asia at the time favored the establishment of free and independent states rather than the reinstatement of the colonial empires.²⁰ To a certain extent it could be argued that the United States was replacing the British and the French in that area.

The Thai government, in a pragmatic assessment of world politics, gave particular attention to the strengths and goals of the great powers. One of the major guiding principles of Thai foreign policy has been to adjust to "the world as defined by the great powers".²¹ Thailand's present alignment was largely the result of an assessment of the existing world power structure, not a common ideological commitment.²² For instance, during the Korean War, the Thai government saw an excellent

opportunity to win American good-will through forthright support of American policy in Korea by sending Thai combat troops into action. The Thai contribution to the war was warmly received by the United States government. Also, Thai values stress the virtues of reserve and emotional non-involvement and, therefore, adjustment to any given set of circumstances. Throughout the cataclysmic events of the last three decades, Thailand has always managed to be allied to the dominant power in the region.²³

Between 1950 and 1960 Thailand was devoted to the notion of collective security. Thailand's participation in the United Nations, including her small contribution of troops in Korea, and the provision of facilities for the United Nations, SEATO, and other international agencies in Bangkok were token of the government's interest in collective security efforts. The United States began at the same time to organize its Asian and Pacific position through multilateral military commitments to Japan, Nationalist China on Taiwan, the Philippines and Thailand, which responded favorably to this line of American policy.²⁴

The expanding interest of the United States in Southeast Asia coincided with Thailand's rising alarm over the growth of communist power in China and Vietnam. The leadership in Thailand became concerned when the government of the People's Republic of China announced that one of its major targets for revolutionary change was Thailand.²⁵ Although full scale guerrilla warfare has yet to develop, there have been many sporadic terrorist activities. Thailand became alarmed over the intrusion of domestic communist cadres into local problem areas. These fears encouraged the Thai leadership to bolster its security through arrangements with the United States. An effective bilateral defensive alliance was

concluded between Thailand and the United States that led to the creation of American bases in Thailand. The United States committed itself to the defense of Thailand and became involved through various aid and intelligence activities in supporting the Thai regime against internal subversion.

The United States government, after the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, set as its objective in 1954 the denial of military victory in Indochina to the Communists. Secretary Dulles said in March, 1954:

If the Communist armies achieved victory in Indochina, or any part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against other free peoples in the area. Under the conditions of today, the imposition in Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, must be a grave threat to the world free community.²⁶

Since it was perceived that Communist expansion by military force was in progress, the United States government assumed the "protectorate position" of the French when they left in 1954. After the Geneva Conference of 1954, Ngo Dinh Diem was placed in power in South Vietnam. Although the new regime may have been legitimate in the international sense, it still faced the difficult task of actually winning domestic support and acquiring legitimacy within a divided and fragmented country. Following the Geneva settlement, the United States backed the Diem regime against the Communists. The United States supplied technical advisers and economic aid and eventually became a full military participant and the sustaining power in support of the South Vietnamese regime. As the United States became more involved in Vietnam, its policy planners sought to involve other states in the region against the Communists. The United States' military leaders stressed the need to deploy American forces in the area and viewed Thailand as a suitable place.

A National Security Council staff study made in February, 1952, argued that if Indochina were lost to the Communists, Thailand would be exposed to "infiltration and severe political pressure as well as direct attack". The political pressure alone might induce the Thais to seek an accommodation with "international communism" unless "substantial aid" and assurance of military support by the United States were provided.²⁷ The policy adopted by the United States under Truman's administration was that Thailand should be kept oriented towards the United States through "substantial aid" and "assurances" of American support.²⁸

According to Frank C. Darling, who served in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for several years, the United States sent twenty-eight shipments of arms to Thailand in addition to an unspecified number of fighter aircrafts and naval vessels during 1952. A Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was also established in Thailand.²⁹ The Truman administration was convinced that the investment it had made in Thailand was beneficial in achieving United States objectives in the region. John M. Allison, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, expressed satisfaction over the fact that American representatives were working in close cooperation with the officials of this "small but important nation, which has a long tradition of independence and firmly against communism."³⁰

American policy planners were forced to give much attention to developing policy alternatives that were oriented toward building "sufficient strength in the area".³¹ At a meeting on August 30, 1956, the National Security Council restated the policy contention that the national independence of the mainland Southeast Asian states was important to the security interests of the United States. It went on to make

a significant statement that:

The United States' policy should not depend primarily on the degree and nature of Communist activity at any particular time, but should seek to promote these goals within the limits of the United States' resources available in the area.³²

In the late 1950's, Vietnam and Laos became trouble spots for American planners. The Department of Defense submitted "Operation Plan for Vietnam", which was approved by the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) of the National Security Council on January 4, 1959. This Department of Defense document presented contingency plans prepared by the United States Army, Navy, and Air Force calling for execution in accordance with the United States' policy in the event of an actual or imminent Communist attempt to seize control of South Vietnam from within. The plan also envisaged a whole spectrum of American activities to bolster the South Vietnamese regime and to defeat the Vietcong and its allies.³³ As the United States became more deeply involved in the Indochinese conflict, the United States government made commitments to the Thai government to strengthen Thai defense capabilities through greater joint efforts and by military assistance, including armed forces.³⁴ Moreover the United States government under Kennedy's leadership reassured the Thai government that its independence was as critical to the United States as that of South Vietnam.³⁵

Yet, despite this strong support for American role and presence in Southeast Asia--in fact, because of it--Thailand also constituted an important foreign policy problem for the United States. America, with its global concerns and responsibilities as well as with one very hot war on its hands in Southeast Asia, faced the possibility that its Thai ally might also become involved in a serious Communist revolutionary war. Peking had already made a start in this direction and openly proclaimed

its goals to be the capture of Thailand. The United States was pledged to defend Thailand not only under the SEATO pact but also on a bilateral basis following a joint statement issued by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman on March 6, 1962. That statement declared:

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 reaffirmed that this obligation of the United States does not depend upon the prior agreement of other parties to the Treaty (SEATO) since this Treaty obligation is individual as well as collective.³⁶

On May 15, 1962 President Kennedy announced that, at the invitation of the Thai government, he had ordered "additional elements of the United States' military forces, both ground and air, to proceed to Thailand and to remain there until further orders."³⁷ The Thai government probably did not have very much to do with the "invitation" to deploy American forces in its territory. It was an American decision and consultation with Thailand appeared to have been prefatory.³⁸

It is interesting to note that there is evidence that this decision was related to the plan which called for the use of American forces in Thailand in support of future military action in Vietnam. From the Task Force Program of the Department of Defense itself and another joint State-Defense Department paper, the Departments of State and Defense recommended a substantial escalation of American commitments in South Vietnam. However, if the escalation were to take place in Vietnam, it was evident that the United States' need for Thai cooperation would also increase. The Commander-in-Chief, Pacific recommended the pre-stocking of railroad, rolling stock, petroleum, oil, lubricants, ammunition, heavy engineering

equipment, and other materials in Southeast Asia "for the use by the United States forces in contingency actions". All this would, as Lieutenant-General Earl D. Wheeler, Director, Joint Staff pointed out, necessitate the early conclusion of a bilateral agreement with Thailand.³⁹

The Thai government agreed to accept this "military assistance" because of the deteriorating military situation in Laos and Vietnam and because Bangkok was granted the right to restrict the use of military facilities to the defense of Thailand and its vital interests. The appearance of American air and ground forces during the 1962 Laos crisis, the retention of an American air presence thereafter, and the more active military role played by the United States in Laos and Vietnam helped to make the Thai-American connection, strengthened by the Rusk-Thanat accord, more intimate than ever. The rise of the guerrilla threat in the mid 1960's further strengthened Thai interest in the alliance and the direct help it could provide for internal security and stability.

The mighty technological and military resources of the United States were already on the way to contain the "threat" posed by just 10,000 Vietcong troops in South Vietnam and a few thousand Pathet Lao, the communist-led movement in Laos. The North Vietnamese were providing such assistance to these forces as they could spare from their own meager resources. The Soviet Union, too, had air-lifted supplies to the Pathet Lao. However, by this time it was unmistakably clear that the Sino-Soviet split had become serious and that neither China nor the Soviet Union wanted to be involved singly in a shooting war with the United States. The United States called for a military victory and escalated its involvement in the Vietnam conflict. In this crusade, Thailand was to be a sub-junior partner whose support and cooperation were to be insured, as

in the Truman and Eisenhower years, by "assurances" and "generous aid".

Kennedy, indeed, had plans for Thailand. To secure Thai approval of anticipated American requirements, he initiated discussions through a joint Thai-American committee set up in Bangkok on a series of issues supposedly designed to overcome the "weakness in Thailand's logistical structure". This referred to the American commitments to Thailand under the Southeast Asian Collective Defense Treaty and other bilateral agreements on economic and military assistance whose purpose was to provide "an important basis for United States actions to help Thailand meet indirect aggression".⁴⁰ In the 1960's, extensive aid programs were extended to Thailand (a cumulative total of \$315.0 million in economic and \$423.3 million in military assistance by 1963),⁴¹ and important projects in communications and transportation were launched. Air base facilities in the central and northeast regions were constructed in the early 1960's which enabled the United States to send substantial aid and immediate military support to the Indochinese states to the east. Thai soil had potential long range value for the United States as long as the United States continued to exercise its influence in Southeast Asia.

In the years since 1962, Thailand has become the western-most anchor of a network of United States military bases that extend all the way to Japan. Despite the lack of regional diplomatic integration in security affairs and the various restrictions on America's freedom to treat its strong points around the Chinese periphery as a truly integrated defense system, the physical potential was there, and Thailand made an important contribution to it. Moreover, in practice, the United States gained a surprising degree of area-wide mobility from its "diplomatically disconnected" network.⁴²

FOOTNOTES

¹George F. Kennan, American Diplomacy 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1951), p. 126.

