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TENSIONS WITHIN THE THAI INSURGENCY

Martin Stuart-Fox*

The Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and the border war between China and Vietnam have had important and far-reaching repercussions on political relations in Southeast Asia. Nowhere will the effects of these new regional antagonisms and antipathies be more crucial than in the way they influence the direction and progress of communist insurgency in Thailand. For nowhere else are rival powers in a position, directly or by proxy, to provide sanctuary or move supplies and cadres across a common land frontier in support of an armed communist rebellion. It is the purpose of this paper to examine how changing relations between the communist powers in Asia have affected the Thai insurgency. Evidence of competition for political and ideological control over the Thai communist movement between the Chinese on one side and the Vietnamese on the other goes back at least to the mid-1960's if not earlier. The increasing identification of the Vietnamese with the Soviet side of the Sino-Soviet dispute since 1975 added considerably to this rivalry, as indicated by the pattern of insurgency between 1976 and 1978.[1] It is too soon to predict the outcome of this Chinese-Vietnamese struggle, or to foresee its effect upon the structure and policies of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), but an analysis of the forces at work, particularly over the past decade, may provide a useful insight into the complexities of the Thai insurgency.

The CPT, China and Vietnam

Even before the official founding of the CPT in 1942, both Chinese and Vietnamese were actively involved in the propagation of Marxism in Thailand. In Bangkok Chinese students organised financial and ideological support for the Chinese communists after their break with the Kuomintang in 1927.[2] The following year Ho Chi Minh, then an agent of the Comintern, began organising support among Vietnamese communities in northeastern Thailand for what was to become the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). Ho, in the guise of a Buddhist monk, was also active in Bangkok where he preached his social beliefs to groups of young monks.[3] The headquarters of the ICP was even moved temporarily to northeastern Thailand during the period 1931 to 1933 to escape French colonial repression.

The role played by Thai Chinese Marxists (as opposed to Chinese emigres resident in Thailand) in setting up the short-lived Siam Communist Committee in the early 1930's is unclear, but there is little doubt that the founding of the CPT was due more to Thai Chinese than to ethnic Thai initiatives. During the war years no fewer than four separate communist organisations were active in Thailand. In the far south the Malay Communist

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1. This increasing competition was already evident to an astute observer by mid-1976. See Robert F. Zimmerman, 'Insurgency in Thailand', *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 25 No. 3 (May-June 1976), pp.18 and 37.
2. Ross Prizzia, 'Thailand: New Social Forces and Re-emerging Socialist Principles', *Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 5 No. 4 (1975), p.346.
3. Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, translated by Peter Wiles (Allen Lane the Penguin Press, London, 1968), p.39.

Party pursued its own policies, as did the Indochinese Communist Party among Vietnamese in the northeast. The Thai communist movement proper was divided along ethnic lines between the CPT and the Chinese Communist Party of Thailand (CCPT), each nominally independent of the other but co-operating closely together.[4] With the founding of the PRC in 1949, the CCPT lost its *raison d'etre* which was to generate (largely financial) support for the Chinese communists among the wealthy Thai Chinese business community. During the early 1950's some of its key members returned to China; others joined the CPT. At this time the CCPT had an estimated membership of around 4,000, compared to less than 200 in the CPT.[5] What in fact occurred therefore was that the more numerous, better motivated and more experienced Thai Chinese Communists took over direction of the CPT, placing them in a position of influence that they have not since relinquished.[6]

This development had important long-term effects. The CPT, by then illegal and forced to operate underground, became to all intents and purposes a Chinese party. Party leaders stayed for years at a time in Peking. The only news of their activities or pronouncements came through the Chinese news media, or were broadcast over the clandestine radio station, Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT), set up by the Chinese in Yunnan. The mainly ethnic Chinese membership of the CPT and its evident subserviency to Peking naturally reduced its appeal to independent-minded Thais.[7] Recruitment during the late 1950s, when the party was more concerned to bring about a modification of Thai foreign policy in favour of Peking than with internal affairs in Thailand, was slow, and the party remained composed predominantly of ethnic Chinese.[8]

In 1961 the decision was taken to launch a war of national liberation based upon a broad alliance of progressive forces.[9] This represented the deliberate application of Maoist revolutionary philosophy: 'The path of seizing political power by armed force and surrounding the city with the countryside'.[10] In 1964 the CPT for the first time came out clearly on the Chinese side of the Sino-Soviet dispute,[11] a position it has followed unwaveringly ever since in its few official announcements touching on other than internal affairs.[12]

The Chinese-inspired decision to move from political agitation to armed revolution took time to implement. Cadres had to be trained, guerrilla cells established. Recruits,

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4. N. A. Simoniya, *Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia — A Russian Study*, Southeast Asian Program Data Paper No. 45 (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York), p.107. According to the official account, the CPT was founded on 1 December 1942. Patrice de Beer, 'History and Policy of the Communist Party of Thailand', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 8 (1978), p.144.
5. See Daniel D. Lovelace, *China and 'People's War' in Thailand 1964-1969* (Centre for Chinese Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1971), p.16.
6. 'The backbone of the CPT still consists predominantly of the same 55 Sino-Thai leading cadres who formed the Central Committee in 1952.' Zimmerman, *op.cit.*, p.19.
7. Donald E. Weatherbee, *The United Front in Thailand: A Documentary Analysis* (University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C., 1970), p.61.
8. For the phases in CPT strategy, see David A. Wilson, *The United States and the Future of Thailand* (Praeger, New York, 1970), pp.92-3.
9. Sources quoted in Melvin Gurtov, *China and Southeast Asia: The Politics of Survival* (D. C. Heath & Co., Lexington, Mass., 1971), p.11. However, Zimmerman believes the decision was taken as early as 1952: *op.cit.*, p.19.
10. 'The Dawn of a New Year of Unity and Victory', *Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT)*, 31 December 1976 (Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), 6 January 1977).
11. Gurtov, *op.cit.*, p.13.
12. See e.g., 'Introduction to the Communist Party of Thailand's Immediate Policy', *VOPT*, 4 January 1979 (FBIS, 9 January 1979). In a recent commentary on foreign affairs VOPT attacked the 'depraved schemes' of the 'Soviet social imperialists' and praised China's continuing struggle against 'imperialism, colonialism and hegemonism.' *VOPT*, 29 December 1978 (FBIS, 2 January 1979).

particularly from among the Thai Chinese community and the Isan-Thai[13] of the northeastern provinces had been attending training camps in southern China, North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao-controlled areas of northeastern Laos since the mid-1950s. The pick of these, initially for the most part ethnic Chinese, went to the cadre training school at K'un-ming, Yunnan, and a few to the Marxist-Leninist Institute in Peking; other recruits went to Vietnam and to Laos.[14] But while the Chinese-trained cadres were used to reinforce Chinese control over the CPT, [15] many of the Isan-Thai graduates from Vietnamese schools were sent to work with the Pathet Lao, at all times under close Vietnamese supervision. The Pathet Lao victory in Laos in 1975 later freed these cadres to be re-integrated into the CPT, thus providing Hanoi with added leverage within the Thai insurgency.[16]

