

CHAPTER IX

DEVELOPMENT OF THAI COIN

Doctrinal development of Thai COIN grew as the government faced an expanding communist insurgency. Beginning in roughly 1950, the Communist Party of Thailand embraced the Maoist Revolutionary model, and in a direct challenge to the Thai government, adopted people's war as its strategy to completely transform society. Thailand's answer to this challenge would eventually influence its policies in dealing with the southern separatist movements as well.

9.1 Communist Movement in Thailand.

In a white paper published by the Communist Suppression Operation Command (CSOC) in 1972, the Thai government detailed the growth of the communist movement and the measures implemented to counter its expansion.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, communist cadres from both China and Vietnam crossed the border and began to recruit members of their respective communities working as laborers in Thailand.¹ The Thai chapter of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was established soon after the 1932 coup. Soon thereafter the "1933 Act Concerning Communism" was enacted, outlawing all radical thought and in effect suppressing the movement until the outbreak of WWII.²

In December 1942, CCP agents who had entered Thailand earlier convened a meeting with their Thai counterparts. It was at this First Party Congress that the Thai

¹ "Communist Movement in Thailand" Communist Suppression Operations Command. 1972: p.2.

² Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.31.

Chapter of the CCP officially became known as the Thai Communist Party (TCP) and would begin to work directly on propaganda and organization of Thais and Sino Thais.³ By the wars end the party had split to become the TCP and the Chinese Communist Party of Thailand (CCPT), and continued to influence Chinese language press, schools, and the Chinese community in general. Following the 1949 Communist Revolution in China, the TCP was tasked to “pursue the communist aims of overthrowing the government...with assistance and support given by the Chinese communists.”⁴ Party members began a propaganda campaign among rice mill workers in BKK, later spreading to laborers of other industries.⁵

At the 2d Congress of the TCP in 1952, the official name was again changed to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and a central committee was formed. The Maoist influence on the party became clear in the adoption of theory of “encircling the cities from the countryside”; in that the rural areas would be occupied first in order to establish bases, and then later seize cities by force.⁶ Later in the decade, CPT members were for the first time taken out of the country for training in China, North Vietnam, and Laos.⁷

9.1.1 Goals of the CPT

The goal of the communist insurgents was political. They aimed to restructure the existing systems of social stratification and to redistribute political power by seizing the reins of the state. Because there were no peaceful means to employ, having been officially frozen out of the system, violence became their principle instrument.⁸

³ “Communist Movement in Thailand” Communist Suppression Operations Command. 1972: p.3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. p.31.

⁷ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.32.

⁸ Ibid.

Additionally, the vagaries and broad definition of communist activity in the 1952 Anti Communist act in fact alienated many who merely disagreed with government policy or expressed new progressive political ideas.⁹ With Bangkok being completely unreceptive to any sort of political reform, even non Communist political opponents would have been forced to choose sides as they would have been perceived as being anti government. Loyalties were up for grabs.

9.1.2 CPT and the Maoist model

The CPT formally adopted the Maoist strategy of a “revolutionary armed struggle” at the 3d Party Congress of 1961. The CPT guerilla units in the jungle were armed, organized, and proceeded to not only to mobilize the masses but simultaneously provided military training as well. While creating their counterstate, the CPT deliberately avoided combat with government forces so as to develop stronger control of base areas, pursuant to the Maoist template of strategic defense. With an immediate aim of “deceiving the people into thinking the government is neither capable nor interested in improving the lot of the people,” the CPT painted their struggle as a war of national liberation like so many others in this time period.¹⁰

Although insurgent activity was centered in the northeast, conflict would take place in the north and south as well. Contributing to this was the fact that each of these areas possessed features that fostered unrest. As such, each was susceptible to revolutionary action due to economic, cultural, and political characteristics that were different from “Thainess” as perceived by the center. The northeast Issan region was economically poor for a number of reasons, suffering from uneven rainfall, poor soils, low per capita income (6% of the national average), and widespread debt. In addition, it was culturally distinct that the people were Thai-Lao in orientation. In the north, the CPT

⁹ Kanok Wongtrangan, Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy. ISIS Occasional Paper 1, Chulalongkorn University, 1983: p.3.