²David P. Mozingo, "Containment in Asia Reconsidered," World Politics, Vol. XIX, No. 3 (April, 1967), p. 361.

³Ibid.

⁴U. S. Department of State, "U. S. Air and Sea Forces Order Into Supporting Action," The Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXIII (Washington, D.C., July 3, 1950), p. 5. Hereafter cited as Department of State Bulletin.

⁵"Peace and Security Rest on Economic Improvement of Free Nations," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXV (August 6, 1951), pp. 209-212.

⁶Robert A. Scalapino, "The United States and Japan," The United States and the Far East, ed. Willard L. Thorp (New Jersey, 1964), pp. 53-54.

⁷"Defense Against Menace of External and Internal Attack--Statement by Secretary Acheson," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXV (July 9, 1951), pp. 51-52.

⁸Peter V. Curl, ed., Documents on American Foreign Relations 1953 (New York, 1954), pp. 312-313.

⁹"The Threat of a Red Asia--Addressed by Secretary Dulles," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXX (April 12, 1954), p. 540. He had proposed a formal alliance prior to the Geneva Conference.

¹⁰Russel H. Fifield, Southeast Asia in United States Policy (New York, 1963), p. 27. According to Professor Fifield: "The conflict in Indochina led the United States viewed a multilateral security pact or 'united action' under the circumstances as a means of involvement in the war rather than a deterrent to it. The United States believed that a security treaty would strengthen the West in the coming negotiations with the communist in Indochina."

¹¹South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were not parties to the treaty, but they were included in the area covered by the defense and economic provision in the protocol to the treaty. Laos was removed from coverage under the treaty as a result of the Geneva Conference in 1962, which neutralized it, and Cambodia later voluntarily withdrew.

¹²Russel H. Fifield, "Another Look at SEATO," Southeast Asia: Problems of United States Policy, ed. William Henderson (Massachusetts, 1965), p. 190.

¹³U. S. Department of State, "Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and Protocol Between the United States of America and Other Governments," Treaties and Other International Act Series, No. 3170 (Washington, D.C., 1956), p. 3.

¹⁴Fifield, "Another Look at SEATO," p. 191.

¹⁵"Collective Defense for Southeast Asia," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXXI (September 20, 1954), p. 391.

¹⁶C. L. Sulzberger, "The Loss of Option in Vietnam," The New York Times (January 11, 1956), p. 44. The author described that the alliance system constructed by Secretary Dulles as "valueless".

¹⁷Richard Butwell, "Southeast Asia: A Survey," Headline Series, No. 192 (New York, December, 1956), p. 9.

¹⁸Frank C. Darling, "America and Thailand," Asian Survey, Vol. VII, No. 4 (April, 1967), p. 215.

¹⁹John F. Cady, "The Historical Background of United States Policy in Southeast Asia," Southeast Asia: Problems of United States Policy, ed. William Henderson (Massachusetts, 1965), p. 16.

²⁰Butwell, p. 54.

²¹David A. Wilson, "Thailand," Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia, ed. George M. T. Kahin (New York, 1959), p. 9.

²²David A. Wurfel, "Southeast Asia Response to International Politics," Southeast Asia: Problems of United States Policy, ed. William Henderson (Massachusetts, 1965), p. 82.

²³Ibid.

²⁴David A. Wilson, The United States and the Future of Thailand (New York, 1970), p. 30.

²⁵_____, "China, Thailand and the Spirit of Bundung," China Quarterly, No. 30 (April-June, 1967), pp. 154-155.

²⁶"The Threat of a Red Asia," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXX (April 12, 1954), pp. 539-542.

²⁷Department of Defense, National Security Council Staff Study, "United States Objectives and Course of Action With Respect to Communist Aggression in Southeast Asia," United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, Vol. 8 (Washington, D.C., 1971), pp. 470-471. This is one of the major sources which consists of Volumes 8-12 and will hereafter be described as Department of Defense Documents.

²⁸"Truman Special Message to Congress on the Mutual Security Program, May 24, 1951," Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 304.

²⁹Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 81.

³⁰"U. S. Problems and Accomplishments in the Far East," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXVII (July 21, 1952), p. 100.

³¹"Review of United States Policy in the Far East--NSC. 5429," Department of Defense Documents, Vol. 10, pp. 709-710. The Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, Nathan F. Twining, for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, Charles E. Wilson on August 11, 1954. And Statement of Policy by the National Security Council on August 4, 1954, "Review of United States Policy in the Far East," Ibid., pp. 731-740, especially p. 738.

³²"National Security Council 5612/1, adopted on August 30, 1956, and approved by the President on September 5, 1956: State of Policy on United States Policy in Mainland Asia," Department of Defense Documents, Vol. 10, pp. 1082-1095.

³³"Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) Operations Plan for Vietnam (U), May 20, 1959," Department of Defense Documents, Vol. 10, pp. 1185-1189. The Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs, Robert H. Knight, to the Secretaries of the Army, Air Force, and Navy, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller).

³⁴"Joint Communique, Bangkok, May 18," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XLIV (June 19, 1961), pp. 958-959.

³⁵"Mission to Southeast Asia, India, and Pakistan," Department of Defense Documents, Vol. 11, pp. 159-166. The Vice President Johnson to the President Kennedy on May 25, 1961.

³⁶"Secretary Rusk, Thai Foreign Minister Discuss Matters of Mutual Concern," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XLVI (March 26, 1962), p. 498.

³⁷"Text of Kennedy's Statements," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XLVI (June 4, 1962), pp. 904-905.

³⁸This view is held by Professor M. S. Venkataramani in his analysis of United States policy at that time. ("The United States and Thailand: The Anatomy of Super Power Policy Making," International Studies (January-March, 1973), pp. 102-103,) There was some evidence in his analysis that showed it was the American leadership's intention to install United States forces in this area to reaffirm that United States policy in Indochina continued to be the establishment of an effective area of American influence. It was significant that there had been no change in American policy toward the region; the implication was that the United States forces were deployed to restore American power. In this way the United States sought Thai approval with the actual deployment of American troops in Thailand. The invitation from the Thai government appeared to provide the local support for American strategy.

³⁹"Memorandum for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff-South Vietnam," Department of Defense Documents, Vol. 11, p. 369. The Director, Joint Staff, General D. Wheeler, to the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lemnitzer on November 14, 1961.

⁴⁰"Secretary Rusk, Thai Foreign Minister Discuss Matters of Mutual Concern," pp. 498-499.

⁴¹Fred Greene, The United States Policy and the Security of Asia (New York, 1968), p. 118.

⁴²Ibid., p. 119.

CHAPTER III

VIETNAM INTERVENTION AND MILITARY

BUILD-UP IN THAILAND

... under the situation in Indochina, the United States has held to a stable and consistent course and has made clear the condition which, in its opinion, might justify intervention. These conditions were and are (1) an invitation from present lawful authorities; (2) clear assurance of complete independence to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam; (3) evidence of concern by the United Nations; (4) a joining of collective effort of some of the other nations in the area and (5) assurance that France will not itself withdraw from the battle until it is won.¹

United States policy as stated elsewhere in this thesis was to maintain a compatible regime in South Vietnam to help contain the communist movement in Southeast Asia. For this reason the American leadership felt compelled to commit the United States long before the Geneva Conference began in April, 1954 to the maintenance of a "free" or a pro-Western regime in Vietnam.² However, the United States refused to commit military forces to the Indochinese Conflict until the 1960's. Credits and material aid were supplied to the French in hopes of sustaining the French position in Indochina, which indirectly would enable the United States to achieve its objectives.³ United States aid, however, did not accomplish its intended purpose and the situation continued to deteriorate until the French military forces were forced to surrender at Dien Bien Phu on May 8, 1954. Following the Geneva negotiations in 1954 which militarily partitioned Vietnam, the United States began to extend aid to strengthen the defense of South Vietnam and to convert Laos into a

pro-Western stronghold that could shield Thailand from North Vietnam and deny the Communists in South Vietnam access to supplies from the North.

The Indochinese War was officially regarded by Washington as a contest between a non-communist state and a communist state (North Vietnam), and not as a civil war between contending forces for control of the government within a single state. The agreement of the Geneva Conference on July 21, 1954 was interpreted by the United States leadership as a diplomatic victory for the North Vietnamese regime.⁴ According to the Geneva accord, the partition was clearly described as a military regroupment of forces. It involved the establishment of no political boundaries and certainly provided no basis for the establishment of a separate state in the South or the North. The Geneva accord explicitly read that within a period of two years national elections were to be held on the basis of which a single government for all of Vietnam would be established. The Vietminh had every reason to believe that they could win the elections because the major elements of the population in both the North and South knew that it was the Vietminh regime, now established in the North, that had driven out the French; and many landless peasants were aware that it was the Vietminh that had divided up the estates of absentee landlords and distributed the land. The Southern regime under Ngo Dinh Diem's leadership did not have the nationalist credentials enjoyed by the Northern leadership. Ho Chi Minh, who during the previous decade had been the acknowledged head of the Vietnamese nationalist movement, simply could not be displaced by Diem as a nationalist leader. Diem's support came primarily from the United States. To many he was not known, and he was absent from the country during the critical years of the war against the French.⁵ In effect, both the United States and South Vietnam accepted only those

aspects of the Geneva accord that were advantageous and repudiated those provisions that were regarded to be contrary to their interests. Thus, with American support, the elections were never held. The Hanoi government persisted in its effort to arrange for the promised elections, but Diem, consistently backed by the United States, refused. During the first three years of the post Geneva period there was a lull in military activity. Hanoi did not openly support the insurrectionary activity in the South, though the United States assisted the Diem regime in building its police forces and administration. By repudiating the essence of the Geneva agreement Diem made civil war inevitable. In a civil war in which the military struggle for power ends on the condition that the competition will be transferred to the political level, the side which repudiates the terms should expect military conflict to be resumed.⁶ Consequently, the United States moved rapidly to strengthen the South Vietnamese regime and its economy so that the South Vietnamese government might successfully maintain itself vis-a-vis the Communists.