The stepped-up cadre training programme bore results with the decision by the end of 1964 to set up two front organisations, the Thai Independence Movement (TIM) and the Thai Patriotic Front (TPF), together with various affiliated organisations. Armed rebellion broke out, according to CPT accounts, on 7 August 1965 when the first communist-initiated incident took place at Ban Nabua in the Phu Pan hills of Nakhon Phanom province in northeastern Thailand. Not until the end of 1966 did the CPT formally acknowledge its leading role in the TPF. On 1 January 1969 the supreme command of the Thai People's Liberation Forces (TPLF) announced that it too was under the control of the CPT. The organisational structure was complete.[17]

The timing of these developments and the initial areas of operations in northeastern Thailand were both significant in the light of a developing Chinese-Vietnamese competition for influence in mainland Southeast Asia. The origins of this rivalry have been traced to the establishment of a Thai autonomous region in southern China in 1953.[18] China has consistently shown an interest in northern Laos, and with the signing in 1962 of an agreement to build a network of roads in the area, Chinese troops and construction gangs moved in. This seems to have been a deliberate move to limit Vietnamese influence in this area.[19] There is reason to believe therefore that the Chinese decision actively to support armed revolution in Thailand was also taken with a view to circumventing increasing Vietnamese interest in the northeast of the country.

That Hanoi should evince an interest in northeastern Thailand in the 1960s is hardly surprising in view of the presence there of the major American airbases for operations against communist targets in Laos and Vietnam. This American presence was the spur to Hanoi's determination to increase support for the Thai insurgency. Almost certainly this was the argument Hanoi put to the Chinese. On these grounds it has been argued that the

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13. The appeal of communist propaganda was principally at first to peripheral minority groups. The Isan-Thai are ethnically Lao.
14. Gurtov, *op.cit.*, pp.16-7. See also Jeffrey Race, 'The War in Northern Thailand', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (1974), pp.92-7.
15. This programme has continued. According to the Thai National Security Council's White Paper on Communist Insurgency as carried in *Voice of the Nation* (Bangkok), 3 September 1976, 65 top cadres of the CPT were sent to China for study courses between 1966 and 1976.
16. Prizzia, *op.cit.*, p.355, note 18.
17. For these developments see Weatherbee, *op.cit.*, pp.50-63. See also de Beer, *op.cit.*, pp.144-8.
18. Harold C. Hinton, *Communist China in World Politics* (Macmillan, London, 1966), p.420.
19. In his discussion of the importance of the Chinese road network in northern Laos, Langer lists four reasons for its construction: to facilitate the possible introduction of Chinese forces should Chinese security be considered at risk; to counter US-backed Lao forces; to support the Thai insurgency; and to 'gain leverage over Hanoi'. Paul F. Langer, 'The Soviet Union, China, and the Revolutionary Movement in Laos', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 6 No. 1 (Spring 1973), p.82. However, this did not prevent the movement of Vietnamese cadres, casualties and mail to and from northern Laos via South China and along the Chinese road system in Laos. *Ibid.*, p.80. For the anti-Vietnamese aspect of the Chinese presence in northern Laos, see also Zimmerman, *op.cit.*, p.27.

build-up to people's war in Thailand was dictated by external circumstances.[20] However this now appears to be only part of the picture, for it seems likely that Peking acquiesced not simply to strike a blow at the US, but also for fear that the Vietnamese would act unilaterally in building up a guerrilla organisation in northeastern Thailand answerable to Hanoi and outside Chinese control. Also at about this time the Chinese were becoming increasingly concerned over the influence Moscow was exerting in Hanoi through massive military aid to the North Vietnamese. In 1966 the CPT openly criticised Hanoi's refusal to side with Peking over the Sino-Soviet dispute.[21] Weatherbee is probably correct, therefore, when he suggests that 'the China-sponsored Thai Patriotic Front was a political attempt to circumscribe Vietnamese power ambitions'.[22]

That the Thai revolution should have begun in the northeast is also of significance for long-term Vietnamese-Chinese competition for influence over the Thai communist movement, for Vietnamese contacts with the area go back to the 1930s. The Isan region provides important conditions favouring anti-government insurgency. It has a long history of political discontent and radicalism[23] and a lower standard of living than most of the rest of the country. Poor sandy soils and low rainfall keep productivity at a minimum while the birthrate remains high. Disease is endemic and illiteracy prevalent. But most important are the ethnic differences which separate the Isan-Thai of the northeast from the central Thai of the rich rice plains of the Menam valley. Ethnically, culturally and linguistically northeasterners are closer to the Lao than to the Thai of Bangkok who look down upon them as provincial rustics. Not surprisingly Isan-Thai feel an affinity with the Lao,[24] a sentiment which is open to exploitation. Given the close control exercised by Hanoi over the Lao communist movement since its inception,[25] and the ease with which agents and supplies could be infiltrated from the southern part of North Vietnam across the narrow sector of central Laos into the Isan region, the potential for Vietnamese influence in the northeast was, and is, considerable. It was an influence Hanoi was not loath to exercise. What is more, the presence of a close-knit Vietnamese community in northeastern Thailand, many of whom were sympathetic to the communist cause, provided Hanoi with an excellent fifth column.[26]

Thus, while ideologically and strategically direction of the Thai revolution rested with the Chinese-controlled Central Committee of the CPT, on a tactical and logistical level the Thai insurgency in northeastern Thailand came to be dominated by North Vietnam operating through the Pathet Lao. While the Vietnam war lasted no conflict of interests that might have arisen from this arrangement was allowed to interfere with the overall goal of getting rid of the Americans. But once that goal was achieved the likelihood of differences arising over the direction and progress the Thai insurgency might take was proportionally increased.

A struggle for influence between Vietnam and China was much less likely to arise in the other principal centres of insurgent activity. In the far south, particularly along the Malay border, Chinese influence appears firmly entrenched as it is in the predominantly

20. Gurtov, *op.cit.*, pp.19-24.
21. Weatherbee, *op.cit.*, p.48.
22. *Ibid.*
23. For a political history of the Isan region see Charles F. Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeast Thailand*, Data paper No. 65, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1967).
24. Toshio Yatsushiro, *Village Organisation and Leadership in Thailand: A Summary* (USOM Research Division, Bangkok, Mimeo, June 1966), p.117.
25. See Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, *North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao: Partners in the Struggle for Laos* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1970).
26. See Stephen I. Alpern, 'Insurgency in Northeast Thailand: A New Cause for Alarm', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 15 No. 8 (August 1975), p.685.

Chinese Malay Communist Party.[27] Nor is there any obvious way for the Vietnamese to assist this southern insurgency, complicated as it is by the demands and activities of Muslim separatists.[28] From the central west along the Burmese border only relatively minor activity has been reported;[29] there is no reason to suspect any Vietnamese influence.