¹⁰ “Communist Movement in Thailand” Communist Suppression Operations Command. 1972: p.7.

was able to exploit tribal grievances among the Hmong, and it managed to recruit in greater numbers.¹¹ Similarly, in the south, the CPT attempted to take advantage of the existing ethno-religious tension and “launched propaganda denouncing the Royal Thai Government and incited Muslim Thais...to join hands with the communists”.¹² True to the Maoist model, the CPT deliberately concentrated its activity mainly in rural areas plagued by poverty and politically marginalized from the government.¹³

All the while, the CPT engaged in “deception, terrorism, vengeance, coercion, and assassination” targeting administration officials, health workers, teachers, and village leaders.¹⁴ The Thai security forces responded with hundreds of arrests and repressive measures towards the local populace, loyalties which were previously up for grabs gravitated toward the communists providing the movement with an increasing mass base in support.¹⁵ “Officialdom was its own enemy, turning ordinary villagers into communist sympathizers determined to avenge the wrongs perpetrated.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, CSOC believed that its “countermeasures and unrelenting sweep operations...inflicted not inconsiderable losses on CPT organization to the extent, sometimes, of dampening down communist insurgent activities for a long period.”¹⁷

In August 1965, after numerous “mopping up operations and large scale arrests” the very first armed clash between the CPT and security forces took place in Nakhon Phanom, marking the move from strategic defensive to strategic stalemate. The CPT referred to it as Gun Firing Day.¹⁸ 1965 would mark a change in Thai COIN strategy.

¹¹ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.33.

¹² “Communist Movement in Thailand” Communist Suppression Operations Command. 1972: p.21.

¹³ Tom Marks., “Thailand: Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory.” *Military Review*, January-February 2007: p.36.

¹⁴ “Communist Movement in Thailand” Communist Suppression Operations Command. 1972. p.7.

¹⁵ Tom Marks, “Thailand: Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory.” *Military Review*, January-February 2007: p.36.

¹⁶ Prem Tinsulanonda, address, “Thai Experience in Combating Insurgency”, Manila. 4 March 1995.

¹⁷ “Communist Movement in Thailand” Communist Suppression Operations Command. 1972: p.6.

¹⁸ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p. 32.

9.2 Thai COIN Concept

According to an occasional paper published by the Institute of Security and International Studies at Chulalongkorn University in 1983, author Kanok Wongtrangan traces the conceptual development of Thai counterinsurgency during the Communist Insurgency of the 1960s and 1970s. During this time period, which again has been referred to by historians as the “insurgency era”, Thai COIN evolved through three distinct policy periods in which the Royal Thai government applied various measures in response to the insurgency; the Suppression Period (1962-1968), the Isolation Period (1969- 1974) and Popular Mobilization Period (1974-1983). Throughout each phase, Thai policy makers continued to apply an adopted Western approach where the overall strategy was to eliminate the insurgents and encourage faith in government officials as well as stimulate public willingness to fight the guerillas through mixture of military activity and civic action projects.¹⁹ This strategy exemplifies the nexus between security and development and was applied using three specific measures; 1) Military/security operations against the insurgents, 2) population and resources control, 3) elimination of grievances.²⁰ It will be shown that the third concept required the greatest amount of adjustment, in that eventually political and social development schemes were demonstrated to be more effective in eliminating grievances than simply economic and development solutions.

9.2.1 Suppression Period

In 1962 the National Security Command (NSC) was established under the Ministry of Defense in response to the growing communist insurgency in the northeast and southern provinces. The concept of design was a combination of military and

“Communist Movement in Thailand” Communist Suppression Operations Command. 1972: p.5.

¹⁹ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.72.

²⁰ Ibid. p.41.

civilian agencies into one field unit. In this early period the government's basic objectives were: 1) eliminate all communist terrorists, 2) secure the loyalty of the people, 3) motivate the people to resist communism.

In addition to the basic overlying objectives, the NSC aimed at helping the rural people improve their livelihood and security, in line with Sarit's earlier national development policy that aimed to "raise social and economic conditions in order to convince the locals of the good intentions of the Thai government."²¹ In the early 1960s, the RTG continued to broaden its rural development programs based on the idea that advancing peoples' economic welfare would eventually eliminate grievances by removing the objective conditions of poverty which could be exploited by the CPT.²² Through civilian agencies such as the Department of Community Development, Accelerated Rural Development, and the Mobile Development Unit the RTG sought to win the loyalty of villagers and obtain cooperation and information by building of schools, roads, wells, medical services and so on. All the while, the army was responsible for not only providing security but conducting active counterinsurgency operations throughout the affected provinces. Kanok writes, "In general the NSC operations aimed at prevention and suppression that is improving villagers living conditions to prevent them from supporting the communist insurgents and, at the same time exercising physical force, e.g. military operations, to suppress communist activities. However, in reality, the NSC placed more emphasis on military suppression because it believed that the communist insurgency could be easily suppressed in its early stage of development."²³ This suppression strategy was focused against combatants, and sought to suppress

²¹ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories" Policy Studies 35 (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.56.

²² Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.110.

²³ Kanok Wongtrangan, Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy. ISIS Occasional Paper 1. Chulalongkorn University, 1983: p.4.

opposition by brute force rather than attempting to assuage popular discontent fueling the insurgency.²⁴

In 1965 the Communist Suppression Command (CSC) was created as a central organization designed to specifically deal with the communist insurgency. The CSC was not to be directly involved in operations, but would rather serve as the planning and coordinating center. The strategic concept was to utilize existing police, military, and civilian agencies in a coordinating fashion, yet still the emphasis was on physical suppression.²⁵ This is due to the fact that while CSC served as a joint headquarters for coordination, it had no operational control over army units, and as such army commanders continued to conduct operations as they saw fit.

An example of this is a joint suppression operation called the 0910 plan conducted in 1966-67. Kanok writes that the objectives of the plan were to “clear guerillas from the target area, provide local security, stimulate civilian action, and initiate short term development projects. In short, its aim was to locate and destroy communist insurgents as well as isolate them from the people.”²⁶ The 0910 plan’s methodology was to provide village-recruited and trained security forces for critical areas; improving communications between villagers and government authorities; increasing civic action programs; and developing an information and psychological operations program for the benefit of the rural population. Conceptually, direct operations against the communist terrorists were, by contrast, only a secondary priority.²⁷ In reality, however, the focus was on physical suppression by police and military forces, and cooperation failed as each

²⁴ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.110.

²⁵ Kanok Wongtrangan, Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy. ISIS Occasional Paper 1. Chulalongkorn University, 1983: p.5.

²⁶ Ibid. p.6.

²⁷ Saiyud Kerdphol, The Struggle for Thailand: Counterinsurgency 1965-1985. Bangkok: S Research Center, 1986: p.28.

pursued their own plan and program.²⁸ They did not cooperate, and instead proceeded in the traditional military fashion most resented by local people: search and destroy.²⁹

9.2.2 Isolation Period

Soon after its formation, a respected officer named Saiyud Kerdpol was placed in command of CSC. His experience in covert operations in Laos as well as his appreciation for the British COIN model applied in Malaya prepared him to look for new solutions. Kerdpol realized that despite the creation of an agency dedicated to combating the insurgency, the CSC, and in fact the RTG, was still focused on counterinsurgency operations, not an overall COIN campaign. He believed that the older generation of RTA officers did not understand COIN or the fundamental causes which fed revolt. Saiyud “understood immediately that we were dealing with a political problem... (find out) the reasons for popular discontent... figure out the solutions, then implement and coordinate.”³⁰ In reorganizing CSC, he worked to implement true civil-political-military (CPM) approach with coordinated application of all resources to the insurgent problem following the British model. Yet despite having a logical response to the structural causes of the insurgency, Saiyud continued to meet resistance from regional army commanders who were reluctant to deploy forces in support of “secondary” missions. And remaining consistent with its political traditions, Bangkok was completely unresponsive to any idea of political reform, even in the interests of winning over communist sympathies.

By 1969, after the failure of physical suppression measures, the government changed its strategy to a concept of isolation. The CSC was renamed the Communist

²⁸ Kanok Wongtrangan, *Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy*. ISIS Occasional Paper 1. Chulalongkorn University, 1983: p.6.

²⁹ Tom Marks., “Thailand: Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory.” *Military Review*, January-February 2007: p.39.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.38.

Suppression Operations Command and along with a name change came organizational and policy changes. The principal policy of the government was to establish a combined force of civilians, police, and military to contain and suppress communists. Each agency was to conduct its normal routines but close cooperation in formulating and implementing plans was called for. The responsibilities delineated were:

1. Civilian agencies were responsible for the protection of life and property as well as the promotion of local government. They were to help develop the human resources in order to improve incomes and living conditions, as well as cooperate with the military and police.
2. Police officials were responsible for blocking or severing links between villagers and the communists, containing communist expansion, and enforcing the laws.
3. The military was responsible for attacking and destroying communist bases, supplies, training camps.

The importance of this change in strategy is that it indicates the government's acceptance of the failure of its earlier counterinsurgency concepts based on physical suppression alone. The new concept emphasized that in order to minimize the insurgent influence on the people, they must be separated or isolated from the people. Their support would be cut off from the village and their activities would be minimized. This strategy provided for effective coordination of civilian, military, and police efforts to prevent and suppress insurgent activities, physical suppression being an active measure and development a passive measure.