Why did the policy of the United States take this course? In the thinking of Eisenhower and Dulles, Indochina was the key to all of Southeast Asia. This became known as the domino theory. In the words of Eisenhower: "You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go, very quickly."⁷ So vital was the region considered to be to American interests in Asia and the Pacific that Dulles asserted that a communist take-over in Indochina would carry a grave threat to Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand.⁸

The United States government believed that the loss of Vietnam would have a multiplier effect which could disrupt the "status quo" within Asia

and lead to permanent communist hegemony in the region. Indochina became the last bastion for the preservation of anti-communist power in the Far East. If the United States wanted to prevent communist expansion anywhere in Asia, it felt that it had to prevent the communist domination of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. Hence, during the post-Geneva Conference period, the United States government was concerned with the development of the South Vietnamese regime; this was paralleled by an effort to increasingly involve its allies, especially Thailand, in an effort to resist the Communists.

By 1963, it had become clear to President Kennedy that Diem's leadership was incapable of stemming the rapid political and military disintegration of the regime. Diem had failed to develop the loyalty of the South Vietnamese people; he lacked a capable and effective administrative organization, a dedicated and trained party cadre, and a unified and well trained military establishment. The test came as insurrectionary activity, supported by the North, began to intensify and make serious inroads into the areas controlled by the Southern regime.⁹ The massive build up of American aid to the South Vietnamese was not sufficient to overcome the weakness of the regime. In fact, the Vietcong benefited from the vast infusion of American weapons into the conflict as the Vietnamese Army lost ground.¹⁰

On November first and second 1963, a coup d'etat occurred in which President Diem and his closest colleagues were killed or imprisoned. A military backed civilian government assumed office on November 4, 1963, and a Military Revolutionary Council was formed under Major General Duong Van Minh's leadership. This military junta ruled South Vietnam until it was replaced by the bloodless coup d'etat of January 30, 1964 by Major

General Nguen Khan, Commander of the Army's First Corps. It was immediately recognized by the United States government and aid was promised to sustain the new military regime.¹¹ By the end of 1964 the crisis continued as Saigon's position eroded politically and militarily at an accelerated rate. The deterioration of the military situation was reflected in the increasing rate of desertions among new recruits (thirty per cent by January 1965), the disintegration of Saigon's administrative effectiveness and perceptible growth in war weariness among the South Vietnamese. Demands for peaceful settlement multiplied. In Saigon itself, as well as Buddhist strongholds in Hué, students and monks publicly advocated an end to the fighting and called for negotiations with Hanoi.¹²

During these critical months the United States military commitment to the South Vietnamese regime increased at an accelerated rate. The United States government under the Johnson administration, fearing that the Saigon regime would fall, was determined to maintain by direct military intervention an "independent" South Vietnam. Settlement of the conflict by negotiation would require political concessions that would be intolerable to South Vietnam and the United States.¹³ It was reasonably certain that negotiations would require free elections, which would be politically unsuitable to the United States and would be contrary to its national interests in the region. The strategic purpose of intervention, which resulted in rather rapid political and military escalation, prevented such political concessions by South Vietnam. There is some evidence that escalation of the war had been systematically pursued by Washington as a means of putting an end to any diplomatic moves, or domestic or foreign pressures designed to promote a negotiated settlement

of the conflict.¹⁴ President Johnson did assert that he would consider any plan that would insure the stability of the South Vietnamese regime. He said: "As long as Communist inspired unrest in South Vietnam persists, I think that the present course we are conducting is the only answer and I think that the operation should be stepped up there."¹⁵ The essence of the Johnson policy in Vietnam was escalation to the degree he felt to be necessary to induce the North Vietnamese to withdraw support from the National Liberation Front (NLF). The NLF, commonly referred to as the Vietcong, was an anti-South Vietnamese government movement inspired by the communist ideology.

The incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin off the North Vietnam coast on August 2 and 4, 1964¹⁶ were used to further escalate the United States' military role in the conflict. The United States' commitment to participate in the war was clearly indicated by such measures as the naval and air bombardment of North Vietnamese territory early in August 1964 in retaliation for the Tonkin Gulf incidents, and by the dispatch of more planes and more American troops to South Vietnam.¹⁷ The United States Congress gave its support by an overwhelming vote in favor of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution¹⁸ and by the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 189 on August 7, 1964 supporting "... the determination of the President ... to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."¹⁹

Thus, the United States' political and military commitment to the war in Vietnam was complete. The Tonkin Gulf incidents and the United States' raids in response to them marked the beginning of direct military involvement by the United States in the Vietnam conflict. American troops in Vietnam soon reached the level of more than 500,000 men and air

war against North Vietnam became very intense and costly.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the military operation in Vietnam to the allies (especially Thailand) of the United States was the inability of the United States to devise an effective means of coping with the guerrilla warfare used so effectively by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces.²⁰ Despite its vast superiority in modern weapons and delivery systems, the United States at the beginning of 1965 seemed unable to effectively counter the Vietcong. For three years the United States sought to bolster the South Vietnamese forces with modern equipment and technical assistance, but the military situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate markedly. President Johnson faced the harsh choice of either accepting the humiliating defeat of American policy in Vietnam or of changing the ground rules to permit the United States and its allies to fight the Communists on terms that were more favorable to the United States. The latter alternative focused on the use of air power to convince the "Communist aggressors" that the price they had to pay for continuation of the war was too high. Such a change in rules required the continued deployment of a sizable force of troops from the United States and its allies. The air warfare strategy of the United States was warmly endorsed by the Thai government and other Asian governments that feared the repercussions of a communist victory in Vietnam.²¹

After World War II the United States developed a military position in Asia which required military bases, pivotal port facilities, air bases and supply depots to be located in key military positions. This included installations in South Korea, Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines, and later in Thailand and South Vietnam. Air Force headquarters were located

in Japan and the Philippines and were complemented by the strategic island base of Guam to the East.²² The interdependence of United States forces was demonstrated by the Oahu Base in Hawaii which provided back up support and reinforcement for all services and installations, and by Clark Air Force Base in the Philippine Islands. In 1964 the Clark Base received B-57s from Japan and in 1965 served as a transfer point for planes conducting raids above the 17th parallel in Vietnam. In addition to its value in the Indochina campaign, the Clark Base also remained a strategic center for the deployment of air power in case of a larger conflict.²³ From there and other established strongholds it was possible to move forces into Thailand in 1962 without fear of over extension. These bases also served as support units when the United States, during the Vietnam War, set up new air bases in central and northeast Thailand, and at Bien Hoa and Danang in South Vietnam.

The Thai facilities broadened the American capacity to use land based air power over Laos and Vietnam as well as to protect Thailand. To prepare for other contingencies, a special logistics program for Thailand had begun, consisting mainly of rolling stock, mobile pipelines, air field improvements, and forward storage depots for ground forces.²⁴ Compelling reasons for the Thai government to accept this kind of military role in connection with the Vietnam War was the rise of local communist guerrilla activities in the country and fear of Chinese and North Vietnamese expansion.²⁵ The Thai government, a military regime, needed economic and military aid to sustain itself against internal political threats. Therefore, it sought an even greater American commitment. To help meet the growing insurgency in the northeast, the Thai government asked the United States to provide it with additional

military assistance. The United States government extended aid, but pursued a policy of non-involvement of United States forces in combat operations against the Thai insurgents.²⁶

Thailand provided the United States with vital military facilities. This involved the substantial build up of United States forces which were made up primarily of air force personnel in Thailand. The extent of the American military build up was impressive, and the emerging geographic pattern was instructive. The United States built its "main line" of air bases and supply depots in Thailand's central Khorat plateau. This line divides Thailand from the Gulf of Thailand on the south to the Mekong River border with Laos on the north (see Figure 1). Starting at the cape south of Bangkok, the chief American installations were these: Sattahip Naval Base and U-Tapao Base for B-52, the Don Muang Air Field at Bangkok itself, and then moving north and east of Bangkok were Khorat, Khon Kaen and U-dorn. East of that line on the Mekong River border with Laos, was the helicopter and air base at Nakorn Phanom, and due south about 150 miles was the base at U-bon. Finally, on the line running northwest of Bangkok were two more installations, the air base at Takhli and in the far northwest near Chiangmai was located an electronic installation base.²⁷ Journalists reported that most flights by American Phantom jets into Vietnam--perhaps 1,500 missions each week²⁸--originated from Takhli, Khorat, U-dorn and U-bon Bases.