The northern insurgency is altogether more important stretching as it does from the Burmese border in the northwest to Nan province abutting the trans-Mekong Lao salient of Sayaboury. Weatherbee suggests the new emphasis on the northern insurgency evident in 1968-9 may represent the ascendancy of Chinese influence over Vietnamese.[30] This seems very likely, for it represents both a shift to areas under closer Chinese control and a reduction of emphasis on those areas where Vietnamese influence was strongest. The importance the Vietnamese attached to the presence of US air bases in northeast Thailand makes it likely that Hanoi opposed the move, which reinforces this interpretation.

The northern insurgency has remained an 'essentially Chinese operation',[31] exploiting the discontent felt by some of the Thai hill tribes, particularly the Meo (Hmong), against the policies of the Thai Government. Most of the cadres in the north are Meo, though they are often led by Thai-Chinese.[32] Meo recruits are trained in South China, and the weapons and supplies are channelled in along the Chinese constructed and controlled road network in northern Laos that runs down from the Chinese frontier to the Mekong at Ban Houei Sai and Pakbeng, west of Luang Prabang. It has been known for some time that the CPT national command centre, previously located somewhere in Sayaboury, has transferred to Nan province in this northern region.[33]

In 1971, according to a Thai Government report on communist insurgency, a complete unit of the Chinese People's Liberation Army composed of between 150 and 200 men, all ethnically from the hill tribes of south China, infiltrated into northern Thailand in support of the growing insurgency there.[34] The unit may originally have provided defence for the northern command headquarters, but the subsequent order to stay permanently in Thailand more likely reflects Chinese determination to prevent any Vietnamese attempt to extend their influence over the northern insurgency.[35]

To sum up, therefore, the insurgency situation in Thailand in the early 1970s was such that overall strategic control rested with the pro-Chinese Central Committee of the CPT, a body reportedly including a majority of ethnic Chinese many of whom lived in China — the reason, perhaps, that its full membership has never been published.[36] The major centre of armed struggle was in the northeast of Thailand among Isan-Thai for the most part trained and supplied by the Vietnamese through the Pathet Lao. This apparently amicable 'division of labour' between Peking and Hanoi[37] masked an already active

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27. Weatherbee, *op.cit.*, p.85.
28. Vietnamese war surplus weapons are said to be in use by the southern insurgents, though these were apparently smuggled out of Vietnam and obtained on the black market in Thailand. *Thai Rat* (Bangkok), 25 March 1977 (FBIS, 29 March 1977).
29. The so-called Area 10 in Tak province.
30. Weatherbee, *op.cit.*, p.83.
31. Frank C. Darling, 'Rural Insurgencies in Thailand — a Comparative Analysis', *Southeast Asian Spectrum* (April 1975), p.15. Also Thomas A. Marks, 'Sino-Thai Relations', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 61 Part 3 (October 1974), p.309.
32. E.g. in the attack on a civilian truck convoy in Chiangrai province which left 29 dead and 15 wounded. *Bangkok Post*, 4 March 1977.
33. *Daily Times* (Bangkok), 30 January 1977 (FBIS, 30 January 1977).
34. Royal Thai Government White Paper, *Communist Insurgency in Thailand* (Communist Suppression Operation Command, Bangkok, 1973), p.41.
35. Cf. Zimmerman, *op.cit.*, p.20.
36. Zimmerman, *op.cit.*, p.32. See also Justus M. van der Kroef, 'Communism and Political Instability in Thailand', *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 12 No. 9 (September 1976), p.96.
37. Cf. Gurtov, *op.cit.*, p.17.

competition for control of the Thai communist movement, the extent of which was not evident due to the Vietnamese war.

From the Thai Government's point of view the insurgency was a nuisance, but not too serious. Some attempt was being made to ameliorate conditions in the region. Also it was believed that the insurgency had in large part been orchestrated in conjunction with the conflict in Vietnam and the American presence in Thailand. As the Americans began their disengagement from Indochina, therefore, it was hoped that external support for the CPT would be reduced, especially if American bases in Thailand were dismantled. Policies based on these assumptions were broadly followed by the short-lived democratically-elected governments in Thailand between October 1973 and October 1976. The return to military rule put an end to the experiment, and changed the complexion of Thai politics. In addition, the communist victories in Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos in 1975 introduced new tensions into the Thai insurgency.

The Thai Insurgency after 1975: Competition Grows

Broadly the effect of communist victories in Indochina was to focus attention on the next target in the world socialist revolution: Thailand. With the Thai military coup of October 1976, the external condition of the possibility of greatly increased aid to the Thai insurgents was compounded by the internal condition of expanded recruitment and a more widely attractive programme. This was brought about as thousands of left-wing activists were forced by military repression into the waiting arms of the CPT and its front organisations. This increased potential for revolution in Thailand coincided with the extension of the Sino-Soviet dispute into the geopolitics of mainland Southeast Asia as Hanoi moved progressively into the Soviet camp, taking Laos with it. In reply Peking threw its support behind Kampuchea, and moved to counter Vietnamese influence in the Thai insurgency. The effect of these developments will be traced below.

The swiftness of the collapse of rightist regimes in Kampuchea and South Vietnam, and the more leisurely but equally conclusive Pathet Lao takeover in Laos, created an entirely new set of circumstances in Thailand. All at once the CPT was provided with a vast 'rear area' stretching for well over a thousand miles from the Burmese border to the Gulf of Siam. Almost at any point cadres were free to move back and forth for training or instruction, while sympathetic communist governments in Kampuchea and Laos were in an excellent position to funnel assistance from the entire socialist bloc to the insurgents. After all both the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Rouge had old scores to settle with the Thai, for both had suffered much from Thai-based American bombing. Within a year, too, both countries had additional reasons to aid anti-governemt insurgents in Thailand, for both had been victims of anti-communist guerrilla raids mounted from Thai bases.[38]

Even allowing for the exaggerations of the Thai press, it was quite clear that the communists had both an enormous quantity of military hardware and the logistic apparatus necessary to channel it to the Thai insurgents. According to reports supposedly based upon secret US documents, two elaborate supply networks, formally separate but equal and operating under a combined command in Hanoi, had long been in effective operation. Party documents, currency, propaganda and training materials, light weapons, ammunition, and communications equipment went to two receiving centres, one in Nan province in the north and the other in Ubon province not far from the Kampuchean

38. And still are. For Khmer Serei activities in Thailand see *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, 10 March 1978. For reference to Lao anti-government insurgents, see *New York Times*, 10 April 1977.

frontier.[39] The fears and alarms of the Thai Government found their expression in rumours of North Vietnamese plans to set up a 'liberated area' fifty to a hundred kilometres deep along the length of the Mekong in northeastern Thailand. This was to become a joint protectorate of Laos and a unified Vietnam to form a springboard for the progressive liberation of the whole country,[40] an interesting programme that seems to have been the product of the fertile Thai imagination. What the Vietnamese were doing, on the contrary, was to maintain their interest in the Thai revolution and their influence in the northeastern insurgency as part of a general strategy of weakening the Thai state and competing with the Chinese. There is some evidence of Vietnamese success in pursuing this strategy, for Chinese control over the Thai communist movement seems to have slipped during 1976 and 1977 sufficiently for Peking to have reacted vigorously. The conditions for this increase in Vietnamese influence within the CPT were largely provided by internal events in Thailand.

