

Thai's Foreign Minister Says Military Will Act if Cambodian Reds Threaten

5-29-70

NYT

By SYDNEY H. SCHANBERG
Special to The New York Times

BANGKOK, Thailand, May 28—Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman of Thailand declared today that if Communists in Cambodia threatened Thailand's border "there isn't any doubt our military authorities will take whatever steps are necessary."

In an interview at his home here, Mr. Thanat added that "it's too early to say" whether Thai troops would be sent into Cambodia to fight the North Vietnamese and Vietcong there.

For the present, he continued, Thailand will provide aid to Cambodia in the form of items manufactured in Thailand—"boots, uniforms, things like that"—but not arms or military equipment, which come mainly from the United States. Their transfer to Cambodia would require Washington's approval.

In Post 11 Years

Mr. Thanat, Foreign Minister since 1959, left open the eventual level of aid to Cambodia by saying that the Thai Government would have to await the report of the 30-man delegation that flew to Pnom Penh yesterday to discuss the question.

The military-dominated delegation was also charged with working out the formalities of

restoring diplomatic relations between the two countries, severed since 1961.

Success on this point was announced today by Gen. Praphas Charusathien, commander of the Thai Army and Deputy Premier. He said that diplomatic representatives would be exchanged within a week.

Wars both hot and cold have marked relations between Cambodia and Thailand for nearly eight centuries.

Press and Radio Attacks

Since the departure of the French from Indochina in 1953, Cambodia's relations with Thailand have consisted of a succession of incidents including press and radio attacks, cattle rustling, piracy, armed forays by the police forces of each country into the other, violations of airspace and several territorial claims.

Five years ago, Cambodia was viewing Thai actions along the border as preparations for an eventual takeover of Cambodian territory. Prince Norodom Sihanouk told the National Assembly that Thai secret agents were active in Cambodian territory and Thailand replied that she was ready to repel "any aggression." Armed confrontation was averted, however.

The Thai delegation is scheduled to return here from Pnompenh tonight. Asked why it was not staying longer, Mr. Thanat said that it had been an urgent mission designed primarily to find out "what the Cambodians want to have."

On the matter of arms aid, the 56-year-old Foreign Minister said that weapons could not be provided now "for the simple reason that we don't manufacture arms in this country." He said that the question of seeking Washington's permission to give weapons supplied by the United States "did not arise." He also gave another reason for not sending weapons—"the arms we have, we need for our own use" against Communist insurgents operating in various parts of Thailand.

As for the possibility of organizing a volunteer force of soldiers to go to Cambodia, Mr.

Thanat said that some members of Parliament had made such a suggestion, "but not the Government."

Thailand is already providing military aid indirectly to Cambodia through the six air bases here from which United States B-52 bombers and F-105 and F-4 fighter-bombers have been raiding enemy targets there, as well as the older targets in Laos and South Vietnam.

In addition, Thailand has

more than 12,000 combat soldiers in South Vietnam—a relatively large part of her military establishment of about 200,000 men.

Thai troops have also been reported in Laos, but Bangkok denies that they are there.

Some observers believe that Thailand will provide troops to Cambodia or at least military advisors and instructors but will do so quietly.

New Cuts Doubted Now

Mr. Thanat said that a further withdrawal of American military personnel from the air bases in Thailand was possible, but added that "for the time being, I cannot see any justification for hastening the withdrawal."

To answer critics of the war in America and to prove that they were independent of Washington, the Thais asked last year for a reduction in the 48,000 United States soldiers. In Thailand, most of them are Air Force personnel. According to both Washington and Bangkok, there are no American ground troops here.

A 6,000-man cut was agreed upon, and will be completed by the end of next month. This apparently did not impair United States air strike capability, and no further cuts are being discussed.