In March 1965, following the Vietcong raids on Plaiku in South Vietnam, the United States began bombing North Vietnam from Thailand, as well as from carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin. In 1967, the United States began to station B-52s at U-Tapao in Sattahip area for striking targets in South Vietnam and Laos. This saved a considerable amount in operating

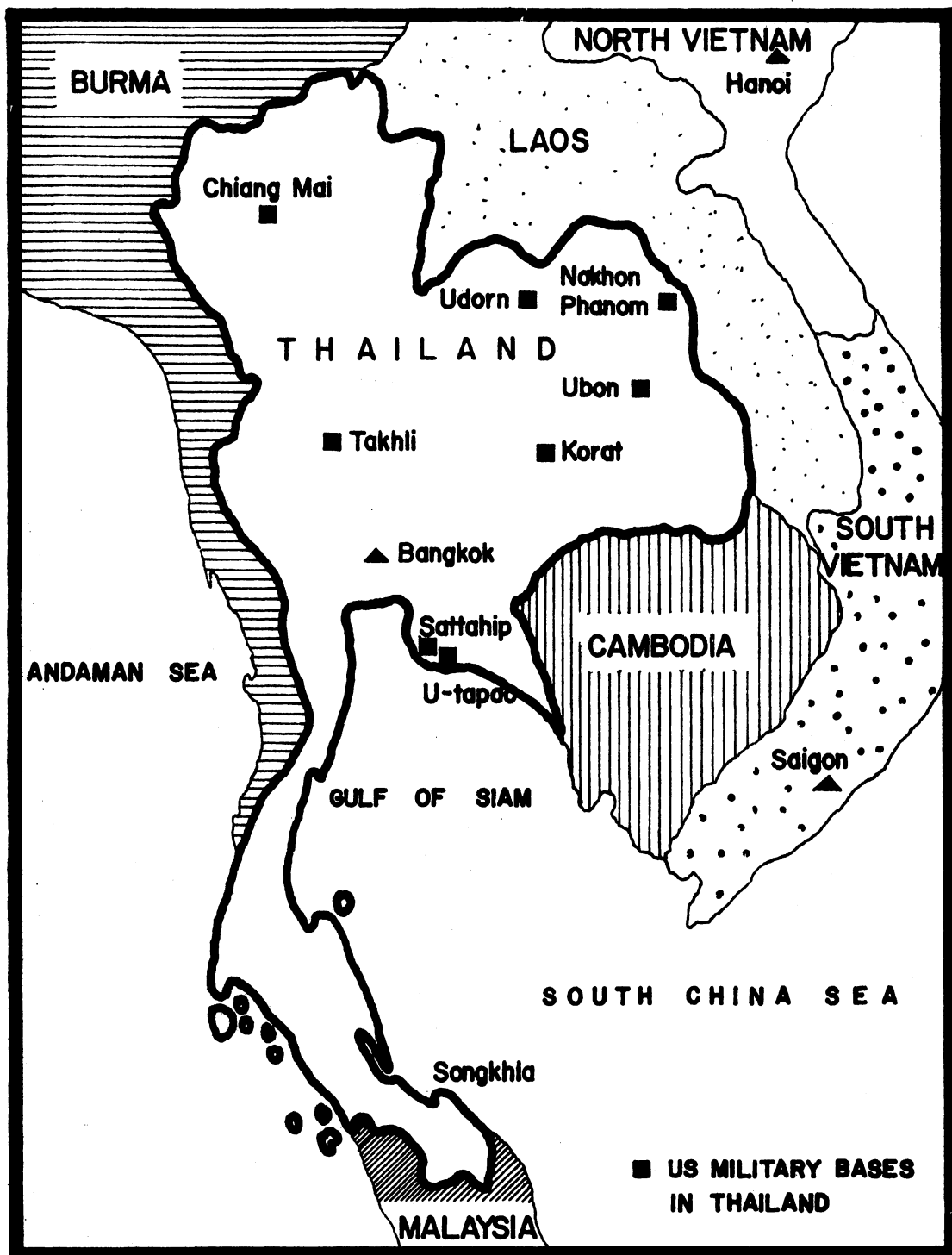


Figure 1. U. S. Military Bases in Thailand

costs. A typical B-52 sortie from U-Tapao cost \$3,440, exclusive of munitions costs, compared with \$19,937 for a sortie from Guam. By the end of 1967, there were approximately 33,000 Air Force personnel, approximately 10,300 Army personnel, and 527 air crafts in Thailand.²⁹

During this period the major function of Thailand in American Southeast Asian strategy was to serve as a center for air operations in the military conflict in South Vietnam. Besides the bases, other important logistical and support facilities were constructed; and Bangkok served as a major rest and rehabilitation center for the United States soldiers on leave from Vietnam. The number of American military personnel stationed in Thailand increased from 400 in 1961 to more than 40,000 in 1967.³⁰ Without the use of bases in Thailand, only a few hundred miles away from the targets in North Vietnam, the American military effort in Vietnam would have been more costly and difficult.

In addition to providing bases for United States military operations, Thailand agreed to send ground forces to South Vietnam. In September 1964, Thailand sent a small air lift unit to serve there which totaled forty-five men; and in December 1966, a small naval patrol unit numbering about 200 men was dispatched to Vietnam. Finally, in early 1967 a ground combat unit of 2,207 men was sent there; this was increased to 11,000 men by mid-1967.³¹ The commitment of such a large Thai force was encouraged by the United States government. To support the Thai forces in Vietnam, the United States spent about \$200 million. The greatest portion of these expenditures was used to equip, supply, and sustain the troops in Vietnam. Other American expenses within this total included the payment of overseas allowances to Thai officers. Also, a \$15 million increase in military assistance to Thailand for each of the two years after 1966 was

granted, and a Hawk anti-aircraft battery was provided the Thai government. United States officials informed a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee that the main reason that the Thai government had sent men to Vietnam was to satisfy the strong desire of the United States government that they do so.³²

During the Vietnam War many observers in Southeast Asia believed that the United States commitment in Thailand had become somewhat permanent. More than 40,000 American soldiers were stationed in Thailand and more than \$300 million were spent to equip Thai bases and other military facilities. The Sattahip complex constructed by the United States provided Thailand with a second port which is far bigger than the port at Bangkok. The United States also assisted Thailand in building a road network that opened up the interior.³³

These major economic and military aid programs were designed to meet Communist infiltration as well as to provide a base for American military operations in Southeast Asia. The United States' commitment was sizable and had the appearance of being long-term. The consensus was that Washington had no choice because Thailand was essential to the whole American strategy in Southeast Asia, and particularly to the war effort in South Vietnam.

As the war continued, the United States government kept insisting that its commitment to South Vietnam and the military build up in Thailand was compatible with the SEATO pact. Under the various bilateral agreements and the commitment under SEATO, the United States legally rationalized its freedom to maneuver in the region. One of the undertakings which the Johnson Administration constantly cited as proof of a Vietnam commitment was the Southeast Asian Treaty.³⁴ But the treaty involved no

specific American pledge to the South Vietnamese government, which was not and could not be a signatory. A protocol to the treaty did provide a formal basis for America's military assistance to South Vietnam. However, the United States justified its military intervention there more on the basis of its direct commitments to Saigon than on the basis of its commitments to SEATO.³⁵

Unlike other signatories to SEATO, who would not agree that the treaty's vague language could possibly be interpreted as a general commitment to the South Vietnamese government.³⁶ Thailand responded favorably to the interpretation made by the United States. From past experience, the Thai government reasoned that Thailand had a direct security interest to which SEATO seemed to respond.³⁷ SEATO provided an important framework for the bilateral accords between Washington and Bangkok. Without it, for instance, a major treaty would have been required to validate the Rusk-Thanat accord of 1962.³⁸ As the Thai experience indicates, the United States government assumed a higher degree of freedom and mobility than what SEATO theoretically conferred. The United States repeatedly asserted its belief in the importance of coalition operations; nevertheless, it avoided operating through SEATO whenever possible. The 1962 landings in Thailand, the retaliatory strikes and escalation in South Vietnam, and appeal for third country assistance to Saigon were dramatic illustrations of this tendency.³⁹

Under the shadow of American troop presence in Thailand, the governments of Thailand and the United States issued separate announcements concerning the agreement between them for the stationing of United States forces in Thailand. The communiqué issued by the Thai government on May 15, 1962, cited the Communist-led movements in Laos and also the

pro-Communist forces in South Vietnam as constituting a threat to the security of the country. Citing the Rusk-Thanat statement of March 6, 1962, the Thai government reaffirmed its obligation under the SEATO treaty to cooperate with the United States in "defending and preserving the peace and security of Thailand." The United States President's statement issued on the same day said that the joint consideration by the two governments concerning the situation in Southeast Asia resulted in the "invitation" from the Thai government to the United States to deploy its troops in Thailand. It asserted that this defensive act on the part of the United States was wholly consistent with the United Nations Charter.⁴⁰

Both the Thai and American statements emphasized that the action taken was in accordance with the obligations under the SEATO agreement of 1954. However, it is interesting to note that the statement issued by the SEATO council on May 16 simply took note of the United States and Thai action and did not really endorse it. It did note that the movement of American troops to Thailand was "entirely precautionary and defensive in character."⁴¹ In fact, this document only expressed a concern for providing security for the government in Bangkok. Not one word in the memorandum related to the question of Thai bases being used by American aircraft as a point from which they could bomb North Vietnam. On the contrary, the memorandum suggested that American military forces in Thailand were to protect that country and to "modernize and enlarge Thailand's military and logistical facilities."⁴² But the United States assumed that these supportive activities under the circumstances gave it justification to escalate the war in Vietnam. Moreover, the Rusk-Thanat accord was a spurious document. It involved SEATO far beyond what member

states had consented to. The interpretation of the SEATO agreement which was set forth was not supported by the wording of that treaty. It was, in effect, a "hand-shake understanding" between the Johnson Administration and the Bangkok government.⁴³ The Washington-Bangkok agreement in this matter was based on the efforts of the United States to increase Thailand's support of the American military escalation of the Vietnam Conflict.

These developments of America's role in the conflict reflected the United States' policy of containing the spread of communist influence in the Southeast Asian region. It was believed that strenuous American efforts to build a more tenable defense line against Communist subversion would contribute to the stability of the region.

FOOTNOTES

¹"Security in the Pacific," Department of State Bulletin (June 28, 1954), pp. 971-973. The late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's speech at Geneva Conference.

²Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina (California, 1965), p. 313.

