

Thai Hearts and Minds: The Public Diplomacy and Public Relations Programs of the  
United States Information Service and Thai Ministry of Interior, 1957 – 1979

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This dissertation titled  
Thai Hearts and Minds: The Public Diplomacy and Public Relations Programs of the  
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## ABSTRACT

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Thai Hearts and Minds: The Public Diplomacy and Public Relations programs of the United States Information Service and Thai Ministry of Interior, 1957 – 1979

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During the Cold War, U.S. and Thai leaders were engaged in trying to win the hearts and minds of the Thai people. Much of the literature on U.S.-Thai relations has been from the American perspective and mainly examines economic and military aspects. This dissertation looks at the relationship by drawing from U.S. and Thai government sources to examine both countries public diplomacy and public relations programs in Thailand. From 1957 to 1979, the United States and Thai governments sought to stymie the influence of communism and to build the Thai nation by using the resources of the United States Information Service (USIS) and the Thai Ministry of Interior (MOI). The USIS promoted capitalism, modernization, and anti-communism, while the MOI built up the monarchy, Buddhism, and Thai nationalism. Both organizations used mass media, cultural exchanges, rural development, humanitarian aid, and religious and state ceremonies to convey the U.S. and Thai government's messages and programs. One purpose of the USIS and MOI was to show that communism was a threat to economic development, to Buddhism, and the monarchy. However, promoting anti-communism and building up the institutions of the monarchy and Buddhism divided the country. USIS and MOI programs strengthened the political and public image of King Bhumibol Adulyadej. This dissertation argues that the USIS and MOI played an important role in stymieing communism and strengthening the Thai state.

## DEDICATION

*To Ashley, Boston, Mom and Dad.*

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## GLOSSARY

Accelerated Rural Development (ARD)  
American Field Service (AFS)  
American University Alumni Association (AUA)  
Border Patrol Police (BPP)  
Branch Public Affairs Officer (BPAO)  
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)  
Communist Party of Thailand (CPT)  
Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC)  
Community Development Department (CDD)  
Community Development Workers (CDWs)  
Coordinating Patriotic and Democratic Forces (CCPDF)  
Crop Replacement and Community Development Project (CRCDP)  
Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO)  
Department of Public Welfare (DPW)  
Department of Religious Affairs (DRA)  
Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)  
General Records of the United States Information Agency (GRUSIA)  
General Records of the Department of State (GRDS)  
General Records of the US Forces in Southeast East Asia (GRUSFSEA)  
Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library (GFPL)  
Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCPL)  
Ministry of Interior (MOI)  
Mobile Development Unit (MDU)  
Mobile Information Unit (MIT)  
Mobile Medical Unit (MMU)  
National Administrative Reform Council (NARC)  
National Archives at College Park, Maryland (NACP)  
National Executive Council (NEC)  
National Information and Psychological Operations (NISPO)  
National Security Council (Thai NSC)  
National Security Study Memorandum 51 (NSSM-51)  
National Student Council of Thailand (NSCT)  
Public Affairs Officer (PAO)  
Promotion and Publicity Special Mobile Units (PPSMU)  
Promotion and Publicity Unit (PPU)  
Richard Nixon Presidential Library (RNPL)  
Royal Thai Government (RTG)  
Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO)  
Tambon Development Communities (TDC)  
Thai National Archives (TNA)  
University of Arkansas, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Historical Collection (ABECAH)  
United States Information Agency (USIA)



United States Information and Education Program (USIEP)

United States Information Service (USIS)

United States Operations Mission (USOM)

United Nations (UN)

Village Development Communities (VDC)

Voice of America (VOA)

## INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War, the United States was eager to build Thailand into an anti-communist ally. In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower increased the military and economic aid to help bolster the Royal Thai Government (RTG). Eisenhower helped establish the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), with Thailand as a charter member, to contain the spread of communism. An overlooked means that the United States employed to stymie communism was psychological information operations, or, as it would later be termed, public diplomacy. According to historian Kenneth A. Osgood, the most important U.S. propaganda activities of the Cold War took place on the “other side of the [Iron] curtain, in the so-called ‘free world.’”<sup>1</sup> As one of these places in the “free world,” Thailand was crucial to U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia. The United States and Thai governments worked together in using public diplomacy as an important tool to combat communist influences and win the hearts and minds of Thais.<sup>2</sup>

However, the twelve years after World War II was a complicated time for U.S.-Thai relations. During World War II, under the leadership of Phibun Songkhram, Thailand had sided with Japan. Bangkok had used this new relationship to annex provinces from the French in Cambodia. When the war ended, pro-Japanese Thai government leaders were thrown into prison. The British wanted harsh punishments placed on Thailand, specifically to semi-colonize the country and take control of its rice

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth A. Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> “Memorandum of Discussion at the 188<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council Held on Thursday,” March 11, 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1952-1954, East Asia and the Pacific, Volume XII, Part I, Document 138, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v12p1/d138> [accessed 1 January 2019].

production. Though Southeast Asia was low on Washington's priority list in terms of geostrategic value, Washington objected, and the United States was the first nation to say that Thailand's pronouncement of war was illegal and that the country was free and independent.<sup>3</sup> One rationale for this declaration was that the United States wanted Thailand to be a market for exports to help rebuild Japan's economy. Nevertheless, relations were limited between the United States and Thailand. After a stint in prison, Phibun returned to power in 1947 on an anti-communist platform. President Harry S. Truman saw this as a good move to block any communist tendencies in the country. Though Washington was still leery of trusting Phibun, it still supported his government.

With the fall of China to communism in 1949 and the continuing French-Vietminh War, Southeast Asia and Thailand became strategically important to the United States. Washington increased its financial support for the French war effort in Indochina. In addition, the United States recognized Bao Dai's government as the legitimate political authority in Vietnam. Truman sent military aid in 1950 to build Thailand's military in case Communist China invaded Southeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, the U.S. government wanted to build Thailand into an anti-communist nation ready to support its foreign policy in the region.

When Eisenhower became president, his administration saw obstacles to U.S. foreign policy in Thailand. A turning point in U.S. foreign policy was the French loss at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, which led to peace talks. One response to the French defeat

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<sup>3</sup> Surachart Bamrungsuk, *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule: 1947-1977* (Bangkok, Thailand: D.K. Book House, 1988), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 144.

was the creation of SEATO as a means of collective security in Southeast Asia, with Bangkok as its headquarters. However, one issue was that the United States needed a strong government in Bangkok. In the 1950s, there was political instability caused by four figures vying for power: General Sarit Thanarat, head of the army, police chief Phao Sriyanond, Prime Minister Phibun, and King Bhumibol Adulyadej.<sup>5</sup> Phibun in particular, was a complicated figure. He had helped overthrow the absolute monarchy in 1932 and then sided with the Japanese in World War II. After the war, Phibun regained power and repented of his previous anti-American stance by sending a battalion to fight in the Korean War. He recognized Bao Dai's Vietnamese government and joined SEATO.<sup>6</sup> Domestically however, Phibun encountered criticism from rivals, as some wanted an independent foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> To appease the opposition, in August 1955 he declared that Thailand would "recognize Communist China as soon as [it was] admitted into the United Nations."<sup>8</sup> According to historian Daniel Fineman, this was the beginning of a rocky phase between Thailand and the United States.<sup>9</sup> U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Max Bishop denounced Phibun for reaching out to China to open up trade.<sup>10</sup> The prime minister lifted the ban on freedom of speech and the press leading to more criticism of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> Though Phibun was not a communist, some saw his policies as a

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<sup>5</sup> "Report by the Staff Planners to the Military Representatives to the ANZUS Council," November 25, 1952, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, XIII, 1, Document 82, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v12p1/d82> [accessed 1 January 2019].

<sup>6</sup> Surachart, *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule*, 71.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University Hawaii Press, 1997), 212.

<sup>8</sup> *Bangkok Post*, August 30, 1957.

<sup>9</sup> Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 209.

<sup>10</sup> Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 210; Claude E. Welch Jr. and Arthur K. Smith, *Military Role and Rule: Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations* (Massachusetts: Duxbury Press, 1974), 94.

<sup>11</sup> Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 221.

threat to U.S. interests. In addition, King Bhumibol and his allies were waiting for an opportunity to reassert the monarchy's former political prerogatives and rebuild its image. Phibun was standing in his way.

Beyond worrying about increasing instability in Bangkok, U.S. and Thai officials grew concerned about the weakness of the Thai government's political authority and presence in the countryside. Historian Thongchai Winichakul said that for much of Thailand's early modern history, political power was concentrated at the center of the kingdom, diminishing gradually as it diffused outward.<sup>12</sup> The border regions had little communication and connection with the central government, and most of the peoples inhabiting the countryside were non-Thais.<sup>13</sup> Ethnic groups had more loyalty to their region or village than to an idea of a Thai nation. This lack of social and political connection carried the potential of destabilizing the country, especially as China and North Vietnam had become communist and Laos was involved in a civil war. Eisenhower created SEATO in 1954 to help anti-communist defenses in the region. However, fearing that the rural population and ethnic minorities would be susceptible to communist influences, Washington also saw the need for psychological and information operations in Thailand. It was crucial for the Thai people to learn about their government in Bangkok and the evils of communism to maintain the country's stability. The Thai Ministry of Interior (MOI) wanted to expand the government's reach and influence into

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<sup>12</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 79, 81-84.

<sup>13</sup> "Telegram from USIS in Bangkok to USIA in Washington," March 31, 1964, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 2, Dispatch #34, General Records of the United States Information Agency (GRUSIA), Record Group [RG] 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 3, Entry 1047, National Archives – College Park, Maryland (NACP).

the countryside. Cadres of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) had already been recruiting in the countryside among those who felt marginalized by Bangkok.<sup>14</sup> The strife between political rivals, a weak prime minister, and the lack of RTG presence in the countryside could lead to a possible communist takeover.

Fortunately for Eisenhower, a coup led by Sarit in 1957 turned Thailand into an anti-communist ally and facilitated the implementation of U.S. foreign policy, specifically public diplomacy. Immediately after coming to power, Sarit built a partnership with both King Bhumibol and the United States. One of the issues that brought these three parties together was the specter of communism. Washington and Bangkok saw it as a threat to stability and efforts to pacify the periphery and build the Thai nation. A stable, anti-communist Thailand would help both governments achieve their goals. Coercive measures by the Thai regime along with U.S. military and economic aid were important means used to counter communism, but they were not the only methods. The task for both governments was to promote their relationship and the cause of anti-communism to the Thai people. To do so, Washington and Bangkok employed the services and resources of many organizations, specifically the United States Information Service (USIS) and the Thai MOI. From 1957 to 1979, the USIS and MOI were vital to the U. S. and RTG's battle for the hearts and minds of the Thai people as they promoted anti-communism, American and Thai culture, and Thai nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tom Marks, *Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), 96; John L.S. Girling, *Thailand, Society and Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 255; Charles F. Keyes, *Isan Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Data paper No. 65, 1967), 37-39, 41-43, 51-53.

<sup>15</sup> The USIS is the name of the United States Information Agency (USIA) abroad.

## Arguments

This dissertation shows that the USIS and MOI played an important role in combating communism and stabilizing and unifying Thailand by promoting both American and Thai political and cultural ideas and programs. The USIS promoted capitalism, modernization, education, and liberalism, while the MOI built up ideas of the Thai kingship, Buddhism's role in Thai culture, and nationalism. Both organizations attempted to show that American and Thai ideas, such as modernization and the kingship, could coexist and even support one another. This dissertation shows how the USIS and MOI portrayed America as a friend that sought to protect the king and Buddhism from communism. More importantly, they juxtaposed communism with the Thai monarchy, Buddhism, and American modernity. Thais learned that communism and any subversive activities against the government were threats to the nation.

One idea that the USIS had to be careful in promoting was democracy. Public diplomacy officials tried to craft their messages and programs about liberalism in ways that would not incite political unrest and make the regime suspicious. Generally, U.S. policymakers willfully ignored the fact that the military regime and monarchy were both hindrances to democracy. They recognized it was better to promote a government that was anti-communist rather than allow the country to turn neutral or communist. Thus, the USIS subtly promoted America's form of democracy through student exchanges, instead of pushing for immediate political change, creating special public relations campaigns, and spending a lot of resources. The overall goal was to stop the spread of communism, the establishment of democratic institutions was secondary. If the USIS promoted aspects

of liberalism, it was to show how the American way of life contrasted to a communist system and the organization only portrayed an idealistic image of democracy.

This dissertation also explores how mass media became a vehicle to convey ideas and policies to the people. Before print and electronic media, geography and cultural divisions isolated many Thais from the big cities and centers of political power.<sup>16</sup> When Sarit became prime minister in 1957, Thailand's mass media and communications capabilities were underdeveloped. I argue that the USIS built up Thailand's communications infrastructure, so the government could reach all peoples and corners of the land. The USIS and MOI employed many forms of media, such as radio, print, and television, while trying to unify the nation under a set of ideas and policies and also to combat communist propaganda. The USIS contracted Thai writers and worked with local news editors to cover events and publish stories.<sup>17</sup> The Thai media became a strong advocate of anti-communism and the monarchy. USIS officials also established relations with media leaders to secure prime airtime on the radio and television. I also see mass media functioning as a mechanism for spreading Thai nationalism to stymie the influence of communism. According to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, print capitalism and its appendages helped unify different peoples of the same country under a set of government ideologies and policies.<sup>18</sup> New media technology transcended barriers to government communication and national unity. All Thais could have some experience

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<sup>16</sup> Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, 79, 81-84.

<sup>17</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," March 10, 1960, Subject: Annual USIS Assessment Report, p. 9, Dispatch # 69, GRUSIA, RG 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 2, Entry 1047, NACP.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 41-42.



and connection with the royal family, the government, and peoples in other regions of Thailand. All could feel like they were Thai and part of the idea called the “nation.”

Another argument I make to show the importance of the USIS and MOI role was their ability to form relationships with key persons at the local level to help with their public relations programs. In the early years of the Cold War, the Thai government had little ability to project its political authority into rural areas.<sup>19</sup> To expand its influence, Bangkok sought to improve provincial administration and the training of its leaders. However, most local administrators had very little interaction with the people, and when they did, relations were uneasy. The USIS and MOI found that even though it was becoming easier to convey messages and policies through mass media, traditional ways of passing along information, such as face-to-face communication or interpersonal relationships, were still useful. U.S. and Thai officials learned to work with teachers, clergy, and village headmen to build closer relations with rural villagers and ethnic minorities. Customarily, these three persons were the gatekeepers of information and were important to promoting policies and ideas that came from Bangkok and the United States. To mold provincial administrators, the USIS and MOI developed training programs based on ideas that would benefit the Thai and U.S. governments. Specifically, the USIS and MOI taught local leaders to govern more efficiently, be receptive to the people’s needs, and use public relations to build connections between villagers and Bangkok. Rural teachers, clergymen, village headmen, and provincial officials were

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<sup>19</sup> Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, 79, 81-84.

critical in legitimizing the news and programs that the USIS and MOI were trying to promote in the countryside.

Cultural and student exchanges were other avenues for building relations between the two peoples and promoting Thai and American ideas. Thai leaders told the people that they would bring modernization and prosperity to the country. The United States helped Thailand by facilitating foreign investments and offering economic aid. Thais partook in American consumer goods and culture. Urban Thais fell in love with American clothing styles, technology, movies, and music.<sup>20</sup> Some traveled to the United States to receive education. While there, they learned more about American culture, education, politics, and technology, and many returned infused with western ideas. USIS documents cite instances where former exchange students took positions of influence in the Thai government and military, big corporations, and the field of education.<sup>21</sup> Other Thais enrolled in English language classes and participated in cultural events at USIS sites. Those who consumed American products and ideas became agents of cultural diffusion as they helped spread western culture within their spheres of influence. However, there were some downsides to this contact. According to USIS and Thai officials, western liberalism pushed some Thai students to seek more change at home. As the latter part of this dissertation will show, the student and intellectual populations,

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<sup>20</sup> Baker and Pasuk, *A History of Thailand*, 149-150.

<sup>21</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," February 14, 1961, Subject: Country Assessment Report, p. 12, Dispatch # 42, GRUSIA, RG 330, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 2, Entry 1047, NACP; See also, Frank C. Darling, "American Policy in Thailand," *The Western Political Quarterly* 15, No. 1 (March 1962): 99-100.

inspired by their education, almost caused the downfall of the military-monarchical oligarchy as they sought political reform.

In the rural regions, Thais saw a benevolent side of the U.S. and Thai governments. The USIS, MOI, monarchy, U.S. and Thai militaries, and Border Patrol Police (BPP) engaged in humanitarian aid projects such as building hospitals, dams, and schools, providing health care, and improving farming. They taught in schools. Several U.S. and Thai organizations assisted the hill tribes to adopt sedentary lifestyles. They received citizenship, education, and financial aid to make the adjustment easier. I argue that the USIS promoted many of these U.S. and Thai development and humanitarian projects to boost public image. Development projects also had a practical function. Roads, canals, and telecommunication stations facilitated transportation and communication between the central government and the countryside. It was important for Bangkok to build ties with the periphery as a large portion of the population was non-ethnic Thai or had little contact with Bangkok. The king and regime leaders made frequent trips to the countryside to express their love for the people, oversee new public projects, and distribute humanitarian aid. This increased exposure was meant to help people become familiar with their leaders. I argue that outreach programs to rural Thais and ethnic minorities were important to showing that the government cared and that they were part of the nation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," December 18, 1959, Subject: Evidence of Effectiveness, p. 5, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Country Project Correspondence, 1952-1959, Box 20, Entry A1 1021, NACP.

A critical part of the dissertation is to show, in conjunction with USIS and MOI programs, that the military-monarchy government engaged in its own public relations activities using Thai cultural ideals of politics to win hearts and minds. One of the goals of the RTG and monarchy was to build up King Bhumibol's political and religious image. They did this by employing indigenous views of authority and kingship. According to political scientist Benedict Anderson, many western scholars considered eastern philosophies of political power irrational because of their traditional or religious roots.<sup>23</sup> However, Thais saw the supernatural world as real and believed that the heavens or the spirits chose persons in authority; political power resided in the individual and not the position.<sup>24</sup> Thais had a long tradition of viewing their kings as *devarajas* or god-kings. This dissertation shows that through routine state and royally-sponsored education, events and religious ceremonies, Thais learned that King Bhumibol was a *devaraja*. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz called this type of governance a theater state or *negara*.<sup>25</sup> The public spectacles and rituals became outward signs of a ruler's virtue and inner ability to be king. Parades and ceremonies filled with symbols and ideology showed the king's authority and respect for tradition and the spirits. What he proclaimed and did was considered sacred and the will of the spirits.<sup>26</sup> Anthropologist Christine Gray wrote that

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<sup>23</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 17-21.

<sup>24</sup> Lucian W. Pye and Mary W. Pye, *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), vii-viii, 22; See also Charles F. Keyes, *Thailand, Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 31, 38; Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 2007), xii.

<sup>25</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13, 129; See also Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 13-18.

<sup>26</sup> Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2006), 9-10; Jack Fong, "Sacred Nationalism: The Thai Monarchy and

what gave a king the ability to assign meaning to symbols, rituals, and events was his performance in religious activity. According to Gray, a Thai king achieved truth and purity through religious virtue by controlling the “ritual system, the Buddhist Sangha, and the Buddhist kingship.”<sup>27</sup> The other objective was to have the king’s moral influence be “absorbed” by the “lay audience” who then in turn did good works.<sup>28</sup> King Bhumibol’s words of exhortation to stay unified and fight communism were critical to the U.S. and Thai governments’ policies. USIS public diplomacy and MOI public relations programs also facilitated the growth of the monarchy’s image and part in the nation’s identity. I argue that the monarchy was the most common institution promoted by the USIS and MOI; it was the antithesis of communism and a rallying point for the people.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of the theater state mingled with western influences. Institutions such as the monarchy and Buddhist Sangha (church) were not replaced by American ideas but instead adapted. The constitutional monarchy became the main pillar in Thai nationalism. The USIS and MOI portrayed King Bhumibol as both modern and traditional. He promoted modernization while staying true to Thai culture. Buddhist clergymen also became involved in domestic politics by promoting anti-communism. I attempt to show that the theater state was another form of public relations used to build connections with the Thai people. The USIS and MOI understood Thai cultural politics and saw a need to support the Thai government’s and monarchy’s activities. Thus, while royal and state

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Primordial Nation Construction,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* Vol. 39, No. 4 (November 2009): 676, 678, 686; Pye, *Asian Power*, 21-23.

<sup>27</sup> Christine Gray, “Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s,” 2 vols., Ph.D. Dissertation, (University of Chicago, 1986), 25.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:485.

<sup>29</sup> Peter A. Jackson, "Markets, Media and Magic: Thailand's Monarch as a Virtual Deity," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol. 10, No. 3 (2009): 367.

parades, ceremonies, and dedications of buildings and sacred sites may seem meaningless on the surface, King Bhumibol and other political and religious leaders were following a long tradition established by monarchs of the past, showing the people they deserved political power by using cultural symbols, images, and language that Thais could understand. The “theater state” became one mechanism to reaching hearts and minds.

Moreover, the part Buddhism played in USIS and MOI programs cannot be ignored. In Thailand, Buddhism was and still is the state religion. Donald K. Swearer, a scholar of Buddhism, said that religion is more than beliefs and aspirations; it embodies and expresses the meanings and desires of a particular culture.<sup>30</sup> Buddhism was part of the fabric of Thai life and throughout the twentieth century it was an important political institution. Some monks publicly supported the regime and monarchy and promoted anti-communism. The RTG sent Buddhist missionaries to convert ethnic minorities and strengthen the faith of lay members and promote Thai culture as part of nation-building. Historian Peter A. Jackson stated that the primary political purpose of Thai Buddhism “is the belief that the welfare of the country is intimately related to the welfare of the *dhamma*, the teaching and practice of the Buddha’s message of salvation.”<sup>31</sup> Each political leader needed to be seen as a protector and promotor of the religion because that would mean they were also seeking the welfare of the nation. I argue that by paying tribute to Buddhism and its ceremonies, King Bhumibol and Thai leaders helped their religious image. Like the monarchy, I see Buddhism as a source of unity and another idea

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<sup>30</sup> Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), xv.

<sup>31</sup> Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 1989), 11-12.

used often in public relations campaigns. It was a powerful political tool for the USIS, MOI, and monarchy in their fight against communism.

The long-term impact of USIS public diplomacy and MOI public relations, I contend, was that they helped strengthen the political power of the military-monarchy oligarchy and to help it maintain its hold over the country throughout the Cold War. The USIS and MOI portrayed communism as a threat to the nation, Buddhism, and the monarchy. Democracy was not one of the main ideas promoted, anti-communism was more important. The military regime established laws to protect the royal family (and itself indirectly) from defamation and criticism.<sup>32</sup> The USIS and MOI propagated specific ideas about Thai identity that created an “us” versus “them” or “other” mentality. They showed only the good, benevolent side of the government. All who opposed the regime were labeled as anti-monarchy, whether they were communists or not. The military’s power over the country endured until a 1973 student-led coup. Then it returned to power in 1976 with help from the monarchy. Even with these intervals of volatility, for the most part Thailand’s experience during the Cold War was characterized by stability, unlike its neighbors in Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos. The military and monarchy continued to dominate Thai politics as they orchestrated two coups in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century over democratically elected governments.

A major result of building the political power of the military-monarchy oligarchy was that USIS and MOI programs and the overall U.S. involvement in Thailand helped stymie the influence of communism. Scholars have argued that the CPT posed little

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<sup>32</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*.

general threat to the country and to the military's and monarchy's political control.<sup>33</sup> Some of the reasons they point to are the cohesion of the Thai people culturally, religiously, and linguistically. Others look at the strong feelings many Thais had towards Buddhism and the monarchy. Many saw the CPT as anti-Buddhist and anti-monarchy. I argue that, even if communists would not have been able to take over the whole country, they were a threat in the border regions and to the Thai government's nation-building efforts. As long as the CPT had bases in the countryside and conducted military and propaganda campaigns, Bangkok would not be able to pacify the rural areas and extend fully its political authority and influence. It would not be able to build the Thai nation. I contend that U.S. involvement in Thailand, in general, and the USIS and MOI activities, specifically, were some of the main factors limiting the CPT movement and hindering its ability to gain momentum in the country. Mass media, building relationships with local leaders, state and religious events, cultural and student exchanges, economic development, and humanitarian aid all helped to illustrate to Thais what it meant to be Thai, showing that communism was not only a poor political and economic alternative, but also a threat to all that the people held dear.

### Definitions

To understand the arguments of this dissertation, it is important to define the terms "public diplomacy" and "public relations." "Public diplomacy" became a part of

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<sup>33</sup> Frank C. Darling, *Thailand and the United States* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1965), 83 and 85; Katherine Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty: An Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 63, 74; Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country, and Constitutions: Thailand's Political Development, 1932-2000* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 195; Alessandro Casella, "Communism and Insurrection in Thailand," *The World Today* 26, No. 5 (May 1970), 200.



the American diplomatic lexicon when Foreign Service Officer Edmund Gullion coined it in 1965.<sup>34</sup> Gullion thought that “propaganda” was a better word to describe America’s efforts to influence foreign public opinion but opted for “public diplomacy” because it was less negative. A more contemporary iteration came from Joseph Nye, who devised the term “soft power.” Nye said that “soft power” is a country’s ability to build goodwill or support abroad through the attractiveness of its culture, political ideas, and policies.<sup>35</sup> Nye’s definition of “soft power” is much broader than how recent historians have viewed public diplomacy. For Osgood, Nicholas Cull, and Justin Hart, public diplomacy is the activities of the U.S. government to influence a foreign public politically, socially, and culturally to fulfill its objectives.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the three scholars see propaganda and public diplomacy as synonymous.

However, some historians have classified cultural relations as distinct programs from public diplomacy. Historian Frank Ninkovich sees cultural relations as the attempt by governments to reorient individuals through the non-coercive, rational implantation of ideas.<sup>37</sup> Ninkovich further maintains that cultural diplomacy is a form of statecraft that is the totality of relations between cultures – social, cultural, diplomatic, and military. Other historians think of cultural diplomacy in benign and apolitical terms. Naima Prevots

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<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Cull, “Public Diplomacy Before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase,” in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Phillip Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2004), x.

<sup>36</sup> Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1; Nicholas Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xv; Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 181.

writes about how dance exhibitions during the Cold War broke down barriers between cultures.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the dancers were not weapons of the Cold War but performed for the sake of promoting the arts.

In my dissertation, I will use the term “public diplomacy” to describe the USIS mission to help the U.S. government build relations with the Thai people; “public relations” will mean the same but from a Thai domestic angle, showing Bangkok’s desire to spread its influence. The USIS and MOI used mass media, development and humanitarian projects, cultural and education exchanges, and relationship building activities with elites, students, youth, and rural leaders. King Bhumibol also engaged in public relations to strengthen his own political, public, and religious image through propagating cultural philosophies of kingship and Buddhism. The main objectives for all these groups were to stymie communism, stabilize the country, and build the Thai nation.

#### Main Actors

The background of the groups and characters involved is essential to understanding the arguments made in this dissertation. The lead U.S organization involved in public diplomacy globally and in Thailand was the USIA or USIS. The USIS predated the USIA but Eisenhower combined the two organizations when he formally created in the latter agency in 1953. President Eisenhower saw the agency as an important weapon to counter communism abroad, to inform and influence foreign peoples, and to promote U.S. interests. The USIS targeted populations not just in

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<sup>38</sup> Naima Prevots, *Dance for Exports: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998); David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

communist countries, but also in neutralist and western nations. It was interested not only in converting people to the American way of life, but also in maintaining the goodwill of U.S. allies and their citizens, or at least in ensuring that nations did not join the communist bloc.<sup>39</sup>

The USIS also had a significant role in nation-building as a means of containing the spread of Chinese and Communist influences in the region. The first USIS station in Southeast Asia opened in 1950 in Saigon. The USIS helped with press and public relations efforts for the Bao Dai government. In addition, it developed psychological warfare programs for the French during the war against the Viet Minh. After the war, the 1954 Geneva Accords had temporarily divided Vietnam between north and south, with a national election to decide on unification in 1956. However, President Dwight Eisenhower ignored the Accords, and the United States began its two-decade mission to create a nation out of South Vietnam. Eisenhower looked to Ngo Dinh Diem as a leader around whom a nation could be built and used the USIS to help.<sup>40</sup> There were other public diplomacy stations created, one in Laos and another in Cambodia.

In Thailand, as elsewhere, USIS officials wanted it to become a strong anti-communist ally and saw spreading ideas such as such as democracy, capitalism, and modernization as the means to do so. In 1954, the USIS established its first station in Thailand to develop indoctrination programs further.<sup>41</sup> They used mass media, cultural

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<sup>39</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 3; Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 1, 4, and 101.

<sup>40</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 124; James M. Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 124.

exchange programs, development and humanitarian projects, and relations with elites, students, and the monarchy. Agency members were involved in counterinsurgency, as well as training American senior, middle, and junior level foreign service officers on the political and cultural environment.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the USIS taught Thais about governance using bureaucratic and educational systems reflecting the American model. Thais studied abroad in the United States to further their education, where they learned firsthand the ways of modernity. U.S. public diplomacy officials conducted public opinion surveys and research on the target population to improve programs and inform policymakers.

A counterpart to the USIS in Thailand was the MOI. The MOI was one of the oldest and largest ministries in the Thai government, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when King Chulalongkorn reformed government administration to spread Bangkok's political power and influence, manage local provinces, and gather information. Though it had many different responsibilities and departments, one MOI mission was to help Bangkok build relations with the rural Thais and hill tribes. Within the ministry, the Community Development Department (CDD) and the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) were two of the main organizations. In addition, the MOI collaborated on public relations programs with the BPP and the Mobile Development Unit (MDU). Through creating connections with people in the countryside and ethnic minorities, the Thai government hoped to stymie communist influences. The MOI disseminated political messages that attacked

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<sup>42</sup> "Memorandum to Members of the Special Group (CI)," April 1963, Subject USIA Report on COIN Training, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Deputy Director Policy and Plans/Office of the Special Assistant, Defense Liaison Files, 1955-1964, Box 6, Entry P 222, NACP; "Memorandum to Members of the Special Group (CI)," July 9, 1963, Subject USIA Report on COIN Training, p. 1 and 3, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Deputy Director Policy and Plans/Office of the Special Assistant, Defense Liaison Files, 1955-1964, Box 6, Entry P 222, NACP.

communism, showing how it endangered the national and cultural integrity of Thailand. It promoted the two most powerful cultural institutions, the Buddhist church and the monarchy. The ministry perpetuated the idea that Thai nationalism consisted of the nation, Buddhism, and the monarchy. The MOI also engaged in other public relations activities, such as development and humanitarian projects, training local leaders, and fostering relations with youth and ethnic minorities.

Though they shared the objectives of stymieing the influence of communism and unifying the nation, the USIS and MOI each exercised a level of autonomy from one another. There were times when both organizations coordinated their efforts in certain projects, such as those dealing with humanitarian aid and development, mass media programs, or the training of provincial administrators. However, USIS and MOI officials often acted on their own initiative. Both groups had different taskmasters, Washington and Bangkok, respectively. There were sometimes disagreements over who would take the lead on a program or the content of a mass media campaign, but from available sources, it seems the conflicts rarely hindered the USIS and MOI from fulfilling their objectives.

One of the most important supporters of the USIS and MOI was King Bhumibol. For centuries, the monarchy had wielded absolute power. Then in 1932, a military coup made the king into a figurehead, and Thailand became a constitutional monarchy. Over the next fourteen years, it looked as if the institution would fade into history until the royal family found an heir—Ananda Mahidol—who had been living in Europe. Ananda did not reign long, dying mysteriously in 1946. Bhumibol, Ananda's younger brother, became the next king. When he came to the throne, the monarchy's political authority

was slowly diminishing under Phibun. However, Sarit's coup in 1957 changed the palace's fortunes. The king and other members of the royal family used mass media, state and religious ceremonies, political and social connections, and their prestige to restore the image of the institution. As the monarchy's influence grew, King Bhumibol became the central pillar of Thai nationalism. The USIS and MOI were eager to help the monarchy, as the king was a useful symbol to fight communism. King Bhumibol used the resources of both institutions to promote the monarchy's many public relations activities, such as religious and state events. He was a staunch anti-communist and a supporter of friendly U.S.-Thai relations. The king saw communism as a threat to the nation and the power of the monarchy.

Though it is not one of the principal groups discussed in this dissertation, it is important to give a brief history of the CPT. Communist ideology began spreading from China in the 1920s into Siam, and it was not until World War II when the CPT was established. Initially the organization was divided into two sections, a Chinese one that catered to Sino-Thais and a Thai group. In 1952, these groups merged and formally adopted the name of the Communist Party of Thailand, with most of the leadership being Thais of Chinese descent. With bases in the northeast and north, the CPT recruited ethnic minorities such as the Hmong and Mien in the early 1960s. There were also branches in the south. Years later in the late 1970s, thousands of students and intellectuals joined the communist ranks as a result of a military coup in 1976. The CPT targeted the military government, calling them corrupt and lackeys of the United States. It highlighted the economic and political grievances of rural Thais and Bangkok's political imposition on the hill tribes. Eventually in the late 1970s, the CPT lifted its ban on avoiding disparaging

remarks against the monarchy and said the institution was exploiting the Thai people. Its goals were to overthrow the military government and monarchy, drive out the U.S. military presence and cultural influence, and establish a communist nation.

### Historiography

Much of the historical work on U.S.-Thai relations, unlike this dissertation, which seeks to incorporate both government's perspectives, employs mostly U.S. documents and not Thai materials. Some of the earliest studies come from historians David A. Wilson and Frank C. Darling in the 1960s.<sup>43</sup> In the 1980s, historian R. Sean Randolph and political scientist Karl D. Jackson both wrote about U.S.-Thai relations during the Cold War.<sup>44</sup> Randolph's book used American and few Thai sources to show that the relationship ebbed and flowed, especially after the Vietnam War. More recently, historian Daniel Fineman described some of the complications in U.S.-Thai relations during Phibun's tenure as Eisenhower struggled to work with him to keep the country politically stable. After Sarit's coup, relations improved dramatically but Fineman's study does not go beyond 1958.<sup>45</sup> Arne Kislenko's dissertation examines U.S. foreign policy in Thailand from 1961 to 1968, discussing how relations wavered but remained strong.<sup>46</sup> Robert J. Flynn's dissertation shows that the Thai government was not a passive partner and was able to manipulate the United States into giving more aid and increasing its involvement

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<sup>43</sup> David A. Wilson, *The United States and the Future of Thailand* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Darling, *Thailand and the United States*.

<sup>44</sup> Karl Jackson and Wiwat Mungkandi, *United States-Thailand Relations* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986); R. Sean Randolph, *The United States and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics, 1950-1985* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986); Surachart, *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule*.

<sup>45</sup> Fineman, *A Special Relationship*.

<sup>46</sup> Arne Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind: United States Foreign Policy and Thailand during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969," Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Toronto, 2000).

in the region.<sup>47</sup> The newest research on the Cold War relationship between the United States and Thailand is Eugene Ford's *Cold War Monks*. In his book, Ford looks at how the United States, through the Asia Foundation, worked with Thai Buddhist clergymen to combat the influence of communism. In addition, the Cold War enabled the religious order to become actively involved in Thai politics.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of the literature on public diplomacy, scholars have only recently started studying critically the history of the American experience with selling its image abroad. Osgood's *Total Cold War* looks at the early years of the USIA during Eisenhower's presidency, when Washington made public diplomacy a part of the U.S. foreign policymaking process. The book shows how the president saw information warfare as an important psychological weapon. In *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, Cull chronicles the history of the USIA from the perspective of the agency's directors. He argues that although public diplomacy was an integral part of U.S. policy during the Cold War, scholars failed to account for it in the study of U.S. foreign relations. Hart's *Empire of Ideas* discusses the American experience with forms of public diplomacy from 1936 to 1953. He examines how as the U.S. role expanded internationally, it became more important for the government to create a favorable image, even though American leaders were reluctant to engage in propaganda because they thought doing so would contradict traditional ideals.<sup>49</sup> Notwithstanding these scholarly

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<sup>47</sup> Robert J. Flynn, "Preserving the Hub: United States-Thai Relations during the Vietnam War, 1961-1976," Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Kentucky, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Eugene Ford, *Cold War Monks: Buddhism and America's Secret Strategy in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

<sup>49</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*; Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*; Hart, *Empire of Ideas*, 1; See also, Laura Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Penny M. Von Eschen *Satchmo Blows up the*



works on public diplomacy, researchers have not yet focused in depth on the USIS role in U.S. foreign policy, the agency's activities in other countries, and its impact on the target population. In addition, the literature has yet to examine the relationship between the USIS and foreign public relations organizations. As will be shown in this dissertation, the role of U.S. public diplomacy is exemplified in Thailand, where it is possible to see not only the influence the USIS had on the Thai people and events in the country, but also the role played by the MOI, a Thai partner organization to the USIS.

Scholars focusing on twentieth-century Thai history have considered the social impact of American intervention in Thailand but have not discussed in detail on the major role the United States played in helping the Thai military-monarchical oligarchy stay in power, specifically through public diplomacy and public relations. One major work about the Cold War period came from political historian Thak Chaloemtirana, who wrote a biography of Sarit. Thak argued that Sarit's policies established a Thai political system with a strong military and monarchy that have endured to the present.<sup>50</sup> His book explains Thai politics from a cultural perspective and spend some time discussing Sarit's relations with the United States, but his narrative ends in 1963. Journalist Paul M. Handley analyzes the monarchy and argues that it played an integral part in developing the modern Thai nation.<sup>51</sup> The United States helped build up both the military and monarchy, specifically through the USIA, but Handley's analysis and primary source base were

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*World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Eschen describes how musicians, instead of promoting American democracy, used the international stage to publicize black American culture.

<sup>50</sup> Thak *Despotic Paternalism*, 231 and 408 from original introduction.

<sup>51</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*.

minimal. Historian Thongchai *Siam Mapped* shows how modern borders and maps influenced the Thai government's notions of nationalism and how it remembered its history.<sup>52</sup> His book has been important to understanding Thai nation-building, but his analysis overlooks the role of the USIA and the Thai government's media and information programs in promoting Thai nationalism and identity. David K. Wyatt, Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, and Joseph Wright Jr. all wrote about the history of Thailand and see the United States as a major influence on the development of modern Thailand. However, they confine their analyses to U.S. military and economic aid; discussions of the impacts of ideas and culture are minimal.<sup>53</sup>

To understand Thai history better, there needs to be a closer examination of the Thai government's relations with the United States in helping to strengthen the Thai state during the Cold War, specifically through public diplomacy and public relations programs. One work that looks at a Thai institution's efforts to win hearts and minds is Sinae Hyun's dissertation on the BPP. Hyun examines how Thai elites and organizations like the BPP adapted western ideas of modernization and nation-building to fit the local context. Most importantly, the BPP served as a tool to promote the Thai government's and monarchy's images and programs.<sup>54</sup> *In Thailand in the Cold War*, historian Matthew Phillips argues for the importance of looking at both governments' perspectives on promoting anti-communism and national identity in Thailand. Phillips hoped to

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<sup>52</sup> Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*.

<sup>53</sup> Baker and Pasuk, *A History of Thailand*; David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

<sup>54</sup> Sinae Hyun, "Indigenizing the Cold War: Nation-Building by the Border Patrol Police of Thailand, 1945-1980," Ph.D. Dissertation, (University of Wisconsin, 2014).

“problematize the search of a Thai essence [identity], but [do] so by placing greater emphasis on the relations between Thailand and the United States during the Cold War.”<sup>55</sup> Sarit promoted a version of Thai identity and culture based on the preferences of American consumers, specifically tourists.<sup>56</sup> According to Phillips, the ideology of consumerism is what helped turn Thailand into an anti-communist ally of the United States. My dissertation looks at both U.S. and Thai perspectives to better explain U.S.-Thai relations by focusing on public diplomacy. An explanation of Thai history during the Cold War must account for the involvement of the United States.

This dissertation also contributes to the study of nation-building. Historian Michael E. Latham wrote about nation-building during the John F. Kennedy era, focusing on how the social science modernization theory helped influence U.S. foreign policy.<sup>57</sup> The core ideas of modernization are that underdeveloped nations can progress towards becoming modern and developed through “contact” with nations that have already reached the level of modernity.<sup>58</sup> The United States and Western Europe are the prime examples of how to achieve modernization. Thus, Washington wanted to promote the American economic, social, and political model throughout the underdeveloped world. Latham’s book looks at the Alliance for Progress, the Peace Corps, and the Strategic Hamlet Program in South Vietnam.

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<sup>55</sup> Matthew Phillips, *Thailand in the Cold War* (Routledge: New York, 2016), 11.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

As I see it, public diplomacy should be another important component in the study of nation-building. In the context of Thailand, public diplomacy included mass media, relationship-building activities, and state and religious events to promote a certain culture, religion, and government to the Thai people in order to unify the nation under a set of ideas. However, Thailand is a case study that complicates modernization theory, as USIS and U.S. leaders had to adapt to local conditions and the demands of their Thai ally. The military government and the monarchy had their own nation-building programs that included building up Buddhism and the king. They also adopted some American ideas and programs like economic development and modernization. What Bangkok did not use from modernization theory were the political aspects, specifically democratic reform. Instead military and royal leaders had their own version of political modernity: King Bhumibol was the symbol of democracy. He represented the voice of the people through adhering to Buddhist teachings and political traditions.

A comparative example of U.S. nation-building is in South Korea. In his book *Nation Building in South Korea*, Gregg Brazinsky examines how that country made the transition from a dictatorship to an economic powerhouse and political democracy, highlighting the role of the United States in this process.<sup>59</sup> Brazinsky sees South Korea's transformation arising from American economic and military assistance and Korean agency. The Thai case has some similarities to South Korea. As in Korea, Washington supported the Thai military regime, favoring a dictatorship as a means of providing order and stability. Both countries had extensive economic aid from the United States that led

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<sup>59</sup> Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

to modernization and increased wealth. There were major efforts at nation-building on the local level including programs targeting youth and students. According to Brazinsky, some organizations on the ground in South Korea seemed to lay the groundwork to help the country eventually turn into a democracy.<sup>60</sup> Koreans also had agency to adapt American ideas to fit their circumstances, so U.S. intervention did not seem like a large imposition. Though Thailand had the Peace Corps and non-government organizations involved in humanitarian projects, education, and economic development at the grassroots level, Thailand did not turn into a democracy. The Thai military regime and monarchy, which the United States supported and promoted to the Thai people and which controlled the country during the Cold War, did not implement democratic reforms and continues to hold power today. The military and monarchy were afraid of political liberalism and viewed it as a threat to their power. This dissertation offers a different example from South Korea by showing some of the mixed results from U.S. nation-building efforts during the Cold War.

To supplement the historical literature, my dissertation draws from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and political science. Historian John Lewis Gaddis said in an article that diplomatic history needs to “bump” up against other disciplines.<sup>61</sup> Gaddis explains that an interdisciplinary approach would help account for the complexities in explaining historical events instead of finding mono-causal answers.<sup>62</sup> In addition, field studies conducted by anthropologists and sociologists during the 1960s and 1970s

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<sup>60</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 225.

<sup>61</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “New Conceptual Approaches to the Study of American Foreign Relations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,” *Diplomatic History* 14, No. 3 (July 1990): 407.

<sup>62</sup> Gaddis, “New Conceptual,” 410.

provide some context for the activities of the USIS, MOI, and monarchy. Anthropologists Charles Keyes, Clifford Geertz, Katherine Bowie, and Eric Wakin and political scientists Benedict Anderson and Thak Chaloemtirana all wrote extensively on Southeast Asia and specifically on Thai social and political culture. Where some USIS and MOI documents do not explain certain aspects of Thai political and cultural behavior, theories and findings from the social sciences helped.

#### Research Method/Approaches/Sources

From the literature on U.S.-Thai relations, U.S. public diplomacy, and Thai history, my approach will examine several organizations, characters, and ideas that are given little attention by other scholars. First, the role of public diplomacy is absent. Cull argued for a larger examination of public diplomacy's influence in U.S. foreign policymaking, and this dissertation will explore that influence in the context of Thailand. Second, the Thai government's perspective, particularly that of the monarchy, is missing. King Bhumibol reigned from 1950 to 2016. Although seen as a mere figurehead on the surface, the king was not apolitical but manipulated events from behind the scenes. He was involved in domestic and foreign policies, especially in helping the U.S. and Thai governments win hearts and minds. Furthermore, there were other perspectives from the MOI and BPP that need to be considered. Third, this dissertation incorporates not just U.S. sources from the National Archives and presidential libraries, but also Thai government documents and language sources housed in the Thai National Archives and the libraries at Thammasat University in Thailand, Cornell University, and the University of Wisconsin.

For the U.S. perspective, I employed materials from the USIS housed at the U.S. National Archives. Each year the USIS issued Country Plans that contained the objectives for the mission. Then every month it tracked progress through Country Assessment Reports, Effectiveness Reports, and Country Situation Reports. These documents showed how USIS officials measured success. In addition, I examined surveys on reader, listener, and viewer habits to find out preferences, peak viewing and listening times, and comprehension of the mass media programs. There were also public opinion polls, which, despite some weaknesses, provided insight into what Thais thought about U.S. foreign policy, American culture, and communism. Meeting notes and correspondence illustrated the projects the USIS collaborated on with the U.S. embassy and military as well as various Thai agencies. Magazines such as the USIS publication *Seripharb* documented the U.S. and Thai governments' activities in the country and showed what the mission thought was most important to publicize. To supplement records from the National Archives, I used documents from presidential libraries and universities.

For the Thai perspective, I gathered sources from the Thai National Archives and various ministry libraries in Bangkok. At the Thai National Archives, I used the records of the MOI, CDD, and Foreign Ministry. I found meeting notes about the many projects undertaken to build relations with Thai villagers and ethnic minorities. They discussed objectives and results. Other documents showed the MOI's public relations projects to stymie the influence of communism and promote Thai nationalism in the countryside. There was information about government projects with ethnic minorities, rural villagers, and youth. Correspondence illustrated the MOI's relations with other agencies as they

collaborated on various public relations projects. Materials from the Foreign Ministry contained mostly information about student and cultural exchange programs and little on overall Thai policy with other nations.

At Thammasat University in Thailand, Cornell University, and the University of Wisconsin, I found Thai language government sources and newspapers to supplement documents from the U.S. and Thai National Archives. Both locations house information about USIS public diplomacy, the MDU's and CDD's programs, and the MOI's ethnic minority projects. Most of the materials in the libraries were Thai newspapers, USIS periodicals, and published research reports. With the media materials, I analyzed the language and stories used to promote Thai and American culture and anti-communism. Articles documented many of the United States and Thai governments' activities. USIS and Thai journalists provided commentary and explanations of policies, state events, religious ceremonies, and royal rituals.<sup>63</sup> The periodicals and newspapers had their biases, but they were useful in providing some understanding into how Thais interpreted what they saw when watching or participating in government events. The newspapers also showed how the Thai public reacted to particular situations or policies, such as the king's visit to America in 1960, the 1963 Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam, Thailand's entry into the Vietnam War in 1967, and the presence of American bases in Thailand. The editorials were important in revealing the political position of newspapers and how they promoted U.S.-Thai relations, the monarchy, and anti-communism.

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<sup>63</sup> "The King visits the Northern Kingdom," *Seripharb*, 1958, USIS, p. 39 and "Celebrating 150 years of Lincoln in Bangkok," *Seripharb*, 1958, USIS, No. 44, p. 35-36, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World", Thai, Numbers 1-48, Box 269, Entry 1053, NACP.



I attempted to capture both perspectives together to create a balanced narrative through analyzing the policies of the USIS, MOI, and the monarchy. This dissertation seeks to fill a space in the historiography, providing direct and detailed examination of the public diplomacy and public relations programs of the United States, Thai MOI, and monarchy to illustrate another viewpoint of the impact of their activities in the country.

With the sources I found, there were several ways in which I analyzed the role of the USIS and the MOI in both governments' efforts to stymie communism and engage in nation-building. I began by examining why both Washington and Bangkok used the resources of the USIS and MOI. Though military and economic aid helped the Thai police state to maintain power, non-coercive measures such as public diplomacy and public relations were important to U.S. and Thai anti-communist policies and promoting the ideas and programs of both governments. Thai people needed to be convinced that U.S. and Thai leaders were looking out for their interests or at least that communism was not a good alternative.

Another method of examining the influence of the USIS and MOI was to look at research studies, assessment reports, and surveys. Public views and sentiments can be challenging to measure accurately even with modern technology. Nevertheless, the methods used by the USIS and MOI gave some indication as to how Thais viewed and responded to the public diplomacy programs and government policies. The findings from the reports informed future public relations campaigns and advised some government policies. Many U.S. and Thai organizations used the services, resources, and information of the USIS and MOI, such as both militaries, the BPP, MDU, CDD, and the monarchy. Though USIS field workers and the MOI saw their work as important and effective, there

was some caution in reading their reports as it was likely that officials wrote positively to ensure future funding for their organizations.

### Overview of Dissertation

After I analyzed the sources, I created a narrative of U.S.-Thai public diplomacy and public relations that covers the years from 1957 to 1979. Chapter One looks at the U.S.-Thai relationship starting with Sarit's coup and King Bhumibol's re-ascension to political relevance in 1957 and 1958. Eisenhower wanted to halt the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, especially after the establishment of a communist North Vietnam. He looked to Thailand as one place in the region to be a front line against communism. Washington developed relations with Sarit and King Bhumibol to ensure that Thailand would not be the next domino to fall. Both governments began using USIS and MOI resources and skills to keep the country anti-communist and pro-American and to build the legitimacy of Sarit's regime and the monarchy. They also had to sell this new relationship between the two countries to the Thai people. The USIS and MOI helped manage events such as King Bhumibol's visit to the United States and the growing American involvement in the region. The chapter also briefly discusses the growth and influence of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT).

Chapter Two concerns the early Vietnam War years from 1964 to 1968. Conflict in Southeast Asia was heating up, with a civil war in Laos and the United States becoming more involved in Vietnam. The United States began using Thailand as a base for its military operations in the region, and, in return, Bangkok received military and economic aid. Soon Thailand sent troops to help fight in Vietnam. This chapter looks at how the MOI, Thai government, and USIS promoted the policy of allowing the United

States to use Thailand to house military bases as well as both countries' involvement in Vietnam. The USIS, MOI, and Thai government glorified the Thai soldiers who volunteered to fight in the war. King Bhumibol played a large role in building public support for the war by serving as a strong spokesman. As the Vietnam conflict grew, issues arose from tensions with hill tribes and the CPT increasing its insurgency in the rural areas. The USIS and MOI focused more attention and resources on promoting the government's policies and anti-communism in the countryside. In addition, the U.S. and Thai militaries and the monarchy began reaching out to villagers to facilitate nation-building policies and to consolidate Bangkok's political power. The U.S. and Thai governments engaged in development projects and pacification programs to win the loyalty of ethnic minorities and to counter CPT influence.

The second half of the dissertation examines how the USIS and MOI had to adjust their programs as a result of changes stemming from the Vietnam War and domestic unrest in Thailand. Chapter Three covers the years between 1969 and 1972 and examine some of the impacts from the 1968 Tet Offensive, U.S. peace negotiations with Hanoi, and President Richard Nixon's policies. There was much fear among Thais that North Vietnam would seek to punish Thailand for aiding the United States. At the same time, President Richard Nixon decreased American troop strength in the region and diminished USIS operations, pushing for the Thais to take on more responsibility with public relations programs because of the Nixon Doctrine. The MOI, the monarchy, and some right-wing organizations helped fill the void by establishing more programs in the rural and hill tribe areas. The USIS slowly withdrew from operations in counterinsurgency and from directly promoting the monarchy. Instead, it focused more on mass media, cultural

exchange, and advising and training. This was a time of transition as the USIS began taking a step back, while the MOI and the monarchy led the way in the effort to win hearts and minds.

Chapter Four describes the USIS and MOI activities during a very complicated time in Thai history. In 1973, Thailand experienced a massive student protest that forced the military regime that had been in power since 1957 to step down and allow the democratic election of a civilian prime minister. Under this new government, relations with the United States were complex, as Bangkok still wanted to stay on good terms with Washington but also sought a more neutral foreign policy. At the same time, some of the new Thai leaders were afraid of communist expansion in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and within their own borders and continued supporting anti-communist programs. The monarchy's influence and power grew after King Bhumibol supported the student movement. Amid these changes, the USIS mission saw more cuts and adjusted its programs to promote the benefits of continued close relations between the United States and Thailand, while focusing less directly on anti-communism. The MOI activities were not hindered by the changes in leadership and still focused on stymieing the spread of communism in the countryside and propagating nationalism.

Fears of communism heightened when South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos all turned communist in 1975. The MOI and King Bhumibol did not want Thailand to be next. With help from Buddhist monks and right-wing groups, they increased anti-communist rhetoric and rural programs to shore up the country in preparation for what some thought was a communist invasion. A year later, the democratic experience ended when the military, with backing from the monarchy, returned to power. This move

reoriented Thailand back to hardline conservatism, focusing more on anti-communism, Thai nationalism, and continued close U.S.-Thai relations. The USIS put more resources into education and cultural exchange as ways of nurturing Thailand's friendship with America. The MOI took over many of the roles of the USIS in the countryside with radio, mass media, leadership training, and mobile information programs.

The last chapter looks at the years of 1977 to 1979. The military coup in 1976 led thousands of students and intellectuals to flee to the jungles and join the CPT. With the new recruits, the CPT went on a military and propaganda offensive. The USIS, MOI, and monarchy countered by placing more energy into building Thai nationalism and U.S.-Thai relations. Right-wing conservatives orchestrated public relations events criticizing students and communists, calling them traitors and anti-monarchists. Eventually, regional changes and the lack of domestic success by the CPT caused the revolution to stall and flounder. By 1979, it had ceased to be a threat, and it surrendered in 1982.

Thailand weathered the storms of its neighbors turning communist and threats from the CPT revolution. The public information programs of the USIS, MOI, and the monarchy were important in the U.S. and Thai government's anti-communist and nation-building policies. Many of the cultural and political ideals these organizations promoted were carried into the twenty-first century and have a strong hold in Thailand even today.

## CHAPTER 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF U.S.-THAI PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, 1957-1963

### Introduction

The United States, the military government, and the monarchy all had an interest in keeping Thailand from turning communist and remaining politically stable. Relations between Washington and Phibun had been uneasy for several years but with Sarit in power, the United States now had a Thai leader with whom it could work with to fight communism. In addition, King Bhumibol could now rebuild its political influence. The Eisenhower administration, Sarit, and King Bhumibol each had their own reasons for keeping Thailand secure. The president wanted to make Thailand into a strong U.S. ally; Sarit sought to legitimize his new regime; and King Bhumibol wanted the monarchy to return to its former political influence. As this chapter will show, the common interest that brought the three groups closer together was fighting communism. They wanted Thailand to become an anti-communist, military-monarchical state. The U.S. and Thai governments saw communism and any subversive groups and activities as threats to the country's stability and to their goals. To stymie the spread of communism, while also achieving their goals, Washington and Bangkok combined efforts and used many methods, with public diplomacy being one of the most important. The stabilization of Thailand would come in many ways, one of them being winning the hearts and minds of the people.

The USIS and MOI were of the main groups charged with helping to promote the goals of the United States, the Thai military government, and the monarchy. Both groups facilitated the growth of the new relationship between Washington, Sarit, and King

Bhumibol after the 1957 coup while also combatting the influence of communism. The USIS began by supporting Sarit's development programs as part of his goal of showing the Thai people that he was a father figure and would take care of them. With King Bhumibol, U.S. officials publicized the monarch's travels throughout the nation performing religious and state ceremonies, and building up his image as a righteous ruler. To strengthen U.S.-Thai relations, the USIS orchestrated a public relations campaign focusing on the king's trip to America in 1960. Furthermore, Sarit and King Bhumibol engaged in their own public relations activities to promote anti-communism and their political power.

Shortly after King Bhumibol's trip to the United States, a civil war began in Laos causing Thai leaders to panic. Northeast Thailand had a large ethnic Laotian population and Bangkok feared they would become involved in the war and destabilize the country. In addition, the CPT had established bases in the area, recruiting rural Thais and ethnic minorities. The USIS and MOI placed more attention on the peoples of the north and northeast by establishing radio programs, disseminating literature, building relations with local leaders, and engaging in economic development. In 1962, the first detachment of American troops arrived in Thailand to bolster the country's defense in case of a communist invasion via Laos. USIS officials organized humanitarian events with U.S. soldiers visiting villages and providing health care. Sarit and King Bhumibol supported the stationing of American troops by justifying it as a necessary measure to combat communism. Public diplomacy programs from 1957 to 1963 were meant to help both governments increase the Thai people's loyalty to the regime and the monarchy and make them see the United States as a friend of Thailand. The institutions and programs would

grow, endure, and lay the foundation of a strong anti-communist, pro-American, pro-monarchy, military Thai state for the next several decades.

### The Coups

Sarit's pretext for his power grab was based on the perceived threat of communism. In 1957, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) shifted its policies from an urban to rural revolution because of Sarit's first coup in the fall. Sarit came to power when he overthrew the military government of Phibun Songkhram. According to researcher Alessandro Casella, the new regime's rise to power debilitated the urban approach of the CPT.<sup>64</sup> Most cadres retreated to the north and northeast to keep the revolution alive. While in the countryside, CPT cadres recruited rural and ethnic peoples who felt marginalized.<sup>65</sup> Southeast Asian historian John L.S. Girling said the "depressed economic conditions in the [North] and Northeast led to extensive migration by farmers seeking work as unskilled laborers to Bangkok.... They returned, resentful [of] what they felt was both class and ethnic discrimination."<sup>66</sup> Some rural peoples felt ignored by Bangkok because of distance, poverty, and ethnicity.

In 1958, USIS thought communism was becoming a serious threat to Thailand's security because of the lack of political awareness among the general Thai population. Richard M. McCarthy was head of the USIS mission in Bangkok as Public Affairs Officer (PAO). McCarthy said in a 1988 interview that Thais generally were very anti-

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<sup>64</sup> Casella, "Communism and Insurrection in Thailand," 200-201. Alessandro Casella was a research specialist at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Marks, *Making Revolution*, 96.

<sup>66</sup> Girling, *Thailand, Society and Politics*, 255; Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom*, 37-39, 41-43, 51-53.



communist and had little need for indoctrination.<sup>67</sup> However, almost thirty years before, McCarthy had made a different assessment. In a July 1958 Country Plan he said, “Most Thais do not comprehend the danger” of communism.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the PAO stated that the communists were on the offensive and had “turned to intensive propaganda” to counter Sarit’s regime.<sup>69</sup> USIS officials were concerned that rural Thais would be susceptible to leftist tactics because of their lack of education. Without understanding the threat, Thais might end up following the communists blindly. This fear was somewhat warranted because, as McCarthy cited, Thais have historically acquiesced to the demands of dominant powers in Southeast Asia, such as China and Japan during World War II.<sup>70</sup> It was possible that Thailand would seek to appease the most threatening neighbor – China or North Vietnam – for purposes of national survival.

If it were true (according to the USIS) that the Thai people did not seem to understand the communist threat, the regime certainly did. Most of the government intelligence reports cited only small communist movements in the countryside but understood that these signs were still dangerous. Sarit, in one of the military’s general-situation assessments, said that the communists were using a variety of methods to build their capabilities in the countryside through such methods as propaganda, infiltration, and

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<sup>67</sup> Oral History, Richard M. McCarthy Interview, 1988, GRUSIA, RG 306, Transcripts of Oral History Project Interviews, Box 8, Entry A1 1073, NACP.

<sup>68</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” July 29, 1958, Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, p. 1-2, Dispatch # 12, GRUSIA, RG 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 2, Entry 1047, NACP.

<sup>69</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” July 29, 1958, Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” July 29, 1958, Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, p. 3.

small-unit guerrilla actions.<sup>71</sup> The report added that communist aims were either to create a separate country or to take over the whole government. The Thai military understood that the threat was not going to go away easily and that many of the communist forces were operating in secret in remote regions. More important, Thai officials were not ignorant of the political and economic issues in the rural areas.

Other sources claimed that the communists were not as threatening as McCarthy and the Thai government believed. Former CIA analyst and lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, Frank C. Darling, said as early as 1950: “the communist threat...was not as big of a threat as the United States proclaimed.”<sup>72</sup> Later, during the Laotian conflict in 1961, U.S. Ambassador Kenneth T. Young sent a telegram to John F. Kennedy’s administration in which he acknowledged that communist insurgencies were unlikely to occur. Ambassador Young stated, “[I] do not believe that there is at present time a Communist underground in Thailand of any importance.”<sup>73</sup> Thailand seemed to be in little danger at the beginning of Sarit’s tenure, but that did not stop American and Thai leaders and public diplomacy officials from promoting anti-communist rhetoric and related programs. Any sign of unrest or threat in the country, even if it was not of communist origin, made U.S. leaders fearful of another country falling to communism,

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<sup>71</sup> “Appendage n Intelligence Consists of Strategy Command n.1,” August 2, 1962, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Central Division, Ministry of Defense, (2) nB 15.1.1/2, Thai National Archives (TNA) – Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>72</sup> Darling, *Thailand and the United States*, 83 and 85.

<sup>73</sup> “Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State,” May 27, 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Southeast Asia, Vol. XXIII (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), p. 863; Foreign Areas Studies Division, *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand* (American University: Special Operations Research Office, June 1963), 335.

while the RTG did not want to lose power. Invoking the possible negative consequences of communism helped both governments justify their actions and policies.

Even with no current overwhelming communist threat in Thailand, Eisenhower had reasons for wanting to keep the country anti-communist. In 1953, the French-Vietminh War spread into Laos, with Vietnamese cadres supporting Laotian leftist groups. For centuries, Laotian kingdoms had been vassals of Siam, and Thais worried that the conflict would affect Thailand. Thai leaders were also worried that the Laotian minority in northeastern Thailand would become susceptible to communist influences in Laos. Meanwhile, the CPT set up the “Thai Autonomous People’s Government” in Yunnan, China. Then a year later, the Vietminh defeated the French, gaining independence for Vietnam. In NSC 5429/2, the Eisenhower administration was concerned that with the establishment of North Vietnam, Vietnamese communists would be able to spread the ideology “against adjacent and more non-communist remote areas.” The victory over the French had brought Hanoi a level of prestige and credibility in Asia, allowing it to exploit “political and economic weakness and instability” in neighboring countries like Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.<sup>74</sup> These events pushed Eisenhower to bolster Thailand’s security. Part of the NSC policy called for the United States to provide military and economic aid to Thailand and to develop the country into a base for U.S. operations in the area.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> “NSC 5429/2,” August 20, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, XVII, 1, Document 312, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v12p1/d312> [accessed 15 January 2019].

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

As part of Eisenhower's foreign policy for the region, the United States created SEATO in 1954 to stymie the spread of communism. The organization was a collective security measure, headed by the United States along with several nations including Thailand.<sup>76</sup> Bangkok would serve as the headquarters of SEATO. If any nation was threatened by communist forces, the other members would consult with one another on how to respond to the threat. SEATO's public relations materials were lackluster, so the USIS provided information and supplies. It created news releases, films, radio programs, and photos and helped with research support, advice, and consultation.<sup>77</sup> The CPT movement was small compared to its counterparts in Laos and South Vietnam, but U.S. and Thai leaders wanted to build up the nation's defenses before a communist threat could get too large to contain. Thailand's place as an anti-communist nation was important to regional security for the United States.

The possibility of communism spreading into Thailand created the context for Sarit to consolidate power. Born in 1908 and raised in the Isan region of Thailand, Sarit devoted much of his life to the army before 1957. After graduating from the military academy, Sarit received his first army commission in 1928 where he became an officer in the First Battalion of the First Regiment in Bangkok. His military experience included the suppression of an attempted coup in 1933. He then was a Lieutenant stationed in the north during World War II. By 1957, Sarit was head of the military. After orchestrating a coup in 1957, Sarit returned after spending several months in the United States receiving

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<sup>76</sup> Member nations included Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, France, United Kingdom, and the United States.

<sup>77</sup> "A SEATO Report," by Robert W. Ehrman, p. 4, GRUSIA, RG 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 2, Entry 1047, NACP.

medical attention in late 1958 and declared a *pattiwat*, or revolution, that would reinforce traditional Thai values.<sup>78</sup> Sarit justified this revolution in a press statement that declared: “The growing internal menace of communism was undermining the basic foundations of the state by attempting to ‘uproot the monarchy, destroy Buddhism, and overthrow institutions of all types which the Thai nation cherished.’”<sup>79</sup> King Bhumibol showed his support by saying that Sarit’s revolution was necessary to “permit drastic anti-communist measures.”<sup>80</sup>

In order to increase Thai resolve to fight communism and gain political legitimacy, Sarit sought to strengthen traditional political ideas. This new regime was different from Phibun’s, where many officials had received military training and schooling in Europe and adopted Western political philosophies like fascism.<sup>81</sup> Sarit and his group, by contrast, were “indigenous products.”<sup>82</sup> Western ideas of democracy were foreign to them. Political scientist Thak Chaloemtiarana, who wrote a biography of Sarit, explained that instead of basing legitimacy on the rule of law or popular consensus, the new regime was to be “imbued with traditional authoritarian notions of political leadership....”<sup>83</sup> Sarit called his new way of governing “Thai-democracy.” Thak said “...Sarit believed that his return to old concepts of government was a means that would

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<sup>78</sup> This call for a revolution occurred after Sarit underwent surgery in the United States. When he returned to Thailand in October of 1958, he orchestrated another coup and established a new regime.