Yet despite the appreciation of an applied CPM approach at undermining the insurgency, the RTG still did not grasp the concept of applying political solutions to a political problem. They continued to respond with force and economic initiative rather

than development of the constitutive system.³¹ Elimination of grievances emphasized providing resources and resolving economic complaints as opposed to rectifying weaknesses of the political system. As Wongtrangan illustrates, “the government did not take the ideological conflicts between the CPT and the government into serious consideration... The CPT (did) not conduct its armed struggle to force more development projects, such as roads, schools, or wells from the government. On the contrary, the CPT (fought) for fundamental change of the existing system, both political and economic.”³²

9.2.3 Popular Mobilization Period

In November 1973, Prem Tinsulanond assumed deputy command of the Second Regional Army. At that time, the Second Army, which was responsible for all COIN programs in Issan, began to develop a new policy under his direction. Prem was a professional colleague of Saiyud, and he began to modify the latter’s original CPM approach by specifically addressing its political aspects.³³

By 1976, when Prem became overall commander, he began to implement a new conceptual approach to COIN in the Second Region. His Chief of Staff at the time was Harn Linanon. Linanon recognized that the insurgency was a “consequence of conflictbetween people and government officials. This conflict arises from various causes e.g. exploitation by local influential people, poverty, social injustice, corruption and the abuse of power by the authorities. Therefore to solve the insurgency problem, it is necessary to work with the people as well as to end the misdeeds of the officials.” This policy was a

³¹ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.125.

³² Kanok Wongtrangan, Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy. ISIS Occasional Paper 1. Chulalongkorn University, 1983:p.13.

³³ Tom Marks., “Thailand: Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory.” *Military Review*, January-February 2007: p.45.

move to address issues of political, social and economic equity along with the CPM efforts.³⁴

The overall methodology was as follows: First, a target area was blanketed with troops who drove off the CPT's armed units. Then, all particulars of the population were learned and the insurgent counterstate dismantled through systematic intelligence collection and exploitation. At the same time, civic action programs were instituted and local forces formed, while special operations against strongholds kept insurgent forces at bay. Finally, civil authorities again assumed control.³⁵ Significant to this new methodology was the formation of local forces, which in effect became paramilitary units under direct control of the army or police. When Saiyud Kerdphol took command of CSC in 1965, he had begun incorporating paramilitary forces such as the Village Scouts, and eventually the Tahan Pran as part of the overall CPM concept. As well as providing security in outlying regions, Thailand's paramilitary forces and village militias were designed as a link between the central government and the people. Many were involved in development projects and other programs to win the support of poor rural villagers deemed susceptible to communist indoctrination.³⁶ Prem described it thus:

“This Self-defense Volunteers Program was later to become the thrust of our counter-insurgency campaign in that it served as the organizational framework for dialogue and interaction with the villagers at grassroots level. The Program took on life from an initiative of a local district officer whose commitment to his work was total. He went around recruiting local teachers, village leaders or just acquaintances, engaging them in discussion on how best to organize and train self-defense volunteers to

³⁴ Kanok Wongtrangan, Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy. ISIS Occasional Paper 1, Chulalongkorn University, 1983: p.13.

³⁵ Tom Marks., “Thailand: Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory.” *Military Review*, January-February 2007: p.45.

³⁶ “Southern Thailand: The Problem with Paramilitaries”. International Crisis Group Asia Report No.140. 23 October 2007: p.2.

resist the CPT. We simply amplified on his initiative and extended it cover all other villages.”³⁷

Through appeals to their nationalism and willingness to defend what belonged to them, this move was intended as a counter to the CPT’s attempt to mobilize the masses. A move made easier once the CPT began to attack the monarchy as an institution in 1977.³⁸

Prem became Prime Minister in 1980, and Saiyud eventually became supreme commander of the armed forces. In this position, Prem was able to fully implement the political aspect of his COIN policy. Prem placed ISOC (renamed from CSOC in 1974) into the operational chain of command rather than a joint coordination agency. ISOC was granted the authority to direct all CPM task forces as well as regional army commanders.

Soon after becoming Prime Minister, Prem directed two significant orders that clearly demonstrate a politically oriented strategy to defeating the Communists; Prime Minister Orders 66/2523 and 65/2525.

9.2.4 PM Order 66/2523

Prem recalled, “Politics before Military became the underlying rationale of Prime Minister’s Order No. 66/23, which during my time as Head of Government, came to stand as the clear policy directive for all government agencies in the country-wide effort to put an end to insurgency by peaceful means. Someone has rightly observed that it was a time when guns were replaced by words.”³⁹

³⁷ Prem Tinsulanonda, address, “Thai Experience in Combating Insurgency”, Manila. 4 March 1995.