³Beverly O'Conner, "The United States and the Indochinese War" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1967), p. 68.

⁴William Thomas Dever, "The United States Commitment to Vietnam: A Study of the Politics of Escalation" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1971). The Geneva Conference was discussed in Chapter II.

⁵He spent four years in the United States (1950-1954).

⁶Peace in Vietnam: A New Approach in Southeast Asia - A report prepared for the American Friend Service Committee (New York, 1966), p. 43. Hereafter referred to as Peace in Vietnam.

⁷Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C., 1954), p. 382. Dwight D. Eisenhower.

⁸"The Threat of the Red China," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XXX (January 4, 1954), p. 12.

⁹Peace in Vietnam, pp. 45-46.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 48.

¹¹The New York Times (November 5, 1963), p. 12.

¹²Peace in Vietnam, p. 49.

¹³Edward S. Herman, and Richard B. Duboff, American's Vietnam Policy: The Strategic of Deception (Washington, D.C., 1966), p. 31.

¹⁴Franz Schurmann, Peter Scott, and Reginald Zelnick, The Politics of Escalation: A Study of United States Responses to Pressure for a Political Settlement of the Vietnamese War, November 1963-January 1966 (California, 1966), pp. 97-115. The authors analyze the United States' policy of escalation as a means to avoid a political settlement in the conflict.

¹⁵The New York Times (February 1, 1964), pp. 1-4.

¹⁶Ibid., (February 22, 1968), p. 15. It has since been referred to as the "Tonkin Gulf Incidents." United States naval vessels, operating in international water in the Gulf of Tonkin, were attacked by three North Vietnamese torpedo boats. But there was some evidence that the two United States vessels were on an intelligence mission and not on a routine patrol; and that they were violating the twelve miles territorial water limits of North Vietnam. Senator Wayne Morse accused the United States of being the provocateur in the Gulf of Tonkin.

¹⁷Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution (New York, 1965), p. 235.

¹⁸U. S. Congress, House, H. J. Res. 1145, 88th Cong., 2nd Sess., Vol. 110, Part 14, Congressional Records (1964), p. 18133. It was adopted on August 7, 1964. The resolution was unanimously adopted by the House of Representatives and in the Senate it was adopted by a vote of 88 to 2.

¹⁹"Text of Joint Resolution, August 7," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. LI (August 27, 1964), p. 268.

²⁰Donal E. Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia (New York, 1965), p. 264.

²¹Ibid.

²²Fred Greene, United States Policy and the Security of Asia (New York, 1968), p. 146.

²³Ibid., p. 147.

²⁴U. S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Foreign Assistance Act of 1964, Hearing, before a Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 88th Cong., 2nd Sess. (March 25 and April 16, 1964), p. 86; p. 500. Secretary McNamara noted that Thailand came within the "forward strategic defense" category of eleven states around the communist periphery in which the United States was concentrating the bulk of its military aid. Also, Deputy Assistant Frank Sloan described Thailand as the hub of the United States' Southeast Asian defense effort, a key to SEATO and to American planning, an important center of a counter insurgency program, and a locale for military construction work.

²⁵Threats were made by the "Voice of Free Thailand" broadcasts from Hanoi in Thai language heard by the author almost daily while working on northeastern part of Thailand during the summers of 1967-1969, and Peking's support of the "Independence Thailand Movement" after 1965 also gave rise to fear that an assault would begin in earnest.

²⁶Roland A. Paul, American Military Commitments Abroad (New Jersey, 1973), pp. 116-119.

²⁷Bernard K. Gordon, "Thailand: Its Meaning to the United States," Current History (January, 1967), pp. 17-18.

²⁸The Times (London) (May 27, 1968), p. 34. Reported that more than 125 missions daily or 80% of all the United States bombing of North Vietnam originated from Thailand.

²⁹Paul, pp. 109-111.

³⁰Frank C. Darling, "America and Thailand," Asian Survey, Vol. VII, No. 4 (April, 1967), p. 219.

³¹Paul, p. 114.

³²Ibid.

³³U. S. News and World Report (February 27, 1967), p. 46.

³⁴Peace in Vietnam, p. 44.

³⁵U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Testimony, before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Relations, House of Senate, 89th Cong., 2nd Sess. (February 18, 1966), p. 596.

³⁶Peace in Vietnam, p. 44.

³⁷The SEATO system itself is very Thai oriented; its headquarters are in Bangkok, and many of the ablest Thai officers participate actively in the planning and other staff work. Moreover, Thailand takes part in frequent SEATO combat exercise.

³⁸Greene, p. 122.

³⁹Ibid., p. 121.

⁴⁰The text of both statements may be found in "President Sends Troops to Thailand, U. S. Policy Toward Laos Unchanged," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XLVI (June 4, 1962), pp. 904-905, and Thailand's Foreign Affairs Bulletin (April-May, 1962), pp. 29-30. See Appendix D.

⁴¹"SEATO Statement May 16," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XLVI (June 4, 1962), p. 906.

⁴²Louis E. Lomax, Thailand: The War That Is, The War That Will Be (New York, 1967), p. 154.

⁴³Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THAILAND: ITS MEANING TO THE UNITED STATES' VIETNAMESE POLICY

The presence of American military forces in Thailand raised the fundamental question of why Thailand was so strategically important to the United States in the Vietnam War. Further, how did American involvement in the Indochinese conflict affect the relationship between the two countries in reference to the war?

The American government, as early as 1961, made the decision that South Vietnam was of critical importance to United States national interests in Asia and that its absorption into the Communist bloc must be prevented by a major United States military intervention should the South Vietnamese government fail to stem the Vietcong with the help of American advisers and equipment. American planners believed that if the United States abandoned South Vietnam, it must be prepared to abandon all of Southeast Asia.¹ The loss of South Vietnam would adversely affect the regional balance of power and American credibility and prestige throughout the world.² The establishment of American military bases in Thailand was the consequence of this political decision, which was facilitated by the willingness of the Thai government to collaborate in the policy of containment.³

American policy in Thailand during the past two decades has been to build that country into a "bastion" of the American block in Southeast

Asia through programs to strengthen the will and ability of the Thai government to resist Communist China. This line of policy became a major concern of the United States in the region.⁴ While the conflict in Vietnam was growing and the American commitment to defend the South Vietnamese regime against the Communists increased, the major function of Thailand in American strategy was to serve, not only as an air base, but also as an important logistical and support center for other American military operations.

American political strategy in Vietnam after 1961 emphasized military means. The South Vietnamese regime was under intense Communist attacks from both internal and external sources. The United States and various non-Communist governments in Southeast Asia had an interest in preserving the independence and territorial integrity of South Vietnam. Thailand, throughout these difficult years, played a crucial role in this endeavor. Many American experts⁵ have observed that without the use of Thai bases, the United States' military effort in South Vietnam would have been more costly and difficult.

American air war strategy in Thailand included the use of U-dorn as headquarters for the 7th and 13th Air Force, a composite American unit controlled from both Saigon and from Clarke Field in the Philippines. American officials said that the base was used primarily for reconnaissance aircraft, but it had tactical bombers as well. The bases at U-bon, U-dorn, Korat and Nakorn Phanom in northeast Thailand became considerably greater in strategic importance after the United States built a fortified buffer strip between North and South Vietnam. Following the dictates of military strategy, the United States extended the fortified barrier across the narrow neck of Laos to the Thai border. This was designed to

cut off the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" over which the Communists moved men and supplies to South Vietnam.⁶ The base at U-bon, in the southern half of the northeast region, had a tactical wing of F-4c Phantom jets, each of which could carry over 12,000 pounds of bombs. The base at Korat was located at the gateway to the northeast. Aircraft known as F-105 Thunderchief flew from both Korat and another base at Takhli. B-52s were flying from U-tapao, near Sattahip, south of Bangkok. These giant strategic bombers were not initially flown over North Vietnam, but were used in support of ground actions as far north as the demilitarized zone.⁷

During the 1967 fiscal years, the United States Military Assistance Program for Thailand was budgeted at \$62 million. Total military expenditures were undoubtedly much greater because many expenses connected with the air bases were charged to the American budget in Vietnam. An example was the completion by the United States of a \$65 million communications network in Thailand to link up the various command headquarters in Vietnam.⁸ This American Military Assistance Program, which officially furnished the Thai government, took the form of training and matériel for the Thai units to man those bases. The establishment of an American military presence in Thailand represented the installation of a strategy of counter-insurgency that had military as well as political implications. The Kingdom's strategic importance and its anti-Communist posture provided the United States government tangible benefits in its military strategy and operations in Indochina.⁹ Despite the military and non-military aid which was expended to build those conditions of development and security considered necessary to frustrate the incipient communism insurgency, there were signs that revolutionary patterns found earlier in South Vietnam were being duplicated in Thailand.