<sup>79</sup> “Prakat khong Khana Pattiwat [Revolutionary Council Proclamation], No. 2 and 4,” October 20, 1958, *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, 1958, Vol. 75, 658-659.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Welch Jr. and Smith, *Military Role and Rule*, 87-88.

<sup>82</sup> Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 99.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Traditionally Thais use their first names as the family name, unlike in the west where the last name is the family name.

propel the nation toward modernization.”<sup>84</sup> In a radio broadcast, the regime stated it would “abolish democratic ideas borrowed from the West” and that “it would build a democratic system that would be appropriate to the special characteristics and realities of the Thai. It will build...a Thai way of democracy.”<sup>85</sup> Some of these “old concepts” included promoting the monarchy and pushing for its involvement in politics. Buddhism would be the state religion. Sarit portrayed himself and the king as fathers of the people.

Thai-democracy had nothing to do with Western political liberalism. Sarit’s style of rule was like that of any other dictator, restricting civil liberties, banning political parties, abrogating the constitution, and holding no elections. If there was a parliament, it would be subject to supreme executives, which, in the Thai case, would be the prime minister and the king. The monarch would choose the government, including cabinet ministers. Thak explained that Sarit’s regime saw the king as the embodiment of the people, representing their will. King Bhumibol’s active role in politics was the central part of the Thai form of democracy. The king was not just a figurehead. There were ideas from the west Sarit wanted, such as economic development. He sought to modernize the country’s infrastructure and economy to increase Thailand’s participation in global trade. In addition, Sarit thought the military should have up-to-date technology to protect the nation.

The State Department and U.S. embassy were happy with Sarit. Embassy officials expressed positive feelings about backing Sarit, saying that he was a

Happy medium from the standpoint of U.S. interests as a situation which encompasses a military regime civilianized to the greatest extent possible and

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<sup>84</sup> Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 107.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 101 and 103.

headed by a military leader who saw security and development in perspective and thereby evidenced political leadership of the type required in a developing society.<sup>86</sup>

U.S. officials agreed that having a strong leader like Sarit was appropriate for Thailand and that the lack of democracy was not a big problem. A harsh anti-democratic Sarit was a better option for the United States than a communist or neutralist leader. Even King Bhumibol would admit in 1967 that communism, “in practice,” was “more terrible than a dictatorship.”<sup>87</sup> It was better to have political stability than a regime that criticized U.S. foreign policy.

Interestingly, the USIS also seemed to have little issue with the new Thai dictator. The USIS PAO Howard Garnish explained how the mission dealt with the contradiction between the agency’s objectives and Sarit’s regime. The approach in the cities was different from that in the countryside. When it came to publicizing American political culture and presidential elections, Garnish said the post “had to use some tact because” the government “had suspended” elections and other democratic-type activities.<sup>88</sup> Instead, they focused on information about famous American political leaders, historical events, education, and the electoral process. Rarely did the public diplomacy campaigns urge rapid political change from military dictatorship to full democracy. In terms of culture, a paper written by Dr. James Moselle working for the USIS said that the “USIS does not

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<sup>86</sup> “Dispatch from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State,” *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Southeast Asia, Vol. XV (Washington, U.S.: Government Printing Office, 1959), p. 1098.

<sup>87</sup> Hyun, “Indigenizing the Cold War,” 166.

<sup>88</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” November 25, 1960, Subject: USIS Treatment of US Elections, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Country Project Correspondence, 1952-1959, Box 20, Entry A1 1021, NACP.

cut across Thai values in any serious way.”<sup>89</sup> U.S. public diplomacy officials did not want to pose any serious threat to Sarit’s regime. Garnish wanted to tread lightly to stay on Sarit’s good side and not destabilize the political situation. However the unintended consequence was that the USIS was supporting a regime that was democratic and would suppress civil liberties. The main goal was to keep Thailand from turning communist, so even the USIS had to be selective in what ideas it propagated.

Sarit’s regime carefully framed the messages that it communicated to the Thai people. To emphasize his role in the new government, Sarit tried to represent himself as a *pho-khun*. A *pho-khun* was a term taken from the thirteenth-century Thai kingdom of Sukhothai that combined the characteristics of a despot and a father-figure. Political scientist Benedict Anderson said that languages have embedded within them special meanings that relate to hierarchies, cultural norms, and political power.<sup>90</sup> Sarit wanted Thais to see him as a parent and themselves as his children. He would take care of them. Political scientist Fred Warren Riggs argued, “Siamese peasants look to their government as a source of gentle benevolent concern, as a body possessed, ideally, of the attributes of a strong, wise, but indulgent father. The government is like our father, we are like its children.”<sup>91</sup> Sarit was able to gain support from many Thais and powerful groups within society by adopting a traditional charismatic persona.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> “Paper Prepared by Dr. James Moselle for USIS Bangkok,” November 1959, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports 1953-1986, Box 67, Entry A1-1007, NACP.

<sup>90</sup> Anderson, *Language and Power*, 139-42 and 155; Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, x.

<sup>91</sup> Fred Warren Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu, HI: East-West Center Press, 1966), 324.

<sup>92</sup> Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 122.



His tough image inevitably had some negative impacts, especially with the hill tribes. Contact between the hill tribes and central government increased under Sarit. In a study that he conducted with the Thai Department of Public Welfare (DPW), anthropologist Hans Manndorff maintained the Thai government began a concerted move toward understanding and incorporating the tribes.<sup>93</sup> Yet the first interaction with the ethnic minorities had been tense. The prime minister's Revolutionary Proclamations on December 9, 1958, outlawed the use, growth, and sale of opium. For centuries, hill tribes such as the Hmong, Mien, and Ma Soe, originally from southern China, planted and used the drug for trade, medicinal purposes, and leisure. Some Thai officials thought that banning opium and arresting the tribe members who defied the ban would be bad for public relations.<sup>94</sup> Since most of them practiced slash and burn farming and frequently migrated, the groups would simply move to avoid capture or government interference. Some tribes were unwilling to let go of a traditional practice and a lucrative cash crop.

There was also a compassionate side to the *pho-khun*. To fulfill the dual objective of eradicating opium while building goodwill with the hill tribes, the government enacted several policies, one of them the resettlement of tribes on designated land plots called Tribal Support Self-Sufficient Settlements. In these places, royal officials could keep a closer eye on the tribes, assimilate them into Thai culture, collect taxes, and stop opium sales. As an incentive to get the tribes to come, the government offered land, farming equipment, and seeds for crops to replace opium. In June 1959, the Thai MOI created

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<sup>93</sup> Hans Manndorff, "The Hill Tribe Program of the Public Welfare Department," in *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations*, ed. Peter Kunstadter, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 530.

<sup>94</sup> "Officials Report of Tribal Self-sufficient Settlement in Phetchabun, Phitsanulok, and Loey," January 1963, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) มท 3.1.8/28, TNA.

settlements in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Loey, Mae Hong Son, and Tak provinces with the Department of Public Welfare as the organization overseeing the project.<sup>95</sup> As will be shown later, this policy had mixed results.

Sarit became the first prime minister to initiate massive development projects in the poorer regions. The prime minister, who frequently inspected village life, saw the importance of lifting the standard of living in the rural areas. On one trip to the northeast, Sarit said he wanted to see for himself the conditions of the people. During the visit, he made a promise that he would remember their needs and try to fulfill them.<sup>96</sup> In 1960, Sarit announced the National Economic Development Plan to modernize the country. The purpose of the development plan was to show the people that the government would take care of them. As part of the initiative, the Prime Minister created the Committee for Northeast Development to focus most of the attention on the poor provinces. Decades after his death in 1963, some Thais remembered Sarit as a great and important leader of the nation who was a dedicated leader, a “doer”, and a decisive person.<sup>97</sup>

Sarit utilized a Thai custom of building inter-personal networks in society, which were known as patron-client relationships. In Thai society, this system existed in many forms but was most important from the highest levels of government down to the local provincial administration. Social Scientist William L. Bradley explained the patron-client system as an integral part of many Southeast Asian societies. In this structure, the client,

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<sup>95</sup> Manndorff, “The Hill Tribe Program of the Public Welfare Department,” 539.

<sup>96</sup> Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 131; Sarit Thanarat, “Khamprasi nai Kanpaitruad Ratchakan Phak Isan [Remarks Regarding Inspection Tour to the Isan region],” April 12, 1960, in *Pramuan Sunthoraphot khong Chompon Sarit Thanarat I* (Bangkok: Prime Minister’s Publication, B.E. 2507 [1964]), 158.

<sup>97</sup> Thak Chaloeamtirana, “Distinctions with a Difference: The Despotic Paternalism of Sarit Thanarat and the Demagogic Authoritarianism of Thaksin Shinawatra,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19, No. 1 (2007): 51.

usually someone of a lower economic and social class, provided gifts, military service, or labor in return for protection and the ability to receive benefits from the interpersonal connection. Bradley wrote that the patron has “the obligation to look after the client as long as the bond may last, which may be only as long as it is mutually beneficial to both parties.”<sup>98</sup> Girling observed several types of these associations, such as between the United States and Thailand, and between Thai leaders and their “favored clients.”<sup>99</sup> Other examples included King Bhumibol with other political figures and socialites seeking prestige, and the central government with the provincial leaders. This social organization would become beneficial in terms of building state-society relations and spreading the influence of the United States, the regime, and the monarchy. As the patron, these three groups would facilitate government information and benefits to clients in all levels of society through their own efforts and through the many different agencies created to represent them.

### The Return of the King

Even with the *pho-khun* image, the regime and the United States needed the monarchy to play a stronger role politically and culturally to ensure the longevity and the stability of the military government and Thai nation. After Sarit’s coup in 1957, the State Department exhorted the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok to reach out to the royalists and build a coalition with them that would be favorable to U.S. interests.<sup>100</sup> With encouragement

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<sup>98</sup> William L. Bradley, “The Evolution of Education and Society,” in *Thailand since King Chulalongkorn*, ed. Lauriston Sharp (New York: The Asia Society, 1976) 18; See also Girling, *Thailand, Society and Politics*, 11 and 76.

<sup>99</sup> Girling, *Thailand, Society and Politics*, 92.

<sup>100</sup> “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand,” October 22, 1957, *FRUS*, 1954-1957, Southeast Asia, Vol. XX (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), p. 940; Baker and Pasuk, *A History of Thailand*, 148 and 175; “Dispatch from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of

from royalists and the Sarit regime and support from the United States, the monarchy became the centerpiece of Thai nationalism.<sup>101</sup> Nationalism became part of Thai political rhetoric when King Vajiravudh (1910-1925) was the first to articulate it. He asserted that nationalism was around “the monarchy, nation and religion.”<sup>102</sup> King Vajiravudh argued, “Without any one of the three..., the Kingdom of Siam could not exist.”<sup>103</sup>

Thai intellectuals found ways to portray the monarchy as a modern and even democratic institution. To help justify Sarit’s revolution and his notion of Thai-democracy, Prince Dhani Nivat and other royal supporters asserted that “the monarchy is all the constitution and representation the people require....”<sup>104</sup> In their eyes, the king embodied democracy and was the true representative of the people because of his moral superiority and infallibility. This was hardly democracy according to Western standards, but it was the interpretation of some Thai elites and intellectuals. Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman explained the main tenet of Thai democracy in the *Bangkok Post* by saying, “If we look at our national history, we can see very well that this country works better and prospers under an authority – not a tyrannical authority, but a unifying authority, around which all elements of the nation can rally.”<sup>105</sup> He added, “On the contrary, the dark pages of our history show that whenever such an authority is lacking and divisive elements are

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State,” October 20, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, South and Southeast Asia, Vol. XV (Washington, U.S.: Government Printing Office, 1959), p. 1098. Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 232.

<sup>101</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 140.

<sup>102</sup> Supamit Pitipat, “The Evolution of the Thai Monarchy in the Constitutional Period, 1932-Present,” Master’s Thesis, (American University, 1990), 42-43.

<sup>103</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 36.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 142; see also, Prince Dhani Nivat, “The Old Siamese Conception of the Monarchy,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 36, No. 2 (1947): 95.

<sup>105</sup> Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 100-101.

set into play, the nation has been plunged into one disaster after another.”<sup>106</sup> The Thai monarchy was portrayed as a blend of tradition and modernity by elites and intellectuals.<sup>107</sup>

Though considered modern, the monarchy still had traditional characteristics. King Bhumibol built and promoted his prestige and patronage publicly by participating in religious ceremonies, mimicking the “theater state.” Clifford Geertz argued that Southeast Asian leaders utilized mass rituals to project their authority.<sup>108</sup> Using Buddhism was an effective method of connecting with the Thai people. Buddhism was more than the people’s beliefs and aspirations; it embodied and expressed the meanings and desires of their culture, according to Buddhist scholar Donald K. Swearer.<sup>109</sup> It was part of the fabric of Thai life and politics. Leaders gained public support through showing their patronage of religious rituals, ceremonies, and the Sangha. A king’s adherence to religious rites helped determine his legitimacy. One famous religious event was the *Kathin*, a special ceremony where Buddhists donated new robes to the monks.<sup>110</sup> In November 1959, the government sponsored the first *Kathin* in several years as part of a campaign to revive traditional royal celebrations.<sup>111</sup> The centerpiece of the ceremony, filled with symbolic meaning, was the king’s royal barge procession on the river. The armada of boats showed off the king’s wealth, refinement, and power. As the Thai people

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Hyun, “Indigenizing the Cold War,” 160.

<sup>108</sup> Geertz, *Negara*, 13.

<sup>109</sup> Swearer, *The Buddhist World*, xv.

<sup>110</sup> Riggs, *Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*, 104; Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 164; Baker and Pasuk, *A History of Thailand*, 177-78.

<sup>111</sup> *Sarn Seri*, November 5, 1959, in *Editorial and Columns (Summary)*, USIS, September-December 1959 (Bangkok: USIS, 1959).

saw King Bhumibol performing this religious duty, they were inspired to follow his example by continuing the *Kathin* on a smaller scale at the local level.<sup>112</sup> This ceremony along with other religious rituals and performances helped integrate the people with the government and monarchy by reinforcing traditional cultural practices and Buddhism.<sup>113</sup> From 1959 forward, the state continued to sponsor the *Kathin* and many other royal events, building the Thai theater state. In 1960, the government established four types of royal barge ceremonies in which Thais from different social classes could participate.<sup>114</sup> The USIS would be there to help promote the event in its magazine *Seripharb* and through other forms of mass media.<sup>115</sup>

Religious ceremonies like the *Kathin* became one of many ways the regime and the monarchy attempted to reach Thai people in the countryside on their level. The majority of ethnic minorities living in the northeast, such as the Laotians and Cambodians, were of the Theravada Buddhist sect, as were the majority of Thais. The Thai government and King Bhumibol employed Buddhist ceremonies, rituals, and teachings as a means of building the people's trust in government officials from Bangkok who were trying to sell policies to villagers. Anthropologist Christine Gray argued, "The penetration of [government] capital into the countryside thus took the shape of a royal procession; the king blazed a trail of virtue to rural areas and the laity followed, attracted

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<sup>112</sup> H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Supplementary Notes on Siamese State Ceremonies* (London: B. Quaritch, 1971), 200-201; Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 130-131; Gray, "Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s," Vol. 2, 485.

<sup>113</sup> Riggs, *Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*, 100-104; Chintana Bhandfalk, *The Thai Monarchy* (Bangkok, Thailand: Public Relations Department, March 2000), 59; *Chao Thai*, November 15, 1959, in *Editorial and Columns (Summary)*, USIS, September-December 1959 (Bangkok: USIS, 1959).

<sup>114</sup> Gray, "Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s," Vol. 2, 450.

<sup>115</sup> *Seripharb*, March 2, 1964, USIS, No. 100, p. 22-23, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World" (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

by the power of his virtue.”<sup>116</sup> Development, modernization, and Bangkok’s influence entered the villages with help from the monarchy and the central government. King Bhumibol used his cultural and religious prestige to bridge the gaps of economic and social class and ethnicity. Government agencies and businesses portrayed themselves as representatives of the monarchy by sponsoring events such as the *Kathin*. Gray said, “It [(*Kathin*)] reconstructed the social-celestial hierarchy, boosting the nation’s most aggressive capitalists nearer to the realms of the gods and placing their activities, like those of the monarchy....”<sup>117</sup> Buddhism helped facilitate the government’s agenda.

Some saw Western capitalism as incompatible with Buddhist ideology. Economic ideas of progress and modernization perpetuated a system of corruption within the Thai government, according to one scholar.<sup>118</sup> Politicians, military leaders, and elites used the patron-client system to enrich themselves on foreign economic aid and investments. The regime distributed funds and opportunities for joint ventures. Many in the government sat on company boards to influence decisions that would benefit themselves.<sup>119</sup> Others, like King Bhumibol, saw aspects of capitalism as a catalyst for corruption and greed. The king became disillusioned in certain ways by the immorality of the Western ideology.<sup>120</sup> However, he preferred capitalism over communism.

Sarit saw no contradictions between Buddhism and capitalism. The prime minister and many of his allies viewed economic progress “as a function of religious

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<sup>116</sup> Gray, “Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s,” Vol. 2, 444.

<sup>117</sup> Gray, “Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s,” Vol 2, 446.

<sup>118</sup> Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*, 251.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 274

<sup>120</sup> Gray, “Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s,” Vol. 2, 680.

purity....”<sup>121</sup> This strand of religious thought came from the idea that living a righteous life and performing rituals consistently and correctly would “naturally” bring wealth and prosperity to the believer. Sarit proposed that before the country would prosper, the people needed to understand and live the principles of Buddhism.<sup>122</sup>

Adding to King Bhumibol’s religious image were his humanitarian and development projects. The king established charities to fund public projects throughout the country, such as the building of hospitals and schools.<sup>123</sup> After natural disasters or epidemics, King Bhumibol collected donations for victims of the tragedies. In late 1958, the king amassed 884,000 baht (U.S. \$44,200) to fight a cholera outbreak. In 1962, after a large storm destroyed farmlands in the south, he raised 10.8 million baht.<sup>124</sup> It was unclear how effective the charities were in helping the poor, but they did enhance the king’s popularity. The USIS publicized many of the royal family’s humanitarian projects in the countryside.<sup>125</sup> Just as Thais had donated to religious ceremonies because of their king, one of the king’s biographers, Paul M. Handley, said that as Thais saw King Bhumibol giving money for charity, “the more they were willing to give him, in exchange for a share of his great merit.”<sup>126</sup> He was a strong advocate of development, building economic prosperity, and lifting the standards of living of the rural people. He had plans and designs to bring hydroelectric power through dam building, hoping to expand electricity throughout the country. There were water, seed, and farming projects.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 583.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 216.

<sup>124</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 164.

<sup>125</sup> *Seripharb*, May 1962, USIS, No. 79, p. 15, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World" (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>126</sup> Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 214; Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 131, 149, 164.



Many Thais would call him the “king of development.”<sup>127</sup> The monarchy’s efforts would be critical to the central government’s public relations plans.

The royal family took frequent country tours to be among the people. In March 1958, the royal family went on their first national tour in years.<sup>128</sup> Under the previous government, Phibun limited the monarchy’s public activities. However, with Sarit, the king was free to participate in politics and social and community events. The USIS went along to promote King Bhumibol’s travels in the *Seripharb* magazine.<sup>129</sup> One issue contained photos showing the king dressed in military garb, signifying his relationship with the army and his role as protector of the nation. Other images captured the king visiting sacred Buddhist sites and participating in religious rites and ceremonies. Most interesting were the depictions of ethnic minorities. The royal family tried to meet with the non-Thai populations to make them feel part of the nation. This royal visit would be the first of many tours throughout the countryside. Interactions between King Bhumibol and the people brought a more human side to the government and helped garner public support.<sup>130</sup>

Some Thais began to see the immediate effects of promoting the king and religious ceremonies. In the editorial section of the *Chao Thai* newspaper, a pro-regime and pro-monarchy editor wrote that revival of ancient customs and traditions by Sarit and the monarchy was having “an excellent psychological effect on the people.”<sup>131</sup> He went

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<sup>127</sup> Hyun, “Indigenizing the Cold War,” 162.

<sup>128</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 105, 115; Girling, *Thailand, Society and Politics*, 112.

<sup>129</sup> “The King visits the Northern Kingdom,” *Seripharb*, 1958, USIS, No. 39, p. 1-7, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, “Free World”, Thai, Numbers 1-48, Box 269, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>130</sup> Girling, *Thailand, Society and Politics*, 112.

<sup>131</sup> *Chao Thai*, November 15, 1959, in *Editorial and Columns (Summary)*.

on further to write that the results of these events were bringing a renewal of pride in Thai customs, traditions, and culture.<sup>132</sup> Some Thais began showing their love for the king in unique ways. In the *Seri Thai* newspaper, the editor observed that many Thais decorated their homes with lights on the king's birthday. He said the lights were "sufficient proof of the unchanged love and loyalty of the Thai people for their king."<sup>133</sup> This was only the beginning, as the king's popularity would grow as the government continued promoting royal and religious events.

### The American Image

The regime provided an ideal environment for the USIS to work in Thailand. President Eisenhower established the agency in 1953 to promote U.S. interests by informing and influencing foreign peoples. The USIS began operations in Thailand in the mid-1950s but had a slow start. After coming to power, Sarit closed down all newspapers with leftist tendencies, and all media outlets came under the control of the government.<sup>134</sup> By law, news agencies could only stay in business if they did not offend the monarchy, Thai people, and government, and if they did not promote communism. The only agencies able to operate were pro-government media and, eventually, the USIS. For about a year after he came to power, Sarit was leery of the USIS and threatened to prohibit its work in Thailand. However, by the end of 1958, Sarit had a change of heart, as evidenced by a conversation in which he said that he wanted the USIS to publicize

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> "Displaying Loyalty to the Throne," *Seri Thai*, December 9, 1959, in *Editorial and Columns (Summary)*, USIS, September-December 1959 (Bangkok: USIS, 1959); See also, "Security under the Shadow of the Throne," *Krungthep*, December 11, 1959, in *Editorial and Columns (Summary)*, USIS, September-December 1959 (Bangkok: USIS, 1959).

<sup>134</sup> "Telegram from Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State," July 2, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, XV (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 1040.

more aid programs because not enough Thais knew about them.<sup>135</sup> He thought military aid received too much media attention and that there needed to be more attention to economic, social, and cultural projects. By early 1959, the USIA in Washington reported that Sarit was becoming more cooperative with USIS in publicizing U.S. and Thai projects and events in the country.<sup>136</sup> He was coming around to understanding the benefits of the of USIS media capabilities.

Eventually, the USIS became one of the main public relations organizations for the Thai government. In a 1958 Country Plan, the USIS PAO McCarthy established three primary goals: first, combat communism and show how U.S. foreign policy would benefit Thailand; second, encourage an indigenous interest in American culture; and last, help Sarit's regime to incorporate the periphery into the greater Thai nation.<sup>137</sup> The USIS added another important goal later in 1960 – to support the king, queen, and members of the palace in their efforts to strengthen national unity.<sup>138</sup>

On the ground level, the USIS had station chiefs called PAO. In Thailand, the PAO worked with U.S. ambassadors and Thai officials to coordinate and design public and cultural exchange events to improve U.S. government relations with the people in the host country. According to the 1962 USIS Country Public Affairs Officer Handbook, the

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<sup>135</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation," March 17, 1958, Subject: Thai Attitudes toward the AID programs, General Records of the Department of State (GRDS), RG 59, Misc. Lot Files, Subject Files Relating to Thailand, Box 1, Entry A1 1345, NACP.

<sup>136</sup> "USIA's Status of National Security Programs," June 30, 1959, NSC 5819, Part 6, p. 14-15, GRUSIA, RG 306, IAE General Country, Budget and Administration Files, 1956-1963, Box 14, Entry UD WW239, NACP.

<sup>137</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," July 29, 1958, Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, 8.

<sup>138</sup> "Telegram from USIS in Bangkok to USIA in Washington," March 10, 1960, Subject: Annual USIS Assessment Report, p. 9, Dispatch #69, GRUSIA, RG 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 2, Entry 1047, NACP.

PAO also helped inform other American mission agencies of USIS services and at the same time “insure local understanding of the purpose of America’s military presence in the country.”<sup>139</sup> American officials received help from the Thai staff as the mission hired locals in positions such as translator, writer, programmer, librarian, and other roles facilitating USIS objectives.

To stay congruent with Sarit’s and King Bhumibol’s political and cultural images and messages, the USIS portrayed the United States in its public diplomacy efforts as a friend to the Thai government and people. In a July 1958 USIS Country Plan document, PAO McCarthy said that the agency needed to convince Thais that all U.S. policies and activities were to promote Thai economic, social, and political progress and the nation’s ability to protect itself against aggression.<sup>140</sup> The USIS method of persuading Thais of the U.S. government’s good intentions was first to flood them with information about America through mass media. Thais learned about capitalism, Western education, technology, and American society. Next, the USIS had to show Thais that America wanted to improve their lives by engaging in development and humanitarian projects. The U.S. and Thai governments designed and funded infrastructure and farming improvements in the poorer regions. USIS and Thai media publicized these projects as part of public relations campaigns. Third, U.S. public diplomacy officials tried to show the compatibility of Thai and American culture by coordinating cultural exchanges,

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<sup>139</sup> Country Public Affairs Officer Handbook, USIA, 1962, p. 22 and 24, GRUSIA, RG 306, Board of Info. Office Research Library Program Division Special Collections Br. Office of Historical Librarian, Subject Files, 1953-1999, Box 3, Entry P 195, NACP.

<sup>140</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” July 29, 1958, Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, p. 13.

events, and study abroad programs. A major message from the USIS was that America would not threaten the institutions Thais held dear but strengthen them. Interestingly, few questioned the theoretical incompatibility between Western democracy and Thailand's version of democracy. The USIS saw promoting Sarit and King Bhumibol as the best means of combatting communism, even if it meant that Thailand would not be a democratic nation. It would not be until the mid-1970s when Thais, borrowing ideas from the United States, began to clamor for political change.

The absence of a strong media infrastructure posed a problem for the Thai government as it wanted to project the state's influence into the periphery. For centuries, the rural regions had little interaction with the centers of power because of distance, geography, and language. Boundaries between neighboring kingdoms were never clear. According to historian Thongchai Winichakul, before European colonization, political power was concentrated at the center of the kingdom, and as it diffused outward, a king's ability to enforce his authority decreased.<sup>141</sup> Peoples in the outer regions could be subjects of two or three different principalities simultaneously. Colonization by Europeans changed the geopolitical situation in Southeast Asia by imposing new concepts such as the nation and national boundaries. Even with the establishment of borders and nation-states, rural peoples had little communication and connection with the central government. Some ethnic groups had more loyalty to their region or village than to the idea of a Thai nation. This lack of social and political connection carried the potential of destabilizing the country. Much of the media came in the form of print via

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<sup>141</sup> Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, 79, 81-84.

newspapers, but circulation was limited mostly to the metropolitan areas. Because of this, the Thai government could not project its influence and information beyond central Thailand.

USIS aid and expertise in mass media helped improve Thailand's media capabilities. The media technology consisted of print magazines, pamphlets, radio, and film. Victor Stier was an editor-writer for the USIS from 1955 to 1960. He wrote stories, radio scripts, and press releases as part of the psychological indoctrination program.<sup>142</sup> Mass media had a profound impact on Thai society. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson asserted that print capitalism and its appendages helped unify different peoples of the same country under a set of government ideologies and policies.<sup>143</sup> In certain ways, print capitalism, like newspapers and literature, helped unite the Thai people and build a nation. Though Thailand had some radio and television capabilities, they were still primitive and only those living in the cities and who had money could access the technology. In the mid-1950s, the USIS began building Thailand's radio and television capabilities across the country. During Sarit's tenure, the USIS and Bangkok created two high-power radio transmitters that would reach into the rural areas. American officials gave out free transistor radios to Thai villagers. Domestic Thai radio and television stations were eager to use the materials developed by the USIS.<sup>144</sup> Most villages had at least one radio, while some did not have a television. More televisions could be found in

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<sup>142</sup> Oral History, Victor Stier Interview, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <https://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 7/11/18].

<sup>143</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 41-42.

<sup>144</sup> "Inspection Report, USIS Thailand," October 10, 1959, p. 2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Inspection Staff, Inspection Reports and Related Records, 1954-62, Sudan thru UK, Box #9, Entry 1047, NACP.

the bigger cities, with about two-thirds of the upper-class owning one.<sup>145</sup> However, after 1957 the USIS reported that the number of TV receivers had doubled and would only grow faster.<sup>146</sup> The media displayed the many U.S.-Thai programs and policies in the country. Thais living in the countryside received free copies of *Seripharb* or the *Free World*, a monthly periodical, while in cities the publication sold on newsstands. The USIS established libraries and information centers filled with books about the United States and other Western countries. New media helped transcend old barriers of geography and distance. All Thais could experience a connection with the royal family, state government, and peoples throughout Thailand. All had the opportunity to learn what it meant to be a Thai citizen.

On a preliminary survey trip to Utradit Province in northern Thailand, USIS and U.S. embassy officials found the communications infrastructure to be very poor. The Thai government and the USIS had little contact with villagers. More importantly, many people spoke Laotian or other minority languages and were economically oriented towards Laos.<sup>147</sup> From its headquarters in Bangkok, the USIS began setting up branches and libraries throughout the country, mostly in the sensitive regions of the northeast, north, and south. Stier said that the USIS, State Department, and the Thai military used

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<sup>145</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok and USIA Washington to Washington," December 21, 1959, Subject: USIS-USOM Communication Evaluation Survey, p. 1, Dispatch # 44, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1953-1986, Box 67, Entry 1007, NACP.

<sup>146</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," July 29, 1960, Subject: Country Plan for Thailand, p. 19, Dispatch # 12, GRUSIA, RG 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 2, Entry 1047, NACP.

<sup>147</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," August 10, 1962, Subject: Youth Activity Programs, p. 2-7, Dispatch #8, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Cultural Operations Division, Far Eastern Libraries and Centers Branch: Country Files, 1947-1965, Box 87, Entry P 51, NACP.

the information materials in their operations, usually directed towards village leaders.<sup>148</sup>

Mass media communication enabled the people in the cities and countryside to become more informed about the military regime, the monarchy, and U.S. policies.<sup>149</sup>

The USIS donated transistor radios and televisions to overcome the problems of geography and illiteracy among rural peoples. The Voice of America (VOA) began broadcasting in Thailand in 1942, airing programs about the United States and the Thai government. Sarit, with U.S. aid, installed radio and television stations all around the country starting in 1962. Films publicized the king's charities and highlighted his role as caretaker of the people.<sup>150</sup> They also contained information about Western culture and technology. USIS and Thai officials translated popular American movies and showed them in Thai theaters in many metropolitan areas. Movies and magazines tried to attract the Thai youth and the middle to upper classes to American culture and consumer styles.<sup>151</sup> The USIS sponsored trade fairs and exhibits to show off American technology and advances in science.

The USIS established a strong relationship with the Thai media, according to the new PAO J. Howard Garnish, who replaced McCarthy in the fall of 1958. Garnish had a background in media as a reporter in Rochester, NY, after which he held a position at the

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<sup>148</sup> Stier Interview.

<sup>149</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Review of United States Information Agency Operations, Hearings before the Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Foreign Operations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives*, September 22 – October 6, 1958, 85th Congress, Second Session (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Press, 1959), p. 40 and 48; *USIS Mobile Information Team I Trip 3: a report by the United States Information Service*, May 21 to June 4, 1962 (Bangkok: U.S. Government Press, 1962), 1; "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, July 29, 1958, p. 13, 16.

<sup>150</sup> "Telegram from USIS in Bangkok to USIA in Washington," March 10, 1960, Subject: Annual USIS Assessment Report, p. 9.

<sup>151</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," July 29, 1958, Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, p. 33.



military desk of the Office of War Information's Basic News Unit during World War II.<sup>152</sup> When taking over in Bangkok, it seemed Garnish used his previous media experiences to his advantage. In a 1960 USIS assessment report of the 1959 fiscal year, Garnish said that Thai awareness of U.S. and Thai projects increased among elites, policymakers, and the general population in Bangkok because of the USIS "close personal contacts" with the press.<sup>153</sup> USIS Press Officers wrote most of the press releases coming from the American embassy. A 1959 USIS Inspection Report said that 87 percent of Thai newspaper editors used USIS news stories and were "convinced of their reliability."<sup>154</sup> USIS officials could enact mass media more easily when they worked with locals to promote its messages and government policies.

In November 1962, the USIS and the Thai government received positive reports regarding media outlets such the *Seripharb* magazine and the VOA radio broadcasts. In one study of 600 people from Bangkok and the northeast, the USIS interviewed monks, teachers, and private citizens about their feelings towards *Seripharb*. The most interesting finding concerned credibility. Most respondents said they believed and could rely on what they read.<sup>155</sup> Many retained their copies for future reference and sharing. A group of media and communication specialists responded similarly, but about the VOA. A

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<sup>152</sup> Oral History, Howard Garnish Interview, October 27, 1989, p. 1-2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Transcripts of Oral History Project Interviews, Box 8, Entry A1 1073, NACP.

<sup>153</sup> "Telegram from USIS in Bangkok to USIA in Washington," March 10, 1960, Subject: Annual USIS Assessment Report, p. 14-15, 19.

<sup>154</sup> "Inspection Report, USIS Thailand," October 10, 1959, p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> "Thailand - Summary Report, Survey of Readers of *Seripharb*," November 1, 1962, p. 3-4, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Reference/Agency Library, USIA, International Survey Research Reports, 1953-1964, Box 26, Entry P 78, NACP; "Readership *Seripharb*," June-August 1962, E, Coordination Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Bangkok, Thailand, Code Book, Thailand, November 1959, Low Price Book Program, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Country Project Files, 1951-1964, Thailand, 1959 to Thailand, 1963, Box 97, Entry A1 1015, NACP.

majority said that VOA broadcasts had a better reputation than communist stations among listeners.<sup>156</sup> These specialists thought the radio programs were more interesting and credible because they quoted sources, whereas communist stations did not. The VOA created documentaries and had interviews with Buddhist monks, government leaders, and academics speaking about the dangers of communism. The shows portrayed these three groups of people as experts. There were also testimonials from those who had bad experiences with communists. USIS media activities had borne some fruit.

USIS cultural exchange program was another facet of American public diplomacy. Part of the mission's Country Plan focused on building among Thais an interest in and understanding of American culture and politics.<sup>157</sup> USIS proposed to target the universities and the youth through promoting Western democracy and humanism.<sup>158</sup> One project established USIS information centers around Thailand to house books about America. University libraries and specific faculty were to receive American-published books to augment their classes. The USIS created an English teaching program through the Bi-National Center that targeted educated Thais. The Center was a USIS facility in Bangkok that put on cultural events and exhibits, had guest lectures, and taught English. It was a symbol of America's efforts to disseminate its ideals. USIA director George V. Allen saw a big demand for language instruction around the world, especially during his

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<sup>156</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," November 5, 1962, Subject: Research Report, Comparison and Evaluation of Thai Language Broadcasts of the VOA, Radio Peking, and Radio Hanoi, p. 1-2, Dispatch # 30, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports 1953-1986, Box 68, Entry A1 1007, NACP; See also, "Telegram from USIS in Bangkok to USIA in Washington," March 10, 1960, Subject: Annual USIS Assessment Report, p. 13.

<sup>157</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," July 29, 1958, Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, p. 8.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

time as Ambassador of Greece. USIA Washington instructed its USIS missions to provide seminars to train local English language teachers. Under Sarit, major Thai universities such as Chulalongkorn and Thammasat began teaching English.

To link Thai and American political history together, the USIS held a ceremony that celebrated Abraham Lincoln's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1959. USIA Director George Allen wanted to promote Lincoln's accomplishments around the globe.<sup>159</sup> USIS officials in Thailand thought that an event would be a great opportunity to show how both countries had much in common politically and socially.<sup>160</sup> According to *Seripharb*, the USIS held the commemoration in Bangkok, with King Bhumibol and U.S. Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson presiding and approximately 700 other people in attendance. The event saw the unveiling of a statue of Lincoln. Garnish gave the main remarks and discussed the great achievements of both Lincoln and Thai King Mongkut.<sup>161</sup> Mongkut was a contemporary of Lincoln. Thais viewed Mongkut, who oversaw Thailand's early modernization efforts, as one of the country's most revered kings. Like Lincoln, King Mongkut initiated many social reforms that culminated after his death with the abolition of slavery in Thailand. In this setting, both America and Thailand seemed like progressive nations.

The USIS also helped Sarit's regime promote Thai culture through publicizing religious ceremonies and literature. In a forty-five-page memo to the USIA in Washington, the USIS discussed the effectiveness of some of its projects. Garnish saw

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<sup>159</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 171-172.

<sup>160</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," July 29, 1958, Subject: Revision of USIS Country Plan for Thailand, p. 34.

<sup>161</sup> "Celebrating 150 years of Lincoln in Bangkok," *Seripharb*, 1958, USIS, No. 44, p. 35-36, GRUSIA, RG. 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World," Thai, Numbers 1-48, Box 269, Entry 1053, NACP.

one program as being very fruitful, the promotion of Thai Buddhism. The USIS put together and distributed a book titled *The Life of the Buddha*. Buddhist monks and other Thai leaders praised the book and requested more copies than the 50,000 originally published. Thailand's Minister of Education said the USIS "goodwill towards Buddhism will be appreciated by all clergy and laymen."<sup>162</sup>

In addition to the publication, the USIS sponsored lectures by Buddhist monks and scholars. An important theme of most of the talks was how communism was a threat to Buddhism both philosophically and politically. One prestigious monk viewed communism as a psychological issue.<sup>163</sup> He argued that proponents of it were in opposition to *dhamma*, the virtuous living according to Buddhist teachings. More importantly, communists did not respect the Thai monarchy and were thus anti-Buddhist and anti-Thai. The USIS made copies of the lectures and sent them to 22,000 temples in the country. Garnish was happy to report that the Ecclesiastical Council was thankful for the assistance of the USIS in helping build Buddhism. This program of promoting Thai culture was important to building relations between the United States and Thailand. The USIS would receive the recognition for promoting Thai culture and Buddhism. More importantly, it was a way of mitigating the notion propagated by the CPT that the United States had come to Thailand as cultural imperialists.

Student exchanges facilitated understanding between both nations' cultures. In *Total Cold War*, historian Kenneth A. Osgood discussed how personal interactions

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<sup>162</sup> "Telegram USIS Bangkok to USIS Washington," November 12, 1958, Subject: Evidence of Effectiveness, Operations Plan for Thailand, p. 5, Dispatch # 31, GRUSIA, RG 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Entry 1047, Box 2 NACP.

<sup>163</sup> Gray, "Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s," Vol. 2, 514.

between individuals, both leaders and private citizens, were important to Eisenhower's psychological strategy during the Cold War.<sup>164</sup> In 1958, Sarit established the General Education Development Program to train a population that could modernize Thailand. It was also a means of indoctrination.<sup>165</sup> Part of the initiative was for the Thai government to utilize the U.S. Fulbright Exchange program. From 1958 to 1963, around 5,500 Thai students traveled abroad for training in civil service and bureaucratic protocol. The USIS helped train Thai government officials for the newly established Thai School of Public Relations and Communications.<sup>166</sup> In 1961, PAO Garnish reported that the exchange program "continues to be the most effective means of" training future influential Thais.<sup>167</sup> He further explained that many of the students returned to take positions "of influence and prestige" in the Cabinet, Privy Council (King Bhumibol's advisory committee), and Supreme Court, and as editors, writers, and educators.<sup>168</sup> Other students took jobs as technocrats and military officers.<sup>169</sup> Two recipients of the Fulbright program went on to write editorials in two Thai newspapers condemning international communism. The United States was trying to mold Thailand's government bureaucracies, institutions, and education systems after its own. However, when it came to academics, U.S. educators could only change as much as the RTG would let them.

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<sup>164</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 193, 209.

<sup>165</sup> Fred von der Mehden, "The Military and Development in Thailand," *Journal of Comparative Administration* Vol. 2 (Nov. 1970): 326.

<sup>166</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," November 7, 1961, Subject: USIS Country Plan, p. 7, Dispatch # 12, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Cultural Operations Division, Far Eastern Libraries and Centers Branch: Country Files, 1947-1965, Box 87, Entry P 51, NACP.

<sup>167</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," February 14, 1961, Subject: Country Assessment Report, p. 12, Dispatch # 42, GRUSIA, RG 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 2, Entry 1047, NACP.

<sup>168</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 193, 209.

<sup>169</sup> Darling, "American Policy in Thailand," 99-100.

The USIS offered training programs and Foreign Leader Grants for individuals to study in America and attend leadership seminars throughout Thailand. One example was Supat Wongwatana, the governor of Sakol Nakorn, an area in the northeast that was experiencing communist activity in 1962. Garnish said that the Thai government “sees great potential in him,” and his “continued support of US program activities in his area could be insured” because of the award.<sup>170</sup> Because of their position in village society, local leaders were crucial for USIS-Thai public diplomacy programs. They would become important contacts at the local level to help propagate government messages and incorporate the borderlands into Bangkok.

Arguably, one of the most important exchanges took place in June 1960 when Eisenhower invited King Bhumibol to tour the United States. During their travels, King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit received the royal treatment. The couple’s first stop was in New York City where, according to the *New York Times*, approximately 750,000 people attended a twenty-minute parade to welcome them.<sup>171</sup> Afterwards King Bhumibol participated in a concert performance with jazz artist Benny Goodman. The family then made a stop in Disneyland. According to the *Washington Post*, King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit captured the hearts of Americans.<sup>172</sup> People enjoyed their charm and glamour. Their final stop was in Washington, where the king addressed Congress and had

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<sup>170</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department in Washington,” April 4, 1962, Subject: Educational and Cultural Exchanges, Mr. Supat, p. 1, Dispatch # 421, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/English Teaching Division, Country Files, 1955-1965, Lebanon - E.T. thru Chile E.T., Box 8, Entry P 79, NACP.

<sup>171</sup> Greg MacGregor, “Thai Rulers Honored in Parade: King and Queen Win Applause of Crowd along Broadway,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1960, p. 1.

<sup>172</sup> “Thailand’s King and Queen Go Western-Style in Washington,” *The Washington Post*, July 29, 1960, p. D1; Winzola McLendon, Queen Goes from Tuesday to Saturday in a Day: ‘Do Job,’ King Tells Press,” *The Washington Post*, July 29, 1960, p. D1.

a meeting with President Eisenhower to discuss how to strengthen relations, such as increasing economic and military aid and how to fight communism. This trip sent an important message to Americans and Thais that Thailand was critical to America's larger Southeast Asian policy.

Back in Thailand, the results of the king and queen's tour were significant. During the planning process, PAO Garnish received instruction from the U.S. Ambassador to Thailand to coordinate efforts to publicize the visit with Thai officials. In the July 1960 Country Plan, Garnish wanted to use the king and queen's visit to the United States in order to "advance Thai understanding" of American culture and its desire to fight communism.<sup>173</sup> More importantly, he wanted Thais to see how U.S.-Thai relations were helping Thailand.<sup>174</sup> *Seripharb* devoted a special issue with pictures and stories about United States geography, the royal couple's experiences in America, and maps tracing their travels.<sup>175</sup> USIS and Thai officials translated and distributed Eisenhower and King Bhumibol's joint communiqué throughout the country. A 30-minute colored film titled "A Sentimental Journey" brought the trip to life for Thais. According to a 1961 Country Assessment Report, Garnish said the Thai people "were beginning to feel more warmth and kinship for their King's friends across the sea."<sup>176</sup> He finished by saying this sentiment was "probably the most important consequence of the tour."<sup>177</sup> The support of

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<sup>173</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," Country Plan for Thailand, July 29, 1960, p. 6.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>175</sup> "Special Issue of Thai Free World, Devoted to the United States, for Distribution in Time with the Projected Visit of the Thai Royal Couple to the U.S," *Seripharb*, USIS, 1960, No. 57, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World", Thai, Numbers 49-98, Box. 270, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>176</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," February 14, 1961, Subject: Country Assessment Report, p. 4.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

Thailand's most revered leader and cultural and religious symbol was a strong endorsement of close U.S.-Thai relations.

Another exchange was the sister city affiliation program between Washington and Bangkok. The idea for this association began on December 10, 1960, when the Mayor of Bangkok, Chamnan Yorapurna, sent a letter to Mark Bortman, the Chairman of the Civic Committee of the People-to-People Program, where he expressed interest in joining a Town Affiliation Program with Washington, D.C. Almost two years later, the committee approved the request and then scheduled December 5-8, 1962, as a date for a salute, a special event recognizing the friendship between the two cities. The D.C. committee would fly the Thai flag at the Federal Triangle in Washington in honor of King Bhumibol's birthday. The *Bangkok World* was excited about the program and said it would lead to the "exchange of ideas between residents of the two cities."<sup>178</sup>

Garnish reported to USIA Washington that the people of Bangkok received the news of the affiliation happily and that there was much interest in the city. According to USIS Cultural Public Affairs Officer, Paul P. Blackburn, the relationship between Washington and Bangkok was one of two hundred twenty-five "liaison[s] which exist[ed] between American and foreign cities under the 'City Affiliation Program of the Civic Committee of the People-to-People Program."<sup>179</sup> CPAO Blackburn wrote an essay titled "The Washington-Bangkok Sister City Affiliation" that discussed the early years of the relationship between the two cities. He argued that this was "one of the most fruitful" of

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<sup>178</sup> "This Wonderful World," *Bangkok World*, March 6, 1962, p. 1, Newspaper Summary, GRUSIA, RG 306, Records of the USIA, Subject Files 1953-1967, Box 39, Entry A1 56, NACP.

<sup>179</sup> "The Washington-Bangkok Sister City Affiliation," Paul P. Blackburn, 1962, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files 1953-1967, Box 39, Entry A1 56, NACP.



the People-to-People programs, as it enabled Americans to build a strong rapport with the Thai government and its people. However, there were still some weaknesses in the affiliation. As Blackburn referenced, some Washington D.C. commissioners were apathetic about furthering the relationship.

Nevertheless, the USIS and the U.S. embassy in Bangkok provided information materials about both cities for the project. In preparation for the December salute, U.S. Ambassador Young said the embassy and the USIS would give massive media coverage, create photo exhibits, and show films about Washington, D.C.<sup>180</sup> The USIS would print and distribute pamphlets on other American cities and pictures of President Kennedy. On July 3–5, 1963, Bangkok returned the salute to Washington, D.C. The Thai municipality enlisted the help of the USIS for the same preparation of public information materials and exhibits. Americans and Thais were slowly becoming familiar with each other.

The good publicity generated by Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the USIS still did not stop some anti-American sentiments from developing, especially when it came to Washington's relations with Cambodia. For centuries, Thais and Cambodians warred against each other, creating a history of hatred between the two peoples. By the 1960s, feelings had changed very little. The issue that troubled Thais was that the United States sent more economic and military aid to the Cambodian government than to Thailand, even when the former had declared neutrality in the 1950s. Garnish observed that the Thai government and many of its citizens were disappointed and offended.<sup>181</sup> The feeling

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<sup>180</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy-USIS to USIA Washington," June 6, 1963, p. 1-2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files 1953-1967, Box 39, Entry A1 56, NACP.

<sup>181</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," Country Plan for Thailand, July 29, 1960, p. 1.

was that the United States seemed to care little that Bangkok was anti-communist, since it treated neutralists better than its Western allies.<sup>182</sup> The only immediate answer to the Thai government and public from Washington was continued aid and verbal assurance that Thailand was important.

Some Thais were also upset with some U.S. trade policies. Thailand's biggest export at the time, rice, was slowly declining. At about the same time, the United States began sending rice to neutral countries such as India and Indonesia as a means of persuading them to support Washington's foreign policy.<sup>183</sup> This program was the PL 480 or "Food for Peace." President Eisenhower established it in 1954 for agricultural interests. Thailand's foreign minister and minister for economic affairs protested vehemently and threatened to resign from office. Thai officials were angry that America's large donations of rice would further damage Thai rice exports by taking over markets.

Even with the Cambodian and rice problems, some Thais viewed Americans positively. In the summer of 1960, the USIS surveyed 500 Thais in Bangkok on how they felt about the increasing presence of Americans in the country. Researchers found that overall, the Thais were aware of the large number of Americans in Thailand, and many did not see it as scary.<sup>184</sup> One hundred ninety-two felt it was a good idea to have U.S.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> "Milestones: 1961-1968, USAID and PL 480, 1961-1969," Department of State Office of the Historian Website, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/pl-480>, [accessed 2 February 2016].

<sup>184</sup> Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," August 28, 1960, Subject: Thai Reaction to the American Presence, p. 2, Dispatch 75, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports 1953-1986, Box 67, Entry A1 1007, NACP.

citizens in the country.<sup>185</sup> When asked why they saw it as positive, one hundred fifty-two said the Americans were bringing economic development. What the interviewees said they least liked about Americans was their bad behavior, which stemmed from prostitution and drunkenness. These two problems were then small but would become serious during the Vietnam War.

#### The Laotian Crisis and Accelerated Public Diplomacy into the Jungle

In August 1960, shortly after King Bhumibol's visit to America, fighting broke out again in Laos that caused Thailand much anxiety about its safety. Historically, the Lao kingdoms paid tribute to the Siamese kings, and now because of proximity, Thailand had a strategic interest in keeping Laos from turning communist. The year before, editorials from several major Thai newspapers linked the Laotian situation to Thailand's security.<sup>186</sup> Before leaving office, Eisenhower warned Kennedy that if Laos fell to communism then a domino effect would ensue in Southeast Asia.<sup>187</sup> Kennedy was unwilling to commit U.S. ground troops to Laos and other areas of Southeast Asia. His approach was to use special forces and advisers to train local militaries to fight communists on their own. Kennedy sought for a neutral Laos through peaceful negotiations.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," April 28, 1960, Subject: Thai Reaction to the American Presence, p. 8.

<sup>186</sup> *Sarn Seri*, September 6, 1959 and *Kiattisak*, September 9, 1959 and *Prachatiptatai*, October 30, 1959, all in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)* USIS, September-December 1959 (Bangkok: USIS, 1959), p. 2-3.

<sup>187</sup> William J. Rust, *Before the Quagmire: American Intervention in Laos, 1954-1961* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 251-252.

<sup>188</sup> Seth Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); Ingo Trauschweizer, *The Cold War: Building Deterrence for Limited War* (Lawrence, KS.: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 114, 174; Surachart, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule*, 93-96; Rust, *Before the Quagmire*, 259-262; Girling, *Thailand, Society, and Politics*, 132; Thomas Lobe and David Morell, *United States National Security and AID to the Thailand Police* (Denver: University of Denver, 1977), 33, 49.

In 1961, the conflict in Laos grew more intense as Laotian and Vietnamese communists routed Laotian right-wing forces and threatened to take the capital city, Vientiane. Kennedy assured the Thai government that the United States would protect the country if communist forces attacked, but Sarit wanted a stronger commitment.<sup>189</sup> Some Thai leaders began to express doubts about America's promises. The USIS began reporting a small trend towards neutralism in the government.<sup>190</sup> Others U.S. officials, like Ambassador Young, noticed that important Thai decision-makers were calling the United States “untrustworthy” and “a bad ally.”<sup>191</sup> In response, President Kennedy gave Young the specific objective of getting “Thailand as strongly prepared for the future as possible....”<sup>192</sup> He went on to tell the ambassador that Thailand was “our anchor in the whole area,” and the critical piece. If Thailand fell, then Indonesia and the Philippines would as well, South Vietnam was “the pawn in the anchor.”<sup>193</sup> The ambassador would try to create a unified mission where all agencies and departments could coordinate their efforts and resources, which included the USIS. At about the same time, the CPT announced its armed insurrection and began small attacks against Thai government installations in the countryside.<sup>194</sup> Finally, to send a warning message to Laotian and Vietnamese communist forces and one of reassurance to the Thais, Kennedy dispatched

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<sup>189</sup> *Sayam Rath*, September 23, 1960, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS, September-December 1959 (Bangkok: USIS, 1959), 2-3; Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 162.

<sup>190</sup> “Recent Trend Toward Neutralism in Thailand,” September 27, 1961, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Analysis, USIA Office of Research and Analysis, Research Notes, 1958-1962, Box 4, Entry A1 1029, NACP.

<sup>191</sup> Oral History, Kenneth T. Young Interview, February 25, 1969, p. 21, John F. Kennedy Oral History Collection, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-KTY-01.aspx>, [accessed 3/16/2017].

<sup>192</sup> Young Interview, February 25, 1969, p. 28.

<sup>193</sup> Young Interview, April 28, 1969, p. 127.

<sup>194</sup> Baker and Pasuk, *A History of Thailand*, 184; Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 63.

the first of several Marine units to Thailand and initiated an air defense plan with B-26 planes in 1962.<sup>195</sup>

The Laotian crisis caused the USIS to grow concerned over the future of Thailand's foreign policy. In the 1961 Country Plan, Garnish reported that Sarit was flirting with the idea of opening stronger relations with the Soviet Union. The lack of U.S. military action in Laos made Bangkok doubt its relationship with Washington. Garnish said he had seen the prime minister frequenting Soviet cultural events. Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khomen warned the USIS in a speech to the American Association in Bangkok "that Thailand must consider an adjustment of its one-sided policy" towards the United States.<sup>196</sup> Available evidence does not show whether the Thai government was actually going to strengthen ties with the Soviets, but the USIS wanted to shore up Thailand's confidence in the United States. Even with the Soviet Union's public relations apparatus working in Thailand, Garnish believed there was still hope for the U.S. image, as Washington and the USIS were in good standing with King Bhumibol.<sup>197</sup> USIS objectives for 1961 consisted of obtaining the support of Thai opinion for U.S. foreign policy, convincing Thais they could depend on the United States, advancing Thailand's awareness that U.S. cooperation was strengthening Thailand's economy and military, promoting Thai national unity, developing understanding of the communist threat, and building Thai appreciation for American culture.

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<sup>195</sup> "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand," March 21, 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, XXIII (Washington, D.C.: Government Publication Office, 1994), p. 397-398; Randolph, *The United States and Thailand*, 39.

<sup>196</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," November 7, 1961, Subject: USIS Country Plan, p. 1.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The USIS developed contact with powerful individuals in politics, the military, and society to help fulfill some of the 1961 Country Plan objectives. One of Garnish's projects was "to convince opinion leaders that American foreign policy is consistent with Thailand's independence and programs."<sup>198</sup> This target group was what the PAO identified as opinion-makers/leaders. These would include government officials, professors, college students, royalty, the press, and the military. Garnish wanted to ensure that these individuals received steady flows of material explaining overall U.S. foreign policy. More than that, USIS officials would make contact with them through personal correspondence, attendance at dinners, parties, and state and cultural events, and one-on-one meetings. Darling discussed the importance of face-to-face interactions on forging rapport and transmitting and receiving information. In his article about the role of the American diplomatic mission in Thailand, Darling said American and Thai officials exchanged intelligence and news about policies and secret actions most effectively through "personal contacts on an informal basis."<sup>199</sup> USIS officials had the dual charge of not only orchestrating public diplomacy but also cultivating personal relationships, showing that information programs were to be coupled with human interactions.

As the Laotian conflict heated up and with fear of it expanding into rural parts of Thailand, public diplomacy officials wanted to understand the media habits and political culture of the people in areas susceptible to communist influences so they could tailor their public media programs. Most villagers, according to one USIS-sponsored research

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>199</sup> Frank C. Darling, "Political Functions of the United States Embassy in Thailand," *Asian Survey* Vol. 18, No. 11 (November 1978): 1196.

study by anthropologist William Klausner, were “politically unconscious.”<sup>200</sup> This lack of political awareness had the potential to lead many rural Thais to join the communist movement. In October 1960, USIS and Thai government personnel conducted a pilot village study in northeast Thailand at the Yang Tern village, which had seventy-two houses. The purpose was “to provide more quantitative information on village communication habits with particular attention to [what the USIS called] wall newspaper, leadership, and knowledge of foreign aid.”<sup>201</sup> Researchers found that the local government or the village headman (*phu yai ban*) was the most important and reliable source of news, more than mass media. The USIS considered them “opinion molders” because of their position in society.<sup>202</sup> Interestingly, the next best way for villagers to receive information was by a wall newspaper.<sup>203</sup> The wall was in the center of the village and was where leaders posted newspapers, pamphlets, and announcements. Illiteracy was about 50 percent, but in this village, 67 percent could read the newspapers. Only 17 percent felt the radio was most reliable. Knowledge of American aid to Thailand was high, at about 54 percent.<sup>204</sup>

However, in other areas of the northeast, radio ranked higher as one of the best ways to communicate information to the people. In February 1961, the USIS surveyed

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<sup>200</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” September 23, 1959, Subject: Rural Thailand and USIS Communications Media, Dispatch # 27, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1953-1986, Box 67, Entry 1007, NACP.

<sup>201</sup> “A Pilot Village Study in Northeast Thailand,” October 1960, USIS, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Reference/Agency Library, International Survey Research Reports, 1953-1964, Box 26, Entry P 78, NACP.

<sup>202</sup> *Communication Fact Book Thailand*, January 8, 1963, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Exhibits Division, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, 1955-1967, Taiwan: Paintings by Ran In-Tang thru Thailand, Box 36, Entry A1 1039, NACP.

<sup>203</sup> “A Pilot Village Study in Northeast Thailand,” 3.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Thais in the northeast about their general attitudes.<sup>205</sup> According to the findings, radio listenership was heavy, at least four out of five people. Many Thai villages throughout the country had at least one radio that the USIS had freely provided. If there were few radios, people gathered at the home of someone who had one to hear the news and music. The radio was highly sought after and eventually became a sign of status and wealth.<sup>206</sup>

With better knowledge of how to reach the rural people, USIS and Thai officials needed to figure out the best messages, images, and activities for their information programs. In late 1960, the USIS contracted anthropologist Robert W. Kickert to conduct a study on values, media habits, and some central attitudes of rural Thailand. Kickert's research was informative on what Thai villagers valued when it came to public relations. The anthropologist wrote that information programs of the USIS and the Thai government did not destroy Thai values "but rather, support[ed] them."<sup>207</sup> What rural Thais valued most when it came to information programs was that they were pertinent to their local culture. Kickert said the best way to reach villagers was to focus on village life, such as Buddhism, rice farming, fishing, animal husbandry, Mohlam music, and the monarchy.<sup>208</sup> Thais also valued prestige based on wealth from acquiring material goods and political power. As a result, Kickert asserted that most Thais saw the United States as

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<sup>205</sup> "General Attitudes (NE Thailand), Implication for an Information Program in the Northeast," February 1961, p. 1-2, GRUSIA, RG. 306, Office of Research, Country Project Files, 1951-1964, Thailand, 1959 to Thailand, 1963, Box 97, Entry A1 1015, NACP.

<sup>206</sup> "Memorandum on Values, Media Habits and Some Central Attitudes of Rural Thailand as they Apply to USIS Programs," by Robert W. Kickert, Report #5, December 1960, p. 5, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports 1953-1986, Box 67, Entry A1 1007, NACP.

<sup>207</sup> "Memorandum on Values, Media Habits and Some Central Attitudes of Rural Thailand as they Apply to USIS Programs," by Robert W. Kickert, Report #5, December 1960, p. 1.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.



the most prestigious nation in the world and would “prefer to associate themselves with” it.<sup>209</sup> Their cultures were different, but some Thais seemed to admire Americans.

Another anthropologist, Klausner, had a more negative view of the USIS work in the countryside. Klausner had been living in Ubon with his Thai wife doing research. Ford shared that the anthropologist assumed that the USIS was involved in intelligence gathering rather than cultural exchange. Klausner thought the U.S. public diplomacy officials had a “narrow view” of anti-communism. He disliked their propaganda films. More importantly, the Americans did not understand rural conditions. Many of the USIS programs did not meet the people’s needs.<sup>210</sup> Klausner said Thai villagers had little in common with Americans, such as the “envy of riches.”<sup>211</sup> His research on USIS communication media in 1959 said that personal contacts were the best mode of disseminating information. The mission was wasting some of its time using mass media technology. It seemed that not all agreed on how much the USIS was contributing to stymieing communism and to helping both governments build relations with rural Thais. It was possible that Kickert’s reports were overly positive to please his employers.

Some Thais saw some cultural and social incompatibilities between the two nations. The USIS wrote a research paper on the views of teachers, where they shared that “there is little on the American material scene with which [Thais] can identify.”<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>210</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*, 108-109.

<sup>211</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” September 23, 1959, Subject: Rural Thailand and USIS Communications Media, p. 4, Dispatch # 27, GRUSIA, RG 306 Office of Research, Research Reports, 1953-1986, Box 67, Entry 1007, NACP.

<sup>212</sup> “Research Paper: Some comments related to USIS Goals with Special Reference to the Teacher in the Community,” February 1961, p. 2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1953-1986, Box 67, Entry 1007, NACP.

American culture was distant, hard to understand, and expensive. The teachers considered most Thais as not big spenders. What they wanted the USIS to focus more of its attention on were non-material values like resourcefulness, health, and education. Despite the differences in opinion about social and cultural expectations, the USIS and the Thai government tried to tailor messages and programs with both studies in mind.

Public diplomacy officials continued to contrast the Buddhist beliefs of the rural peoples with the foreign concept of communism. As was said previously, the USIS sponsored lectures with Thai monks and academics. Several lecturers attacked communism and provided evidence that it was a threat to the religious institution.<sup>213</sup> In the February 1961 Country Assessment Report, Garnish reaffirmed the post's desire to continue using religion as a public relations tool. The USIS showed interest in the Buddhist tradition of Thailand and pointed out its incompatibility with communist ideology.<sup>214</sup> In one *Seripharb* article titled "War against Religion," Thai writers criticized the communist Chinese government for being anti-religious.<sup>215</sup> If communists took over, they would persecute religious leaders and force them to denounce their faith publicly. The USIS distributed cartoon drawings emphasizing the differences between living under communism and Buddhism. They showed images of communists making Thais destroy temples and Buddhist images. There were numerous radio programs emphasizing the

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<sup>213</sup> "Telegram USIS Bangkok to USIS Washington," November 12, 1958, Subject: Evidence of Effectiveness, Operations Plan for Thailand, p. 6.

<sup>214</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," February 14, 1961, Subject: Country Assessment Report, p. 16-17; see also, "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," Country Plan for Thailand, July 29, 1960, p. 16.

<sup>215</sup> "War against Religion," *Seripharb*, 1960, USIS, No. 52, p. 8-9, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World", Thai, Numbers 49-98, RG 306, Box. 270, Entry 1053, NACP; See also "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," February 14, 1961, Subject: Country Assessment Report, p. 16.

dangers of the leftist ideology. In some villages, local leaders forbade listening to communist radio stations. According to one study, many villagers obeyed their local leaders, and some expressed a dislike for Radio Hanoi and Radio Beijing.<sup>216</sup> The new state religion would be communism if Thais failed to stop it.

Garnish provided Sarit, on request, with anti-communist materials sent from the Hong Kong field office. The literature contained information about the atrocities committed by Mao Zedong's regime. Garnish reported that the materials were "welcomed and there were letters asking for more." Sarit used the USIS materials to indoctrinate the armed forces with courses on psychological warfare and anti-communism.<sup>217</sup>

King Bhumibol joined the attack against communism by encouraging the people to unite against threats to the nation. In a royal speech on New Year's Day, 1961, the king told the people to "cooperate with the government" because by doing so "then would the nation profit."<sup>218</sup> Part of cooperating with the government was to beware of subversive propaganda and communism. He said that those who sought to sow instability were threatening the country from both inside and outside of the borders. On one of his visits to the northeast, King Bhumibol told a group of village leaders to stay unified with

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<sup>216</sup> "Pilot Study: NE Radio Listening Thailand," December 1963, p. 9, Coordination Center for Southeast Asian Studies, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports 1953-1986, Box 68, Entry A1-1007, NACP.

<sup>217</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," February 14, 1961, Subject: Country Assessment Report, p. 16.

<sup>218</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, "Phraratchadamrat Phraratchathan kae Prachachon Chao Thai nai Okat Wan Khun Pi Mai, Ph. S. 2504 [Royal New Year Address to the Thai People, 1961]," in *Speeches and Advice of His Majesty King Phumiphon Adunyadet and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit* (Bangkok: Bandansat Press, 1966), 110.

the government.<sup>219</sup> He said, “Now that our neighboring countries are undergoing many fundamental changes, we must therefore be on the look-out for threats to our national security....”<sup>220</sup> The local leaders were to be the link between the people and the government, and if they did not support Bangkok, then the people might do the same. Social cohesion would combat communism and other national security fears. The king became a figure Thais could trust, even if they did not fully understand the government’s policies or communist ideology.<sup>221</sup>

Thailand’s countryside was a target area, but the USIS and the Thai government still had to tailor their information campaigns for people in cities. Unlike rural areas, Bangkok and metropolitan Thais had more contact with Western culture and education. With public diplomacy the USIS and the Thai government used the television, radio, films, publications, press releases, English teaching, and exhibits. In the July 1960 Country Plan Garnish wanted the mission to utilize television programming more than previously. He said, “The audience and the number of receivers have been almost doubling each year.”<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, it “has been one of the most effective media for telling mutual aid story.” In a study on television use in the urban city of Nakorn Nayok, 137 kilometers from Bangkok, the USIS concluded that four out of five people watched

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<sup>219</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Phraratchadamrat Phraratchathan nai Kanobrom Kamnan Phuyaiban nai Khet Chaidan Phaktawanok Chiengnua [Royal Address to the Conference of Commune and Village Heads from the Northeast], August 12, 1962, in *Speeches and Advice of His Majesty King Phumiphon Adunyadet and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit* (Bangkok: Bandansat Press, 1966), 144.