In October 1976 the military coup that toppled the elected government in Bangkok radically changed the nature and composition of the Thai insurgency. This it did by driving underground into the CPT hundreds of radical students and intellectuals, peasants, workers and members of the Socialist Party of Thailand (SPT). Many students fled to Laos and Kampuchea,[41] or made contact with the CPT in the far south.[42] They were welcomed by the party; facilities were made available for members of the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT), and others, to broadcast their manifesto over VOPT. Leaders of all groups endorsed the CPT's Maoist strategy for revolution based upon rural insurgency.[43] This new unity of purpose culminated on 28 September 1977 in the founding of the Committee for Co-ordinating Patriotic and Democratic Forces (CCPDF). But this apparent unanimity masked some underlying divisions. Many of the students and SPT members were less ideologically committed to Peking than were the aging CPT leadership. Many were Thai nationalists whose first thought was for the revolution, and who were prepared to argue for a more neutral position in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Evidence that many of the new cadres questioned the wisdom of the current official party line came from an appeal from the NSCT for students 'seriously (to) adjust themselves to the new concepts'. The task of students who had joined the armed struggle was 'to study and master the political line'.[44] It would appear therefore that the CPT has experienced some difficulty in enforcing its pro-Chinese line.

Under different circumstances the Chinese might have been prepared, for tactical reasons, to loosen their ideological grip on the CPT if that would further the revolution in Thailand. Two further events, however, made this impossible: the outbreak of war between Vietnam and Kampuchea, and the serious deterioration in Sino-Vietnamese relations. The subsequent polarisation of Asian communist nations has left Vietnam closely allied with the Soviet Union, linked by a 25-year Treaty of Friendship, and a member of Comecon. Laos, despite initial reluctance, has fallen into line with Hanoi. On

39. *Bangkok Post Sunday Magazine*, 6 April 1975. Also *FEER*, 22 August 1975.
40. *Bangkok Post*, 30 March 1975.
41. *Siam Rath* (Bangkok), 29 January 1977 (FBIS, 3 February 1977); Joel Henri, Agence France Presse (AFP), Bangkok, 17 January 1977 (FBIS, 18 January 1977).
42. Many of these reportedly were prevented from leaving once they had joined the CPT. See e.g. *Morning Express* (Bangkok), 4 January 1977 (FBIS, 4 January 1977), and 26 February 1977 (FBIS, 2 March 1977).
43. See e.g. NSCT statement of 10 December 1976 broadcast over *VOPT*, 2 January 1977 (FBIS, 6 January 1977). Other groups joining the insurgency have been given similar opportunities, e.g. Wachai Hinkaed, member of the Centre for the Protection of Thai Teachers' Rights over *VOPT*, 15 January 1977 (FBIS, 21 January 1977).
44. The NSCT appeal placed great stress upon 'the study of political theory and ... knowing how to apply these theories'. *VOPT*, 2 January 1978 (FBIS, 6 January 1978).

the other side China took the part of the former Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea. As this polarisation progressively developed during 1977 and 1978, the two sides stepped up their competition for influence within the Thai communist movement, particularly within the CCPDF, in the ranks of the TPLAF and in the middle-level echelons of the CPT.

Behind most, but not all, of the recent tension between communist states in Asia lies the Sino-Soviet dispute. The Soviet Union, however, has been generally discreet in its activities in Thailand.[45] It has chosen to cultivate relations with the Thai Government rather than attempt to open a dialogue with the pro-Chinese CPT.[46] Moscow has castigated Peking for everything from attempting to use the Thai Chinese community to subvert the Thai Government to flooding Thailand with cheap goods in order to undermine its economy.[47] At the same time the Soviets have avoided reference to the CPT. Reports of the founding of a separate pro-Soviet communist party in southern Thailand can be discounted,[48] but periodical rumours of divisions within the CPT into pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet factions cannot be so easily dismissed, given the struggle for influence within the party that is now in progress.[49] Moscow is certainly encouraging pro-Soviet sentiments among CPT student recruits and trainee cadres in Laos.[50] The Soviets are reported to have deposited $10 million in Vientiane to meet the cost of sending Thai students to study in the USSR.[51]

But if direct Soviet influence in the Thai insurgency has been negligible, this has not spared the Thai communist movement from the tensions of Sino-Soviet differences. For in the eyes of the Chinese during the period from 1975 to 1978 Hanoi became no more than a puppet of Moscow. Thus in the Thai context the Sino-Soviet dispute took the form of Chinese-Vietnamese competition; a competition whose political and ideological component was sharpened by ancient ethnic fears and suspicions.

The Vietnamese, working through the Lao, were in an excellent position to influence events in Thailand. Unlike the Soviets they had not eschewed official contact with the CPT. As late as December 1976 the CPT was reportedly one of the few Asian communist parties invited to attend the Fourth Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party in Hanoi.[52] At the same time, however, the CPT in its statement celebrating the thirty-fourth anniversary of the founding of the party reaffirmed its pro-Chinese and anti-Soviet position.[53] Given the CPT's ideological position and the composition of the Central

45. But see 'The Soviets in Bangkok: Undercover Diplomacy', *FEER*, 26 August 1975.
46. For Chinese fears over Soviet successes in this approach, see 'Soviet Pincer Alarms China', *FEER*, 3 March 1978.
47. *New York Times*, 24 June 1975. See also *USSR and Third World*, Vol. 6 Nos. 2-3 (1 April-31 July 1976), p.116. The Chinese, however, give as good as they get. The Soviets have 'exposed their true nature in Thailand of aggression and hegemonism . . .', their tricks are 'more dangerous and artistic' than those of the US imperialists. *VOPT*, 20 September 1977 (FBIS, 26 September 1977).
48. E.g. in *News Weekly* (Melbourne), 16 January 1974.
49. E.g. in interview with General Saiyut Koetphon, Deputy Director of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), *Bangkok Post*, 7 February 1976.
50. John Everingham, last permanent Western correspondent to be expelled from Laos, personal communication, September 1977. Everingham reports having had long discussions on Thai-Lao relations with a Thai student activist, a TCP member from the northeast of Thailand, whom he knew previously in Bangkok and met again in Vientiane after the October 1976 Thai military coup. This student claimed to be a TCP agent sent to attend camps for student recruits in Laos. His job was to counter pro-Moscow propaganda on the part of the predominantly Lao instructors and to keep his charges on the straight and narrow Chinese line.
51. Justus M. van der Kroef, 'Thailand: A New Phase in the Insurgency', *Pacific Community*, Vol. 8 No 4 (July 1977), pp.615-6.
52. *FEER*, 14 January 1977.
53. TCP Thirty-fourth Anniversary Statement, reprinted in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 7 No. 3 (1977), pp.430-4.