The Thai government was interested in developing strategic, economic, and political strength in order to prevent Communist penetration of northeast Thailand.¹⁰ By 1963 approximately \$300 million for economic and military assistance programs had been spent. American economic assistance to Thailand increased substantially in 1965, while military assistance went up from \$31.4 million in 1966 to \$170.5 million in 1967.¹¹ A major reason for these increases was an effort to counter the growing insurgency in Thailand itself. However, it must be recognized that the insurgency was being stimulated to some extent by the mounting American presence in Thailand.¹²

An important distinction between the United States and Thailand in their respective commitments to the Vietnam War was the fact that the commitments were made through a regional organization.¹³ Most basic was the SEATO treaty, but this document was ambiguous in a number of ways. In fact, the Thais were so concerned over one ambiguity in the treaty that they induced the United States government in 1962 to make a clarifying declaration in the Rusk-Thanat communique. In that communique, the United States government did agree to an interpretation of its SEATO obligation vis-a-vis Thailand in 1962 that in effect established a bilateral defense relationship between the two states.¹⁴ On top of the somewhat ambiguous commitments in SEATO and the declarations of American officials, there were numerous governmental arrangements between the two countries arising from the large scale American presence in Thailand. American ground combat forces were sent to Thailand in 1961, 1962, and 1963, along with the establishment of the air bases in the late 1960's. This provided an implicit commitment of United States forces in the event that a serious crisis should develop in Laos and Vietnam by the Communist

advances. Not surprisingly, therefore, signs of trouble were apparent in Thailand's northeastern region. In the border areas just across the Mekong River, Thai security forces had fought a number of limited engagements with guerrilla units. It was likely that these terrorists had liaison with the Communist forces in Laos and Vietnam. This northeastern area was likely to witness increasing trouble for Thailand's security interest and the United States might have to come to her defense. Besides these implicit commitments, some believe that an American moral obligation to Thailand was generated by Thailand's willingness to let the United States use its territory for bases to prosecute the war in Vietnam.¹⁵

Another dimension of the American commitment to Thailand was reflected in the United States government's interest in stabilizing South Vietnam as well as the rest of Indochina.¹⁶ In the context of the so-called domino theory, Thailand would "fall" if South Vietnam should collapse and Thailand would probably be forced to assume a neutralist position toward the Communist bloc.¹⁷ Since South Vietnam was considered vital to American interests in Asia and the American government justified its intervention in Vietnam accordingly, the United States was indirectly committed to the defense of Thailand through various aid programs and counter-insurgency activities to support the Thai government against internal subversion. The United States has, therefore, borne the principal cost of equipping a modern Thai army of over 130,000 men and 30,000 militarized police. The bulk of United States military and economic aid to Thailand over the years has been grant assistance for defense or defense-related purposes.¹⁸

The United States' response to the military deterioration of South.

Vietnam until 1964 had remained limited to indirect military involvement. One reason for the subsequent American escalation was the need to stabilize a deteriorating political situation in Saigon. The bombing of North Vietnamese objectives and the air war in South Vietnam proved to be of limited value. The American military presence and the sustained bombings of 1965 did bolster the successive regimes in Saigon. Direct American military intervention improved the military situation from the view point of Washington and Saigon. It was expected that such offensive actions would bring imminent military defeat to the Communists.¹⁹

The decision by the American leadership to escalate the war to the stage of bombing North Vietnam was designed to punish North Vietnam with a moderate but not a fatal attack, and to demonstrate to Hanoi that its territory would no longer serve as a sanctuary.²⁰ In a more limited military sense, the attacks were intended to make the war more difficult to conduct, especially in supplying the forces below the 17th parallel. Most important, the attacks were designed to make Hanoi adopt a more reasonable bargaining position by raising the cost of the war, demonstrating America's will to persist, and showing that the North's Communist allies (especially the People's Republic of China) would not join in the struggle.²¹ In this effort, the American bases in Thailand and the air operations over Vietnam reflected a determination to preserve the non-Communist regime in South Vietnam and to deter further threats to American political and territorial interests there. Thus, American and Thai forces were prepared to establish control over the strategically important segments of Indochina.²²

The Vietnam War became a major source of political instability along Thailand's eastern border as Communist-supplied insurgents within the

northeastern part of the country caused a political problem for the Thai government. The outcome of the war in Vietnam was considered to be vitally important to Thai security. According to one Thai view:

The impact of the Vietnam War on Thailand is total; it relates directly to our country's security interest; it has altered our way of life and swollen our economy. It should not surprise anyone that we are vitally concerned about what happens there.²³

Thai units were sent to Vietnam in 1967. In addition, six air bases and a giant naval base were provided the United States within Thailand from which to conduct the war. These efforts represented the Thai government's grave concern about the future of Vietnam. Communist domination of all Vietnam was viewed by the Thai leadership as a major threat to the security and stability of Thailand.²⁴

As the kingdom faced increased Communist pressure along its exposed Laotian boundary, Thai and American efforts to counter the insurgency called for maximum cooperation. Thai-United States cooperation was intended to develop the poverty-stricken northeast, thus blocking Communist penetration. In addition to the United States military bases, a key electronic intelligence unit was stationed in the northeast at a place called Ramasun, about five miles south of a major air base at U-dorn; it became a major American instrument to interrupt the Communists' offensive. Ramasun was involved in electronic research projects and communication research and development. It provided rapid radio relay and service communications for defense of the United States and Thailand, as well as the whole region. Ramasun was able to monitor low frequency radio transmissions in North Vietnam and China that could not be picked up by more remote listening stations or satellites.²⁵

This key electronic intelligence was also regarded as one of the

most important "residual interests" that the United States had sought to obtain from Thailand along with the right to use Thai territory for American military strategy. An American official noted: "Without Thailand, there is no place between the Philippines and Iran where we can land a military plane."²⁶ Thailand represented more than a site for bases in the Vietnam War, for that could be only temporary. More important to the Americans in the long run was Thailand's role in helping to bring about cooperation among Southeast Asian nations as part of the large task of the United States government to achieve long-term stability in Asia.²⁷ To observers, the United States seemed to assume the whole responsibility for the security of the non-Communist nations in Southeast Asia, which caused the United States to become the policeman in the eyes of the rest of the world. But there was some evidence that the United States also sought to stabilize power relationships in Asia and to maintain a regional balance of power.²⁸ It endeavored to institutionalize international relationships within this sensitive strategic region so that bitter conflicts among small regional countries would not readily escalate into large scale confrontations between the major powers.²⁹ The United States' policy to stabilize power relationships in the region also coincided with modifications in the foreign policies of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China during the late of 1960's and early 1970's, which represented the politics of "detente" among the super powers. In effect, this line of policy has been supplemented by a new role to stabilize power relationships between small regional states.³⁰

Much of the credit on this score belongs to Thailand, especially its Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman. Not only was he instrumental in creating the Association of Southeast Asia (A.S.A), representing the Philippines,

Thailand and Malaysia in 1961, but he also served as an intermediary when the other Southeast Asian governments had quarreled. Thailand became a leading supporter of the Asian and Pacific Council (A.S.P.A.C.), a multination group established in 1966.³¹ This was particularly important to those American leaders who saw in Asian regionalism an important way to help small and weak Southeast Asian nations build an effective barrier against a resurgent China.³²

Pursuit by the United States of policy goals in Asia still involved preservation of the status quo in the area. American interest, and ultimately American national security, as Secretary Rusk mentioned in a news conference held on October 12, 1967, would be gravely jeopardized should a Communist power succeed in establishing control over those areas in Southeast Asia that the United States was endeavoring to protect by its stand in Vietnam. He said:

These are vitally important matters to us, who are both a Pacific and Atlantic power. So, we have a tremendous stake in the ability of the free nations of Southeast Asia to live in peace ... That does not mean that we ourselves have nominated ourselves to be the policemen of all Asia ... But we have a part, we have to accept a share, and we have accepted that share as part of the vital national interest of the United States.³³

It appeared that on the basis of an overriding "security interest" of the United States in the area, the American government continued to take an active interest in the politics of Southeast Asia at both the regional and national levels.³⁴ The United States, as part of its global policy, wanted to preserve the loyalty of its allies and its own credibility in Southeast Asia. As early as February 1970, when there was much talk about a possible United States withdrawal from Southeast Asia, President Nixon in a special message to the United States Congress promised that the United States would remain involved in Asia and added, "we

are a Pacific power, we have learned that peace for us is much less likely if there is no peace in Asia."³⁵

In October of 1972, a reporter for U. S. News and World Report interviewed Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., who was serving as Special Assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations in the Pentagon. McCain was asked: "In the event of an agreement to end the war in Vietnam, would it still be advisable for the United States to use the bases in Thailand? His reply was:

Yes, we need to retain our access to some of those bases, because as I said before, an end of the war between the North and South is not going to be the end of the fighting in the rest of Southeast Asia. On the northeastern and northern borders of Thailand, for example, the Communists are on the move. The real concern in Thailand, because if Thailand ever fell, the Communists could take all of the Southeast Asian peninsular. Thailand is the key-stone to the entire area. We must not abandon our role as the Pacific power.³⁶

There has been talk of establishing an American naval base at Sattahip in the gulf of Thailand "to supplement-if not to replace-the naval base at Subic Bay in the Philippines" and to enable Seventh Fleet warships operating from Sattahip to counter quickly Russia's determined bid to expand its authority in the region.³⁷

The presence of American military installations in Thailand have pointed up some of the advantages for the United States in this type of overseas base. American facilities in U-dorn or Sattahip mean more than just the security of Thailand. They have been extremely important in the forward strategy of the United States to assert its influence and power over the rest of Southeast Asia. They have served as a symbol of Washington's determination to stand by the weak governments that support American policy and interests. The naval and tactical air forces of the

United States in the Western Pacific have derived part of their operational strength from the logistical support afforded by the Thai bases.³⁸

FOOTNOTES

¹Donald E. Nuechterlein, "U. S. National Interests in Southeast Asia: A Reappraisal," Asian Survey, Vol. XI, No. 11 (November, 1971), p. 1058.

²These factors are not the only ones which should be considered in determining the degree of national interest, but they constitute the most important factors which should be taken into account by policy-makers.

³Nuechterlein, p. 1061.

⁴Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States (Washington, D.C., 1965), pp. 69-103.

⁵Such as Frank C. Darling, Bernard K. Gordon, David A. Wilson, and Donald E. Nuechterlein.

⁶Far Eastern Economic Review (October 12, 1967), p. 67.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 68.

⁹Russel H. Fifield, Southeast Asia in United States Policy (New York, 1963), p. 210.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 315.