<sup>220</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Royal Address to Kammans (Commune) and Phuyaibans from the Border Areas of the Northeast,” August 12, 1962, in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Bangkok: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 10.

<sup>221</sup> Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 209-210.

<sup>222</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” Country Plan for Thailand, July 29, 1960, p. 19.

television every night.<sup>223</sup> Most preferred adventure stories and the news. Fortunately, USIS programs already had a good amount of media time at about 22 percent of airtime.<sup>224</sup>

#### Additional Support

With the big push to incorporate the countryside, and with the Laotian crisis heating up, the United States and Thai governments came to a security arrangement under the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué on March 6, 1962. As explained earlier, Sarit worried that Laotian communist forces would soon threaten Thailand if the United States did not intervene. He pushed for a stronger American military commitment in Laos and Thailand, opposing Kennedy's call for a negotiated settlement in Laos.<sup>225</sup> Marines stationed in Thailand were not enough of an assurance for the Thai government. Thailand was already a member of the SEATO but all parties had to agree before taking military action.<sup>226</sup> Finally, Washington and Bangkok entered into a different agreement that stated it was the "firm intention of the United States to aid Thailand, its ally and historic friend, in resisting Communist aggression and subversion."<sup>227</sup> This bilateral agreement allowed the U.S. and Thai governments to bypass SEATO's military clause and precluded approval

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<sup>223</sup> "Media Habits [Television]," June 1961, Business Research Limited, p. 1-4, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Country Project Files, 1951-1964, Thailand, 1959 to Thailand, 1963, Box 97, Entry A1 1015, NACP.

<sup>224</sup> "Foreign Reaction to US Commercially-Produced Television Programs," June 1, 1961, R-26-61, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1960-1999, Box 4, Entry P 142, NACP.

<sup>225</sup> Darling, *United States and Thailand*, 205; Surachart *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule*, 94; "Memorandum," February 26, 1962, Subject: Comments by Prime Minister Sarit, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol. XXIII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v23/d432>, [accessed 1 February 2016].

<sup>226</sup> Randolph, *The United States and Thailand*, 41-42.

<sup>227</sup> "Secretary Rusk, Thai Foreign Minister Discuss Matter of Mutual Concern," March 26, 1962, *Department of State Bulletin* Vol. XLVI, No. 1187, 498; Darling, *United States and Thailand*, 208.

from other members. Gradually, the number of Marines and advisers rose to 10,000 by late 1962.

The Thai government portrayed the communiqué and increased presence of American troops as a positive and necessary measure. One article in *Seripharb* about the Marines was titled, “They [(the United States)] Have Come to Help Protect Thailand.”<sup>228</sup> The justification given by Sarit in the article was that the communist world had imperial ambitions, and Thailand could fall next. Eighteen pages of the article contained pictures of Americans interacting with Thai military leaders, village heads, and locals. Marine doctors gave medical care to children, and American and Thai troops participated in military exercises together. A final seal of approval came from King Bhumibol in June 1962, when the king and queen toured several U.S. bases and expressed gratitude for America’s help. The *New York Times* reported the king saying that Thailand “is happy to have you [Marines] here.”<sup>229</sup> King Bhumibol stressed that both Americans and Thais must work closely as “comrades in arms” to fight the threat looming in neighboring Laos.<sup>230</sup> An invitation for a foreign army to come to Thailand was significant. The king’s visit to the U.S. Marines conveyed a message of unity in purpose. Instead of being an outside power intervening in Thailand’s affairs, America was a partner with the Thais in protecting the country.

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<sup>228</sup> “Maa chuay bong gan thai” [“They have come to help protect Thailand],” *Seripharb*, September 1962, USIS, No. 81, p. 10-17, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, “Free World,” Thai, Numbers 49-98, RG 306, Box. 270, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>229</sup> Robert Trumbull, “King of Thailand Visits U.S. Camps: He Tells Troops Country is ‘Happy to have you Here,’” *New York Times*, June 15, 1962; “Thai King Praises U.S. Marines,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1962.

<sup>230</sup> “Their Majesties the King and Queen Visit U.S. Forces in Thailand,” Pamphlet, King Bhumibol Adulyadej and U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Todd Young, June 1962 (Bangkok, Thailand: C. Tanuan for The Thai Commercial Co., Ltd., 1962).

The increase of American troops in Thailand and a stronger need for more government presence in the vulnerable parts of the country led Sarit to establish, with U.S. support, a slew of organizations to work at the rural level. One central location for the gathering of resources and for the creating of development, humanitarian, and education projects was the Development Center at Nakhu village, Amphur Kuchinarai, Kalasin Province in the northeast. The Thai MOI designated several institutions to use Nakhu as one of its bases of operations, such as the Community Development Department, the Department of Public Welfare, and provincial police. In addition, the facility would house units from the army, the Thai Public Relations Department (PRD), and the Ministry of Education.<sup>231</sup> With these organizations under one roof, so to speak, the RTG hoped to cover economic, social, military, and psychological aspects of development to eliminate conditions where communism could thrive. Government organizations would go out from Nakhu to gather information about local feelings, relationships, and political loyalties and develop the rural areas.<sup>232</sup> By building the local economy and meaningful contacts with the people, Sarit hoped villagers would come to trust the government.

The Nakhu Development Center was important for public relations programs. The government hoped to increase its psychological activities as a means of “winning the

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<sup>231</sup> “Meeting Records about Establishing Center of Operations of Suppressing Communism,” June 1, 1962, p. 1-3, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) นพ 3.1.6.2/1, TNA.

<sup>232</sup> “Action Command ๙.1, Central Division, Ministry of Defense,” August 2, 1962, p. 1-3, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, (2) นพ 15.1.1/2, TNA.

hearts and minds and loyalty of the people.”<sup>233</sup> According to the Thai Ministry of Defense, the public relations programs were meant to help rural villagers believe that the government cared about them. At Nakhu, economic aid, humanitarian and development projects, public relations out-reach programs, leadership training, education, and medical care were all supposed to have a psychological effect of convincing the people to reject communism.<sup>234</sup> Security and economic growth were important, but members of the Thai government understood the value of giving the people concrete benefits through infrastructure projects, creating government-to-people relationships, and information programs. The Ministry of Defense had observed that communist radio programs from Peking, Hanoi, and Laos could be heard throughout rural Thailand, highlighting the economic poverty and lack of development among poor villagers. The Thai and United States governments needed to counter the communist propaganda with actual projects and better publicity and information.

After several months, the MOI reported seeing some small improvements from the Development Center’s operations. For instance, units from Nakhu drilled wells, built schools and roads, and advised on agricultural and animal husbandry projects. MOI officials reported that the people began feeling like the government cared about their welfare and protection. Many began to have hope in a prosperous future.<sup>235</sup> Local leaders

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<sup>233</sup> “Appendage ๗ Psychological Operations from Action Command ๗.1, Central Division, Ministry of Defense,” August 2, 1962, p. 2-3, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, (2) ๗๗ 15.1.1/2, TNA.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> “Long-Term Projects in Development in Amphur Kuchinarai (Kalasin Province) of the Development Center of the Central Department,” November 1962, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, (2) ๗๗ 15.1.1/7, TNA.



serving in Kalasin province who had received training on development seemed to buy into the Nakhu project. One Ministry of Defense report said that these leaders began to care about and love community development work. There was so much enthusiasm that some wanted to have their own development centers.

In addition to using Nakhu, the USIS and the Thai government began utilizing small group information units on research and public relations field trips. In 1962, Sarit created the Mobile Development Unit (MDU) in conjunction with the Thai MOI and the USIS Mobile Information Teams (MIT). The MIT program was the idea of Ambassador Kenneth Young, who saw a need for public diplomacy in the countryside. Garnish said the MDU's and MITs devoted much effort to trying to convince rural Thais and ethnic minorities that they were part of the Thai nation. Both organizations went on several missions each year to gauge the political and social pulse in the countryside. MDU's were to aid "the economic and political development of Thailand," particularly "in the areas classified as sensitive and remote."<sup>236</sup> MDU's and MIT's first goal was "to establish a bridge of understanding between the Thai government and the people living in remote areas of Thailand, particularly those people in northeast Thailand, who are most likely to be exposed to Communist pressures."<sup>237</sup> The units met with village leaders and other important people to find information for the government about the needs of the people

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<sup>236</sup> James P. Thompson, "The Thai Military: An Analysis of its Role in the Thai Nation," Ph.D. Dissertation, (Claremont Graduate School, 1973), 112.

<sup>237</sup> *USIS Mobile Information Team 1, Trip 2: A Report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok*, March 15 to April 4, 1962 (Bangkok: United States Government Press, 1962), p. 1; Robert Muscat, *Thailand and the United States: Development, Security, and Foreign Aid* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 148-149.

and their social, political, and media habits.<sup>238</sup> Lastly, the MDU and MIT assisted the Thai government in instilling a sense of love and loyalty for the central government and monarchy among the Thai people.<sup>239</sup> In the process, the USIS hoped to stimulate a relationship with America among the Thais by strengthening “the image of the United States as a strong, peace loving...nation which stands ready and willing to aid Thailand to maintain its sovereignty.”<sup>240</sup> The USIS role evolved from solely designing media campaigns into serving the U.S. and Thai governments through being additional eyes and ears.

According to Garnish, the MDU/MIT visits helped reinforce villagers’ connections with the Thai government. Garnish told an interviewer in 1989 that USIS efforts in the countryside were effective in “getting the Thais to identify with Thailand.”<sup>241</sup> He supported this statement by saying that villagers “still talked about the team visit, they talked about the health aspect, [and] they still had these pictures of the king and the Buddha on their walls” that had been distributed by the MITs.<sup>242</sup> One MIT report in January 1964, in which USIS and Thai officials recorded reactions and attitudes about their visit, supports Garnish’s assertions. The report stated that some people did not know why the MIT was in their village but appreciated the health care. When villagers received pictures of the Buddha and King Bhumibol, “it was evident that the

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<sup>238</sup> *USIS Mobile Information Team, Trip 14, A Report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok, November 8 to November 28, 1963*, (Bangkok: United States Government Press, 1963), p. 1.

<sup>239</sup> *USIS Mobile Information Team 1, Trip 3*, p. 1; *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, 393.

<sup>240</sup> “USIS-Thailand,” Pamphlet from the Agency for International Development, USOM/Thailand, Job 769, Bangkok, April 1964.

<sup>241</sup> Oral History, Howard Garnish Interview, October 27, 1989, p. 58, GRUSIA, RG 306 Transcripts of Oral History Project Interviews, Box 8, Entry A1 1073, NACP.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

pictures...were revered.”<sup>243</sup> Officials reported one village leader who said that when the pictures were hung in the house, “no ghost would dare enter.”<sup>244</sup> The simple act of giving pictures of the Buddha and the king as gifts was an important means of touching the hearts of the Thai villagers. Garnish brought in *mohlam* musicians from Laos and had them accompany the MIT as a form of entertainment during visits throughout the northeast. *Mohlam* was traditional music of the Laotians living in the area and was used to convey stories and political messages.

However, there were other reports that questioned the effectiveness of the USIS MIT units. Randolph said the problem with the program was with follow-up; the MIT visits were “brief and sporadic.”<sup>245</sup> They did little to meet the actual needs of the people. Soon, communication between the U.S. and Thai mobile teams broke down and there was little information sharing. In an interview done by Randolph, the interviewee said the MIT movies became less effective as villagers found information in other ways, such as by radio. In addition, some Thai villagers no longer saw film as entertaining. Another study referenced by economist J. Alexander Caldwell explained further that the MIT did little in “changing villager opinion of the RTG and its officials.”<sup>246</sup> Nevertheless, the MIT would continue to tour the countryside trying to connect villagers with the Thai government. According to one report, once the Thai government had seen the successes

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<sup>243</sup> *USIS Mobile Information Trip #16, Visits to 11 Villages in Nakorn Phanom Province*, January 15-30, 1964, p. 11, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports 1953-1986, Box 69, Entry A1 1007, NACP.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> Randolph, *The United States and Thailand*, 107 (It was a confidential interview); Muscat, *Thailand and the United States*, 149. Muscat said that the results of the MIT’s and MDU’s programs were mixed in the early stages but seemed to have improved with time.

<sup>246</sup> J. Alexander Caldwell, *American Economic Aid to Thailand* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1974), 133.

of the MIT visits in Nong Khai Province, it wanted to expand the program.<sup>247</sup> The MIT would continue its work until it was dissolved in 1971.

Another assessment noted the impacts of the MDU program. As part of a U.S.-Thai combat research project, social scientist Dr. Lee W. Huff took part in a seven-week MDU trip to observe the presence of the RTG in Sakol Nakhon province in the northeast. At the time, the MDU had several stations throughout the country, in Kalasin, Nakorn Phanom, and Sakol Nakorn provinces. During the tour, Dr. Huff accompanied a Thai mobile unit as it traveled over 3000 miles, and he saw that “The RTG has embarked on an effort to extend its presence effectively in the northeast” and as a result had helped to improve the standard of living of rural Thais.<sup>248</sup> After gathering information on the people’s needs during its first visits, the MDU returned to engage in public work projects, medical care, and education programs. Through the MDU follow-up visits, Thai villagers in the province had developed a feeling of faith and confidence toward the government. Huff noticed that villagers had seen visible “improvements” to their lives and had helped to dispel anti-government propaganda.<sup>249</sup> More importantly, according to the report, the fact that the government officials had visited the people, interacted with them in the local dialect, eaten dinner with them, and treated the villagers as equals seemed to have contributed greatly to the MDU’s success. Huff’s final assessment was that the program

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<sup>247</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” February 6, 1963, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 1, Dispatch 48, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Cultural Operations Division, Far Eastern Libraries and Centers Branch: Country Files, 1947-1965, Box 88, Entry P 51, NACP.

<sup>248</sup> “Observations on Mobile Development Unit-2 Operations,” Dr. Lee W. Huff, June 1963, p. 1-2, Joint Thai-US Combat Development and Text Center, General Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia (GRUSFSEA), RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI/R&D Center, Project Reports, Box 31, Entry P 1068, NACP.

<sup>249</sup> “Observations on Mobile Development Unit-2 Operations,” Dr. Lee W. Huff, June 1963, p. 22.

deserved more support from all departments and agencies in the RTG and from the United States.

The U.S. embassy discussed the idea of expanding Thai and U.S. military civic activities in the rural villages. The Kennedy administration's National Security Agency Memorandum 119 sought to expand the program by having more military-led village and rural projects. Specifically for Thailand, it said both militaries would build schools, roads, and irrigation channels. It would also provide medical assistance and job training for veterans. Alfred Puhan, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires, wrote in a document to the State Department that the U.S. and Thai military's involvement in village development projects would be helpful in meeting "the threat of subversion and insurgency in vulnerable areas of north and northeast Thailand."<sup>250</sup> Puhan felt doing development and humanitarian work in the rural and poorer regions would relieve some of the economic problems in the countryside. Civic action programs would also be a way of winning more hearts and minds away from communist influence and countering anti-government and anti-American propaganda.

An important organization established to facilitate the government's economic development and to counter communist influence in the countryside was the Community Development Department (CDD) of the MOI. The CDD, which was formed in 1960 and received departmental status in 1963, had three main objectives: to build village economy through installing various public infrastructure projects; to provide youth and local

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<sup>250</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," September 7, 1963, Subject: Expanded Thai Military Civic Action in Support of Rural Development, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Thailand, Records Relating to Thailand, 1964-1966, Box 2, Entry A1 5310, NACP.

officials training in education, technical knowledge, and leadership skills; and to strengthen ties between villagers and the government. The department oversaw local projects and trained Community Development Workers, local community development officials, rural workers, and village leaders. Sai Hutacharearn was the first Director-General of the CDD and was a big proponent of building good relations with villagers to help them become self-reliant in developing their villages and improving the standard of living. Development projects were slow in the beginning until United States Operations Mission (USOM) logistical and financial support increased efficiency. By 1965, there were 6,682 villages, 13 percent of all in the country, receiving help from the CDD.<sup>251</sup> In addition, 4,163 local leaders obtained leadership training.

A contribution of the CDD was its role in promoting government-to-people relations. The CDD served as information intermediary between Bangkok's technical officials and the local leadership.<sup>252</sup> The department established the Promotion and Publicity Unit to help villagers become more aware of what the government was doing to increase their living standard. Other groups within the CDD orchestrated cultural programs to build nationalism while recognizing local traditions at the grassroots level.<sup>253</sup> In some locales, the department's officials were the only government representatives from Bangkok to interact with the people. The CDD had to establish friendly relationships to gain people's trust, work intimately to find villager's needs, then create a

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<sup>251</sup> Royal Thai Government, *Thailand Official Yearbook 1968* (Bangkok: Government House Printing Office, 1968), 389.

<sup>252</sup> Caldwell, *American Economic Aid to Thailand*, 57.

<sup>253</sup> Vichit Sukaviriya, *Facts about Community Development Programs in Thailand* (Thonburi: Boonhen Laosakul, November 1966), 39.

plan to alleviate them, and work alongside them in various development projects. In some instances, villagers disliked the CDD telling them what to do, but the program would grow to be successful in developing the countryside and garnering goodwill for the government.<sup>254</sup> Interactions like these made the CDD's position important in the line of communication between Bangkok and the rural peoples.

A key person within the CDD was the Community Development Worker (CDW). CDD Deputy-Director Vichit Sukaviriya said in 1966 that the CDW was a critical part of the department's program.<sup>255</sup> One academic called them the agents of change or "culture broker[s]."<sup>256</sup> Their duty was to help bring about development projects and at the same time link the dominant Thai culture with that of local traditions. Anthropologist Charles Keyes observed that villagers viewed CDWs as people who had a genuine interest in helping rural populations rather than trying to destroy local peasant culture.<sup>257</sup> Most of the CDWs were from rural backgrounds and could relate to villagers. While on assignment, they lived among the people, trying to harness the physical and human resources efficiently, training local leaders, and finding ways to resolve problems within the villages. Some rural Thais came to know the government's policies and care through the CDD and CDWs.

The USIS helped the CDD with some of its public relations programs. In December 1962, USIS officials met with the director-general of the CDD, Sai, to discuss

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<sup>254</sup> George K. Tanham, *Trial in Thailand* (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, Inc., 1974), 71-72.

<sup>255</sup> Vichit, *Facts about Community Development Programs in Thailand*, 11.

<sup>256</sup> Titaya Suvanajata, "Perceived Leader Role of Community Development Workers in Thailand," Master's Thesis, (Cornell University, February 1964), 9.

<sup>257</sup> Charles Keyes, "Local Leadership in Rural Thailand" in *Modern Thai Politics*, ed. Clark D. Neher (Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1979), 217.

an idea of building mobile exhibits to showcase community development projects. The USIS wanted “to show residents...what community development can mean for them if they cooperate with their Government to undertake such projects.” Sai was thrilled and added that making a film would also help publicity. The USIS media unit went on a weeklong field trip filming thirteen community development projects in the Ubon and Srisaket provinces. From the meeting, the USIS and CDD developed a TV show that reached about 500,000 viewers. It explained to the Thai people that the government was interested in improving their lives. Afterwards, the USIS was a supplier of information materials for the CDD.<sup>258</sup>

In addition to its development responsibilities, the CDW was to nurture relations with the local leadership as a method of reaching more villagers. The CDD had a program where the CDW would identify villagers who had political acumen and were popular as potential people to receive special training in administration and human relations. With these skills, the CDD hoped to build a group of villagers who could be future leaders, become government representatives, and assist in development projects. Once trained, these men had the potential of becoming *phu yai ban*'s or district leaders. Others could join village development committees. Deputy-Director Vichit saw the program going well when he said it “has awakened the local leaders and other rural

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<sup>258</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” March 1, 1963, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 3, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 45, Entry A1 56, NACP; “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” February 27, 1963, Subject: USIS Exploitation of Thai Community-Development Program, p. 1-2, Dispatch 54, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 45, Entry A1 56, NACP; “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” October 30, 1963, Subject: Situation Report for USIS, Thailand, p. 4, Dispatch 17, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 45, Entry A1 56, NACP.



villagers and acquainted them with the conditions and methods of achieving progress” in terms of economic and political development.<sup>259</sup>

The CDD’s leadership training project was one part of the RTG’s much larger program of training village headsmen. Responsible for overseeing government administration beyond Bangkok was the Department of Local Administration (DOLA) within the MOI. Thailand’s local political structure began at the provincial, or *changwat*, level with the governor. From there, *amphurs*, or districts, were the next level dividing the province, each with a *nai amphur*, or district leader. Then there were sub-districts or communes called *tambons*, each with a *kamnans* as its head authority. The lowest level of administrative authority was the *phu yai ban*, leader of the *muban*, or village.<sup>260</sup> All these positions answered to higher-level government authorities and not to the local populations, as all individuals received their posts from Bangkok.

The role of local administrator, specifically a *nai amphur*, was significant. Researcher Sakda Labcharoen explained the importance of a *nai amphur* by listing some of his duties. The district leader could arrest people and search houses without a warrant.<sup>261</sup> He was a person who had “intimate and continuing control over the safety, livelihood, health and general well-being of the people.”<sup>262</sup> He also sanctioned the local elections of *phu yai bans* and *kamnans* and could exercise his will and the desires of the provincial government to influence certain outcomes. The appointment of a *nai amphur*

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<sup>259</sup> Vichit, *Facts about Community Development Programs in Thailand*, 12.

<sup>260</sup> Keyes, “Local Leadership in Rural Thailand,” 203-206.

<sup>261</sup> Sakda Labcharoen, “Administrative Responsibilities of Nai Amphoe,” Master’s Thesis, (Thammasat University, IPA, February 1960), 131.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

was often political, with most being chosen based on personal connections rather than merit.

However, the RTG established the *Nai Amphur* Academy to train leaders to be better administrators. An important figure in building the government's public administration programs, especially in the MOI, was Deputy-Secretary Dr. Malai Huvanandana. Born in Prachuab Kirikan, central Thailand, Dr. Malai received his education abroad, in the Philippines and at the University of Michigan. After his studies, he wore many hats. Dr. Malai spent most of his political career within the MOI, mainly serving in the DPW with the hill tribes. At the same time, he held positions at Thammasat University in the political science department. One of his many activities was as the project director of training administrators.<sup>263</sup> In 1963, DOLA teamed up with the USOM to help improve governance at the local level. Chief of the USOM's Public Administration Division, Duval Stoaks, in a letter to the Thai Under-Secretary of State, General Luang Chart, said the earlier training session brought such good results that it would be wise to expand the program.<sup>264</sup> Soon after, DOLA created the academy as a means "to improve the relationship between the central government and the people at the village level in the belief that effective counterinsurgency must provide for popular participation in the processes of self-government as well as development projects."<sup>265</sup> The

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<sup>263</sup> "Memorandum from Kenneth Kugel of USOM to Mr. Piev Phusavat, Deputy Director-General, DTEC," December 30, 1963, Subject: Nomination of Dr. Malai Huvanandana, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.5.9/682, TNA.

<sup>264</sup> "Letter from Duval Stoaks, Chief Public Administration Division USOM to General Luang Chart, Under-Secretary of State," January 3, 1963, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.5.9/682, TNA.

<sup>265</sup> Caldwell, *American Economic Aid to Thailand*, 108.

MOI envisioned that the academy would develop a better generation of officials to be good government representatives to the people.

As another facet of catering to rural Thais, other organizations like the Border Patrol Police (BPP) worked with the hill tribes. The CIA established the police unit in 1951 as a means of protecting the countryside. Though it was a major police arm of the state, the BPP was also a political weapon, according to one commander.<sup>266</sup> Then in 1955, by orders of the MOI, the BPP began trying to lengthen the government's political, economic, and social reach among ethnic minorities.<sup>267</sup> Sarit's rise to power put a hold on funding, but by 1962 the BPP had become an important government institution as part of the police department, where it focused on civic action programs among the ethnic minorities. It had four objectives: the first was to fight communism and win the support of the hill tribes. The second was to stop the opium trade. The third objective was to protect natural resources. The last was probably the most important, to incorporate and convert the rural peoples into the Thai national project.<sup>268</sup> As the government's representatives in the border regions, the BPP would be a major force in winning hearts and minds.

In the spring of 1962, the U.S. embassy and USOM officials met with Sarit to discuss how to fund and support BPP projects. Thai policymakers proposed giving the police more responsibilities, such as providing medical care, education services,

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<sup>266</sup> Hyun, "Indigenizing the Cold War," 134.

<sup>267</sup> Hans Manndorff, "The Hill Tribe Program," 531.

<sup>268</sup> Hyun, "Indigenizing the Cold War," 187.

occupational training, and development, in addition to fighting insurgents.<sup>269</sup> Most important, it would distribute educational and informational materials and radios. These communication tools were important for publications, as the BPP pointed out, since the hill tribes and rural peoples were “uneducated,” and if they were not taught the “right way” about the government’s ideologies and policies, then they would fall susceptible to communists and subversives.<sup>270</sup> Education would be the main civic action program for the BPP to help win hearts and minds. American officials agreed with the plan to help the BPP and began providing more funding. In the years to come, the BPP would be heavily engaged in breaking down the barriers between the government and the hill tribes. One BPP commander said that the group “had contributed in building the bridges between the government authority and the border people.”<sup>271</sup>

Soon the BPP began receiving funding and support from the monarchy, giving it an elevated status among the security forces and the public. Before the coups of 1957 and 1958, King Bhumibol and the royal family had been slowly nurturing a relationship with the police unit. After Sarit’s coup, the BPP accompanied the monarchy on its many field trips, serving as escort. The king’s Princess Mother Sangwal also began to work closely with the group in humanitarian projects and royal visits to hill tribe villages. She would become one of the biggest patrons of the BPP, donating money and supporting the organization’s work and purpose. Soon she would call the police her sons and

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<sup>269</sup> “Letter from Deputy Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Planning to Minister,” April 1962, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) มท 3.1.6.2/1, TNA.

<sup>270</sup> Hyun, “Indigenizing the Cold War,” 180-181.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

grandchildren.<sup>272</sup> In all the king's tours around the country, the police force would serve as escorts and guards. Eventually the police force began to see "themselves as holding special responsibility for protection of the Thai nation and the king."<sup>273</sup>

The civilian counterpart of the BPP assigned to work with ethnic minorities was the MOI Department of Public Welfare (DPW). Along with the Ministry of Education, the DPW helped the BPP with many projects, specifically with school building and teaching. In 1959, the DPW received the assignment to oversee relations with the hill tribes and their welfare. Concerned ethnic groups were mainly the Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Lisu, and Ma Soe. One of the earliest efforts to implement a government policy was in 1959 with the creation of resettlements. In these areas, the government hoped to keep the tribes from falling under communist influence.<sup>274</sup> The resettlements were places where the government provided health care, education, and opportunities to raise cash crops that were not opium.<sup>275</sup> More importantly, the project became a means of incorporating the ethnic minorities into the Thai state by making them learn the Thai language, Buddhism, national laws, and government policies. The project became a mechanism of limiting the movements of a people who were accustomed to migrating.

In 1962, the DPW conducted a socio-economic survey of some of the hill tribes to understand better how the government could build relations with them and meet their

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>273</sup> Thomas Lobe and David Morell, "Thailand's Border Patrol Police: Paramilitary Political Power," in *Supplementary Military Forces: Reserves, Militias, Auxiliaries*, ed. Louis Surcher and Gwyn Harris-Jenkins (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978), 157.

<sup>274</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 73.

<sup>275</sup> "Record of Meeting about Requesting Help from America Project according to Needs of National Economic Development Institute," September 1, 1964, p. 3, Papers of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.5.9/663, #3, TNA.

needs. Some of the big concerns of the RTG and associated U.S. agencies were stopping opium production and forest destruction and increasing border security. The research group consisted of members of the DPW, BPP, and Ministry of Agriculture, in five teams, visiting eighteen villages. Some highlights from the report related to political and social aspects of the people. For instance, the DPW learned that the hill tribes felt more loyalty to their tribes and local leaders than to Bangkok. Constant migration throughout northern Thailand and Laos illustrated that they had “no sense of territorial nationality.”<sup>276</sup> The study said that “almost all” of the government’s issues with the hill tribes consisted of “destruction of forests, opium growing, border insecurity, difficulties in administration and control” deriving from the hill tribes’ migratory practices.<sup>277</sup> Thus, the government needed to find a way to keep them sedentary. Through interviews, some Hmong elders said they would stop growing opium if they had a good economic alternative and advice on how to grow other cash crops like Thai chilies.<sup>278</sup> When asked what else the government could do for them, some wanted farming equipment and more roads for easier travel. Some hill tribes felt favorable towards modernization development projects but were also leery of too much government intervention.

The USIS also had programs for hill tribes. Anthropologist Peter Kunstadter, often hired by different American and Thai agencies to do research in Thailand, said the USIS goal with rural Thais was the same as with the hill tribes, to strengthen their ties

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<sup>276</sup> “Report on the Socio-Economic Survey of the Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand,” 42.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-72.

with the government and incorporate them into the Thai nation.<sup>279</sup> The USIS would broadcast radio programs in various hill tribe and regional languages. However, the project progressed slowly due to the RTG's policy of promoting the Thai language. The USIS got around this obstacle by educating Thais about the hill tribes, trying to make them more relatable. Information came in the form of films, art, and exhibitions. The USIS produced hill tribe films for the BPP and had publications promoting Thai unity.<sup>280</sup> They emphasized to the Thai people that tribes like the Hmong, Mien, Lahu, and Lisu were citizens like them.

The Thai government did not overlook the rural youth. On April 29, 1963, youth from different provinces of the northeast gathered for a special conference. The event emphasized to the youth that they were part of the Thai nation. Although many lived in areas where development and modernization had not yet occurred, Sarit did not want them to feel ignored by the government.<sup>281</sup> Participants attended seminars to learn Thai history and geography. One *Seripharb* photo showed students in front of several maps of Thailand with modern borders.<sup>282</sup> Maps were powerful political tools, as they helped make the idea of the Thai nation more concrete to the audience. Boundaries became a way of distinguishing one national identity from another. In his speech to the youth, Sarit

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<sup>279</sup> Peter Kunstadter, "Thailand: Introduction," in *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations*, Vol. 1, ed. Peter Kunstadter (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967), 385-386.

<sup>280</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," February 6, 1963, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 6.

<sup>281</sup> "ngaan chum num luuk sera heeng chat khrang thii sii" ["The Fourth International Boy Scout Conference,"] *Seripharb*, September 1962, USIS, No. 81, p. 35-39, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World", Thai, Numbers 49-98, Box. 270, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>282</sup> "pen huu, pen dtaa khong phra naa khon" ["Eyes and Ears of the Capital,"] *Seripharb*, July 1963, USIS, No. 3, 30, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World," Thai, Numbers 1-48, Box 269, Entry 1053, NACP.

said, “Always remember that you are all Thai” and to remain unified as a people.<sup>283</sup> The main message of his address was that they were “the eyes and ears of the government” in the countryside.<sup>284</sup> The youth had a special role, to protect the nation by reporting any suspicious activities. They could become an asset to the nation if they received proper training.

In early 1962, the USIS established a youth and student office to organize activities. Garnish wrote to USIA headquarters that for several years the agency had been “actively engaged” in youth programs in Thailand and had begun increasing its public relations efforts to cater to them.<sup>285</sup> He reported that USIS had readjusted its objectives to include more events for the young people and had hired an additional Thai employee to help. Ambassador Young supported the initiative, as he had been interested in working with the Thai youth. Garnish felt encouraged by the embassy’s attentiveness and wanted to make more opportunities for the USIS and the ambassador to combine efforts.

Along with the military came a small group of young American students as part of the first wave of Kennedy’s newly established Peace Corps. The president proclaimed the 1960s as a new era of promise, especially for the youth. Kennedy challenged students to be extraordinary and make sacrifices for the country. Part of the call was for the rising generation to be informal ambassadors abroad. President Kennedy established the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961, as means of fostering cross-cultural exchange and development in the Third World. In 1961, forty-five volunteers arrived in Thailand. For twelve weeks,

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<sup>283</sup> “Eyes and Ears of the Capital,” *Seripharb*, July 1963, p. 28

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” August 10, 1962, Subject: Youth Activity Programs, p. 1.



they trained at the University of Michigan. Once in the country, the first group taught English and trade skills at the local schools and colleges. Some went to the countryside to construct schools, provide health care, help build wells, and fight malaria. By the end of the year, Thai leaders and the press had a favorable view of the American volunteers.<sup>286</sup>

The Thai government used the USIS for its expertise and resources in many of its youth-oriented programs. In a January 1964 Thai Internal Security Plan, U.S.

Ambassador to Thailand Graham Martin reported on the activities of the public diplomacy officials in reaching out to the younger people. Martin said the USIS had conducted two projectionist-training courses for officials and members of the twenty-three Bangkok Youth Centers.<sup>287</sup> Each center had a membership level of about 800.

The USIS also made in-roads with high school and college students through their English-teaching program. The mission established the Bi-National Center in Bangkok to provide English language courses and study abroad opportunities for Thais. Garnish measured the success of the Bi-National Center by looking at those who enrolled and supported it. An evaluation on April 3, 1963, reported that “the membership and patronage” of the center consisted of mostly people from the USIS target audience.<sup>288</sup>

The primary focus groups for the English teaching program were educators, government

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<sup>286</sup> “USIA Office of Research and Analysis, Peace Corps Overseas Press Reaction,” April 20, 1961, p. 3, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Analysis, Research Notes, 1958-1962, Box 4, Entry A1 1029, NACP; See also, “Memorandum from Koren to Hilsman,” July 2, 1963, Subject: Proposed Addition to Peace Corps in Thailand, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs 1956-1966, Thailand Files, Box 6, Entry A1 1345, NACP.

<sup>287</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok embassy to Department of State,” January 6, 1964, Subject: Quarterly Progress Report V on the US Plan for Promoting the Internal Security of Thailand, p. 20, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 5, Entry P 296, NACP.

<sup>288</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” April 3, 1963, Subject: Evaluation of Binational Center, p. 1, Message 62, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 45, Entry A1 56, NACP.

officials, university students, military personnel, and former exchange students. Garnish thought that the Bi-National Center had advanced the objectives of educating Thai leaders and “fostering the image of the U.S. as a strong and dependable ally of Thailand.”<sup>289</sup> Furthermore, the center was an “avenue of informal communication between Americans and Thai leaders.”<sup>290</sup> The means of informally influencing the Thai educated and elites were hard to determine, but according to the USIS, they had made some progress. In their eyes, the BNC was a means of indirectly managing the opinions of educated Thais.

Ambassador Martin saw English language teaching as an important tool in America’s ability to influence the Thai people. In a letter to Lucius D. Battle, assistant secretary of state for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Martin argued that having Thais learn English was “a foreign policy instrument.”<sup>291</sup> He went on to say that English should

Provide easier access for the Thai to Western technological and educational knowledge, to orient Thai to the political, social, and economic ideals of the Free World...to improve communication in the lower echelons between representatives of Thailand and her western allies, and to open a major avenue of communication with the youth and future as a second language.<sup>292</sup>

The USIS also facilitated the growth of English teaching through radio and television programs. English would open doors to better relations via education, person-to-person interactions, and the sharing of political ideas.

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>291</sup> “Letter from Ambassador Graham to Lucius D. Battle,” November 22, 1963, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59 Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Thailand, Records Relating to Thailand, 1964-1966, Box 1, Entry A1 5310, NACP.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

When the USIS interviewed Thai students, it found positive sentiments among the respondents. In March 1963, the USIS surveyed students at Thammasat University. Traditionally, Thammasat was a center of liberal thinking. In the 1970s, it would be a site of student protest against the military government and the Vietnam War. In 1963 however, most students saw the United States and Thailand as having similar interests.<sup>293</sup> What appealed the most to them about America was its way of life, specifically, its education system and freedoms.<sup>294</sup> None mentioned anything about U.S. foreign policy. Many however, did express negative opinions of communist China.<sup>295</sup> The United States was in good standing in the eyes of at least some of the young educated portions of society.

### Conclusion

On December 8, 1963, Sarit died, and his protégé, Thanom Kittikachorn, assumed power. It was apparent from the beginning of Thanom's tenure that he would continue Sarit's policies of supporting the United States, the monarchy, and anti-communism.<sup>296</sup> In a memo to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman observed that "the present political structure, i.e., a working

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<sup>293</sup> "General Attitudes (Student Study - Thailand)," March 1963, Coordination Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Bangkok, Thailand, p. 7, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Country Project Files, 1951-1964, Thailand, 1959 to Thailand, 1963, Box 97, Entry A1 1015, NACP.

<sup>294</sup> "General Attitudes (Student Study - Thailand)," p. 4.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Toru Yano, "Sarit and Thailand's 'Pro-American Policy,'" *The Developing Economies* 6, Issue 3 (1968): 298; Thak, *Despotic Paternalism*, 218.

relationship among the military, the civil bureaucracy, and the monarchy and its supporters with the Army predominating, will continue.”<sup>297</sup>

The years 1957 to 1963 laid the foundations for a Thai state that was anti-communist. Sarit’s coup allowed King Bhumibol and the monarchy to return to the political limelight and take an active public role. Relations with the United States were uneasy under Phibun, but the new regime placed the government firmly in the Western camp. To help promote the power structure, both governments engaged in public diplomacy through an army of organizations consisting of the USIS, the regime, the monarchy, the Thai MOI’s CDD and DPW, and security forces of the MDU BPP. These groups portrayed the United States and Thai government as strong allies and friends of the Thai people. Both would take care of the people’s needs and protect them from harm. Rhetoric and propaganda depicted communists and anyone opposed to the regime as anti-monarchy and anti-modernization. Rural Thais and ethnic minorities encountered new terms like the nation, citizenship, and economic development. With the situation heating up in Vietnam, Thailand continued to prepare for the possible spread of communism into its borders. U.S.-Thai relations would grow and experience some hard times, but Thailand remained anti-communist and pro-American. The USIS, the regime, the monarchy, the MOI, and some of the security forces together expanded their public diplomacy activities and the Thai government’s ability to reach and meet the needs of its people, both citizens and ethnic minorities. They all sought to build a population that

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<sup>297</sup> “Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Acting Secretary of State (Rusk),” December 9, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, XXIII (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), p. 1002.

would love the nation, Buddhism, and the monarchy, and that would accept the United States as an ally.

## CHAPTER 2: THE HEIGHT OF U.S.-THAI PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS, 1964-1968

### Introduction

The mid-1960s was a time when U.S.-Thai relations were the strongest and both governments' use of USIS public diplomacy and MOI public relations was at its highest. The Vietnam War and a rise in Communist activities brought Washington and Bangkok closer together. Internal and external communist threats drove U.S. and Thai leaders to press for a public information apparatus to support their policies and programs. The United States began using Thailand as a base for its air and military operations in the region. In return, the RTG received military and economic aid against possible attacks from the CPT or neighboring nations. The military regime created by Sarit grew more powerful with U.S. backing. King Bhumibol's prestige reached new levels as he gained more freedom to be among the people and engage in political and public relations activities after Sarit's coup over Phibun back in 1957. The USIS and MOI would both play a part in strengthening U.S.-Thai relations, promoting the government, monarchy, and the growing U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and expanding the political influence of Bangkok into the periphery.

As the Vietnam War heated up for the United States, Washington and Bangkok needed USIS and MOI help to sell the conflict. Both organizations tried to create awareness of the dangers of communism and how involvement in Vietnam would help protect Thailand. The USIS and MOI showed the benefits of having foreign soldiers on Thai soil through promoting civic action projects and public relations programs that showed Americans were in Thailand to help Thailand fight communism.

However, there were some downsides to U.S.-Thai operations in the countryside and having American troops stationed in Thailand. Though some Thai leaders and peoples welcomed U.S. help in fighting communists, the soldiers' extracurricular activities caused tensions with the locals. Some people grew to dislike foreign troops for taking advantage of their goodwill. Service members were rowdy and indulged in prostitution and partying. They cared little about local traditions. In addition, tribes like the Hmong felt threatened by the central government's efforts to exercise authority over them. Bangkok pushed the hill tribes to abandon their territories and cultural practices of slash-and-burn farming and cultivating opium to settle in the lowlands and live sedentary lives. Some tribes were not convinced that following the U.S. and Thai government would be beneficial. The USIS and MOI, along with the military, tried to alleviate tensions through dialogue and civic action programs, with varying success. Washington and Bangkok turned to the two organizations to help with issues arising from the American military presence, the hill tribes, and CPT insurgency.

As the CPT increased its propaganda and insurgency campaigns, and as the RTG became more embroiled in the Vietnam War, the USIS and MOI saw their roles expand into counterinsurgency and military campaigns. More U.S. and Thai leaders began to see the value of public diplomacy and relations. American and Thai officials worked with the BPP and Thai military on ways to improve relations with hill tribes and villagers. Face-to-face contact through local officials was crucial to disseminating information and ideas. USIS and MOI agencies trained provincial leaders to be better administrators and government representatives. They helped organize and publicize civic action and

humanitarian projects. Both organizations taught Thai counterinsurgency and military personnel how to conduct public relations.

From 1964 to 1968, Washington and Bangkok used USIS and MOI to win the hearts and minds of the Thai people, stabilize the countryside, and sell the RTG's and U.S.'s policies of intervention in Vietnam and of allowing the stationing of American troops in the country. Both organizations strengthened bilateral relations and both governments' connections with rural Thais and ethnic minorities. Many American and Thai leaders and institutions saw the benefit of mass media and public relations, development projects, and cultivating relations with villagers.

#### Transition

America's public diplomacy operations would grow further beyond what they had been doing during Sarit's time. By 1968, USIS budget for Bangkok had grown to \$15 million, making it the third largest USIA field bureau, following South Vietnam and Japan.<sup>298</sup> When it came to sheer size, Thailand was the second largest post in the world, trailing only South Vietnam in the number of employees and operations. U.S. public diplomacy officials wore many hats, working with their Thai counterparts in mass media and cultural programs, counterinsurgency, and the training of local government officials on community relations. By 1967, Thailand had 54 officers and 13 branch posts.<sup>299</sup>

The USIS expansion took place during the transfer of power from Sarit to Thanom. On December 9, 1963, King Bhumibol appointed Thanom as prime minister.

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<sup>298</sup> Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," 301.

<sup>299</sup> Oral History, Robert L. Chatten Interview, p. 51, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Chatten,%20Robert%20L.toc.pdf>, [accessed 3/15/2017].



Thanom had less charisma and political strength than his predecessor. He was socially awkward and he lacked any political ambition. Nevertheless, the king saw Thanom as a good fit to be leader of Thailand.<sup>300</sup> Born on August 11, 1911, in Tak Province, Thanom had been in the army for most of his life. He climbed the ranks quickly and entered government when he helped Sarit oust Phibun.<sup>301</sup> Upon taking office, Thanom portrayed himself as a leader above corruption. He would continue to follow to build close relations with the United States.

In order to build a strong government, Thanom chose Praphat Charisathien as his deputy and made him minister of interior. Praphat was more like Sarit, a decisive leader and politically aggressive. During Sarit's tenure, Praphat developed business connections and powerful allies as minister of interior. He would have been a good candidate for prime minister, but the king did not like him, and the general had too many enemies in the army. The two men solidified their relationship with the marriage of Thanom's son to Praphat's daughter. Thanom was the face of the regime, while Praphat provided the strength, especially through the MOI.<sup>302</sup>

During the 1960s, the monarchy's prestige almost surpassed that of the regime. King Bhumibol acted more independently by promoting the monarchy through state and religious events and ceremonies as well as development and humanitarian projects. He portrayed himself as the both the father and ruler of the Thai people. King Bhumibol's

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<sup>300</sup> Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," 173.

<sup>301</sup> "Thanom Kittikachorn, Ex-Thai Leader, 92," *New York Times*, June 18, 2002, [http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/18/us/thanom-kittikachorn-ex-thai-leader-92.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/18/us/thanom-kittikachorn-ex-thai-leader-92.html?_r=0). [accessed 2/12/16].

<sup>302</sup> Phumin Vanaputi, "Thanom Kittikachorn and the Politics of Military Dictatorship in Thailand, 1963-1973," Master's Thesis, (West Virginia University, 1974), 16.

popularity would help the USIS and MOI by providing backing for their anti-communist and pro-American policies and messages. At the same time, both organizations were important to perpetuating the monarch's image and political authority to the Thai people.

As part of the transition in Bangkok, the Thai government began putting more resources into public relations, starting with the Thai Public Relations Department (PRD). Director-General Krit Punnakan pushed the department to become more involved in stymieing the influence of communism. An appendage of the Office of the Prime Minister, the PRD was one of the largest bureaucracies within the Thai government and the oldest organization in the information field. The department ran all the radio and television stations and monitored the content of public print materials.<sup>303</sup> Specifically, the PRD controlled television channels five and nine and the military oversaw channels seven and three.<sup>304</sup> The PRD distributed all licenses to run media installations in the country and coordinated with other agencies to help spread government information, mainly through radio and newspaper. To facilitate the transmission of information, the RTG built an intimate relationship with the media industry.<sup>305</sup> Krit explained the importance of public relations when he said, "How would the government develop the nation if the people [did] not understand and not support the achievements?"<sup>306</sup> For example, achievements in the realm of economic development in the countryside. The

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<sup>303</sup> "Thailand: The Society, National Intelligence Survey," April 1974, 59-62, CREST, General CIA Records, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP01-00707R000200090028-6.pdf>, [accessed 2/22/2017].

<sup>304</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand Economy and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 389.

<sup>305</sup> "Public Relations of the State," Newspaper name unclear, Collection of Important News, n.p./๒๕๐๕(1962)/ ๗.5, TNA.

<sup>306</sup> *Cremation Volume of Krit Punnakan*, Thursday, December 11, 1986 (The Crest at the Tabernacle of Isiryaphorn: United Bank, 1986), 116-117.

PRD, like the USIS and MOI, wanted to help the people understand the policies of the government. Krit made a comparison between information programs and medicine, saying correct knowledge would dispel misunderstandings, just as vaccines could help with diseases. His view reflected the RTG's new push for more public information programs.

There was also change in the United States with Kennedy's death. *Seripharb* paid tribute to the fallen president alongside the passing of Sarit. At the same time, the USIA introduced President Lyndon B. Johnson to the world. Carl Rowan was the new director of the agency. Cull argued that Rowan was a significant appointee, and being an African-American, he "embodied the opportunities available within the United States" and tried to help alleviate the president's worry over public opinion. Johnson would call the VOA "my radio station."<sup>307</sup>

The U.S. diplomatic mission in Thailand gained an important figure that would help Washington achieve its goals in the country when the Kennedy administration replaced Ambassador Young with Graham A. Martin. USIS Press Officer Charles Beecham and PAO John R. O'Brien said the ambassador was secretive and stoic, but good at pursuing U.S. foreign policy objectives.<sup>308</sup> The ambassador's relationship with the USIS was good for the most part, as O'Brien remembered him attending many of their planning meetings.<sup>309</sup> Martin would help sell and implement many of Washington's

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<sup>307</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 255.

<sup>308</sup> Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," 167-168.

<sup>309</sup> Oral History, John R. O'Brien Interview, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 2/4/2016].

policies in Thailand. After Thailand, he would take up the post in South Vietnam and be there until the fall of Saigon in April 1975.

### Thailand and the Beginning of the Vietnam War

A turning point in U.S.-Thai relations was America's war in Vietnam. In August 1964, the USS *Maddox* was chased and attacked by several North Vietnamese boats. Several days later, the USS *Maddox*, joined by the *Turner Joy*, returned to the area and reported inaccurately that the North Vietnamese had fired upon it. This false report triggered a bombing response from President Johnson that lasted a few hours. The retaliatory attacks made the Thais hopeful about America's resolve to fight communism in the region.<sup>310</sup> One newspaper supported the war by saying "The US had finally seen the light about communism in Southeast Asia, and was now going to take forceful action."<sup>311</sup> One result from the increasing U.S. involvement in South Vietnam was that Washington turned to Thailand as a base for American military operations. In return, the Thai government acquired more military and economic. In 1965, Thailand received a large amount of assistance militarily in the form of \$30.8 million and military advisors for special forces and counterinsurgency training.<sup>312</sup> Washington sent aid and experts to help build Thailand's infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, wells, dams, radio and television stations, and schools.<sup>313</sup> Thanom hoped having American bases would protect Thailand from communist insurgencies and help him retain power.

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<sup>310</sup> "Memorandum from FE: SEA William C. Trueheart to Special Group (COIN)," November 16, 1964, Subject: Progress Report on Thailand Internal Security Plan, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records Relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 5, Entry P 296, NACP.

<sup>311</sup> Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," 183.

<sup>312</sup> Randolph, *The United States and Thailand*, 91-92.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-104

In February 1965, the Viet Cong attacked the U.S. base in Pleiku, South Vietnam. The USIA in Washington gave the president conflicting advice about a course of action. Some officials warned Johnson that world opinion would not favor an aggressive response to Pleiku.<sup>314</sup> However, Director Rowan advised the opposite by encouraging the president to escalate.<sup>315</sup> Rowan told Johnson to “not climb down, as this would lead to unbridled Communist influence in the Asian region, with pro-Communist regimes in Vietnam and Laos and a decline in the Thai will to maintain an anti-Communist posture.”<sup>316</sup> Johnson’s response was Operation Flaming Dart, an air bombing campaign against North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong bases north of the demilitarized zone.

The Thai press played an integral part in helping the USIS and MOI to promote anti-communism. Many media agencies supported strong U.S.-Thai relations, anti-communism, and both governments’ involvement in the Vietnam War. In 1963, the USIS issued a *Communications Fact Book* with information about cultural forms of communication and the main media agencies in Thailand. When Sarit came to power, he closed all leftist newspapers, leaving conservative and royalist news agencies still operating. One example was the popular *Sarn Seri*, once run by Sarit. This news company set policies for other newspapers to follow.<sup>317</sup> The *Bangkok Post* was an English-language and anti-communist newspaper, started as a partnership between

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<sup>314</sup> Nicholas J. Cull, “Justifying Vietnam: The United States Information Agency’s Vietnam Campaign for International Audiences,” in *Justifying War*, ed. D. Welch and J. Fox (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 293.

<sup>315</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 249.

<sup>316</sup> “Memorandum from Director Carl Rowan to President,” Secret, February 8, 1965, National Security File Agency, USIA, Vol. 3 A, File 2, Documents 83a, Box 74, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library (LBJPL) – Austin, Texas.

<sup>317</sup> *Communication Fact Book Thailand*, 13.

Americans and Thais in 1946.<sup>318</sup> Almost half of its readership was Asian, with 44 percent being Westerners.<sup>319</sup> Many newspapers became advocates of the RTG allowing the United States to station its troops in the country to prosecute war in Vietnam.

Some news agency owners were elite figures with ties to the monarchy or special interest groups.<sup>320</sup> For example, *Siam Rath* was one of the largest and most popular dailies. It was owned by Kukrit Pramoj, an important social and political figure who would later become prime minister. Kukrit was the son of Prince Khamrob and spent several years in the palace developing good relations with the monarchy. Kukrit's journalism career began in 1950 when he created *Siam Rath*. The paper was pro-monarchy and anti-communist. One of his dailies published his story titled *Phai Daeng* [*Red Bamboo*] about a monk and a communist trying to improve life in their village.<sup>321</sup> According to Rachel V. Harrison, the story was based on a piece written by Giovanni Guareschi about an argument between a Catholic priest and communist mayor.<sup>322</sup> Interspersed throughout his time as a writer and politician, Kukrit was a college professor and practiced art and acting. His most famous role was in the movie *Ugly American*.

Kukrit's social standing and connections helped him become an influential figure in Thai society and politics. Through his newspaper and writings, Kukrit helped support friendly U.S.-Thai relations, American foreign policy, and the monarchy.<sup>323</sup> *Siam Rath*

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<sup>318</sup> Prasit Lulitanond, *A Postman's Life: Prasit Lulitanond* (Bangkok, Thailand: Post Books, 1999), 62.

<sup>319</sup> *Communication Fact Book Thailand*, 11.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>321</sup> Kukrit Pramoj, *Kukrit Pramoj, His Wit and Wisdom: Writings, Speeches, and Interviews*, Vilas Manivat compiler, ed. Steve Van Beek (Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1983), 12, 16, 20-21.

<sup>322</sup> Rachel V. Harrison, "The Man with the Golden Gauntlets" in *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia*, ed. Tony Day and Maya Ht Liem (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program publications, 2010), 203. Rachel V. Harrison is a Thai Studies Lecturer.

<sup>323</sup> Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 157.

became one source by which to gauge elite opinion. An anthropologist said, “Many readers [considered Kukrit] to represent the views of the king because Kukrit was a close member of the royal family....”<sup>324</sup> *Siam Rath* was a favorite among the Thai elite, government officials, and students.<sup>325</sup>

Some Thai news agencies supported increasing America’s military involvement in Vietnam. The pro-government newspaper *Thai Raiwan* exclaimed the only option was for the United States to step up its attacks to force Hanoi to surrender. *Prachatiptatai* argued that North Vietnam’s insistence on a total American withdrawal before negotiations could take place was absurd.<sup>326</sup> Other newspapers praised the United States for standing strong against Hanoi. Days after American troops landed in Da Nang, South Vietnam in March 1965, anti-North Vietnamese and pro-American rhetoric filled the pages of some Thai papers. Writers at *Sarn Seri* “thought bombing and destroying communist supply routes was insufficient” and wanted more aggressive measures. *Siam Rath* thought “the US deserved sympathy for the difficult position it was in for standing by its Asian allies to prevent them from coming under Chinese communist domination.”<sup>327</sup> A few days later, it favored continued air strikes and added, “If use of tear gas can stop communist aggression...then it is the best method to use, because it does not cause widespread destruction and loss of life.”<sup>328</sup> *Sarn Seri* was also in favor of

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<sup>324</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 94.

<sup>325</sup> *Thai Daily Press*, January 6, 1965, p. 2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memo, 1963-1999, Box 14, Entry P 64, NACP.

<sup>326</sup> “Far Eastern Reaction to the Viet Nam Crisis,” September 6-13, 1965, p. 1-2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memoranda, 1963-1999, Box 20, Entry P 64, NACP.

<sup>327</sup> “Far East Reaction to Vietnam Crisis,” March 17, 1965, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memo, 1963-1999, Box 15, Entry P 64, NACP.

<sup>328</sup> “Far East Reaction to Vietnam Crisis,” March 31, 1965, p. 3, GRUSIA, RG 306 Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memo, 1963-1999, Box 15a, Entry P 64, NACP.

tear gas, saying it “does not constitute any violation of international law.”<sup>329</sup> Then it encouraged the United States “to destroy Hanoi.”<sup>330</sup> In *Siam Rath*, Kukrit responded to what he saw as a rise in anti-Americanism in the country writing, “Though I feel there is a new wave of anti-Americanism in Thailand...I wish to oppose that feeling, or at least prove there are some Thais who are grateful to the U.S. for the aid it is pouring out to Thailand and neighboring countries to this day.”<sup>331</sup>

Some Thai students also agreed with the press about Vietnam. At a teacher’s college in Korat, the USIS gave 897 students a questionnaire.<sup>332</sup> The students did not know who created it. When asked if the United States should continue bombing North Vietnam, 78 percent said yes and 8 percent responded no. About 74 percent feared that if South Vietnam fell to communism, Thailand could be next. A majority thought that the communists in Thailand were the cause of much of the recent unrest in the country. Interestingly, when asked if the RTG could handle the communist insurgency, less than half said yes. Over 50 percent thought that having the U.S. military in Thailand was helpful in combatting communism and protecting the country from hostile neighbors. Though many of these students seemed pro-American and anti-communist, they were only a small population of young adults.

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<sup>329</sup> “Far East Comment on Vietnam,” April 5, 1965, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memo, 1963-1999, Box 15a, Entry P 64, NACP.

<sup>330</sup> “Far East Reaction to the Vietnam Crisis,” April 8, 1965, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memo, 1963-1999, Box 15a, Entry P 64, NACP.

<sup>331</sup> Kukrit Pramoj, *Siam Rath*, “Daily Problems,” May 13, 1965, in *Thai Press Comment (Summary)*, USIS Bangkok Press Section (Bangkok: USIS, 1975).

<sup>332</sup> “Thai Students Support US Bombing of N. Vietnam,” July 11, 1966, p. 1-3, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memo, 1963-1999, Box 29, Entry P 64, NACP.



When the USIS asked a number of Thai citizens about their views on the war, many expressed some of the same sentiments as the press. Officials interviewed people with at least a secondary education and found that 43 percent said that the interests of the United States and Thailand were “fairly” congruent, while 36 percent felt they were “very much” so. In response to what they thought the greatest threat to the country was, a little more than half pointed to communism. When asked about the Vietnam War, almost three-fourths had heard or read about it. Close to half approved of U.S. policy in Vietnam, and 24 percent wanted America to take a tougher stance. One-third surveyed said Thailand should help South Vietnam, with another one-third responding no.<sup>333</sup> Another poll showed some Bangkok residents held pro-American sentiments. USIS officials noticed, “The prevailing favorable climate of opinion for the United States among Bangkok residents is in keeping with the tenor of official and media comment over a considerable period of time.”<sup>334</sup> The United States was a favored nation among 78 percent of respondents. Negative opinion was minimal, while a majority disliked the Soviet Union and Communist China. When it came to U.S. support of South Vietnam, 41 percent were in favor and 22 percent did not care. However, regarding if Thailand should help Saigon, the results were less polarized, with about 37 percent saying yes, 20 percent saying no, and 10 percent that did not know. In another survey in Bangkok about Thai opinion of America, 45 percent approved of the government’s policy in Vietnam. Over

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<sup>333</sup> “Tables 9, 76, 78, 83, 85, 88,” Project File: TH 6401, June 1965, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Records of Research Projects, East Asia, 1964-1973, “Thailand, USIS Publications Survey,” Box 15, Entry P 64, NACP.

<sup>334</sup> “The Standing of the US in Thai (Bangkok) Public Opinion,” May 1966, Charts 1-2, p. forward, i-ii, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1960-1999, Box 31, Entry P 142, NACP.

half surveyed had good impressions of U.S. foreign policy, and 70 percent had favorable sentiments towards America.<sup>335</sup>

However, Thai opinion was different when it came to America's domestic racial issues. The USIA conducted a worldwide opinion survey about U.S. race relations after the Watts riots in Los Angeles, and the findings were negative. Some in Bangkok believed American whites opposed equal rights for blacks. Thirty-two percent of those surveyed had a bad opinion of American treatment of blacks, and 22 percent had unfavorable impressions about whites.<sup>336</sup> *Seripharb* tried to portray an image of America as a country free of discrimination. Articles about U.S. politics discussed equality and democracy for all races. Many *Seripharb* issues had pictures of integrated schools and voting booths with blacks and whites happily casting ballots together.<sup>337</sup> The race problem did not seem to hinder America's image in Thailand, though. Many Thais remained pro-American and supported United States' foreign policy, even if they did not agree with what the U.S. government was doing at home.

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<sup>335</sup> "US Standing in Worldwide Public Opinion," December 1965, p. 7, 10-11, 13-14, 38, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1960-1999, Box 28, Entry P 142, NACP.

<sup>336</sup> "A Note on Worldwide Opinion about US Race Relations," December 1965, p. i-ii, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1960-1999, Box 29, Entry P 142, NACP; Also look at "World Survey II, General Attitudes," March 1964, Coordination Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Bangkok, Thailand, p. 69, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Records of Research Projects, East Asia, 1964-1973, "Thailand, USIS Publications Survey," Box 15, Entry P 142, NACP.

<sup>337</sup> "Kannluakdtaang prataanhipdii khong amelika, phaak thii song" [Presidential Elections of America, part 2], *Seripharb*, November 1961, USIS, No. 61, p. 10-13, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World", Thai, Numbers 49-98, Box. 270, Entry 1053, NACP; "wiithiichaoamelikan luakdtaang prataanhipdii" [The Way Americans Elect a President], *Seripharb*, 1953, USIS, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 12-15, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World", Thai, Numbers 1-48, Box 269, Entry 1053, NACP; *Seripharb*, November 1961, USIS, No. 99, x p. 17, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World" (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

### The USIS Reaching Out to Rural Thais

After the Gulf of Tonkin and Pleiku, the U.S. embassy assessed the situation in Thailand. The report began by discussing the increased CPT activity as cadres stepped up the violence and propaganda campaign. In Nakhon Phanom province, Ambassador Martin said that dozens of government officials, teachers, and police informers “had been assassinated, wounded, or attempts made against their lives.”<sup>338</sup> In December 1964, the CPT announced its independence movement. The goals were to drive out any American influences, overthrow the military-monarchical government, and establish a communist country. Through a military and propaganda offensive the CPT hoped to start a people’s revolution by recruiting from the rural Thais and ethnic minorities living in the countryside. In a memo regarding counterinsurgency, U.S. and Thai officials said that Chinese leader Chen Yi confirmed the CPT declaration when he told the French Ambassador in Beijing that “insurgency may break out in Thailand in 1965.”<sup>339</sup> Just as the Vietnam conflict was heating up, Thailand seemed to be under attack as well. The U.S. and Thai government needed to marshal public opinion against communism.

USIS was confident that its staff could handle the responsibility of promoting the U.S. and Thai governments’ policies and programs in light of the Vietnam War and CPT insurgency. The post had a strong operation with many Thai writers, translators, and MIT members. G. Lewis Schmidt, PAO from 1967 to 1971, also saw the valuable contribution

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<sup>338</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to Department of State,” January 1, 1965, Subject: Quarterly Progress Report IX on the US Plan for Promoting the Internal Security of Thailand, p. 2 and 4, Document #295, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 5, Entry P 296, NACP.

<sup>339</sup> “Memorandum for the Record, Washington,” January 29, 1965, Subject: Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Group (CI), *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Mainland Southeast Asia, Regional Affairs, Vol. XXVII, Document 286, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v27/d286>, [accessed 2/16/16].

of the American members of the staff. Before Thailand, Schmidt worked as an analyst for the U.S. Information and Education program, the precursor to the USIA. During his tenure, the USIS reached its zenith of influence, but he would also see its slow decline.

Regarding USIS strengths, Schmidt said,

We made every effort to teach young officers coming into USIA and being assigned to Thailand to learn Thai. Most of them learned it well and during village visits, made it a point to converse extensively with the villagers, find out about their wishes and expectations, and generally give a good impression of Americans. I believe we scored many points with the backcountry people, and now, that Thailand is developing rapidly, and the isolation of the villages is disappearing, the fruits of that program are beginning to be demonstrated.<sup>340</sup>

The language training was six months long. One notable American was Ambassador Leonard A. Unger (1967-1973), who spoke Thai well enough to converse with leaders and elite figures who knew little English. Unger believed knowledge of the language helped him understand the country better than other American ambassadors.<sup>341</sup> The training and in-country experiences of its officials made USIS one of the most “skillfully conceived and effectively operated programs” in the USIA.<sup>342</sup> The staff had high morale. The stable political environment and good relations with the RTG provided the “USIS with an almost unlimited range of opportunity” for “our information program.” Thailand seemed to be an exceptional situation where many USIS officials could communicate and connect with locals and cultivate relations.

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<sup>340</sup> Oral History, G. Lewis Schmidt Interview, February 8, 1988, p. 4-5, 189-190, GRUSIA, RG 306, Transcripts of Oral History Project Interviews, Box 3, Entry A1 1073, NACP.

<sup>341</sup> Oral History, Leonard A. Unger Interview, May 10, 1989, p. 42 and 44, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Unger.%20Leonard.toc.pdf>, [accessed 4/4/16].

<sup>342</sup> “Memorandum for USIA from IAF Daniel E. Moore,” July 14, 1964, Subject: Thailand - Program Review Report, p. 2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Cultural Operations Division, Far Eastern Libraries and Centers Branch: Country Files, 1947-1965, Box 103, Entry P 51, NACP.

USIS officials agreed with the embassy, viewing the northeast as a volatile area. In 1963, Garnish warned that in the next year or two, the CPT would be able to execute a strong propaganda campaign and armed insurgency in the northeast.<sup>343</sup> John R. O'Brien was the USIS Information Officer and PAO after Garnish. Before World War II, O'Brien was a journalist and afterwards joined the USIA, serving most of his career in Southeast Asia. He was a diligent PAO who focused on the fine details of every project in Thailand. In a 1988 interview, he recalled that "the communists had a foothold there [northeast Thailand]." According to O'Brien, the USIS had an important role. He said, "Our people would spend an awful lot of their time out in the boondocks with the Thai officials, making friends, passing out material, showing our films, reports on problems...." He added, "...we work closely with them, we share a lot of the costs with them and ideas, but it's a joint enterprise and we [look] upon them as partners in this."<sup>344</sup> The rural regions needed more contact with the central government. The USIS and MOI were to bridge the gap between Bangkok and the countryside.

To overcome the issue of illiteracy, the USIS and MOI used radio, film, and key village figures to convey important government policies and political ideas. The USIS and MOI print media projects in the countryside ran up against problems with literacy and comprehension. In the rural areas, many people had little education. The USIS combined modern mass media technology with traditional village ways of communication. In rural areas, three figures, the village headman (phuyaiban), monk, and

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<sup>343</sup> "Country Plan for Thailand," May 2, 1963, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 45, Entry A1 56, NACP.