³⁸ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.174.

³⁹ Prem Tinsulanonda, address, “Thai Experience in Combating Insurgency”, Manila. 4 March 1995.

Prime Ministerial Order No. 66/2523, the “The Policy for the Fight to Defeat the Communists,” was a politically driven strategy to meet the Communist threat, recognizing that decisive victory could only come through political measures.⁴⁰ The order held that social injustice in Thailand was a contributing factor which helped strengthen communism, and it must be eliminated at every level. Corruption and malfeasance in the bureaucracy must be decisively prevented and suppressed, and all exploitation must be done away with and security of the people’s life and property provided. Additionally, it advocated that organization of all existing democratic movements be promoted, and recognized the ability of people of all professions to govern themselves and the opportunity for their political participation must be promoted.⁴¹ Insurgents would not be treated as prisoners, but as those returning to the fold, creating an environment which facilitated the willingness among guerrillas to surrender. This amnesty program enticed the insurgents to return to normal lives.⁴²

Twenty six years later, the National Reconciliation Committee would describe the order as reflecting “both the courage and creativity of the Thai Army in using a political approach, through nonviolence and forgiveness, to solve the conflict and end the war between fellow Thais. It was a groundbreaking attempt to reconstruct a political society based on reconciliation which opens up space where former foes could return to live as friends, fantastically leading the country towards victory and a sustained security.”⁴³

⁴⁰ National Reconciliation Commission, Overcoming Violence through the Power of Reconciliation, Unofficial Translation, June 2006. Available from: <http://thailand.ahrck.net/docs/nrc_report_en.pdf> p.118. [15 March 2008].

⁴¹ Kanok Wongtrangan, Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy. ISIS Occasional Paper 1. Chulalongkorn University, 1983:App I.

⁴² Tom Marks., “Thailand: Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory.” *Military Review*, January-February 2007: p.48.

⁴³ National Reconciliation Commission, Overcoming Violence through the Power of Reconciliation, Unofficial Translation, June 2006. Available from: <http://thailand.ahrck.net/docs/nrc_report_en.pdf> p.60. [15 March 2008].

9.2.5 PM Order 65/2525

Two years later, Prem issued the “Plan for Political Offensive” order, which was a follow up to 66/2523. In it he declared that the CPT was no longer a viable threat to Thailand and that a plan for the development of democracy is “key to political offensive aiming at the defeat of the communists and at destroying all forms of dictatorship”.⁴⁴

Three particular sections illustrate the overall intent for developing democracy:

Section 7.2.1 Reads “Faith in the value of democracy...must be promoted by disseminating and improving knowledge of democracy both in theory and in application...government officials (must) conduct themselves in an exemplary and democratic manner”

Section 7.2.2 Reads “...bureaucrats must be made to develop conscience and sense of duty...enforce the law and bring justice for one and all...the bureaucratic system must be reformed and decentralized, delegating power and responsibility toward regions and localities.”

Section 7.2.3 Reads “Popular participation in political activities must be promoted to enable the people to have more practical experience which can serve to strengthen their attachment to and understanding of the principle of popular sovereignty. This must be done by involving the people in activities near their places of residence such as in the tambon councils, village committees and cooperatives...encouraging the use of political parties as a means of promoting their own interests at the national or local level in accordance with the principles of democracy”

⁴⁴ Kanok Wongtrangan, Change and Persistence in Thai Counterinsurgency Policy. ISIS Occasional Paper 1. Chulalongkorn University, 1983:p.28.

PM order 65/25 places significant emphasis on the bureaucracy as the primary mechanism for reinforcing democracy. Yet the order also alludes to the necessity of devolution of political power to district and subdistrict levels. In essence, what the order advocates is not so much a restructuring of the constitutive polity of Thailand in terms of democratic development, but instead implores the central bureaucracy to operate in a professional, ethical, and benevolent manner toward the people. So while the order recognizes that political grievances are a root cause of insurgency, it equates the lack of democracy to corruption and dictatorship within the existing centralized state structure. The solution being to imbue that structure with democratic principles. Nonetheless, the fact that the order spoke to the expansion of political activity in general, and delegation of power specifically demonstrates that the RTG at the time could see the value of local empowerment as a means to prevent unrest. It demonstrated the appreciation of insurgency being the consequence of political struggle, and that lack of development as contributing factor was “all encompassing socio-economic-political” development.

By 1983, the CPT had collapsed and no longer posed an internal threat to Thailand. Thailand's application of COIN was effective because it had become a national as opposed to a military endeavor, and was multifaceted in its approach.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Tom Marks, Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), p.208.