¹¹Statistics and Report Office Management Agency for International Development, report on United States Overseas Loans and Grants and Assistance From International Organization: United States Loans and Grants - Obligations and Loan Authorization July 1, 1945-June 30, 1973 (Washington, D.C., May, 1974), p. 80.

¹²Roland A. Paul, American Military Commitments Abroad (New Jersey, 1973), p. 110.

¹³Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁴Richard Butwell, "South and Southeast Asia," America's World Role in the 70's, ed. Abdul Said (New Jersey, 1970), p. 112.

¹⁵Paul, p. 121.

¹⁶Fifield, pp. 212-213.

¹⁷Wayne A. Wilcox, Asia and United States Policy (New Jersey, 1967), p. 65.

¹⁸U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Vietnam and Southeast Asia, report of Senator Mike Mansfield, Senator J. Caleb Boggs, Senator Clairborn Rell, and Senator Benjamin A. Smith, to Committee on Foreign Relations, House of Senate, 88th Cong., 1st Sess. (February, 1963), pp. 14-15.

¹⁹Jean Kuebler, "Political Instability in South Vietnam," Editorial Research (May 26, 1965), p. 399.

²⁰P. J. Honey reported that the North Vietnamese economy was suffering severely by the spring of 1965. See, "Hard Times in North Vietnam," U. S. News and World Report, Vol. 58 (May 31, 1965), pp. 56-57.

²¹Fred Greene, United States Policy and Security of Asia (New York, 1968), pp. 238-239.

²²Ibid., p. 243.

²³The New York Times (April 14, 1968), p. 1.

²⁴P. D. Tavedikul, "Foreign Policy Determinants and Directions of Contemporary Thailand" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1972), p. 81.

²⁵The New York Times (June 26, 1974), p. 14.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Bernard K. Gordon, "Thailand: Its Meaning for the United States," Current History (January, 1967), p. 33.

²⁸Frank C. Darling, "United States Policy in Southeast Asia: Permanency and Change," Asian Survey, Vol. XIV, No. 7 (July, 1974), p. 611.

²⁹Ibid., "American Policy in Vietnam: Its Role in the Quakeland Theory and International Peace," Asian Survey, Vol. XI, No. 8 (August, 1971), pp. 818-839.

³⁰Ibid., "United States Policy in Southeast Asia: Permanency and Change," p. 613.

³¹Gordon, p. 53.

³²Ibid., p. 16.

³³Foster Rhea Dulles, American Foreign Policy Toward Communist China (New York, 1972), p. 214.

³⁴Vishal Singh, "The End of the Conflict in Vietnam War and the Prospects for Southeast Asia," International Studies (India, October, 1972), p. 553.

³⁵"First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970's - Addressed by President Richard M. Nixon," Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C., 1971), p. 140.

³⁶U. S. News and World Report (October 23, 1972), p. 31.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Fifield, pp. 110-111.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

For the United States, the main issue of the conflict in Vietnam was the expansion of Communist power. The war in Vietnam was viewed by the American leadership as part and parcel of its over-all strategy of containing the Communists throughout the world. American interests were considered to be directly affected by the outcome of the Indochinese War after the defeat of the French in Vietnam. The United States assumed a "protectorate position" in support of the South Vietnamese regime against the Communists when the French left in 1954.

The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) was negotiated soon after as a symbol of the continuing "strategic" defense of the region. It was more of a symbol of American commitment to Southeast Asia than a real regional security treaty. In the post Geneva period, especially after 1965, because of the absence of South Vietnamese military strength and political stability, the United States government committed itself as a full military participant in the South Vietnamese conflict. As the war continued, the United States sought to develop a working coalition of concerned nations in the region. This coalition included Thailand. The war in Vietnam involved Thailand increasingly as a major supplier of air bases for United States' aircraft involved in the conflict in Vietnam.

This study was concerned primarily with an analysis of the policies of the United States government which were designed to keep Thailand

committed to the United States. Also, a major concern of the study was an examination of the rationales which the United States and Thailand developed to justify their relationship to one another and to the Vietnam Conflict.

Research for this study has produced evidence that the United States government decided to establish bases and other military facilities initially in Thailand to protect South Vietnam from being dominated by North Vietnam. In the long run, Thailand was viewed as a pivot area in American strategy to prevent the Communists from taking over not only South Vietnam, but also Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand itself. It was believed that a Communist victory in Indochina would expose other countries in the region to Communist influence. In fact, during the 1940's and 1950's, only North Vietnam in the Indochina region came under the control of the Communists. This rather favorable outcome of the earlier Indochinese War provided hope on the part of American officials that Communist territorial gains could be localized.

The misconception that each Communist territorial gain constituted for the United States a calamity of the first magnitude had as its corollary the proposition that the United States must commit its military power to the defense of any territory that might be threatened by Communists subversion or overt attack. The indiscriminate policy of forming alliances and offering American military support to whatever nation was willing to accept it reflected that conviction.

This study revealed that Thailand was regarded as a country in which the United States' policy of containing the Communists could be effectively rationalized under SEATO. Both the Thai and United States governments subsequently made bilateral commitments by asserting a mutual

obligation to defend the region under this alliance. It was found that the mutual "commitment" between the United States and Thailand implied an American defense of Thailand against any armed attack by Communist forces in the region. Thailand's obligations were to provide bases within its own territory for United States military forces and to deploy troops in Vietnam and Cambodia.

In reference to the war in Vietnam, it was found that the SEATO treaty provided the basis for a mutual understanding between the United States and Thailand which permitted the United States to use air bases in Thailand. To the American government, the SEATO treaty was very useful throughout the 1960's--if for no other reason than justification for its ever-growing military presence in Thailand. Also, it was found that the United States government interpreted the SEATO obligation that established a bilateral mutual defense relationship between the United States and Thailand to justify its military intervention in South Vietnam. Under SEATO, protection against armed attack was provided in 1954 to the former Indochinese states (South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). They were forbidden to join the alliance by the terms of Geneva Accords. Thai and American leaders soon thereafter became anxious about the continuous movement of Communist forces into South Vietnam. Eventually substantial Thai-American involvement to sustain the South Vietnamese regime resulted, and relationships between the two states evolved to the point of substantial mutual involvement in the war. In effect, it was in part an American pledge to assist the Saigon regime through military means that the United States government was subsequently to escalate the massive American participation in the war. Thailand served American military purposes by providing an important base area in support of the escalation and as a

rehabilitation center for United States soldiers on leave from Vietnam.

Further, it was found that American policy planners tended to emphasize military force over political means in those measures which they designed to stabilize South Vietnam. This was the reason for the escalation of the war to the stage of bombing North Vietnam and for the huge military build-up in Thailand. However, the major objective of the American government was political. It was concerned that its use of force be viewed as legitimate and that North Vietnam and its allies be convinced that they would be effectively opposed. The United States was also concerned that its allies, especially South Vietnam and Thailand, be assured that they would be supported against Communist military action. But the most important objective was to safeguard what were then perceived to be the United States' national interests. It appeared that wherever American interests were involved, military and economic aid would be extended to the governments that demonstrated a will and capability to resist the Communists. The United States government believed that the Indochinese problem could be solved most effectively by military means and that states such as Thailand and South Vietnam were a key factor in the entire area from this standpoint. By assuming that such intervention would prevent further threats to American interests and preserve the political status quo in the region, an important rationale of United States military action was provided.

From the standpoint of Thailand, it was found that Thai military cooperation with the United States was in part predicated on the Thai leadership's felt need to sustain itself in political power against the internal political opposition in Bangkok. Additionally, this leadership was concerned with the insurgent movement within Thailand itself. The

presence of American military power in Thailand and the commitment of the United States to defend Thailand against Communist military action were deemed essential to dealing with both of these problems. It was conceived by the Thai military leaders that American support was the main stabilizing instrument. With the United States' military and economic power heavily committed, the ultimate reckoning by the Thai government was that the American presence could make up for its own lack of broad popular support and could provide the necessary back up to overcome the indigenous revolutionaries in the northeastern part of the country who had secured support from North Vietnam and the People's Republic of China.

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APPENDIX A

National Security Council "Action" paper No. 1074-A, April 5, 1954: Alternative forms of commitment of United States combat forces for operation in Indochina:

In concert with the Free world reaction: The United Kingdom, apprehensive of the possibility of war with Communist China, would approve a United States intervention in Indochina only if convinced that it was necessary for the prevention of further expansion of Communist power in Asia. Australia and New Zealand would fully support such a United States action, and Canada to a lesser extent. Nationalist China and Republic of Korea would welcome United States intervention in Indochina, since both would hope that this would lead to a general war between the United States and Communist China. Thailand, if assured of United States guarantee of adequate permanence would probably permit the use of Thai territory and facilities. The Philippines would support United States intervention. Japan would lend unenthusiastic diplomatic support. India and Indonesia strongly, and Ceylon and Burma to a lesser extent, would disapprove United States intervention. Other members of the Arab-Asian bloc would be unsympathetic especially because of seeming United States support for French colonialism. The NATO countries, other than those mentioned above, would generally support United States military action, but their support would be tempered by fear of expansion of the hostilities and the effect on the NATO build-up. The attitude of most of Latin-American countries would tend to be non-committal.

Regional action: It would be feasible to secure support of a regional grouping for United States replacement of French forces in Indochina. In the contingency of French withdrawal, Thailand, in particular, and other states in general, would wish to assure themselves that the United States was really committed to fully replacing French strength in the area. If they were convinced this was the case, and if the nature of French withdrawal made replacement by the United States troops, practicable, they would support a United States effort.

Source: U. S. Department of Defense, United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1964: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense (Washington, D.C., 1971), Vol. 9, pp. 315-316, 329-330.