<sup>344</sup> O'Brien Interview.

teacher, served as customary intermediaries, transferring information and news from the city and government to villagers.<sup>345</sup> These three figures were influential, as many people turned to them for advice and sanction for activities. As gatekeepers, they transmitted knowledge and happenings in the country through word-of-mouth. According to a USIS cultural study, traditional attitudes “tend to accept readily the prerogatives of authority figures, and habitually look to central authority for leadership, guidance, and control.”<sup>346</sup> The villager “looks to the person of superior social standing for the validation and interpretation of facts that he may receive through either formal or informal channels.”<sup>347</sup> This made these three people important contacts for the U.S. and Thai governments. With the introduction of radio and film, the USIS saw traditional forms of communication changing. News and information were no longer received primarily through intermediaries but could be accessed by all within the sound of a radio and sight of a television. The USIS utilized these new forms of communication technology to reach more villagers. The radio program improved so much that the USIS “hours of placement...tripled in three years.”<sup>348</sup> Its strong relationship with the RTG enabled it to air its television shows during prime time at five stations.<sup>349</sup> The USIS worked through local leaders and mass media to reach as many people as possible. The phuyaiban, monk, and teacher helped validate what people learned from the media.

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<sup>345</sup> “Northeast Thailand: Patterns of Leadership and Communication,” December 1966, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1960-1999, Box 32, Entry P 142, NACP.

<sup>346</sup> “Thailand: Climate of Opinion,” May 1967, p. iii, 4, RG 306 Records of the USIA, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1960-1999, Box 32, Entry P 142, NACP.

<sup>347</sup> “Thailand: Climate of Opinion,” May 1967, p. 5.

<sup>348</sup> “Post Inspection Report on USIS Thailand,” April 24, 1967, p. 10, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy and Plans/Office of the Chief Inspector, Inspection Report Reference Files, 1954-1976, Box 15, Entry P 130, NACP.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

The USIS Country Plan focused on accelerating the RTG and the U.S. anti-communist efforts in the countryside. The USIS team was “convinced that neither” Bangkok nor Washington were moving quickly enough to stymie the communist pressures in Laos and Northeast Thailand.<sup>350</sup> The embassy and the USIS began helping the RTG create its “own joint internal security plan” to gather and coordinate both governments’ resources. The USIS had several objectives for the security plan, the first was to “develop better-trained, better-equipped, and more effective military and police forces with an effective countersubversion and counter-guerrilla capability; second to foster the continued development of a Thai leadership able and willing to maintain Thailand's independence and its pro-west posture; and third help the country increase homogeneity.”<sup>351</sup>

In addition to the “internal security plan,” the USIS had other goals during the mid to late 1960s. The Country Plan consisted of making Thailand a center for U.S. security efforts in Southeast Asia; training and equipping the military and police for counterinsurgency and pacification; strengthening U.S.-Thai relations through rural development; and increasing ties between the countryside and the RTG through modernization programs.<sup>352</sup> However, Garnish warned that the USIS would only be effective if Washington’s actions were “consistent and credible.” He urged U.S. policy makers to be firm in keeping their promises of aid to Bangkok.

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<sup>350</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” March 28, 1963, Subject: USIS Country Plan, p. 1, Dispatch 60, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Cultural Operations Division, Far Eastern Libraries and Centers Branch: Country Files, 1947-1965, Box 87, Entry P 51, NACP.

<sup>351</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” March 28, 1963, Subject: USIS Country Plan, p. 3.

<sup>352</sup> “Country Plan for Thailand,” May 2, 1963, p. 1 and 3.

The USIS increased the country's radio capabilities to reach more rural people. For several years, Garnish and O'Brien had been negotiating with the RTG about building a 50-kw radio transmitter in the northeast to counter communist stations. USIS researchers reported that Radio Hanoi and Radio Beijing programs could be heard throughout the north and northeast.<sup>353</sup> In October 1963, the United States lent a 50-kw transmitter to Thailand. The radio's effectiveness was immediate. Its signal could be heard throughout the northeast and even in Laos.<sup>354</sup> Through it, USIS and RTG officials disseminated information about the United States and RTG and provided entertainment. Soon the 50-kilowatt programs grew very popular.<sup>355</sup>

There were some issues with establishing the 50- kilowatt station permanently in Thailand. During negotiations, both governments disagreed over where to build it, who would pay operation costs, and who would be in charge. Some Thai leaders feared the USIS would take over the station. To make matters worse, the USIS complained that some Thai media officials had little desire to improve the quality of radio programming. However, talks improved as Krit and the Thai chief of operations in the northeast became more cooperative. O'Brien said, "Thai members of the committee showed a sincere

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<sup>353</sup> "Status Report on Strengthening Radio Broadcasting in Thailand, USIA, 1962," GRUSIA, RG 306 Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 6, Entry P 296, p. 1, 3, NACP; "Status Report of COIN Projects in Thailand," August 1963, Task Force Southeast Asia, RG 306 USIA, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 5, Entry P 296, NACP.

<sup>354</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok embassy to Department of State," January 6, 1964, Subject: Quarterly Progress Report V on the US Plan for Promoting the Internal Security of Thailand, p. 10, Document #273, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 5, Entry P 296, NACP.

<sup>355</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA," May 26, 1964, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, Dispatch 28, p. 2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Exhibits Division, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, 1955-1967, Taiwan: Paintings by Ran In-Tang thru Thailand, Box 36, Entry A1 1039, NACP.



interest in doing a better job of programming and in drawing on the American and Australians for advice and assistance.”<sup>356</sup> Krit was conciliatory and requested USIS help in producing more *mohlam* radio shows. The PRD also announced an expansion of the number of hours available for radio programming, from 7.5 to 10.5 a day. Bangkok saw the benefit of American media expertise and realized that it could not do it alone.

The USIS offered much by way of radio training. In June 1963, Garnish, USIS TV/radio officer Leonard I. Robock, and the second secretary of the American embassy met with Deputy Director of the PRD Dr. Witt Siwansriyanond about the 50-kilowatt station. According to the summary, Dr. Witt worried about the logistics and great responsibility given to Thailand. Specialists would help with training, and the USIS would bring Thais to the VOA headquarters for further education.<sup>357</sup> The USIS would begin taking the lead in operating some of Thailand’s radio programming to relieve some of the PRD’s worries. The deputy was grateful for the help and promised Garnish that the PRD would publicize the 50- kilowatt station. In addition, Dr. Witt assigned three radio announcers who spoke the local dialects to cater to ethnic groups.

After the USIS-Thai radio collaboration with the 50- kilowatt station, Washington and Bangkok began discussing Project Teak, a program to build a permanent 100-kilowatt transmitter. The USIS had introduced the idea years earlier as another means of countering broadcasts from China, North Vietnam, and Laos. The 100-kilowatt station

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<sup>356</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA,” January 30, 1964, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 1, Dispatch #24, GRUSIA, RG 306, Foreign Service Dispatches, 1954-1965, Asia, Box 3, Entry 1047, NACP; “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA,” May 26, 1964, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 1.

<sup>357</sup> “Summary of the Meeting between Thai PRD and USIS,” June 19, 1963, Subject: Exchange of Technical Information Concerning the Loan of the US 50-kw Portable Transmitter, p. 4, GRDS, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of SEA Affairs, Thailand Files, Box 6, Entry A1 1345, NACP.

would provide its best VOA transmitter and retransmit programs for Thailand. One newspaper said that the station would inform rural peoples about RTG activities and help protect against propaganda.<sup>358</sup> However, there were some issues. In 1962, there were arguments over ownership and who would be in charge. The USIS wanted a partnership with its officials as head of the station and responsible for training and programming. A newspaper editor argued that the station should be Thai run for racial reasons. The writer worried that Thais would not listen to nor trust information coming from what he termed the “white west.”<sup>359</sup> The bias might interfere with the station’s reception. The documents did not say how the Americans and Thais resolved the dispute, but they somehow agreed to the construction of the 100-kw station.

Another dispute was over content. Krit told the USIS that he would agree to the station if the PRD could inspect all programming. Henry Loomis, head of the VOA, said the “U.S. couldn’t submit its broadcasts to Thai censorship.”<sup>360</sup> Eventually, they settled on minimal oversight by the Thais. In August 1965, Ambassador Martin and Foreign Minister Thanat signed an agreement to build the 100-kw VOA transmitter.<sup>361</sup> It would have the capability of reaching rural areas in many dialects.

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<sup>358</sup> “Will Establish 100 KW Radio Station to Send Throughout the Countryside,” Newspaper name unclear, p. 5 of file collection, Collection of Important News, n 17/๒๕๐๕(1962) / ๗๕.5, TNA.

<sup>359</sup> “Voice of America in Thailand,” Newspaper name unclear, p. 15 of file collection, Collection of Important News, n 17/๒๕๐๕(1962)/ ๗๕.5, TNA.

<sup>360</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation,” September 11, 1964, Subject: Renewed Thai Interest in Project Teak, p. 2, GRDS, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Thailand, Records Relating to Thailand, 1964-1966, Box 1, Entry A1 5310, NACP.

<sup>361</sup> “Memorandum from William C. Trueheart to Special Group COIN,” September 21, 1965, Subject: Progress Report of the Thailand Internal Security, p. 7, Document #305, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 6, Entry P 296, NACP; “Memorandum from UAF Daniel E. Moore to IOP Mr. Ryan,” September 22, 1965, Subject: Project Teak, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 6, Entry P 296, NACP; “Telegram from Department of State to Bangkok Embassy,” April 27, 1965, Subject: VOA Project Teak, p.

The Thai army utilized USIS technology for their programs. One of PAO Schmidt's programs was to train the Thai army on village public relations. The USIS obtained a mobile radio transmitter from the U.S. army and stationed it in north central Thailand. With an American officer in charge, Thai soldiers learned how to be reporters for the new radio installation. They visited villages, interviewing people and listening to their grievances. When the RTG responded positively to the people's needs, the Thai army was there to record it. With the information, the USIS edited the data and aired the army's findings on the radio.<sup>362</sup> Schmidt said it was effective in building trust with the countryside.

Some of the USIS and RTG radio programs employed cultural themes. USIS officials tracked the listening habits of rural Thais and learned they enjoyed music and soap operas in *mohlam*, a style of performance based in more Laotian speaking areas, specifically in the northeast. *Mohlam* music had two to six singers accompanied by the *Kaen*, a bamboo instrument of varied reed lengths tied together. What made this music special was its ability to convey messages. A moral or political idea would be encapsulated in a legend or lore song in *mohlam*; the music was a mixture of singing and poetry. Starting in 1963, the PAOs and Thai officials used *mohlam* to reach rural Thais. USIS' Robock conducted a study on the listening behaviors of Thais living in six northeast provinces and found that what made the VOA and some RTG stations popular

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1-3, 8, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 6, Entry P 296, NACP.

<sup>362</sup> Schmidt Interview, p. 4-5, 192.

were their *mohlam* music and programs.<sup>363</sup> The USIS infused in the *mohlam* government information and messages. Robock said, “Villagers and others we talked to were greatly in favor of using *mohlam* to convey government information and educate villagers....”<sup>364</sup>

The USIS and other RTG groups saw the importance of using aspects of Thai culture in their public relations programs.

This cultural approach by the USIS and RTG made some inroads in the countryside. The USIS asked villagers their feelings about the communist radio stations, and a majority said they did not like them because of “bad programming.” They also said that they were afraid of accusations of being a communist if other people caught them listening.<sup>365</sup> Rural Thais may have been afraid of listening to communist radio stations, but they had other alternatives in the VOA’s and RTG’s programs. Many villagers began to accept the 50- kilowatt “as their station because of it being the first Thai station to employ the northeast dialect widely.”<sup>366</sup> By the end of 1964, USIS officials noticed increased “evidence of changing attitudes on the part of the rural population toward the government, favorably reflecting its greater efforts in the countryside.”<sup>367</sup> However, USIS documents did not give any specific details on how people’s sentiments changed.

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<sup>363</sup> “Radio Reception and Listening Habits in Six Provinces of NE Thailand,” Leonard I. Robock, August 1964, p. 12-15, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports 1953-1986, Box 69, Entry A1 1007, NACP; See also, “Preliminary Report on the NE Media Survey, USIS,” April-July 1964, p. 11, 14-16, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Records of Research Projects, East Asia, 1964-1973, “Thailand, USIS Publications Survey,” Box 15, Entry P 64, NACP.

<sup>364</sup> “Radio Reception and Listening Habits in Six Provinces of NE Thailand,” August 1964, p. 24.

<sup>365</sup> “Radio Reception and Listening Habits in Six Provinces of NE Thailand,” August 1964, p. 49.

<sup>366</sup> “Radio Reception and Listening Habits in Six Provinces of NE Thailand, USIS, Bangkok,” October 19, 1964, p. 2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1960-1999, Box 13, Entry P 142, NACP.

<sup>367</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to Department of State,” January 1, 1965, Subject: Quarterly Progress Report IX on the US Plan for Promoting the Internal Security of Thailand, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 5, Entry P 296, NACP.

On field trips, the MIT also utilized *mohlam* in their media presentations. In one *Time* magazine article, the reporter looked at the role of the USIS in fighting communism and promoting the monarchy. One part said the MIT had embedded anti-communist messages inside *mohlam* music, radio shows, and films. In one program, a male character said to a female, “May I sleep with you, beautiful girl, may I?” Then both proclaimed, “Our Thai brethren should not forget that Thai people can be owners of land, but in communist countries land belongs to the state.”<sup>368</sup> The USIS and the RTG became adept at inserting anti-communist messages and adjusting to their audience with entertainment and information in the language and manner they could understand.

The USIS relationship with the monarchy helped open doors for the post. William G. Ridgeway was the USIS film officer in 1966. During Ridgeway’s time, the monarchy turned to the USIS for film coverage of its activities. His tenure began with King Bhumibol writing the soundtrack for a USIS film on the royal family. For the movie, Ridgeway’s crew followed the monarchy on their humanitarian trips and events.<sup>369</sup> The film helped raise money for the queen’s children’s charity. According to Ridgeway, the USIS film department had an excellent relationship with the palace afterwards. He said, “When we wanted coverage [of a palace event], instead of having to go through the Embassy then to the Privy Council for permission, Kun Sumon of my staff would get on the telephone and call the palace.”<sup>370</sup> In instances when the domestic press excluded the

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<sup>368</sup> “Thailand: Holder of the Kingdom, Strength of the Land,” *Time Magazine*, May 27, 1966 Vol. 87, No. 21 p. 33-34.

<sup>369</sup> Oral History, William G. Ridgeway Interview, February 28, 1989, p. 56-57, GRUSIA, RG 306, Transcripts of Oral History Project Interviews, Box 5, Entry A1 1073, NACP.

<sup>370</sup> Ridgeway Interview, p. 59-60.

USIS from covering high-profile events, the monarchy would intervene and accredit them as royal photographers.

Coupled with mass media, development continued to be a way of showing goodwill to the people. In one example, the USIS reported on the opening of a project in Ubon Ratachatani, where the U.S. Seabee military construction group and the RTG built a dam, a road, and a school.<sup>371</sup> The opening ceremony began with a Buddhist ritual, giving thanks and dedicating the project to bringing prosperity. USIS photographers captured images of Seabee engineers interacting with local residents during the service.<sup>372</sup> One of the highlights of the event was military officials distributing clothes to locals. In other Seabee projects, American and Thai soldiers would provide health care, toiletries, and USIS education materials.

The Seabees also worked with the BPP in civil construction and rural relations. A letter from the BPP to Dr. Malai stated that starting in November 1967, the police force and the Seabees would team up on public works projects to increase the welfare of the people. The Seabees provided the tools, guidance, and training, while the BPP received all the credit. In a MOI paper, the ministry wanted to emphasize the importance of public relations in the Seabee-BPP program. The argument was that building connections with the people was the goal of their work. Before construction, the units were to gain consent from the village leaders. With their blessing, the people would be more willing to give

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<sup>371</sup> "pherngtalea: chuayngaanphatanakaan phaktawhenawkwchiangneua, [Seabee Helping development the Northeast]," *Seripharb*, October 1964, USIS, No. 107, pg. 12, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World" (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>372</sup> "pherngtalea: chuayngaanphatanakaan phaktawhenawkwchiangneua, [Seabee Helping development the Northeast]," 15.

resources and help. In addition, the Seabees and BPP had to work according to local traditions and customs to avoid any offenses. The officials were to make it seem as if they were encouraging the people to participate in projects, rather than forcing them. If a village did not want to cooperate, the Seabees and BPP were to move on to another location. When encountering propaganda, they were to address questions immediately, while telling the people that the RTG cared for their welfare.<sup>373</sup> According to some villagers, the Seabees and BPP had brought “happiness” to them, and the projects were evidence that the government did not forget them.<sup>374</sup>

#### Thai Rural Public Relations

Eventually other Thai institutions relating to security and defense began to see the importance of public relations in combatting communism. In December 1965, Praphat established the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) to coordinate counterinsurgency efforts with all the ministries. To help in this process, he utilized the logistical and information capabilities of the USIS for countryside security. CSOC civilian personnel and rural leaders underwent ideological training courses. Much of the curriculum came from ideas and themes developed by the USIS.<sup>375</sup> U.S. and Thai experts published materials and showed films to supplement the training. Praphat arranged to have a USIS liaison officer in the CSOC headquarters. O’Brien saw the benefits of this

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<sup>373</sup> “Paper on Border Patrol Police and Sea Bee Construction -- Development -- Operating Philosophy for Remote Area Security Development in Thailand,” November 8, 1966, p. 3-5, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) um 3.1.8/21, TNA.

<sup>374</sup> “Plan Opposes Reds with Good Results,” *Siam Rath*, April 27, 1967, Collection of Important News, n/18/2510/68, TNA.

<sup>375</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” January 24, 1967, Subject: Country Assessment Report of USIS Thailand, p. 2-3, Dispatch # 29, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 57, Entry A1 56, NACP.

relationship by saying, “Having a liaison officer right in the office with the Thai information planners of CSOC has given us daily influence on Thai thinking and programming.”<sup>376</sup>

The Thai NSC also understood the need for more public relations programs in light of the CPT insurgency and Vietnam conflict. The NSC met in November 1965 to discuss how to counter communist propaganda. According to meeting notes, the Thai NSC reported that the goals of the CPT’s information campaign were to rid American troops from Thailand, promote a neutral foreign policy, and stop political corruption and the spread of western culture.<sup>377</sup> The Council developed several strategies to meet the CPT offensive, one of them being winning the battle of hearts and minds. NSC officials proposed creating the Research of Communist Propaganda Center to gather intelligence and to orchestrate programs. Some of the information subjects were the Thai nation and nationalism, culture, traditions, religion, monarchy, democracy, development and humanitarian projects, and the goodwill of the RTG.<sup>378</sup> There would also be an increase in the use of the MDU, Mobile Public Relations Unit, and Mobile Medical Unit to make consistent contact with the rural people.

The CDD began a training program to help their Community Development Workers (CDWs) have better interactions with villagers and win their trust. An important

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., p. 1-2.

<sup>377</sup> “Consideration of Planning Committee of National Security Council about Communist China Policy to Establish Insurgency in Thailand and Get Rid of Government,” November 4, 1965, p. 1, Papers of the Office of the Secretary Cabinet Minister, National Security Council, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2) ๓๓ 1.1.1. 7/12, TNA.

<sup>378</sup> “Considerations of the National Security Council #2/1965,” November 25, 1965, Subject: Policy and Strategy of Suppressing Guerrilla Operations of the Chinese Communists in Thailand, p. 13, 17, Papers of the Office Secretary Cabinet Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2) ๓๓ 1.1.1.7/14, TNA.



task of the CDW was to help villages with development by taking the lead in initiating discussions about projects, while the Village Development Committees (VDCs), villagers, and their leaders were to figure out the details. To help in this process, the CDWs learned to preside over meetings and to guide villagers in finding solutions to their economic and social issues. These types of interactions between the CDW and the VDC modeled democratic practices instead of traditional methods of deferring to leaders or the government. The CDWs learned how to manage differing opinions in a way that included all stakeholders in the villages.<sup>379</sup> Answers to problems came through consensus or majority vote and not from the commands of a leader.

Dr. Malai said the CDWs' training had grown into a method of identifying future leaders and people the RTG could trust at the village level to disseminate government ideas and policies. He continued, "Village organizers [or CDWs] are responsible for looking for those people to whom villagers give special recognition and respect."<sup>380</sup> The CDWs found potential leaders through interviews and general observations. Once identified, they would get the leaders to join the VDC, where they could build a relationship with them. Deputy Director-General of the CDD Vichit Sukaviriya said that by the end of 1965, the CDD had trained 3,120 leaders involved with the VDC in 21 provinces.<sup>381</sup> The CDWs were important intermediaries building the government's image in the countryside.

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<sup>379</sup> "Project 2/9/1964, Training between Stations for Developers Project, CDD, MOI," July 1964, p. 1 and 3, Papers of the Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, (8) 5.3.1.1/1, TNA.

<sup>380</sup> Dr. Malai Huvanandhana and Sai Hutacharern, "Mobilization of Village Resources through the Community Development Program in Thailand," Paper Presented by Thailand at SEATO Seminar on Community Development, Bangkok, Thailand, July 19-23, 1965, p. 221, Thammasat University Library (TUL) – Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>381</sup> Vichit, *Facts about Community Development Programs in Thailand*, 12 and 16-17.

Public relations units were crucial agents at the rural level, supporting media messages, development, and government programs. The CDD created the Promotion and Publicity Unit (PPU) to do work similar to the MIT and MDU, traveling throughout the countryside publicizing the government's activities and events through mass media and face-to-face communications.<sup>382</sup> For this unit, they recruited people with a high school education, with good behavior and health, who had a desire to work in rural publicity. Their training included how to use audiovisual materials and art as well as theories of photo and mass communication. They also learned to engage in public relations. CDD Director-General Sai Hutachareon along with the heads of the PPU, USIS, and Thai-American Official Administrators of Audiovisual Art and Materials were all instructors and advisers working with and training the new group.

Other traveling public relations units like the MDU began expanding operations into volatile border provinces like Nong Khai, located across the river from the Laotian capital of Vientiane. The people in the province spoke a dialect called Isan, which was similar to Laotian, but they understood Thai and they were Buddhists. However, the MDU learned that the residents had low living standards and lacked education. Communication connecting Bangkok to Nong Khai was limited. According to an MDU report, the province was vulnerable to communists and was an avenue for infiltration, spreading propaganda, and orchestrating small insurgencies.<sup>383</sup> Locals could hear news

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<sup>382</sup> "Training Project for Promotion and Publicity Development Staff, January to February 1966, p. 1, Papers of the Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, (8) ๓๓ 5.3.1.1/5, TNA; "Lecturer Meeting for Training Project for Promotion and Publicity Development Staff," January 7, 1966, p. 1-2, Papers of Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, (8) ๓๓ 5.3.1.1/5, TNA.

<sup>383</sup> "Order Operations 5 of Central Division, Brief Operation Plan of Development Unit, Public Relations," January 2, 1964, p. 40, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, (2) ๓๓ 15.1.1/19, TNA.

and propaganda from Beijing, Hanoi, and Laos by way of the CPT's VOPT's radio station.<sup>384</sup> The only government station receiving any signal in Nong Khai was from Khon Kaen province, 107 miles south.

In response, the MDU established a unit station in Nong Khai. The Military Command, the governor of Nong Khai, the CDD, and USOM met to discuss the unit's work in the province. The purposes of the MDU were to help stymie communist infiltration, develop the remote villages, support military operations, build stronger relations between the RTG and the people, and ensure the people knew the government cared.<sup>385</sup> Before beginning their work, MDU officials received a 14-day training course. The aims of the syllabus were to emphasize the importance of their work, explain the MDU's operation plans in Nong Khai, and teach about community development and how to reach the hearts and minds of the people.<sup>386</sup> Specific subjects included the communist threat, counterinsurgency, psychological operations, and social and community development.

While in the province, the MDU focused on encouraging the people to trust the RTG and to adopt ideas such as the nation and the monarchy. The unit showed films depicting development projects and King Bhumibol's activities. They provided entertainment with *mohlam* thematic music and movies. Villagers received pictures of the

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<sup>384</sup> "Order Operations 5 of Central Division, Brief Operation Plan of Development Unit, Appendix A Psychological Operations," January 2, 1964, p. 27, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, (2) ฝธ 15.1.1/19, TNA

<sup>385</sup> "Meeting Report between Committee Officials of Central Division and Officials of Nong Khai Province," November 5, 1963, Subject: Nong Khai MDU Consideration of Work, p. 1-3, Permanent Secretary Papers, Ministry of Education, (2) ฝธ 15.1.1/12, #1, TNA.

<sup>386</sup> "MDU Nongkhai Officials Training Syllabus," October 1963, p. 1, Central Division, Thawe Chunlasap, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, (2) ฝธ 15.1.1/12, TNA.

monarchy, the *Phra Kaew* [Emerald Buddha], and Thanom.<sup>387</sup> People learned about political concepts like the Thai nation and independence. The Thai government counseled the MDU to build friendly relations with the people, especially district officials. They were to avoid language that emphasized differences like “other people” and regionalist terms like Nan and Isan. The people needed to know that all regions were part of the Thai nation. MDU officials were to call everyone “Thais.”

In a short time, the overall MDU program had made some progress in the countryside. Ambassador Martin told the State Department that the \$1.5 million package to the organization was paying off.<sup>388</sup> U. Alexis Johnson gave high praise to the MDU in the *Mahidol* Thai magazine, saying, “The success of these MDUs is established beyond question.”<sup>389</sup> In an MDU follow-up mission, a group of U.S. and Thai military officials visited villages where the unit had previously been, checking on the progress of development and pacification. The report found villagers supportive of the MDU program.<sup>390</sup> One newspaper said the unit had been educating villagers about some of America’s good works in Thailand and its political ideas. The *Lak Mueang* applauded the MDU for teaching democracy to villagers. In addition, the writer said the unit was having

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<sup>387</sup> “Order Operations 5 of Central Division, Brief Operation Plan of Development Unit, Appendix on Psychological Operations,” January 2, 1964, p. 42 and 31.

<sup>388</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy (Martin) to State Department,” January 4, 1964, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Thailand, Records Relating to Thailand, 1964-1966, Box 2, Entry A1 5310, NACP.

<sup>389</sup> “Telegram from Mr. Kosakd to U. Alexis Johnson,” April 6, 1964, Subject: “Rural Development -- Challenge to Thailand,” U. Alexis Johnson, Article submission for publication in *Mahidol*, GRDS, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Thailand, Records Relating to Thailand, 1964-1966, Box 1, Entry A1 5310, NACP.

<sup>390</sup> Dr. Lee W. Huff, *Mobile Development Unit Follow-Up*, Joint Thai-U.S. Military Research and Development Center (Bangkok, Thailand, December 1964), 8.

good results dispelling misunderstandings and combatting communist propaganda.<sup>391</sup>

Through their efforts, villagers gained more knowledge of communism and developed a stronger rapport with locals and officials. The *Phim Thai* newspaper interviewed villagers in Sakon Nakhon province, where they called the MDU “angels coming to bless.”

Journalists in Nong Khai province reported similar sentiments. News of the MDU’s good works received good publicity on the front pages of many Thai newspapers.<sup>392</sup> The unit furthered the reach and influence of the RTG into the countryside.

Within the countryside, the U.S. and Thai governments needed good partners in mid- to lower-level leadership positions to help with expanding Bangkok’s influence and stabilizing the nation. One issue was that some officials were inept at fulfilling their duties. Phuyaibans most often received their positions through elections, while Bangkok appointed nai amphurs and governors with little input from the people. Those filling the two latter positions had few connections with the region and seemed like foreigners. They often had little desire to interact with the people regularly. Even though public relations programs had increased village understanding of the RTG, according to some reports there still was room for improvement. Ambassador Martin wrote to Washington that most villagers had negative feelings towards mid-level officials. Some rural Thais saw government laws as annoyances and restrictions to their daily lives.<sup>393</sup> USIS Assistant

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<sup>391</sup> "Mobile Development Unit," *Lak Mueang*, June 9, 1965, Collection of Important News, n/17/2508/111 42, TNA.

<sup>392</sup> "Mobile Development Unit, Through Development," *Phim Thai*, April 11, 1964, Collection of Important News, n/17 2507/ 111/4.2, TNA.

<sup>393</sup> “Telegram from Embassy to Department of State,” February 16, 1966, Subject: Response to Questions Raised by Special Group COIN, p. 2, GRUSIA, RG 306 USIA, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 6, Entry P 296, NACP.

Executive Officer John M. Reid said the mission tried “encouraging Thai officials to get out into the villages and interact with people at the local level. Our part of it was information. We went out to the villages with the Thai officials, we showed films, we distributed publications, and we talked to people.”<sup>394</sup>

The issue that O’Brien noticed with government appointees was that some did not feel invested in the people. When it came to training them on how to combat communism and convey the threat to villagers, he said most Thai officials were unable “to communicate with their countrymen in the villages.”<sup>395</sup> Others lacked resources. Some mid-level officers grew reliant on USIS logistical and material aid. The traditional leadership approach to dealing with villagers consisted of heavy-handedness and long lectures. Some governors said that they had no idea how to fulfill USIS and MOI public relations objectives. O’Brien cited an instance where the governor of a CPT-threatened province “pleaded” with him to open a USIS branch in his capital because he did not have the knowledge and materials to engage in information programs. Richard A. Virden, an assistant BPAO in Chiang Mai from 1967–1968 had an interesting observation about trying to get RTG leaders to go see their people. Often it was a struggle to get officials to leave the district and provincial capitals. The weather was hot, humid, and sometimes rainy. Virden said, “Traditionally, state officials stayed in their offices, and if there was contact at all, the people came to them; they did not go out to the people. So in a way this

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<sup>394</sup> Oral History, John M. Reid Interview, 2002, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 2/4/2016].

<sup>395</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” February 28, 1966, Subject: Country Assessment Report of USIS Thailand, p. 3, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 54, Entry A1 56, NACP.

was a revolutionary concept.”<sup>396</sup> This had been the mode of governance for centuries, and it was difficult to change the cultural habit. The USIS and MOI needed local officials as allies, and their support was important for winning hearts and minds at the village level. Soon leadership training would be part of both organizations’ programs.

Where some government officials may have fallen short, the monarchy made up for it. King Bhumibol played a significant role in the patron-client system. Historically, in this relationship, the superior agreed to provide for the needs and safety of those below him, like a king protecting his subjects. The client, in return, supported the patron through military service, taxes, political support, or *corvée* labor. In modern times, a patron gave special economic concessions or political benefits, and the client offered their loyalty or contributed money as a gift. Though the absolute monarchy ended in 1932, the king and the royal entourage still wielded influence.<sup>397</sup> At the top of the patron-client system, King Bhumibol was a client to no one and a patron to all. Other than members of the royal family, the prime minister was the next level, answering only to the king as a client and acting as a patron to officials below him. Ambassador Martin saw the value of King Bhumibol and his place in Thai society. In a telegram to the State Department, he said, “NE villagers have only vaguest idea at best of existence and role of RTG. Monarchy, on other hand, is known and widely revered as a rather vague, general concept of all that is good. Monarchy has not been exploited sufficiently by RTG in winning popular

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<sup>396</sup> Oral History, Richard A. Virden Interview, 2011, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/>, [accessed 1/17/2019].

<sup>397</sup> Lucien M. Hanks, “American Aid is Damaging Thai Society,” *Society* 5, No. 10 (October 1968): 31-32.

loyalty.”<sup>398</sup> In many ways, King Bhumibol was the perfect person to promote because of his religious and social influence. He became an important tool for U.S. and Thai public relations campaigns. With him, the U.S. and Thai governments would have a better chance of building closer relations with the countryside and Thais in general.

#### Helping the Hill Tribes to Feel Included

In addition to focusing on rural Thais, the U.S. and Thai governments devoted considerable energy to winning the loyalty of the hill tribes. It was not enough to buy their loyalty or force ethnic minorities to become part of the Thai nation, though these two methods were used. The tribes needed to know that the RTG cared and that they had a stake in the nation. In previous years, Bangkok had left tribal responsibilities to the local leaders. Formal government contact with ethnic minorities began in 1955 with the BPP and increased in 1959. Eventually Bangkok realized that it knew little about the tribespeople. To address the issue, from 1961–1962 the RTG sponsored “The Socio-Economic Survey of Selected Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand” with the intention of learning how to make them part of the Thai nation. The survey recommended a combination of more development and research about the ethnic minorities, such as language, culture, family structure, etc.<sup>399</sup> The government began “reconnaissance” missions in 26 Hmong villages, picking four as sites for major development projects.<sup>400</sup> Development and humanitarian projects were public relations tools used in trying to win the hearts and minds of the hill tribes.

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<sup>398</sup> “Telegram from Embassy to Secretary of State,” February 15, 1966, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306 USIA, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 6, Entry P 296, NACP.

<sup>399</sup> Manndorff, “The Hill Tribe Program of the Public Welfare Department,” 553.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 546.



The Thai and U.S. governments learned that the peoples in the mountains were quite different from the Thai population. Minorities like the Hmong, Mien, Ma Soe, Lisu, and Krathieng were not Buddhists and not sedentary farmers. Many traveled freely throughout northern Southeast Asia and southern China. They had little concept of a nation and government. For decades, the government had given them political autonomy over the areas they inhabited. However, with Bangkok's push to modernize politically and solidify the borders of the nation through defining sovereignty and harnessing the country's resources to participate in the global economy, the hill tribes and their lands would no longer be free of government intervention. Ethnic minorities tried to avoid government efforts to extract labor, taxes, and military service by moving into remote areas.<sup>401</sup> In a letter to provincial officials, the MOI considered the hill tribes as an important target population for the communists to win over via public relations.<sup>402</sup> The CPT attacked the RTG for being corrupt and wanting to limit the freedoms of the tribes, especially by prohibiting them from growing opium. For communists, the land was for all to use and to grow whatever they wanted.<sup>403</sup> The tribes became a population over whose loyalty the U.S. and Thai governments and the CPT fought. U.S. and Thai officials

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<sup>401</sup> James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>402</sup> "Letter from Ministry of Interior to Provincial Officials," March 1965, Subject: The Survey of the Missionary Work among the Hill Tribes, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.8/8, ๒๓๓ 2, TNA.

<sup>403</sup> "Tribal Issues, Chiang Mai Province," March 25, 1965, p. 2, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.8/20, #2, TNA.

needed to counter the propaganda circulated by the communists and incorporate, then assimilate, as Thongchai said, “others within.”<sup>404</sup>

In the fall of 1964 the MOI met to discuss its approach to the hill tribes. Dr. Malai began the meeting by saying that Washington would offer aid, training, and materials to help with the minorities. Within the MOI, the DPW created the Tribal Development Support Project to develop the tribes’ economy and society, protect the forests, stop the opium trade, and persuade tribes to be loyal to the nation.<sup>405</sup> The project created two zones between the areas bordering Burma and Laos. At each location, there would be a Tribal Development Center with mobile units assigned to work in 120 villages. The DPW also increased the number of resettlement areas for relocating tribes. These sites would help them start new lives as cash crop farmers. The Ministry of Defense requested the construction of airstrips in some mountainous locations so that government officials could resupply and visit the settlements.<sup>406</sup>

Several months later, MOI officials gathered with some hill tribe leaders to understand their grievances and try to resolve them. In his opening remarks, Dr. Malai reminded all government officials present that the ethnic minorities were important to Thanom and Praphat. Some tribal leaders worried that without opium their people would not be able to make a living. Others argued that the drug was an integral part of the

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<sup>404</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, “The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910,” in *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. Andrew Turton (London: Curzon Press, 2000), 49.

<sup>405</sup> “Record of Meeting about Requesting Help from America Project according to Needs of National Economic Development Institute,” September 1, 1964, p. 3, Papers of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.5.9/663, #3, TNA.

<sup>406</sup> “Report of Meeting of The Committee of Cooperating with American Experts,” September 9, 1964, p. 3, Papers of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.5.9/663, #2, TNA.

culture. Dr. Malai seemed unsympathetic when he said that even though “The government was willing to listen to complaints,” the law called for its prohibition. However, he did say that Bangkok would consider opium’s medicinal purposes and that one development unit was studying to find alternatives ways to make a living, outside of growing and selling opium. Unfortunately, there were no rebuttals from tribal leaders to the government’s answers recorded in the meeting notes.<sup>407</sup>

One answer to help with the hill tribes came in the form of the BPP. Bangkok placed about 200,000 minorities under their stewardship. The MOI worked with the police force to build security in the border regions, initiate self-help projects, and institute village improvement measures and health standards. In August 1963, the BPP held a 3-week training orientation about hill tribes. Afterwards, some of the first units went to Nan and Chiang Mai provinces. They were equipped with civic action supplies, food, seeds, and medicine.<sup>408</sup> With the new commission, the BPP trained local leaders and villagers on how to detect insurgency and combat communism.<sup>409</sup> They built hospitals and public infrastructure. Some became permanent members of villages by marrying into families or bringing their own. The BPP was one of the faces of the government for the hill tribes.

School construction and education would become hallmarks of the BPP’s work with the hill tribes. The teaching of Thai was paramount in the BPP’s education mission.

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<sup>407</sup> “Meeting about Fixing Tribal Problems #1,” April 8, 1965, p. 6-7, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) มท 3.1.8/20, #3, TNA.

<sup>408</sup> “Letter from Deputy MOI Academic Branch Malai Huvananda to Information and Foreign Unit Permanent Secretary,” March 25, 1965, Subject: American Ambassador's Travels to Inspect Tribal Development and Support, p. 1-2, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) มท 3.1.8/13, TNA

<sup>409</sup> “tamluatchaaydaen chuaychatdtang muhanklarbdawdab [Border Patrol Police Help Establish Village Protection],” *Seripharb*, July 1964, No. 104, pg. 4-9, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, “Free World” (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

If the hill tribes learned Thai, it would help with communicating ideas and policies and with gathering information. More importantly, the language was a form of assimilation, incorporating all who spoke it into the Thai nation-state. These schools became sites of indoctrination as well. Hill tribe children and young adults learned about Thai culture, history, nationalism, and the government's modernization programs.<sup>410</sup> Historian Sinae Hyun cited one Thai official saying that the BPP and RTG focused so much on the ethnic minority children and youth because they were easier to teach and influence. "Once they win the hearts and attention" of the young people, Hyun said, they would help build connections between the government and the hill tribes.<sup>411</sup>

What helped the BPP make some breakthroughs among rural Thais and hill tribes was the support of the monarchy. According to historians Thomas Lobe and David Morell, the police force gained political legitimacy and popularity because of the king.<sup>412</sup> King Bhumibol presided over police ceremonies and frequently visited the BPP's training.<sup>413</sup> Anthropologist Katherine A. Bowie said the police acted as royal bodyguards during the monarchy's rural tours.<sup>414</sup> CIA advisers helped nurture the relationship between the two institutions. Palace members welcomed the BPP's protection. Lobe and Morell concluded, "They have been the only institution able to affect active linkages simultaneously with the army, the palace, the U.S. government, and rural villagers in key areas across the country."<sup>415</sup> The Princess Mother, Sangwal, was one of the foremost

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<sup>410</sup> Hyun, "Indigenizing the Cold War," 270.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 282-283.

<sup>412</sup> Lobe and Morell, "Thailand's Border Patrol Police: Paramilitary Political Power," 153; See also, Lobe and Morell, *United States National Security and AID to the Thailand Police*, 76.

<sup>413</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 125

<sup>414</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 97.

<sup>415</sup> Lobe and Morell, "Thailand's Border Patrol Police," 171.

royalists helping the hill people with the BPP. She orchestrated projects building schools and health clinics and gathering donations for humanitarian aid.<sup>416</sup> This paramilitary group helped give the government a good name.

According to Hyun, the BPP's public relations activities with the hill tribes enabled King Bhumibol to create an image of himself as a great modernizer. He was involved in many development programs such as road construction, seed experimentation, infrastructure development, sanitation, and natural resource conservation, all with the goal of helping ethnic minorities. Eventually, by 1965, the royal family established the Royal Hill Tribe Development Project. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, members of the palace, especially the king, would traverse the countryside and mountain regions dedicating public projects and overseeing their progress. He wanted to show the hill people that he would take care of their needs and that they were part of the Thai nation. The king hoped that civic action initiatives among minorities would be a way of stymieing the influence of communism by improving the people's standard of living, specifically giving them land to settle and alternative crops to opium so they would stop the practice of slash-and-burn farming. There were other cash crops such as rice, corn, hemp, and various fruits. The king had a program that did seed experimentation for growing in high altitudes. Rural development would help with security and incorporating the border regions.<sup>417</sup>

The USIS also joined with the BPP in working with minorities. In the 1963–1964 Country Plan, one objective was to assist with the civic action programs of the BPP and

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<sup>416</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 167.

<sup>417</sup> Hyun, "Indigenizing the Cold War," 203-204

military amongst the tribes.<sup>418</sup> O'Brien recalled providing the BPP with informal reports from their research projects.<sup>419</sup> He went on helicopter tours to see the borderlands and BPP activities. The USIS provided publications and information about the RTG and United States, pictures of the Buddha and the king, and a map of Thailand for distribution.<sup>420</sup> There were films and radio/TV programs highlighting police activities. According to one USIS report, some minorities had grown "more relaxed with the BPP's presence in their villages" and were looking forward to seeing them again.<sup>421</sup> One USIS official believed that giving health care through humanitarian projects was one of the best methods for winning tribal support. They would receive vaccinations and sanitation products. The BPP were very pleased with the USIS work.<sup>422</sup>

In 1965, the DPW developed a program where students and teachers volunteered for three months to teach the tribes about Thai traditions to build cultural understanding. The first group of volunteers came from Chulalongkorn University's literature department. Their assignment was with a Ma Soe tribal settlement in Tak province. At the settlement, students taught about Thai values, while learning more about the tribe. Meanwhile, the DPW sent 14 volunteer educators to teach the Hmong and Ma Soe in another area. They taught Thai geography, history, math, state-society relations, Thai-tribal languages, and economic development. More importantly, the teachers tried to

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<sup>418</sup> "Country Plan for Thailand," May 2, 1963, p. 8.

<sup>419</sup> O'Brien Interview.

<sup>420</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to Department of State," January 6, 1964, Subject: Quarterly Progress Report V on the US Plan for Promoting the Internal Security of Thailand, p. 12.

<sup>421</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to Department of State," October 7, 1964, Subject: Quarterly Progress Report VIII on the US Plan for Promoting the Internal Security of Thailand, p. 16, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 5, P 296, NACP.

<sup>422</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington," February 6, 1963, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 1, 6.

persuade the tribes to think of themselves as Thai. Volunteers showed the tribe that their camp was within the borders of Thailand on maps, thus making them part of the nation. The teachers learned that they made good connections with the women and children through audiovisual mediums and sports. Outside of instruction, the students cleaned the football field and played with the kids. They created a sign at the visitor's center that said, "Hmong Home Welcomes Friends of Thailand."<sup>423</sup> The volunteers and tribes were pleased with the exchange, said the DPW. The students received valuable experience in service and development. The Ma Soe became more familiar with Thai history and the concept of the nation.<sup>424</sup>

However, not all tribespeople were interested in the government's programs. Phetchabun province was an area of interest for both the RTG and the CPT. About 2,000 ethnic minorities inhabited the province, mostly Hmong. In March 1965, the governor of Phetchabun requested that the DPW send officials to help govern the Hmong. He said that most of them did not want to move into settlements or to the lowlands.<sup>425</sup> Some Hmong did not trust government officials from the plains. They simply wanted to live peacefully, practicing their slash-and-burn agriculture and opium production. To make matters worse, the governor reported that some of the Hmong had traveled to Laos to

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<sup>423</sup> "Agenda for the Meeting of the Tribal Support Committee, #1, Report Results of Work of Tribal Volunteer Development Students from Literature Department of Chulalongkorn University towards DPW, Asian students and Chulalongkorn," June 17, 1965, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.8/20, TNA.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> "Letter from Governor of Phetchabun to President of Tribal Support Committee", March 23, 1965, Subject: Requesting Send Officials of Department of Public Welfare to Help Govern Hmong Support in Phetchabun, p. 1-2, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) un 3.1.8/20, #2, TNA.

receive weapons training from communists. The government needed to tread lightly for fear of alienating them and other ethnic minorities.

There were reports of communists infiltrating some of the Hmong tribes. The governor of Phetchabun wrote to the deputy MOI requesting more BPP support to watch the movements and behavior of the tribes. According to the letter, communists had persuaded some Hmong to join them and receive weapons training. The governor said that an airplane with no nationality insignia had dropped off some equipment and then picked up a group of tribespeople.<sup>426</sup> In the north in Chiang Rai and Nan provinces, minorities and Thais argued over land, causing further tensions and violence.<sup>427</sup>

In addition, because of their remote locations, the hill tribes only had access to communist radio stations. An American technical team conducted a survey of the hill tribes and their media habits. The purpose of the project was to design a program tailored for the minorities “as part of the joint RTG/USG program to improve the internal security of Thailand.”<sup>428</sup> They learned that some of the news reaching the tribes came from communist radio stations promoting the idea that the tribes were not Thai citizens. In a letter to the Thai NSC, the prime minister’s office reported that communists had inundated some Mien tribes living outside of tribal settlements with broadcasts in their

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<sup>426</sup> “Letter from Chalerm Yupanan Governor of Petchabun Province to Deputy Ministry of Interior,” May 2, 1967, Subject: Request for BPP to Inspect the Movement of Tribes, Permanent Secretary Papers, Ministry of Interior, (1) 3.1.8/24, TNA.

<sup>427</sup> Marks, *Making Revolution*, 107.

<sup>428</sup> “Scope of Inquiry for the Technical Team Investigating Radio Broadcasting to the Hill Tribe of North Thailand Paper,” October 9, 1964, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Thailand, Records Relating to Thailand, 1964-1966, Box 3, Entry A1 5310, NACP.



language. The programs criticized the RTG for its settlements, saying it was a way to collect taxes and conscript the Mien.<sup>429</sup>

It was important for the ethnic minorities to have radio broadcasts and information given in their own language. In early 1965, the MOI began a radio program to promote the government's perspective to the hill tribes. There were four purposes for the radio project: to promote and publicize topics like farming and how to improve the standard of living; to build understanding between tribes and the RTG; to disseminate news about the RTG's and monarchy's activities; and to counter communist propaganda in the north.<sup>430</sup> The MOI divided the programming into several sections, the first being entertainment, such as tribal musical bands. Second was the news, sharing information about foreign and domestic politics, with a focus on the Tribal Development and Support Centers. Third was education. The last type focused on combatting communist propaganda. The MOI created documentaries about the monarchy, anti-communism, government administration, and regional Thai history.<sup>431</sup> Programs would air in the Kham, Mueang, Hmong, Ma Soe, Mien, Chinese, and Karieng languages. Designated to run the radio programs were the Tribal Support and Tribal Radio Broadcasting Committees, which consisted of the several government organizations like the BPP and DPW. It was important for the tribespeople to receive accurate news and information to remove some of the obstacle to winning their trust.

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<sup>429</sup> "Letter from Acting Administrative Secretary of Prime Minister's Office (Senanarong) to Secretary of National Security Council," May 14, 1964, Subject: Tribal Behavior, Papers of the Office Secretary Cabinet Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2) นน 1.1.1.7/3, TNA.

<sup>430</sup> "Tribal Radio Broadcasting Project," March 25, 1965, p. 1, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) นน 3.1.8/20, #2, TNA.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

The CDD created a public relations unit to help with the recent hill tribe issues. In late 1967, Praphat established the CDD's Promotion and Publicity Special Mobile Units (PPSMU). CDD Director-General Sai Hutacharoern wrote to Dr. Malai saying that the unit was to specialize in developing and restoring people's hearts and minds in favor of the government. The PPSMU was an offshoot of the Promotion and Publicity Unit that helped spread awareness about the government's development and humanitarian projects. The PPSMU consisted of officials who understood human psychology and knew how to engage in recreation, promote Buddhism, and use audiovisual technology.<sup>432</sup> The CDD assigned the first group to Chiang Rai province. Sai said the PPSMU would help stymie communist influence in the borderlands.

Before engaging in any work, the PPSMU was to build relationships of trust with the hill tribe villagers. They participated in sports and shared meals with the people. After breaking the ice, unit members sought to understand the people's needs through surveys and interviews.<sup>433</sup> With this information in hand, they then used mass media and personal interactions to promote the benefits of supporting the government.<sup>434</sup> They tried to immediately address any misinformation originating from the CPT. The people were to understand that the government sought their welfare.

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<sup>432</sup> "Letter from Nai Sai Hutacharoern (Director-General CDD) to Deputy MOI Academic Branch," September 7, 1967, Subject: Promotion and Publication Special Mobile Project, p. 1, Community Development Department Papers, Ministry of Interior, (8) ๙๓ 5.3.1.1/13, TNA.

<sup>433</sup> "Methods of the Work of the Special Promotion and Publication Mobile Unit," September 4, 1967, Community Development Department Papers, Ministry of Interior, (8) ๙๓ 5.3.1.1/13, TNA.

<sup>434</sup> Letter from Nai Sai Hutacharoern (Director-General CDD) to Deputy MOI Academic Branch, September 7, 1967, Subject: Promotion and Publication Special Mobile Project, p. 1.

The PPSMU had made good progress by the spring of 1968. One report came from Prachuab Kiri Khan province. The unit coordinated its work with other organizations and provincial leaders to learn the needs of the people. With CDD officials they built a temple, renovated a school, and created vocational centers to teach weaving, floral arranging, and hair cutting. They formed recreation groups for sports with equipment provided by the CDD.<sup>435</sup> About 120 people joined the outdoor activities. Villagers received seeds to plant vegetables in their backyards. There were projects to build wells for drinking and irrigation. The PPSMU took pictures and publicized the activities in newspapers and on radio stations. According to Deputy Provincial Official Nayrom Chitthi Kanyasiri, there were some good results from the PPSMU's work that could be seen amongst the people but did not give any evidence to back up his assertion.<sup>436</sup>

### Buddhism's Influence

Promoting Buddhism was another facet of the U.S. and Thai government's the public relations programs. The United States had been using Buddhism as a means of building connections with Thais since the early 1950s.<sup>437</sup> However, it was not until the 1960s when the Thai government began proselytizing in the countryside. The RTG established a program of promoting Buddhism in the countryside to combat communist influence and instill Thai cultural values amongst rural villagers and hill tribes.

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<sup>435</sup> "Recorded Message from Division of Recreation, Special Enhancement and Promotion Unit," April 24, 1968, Subject: Approving Outcomes for Community Development of Prachuab Khiri Khan Province, Community Development Department Records, (8) ๗๗ 5.3.2/3, TNA.

<sup>436</sup> "Letter from the Director of CDD," April 26, 1968, Subject: Promotion of Recreation of the Special Unit of Prachuab Kiri Khan Province, Community Development Department Records, (8) ๗๗ 5.3.2/3, TNA.

<sup>437</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*.

Sociologist Yoshihide Sakurai explained the role of Buddhist monks in rural Thai development. According to Sakurai, “Thai Buddhism cannot be researched in separation from politics.”<sup>438</sup> Although it had always been an important part of religious culture, in 1902 the Thai Buddhist Sangha became a force in politics under the monarchy’s patronage and protection. Buddhist monks played an important role in legitimizing political actions and economic development and integrating the Thai and even ethnic populations.

In 1964, the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA) had the Thammayut sect begin missionary work in the rural areas. The Thammayut was a Buddhist group created by King Mongkut (reigning 1851-1868) as a way of reforming the religion along stricter beliefs based on purer doctrine. The other group was the Mahanikay, the more popular monkhood. Religious officials worked alongside the CSOC, CDD, and the police department to coordinate where the Thammayut monks would go preach. Some of the missionary program’s objectives were to help villagers and ethnic minorities “internalize the ideology of worshiping the nation, religion, and king” and to help “suppress sympathy” for communism.<sup>439</sup> The government sent monks to the outer provinces, teaching the Thammayut version of Buddhism. They called this initiative the Wandering Dhama-Preacher Project.<sup>440</sup> The religious missionaries hoped those they taught would develop a sense of loyalty to the nation and adhere to Buddhism.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Yoshihide Sakurai, “The Role of Buddhist Monks in Rural Development and their Social Function in Civil Society,” *Tai Culture* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1999): 109.

<sup>439</sup> Sakurai, “The Role of Buddhist Monks in Rural Development and their Social Function in Civil Society,” 117.

<sup>440</sup> Charoenkiat Thanasukthaworn, “Religion and the Thai Political System,” *The Review of Thai Social Science*, The Social Science Association of Thailand, (1977): 133.

<sup>441</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*, 196.

Pin Muthukan was one of the masterminds behind the government's missionary program. Born in Ubon province, Pin devoted much of his life to promoting Buddhism. In 1944, he joined the military as a chaplain. Then in the 1950s, he became the army's media representative and developed a reputation for being quite knowledgeable of Buddhist doctrine. When Thanom came to power, he appointed Pin director-general of the DRA (1963–1971).<sup>442</sup> During his tenure, Pin developed a religious curriculum to bring about uniformity amongst the many regional Isan versions of Buddhism.<sup>443</sup> Many of the principles focused on purification, while other programs provided moral instruction. According to *Thai Raiwan*, the department had noticed a decline of standards. A combination of the Ethics Division, DRA, and Ministry of Education created the Buddhist Religious Promotion Unit to help with the missionary program.<sup>444</sup>

Before leaving for the field, monks received training in proselytizing methods and learned about the areas in which they were serving. The DRA selected only those who could speak Laotian and some of the hill tribe languages. Pin sent some groups to the northeast and others to the northern regions. He praised these monks for their work and said they would be following the footsteps of the enlightened Buddha.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Christine Gray, "Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s," Vol. 2, 654; Colonel Pin Mutukun, *kho naenam dhammadhut Buddha-sasana [Introducing Buddhist Missionaries]* (Bangkok: Department of Religious Affairs, 1964), 5-6.

<sup>443</sup> Gray, "Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s," Vol. 2, 655.

<sup>444</sup> "Center to Promote and Propagate Morals," *Thai Raiwan*, January 31, 1964, Collection of Important News, ๓๑/7 2507/ ๓๓/4.2, TNA.

<sup>445</sup> "Send Diplomatic Mission to Promote Buddhism to People in Rural Areas," *Siam Nikorn*, February 3, 1964, Collection of Important News, ๓๑/7 2507/ ๓๓/4.2, TNA.

One pool of investigators was the hill tribes. Most of the ethnic minorities were animists or shamanists.<sup>446</sup> According to their beliefs, the world was divided between the spiritual and temporal, with both interacting for good and evil purposes. Practitioners appeased the spirits through rituals and sacrifices. The *Daily News* said, “These tribes do not have a religion, they just believe in spirits.”<sup>447</sup> In other words, they needed Buddhism. At the first general Tribal Support Committee meeting, the MOI followed up on one group of missionaries working with the tribes. This proselyting group had some major backers from Wat Benjamabophit (a royal-level temple in Bangkok), the Sub-Committee of Cultural Psychological Branch, the DRA, and the Asia Foundation. This missionary cohort consisted of 50 monks proselyting in the north with the purposes of not just of spreading Buddhism, but also of building relations and gathering information to establish education programs. Before leaving, the monks went through orientation with the DPW. They were divided into ten groups of five to go teach the Hmong, Mien, Lisu, Ikaw, and Karieng.<sup>448</sup>

Monk missionaries had a modicum of success amongst the hill tribes and rural villagers. The DPW director-general observed that some tribespeople had converted and others had entered the monkhood as novices.<sup>449</sup> From Phetchabun and Loey provinces, thirteen Hmong received ordination.<sup>450</sup> The DPW hosted the ceremony of the robing of

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<sup>446</sup> Steven Piker, “The Relationship of Belief Systems to Behavior in Rural Thai Society,” in *Modern Thai Politics: From Village to Nation*, ed Clark D. Neher (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1979), 115-116.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> “Agenda for the Meeting of the Tribal Support Committee, #1,” June 17, 1965, p. 6, (1) ๓๓ 3.1.8/20, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, TNA.

<sup>449</sup> “Agenda for the Meeting of the Tribal Support Committee, #1,” June 17, 1965, Agenda #3.

<sup>450</sup> “13 Hmong from the Mountains Come to be Ordained Monks,” *Daily News*, June 20, 1966, Collection of Important News, ๓/๑๗/2509/๓๓ 4.2, TNA.

new tribal monks. After their investiture and training, they would go on their pilgrimage as missionaries. In 1966, *Thai Rath*'s editor wrote that about 800 villagers had converted to Buddhism in one year.<sup>451</sup> He added that no one objected to the non-Thais and former animists accepting the Buddhist faith. To help the rural youth, the Junior Buddhist Association of Thailand received support from the government and other organizations to establish Junior Buddhist Groups in schools. This program, according to *Lak Muang*, would help Thai people "to recite the Buddhist teachings of the five principles of conduct every morning."<sup>452</sup> The RTG accepted a proposal of having a daily Buddhist prayer radio program. The promotion of Buddhist traditions was a means of promoting the government's version of Thai culture and of unifying the nation. However, other sources reported lackluster results from some of the missionary trips. In *Cold War Monks*, Ford showed the program had some faults, such as unqualified monks and villagers' frustrations with being forced to listen to sermons.<sup>453</sup> Nevertheless, Buddhism became a way of propagating Thai culture.

#### Acclimating to Americans in Thailand

The large number of American troops in Thailand because of the Vietnam War created more issues in the countryside for the U.S. and Thai governments. In August 1965, there were over 5,000 U.S. military advisers and engineers. The number would increase to 45,000 by 1968. Thanom expressed reluctance about having more soldiers in

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<sup>451</sup> "Thai Rath Praises Buddhist Missionaries," April 14, 1966, *Bangkok Post*, Collection of Important News, n/17/ 2509/ ๗๗, 4.2, TNA.

<sup>452</sup> "Junior Buddhist Groups," June 8, 1966, *Bangkok Post*, Collection of Important News, n/17/2509/๗๗ 4.2, TNA.

<sup>453</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*, 196-197.

Thailand because of the negative consequences. Martin said, “The Thai are quite frankly extremely loath to increase the American military presence.”<sup>454</sup> Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was also nervous about having a lot of soldiers in Thailand. McNamara purposely wanted to keep the numbers low to avoid providing fuel for CPT propaganda and exacerbating tensions with locals.<sup>455</sup> However, the numbers increased due to the need for service personnel to support several military bases and operations. Neither government wanted to lose public support or incur attacks from communists, so they used the USIS and MOI to sell the idea of having foreign troops on Thai soil.

As some in Bangkok and Washington grew nervous about having American soldiers in Thailand, King Bhumibol welcomed the extra help. From April 20 to 30, 1964, SEATO held a joint Air Force exercise called “Air Bunchuu.” In the opening remarks, Thanom explained that the military activities were necessary to prepare for future threats. In the Don Muang base area, SEATO personnel gave humanitarian aid and had villagers tour the American bases. The highlight of the event was the visit of King Bhumibol and the crown prince.<sup>456</sup> *Seripharb* had photos of the king in military dress and the prince greeting American officers. Then in the fall, SEATO military and diplomatic representatives gathered in Bangkok, the organization’s headquarters, to commemorate its tenth anniversary. The event featured speeches by Thanom and King Bhumibol.

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<sup>454</sup> “Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State,” August 8, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, XXVII, Document 283, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v27/d283>, [accessed 2/16/16].

<sup>455</sup> “Memorandum from the Secretary of Defense McNamara to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler),” January 16, 1967, Subject: U.S. Deployments to Thailand, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, XXVII, Document 310, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v27/d340>, [accessed 3/21/16].

<sup>456</sup> “airbunchuu: kaanfuekyut withiaakart, [Air Butchuu Air Military Exercises],” *Seripharb*, July 1964, p. 26-28, No. 104, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, “Free World” (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.



“SEATO was an important organization established to protect the region,” said the king.<sup>457</sup> He added that the relationship helped develop the Thai economy, community, and culture. The king portrayed the alliance as more than just a military measure; it was also a means of helping Thailand. Royal support was critical to promoting the idea of U.S. troops in Thailand.

Nevertheless, the large American presence in Thailand strained military-local relations since neither government had much control over the soldiers’ conduct. Thailand became a home for numerous U.S. military bases and operations and a destination for soldiers on R&R.<sup>458</sup> The country saw a boom in prostitution, bars, and black markets. Thais complained that Americans were loud, rude, disrespectful of local customs, and were “love making” in taxis. They feared that Americans would corrupt their youth. Thai military officer Vudhi Veluchandra had a radio program that aired daily in which he shared his own observations and letters from listeners and the Thai press about GIs causing trouble. Even some anti-communist radio commentators criticized the soldiers’ behavior.<sup>459</sup> Kukrit said the soldiers were “too base” to understand the great role of the

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<sup>457</sup> “thai chalongwankhloblawb thii sip khongonkaansanthisanyaapwngkanluamkan SEATO duayphiithiwanngsilaatsok thiithamkaansamnueknyaay heengmai lae kaanpertteukthaangphaatphuea chuayleuangaan phatthanaprathet [Thai celebrate ten years of SEATO by laying the cornerstone for opening ceremony of medical facility to help develop Thailand],” *Seripharb*, December 1964, No. 109, p. 36-37, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World" (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>458</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” October 3, 1966, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 10, Dispatch 11, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Exhibits Division, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, 1955-1967, Taiwan: Paintings by Ran In-Tang thru Thailand, Box 36, Entry A1 1039, NACP.

<sup>459</sup> “Telegram from USIS Thailand to USIA Washington,” August 1, 1966, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, Dispatch 4, p. 6, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Exhibits Division, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, 1955-1967, Taiwan: Paintings by Ran In-Tang thru Thailand, Box 36, Entry A1 1039, NACP.

monarchy and that they “threw money around, destroying Thai culture.”<sup>460</sup> USIS Field Support Officer Paul Good observed that Americans had the attitude where “anything you wanted was yours. Nobody would tell you no. It was up to you to be sensitive. Unfortunately, there were so many Americans that a lot of people weren’t sensitive.”<sup>461</sup> Some USIS officials got into a little trouble too. USIS Staff Officer Robin Berrington did not elaborate but admitted that he ran into some issues as he enjoyed interacting with locals. One BPAO remembered some U.S. officers at the Udorn military base say they “didn't care too much about cultural sensitivities”; they were there to fight a war.<sup>462</sup> The actions of the American soldiers were the opposite of what the USIS and MOI were preaching. Instead of civilization, liberalism, and high morals, Thais saw a negative side of western society.

Thai women benefitted the least from American soldiers in Thailand. According to Good, there were 10,000 GIs a week in Bangkok for R&R. Anthropologist Herbert Phillips said that at least five percent of Thais profited from U.S. personnel stationed in Thailand.<sup>463</sup> However, Phillips wrote that short-term economic gains would have long-term disadvantages, specifically on rural women. Poverty in the countryside led many to find jobs and money in the cities and on American bases. Women made money running

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<sup>460</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok to State Department,” December 29, 1967, Dispatch # 8083, GRUSIA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2518, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

<sup>461</sup> Oral History, Paul Good Interview, August 2000, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 2/4/2016].

<sup>462</sup> Oral History, Paul P. Blackburn Interview, November 2002, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 2/4/2016].

<sup>463</sup> Herbert P. Phillips, *Thai attitude Toward the American Presence* (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 1971), 12.

brothels, bars, and massage parlors. Some called Petachburi Road in Bangkok “The American Strip.” The downside, Phillips predicted, was that when Americans eventually left, the women’s job skills would not transfer well to the postwar economy.<sup>464</sup> Good observed that near his and the governor’s homes in Ubon, there were nineteen “whorehouses within that two-block radius.”<sup>465</sup> He knew the Thai language well enough to learn where the prostitution was and who was running the businesses. There were places for men who wanted teenagers or pregnant women. During WWII, Ubon had been a center for Korean comfort women serving the Japanese. Once the war ended, much of the prostitution infrastructure remained.

Another big complaint by Thais was the extraterritorial laws protecting foreign troops. *Siam Rath* was frustrated that soldiers who had broken the law or offended aspects of Thai culture avoided trial in domestic courts.<sup>466</sup> Instead, foreign military commands dealt out their own punishments. The writer of the article argued that Thai laws and the government’s agreements with foreign nations needed to change. Thai foreign minister Thanat Khomen thought similarly and advocated the creation of an independent court to adjudicate issues with foreign soldiers.<sup>467</sup> *Phim Thai* went even further to say that there should be no special rights for foreigners in Thai territory.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> Jim Algie, Denis Gray, Nicholas Grossman, Jeff Hodson, Robert Horn, and Wesley Hsu, *Americans in Thailand* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2014), 183.

<sup>465</sup> Good Interview.

<sup>466</sup> Independence Court [eekarathangsan], June 10, 1966, *Siam Rath*, Collection of Important News, ๗๑/7 2509/ ๗๗/1.5 #2, TNA.

<sup>467</sup> “Problems about Foreign Soldiers [panhaakiawkapthahanthangchat],” June 13, 1966, *Phim Thai*, Collection of Important News, ๗๑/7 2509/ ๗๗/1.5 #2, TNA.

<sup>468</sup> “Foreign Military does not have Special Rights, Cancel Extraterritorial Rights Already [thahantangchatmaymiisitthiphiset, lersitthinawkanakhetlaew],” June 13, 1966, *Phim Thai*, Collection of Important News, ๗๑/7 2509/ ๗๗/1.5 #2, TNA.

There were no large immediate consequences from the American offenses, other than GIs being tried in military courts, but with each year and as negative stories piled up, Thais began protesting more for the soldiers to leave.

Thais also grew concerned that American cultural symbols and messages via film would have a bad impact on society. In the summer of 1966, Thanom ordered the removal of the U.S. TV series *Jesse James* from television. He said the show was “likely to lead youth astray and make them think wrong is right.”<sup>469</sup> *Jesse James* was about an American outlaw who stole from rich northerners and gave the goods to the people. The idea of stealing from corrupt officials was not a message Thanom wanted to implant into the minds of youth. Before this ban, Sarit had tried to censor foreign movies that displayed the dance the twist, but with little success.<sup>470</sup> Later, in 1968, Thanat said the government would give no visas to hippies, and then Thanom tried unsuccessfully to prohibit mini-skirts. Authorities struggled to keep what they viewed as negative aspects of western culture at bay.