Committee it is not surprising therefore that Vietnamese influence should principally have been exercised on other levels within the party and its affiliated organisations.

It was the sheer extent of the assistance given by Vietnam to the Thai insurgents that enabled Hanoi to influence the Thai communist movement.[54] This aid has been freely acknowledged by the CPT.[55] It consists of everything from the provision of training facilities in Vietnam and scholarships for Thai students to study in Hanoi to supplies, weapons, ammunition and communications equipment, military and political advisers, and finance. In addition the Vietnamese meet most of the costs of training CPT cadres in Laos and of transporting supplies across Laos. The Vietnamese are also reported to have trained Thai cadres in parts of Kampuchea that remained under their control even while the Pol Pot Government was in power.[56] The most important Vietnamese training camp for TPLAF cadres was Hoa Binh outside Hanoi. By the end of 1974 it was claimed that over 700 Thai had passed through the camp compared to some 300 trained in China. During the same period around 2,500 lower-level cadres were trained in Laos.[57] Instructors in the Lao camps were for the most part Thai and Lao, but Vietnamese were also involved in political indoctrination [58] and later reports indicated that Hanoi was preparing to keep a closer eye on both the Lao training programme and the activities of the trainees. In 1977 eighty Vietnamese army officers were reported to be learning Thai in camps in southern Laos, and the Thai military authorities claimed to have evidence that a mixed battalion of Thai, Lao and Vietnamese guerrillas had been formed to operate in the northeast.[59]

Hanoi has had a further means of communicating with the insurgents in northeast Thailand through the 60,000-strong Vietnamese minority in the region. The extent to which the Thai Vietnamese have aided Hanoi is unclear, though most scholars believe that Vietnamese communists in the northeast have deliberately kept a low profile so as not to create difficulties for the Thai Vietnamese community. Gurtov concludes that the Vietnamese 'seem to have avoided seeking support for the CPT from among the Vietnamese communities in the northeast of Thailand'.[60] Funds collected from the Vietnamese may, however, have gone to finance Thai guerrillas, and the Thai White Paper on Communist Insurgency accuses the Vietnamese community of aiding Thai communists to return to Thailand after training in Laos or Vietnam.[61] Thai Minister of the Interior Samak Sundaravel even claimed in December 1976 to have 'solid evidence' of a plot in which the Vietnamese community would incite rioting in the northeast to provide Hanoi with a pretext for invasion.[62] The date of the supposed attack, 15 January 1977, passed without incident. But given this suspicion of the Thai Vietnamese, it is no wonder that Hanoi has preferred to work through other channels, principally the Pathet Lao.

Lao involvement in the Thai insurgency has been considerable. The Lao begin with the

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54. Probably only the fact that a number of top leadership positions in the northeast are held by Thai-Chinese had prevented greater Vietnamese control there. Cf. Zimmerman, *op.cit.*, p. 22.
55. *FEER*, 14 January 1977.
56. Van der Kroef, 'Political Instability', p. 83.
57. *Bangkok Post*, 6 April 1975.
58. See *Bangkok Post*, 7 February 1976 (FBIS, 9 February 1976), for a report of Vietnamese cadres taking seminars for Thai recruits.
59. Interview with Lt.-Col. Thanit Wasaphuti, Deputy Chief of Intelligence, Second Army Region, carried in Thai by Bangkok Domestic Radio Service, 23 August 1977 (FBIS, 25 August 1977). This would appear to be the 718th Battalion reported earlier by the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC). See *Bangkok Post*, 16 March 1977 (FBIS, 16 March 1977).
60. Gurtov, *op.cit.*, p. 11.
61. As reported in *Voice of the Nation* (Bangkok), 5 September 1976, though a lack of hard evidence is admitted.
62. *New York Times*, 12 December 1976.

enormous advantage of a common language (at least with the Isan-Thai), a common cultural heritage and traditions which enable them directly to apply their own revolutionary experience in appealing to the Thai peasantry — facts which Hanoi and Peking are both well aware of. Lao involvement in the Thai insurgency springs in part, but not entirely, from their alliance with Hanoi. Lao irredentism also motivates Lao interest in the activities of the CPT.[63] Some Lao cadres even go so far as to state that the 'primary goal' of the LPRP, now that the party has achieved power in Laos, should be to liberate 'Lao' areas of Thailand.[64] The Lao therefore have their own reason for continued interest in the Thai insurgency which have nothing to do with Vietnamese designs.

The presence within the Pathet Lao of Isan-Thai cadres prior to 1975 and the return of these revolutionaries to active involvement in the Thai insurgency after the PL victory in Laos had the effect of strengthening Lao lines of communication within the CPT. The provision of training camps and other facilities and the logistics of resupply meant that probably the majority of Isan-Thai cadres were in constant contact with the Lao communist movement. So concerned did the Chinese and the Maoist leadership of the CPT become over Lao (and by extension Vietnamese and Soviet) influence, especially over Thai recruits training in Laos, that in early 1977 they attached liaison cadres to the camps and even infiltrated 'agents' among groups of trainees specifically to counter pro-Soviet and pro-Vietnamese propaganda by Pathet Lao instructors.[65]

Changing Patterns of Insurgent Activity

By 1977 the leadership of the CPT and their Chinese sponsors were determined to counter Vietnamese influence within the Thai insurgency. It was not sufficient simply to 'correct' unacceptable propaganda in Laos. Thus a move was made to extend the struggle at the level of armed insurgency in that area where Vietnamese influence was most strongly entrenched, i.e. in the northeast. The evidence for this comes from the pattern of insurgency during 1977 and 1978, especially in two key areas: in the Khao Klor mountains where the provinces of Loei, Phitsanulok and Petchabun come together, and along the northern sector of the border with Kampuchea.[66]

The former tri-province area is strategically situated between the northern and northeastern zones of insurgency based respectively in Nan province and the Phu Pan hills liberated zone in Nakhon Phanom province. Control of the area, which points like a dagger towards the heart of the central Thai rice plain, would provide an ideal staging

63. Martin Stuart-Fox, 'Factors Influencing Relations Between the Communist parties of Thailand and Laos', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19 No. 4 (April 1979).
64. John Everingham, personal communication, January 1977. Everingham reported visiting the village of Pak Hao a few kilometres south of Luang Prabang where he attended such a gathering. A frequent theme in conversations with lower level LPRP cadres was the eventual liberation of all Lao and their incorporation in a greater Lao state. Everingham quoted one Lao cadre as saying it had taken the PL thirty years to win half the Lao territories (i.e. Laos), and they were prepared to fight another thirty years to gain the rest (i.e. northeastern Thailand). This reflected the will of the Isan people. See also Phra Mahacanla Tanbuali, *Sathaana Phra-Phuttha-Saasanaa nai Pratheet Saathaaranarat Drachaathipotai Prachaachou Laau* ('The State of the Buddhist Religion in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos') (Khana Saasanikachon, Bangkok, 1977), pp.90-1, where this Buddhist monk claims to have attended a number of meetings on the subject.
65. See note 41.
66. Both these were pinpointed in McColl's analysis of the most effective base areas for guerrilla operations in Thailand. Robert W. McColl, 'A Political Geography of Resolution, China, Vietnam and Thailand', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 11 No. 2 (June 1967), pp.153-67.

base for communist guerrillas intent upon exploiting growing peasant unrest.[67] It also provides the possibility of limiting any northern expansion of the northeastern insurgency.

