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Thai Insurgents, Using Hanoi's

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BANGKOK, April 24— Communist-led insurgents in Thailand, still relatively small in number but amply trained and supplied by China and North Vietnam, have markedly stepped up their attacks in recent weeks, according to intelligence sources here.

The insurgents, attacking government army and police units in larger groups than previously, now regularly employ tried and proven North Vietnamese tactics and devices and the length and sophistication of their attacks has grown noticeably, the sources said.

As in neighboring Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge leadership emerged from the shadows only recently, the men at the top of the Thai insurgency live very much in mystery. There is a consensus among experts here, however, that these leaders will soon be assisted by increased numbers of military advisers and political cadre sent by Hanoi.

The debacles in Cambodia and South Vietnam and renewed uncertainty about Communist intentions in Laos have raised fears here of greater antigovernment operations by the insurgents.

In the last few weeks, the rebels have launched heavy attacks against ineffectual U.S.-trained government forces in the north and northeast areas of the country. In one of these attacks, on an armored cavalry post at Ban Huey Kon near Nan, and 350 miles north of Bangkok, the insurgents killed 17 soldiers in one of the worst government defeats in Thailand's 10 years of guerrilla warfare.

[Twelve persons were killed today when Communist guerrillas attacked a government unit in Nong Khai Province near the Laotian border, provincial officials said. They said an army

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colonel and a major were among those killed when some 200 guerrillas opened fire.]

Thai and Western counter-insurgency experts consider it too early to know whether these new offensives are the start of a general intensification. Most experts agree, however, that once the North Vietnamese wrap up their victory in Saigon. They will be free to redirect arms and ammunition to Thailand.

Most experts doubt that Hanoi will send large numbers of troops from Vietnam to Thailand in the near future.

But they expect more advisers, whose principal task will be building up the numbers of the insurgent forces, now thought to be about 8,500, most located in the north and northeast.

The insurgents, known as the Thai People's Liberation Armed Forces, are short of personnel. According to some experts in Bangkok, there is no more than one insurgent for every 1,000 persons in the most critical areas.

The flow of materiel from China and North Vietnam to Thailand and the two-way movement of military and political trainees seeps easily across Thailand's porous border with Laos.

A new outburst of hostilities between the Communist-led Pathet Lao and forces loyal to the rightist faction of the three-way Laotian government could lead the way to a rapid political deterioration in Laos.

Such a breakdown in Laos would be an immeasurable gain for the Thai insurgents. Furthermore, the Thai gov-

ernment of Premier M.R. Kukrit Pramoj has indicated that as a result of the Communist victory in Cambodia and the impending fall of South Vietnam, the Thais are going to work toward a peaceful settlement with Hanoi.

There is little on the record of Thailand's insurgency to indicate that the rebels will respond to such a gesture by giving up their struggle. Quite the opposite.

Intelligence sources report that the insurgent forces have risen to their current strength from just a few dozen about 15 years ago. The number of rebels committed to individual attacks on government army and police units has risen to as many as 100 from the early days when just a dozen men would spring a fleeting attack on a government patrol.

The government forces enjoy vast superiority in numbers and weapons, but the Communists' advantage here, as throughout the wars in Vietnam and Cambodia, is that they regularly take the offensive, on their

own terms, while the army is reluctant to stray too far from its camps.

The rebels do not limit their activities to armed contact. They are also active in what U.S. counterinsurgency experts in South Vietnam used to call "winning the hearts and minds of the people".

According to intelligence information from insurgent strongholds, the rebels generally pay farmers more than the going market price for rice and other food. They also help the farmers with planting and harvesting.

Rebel paramedics frequently provide free medical services to villagers. Although they will occasionally murder a village headman as a warning, far more often they direct their violence at government troops and concentrate on be-

friending the villagers, something the Bangkok-centered government often ignores.

Although Communist claims of having "liberated" extensive areas around the northern town of Chiang Rai are generally considered exaggerated, counterinsurgency experts in Bangkok concede that the rebels enjoy "great security" in a number of surrounding villages.

In these villages, the experts say, the Communists run schools, collect taxes and generally administer local government along Communist lines.

Among recent insurgent victories was their success in forcing the government to abandon two road-building projects in the areas of Chiang Rai and Nan, near where the 17 soldiers were killed earlier this month.

Chiang Rai is about 100 miles northwest of Nan.

The roads were intended to allow farmers to take produce to markets. They were also to be used by the army to move troops into guerrilla-held territory.

"Stopping work on these roads was an openly stated Communist goal," noted a counterinsurgency expert. "They did what they said they would. It was a clear-cut victory." Work was halted on the two projects last December and has not resumed.

Although the Thai army has begun to change its anti-guerrilla tactics from the methods taught by the U.S. Army, its failure so far seems to make clear that a whole new approach is required.

One such technique now under government consideration is the National Village

Volunteer Self-Development and Defense Program, or Aw Paw Paw, as it is known by its Thai abbreviation.

The idea of the program is to decentralize the tightly knotted Bangkok administration and turn government over to local district and village organizations.

The reason for arming the villagers and making them responsible for their own defense is to force the insurgents to turn their armed attacks from the army against the people. The plan's organizers reason that they will be loath to do this since the prime goal of the insurgency is to win popular support and make the government look like the people's enemy.

Once the Government gives the program a green light, initial plans call for organizing 27 villages in the worst affected areas of the

north and northeast as well as in the south, where moslem guerrilla, are waging a long simmering separatist movement along Thailand's narrow border with peninsular Malaysia. If successful. The program would be extended to other areas.

The main body of rebels is composed of a mix of ethnic Thais/ Chinese-Thais and a variety of Thai and Lao hill tribesmen who pay no heed to what they consider the artificial boundary between Thailand and Laos.

The easy flow across the Thai-Laotian border has led political leaders in Bangkok to claim that the insurgency is Pathet Lao-inspired and led. But most impartial Thai observers consider this an attempt to shift blame to a foreign power.

They reason that the Thailand is fertile ground for a home-grown rebellion and



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that, if the government and the armed forces do not admit this and tear themselves away from the comforts and distractions of Bangkok, the insurgency will continue to flower until the brassy capital faces the same fate as Phnom Penh.