In the 1966 Country Plan, O’Brien made American military-local relations a priority for the USIS. Project 3 of the Country Plan called for the USIS to “maintain Thai acceptance of US military activities in Thailand and the presence of a large number of US military personnel.” They would accomplish this program in three ways. First, they would call for all media and public relations events to support the RTG’s policy of having Americans in Thailand by emphasizing that they were here to assist the country in

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<sup>469</sup> “Telegram from USIS Thailand to USIA Washington,” August 1, 1966, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 9.

<sup>470</sup> Algie, *Americans in Thailand*, 199.

defending itself. Next, the USIS would publicize the noteworthy aspects of U.S. military assistance in Thailand. Last, public diplomacy officials would be encouraged to help guide civic action and military-community relations programs.<sup>471</sup> O'Brien and Thai officials understood that much of America's ability to achieve its objectives successfully was contingent on Thai public support, or at least on keeping protest to a minimum.

The USIS worked diligently with the Thai press to counter some of the negative news resulting from the misconduct of American soldiers. O'Brien noticed a growing number of unfavorable stories about foreign troops. In response, he made a big public relations push to ensure that Thais saw the good that Americans were doing for them. One example from this push was the USIS working with *Siam Rath* to print a story about an Air Force doctor who visited villagers providing health care.<sup>472</sup> Other newspaper agencies had articles highlighting two pilots teaching English at a primary school. *Kiattisak* defended Thailand's policy of having U.S. troops in the country when the editor wrote that America was simply fulfilling its SEATO obligations to stymie communism.<sup>473</sup> It went on further to dismiss communist criticism that Thailand had lost its independence. Although the Thai press could be troublesome at times, in instances like this one, it was an ally.

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<sup>471</sup> "Country Plan for Thailand, 10/22/1965 to 8/3/1966," p. 4, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 53, Entry A1 56, NACP.

<sup>472</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA," June 30, 1966, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 2, Dispatch # 39, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Exhibits Division, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, 1955-1967, Taiwan: Paintings by Ran In-Tang thru Thailand, Box 36, Entry A1 1039, NACP.

<sup>473</sup> "Far East Media Reaction," March 15, 1966, p. 6, GRUSIA, RG 306 USIA, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memo, 1963-1999, Box 25, Entry P 64, NACP.

BPAOs proved to be important in troop-community relations. In rural areas, these individuals operated branches that assisted in public relations, specifically coordinating civic-action programs. These individuals served as intermediaries between the people and the government.<sup>474</sup> Many could speak Thai, which helped improve their ability to build rapport and goodwill with local leaders and villagers. In Ubon and Korat provinces, the USIS worked with the U.S. Air Force to give a tour of the base to the governor of Ubon and other high-ranking officials.<sup>475</sup> In other areas, BPAOs gave toys, soccer balls, and clothes to youth.<sup>476</sup> The BPAO at Korat held regular meetings to hear the complaints of locals and to plan civic action events. In Sakon Nakorn province, the governor, the American consul at Udorn, BPAO Edward Schulic, representative John Bura from USIS headquarters in Bangkok, and Tiew Tuwat Pantuwong from the USIS station at Udorn met to discuss troop-community issues and to help alleviate problems stemming from fights, cultural offenses, and employment. Bilateral talks allowed each side to try and dispel misunderstandings.<sup>477</sup> O'Brien said Thai officials expressed appreciation for USIS efforts to "minimize the strains caused by the arrival of thousands of U.S. military personnel."<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok embassy to Department of State," July 7, 1965, Subject: Quarterly Progress Report XI on the US Plan for Promoting the Internal Security of Thailand, p. 3, 12, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy, Records relating to COIN Matters, 1962-1966, Box 5, Entry P 296, NACP.

<sup>475</sup> "Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA," August 31, 1965, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, p. 2, Dispatch 13, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Exhibits Division, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, 1955-1967, Taiwan: Paintings by Ran In-Tang thru Thailand, Box 36, Entry A1 1039, NACP.

<sup>476</sup> "Memorandum from IOC Mr. Levin to IOC Mr. Hansen," September 30, 1965, Subject: Items for Thailand - Levin Report, p. 1-2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Subject Files, 1953-1967, Box 57, Entry A1 56, NACP.

<sup>477</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation," October 6, 1966, Subject: Thai-US Military relations in Sakon Nakorn Province, p. 1-2, GRDS, RG 59, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Office of the Country Director for Thailand, Records Relating to Thailand, 1964-1966, Box 6, Entry A1-5310, NACP.

<sup>478</sup> Country Plan for Thailand, 10/22/1965 to 8/3/1966, p. 5.

The U.S. military's reputation improved through civic action projects. Since the early 1960s, American and Thai military soldiers and doctors teamed up for development, humanitarian, and civic projects. By the summer of 1966, U.S. General Richard G. Stilwell reported that the American and Thai development units had visited 850 isolated villages, medically treated 119,000 people, built 216 kilometers of roads, showed 611 movies with 463,000 in attendance, and distributed 67,000 USIS rural information packets.<sup>479</sup> In the first half of 1967, the Royal Thai Army provided medical kits and treatment for 15,000 people, constructed and repaired 46 kilometers of roads, and held 125 film showings with 80,000 viewers.<sup>480</sup> Both militaries established mobile medical units to visit remote areas. One *Thai Rath* article said that the "mobile units are an important strength in combatting communists and reaching the hearts and minds of the people in the northeast."<sup>481</sup> The writer added that the mobile medical units had brought much benefit to the people in Udon Thani province by curing some diseases. The USIS traveled with the units to promote their work. U.S.-Thai officials used these programs to connect with locals and alleviate tensions relating to soldiers.<sup>482</sup>

Student exchanges helped nurture cultural understanding between private citizens of both countries. The USIS assisted in funding American and Thai students as part of the

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<sup>479</sup> "Report from USMACTHAI to Commander in Chief, Pacific," August 21, 1966, Subject: Developments in Thailand, p. 3-13, Records of the United States Army Pacific (GRUSAP), RG 550, Organizational History Files, USMACTHAI, Box 160, Entry A1 2, NACP.

<sup>480</sup> "Report from USMACTHAI to Commander in Chief, Pacific," April 20, 1967, Subject: Developments in Thailand, p. 13, GRUSAP, RG 550, Organizational History Files, USMACTHAI, Box 160, Entry A1 2, NACP.

<sup>481</sup> Mobile Clinic [mobilkalinik] April 10, 1966, *Thai Rath*, Collection of Important News, n/17/ 2509/ ๓๓ 1.5, #1, TNA.

<sup>482</sup> "Developments in Thailand, Reports Control Symbol 3500-5, 1st Quarter, FY 1969," October 1, 1968, USMACTHAI/JUSMAG, Section 20, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI Assistant Chief of Staff for Ops, Box 2, Entry P 1026, NACP.

Fulbright program. Nakhon Savan province took in the largest number of American students. While in the country, these students taught English or worked in community development.<sup>483</sup> Students learned many aspects of the culture such as dancing, food, and sports. Some, interviewed by the USIS, said they were excited about their experiences.

“The Thai people are always smiling, even the little kids,” one person observed.

American students were important ambassadors for the United States as they helped dissipate some of the negative sentiments stemming from the behavior of soldiers.

The USIS Bi-National Center in Bangkok also facilitated exchange. At the BNC, Thais attended forums, speeches, exhibits, and classes to learn more about American culture, society, and politics. Most of the instructors and employees were Thais and Americans from the American University Alumni Association (AUA). Thais returning from studying in America established the AUA in 1952. An inspector visiting Bangkok said the BNC was helping to fulfill one of the USIS psychological objectives by strengthening U.S.-Thai relations. In 1967, the center taught 6,000 Thais English, and many of its graduates took up positions in “virtually every office in Thailand....”<sup>484</sup> In the countryside, the USIS had branch libraries and mobile book trucks bringing American and Thai literature to villagers. One survey found that Thais used these libraries almost as much as the Thai National Library in Bangkok.<sup>485</sup> In another research project with elites, educators, and library users, the post learned that libraries promoted “understanding

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<sup>483</sup> *Seripharb*, November 1966, No. 132, p. 46-47, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World" (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>484</sup> “Post Inspection Report on USIS Thailand, 1967,” April 24, 1967, p. 6-7.

<sup>485</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok USIA Washington,” February 17, 1960, Subject: Bangkok Opinion Survey, Basic Communication Habits among Thai University Students, p. 2, Dispatch 65, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1953-1986, Box 67, Entry 1007, NACP.



between America and Thailand” and “cooperation with the Thai government.”<sup>486</sup> The BNC helped to Americanize a portion of the Thai population through disseminating western ideas.

#### Thailand Increases Involvement in Vietnam

On January 6, 1967, Thailand took a big step towards fighting communism when Thanom announced that the country would send troops to South Vietnam to help the United States. Several months before, the RTG and the Johnson administration had been negotiating Thailand’s assistance in Vietnam. The president made a trip in late 1966 to convince Thailand to send troops.<sup>487</sup> Praphat and most senior military officials supported sending troops. Some of the Thai military thought fighting in Vietnam would allow Thais to show their courage in battle. The *Bangkok Post*’s editor Theh Chongkhadikij said, “non-alignment won’t work.”<sup>488</sup> Theh warned, “If the free countries are unable to stop the communist aggression there, the consequences will become more serious.” The USIS publicized the trip through *Seripharb* with photos showing the president visiting different sites and meeting with political leaders.<sup>489</sup>

Support for entering the war was surprisingly high. The government set up recruitment stations throughout the country calling for volunteers between the ages of 18

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<sup>486</sup> “TH 6302 USIS Library Study,” January-February 1963, p. 12, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Country Project Files, 1951-1964, Thailand, 1959 to Thailand, 1963, Box 98, Entry A1 1015, NACP.

<sup>487</sup> Kislenko, “Bamboo in the Wind,” 260-261.

<sup>488</sup> “Telegram from American Bangkok Embassy to State Department Washington,” October 1, 1968, Subject: The U.S. Presence and the Thai Elections, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59 Records of Negotiations about Vietnam, 1956-1969, A1 5410, Box 13, NACP.

<sup>489</sup> “Telegram from USIS Bangkok to USIA Washington,” December 1, 1966, Subject: Situation Report for USIS Thailand, Dispatch # 22, GRUSIA, RG 306, Information Center Service/Exhibits Division, Records Concerning Exhibits in Foreign Countries, 1955-1967, Taiwan: Paintings by Ran In-Tang thru Thailand, Box 36, Entry A1 1039, NACP.

and 35.<sup>490</sup> The embassy said the people's response was enthusiastic. Bangkok originally called for 1,000 volunteers, but after a month the number was already at 5,000.<sup>491</sup> Some notable recruits included twenty monks and the sons of important political figures, like Thanom's son Narong. Although at first the Buddhist Order had discouraged its monks from joining, eventually the leadership endorsed the war by offering blessings for soldiers departing for Vietnam.<sup>492</sup> One Thai newspaper interviewed a 34-year-old male who worked at a school and asked him why he joined. He said, "I was afraid not to go to Vietnam. I am a man. I need to serve my nation."<sup>493</sup> Other volunteers wanted to protect Thailand from communism by stopping it in Vietnam. Some felt it was a call from the king and wanted to serve him. In a speech, Thanom justified Thailand's entry into the war by saying, "If we can't stop communism in Vietnam, then we will need to worry about Thailand." In a short time, the number of volunteers rose to over 10,000. Duty to country and the fear of communism spreading were some reasons used by Thailand to justify the war to the people.

Historian Richard A. Ruth argued that Thai forces played a symbolic role for the United States and Thai governments. The Thai troops helped Johnson's "Many Flags" campaign, showing that the U.S. had some international support for its military

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<sup>490</sup> "raodtongkamchat komunist [We need to eradicate Communists]," *Seripharb*, April 1967, No. 137, p. 12, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, "Free World" (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

<sup>491</sup> Wilson, *The United States and the Future of Thailand*, 144; "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," January 20, 1967, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59 Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2518, Entry A1 1613, NACP.

<sup>492</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*, 224.

<sup>493</sup> "raodtongkamchat komunist [We need to eradicate Communists]," *Seripharb*, p. 15.

intervention in Vietnam.<sup>494</sup> The RTG sent troops not only to ensure continued U.S. aid, but also to build domestic support for fighting communism at home. Ruth said, “The Thai political-military leadership constructed national symbols out of the image of the volunteer forces and then used those symbols to further its own domestic and international policies.”<sup>495</sup> The RTG sent the Queen’s Cobra Regiment and the Black Panther Division. The war helped promote both the RTG’s fight against the CPT and its involvement in Vietnam.

Popular Thai newspapers praised the RTG’s decision and provided the U.S. and Thai governments with some support publicly. The *Bangkok Post*, *Siam Rath*, *Thai Rath*, and *Chao Thai* justified the war by using anti-communist rhetoric.<sup>496</sup> *Thai Rath*’s editor wrote, “If we wish to enjoy peace we must put up outer line of defense to prevent the enemy reaching our homes...decision of government to call for volunteers most proper and suitable.”<sup>497</sup> Several months later, *Kiattisak* and *Siam Times* threw in their support by arguing that the communists had forced Vietnam to become Thailand’s first line of defense against aggression.<sup>498</sup> The *Siam Times* asserted, “Any war waged in Southeast Asia has repercussions on us.” *Kiattisak* also defended Bangkok’s policy, saying that the RTG was retaliating against North Vietnamese and CPT attacks and infiltration of Thailand.

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<sup>494</sup> Richard A. Ruth, *In Buddha’s Company: Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (University of Hawaii: Honolulu, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>495</sup> Ruth, *In Buddha’s Company*, p. 4.

<sup>496</sup> *Bangkok Post*, January 7, 1967, p. 4; *Siam Rath*, January 7, 1967, p. 3; *Thai Rath*, January 10, 1967, p. 4; *Chao Thai*, January 11, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>497</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to USIA,” January 1967, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy and Research/Policy Guidance and Media Reaction Staff, 1964 - 1969, Box 2, Entry P 231, NACP.

<sup>498</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” December 15, 1967, p. 3, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2518, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

The monarchy was fully on board with Thanom's Vietnam policy. Queen Sirikit became the patron of the Queen's Cobra Regiment. According to Ruth, volunteers saw her connection with the unit as a sign of royal and popular support.<sup>499</sup> King Bhumibol's role was important as it dismissed doubts about Thailand's participation. In a speech he said that Thailand's fight in Vietnam was the same as at home, to eradicate communism.<sup>500</sup> In an interview with *Look Magazine*, the king told the reporter, "Communism can be worse than the Nazis or the Fascists."<sup>501</sup> Newspapers publicized many instances of the king and queen visiting Thai soldiers wounded from Vietnam. One example was in December 1967, when King Bhumibol met with soldiers at a hospital after a battle with the Viet Cong. The *Bangkok Post* included images of him dressed in military uniform and handing out treats to the men. King Bhumibol told them, "The Thai people are proud of you."<sup>502</sup> Some Thais rallied behind the RTG and king, supporting the Vietnam War and the domestic battle against communism.<sup>503</sup> King Bhumibol was not shy about supporting a war that was generally unpopular globally. His backing helped public relations campaigns promoting U.S. and Thai involvement. Fortunately, the king's views did not tarnish his domestic image. In return, President Johnson promised to give Thailand more economic and military aid, specifically that the United States would help train Thai troops and pay for the costs.

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<sup>499</sup> Ruth, *In Buddha's Company*, 40.

<sup>500</sup> *Bangkok Post*, January 1, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>501</sup> Hyun, "Indigenizing the Cold War," 166.

<sup>502</sup> Chiyong Taevajira and Kamthorn Sermkasem, "His Majesty Visits Wounded Thai Soldiers," *Bangkok Post*, December 27, 1967, Collection of Important News, n/13/2510/1, #4, TNA.

<sup>503</sup> Ruth, *In Buddha's Company*, 25-26.

Shortly after sending troops to Vietnam, news about the Vietnamese Tet Offensive in early 1968 made Bangkok very anxious. When the United States fought back and regained territory, Thai leaders were happy and said publicly that the communists had suffered heavy setbacks. According to the *Bangkok Post*, Thanom told Thais that the United States and the South Vietnamese forces had the situation under control.<sup>504</sup> Thanat said the attacks were the enemy's "last swing of the tail of a dying crocodile."<sup>505</sup> The USIA tried to show the positive aspects of Tet like the massive losses suffered by the communists and allied forces winning back lost ground. However, Johnson's desire for peace talks and his decision not to run for another presidential term clouded the successes. Thanom was infuriated when Ambassador Unger told him that Johnson was not seeking re-election.<sup>506</sup> Some U.S. officials were worried that Tet might negatively impact Thai perception of America's will to fight. The Thais, nevertheless, stuck with the United States, hoping its policies would change.

### Conclusion

In October, in the aftermath of Tet and President Johnson's announcements, Unger gave an important assessment of Thai opinion. His report began by acknowledging that American influence in Thailand was still significant because of the many military, economic, and public relations programs in the country. Bangkok still looked to Washington as a security blanket.<sup>507</sup> In some way, good relations between the two

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<sup>504</sup> *Bangkok Post*, February 6, 1968, p. 1, 5; Flynn, "Preserving the Hub," 142.

<sup>505</sup> *Bangkok Post*, February 8, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>506</sup> Randolph, *The United States and Thailand*, 130.

<sup>507</sup> "Telegram from American Bangkok Embassy to State Department Washington," October 1, 1968, Subject: The U.S. Presence and the Thai Elections, p. 1-7, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2520, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

governments hinged on the confidence Thailand had in America's commitment to aiding it against internal and external aggression. U.S. policy in Vietnam, such as the decision to restrict the bombing of North Vietnam, concerned Thai leaders greatly. Thai opinion of America was still positive though. Unger said Thais in critical areas such as the northeast "associate U.S. efforts with the benefits to them from Thai rural development programs." Some of these activities included on and off base recreational activities and civic action projects. If there were anti-American sentiments, Unger said, they came more from CPT propaganda or intellectuals who were angrier about the lack of political reform than with U.S. presence and foreign policy.

Another view into Thai sentiments came from of a survey of 1,500 people in Khon Kaen and Udon Thani provinces. Surveyors interviewed villagers about living standards and jobs on American bases. Most of the findings focused on American-local relations. The report stated that anti-American feelings had not reached an uncomfortable level, but they were on the rise. Some Thais liked Americans because they had given money and helped with the country's political situation. Hatred towards the United States was mostly from those who disliked foreigners in general. Interestingly, even with the soldiers' bad behavior with women, some Thais thought their help in fighting communists had mitigated the problem.<sup>508</sup>

The administrative division of USOM-Thailand conducted a study in ten northeast provinces, in 94 villages, and with 924 interviews about the results from U.S.-Thai development projects. Findings showed positive views about harvests and more jobs.

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<sup>508</sup> "Thai People's Feelings towards Americans," April 21, 1968, *Lak Muang*, Collection of Important News, n/15 2511/21 #3, TNA.

Some villagers considered themselves richer than before.<sup>509</sup> About 70 percent said Thai officials visited them more than they had three years ago. Most visits came from the Mobile Medical Unit and MDU. Regarding communism, all expressed negative views, with 88 percent and 82 percent saying that communists did not respect Buddhism and the monarchy, respectively. Some people's opinions of Americans were still positive, and locals gave them credit for building roads and bridges and providing aid.

With Tet and America's desire for peace talks with Hanoi, both the Thai and U.S. governments saw fit to continue supporting some rural relations building programs. In March 1968, Chief of Staff Field Marshal Thawee Chunlasap and the USOM's Howard L. Parson agreed that Washington would help expand the MDU with an additional 11 million dollars to fund 21 more units to work in the countryside. The United States also gave trucks, tractors, building materials, communications support, radio training, and funding for the MDU and Radio Station 909. The installation aired 24 hours a day, broadcasting television programs and government activities. Since 1962, the MDU had made some great strides; it built 700 ponds and 230 new schools, improved 900 schools, constructed 50 sanitation facilities, and gave medical care to over one million people<sup>510</sup> Both governments saw the good the unit had done not just in developing the country but also in connecting the people to Bangkok.

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<sup>509</sup> *Attitude Survey of Rural Northeast Thailand* (Bangkok, Thailand: Research Division of Public Administration Division, USOM-Thailand, 1968), p. i.

<sup>510</sup> "This Year the United States Agreed to Help MDU with an Addition 11 Million to Expand the Project to 22 More Units and Help Radio Station 909," *Chao Thai*, March 20, 1968, Collection of Important News, n/15/2511/21, #2, TNA.

The 1960s, after the death of Sarit, was a time when U.S.-Thai relations were the strongest and Washington and Bangkok saw the importance of the USIS and MOI in stymieing communism and influencing the Thai people. Events in Laos and South Vietnam caused Washington and Bangkok to turn to each other for support. The RTG gave bases for the United States, receiving economic and military aid in return. These conditions created an environment where the USIS and the MOI could orchestrate public diplomacy through mass media, interpersonal communications, and development and humanitarian projects. They were also crucial in helping to sell the Vietnam War and both governments' involvement in it. In addition, the USIS promoted the positive results from U.S.-Thai relations and the stationing of American troops in the country. It held events with the U.S. military giving back to the community by way of humanitarian aid and the construction of infrastructure, schools, and hospitals. King Bhumibol and the Buddhist Sangha supported the U.S. and RTG's messages of Thai nationalism and anti-communism to rural Thais and hill tribes as both groups became populations for the United States and RTG to win over. The monarchy and the clergy, two of the most important institutions in the country, were critical backers of the USIS and MOI.

However, not all went smoothly. U.S. soldiers offended locals with their rowdy behavior and sense of entitlement. The tourism and service industries grew through prostitution and bars, but Thais complained about Americans inundating the country. Many worried about the bad influence of foreigners on the youth. The USIS and the U.S. and Thai militaries orchestrated civic action and development programs as ways of mitigating some of the negative actions of service members. Both groups helped keep America's image from being completely tarnished.



As for the hill tribes, some did not want to comply with Washington and Bangkok's integration and pacification efforts. Eventually, some fought back by joining the CPT. The MOI engaged in public relations campaigns with the hill tribes, helping them transition to a sedentary lifestyle. The RTG gave ethnic minorities more political rights as an incentive to follow the government's programs. Unfortunately, in the years to come, the tribes would continue to be a thorn in Bangkok's side.

The country saw many events impacting its security, such as Laos erupting into a civil war, the beginning of the CPT independence movement, both countries' involvement in the Vietnam War, Thailand becoming a site of U.S. and Thai military bases, and growing tensions between the RTG and the ethnic minorities. The USIS and MOI played a key role in dealing with these issues and in crafting responses that helped the Thai people understand what the U.S. and Thai governments were doing. Mass media, Buddhism, development and humanitarian projects, civic action programs, and cultural exchanges were important public relations tools. Washington and Bangkok used both organizations' resources, manpower, and ideas to achieve their goals for the region and the nation.

## CHAPTER 3: CHANGE AND ADJUSTMENT, 1969-1972

### Introduction

The USIS role in Thailand changed when Richard Nixon became president. In 1969, the president proclaimed the Nixon Doctrine, which called for the United States to support its allies militarily without committing U.S. soldiers. This policy also affected public diplomacy in Thailand by cutting the post's budget and reducing manpower. More importantly, the doctrine pushed the Bangkok mission to shift more responsibility for public information programs onto the Thais. USIS members stationed in Thailand protested, arguing that they had made progress in winning hearts and minds. Nevertheless, the organization adjusted its role by not promoting the monarchy and anti-communism openly, and not participating in counterinsurgency operations. The USIS continued to oversee and mass media programs, education and cultural exchanges, and relations with Thai elites and leaders. It also trained and advised Thai public relations and government officials on information programs.

The changes to the USIS role in Thailand placed more pressure on many Thai organizations to play a bigger role in winning the hearts and minds of the Thai people and ethnic minorities. The MOI responded to the USIS diminishing presence by expanding its public relations programs in the north, northeast, and the south among the Muslim population. Bangkok wanted the Muslims to feel they were part of the nation. It also focused on indoctrinating the rural youth, giving them a sense of purpose as future leaders of the nation. Developed by the BPP, a new major organization called the Village Scouts worked among rural Thais to build a population loyal to the government and the monarchy. These groups had the purpose of strengthening the nation against communist

influence by promoting Thai nationalism and the king's role as protector of the people and head of state.

As the USIS and MOI were adjusting their programs and roles, there were several problems that both organizations had to continue managing. The first issue was the hill tribes. Many of them resisted the U.S. and Thai governments' pacification and integration policies. An obstacle to keeping the peace was opium. The RTG and United States wanted to stop the drug trafficking stemming from northern Thailand, but opium was a lucrative source of income and a major part of many hill tribe cultures. USIS and MOI officials decried the negative health impacts of the drug and promoted alternative ways of making a living. Another issue was that the U.S. military presence had caused some Thais to resent America and its support of the military government. The USIS and MOI collaborated with the U.S. and Thai militaries to engage in civic action programs, humanitarian projects, and economic rural development to improve the public images of both the United States and Thai government.

The students were the biggest issue for both governments. Many university students saw the political corruption in the government and the economic inequality in society. They learned about democracy and liberalism from studying in the United States or taking classes on Western politics and saw the need for change in Thailand. Unlike as in previous years, the students became more organized and demanded political reform, the banishment of American soldiers, and a foreign policy not tied to the United States. To ease tensions, the USIS continued its student and cultural exchange programs. The MOI focused on the youth in the countryside through indoctrination programs based on ideas of the monarchy, Buddhism, and national unity. The government did not want these

rural young people to adopt the same ideas as some of the university students in the cities.

The USIS and MOI roles and programs had changed during a tense time with issues stemming from hill tribes, Thais having anti-American sentiments, and the student population. Nixon wanted the Thais to do more of the heavy lifting with public information programs. The USIS presence was smaller but still important to building relations with Thai elites and fostering cultural understanding with university students. The MOI took over many of the duties of the USIS by engaging in counterinsurgency, developing rural projects, and working with youth. Both organizations orchestrated humanitarian missions to try to meet the needs of villagers and ethnic minorities. Even with all the changes, the objectives were still the same for both groups: to promote U.S.-Thai relations, anti-communism, and Thai nationalism.

#### New USIS Roles

In May 1967, PAO O'Brien finished his term at the Bangkok mission, and USIA headquarters in Washington assigned G. Lewis Schmidt to the position. Before joining the USIS, Schmidt was a budget analyst for the U.S. Information and Education Program (USIEP) as a budget analyst.<sup>511</sup> He arrived at a time when the USIS presence in Thailand was expanding rapidly with thirteen posts and making in-roads in the countryside. Schmidt required Branch-PAOs (BPAO) to spend 50 percent of their time in the villages helping provincial leaders build relations with the people. However, the big challenge of his tenure was adjusting the USIS role to some of Nixon's policies in 1969. USIA

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<sup>511</sup> Schmidt Interview, p. 4-5, 188-190.

Assistant Director Dan Oleksiw and Directors Leonard H. Marks and Frank Shakespeare all wanted to cut back on the public diplomacy programs in Thailand, specifically those dealing with counterinsurgency.

At about the same time that Schmidt took up his position as PAO, the U.S. embassy in Bangkok received a new ambassador who would impact the USIS program in Thailand. In October 1967, Leonard Unger replaced Martin. Previously, Unger had served as deputy mission chief in Thailand during Sarit's time and was very well versed in the Thai language. From 1965 to 1967 he was the deputy assistant secretary of state for the Far East. President Johnson turned to Unger for help in easing Thanom's fears of U.S. abandonment. The ambassador would become an asset to the USIS in helping to build relations with Thai elites and officials as many trusted him and thought he was an effective advocate for their interests.<sup>512</sup> Unger would also try to limit the political and public backlash from having U.S. soldiers in the country and from America's military withdrawal from the region.

USIS operations changed dramatically when USIA Director Frank Shakespeare ordered the Bangkok office to halt many of its programs. The Nixon Doctrine called for U.S. allies to take over the responsibility for providing ground troops for their own defense. The United States would continue to provide other tactical means of protection like nuclear weapons. Though not part of the Nixon Doctrine, a reduction occurred in USIS resources and responsibilities. According to Assistant Executive Officer Reid, Kissinger wanted "to get out of the business of doing the Thai government's job for

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<sup>512</sup> Kislenko, "Bamboo in the Wind," 297.

them.”<sup>513</sup> Shakespeare said he wanted public diplomacy officials to stop “propagandizing to the Thai citizens for the RTG.”<sup>514</sup> The agency in Thailand had done too much. The director said the activities to persuade Thais were “obvious distortion[s], if not a legal violation, of USIA's mandate to help achieve US foreign policy objectives by influencing public attitudes in other nations.” What he meant was that the USIS was promoting the monarchy and the Thai government instead of solely focusing on disseminating American ideas and policies.

USIS officials objected to Shakespeare’s order. Field Officer Paul Good remembered PAOs O’Brien and Schmidt having shouting arguments on the telephone with the USIA directors. According to Good, USIA headquarters was not happy with the mission promoting the monarchy. He recalled, “Washington thought we were spending too much money on something that wasn't direct enough for their feelings.”<sup>515</sup> Assistant Director of USIA in the Far East Dan Oleksiw said, “[A]s I used to say to Lew Schmidt’s chagrin, we were involved in everything from midwifery to supporting internal ministry of information programs....”<sup>516</sup> Good explained further, “Washington, want[ed] something much more direct or policy oriented,” like “‘You fight communists,’ that sort

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<sup>513</sup> Reid Interview.

<sup>514</sup> "USIA Halts Thai Propagandizing," Charles Bartlett, December 6, 1969, *Washington Evening Star*, Newspaper Clipping, GRUSIA, RG 306, Historical Collection, Subject Files, 1953-2000, Europe, Newspaper Clippings, 1951-1975 to Far East, 1951-1999, Box 211, Entry A1 1066, NACP.

<sup>515</sup> Good Interview. He does not specify any names in his oral interview but according to the timeline of the comments, the PAOs were likely O’Brien and Lewis Schmidt while Oleksiw and Leonard H. Marks were the Assistant and the Director, respectively.

<sup>516</sup> Oral History, Dan Oleksiw Interview, February 8, 1989, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Oleksiw,%20Dan.toc.pdf>, [accessed 4/4/16].

of thing.” However, O’Brien and Good both thought helping the king was an indirect and beneficial route. The best way to fight communism was, “You support the king.”

Schmidt tried to defend the post’s *raison d’etre*. He explained that the USIS work in Thailand was integral to U.S. foreign policy in the country. In a letter to Oleksiw, the PAO expressed hope that Thailand still had a “reasonable priority as a critical area of the world” and added that the timing was horrible for cuts as the RTG was starting to assume more responsibilities in promoting its programs and ideas. Schmidt saw Thailand as one of the “highest priority programs in the world.” He pointed to the power of television and the fact that it was finally taking off in the country. The new technology was reaching most Thai leaders and opinion makers and approximately one million citizens. Reid agreed with Schmidt and lamented that many of the Thais “in the field had worked hard and thought they had done their job. Yet, it seemed, very arbitrarily, we were being told to liquidate operations in which we had made major investments and to dismiss talented, loyal staff who had served us well.”<sup>517</sup> An inspection report on USIS-Thailand said the mission “is beautifully, though somewhat unconventionally, organized and is functioning very well indeed.”<sup>518</sup> It went on further to say that its work was growing to be effective in counterinsurgency and that USIS officials should be placing more energy there. Schmidt and many stationed in the country had good reasons for disagreeing with downsizing, but they also likely wanted to save their jobs.

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<sup>517</sup> “Letter from PAO G. Lewis Schmidt to Daniel P. Oleksiw Assistant Director (East Asia and Pacific) USIA,” July 24, 1968, Subject: How to Redesign the Thai Program, p. 1 and 3, GRUSIA, RG 306, Budget Correspondence, 1968-1969, Box 83, Entry UD 2010 62, NACP.

<sup>518</sup> “Letter from Edgar D. Brooks to Mr. Marks,” April 28, 1967, Subject: Inspection Report - USIS Thailand, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy and Plans/Office of the Chief Inspector, Inspection Report Reference Files, 1954-1976, Box 15, Entry P 130, NACP.

Notwithstanding Schmidt's protests and some of the positive reports, Washington began terminating positions in Thailand such as assistant BPAOs and assistant radio officers. As a result, Schmidt shifted personnel around and kept all posts manned on a small scale with at least one American officer.<sup>519</sup> The rest of the employees were Thai. However, BPAOs remained at Ubon, Korat, Udorn, and Chiang Mai to work on U.S. troop-Thai community relations, military indoctrination, and tribal assimilation. Years later Reid said many Thais felt a loss from the USIS drawing back from its former projects and programs.<sup>520</sup>

Two cultural exchange organizations impacted by the changes were the AUA and the USIS Bi-National Center. Both were critical in training Thai elites and potential leaders and disseminating American culture to students. For more than a decade Thais studied abroad at American universities and enrolled in English language classes at home. After returning to Thailand, some wanted to continue their connections with the United States. One group was the AUA through American University, created by a group of Thai alums in 1922.<sup>521</sup> Both Thais and Americans used the AUA to teach and learn English and Thai. It also helped promote cultural exchange. The AUA was an important asset and partner with the USIS Binational Center. The BNC was the mission's center for cultural exchange and language instruction. Thousands of Thais visited the BNC for trade shows, exhibits, lectures, and classes teaching about Western society and technology.

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<sup>519</sup> "Memorandum from USIS Bangkok to USIA," April 24, 1968, Subject: Proposed American to Realignment and Assignments in USIS Thailand Following Balpa, p. 1-2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Budget Correspondence, 1968-1969, Box 83, Entry UD 2010 62, NACP.

<sup>520</sup> Reid Interview.

<sup>521</sup> Oral History, Milton Leavitt Interview, 1989, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/>, [accessed April 25, 2016].



Budget cuts pushed the AUA and BNC to combine their resources. Milton Leavitt was the BNC director in Bangkok from 1967 to 1970 and then served another stint from 1974 to 1978. Leavitt said his main objective was to invigorate informational activities with more books, lectures, and shows.<sup>522</sup> When Nixon became president, Leavitt merged the AUA and the BNC, taking on the former's name. He saw the move as a clever means to avoid duplicating work. According to Leavitt, the center attracted thousands of visitors and students. People did not merely stroll into the BNC, but many enrolled in English classes and took part in lectures and film showings. When speaking of the benefits of the AUA-BNC union, Leavitt said, "You couldn't have met a better bunch of Thais than the people on the [AUA] Board. They were just outstanding patriots and outstanding people and all for USIS information program." The move strengthened relations between the two institutions and peoples.

The English teaching and exchange programs left a large imprint on Thailand. Assistant Executive Officer Reid said that through the many American cultural programs, Thailand gained a whole generation of leaders, bureaucrats, businesspersons, military officials, and teachers. One such person was Surin Pitsuwan. Surin was a Muslim from a poor village in the south. While attending high school in Bangkok, he frequented the BNC, where he became friends with a USIS staff member. The employee helped Surin get into the American Field Service exchange program. Afterwards he attended Thammasat and then Harvard, where he received a PhD. Reid said, "Surin is one of the most promising, most admired politicians in Thailand, and, recently, he has been very

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<sup>522</sup> Leavitt Interview.

helpful in moderating anti-American sentiment within the Muslim minority in Thailand.”<sup>523</sup> Reid sadly felt “people like [Surin] would regret the decline and demise of USIS.”

Irving Sablosky arrived in Thailand in 1971 as the USIS Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO) to bolster educational exchanges and to manage some of the issues between American troops and Thais. According to Sablosky, his role was to contact and continually nurture relations with the universities and rural communities.<sup>524</sup> This involved three USIS branch posts and the Binational Center. He worked with the Thai and American board of directors of the Binational Center to set up lectures, cultural events, and student exchanges. Sablosky observed that Thais “always have been open to western culture.” The Thais were eager to have musicians and artists from other countries visit and share their art. For example, Thai artists gained inspiration from American abstract expressionists. Inspectors recommended an increase in American cultural events.<sup>525</sup> The student exchange project was one of the best for training future Thai leaders who had developed a sense of respect for the United States.<sup>526</sup>

The reduced funds for educational programs diminished the number of students traveling between the two countries. Unger reported to Washington that the budget cuts decreased the number of grants by almost 50 percent. The Fulbright program went from

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<sup>523</sup> Reid Interview

<sup>524</sup> Oral History, Irving Sablosky Interview, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, p. 437, [adst.org/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf](http://adst.org/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf), [accessed 9/6/2016].

<sup>525</sup> “Inspectors Memorandum of AUA Language Center, Information Center, Library at Chiangmai, Radio Programming and Construction, Branch Post Designations, Use of Printing Facilities, and American Staff,” January-June 1967, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy and Plans/Office of the Chief Inspector, Inspection Report Reference Files, 1954-1976, Box 15, Entry P 130, NACP.

<sup>526</sup> “Post Inspection Report on USIS Thailand,” p. 6-7, 11, and 14.

72 grants to 43, and the International Visitor Program dropped from 42 to 26. However, Unger had a plan to make the money stretch to still fulfill the aims of the exchange programs. He suggested that when picking American specialists bound for Thailand, their résumé and expertise should “relate directly to local needs and/or interests.”<sup>527</sup> The USIS and other organizations had to be more selective when finding Thais and Americans who could offer the best benefit for the money invested.

The USIS also had to make tough choices about media programming. USIA headquarters wanted to trim the money allotted for television, but Schmidt objected, recommending that the mission should utilize the technology and that it could not afford to lose access. In Bangkok alone, 60 percent of the population had TV receivers. One program Washington wanted to cut was the “Thai-Washington Report.” Schmidt argued that ending the show, which already occupied prime television time, would have negative repercussions.<sup>528</sup> Others, including Unger and some of Thailand’s television executives, wanted to keep the show.<sup>529</sup> According to the USIS, it was the “single most important media product.” USIA Washington justified cutting the show for economic reasons. Not having the “Thai-Washington Report” would psychologically damage relations with Thailand’s TV industry.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” September 29, 1969, Subject: Educational and Cultural Exchange Annual Report for Thailand - FY 1969, p. 1 and 4, Group 16, Post Reports, Thailand 1961-1970, Box 320, Folder 13, University of Arkansas Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Historical Collection (ABECAH).

<sup>528</sup> “Telegram from American Embassy in Bangkok to USIA,” July 9, 1969, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Folder: MAP, IAF “War Room”, Misc, Thailand, 1969, IAF, 1968-1969, Box 84, Entry UD 2010 62, NACP.

<sup>529</sup> “Memorandum from IMV Anthony Guarco to IOA/B Mrs. Stephens,” September 3, 1969, Subject: IAF Proposal to Discontinue Thai TV Series, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Folder: MAP, IAF “War Room”, Misc, Thailand, 1969, IAF, 1968-1969, Box 84, Entry UD 2010 62, NACP.

<sup>530</sup> Available sources did not indicate the results from the loss of the “Thai-Washington Report.”

Like Schmidt, some at USIA headquarters also saw the importance of keeping the USIS media efforts going in Thailand. The USIA had a list of priority languages categorized into tier-systems based on security needs. Some of the most critical were Chinese, Russian, and Vietnamese. Thai was third from the top in significance. Some public diplomacy officials like James Halsema, director of the training division, observed that broadcasting and disseminating materials in Thai was still critical to U.S. objectives in Thailand. Downsizing, specifically in radio, would have negative consequences as the “insurgency situation, the prestige factor, and the sensitivity of Thais to possible U.S. withdrawal from the area require that a daily transmission in Thai from VOA be maintained.”<sup>531</sup> He recommended the VOA decrease its airtime instead of gutting the program completely.

Another part of the downsizing was for the USIS gradually to give the RTG control over some of the printing and disseminating of print materials. To help with print media, the government established the National Information and Psychological Operations (NISPO) in 1969. The NISPO was to support the PRD with public relations campaigns. The USIS assisted in the layout and artwork for a NISPO magazine titled *Muang Thai*, which was geared towards lower-level RTG officials. The mission donated films, materials, and equipment. From 1969 to 1971, the NISPO and PRD distributed 235,000 copies of *Muang Thai*.<sup>532</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> “Memorandum from Mr. Halsema to Fitzhugh Green,” August 18, 1969, Subject: IBS (International Broadcasting System) Language Priorities in East Asia and the Pacific, p. 5, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Policy and Plans/Programs Coordination Staff, Subject Files, 1966-1971, Box 8, Entry P 12, NACP.

<sup>532</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” January 25, 1971, Subject: Quarterly Airgram on the Insurgency and COIN Programs in Thailand, p. 1 and 20, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2624, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

As it had with print, the USIS gradually turned over radio responsibilities to the Thais. For years, USIS officials had produced and conducted trainings for most of Thailand's stations. Throughout this process, Thais went to the United States to receive training in radio communication. Radio station 909 in the northeast, according to U.S. officials, was "a unique US training and transfer venture and [was] widely accepted as the single most successful RTG COIN and development information project."<sup>533</sup> In one survey of 2,000 adult respondents, three-fourths listened to the 909 station consistently. One USIS official said, "It is the favorite station for most adults in Nong Khai, Nakorn Phanom, and Sakol Nakorn."<sup>534</sup> More than half of local elite figures (village and provincial leaders) tuned in to 909 daily and thought most of the content, specifically the anti-communist themed programs, was useful.<sup>535</sup> The Thais would not be left alone though, as the USIS still provided some programming and advisement.

Even with the changes, the mass media program remained an effective part of the USIS mission and the Thai government's efforts to win hearts and minds. USIS television shows had prime-time spots on five stations in Thailand because of the mission's close contacts with the media. Radio programming had tripled in the last three years, since 1966. In particular, the Sakorn Nakorn and Chiang Mai stations were significant in broadcasting to sensitive areas. Both installations had skilled staffs and crafted highly

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<sup>533</sup> "U.S. Information Programs in Thailand," Fall 1969, p. 49, GRUSIA, RG 306, Folder: MAP, IAF "War Room", Misc, Thailand, 1969, IAF, 1968-1969, Box 84, Entry UD 2010 62, NACP. This was an excerpt from National Security Study Memorandum-51, April 26, 1969.

<sup>534</sup> "Memorandum from USIS Office of Policy and Research: Research Service," April 16, 1969, Subject: Radio Listening in Northeast Thailand, p. 1-2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Special Reports, 1953-1997, Box 26, Entry P 160, NACP.

<sup>535</sup> "Memorandum," April 10, 1970, Subject: Summarized Implications of the NE Thai Radio Media Survey 1969, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Research Services/East Asia and South Asia Division, Records Relating to Public Opinion Surveys, Box, 2, Entry P 228, NACP.

professional shows. Thailand still had the 100-kilowatt transmitter that catered to the northern tribes in their own dialect.<sup>536</sup> There was also the 50-kilowatt station 909 in Nakorn Sakorn province serving the northeast. Ambassador Martin said the station would be a “direct, audible response to the needs and aspirations of the people living in this area.” Thanom reaffirmed the benefits of the transmitter by pointing out that the station led five CPT members to defect.<sup>537</sup> Assigned near the 50-kilowatt station, USIS Junior Officer Training official Willis J. Sutter noticed that it was very popular among people in the region.<sup>538</sup> More importantly, most of the programs targeted the USIS main audience groups and fulfilled its psychological objectives. The Thai government’s Village Radio System was also doing an excellent job of increasing contact between rural peoples and the government. A Thai Military Research Development Center study argued that the RTG’s radio systems were good enough to relay both security messages and other government policies to remote villages.<sup>539</sup> In psychological terms, the radio structure “appears to exert modest but direct effects in accelerating the awakening of political and social expectations of villagers.”

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<sup>536</sup> “Report of the Thai Working Group to the East Asia and Pacific and Interdepartmental Regional Group,” April 26, 1967, Subject: The Situation in Thailand, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, XXVII, Document 344, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v27/d344>, [accessed 1/17/2019].

<sup>537</sup> “Report on study on New Radio Station in Sakorn Nakorn,” August 3, 1967, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research, Records of Research Projects, East Asia, 1964-1973, “Thailand, USIS Publications Survey,” Box 16, Entry P 142, NACP.

<sup>538</sup> Oral History, Willis J. Sutter Interview, 1988, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, p. 315, <https://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 11/21/2018].

<sup>539</sup> “Thailand Village Radio Study: A Study of the Amphur-Tambon Transceiver Radio System Established in Some Provinces in Thailand,” James Wood, Thailand Military Research and Development Center, Bangkok, Thailand, January 1967, p. iii and xi, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI R&D Center, Projects Records, Box 36, Entry P 1068, NACP.

The USIS and the RTG continued to cooperate in radio media campaigns. One such case was the Voice of Free Asia. According to the *Bangkok Post*, John Daly, director of the VOA, worked with the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this new program, a derivative of Project Teak.<sup>540</sup> Apparently, it was “double the power of Radio Peking.” U.S. and Thai officials tested the VFA from a site in Ayudaha, Thailand. Reports said the radio station could be heard from Hawaii. Daly thought that the VFA was a good way of meeting both governments’ needs, as the VOA would use it as a relay station while the Thais would broadcast its daytime programs in the country.<sup>541</sup>

The USIS was also ceding its role in aiding Thailand’s counterinsurgency operations. Starting in June 1970, the USIS would only be working on training and information materials in the early stages of pacification.<sup>542</sup> From there, the Thai BPP and army would do much of the heavy lifting, which included going on village visits, manning the radio stations, and conducting more research. Washington hoped that this change would allow their Thai counterparts to become more self-sufficient.

To maximize its resources, the USIS sought to focus more attention on a smaller target population for its information and public diplomacy campaigns instead of casting a wide net. In April 1969, Kissinger called for a study of USIS information programs in the country, National Security Study Memorandum 51 (NSSM-51). The study recommended

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<sup>540</sup> Look to Chapter 2 for references to Project Teak. “Battle of the Air Waves,” March 10, 1968, *Bangkok Post*, Collection of Important News, n/15/2511/21, #2, TNA.

<sup>541</sup> “Important News and Policies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between July and September 1968,” p. 8, Department of Information Papers, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2) n/18.2.3/4, TNA.

<sup>542</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” January 19, 1970, Subject: Quarterly Airgram on the Insurgency and COIN Programs in Thailand, p. 15, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2623, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

a focus on “high-yield” public diplomacy programs. These would come in the form of working with Thai elites. The USIS would be the catalyst for bringing high-level Thai politicians, military officers, elites, and royalists into contact with American leaders. Part of the reason NSSM-51 suggested targeting specific groups of people rather than all Thais was because of the effectiveness of personal contacts or face-to-face communication in disseminating ideas and information. A USIA research paper supported NSSM-51 by specifically saying that “Personal channels” would advance “COIN, national unity, and development goals set by US programs.” Personal channels referred to connections at both the local level and among elites and top government officials. In villages, the headman, teacher, and abbot were traditional figures sharing information about the outside world. At the upper echelons of society and government, the cabinet, the military, and the monarchy were the key groups influencing power brokers and opinion makers.<sup>543</sup> The USIS was shifting towards building interpersonal relationships with people who would serve as intermediaries between the United States and Thai government and the masses, spreading ideas, programs, and policies.

Though not involved directly with counterinsurgency, the USIS continued to help foster relationships at the village level with mobile information units. Since 1962, the MITs had been traveling throughout the countryside disseminating information and serving as representatives of the U.S. and Thai governments. A criticism from a U.S. counterinsurgency analysis was that the MIT visits did little to change villager opinion of

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<sup>543</sup> “U.S. Information Programs in Thailand,” Fall 1969, p. 8-9.



the Thai government, but the report gave no reason as to why.<sup>544</sup> Other assessments from the mid-1960s noted that the group lacked positive results because there was no follow-up process. In early 1967, the USIS tried to make some changes to the MIT to make it more effective. O'Brien attached Mobile Medical Units (MMU) to the MIT on their countryside trips to provide medical care along with showing films, distributing publications, and learning about villagers' needs.<sup>545</sup> With the added ability to care for the sick, the MITs increased the number of visits and follow-ups. Stationed in Nakhon Phanom from 1967 to 1971, Sutter had high regard for the work of the mobile groups.<sup>546</sup> He said that during visits, "[his] job was to join up with local Thai officials and to basically back them up" with informational assistance and help the Thai people get to know their leaders. He then added, "Our presence there was simply to show that we were united with the Thais in this effort to improve the relationship between the government and its peoples out in these isolated villages." The USIS still played a critical role in rural pacification, even if in a limited capacity.

#### Expansion of the RTG's Role in Winning Hearts and Minds

With the USIS slowly decreasing its role in Thailand, the Thais picked up some of the responsibilities when it came to public relations by utilizing key personnel such as the Community Development Worker (CDW). CDWs represented the government and its desire to bring modernity to the rural people, specifically when it came to government

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<sup>544</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," October 23, 1970, Subject: Quarterly Airgram on the Insurgency and COIN Programs in Thailand, p. 18 and 23, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2623, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

<sup>545</sup> "Telegram from Chiang Mai Consulate to Bangkok Embassy," March 24, 1967, Subject: Events of Political Significance in North Thailand, p. 6, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2518, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

<sup>546</sup> Sutter Interview.

administration. In response, at a 1970 Thai NSC meeting officials said CDWs would receive help with promoting countryside development through education, building libraries and exhibits, distributing information materials, and engaging in rural sports and various cultural activities.<sup>547</sup> Those involved in the training included officials from surrounding USIS branch posts.<sup>548</sup> The Thai NSC issued a report that stated, “Developing people is the foundation of having CDW's as central to bringing management skills from government officials to the people.” As shown previously, CDWs worked with the Village Development Committee (VDC) and the Tambon Development Committee (TDC). These two groups embodied the idea of group work in fixing local problems. Committee members had a voice in matters relating to their villages and tambons. With help from the CDWs, some Thai villagers learned self-governance at the grassroots level through the local institutions of the VDC and TDC. These two groups would become, as the NSC called them, human resources of the government and nation. They not only helped institute development projects, but also promoted Bangkok’s push for development in the countryside.<sup>549</sup>

The Thai NSC also saw a need to improve public relations programs, specifically with the CSOC. A year after its creation, the CSOC initiated three projects to increase its effectiveness in promotion and publicity. The first was to continue training local officials, specifically kamnans and phuyaibans. In the summer of 1970, the MOI developed a new

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<sup>547</sup> “Records of National Security Council Meeting 5/2513 (1970),” April 1970, p. 11, Papers of the Office of the Secretary Cabinet Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2) นท 1.1.1.7/18, TNA.

<sup>548</sup> “Letter from Deputy Governor of Nakhon Phanom to Director-General of CDD,” September 9, 1969, Subject: Promotion and Publicity Developer Training Project, Papers of the Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, (8) นม 5.3.1.1/19, TNA.

<sup>549</sup> “Records of National Security Council Meeting 5/2513 (1970),” p. 8-10.

training course for phuyaibans. The *Chao Thai* newspaper reported that these leaders would not only have their normal administrative duties, but also would also seek out defectors and punish them. In addition, the classes would train the phuyaibans to be among the people more often and to build relationships with them.<sup>550</sup> The second project was twofold and included encouraging villagers to be involved in local politics at the provincial level and publicizing anti-communist literature. The third project was to survey the needs of the people. The CSOC sought information about the insurgents, village activities, and public operations. The work with local leaders would allow the government to create connections in the villages. Many of these training programs were already established, but the CSOC wanted to strengthen them to help suppress communism.<sup>551</sup>

A critical institution in promoting Thai nationalism and the monarchy was the Village Scouts. In 1971, the BPP created the Village Scouts initially to gather intelligence and provide village security, but it grew quickly into an organization for winning hearts and minds. The impetus for creating the organization came after a battle between CPT insurgents and the BPP in December 1968, when communists set fire to a tribal village school run by the police.<sup>552</sup> Thai police commanders soon realized that the communist movement had grown and was a force to be reckoned with. The BPP faced pressure to find a different approach. As Saiyud and King Bhumibol were devising different counterinsurgency methods, another response came from a BPP officer of a lower-class

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<sup>550</sup> “Established from Phu Yai Ban in MOI in order that Everyone is Honest,” *Chao Thai*, July 19, 1970, Collection of Important News, n/12/2512/34, TNA.

<sup>551</sup> “Records of National Security Council Meeting 5/2513 (1970),” p. 13-14.

<sup>552</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Identity*, 55.

family in the southern province of Krabi named Major General Somkhuan Harikul. For years, the BPP had had frequent contacts with villagers and hill tribes. Somkhuan saw the conflict as a civil war –a battle between the Thai government and communists for the hearts and minds of the Thai people. Somkhuan’s tough upbringing enabled him to sympathize with the struggles of the rural Thai population. He wanted to fight communism by improving the lives of villagers in poverty. The Village Scout program would allow him to do both.

Much of the inspiration for the Village Scouts came from the Boy Scout organization. While attending a scouting meeting, Somkhuan fell in love with the youth program since it promoted unity among people from different backgrounds. The general soon became a Boy Scout. BPP officials had always encouraged village boys to join the scouts, but as the communist insurgency escalated, Somkhuan wanted something different – a program to boost government relations with the rural peoples and to build unity. In 1970, the general began his experiment by combining his previous village experiences with what he had learned with the Boy Scouts. With a host of BPP officers, Somkhuan developed initiation rites, songs, training, and an education curriculum. According to anthropologist Katherine Bowie, Somkhuan wanted to focus on “forming groups, engaging in competition, team problem solving, and working, eating...together.”<sup>553</sup> After the first Village Scout meeting, the general said some of the people involved wept because of the power of the experience. The Village Scouts then expanded its organization into five border provinces.

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<sup>553</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Identity*, 59.

The movement grew dramatically when it gained the patronage of the monarchy. Almost from its inception, the Princess Mother and King Bhumibol promoted the Village Scouts. In November 1971, the Princess Mother attended an initiation ceremony, and “as a token of her approval of Somkhuan’s” program, she gave him a book on counterinsurgency.<sup>554</sup> At a training program in Buriram province, she said the group’s work would benefit all and that “this project is making democracy a part of you and will help you have better morals.”<sup>555</sup> King Bhumibol got involved when he viewed the thirtieth initiation. The king invited Somkhuan to the palace to discuss his ideas, and he eventually donated 100,000 baht (U.S. \$5,000). He hoped that all Thais, male and female, would become Village Scouts.<sup>556</sup> The monarchy’s support drew in many elite figures who helped publicize the organization. These persons had an ulterior motive for backing the Village Scouts as many wanted to build connections with the king and enlarge their social networks.

As part of the BPP initiation ceremony, members took an oath to protect the nation, the king, and Buddhism. Members read the promise saying, “On my honor I promise that I will do my best to do my duty to God and King...”<sup>557</sup> As a sign of their promise, they received a maroon handkerchief with yellow, blue, and black colored edges provided by King Bhumibol. Bowie said the colors had symbolic importance; yellow represented religion, blue stood for monarchy, maroon was the blood of the nation, and

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>555</sup> Village Scout Operational Center, *Prawatsat luksuea chaoban* [History of the Village Scout] (Bangkok: Modern Press Limited, 1987), 41.

<sup>556</sup> Village Scout Operational Center, *Prawatsat luksuea chaoban*, 67.

<sup>557</sup> Hyun, “Indigenizing the Cold War,” 374-375.

black memorialized those who died for the country. BPP instructors emphasized the sacredness of the handkerchiefs. The new members were to uphold and protect the ideas represented by the colors. “Being a scout was such an important aspect of a person’s identity,” according to Bowie, “it should be remembered even after a scout’s death.” When scouts put on the handkerchief, instructors admonished them to “think for a moment of the kindness and generosity of his majesty the king. Think of the oath that you have taken and follow it.”<sup>558</sup> The Village Scouts quickly became synonymous with the monarchy and Thai nationalism.

The Village Scouts were an important group in helping to propagate the government’s and the monarchy’s ideas and in integrating the rural people into the Thai state. Just as donating to royal charities and ceremonies brought merit, giving to the Village Scouts did the same. Thousands of villagers gave money and joined to improve their social standing, but they also did both to “gain access to the king or members of his entourage for assistance with their problems.”<sup>559</sup> This was another example of the patron-client relationship. The villagers helped the ruler through loyalty and fulfilling specific duties such as fighting communism and promoting unity, while the king gave spiritual blessings and special favors. Praphat and future prime minister Kukrit praised the Village Scouts for helping to promote national accord.<sup>560</sup> At the training sessions, the scouts learned about Thai history with anti-communist themes infused. They emphasized that outside forces, which included the Vietnamese, the Burmese, and communists, were

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<sup>558</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Identity*, 222, 227.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>560</sup> Hyun, “Indigenizing the Cold War,” 363.

threats to Thailand. Bowie explained it well: “By defining communists as outsiders and non-Thai, the scout movement was able to imply that all critics of the government were in collusion with outsiders seeking to undermine the government. Non-Thais were not loyal to the Thai nation, religion, or king.”<sup>561</sup> At its height, the organization had five million members and was a symbol of unity.

Like the Village Scouts, the Boy Scout program was used by the RTG to promote nationalism to the youth. In 1911, King Vajiravudh had introduced scouting to Thailand and created the Wild Tiger Corps to form villagers into militias. The king used the Boy Scouts to teach youth discipline and build Thai nationalism.<sup>562</sup> For years to come, the Thai Ministry of Education would perpetuate the work of the Wild Tiger Corps and Boy Scouts. During the Cold War, the scouting program flourished and became part of Thailand’s educational system. Royal family members were strong patrons of the organization, attending troop meetings and supporting the Boy Scout’s role in supporting Thai nationalism.<sup>563</sup> The Committee on Public Relations and the USIS helped advertise Boy Scout meetings to persuade people to come see the ceremonies and gain an understanding of the program. The government hoped that the publicity would spark interest in more youth joining and funding from large donors. Public relations committees highlighted the different activities and travels in newspapers. Films depicted the camping

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<sup>561</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Identity*, 242.

<sup>562</sup> Hyun, “Indigenizing the Cold War,” 355-356.

<sup>563</sup> “ngaan chum num luuk sera heeng chat khrang thii sii” [“The Fourth International Boy Scout Conference”], *Seripharb*, USIS, September 1962, No. 81, p. 35-39, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, “Free World”, Thai, Numbers 49-98, Box 270, Entry 1053, NACP.

and ceremonies. The committees held large demonstrations showing off the scouts wearing their uniforms, holding flags, and singing songs.

The Thai government invested heavily in protecting the youth from communist influences. In 1967, Bangkok initiated the ARD Youth Program to create economic opportunities and to instill nationalistic ideals. The impetus came from the USOM and ARD Secretary-General Khun Prasong Sukhum. Ultimately, providing employment would be a means of raising living standards and countering communist propaganda. The program, according to a ten-page syllabus, included courses on Thai history, culture, and government administration, instruction in weapons handling, and surprisingly, democracy.<sup>564</sup> King Bhumibol, Thanom, and Praphat all endorsed the youth initiative. Each year membership grew, and many of the graduates successfully dealt with attempts by communists to engage in subversive activities in their villages. Program documents said little about the youth and jobs, focusing more on how their attitudes changed, specifically their increased loyalty towards the government.

The CDD coordinated with the Boy Scouts in public relations programs. In Lampang province in the northeast, the PPU held a two-month session for scout leaders and education evaluators to teach about scouting and public relations. The unit argued that all those who worked with youth needed to learn about the effectiveness of the Boy Scout program. Scouting would help promote good behavior and love for the nation, Buddhism, and the monarchy. Most trainees, including members of development committees and government officials, saw the PPU training as beneficial to their work.

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<sup>564</sup> William J. Ackerman, *Rural Youth Program Accelerated Rural Development*, July 28, 1970, Office of the Prime Minister January 1968 to July 1970 (Bangkok, Thailand: USOM, 1970), Appendix E.



Eventually, other agencies began establishing Boy Scout trainings to perpetuate the youth program.<sup>565</sup>

The CDD and provincial administrators began having their own officials and leaders undergo the same training that was held at Lampang, specifically the Cub Scouts Wood Badge. This level was the next step beyond basic scouting courses, and it covered leadership, problem solving, and conflict management. A provincial official from Narathiwat communicated with the CDD director about expanding the scout organization to help with the youth in the area. From the provincial, amphur, and village levels, the CDD helped establish Boy Scout troops to educate the youth.<sup>566</sup> Young people learned about physical education, Buddhist morals, and Thai nationalism. It was a way of indoctrination. Local administrative officials and CDWs all became leaders in the Boy Scouts, helping to implement the program.<sup>567</sup> Narathiwat officials discussed some of the benefits of the Boy Scouts in his province. Sixty leaders had received an orientation and paid for it on their own. The PPU agreed that the project was fruitful and would help the trainees in their work with children and young adults. Slowly, many schools throughout the country began establishing scouting programs as part of the education curriculum.

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<sup>565</sup> “Letter from Promotion and Publicity Unit to CDD Director,” January 23, 1972, Subject: Report of Results of Boy Scout Training for Youth Leaders # 13, p. 1-2, Community Development Department Records, Ministry of Interior, (8) un 5.3.2.3.2/2, TNA.

<sup>566</sup> “Message from Provincial Administrator of Narathiwat to the Director-General of CDD,” April 14, 1972, Subject: Training of Cub Boy Scout Leaders Wood Badge, Community Development Department Records, Ministry of Interior, (8) un 5.3.2.3.2/1, TNA.

<sup>567</sup> “Record Message from the Head of Recreation Division to the Promotion and Publicity Unit (CDD),” April 28, 1972, Subject: Training of Cub Boy Scout Leaders, Community Development Department Records, Ministry of Interior, (8) un 5.3.2.3.2/1, TNA; “The Project to Train Cub Boy Scout Leaders in Wood Badge, Narathiwat Province,” 1972, p. 1, Community Development Department Records, Ministry of Interior, (8) un 5.3.2.3.2/1, TNA.

To properly teach the youth, the government wanted competent youth leaders. In 1970, the CDD and MOI held a training event to help youth leaders. The program lasted 45 days and took place in eight provinces, mostly in the northeast. The PPU and Military Area Six offered their support for the training. Trainees went through an intense schedule with classes on leadership, job training, and political ideology. For example, they learned to teach children and students how to use their free time, gain job skills, and become Thais who loved Buddhism, the monarchy, and the nation. At the end they received certificates, and the CDD told them that they were to try to bring prosperity, build unity, and stymie any opposition when they returned to their villages.<sup>568</sup>

Along with the regime, King Bhumibol paid particular attention to the youth. In April 1969, Thai teenagers from 20 provinces visited Bangkok for a tour. Many of the youth were from poor regions, areas susceptible to communist influence. The purpose of the visit was to acquaint them with the center of power, Bangkok, and to ingrain in them certain concepts about nationalism. At one point in their travels, the teens took an oath of loyalty to the nation during an audience with the king. King Bhumibol explained the purpose of the pledge, saying, “The country cannot be held together without the help of everyone far and wide across the land to safeguard the national security; unity of mind and purpose to promote progress is absolutely essential.”<sup>569</sup> He further told them that one of their duties was to bring about development in their home provinces when they

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<sup>568</sup> “Closing of Youth Leadership Training # 11,” June 3, 1971, Papers of the Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, (8) ๓๓ 5.3.1.2/19, TNA.

<sup>569</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Royal Speech delivered to the Delegation of Youths from 20 Provinces,” Sala Bhakabhirom, Chitralada Villa, April 6, 1969, in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 16.

returned. Later in the year, King Bhumibol emphasized to youth leaders and officials the importance of training the future generation.<sup>570</sup> Interactions with the youth provided opportunities to impress upon them a set of ideas that the monarchy and government hoped would shape their future political views.

### The South

The southern region of Thailand was another major rural area of interest for Bangkok in the battle for hearts and minds. Unlike the north and the northeast, the south had a large Muslim population. Siam gained suzerainty over five provinces in the south from British Malay in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning in 1902, Muslim groups began pushing for secession. The Thais and British signed a treaty in 1909, creating the modern-day border between Thailand and Malaysia. Many Muslims felt ostracized by the Buddhist majority. Bangkok seemed to pay attention to the region only to suppress the communist and secessionist movements and to incorporate the Muslims, not to improve the welfare of the people. In 1969, the Malayan Communist Party and CPT merged forces to coordinate trainings. The CPT set up bases in Trang, Phattalung, and Songkhla provinces.

In early 1969, the MDU began expanding operations in southern Thailand as it did in Nong Khai, with stations in Phattalung and Surat Thani provinces. With reports of communist activity and propaganda in the area, the government sent the MDU to show

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<sup>570</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, "Royal Speech by his Majesty the King Delivered to Youth Leaders and Officials Chitralada Villa," October 14, 1969, in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat* [Royal Address and Speeches] (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 34.

that Bangkok worried about the people and wanted to improve their welfare.<sup>571</sup> A year later, King Bhumibol visited Phattalung and emphasized the historical importance of the province to Thailand. He said, “Phatthalung has for a long time been a place of importance and famous in history....” Then the king dedicated a Buddhist edifice to the people and declared, “The statue was built to emphasize that all are part of the nation and that they are Thai too. May [the Buddhist statue] be an anchor of the heart and mind.”<sup>572</sup>

At their first training program in Phattalung and Surat Thani provinces, MDU leaders emphasized the importance of public relations to the unit officials. The trainees learned how to combat communism by orchestrating civic action programs. More importantly, MDU officials knew how to reach people’s hearts and minds. When the MDU stations were established and officials had built a rapport with the locals, the units began gathering news and information about the area.<sup>573</sup>

The USIS was also involved in training CDD officials in the southern province of Yala on how to use audiovisual equipment in public relations programs. U.S. and Thai officials wanted to implement new communication tools in the department but saw that the CDD in the south lacked expertise. In Yala, the director and the assistant director of the USIS in the region taught CDD officials to use and maintain new communication

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<sup>571</sup> “Letter from Central Division,” October 18, 1968, Subject: Considerations in sending MDU go out to work in fiscal year of 1969, p. 1-2, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Mobile Development Unit, Ministry of Education, (2) #B 15.1.1/25, TNA; “MDU Training Plan of Provinces Phatthalung and Surat Thani,” January 8, 1969, Central Division, p. 1-2, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Mobile Development Unit, Ministry of Education, (2) #B 15.1.1/25, TNA.