Initial moves into the Loei-Phitsanulok-Petchabun area were Chinese-directed from the north.[68] The decision to take over this area may have been facilitated by the completion of new sections of the Chinese-built road system in northern Laos which permitted the movement of supplies into the tri-province area independently of Vietnamese-Lao logistics. By 1976 most CPT guerrillas operating in the Khao Klor mountains were Meo.[69]

Armed incidents in the area increased from 98 between October 1976 and January 1977 to 165 between January and April 1977. This sudden activity led the Thai Army to claim that the CPT was establishing a new 'liberated zone' there.[70] This may have been true, but it also reflected stepped-up Chinese-Vietnamese competition for control of the Thai insurgency. By 1977 Thai cadres trained in the northeast were reported to be moving into the area,[71] apparently in a deliberate Vietnamese move to counter Chinese influence. The scheme was set, therefore, for a confrontation between Chinese and Vietnamese backed insurgencies.

In 1978, however, the focus of this rivalry shifted further south. Insurgent activity along the Thai-Kampuchean frontier from 1976 to 1978 indicated a pattern of increasing Kampuchean interest in the activities of the CPT. The Khmer Rouge reportedly welcomed Thai students fleeing after the October 1976 military coup in Bangkok, and set up a number of camps for their training and indoctrination.[72] Subsequently the frequency of armed clashes along the border increased. It has not always been clear, however, who was responsible for many of the incidents in this border area. Some of the earlier raids appear to have been mounted by the Khmer Rouge in retaliation for Khmer Serei (Free Khmer) raids mounted from the Thai side.[73] An organisation known as 'Angka Siam' was held responsible for most incidents by the Bangkok press.[74] This was supposed to have been set up by Phnom Penh following radical Kampuchean models, as a joint venture with the CPT. However, it seems likely that no such organisation existed as a separate entity, and that the guerrillas were members of the TPLAF under CPT control.[75] This was the explanation favoured, at least for official consumption, by Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanand who blamed the border incidents on a 'third force' operating not necessarily with the support of the Kampuchean Government.[76] This was despite the fact that defectors have confirmed that the Kampucheans were actively involved in training CPT guerrillas.[77]

In the latter part of 1977 and in 1978 an important shift was evident in the principal area of insurgent activity along the Kampuchean frontier. Whereas earlier incidents were concentrated in the region of Aranyaprathet, most in 1978 occurred further north along the border with the southern provinces of the Thai northeast, especially Buriram and

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67. Van der Kroef, 'A New Phase', p.662. In March 1977 a force of 100 men reportedly attacked a Border Patrol Police base in Petchaburi province using M79s and rocket launchers. *Bangkok World*, 3 March 1977 (FBIS, 3 March 1977).
68. See e.g. Ho Kwan Ping, 'Thailand's Broken Ricebowl', *FEER*, 1 December 1978.
69. Race, *op.cit.*, pp.94-7, 107-8.
70. *FEER*, 25 June 1976.
71. Interview with unnamed defector, *Daily Time* (Bangkok), 30 January 1977 (FBIS, 1 February 1977).
72. Joel Henri, *AFP*, 17 January 1977 (FBIS, 18 January 1977).
73. See statements by Police Maj.-Gen. Chana Samutwanit in *Athit Weekly Magazine* (Bangkok), as summarised in FBIS, 10 February 1978.
74. *VOPT* has never made any mention of 'Angka Siam'.
75. *FEER*, 5 May 1978.
76. See *Nation Review* (Bangkok), 29 Janauary 1978 (FBIS, 30 January 1978).
77. Joel Henri, AFP, 24 February 1978 (FBIS, 28 February 1978).

Surin.[78] This has been seen as an attempt by the 'southern division of the northeastern command' of the TPLAF to set up a new liberated zone in Banthat Range which would enable it to link up with its 'northern' counterpart 'to cut off the 16 provinces of Thailand's northeast'.[79] This interpretation was possible in terms of long-term strategy, but it failed to take note of divisions within the insurgency. A monolithic view of the insurgency is inadequate to account for the essentially competitive nature of Vietnamese and Kampuchean backed elements. For it must be borne in mind that by 1978 Vietnam and Kampuchea were at war. What is more likely is that the insurgency along the northern Kampuchean border represented an attempt by the Chinese, working through the Kampucheans in much the same way as the Vietnamese worked though the Lao, to challenge Vietnamese influence within the northeastern insurgency.[80] A new 'liberated zone' in the strategically situated Banthat Range would have established an important area of the northeastern insurgency free of Vietnamese influence. It would also have improved the revolutionary credentials of the CPT Central Committee in the eyes of those young militants within the party who argue that if the Thai revolution is to advance the CPT must obtain aid from the Soviet bloc as well as China. This in turn would have reduced pressure within the party to adopt a more neutral position in the Sino-Soviet dispute.[81]

By the end of 1978, therefore, an unpublicised but intense struggle for control of the Thai insurgency was under way in those peripheral regions of the northeast where Vietnamese influence was least well established. Initial Chinese moves into the Loei-Phitsanulok-Petchabun area were apparently countered by the Vietnamese. In any case the Kampuchean frontier offered better opportunities in terms of training of cadres, ease of supply and rear areas from which to mount a Chinese challenge to Vietnamese domination of the northeastern insurgency. For this reason in 1978 the focus of competition shifted to this area. At the root of this struggle lay the Sino-Soviet dispute exacerbated by Sino-Vietnamese rivalry, though the actual conflict was largely being fought out by proxy via the Lao and Kampucheans through those elements of the TPLAF that each trained, supplied and advised. In January 1979 a further event occurred, however, which once again must have serious repercussions on the Thai insurgency.