APPENDIX B

The Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, recommended the "prestocks" of aviation fuel and ammunition to be built-up in Thailand in case of escalation of the war in Vietnam were to take place. It was the evident that America's need for Thai cooperation:

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
Washington 25, D.C.,

THE JOINT STAFF

DJSM-1383-61
14 November 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Subject: South Vietnam

1. Reference is made to the memorandum for the National Security Council, subject as above, dated 13 November 1961.
2. Briefs of the military actions contained in the draft National Security Action Memorandum attached to the above reference memorandum are enclosed. These briefs are indexed to relate directly to appropriate paragraphs of the draft memorandum. Because of the security classification involved with the provision of additional equipment and United States uniformed personnel for special intelligence in South Vietnam, the brief for this item has been provided separately.
3. In connection with paragraph 1 of the draft memorandum, the Joint Staff considers it militarily desirable to preposition forces and equipment and is currently considering augmentation of US Army forces Pacific with one infantry division plus appropriate logistic and combat support units. CINPAC has recommended that, in consideration of the requirement to locate army forces in close proximity to Southeast Asia, this division be prepositioned in the Philippines. The Army has established a Pacific Forward Depot on Okinawa for prestocking essential non-air-transportable items of material required for a one division force. In addition, there are ammunition stocks in Japan. There are also limited prestocks of aviation fuel and ammunition in Thailand for use by the USAF. Prestocks have not been established in South Vietnam. CINPAC has recommended and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have concurred in the additional prestocking of railroad rolling stock, petroleum, oil, lubricants, ammunition, heavy engineering equipment and other material in Southeast Asia for use by United States forces in contingency

action. These recommendations are currently under consideration by the Department of Defense. If these necessary country-to-country bilateral agreements with Thailand and South Vietnam will be required.

Earl G. Wheeler
Director, Joint Staff
Lieutenant General, USA.

Source: U. S. Department of Defense, "Memorandum for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff-South Vietnam," United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1969: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense (Washington, D.C., 1971), Vol. 11, pp. 368-369. The Director, Joint Staff, General Wheeler to the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lemnitzer on November 14, 1961.

APPENDIX C

A joint statement issued by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Thanat Khoman, Foreign Minister of Thailand, on March 6, 1962. The Foreign Minister visited Washington March 1-6, where he conferred with President Kennedy, Secretary Rusk, and other government officials in the matters of mutual concern:

(Press release 145 dated March 6)

The Foreign Minister of Thailand, Thanat Khoman, and the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, met on several occasions during the past few days for discussions on the current situation in Southeast Asia, the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and the security of Thailand.

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 Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State reviewed the close association of Thailand and the United States in the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and agreed that such association is an effective deterrent to direct Communist aggression against Thailand. They agreed that the Treaty provides the basis for the signatories collectively to assist Thailand in case of Communist armed attack against that country. 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 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.

In reviewing measures to meet indirect aggression, the Secretary of State stated that the United States regards its commitments to Thailand under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and under its bilateral economic and military assistance agreements with Thailand as providing an important basis for United States actions to help Thailand meet indirect aggression. In this connection the Secretary reviewed with the Foreign Minister the actions being taken by the United States

to assist the Republic of Vietnam to meet the threat of indirect aggression.

The Foreign Minister assured the Secretary of State of the determination of the government of Thailand to meet the threat of indirect aggression by pursuing vigorously measures for the economic and social welfare and the safety of its people.

The situation in Laos was reviewed in detail and full agreement was reached in the necessity for the stability of Southeast Asia, of achieving a free, independent and truly neutral Laos.

The Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State reviewed the mutual efforts of their governments to increase the capabilities and readiness of the Thai armed forces to defend the kingdom. They noted also that the United States is making a significant contribution to this effort and that the United States intends to accelerate future deliveries to the greatest extent possible. The Secretary and the Foreign Minister also took note of the work of the Joint Thai-United States Committee which has been established in Bangkok to assure effective cooperation in social, economic and military measures to increase Thailand's national capabilities. They agreed that this Joint Committee and its subcommittees should continue to work toward the most effective utilization of Thailand's resources and those provided by the United States to promote Thailand's development and security.

The Foreign Minister and the Secretary were in full agreement that continued economic and social progress and the Thai government's plans to accelerate development, particularly Thailand's continuing determination fully to utilize its own resources in moving toward its development goals.

The Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State also discussed the desirability of an early conclusion of a treaty of friendship, commerce and navigation between the two countries which would bring into accord with current conditions the existing treaty of 1937.

APPENDIX D

On May 15, 1962, President Kennedy at the invitation of the Royal Thai Government ordered United States troops into Thailand because of attacks in Laos and Vietnam by Communist forces. Following are statements issued by President Kennedy and the Royal Thai Government on May 15; the text of a letter from Ambassador Charles W. Yost, Deputy United States Representative to the United Nations, to the United Nations Secretary-General informing him of the United States action; and a statement made by William Worth, Deputy Secretary General of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, at the conclusion of the meeting of SEATO Council representatives on May 16:

Statement by President Kennedy, May 15.
(White House press release dated May 15)

Following joint consideration by the Governments of the United States and Thailand of the situation in Southeast Asia, the Royal Thai Government has invited, and I have today ordered, additional elements of the United States military forces, both ground and air, to proceed to Thailand and to remain there until further orders. These forces are to help insure the territorial integrity of this peaceful country.

The dispatch of the United States forces to Thailand was considered desirable because of recent attacks in Laos by Communist forces and the subsequent movement of Communist military units toward the border of Thailand.

A threat to Thailand is of a grave concern to the United States. I have, therefore, ordered certain additional American military forces into Thailand in order that we may be in a position to fulfill speedily our obligations under the Manila Pact of 1954,¹ a defense agreement which was approved overwhelmingly by the United States Senate and Foreign Minister of Thailand referred in their joint statement of March 6, 1962.² We are in consultation with SEATO governments on the situation.

I emphasize that this is a defensive act on the part of the United States and wholly consistent with the United Nations Charter, which specifically recognizes that nations have an inherent right to take collective measures for self-defense. In the spirit of that charter I have directed that the Secretary General of the United Nations be informed of the actions that we are taking.

There is no change of our policy toward Laos, which continues to be the reestablishment of an effective cease-fire and prompt negotiations for a government of national union.

Thai Statement, May 15.

The recent events in the Kingdom of Laos have now developed into an increasingly critical and dangerous situation. The pro-Communist Pathet Lao, with the support of several Communist countries, has engaged itself in premeditated actions by the seizure of Muong Sing and Nam Tha in deliberate and flagrant violation of the cease-fire agreement. Moreover, the pro-Communist elements have pushed their forces in the southwestern direction toward that Thai border. Such incursions can only mean that the pro-Communist elements not only seek to gain power over and to control the Kingdom of Laos, but also desire to expand further their domination and influence without limit. These circumstances constitute a threat to the kingdom of Thailand and the safety of the Thai people.

In the face of this threat, His Majesty's Government and governments of friendly nations which are concerned over the security and safety of Thailand consider it necessary to adopt measures to prevent the danger from spreading into this country.

In the consideration of the provisions of the joint statement of March 6, 1962, issued by the United States Secretary of State and the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Thanat Khoman), in which the following important provision is included: "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", and pursuant to the obligations under the SEATO treaty, the United States government and His Majesty's Government have agreed that some units of the United States forces be stationed in Thailand for the purpose of cooperating with the Thai Armed Forces in defending and preserving the peace and security of the Kingdom of Thailand against the threat of the pro-Communist troops which are presently approaching the Thai territory.

It is hereby announced to the people of Thailand with the request that they cooperate fully with the government in the firm determination to protect and maintain the freedom, integrity, independence and sovereignty of the Thai nation.

Letter to U.N. Secretary-General, May 15.
(U.S./U.N. press release 3994 dated May 16)

May 15, 1962

Dear Mr. Secretary General: I wish to inform you that in response to a request of the Government of Thailand, the President of the United States has ordered additional elements of United States military forces to Thailand.

You will recall that, in his address on September 25, 1961³ to the General Assembly, the President brought to the attention of the General Assembly two threats to the peace which caused concern to the United States. The first concerned Southeast Asia and the second Germany and Berlin.

Consistent with the policy of the United States to keep the United Nations fully informed as to events affecting the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia, I am informing you of the President's decision. This decision was considered necessary because of recent attacks in Laos by Communist forces and subsequent movements of Communist military units toward the border of Thailand. The forces of the United States are to help ensure the territorial integrity of Thailand which now faces a threat of Communist aggression.

Sincerely yours,

Charles W. Yost

SEATO Statement, May 16.

The Council representatives met this morning and reviewed the situation in the treaty area. They heard statements from the United States and Thai representatives of moves which have already begun for deployment of additional United States forces to help insure the territorial integrity of Thailand. The Council representatives welcomed the detail information provided. They noted that continuing consultations were in progress among SEATO nations for the purpose of considering further possible moves by other member countries.

They further noted that movement of United States forces into the Kingdom of Thailand was entirely precautionary and defensive in character but that it also served as a warning that any Communist aggression would be resisted.

The movement of United States forces to cooperate with and to reinforce Royal Thai Armed Forces is wholly consistent with the United Nations Charter, and the Council representatives noted that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has been informed of the action taken.

All SEATO member governments have on many occasions publicly stated their desire for a united independent Laos, with a truly neutral government, and for the reestablishment of an effective cease-fire.

¹For text, see Bulletin of (Sept. 20, 1954), p. 393.

²For text, see Ibid., (Mar. 26, 1962), p. 498.

³For text, see Ibid., (Oct. 16, 1961), p. 619.

Source: "President Sends Troops to Thailand, U. S. Policy Toward Laos Unchanged," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. XLVI, No. 1197 (June 4, 1962), pp. 904-906.

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