<sup>572</sup> “King Had Speech for Courageous People of Phatthalung,” *Chao Thai*, January 14, 1970, Collection of Important News, n/1/3/2513/1, #2, TNA.

<sup>573</sup> “Curriculum Announcement of MDU Officials Training Work,” January 8, 1969, p. 2, 5-6, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Mobile Development Unit, Ministry of Education, (2) #B 15.1.1/25, TNA.

technology.<sup>574</sup> The syllabus for the training included methods of reaching the people's hearts and minds, the creation of Mobile Public Relations Units, and information on psychological warfare. Once CDD officials finished their training, they would go work in various amphurs, publicizing development and government activities.

In the province of Pattani, the CDD began another program to promote community projects. The province had some strategic importance for the RTG. It was 130 kilometers from Malaysia and held a large Muslim population. According to anthropologist Keyes, the people in this province felt the most alienation from Bangkok since it had once been under the rule of a Malayan sultan.<sup>575</sup> Pattani was also the site of communist and secessionist activities. In 1968, the United Pattani Liberation Organization was created to fight for independence. In reaction, the governor of the province sent a letter to the CDD requesting help. Before setting off for the province, CDD officials received training from the USIS on audiovisual methods and publicity.<sup>576</sup> They hoped a good public relations campaign would create a better image of the RTG and deter Muslims from joining the communists in Pattani.

The CDD set up a post in Amphur Mayo in Pattani. The CDD had several objectives in Mayo: publicize "true" news to build understanding between the people and the government; survey the needs of the people; help with education; try to change

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<sup>574</sup> "Report of Training Developers who have Responsibility over Audiovisual Materials, CDD, Narathiwat Province," November 24, 1968, p. 1-3, Community Development Department Papers, Ministry of Interior, (8) มน 5.3.1.1/16, TNA.

<sup>575</sup> Keyes, *Thailand, Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State*, 131-132.

<sup>576</sup> "Letter to Director-General of CDD from Governor of Pattani Province Nai Phusawat Kamlangngam," April 3, 1969, Subject: Sending Community Development Promoting and Publishing Project, Community Development Department Papers, Ministry of Interior, (8) มน 5.3.1.1/15, TNA.

attitudes; and develop trust in the United States. Department officials were also attempting to encourage the people to support the government's anti-communist and national security policies.<sup>577</sup> The USIS from the Yala province offered materials and training for CDD and amphur officials by way of mobile film units, visual equipment, photo exhibitions, and libraries.<sup>578</sup> Mayo's nai amphur received cameras and slide projectors and worked alongside the CDD in "promoting the work of developers [and development] in villages." Thai Muslims needed to understand some of the good works the RTG was doing for them.

To help coordinate the different development and public relations programs in the region, the government utilized the Committee of Southern Development. Years earlier, in March 1961, the king advised Sarit to accelerate southern development to help the economy, society, education system, and people's welfare. King Bhumibol thought Bangkok had neglected the region and that local administrators did not care about fulfilling their responsibilities. Praphat was the first president of the committee, and then in 1964, Thanom placed Thanat as its head. The organization established development projects in fourteen provinces, mostly in the south, focusing on communication, jobs, education, and local governance.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> "Report of Developer Training, Promoting and Publishing and Audiovisual," p. 5, Community Development Department Papers, Ministry of Interior, (8) นน 5.3.1.1/15, TNA.

<sup>578</sup> "Project 1/1969, CD Promoting and Publishing by using Audiovisual, CD work, Amphur Mayo, Pattani Province," April 3, 1969, Community Development Department Papers, Ministry of Interior, (8) นน 5.3.1.1/15, TNA.

<sup>579</sup> "Report Work of the Committee of Southern Development, Pattani," January 26, 1970 to September 24, 1971, p. 1, Office of the Secretary Cabinet Minister, Committee of Southern Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2) นน 1.1.2.8/13, TNA.

One of the biggest results from the Committee of Southern Development was in education. The MOI wanted to bring educational opportunities to the Muslim population, especially at the secondary and university levels. A big project was the establishment of the Prince Songkhla University in Songkhla province. Muslims would receive more education grants and the Thai Ministry of Education would help improve the syllabus of the Pondo School, a facility that taught Islam and Arabic to the youth. Bangkok hoped that giving the people more educational opportunities would show them that the RTG cared. The committee emphasized that all fourteen southern provinces were important parts of the kingdom. The Muslims were Thai, even if they did not follow Buddhism.<sup>580</sup>

In the summer of 1972, the CDD proposed establishing a system of libraries in Yala to facilitate education and the spread of government ideas. This project was a coordinated effort between the CDD and the American Institute for Research. Though it would help encourage literacy, the department wanted to push the importance of reading and writing in Thai. The PPU created media campaigns to promote the library and its benefits. CDD officials researched local media interests and the needs of the people to determine how to tailor the facility and its programs. The libraries would be a medium for the government to educate villagers through the distribution and placement of materials reinforcing policies, programs, and nationalism.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> "Report Work of the Committee of Southern Development, Pattani," January 26, 1970 to September 24, 1971, p. 7-9.

<sup>581</sup> "Meeting Reports 11/1972," August 2, 1972, Community Development Department, p. 18-20, Papers of the Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, (8) ๓๓ 5.2.1.1.1/4, TNA.

## Hill Tribes and Drugs

As the USIS was making the transition to giving the RTG more responsibilities over information and public relations programs, problems with the hill tribes were getting worse. At the beginning of 1969, U.S. and Thai officials became aware of a sudden outburst of violence in the north. Unger attributed this new surge to the hill tribes' dissatisfaction with the government.<sup>582</sup> Some tribespeople gradually began joining the CPT to resist Bangkok's efforts to incorporate them. The ambassador urged Thanom and Praphat to work harder at recognizing the hill tribes "as part of the Thai nation" and to build stronger relations with them.

Among the mountain peoples, the Hmong had the strongest independence movement. According to a Thai-U.S. military report, some of the tribal leaders claimed that at one time a chieftain owned 20 or more villages in Thailand. This Hmong leader had an amicable relationship with Bangkok, which saw the tribe as semi-autonomous. The Hmong wanted to be free of government control. What also caused government-tribe tension were issues such as the opium trade, village relocation program, and lack of education. However, with the Vietnam War and the CPT insurgencies, the government wanted to integrate the borderlands to increase the nation's security and unity.<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>582</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State, January 14, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Southeast Asia, Vol, XX, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v20/d1>, [accessed 4/21/16]; "Memorandum of Conversation," March 9, 1969, Subject: Meeting with Prime Minister Thanom in Bangkok on 9 March 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, XX, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v20/d4>, [accessed 4/21/16].

<sup>583</sup> "Meo Handbook," October 1969, Joint Thai-U.S. Military Research and Development Center, Bangkok, Thailand, p. 47 and 49, 50-51, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI/R&D Center, Project Reports, Box 23, Entry P 1068, NACP.



Part of the reason the communists were experiencing some success with the hill tribes was because of the RTG's approach to pacifying the rural regions. In front of the Bangkok Rotary Club in March 1969, King Bhumibol spoke frankly about his displeasure with how the government was conducting its hill tribe policy. The king said the RTG's treatment of the ethnic minorities was despicable, insisting that the resettlement camps were more like prisons with inadequate water. At times, the government used too much force to root out communists among the ethnic minorities. Moreover, the radio programming for the hill tribes needed to be better.<sup>584</sup> The king went even further when speaking to a smaller group of Rotary Club members behind closed-doors.<sup>585</sup> He proposed relocating settlements to the foot of the mountains so they could be easily defended. To avoid U.S.-Thai troop-community friction, he said soldiers should not be stationed in villages. Opium was another problem. The king said the tribes should be allowed to grow the drug, and the government would buy the product until the people could find better employment.<sup>586</sup> He urged the audience and the government to show more compassion for the hill tribes because many were not communist at heart but were forced to join because of harsh treatment by Thai authorities. In his own words, "The commie tribesmen are only painted red...we must help them wash the paint off." It was the duty of the ethnic majority Thai to welcome minorities.

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<sup>584</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," March 7, 1969, Subject: His Majesty Speaks His Mind, p. 2, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2521, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

<sup>585</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," April 1, 1969, Subject: The King's Plan for Combatting Hill Tribe Insurgency, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2521, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

<sup>586</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," April 1, 1969, The King's Plan for Combatting Hill Tribe Insurgency, p. 2.

One of the foremost experts on counterinsurgency and an advocate for a new tribal policy based on better public relations programs was Lt. Gen. Saiyud Kerdphol. Born and raised in Sukhothai, Saiyud attended the Chulachomklao Royal Military Cadet School. He gained popularity for his innovative counterinsurgency tactics of coordinating civil-police-military efforts.<sup>587</sup> The general studied the British methods used in Malaysia and looked to implement many of the ideas. In his view, the RTG needed to focus not only on military operations but also on effective governance and improvement of the social and economic environments. Political scientist Tom Marks, a specialist in Thai counterinsurgency, argued that Saiyud and future military leader and prime minister Prem Tinsulanond were some of the few in the Thai military and Bangkok who had the best view on how to fight communism.<sup>588</sup> Interestingly, the USIS, MOI, BPP, and other Thai agencies were already practicing what Saiyud was promoting. However, there was little coordination between the organizations involved in public relations.

King Bhumibol made Saiyud a special advisor on counterinsurgency and ethnic relations. The general's focus was on building better connections with villagers and minorities through civic action, local security, intelligence gathering, and use of military force only when needed to fight communist forces.<sup>589</sup> There was also more coordination among the different agencies. Instead of using mostly government officials from Bangkok, Saiyud trained the local leadership, thinking they would have an easier time

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<sup>587</sup> Saiyud Kerdphol, *The Struggle for Thailand: Counterinsurgency 1965-1985* (Bangkok: S. Research Center Co., Ltd., 1986), 2.

<sup>588</sup> Marks, *Making Revolution*, 207.

<sup>589</sup> Daniel Weimer, *Seeing Drugs: Modernization, Counterinsurgency, and U.S. Narcotics Control in the Third World, 1969-1976* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2011) 96.

connecting with villagers. The new approach reflected the particulars of each village, rather than a one-size-fits-all policy.<sup>590</sup>

After King Bhumibol's public criticism of the RTG's hill tribe policy, some Thai officials began making changes. Through the CSOC, the RTG hoped to coordinate and streamline counterinsurgency policy down to the provincial level. For example, in Chiang Rai, Deputy Governor Chalem Vathnothai had implemented a village defense plan that was having a modicum of success. Previously, the northern province had experienced massive CPT infiltration and recruitment among the hill tribes. Chalem used the twin approach of development and psychological operations to build the people's faith in the government.<sup>591</sup> He established reception centers to help refugees who had either fled the fighting between the CPT and Thai government or had surrendered. At each center, there was a cooperative of government agencies offering humanitarian aid and education to the ethnic minorities, similar to the Development Center at Nakhu. These projects were not completely without American help, as the U.S. military and the USIS offered support.<sup>592</sup> At a meeting with development administrators, King Bhumibol said, "Foreign personnel [Americans] who are now engaged in giving us assistance do so because it is the policy of their government to help in our national development."<sup>593</sup> Moreover, many of the

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<sup>590</sup> Saiyud, *The Struggle for Thailand*, 96-97.

<sup>591</sup> Communist Suppression Operations Center, "Hill Tribe Pilot Project Plans (Toeng-Chieng Khong)," March 28, 1969, Subject: Village Defense, p. 3, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI Joint Services Division, General Records, Box 2, Entry P 1036, NACP.

<sup>592</sup> "Telegram from EA G. McMurtrie Godley to Ambassador Johnson," April 1, 1969, Subject: Meeting with Marshal Dawee, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box 6, Entry 5416, NACP.

<sup>593</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, "Royal Speech delivered to Accelerated Rural Development Administrators at the Provincial Governor's Level, Ambara Villa," in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 25.

policies and ideas implemented by the CSOC had their origins from the USIS and American military.

To support the RTG's hill tribe policies, the USIS began an information campaign highlighting the dangers of opium and its trafficking. In 1971, the USIS received a new PAO, Jack Hedges, who oversaw the agency during a time of change for both the United States and Thailand. Information Officer Fred A. Coffey Jr. convinced Hedges to include Nixon's war on drugs in the "Golden Triangle" (the area where Burma, Laos, and Thailand touch) in the 1971 Country Plan. Washington resisted at first, but Hedges was able to get it approved. According to Coffey, the mission created books, radio broadcasts, and films to build awareness about the negative effects of drugs.<sup>594</sup> The deputy PAO said, "In about a year's time, the Thai people realized – and our message was – that they had a problem." USIS-Bangkok numbers showed that approximately 750,000 out of a population of 32 million were heroin addicts. Though not directly related to anti-communism, the anti-drug campaign portrayed the United States as supporters of Thailand's public welfare.

The eradication of drugs in Thailand became part of the U.S. effort to modernize the country. As part of assimilation, the ethnic groups needed to act and live like the rest of the Thai population, who were "civilized." To do this, the hill tribes had to stop growing and using opium.<sup>595</sup> In addition, they were to practice sedentary farming and

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<sup>594</sup> Oral History, Fred A. Coffey Jr. Interview, 1990, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/>, [accessed 5/11/2016].

<sup>595</sup> Weimer, *Seeing Drugs*, 97.

give up some of their traditions, such as animal sacrifices. Unfortunately, these policies would push some to join the CPT.

In the fall of 1972, the United Nations, United States, and RTG began a crop-replacement project to help the hill tribes find a source of income other than growing opium. They called it the UN-Thai Crop Replacement and Community Development Project (CRCDP). The theory behind the program was that replacing the opium with other agricultural products would increase the standard of living and help the tribes achieve a level of modernity.<sup>596</sup> The RTG created another program based on the MIT and MDU model called the Mobile Trade Training School Project, which had units traveling throughout the countryside “to provide trade training opportunities to out-of-school youth and adults in” northeast Thailand.<sup>597</sup>

Some minority groups responded well to the CRCDPs. The UN reported that the hill tribes were “interested and anxious to be trained” in areas of livestock, sanitation, and health care.<sup>598</sup> One hill tribesman said, “You do not know how happy we were when we learned that you people had come to help us with farming.” Many became more aware of the illegality and harmfulness of using opium. Some tribal leaders saw the benefit of the program, endorsed it, and took large roles in helping to replace opium with other crops.

However, relocation, re-socialization, and crop-substitution were too much to handle for some tribespeople. Within the Cold War context, the U.S. and Thai governments had an interest in stabilizing Thailand, specifically the rural and border

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<sup>596</sup> Weimer, *Seeing Drugs*, 114.

<sup>597</sup> Alton Straughan and James Murray, *An Evaluation of the Mobile Trade Training School Project*, April 29, 1971, Pamphlet (Bangkok: USOM, 1971), 11.

<sup>598</sup> Weimer, *Seeing Drugs*, 119.

areas. To stymie communism and secure the borders, Bangkok and Washington wanted to integrate the tribes into the Thai state by ensuring their loyalty. Political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott described the periphery areas where the tribes lived as Zomias, meaning remote or highlands. Zomias provided sanctuary for what Scott called “state-evading groups.”<sup>599</sup> Some of the hill tribes in Thailand were trying to avoid government intervention and the ideas Bangkok was promoting. Many were part of a different culture and spoke a different language. When they felt mistreated or needed more land, they moved, and when encroached upon by the majority or the government, they fought back.

The grievances of the hill tribes were great recruiting tools for the CPT. U.S. embassy officials observed that issues with narcotics, forest preservation, land tenure, and assimilation were causing tension between the ethnic minorities and Bangkok. Scott said the RTG’s “handling of the grievances and aspirations of the hill peoples is the most decisive factor in determining the outcome of the struggle in the north between the government” and the CPT.<sup>600</sup> Geographical distance, complaints against the RTG, and a desire not to be integrated pushed some hill tribes into the arms of the communists.

The RTG tried to placate the hill tribes and prevent them from joining the ranks of the CPT by offering citizenship in 1971. Four years before, MOI Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Praphat had made a promise that ethnic minorities would become Thai nationals and obtain the same rights and privileges as other Thais. One sign of change

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<sup>599</sup> Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 127.

<sup>600</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” August 30, 1971, Subject: RTG Hilltribe Programs and COIN, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2623, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

was in March 1971, when the MOI requested that all Thais call the people living in the mountains “Thai Mountain People.”<sup>601</sup> According to *Chao Thai*, the king enacted this new policy as a means of showing the tribes his kindness and grace. King Bhumibol and the MOI wanted to eliminate ethnic distinctions in policy to create unity. Then in the summer of 1971, Praphat’s promise was fulfilled when the MOI drafted a law allowing hill tribes to become citizens.<sup>602</sup> To help ethnic minorities assimilate, the head of amphur education in Chiang Mai, with support from the DPW, established the Center for the Education and Training of Buddhist Tribal Monks. According to the *Daily News*, the purpose of the school was to teach the Thai language and build a Thai consciousness among the tribes.<sup>603</sup> The RTG wanted the center to reinforce the policy of offering hill tribes citizenship. These initiatives were ways of making them feel like they were part of the Thai nation.

#### U.S. Troop-Local Issues

Another major public relations initiative for U.S.-Thai policymakers was to continue managing problems arising from American soldiers stationed in the country. In 1968 and 1969, there were about 35,000 U.S. military personnel stationed in Thailand. As shown in the previous chapter, the flood of U.S. service personnel angered Thai locals, as Americans seemed to care little about propriety, Buddhist traditions, or social norms.

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<sup>601</sup> “MOI Says to Stop Calling “Tribes,” Should Call Thai Mountain People as a Replacement,” *Chao Thai*, March 17, 1971, Collection of Important News, n/18/2514/23, TNA.

<sup>602</sup> Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department, Subject: Quarterly Airgram on the Insurgency and COIN Programs in Thailand, July 30, 1971, p. 1 and 11, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2624, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

<sup>603</sup> “Establish School to Teach Tribes to Consciously be Thai,” September 9, 1971, *Daily News*, Collection of Important News, n/18/2514/23, TNA.

Though most of the Thai media at the time were still pro-American, they were also very nationalistic. Any slight towards the country produced immediate negative responses. One incident came when a Thai newspaper captured a photo of an Air Force sergeant carrying an image of the Buddha in a disrespectful manner. In Thai culture, the head is the most sacred part of the body, while the feet are the dirtiest. The photo in the newspaper showed the officer holding the Buddha statue by the head in a haphazard way.<sup>604</sup> The writer titled the article “Look at Him.” He then proceeded to explain: “Buddha’s image is an item of respect for the Thais, but this Farang [foreigner] carries the Buddha image by the head, showing [a] sign of disrespect....” A statue or painting of the Buddha was as sacred to Buddhists as the cross was to Christians, the writer wrote. He ended with an etiquette lesson on how to handle religious Buddhist icons. PAO Schmidt and Ambassador Unger impressed upon Coffey “to work with the Thai press on a personal basis, improve our press placement and content, and improve the Thai attitude a little bit concerning the American military presence.”<sup>605</sup> Both men brought Coffey in because of his previous experience with the VOA.

To help portray Americans in a better light, Coffey focused a lot of energy on showcasing the U.S.-Thai aid projects. The purpose of this big push was “to enlighten Thai attitudes [and] to show that [the Americans] were supporting Thai aspirations and not just U.S. government aspirations.”<sup>606</sup> He brought American and foreign

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<sup>604</sup> “Memorandum,” March 1971, Subject: Mishandling of Buddha Images, p. 1, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI Public Affairs Office, General Records, Box 2, Entry P 1063, NACP.

<sup>605</sup> Coffey Jr. Interview.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.



correspondents together with the Thai press to cover the same events. In these settings, journalists would exchange ideas about specific issues and both governments' humanitarian and development projects. Moreover, the USIS invited Thai news personnel to seminars and press conferences to supply them with information. The result was an improved rapport between the USIS and Thai journalists and a decrease in anti-American rhetoric from some Thai news agencies.

On the ground, the U.S. and Thai militaries increased civic action programs in the countryside to build their public images. Specifically, the Thais trained more medical non-commissioned officer students at one of the military schools in Lopburi to provide health care to the villagers. There was also a veterinarian program visiting remote farms to help with livestock.<sup>607</sup> In November 1969, USMAC-Thai/JUSMAGTHAI organized a soccer game to play other teams and raise money for a royal charity. Reports said the event was a great success, with 20,000 in attendance, including the king. In addition, the 13<sup>th</sup> U.S. Air Force Band toured Thailand with help from the Thai-U.S. military PAO and a USIS cultural affairs officer. The band performed concerts at six colleges, an orphanage, and a village. Though the music was foreign to some, those who understood were impressed. The band also played a few Thai songs to show respect to Thai culture.

In the summer of 1970, the U.S. Advanced Research Projects Agency conducted a study on the capabilities and impacts of military civic action programs. Former Secretary

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<sup>607</sup> Advanced Research Projects Agency, "Military Civic Action: Capabilities and Impact," June 2, 1970, Office of the Secretary of Defense, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI R&D Center, General Records, Box 17, Entry P 1067, p. 2, NACP; "Developments in Thailand, Reports Control Symbol 3500-5, 2nd Quarter, FY 1969," April 1, 1969, p. 27-29, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI Assistant Chief of Staff for Ops, Box 2, Entry P 1026, NACP.

of Defense Robert McNamara observed that the projects “had some impressive results, quite apart from the developmental projects themselves, the program powerfully alters the negative image of the military man, as the oppressive preserver of the status quo.”<sup>608</sup> Furthermore, when government forces engaged in humanitarian aid work, the people “bec[a]me less receptive to enemy propaganda.”

Not all Thais had negative impressions of U.S. soldiers. In late 1969, USIS conducted a survey among adults living in the Bangkok-Thonburi area. The majority of the respondents consisted of students, professionals, college-educated people, and middle to upper middle-class individuals.<sup>609</sup> In regard to American troops in the country, 41 percent considered their presence “very useful,” with a large portion saying it was “rather useful.” Almost half saw the GIs as protecting other Asian countries, while only 16 percent and 15 percent said they were there to defend Thailand or safeguard American interests, respectively. Interestingly, 4 percent thought it was unwise to rely solely on American aid for protection against communism and other enemies. Many thought that U.S. development and economic funding were some of the main sources contributing to the country’s growth.

Another survey, this one led by Thais at Chulalongkorn University, supported the USIS findings. Dr. Miss Prown-Pun Kamolmal of the Department of Education Research interviewed 409 eighteen-year-old students. In a report to Ambassador Unger, Prown-Pun

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<sup>608</sup> Advanced Research Projects Agency, “Military Civic Action: Capabilities and Impact,” June 2, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>609</sup> “Thai Opinions of the American Domestic Scene and the U.S. Presence in Thailand,” December 29, 1969, p. 1 and 8, GRUSIA, RG 306, USIA Office of Research and Assessment, Office of Research, Research Reports, 1960-1999, Box 43, Entry P 142, NACP.

said that 52 percent had favorable sentiments, while almost half held neutral views about American personnel in the country. Most praised the United States for its progressive ideas and democratic political system. When it came to the Vietnam War, students “sympathized with America’s role.”<sup>610</sup>

U.S. officials began having orientations to help avoid problems between Americans and Thais. The PAO for the U.S. military gave a speech “to impress upon [the soldiers] the practical necessity of your knowing a little bit about the culture. At least enough to stay out of trouble.”<sup>611</sup> He then showed a picture of a young American sitting on top of a Buddha statue. The next image was of the same young man in handcuffs. The PAO referred to another incident, but this time it had to do with the king. On March 17, 1970, the Thai police jailed a U.S. soldier for sixteen hours for “being disrespectful to [the] king of Thailand.”<sup>612</sup> Since the time of Sarit, the RTG had a law prohibiting any slander or criticism of the monarchy. While in a club, the soldier stood on a coin with an image of King Bhumibol (the feet being considered the dirtiest part of the body). He had stepped on the coin after it fell on the ground. The PAO wanted to make a point: any sign of disrespect, large or small, was serious. Thais were fiercely sensitive about their

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<sup>610</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” August 26, 1969, Subject: A Resurvey of Thai Student Attitudes and Unrest, p. 10, GRUSIA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2520, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

<sup>611</sup> “Speech about Buddhist Culture given at Orientation of New Officials,” 1972, p. 1, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI Public Affairs Office, General Records, Box 2, Entry P 1063, NACP.

<sup>612</sup> “Speech about Buddhist Culture given at Orientation of New Officials,” p. 2. “Telegram from Co. 7th RPFS Udorn, Thailand to RHMFMFTA/COMUSMACTHAI/CHJUSMAGTHAI,” March 17, 1970, p. 1, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI Public Affairs Office, General Records, Box 2, Entry P 1063, NACP.

culture, and U.S. officials needed to protect relations with the country by avoiding serious incidents such as this one.

U.S. public diplomacy officials worked hard to maintain a good image of the American military. They disseminated 12,000 copies of “Twenty-Five Years of Friendship [between the U.S. and the monarchy] in connection with the King’s Silver Jubilee celebration.” The Bureau of Educational Cultural Affairs (BECA) reported that USIS branches continued cooperating “extensively with US military authorities to carry out joint public relations projects and to gain maximum national impact for their civic action and community relations efforts.” The USIS scrutinized most news reports about issues with American troops before publication to provide necessary context and avoid too much anti-American coverage.<sup>613</sup> They held frequent press conferences, issued statements, and used mass media to highlight the benefits of close U.S.-Thai relations.

#### Youth and Students

On the radar of most U.S. and Thai policymakers was the growing political activism of the youth and student populations. There were reports from some areas of the country that youth had developed contacts with communists. An official from the MOI told *Siam Rath* that youth in the northeast and south had left their villages to go to areas with lots of communist activity and to learn things that would be dangerous to national security. According to ministry reports, many of the travelers were between the ages of 14 to 18 and came from areas where there were active communist insurgents. The MOI argued that the communists had recruited the youth to find news and report on the

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<sup>613</sup> “Country Program Memorandum, Communications Unity Annual Field Proposal for Thailand,” June 21, 1972, p. 9 and 30, Folder 25, Group 1, Series 2, Box 15, ABECALH.

movements of government officials. The CPT seemed to be infiltrating the country through those who seemed to be the most impressionable.<sup>614</sup>

The USIS and RTG also noticed that communists had begun heavily propagandizing university students. For the most part, since the late 1950s undergraduates had remained politically neutral—in public. Nevertheless, U.S. and Thai policymakers kept a close eye on student culture and movements. In 1966, the USIS received intelligence from two sources that had “good contacts with the students on the major Bangkok university campuses” that contents from the CPT’s radio station were being spread by word-of-mouth to about half of the student body at the conservative Chulalongkorn University.<sup>615</sup> At Thammasat University, a more liberal institution, the students disregarded much of the information about leftist ideology from the CPT radio programs; instead, they paid more attention to allegations of government corruption. This trend occurred at the University of Fine Arts, Prasarnmit Teachers College, and Sirirat Hospital Medical School.

Thanom, Praphat, and the USIS had reasons to worry about the students. The prime minister said that the students might one day come to believe that Thailand was a puppet of the United States. USIS officials reported that many students “prefer to see greater democratization, less reliance upon military leadership, less censorship, and less corruption in government.”<sup>616</sup> Some students predicted back in 1963 that “the military

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<sup>614</sup> “Reveal Kids of this Generation Have Gone to Find 'Reds,” *Siam Rath*, August 5, 1971, Collection of Important News, n/18/2514/7, TNA.

<sup>615</sup> “Thai Students Listen to Clandestine Communist Radio,” March 28, 1966, p. 1-3, GRUSIA, RG 306, Office of Research and Media Reaction, Research Memo, 1963-1999, Box 26, Entry P 64, NACP.

<sup>616</sup> “Thai Students Listen to Clandestine Communist Radio,” March 28, 1966, p. 1 and 3.

would come to exert even more influence in government, that the coup d'etat might become more frequent in the future, and that there might be a further increase in the level of corruption in government.” Communist ideology was not brainwashing students, but it was opening their eyes to some of the latent problems in the country.

The regime tried to appease the students, young adults, intellectuals, and groups wanting political reform by creating a new constitution in June 1968. Handley argued that King Bhumibol wanted to set the announcement date for the constitution on his birthday to strengthen the belief that democracy flowed from the kingship.<sup>617</sup> On the day it was promulgated, all media outlets and the USIS televised and reported on the ceremony to dedicate the constitution. This moment became an opportunity for the regime and the monarchy to appear modern and progressive in the eyes of the people. With the king on his throne and the political and military leaders below at his feet, he received the constitution and gave it his approval.<sup>618</sup> The document called for the creation of a bicameral parliament and elections. Members of one house would be elected, with the king appointing politicians to fill the second. There would be a prime minister, but the king was still the chief of state, the real power behind the government.

However, as the RTG was trying to implement some political reform, Thai students still wanted more change. The year 1968 saw a wave of public and student protests throughout the Western world. Leaders of major governments promised peace and a bright future but failed to deliver. In his book *Power and Protest*, historian Jeremi

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<sup>617</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 195.

<sup>618</sup> “phralratchahaanratthamanunhaybuangthai [A Royal Constitution for All Thai],” *Seripharb*, September 1968, no. 154, p. 18-21, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, “Free World” (Thai), Box 271, Entry 1053, NACP.

Suri argued that détente made the world less violent, but it isolated governments from the people. Many people demanded more political, educational, and economic opportunities as well as the abolition of nuclear weapons and an end to the Vietnam War. More importantly, activists wanted peace amid the Cold War.<sup>619</sup>

The Thai students, like their international counterparts, wanted better governance and more prospects for the future. Under the umbrella of the Thai University Student Direct Action organization, young educated adults began gathering and organizing to push for more political change. To stay privy to the workings of the student population in Thailand, the USIS appointed Frank Coward, already in charge of academic activities, as a student contact person in August 1968.<sup>620</sup> Coward had the responsibility of obtaining knowledge about Thai student attitudes and motivations, what issues were important to them, and if there were any CPT influences among them.<sup>621</sup> The USIS and U.S. embassy worried that the group had some sort of connection with other protestors internationally. However, American officials found from their contacts that the students were unlikely to “follow other international demonstrations,” and the RTG usually tried to control the student population through appointing government officials as presidents of

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<sup>619</sup> Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5 and 164.

<sup>620</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to USIA Washington,” October 3, 1968, Subject: Measures to Counter Anti-Americanism among Thai students, p. 2, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2520, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

<sup>621</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” November 1, 1968, Subject: Student Unrest, p. 1-2, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2520, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

universities.<sup>622</sup> Furthermore, the government paid off student leaders of the various organizations and promised them good jobs upon graduation if they kept the peace.

The Thai student population did not immediately go from political neutrality to activism, but there were certain factors that led to this evolution. In a paper titled "Impact of Youth and the U.S. National Interest," U.S. embassy political analyst Joseph E. Lee argued that as Thailand became more modernized, the students would seek more change and political involvement.<sup>623</sup> "On the basis of culture, tradition, education, and upbringing," Lee said, the "youth in Thailand remains very much the led and not the leaders."<sup>624</sup> A majority of the students were from rural areas and carried with them a traditional outlook on life. There was an agreement among embassy and USIS officials that although Thais attending universities were currently "politically passive," as "the pace of social change" increased in Thailand, the "youth might well become considerably more politically aware and activist...."

While the Thai and U.S. governments' modernization and economic programs had brought prosperity to the country, they also led to some unintended consequences. Western education and influence made some Thais see the contradictions within their own government, and they wanted change. Financial wealth was not good enough without political reform. American officials were not ignorant of some of the

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<sup>622</sup> "Telegram from American Embassy Bangkok to State Department," July 16, 1968, Subject: Thai Opinion about Thai University Student Direct Action, p. 1-2, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2520, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

<sup>623</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy and USIS-Bangkok to State Department," March 31, 1970, Subject: Mission Assessment of Youth Activities, Paper: "Impact of Youth and the U.S. National Interest," p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2620, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

<sup>624</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy and USIS-Bangkok to State Department," March 31, 1970, Subject: Mission Assessment of Youth Activities Paper: "Impact of Youth and the U.S. National Interest," p. 2.



complications. The Bangkok Mission Council, which included USIS and U.S. embassy officials, saw a conflict with some of the public diplomacy and educational programs. While organizations like the USIS and USOM wanted to build a rapport with student groups, they also did not want to upset the RTG. Some Thai government leaders saw contact with Americans and U.S. political ideas as encouraging political activism and uprisings.<sup>625</sup> Ideas such as democracy, liberalism, and capitalism were modernizing Thailand, but in ways that the U.S. and Thai governments had not foreseen. What some American officials did not anticipate either was that Thais would attack the United States. The USIS and U.S. embassy observed that there was a “small but perceptible increase in anti-American attitudes among university students.”<sup>626</sup> Nevertheless, the desire for democracy by the students was causing some political instability, something Washington and the USIS did not want. Modernization came to Thailand in large measure because of U.S. aid, resources, and ideas. The more Thai students interacted with Americans and organizations such as the USIS, the more active in politics it seemed they would become.

Some young people did not see the positive side of the U.S. and Thai governments’ policies. On March 20, 1971, a column ran in the *Siam Rath* newspaper discussing how university students were seeing the many contradictions in the conduct of their politicians and leaders. This sentiment was encapsulated in an essay written by two young Thais from Thammasat University titled “Bhai Khao.”<sup>627</sup> In this paper, they listed

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<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

<sup>626</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy and USIS-Bangkok to State Department,” February 2, 1970, Subject: Anti-Americanism among Students, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2620, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

<sup>627</sup> “An Era of Distrust,” *Siam Rath*, March 20, 1971, p. 3, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1971).

their grievances, specifically that leaders and elders ignored the views and opinions of the students. Politicians stymied open discussions of politics and contrary perspectives. Thai leaders did not want them to be politically involved.

A couple of months later, the USIS and U.S. embassy reported that students from Thammasat wrote an essay criticizing U.S.-Thai relations. The title of the 100-page paper was “The White Menace.” This piece had intense imagery comparing Thailand to a beautiful lady being blood-sucked by the United States.<sup>628</sup> The students saw Americans as imperialists taking advantage of the people. USIS officials observed that many of the references and sources came from “reproductions of communist” and anti-war movement propaganda. The agency attributed the essay to the underground student leftist group called the “Dome Group”.

Not all students protested against the government as some supported development, modernization, and U.S.-Thai relations. In 1967 during the summer holiday, fifty Chiang Mai students teamed up with American Peace Corps volunteers to help with rural development. The students paid for the costs of the project from fund raising.<sup>629</sup> Another example was at the end of the 1969 spring term, when students from Chulalongkorn University engaged in outreach efforts in the northeast. A USIS journalist chronicled the work of 22 males and 25 females in Buriram and Chaiyaphum

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<sup>628</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy and USIS-Bangkok to State Department and USIA Washington,” May 3, 1971, Subject: Thammasat University Student Publication, “The White Menace,” p. 1-2, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2620, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

<sup>629</sup> “Telegram from Chiang Mai Consulate to Bangkok Embassy,” April 12, 1967, Subject: Events of Political Significance in North Thailand, p. 2, GRDS, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Political and Defense, Box 2518, Entry A1 1613-C, NACP.

provinces.<sup>630</sup> The students developed two projects, one for farming and another for youth education. Their belief was that by lifting the people's standard of living and literacy, they would become better citizens. A typical day in the program began with a ceremony in front of the Thai flag before everyone received their assignment for the day. One group went into the villages to teach about health and hygiene, others taught in the schools, and some worked in the fields. When the students finished their volunteer projects, the locals had a Buddhist ceremony to commemorate and consecrate the work done. According to the USIS journalist, volunteering was a good experience not only for the students but also for the recipients. This program helped pave the way for more voluntary development initiatives by students.

Notwithstanding some student discontent, both governments continued with foreign exchange programs in the hope of building positive sentiments towards U.S.-Thai relations. Along with the traditional Fulbright, the United States had the American Field Service (AFS) program. The AFS began during World War I and then evolved into a non-profit cultural exchange organization for youth. It began exchanges with Thailand in 1962. Most AFS funding came from BECA as a form of public diplomacy. *Seripharb* followed a couple of AFS students in Thailand in one issue. According to the article, American students lived with a host family and learned about the culture for one year. The journalist summarized the students' experience as helping to break down misunderstandings between the American and Thai cultures. One student from the United

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<sup>630</sup> "nisitchulaa chuayphattana chonabot chayphuumi [Chulalongkorn Students help Develop the Countryside of chayphuumi]," *Seripharb*, August 19, 1969, p. 18-23, vol. 10, GRUSAI, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, Box 272, Entry A1 1053, NACP.

States said she loved the little Thai children and observed that they were much more polite than American kids.<sup>631</sup> Thai and U.S. officials saw the importance of continuing the exchange programs to dispel misunderstandings and to protect bilateral relations.

The student exchange program greatly benefitted the USIS. The ability to control news and promote good relations had come in some ways from USIS contacts with the press and local leadership. Members of the media and provincial governments were former study abroad grantees. They learned about the United States and gained an appreciation for U.S.-Thai relations. BECA noted, the “USIS definitely was a catalytic agent in stimulating Thai public media interest.”<sup>632</sup> Editors at the *Siam Rath*, *The Daily News*, and *Chao Isan* were former study abroad students. Even with student protests and some anti-American sentiment, BECA said, public and government opinion “continues to support a very active partnership with the U.S.”

#### More Student Unrest

On November 17, 1971, members of the military regime retracted some of the political reform they had enacted in 1968. Tanks and troops surrounded the parliament building and forced the National Assembly to disband, banned all political parties, and reinstalled the same revolutionary party from the Sarit era. The next day, Thanom justified his actions by saying that the precarious situation in neighboring Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam and the admission of the People’s Republic of China to

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<sup>631</sup> “nakrianamelikan tunat.f.s naythai [American Students (A.F.S.) in Thailand],” *Seripharb*, February 22, 1971, p. 18-19, 23, Vol. 2, GRUSIA, RG 306, Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, Box 273, Entry A1 1053, NACP.

<sup>632</sup> “Country Program Memorandum, Communications Unity Annual Field Proposal for Thailand,” June 21, 1972, 11.

the UN caused them to act for national security purposes. Thanom added another reason: he blamed the National Assembly for causing so much trouble for government administrators and for seeking their own interests. Without parliament, the government could run smoothly like it did during the time of Sarit, he argued.<sup>633</sup> Problems with politicians, Thanom said, “will endanger the nation, the king, and the people.”<sup>634</sup>

The new leadership called themselves the National Executive Council (NEC). The NEC consisted of five people, most notably Thanom, his son Narong, and Praphat. The NEC promulgated an interim constitution in December 1972. Narong became assistant secretary-general of the NEC. Praphat appointed himself head of the CSOC, interior minister, and chief of police. Thanom was the chair of the NEC, remained prime minister, and ran foreign affairs.

The reaction from university students, especially towards Praphat, was harsh. The American consulate in Chiang Mai reported that one student magazine called “Tracking Ideas” was filled with anti-government messages, especially from revolutionary Che Guevara.<sup>635</sup> A caption for one picture of Praphat reviewing soldiers made fun of the military leadership by saying, “The stomachs which walk the troops do not belong to the soldiers but instead they happen to be those of a few generals who hide themselves behind the troops in war time and step forward during peace time. The stomachs here would merely mean tummies which protrude so much that they block view of their toes.”

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<sup>633</sup> Phumin, “Thanom Kittikachorn and the Politics of Military Dictatorship in Thailand,” 28.

<sup>634</sup> “Proclamation of the Revolutionary Party No. 6,” *Royal Thai Government Gazette* Vol. 26, 1972, p. 71,

<sup>635</sup> “Telegram from American Consulate Chiang Mai thru Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” November 23, 1971, Subject: New Political Magazine at Chiang Mai University, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59 Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2620, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

Another article titled “Military and Thai Political Problems” called the NEC hypocrites who never lived up to their promises to implement social and political reform. It criticized the leadership for holding on to traditional notions of promoting unity over individualism and idealizing or romanticizing divine kingship and authoritarianism.<sup>636</sup>

The MOI Council of Information did an analysis of student reaction to the coup. In their view, the reason for the student unrest was, interestingly, the influence of education, specifically from the West, which echoed assessments from the USIS and U.S. embassy. Ideas like democracy and liberalism allowed students to think openly, debate, and question. Foreign concepts led students to want more say in politics. Another major inspiration for the protests was the International Union of Students (IUS), which the MOI called a front for communism. According to MOI reports, the IUS had been disseminating propaganda at Thammasat University to recruit and stir up trouble.<sup>637</sup> The RTG feared the IUS. Based on reports, the IUS had ties to communism that began in 1957, and it had been publicizing populist ideas to Thai students. It used journals, newspapers, and other print media to propagate its philosophies.

King Bhumibol tried to mollify some of the student unrest. Every year, the king attended many university graduations to hand out diplomas personally. During one such occasion at Thammasat, he cautioned the students about following ideas that seemed to have all the right answers to society’s woes. He said, “At present there appears to be a new theory that all things that have been formerly established must be abolished and

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<sup>636</sup> “Telegram from American Consulate Chiang Mai thru Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” November 23, 1971, Subject: New Political Magazine at Chiang Mai University, p. 4.

<sup>637</sup> “Study on Situation by the Council of Information, Subject: Political Reaction of Students,” March 1972, Papers of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, (1) มท 3.1.6.1/8, TNA.

destroyed by violent means so that something new may be initiated.” The king expressed his doubts that “the new things” would bring any good to the country. “Wiping out the old to create the new,” he argued, “may also destroy the good things already in existence and put a stop to progress in various fields.” Protest was not the way to bring change to the country. He wanted to protect Thai traditions, one of them being the monarchy.<sup>638</sup>

At universities outside of Bangkok, the king’s message was different. While conferring degrees at the College of Education at Prasarnmitra and in Phitsanulok, King Bhumibol said little about political ideology and more about the purpose of education and national unity. He discussed the importance of the graduates’ roles as future teachers to the youth of the nation. The graduates were to instruct students so that they would one day be a benefit to the country.<sup>639</sup> In Phitsanulok, King Bhumibol argued, “Our country has developed increasing youth problems” and without the “care and attention” of their teachers, they will “become troublesome and a problem to society.”<sup>640</sup> Future teachers had the responsibility of training a generation that would not rebel but be good Thais by obeying their leaders.

The king’s words were important and had some traction. Thai people still had a strong love for the monarchy. Dr. Somchai Rakwijit conducted a survey of leaders and

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<sup>638</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Royal Speech by his Majesty the King Delivered at the Ceremony of Conferring Degrees Thammasat University,” August 17-18, 1972, in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 60.

<sup>639</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Royal Speech by his Majesty the King Delivered at the Ceremony of Conferring Degrees at The College of Education,” November 27, 1972, in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 68.

<sup>640</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Royal Speech by his Majesty the King Delivered at the Ceremony of Conferring Degrees at The College of Education in Phitsanulok,” November 30, 1972, in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 70.

young adults (aged 18 to 32) in Nakhon Phanom and Ubon provinces. The questions covered various topics, such as identification with national symbols and institutions, democracy, attitudes towards the government, ideas about communism, and counterinsurgency. A significant finding dealt with the monarchy. About half of respondents believed the king was important to the country. Interviewees said, “The king rules and looks after the peace and security of the country.” Forty-one percent of leaders and 28 percent of youth believed the well-being of the people was an important priority for the monarchy. Many had experience with the king, having received medicine, clothes, and other supplies from the palace’s charities. The most noteworthy finding was that 87 percent of leaders and 73 percent of youth thought Thailand could not survive without the king.<sup>641</sup> If the monarchy was overthrown, anarchy and an invasion would ensue.

#### Omniscience of the Monarchy

Fortunately for the U.S. and Thai governments, the monarchy was an important institution bringing some stability to the country. The 1970s was a time when the royal family’s influence reached a new high. Though King Bhumibol did not have any formal political authority, they were able to steer policies and events to their advantage through personal alliances within the military, government, and business industry. Political scientist Duncan McCargo called this form of politicking a “para-political institution” or network monarchy.<sup>642</sup> The king intervened through proxies “to promote the power and prestige of the throne.” McCargo added that “in turn,” the monarchy served “to underpin

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<sup>641</sup> Dr. Somchai Rekwijit, *Village Leadership in Northeast Thailand*, November 1971 (Bangkok, Thailand: Joint Thai-US Military Research and Development Center, November 1971), p. 2, 247, and 251.

<sup>642</sup> Duncan McCargo, “Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand,” *The Pacific Review* Vol. 18, No.4 (December 2005): 501.



national identity, creating broader legitimacy for those associated with it.”<sup>643</sup> By working through others, the royal family shielded itself from failures and received credit for successes. Businesses and political groups gained economic and political benefits from supporting the monarchy, while promoting the royal institution.

In the summer of 1972, the U.S. embassy assessed the current role of the monarchy in Thai politics. Unger said King Bhumibol was politically involved and a central figure in Thailand. The king had celebrated his royal silver jubilee in 1971, marking 25 years on the throne. “The king participates in ceremonies and state events as a means of building his stature and prestige,” said the ambassador.<sup>644</sup> Though he technically stayed neutral in political matters, King Bhumibol still had a hand in important decisions through “extensive private audiences with officials.” He attended many state and royal functions in 1970. Through these interactions, King Bhumibol made contacts and built alliances. He was very aware of domestic and international affairs.

### Conclusion

For budgetary and policy purposes, the Nixon administration thought the USIS needed to stop doing what the Thais could do for themselves. However, there was evidence that the post was integral in helping the U.S. and Thai governments with their anti-communist policies in the country. Fortunately, the Thais, specifically the MOI, tried to take on more responsibility for public relations. In addition, members of the BPP developed the Village Scouts to help the government’s efforts in the countryside.

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<sup>643</sup> McCargo, “Network Monarchy,” 503.

<sup>644</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy and USIS-Bangkok to State Department,” July 14, 1972, Subject: Role of the Monarch and His Future Prospects, p. 2, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2621, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

Members of the Thai military began adopting non-violent means of winning hearts and minds. The USIS would not completely be absent but provided training, materials, and equipment. It still produced print, radio, and TV programs for the Thai government, it built relations with key persons in political, social, and business circles, and it engaged in cultural exchange.

An issue causing both governments trouble during this time of transition was ethnic relations. Washington wanted to help Bangkok pacify the countryside, and to do this, the hill tribes had to be incorporated into the Thai nation. The Thai government wanted them to practice sedentary farming, adopt some Thai cultural values, and, most importantly, stop using and trafficking opium. These things would help modernize not only Thailand but also the non-Thai peoples. Unfortunately, some groups resisted government intervention by moving further into the jungle or joining the CPT. The USIS, MOI, and BPP organized programs to help win over the hill tribes and to assimilate them into mainstream Thai society through replacing opium with other cash crops, resettlement, education, and citizenship. In the south, Muslim groups also wanted to be free of Bangkok's political power. Like the northern hill tribes, many joined the CPT or formed their own independence movements. U.S. and Thai officials established educational and development projects to show the Muslims that Bangkok did not forget about them. Among these ethnic groups, some accepted being part of the Thai nation while others continued to fight for some level of autonomy.

In addition to the hill tribes and the Muslims, the student population was quickly growing into an organized movement pushing for political reform. The USIS and MOI promotion of Western ideas had the unintended consequence of inciting some of the

student population. Some Thais used their foreign education and training to gain jobs in the government and the private sector. This was the trend for much of the 1960s, but by the 1970s, students educated in the United States began clamoring for a bigger role in political decisions. Thanom's and Praphat's new political policies in 1971 pushed young adults to organize more thoroughly to fight for change. Soon the RTG would see that it could not stop the movement from growing. The U.S. and Thai governments' images suffered major setbacks. Leaders from Washington and Bangkok hoped the spread of Western ideas would turn Thais into proponents of strong U.S.-Thai relations, make them see America as an ally, and lead them to trust their government. Some welcomed foreign help, while others recognized the contradictions between America's liberalism and its foreign policy. Even more so, they were unhappy with the military government's lack of reform and political development. The spread of American political and social culture into Thailand was a double-edged sword.

The USIS, the MOI, and the Thai monarchy tried to manage some of the problems arising from the student protests. U.S. officials continued to support foreign student and cultural exchanges. The AUA held English language classes and exhibits in which many Thais took part. The CDD reached out to rural youth hoping to exert some influence through scouting and education. It hoped these young people would not follow the footsteps of their counterparts in the cities. King Bhumibol used his religious prestige and charisma to encourage the students not to protest but to remember that national unity was more important than political reform.

Thailand's political situation was growing precarious during a time of change for the USIS and MOI. The USIS was slowly delegating more duties to the Thais. Several

Thai groups such as the MOI, military, and BPP stepped up their efforts by expanding their projects into the countryside. They both developed programs to help the RTG build stronger relations with Thai youth, students, and ethnic minorities. USIS public diplomacy and Thai public relations programs remained an important part not just in fighting communism but also in influencing the people of Thailand.

## CHAPTER 4: THROUGH THE FIRE, 1973-1976

### Introduction

After budget cuts and the issuance of the Nixon Doctrine, the USIS and MOI had to adjust to another change, a student revolution that overthrew Thanom's regime and ushered in a civilian government under Kukrit Pramoj. For years, students had pushed for more political participation. A turning point came in October 1973, when thousands of students took to the streets demanding political reform. Thanom and Praphat sent the military to crush the movement, but King Bhumibol intervened, calling for both leaders to step down. A popularly elected government, for the first time in decades, replaced the regime. It lifted restrictions on civil liberties, allowing for a freer press and freer speech. Thais felt more emboldened to speak their minds and criticized U.S.-Thai relations and the presence of U.S. troops in Thailand. Others pushed further for more political reform and freedoms. In foreign policy, the government opened relations with communist nations and called for a quicker removal of U.S. troops from the country. U.S. troop strength was about 45,000. But at the same time, domestically, the Thai government still opposed communism, especially the CPT, and did not want to sever all ties with the United States. The U.S. and Thai government, the monarchy, and conservatives feared the revolution had destabilized the country. Right-wing groups emerged to help promote Thai nationalism and anti-communism, but at the same time further weakened political stability. Making things worse were the communist victories in Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos. Thailand looked like it might be next. To help the U.S. and Thai governments with these issues, the USIS tried to counter anti-Americanism and support

bilateral relations, while the MOI promoted anti-communism and Bangkok's efforts to stabilize the nation.

In this new political climate, USIS and MOI operations remained mostly the same. As the U.S. military involvement in the country declined, the USIS continued to be the link between the two governments and peoples by promoting cultural and educational exchange, close U.S.-Thai relations, and economic development. Through education programs, the USIS reached out to students and young adults to stymie any anti-American sentiments. The MOI mission did not change with the new government; it continued to work on improving state-society relations through community development and information campaigns. It expanded the Boy Scouts program into the countryside in hopes of connecting with the youth. Then when Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos turned communist, the MOI increased the anti-communist rhetoric and stoked fears of possible communist invasions. In addition to the USIS and MOI, a host of right-wing organizations, operating with royal sanction, helped propagate Thai nationalism to build public support against communism. Even with Thailand's new domestic and foreign policies, the Thai and U.S. governments used the USIS and MOI in strengthening state-society relations and stymieing communism.

The civilian government lasted only three years. In October 1976, another military regime came to power with the backing of the monarchy and several right-wing groups. Conservatives, the palace, and the military protested some of the domestic and foreign policy changes of the Kukrit government. When Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos turned communist in 1975, many Thais feared that Thailand could be next. The monarchy, right-wing groups, and the MOI began public relations campaigns calling

students communists, anti-Thai, and anti-monarchy. After the 1976 coup, the new military government reversed almost every policy enacted by the civilian leadership during the previous three years. It disbanded political parties, revoked the constitution, and curbed civil liberties. It turned to the United States for more military and economic aid and sought closer relations.

From 1973 to 1976, King Bhumibol's political influence and public image grew. In 1973, the king backed the students by forcing Thanom and Praphat to resign. He became a symbol of democracy, but shortly after the 1973 revolution, the king distanced himself from the students. Conservatives, right-wing groups, and the military, who thought they had lost their power, still had the support of the monarchy. The king cautioned and criticized the students' behavior. King Bhumibol remained an important public relations symbol for the MOI and USIS. He continued to be the rallying point for those purporting to uphold the "true" form of Thai nationalism. The MOI increased the nationalistic tone of its rhetoric. U.S. public diplomacy officials developed information campaigns that highlighted America's strong, longtime relationship with the monarchy. USIS and MOI promotion of King Bhumibol and Thai nationalism were important during the three years of civilian rule.

This chapter looks at how during this complicated time, the USIS and MOI had different public relations responsibilities and approaches but maintained the same goals of supporting U.S.-Thai relations and promoting the monarchy and anti-communism. The USIS had lost much of its budget and manpower, which limited its efforts to orchestrate mass media programs. In addition, the American image had reached an all-time low because of the U.S. military presence. The American objectives were to alleviate some of

the student unrest and anti-Americanism through increasing cultural, student, and English teaching programs and to support humanitarian and development projects. Unlike the USIS, the MOI and many right-wing groups continued propagating anti-communist rhetoric, criticizing the students, and supporting the monarchy. Though their methods and strategies were different, U.S. and Thai public relations organizations still wanted to counter communist influence in Thailand and maintain U.S.-Thai relations.

### Revolution

The year 1973 began with uncertainty, and, as ambassador Unger noticed, there were some big issues for U.S. and Thai policymakers to consider. The work among the hill tribes developed slowly. Unger said that some tribal people were “uncommitted to Thai society and remain[ed] [a] divisive force, which RTG’s enemies want[ed] to exploit.”<sup>645</sup> Relations grew more strained as the king and RTG wanted to stop the drug trade. Then on January 27, the United States and North Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Accords, ending America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Bangkok was ambivalent about the agreement, as it was unsure of what Thailand’s role in the region would be once the Americans left. Notwithstanding these concerns, the ambassador felt encouraged that there was “still a reservoir of goodwill toward Americans and a general sympathetic view of American world leadership and policies.”<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to Secretary of State,” January 26, 1973, Subject: FY-1974: Annex I, Thailand Background Statement, p. 4, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2625, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

<sup>646</sup> “Country Program Memorandum, Communications Unity Annual Field Proposal for Thailand,” June 21, 1972, p. 13.



Contrary to Unger's observations, there was a growing wave of anti-Americanism. One of the foremost critics of U.S. foreign policy was former foreign minister Thanat Khomen (1959 to 1971). Thanat was crucial in building strong relations with the United States and had been a faithful supporter of U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia for many years. However, by 1969 his views had changed. After the Tet Offensive and Johnson's decision to seek peace talks, Thanat went rogue by deciding to reach out to the communist Chinese.<sup>647</sup> Thanat told the public that Thailand was neither anti-communist nor anti-Chinese and wanted to establish a "peaceful co-existence." He thought U.S.-Thai relations needed to change, especially in light of the Nixon Doctrine and American military withdrawal.

Complaints about the U.S. military presence in Thailand seemed to have more validity as bad press about American troop-community relations continued to be an issue. One incident occurred at Utapao Air Base. The *Bangkok Post* ran a story about Colonel Roger Brooks, who wanted Thai female servers at bars and restaurants to "wear badges on their upper torso" with different colors indicating their professions.<sup>648</sup> The writer responded, "The U.S. Army should wear some with titles, such as "married but will fool around,' 'first-class lover,' 'reluctant virgin,' 'VD victim,' 'prefer *kratoey* [gay person].'"

In addition to problems with U.S. troop-Thai community relations, the students were becoming a more organized political force that the Thai government and the United States could not ignore. By 1973, universities were teeming with activism. Some student

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<sup>647</sup> Kislenco, "Bamboo in the Wind," 316-317.

<sup>648</sup> "Don't Badger Us Colonel!," *Bangkok Post*, July 29, 1973, Newspaper Clipping, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box 14, Entry 5416, NACP.

organizations wanted an end to martial law and the return of parliament.<sup>649</sup> Many grew weary of the aging leadership in the government and called for democratic reform, specifically a constitution. The flagship organization leading student protest throughout the country was the National Student Council of Thailand (NSCT), founded on February 1, 1970. Its objectives were to protect and service student communities throughout the country, foster cross-culture communication with other nations, promote Thai traditions, and build better student-community relations.<sup>650</sup> Trouble between the students and the government began in June 1973, when officials of Ramkhamhaeng University expelled and jailed nine students for publishing an anti-government newspaper.<sup>651</sup> The RTG and the university refused to release the students. NSCT officers acted quickly. On June 21, about fifty thousand people rallied at Democracy Monument in Bangkok calling for the students to be released. Labor unionists joined in the protest, seeing it as a chance to express their complaints along with the students. Finally, the university reinstated the students but changed their status to “suspension.”

The NSCT also directed their criticism towards the United States. Students knew that one of the main causes for U.S. troops in Thailand was the Vietnam War. Like anti-war protestors in the United States, Thai young adults wanted the war to end and were critical of the RTG’s support of it. In September 1973, Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) said, “President Nixon would be perfectly justified in launching full scale bombing raids

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<sup>649</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” June 30, 1973, Subject: Student Power as a New Political Element, p. 1-3, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2620, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

<sup>650</sup> Phumin, “Thanom Kittikachorn,” 40.

<sup>651</sup> Joseph J. Wright Jr., *The Balancing Act: A History of Modern Thailand* (California: Pacific Rim Press, 1991), 199.

in Thailand if communist forces try to overrun the kingdom. It is to our vital interest to protect Thailand.”<sup>652</sup> The NSCT responded by organizing a protest in front of the American Embassy, saying that Goldwater’s speech was an example of “the evil determination of a powerful country.” One student said Thailand was not a testing ground for U.S. experiments. The NSCT distributed twenty-five thousand copies of the group’s complaints.

The student movement gained momentum in mid to late 1973. One government response was when the Thai Government Universities Bureau forbade non-students from speaking on campuses.<sup>653</sup> In another instance, the police guarded one university entrance to keep students of different schools from uniting. Finally, the floodgates opened on October 6, 1973, when the regime arrested 13 individuals on charges of trying to overthrow the government and having communist affiliations. According to Unger, the students gave an ultimatum to the government that if the 13 people were not released by October 12, they would take to the streets. Unlike during previous protests, the ambassador feared what might happen since the “students seem[ed] to be better organized...and [had] more support of faculty.”<sup>654</sup> There was even an anti-American component to the student rhetoric, but it was “very much an afterthought.”

Praphat made a weak attempt at reconciliation by promising to promulgate a constitution in twenty months, but he would not release the people arrested. On October

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<sup>652</sup> “Protest to US Embassy,” *Bangkok Post*, September 5, 1973, Newspaper Clipping, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box 14, Entry 5416, NACP.

<sup>653</sup> Wright Jr., *The Balancing Act*, 201.

<sup>654</sup> “Letter from Dexter to Hummel,” October 12, 1973, Subject: Student Unrest in Thailand, p. 1-2, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box # 14, Entry 5416, NACP.

8, the new secretary-general of the NSCT, Sombat Thamrongthanyarongse, called the government a dictatorship and declared, “We will take action to restore democracy.”<sup>655</sup> Soon two thousand students congregated at Thammasat University’s football stadium in protest. The movement gained more traction as those associated with the regime called for the charges to be dropped against the 13 detainees. One of these voices was Thanom’s brother, police major general Sanga Kittikachorn.<sup>656</sup> Then some officials from the prime minister’s cabinet offered to pay the bail. Thanom, Praphat, and Narong would not give in. On October 13, seventy thousand students marched from Thammasat to Democracy Monument. Along the way, vocational and engineering students and members of labor unions joined in. Eventually about one hundred thousand people gathered, carrying the Thai flag, holding pictures of the royal family, and singing the national anthem.

Initially, King Bhumibol kept his distance from the students. In the months leading up to the student movement, Unger reported that the king had “been careful not to champion their cause beyond cautioning the government not to use violence, and [had] in fact counseled students publicly to use their heads to stay out of trouble.”<sup>657</sup> At the same time, the Thai public was also aware that King Bhumibol did not have a high opinion of the regime leaders. According to journalist Paul Handley, knowing the king’s views gave a boost to the student protests.<sup>658</sup> In a speech at Prasarnmit College in 1969, he told the students the RTG needed to “learn to listen to the people.”<sup>659</sup> Even Kukrit joined in on

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<sup>655</sup> Wright Jr., *The Balancing Act*, 202.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> “Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department,” June 30, 1973, Subject: Student Power as a New Political Element, p. 2.

<sup>658</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 204.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid, 199.

the attacks against Thanom, Praphat, and Narong when he wrote, “I am loyal to the king.” But when he saw the direction the country was going, he was doubtful that the regime could counter the communist insurgency.<sup>660</sup>

However, the student protests put the king in an awkward position. He still supported parts of the police state. The military and Village Scouts were all institutions that had royal sanction and funding. Without the army, the police, and other grassroots groups, the monarchy would lose important backing and protection. In March 1970, the king denounced students protesting outside the Ministry of Justice.<sup>661</sup> King Bhumibol told them to submit their complaints in a less belligerent fashion. He was walking a fine line between his ties with the military government and support of the younger generation.

Bangkok was not the only site of student protests. The NSCT had relations with universities around the country. Those who could not make it to Bangkok orchestrated their own demonstrations at their local universities. U.S. embassy officials reported that students at the College of Education and Prince of Songkhla University in the south gathered for a “Hyde Park” event to support their counterparts in Bangkok.<sup>662</sup> Their complaints were slightly different from those of students in Bangkok, as the southern students thought they were “being ignored by the RTG and Bangkok.” They argued that when development projects came to the region, local officials siphoned off much of the funding and gave few resources to modernizing the south. Many began to sympathize

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> “Telegram from Songkhla Consulate to State Department,” November 16, 1973, Subject: Student Demonstrations and Aftermath of Thanom-Praphat Ouster, p. 1-3, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2620, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

with the students when thirty thousand employees joined the protests. Local officials and police forces stayed away from the demonstrators. Surprisingly, the U.S. consulate in Songkhla noticed that there was less opposition to Thanom, Praphat, and Narong than in Bangkok. Not all the students in the NSCT felt the same; complaints were specific to regional concerns.

On October 13, the number of marchers had swelled so much that some began protesting in front of the House of Parliament, not far from the royal palace. Eventually, King Bhumibol met with student leaders. Wright Jr. suspected that the king “intervened only after great consideration and with equal reluctance.”<sup>663</sup> Soon the student movement turned violent. The next day as students were starting to leave, they clashed with the police and by evening, hundreds were dead and thousands were in the hospital. King Bhumibol finally intervened. On national television, he announced the resignation of Thanom and Praphat and chose Sanya Dharamasakdi, then the rector of Thammasat University and privy councilor, as interim head of government. In the eyes of the students and liberal-minded groups, the king was the hero of the day.

Several months after the revolution, Thailand held its first free election in decades, with Kukrit Pramoj becoming prime minister. Kukrit’s government was a blend of intellectuals, conservatives, and the former military leaders. Domestically, Thailand became a more open society with free elections, a constitution, and fewer restrictions on the media and speech. The new government had good relations with the monarchy, as Kukrit and King Bhumibol were close friends. Kukrit advocated a neutral foreign policy

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<sup>663</sup> Wright Jr., *The Balancing Act*, 205.

to build relations with Thailand's communist neighbors. But at the same time, the government and military did not want to sever all ties with the United States. Bangkok still sought economic and military aid and educational and cultural exchange from the United States. More importantly, Kukrit's government still feared the CPT and possible communist invasion from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Even with the new leadership, some policies remained the same, such as the effort to stymie communism and continued good relations with the United States.

#### King Bhumibol's Influence Grows

King Bhumibol's intervention in forcing Thanom and Praphat to step down did not mean he completely supported the students' cause; he did it to boost his public image. On October 13 as the protesters gathered, the king was unsympathetic to the student complaints when he responded, "The government had been generous, gave more than they asked, and that they were young and should just try to benefit from the experience of their elders."<sup>664</sup> Another source recorded the king saying, "Even the wisest of monkeys uses its feet to scratch its head. Men are wiser than monkeys...we should use our head to try to find the solution." After the revolution, the king cautioned a representative group of students, teachers, and lecturers by pointing out that education was to enrich the common good and "should not lead to destructive agitation."<sup>665</sup> According to Handley, official Thai history portrayed the king's role in the October 1973 revolution as "single-handedly" restoring constitutionalism and democracy by removing the "three tyrants" and

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<sup>664</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 211.

<sup>665</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, "Royal Speech by his Majesty the King Delivered to Representative Groups of Students, Teachers, and College Lecturers," October 27, 1973, in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 82.

instituting political reform.<sup>666</sup> He called the king's involvement and then portrayal as the "giver of democracy" "an act of alchemy."<sup>667</sup> A group of scholars argued this about King Bhumibol's intervention: it "should be understood as a necessary move to reestablish calm and stability, not as support for major socio-political reform in Thai society—as the reformers chose to interpret it."<sup>668</sup> Outwardly, King Bhumibol supported some reform, but there were still signs of reluctance and conservatism. His main objective was to ensure the country did not devolve into anarchy. This would be one of the monarchy's greatest public relations moves, as the king gave the students enough to appease them and win their support by portraying himself as a supporter of democracy. However, King Bhumibol wanted to elevate his political image and maintain control over the country. In the years to come, the king would show his true colors by keeping his distance from the students and reformers and help the right and military regain power.