Effects of the Vietnamese Invasion of Kampuchea and the Sino-Vietnamese War

It is too soon to be able to determine how the massive invasion and occupation of Kampuchea by Vietnamese forces and the subsequent Chinese invasion of the northern border area of Vietnam will ultimately affect the political and military balance in Southeast Asia. Despite repercussions with China, the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea achieved its immediate purpose in that Hanoi quickly established relations with its sponsored regime in Phnom Penh on a similar basis to those it enjoyed with Laos. The Vietnamese-Kampuchean Friendship Treaty, signed by Pham van Dong in Phnom Penh on 18 February 1979, was immediately denounced by the Chinese as part of a Vietnamese design to establish an Indochinese federation under Hanoi's control.[82] Under

78. Richard Nations, 'Fighting for a Frontier Formula', *FEER*, 28 July 1978. That this did not extend to Ubon where Vietnamese-backed insurgents were well established is significant.
79. *FEER*, 14 July 1978.
80. *Ibid.*
81. Cf. van der Kroef, 'A New Phase', p.616, for suggestions that an active group within the CPT is arguing along these lines.
82. *Beijing Review*, 2 March 1979, p.26.

the terms of the treaty, Vietnamese forces seem likely to be stationed in Kampuchea for the foreseeable future. The intensely nationalistic Kampucheans can be relied upon, however, to resist overt Vietnamese domination, provided they have some external source of support. This can only come via Thailand.

The Vietnamese have charged the Thai Government with aiding the remnants of Pol Pot's forces in Kampuchea, a charge the Thai have vigorously denied.[83] However, the Thai authorities have permitted some fifty to eighty thousand Khmer Rouge, both soldiers and civilians, to pass through Thai territory to escape from the Vietnamese and regroup elsewhere;[84] and Prince Sihanouk, speaking in Peking, claimed that the Thai were supporting the Kampuchean anti-Vietnamese guerrillas.[85] The Thai, though clearly attracted by the possibility of countering Vietnamese influence in either Kampuchea or Laos by any available means, are taking care not to invite retaliation which could lead to clashes with Vietnamese forces along the Thai border, something Bangkok undoubtedly wants to avoid. On balance, therefore, it would seem that the Kampuchean guerrillas can expect only minimal assistance from the Thai authorities.

This leaves only the Chinese. Already Peking has given the Pol Pot forces what military and political assistance it can, though it is hampered by lack of access routes to the principal Kampuchean guerrilla bases in the Dangrek Range and the Cardamom Mountains. The lengths to which the Chinese may be prepared to go in their determination to counter the Vietnamese were again indicated by Sihanouk when he claimed Peking would even finance and supply anti-communist Khmer Serei (Free Khmer) forces under In Tam, former Kampuchean Prime Minister in the discredited Lon Nol regime, to harass the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh.[86]

Given Vietnamese control of Laos, and of the Kampuchean coastline, Chinese aid to the Kampuchean guerrillas can only pass through Thailand, either with the connivance of the Thai authorities, or via the CPT. While the former is possible it is also unlikely, for the reasons suggested above. CPT bases across the Thai border would, however, provide the Kampuchean guerrillas with a relatively safe rear area from which to mount attacks against the Vietnamese.[87] To this the Vietnamese could respond in either of two ways: by carrying out raids 'in hot pursuit' across the Thai border, thus risking a clash with the Thai army; or by continuing to attempt to supplant the Chinese within the Thai insurgency, with the aim of carving out regions of *de facto* control in key base areas, thus denying them to the Kampuchean insurgents.

There is, however, a further possibility, and that is for Hanoi to withdraw all support from the CPT, and leave it to the Thai Government to gain the upper hand over the guerrillas of the TPLAF and prevent the use of Thai bases by Kampuchean forces. In the light of assurances given by Pham van Dong and Lao Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihan in Bangkok, Hanoi now seems prepared to abandon the CPT. Pham van Dong's visit to Thailand in September 1978 took place before the outbreak of hostilities with either Kampuchea or China. His promise of an end to Vietnamese support for the Thai

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83. See the official statement by the Thai Foreign Ministry broadcast over Bangkok Radio, 2 March 1979 (FBIS, 2 March 1979). This followed Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanand's assurances of strict Thai neutrality. *Nation Review* (Bangkok), 1 March 1979 (FBIS, 1 March 1979). See also *FEER*, 23 February 1979.
84. *FEER*, 4 May 1979.
85. Nayan Chanda, 'Sihanouk's Intriguing Indiscretions', *ibid., 27 April 1979.*
86. *Ibid.*
87. See Richard Nations, 'Thailand Prepares to Think of the Unthinkable', *ibid.*, 2 February 1979. On the other hand, the CPT has been weakened through its loss of bases in Kampuchea. See *Bangkok Post*, 24 January 1979 (FBIS, 24 January 1979).

insurgents could thus not be taken entirely at face value,[88] for Hanoi could always claim to have stopped all assistance to the CPT while the Lao continued as active as ever. But with the exchange of visits between Kaysone and Thailand's Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanand in January and April 1979, Lao promises not to aid the Thai insurgents were made explicit. Both sides stated their determination not to permit anyone to use in any way whatever their territory as a military base from which to mount any interference, threat or aggression against the other, nor to use their territory as a base from which to carry out subversive activities of any kind against the other.[89] The rationale behind Lao (and by extension, Vietnamese) willingness to deny further assistance to the CPT was provided by a Lao diplomat who was reported as confiding that 'we have agreed to support the Thai Government in eliminating Communist insurgents because they are backed by China.'[90]

It would appear, therefore, that for the present at least, the Vietnamese are prepared to curtail their support for the CPT. But while Chinese influence within the CPT may be one reason for this decision, it is by no means the only one. The Vietnamese are aware of the need to consolidate their position in Laos and Kampuchea, not to mention defending themselves against the Chinese, before embarking upon further adventures. They may hope to obtain some respite from anti-communist Lao insurgents operating from Thailand, thus reducing the need for Vietnamese security forces in Laos. The Vietnamese may also want to place all the blame for communist insurgency in the most vulnerable areas of Southeast Asia (in Thailand, Burma, Malaya) on the Chinese, thus isolating Peking diplomatically in the region and improving their own standing. In addition, Peking would be bound to contest any Vietnamese attempts to build up, or even retain, influence within the CPT. In view of the way in which the Soviet Union gained the upper hand in Hanoi through the level of aid and advice given during the Vietnam war, the Chinese would be sure to resist any moves by Hanoi so to influence the Thai insurgency. In other words, Peking seems likely, whatever course Hanoi adopts, to encourage the CPT to reduce its dependency upon Vietnamese and Lao supplies and training facilities. Thus on all counts it would seem to be to Vietnam's advantage, temporarily at least, to scale down support for the CPT, even though this leaves the running with the Chinese.

Whether the CPT would lend themselves willingly to any Chinese scheme which might involve the party directly in the Sino-Vietnamese controversy is to be doubted. There is evidence of support within the party for a neutral position: more than a month after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, VOPT had still made no comment, though other current events, for example, Teng Hsiao-ping's visit to Washington, were reported. Yet Vietnamese withdrawal of support may leave the CPT no alternative but to identify itself even more closely with the Chinese, circumstances which would improve Peking's chances of enlisting active CPT involvement on behalf of the Kampuchean insurgents.