King Bhumibol seemed to have emerged from the revolution politically and publicly more powerful. Political scientist Duncan McCargo said that after 1973, "Thailand could not return to an absolute monarchy...but monarchists hoped for an alternative mode of operation, one in which the palace could operate through a mixture of direct and indirect interventions to influence Thailand's political direction."<sup>669</sup> Instead of having complete control where the king could be susceptible to criticism or blame for bad policies, royalists created a network of alliances and contacts. King Bhumibol and

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<sup>666</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 212.

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>668</sup> William Bradley, David Morell, David Szanton, Stephen Young, *Thailand, Domino by Default?* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, 1978), 21.

<sup>669</sup> McCargo, "Network Monarchy," 504-505.



members of the royal family could enact policies and control political decisions from behind a protective wall of allies and intermediaries. From 1973 onwards, “the monarchy was reintroducing itself into the political order as a leading player.”<sup>670</sup> This network would be crucial to promoting the monarchy and allowing King Bhumibol to exercise political control.

While cautious about giving complete political power to the people, the king continued to keep up his image as a hero of democracy when he led the move for a constitution. King Bhumibol called for the formation of a National Convention consisting of two thousand people to write a new constitution. To give some semblance of popular representation, the king made sure the members of the convention were from all social classes.<sup>671</sup> Then the convention met to choose a temporary Legislative Assembly of 299 representatives. On October 1, 1974, the civilian government established a new constitution. It looked as if Thailand’s experiment with democracy was working. The king had again come through for the students.

However, there were some major inefficiencies in the process of drafting the constitution. A majority of National Convention members consisted of people from the upper echelons of government, with only 27 percent from rural villages. In addition, many of the village leaders voted the same as their “perceived superiors at the convention,” higher ranking political officials. Eventually, the Legislative Assembly consisted of mostly urban elite figures. This was a far cry from full representation of Thai society. Wright Jr. argued that these leaders from the countryside were easy prey for self-

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> Kobkua, *Kings, Country, and Constitutions*, 170.

interest groups.<sup>672</sup> Traditional patron-client relations between lower- and upper-level officials ruled the day. The resulting constitution benefitted the conservative portions of the population. Publicly, the monarchy and the new government touted democracy, but in reality, it was a return to old-style politics.

#### The USIS Adjust to a New Thai Government

In the aftermath of the revolution, one big question was how it would impact U.S.-Thai relations. On October 15, Unger reported that the situation was calming down. He said, "There is no indication of any significant change in Thai foreign policy, including the question of the U.S. military presence."<sup>673</sup> Though the issue of American troops was still an important question, the biggest concern for U.S. policymakers and for many in Thailand was the army's control over politics. Sanya Thammasak, the interim prime minister, was a good friend of Unger, and with him in charge it was possible that the Thai army would still have a strong hand in decision-making. Unger said that the push for a constitution by the students and liberal groups may have tempered the military a little, but that they were still a force to reckon with.<sup>674</sup> However, other U.S. officials saw this event as the end of the military's monopoly over politics. One U.S. report said the most ideal situation for the United States in the long run was a more progressive, efficient, and honest Thai government with a constitution, since it would create a healthier relationship with Thailand. But adjusting to such a new situation would be

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<sup>672</sup> Wright Jr., *The Balancing Act*, 220-222; Look at Kobkua, *Kings, Country, and Constitutions*, 171; and Girling, *Thailand, Society and Politics*, 194-196 for other explanations for the deficiencies of Thai politics during this period.

<sup>673</sup> "Memorandum for the Record Telegram from Embassy to State Department," October 14, 1973, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59 Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box # 14, Entry 5416, NACP.

<sup>674</sup> "Memorandum for the Record Telegram from Embassy to State Department," October 14, 1973, p. 2.

difficult for Washington after having almost *carte blanche* to implement its foreign policies in Thailand for the previous two decades.<sup>675</sup>

However, the 1973 revolution seemed to open the floodgates to more anti-American rhetoric from some Thais. The press, with more freedom to express its opinions pushed for the United States to pull out its troops. Then media officials caught wind of a rumor that the CIA was working with the CPT on a ceasefire agreement and more importantly, a plan to assassinate the king.<sup>676</sup> This rumor resulted in an onslaught of accusations that the U.S. government and CIA were interfering in internal affairs and promoting drug trafficking to incite instability.<sup>677</sup> *Chao Thai* even went so far as calling members of the Peace Corps CIA agents.<sup>678</sup> *Siam Rath* questioned the purpose of having the Corps in the countryside, asking, “Have these American Peace Corps volunteers really been able to make Thais possess a better knowledge of the English language?”<sup>679</sup> These rumors renewed a push to remove American military personnel.

More trouble emerged in the countryside when the joint U.S.-Thai military command at one Air Force base issued an order banning all monks from entering the

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<sup>675</sup> “Letter from Dexter to Hummel,” October 15, 1973, Subject: Talking Points on Situation in Thailand, p. 1-2, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box 14, Entry 5416, NACP.

<sup>676</sup> “Telegram 1667 from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State,” January 30, 1974, Subject: Assessment of Trends and Developments in Thailand, *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973–1976, Volume E–12, Document 379, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d379>, [accessed 10/5/2016].

<sup>677</sup> Noui Bangkhunthien, “Evil Trick of the CIA,” *Daily News*, January 8, 1974, p. 1-2, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1974); Noui Bangkhunthien, “Red Danger in the Northeast,” *Daily News*, January 24, 1974, p. 1-2, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1974).

<sup>678</sup> “The CIA and National Economy,” *Chao Thai*, February 14, 1974, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1974).

<sup>679</sup> Duangkaew Kijvikran, “Does Teaching the English Language by American Volunteers really Obtain Results,” *Siam Rath*, March 19, 1974, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1974).

grounds. Locals were angry. Air Force officials justified the new policy by reporting that communist terrorists, impersonating monks, had been seen entering the base.<sup>680</sup> Some charged that a monk tried to sneak under the outer fences. In Udon Thani, soldiers captured one person dressed in saffron robes carrying a bag full of grenades.

Nevertheless, one hundred families of Thai Air Force personnel protested and criticized the U.S. military in the local press. They were infuriated when real monks were subjected to searches. The ban caused issues for cultural reasons. Traditionally monks would go into the communities seeking alms. Their actions gave laypersons an opportunity to receive merit for giving food to the monks. The new restrictions on monks cut some people's access to the blessings and made the U.S. military look bad in the eyes of many Thais.

Unfortunately for the U.S. embassy and USIS post, Unger's replacement as ambassador built little goodwill with Thai leaders and the people. In the fall of 1973, William R. Kintner took the helm. Kintner was a political appointee because of his connections with Henry Kissinger.<sup>681</sup> During his time in Thailand, Kintner's drinking problem caused some issues. One incident that caused a public relations embarrassment was the Marine Corps Ball in 1974. USIS official Victor L. Tomseth recalled that the ambassador was so drunk that he fell off the stage into the band pit. At many receptions

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<sup>680</sup> "Joint Message from AFOSI District 51 Bangkok Thailand to AFOSI Washington," June 18-19, 1974, p. 3-8, GRUSFSEA, RG 472, 1950-1975, MACTHAI/JUSMAGTHAI Joint Services Division, General Records, Box 1, Entry P 1036, NACP.

<sup>681</sup> Oral History, Victor L. Tomseth Interview, 1999, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Oral History, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 9/29/2016].

he would fall asleep in the corner.<sup>682</sup> Numerous Thai and U.S. officials questioned whether he was fit for the job. The drinking led U.S. officials to persuade Kissinger to replace him in March 1975.

When not making a fool of himself, Kintner had some good ideas. The ambassador liked to have a lot of planning meetings, and he tried to figure out what America's real interests were in the region. The ambassador thought the government change in Thailand provided an opportunity for U.S. and Thai officials to "reach out to students and democratic forces generally" to build relations.<sup>683</sup> It looked like Kintner wanted to bring some positive changes to U.S.-Thai relations and the country's politics.

However, Kintner was a difficult leader. From the onset, the new Thai government was a little leery of him. Some of the Thai leadership viewed his appointment as the United States wanting "the [Thai] military to come back."<sup>684</sup> The ambassador's relations with fellow U.S. staff, officials, and organizations were not smooth either. USIS official Perry J. Stieglitz said Kintner should have never been ambassador.<sup>685</sup> He thought Kintner was an embarrassment in public, as he could not handle alcohol and would openly criticize Thai elites. He was averse to feedback from those who he thought knew less, which seemed to be everyone. Eventually, Thai officials

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<sup>682</sup> Oral History, Margaret J. Barnhart Interview, 1998, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Oral History, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 9/29/2016].

<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

<sup>684</sup> Oral History, David E. Reuther Interview, 1996, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Oral History, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 9/29/2016].

<sup>685</sup> Oral History, Perry J. Stieglitz Interview, 1992, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/oral-history/country-reader-series/>, [accessed 6/23/2016].

avoided meeting with Kintner and often asked not to be invited to his residence for meetings or receptions. Instead of working directly with the ambassador, the Thais used back channels, working with other American officials. This was in stark contrast from Unger.

The USIS devised a new Country Plan for fiscal year 1974 to adjust to the new political situation in Thailand. The document explained that the U.S. government was in an uphill battle for public opinion. There were a few foreign policy issues that could impact public relations in Thailand, such as the U.S.-Communist Chinese rapprochement, the Paris Peace Accords, and American domestic opposition to intervention in Southeast Asia. However, the biggest obstacles to USIS efforts were the student population and the anti-American sentiment among some Thais.<sup>686</sup> Most of the negative feelings came from the U.S. troop presence, which was up to about 45,000.

Many of the USIS objectives focused less on anti-communist themes, as in previous years, and more on showing the positive aspects of America's partnership with Thailand's government and people. The post devised several goals; the first was to "increase confidence in the US as a strong ally."<sup>687</sup> Thai officials and elites interpreted the Nixon Doctrine and the Paris Peace Accords as the United States abandoning the country to the communists. The USIS needed to ensure Bangkok that America would not abandon them. The next three objectives dealt with increasing awareness of the benefits

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<sup>686</sup> "Letter from USIA to Bangkok Embassy," October 15, 1973, Subject: USIA FY 1974 Country Plan: Thailand, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box # 13, Entry 5416, NACP.

<sup>687</sup> "Letter from USIA to Bangkok Embassy," October 15, 1973, Subject: USIA FY 1974 Country Plan: Thailand, p. 2.

of American aid and investment, building a good understanding of American society, and creating a positive image of the remaining 30,000 U.S. military troops. USIS and U.S. embassy personnel noticed that much of the anti-American sentiment stemmed from Thais' desire to have a more independent foreign policy from the United States. The USIS wanted to convey the idea that the country could remain independent while still having close relations with the United States. The last objective was promoting the dangers of illegal substance abuse as part of Nixon's international war on drugs.

Included in the USIS information and cultural programs was the idea of increasing the number of USIS contacts with specific population groups. The primary targets were elites, government officials, royalty, businesspersons, heads of media agencies and the military, and university administrators. The elites consisted of about one thousand persons, and the USIS proposed that they should be contacted at least eight times a year. These individuals would be invited to cultural, state, and religious functions; there would be personal meetings and phone calls, free subscriptions to information materials (including specialized post publications), and "active membership in at least one [USIS] post-support organization."<sup>688</sup> The second target group had thirteen thousand people, comprising mid-level politicians, military officers, media personnel, teachers, and librarians. Instead of casting a wide net to capture everyone's attention, the USIS worked with those with the ability to influence the opinions of the masses. Of course, the wider population was still important, but the USIS and the Thai government would use mass media to reach them and let the Thais handle most of the work on the ground. The

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

budgets cuts under Nixon forced the USIS to narrow its focus to save resources and energy.

As part of building relations with Thai elites and leaders, the USIS created an exchange program for mid-level officials. The USIS set money aside in their budget for education grants for people “below the decision-maker level” to study in the United States.<sup>689</sup> The PAO described these people as “influential interpreters between the U.S. and Thailand.” They could be disseminators or agents of American culture, ideas, and politics to Thai leaders and the public. USIS officials would carefully select student and travel grant candidates who had no previous contact as well as those who had previously traveled to the United States. The USIS set aside eight grants for policymakers and opinion leaders in the field of foreign affairs, eight more for economists and business executives, seven for professors, and two for lawyers. Awards could be given to new persons or former recipients as a means of following-up and reinforcing their relations with the United States.

The USIS diverted more energy to cultural and educational activities in the country. The mission thought 1973 that it needed to utilize “non-political assets” such as the student exchanges and English teaching to continue disseminating information and ideas about the United States.<sup>690</sup> To help with cultural programs, Perry J. Stieglitz joined the mission as the new cultural affairs officer (CAO). Before Thailand, Stieglitz had served a stint in Laos. When the position of CAO opened, he said, “That job is mine.

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<sup>689</sup> Ibid., p. 1 (Cultural Program Objectives Section).

<sup>690</sup> “Project Plan: Evaluation Study of the Bangkok Binational Center,” 1973, p. 1, GRUSIA, RG 306 USIA, Office of Research, Research Services/East Asia and South Asia Division, Records Relating to Public Opinion Surveys, Box 1, Entry P 228, NACP.



Don't even think of offering it to anyone else.”<sup>691</sup> In his interview, he remembered that while his time in Bangkok was excellent, “those were also some dark years.” Stieglitz served through two revolutions; he also saw South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos all fall to communism and Thailand be inundated by refugees. Stieglitz reminisced about how the social life of dinners, parties, and state events filled his schedule. On these many occasions, he developed some good relationships with ministers and directors of local universities. These personal contacts allowed the USIS mission to reach many young people. U.S. and Thai leaders saw the importance of continuing cultural exchanges.<sup>692</sup>

The AUA saw some expansion. Surprisingly, after the 1973 coup and with the rising anti-Americanism among young adults, students still came in droves to learn English from the AUA. Stieglitz noted that the center was “almost too successful.” In 1974, Washington appointed Milton Leavitt to serve a second term as the director of the AUA as a means of rebuilding relations with Thai students. This move came at Leavitt's request. Some Thais saw the important contributions of the AUA in developing cultural understanding between Americans and Thais. For example, the Thai newspaper *The Daily Time* paid recognition to the USIS *Seripharb* edition highlighting the AUA's fifty-year relationship with Thai students.<sup>693</sup> According to Leavitt, the AUA program was just as successful as it had been when he served as director the first time.<sup>694</sup> He maintained the English teaching portion of the mission for a time and even taught Thai to Americans.

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<sup>691</sup> Stieglitz Interview.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

<sup>693</sup> Siva Ronachit, “Easterly Winds,” *Daily Time*, January 4, 1975, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1975).

<sup>694</sup> Leavitt Interview.

The center continued publishing books to fill the information libraries, which was helpful for their teaching. Overall, the 1973 student movement had little negative impact on USIS education activities. Leavitt said most students at the AUA were not argumentative. When he would visit universities throughout Thailand, there were some anti-American discussions, but they were rare.

### Rural Thais and Hill Tribes

While the USIS was focusing much of its attention in the cities and on cultural exchange, the Thai government's rural public relations programs seemed not to skip a beat. The Thai government was slowing making changes to how it developed relations with rural Thais. In April 1973, Unger reported that "Senior Royal Thai Army and [Thai] police officials in Northeast Thailand...[were] directing their counterinsurgency efforts primarily to winning the allegiance of the people" and less on force.<sup>695</sup> The security services said that most of the CPT recruits were deluded Thais who could easily be won back. Major General Somkhuan of the BPP argued that "Thais should not kill other Thais." He wanted the government and the people to use political and peaceful means of winning people's hearts and minds. Unger pointed out that many in the BPP believed that a true Thai person would never become a real convert to communism because "it [would go] against his respect for the king and Buddhism."<sup>696</sup> The USIS and other U.S. officials

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<sup>695</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," April 17, 1973, Subject: Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People in NE Thailand, p. 1, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Numeric Files, 1970-73, Political and Defense, Box 2622, Entry A1 1613-D, NACP.

<sup>696</sup> <sup>696</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," April 17, 1973, Subject: Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People in NE Thailand, April 17, 1973, p. 2.

had been using a nonviolent approach for years, but with responsibility shifting to the Thais, the RTG was taking more initiative.

In the south, the government wanted to build better relations with the Muslim minority population to make them feel part of the Thai nation. The MOI started with focusing on the youth by implementing the Boy Scouts program. The syllabus for the scouts included nationalistic topics such as love of nation, Buddhism, monarchy, and unity. Throughout Narathiwat, from February to April 1973, the scouting program held training events at five schools. At Tambon Chuab, the CDD wanted to empower the youth through the Boy Scouts to help them and their communities by developing skills for the job market. These activities would in turn bring about an increase in the standard of living. The training also would encourage the young people to support national unity and nationalism at the village level.<sup>697</sup>

According to the CDD, there were many favorable results from the Narathiwat training programs. First, the youth's love for the nation, Buddhism, and monarchy increased. Second, was greater unity among the different villagers who participated. Third, the CDD argued that understanding and relations between government officials and the people grew stronger. Fourth, because of the scouting training, the youth learned vocational and teamwork skills to help them participate in development projects. The most important part of the report referred to the Muslim youth involved. From

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<sup>697</sup> "Summary of the Reports/Results of the Boy Scout Youth Village Community Training, Development 9 tambon's, Changwat Narathiwat," April 10-14, 1973, p. 1-2, Community Development Department Papers, Ministry of Interior, (8) ๓๓ 5.3.2.3.2/3, TNA.

observations, only 50 percent spoke Thai. Scout leaders tried to promote the use of the Thai language to the youth.<sup>698</sup>

In the opposite end of the country in the north, the government sought to involve more organizations like the MDU in the cause of winning the loyalty of the hill tribes. For much of its existence, the MDU had worked primarily with rural Thais, but the group expanded its duties to cover the northern mountain ranges. In mid-1973, the MDU held a three-month training program in Mae Hong Son province with 40 officials to discuss the history and customs of the tribes and their lives in settlements. In addition, officials learned some of the languages of the different minorities, theoretical principles of community development, administration skills, and public relations.<sup>699</sup>

The purposes of the MDU's work with the tribes were to assimilate them and initiate community development programs. According to the tribal MDU training book, the units were to improve the living standards of the people economically, socially, and culturally. Officials saw community development as a way of bringing freedom and liberty to all people in Thailand. There would be vocational training to help them with job and agricultural skills. The government hoped to "persuade people to learn to have an attitude and belief that [was] correct," based on the government's ideas of what it meant to be part of the Thai nation. The unit focused on having the hill tribes adopt Thai nationalism as their own.<sup>700</sup> More importantly, the program among the ethnic minorities

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<sup>698</sup> "Summary of the Reports/Results of the Boy Scout Youth Community Training, Development Amphur Ruasaw Level," February-April 1973, p. 1-2, Community Development Department Papers, Ministry of Interior, (8) มท 5.3.2.3.2/3 ชั้น 2, TNA.

<sup>699</sup> *Handbook Training of Tribal Mobile Development Unit Officials and Tribal Support Generation # 1*, April-September 1973, Introduction to p. 2, TUL.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3-4

was to ensure that they would not join the communists but see Bangkok as their government.

The government continued to use Buddhism as a means of assimilating the hill tribes in the Thai way of life. The government had been sending Buddhist missionaries to the countryside since 1965. In November 1973, the government sent Buddhist monks to live among the hill tribes to convert them to Buddhism.<sup>701</sup> According to the chief abbot at Wat Banjamaborpit, 200 monks from Bangkok would go to the northern and northeastern provinces and stay for four months teaching Buddhist doctrine, vocational skills, and reading and writing in Thai. Since 1965 when the government first sent Buddhist missionaries into the countryside, 500 tribesmen had been ordained into the priesthood. The most successful temple was Wat Si Soda in Chiang Mai Province, in which more than 300 hill tribe monks and novices served. The missionary program had shown a modicum of success.

General Saiyud reported that the resettlement program was making some progress in helping hill tribes. In January 1974, about 200 ethnic minority families had moved to the Resettlement Center in Petachabun.<sup>702</sup> He said that each family had stopped growing opium as a cash crop, adopting a sedentary lifestyle. Worried about making a living outside of producing heroin, each family was making approximately four thousand baht annually producing other cash crops. In April 1974, the USIS *Seripharb* ran an article about some of the changes occurring with minorities. The writer titled the piece "A New

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<sup>701</sup> "200 Monks to Live with Hilltribes," *Bangkok Post*, November 6, 1973, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box 15, Entry 5416, NACP.

<sup>702</sup> "Hilltribe Project a Success," January 8, 1974, *Bangkok World*, Newspaper Clipping-hill tribes, GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box 15, Entry 5416, NACP.

Period for the Hill Tribes.” It discussed how the RTG, with help from the United States, had resettled and taught many hill tribes new means of finding a living and using the land. King Bhumibol also had a big hand in helping to integrate and reform the minorities through education and seed experimentation. American universities joined in with the monarchy to test new types of seeds to grow at higher elevations. One interviewee said “growing vegetables instead of opium [had] been a success.”<sup>703</sup>

Several months later, the Thai government tried to show the ethnic minorities that they were welcome members of the nation by giving them citizenship. Under Secretary for Interior Chalor Wanaphuti announced that all hill tribes living within the borders of the country had become citizens and had legal rights, especially the ability to vote in general elections.<sup>704</sup> This move by the government was long awaited, and many officials thought it would help to further integrate the more than five hundred thousand hill people. Representatives of the different ethnic groups had complained previously about the difficulty of enrolling their children in schools because they were not citizens. There were limits, however, such as exemption from military service; there still seemed to be some suspicion of minority loyalty, especially as some had joined the communist movement.

Thammasat University’s economics department had an arrangement that recruited Thai students for work with the hill tribes. The purpose of the project was two-fold: to

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<sup>703</sup> “khwaamchuangmaykhongchaaokhao [New Period of the Hill Tribes],” April 16, 1974, Seripharb, Vol. 2, p. 35-38, GRUSIA, RG 306 Publications about the United States, 1953-1999, Box 313, Entry A1 1053, NACP.

<sup>704</sup> “Hilltribes get Citizenship,” October 9, 1974, *Bangkok Post*, Newspaper Clipping, GRUSIA, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box 15, Entry 5416, NACP.

give graduated students meaningful jobs in the government and to build connections with ethnic minorities. Specifically, the graduates were to learn public relation skills.

Thammasat coordinated with many groups, such as the MOI, the Ministry of Education, Tribal Promotion and Development, and the King's Tribal Foundation of Promotion and Production. A short-term goal was to have officials and students use economic development to build loyalty among the hill people. As for the long-term goals, the students were to promote education and help the ethnic groups stop growing opium and practicing slash-and-burn farming. There was also hope that countryside projects such as this one would help quell student protests by giving them purposeful jobs in the government and reducing state tensions with the hill tribes.<sup>705</sup>

In addition to the government's rural policies, the Village Scouts program had expanded quickly. In the spring of 1973, Unger reported that the movement had about twenty-eight thousand villagers in its membership.<sup>706</sup> To strengthen the group, Somkhuan established a policy where BPP officials would return to follow up with the new recruits in their villages to obtain information about the CPT and reinforce the scouts' ideologies.<sup>707</sup> According to anthropologist Katherine Bowie, many people joined the group for mainly two reasons: the first was the simple nationalist message of unity amid dramatic change and protests. The other motive was "an alluring potential power base from which to affect future developments in the country."<sup>708</sup> Most of the new recruits in

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<sup>705</sup> Nai Wichan Anaphanurak, "The Study of Hmong Pha Puchawm Development Project, Chiang Mai Volunteer Graduate # 5," Master's Thesis, (Thammasat University, 1973), p. 1-4.

<sup>706</sup> <sup>706</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," April 17, 1973, Subject: Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People in NE Thailand, p. 3.

<sup>707</sup> <sup>707</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok Embassy to State Department," April 17, 1973, Subject: Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People in NE Thailand, p. 4.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

the 1970s consisted of middle- and upper-class Thais, whereas in the early years rural villagers had filled the ranks. Military wives, business leaders, bankers, and members of the palace took part in scout training. The leadership of the Village Scouts began to see a character change in the organization as it reached Thais from different classes and regions. By the middle of 1976, there were 1,897,540 initiates.<sup>709</sup> As a result, the Village Scouts grew into a formidable political group with a lot of money. Each initiation ceremony cost anywhere between \$750 and \$2,000. Large businesses and the palace donated money to augment the costs, giving them a position of leadership in the group.

The monarchy continued to be an important patron of the Village Scouts. In the first six months of 1976, the king and queen participated in over nineteen scout gatherings. According to Handley, “sometimes tens of thousands of scouts massed together to see the king and hear him” speak. Many of his speeches emphasized virtues that each scout needed to cultivate, such as cooperation, discipline, hard work, and “the king’s new dhammic [Buddhist] values.”<sup>710</sup> King Bhumibol emphasized nationalism and unity to maintain stability and security. On one occasion at Bhikku’s Jittiphawan Buddhist College, after presiding over a ceremony, he said the scouts’ purpose was to unite so Thailand could survive internal and external threats.<sup>711</sup> Anyone not willing to put the nation’s peace above their own was a danger. King Bhumibol praised the work of the Village Scouts. He said that they “[had] rendered invaluable assistance to the

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<sup>709</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 83-84.

<sup>710</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Speech to Village Scouts in Khon Kaen,” February 19, 1976, in *Royal Addresses and Speeches* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976).

<sup>711</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Speech to Village Scouts at Jittipawan College in Chon Buri,” May 23, 1976, in *Phraborommarachawat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Addresses and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976).



community....”<sup>712</sup> The king then criticized those who did not favor the Village Scouts as people “who [did] not wish to see [the] country enjoying progress or stability [and who had] attacked or distorted Scouts’ activities.” King Bhumibol thought the training was very effective.<sup>713</sup> Monarchical backing was crucial to the group’s growing success, as more people wanted to join to show their patriotism.

Other right-wing groups became part of the Thai government’s public relations apparatus to win the hearts and minds of Thais in the cities. The first group was the paramilitary Krating Daeng, meaning the Red Gaur. Formed in early 1974 by officer Sudsai Hasdin, the organization consisted of former soldiers, ex-convicts, and technical school students. They were most famous for using violence to intimidate political opponents of the right. Notwithstanding, its other role was to promote anti-communism and portray themselves as protectors of the monarchy in the cities. When King Bhumibol held a memorial on October 14, 1974 for the people who had been killed in the October 1973 revolution, the Red Gaur showed up. During one of the rituals, the group “surrounded” the royal family and said they were protecting them from some students trying to shoot them. According to Handley, King Bhumibol “made no effort to distance himself from them.”<sup>714</sup> The king became a strong supporter of the group, especially at it promoted the monarchy and the need to protect the institution.

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<sup>712</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Royal Speech by his Majesty the King Delivered to the Village Scouts Committees,” July 3, 1973, in *Phraborommarachowat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 75.

<sup>713</sup> King Bhumibol Adulyadej, “Royal Speech by his Majesty the King Delivered at the Presentation of Scouts Colors to Village Scouts, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province,” July 8, 1975, in *Phraborommarachowat lae phraratchadamrat [Royal Address and Speeches]* (Thailand: Office of the Prime Minister, 1976), 103.

<sup>714</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 224.

The other group was the Navapol, headed by military intelligence chief General Wallop Rojanavisut. Unlike the Village Scouts and Red Gaur, members of the Navapol came from positions of political and military power and had social influence. They had large networks among conservative intellectuals, government leaders, monks, and major business owners. Like the Red Gaur, the Navapol were not afraid to use extreme measures to neutralize the political opposition. The organization's name related to the ninth reign of the Chakri dynasty, King Bhumibol's rule. Navapol's purpose was to "build a Thai wall against the communists" to protect Buddhism and the monarchy.<sup>715</sup> Handley described the members as part of a Masonic type of brotherhood. Each person "was proud of their dedication and of not being part of the corrupt business-political establishment." An important individual was Supreme Court judge Thanin Kraivixien, who would later become prime minister. To recruit like-minded people, the Navapol held anti-communist rallies among the middle and upper classes. From its membership, they selected potential leaders to participate in political and motivational trainings at the local, provincial, and national levels.<sup>716</sup>

The Navapol was one of several right-wing groups whose members were ardent supporters of U.S.-Thai relations. The executive coordinator, Lieutenant General Chamnion Pongpairroj, wrote a letter to Ford's national security advisor, General Brent Scowcroft, expressing the organization's desire to help the United States achieve its foreign policy goals in Thailand and to request funds for its projects. Chamnion began the letter by saying: the "Navapol has done our best to prove to all people that [the] majority

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<sup>715</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>716</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 105.

of Thai people are still with you and your good country.”<sup>717</sup> In order to continue fighting communism and supporting U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia, Navapol asked for help with the “Project of Navapol's Movement in Combatting Communist and Strong Socialist Subversion in Thailand.” The letter did not give further details about the venture, however. Nevertheless, Chamnion urged U.S. policymakers to continue aiding Thailand in fighting the communist insurgency.

Even some Buddhist monks became important voices in condemning communism and building support for the monarchy. Though largely seen as politically neutral, some prominent abbots were not afraid to show their loyalty to the monarchy and attack communism. One figure was Kittivudho Bhikku, who became popular among the Sangha through his anti-communist rhetoric and witch hunts. Born in West Bangkok in 1936, he joined the monkhood and was ordained in 1957 at Wat Mahathat, a Mahanikay temple. His political influence grew quickly when he developed strong ties with conservatives and the Thammayut sect. In 1967, Kittivudho established Jittiphawan College, a Buddhist training school. Though it operated outside the official Sangha parameters, Queen Sirikit endorsed it by participating in its dedication. Handley said both the king and queen visited often, notwithstanding Kittivudho's unorthodox philosophies. The abbot labeled students and communists as threats to the nation.<sup>718</sup> Later, he would play an important

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<sup>717</sup> “Letter from Navapol to Scowcroft,” April 20, 1976, p. 1, Thai-English Document, Box 48, White House Central Files, Subject File, CO 144 Sweden to CO 154 Crucial States, Gerald Ford Presidential Library (GFPL) – Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>718</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 225.

role in promoting the Navapol by preaching at their events to stir public support for the monarchy and speak out against communism.<sup>719</sup>

Phra Kittivudho used his own interpretation of Buddhist doctrine to justify the killing of communists. According to Wright Jr., the right-wing media campaigns gave the Buddhist leader a large amount of attention, helping to promote his version of anti-communism. Kittivudho's taught that "killing communists is not killing persons because whoever destroys the nation, the religion, or the monarchy, such bestial types are not complete persons. Thus, we must intend not to kill people but to kill the Devil (Mara); this is the duty of all Thai."<sup>720</sup> He also considered students of the NSCT communists and justified the use of force against them. The act of killing another was a sin in Buddhist teachings, but according to Kittivudho, a lay member would not incur bad karma in this life or punishments in the next if he rid the country of leftists. Historian Eugene Ford said the Buddhist leader claimed that fifty thousand communist deaths would bring enough merit to all 42 million Thais in the country.<sup>721</sup> The communist label was a blanket statement that made it easier for leaders to bring order to the country, get rid of dissidents, and rally public support. By 1978, Kittivudho's influence waned amid accusations of sex scandals and of his temple lacking formal government status.<sup>722</sup>

The size of these rightist groups outnumbered, and their political influence was greater than, those of the students and liberal reformers. Counterinsurgency scholar Tom

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<sup>719</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*, 260.

<sup>720</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Communism: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1988), 89.

<sup>721</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*, 267.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid*, 284.

Marks argued that organizations such as the Village Scouts, the Red Gaur, and the Navapol were “more representative of the conservative nature of Thai popular opinion.”<sup>723</sup> Many Thais sided with the values and ideas of these right-wing organizations that espoused protecting the monarchy and Buddhism from the threats of communism and liberals. They stirred up fears of communism, saying it was anti-Thai and anti-monarchy. Students, liberals, and reformers were often targets of harsh criticism and even violence. The right-wing groups portrayed themselves as nationalists, while those who did not agree or support their causes were traitors. Most importantly, they became important advocates in the Thai government’s efforts to win hearts and minds away from communism, which many leaders thought was the true source of instability in the country. However, Ford showed that some U.S. policymakers and diplomats were concerned about the extremism of the right and its politicization of Buddhism and the monarchy. He stated that doing so would contribute “to the weakening of the monarchy as a factor for political and social stability.”<sup>724</sup> They seemed to be less worried about ostracizing liberals and more about the Thai monarchy. As will be shown towards the end of this chapter, members of the extreme right would help incite a coup against the civilian government causing some of the Thai population to stop supporting the monarchy, leading to instability and the resurgence of the CPT.

### A Perilous Time

Thailand’s democratic reform and the USIS and MOI public relations initiatives were all taking place during a precarious time in the country, especially in 1975. In a

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<sup>723</sup> Marks, *Making Revolution*, 144.

<sup>724</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*, 262.

meeting with Ambassador Kintner, King Bhumibol expressed frankly his concern about the tense environment in Southeast Asia. He believed the Soviets were the main party behind the recent communist success in the region but gave no evidence for the assertion. The king thought Moscow's goal was hegemony in the region through North Vietnam.<sup>725</sup> There were civil wars in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. In Cambodia, the king hoped, Prince Sihanouk would take over instead of the Khmer Rouge because he thought he could have a better working relationship with the monarch than with the leftists. At the beginning of March, the Khmer Rouge were closing in on Phnom Penh. The American-backed Lon Nol government was weak and its military inept. *Siam Rath*, trying to stoke fear of communism, warned of a domino effect in the near future.<sup>726</sup> It said that soon, "Red Cambodians [would] be near [the Thai] border." At the same time, there were still fears of the CPT domestic insurgency. Kukrit declared if there was a communist takeover in Cambodia, Thailand would have to be on alert for a possible military invasion and a flood of refugees.<sup>727</sup> By mid-April, the Khmer Rouge had taken power.

On April 30, shortly after the fall of Phnom Penh, Saigon followed suit, leading the Thai media and the government to grow very concerned about the country's fate. *Prachachart* reported that some Thai politicians wanted the 22,000 remaining U.S. military troops to leave in one or two months to avoid the same thing happening to

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<sup>725</sup> "Telegram from Bangkok to State Department," March 12, 1975, Subject: The King's Views on Recent Events in Thailand and Indochina, p. 1 and 3, Box 18, National Security Adviser, Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Country File: Thailand-State Department Telegrams, GFPL.

<sup>726</sup> Kasem Sirisamphan, "The Turning Point," *Siam Rath*, March 7, 1975, p. 1, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*,

USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1975).

<sup>727</sup> "Will the Fall of Phnom Penh Affect Thailand," *Siang Puang Chon*, April 1, 1975, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1975).

Thailand.<sup>728</sup> They believed that Vietnamese communists would not invade if the Americans left. The article reported Democrat Party leader Seni Pramoj advocated trying to cut a deal with Hanoi. Even though the United States had pulled out of Cambodia and South Vietnam, Secretary of State Kissinger promised that the United States would still uphold its promises to its Asian allies. *Ban Muang* was insulted and said, “Anybody who believes and feels trust and confidence in America...will give birth to a monkey.”<sup>729</sup> Thailand feared a communist invasion.

To help manage this tumultuous time, on May 8, 1975, the United States replaced Ambassador Kintner, who had spent only a year in Thailand, with Charles S. Whitehouse. Whitehouse was a career foreign service officer and had much experience in Southeast Asia. According to Edward Masters, deputy chief of mission in Thailand from 1971 to 1975, Whitehouse was the right man at the right time and understood the country well.<sup>730</sup> He also knew how to work with the USIS and supported its efforts, even during its time of downsizing.<sup>731</sup> The new ambassador helped rebuild strained relations between the American embassy and the Thai government.

On May 12, 1975, an incident in the Gulf of Thailand damaged America’s image in the country further. A rogue group of Khmer Rouge soldiers captured the U.S. merchant ship *Mayaguez* in the Gulf of Thailand and held the American crewmembers as prisoners. President Gerald Ford demanded their release. Thai Prime Minister Kukrit said

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<sup>728</sup> *Prachachat*, May 1, 1975, p. 1; *Prachachat*, May 2, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>729</sup> “America can no longer be trust,” *Ban Muang*, May 1, 1975, p. 1, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1975).

<sup>730</sup> Oral History, Edward E. Masters Interview, March 14, 1989, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004whi07/2004whi07.pdf>, [accessed 2/2/2017].

<sup>731</sup> Reid Interview.

publicly that he did not want Thailand to get involved in case it damaged his government's attempts to build relations with the Khmer Rouge. Nevertheless, Ford authorized the use of U.S. military forces to save the captured soldiers.<sup>732</sup> When Phnom Penh heard about the American prisoners, it issued an order for them to be released immediately. This news made it to Washington but not to the U.S. soldiers sent on the rescue mission. With help from the Thai military, U.S. forces launched the rescue operation from Utapao base. This move was a public relations fiasco and greatly angered Thais. *Prachathipatai* and *The Daily Times* exclaimed that the United States had violated Thai sovereignty.<sup>733</sup> Ford apologized in a letter to Kukrit but justified his actions by saying, "We [the United States and Thailand] were also able to counter the common danger to Thailand, its neighbors, and the world's ocean commerce presented by this illegal and unwarranted interference with international shipping routes in the Gulf of Thailand."<sup>734</sup> However, Ford received a boost to his public image, as he was portrayed as standing firm in rescuing the imprisoned U.S. soldiers.

When things could not seem to get worse for Thailand, on December 2, 1975, Laos's monarchy, after centuries in power, ended. The communist Pathet Lao defeated a coalition of neutralist and American-backed right-wing groups. Several days before, the Thai government had made preparations in Nong Khai to receive Laotians fleeing the

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<sup>732</sup> "Memorandum from Phil Buchen to Jack Marsh, including Talking Points for Congressional Notification," May 13, 1975, Subject: Summary of NSC Meeting, Box 20, Folder "Mayaguez Crisis," John Marsh Files, GFPL.

<sup>733</sup> "From US," *Prachathipatai*, May 15, 1975, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1975); Nai Kang Kan, "North, South, East, West," *Daily News*, May 15, 1975, in *Editorials and Columns (Summary)*, USIS (Bangkok: USIS, 1975).

<sup>734</sup> "Letter to Khukrit Pramoj from Gerald Ford," GRDS, RG 59, Subject Files of the Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, 1963-1975, Box 16, Entry 5416, NACP.



communists. On December 5, the Pathet Lao warned Thailand not to violate its new-found sovereignty.<sup>735</sup> Kukrit expressed grave concern about the Isan region because of its proximity to Laos and its large Laotian population. He feared the Laotians in Isan would rise up and help the CPT and Pathet Lao fight the Thai government. As a precaution, he decided to leave Thai troops in Nong Khai.<sup>736</sup>

The fall of Laos in December was a scary sign of possible things to come for Thailand. Culturally and historically, Thais saw the Laotians as distant relatives, and their loss to communism was a great concern. Bowie wrote that the king was “personally horrified by the deposition of the king of Laos....” He was afraid of being the last Thai king in the Chakri dynasty.<sup>737</sup> King Bhumibol and many of his allies saw the student and labor union protests as signs of communist infiltration. The royal family grew closer with right-wing groups and the military, taking part in the different institutions’ ceremonies and providing funding as a form of protection. The Navapol, Krathing Daeng, the Village Scouts, and the National Vocational Student Center of Thailand promoted Thai nationalism and the monarchy in their rallies against students and liberals. These groups became great tools in King Bhumibol’s public relations efforts, as they proclaimed to be the true protectors of the monarchy.

During his birthday speech in December 1975, King Bhumibol stood up to communism. The king heard reports predicting that “by the end of the year, Thailand [would] not appear on the world map anymore.” He said, “I heard another story: next

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<sup>735</sup> *Prachachat*, December 5, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>736</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 229.

<sup>737</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 107-109.

year ‘Thailand’ would become ‘Dieland.’” The king consoled the country by saying, “Thai rulers have laid foundations for the country, and have preserved its independence with such tenacity that enabled us to enjoy the benefits of an invaluable inheritance.” King Bhumibol promised, “But if we remain united and help each other, we will not die.”<sup>738</sup> In the face of what seemed like falling dominoes after the Vietnam War, Thailand looked like the next victim. Nevertheless, the king made himself a rallying point for Thais to stop the influence and possible invasion by communist forces.

More news of communist activities in early 1976 added to the fear of an invasion. The CIA reported that the Vietnamese and the CPT had plans of military action against the Thai government. Hanoi had been taking a tough public stance against Thailand, condemning it for supplying the United States with bases. The CPT also issued a declaration that it hoped “to liberate the sixteen provinces in Northeast Thailand within two to three years.”<sup>739</sup> The CIA reported that the North Vietnamese had begun smuggling advisers and weapons to the cadres to support the insurgency. Bangkok was in a difficult position. It did not want to lose the backing of the United States nor its military presence, but at the same time, Thai leaders wanted to build amicable relations with the Vietnamese to avoid repercussions for their pro-American policies.

#### The Return of the Right and the End of the Civilian-led Government

After three years, the right found its way back to political power. On April 4, 1976, Thailand held parliamentary elections, with Kukrit losing to his brother Seni

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<sup>738</sup> Nicholas Grossman and Dominic Faulder, *King Bhumibol Adulyadej, A Life's Work* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2011), 133.

<sup>739</sup> “East Asia Supplement, Staff Notes, CIA,” February 9, 1976, p. 1, Box 12, Dale Van Atta Papers, Intelligence Documents, GFPL.

Pramoj, someone associated with the right. Regarding the election results, *Time* magazine declared, “Alarmed by the Communist threat, many Thai voters as well as the country’s powerful military bosses” chose a government that was ardently anti-communist.<sup>740</sup> According to Bowie, right-wing radio stations had played nationalistic-themed songs such as “Nak Phaendin” (“Burden on the Earth”) constantly during the elections to stir public support against communism. The song was critical of students and liberals for their political ideas.<sup>741</sup> Later in 1977, the Village Scouts would use the song as its national anthem. Thailand’s defense minister used military TV and radio stations to promote anti-communist threats with the slogan “Right Kill Left!” Most notable was the “Armored Division Radio Station” in Bangkok, run by Lieutenant Colonel Uthan Sanitwong Na Ayutthaya, a relative of Queen Sirikit, with the purpose of upholding the nation, monarchy, and religion.<sup>742</sup> Thailand saw a proliferation of leaflets and posters accusing liberals and socialists of being communists who wanted to overthrow the monarchy. Anti-communism as a political message had not lost its utility as a public relations tool but also expanded to target all opponents of the right, such as liberals and students.

Shortly after the elections, student unrest began with the return of Praphat and Thanom to Thailand. On August 14, Praphat sneaked into the country from exile after the coup in 1973, and when the public found out, he justified his return by citing illness.<sup>743</sup> Several days later, twenty thousand students staged a demonstration at Thammasat

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<sup>740</sup> “Thailand: A Victim of Bad Reviews,” *Time*, April 19, 1976 Vol. 107, p. 62.

<sup>741</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 106.

<sup>742</sup> *Bangkok Post*, June 9, 1976, p. 5.

<sup>743</sup> Wright, *The Balancing Act*, 251.

University arguing for Praphat's expulsion. Abroad in the United States, 800 members of the American Thai Student Association demonstrated in Boston Common and then in front of Thanom's overseas home in Cambridge.<sup>744</sup> In a short time, a coalition of Red Gaur and Navapol members attacked the students at Thammasat University, leaving several dead and many wounded. The situation got worse with the surprise appearance of Thanom on September 19. Dressed in monk's robes, the former prime minister said he had come to visit his dying father and that after his passing, Thanom wanted to dedicate the rest of his life to the monkhood. The place he chose for his ministry was Wat Bovornives, the royal family's personal temple where Thai kings since Chulalongkorn had been ordained. The abbot in charge was King Bhumibol's personal religious aide.<sup>745</sup> The king and queen visited Thanom at the temple, in front of hundreds, with the media capturing the event. As part of his entourage, there were several leaders of the Navapol serving as protection.<sup>746</sup> Praphat and Thanom's return instigated a student uprising that could have been stymied by the king, but instead, his lack of intervention only enflamed the situation. Soon there were ten thousand demonstrators demanding that Thanom leave the country by October 2. At Thammasat, four thousand students gathered, sitting cross-legged on the ground and singing peace songs. The situation seemed peaceful until reports began circulating that the students had lynched an effigy of the crown prince. Soon this incident reached the news, where the media manipulated the event and incited strong feelings against the students.

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<sup>744</sup> Bradley, "The Evolution of Education and Society," 17.

<sup>745</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 234.

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

The full might of the right-wing movement became apparent when a host of Village Scouts, BPP, Red Gaur, and Navapol members surrounded the Thammasat University campus. For a couple of days, students barricaded themselves in at the school. NSCT leaders left the campus to surrender to the prime minister, but this news did not reach the rightist groups laying siege. On the morning of October 6, police and other paramilitary groups stormed the soccer field.<sup>747</sup> Men armed with guns, clubs, and knives beat some students to death. They hung others and then burned them with gasoline. A few who jumped into the river drowned when they tried to flee. By the end of the chaos, the police had arrested 1,700 students. The military assumed power and established an interim government, the National Administrative Reform Council (NARC). Over the next several days, NARC rounded up leftists and liberals and clamped down on other subversives. According to Marks, much of the Thai public thought that “the students had met their just end for having attacked the monarchy.”<sup>748</sup>

The new government, under General Thanin Kraivixien, gave a couple of explanations for the events of October 6. Thanin had received his education abroad and was an ultraconservative, staunch royalist and a Supreme Court member with connections to the Navapol. In the immediate aftermath, Thai military leaders said the student crackdown was to stymie a Vietnamese-supported revolution. The media captured an image of a body that the police forces said was a communist fighter. In addition, the right-wing groups outside of campus said the students fired shots at them.<sup>749</sup>

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<sup>747</sup> Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty*, 24-25.

<sup>748</sup> Tom Marks, “The Status of the Monarchy in Thailand,” *Issues and Studies* Vol. 13, No. 11 (1977): 63.

<sup>749</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 236-237.

Handley wrote a stinging critique of the king's role in the events of October 6. He argued that the violence was the "throne's most explicit and assertive intervention in politics" in three decades.<sup>750</sup> After the 1973 revolution, palace members had distanced themselves from the students and liberals and built stronger ties with right-wing conservatives and the military. The monarchy became a symbol of Thai nationalism and was promoted as the antithesis of liberalism and communism. The communist takeovers in neighboring countries put the monarchy at odds with reformers threatening the status quo. Coddling the military was one way of protecting the royal institution. King Bhumibol justified the October 1976 coup by saying, "At a time when our country is being continually threatened with aggression by the enemy, our very freedom and existence as Thais may be destroyed if Thai people fail to realize their patriotism and their solidarity in resisting the enemy..." and thus, the military needed to crack down on the protests.<sup>751</sup> Handley asserted that King Bhumibol "turned one half of Thai society against the other half" with no middle ground. The monarchy was not the unifier that it portrayed itself to be. Instead, the king promoted a version of Thai identity and nationalism that put students and liberals in the same category as the "other" or non-Thai.

King Bhumibol's own words gave some indication of how he felt about the changes. During his annual birthday address to the nation, his words seemed to hearken back to Sarit's idea of Thai democracy. The king said that there were issues with democracy like people arguing and seeking their own self-interest. He advocated not using other styles of democracy like those of the United States but sticking to principles

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<sup>750</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>751</sup> Girling, *Thailand, Society and Politics*, 215.

that were inherently Thai, such as politics that promoted unity and leaders who had “pure hearts.” He then alluded to a connection between political legitimacy and the monarchy by saying, “The king and the people are one.” In some ways he was referring to himself being the embodiment of democracy, as he represented the voice of the people.<sup>752</sup> In the king’s view, Thailand already had a democracy, it was just different from other western versions. However, the country was far from democratic, especially as the military and monarchy had just gotten rid of an elected government.

The United States response to the 1976 coup was mixed. NARC waited to meet officially with the U.S. embassy until it had a plan for a new constitution. Likewise, ambassador Whitehouse deferred any official contacts with the government for a week, but did have talks with King Bhumibol’s representatives. He learned that the king supported NARC but was hoping that Washington would help deflect the negative reactions from the press about the coup.<sup>753</sup> King Bhumibol placed the onus for coup on the students. In a telegram to Washington, Whitehouse seemed to have agreed that the young people were mostly to blame. In addition, the ambassador saw the civilian government that NARC overthrew as inept. Nevertheless, the U.S. embassy placed its support behind the new government.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>752</sup> Pechon Panlaem, “His Majesty and Democracy,” *Siam Rath*, December 4, 1976, Collection of Important News, n/13/2519/1, #4, TNA.

<sup>753</sup> Ford, *Cold War Monks*, 279-280.

<sup>754</sup> “Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State,” October 14, 1976, Subject: The End of the Democratic Experiment in Thailand, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, E-12, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12/d425> [accessed 2/1/2019.]

## Conclusion

A lot transpired in the span of three years. A Thai-student-led revolution in 1973, communist takeovers in Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos in 1975 and a Thai military coup in 1976 caused great instability for the country. The Thai military regime that had lasted from 1957 to 1973 and kept the nation stable and pro-American fell. The revolution of October 1973 ushered in a civilian government and a period of democracy, free elections, and increased civil liberties. U.S. political influence was waning from a growing anti-American movement among the students and intellectuals who disagreed with U.S. foreign policy. However, the new civilian government had two policies that were similar to the military regime's, strong relations with the United States and anti-communism.

Though there were democratic changes and new leadership in the country, the Thai and U.S. governments still saw a need for MOI and USIS public information programs. The USIS did not have the same freedom as the MOI, so it focused on publicly neutral tactics, though the CPT did not think the same. It used cultural and education exchanges and continued to publicize American and Thai humanitarian and development projects. The USIS used information campaigns and personalized contacts to build relationships of trust with elites and high-ranking political and military officials. As for the MOI, it was more direct in attacking communists, spreading Thai nationalism, and initiating development programs. The ministry concentrated on winning over youth, students, and young adults in the rural regions to keep them from joining the political activism in the metropolises.



The monarchy and various conservative groups engaged in their own public relations activities. They stoked the fires of anti-communism and Thai nationalism to build public support against the students and CPT. Their public rhetoric and information campaigns portrayed liberals as anti-monarchy and anti-Thai. King Bhumibol provided the United States and the conservatives with the backing they needed to reassert influence and political power. Many Thais followed their king, turning against the students and supporting a government that would cater to the needs of the old establishment. The new military government renewed policies supporting anti-communism and the monarchy and keeping relations strong with the United States by using the organizations of the USIS, the MOI, and several right-wing groups.

## CHAPTER 5: THE USIS, THE MOI, AND THE RESURGENCE OF THE CPT, 1977-1979

### Introduction

The biggest impact of the 1976 coup on Thailand and the USIS and MOI missions was that thousands of students and intellectuals joined the CPT movement. The attempt of both institutions at reducing tensions with the students had failed. Young Thai people had learned about western democracy and civil liberties, and they wanted them for Thailand. However, the USIS and MOI continued to operate in the country, promoting close U.S.-Thai relations, economic development, Thai nationalism, and anti-communism. The October 1976 coup brought to power several military governments that were pro-American, anti-communist, and conservative under the following leaders, Thanin Kravixien, Kriangsak Chamanan, and Prem Tinsulonanda. The 1976 coup led to thousands of students and intellectuals joining the communists, bolstering their strength and political legitimacy. With this resurgence in the CPT movement, the USIS and MOI remained important to Bangkok's and Washington's policy goals.

Even with the new military regimes, U.S.-Thai relations were different than they had been under Thanom. There would be no more military troops stationed in the country and Thailand would have a more independent foreign policy. Nevertheless, the United States continued to be Thailand's main patron for military and economic aid and cultural exchange. The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in late 1978 pushed Bangkok further into the American camp, with the RTG seeking political and military support from the United States in case Vietnam decided to turn north into Thailand. In addition, the CPT movement reignited the anti-communist frenzy in the country, keeping the Thai military

government on guard. Both governments used the USIS and MOI to maintain popular opposition to communism.

The CPT, with its new student recruits, increased its military insurgency and propaganda campaigns. It criticized the new Thai military government for its violence towards students and dissidents. Even after withdrawing almost all of its armed forces from Thailand except for a few hundred, the United States was still the focus of CPT rhetorical attacks because it supported the new regime. Then surprisingly, the CPT targeted the monarchy, which it had avoided for many years. The years of work by the USIS, MOI, and several other Thai organizations in building the monarchy helped make its image strong, popular, and central to Thai identity. The USIS and MOI played a significant role countering the CPT resurgence.

In reaction to the communists, the use of anti-communism to protect the monarchy was still central to the RTG's public relations campaigns. The MOI continued to promote anti-communism, the monarchy, Buddhism, and a Thai form of democracy with the king as head of state, just as Sarit had espoused two decades before. The MOI and other powerful institutions rallied to protect the monarchy against CPT propaganda, leading to more public support for King Bhumibol. From 1977 to 1979, the king remained the centerpiece of Thai nationalism. The royal institution became a strong rallying point against communism. In the countryside, the MOI and Thai government instituted more initiatives to promote a Thai-styled democracy. Some Buddhist clergymen became outspoken critics of communism and vehement supporters of the monarchy. They advocated extreme methods of suppressing leftism and the CPT. In the

mass media, there was an intensification of attacks on communist ideology and the CPT, even as Bangkok was trying to maintain friendly relations with its neighbors.

After two decades, the Thai government adopted the same approach among rural Thais and hill tribes that the USIS and MOI had already been using. In previous years, the RTG had many different groups involved in the countryside but lacked coordination and agreement over methods. For example, the MOI and the BPP focused their programs on winning popular support. However, in some areas of the country, the Thai army's approach seemed contradictory – using violence to suppress the enemy while at the same time trying to engage in civic action programs to show the people it was there to protect them. In the late 1970s, the Thai government began to fully implement programs in all areas of the country that were based more on public relations and relationships of trust with the people and less on overt violence and intimidation. A rising general by the name of Prem Tinsoulonda promoted a political solution with initiatives to show the Thai people that the RTG was a better alternative than the CPT and it intended to take care of them. Tactics included rural development, political education, and social welfare. Meanwhile, the MOI worked alongside the Thai military among villagers and youth, seeking to build Thai nationalism at the grassroots level.

The USIS still had some influence in the RTG's work to stymie the CPT movement. The mission's budget, manpower, and involvement had been cut dramatically during the past several years. Nevertheless, it still produced mass media content for the Thais but on a much smaller scale. Public diplomacy officials worked with their Thai counterparts to orchestrate information events. The USIS continued its key role in cultural and educational exchanges. The AUA center taught English, held exhibits, hosted

events, and disseminated American culture. Students from both countries traveled to study and live with host families. Though the main programs orchestrated by the USIS seemed benign, they were focused on supporting the Thai government and monarchy's desire for political and social stability. The ways and means were subtle, and the USIS played a supporting role rather than serving as the driver of the information policies.

A confluence of geopolitical shifts in the region and internal CPT divisions caused the communist movement slowly to fizzle out in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Fortunes turned against the CPT in late 1978 when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, which led to a division between the two countries. At the same time, Bangkok had begun developing cordial relations with Communist Laos and Vietnam. Because of these two circumstances, the CPT began losing outside funding, and the revolution lost momentum. Further exacerbating the situation, the new student recruits and old-time cadres argued over ideology and tactics. However, against the backdrop of regional changes and the fissures within the CPT, the MOI and USIS continued to promote anti-communism, nationalism, and cordial U.S.-Thai relations among rural people and students to counter communist influence. Right-wing organizations, acting on their own initiative, bolstered U.S.-Thai information programs by orchestrating public relations events and recruiting more people to their causes. King Bhumibol's role as part of Thai national identity took on more importance when CPT propaganda attacked him and the royal family. Though they public diplomacy and public relations did not lead to an immediate decline in the communist movement, like some other factors, they were still important in challenging the CPT.

## U.S.-Thai Relations

For a brief time after the October 1976 coup, relations between Washington and Bangkok were tense. One of the cornerstones of U.S. President Jimmy Carter's foreign policy was human rights. To push his new agenda forward, the president put pressure on some foreign governments to institute democratic and civil liberty reforms by using aid and other policies as incentives. Carter's agenda caused some issues with the new Thanin military government, as it had been guilty of severe human rights violations, especially on the heels of the October 6 coup. A civilian official, Thanin was a former Supreme Court judge who had studied law in Great Britain. Before becoming prime minister, he was famous for his pro-monarchy and anti-communist viewpoints.<sup>755</sup> The Carter administration sent Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Robert Oakley on a fact-finding mission in Thailand to evaluate the human rights situation. If he thought the Thai government had improved its treatment of its citizens, then the United States would give military aid. After touring Thailand, Oakley testified to the U.S. House Committee on International Relations about the Thai military government's mistreatment of its citizens after October 1976. Oakley criticized the Thanin government for its draconian policies of using violence against students, suspending civil liberties, and restricting freedoms of the press. He said "[a] state of emergency [could not] justify the commission of violations of human rights."<sup>756</sup> One Thai newspaper said that Carter's new policy made the U.S.

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<sup>755</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 258.

<sup>756</sup> "Statement by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the House Committee on International Relations," June 30, 1977, in *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1977-1980* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 1984), 848-859.

government more stubborn and hard to work with, always feeling like it could intrude on other nations' domestic problems.<sup>757</sup>

General Kriangsak Chamanan, a future prime minister, did not agree with Oakley's report of Thanin's administration. Speaking about the United States before an audience that included the U.S. ambassador to Thailand, Charlie Whitehouse, Kriangsak declared, "Don't make yourself out to be the one who judges the morals of the world." He cited one example where he blamed the United States for causing the refugee problem in Southeast Asia and said that Washington was not doing enough to alleviate the problem. Some Thai leaders could not understand why the United States was pushing human rights on the Thais when Thailand was already a democracy; Americans needed to put their attention elsewhere. Kriangsak ended by asserting that Thailand had known about human rights and political liberalism long before the United States, dating back to the ancient Thai monarch of Sukhothai from 1279 AD to 1298 AD, King Ramkhamhaeng. The general seemed offended that the United States, with its short history, would lecture a much older culture about human rights.<sup>758</sup> Carter would continue providing military and economic aid.

Months later, Washington's views on Thai human rights changed with the new government under Kriangsak Chamanan. On October 20, 1977, a Thai military faction led by General Kriangsak came to power and helped to improve the U.S.-Thai partnership. Unlike Thanin, Kriangsak was less conservative and more practical when it

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<sup>757</sup> "Carter Cares for Thai People's Rights," *Daily News*, June 20, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/15/2520/19, #2, TNA.

<sup>758</sup> "Kriangsak Attacks Carter's human Rights Policy," *Siam Rath*, July 8, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/15/2520/19, #2, TNA.

came to foreign policy and fighting the CPT. The new prime minister made some reforms to put Thailand back on good terms with the Carter administration. During the Second Hearing on Human Rights in Thailand, a U.S. official said, “A number of positive steps have been taken to improve basic conditions of human rights in Thailand.”<sup>759</sup> These included a less extreme approach towards fighting communism, which will be discussed later, and a loosening of civil liberty restrictions, such as more freedom of the press. Kriangsak saw the programs to help the influx of Laotian and Cambodian immigrants as a sign that Thais supported human rights.<sup>760</sup> Later, he told one newspaper that human rights were no longer a problem between himself and the United States and that the government did not have any violations.<sup>761</sup> In reality, Kriangsak’s government would still have human rights problems.

Once the Carter administration and the Thai government were able to overcome the issue of human rights, relations improved, especially militarily. The return to power of the military under Thanin, Kriangsak, and then under Prem brought a pro-American, pro-monarchy, and conservative leadership back to Bangkok. The Thai government’s new look under Kriangsak made a positive impression on the Carter administration. Congress decided to continue giving money to Thailand to modernize its military and help it protect itself from external threats and domestic communists. The United States agreed to provide \$600 million in the next fiscal year, sell advanced airplanes to the Thai

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<sup>759</sup> Surachart, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule*, 189.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>761</sup> “Carter Invited PM to Receive 20,000 Refugees,” Newspaper name unclear, January 5, 1978, Collection of Important News, n/15/2521/34, TNA.



military, and send advisers.<sup>762</sup> In addition, Carter promised to continue helping with the refugee problem. The *Mathichon* said this new phase of U.S.-Thai relations reconfirmed the 1962 Rusk-Thanat Communique, symbolizing the continued friendship between the two countries.<sup>763</sup> For public diplomacy, Carter wanted to promote international exchanges and radio and television broadcasting to continue building America's image abroad.<sup>764</sup>

#### New Life to the CPT

What many Thai and U.S. leaders did not anticipate was how the October 6, 1976 clash would benefit the CPT. Unlike the 1973 revolution, this protest consisted mostly of students, a small portion of the Thai population. After the military coup, thousands of students, teachers, liberals, middle-class citizens, and even representatives in parliament fled to the countryside and joined the CPT. One former Thai parliament member proclaimed in a broadcast that military force was the only method left to gain "genuine independence and democracy."<sup>765</sup> Historian Joseph Wright Jr. argued that "[t]he inclusion of such people invigorated the CPT and lent credibility to communist assertions that the Thai political system was too corrupt to be reformed."<sup>766</sup> One Thai army general stated that the October 6 coup was a turning point in the CPT insurgency, as its numbers grew

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<sup>762</sup> "U.S. Points to New Thai Generations Improved, Proposed Military Help, \$600 Million," *Mathichon*, February 17, 1978, Collection of Important News, n/18/2521/34, #1, TNA.

<sup>763</sup> "U.S. Sustains Promise to Cooperate in Stopping Communism," *Mathichon*, January 5, 1978, Collection of Important News, n/15/2521/34, TNA.

<sup>764</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 361, 364.

<sup>765</sup> "Challenges for the New Order," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 5, 1976, p. 8.

<sup>766</sup> Wright, *The Balancing Act*, 258.

and its ability to launch attacks increased.<sup>767</sup> The disaffection of thousands of Thais emboldened the organization.

The CPT quickly took advantage of its new recruits and new power base. After decades of lackluster results, the CPT was finally making some headway as thousands flocked to its ranks; it was now ready to implement the united front strategy, a coalition of peasants and intellectuals.<sup>768</sup> Immediately after receiving hosts of young converts, CPT leaders established the Coordinating Patriotic and Democratic Forces (CCPDF) as a means of creating links between urban and rural as well as international supporters. Communist propaganda revolved around messages like those of the past, such as anti-Americanism, neo-imperialism, and Thai government corruption.

The students played important roles in the CPT movement. After training, they went out to the countryside to do much of what the USIS, MOI, and the U.S. and Thai militaries had been doing for years. The students had four primary jobs: to develop propaganda campaigns, provide medical care, entertain through music, and train villagers in self-defense. Others were involved in mass media production via the VOPT radio station. Many of the themes centered on communist and revolutionary ideologies, such as class struggle, peasant grievances, and even democracy.<sup>769</sup> However, the students and CPT cadres did not see eye to eye for long, and in a short time, conflict and an eventual schism would emerge within the movement.

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<sup>767</sup> General Chaovalit Youngchaiyuth, *luamkhabanyaay le khamsamphaat khong phoneekchaovalit yongchaiyuth* [Collected Speeches and Interviews of Lieutenant General Chaovalit Youngchaiyuth, 1980-1985] (Bangkok: S.S. Printing, 1985), 76.

<sup>768</sup> Tom Marks, *Maoist Insurgency since Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 48-49.

<sup>769</sup> Kanokrat Lertchoosakul, *The Rise of the Octoberists in Contemporary Thailand: Power and Conflict among Former Left-Wing Student Activists in Thai Politics* (New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 2016), 71.

Communist radio broadcasts spoke about democracy and justice rather than about the specific policies and objectives of the CPT. Their goal was to build on common beliefs and shared grievances. Marks argued that “[e]mphasis was placed on shared goals and on demonstrating that people from the entire social spectrum had joined in the struggle.”<sup>770</sup> Furthermore, the CPT attacked the aristocratic class, business elites, royalists, and the United States. Its rhetoric inspired more to join the movement.<sup>771</sup> CPT leaders were trying to portray themselves as patriots challenging the government and monarchy’s version of Thai nationalism.

Many Thai liberals and leftists had become disillusioned with the monarchy when the king failed to intervene to stop the bloodshed. In short, the CPT and the new influx of members saw the king as another supporter or member of the elite establishment. The leadership also focused on verbally attacking the monarchy. For years, the CPT had avoided criticizing the royal institution because of its prestigious place in Thai culture, but now there were no limits to their attacks. The CPT thought this was the right moment to adjust its approach and philosophy by targeting the monarchy in its public relations campaigns.<sup>772</sup> The anti-monarchy propaganda campaign would begin in early 1977 and prove to have mixed results.

The first attack on the monarchy was in January 1977, when Communist forces shot a royalist, secretary Princess Wibhawadi Rangsit, while she was riding in a helicopter taking gifts to troops in southern Thailand. Communist insurgents killed the

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<sup>770</sup> Marks, *Maoist Insurgency after Vietnam*, 50.

<sup>771</sup> Kanokrat, *The Rise of the Octoberists in Contemporary Thailand*, 68-69.

<sup>772</sup> Marks, *Making Revolution*, 168.

princess when she ordered the pilot to land to pick up two wounded police officers.<sup>773</sup> Elsewhere in Thailand, CPT forces ambushed a military unit accompanying the crown prince in the Lomsak district of the Tri-Province region.<sup>774</sup> The Thai public was outraged at the attacks. One editorial titled “Outrage Needing Redress” from the *Bangkok Post* exclaimed that the princess’s “assassination could be considered a threat and a challenge to all loyal Thais, our institutions, and cultural heritage.”<sup>775</sup> It then continued by describing the CPT as “savage terrorists with the objective of bringing Thailand under the domination of an alien ideology.” The CPT’s VOPT radio station responded by calling the princess “the representative of the big feudalists who have been conducting psychological operations to deceive the people.”<sup>776</sup>

The CPT then accused former Thai kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn of exploiting the people’s hard work by not sharing any of the wealth. According to cadre leaders, royalty got fat from their riches while the peasants grew poorer. In a CPT radio broadcast on April 1, 1977, former student leader Thirayut Boonmee declared the monarchy “obsolete and deteriorating.”<sup>777</sup> He continued, “I think that if our people were to destroy it, there would be no adverse effects.” Thirayut made a bolder statement by blaming King Bhumibol for the October 6 coup.<sup>778</sup> However, by turning against the monarchy, the CPT had crossed a line that most Thais could not tolerate. The monarchy was still part of the fabric of Thai society and nationalism – its dissolution was

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<sup>773</sup> Marks, “The Status of the Thai Monarchy in Thailand,” *Issues and Studies*, (Taipei) 13, No. 11 (November 1977): 63.