Kampuchea seems likely to remain a centre of Chinese interest for some time, as Peking will not lightly forget or forgive Vietnamese defiance in mounting their invasion with overt Soviet encouragement.[91] But just how far the CPT would be prepared to bow to Chinese pressure must depend in part upon China's ability to meet the demands of the CPT for arms and supplies. This points up the real difficulties faced by the Chinese. Now

88. *Bangkok Post*, 6 September 1978.
89. See the joint communique issued at the end of Kaysone's visit to Bangkok. *Khao San Pathet Lao* (Bulletin Quotidien), 5 April 1979.
90. *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 8 April 1979.
91. That Vietnam had full Soviet backing was made abundantly clear as early as February 1978 when Soviet Army Commander-in-Chief Iran Pavlovsky paid a visit to Laos. *FEER*, 17 February 1978.

that the Chinese have withdrawn their road construction gangs in northern Laos,[92] they no longer have use of a direct road network to the Thai border. But it is considerably easier to move supplies and men between Vietnam and Thailand via Laos than between southern China and Thailand across Burma. In fact, it would seem impossible for the Chinese to supply the Thai insurgency at a level necessary to satisfy its increased demands (following the October coup) unless they re-establish themselves in northern Laos. There are already indications that this is precisely what they intend to do.

The first seeds of a new insurgency in northern Laos involving dissident tribesmen may have been sown as early as mid-1978.[93] If Lao protestations are anything to go by, these seeds are already bearing fruit.[94] Fears of Chinese support for anti-government insurgents in Laos probably convinced the Lao to move their re-education camps for former Rightists from Phong Saly province abutting the Chinese border to Houa Phan province further south.[95] In view of Sihanouk's claims concerning China's willingness to finance and supply anti-communist guerrillas in Kampuchea, it is at least as likely that they would be prepared to do the same in Laos where the Chinese know the area and have good supply routes, and where anti-Vietnamese feeling runs high. Any Chinese moves, however, are sure to elicit a strong reaction from the thousands of Vietnamese troops stationed in Laos. The Chinese-Vietnamese competition that has been played out within the Thai insurgency from 1976 to 1978 thus seems likely to be transferred to northern Laos.

A pro-Chinese government in Vientiane would provide Peking with the perfect strategic position from which to contain Vietnam, supply the Kampuchean resistance, and dominate the Thai insurgency. The Chinese have already issued a number of veiled threats to Vientiane: 'Laotian people who fought for their liberation will fight again against Vietnamese overlords.'[96] How quickly the Chinese are prepared to act in instigating a new struggle for control of Laos is not yet clear, but two points should be borne in mind before the possibility of a new war in the near future is dismissed: the Chinese did invade Vietnam, and Peking has always considered the presence of an unfriendly regime in Laos as a threat to the security of southwest China.[97]

In attempting to assess the significance of Chinese moves into Laos for the Thai insurgency, one must recall that Peking's primary objective is now the containment and neutralisation of Vietnam. The Lao and the Kampucheans can be of little assistance in furthering this aim; but the Thai could be, for there is an ancient rivalry between the Thai and the Vietnamese for dominance in mainland Southeast Asia. The total withdrawal of Vietnamese support for the CPT, if this occurs, could perhaps be seen as a further move in this long-standing struggle. For, if it is the aim of Vietnam to become the paramount power in mainland Southeast Asia, it is not necessary for Thailand to become communist. All that Hanoi needs is for Thailand to be constantly weakened by internal division.[98] A unified Thailand under a strong central communist government would be likely to present just the kind of rival that Hanoi does not want. From the Chinese point of view, however, such a strong and unified Thai state would be no threat at all if allied to Peking, and would

92. See the text of the Chinese note agreeing to the Lao request that all construction personnel be withdrawn from northern Laos. *Beijing Review*, 23 March 1979, p.4.
93. Nayan Chanda, 'A New Threat From the Mountain Tribes', *FEER*, 1 September 1978. But see also Jean Larteguy, 'Le Piege Chinois', *Paris Match*, 10 November 1978, p.31.
94. See the Lao Government's Declaration on the Chinese Threat, *Khao San Pathet Lao* (Bulletin Quotidien), 7 March 1979.
95. Nayan Chanda, 'Peking Loses Ground in Laos', *FEER*, 23 February 1979.
96. Caption to a photograph in *New China News*, Vol. 7 No. 13, 11 April 1979, p.10. 'Any act undermining this [Lao-Chinese] friendship will not be countenanced by the Lao people'; *Beijing Review*, 23 March 1979.
97. Langer, 'The Soviet Union, China, and the Revolutionary Movement in Laos', p.70, note 6.
98. Cf. Jeffrey Race, 'The Future of Thailand', *Pacific Community*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (January 1977), p.323.

provide just the foil necessary to help curb the Vietnamese. As the present government in Bangkok is unlikely to be able to fill this role, it would seem to be in Peking's interest to support the Thai insurgency. The Vietnamese may thus yet feel it wise to maintain their interest in and influence on the Thai insurgency, via the Lao, both to prevent Chinese domination of the movement, and to weaken it through internal division.

But what of the Thai insurgents themselves? What line are they likely to take given the present imbroglio? There are good reasons why Thai communists at all levels of the party might conclude that it was in their best interests to stick to the Chinese. For in the event that Hanoi is able to consolidate its position in Kampuchea, it will have greatly strengthened Vietnamese influence in mainland Southeast Asia vis-a-vis the Thai. Thai communists may well feel a need to balance the Chinese against Vietnam. Thai of all political persuasions are innately suspicious of Vietnamese intentions. The war between Vietnam and Kampuchea has demonstrated clearly the lengths to which Hanoi is prepared to go to achieve dominance in the region. It is a lesson that is unlikely to be lost on any Thai.

To conclude, therefore, an analysis of tensions within the Thai communist movement, and particularly within the Thai insurgency, has indicated a recently stepped-up struggle for influence waged primarily between China and Vietnam. This promised to intensify through the intervention of the Kampucheans under the former pro-Chinese and violently anti-Vietnamese regime of Pol Pot. The Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea has, however, radically altered the political situation on the mainland of Southeast Asia, making it impossible to predict events with any degree of confidence. Little can be said about the likely effect of these developments upon the Thai insurgency, except that in the short-term Hanoi's goals may be best served by improving relations with Bangkok and cutting aid to the insurgents. This might have the immediate effect of reducing tensions within the Thai communist movement. In the long-term, however, the outlook must be for increased involvement of external powers, and this could well lead to armed clashes between insurgent groups owing different ideological allegiance (such as occurred during the Kampuchean liberation struggle).[99] For direction of the Thai communist movement must remain an important factor in the power rivalries of states in mainland Southeast Asia.

99. Nayan Chanda, 'The Black Book of Hatred', *FEER*, 19 January 1979.