<sup>774</sup> *Bangkok Post*, February 16, 1977, p. 3.

<sup>775</sup> *Bangkok Post*, February 17, 1977, p. 8.

<sup>776</sup> Marks, “The Status of the Monarchy in Thailand,” 64.

<sup>777</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 264; Marks, *Making Revolution*, 174.

<sup>778</sup> Marks, *Making Revolution*, 181.

unthinkable. It was clear that the communists did not fear attacking the monarchy, either verbally or with armed force. With the flood of recruits following the October 6 coup, the CPT was emboldened and thought public sentiment had turned against the monarchy. However, cadre leaders miscalculated, and the people's reaction was not what it expected. Instead of agreeing with the communist accusations and rallying behind them, many Thais were angry and wanted retribution. The king's support of the re-ascension of the military government did not diminish his prestige. His image had become so powerful that he was above reproach.

Another attempt at discrediting the monarchy came when the CPT claimed that King Bhumibol was the cause of the October 1976 coup. As stated earlier, Thanin's government came under a lot of condemnation when it began restricting civil liberties. However, King Bhumibol continued to show his support for the government and encouraged Thais to do the same. Since the CPT thought the public had turned on the monarchy, it tried to highlight the king's backing of Thanin.<sup>779</sup> It laid the blame for the student killings of October 6 on the king. On June 17, the VOPT declared that "the photographs of the Popular Scouts [Village Scouts] using their royal-presented scarves" during the coup linked King Bhumibol to the organization.<sup>780</sup> The station then proclaimed, "No further explanation is needed to point out who was behind the massacre of the schoolchildren and students at Thammasat University." The attack on the monarchy was where the CPT went wrong. The continued popularity of the monarchy was just one of the many challenges to their revolution that the communists would face.

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<sup>779</sup> Marks, *Maoist Insurgency since Vietnam*, 53-54.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

### A United Public Relations Front against the CPT

The CPT's renewed revolution after the 1976 coup pushed the Thai government, Buddhist monks, and right-wing organizations to engage more fully in the battle of hearts and minds, specifically promoting the monarchy as a means of countering communist influence. In the face of CPT propaganda, many of the monarchy's allies used Thai nationalism and cultural ideas in their public relations. Bureaucratic elites, aristocrats, and military officials were some of the biggest promoters of this continued push to enhance the image of the monarchy. Pasuk and Baker argued that conservative groups established programs to "strengthen and activate the ideology of nation, religion, and king."<sup>781</sup> Influential groups gathered resources to refurbish the old palace complex and monuments throughout the country. Elites continued to fund the Royal Barge procession in Bangkok to commemorate monarchical history dating back to the Ayutthaya period. The PRD and army increased the airtime the royal family received on national television channel 7.<sup>782</sup> Television programming consisted of the king's activities during that specific day (including the activities of his family members), in addition to the movements of the prime minister and military leaders. The promotion of the king not only benefitted the monarchy but also those who led the public relations campaigns.

The Buddhist Sangha's public relations activities supporting the monarchy showed Thais the institution's crucial place in Thai society. The abbot Phra Yanasangworn at Wat Bovornives did much to create and promote the sacred image and role of the king. The famous monk had been associated with the king for many years. In

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<sup>781</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thailand Economy and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 333.

<sup>782</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

1956, he had accompanied King Bhumibol during his novice ordination rite of passage, and in 1961, he became an abbot at Wat Bovonives, the Chakri family temple. The king received much of his religious knowledge from the abbot and learned how to carry himself as if he were a dhammaraja, a god-king and the symbol of Buddhism.

Yanasangworn praised the king on the 10,000<sup>th</sup> day of his reign on September 20, 1977. The speech was titled “At the Conclusion of the Meditation Period Dedicated to His Majesty the King.”<sup>783</sup> Numbers and dates in Buddhist and Thai culture had auspicious meanings attached them. The date of the Bhumibol’s 10,000<sup>th</sup> day as king had coincided with the birthdays of both King Rama V, Chulalongkorn the great modernizer, and King Rama VIII, Ananda Mahidol, King Bhumibol’s older brother. This was a serendipitous opportunity to link King Bhumibol with other great monarchs and place special significance to his reign.

Yanasangworn proceeded in his speech to attribute much of the country’s successes to the king. He declared, “We have always managed to overcome all threatening dangers owing to the constantly overriding virtue of his majesty.” The king had still been virtuous in a chaotic world through living the principles of thotsaphit rachatham, the ten kingly virtues. To be a righteous monarch without living the life of a monk, King Bhumibol had developed some powerful qualities that included charity, morality, sacrifice, integrity, gentleness, temperance, lack of hatred, restraint from violence, patience, and conciliation.<sup>784</sup> As a result, Yanasangworn declared that

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<sup>783</sup> Handley, *King Never Smiles*, 254.

<sup>784</sup> Supreme Patriarch Yanasangworn, *Ten Thousand Days on the Throne: A Sermon to Commemorate the Completion of 10,000 days of the Reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand* (Bangkok, Thailand: Thai Watana Panich Press, 1977), 2-3.

Bhumibol was the “very best king” and had achieved a special sacred status. The backing of some important Buddhist clergy helped the reputation of the royal and religious institutions in the face of accusations of colluding with the army and the lack of support from the students. More importantly, religious support of the monarchy was a means of showing Thais the importance of the king to Thailand.

Some monks opposed the idea of getting involved in politics, and specifically overtly fighting communism. In December 1978 at a National Assembly meeting, a member by the name of Sanon Saiswang proposed having monks take a more active part in opposing the CPT movement. Sanon was not clear about what type of involvement or the role they should play, but he justified the proposal by stating that religious leaders would be among the best kinds of people to fight communism and build support for the government’s policies because of the Thai people’s reverence for the clergy. Not all Buddhist leaders held the same political views. Sentiments varied widely across the spectrum, from staunch anti-communist to neutral, with some even criticizing the military government. However, a writer at *Mathichon* thought that having monks take up arms and face the CPT on the battlefield was wrong and would corrupt the religious institution. The writer argued that the best way for the monks to fight communism was to fulfill their duties by living the doctrines of the religion, serving others, and performing sacred rites and ceremonies. Not all agreed with the *Mathichon* article, and conservative-leaning monks still became politically involved in opposing communism, even in extreme



ways.<sup>785</sup> They were important voices in trying to sway people's sentiments against communism and in support of the monarchy and military government.

Many newspapers supported the monarchy's prominent place in the nation's identity. After the coup on October 6, 1976, there seemed to be a proliferation of news articles defending and promoting the monarchy. *Siam Rath* had been pro-king from its start in the 1950s and had not wavered since. At the approach of King Bhumibol's fifty-second birthday, the newspaper published an article titled "The People's King," emphasizing that he was both modern, in that he was democratic, but also that he was still true to Thai values. For four pages, the writer listed the many duties of the king and all his great works. His main point was to make all Thais realize that King Bhumibol's most important duty was to the people: visiting them, serving them, and looking out for their needs. He was a man of the people. More importantly, because of his prestige and popularity, King Bhumibol's relationship with the United States was important to U.S.-Thai relations and the USIS and MOI public information campaigns. He became a voice of support for the Vietnam War, economic development, and anti-communism.<sup>786</sup>

One movie highlighted the king's many duties, activities, and accomplishments. The purpose of the movie was two-fold: to raise money for the Community Welfare Fund and to promote the royal institution. It commemorated the twenty-fifth year of King Bhumibol's reign. Viewers saw the king and queen participating in religious ceremonies, state events, countryside tours, and charities. There were clips capturing the famous

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<sup>785</sup> "Role of Thai Monks in Opposing Communist Doctrine," *Mathichon*, January 27, 1979, Collection of Important News, n/1/2522/112, #7, TNA.

<sup>786</sup> The People's King, *Siam Rath*, December 4, 1979, p. 1-4, n/1/2522/1, #3, Collection of Important News, TNA.

Kathin, where King Bhumibol donated robes to the monks, and the plowing ceremony, which signaled the beginning of the growing season. The film showed other important events such as the king's ordination and the royal couple's marriage. Most of the scenes dealing with international relations were of the king interacting with foreign diplomats and leaders from the United States. *Siam Rath* wrote that this was a testament to the strong relationship between America and King Bhumibol. The movie aired not just in the cities, but also in rural areas to perpetuate the monarchy's image and build unity between Bangkok and the countryside.<sup>787</sup>

To praise the king on his birthday, the Thai government held a public relations event that brought thousands of people together. On December 5, King Bhumibol's birthday and also the country's National Day, the government held a "Day of Celebration" to commemorate the monarch. Kriangsak proclaimed that this was an opportunity for the Thai people to show their loyalty and pride for their king. Thousands of people gathered in front of the king's palace with candles, singing songs of praise. At the same time, the government used the occasion to collect donations for the construction of the Maharat Hospital, dedicating it to King Bhumibol. From the celebration alone, they raised one million baht, with more arriving periodically. According to *Dao Sayuan*, this event was not limited to Bangkok, and Thais around the country showed their love by

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<sup>787</sup> "Movie, Royal Duties in 25 Years, Parts of King's Movie that Does Not Falter," *Siam Rath*, May 19, 1977, Collection of Important News, ๓๑3/2520/1, #1, TNA. Unfortunately, the newspaper article did not provide the title of the movie.

hanging special flags symbolizing their support. Apparently, approximately one million people participated in this special day for King Bhumibol.<sup>788</sup>

By the late 1970s, the king was also adept at portraying himself as a virtuous ruler. King Bhumibol had orchestrated a nationwide tour in 1978 and 1979 to reify the monarchy's religious role after the October 1976 coup. Anthropologist Christine Gray described this trip as the king "circumambulating his kingdom, mimicking kings of old, re-strengthening his religious and pious role."<sup>789</sup> Bangkok, the royal palace specifically, represented the center of the universe, or Mount Meru, the home of the gods. On his travels, King Bhumibol was visiting the far corners of the realm to teach Buddhist doctrines through example and performing rituals at temples. Two highlights of the tour were in 1978 when the king performed the *Kathin* at Wat That and Wat Raykhing in Nakorn Pathorn Province, southwest of Bangkok. Wat That had deep religious significance, as it housed the oldest symbols of the Buddha and many sacred statues. Afterwards, King Bhumibol traveled by land to Wat Raykhing in a yellow Rolls Royce, surrounded by police and military escorts. The temple in Nakorn Pathorn was a government-funded project to facilitate development in the countryside.<sup>790</sup> Some famous monks considered Wat Raykhing a perfect temple because of its cleanliness, the discipline of the monks, and its symbolic location. As it was near a river, many viewed it as an edifice of life and prosperity. Inside, King Bhumibol performed the special rituals of the *Kathin*, while outside, a large crowd of several hundred waited. There were

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<sup>788</sup> "About One Million Gathered for Day of Celebration," *Dao Sayuan*, December 5, 1979, Collection of Important News, n/1/2522/1, #3, TNA.

<sup>789</sup> Gray, "Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s," Vol. 2, 485, 492.

<sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

officials from each government department present, with the police and army guarding the temple. Many villagers wore the Village Scout scarves and carried flags embroidered with “Long Live the King.”<sup>791</sup> Upon leaving, the crowd received amulets of the Buddha as a reward for their attendance, a further move by the government to disseminate the symbol of the king.

Another significant part of King Bhumibol’s countrywide tour was his patronage of Village Scouts’ events. Since late 1977, the Thai government, especially Kriangsak’s, had been slowly curtailing the activities of the movement. Notwithstanding the RTG’s efforts to distance itself from the right-wing organization, the palace continued its support, specifically through hosting the *Kathin luang* (mostly performed in first-class temples by the king personally) and the *Kathin ton* (an unofficial, private ritual also done by the king) ceremonies with the Village Scouts.<sup>792</sup> One *Kathin* ceremony with the Village Scouts had a mixture of religious and political messages, especially anti-communist ones. Gray wrote, “...traditional messages about purity and danger, salvation and damnation, were assimilated to messages about nationalism, communism, and democracy.”<sup>793</sup> The seating arrangement at the ritual had symbolic significance. At the center was King Bhumibol, members of the palace, and other elites. The next level seated the Village Scout members and the leadership. The last group was villagers. The fact that the Village Scouts had an exclusive seat between the king and the villagers was the

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<sup>791</sup> Ibid., 502.

<sup>792</sup> Gray, “Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s,” Vol. 2, 450; “Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s,” Vol. 2, 515-516.

<sup>793</sup> Gray, “Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s,” Vol. 2, 515-516

monarchy's way of rewarding them for their service to the nation.<sup>794</sup> The king's relationship with the group illustrated the palace's continued anti-communist views. The Village Scouts was one of the main organizations perpetuating anti-communist ideas and supporting the monarchy.

The Ministry of Education built up the monarchy in its national curriculum. The events of October 1976 made the Thai government more aware of the power political ideology had in causing instability. In the summer of 1977, the ministry established a policy for all provinces to teach more about democracy, with an emphasis on the king's role as head of state. It also began printing and distributing a book to promote Thai nationalism. Within a short time, five million copies had been distributed. The Ministry of Education hoped that this new initiative would cultivate in students a proper vision of democracy, government policy, and the monarchy.<sup>795</sup>

This policy of promoting democracy in schools was similar to the new political approach of the Thai security and armed forces' to fighting communism. A group of army officers interviewed former CPT members to figure out how to effectively fight the communists. They concluded that democracy was the key. These mid-level officers began to espouse this approach in their counterinsurgency policy and planning. They called themselves the "Democratic Soldiers Group." One officer said, "If we build democracy in the country, we will win over communism."<sup>796</sup> Thus, a democratic

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<sup>794</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 518.

<sup>795</sup> "Book to Promote Love of Nation, Religion, Monarchy, Distribute to More than 5 Million Already, *Siam Rath*, July 18, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/12/2520/7, TNA.

<sup>796</sup> Surachart Bamrungsuk, "From Dominance to Power Sharing: The Military and Politics in Thailand, 1973-1992," Ph.D. dissertation, (Columbia University, 1999), 74-76, 106.

revolution needed to take place. However, it was not clear how the soldiers interpreted democracy or hoped to implement it. Most likely, it was democracy centered on the monarchy.

Through the MOI, the Thai government wanted to implement democratic principles through training leaders in Tambon Committees throughout the nation with programs that would be similar to the “Democratic Soldiers.” These local officials learned about elections, constitutions, and public participation in lawmaking. In addition, the MOI taught them the dangers of communism. Nai Winnu Angkhonarak, director-general of the Department of Interior within the MOI, thought this would ensure that local leaders developed the correct understanding of democracy with the monarch as the head of state. After the training, Tambon leaders would then teach the people what they had learned.<sup>797</sup>

To support the development of Thai democracy in rural Thailand, the government set up the Publicity and Public Relations of Democracy Committee. Members of the committee consisted of the prime minister, deputy secretary prime minister, director-general of the Department of Interior, and the PRD. The group created policy guidelines and plans for public relations campaigns promoting political reform and democratic development. The goals were to have the rural people know their responsibilities when

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<sup>797</sup> “Accelerate Laying Foundation,” *Tawen Siam*, April 5, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/12/2520/7, TNA; “Developing Democracy,” *Siam Rath*, May 23, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/12/2520/7, TNA.

participating in lawmaking and develop the correct views and values of politics and democracy with a king or constitutional monarchy.<sup>798</sup>

The president of the committee, Sermsak Thepkham, issued an order to begin working on a handbook to supplement the teaching of democracy to rural people and students. The text included the history of the ideology, some of its problems, and how to fix and implement it in the Thai context. All the public relations campaigns would be tailored to specific circumstances in the countryside, in the metropolitan areas, and in Bangkok. However, Sermsak wanted to focus less on the theories of democracy and more on its application.<sup>799</sup>

In the south, instead of promoting democracy, the Department of Interior wanted to promote government-Muslims relations. Director-General Damrong Sunthon Santhun accompanied Imams and 660 others to meet with Prime Minister Kriangsak in early 1978 in Bangkok. The prime minister gave a speech emphasizing to Islamic leaders that, as intermediaries, they were critical to persuading the people to cooperate with government officials in developing the region. Kriangsak repeated that he would hold elections in the south to help meet the people's needs.<sup>800</sup> A year later, there was a special training session for Islamic students in the southern province of Songkhla. According to the *Daily Miller*, the fifth class to go through the program consisted of 67 students. The purpose was to help Muslim youth understand the current political, economic, and social situation of the

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<sup>798</sup> "Establish Committee to Publicize Democracy," *Chao ???*, September 18, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/12/2520/7, TNA.

<sup>799</sup> "Emphasize Rural People-Students, Focus on Same Views as a Nation," *Chao ???*, October 19, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/12/2520/7, TNA.

<sup>800</sup> "Improve Relations between Nation," *Daily Thai*, January 19, 1978, Collection of Important News, n/18/2521/34, #1, TNA.

country. In addition, they learned Thai-styled democracy. Anti-communism was also an important part of the training. The youth were taught their role in preserving Thai honor in the face of communism.<sup>801</sup> The south was a crucial area because of its large Muslim population; Bangkok wanted them to feel part of the nation.

Military and police groups slowly began changing their approach to counterinsurgency by focusing more on winning hearts and minds, as had civilian organizations. After 1973, the second army region, led at that time by Prem Tinsoulanond, adopted some ideas like those of the “Democratic Soldiers Group.” Prem was born in southern Thailand and had served most of his life in the army. He had a good reputation, was well liked, and experienced much success in combat operations. The monarchy and the general were well connected, and Prem’s relationship with the king would help him become prime minister in the 1980s. He would be one of the greatest defenders of King Bhumibol and the royal institution. After October 1973, Prem was assigned to the northeast region as deputy commanding general of the second army. He thought a political solution— concentrating more on building relations with the people through development and civic action programs—was the answer to beating the communists. He quickly began having success, and others caught on. Ironically, for many years some Thai organizations had already been trying to do some of the same things as Prem. Available sources did not indicate any link between Prem and organizations such as the USIS. It was not until the early 1980s that Prem’s political approach would be

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<sup>801</sup> “Islamic Students Collaborate/Participate in Training to Help Nation In Order to Build Stability,” *Daily Miller*, January 3, 1979, Collection of Important News, n/1/2522/112, #14, TNA.



applied universally. For the time being, only certain groups and areas would adopt his model.

Prem had built on the efforts of Saiyud in the mid-1960s. As mentioned before, Prem focused (as Saiyud had) on a more people-oriented approach to working in the countryside. The Thai army drew back dramatically from using overwhelming force to suppress subversive and insurgent activities. Instead, there was an emphasis on psychological operations, information campaigns, and the use of local leaders as intermediaries with Bangkok. Saiyud praised Prem by saying the general had employed the non-military method very effectively.<sup>802</sup> Marks viewed the new counterinsurgency strategy espoused by Saiyud, Prem, and others as one of the keys to stymieing the CPT's influence.

Prem was good at using public relations to rally support for the government against communism. In the summer of 1979, he orchestrated "The Day Gun Sounds End" event in Nakhon Phanom province for the second time. This event was like the CPT's annual "Gun Firing Day" that began in August 1965. The purpose of "The Day Gun Sounds End" was to continue building support for the government to fight communism. The first time it took place, Thai leaders saw its success, and they hoped to generate more public awareness and support. This time, Prem presided over the occasion as the minister of defense. In front of five thousand people, he opened the ceremony by praising the people of the area and saying that CPT activities had decreased because of their understanding of the dangers and problems of communism. The speech also cited that

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<sup>802</sup> Ibid.

massive economic, social, and political developments in the northeast had helped cut down on violence and decrease the amount of “gun sounds.” After the speech, there was a parade led by the army and then processions featuring various grassroots organizations.<sup>803</sup>

The Thai cinema industry also began promoting anti-communist themes. In 1979, the movie *Phai Daeng* (Red Danger), written by Kukrit, was released. It was an adaptation of a 1954 novel depicting the threat of communism and the Chinese to Buddhist culture. There were two main characters, a leftist and a monk. The film criticized the antagonist, a communist, for his “quaint convictions” and belief in Maoism. His counterpart, a monk, showed him that communism was the antithesis of Thai life and traditions.<sup>804</sup> At the end, villagers captured the antagonist just in time to avert a disaster. Other films from the late 1970s, such as *Nak Phaendin* and *Ai Yam Daeng*, further depicted the dangers of communism to Thailand’s national and cultural integrity.<sup>805</sup> Anti-communist and nationalist messages were becoming more prevalent not just in political discourse but also in the entertainment and cultural arenas.

The government took a big step towards formalizing what it meant to be a Thai person through the National Identity Board (NIB). The NIB was a means of “defining what Thai meant and promoting Thai-ness as a counter to the social dissensions of the decade,” such as liberalism and communism.<sup>806</sup> Thai identity was centered on Thai

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<sup>803</sup> “Prem: People Join Hands with the State, Sounds of Guns with Die Out,” *Daily Miller*, August 9, 1979, Collection of Important News, n/1/2522/112, #19, TNA.

<sup>804</sup> Harrison, “Golden Gauntlet,” 204.

<sup>805</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>806</sup> Pasuk and Baker, *Thailand Economy and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 337.

nationalism. Those who upheld and believed in it were true Thais, thereby creating a distinction between those who belonged and the enemy or outsider. When it came to the word “Thai,” Pasuk and Baker said, it “was a mixture of royal and rural, the palace and the peasant.”<sup>807</sup> This definition created a connection between the monarchy and the people, both rich and poor. The Thai nation consisted of both the center of power, Bangkok, and the countryside, including Thai villagers and ethnic minorities. NIB officials disseminated materials on royal history, rituals, and Buddhist traditions, in many ways codifying and solidifying Thai culture. According to an NIB survey in 1984, the information campaign was effective in propagating Thai nationalism.<sup>808</sup> The state had been disseminating these ideas since the early twentieth century and now reused them with more effectiveness in countering competing ideologies and groups during the resurgence of the CPT.

At a March department meeting, CDD leaders strongly encouraged all officials to work together with the youth programs, emphasizing that they were the core of community development work and the nation at the rural level. The CDD sought to improve its syllabi, curricula, and methods of training rural young people. The changes were based on the application of principles from the Civil Boy Scout program.<sup>809</sup> Officials adopted some of the program’s mottos, symbols, methodologies, and activities. The new training program was to inspire youth to devote themselves to the traditional

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<sup>807</sup> Ibid.

<sup>808</sup> Office of the Prime Minister, National Identity Office, *Thailand in the 1980s* (Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House, 1984), 69, 136-137.

<sup>809</sup> “Meeting Report of Department,” March 10, 1977, p. 3-4, Papers of the Community Development Department, Thai Ministry of Interior, (8) un 5.2.1.1.1/18, TNA.

nationalist ideas of nation, religion, and monarchy, and to democracy with the king as the head of state. CDD officials planned on setting up the program in 45 provinces. Soon, 2,700 youth passed through the program, receiving diplomas as “symbols of their adherence to being loyal Thai youth.”<sup>810</sup> Government leaders hoped promoting Thai nationalism would keep youth from being influenced by communism.

This push to focus on winning the hearts and minds of the young people was in some part a result of the October 1976 student uprising. In one of its opinion columns, *Khao Phanit* wrote that much of the recent chaos was caused by the Thai youth who did not understand society and politics. The piece began by stressing that the youth were future adults and that they needed proper training and education so that they would become good and obedient grown-ups. Correct information would improve bad behavior. The article concluded by pointing out that programs like those instituted by the CDD would improve the youth and help them be an asset to the nation.<sup>811</sup>

#### USIS after October 6, 1976

After the October 1976 coup, Washington wanted to continue building relations with the Thai people. In early 1976, the Ford administration issued National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 225, which discussed many topics, including the need to maintain and strengthen relations with the Thai people. It stated that Washington would “continue to conduct information, cultural, and Peace Corps programs designed to

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<sup>810</sup> “Improve Syllabus Training Youth in Rural Community,” *Tawen Siam*, March 10, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/18/2520/11, TNA.

<sup>811</sup> “Opinion: Program to Train Youth of Nation,” *Khao Phanit*, May 26, 1977, Collection of Important News, n/18/2520/11, TNA.

demonstrate that good relations with the United States [were] advantageous to Thailand.”<sup>812</sup>

The USIA in Washington appointed William Lenderking as press attaché and information officer to provide a fresh approach in Thailand. Lenderking joined the USIA in 1959, where much of his experience was with helping the Department of State with public diplomacy policy, planning, and research.<sup>813</sup> After arriving in Bangkok, he noticed the country was quiet; the military government had clamped down on subversive groups and any political opposition. There was also widespread feeling in the country that Thailand could be the next domino to fall in Southeast Asia. According to Lenderking, the USIS was again helping to “fight against insurgency.” He tried to trim the USIS mission to make it more effective, letting go of some American and Thai employees. Many of them were proud of their work and so far, thought that they were helping to keep Thailand from falling to communism. Lenderking declared, “But I’ll say this in defense of the domino theory—what we did, especially in Thailand, bought more time for the government and people of that country to get their act together and defeat a tough and determined insurgency.”<sup>814</sup>

Some in the Thai media industry continued to be on good terms with the USIS. The new military leadership allowed the USIS more freedom to promote American and Thai ideas and policies. The USIS had Thais employees with expertise in all the different

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<sup>812</sup> “Memorandum from Thomas J. Barnes to Brent Scowcroft,” February 27, 1976, Subject: Ambassador Whitehouse’s Assessment of Coup Prospects in Thailand, National Security Adviser, Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Country Files: Thailand, Box 17, GFPL.

<sup>813</sup> Oral History, William Lenderking Interview, 2007, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Oral History, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 11/1/16].

<sup>814</sup> Lenderking Interview.

media, such as radio, TV, films, and print. Lenderking observed that Thai news agencies were “generally friendly” towards the USIS, as in the 1960s.<sup>815</sup> According to his friend, many of the newspapers were “in the pocket of the CIA.” However, there were also other papers that were more critical of the United States and did not give the USIS carte blanche to promote their public relations events or programs.

Notwithstanding the good works of the USIS, there were some complications when it came to Carter’s human rights policy. Arriving shortly after the October 1976 coup, Lenderking and other staff members were not sure how to promote Carter’s new human rights agenda. The U.S. embassy and the USIS had to be careful not to offend Thai leaders with Carter’s human rights initiatives. As shown earlier in the chapter, some Thais criticized the United States for trying to tell the Thai government how to treat its citizens. Before the new State Department’s human rights person, Patricia Derian, visited Thailand, Whitehouse and Lenderking agreed that it would be harmful to call “attention to some of the human rights abuses and [rub] the Thais’ noses in the dirt so that they lost face and felt that they were being humiliated or held up to criticism or ridicule by their great friend the United States....” Instead “it was better to work quietly behind the scenes whenever [they] could.”<sup>816</sup> The USIS tweaked Carter’s policy in Thailand by insisting that human rights reforms were “not designed to be a threat to countries” like Thailand. Lenderking vaguely said the USIS used “friendly persuasion” to get the Thais to support more human rights.

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<sup>815</sup> Ibid.

<sup>816</sup> Lenderking Interview.

In addition to addressing human rights, Lenderking built awareness about U.S. help for the refugees in Southeast Asia. The mass refugee issue offered the United States an opportunity to show Thais that it cared about the mess it had left behind. By the summer of 1977, hundreds of boats filled with Vietnamese had left South Vietnam, while thousands of Laotians and Hmong had fled Laos, flooding Thailand's border regions. The next big wave came from Cambodia in 1979. Carter quickly jumped in to help. He offered to resettle thousands of refugees in the United States and in other western countries. In 1977, the United States gave 15,000 temporary asylum in the United States and then accommodated another 42,000 in 1978.

The new ambassador to Thailand, Morton I. Abramowitz, was eager to show Thais that the United States cared for the refugees to help bolster the U.S. image. Abramowitz had joined the Foreign Service in 1960 after serving in the U.S. Army. He came to his position with a lot of experience as a specialist in East Asian political/military affairs. Appointed on June 27, 1978, the ambassador explained that the United States had several reasons for wanting to help the refugees, the first being a sense of moral obligation. He said, "I think we had some feeling of guilt stemming from dumping Vietnam and helping create a vast human tragedy," meaning abandoning the country after years of intervention.<sup>817</sup> The United States was trying to clean up its mess. Another reason was that America was a nation of refugees and had plenty of experience helping displaced peoples. However, there were also security reasons. U.S. policymakers

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<sup>817</sup> Oral History, Ambassador Morton I. Abramowitz Interview, 2007, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 2/4/2016].

feared that the mass movement of people would potentially destabilize the region in general and Thailand specifically.

The USIS and the embassy coordinated trips for the news media to publicize the situation in the refugee camps. Lenderking said serving as intermediaries for news agencies did much to “generate support from back home and from other countries” to help the migrants.<sup>818</sup> Some Thai officials were afraid of the publicity, thinking that if refugees heard about the assistance they could receive, more would flood into Thailand. They also worried that all the United States cared about was giving aid to the refugees, not helping Thailand with its economy, Lenderking added.<sup>819</sup> However, once the United States government began offering large amounts of funding to the camps, Bangkok became less obstinate about letting the press publicize stories from the refugee camps.

One important visitor to the camps was First Lady Rosalynn Carter in November 1979. The purpose of the trip was to bring more public awareness to the refugee crisis and to show the Thais that the United States was doing all it could to help. Ambassador Abramowitz helped organize the visit. Lenderking remembered thinking that Mrs. Carter “was an excellent person to call attention to it [the refugee situation] in a compassionate and humanitarian fashion.”<sup>820</sup> Abramowitz said, “We had asked for a visible major response from Washington and they decided that a visit by the First Lady would have a maximum impact.”<sup>821</sup> While in Thailand, she traveled to several camps near the

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<sup>818</sup> Lenderking Interview.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

<sup>820</sup> Ibid.

<sup>821</sup> Abramowitz Interview.



Cambodian border, where she learned about the need for more humanitarian aid.<sup>822</sup> Mrs. Carter saw that the refugee issue was an immense problem with lots of suffering, disease, and starvation.<sup>823</sup> One camp in northeast Thailand had about thirty-seven thousand persons, some of whom had been there for three to four years. In a meeting with Kriangsak, Mrs. Carter ensured the prime minister that the president would know the urgency of the refugee problem. Less than a month after her visit, Carter expedited the sending of relief aid to the refugee camps. The trip helped “make the U.S. and the world understand the depth of the crisis and encourage the world to respond.”

In early 1979, Robert L. Chatten became the new head of the USIS mission. Chatten did not originally want to go to Thailand. Some thought that the USIA leadership in Washington sent him to the country as punishment for irritating the agency’s leadership.<sup>824</sup> Chatten’s time in Thailand was a painful experience from the beginning, as he spent a year learning Thai. Though he only served for two years, Chatten tried to focus USIS energy on the refugee problem and fighting the drug trade in Thailand. He said, “Everybody in the mission and practically every program in the mission had a refugee dimension superimposed upon it in one way or another.”<sup>825</sup> The biggest obstacles were

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<sup>822</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, Summary of Mrs. Carter’s Meeting with Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak,” November 11, 1979, *FRUS*, 1977-1980, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Vol. XXII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v22/d180>, [accessed 1/19/2019].

<sup>823</sup> Jimmy Carter Press Conference, “Aid for Kampucheans Remarks at a White House Meeting on Relief Efforts and the First Lady’s Trip to Thailand,” November 13, 1979, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/aid-for-kampucheans-remarks-white-house-meeting-relief-efforts-and-the-first-ladys-trip>, [accessed 12/4/2018].

<sup>824</sup> Oral History, James L. Morad Interview, June 9, 1994, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <https://memory.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004mor01/2004mor01.pdf>, [accessed 3/14/2017].

<sup>825</sup> Oral History, Robert L. Chatten Interview, July 1, 1994, p. 49, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Chatten,%20Robert%20L.toc.pdf>, [accessed 3/15/2017].

Carter's administration and the budget and staff cuts. Both Chatten and Ambassador Abramowitz disagreed with how the White House restricted the USIS ability to refocus most of the mission's programming on the refugee problem. The PAO complained that other USIS posts in the region were dealing with the same issue as Thailand and that U.S. public diplomacy needed to highlight some of America's efforts to alleviate the crisis. Chatten said that "Carter was having none of it" and did not want to devote most of the USIS resources to the refugee crisis. The mission had other objectives such as promoting U.S.-Thai relations and cultural exchange. The PAO gave no further explanation about Carter's reaction.

Another important issue in addition to human rights and the refugee crisis was drug trafficking. The policy to stop drug trafficking began under Nixon and continued into the Carter administration. Thailand's narcotics problem had grown tremendously, with some government and military officials at all levels of government partaking in the trade. After October 1976, Thai leaders began cracking down on the trade and building public awareness about the negative health impacts of using drugs. One research paper titled "A Narcotics Control Program for Southeast Asia" highlighted the role of both the USIS and Thai leadership in stymieing the trade. It explained, "For the first time, we are dealing with a Royal Thai Government whose Prime Minister wishes sincerely to move against narcotics trafficking."<sup>826</sup> USIS relations were still good with other Thai agencies. The paper reported, "Our long and close association with the Thai gives us the advantage

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<sup>826</sup> "A Narcotics Control Program for Southeast Asia," p. 5, RAC System, NLC Collection # 63-1-14-10-5, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCPL) – Atlanta, Georgia.

of a special relationship which gives us access to numerous influential people and institutions.”

U.S. officials reported to Washington that much of the Thai populace had little knowledge about the large drug addiction and trafficking problem within their own borders. The goal for the USIS was to partner with other American and Thai agencies “to stimulate an increase in the Thai anti-narcotics effort.” More importantly, the USIS needed to convince Thais to take ownership of the issue. To gain more traction against the war on drugs, the USIS established a major educational campaign to encourage more Thais to support the work.<sup>827</sup> By fighting drugs, U.S. policymakers hoped to show Thais that Americans cared about their welfare and health, and thereby rebuild the U.S. image after several years of anti-American sentiment.

All the work promoting human rights and fighting drugs put some strain on the USIS. Lenderking was concerned about the welfare of Thai public diplomacy officials working for the United States. The country plans that the Bangkok mission devised seemed too ambitious given the small staff. Lenderking said USIS-Bangkok was a “huge operation,” and the Thais were excellent workers, but it was downsizing, even if it was the second biggest post in the agency.<sup>828</sup> He was worried that closing certain branches would have a negative impact on the Thai employees. To ensure they were still cared for, Lenderking hoped to provide a plan for them so they could still have employment.

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<sup>827</sup> “Memorandum from Robert Martens and John J. Helble to Robert Oakley,” Subject Anti-Narcotics Program for Southeast Asia, March 23, 1977, p. 1-4, RAC System, NLC Collection # 63-9-9-1-6, JCPL.

<sup>828</sup> Lenderking Interview.

Eventually, Washington cut the Bangkok staff further to only nine Americans serving in the USIS in Thailand. “This doesn’t make any sense whatsoever,” the PAO protested. “We’ve got to get some people out there where the rubber meets the road...”<sup>829</sup> There was plenty of work to do: the Thai government was still fighting the CPT, the drug trade through Thailand was thriving, and refugees continued to enter the country. Chatten said Washington was “continually after us to cut staff and resources.” For the first several months of his tenure, USIS officials saw little production as they focused on balancing downsizing with trying to establish objectives and programs that would fit the capacity of the mission. Chatten described it as a cycle of making cuts one month, with the next month “spent sweeping up after it and trying to get our resource base fixed under us so that we could go about our business.”<sup>830</sup> Chatten eventually stepped down, and Washington reassigned him to Mexico.

The reduction in manpower and funding did not slow down the USIS work in areas of education and cultural exchange. In 1978, the USIS received a new director for the AUA Language Center, Harry Haven Kendall (1978–1979), a veteran of the U.S. Army Air Corps. Before arriving in Bangkok, he had been in Japan. Initially, Kendall was unsure about his new assignment, as Thailand was not on his request list. Nevertheless, he described it as “the best job I ever had in USIS.”<sup>831</sup> The exodus of several thousand university students after the October 6 coup did not negatively affect

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<sup>829</sup> Chatten Interview, p. 51-52.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>831</sup> Oral History, Harry Haven Kendall Interview, 1988, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Website, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series, <http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Thailand.pdf>, [accessed 2/4/2016].

enrollment at the AUA Language Center. The center had anywhere from seven to eight thousand students taking English language courses during 1978. Many local Thais filled teaching and other administrative positions for the AUA. In addition to language classes, the center held numerous cultural events. Kendall said the AUA “provided for a locally hired cultural director to coordinate” AUA and “USIS cultural programs.”

The results from the AUA Language Center were significant. According to Kendall, the directors of both the AUA and USIS had important social standing in Bangkok, close to that of the ambassador.<sup>832</sup> He said, “I was a member of several committees and organizations and was always given a place of honor wherever I went...” The impact of the USIS educational and cultural programs had reached a large portion of the Thai population. Kendall said, “There are literally tens of thousands of Thai citizens who have gained a working knowledge of English from the American teachers at the AUA.”<sup>833</sup> During his interview, he told a story to illustrate the widespread influence the USIS work had in Thailand. Once when the police pulled him over for driving the wrong way on a one-way street, the officer asked Kendall what his business was in Thailand. When he responded that he was the director of the AUA, the officer’s whole countenance changed immediately, and he said he had learned English at the AUA and expressed gratitude for the center’s contributions to Thailand.

#### Other Factors Working Against the CPT

It is important to note that as the USIS and MOI were engaging in massive public relations projects to stymie the communist movement, other events took place that

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<sup>832</sup> Kendall Interview.

<sup>833</sup> Ibid.

affected the CPT. In December 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia and overthrew the Khmer Rouge regime, destabilizing mainland Southeast Asia. This action caused great fear in Bangkok, as many thought the Vietnamese were going to attack Thailand next. Moreover, a new wave of refugees flooded Thailand, causing more difficulties for the government. Kriangsak's government turned to the United States for help, bringing the two nations closer together again.<sup>834</sup> The result of these events was, according to Randolph, a reaffirmation of the United States' and Thailand's "commitment under the Manila Pact as interpreted in the [1962] Rusk-Thanat Communique," which stated that the United States would help protect Thailand against communist aggression.

The USIS got involved in protesting Vietnam's foreign policy in Cambodia with a few projects centered on the refugees fleeing the country. One document stated that the organization thought "that world public opinion had not yet been properly focused on the plight of the refugees displaced by Vietnamese policy in Kampuchea."<sup>835</sup> Here was an opportunity for the USIS and the United States to influence public opinion towards favoring America's protest against Vietnam's foreign policy. There was a proposal that the USIS work with local Thai television stations to make a documentary. Thai Channel 5 showed a willingness to work with the USIS in creating a movie about the exodus of people and how the Vietnamese were to blame.

The fall of the Khmer Rouge to the Vietnamese helped the Thai government in some unforeseen ways. External events played a significant role in damaging the CPT's

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<sup>834</sup> Randolph, *The United States and Thailand*, 209-221; Abramowitz Interview.

<sup>835</sup> "Production of TV Documentary about Cambodian Refugees," 1977, RAC System, NLC Collection # 131-11-3-13-6, JCPL.

ability to pursue its people's revolution. When the Khmer Rouge fell and fled to the countryside, the Thai communists lost the use of bases for training, supplies, and recruitment in Cambodia. A more important result was the stories shared by refugees from Cambodia and Laos.<sup>836</sup> The Thai people learned from Cambodians and Laotians about atrocities committed by Pol Pot and the communist Pathet Lao. Most of the refugee camps were in the northeast, where much of the communist activity had taken place. The first-hand accounts from Cambodian and Laotian refugees helped influence anti-communist sentiments, as they seemed to coincide with the anti-communist messages that the USIS and MOI had promoted for two decades.

Soon, the conflict between different communist countries led to divisions within the CPT. Some Thai communists had grown disillusioned with Beijing's rapprochement with the United States and the RTG.<sup>837</sup> They preferred a more homegrown Thai communism. Others remained pro-Chinese and endorsed the Maoist approach to revolution. Then there was a group loyal to Hanoi. The fracturing of the international communist movement—the Chinese and Cambodian split from the Vietnamese—posed a large problem for the CPT.<sup>838</sup> Vietnam had occupied Cambodia, and in February 1979, the Chinese briefly invaded Vietnamese territory. Thai communists now had to choose sides, notwithstanding their own issues of unity within the party. Soon the Chinese, Laotians, and Vietnamese halted military aid to the CPT as they attempted to rebuild relations with the RTG. Politically, the communist governments recognized the CPT

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<sup>836</sup> Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, 282-283.

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-286.

<sup>838</sup> Baker and Pasuk, *A History of Thailand*, 196.

movement, but they could not fully endorse it. The CPT was losing external support while having lackluster results in maximizing the political achievements gained from the October 1976 coup.

In March 1980, General Prem became prime minister. For several months in late 1979 and early 1980, Kriangsak's political hold over the government had grown tenuous. Prem and the king had already developed a close relationship, and the general seemed the best candidate to replace the prime minister. He would become the Thai leader most loved by the king, even more than Sarit. For the next three years, Prem implemented his political approach to counterinsurgency through Order 66/2523 by focusing more on rural public relations. The initiative also included amnesty, promising to forgive the students and communists. By end of 1980, the CPT had lost its foreign backing and saw internal strife tear apart its movement. Before too long, the CPT only had a few hundred diehard members.

### Conclusion

The confluence of several factors led to the CPT movement's decline despite the large number of recruits and boost in morale it received after the October 1976 coup. The first factor began with rifts between communist countries in the region that impacted the CPT, causing conflict and schisms within the party. The group lost its funding from the Laotian, Vietnamese, and Chinese governments as the RTG tried to normalize relations with them. Second, the Thai government under Kriangsak, and more so under Prem, found a political strategy to pacify the countryside and combat communist influence with more people-centered policies, like those already used by the USIS and MOI.



However, the third, and arguably equally important, factor was the policies and programs of the USIS and MOI. The latter took on a bigger role in public relations as the former had to downsize. The MOI and CDD trained local leaders and youth to understand their roles in Thai society and how to uphold national dignity in the face of the communist movement. The USIS was able to orchestrate cultural and education exchange programs to reach out to Thai students, intellectuals, and elites. It helped promote U.S.-Thai relations and the positive results of their association. In the areas of human rights, the drug trade, and refugees, the USIS tried to show the Thai people that America was still there to help the nation overcome some of its national crises. With Carter's human rights agenda, the USIS faced some challenges. It was selective in its approach so as not to offend the Thai government and incur more anti-American criticism. It used the refugee crisis to promote human rights by publicizing the conditions in the camps and how the United States was providing aid. With the war on drugs, USIS officials helped the RTG and U.S. government by building public awareness about the harmfulness of narcotics.

Absent from the literature about Thai history during the late 1970s are the roles of the USIS and MOI. The monarchy was an important institution that Thais did not want to see go away. The CPT's version of patriotism did not include some of the pillars of Thai nationalism such as the monarchy and Buddhism. The USIS and MOI promotion of nationalism, democracy with the king as head of state, and modernization were important parts of the battle over hearts and minds. Both organizations were able to show that Thai and American ideas and policies could coexist and help Thailand. The U.S. and Thai

governments saw the importance of spreading their ideas and making people more aware of the dangers of communism and the benefits of U.S.-Thai relations.

## CONCLUSION

In May 2014, with the support of the monarchy, Thai General Prayuth Chan-o-cha orchestrated a coup against democratically elected Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and her government. Military and palace leaders feared that Yingluck's government and supporters (mostly from rural areas) would shift the political balance of power in their favor. Some Thais supported the intervention of the king and military, viewing Yingluck's government as corrupt and anti-monarchy. King Bhumibol, believed by Thais to be a demi-god and righteous ruler, was still widely popular. The military tried to shield itself from criticism by maintaining that it was trying to protect the monarchy. It cracked down on the opposition, jailing hundreds. The U.S. government responded by suspending military and economic aid and threatening to cancel the annual joint military exercise called Cobra Gold for 2015.<sup>839</sup> However, the United States did not call off the exercises and President Barack Obama decided to continue giving military aid, explaining that he wanted to maintain relations with Thailand to meet China's growing power.<sup>840</sup> Even with the tensions, relations remained close between the two countries.<sup>841</sup> This event in 2014 was not out of the ordinary, as the military and monarchy had both intervened to change

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<sup>839</sup> "Thai-U.S. Launch Cobra Gold Military Exercises Amid Tensions over Coup," *Military Times*, February 9, 2015, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2015/02/09/thai-u-s-launch-cobra-gold-military-exercise-amid-tensions-over-coup/> [accessed 2/19/2019].

<sup>840</sup> "Thailand's Aid: The U.S. Ignores the Law on Military Funding," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 27, 2016, <https://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/editorials/2016/01/28/Thailand-s-aid-The-U-S-ignores-the-law-on-military-funding/stories/201601280019> [accessed 2/19/2019].

<sup>841</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Moving the U.S.-Thailand Alliance Forward," August 7, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/moving-us-thailand-alliance-forward> [accessed 2/19/2019]; see also, Panu Wongcha-um, Patpicha Tanakasempipat, and Donna Airoidi, "Trump-Prayuth Meet to Seal Normalization of Thai-U.S. Relations," *Reuters*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-thailand-us-prayuth-trump/trump-prayuth-meet-to-seal-normalisation-of-thai-u-s-relations-idUKKCN1C40RT> [accessed 2/19/2019].

the Thai government in 1957, 1971, 1976, 1992, and 2006 and the United States did little in response.

One of the reasons that the Thai military and monarchy have maintained control over politics is because of the public diplomacy and public relations programs the USIS and MOI implemented during the Cold War and U.S. intervention. From 1957 to 1979, the U.S. and Thai governments employed both groups' resources to promote Thai nationalism and anti-communist ideas and programs. Institutions like the monarchy and Buddhism were portrayed and publicized as being crucial to Thai society, history, and the nation. The USIS, MOI, military government, and monarchy showed anti-communism as the antithesis of what it meant to be Thai, to strong U.S.-Thai relations, and the country's efforts to modernize. The regime, monarchy, and Buddhist church saw their political power and public prestige strengthened during the Cold War. Many Thais accepted these ideas promoted and they remained a major force in Thai political and public rhetoric, education, and history up to the present day. All who opposed the military, monarchy, Buddhist church, anti-communist programs, and modernization were labeled traitors, communists, and non-Thai. Few disagreed.

This dissertation began with a look at the years 1957 to 1963 and how Sarit, the monarchy, the USIS, and the MOI promoted the new leadership in Bangkok and its close relationship with the United States. Sarit had a twin policy of embracing Thai democracy based on the ideas of economic development and the king as head of state and the embodiment of the will of the people. The regime and palace members perpetuated the idea of a divine king. The monarchy had been sidelined from politics in 1932 and it seemed King Bhumibol was trying to make up for lost time. When a civil war broke out

in Laos, Sarit and the king turned to the United States for more aid and protection. Both governments increasingly used the USIS and MOI to heighten the fear of a communist threat from within and from Laos. Washington and Bangkok worried the conflict in Laos would spread into the northeast region, an area inhabited by ethnic Laotians. This period laid the foundation for an anti-communist, military-monarchical state that would endure throughout the Cold War. The task of the USIS and MOI was to help promote close U.S.-Thai relations, anti-communism, the regime, and the monarchy.

The death of Sarit in 1963 coincided with the increase of American and Thai involvement in Vietnam and growing tensions between the RTG and the hill tribes. Thanom and Praphat came to power and continued many of Sarit's policies, such as having close ties with the United States, opposing communism, and building up the monarchy. USIS and MOI work expanded in the areas of mass media, training provincial leaders, counterinsurgency operations, and cultural exchanges. These programs came at an important time, as the conflict in South Vietnam had escalated. Thailand became a base for U.S. air and counterinsurgency missions in the region. The USIS, MOI, and the military-monarchical oligarchy sold the Vietnam conflict to the Thai people as a way of protecting the country from communism. As a result, Thailand saw a huge influx of American soldiers, whose presence and actions caused tension with locals. Thais complained that the troops were offensive and showed little respect for local culture and customs. The CPT tried to use the Thai people's grievances as a recruiting tool. At the same time, the hill tribes felt the encroachment of the Thai government. They resisted programs that tried to make them into Thais culturally. Some joined the CPT as a way of reclaiming their autonomy. The USIS worked with local military leaders to orchestrate

troop-community relations programs. They gave humanitarian aid, built schools, worked on infrastructure, and taught English. MOI officials worked with the hill tribes by giving them land on which to practice sedentary farming and to grow crops other than poppy. They initiated programs to help ethnic minorities feel part of the Thai nation.

The period of 1968 to 1972 was a time of much transition. The Tet Offensive brought about large changes in U.S.-Thai relations. President Johnson responded by opening negotiations with Hanoi and deciding not to seek reelection. Bangkok grew scared, as it looked like its American patron was losing its resolve to fight communism. Thailand did not want to be left alone to fight the CPT and communist forces in the region. There were still issues of the bad conduct of U.S. soldiers, the CPT insurgency, and the hill tribes. The USIS saw its funding and responsibilities decrease because Nixon wanted the Thais to take more control over public relations programs. Nevertheless, the U.S. and Thai governments still employed the services of the USIS and MOI. Student and cultural exchanges, and troop-community relations programs were important in showing a positive side of Americans, in contrast to the soldiers' rowdy behavior. Mass media conveyed the benefits of U.S.-Thai relations. The RTG and MOI responded to the change by engaging in more rural information and public relations activities. The USIS continued to help with funding, training, and mass media but left much of the rural work, counterinsurgency operations, and promotion of the monarchy to the MOI. As head of the MOI, Praphat wanted the ministry to reach out more to ethnic minorities so they would feel the government cared for them and that they were part of the Thai nation. Bangkok had to show it was a better alternative than the CPT.

A new concern for the RTG and U.S. government during this time was the student population. Many young people who had studied in the United States and taken courses with visiting American professors wanted Thailand to have democracy and free elections. The students mobilized and protested the military government. The USIS and MOI established public relations programs to build strong cultural and educational relations with college students and rural youth. They tried to show that the Thai government, along with the United States, heard the young people's voices and were trying to meet their needs.

A major turning point in Thai history took place in October 1973, when a student-led protest forced Thanom and Praphat to resign, ushering in democracy and a civilian government. This transition brought about many changes. The new leadership under Kukrit, a royalist and anti-communist, was less conservative; he pursued a more neutral foreign policy and some political reform. Yet at the same time, the new government did not want to jeopardize close ties with the United States, especially as communists took over in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in 1975. The fear of Thailand becoming the next domino to fall made many Thai conservatives, elites, royalists, and right-wing groups protest some of the changes brought about in 1973 and the student activism. The USIS continued highlighting the benefits of close U.S.-Thai relations. The agency focused on the economic, technological, and educational dimensions of America's contributions to Thailand. The USIS also promoted the many development and humanitarian programs in the countryside. The MOI worked with youth and students to indoctrinate them with ideas of Thai nationalism. Thai leaders did not want the young people in the rural areas to follow the same path as their counterparts in the cities and

universities. MOI groups also wanted to incorporate the hill tribes and the Muslim population in the south. For decades, Muslim Thais had considered themselves to be autonomous of Bangkok. Some Islamic groups started pushing for independence through armed insurgency. The MOI turned some of its attention to the south to establish public relations units and programs to teach Thai, educate the people, and develop their villages.

Thailand's military returned to power in 1976 to protect the monarchy and country from communists. The new military regime arrested and killed thousands of students and dissidents. Many of those who escaped joined the communist movement. The government re-strengthened relations with the United States, requesting more military and economic aid. It made eradicating the CPT its main goal. King Bhumibol, who had helped the students in 1973, supported the military. With the threat of a possible communist invasion from Thailand's neighbors and the demise of the monarchy in Laos, the king saw danger for his country and his rule.

Though the United States had left the region militarily, the USIS still had small-scale public diplomacy operations in the country. It focused on mass media and student and cultural exchanges. Many of the USIS messages and programs promoted building relations between the two peoples instead of directly espousing anti-communism. USIS officials highlighted the many economic and infrastructure projects conducted by the U.S. government. The MOI had a much larger task as the CPT insurgency had intensified after several thousand students joined the movement. The MOI coordinated with the Thai military to expand civic action programs, public relations units, and training for local leaders. The RTG and the army adopted a softer approach against counterinsurgency, using the same ideas the USIS and MOI had already practiced for a couple of decades. In



addition to the public diplomacy and public relations programs, other factors began to impact the communists. Divisions within the CPT and among the Asian communist nations hurt the group's ability to engage in a people's revolution. By 1980, the communist movement had died down dramatically and ceased to pose any threat.

This dissertation on USIS and MOI activities is significant for what it contributes to the literature on U.S.-Thai relations outside of the economic and military viewpoints. The roles of the USIS and MOI during the years of 1957 and 1979 show a different aspect of the relationship between the two countries. As discussed in the introduction, most of the work on U.S.-Thai relations is one-sided, with most narratives covering the U.S. perspective.<sup>842</sup> This dissertation illuminates the Thai perspective showing how Bangkok saw communism as a threat to the nation and wanted to promote the monarchy and Buddhism as a means of influencing public opinion.

This dissertation also shows another aspect of nation-building that includes public diplomacy. Part of creating the Thai nation was unifying the people, in part by promoting a set of political and cultural ideas that most could understand. The USIS, MOI, monarchy, and U.S. and Thai governments saw promoting Buddhism, the king, and economic development as important to building a nation. Most of the Thai people were already Buddhists. The monarchy had been a sacred institution for several centuries. Economic modernization and prosperity were to help strengthen the prestige of the country. The USIS and MOI created and supported many civic groups and institutions

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<sup>842</sup> Wilson, *The United States and the Future of Thailand*; Darling, *Thailand and the United States*; Fineman, *A Special Relationship*; Jackson and Wiwat, *United States-Thailand Relations*; Randolph, *The United States and Thailand*; Kislenco, "Bamboo in the Wind;" Flynn, "Preserving the Hub;" Surchart, *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule*.

that played parts in the nation-building process, such as the Boy Scouts, BPP, Village Scouts, and various student organizations. The USIS was involved in education and cultural exchanges to build relations with and influence intellectuals and technocrats.

Both governments saw the utility of public diplomacy programs to help keep the country stable. Washington understood that communism would inhibit the United States from implementing its policies in the country and region. U.S. leaders believed that supporting the Thai military regime and the monarchy would help to stymie communism. This dissertation shows how the USIS and MOI and other U.S. and Thai organizations interacted to influence the hearts and minds of the people against communism. Thai leaders, from Sarit and King Bhumibol to mid-level officials like the MOI's Dr. Malai Huvanandana and Buddhist extremist Kittivudho tried to convince Thais that communism was wrong for Thailand and that only by staying true to indigenous ideas would the nation remain strong and adhere to Buddhist teachings. There was also a host of USIS PAOs representing the United States in the country through public diplomacy campaigns, visits to rural villages, and interacting with students and elite figures. I argue that to better understand U.S.-Thai relations during the Cold War, it is important to employ both American and Thai documents to see both perspectives and to learn about the work of individuals orchestrating and carrying out the public diplomacy and public relations programs.

Some U.S. policymakers during the Vietnam War wanted to draw lessons from U.S. involvement in both Vietnam and Thailand. In early 1966, Chester L. Cooper of the National Security Council staff told the Counterinsurgency Special Group that "there should be a conscious and systematic cross-fertilization of our experience in Vietnam

with the problems in Thailand.”<sup>843</sup> He understood the danger of indiscriminately applying the same policies to two situations that seemed similar on the surface, but he urged that there had to be some ideas that Americans in Thailand and Vietnam could use. However, available USIA sources did not indicate whether Washington transferred any policies from Thailand to Vietnam or vice versa.

In looking more closely at the USIS, this dissertation analyzes the agency’s impact on Thailand. Previous literature focuses little on how the target populations received public diplomacy programs, it instead looks primarily at the agency’s overall mission from the perspective of the directors.<sup>844</sup> Thailand is a case study in how USIS and MOI public relations programs were implemented and received in the villages, in the cities, and among the hill tribes. Some Thai responded well, while others, like ethnic minorities balked at the Thai government’s intervention. This dissertation examines how American and Thai officials adapted the agency’s goals and programs to fit the local context and political situation. For example, the USIS and MOI used the musical art form *mohlam* to convey message related to anti-communism. Not all went smoothly. As was seen in chapter four, USIS leaders came into conflict with agency directors and policymakers in Washington. USIA director Frank Shakespeare and Kissinger both thought public diplomacy officials were too involved in promoting Thai ideas and institutions instead of American philosophies and interests.

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<sup>843</sup> Report from Chester L. Cooper of the National Security Council Staff to the Special Group (Counter Insurgency), February 28, 1966, FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVII, Document 310, accessed 3/21/16, [<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v27/d310>]

<sup>844</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*.

A major argument of this dissertation is that USIS and MOI activities and U.S. involvement in Thailand helped combat the CPT movement and limit its progress. The CPT had little ability to project its power into the main metropolitan areas and beyond the wooded mountainous regions, except through radio and literature. Some of these limitations were due to the Thai government's military capabilities. Nevertheless, the communists had no chance of convincing most Thais to overthrow the government and monarchy and turn their backs on modernization. As John L.S. Girling argued, the CPT lacked "nationalist credentials."<sup>845</sup> The USIS and MOI, along with the military and monarchy, perpetuated Thai nationalism throughout the country until it became an integral part of Thai society, politics, and education. Communist messages could not compete.<sup>846</sup> Even if there was no real threat of the Communists taking over the country, the CPT still had moderate levels of control over areas in the north, northeast, and south. With this influence, the CPT threatened to disrupt Thai and U.S. policies of nation-building, creating stability, and projecting Bangkok's political authority into the borderlands. USIS and MOI public relations programs, in conjunction with military campaigns and infrastructural development, helped the military and monarchy promote their institutions and their policies to rural Thais and hill tribes. They facilitated the U.S. and Thai governments' anti-communist messages. The USIS, MOI, and the United States helped the military-monarchy oligarchy establish a presence in the countryside and exercise political and military authority. Without the overall U.S. involvement in

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<sup>845</sup> Girling, *Thailand, Society, and Politics*, 253.

<sup>846</sup> Stephen I. Alpern, "Insurgency in Northeast Thailand: A New Cause for Alarm," *Asian Survey* Vol. 15, No. 8 (August 1975): 684.

Thailand, the Thai government would have had a much harder time fighting the CPT insurgency militarily, but more importantly it would have had more difficulty building a Thai nation based on the military government and monarchy.

This dissertation also has significance beyond academia. There are some important lessons to draw from USIS and MOI programs in Thailand during the Cold War, the first being that the promotion of the military and monarchy helped build the political power and public popularity of these two groups that has continued to the present day. The military, with royal backing, used violence, intimidation, and corruption to maintain power. Despite this, they had some success in using public relations to gain the support of the Thai people. Public relations efforts built and perpetuated a certain type of Thai identity based on loyalty to the king, adherence to Buddhism, and anti-communism. The U.S. and Thai governments used these ideas to unite the Thai people, while showing that U.S. concepts like modernization could support native traditions. Military leaders, King Bhumibol, the MOI, and the USIS created a narrative of the Thai nation and especially of the monarchy that consisted of primordial themes, linking the contemporary with an ancient mythical and sacred past, such as connections to kings Ramkhamhaeng and Naresuan. However, as nationalistic ideas tried to unify the country, they also divided it. Public diplomacy and public relations campaigns created enemies out of Thai students, liberals, hill tribes, and communists. All who opposed the government were characterized as anti-monarchy and communists. By promoting Thai nationalism and anti-communism in these ways, both ideas became embedded in the culture. These concepts have endured from the Cold War to the present day, even as King

Bhumibol passed away in 2016 and his son King Vajiralongkorn has ascended to the throne.

Though communism is no longer a threat in Thailand today, the military government and monarchy have some of the same enemies as during the Cold War, with new ones from the rural areas. For example, some students and liberals still push for democracy but are attacked and labeled as anti-monarchy or not truly Thai. Interestingly, people living outside of central Thailand have become a new opposition group to the military, upper-class, and members of the palace. They are frustrated by political corruption and the lack of economic opportunities in the country. And similar to the Cold War period, many rural Thais think that Bangkok and the government neglect their needs. Assassinations of liberal and rural activists by the military government have increased as a result.<sup>847</sup>

Another important conclusion of this dissertation is that U.S. intervention in Thailand helped the Thai military and monarchy blunt the development of democracy. One USIA mandate was to spread American political ideas like liberalism, civil liberties, capitalism, and democracy. However, U.S. public diplomacy officials rarely had the promotion of democracy as part of their country plans. Thais learned about it through educational exchanges, classes at the universities, and literature. One reason for the absence of liberalism in public diplomacy was to avoid upsetting the military government. Another was simply that combatting communism and promoting the monarchy and military government, both opposed to political reform, were more

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<sup>847</sup> “Thai Police says Bodies from River were Missing Activists,” *Associated Press*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/46be62385c4e40aea66fe5881a7492ed> [accessed 2/14/2019].

important. Students and liberals thought King Bhumibol was a supporter of democracy in 1973 when he forced Thanom and Praphat out of power, but it was in fact a public relation move to build his own popularity. Since the time of Sarit, the regime and MOI promoted a Thai style democracy, with the king as head of state. Thai leaders said they already had democracy, it just was not the same as the west. The 1976 coup showed the monarchy's true colors as an institution that had little desire to relinquish political power to the people. This same obstruction to the development of democracy was seen recently in Thailand. The military and monarchy have allowed elections from time-to-time, and civilian governments have come to power, but when conservatives see policies that threaten their monopoly over politics, the military, with royal sanction, steps in to remove the government. As stated earlier, the military has intervened in 1992, 2006, and 2014 to overthrow democratically elected governments. To further secure the junta's political power, the new monarch King Vajiralongkorn signed a constitution that gave the military more ability to remove civilian governments as deemed necessary.<sup>848</sup> In 2018, Prime Minister Prayuth promised to allow elections for early 2019 but with stipulations, specifically that the military would have extra powers to intervene in politics.<sup>849</sup>

Now to discuss whether USIS and MOI programs were successful in influencing hearts and minds against communism and in supporting U.S. and Thai policies. It is difficult to measure if a public relations poster or radio program convinced someone to

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<sup>848</sup> Oliver Holmes, "Thailand's King Signs Constitution that Cements Junta's Grip," *The Guardian*, April 6, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/06/thailand-king-signs-constitution-path-polls-election> [accessed 2/14/2019].

<sup>849</sup> Richard S. Ehrlich, "Thai Military Leader's Plan for Regime Election Loss: Unleash Coup to Quell 'Riots,'" *The Washington Times*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/oct/22/thailand-military-coup-threatened-if-regime-loses/> [accessed 2/14/2019].

believe or act a certain way. The USIS conducted opinion polls about Thai people's political leanings and thoughts on U.S. foreign policy. U.S. public diplomacy officials had research projects on people's media preferences, how they received their news, and what types of information programs they liked. However, from available sources the USIS did not track if a specific pamphlet, book, movie, radio program, or humanitarian project changed anyone's political views. Some USIS officials did share anecdotes about students and government leaders who studied in the United States and then upon returning established organizations like the AUA to continue facilitating relations between the two countries. These Thai individuals became strong advocates of U.S.-Thai relations. According to MOI reports, public relations campaigns with rural youth and ethnic minorities seemed to have some positive results. Ministry officials defined success by counting the number of young people who participated in training programs or joined an organization. Other times, Thai leaders just simply said that a public relation event or training program was successful without giving any evidence. Nevertheless, the promotion of the monarchy and Thai nationalism seemed to be congruent with what many people already believed. Thais did not reject the portrayal of King Bhumibol as a deva-raja and arguments made by the government that said to be a true Thai, one had to adhere to Buddhist principles. The USIS and MOI figured out that to reach hearts and minds, they had to use ideas that the Thai people could understand.

Furthermore, USIS and MOI promotion of the monarchy seemed to also coincide with King Bhumibol's rise in political power and popularity. As explained early in the dissertation, from 1932 to 1957, the monarchy's role in politics had diminished slowly. Fortunes changed for the royal institution when Sarit came to power in 1957. Soon the



king grew more popular as he increased his travels throughout the country performing religious rituals and participating in events put on by the government and by grassroots organizations. The USIS and MOI further enhanced King Bhumibol's image through mass media, by giving all Thais a chance to learn about the monarchy and see the king's righteous works. By the 1970s, King Bhumibol was the most powerful political, cultural, and religious figure in the country. Even years after the end of the Cold War, the king remain an integral figure in Thai culture. Millions of Thais were devastated when King Bhumibol passed away in 2016. The country mourned the king's death by wearing all black clothes. Some Thais chose to wear black for a whole year to show their respect, while government employees were mandated to do so. Time will tell if King Bhumibol's son Vajiralongkorn, who is known by the public as corrupt and highly immoral, will live up to his father's prestige. The public diplomacy and public relations of the USIS and MOI had a lasting impact on Thailand's history by helping to nurture close relations between the United States and Thailand, to support the political power of the military government, and to build the religious, cultural, and public prestige of the monarchy. Both organizations were critical to influencing the hearts and minds of the Thai people.

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